

# **Aloha `Oe: The End of the Hawaiian Monarchy: Examining Sugar's Effects on the Reign of Hawaii's Final Queen**

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Mention Hawaii to the general public and vivid, iconic images most likely come to mind. Even those who have not visited the fiftieth state will certainly imagine palm trees, luaus, beaches and vibrant leis draped around tourists' necks. Beyond the generic images of tourism and the natural beauty of the Hawaiian archipelago, an earlier generation may conjure memories of a darker nature—war and death. American men and women who lived through World War II may remember the tragic bombing of Pearl Harbor that catapulted America into the Second World War. Those famous words spoken by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in reference to December 7, 1941—“a date which will live in infamy”—may certainly be a component of their vision of Hawaii. However, if the name Liliuokalani is asked of these same people, whether it be the World War II generation or the generation at present, would this Hawaiian monarch, who fought for her and her people's autonomy, register any acknowledgement at all?<sup>1</sup>

The intention of this essay is to examine Liliuokalani's leadership and her role as monarch as her kingdom was lost to American expansionism. While looking at her leadership, I will also address the factors that affected the rule of Hawaii's last queen and, in the end, helped diminish her authority. Overall, the purpose is to acknowledge and bring attention to a much-neglected Hawaiian monarch.

Liliuokalani was the final ruler of the Hawaiian monarchy and played a pivotal role in Hawaii's transition from kingdom to brief republic and its eventual annexation by the United States. Soon after ascending the throne in 1891, the new queen had hoped to introduce a new constitu-

tion, revising the restrictions placed on the monarchy by the U.S.-imposed 1887 constitution, also called the Bayonet Constitution, because it was forced upon the previous monarch, King Kalakaua. The proposed constitution was controversial; for many Liliuokalani's affiliation with the document branded her a revolutionary figure and set off alarms of concern among foreigners who were heavily invested in the sugar industry



**Figure 1:** Queen Liliuokalani, final monarch of the Hawaiian Kingdom.

of the islands. Like her brother and predecessor, Kalakaua, Liliuokalani's leadership and ability to rule was called into question. In a speech to the U.S. Congress, President Benjamin Harrison, a vocal supporter of annexation, considered her government "efete", "inadequate", and "weak."<sup>2</sup> President Harrison also referred to her proposed constitutional change as "reactionary and revolutionary." In reporting the overthrow of the queen, the *New York Times* in 1893 compared her leadership to her late

brother, and like President Harrison used the term "revolutionary" to describe her actions while painting her a willful and angry queen.<sup>3</sup> Both of the sources were directed to the supporters of annexation. The speech by Harrison calling for the annexation of Hawaii and the *Times* both supported the overthrow of the queen. *Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen* provided Liliuokalani's perspective. The deposed monarch sought to clarify her position regarding the events that unfolded around the constitutional reform she attempted to produce. She also wanted to give her side of Hawaiian history as it unfolded during her final days as ruler of the Pacific Island kingdom. These three sources present opposite views of the same woman, the first two impart that of a strong-willed and inept leader capable of revolution while the third conveys that of a queen fighting for her fading kingdom and people, endeavoring to return authority to the monarchy and Hawaii to its people. Two faces, two interpretations.<sup>4</sup>

The history of Hawaii prior to the annexation is often absent from American history textbooks.<sup>5</sup> Even Hawaiians have found their educational system and textbooks to be lacking when it comes to representing accurately and appropriately Hawaiian history, and in 1979 passed an amendment to the state constitution that required upgrading the curriculum for students through twelfth grade.<sup>6</sup> Regardless of how Hawaiian history is presented in textbooks, however, the fact remains that the indigenous people and their way of life were changed forever once the ships of British explorer James Cook landed on what he later called the Sandwich Islands. The exotic locale and stories of the lives of the natives soon made their way across the oceans bring in *haoles*, or foreigners, who sought to civilize the “immoral” and “uneducated” natives. When Cook arrived in the islands, it is estimated that there were as many as 800,000 people spread throughout the island chain. The European presence, however, introduced diseases to which the islanders were not immune and combined with changes in the economy and the immigration of plantation workers from China and Japan, the native population shrank dramatically. As few as 29,800 people were documented as native by 1900.<sup>7</sup> The outside world was quickly changing and destroying a group of people that it had originally intended to save.

By the time Liliuokalani became queen, American and foreign interests were deeply engrained in Hawaii. The queen herself had been educated in a Western school and identified with the Christian faith and culture. She married an American man and even adopted the Anglican name Lydia. Though she was dressed in Western fashion and understood Western ways and culture, Liliuokalani also loved Hawaii, her people, and wanted to preserve the Polynesian culture that had existed in the islands prior to Cook’s discovery. In the Bayonet constitution forced upon her brother, she saw American power and intentions laid bare. The Americans openly intended to diminish the authority of the Hawaiian monarchy. When she tried to introduce a new constitution that would have returned power to the Hawaiian monarchy and people, Liliuokalani ignited the spark that started the Hawaiian revolution. Julie Flynn Siler’s recent book, *Lost Kingdom*, asserts that Lorrin Thurston, a third generation Hawaiian businessman born of *haoles*, immediately organized oppo-

sition to the queen's proposed new constitution (the constitution's implementation had been postponed because of disagreement within her cabinet).<sup>8</sup> Respected Hawaiian historian, Ralph S. Kuykendall defined the constitutional dilemma as the "proximate" cause of Liliuokalani's overthrow and also notes Thurston and Dole's roles in the revolution. He maintains that the new constitution served as the cinder block that ignited the movement against the monarchy. Thurston confided to member of the Committee of Safety, a group of men created to monitor the queen and her actions that "steps must be taken at once to form and declare a provisional government."<sup>9</sup>

The men, who led the Hawaiian revolution, in particular Lorrin Thurston and Sanford B. Dole, along with leaders like President Benjamin Harrison, argued that Liliuokalani's leadership was detrimental to the Hawaiians and it was necessary to remove her from power. Thurston's own grandson, Thurston Twigg-Smith contended that her own men wanted to oust her and that democracy was the only route for the Hawaiian people, though the argument for Hawaiian sovereignty continues to this day.<sup>10</sup>

Views on Queen Lydia Dominis, Liliuokalani's married name, are varied but tend to fall within two areas of thinking. First, as seen with President Harrison and the *New York Times*, they held the notion that the Queen was unfit to rule and a deterrent to progress in Hawaii. Liliuokalani, however, believed that her actions and governing were in the best interests of her people. She was also convinced that the petition signed by a majority of native Hawaiians showed the extent of support she garnered for the introduction of a new constitution. After she was deposed, she continued to plead her case and that of her people before the U. S. government until the annexation was complete. There were arguments against the queen, challenging her character and including the use of Social Darwinist arguments to support the idea that she was incapable of ruling.<sup>11</sup> Also, the comparisons to Kalakua, who was known for his excessive use of money and corruption during his own reign, were made to damage the queen's integrity and image. Such contemporary claims, of course, returns the historian back to the question of Liliuokalani and her

leadership. *Was she a capable leader, as she believed, during Hawaii's final years as a kingdom?*

Julius Pratt, in his 1932 article reinterpreting the Hawaiian revolution, defended Hawaii's last queen against the charges of her morality and the attacks on her character. He also made the argument that the people of Hawaii, composed of a majority of foreigners, wanted stability in government and saw the United States as a means to provide a better system of governing.<sup>12</sup> It is clear from most historical scholarship concerning the Hawaiian revolution that the "Sugar Kings" wanted a stronger grip on Hawaii and that American interests in the islands reiterated the growing economic and political geographic importance of the islands. With the gold rush on the Pacific coast, the convenient location of the islands for trade with Asia and interests from France, Russia and Japan, the latter's interest along with the Spanish-American War only served to strengthen American interest in the archipelago.<sup>13</sup> Concerning sugar, there is common agreement among historians that while the profitable crop alone was not the key factor in the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy; it did in the end play a significant role. Pratt, however, dismissed sugar as a relevant factor in the Hawaiian revolution. His analysis has



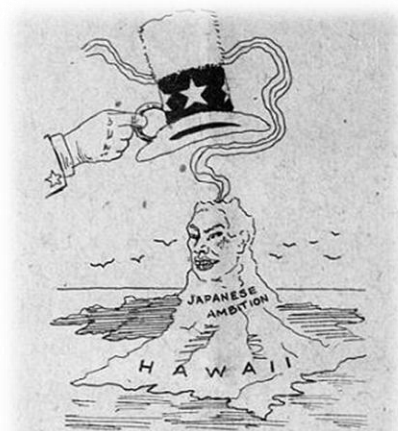
**Figure 1:** Sanford B. Dole and Lorrin Thurston

been easily and often refuted by subsequent historians. William A. Russ Jr., Sumner J. La Croix and Christopher Grandy have all made successful arguments against Pratt's interpretation that sugar played no role in Hawaii's revolution.<sup>14</sup> Though sugar may not have been the main component in sparking

the revolution, the effects it generated were certainly elements in creating the momentum for an anti-royalist revolution. But the question remains, was it possible for Lilioukalani to truly make a difference for

Hawaii through her leadership or were the effects of the sugar industry and American interests too deeply engrained in the Hawaiian Islands?

The act considered treasonous and revolutionary was Liliuokalani's desire to introduce a new constitution that would allow native Hawaiians more control as well as strengthening the monarchy. The Bayonet Constitution actually allowed for a new constitution pending approval of the queen's cabinet.<sup>15</sup> Yet this action sent a wave of anger and fear through those supporting annexation, particularly Americans with financial interests in the islands. It gave them the opportunity and reason to rid Hawaii of its monarchy and replace it with a provisional government. Another revelation that might be considered supportive of the queen's revolutionary tendencies was weaponry found buried in her gardens. Neither of



**Figure 2:** A political cartoon expressing fear of Japanese intrusion in the Hawaiian archipelago, "The Hawaiian Gazette," April 9, 1897.

these actions garner enough evidence to suggest the notion that the Queen presented a true danger to American business or the democracy of the Hawaiian people. In truth, the effects created by the sugar economy were like tentacles strangling the islands. My view, having examined the subject, leads me to believe that the move toward annexation was inevitable and it is unlikely that Liliuokalani's efforts could have changed that momentum.

Three components of sugar's effects can be traced to huge changes in the islands and its inhabitants. First, the reciprocal trade treaty between the United States and Hawaii was the catalyst for the rise and success of the sugar plantations. Sumner J. La Croix and Christopher Grandy, in their 1997 article on the reciprocal trade treaty place it as a major factor in the revolution and contend that the treaty is more relevant in the revolution than sugar itself.<sup>16</sup> This treaty created an environment that allowed immense growth and economic advantage for the owners of

these plantations. The second important effect concerning sugar was the wealth it brought to the white owners of the sugar plantations. This created a lopsided economic advantage for the foreigners and placed growing influence and power in their hands. Finally, sugar changed the racial structure of the island, bringing in Asian immigrants to work in the sugar industry. Having succumbed to disease introduced by Cooke and his men, the dwindling native population only suffered further size reduction as an immigrant worker population grew. William A. Russ Jr. viewed the changing racial demographics as the key factor in sugar's role in the Hawaiian revolution. Fear of a dominant Asian population, he asserted, compelled the white Hawaiian population to revolt and support annexation to avoid possible Japanese interference in the islands. Russ mentions a fear among Annexationists concerning possible Japanese movement into the kingdom with justification being the growing Japanese population.<sup>17</sup>

Liliuokalani's one true revolutionary act, trying to promulgate a new constitution, ended in failure but it was enough to give her opposition the political ammunition they needed to depose her. The weapons buried in her garden were found *after* she was arrested for treason and there was never any proof of her connection to them. Rather than resort to the bloodshed of her people and agitate the situation further, however, she reluctantly agreed to abdicate her throne and instead sought help through diplomatic channels. The ex-queen used words to plead her case to the American president and travelled to Washington D. C. in hopes that her monarchy would be restored. It is clear in her autobiography that Liliuokalani thought that her removal as Hawaii's ruler would be temporary and she felt justice would return the islands to the people and the monarchy. While words by great orators can be used to spark revolutions, this is not the means that Liliuokalani used to plead her case. She believed that the powers that be in Washington would hear her case and see the illegality of the American role in the revolution. None of her actions, including the effort to undo a constitution she saw unfit for the Hawaiian kingdom and its people, were truly revolutionary.

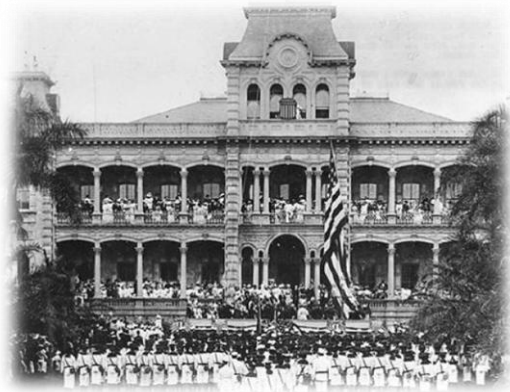
Thurston Twigg-Smith, grandson of Lorrin Thurston argues that the removal of Liliuokalani was necessary for the betterment of Hawaii and

its people, including the native Hawaiians. Obviously, we can make no comparison to the lives of native Hawaiians had Liliuokalani been able to restore the monarchy. We can, however, look at the lives of the descendants of the Polynesian people who lived in the islands before westerners discovered them. According to Jon M. Van Dyke, those descended of indigenous blood are now at the bottom rung of the socioeconomic ladder.<sup>18</sup> He also references the Apology Resolution,<sup>19</sup> enacted in Congress by 1993, that recognizes the unlawful removal of Liliuokalani and the seizure of Hawaiian land without compensation. This public law in essence admits American aggression in Hawaii and seeks resolution between Hawaiians and the American government.

Liliuokalani proved to be a good leader for *her* people; the minority of indigenous descendants of the islands. The problem that proved her undoing was that she was *also* ruling the majority of *haoles*—American, Chinese, and Japanese—within the kingdom. Throughout the previous decades, Hawaii lost more and more of its lands to foreign businessmen, particularly Americans. The rippling effects of sugar throughout the island and America’s growing realization of Hawaii’s importance in the Pacific realm created a perfect storm that was inescapable for the beleaguered Queen and her kingdom. From my reading of this period of Hawaiian history, I find that Liliuokalani made the best decisions she could make for her people but in the end was unable to escape the many factors

that had changed Hawaii irrevocably. The effects of the sugar industry and American expansionism proved far more powerful than her ability to make lasting changes for her kingdom.

On a final note, Liliuokalani may have felt that a higher court, one that she embraced within the Christian faith of



**Figure: 3:** Annexation celebration in 1897 at Iolani Palace.



Western culture, would provide eventual justice on the behalf of the Hawaiian people. Vowell remarks that after reading *Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen* a second time, she became acutely aware of the final sentence of the book. The sentence asking Americans to view her and Hawaii with compassion ends with "so may the Great Ruler of all nations deal with the grand and glorious nation of the United States of America."<sup>20</sup> While she had been forced to relinquish her throne to an imperial power, it is not farfetched to assume that Liliuokalani felt that even the American knee must bow to a higher power. Considering this assumption, had the deposed queen lived to see the attack on Pearl Harbor, is there the possibility that she might have seen this as an act of divine retribution? Possible, perhaps, but highly unlikely from a leader who, following the Hawaiian Revolution sought "to prevent the shedding of the blood of my people, natives and foreigners alike" and to "pursue the path of peace and diplomatic discussion."<sup>21</sup> As a queen or an American citizen, Liliuokalani's words and actions clearly showed that Hawaii and its people were always her first priority.

### Appendix

1. Figure 1 source: (<http://www.biography.com/people/liliuokalani-39552>)
2. Figure 2 source:  
(<http://books.google.com/books?id=gbzIoTq1RzYC&lpg=PA16&pg=PA16#v=onepage&q&f=ffals>)
3. Figure 3: source:  
(<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83025121/1897-04-09/ed-1/seq-1/>)
4. Figure 4 source: (<http://jchatoff.wordpress.com/2012/01/17/queen-of-the-islands/>)

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For information on Liliuokalani, a suggested start is her autobiography, *Liliuokalani, Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen* (Honolulu: Mutual Publishing, 1990). For further reading, see Ralph S. Kuykendall, *Hawaiian King-*

*dom Vol. 3* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1967). It is highly recommended.

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Harrison, "Message to the Senate Transmitting a Treaty to Annex the Hawaiian Islands," *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=71150#axzz1tCOQ2zIV> (accessed April 26, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> "A Revolution in Hawaii," *New York Times*, Jan. 28, 1893, 1.

<sup>4</sup> For full citation, see note 2.

<sup>5</sup> In my experience in American History classes, Hawaiian history has been very limited, other than the attack on Pearl Harbor. In high school, my teacher never referenced Liliuokalani and the Tennessee State University textbook reduces the subject of the former Queen to a paragraph. The textbook used at Tennessee State University is *The American People and the Struggle for Freedom*, Custom Edition for Tennessee State University (New York: Pearce Custom Publishing, 2008), 603.

<sup>6</sup> Julie Kaomea, "A Curriculum of Aloha? Colonialism and Tourism in Hawaii's Elementary Textbooks," *Curriculum Inquiry Vol. 30*, no. 3 (Autumn, 2000): 321.

<sup>7</sup> Davianna McGregor, "Asian Nation," <http://www.asian-nation.org/hawaiian-pacific.shtml> (accessed March 18, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Julie Flynn Siler, *Lost Kingdom: Hawaii's Last Queen, the Sugar Kings and America's First Imperial Adventure* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2011), 208.

<sup>9</sup> Kuykendall, 587.

<sup>10</sup> Thurston Twigg-Smith, *Hawaiian Sovereignty: Do the Facts Matter?* (Honolulu: Goodale Publishing, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> This article gives a clear example of the view that the Queen was incapable to rule and uses Social Darwinism to back up the claim. The entire *New York Times* article dated February 3, 1895 and entitled "The Arrest of Liliuokalani." The article can be accessed at the following URL: <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F70F16F9395911738DDDA0894DA405B8585F0D3>

<sup>12</sup> Julius Pratt, "The Hawaiian Revolution: A Re-interpretation," *Pacific Historical Review 1*, no. 3 (1932): 273-294.

<sup>13</sup> Stephen B. Jones and Klaus Mehnert, "Hawaii and the Pacific: A Survey of Political Geography," *Geographical Review 30*, no. 3 (July 1940): 358-366.

<sup>14</sup> Sumner J. La Croix and Christopher Grandy, "The Political Instability of Reciprocal Trade and the Overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom," *The Journal of Economic History 57*, no. 1 (1997): 161-189.

<sup>15</sup> Sarah Vowell, *Unfamiliar Fishes* (New York: Penguin Group, 2011), 206.

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<sup>16</sup> La Croix and Grandy, 161-189.

<sup>17</sup> William A Russ Jr., "The Role of Sugar in Hawaiian Annexation," *Pacific Historical Review* 12, no. 4 (Dec. 1943): 343.

<sup>18</sup> Jon M. Van Dyke. "The Political Status of the Native Hawaiian People," *Yale Law and Policy Review* 17, no. 1 (1998):95-147.

<sup>19</sup> The full document can be found at the following URL:  
[http://www.alohaquest.com/archive/apology\\_full.htm](http://www.alohaquest.com/archive/apology_full.htm)

<sup>20</sup> Vowell, 58.

<sup>21</sup> Liliuokalani, *Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen*, 282.