

Hawaii's Last Queen

In the mid-1800's, some Americans who had settled in Hawaii developed lucrative sugar plantations. However, in 1890 the McKinley Act raised the import tariff on foreign sugar in America. As a result, the price of Hawaiian sugar went up in the US and the planters' profits sank. The sugar growers, mostly white Americans, knew that if Hawaii were to be annexed by the United States, the tariff problem would disappear. In 1891, Hawaii's king died and the throne passed to his sister, the new Queen Liliuokalani. She believed the root of Hawaii's problems was foreign interference and planned a new constitution that favored native Hawaiians.

In January 1893, the sugar plantation owners staged an uprising to overthrow Liliuokalani and appealed to the United States for protection. The American minister to the islands, John L. Stevens, said the Queen was threatening American "lives and property" and US Marines stormed the islands (without presidential approval), and raised the stars and stripes over Queen Liliuokalani's Iolani Palace.

Queen Liliuokalani was forced to *abdicate* her throne and placed under house arrest. Meanwhile, politicians in Washington, D.C. debated what to do next. President Grover Cleveland was an anti-imperialist and thought Americans had acted shamefully in Hawaii. He withdrew the annexation treaty from Congress and ordered an investigation into potential wrongdoings. Cleveland aimed to restore Liliuokalani to her throne, but many Americans favored annexing the islands.

However, the matter was prolonged until after Cleveland left office. When the Spanish-American War broke out in 1898, the military significance of Hawaii as a way station to the Spanish Philippines outweighed all other considerations. New President William McKinley signed a joint resolution annexing Hawaii on July 7, 1898. The formal ceremony marking the annexation was held at Iolani Palace. Almost no Native Hawaiians attended. Queen Liliuokalani later issued the following protest letter to Congress:

The House of Representatives of the United States:

I, Liliuokalani of Hawaii, named heir apparent on the 10th day of April, 1877, and proclaimed Queen of the Hawaiian Islands on the 29th day of January, 1891, do hereby earnestly and respectfully protest against the assertion of ownership by the United States of America of the so-called Hawaiian Crown Islands amounting to about one million acres and which are my property, and I especially protest against such assertion of ownership as a taking of property without due process of law and without just or other compensation.

Therefore, supplementing my protest of June 17, 1897, I call upon the President and the National Legislature and the People of the United States to do justice in this matter and to restore to me this property, the enjoyment of which is being withheld from me by your Government under what must be a misapprehension of my right and title.

Done at Washington, District of Columbia, United States of America, this nineteenth day of December, in the year one thousand eight hundred and ninety-eight.



