

Annexation of Hawaii Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question:
Did Hawaiians support annexation?

Materials:

- Annexation of Hawaii PowerPoint
- Copies of Student Materials
- Copies of articles (optional)

Plan of Instruction:

- 1) Use the PowerPoint slides to provide background information and introduce the Central Historical Question. Depending on students' background knowledge on Hawaii, you might consider shortening the lecture.
 - a. Slide 1: Title Slide
 - b. Slide 2: Hawaiian Islands. *The group of islands that we now call Hawaii are quite remote: they are located in the Pacific Ocean, over 2,000 miles from the next closest land. Historians disagree about when the first humans reached Hawaii, but it could have been as early as 200 CE that the first Polynesians from other islands in the Pacific reached the Hawaiian Islands. Over hundreds of years, more people arrived from islands in the Pacific, probably including Tahiti and Bora Bora. Over time, societies developed across the islands. Each island was ruled by at least one chief, or ali'i, and societies were hierarchical with a system of rules (kapu) regulating conduct. Many Hawaiian commoners were farmers who built stone aqueducts to irrigate their farms or tended fishponds that were built near the ocean to raise and stockpile fish.*
 - c. Slide 3: British arrival. *In 1778, British explorer James Cook arrived in Hawaii with two ships. The Hawaiians welcomed and celebrated Cook, but he was killed by Hawaiians in 1779 in a dispute over a stolen boat. Crew members killed Hawaiians and burned homes in retaliation before sailing away and returning to England. The British visit changed Hawaii in more ways than one: The British brought diseases that would kill large numbers of Hawaiians as well as guns and cannons. They also spread word about the islands. After these initial visits from Cook, more foreigners began to arrive at the islands. Missionaries, especially from the United States, first arrived in 1819. They aggressively worked to convert Hawaiians to Christianity.*
 - d. Slide 4: Unification. *In 1782 (just a few years after the arrival and death of Captain Cook), the ali'i nui (high chief) of the island of Hawaii (also known as the Big Island), Kamehameha, began a series of wars against neighboring ali'i to take control of their land. By 1795, Kamehameha had won control over*

almost all the Hawaiian Islands and declared the establishment of the Kingdom of Hawaii. By 1810, all of the islands had joined.

- e. *Slide 5: Reforms to Government. Kamehameha III, a son of Kamehameha I, took power in 1825, following the passing of his brother Kamehameha II. In the 1840s, he sent delegations to the United States and European countries to pressure them to recognize Hawaii as a sovereign, independent country, which they did. During his reign, he also led a series of reforms to the structure of government and land ownership in Hawaii. These included enacting the Kingdom of Hawaii's first Constitution, which established a constitutional monarchy, and introducing a system of private land ownership with a series of land reforms called the Great Māhele.*

These reforms divided the land between ali'i (nobility), the mo'i (monarch), and the maka'ainana (common people) and also introduced a law that allowed foreign citizens to own land for the first time. With these reforms, many maka'ainana ended up losing their land, and white planters (many the descendants of missionaries) bought massive amounts of farmland, often for very little money, to use for sugar cane production. Within a few decades, a small group of white American and European planters controlled four-fifths of the arable (useable to grow crops) land in Hawaii.

- f. *Slide 6: Bayonet Constitution. A group of mostly American businessmen living in Hawaii formed the Hawaiian League (aka the Annexation Club) to push for American annexation of Hawaii. In 1887, they lead an uprising against King Kalākaua. They threatened violence and forced him to sign a new constitution that greatly reduced his powers—this was referred to as the “Bayonet Constitution” since he agreed under threat. The new Constitution transferred almost all power to members of the Hawaiian League, who made themselves government officials.*
- g. *Slide 7: Pass out timeline. King Kalākaua died in 1891, and his sister Lili'uokalani became queen. Although she fought to return power to the monarchy and to Native Hawaiians, she was overthrown in 1893 when the Hawaiian League lead a coup d'état and proclaimed the establishment of the Republic of Hawaii. By 1898, Hawaii had been annexed by the United States.*

Read the timeline to learn more about what happened over the course of those 5 years.

- h. *Slide 8: Central Historical Question. Today we are going to focus on the question of whether Hawaiians supported annexation. We're going to do that by looking at Hawaiian newspapers from around the time of annexation. These might give us a sense of how people in Hawaii were feeling about annexation.*

2) Read and discuss Document A as a class. *The Library of Congress has digitized newspapers dating back to 1789, so they have papers from the 1890s, around the time of annexation in Hawaii.*

- a. As a class, navigate to and read aloud “News First” here:
<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85047084/1898-07-14/ed-1/seq-1/>
- b. **Note:** If you have time and want to show students how you navigated to this page within *Chronicling America*, follow these steps:
 - i. Start at <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>
 - ii. Select the “Advanced Search” tab just above the search bar
 - iii. Make the following selections for your search:
 1. “Select states”: Hawaii
 2. “Select Years”: select “Date Range” and enter June 1, 1898-July 31, 1898 (limiting the search to dates adjacent to the date of annexation)
 3. Limit search to “only front page”
 4. “With any of the words”: “annexation”
 - iv. Select search. The *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* article should come up on the first page of results, with the large “Annexation!” headline
- c. Discuss Document A:
 - i. *Based on this article, how supportive were Hawaiians of annexation?*

Even in the short section of the article, it is clear that the writer is jubilant about being annexed by the United States and includes details that would lead us to believe that many Hawaiians are, as well. The article reports that flags were “being hoisted everywhere” and that “thousands” went to the water to celebrate, while “great crowds on the streets” were proof of how excited and joyous everyone was. According to this article, then, Hawaiians were supportive of annexation.

- ii. *How trustworthy is this as a source of information Hawaiians’ support for annexation?*

Although some students might assume that a newspaper is a trustworthy source of information, help them question whether they can be sure based on what they know about the source. In fact, they have very little information about the source other than the name of the newspaper itself. Use questions about the source to transition to the next phase of the inquiry: Investigating Document A’s source.

3) Investigate and discuss Document A’s source:

- a. Assign students to investigate the newspaper in which this article appeared.

- i. **Note:** You may assign students to work independently on computers or in small groups. You may also provide different amounts of support for students as they research the source: Students can conduct their own search for information on the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* through an Internet search. Or, you can direct them to click on the Library of Congress’s description of the paper by clicking on the “About the Pacific Commercial Advertiser” hyperlink just above the digitized image of the paper.
- b. Discuss Document A’s source:
 - i. *What did we learn about this source?*

The *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* was, since its founding in the 1850s, a pro-U.S. paper that was written in English and primarily served the small white population on the island. In 1888, Lorrin Thurston bought the paper and owned it through at least the 1920s. Thurston was one of the founders of the Hawaiian League and leaders of the movement for annexation. Thus, there are many reasons why this paper—and an article on the topic of annexation, in particular—might not represent the views of most Hawaiians.

- ii. *Does knowing more about this source change how much we trust this as a source of information about how supportive Hawaiians were of annexation?*
- iii. *To continue our investigation of how supportive Hawaiians were of annexation, what additional perspectives would we want?*

Students might suggest reading an article from a paper owned by Native Hawaiians, or at least one that is more likely to be representative of the views of more of the Hawaiian population than the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* was. Papers that fall into that category are written in Hawaiian, and at the time this lesson plan was made, they had not yet been translated, making them inaccessible to those who can’t read Hawaiian.

- 4) Share Document B and corresponding Guiding Questions. Students read the document and complete the Guiding Questions.
 - a. “The Memorial”, October 16, 1897:
<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85047097/1897-10-16/ed-1/seq-1/>
 - b. Share out and discuss students’ answers to the Guiding Questions.
 - The *Independent* was edited by Edmund Norrie, who was from Denmark, not a Native Hawaiian. The *Independent* was the only English-language anti-annexation paper in Hawaii at the time. Norrie opposed the Hawaiian

League's coup against Queen Lili'uokalani and supported returning her to power in Hawaii. The document presented in the *Independent's* article, the "Memorial," is a resolution "adopted at the mass meeting of Hawaiian Citizens."

- After providing information about its authors and supporters, this document argues that they do not view the governments that led Hawaii after the 1893 coup as legitimate because they do not have the support of the majority of the Hawaiian population ("the Government of the Republic of Hawaii has no warrant for its existence in the support of the people of these Islands"). Instead, they argue that the government is made up of and supported by only a "numerically insignificant minority of the white and aboriginal male citizens and residents of these Islands" and maintained by force instead of through the support of the Hawaiian population.
- The arguments against annexation presented in this article do reflect the views of its publisher, but the article also reports on a mass meeting to oppose annexation and reprints a document laying out their opposition to annexation that attendees of that meeting approved to be sent to the U.S. and other countries. In that way, it may offer insight into what more Hawaiians thought about annexation than the first source.

2. Closing Discussion:

- a. *Based on the documents we've analyzed today, did Hawaiians support annexation?*
- b. *Do these documents tell us anything about the scale of support or opposition?*

Document A does not provide any clues about the size of support for annexation. Document B provides a few clues by referring to a "mass meeting" where the memorial was approved. Still, as newspaper articles with clear perspectives on annexation, these articles do not provide as much information as we might want about the scale of opposition or support in order to fully answer the central historical question.

- c. *What other sources would we want to investigate?*

Students might suggest reading additional newspapers from other publishers, especially since the two they read presented such different perspectives. Since the sources they read do not provide sufficient evidence about the scale of support or opposition, help them brainstorm the kinds of documents that would. One additional document you might show students is a petition against annexation, organized by men's and women's leagues in Hawaii, that has over 500 pages of signatures: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/595390>.

3. Optional—Extension Activity:
 - a. Ask students to find a corroborating newspaper article on their own, using *Chronicling America*. They should continue to practice sourcing as they did with the first two articles. Ideas for places to start within *Chronicling America* include:
 - i. Annexation of Hawaii Topics page (note: all the articles linked on this page are from mainland U.S. newspapers):
<https://www.loc.gov/rr/news/topics/hawaii.html>
 - ii. Provide students a narrowed set of search results by limiting the state to Hawaii, the date range, and using the search term annex*
(http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/search/pages/results/?state=Hawaii&date1=1892&date2=1898&proxtext=annex*&x=14&y=15&dateFilterType=yearRange&rows=20&searchType=basic)

Sources

Document A: “Annexation!” (1898, July 14). *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*. Retrieved from <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85047084/1898-07-14/ed-1/seq-1/>.

Document B: “The Memorial.” (1897, October 16). *The Independent*. Retrieved from <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85047097/1897-10-16/ed-1/seq-1/>.

This lesson was originally developed by the Stanford History Education Group.