

American Politics: Plotting the Illegal Hawaiian Kingdom Overthrow and Illegal Annexation

After the Civil War of 1861-1865 the Kingdom of Hawai'i was already in the crosshairs of more serious US annexation. The country was flush with money from unspent taxes imposed during the Civil War. It was secured from coast to coast and the Presidency was securely in the hands of Republican Union Civil War veterans who had defeated the secessionist Southern States Democrats and looked for expansion into the Pacific under their doctrine of divine destiny. The navy was expanded with iron warships and two of them under the command of Major General Schofield and Colonel Alexander had visited Honolulu in 1873 under the guise of a "friendly mission," spying on the kingdom and mapping out the potential of Pearl Harbor as a navy base for expansion into the Pacific. In 1840 US Navy Commodore Charles Wilkes had first surveyed the Pearl Harbor area and described it as "the best and most capacious harbor in the Pacific."

Grover Cleveland, the leader of the pro-business Democrats, opposed imperialism, high tariffs, inflation, and subsidies and had established a reputation for relentlessly fighting the widespread political corruption of both the Democratic and Republican parties. Not actually running for president, he was unexpectedly chosen by his Democratic party as a compromise candidate and also unexpectedly won the presidential election, as the public had become sick of the widespread political corruption. He therefore won his first term in 1884 at a time of Republican political domination dating to 1861 which had become pro imperialistic and clamored for colonial expansion. If Cleveland would not have been president during the time of the 1887 "Bayonet Revolution," it is most likely that King Kalakaua would have been overthrown and a Republican expansionist president would have immediately "annexed" the Kingdom of Hawaii.

In retrospect the sugar industry run by big business interests and its connection to Pearl Harbor desired by the US for its expansion across the Pacific proved to be the downfall of the kingdom. The U.S. tariff on sugar posed a major obstacle to expanding sugar production in Hawai'i during peacetime, as the high tariff, ranging from 20 to 42 percent between 1850 and 1870, limited the extent of profitable sugar cultivation in the islands. Sugar interests helped elect King Kalakaua to the Hawaiian throne over the British-leaning Queen Emma in February 1874, and Kalakaua immediately sought a trade agreement with the United States. The 1876 reciprocity treaty between Hawai'i and the United States allowed duty-free sales of Hawai'i sugar and other selected agricultural products in the United States as well as duty-free sales of most U.S. manufactured goods in Hawai'i. Sugar exports from Hawai'i to the United States soared after the treaty's promulgation, rising from 21 million pounds in 1876 to 114 million pounds in 1883 to 224.5 million pounds in 1890 (*Economic History of Hawai'i* Sumner La Croix, University of Hawai'i and East-West Center).

However, as a condition for renewal of the treaty, the United States demanded access to Pearl Bay [now Pearl Harbor], apparently being in a better bargaining position because of the extensive investment by the sugar barons in Hawai'i sugar plantations. King Kalakaua opposed this demand, and in July 1887, opponents of the government forced the king to accept the "Bayonet Constitution" as well as a new cabinet with a new government dominated by American interests. The king then signed (was forced to sign?) an extension of the reciprocity treaty in October 1887 that granted access rights to Pearl Bay to the United States for the life of the treaty (based on *Economic History of Hawai'i* Sumner La Croix, University of Hawai'i and East-West Center).

In his first term Cleveland supported free trade with Hawai'i but accepted an amendment that gave the United States a coaling and naval station in Pearl Harbor.

In 1888 President Cleveland won the popular election for a second term but narrowly lost the electoral votes as the Republicans had won Indiana, largely as the result of a fraudulent voting practice known as Blocks of Five. The Republican victory in Indiana, where Cleveland lost by just 2,348 votes, was sufficient to give Republican candidate Harrison the presidency, despite his loss of the nationwide popular vote. Harrison was known to favor colonial expansion into the Pacific and let it be known that he favored "annexation" of the Hawaiian Kingdom if it would be overthrown. A secret organization formed by Lorrin A. Thurston, the Annexation Club, had also sent delegates to Washington to further scout the members of Congress and the secretaries of the State and Navy and received support for an overthrow. Thurston's fortunes and also the fortunes of his co-conspirators would rise considerably as a result of the illegal 1898 annexation by the United States, since it removed all duties from shipments to the largest market, the USA.

Fearing anarchy and a possible annexation of Hawaii to the United States, British Commissioner to Hawaii Woodehouse had requested the stationing of a British warship at Honolulu which was carried out with the arrival of the H.B.M.S *Chappin* on June 27, 1892 (*Rise and Fall of the Hawaiian Kingdom*).

When the Kingdom was finally overthrown on January 17, 1893, the conspirators seized 1.75 million acres of crown land and conspired with then US President Harrison to annex it quickly to the United States. With Sanford Dole as the head of an illegally constituted "republic," the Harrison administration immediately agreed with its representatives on a treaty of annexation and submitted it to the Senate for quick approval. However, surprisingly, Cleveland had won a second term as president in the fall of 1892 (the only time in American history that a president served two non-consecutive terms). He immediately made it clear that he would not support annexation and, within five days after starting his second term in office on March 9, 1893, was able to withdraw Harrison's annexation treaty from the Senate. He then sent former Congressman James Blount to Hawai'i to investigate the conditions there. He also received Queen Lili'uokalani and requested that Blount replace the American stars and stripes flag hoisted in Honolulu by US Ambassador Stevens with the Hawaiian flag.

The Blount inquiry included interviews with conspirators on how they coordinated the overthrow along with American Ambassador Stevens. It concluded that the American minister to Hawaii had conspired with the businessmen to overthrow the queen, and that the coup would have failed "but for the landing of the United States forces upon false pretexts respecting the dangers to life and property."

It is claimed that Queen Lili'uokalani initially refused to grant amnesty as a condition of her reinstatement, saying that she would either execute or banish the current government in Honolulu. However, Lili'uokalani disputed the execution claim. By December 1893 the matter was still unresolved, and Cleveland referred the issue to Congress, rejecting the idea of annexation and encouraging Congress to continue the American tradition of non-intervention. The House of Representatives voted to censure the U.S. minister to Hawaii and adopted a resolution opposing annexation. The Senate, under Democratic control but greatly weakened in the public's eyes because of the Economic Panic of 1893 and with Republican support, opposed Cleveland and commissioned and produced the Morgan Report, which, for the sake of making a case for annexation, contradicted Blount's findings and found the overthrow was an internal affair. Cleveland, having no political support, dropped talks of reinstating the Queen and his administration later went on to recognize and maintain diplomatic relations with the illegal Republic of Hawaii as forced on him by Congress.

Emboldened, the conspirators who had established a self-declared provisional government on January 17, 1893, claimed to have established the Republic of Hawaii on July 4, 1894 with the help of Lorrin Thurston, a drafter of the 1887 Bayonet Constitution. Sanford Dole declared himself president without a popular vote. The conspirators further decided to hold out and wait until a Republican President would be re-elected in four years. Without the Economic Panic of 1893, President Cleveland most likely would have had the upper hand to restore the kingdom.

Looking back on the Hawaii takeover, Cleveland later wrote that "the provisional government owes its existence to an armed invasion by the United States. By an act of war...a substantial wrong has been done."

In the Presidential election of 1886 the Republican Party platform pushed for the illegal annexation of Hawaii. Petitions for a popular vote in Hawaii were ignored. When McKinley became president on March 4, 1897, a new Treaty of Annexation was signed at his request on June 16, 1897, with the same conspirators that overthrew the kingdom on January 17, 1893, and sent to Congress for approval. In response, the Hawaiian Patriotic League and its female counterpart petitioned Congress, opposing it. In September and October of that year, Hui Aloha `Āina collected 556 pages for a total of 21,269 signatures of native Hawaiians, or over half of the native residents, opposing annexation. Hui Kālai`āina collected another 17,000 signatures for restoring the monarchy. The annexation treaty was subsequently defeated in Congress as it required a two-third majority for passage. Realizing that he could not get a two-thirds majority in Congress for annexation, McKinley in 1888 then called for a resolution of Congress for annexation, known as the Newlands Resolution. With the country aroused by McKinley's Spanish American War, the joint resolution easily passed Congress in 1888 and Hawaii then officially but illegally became a U.S. territory in 1900.

The USA desired Pearl Harbor and Hawai`i as a strategic Pacific military base during the Spanish-American War and also for their further colonial territorial expansion in the Pacific. Queen Lili`uokalani immediately pointed out that annexing the islands without compensation to the Hawaiian government (and its people) amounted to theft and strongly opposed it.

The quick, forced inclusion of the Hawaiian Islands into the USA was part of a larger system adopted, whereby all colonies of predominantly non-Caucasians were assigned as territories. There was great concern in the US Congress (especially the Southern States) that the new Hawai`i territory could become the first to be ruled by a non-white majority if voting rights were extended to all (not only white) males who were citizens of the islands in 1898. However, the new territory put rules and regulations in place that largely further disenfranchised the non-white majority, even to the point of forbidding the teaching of the native Hawaiian language in school.

After their short and largely one-sided 1898 war against Spain, the USA, in 1899, also annexed the former Spanish colonies Puerto Rico, Guam, and Philippines at the Treaty of Paris while promising freedom to Cuba. Spain ceded its colonial power in the Pacific to the US, making it an imperial power. The new Hawai`i territories continued to serve as an important military base in the subsequent drawn-out brutal war by the US to defeat the Filipino freedom fighters who had previously fought the Spanish for their independence since 1896, had largely supported the Americans during their short war with Spain, and had then felt betrayed by them. This bloody war of independence dragged on into the 20th century and finally resulted in the defeat of the Filipino freedom fighters.

President McKinley was assassinated in September 1901 at the beginning of his second term in office and his Vice President Theodore Roosevelt became president, continuing the same policies of "Divine Destiny." Prominent native Hawaiians such as Prince Kuhio and John Henry Wise, while initially strongly opposing the Republican Party, finally joined it in order to have a voice to better the conditions of native Hawaiians. They were successful in their attempt to help establish the Hawaiian Home Commission Act of 1921 that, however, set aside only 200,000 acres of often questionable land for homesteading (Hawaiian Home Lands) so that "Hawaiians could again become self-sufficient, because by nature they were farmers and fishermen and had been forced into the cities through the theft of their lands." Additional painful business concessions forced on them further disenfranchised Hawaiians and also defined them as persons with 50% or more Hawaiian blood, dividing the Hawaiian community itself.

The blog on the Native Hawaiian web site Hawaiiankingdom.org summarizes the 1893 illegal overthrow as follows:

On January 16, 1893, United States diplomatic and military personnel conspired with a small group of individuals to overthrow the constitutional government of the Hawaiian Kingdom and prepared to provide for annexation of the Hawaiian Islands to the United States of America, under a treaty of annexation submitted to the United States Senate on February 15, 1893. Newly elected U.S. President Grover Cleveland, having received notice that the cause of the so-called revolution derived from *illegal intervention* by U.S. diplomatic and military personnel, withdrew the treaty of annexation and appointed James H. Blount as Special Commissioner, to investigate the terms of the so-called revolution and to report his findings.

The Blount report concluded that the United States legation assigned to the Hawaiian Kingdom, together with United States Marines and Naval personnel, were directly responsible for the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom government. The report details the culpability of the United States Government in violating international laws and the sovereignty of the Hawaiian Kingdom, but the United States Government fails to follow through in its commitment to assist in reinstating the constitutional government of the Hawaiian Kingdom.

Instead, the United States allows five years to lapse and a new United States President, William McKinley, enters into a second treaty of annexation with the same individuals who participated in the illegal overthrow with the U.S. legation in 1893 on June 16, 1897, but the treaty was unable to be ratified by the United States Senate due to protests that were submitted by Her Majesty Queen Lili'uokalani and signature petitions against annexation by 21,169 **[shown above as 21,269]** Hawaiian nationals.

As a result of the Spanish-American War, the United States opted to unilaterally annex the Hawaiian Islands by enacting a congressional joint resolution on July 7, 1898, in order to utilize the Hawaiian Islands as a military base to fight the Spanish in Guam and the Philippines. The United States has remained in the Hawaiian Islands and the Hawaiian Kingdom which has since been under prolonged occupation to the present, but its continuity as an independent State remains intact under international law.

The Panic of 1893 (Excerpts based on Wikipedia)

The "Panic of 1893" was the worst economic depression the United States had faced since its existence. It started on February 20, 1893, thirteen days before the inauguration of President Cleveland, with the appointment of receivers for the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Philadelphia, which had greatly overextended itself. Upon taking office, Cleveland dealt directly with the Treasury crisis, successfully convincing Congress to repeal the Sherman Silver Act which he felt was mainly responsible for its happening. However, the emergency had been caused by overbuilding of railroads and their shaky and shady financing which resulted in further bank failures and a run on the country's gold supply. People also rushing to withdraw their money from banks then caused [bank runs](#) resulting in a credit crunch. Furthermore, financial panic in the United Kingdom and a drop in trade in Europe caused foreign investors to sell American stocks to obtain American funds backed by gold.

As a result of the panic, stock prices declined, 500 banks were closed, 15,000 businesses failed, and numerous farms ceased operation. The unemployment rate in Pennsylvania hit 25%, in New York 35%, and in Michigan 43%. Soup kitchens were opened to help feed the destitute. Facing starvation, people chopped wood, broke rocks, and sewed in exchange for food. In some cases, women resorted to prostitution to feed their families.

The [Sherman Silver Purchase Act](#) of 1890, perhaps along with the protectionist [McKinley Tariff](#) of that year passed during the previous Republican Administration, was partially blamed for the panic. Passed in response to a large overproduction of silver by western mines, the Sherman Act required the US Treasury to purchase silver using notes backed by either silver or gold. When the decline of the gold reserves stored in the Treasury fell to a dangerously low level, President Cleveland was forced to borrow \$65 million in gold from Wall-Street banker [J.P. Morgan](#) and the [Rothschild banking family of England](#) to support the gold standard.

Associated with the 1893 Financial Panic was the closing of many of the western silver mines with many never re-opening. A significant number of western mountain narrow-gauge railroads, built to serve the mines, went out of business.

As politics go the Republicans conveniently blamed the President Cleveland and Democrats for the depression and scored a landslide victory in the 1894 state and congressional elections which was the largest Republic gain in history. It greatly weakened the Democratic Party for a long time and assured victories of Republican candidates in upcoming presidential elections who favored colonial expansion into the Pacific, and with it war with Spain and the illegal annexation of the Hawaiian Kingdom. Republican presidential candidate McKinley, a strong expansionist, was subsequently elected in 1886 and took office in March of 1887. The Kingdom of Hawaii was doomed despite brilliant political struggles Hawaiians undertook to save their Kingdom from illegal annexation.

The hand of incoming President McKinley was also strengthened through the economy which began an upswing in 1897, being restored with the Klondike Gold Rush and continued ten years of rapid growth until the Panic of 1907.
