

Series Number Seventeen

Nu'uanu Pali - Oahu Hawaii

Photographs 1991 - Essay 2025

Nineteen Photographs

Michael Nye

Nu'uanu Pali - Oahu, Hawaii

Nu'uanu Pali, (High elevation/cliff) was the site of one of the bloodiest battles in Hawaiian history. It is a section of a cliff located on the Island of Oahu. It has been a vital historical route and passage-way because of the Ko'olau mountain range that connects the leeward side of the island to the windward side.

My wife Naomi said of our visit:

"Pali Lookout is the most astonishing single place on earth I have ever visited. Somehow better than the Himalayas or the vastness of the Sahara Desert. I think how it must have felt for the early Hawaiians to limb and experience that view - before roads or concrete or signs - that exhilaration of, "here is your island, your incredible gift of a place."

Thousands of tourists arriving in Honolulu find their way to Pali Lookout to take a photograph of the expansive Island and ocean and have a photograph taken of them to document, *"I was here."*

Nu'uanu Pali has a history and nine hundred stories to tell. This story really began in 1758 the year Halley's comet and its trail of light passed over the Hawaiian Islands. It was the same year that King Kamehameha was born. He grew up on the biggest island in the Hawaiian Archipelago. On the day he was born there were reports of storms and strange lights. There was a prophecy that Kamehameha would be a great leader and unite all of the Hawaiian Islands under one government.

A lieutenant from the British Royal Navy in 1778 wrote of the young warrior, Kamehameha, "he had as savage a face as I ever saw, but his disposition was good natured and humorous." Captain James Cook described him as, "dignified, astute, graceful and physically powerful."

Kamehameha had lessons in astronomy, geography and navigation. He studied the winds and clouds. He watched the birds in flight. He memorized long chants. He had a unwavering determination and intelligence – knowing when to make alliances and when to attack.



In February 1795, he assembled the largest army the Hawaiian Islands had ever seen, with 12,000 men and 1,200 war canoes. Kamehameha moved against the southern islands of Maui and Moloka'i and then he invaded O'ahu. The warriors on O'ahu fell back through the Nuuanu Valley and were caught between Kamehameha's army and the 1000-foot drop off of Nu'uuanu Pali cliff . Over 800 of O'ahu's warriors either jumped or were pushed over the edge of the cliff.

Uniting the Islands of Hawaii was one part of Kamehameha's story, the other part was how he made the transition from a war lord to a peaceful governing ruler.

Series Number Seventeen - Nu'uuanu Pali Lookout

For a thousand years, Hawaiians have been hiking up through Nu'uuanu valley and standing on the edge of a cliff looking to the other side of the island, to the reach of distance, to the bluest ocean and the connected moving sky. Emotions loom over this seeing. Surprise and Gratitude are the first two insights.

This series of photographs is about looking outward and reflecting inward at the same time. So many visitors fall into a dreamy stare when standing on the edge. What does reverence look like? What does suddenness and wonder feel like? The view from Pali Lookout is a view of empathy, because you can't think of yourself. When does a present moment turn into a question?

This series of photographs was a wish to spend time here, on this mountain's edge. Experiencing with others their first look of surprise like a sudden chill in the air. Here on Pali Lookout, the wind travels up the mountain, then lifts herself higher over the tallest cliffs and merges with light and fog and mist. The experience is more than visual. It is textured and layered and becomes imbedded in memory. The wind can lift you off the ground. The clouds can cover this site with a white imagination then in an instant, like a charmer, lift the curtain of uncertainty.

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Essay - April, 2025



Pali - One



Pali - Two



Pali - Three



Pali - Four



Pali - Five



Pali - Six



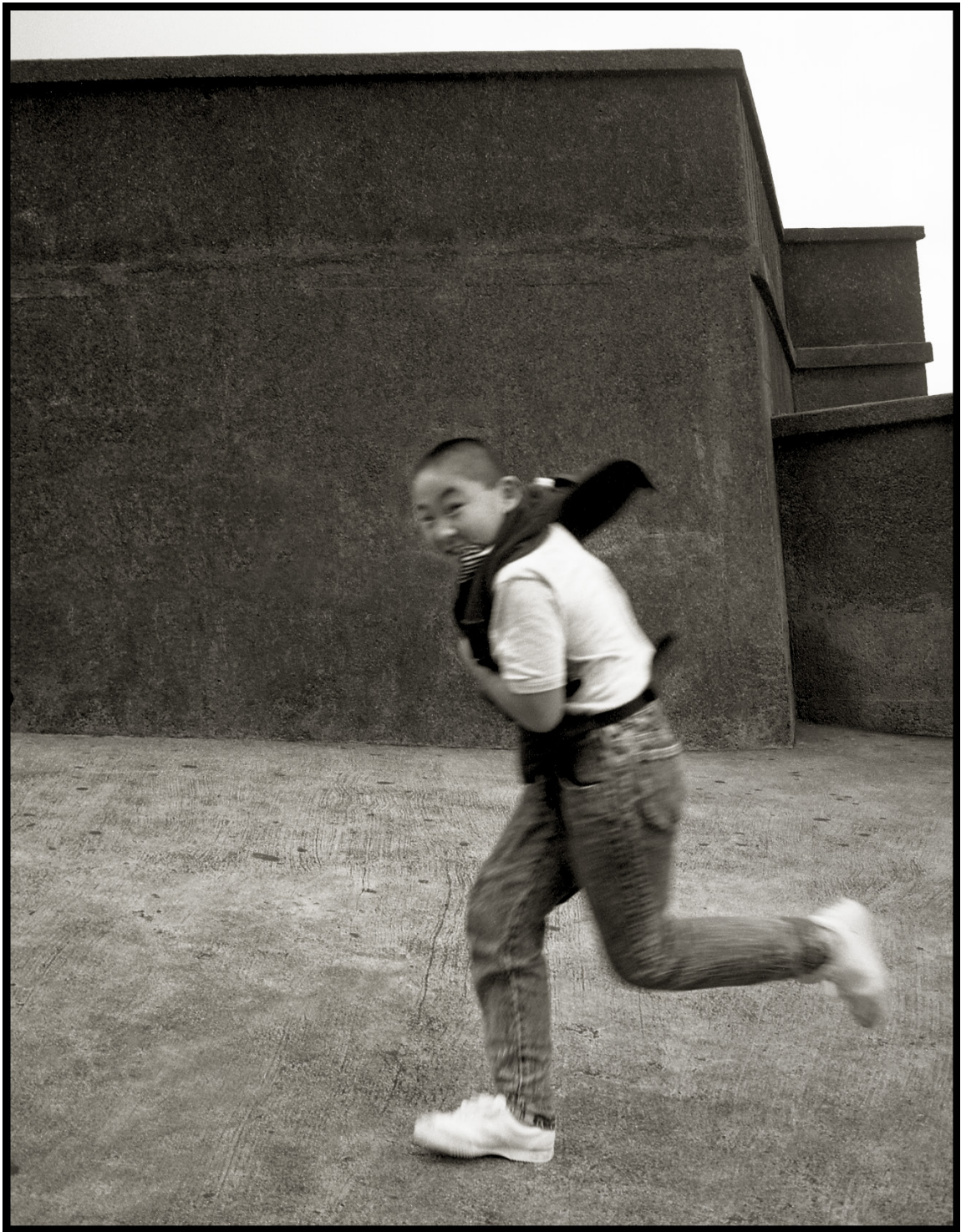
Pali - Seven



Pali - Eight



Pali - Nine



Pali - Ten



Pali - Eleven



Pali - Twelve



Pali - Thirteen



Pali - Fourteen



Pali - Fifteen



Pali - Sixteen



Pali - Seventeen



Pali - Eighteen



Pali - Nineteen