

# John Kanaka

Informant/Performer:  
Unknown seaman in Barbados, West Indies

Source:  
Stan Hugill  
*Shanties and Sailor's Songs*  
London: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1969

*Solo*



I heard, I heard the Old Man say,

*Group*



John Ka - na - ka - na - ka tu - lai - e!

*Solo*



To - day to - day is a ho - li - day.

*Group*



John Ka na - ka - na - ka tu - lai - e!



Tu - lai e - oh! tu - lai - e!



John Ka - na - ka - na - ka tu - lai - e!

2. We'll work tomorrow, but no work today,  
John Kanaka-naka, tulai-e!  
Today, today is a holiday,  
John Kanaka-naka, tulai-e!  
Tulai-e, oh! tulai-e!  
John Kanaka-naka, tulai-e!
3. We're bound away for Frisco Bay,  
We're bound away at the break o' day.
4. A Yankee ship with a Yankee crew,  
Oh we're the buckos for to push her through.
5. A Yankee ship with a Yankee mate,  
If you stop to walk he'll change your gait.
6. Oh, haul away, oh, haul away!  
Oh, haul away, an' make your pay!

### Background Information

This halyard song is the only known representative of a sizeable group of Anglicized Polynesian work-songs popular at one time among seamen in the various Pacific Islands trades. Dana, in his *Two Years Before the Mast*, refers to such songs and the singing of them by Mahana, an Hawaiian shantyman in the hide carriers of the Pacific Slope of America in the 1830s.

The one given here appears to have Samoan connections. However, it was not limited to ships in the Pacific Island trades, this one being very popular in most American sailing ships of the mid-nineteenth century. *John Kanaka* is one of the few representatives of the three-line solo and three-line refrain shanties. The "oh" in the third solo, when sung by a good shantyman, was always rendered with a hitch (a sort of wild yelp).