

To what extent was American economic expansion into Asian markets the primary cause for its annexation of Hawaii?

May 2020

Word Count: 2194



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Section 1: Identification and Evaluation of Sources

Introduction

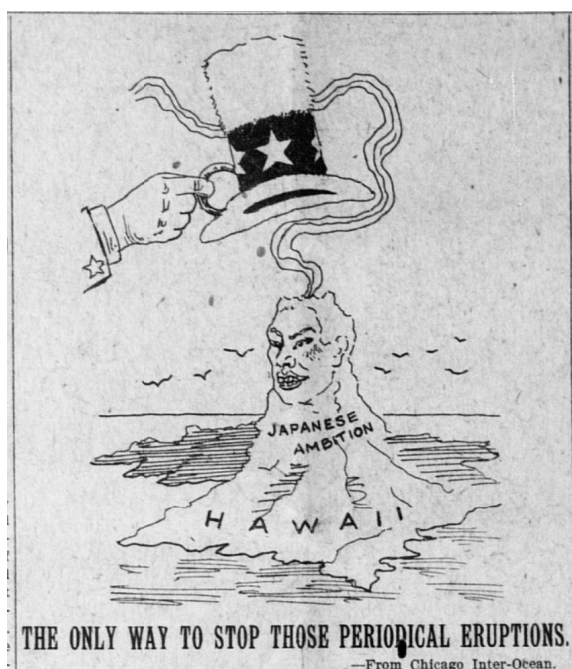
This investigation examines the role of American expansion into Asian trading markets in the United States' 1898 annexation of Hawaii. To answer this question, this essay will extensively consult primary sources from two key stakeholders. The first of these sources is a volume of the Hawaiian Gazette; it is relevant because it was the premier newspaper in Hawaii at the time of annexation, and a fervent advocate of American economic interests. The second source is an extract from Hawaii's Story; it is relevant as it is from a memoir authored by the Queen Lili'uokalani, who was the final queen of Hawaii before the country's overthrow.

Source A: Extract from Hawaii's Story¹

To historians, the value of Liliuokalani's memoir lies in its origin and content. As the final, personally overthrown Queen of Hawaii, she had extensive knowledge on her kingdom's annexation. As its head of state, she also had close connections with the United States government, who was Hawaii's premier trading partner and had extensive business interests in the archipelago. These personal circumstances bolster the credibility of the extract's content; within the passage, Liliuokalani posits that the reasoning behind American expansion into Hawaii was based on nationalistic principles; she asks rhetorically whether the "American Republic of States [is] to degenerate, and become a colonizer and a land-grabber" alongside Europe; this statement furthers the claim that Hawaiian annexation was done for nationalistic reasons. However, the origin and purpose of this document demonstrate the source's limitations; Liliuokalani had a vested interest in retaining the throne, and this belief would incentivise her to portray the American government negatively. An additional limitation of the source is in its purpose as a published memoir. It therefore indicates that Liliuokalani was aware of the wide audience that would read it; the aforementioned agenda that she wanted to impart could have coloured her true account of the event.

¹ Lili'uokalani. Hawaii's Story. London: Forgotten Books, 2015.

Source B: Political Cartoon from the Hawaiian Gazette²



This political cartoon from the Hawaiian Gazette illustrates the views of the American business interests who spearheaded the effort to annex Hawaii. This is reflected in the source's origins; the Hawaiian Gazette was overseen by members of the Committee of Safety, such as William Castle and Sanford Dole — the latter of whom was serving as the first President of Hawaii. The newspaper's views were hence slanted towards portraying annexation favourably. The Gazette's historical value is also limited by its medium; as the premier newspaper in 1897 Hawaii, its editors were aware of its power towards framing the discourse around such a contentious issue. This therefore imposes a degree of scepticism upon analysis of the source's content. However, the source's content demonstrates its historical value; by describing the wave of Asian migration as Japanese 'encroachment' onto Hawaii, and putting the United States in a position to solve this, it infers that intervention in Hawaii is as a result of Japanese intervention.

² National Endowment for the Humanities. "The Hawaiian Gazette. [Volume] (Honolulu [Oahu, Hawaii]) 1865-1918, April 09, 1897, Image 1." News about Chronicling America RSS. Published ... by J.H. Black at the G.P.O. Accessed January 21, 2020.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83025121/1897-04-09/ed-1/seq-1/>.

Section 2: The Investigation

On July 7th 1898, President William McKinley signed the Newlands Resolution. This authorised the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands by the United States — five years after the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy that formed the Hawaiian Republic. This essay will discuss the role of four key causes of the annexation: American economic and military expansion into Asia, anti-Japanese sentiment, and Hawaii's own economic resources through its wealth of sugar plantations. These analyses will conclude that Hawaii was primarily annexed due to its strategic location as a midpoint between the United States and the burgeoning Asian economies that it was in the midst of expanding into.

Anti-Japanese sentiment could be seen as one key reason for Hawaii's annexation. In *Pacific Strife*, Professor Cees van Dijk argues that Japan was “the new threat perceived to the American position in Hawaii”³. It had undergone a period of rapid military expansion into Asia, and East Asian labourers comprised the majority of the Hawaiian population. Hawaii experienced a rapid influx of Japanese immigration, from 116 migrants in 1883 to over 24,000 by 1896⁴. With the Qing dynasty in a state of decline, Japan was in a position to claim legitimacy to the Hawaiian Islands. The Japanese minister to the United States, Toru Hoshi, was sent to strongly protest against the impending annexation, citing the “endangerment of...rights of Japanese subjects in Hawaii”⁵. These fears reached the White House; President McKinley allegedly told Senator George Hoar that “we cannot let the islands go to Japan.”⁶ In Hawaii, the *Hawaiian Gazette* portrayed the islands as a volcano of Japanese ambition — one that only annexation could halt. Although the above evidence demonstrates a fear of Japanese control of Hawaii (to which annexation would therefore be an act of defence), one must consider

³ Dijk, Cees van. *Pacific Strife: The Great Powers and Their Political and Economic Rivalries in Asia and the Western Pacific (1870-1914)*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015.

⁴ Bailey, Thomas A. "Japan's Protest Against the Annexation of Hawaii." *The Journal of Modern History* 3, no. 1 (1931): 46-61. Accessed February 1, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/1872141.

⁵ Osborne, Thomas J. "The Main Reason for Hawaiian Annexation in July, 1898." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 71, no. 2: 161-78. Accessed January 10, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/20613162.

⁶ HOAR, GEORGE FRISBIE. *AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF SEVENTY YEARS*. S.I.: FORGOTTEN BOOKS, 2015.

that the Gazette's editorial position stance may have been affected by their pro-US business lobby ownership. The Gazette would hence have a vested interest in portraying annexation as a natural security issue, as opposed to one rooted in corporate self-interest. These fears were ultimately unfounded; the protests by Hoshi were withdrawn six months before annexation⁷, and the Japanese Foreign Office informed Secretary of State John Sherman after annexation that "there is no danger of a rupture" between the two countries. Considering the lack of American interference in other instances of Japanese military expansion, the US' desire to place a stranglehold on Hawaii indicates that it had existing interests in the islands that it wanted to maintain, which were more likely to have catalysed annexation.

An additional long-term cause for the annexation was the role of American sugar interests in Hawaii; these business leaders overthrew the monarchy in 1893, creating the Hawaiian Republic with the explicit purpose of United States annexation⁸. Historian Edward Beechert argues that "the question of sovereignty and the welfare of the sugar industry were never separate questions."⁹ Sugar plantations flourished in the decades after the Civil War; the economic collapse of the American South increased demand, and the 1875 Reciprocity Treaty lifted tariffs for all United States sugar imports from Hawaii. By 1890, Hawaiian sugar exports had reached 225 million pounds, over ten times its value in 1876¹⁰. The labour behind these sugar plantations were from native Hawaiians and East Asian migrants; Stephen Kinzer argues that their comprisal of over 90% of the population led to opposition from the so-called Committee of Safety (a group of Caucasian business leaders) for a new constitution that would expand suffrage¹¹. Conversely, annexation would allow the United States to

⁷ Osborne, Thomas J. "The Main Reason for Hawaiian Annexation in July, 1898." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 71, no. 2: 161–78. Accessed January 10, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/20613162.

⁸ Chamberlain, Eugene Tyler. "The Hawaiian Situation: The Invasion of Hawaii." *Digital History*. Accessed February 6, 2020. http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=4050.

⁹ Silva, Noenoe K. *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.

¹⁰ Kinzer, Stephen. *Overthrow: Americas Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq*. New York: Times Books, 2007.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

unilaterally impose its economic interests on Hawaii, weighted in favour of the Committee of Safety. However, the Committee's initial plans were stymied by an isolationist Cleveland administration; although the Committee's fundamental goal was American annexation¹², these plans were only realised after the inauguration of an expansionist president.

Alternatively, the annexation could have been due to Hawaii's strategic location as a military base. This argument was topical in a political climate dominated by the 1898 Spanish-American War; one of the war's major theatres was located in the Philippines, which the United States was on the verge of winning as a protectorate. However, the discourse preceding annexation focused on using Hawaii to aid the war effort. Congressman Robert Hitt, Chairman of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, said that "it is not possible to send support to [Admiral George Dewey, general in the Spanish-American War] without taking on coal and supplies at Honolulu in the Hawaiian Islands¹³." The pure intent of this source is tempered, however, when considering that Hitt was later appointed to the commission to establish American governance in Hawaii¹⁴. Congressman Hitt therefore had a vested interest in the passage of the Newlands Resolution, as it increased his proximity to power. However, Hitt's sole self-interest was not applicable to the 208 other Congressmen who voted for the resolution in July 1898, compared to the 91 representatives who opposed it. It was only after the onset of war that the first of many resolutions to annex Hawaii passed Congress. Although the 1897 Treaty of Annexation failed to gain a two-thirds majority in the Senate in early 1898, the joint resolution of annexation was signed in July with 70% support. It entrenched existing American military presence, and Pearl Harbor was built as a base during the following year¹⁵. Thus, one can conclude that the Spanish-American war catalysed annexation by pinpointing the military advantages of Hawaii's location.

¹²Kuykendall, Ralph S. *The Hawaiian Kingdom*. Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Pr., 1967.

¹³ Osborne, Thomas J. "The Main Reason for Hawaiian Annexation in July, 1898." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 71, no. 2: 161–78. Accessed January 10, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/20613162.

¹⁴ "HITT, Robert Roberts." *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress*. Accessed March 8, 2020. <https://bioguideretro.congress.gov/Home/MemberDetails?memIndex=h000649>.

¹⁵ *My Story: Pearl Harbor Home*. Accessed February 1, 2020. <http://teacher.scholastic.com/pearl/>.

Hawaii's existing military role towards the United States at the time of its annexation, however, limits the significance of its military use as a cause of the event. Annexation occurred on the same day – August 12, 1898 – that hostilities stopped between Spain and the United States, marking the end of combat within the Spanish-American War. Furthermore, the Hawaiian Republic already provided the United States with substantial military assistance, with American navy transport receiving 1,667 tons of coal from Honolulu in the summer of 1898¹⁶. It is therefore more likely that Hawaii's location was used as an economic, rather than military, means. Kinzer argues that the United States was gripped by the search for overseas influence, and that the spread of its ideals — violent or otherwise — had the ulterior motive of securing the “markets, resources, and investment potential of these distant lands.”¹⁷ The Senate Foreign Relations Committee stated that “ships of war are the necessary complement to ships of commerce”, with Hawaii being “indispensable...as the protector of our commerce.”¹⁸ However, the origin of this quote betrays its limitation; the Committee was led by a prominent advocate for the US shipping industry, Sen. William Frye, who stood to politically gain from the expansion of the industry that was centered in his home state¹⁹. A highly productive manufacturing sector left America searching for markets to sell its goods in; the New York Times writes that American manufacturing was higher than any European nation, and its mineral production was higher than all of Europe combined²⁰. Unlike in Europe, China's “Open Door” policy prevented the country from administering tariffs to imports, allowing the United States to sell its manufactured goods cheaply. With annexation, the Times predicted that 1898 would mark the largest total exports of American history by 12 million dollars from any other year.²¹ Hawaii's role

¹⁶ Osborne, Thomas J. “The Main Reason for Hawaiian Annexation in July, 1898.” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 71, no. 2: 161–78. Accessed January 10, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/20613162.

¹⁷ Kinzer, Stephen. *Overthrow: Americas Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq*. New York: Times Books, 2007.

¹⁸ Senate Report 681, “Report on the Joint Resolution for the Annexation of Hawaii,” 55 Cong, 2 Sess, p. 16

¹⁹ United States Congress. “William Pierce Frye (Late a Senator from Maine) : Memorial Addresses Delivered in the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States, Sixty-Second ...” HathiTrust. Accessed March 8, 2020. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.hn2ztr&view=1up&seq=24>.

²⁰ New York Times, Feb 21, 1893, p.6

²¹ New York Times, July 1, 1898, p.4

would be to facilitate and protect this shipping process, and its management would also benefit from the revenue that increased trade would bring to the United States.

Hawaiian annexation was ultimately due to attitudes of American expansionism. While the overthrown Queen Lili'uokalani frames this through the ideological lens of colonisation, this expansionism was most prominently shown through economic terms. Business leaders in a newly-industrialised country were eager to sell their goods, and had the political capital to directly influence governmental action. American influence in Asia was also demonstrated through hard power: the conquest of the Philippines and islands in Oceania also necessitated the use of Hawaii as a midpoint in the vast Pacific Ocean. This imperialist political climate could also have contributed to the anti-Japanese sentiment present in the media, further rallying the public to support annexation. Ultimately, an economic analysis behind the causes of annexation prevails to be the most significant. In addition to directly benefiting from their newfound access to Asia's markets, American business interests also contributed to the corollary cause of military aggression and its consequence of anti-Japanese opinion.

Section 3: The Reflection

One insight from this investigation about the methods of the historian is how they limit the scope of their research. I initially intended to center my essay around the role of “Manifest Destiny,” as alluded to in a quote by President McKinley. Disregarding the relevance of such a primary sources, I was unable to find other pieces of evidence that definitively proved the causality of “Manifest Destiny” as an idea. Historians are bound by the sources that support their arguments, and it is evident that certain schools of thought are not supported by the depth of information required for extensive historical analysis.

A challenge that I faced in my investigation was in obtaining a primary source that was relevant both in its content and origin. While I obtained sources such as the Blount Report and the memoirs of Sanford Dole, it was difficult to obtain a short extract from these sources that clearly delineated a motive to the Hawaiian annexation. Unlike a history textbook, primary sources do not necessarily make their views explicit, and historians may find it challenging to pinpoint a cohesive viewpoint that neatly lines up with established historical perspectives.

Another insight that I had into the challenges of the historian is on the prevention of bias. The journal articles and books that I consulted date a span of 70 years, and are from people with varying beliefs. Noenoe K. Silva’s work is rooted in an anticolonial perspective, while Stephen Kinzer’s work focuses on American actions. The inclusion of such narratives means that both authors need to select data that fits their portrayal of history — and will inevitably disregard other pieces of data that are also important. These historians have addressed the limitations of their worldview through the integration of different perspectives into their books, which are in turn supported by different data. As having high quantities of evidence allows for the existence of differing, valid historical narratives — it is the historian’s imperative to be upfront in making clear whether what they state is fact or perspective.

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Appendix

Full Text of Source A

[...]Perhaps I may even venture here upon a final word respecting the American advocates of this annexation of Hawaii. I observe that they have pretty successfully striven to make it a party matter. It is chiefly Republican statesmen and politicians who favor it. But is it really a matter of party interest? Is the American Republic of States to degenerate, and become a colonizer and a land-grabber?

And is this prospect satisfactory to a people who rely upon self-government for their liberties, and whose guaranty of liberty and autonomy to the whole western hemisphere, the grand Monroe doctrine, appealing to the respect and the sense of justice of the masses of every nation on earth, has made any attack upon it practically impossible to the statesmen and rulers of armed empires? There is little question but that the United States could become a successful rival of the European nations in the race for conquest, and could create a vast military and naval power, if such is its ambition. But is such an ambition laudable? Is such a departure from its established principles patriotic or politic?

Source B

