



Hawaiian Autonomy Lili'uokalani (1898)

In 1887, white American businessmen in the Kingdom of Hawai'i (also known then as the Sandwich Islands) used the threat of violence to pressure King Kalākaua to adopt a new constitution. This "Bayonet Constitution," as its critics dubbed it, restricted the monarch's power and limited suffrage in ways that disadvantaged Native Hawaiians and Asian immigrants. When Kalākaua died a few years later, he was succeeded by his sister Lili'uokalani, who attempted in 1893 to overturn the Bayonet Constitution. Whites in Hawai'i reacted with a bloodless coup backed by the intimidating presence of US marines. Queen Lili'uokalani was deposed, and a white-led Republic of Hawaii was established. The republic's leaders spent the next few years lobbying the US government to annex Hawai'i; meanwhile, Lili'uokalani traveled to the United States to lobby for Hawaiian independence and the restoration of her monarchy.

Presented here are excerpts from the conclusion of a memoir that Lili'uokalani published in the United States in an effort to win the support of the American public. Lili'uokalani couches her appeal to Americans as one Christian nation imploring justice from another. In the same year this memoir was published, the Spanish-American War broke out, during which the United States annexed Hawai'i to support US strategic interests in the Pacific.

It has been suggested to me that the American general reader is not well informed regarding the social and political conditions which have come about in the Sandwich Islands and that it would be well here to give some expression to my own observation of them. Space will only permit, however, a mere outline.

It has been said that the Hawaiian people under the rule of the chiefs were most degraded, that under the monarchy their condition greatly improved, but that the native government in any form had at last become intolerable to the more enlightened part of the community. This statement has been substantially repeated recently by certain New England and Hawaiian "statesmen" in speeches made [before a business organization] in Boston. I shall not examine it in detail; but it may serve as a text for the few remarks I feel called upon to make from my own—and that is to say, the native Hawaiian—standpoint.

I shall not claim that in the days of Captain Cook our people were civilized. I shall not claim anything more for their progress in civilization and Christian morality than has been already attested by missionary writers. Perhaps I may safely claim even less, admitting the criticism of some intelligent visitors who were *not* missionaries—that the habits and prejudices of New England Puritanism were not well adapted to the genius of a tropical people nor capable of being thoroughly ingrafted upon them.

But Christianity in substance they have accepted, and I know of no people who have developed a tenderer Christian conscience or who have shown themselves more ready to obey its behests. Nor has any people known to history shown a greater reverence and love for their Christian teachers or filled the measure of a grateful return more overflowing. And where else in the world's history is it written that a savage people, pagan for ages, with fixed hereditary customs and beliefs, have made equal progress in civilization and Christianity in the same space of time? And

what people has ever been subjected during such an evolution to such a flood of external demoralizing influences?

Does it make nothing for us that we have always recognized our Christian teachers as worthy of authority in our councils and repudiated those whose influence or character was vicious or irreligious? That while four-fifths of the population of our Islands was swept out of existence by the vices introduced by foreigners, the ruling class clung to Christian morality and gave its unvarying support and service to the work of saving and civilizing the masses? Has not this class loyally clung to the brotherly alliance made with the better element of foreign settlers, giving freely of its authority and its substance, its sons and its daughters, to cement and to prosper it?

But will it also be thought strange that education and knowledge of the world have enabled us to perceive that as a race we have some special mental and physical requirements not shared by the other races which have come among us? That certain habits and modes of living are better for our health and happiness than others? And that a separate nationality and a particular form of government, as well as special laws, are, at least for the present, best for us? And these things remained to us, until the pitiless and tireless "annexation policy" was effectively backed by the naval power of the United States.

To other usurpations of authority on the part of those whose love for the institutions of their native land we could understand and forgive, we had submitted. We had allowed them virtually to give us a constitution and control the offices of state. Not without protest, indeed; for the usurpation was unrighteous and cost us much humiliation and distress. But we did not resist it by force. It had not entered into our hearts to believe that these friends and allies from the United States, even with all their foreign affinities, would ever go so far as to absolutely overthrow our form of government, seize our nation by the throat, and pass it over to an alien power. [...]

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? [...]

O honest Americans—as Christians, hear me for my downtrodden people! Their form of government is as dear to them as yours is precious to you. Quite as warmly as you love your country, so they love theirs. With all your goodly possessions, covering a territory so immense that there yet remain parts unexplored; possessing islands that, although near at hand, had to be neutral ground in time of war—do not covet the little vineyard of Naboth's, so far from your shores, lest the punishment of Ahab fall upon you, if not in your day, in that of your children, for "be not deceived, God is not mocked." The people whom your fathers told of the living God and taught to call "Father," and whom the sons now seek to despoil and destroy, are crying aloud to Him in their time of trouble; and He will keep His promise and will listen to the voices of His Hawaiian children lamenting for their homes.

It is for them that I would give the last drop of my blood; it is for them that I would spend, nay, am spending, everything belonging to me. Will it be in vain? It is for the American people and their representatives in Congress to answer these questions. As they deal with me and my people—kindly, generously, and justly—so may the Great Ruler of all nations deal with the grand and glorious nation of the United States of America.

Source: Liliuokalani, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen* (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1898), 366-374, <https://archive.org/details/hawaiisstorybyh00lili>. Free eBook from the Internet Archive.

Excerpts edited by John-Charles Duffy. A paragraph break omitted for a more compact presentation of the excerpted text. A grammatical infelicity corrected. An *oh* converted to vocative *O*. Punctuation emended in line with modern conventions. A quotation from the King James Bible punctuated here as in the source publication, although imprecisely reproducing the King James text. The capitalizing of divine pronouns, of the divine epithet *Great Ruler*, and of *Islands* as an abbreviated reference to the Sandwich Islands all reproduce the usage of the source. So too does the use of lowercase in the expressions *native Hawaiian* and *Monroe doctrine*. The unofficial appellation *American Republic of States*, capitalized thus in the source publication, has been downcased here.

These edited excerpts from Lili‘uokalani’s book are intended for **teaching** purposes only. For **research** purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the source publication listed above.



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