



Recently the website of a cigar company on Maui came to my attention. I found the graphics and the implied approval of Native Hawaiians in its company overview offensive... "From the early 1900's until 1953, the Big Island of Hawaii produced some of the finest wrapper leaf tobacco in the world. Conceived in Upcountry Maui in 1994, Royal Hawaiian brings you back to that bygone era of cigars that Queen Lili'uokalani popularized during her reign as Hawaii's last monarch, over 110 years ago."

I found the graphics and statement so offensive that I did a little research and found their claim that tobacco was grown in the early 1900's to be true. In fact, according to the Hawaiian Dictionary tobacco arrived in the Islands as early as 1812. By

1890 King Kalakaua was being petitioned by foreigners such as W. H. Cornwell for land and the right to experiment with tobacco as an export crop. Several members of the "Royal Hawaiian Agricultural Society," between 1813 to 1852, attempted to grow tobacco and market cigars and other tobacco products. After a promising start, the industry quickly faded due to lack of knowledge of how to grow and cure the tobacco and lack of capital.

One statement I found in a 1914 publication of the United States Colonies and Dependencies by William D. Boyce is telling:

"A cigar factory has already been started with Hawaiian and Filipino workmen. The ancient Hawaiians knew nothing about the use of tobacco, but when it was introduced by the whites they quickly adopted it and passed the pipe around the circle as the American Indians did. The old chiefs carried their tobacco in coconut shells and used pipes of great size carved out of whale ivory. Today the Hawaiians use the weed in the world's prevailing fashions."

'Imi Hale Native Hawaiian Cancer Network, a program of Papa Ola Lōkahi, and the Native Hawaiian Health Care Systems have joined with other Native peoples of the Pacific and Americas to educate Native people and build a resistance movement against tobacco. The Royal Hawaiian Cigar Company is a perfect example of the license taken to co-opt culture. To counter the tobacco industry, 'Imi Hale and the Native Hawaiian Health Care Systems, which consists of five offices, developed a website <http://www.nativehabit.com/>. According to the homepage:



Tobacco use is a social justice issue and a resistance movement for Native Hawaiians. Dr. Kekuni Blaisdell's message that "It's Anti-Hawaiian to Smoke" reminds us that using tobacco was not a traditional Hawaiian practice and alerts us to the fact that we have adopted harmful Western ways that contribute to our poor health status. His message is championed by Leimomi Shearer of Hui Malama Ola Na 'Oiwī who tells her clients that "Smoking is NOT a Hawaiian Tradition."