

QUEEN LILI'UOKALANI

& the Annexation of Hawai'i

Observed each May, AAPI Month celebrates the contributions of Asian American and Pacific Islanders to the history and culture of the United States. Hawai'i and their Indigenous population (*in Hawaiian: Kānaka Maoli*) has a rich culture and unique identity that survived generations of colonization and abuse by the U.S Government. A combination of the decimation of the Kānaka Maoli population (*84% from the first European contact in 1778 to 1840*) and impact of American landowners led to the overthrow of Queen Lili'uokalani and the establishment of the Republic of Hawai'i.

Born in 1838 in Honolulu, Lydia Lili'u Loloku Walania Kamaka'eha became the eighth monarch and only queen regent of the Kingdom of Hawai'i, ruling from January 29th, 1891 until January 17th, 1893. During her reign, Queen Lili'uokalani advocated for Kānaka Maoli power and continued to fight for their rights after the overthrow of the monarchy, her imprisonment, and until her death in 1917. While known as the last queen of Hawai'i, she was also a gifted writer, publishing multiple books and over 160 songs.



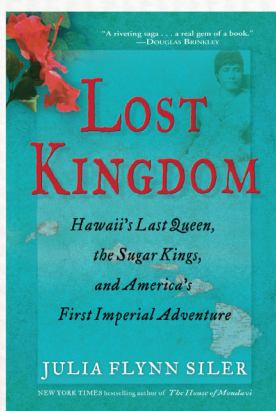
Unified under King Kamehameha in 1810, the Kingdom of Hawai'i became an economic interest to white Americans as they established lucrative sugar plantations by purchasing land and exploiting labor. During this time, the American government also increasingly recognized the strategic importance of the islands' location. In 1874, plantation owners exported roughly 25 million pounds of sugar to the United States. In 1887, attorneys Lorrin Thurston (*the grandson of one of the first Americans to travel to the Kingdom of Hawai'i*) and Sanford B. Dole -- representing a group of influential white sugar planters -- held King Kalākaua at gunpoint to sign the Bayonet Constitution. This document transferred power from the monarchy to American landowners by directly connecting voting rights to land ownership, giving non-Hawaiians the right to vote (*mostly Americans and Europeans*) while disenfranchising Kānaka Maoli (*3 out of 4 lost their voting rights*).

King Kalākaua died in 1891 and his sister, Lili'uokalani, ascended the throne during a time of economic and political upheaval across the Islands. As the American government lowered tariffs paid by foreign countries, the price of sugar dropped significantly and white planters began advocating for annexation of the Kingdom of Hawai'i. An overwhelming majority of the Indigenous population vehemently opposed annexation with over half of the adults signing the Kū'ē Petition -- hand delivered to the United States Senate -- fighting to maintain their sovereignty. Queen Lili'uokalani refused to recognize the Bayonet Constitution, calling for laws that would return power to Kānaka Maoli by revoking the voting privileges of the foreign landowners. Lorrin Thurston, along with an armed group backed by 300 marines sent to protect American interests, surrounded Queen Lili'uokalani's palace calling for her abdication of the throne; to avoid bloodshed, she ordered her guards to surrender. The leaders of the coup enacted Martial Law, raised the American flag over Queen Lili'uokalani's palace, and established Dole as the leader of the new government.

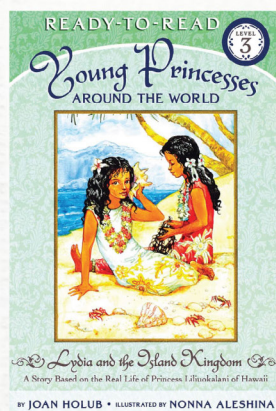
Embarrassed by the actions of the armed coup of planters, President Grover Cleveland withdrew the annexation treaty signed by President Benjamin Harrison and called for the reinstatement of Queen Lili'uokalani. Dole refused to step aside and insisted his government was legitimate; the U.S. refused aid to the Queen, resulting in the further unification of Dole's power and in July 1894, he became the President of the newly founded Republic of Hawai'i.

In January 1895, a small group attempted to restore the monarchy and Kānaka Maoli independence. Their attempt failed and Queen Lili'uokalani was also arrested after weapons were found in her home. She officially abdicated the throne in exchange for the freedom of six supporters sentenced to death for their role in the movement. During her imprisonment, she wrote her autobiography, *Hawai'i's Story by Hawai'i's Queen*. Hawai'i became a U.S. territory in 1898 and the 50th state in 1959. While the United States (in a joint resolution by Congress) conceded that the Kānaka Maoli never relinquished their independence in 1993, they are the only indigenous group without recognized political sovereignty. Today, only 10% of the islands' population are of Kānaka Maoli descent.

Further reading on Queen Lili'uokalani:



[\(Click here for more information\)](#)



[\(Click here for more information\)](#)



[\(Click here for more information\)](#)

