

How the US Stole Hawaii

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XK2MBnw6RIY>

Transcript: <https://dontveter.com/ec/hawaii2.pdf>

- [Johnny] 40 million years ago, the ocean floor cracked open and molten lava started flowing out. It cooled as it hit the cold ocean water and turned solid, eventually making mountains in the ocean. Those mountains got taller and taller, and soon a chain of islands was born. And then, around 2000 years ago, a group of people arrived to these islands in canoes. Those communities eventually unified into one kingdom, the Kingdom of Hawaii. A sovereign nation in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Hawaii became a language, a culture, a national identity. But that sovereignty, that culture, that identity was soon stolen, captured by a new, bigger country, an ocean away.

(rapid ticking) (sinister music) - [Man] This is the story of these islands.

(sinister music) - [Man] For millions of years, there was no land here. Only the sea.

- [Man] Hawaii's half century old request for statehood is granted.

- [Johnny] The Kingdom of Hawaii remained a fairly remote disconnected country for many years, until these guys arrived.

During the 1700 and 1800's, many people from Europe and the United States came to visit Hawaii, mainly on expeditions of exploring the ocean.

But the ones that stayed were mainly Americans who arrived to these islands wanting to talk about Jesus.

For the most part, the Kingdom of Hawaii welcomed these visitors.

One British Explorer even gifted the Hawaiian King a British flag and Hawaii eventually adopted the British flag into their own flag.

There was general friendship and good relations here.

The American missionaries who had settled on the island eventually had kids and grandkids.

And soon these missionaries and their descendants weren't just interested in talking about Jesus.

They were also interested in building businesses, mainly focused on sugar.

- [Man] By far the most valuable single product Hawaii can offer in that trade is sugar.

- [Johnny] With this increased economic interest, these Americans who had originally come to be

missionaries were now much more into sugar, and they did what people of European descent have been doing for many centuries, looking at a culture and government that is different than theirs and saying, we think we could do this better, let us take it from here.

And so during the 1800's, these Americans slowly chipped away at the Hawaiian government structure.

They were still newcomers in this ancient Island nation. They didn't have much power. But that changed quickly.

- [Man] The Pacific always comes rolling in. Mile upon mile dazzling white beaches.

- [Johnny] By the end of the 1800's, these Jesus sugar Americans had amassed a huge amount of Hawaii's wealth and those original missionaries who had come to the Island to convert people to their religion years earlier now had grandkids that looked like this, a full on armed militia of white Hawaiian citizens, descendants of the missionaries, who were eager to get the government out of the way so that they could run the country themselves and help make it more favorable for their sugar businesses.

Now, remember, these guys were born in Hawaii. They considered themselves the Hawaiians.

But even still, their loyalty still lie with the country of their ancestors. They were effectively Americans still.

By 1893, this local white militia and their political allies were ready for a full on takeover of the government, which at the time was headed by this woman, Queen Lili'uokalani.

The sugar missionaries were still a minority and a full on overthrow of the government would have been hard by themselves. But luckily for them, they had help.

The American ambassador of Hawaii at the time helped coordinate the arrival of an American military ship and troops to show up on the shores of the Island of Oahu into the capital city of Honolulu.

Up until this point, the conflict in Hawaii was technically internal, meaning it was between the locals and the white missionaries who were technically locals because they were born there.

But the moment the US arrived to Honolulu to provide military backup for a government overthrow, it became a full line military coup sponsored by a foreign power, a cardinal sin in international relations.

But even still the government backed the overthrow. The queen was forced to give up her power and they put this guy as the leader of the new Republic of Hawaii.

His name was Sanford Dole. His family was huge in the sugar business.

- [Man] There's a new taste in pineapple from Dole.

- [Johnny] And now he was the leader of the country of Hawaii.

The locals fought this but peacefully. They protested. Nearly every adult on the islands signed a petition condemning the takeover.

Back in Washington DC, a debate began as to what to do with Hawaii now that a bunch of pro-American missionaries turned sugar warriors had grabbed power.

Dole himself traveled to DC to lobby for the US to take over Hawaii for themselves.

But so did a group of local Hawaiians to oppose the American encroachment.

The queen who was overthrown wrote a letter demanding to be reinstated as the legitimate leader of the Kingdom of Hawaii.

The United States was split on what to do until 1898 when the new president surrounded himself with leaders who kind of loved war and American expansion.

And this is what sealed the fate of Hawaii.

All of these displays of vehement peaceful protests by the Hawaiian people were trampled on by a superpower who had bigger guns and an insatiable desire for control.

So one summer day in 1898, the US showed up and the flag of the Kingdom Hawaii was taken down and the US flag was raised.

Hawaii was now officially a possession of the United States of America.

With the help of these sugar loving missionaries, these islands had been plucked from their people and put in the hands of a growing superpower.

But stealing land is one thing. The real theft is what happened next.

(ominous music) At this point, Hawaii was just a US territory, not a state, but even still the US began a deep, widespread destruction of Hawaiian way of life.

The Hawaiian language was banned in schools and government and businesses were by law required to be conducted in English.

The US began developing land, often on sacred sites.

And the history itself was censored to make it seem as if the Hawaiian people welcomed the US without a fight.

Much of the real history became inaccessible because it was only documented in the Hawaiian language, which was beginning to die.

And then in 1959, Hawaii became the 50th state of the union and quickly became the place we know today.

(island music) Meanwhile, Dole food company, the company who was perhaps helped the most by this land grab, has become a massive global corporation.

By 1993, Hawaii was a full on part of the United States.

That year, President Bill Clinton came out with an apology. - A Presidential apology.

At the White House yesterday, President Clinton signed a formal letter of apology to the people of Hawaii.

He was apologizing on behalf of the US government for the government's involvement 100 years ago in removing the independent Hawaiian monarchy by force.

- But despite this horrendous land grab and the pillaging and theft of these islands, there is a little bit of hope here.

That spirit of peaceful resistance that led to petitions and protests back in 1893, persisted, even after the takeover.

The Hawaiian language was delicately preserved through painstaking effort.

And today there are full immersion Hawaiian language public schools. Hawaiian traditions have stayed alive.

And last year Hawaiians showed that they were not willing to give up their sacred sites. They staged a dramatic protest to protect a Holy mountain that was slated to be developed on.

Hawaii may have been stolen and attempts made to erase its culture, but while the negative effects of this Imperial land grab are wide reaching, many pillars of this beautiful culture have survived.