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978-1-108-02071-8 - The History of Contract Labor in the Hawaiian Islands

Katharine Coman

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### **The History of Contract Labor in the Hawaiian Islands**

Katharine Coman (1857–1915) was an American historian and economist who served as professor and later dean at Wellesley College. Her works include *A History of England* (1899), *Economic Beginnings of the Far West* (1912), and this 1903 monograph. Written following a trip to the islands, the short piece focuses upon the use of imported contract labour in the form of indentured servants. Used primarily in the sugar industry, the system was, in Coman's view, one of which the results 'advance[d] the interests of the labourers quite as much as those of the planters'. The United States' distaste with such arrangements ended this *status quo* upon annexation, even though the wage system subsequently imposed offered fewer opportunities than before. Covering the decades during which Hawaii underwent massive changes at the hands of Western powers, Coman's work helps illuminate the multiple layers of colonial paternalism in the age of imperialism.

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IN THE

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BY

KATHARINE COMAN, Ph.B.

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AUGUST, 1903

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## PREFACE

This study of contract labor is the result of a recent visit to the Hawaiian Islands. In Honolulu, that most hospitable of cities, the author had opportunity to talk with many of the men who have been directly responsible for the laws under which the industrial possibilities of the islands have been developed and who are now engaged, either as planters or as legislators, in devising a substitute labor system. Whatever there may be of value in this monograph is due directly or indirectly to them. I am especially indebted to ex-Attorney General W. O. Smith for access to the early legislation and to court records; to Chief Justice W. F. Frear and Professor W. D. Alexander, who kindly read this essay in manuscript, for some important corrections; to Judge A. S. Hartwell, Mr. L. A. Thurston, and Mr. W. N. Armstrong for many illuminating suggestions; and to Mr. A. P. C. Griffin of the Congressional Library for courteous assistance in hunting down the printed sources of information. The list of references on the subject of contract labor is as yet very brief. The student of this phase of Hawaiian history may therefore congratulate himself on securing the aid of living authorities so wise and so trustworthy.

KATHARINE COMAN.

Cedar Hill, Waltham, Massachusetts,

May 20, 1903.

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