

The Annexation of Hawaii

Background Information

America's annexation of Hawaii in 1898, which extended U.S. territory into the Pacific, resulted from economic integration and the rise of the United States as a Pacific Power. For most of the 1800s leaders in Washington were concerned that Hawaii might become a part of one of the European nations' empires. In 1849 the United States and Hawaii concluded a treaty of friendship that served as the beginning of a good relationship between the two nations.

Hawaii was a key location for American traders, especially for whalers. The country also had fertile grounds used for sugar cane production, and trade continued to flourish between the two nations. By 1875 the United States had majority control of all Hawaiian plantations. The Queen of Hawaii, Queen Liliuokalani, was not happy with all the involvement from the United States and wanted to take back the plantations from the American owners; this did not please the president of the United States and the American people.

In 1893 Samuel Dole overthrew her, kicking her out of power, and using force and violence, put a new leader in who supported American involvement. Having a ruler that supported the United States' involvement, the American plantation owners could do whatever they wanted with the country. Spurred by nationalism the United States annexed Hawaii in 1898 at the urging of President William McKinley. Hawaii was made a territory in 1900, and Dole became the first governor.

Document 1

Hawaii's former Queen Liliuokalani

We never thought that our friends and allies from the United States would ever go so far as to overthrow our government, to seize our nation by the throat... .

Who gives the United States this "Right of Conquest," under which robbers may establish themselves in possession of whatever they are strong enough to take? The question of taking us over is a change from the existing policy of the United States. The native people of Hawaii are faithful to our own chiefs, and are deeply attached to their own customs and government. They either do not understand, or bitterly oppose, this takeover.

Oh, honest Americans, hear me for my down-trodden people! Our form of government is as dear to them as yours is precious to you. Quite as warmly as you love your country, so we love ours. With all your goodly possessions, covering a territory so immense that there yet remain parts unexplored, why do you seek our lands, so far from your shores? You will surely be punished if not in your day, then in that of your children, for "be not deceived, God is not mocked."

Document 2

President Grover Cleveland in 1898

I regarded and still regard the proposed annexation of Hawaii as not only opposed to our national policy but as a perversion of our national mission. The mission of our nation is to build up and make a great country out of what we have, instead of annexing islands.

Document 3

The Great Republic by the Master Historians (Vol. 4)

by Hubert H Bankroff

Excerpt

In the *North American Review*, Mr. Arthur C. James sets forth on the other side of the question what he conceives to be certain advantages of annexation.

He said that before his visit to Hawaii he was strongly opposed to annexation, but that he returned to this country an ardent annexationist. He has become convinced that the Hawaiian Islands would bring to the United States great commercial and industrial advantages. They are situated in the most fertile part of the world, and are capable of producing all the sugar and coffee that this country can consume, besides large quantities of rice and tropical fruits. They have three excellent harbors, and would control the cable communication of the Pacific. Even more significant than the commercial importance of Hawaii is her strategic position in relation to the protection of the Pacific coast of the United States, and this Mr. James regards as another reason why we should desire annexation. To the objection that annexation would be a radical departure from our traditional policy Mr. James replies by citing the cases of Alaska, Louisiana, New Mexico, Texas, California, and other states, whose value at the time of their annexation was less apparent than is Hawaii's value today. Even now Alaska is farther away and less accessible than Honolulu.

Questions:

- What were the arguments in support of the annexation of Hawaii?
- What were the arguments in opposition to the annexation of Hawaii?