Why did Kalākaua send 6 of the 18 official HYA participants and his two nephews to military academies in America and Italy?

In the mid to late 1880s a ‘new imperialism’ plagued Oceania and much of the globe, which is characterized as a period of colonial expansion by European powers and the United States. During this wave of new imperialism in 1883, the Hawaiian Kingdom attainted the status of an independent state protecting its sovereignty with international law. This punctuation in Hawaiian Kingdom history remains in continuity today as the United States of America continues to illegally occupy ‘Ka Hawai’i Pae ‘Aina. While in other parts of Oceania, the British colonized Aotearoa in 1840 and then Fiji in 1874. France annexed Tahiti in 1886. America and Germany began to take interest in Samoa in 1885. During the 1880s the Hawaiian Kingdom also began planning an attempt to form a Pacific Confederacy and also sending HYA participants abroad was a necessary move to protect the continuity of Hawai‘i’s independence. Furthermore, Kalākaua’s investment in obtaining military ‘ike represents an understanding of global politics and Hawai‘i’s unique political position in the Pacific.

A "new Imperialism" in Oceania

In 1885 Prince Kuhio, Kawananakoa, and Kalihiolani surfed on their redwood papa olo (a surfboard traditionally reserved for Ali‘i) in San Lorenzo river mouth during a break from St. Matthew’s Academy. In 1886, Prince Kawananakoa and Kuhio surfed in Yorkshire, England while attending the Royal Agricultural College. Kalihiolani wrote to Henry Armstrong, a Hawaiian consulate, “We like it very much for we like the sea to be rough so that we are able to have surf riding. We enjoy surf riding very much and surprises the people to see us riding on the surf...Even Wrightson (the princes' tutor) is surprised the people to see us riding home and serve the Kingdom. The day after Prince Kawananakoa and Kuhio are also sent to England to attend Great Harrowden Hall. More importantly, Kalākaua writes that the Princes to travel "Incognito" perhaps a reference to a diplomatic mission in a precarious time. In the same year, Prince Kawananakoa and Kuhio are also sent to England to continue their education by enrolling in Royal Agriculture College in Cirencester, England. In this light, I consider Kalākaua’s sending of his Princes to travel "Incognito" perhaps a reference to a diplomatic mission in a precarious time. In the same year, Prince Kawananakoa and Kuhio are also sent to England to continue their education by enrolling in Royal Agriculture College in Cirencester, England. In this light, I consider Kalākaua’s sending of his Princes to travel "Incognito" perhaps a reference to a diplomatic mission in a precarious time.

HYA Goes Underground: Prince Kawananakoa, Kuhio, and Princess Ka‘iulani head to England

On our visit this summer to England, we visited the Royal Observatory in Greenwich and the British Museum’s exhibit on Captain Cook. The Royal Observatory claims to be the "home of time and space." With the completion of construction in 1676, this observatory has continually trained astronomers to both "discover" and then conquer new lands through the mapping of longitudes. Sitting on the other side of the world, I was offered the opportunity to see the origins of TMT’s imperial science. We must remember that throughout the 1880s, King Kalākaua’s attempt to form a Pacific Confederacy and also sending HYA participants abroad was a necessary move to protect the continuity of Hawai‘i’s independence. Furthermore, Kalākaua’s investment in obtaining military ‘ike represents an understanding of global politics and Hawai‘i’s unique political position in the Pacific.

Royal Observatory, Imperial Science & TMT

On September 15, 1884, Prince David Kawananakoa boarded the Mariposa for San Francisco as part of the Hawaiian Youth Abroad program (HYA). He joined Thomas P. Cummins at St. Matthew’s Hall, an acclaimed military training academy in America. Six months later, Prince Kawananakoa’s two brothers, Prince Kalākaua (Kaiulani) and Prince Kalihiolani boarded the Alameda and sailed towards America to also attend St. Matthew’s Academy. Although Kalihiolani and Kalihiolani were not officially listed as Hawaiian Youth Abroad participants, the addition of King Kānaka‘ōpāli’s nephews outside of the program illuminates his understanding of obtaining ‘ike abroad to ensure the Kingdom remains an independent nation-state.