

## Summary Statement: Advancing Removal of the Monaghan Statue

What is perhaps Spokane's most prominent public statue is dedicated to a local U.S. Navy Ensign in what may be our nation's most obscure war. Virtually none of the thousands of Spokaneites who pass by the John R. Monaghan statue each day have any idea of who he was, or the broader context in which he died. It is a darker story than most realize.

- Monaghan served in the U.S. Navy at a time when the United States was aggressively conquering the native lands of foreign people to extend U.S. influence. The overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy and annexation of the Hawaiian Islands, the Spanish-American War, numerous military interventions in China, Japan, and Latin America, the annexation of Puerto Rico and Guam, and the brutal conquest of the Philippines all took place during this era.
- Monaghan participated in some of these events on the battleships U.S.S. *Olympia*, and later, the U.S.S. *Philadelphia*.
- In 1899, the U.S. Navy, under official orders, attacked Sāmoa in an effort to install a ruler favorable to the United States.
- The U.S. Navy commander in 1899 initiated violence against Sāmoans. The *Philadelphia* shelled Sāmoan villages, targeting and killing civilian populations including women and children.
- An eyewitness to one of these bombardments reported “shells bursting everywhere; the cries of the bedridden and the helplessly wounded burning alive in their blazing houses ... mangled children crawling on the sands.”<sup>1</sup>
- U.S. sailors, including Monaghan, went ashore to burn Sāmoan villages.
- Monaghan died in a war that was unjust and immoral.
- The *bas-relief* pediment on the John R. Monaghan statue uses offensive imagery and language that is degrading, perpetuates racist stereotypes, and misrepresents Sāmoan defenders of their land, homes, and resources.
- The statue of Monaghan represents the unprovoked, antagonistic attacks by the United States on Sāmoa and Sāmoan civilians.

The statue and pediment honor a conflict that was not honorable, and cause pain to the Sāmoan and the larger Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities of Spokane, which includes the second largest Marshallese population in the nation. The seeming courage shown by Monaghan at the moment he died is overshadowed by the injustice of the cause for which he died. We call for the immediate removal of the statue and the pediment, and we ask, with deep humility, for the full support of our community members in these efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> Fanny V. de G. Stevenson, “The Samoan Question,” *The Westminster Budget* (London, England) May 5, 1899, p. 8.

## Historic Context & Justification for Removal

American Sāmoa is part of the United States and classified as “unincorporated territory.” The United States invented this classification in the early 1900s in order to cover the contradiction of a republic taking control of territories that do not participate in the U.S. government. Some define this relationship as colonial.<sup>2</sup> American Sāmoans remain the only people born under the U.S. flag whose nationality is “American” but who are not “citizens” at birth. Their civil status as “noncitizen American nationals” means Sāmoans do not get to elect representatives who are part of the government under which they live.<sup>3</sup>

The United States became interested in Sāmoa in the 1870s as U.S. industrialization increased and as other industrial powers (in Europe along with Japan) embarked on a new period of empire building.<sup>4</sup> Speculators from the United States descended on an independent and united Sāmoa seeking land through outright title. The U.S. American mind-set about individual property ownership was at odds with age-old practice in Sāmoa, where land was communal and employed for the benefit of Sāmoans. Like other foreigners, Americans registered questionable land transfer deeds with their own consuls. These “[s]peculators often exacerbated local political rivalries, typically by supplying one lineage group with arms to expel its rivals from the disputed land.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Colonization occurs when a foreign people assert control over local people by usurping indigenous governing institutions and replacing them with governance by foreigners. Colonization often follows in the wake of a war, demonstrating not only a lack of consent by local people but their active opposition to foreign, imperial control. Colonialism is dynamic and expressed in many ways. The imperial power dispossesses local people of their land and resources, privileging the economic interests of the imperial metropole, extracting and benefitting from stolen resources. Imperial administration denigrates the traditions and values of the indigenous people and works to replace them with the colonizer’s own values, beliefs, and practices. They reward colonial subjects for adopting foreign practices and, in this way, they create hierarchies and new divisions among colonized peoples. In the nineteenth century, newly industrial nations leveraged industrial advantages in war and in subsequent dispossession. As they claimed their practices were somehow better, imperial, industrial powers justified not only the imposition of governance but also the eradication of cultures, and the exploitation of people in colonies. These dynamics of colonization help explain why, despite a mid-20th century effort to decolonize, former colonies continue to struggle with economic underdevelopment, crippling debt, political instability, insufficient infrastructure (which includes education and health care), and an inability to meet the needs of people suffering with poverty and existential uncertainties.

<sup>3</sup> Christina Duffy Burnett & Burke Marshall, *Foreign in a Domestic Sense: Puerto Rico, American Expansion, and the Constitution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), Veta Schlimgen, “The Invention of ‘Noncitizen American Nationality & the Meaning of Colonial Subjecthood in the United States,” *Pacific Historical Review*, 89, no. 3 (2020) 317-346, and Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> They were interested in cultivating coconut palm, cotton, and coffee and in deep-water harbors for coal-powered ships. Kees van Dijk, *Pacific Strife: The Great Powers and Their Political and Economic Rivalries in Asia and the Western Pacific 1870-1914* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015). Larry Cebula, “John R. Monaghan Statue: Martyr to an Obscure War,” *Spokane Historical*, <https://spokanehistorical.org/items/show/600> viewed 24 April 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Barry Rigby, “The Origins of American Expansion in Hawaii and Samoa, 1865-1900,” *The International History Review*, 10, no. 2 (May 1988), p. 228 (quote). Line-Noue Memea Kruse, *The Pacific Insular Case*

Americans, British, and Germans created and exacerbated tensions among Sāmoans, and the foreigners also called on their national government to defend their questionable land claims.

Decades of foreign intervention led to a war of political succession among Sāmoans and foreigners in 1898 when the ruler Malietoa Laupepa died. The United States worked to install Tanumafili as the new paramount ruler, or Malietoa. The Americans and British preferred Tanumafili over Matā'afa Iosefo, who was widely popular among Sāmoans and supported by Germany for Malietoa. All sides had come to an uneasy truce early in 1899 with a provisional government under the German-backed Iosefo. In late January, the U.S.S. *Philadelphia* arrived and shattered the peace.

Ensign Robert Monaghan served on the U.S.S. *Philadelphia* and under the command of Rear Admiral Albert Kautz whose goal was to enforce the U.S. choice for paramount ruler of Sāmoa. Soon after his arrival, Kautz abolished the provisional government, installed Tanumafili (supported by the British and Americans) as Malietoa, and ordered Iosefo to leave the Sāmoan city of Apia. When Iosefo refused to relinquish his claim, Kautz threatened to drive him out by force.<sup>6</sup> This belligerence fits with emerging U.S. imperialism in the 1890s and the nation's quick recourse to military intervention. The U.S. Navy intervened, without orders, in the ha'ole overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893, intervened, under orders, in the Philippines in 1898, and in 1899 in Sāmoa.<sup>7</sup>

Kautz's actions exacerbated tensions and led to outright combat. Iosefo's forces tried to take the U.S. and British consulates in Apia. Kautz ordered the *Philadelphia* to open fire on Apia and coastal villages that supported Iosefo, attacking civilian non-combatants. This assault on coastal 'Upolu (the island where Apia is located) was random and indiscriminate, resulting in countless civilian casualties and unintended damage to the U.S. and German consulates. Kautz escalated the violence by sending American marines to 'Upolu to search for and attack Iosefo's forces, even after a tentative truce in late March. Monaghan was part of one of these raids on April 1st. As the outnumbered U.S. soldiers fled advancing Sāmoan troops, Monaghan's commander, Lieutenant Lansdale, fell injured. Monaghan remained behind with Lansdale; they were two of a

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of *American Sāmoa: Land Rights and Law in Unincorporated US Territories* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2018); and Van Dijk, "The Samoan Conflict" in *Pacific Strife*.

<sup>6</sup> Clinton Snowden, "John Robert Monaghan" History of Washington (1911) in James Monaghan Papers, Box 1, "Rob Monaghan" folder, University Archives & Special Collections, Foley Library. Details on Kautz in Van Dijk, *Pacific Strife*, 404.

<sup>7</sup> Noel Kent, *Hawaii: Islands under the Influence* (Manoa: University of Hawaii Press, 1993 [1983]) and Noenoe K. Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

few dozen foreign deaths in the fight to control Sāmoa's government. Most histories of this conflict fail to report the losses suffered by the Sāmoan people.<sup>8</sup>

The conflict was nearing its end when Monaghan died. The attacks launched by Kautz represent a U.S. assault on Sāmoa which, ultimately, ended with foreign intervention and control. By the end of 1899, the United States, Germany, and Great Britain signed the Tripartite Convention, which divided Sāmoa and abolished the existing government. Neither Iosefo, Tanumafili, nor any other Sāmoan was party to this agreement or its negotiation. As the self-proclaimed sovereign of eastern Sāmoa, the United States put the region under martial law and a succession of U.S. Navy commanders acted as governor of this territory newly subjected to U.S. sovereignty.

Sāmoans did not acquiesce to foreign rule. Local Sāmoan governors continued to assert authority in their provinces. Opposition to foreign rule consolidated in the 1920s in the Mau Movement, which was organized around gaining independence for all of Sāmoa in the international community. (Only Western Sāmoa succeeded in this effort when, in 1962, it gained independence; Eastern Sāmoa remains under U.S. sovereignty.)<sup>9</sup>

The Monaghan statue, erected in 1906, came at a particular time in Spokane history, and tells us more about Spokane in that era than it does about Ensign Monaghan.

Spokane was coming off its most rapid period of growth in 1906. The population rose from approximately 350 in 1880 to 19,922 in 1890 and 36,848 in 1900, the year after Monaghan was killed. Spokane's elite were in the process of attempting to shake off the city's reputation as a rough frontier town, and instead present a facade of elegance and culture.<sup>10</sup>

Accordingly, the creation and unveiling of the statue were staged as major public events. Planning began in 1903, led by a committee of prominent citizens.<sup>11</sup> In 1906 prominent sculptor Sigvald Asbjornsen was commissioned to create the statue.

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<sup>8</sup> "Mataafa of Samoa Dies," *The Spokesman-Review*, 15 July 1912, clipping and Snowden, "John Robert Monaghan" both in James Monaghan Papers, Box 1, "Rob Monaghan" folder, University Archives & Special Collections, Foley Library; Van Dijk *Pacific Strife*, 149.

<sup>9</sup> Matt Matsuda, *Pacific Worlds: A History of Seas, Peoples, and Cultures* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); I.C. Campbell, "Resistance and Colonial Government," *The Journal of Pacific History*, 40, no. 1 (June 2005) 45-69; and I.C. Campbell, "Chiefs, Agitators and the Navy: the Mau in American Samoa, 1920-29," *The Journal of Pacific History*, 44, no. 1 (June 2009) 41-60.

<sup>10</sup> George, Holly J. *Show Town: Theater, Urban Identity, and Cultural Change in Spokane, Washington, 1890-1920*. 2011.

<sup>11</sup> "Hero in Life-Like Pose" *The Spokesman-Review*, Spokane, Washington, 18 Nov 1903, p. 14.

Asbjornsen, a Norwegian immigrant, specialized in public sculptures and was already known for his statues of Benjamin Franklin, Leif Erickson, and Abraham Lincoln.<sup>12</sup>

On October 26, 1906, the Ensign John R. Monaghan Memorial was dedicated in Spokane with great pomp and circumstance. Five to ten thousand Spokaneites turned out for what the *Spokesman-Review* described as “eloquent addresses” and a “magnificent parade” a mile in length, that included every active military man, veteran, and marching band the city had to offer. Washington Governor Albert Mead and United States Senator George Turner were among those offering speeches.

Racial slurs against the Sāmoan people were frequent in the ceremony. Governor Mead described Monaghan’s death at the hands of “a score of savages” and “a savage host” and compared the Sāmoans to the “savage horde” of Native Americans that supposedly menaced white settlers in Washington Territory. Turner predicted that the statue “will be cherished as long as this city stands, and when the city and the monument itself shall have crumbled into dust let us hope that the praise of his heroic deed shall still continue to be sung.”<sup>13</sup>

After the 1906 dedication, that statue has largely been taken for granted, and nearly forgotten, despite its prominent location. However, when the statue has come to the attention of the public, racial slurs against the Sāmoan people were often a part of the conversation. The statue has served as a rallying point for racism in the Spokane community.

In 1927, on Memorial Day, the local Veterans of Foreign Wars chapter stationed a guard at the monument all day, in an effort to remind the public of the statue’s significance.<sup>14</sup> In 1935 the city held a ceremony at the statue; the *Chronicle* article about the event noted that the Sāmoans were “savages.”<sup>15</sup> In 1930 the *Chronicle* implored “Let Us Not Forget This Spokane Hero” calling Monaghan “one rifle against many, [a] brave man against a score of savages.”<sup>16</sup> In 1938 the statue was the answer to a trivia question in the *Spokesman-Review*.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Smithsonian American Art Museum and its Renwick Gallery, “John R. Monaghan Monument, (sculpture)” [https://www.si.edu/object/siris\\_ari\\_31407](https://www.si.edu/object/siris_ari_31407) Accessed 5/17/2021.

<sup>13</sup> “Brave Ensign Honored by Speech and Song” Spokane Chronicle, Spokane, Washington 25 Oct 1906, Thu • Page 1.

<sup>14</sup> “In Memoriam” Spokane Chronicle, Spokane, Washington, 30 May 1927, Mon • Page 9

<sup>15</sup> “Ceremony on Sunday Will Honor City’s Naval Hero, Ensign Robert Monaghan,” Spokane Chronicle, Spokane, Washington, 23 Oct 1935, Wed • Page 3.

<sup>16</sup> “Let Us Not Forget This Spokane Hero,” Spokane Chronicle, Spokane, Washington, 07 Nov 1930, Fri • Page 4.

<sup>17</sup> “Spokesman-Review Service Department,” The Spokesman-Review, Spokane, Washington 10 Jun 1938, Fri • Page 4.

When, in 1967, the statue was moved thirty feet to accommodate street construction, the *Spokane Chronicle* felt the need to explain just who Ensign Monaghan was and why we had a statue of him. “In another jungle battle of the Pacific in another century, Spokane had its first Navy hero, Ensign John Robert Monaghan, who died in a steaming Samoan jungle in 1899,” the story began. The parallel with the Vietnam War, where American involvement was rapidly expanding, was particularly appropriate. The article also repeated the description of the Sāmoans as “savages,” illustrating the ways that this statue perpetuates racism against the Sāmoan people.<sup>18</sup>

In recent decades, some Spokanites began to object to what was increasingly seen as a statue that celebrated American imperialism and perpetuated racism.

In 2000 Mark Lanterman filed a complaint with Spokane’s Human Rights Commission, citing the word “savage” as a racist description of the Sāmoan people.<sup>19</sup> The effort was controversial and sparked a number of editorials and letters to the editor of local newspapers, many of which argued that Sāmoans were indeed savage and primitive people. A *Spokesman-Review* columnist wrote: “Betcha heroic Ensign John Robert Monaghan, who inspired that controversial statue at Riverside and Monroe, thought Samoa Islanders were savage before they killed him 101 years ago. And he would have been right . . .”<sup>20</sup> A letter writer claimed that Sāmoans are described as savage “with good reason!”<sup>21</sup> An official statement from the *Spokesman* editorial board read: “The statue should be left as it is.”<sup>22</sup> In the end the statue and the plaques were left unchanged.

In 2020, a Monaghan family member, Ann M. Cameron, wrote a guest editorial for the *Spokesman-Review* arguing again that the Sāmoans who killed Monaghan were indeed savages, going so far as to approvingly quote from Webster’s Dictionary that a savage is “cruel; barbarous; fierce; ferocious; inhuman; brutal.”<sup>23</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The American invasion and annexation of parts of Sāmoa was unprovoked, brutal, and

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<sup>18</sup> “Navy Hero’s Death in 1899 Recalled” *Spokane Chronicle*, Spokane, Washington 04 Nov 1967, Sat • Page 3.

<sup>19</sup> Rob McDonlad, “Mouthpiece not needed, thank you,” *The Spokesman-Review*, Spokane, Washington, 18 Apr 2000, Sun • Page 31.

<sup>20</sup> “Well, they weren’t Samoa welcome wagoners,” *The Spokesman-Review*, Spokane, Washington, 09 Apr 2000, Tue • Page 28.

<sup>21</sup> Mac McCandless, “Gripe is ‘pure esoteric dribble’” *The Spokesman-Review*, Spokane, Washington, 05 Apr 2000, Wed • Page 12.

<sup>22</sup> “Let viewers decide, now and in the future,” *The Spokesman-Review*, Spokane, Washington, 07 Apr 2000, Fri • Page 16.

<sup>23</sup> Ann M. Cameron, “Monaghan statue honors his character,” *The Spokesman-Review*, Spokane, Washington, 05 Aug 2020, Wed • Page c7.

unjust. Huge numbers of Sāmoan civilians were killed in naval bombardments, invasions and burnings of their villages and crops, and by the rifles and machine guns of the American and British invaders. In retrospect, we know this war was not heroic. However brave the actions surrounding Ensign Monaghan's death, they were actions in support of an unjust and needlessly brutal war.

The dedication of the Monaghan Statue in 1906 was tinged with anti-Sāmoan racism and white supremacy, and the statue has served as a rallying point and a justification for these attitudes ever since. This monument - like the war it memorializes - is unjust. The monument represents an injustice in that it attempts to honor Monaghan using a distorted and false depiction of both the war and an entire people. For Spokaneites unfamiliar with our Pacific Islander community, the monument represents an injustice in that it perpetuates a single, erroneous story about Sāmoans and Sāmoan-Americans as a savage foe and robs both them and us of our humanity. For Spokaneites and the many U.S. veterans whose roots are in the Pacific, the monument represents an injustice by inflicting ongoing pain and offense in its misrepresentation of their ancestors and the devastating impact of that war on their community. That pain and offense extends beyond our local community to Pacific Islanders throughout the U.S. and overseas, for whom Spokane, Washington, is known as the place with the offensive Monaghan Statue. The widespread reputation of this monument is a humiliation to our Spokane community and it must be removed.

By the Citizens' Advisory Council (June 2021)

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