BUILDING AN EMPIRE, DEFINING A NATION:
THE RHETORIC OF U.S. EXPANSION AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

A Dissertation in
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by
Una Kimokeo-Goes

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The dissertation of Una Kimokeo-Goes was reviewed and approved* by the following:

J. Michael Hogan  
Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences  
Chair of Committee  
Dissertation Advisor

Thomas W. Benson  
Professor of Speech Communication and Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of Rhetoric

Steven H. Browne  
Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences

Cheryl Glenn  
Professor of English and Women’s Studies

Kirt Wilson  
Associate Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences  
Director of Graduate Studies

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School
ABSTRACT

At the turn of the twentieth century, the United States looked fundamentally different than it had just ten years before. Its borders had expanded by tens of thousands of miles, pulling in islands in the Caribbean, the Pacific, and even some flanking Asia. Millions of people were folded into these new borders, although few of those people understood themselves to be American. Territorial expansion during the Age of Imperialism was important to determining the nation’s very sense of self. While disputes over the status of these territories continue to this day, historically they were the products of a great debate over the nation’s character, identity, and role in the world. My project focuses on the rise of U.S. nationalism during the Age of Imperialism and the public discourse that shaped the nation’s understanding of territorial expansion by concentrating on the country’s ventures in the Pacific. Building an Empire, Defining a Nation explores how, on the eve of the so-called Progressive Era, imperialism was defended and rationalized within a rhetoric of progressive change, invoking themes of moral uplift, self-determination, and progress. My project unpacks a term that today seems an oxymoron: “progressive imperialism.” By examining the racial and gendered implications of the rhetoric of U.S. foreign policy from 1889-1900, I show how advocates of expansion used the values of progressivism to rationalize imperialism and shed new light on nationalistic themes that still shape U.S. foreign policy and the country’s sense of self.
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When I entered college, I never thought that completing a dissertation in Rhetoric was any part of my future. There are too many people to thank who have helped lead me down this path, but I would like to acknowledge some of the greater influences for this project.

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Chapter 1: Redefining the Nation

At the turn of the twentieth century, the United States looked fundamentally different than it had just ten years before. Its borders had expanded by tens of thousands of miles, pulling in islands in the Caribbean, the Pacific, and even some flanking Asia. Millions of new peoples were folded into those borders, although few of those people understood themselves to be American. As the rhetoric of the period indicates, the young nation undertook these actions in part to demonstrate its strength—even its manliness—to the rest of the world. The United States stood as a world power, and although it did not necessarily see itself in such terms, it had become an empire.

These dramatic changes had not occurred overnight. In the aftermath of the Civil War and Reconstruction, a vigorous debate began over America’s national purpose and its role in the world. The country was growing up. It needed to think about its development and its future. Military strategists like Alfred Thayer Mahan and historians like Fredrick Jackson Turner helped politicians and broader audiences form new ideas about the United States’ character and destiny, and politicians competed to define true “Americanism.”

The times themselves were particularly trying. Changing economic conditions convinced many that the United States needed to expand into new markets overseas, especially while European powers seemed to be on the decline and were losing control over their colonies. Immigration had slowed, but thousands of immigrants still packed U.S. cities. The frontier had closed; the United States had explored and conquered the untamed wilderness within its continental borders. Some saw this as a threat not only to the country’s economy but also to its unique character and spirit. The United States was
in a precarious position, some believed—it either had to find new ways to cope with these challenges at home or it had to expand. As it turns out, it did both.

Territorial expansion during the Age of Imperialism was important to determining the United States’ very sense of self. Today, however, we often forget that the country is composed not only of fifty states, but also a number of territories (and their peoples) in the Caribbean and the Pacific. Even the name “United States” makes it easy to forget that the nation still exercises sovereign control over American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.¹ While disputes over the status of these territories continue to this day, historically they were the products of a great national debate over the U.S. character, identity, and role in the world.

My project focuses on the rise of U.S. nationalism during the Age of Imperialism and the public discourse that shaped the nation’s understanding of territorial expansion. From 1889 to 1900, the United States pursued policies that would take it deep into the Pacific, provoke wars both large and small, and establish the nation as a colonial power. The debates surrounding these actions helped define U.S. nationalism throughout the twentieth and into the twenty first century. As the nation’s elected leaders passionately discussed the need for—and the purposes of—territorial expansion, newspapers, literary works, and even the political cartoons of the era reflected the themes and tensions of the debate over imperialism. My project seeks a better understanding of how the rhetoric of U.S. foreign policy in the Age of Imperialism shaped the nation’s political and cultural identity. It does so by focusing on the U.S. first ventures into empire in the Pacific. The acquisition of Samoa and Hawaii show how the United States was rethinking its position

¹ The country gained control of the U.S. Virgin Islands after World War I.
in the world and set a tone for many of the arguments later raised during the Spanish American War and the annexation of the Philippines. At the same time, the acquisition of these Pacific islands is often overlooked because of the heated rhetoric surrounding the Spanish American War. Yet expansion into the Polynesian nations shifted the country’s policies from nonintervention to empire, thus redefining United States’ identity well before the country was pressed to take on a European nation in 1898.

The Age of Imperialism both preceded and encompassed another era that has been investigated extensively by rhetorical theorists and critics, the so-called Progressive Era. Generally remembered as an era of social “progress,” the Progressive Era, as J. Michael Hogan has suggested, was in some senses a “historical fiction,” as self-described progressives “spoke a rhetoric of reform, morality, and the ‘public interest’” but advocated a wide variety of specific initiatives and differed radically in their moral convictions.\(^2\) Moreover, many of the specific causes championed in the name of Progressive reform were, by today’s standards, not very “progressive” at all. Jim Crow laws were championed under the banner of “progressive” reform, for example, and race relations deteriorated noticeably during the period.\(^3\)

Perhaps even more than race relations, U.S. foreign policy during the Progressive Era seemed to contradict what we might today consider “progressive” principles. The anti-imperialists of the day—those opposed to American expansion, economic exploitation, and colonization of foreign territories—emphasized what we today would call “progressive” ideals, such as self-determination, self-government, and respect for the


\(^3\) The Progressive Era was also marked by an epidemic of lynchings and other violent acts against African Americans.
sovereignty of other countries. Yet so too did many advocates of overseas expansion invoke the vocabulary and the ideals of “progressive” reform. Robert Alexander Kraig explains that “Progressive social thought . . . was a curious combination of yearning for a past golden age of greater economic and political freedom and great hope for the potential rewards of modernity.”4 As J. Michael Hogan has suggested, many Americans at the time viewed overseas expansion and even military domination of foreign peoples as perfectly consistent with progressive ideals—indeed, as part of America’s duty to help bring “progress” and “civilization” to the rest of the world.5 In my project, I account for how imperialism was defended, rationalized, and even actively promoted within a rhetoric of progressive change. By investigating how advocates of imperialism argued for American expansion and justified the domination of foreign peoples, I shed light on the political and cultural logic underlying what in retrospect appears an obvious contradiction between the rhetoric and the realities of American foreign policy during this time. In short, I hope to unpack a term that today seems an oxymoron: “progressive imperialism.”

Rhetoric and Empire

In reviewing the existing literature on the topic, I have observed two gaps: the period itself has been under-examined by rhetorical scholars, and the approaches that most rhetorical scholars have taken to the topic have failed to recognize the importance of race and gender to our understanding of the era. A few public address scholars, such as Karyln Kohrs Campbell, Leroy Dorsey, Bonnie Dow, and Kirt Wilson, have offered gendered or racialized readings of important texts. Yet racial and gendered references

permeate the discourse of this era, and in general scholars have underemphasized the importance of supposedly “progressive” appeals in the rhetoric of territorial expansion. Before discussing this gap, however, let me clarify the general approaches taken toward the topic.

Historians have offered various interpretations of U.S. expansion during the period often dubbed the Age of Imperialism. Historian Walter LaFeber, for example, has emphasized “the economic forces which resulted in commercial and landed expansion,” arguing that, “they appear to be the most important causes and results in the nation’s diplomatic history of the period.”6 Others have noted the strategic or military interests behind U.S. expansion, or the missionary impulse of what was at that time a largely Christian nation.7 Historian Robert Kagan has even suggested that the nation has suffered from a mass delusion, embracing an isolationist self-image while consistently pursuing dangerously aggressive foreign policies. “Americans have cherished an image of themselves as by nature inward-looking and aloof, only sporadically and spasmodically venturing forth into the world, usually in response to external attack or perceived threats,” Kagan writes. And “despite four hundred years of steady expansion and an ever-deepening involvement in world affairs,” this image has survived.8

Even if we accept Kagan’s analysis, questions remain about how Americans came to reconcile expansion with their isolationist tradition, viewing it as a “progressive”

foreign policy, and as necessary to realize the nation’s special calling or Manifest Destiny. Decisions about the nature of the U.S. relationship to the world and how to act in the Pacific were debated vigorously by politicians. Those debates, along with newspaper coverage, popular literature, and political cartoons, not only influenced the course of U.S. foreign policy but also shaped the nation’s understandings of its own character and identity. And opponents of imperialism were hardly silent during this period, including leaders in the Pacific itself. The rhetoric of “progressive imperialism” helps to account for a significant era and aids us in understanding how the United States acted during the turn of the twentieth century and even today.

Scholars in rhetoric and public address have done important work on the Age of Imperialism, but it is rather limited. Stephen Lucas and David Zarefsky have lamented the absence of studies on canonical speeches from this era.9 There is even less work on other modes of rhetorical influence, such as newspaper coverage and popular literature. Two essays in the three-volume series, *A History and Criticism of American Public Address*, examined speakers from the general period (William Jennings Bryan, by Myron G. Phillips, and Albert J. Beveridge, by Herald Truslow Ross).10 There is even less on the earlier figures related to expansion, although Ronald H. Carpenter offers useful research on both Alfred Thayer Mahan and Frederick Jackson Turner, including an edited collection of the latter’s speeches. Studies such as Michelle Bray Davis and Rollin W.


10 Other essays in the series examine figures connected to imperialism, such as James Blaine and Theodore Roosevelt, but the topic is not the authors’ focus. William Norwood Brigance, ed., *A History and Criticism of American Public Address*, vol. 2 (New York: Russell and Russell, 1943).
Quimby’s analysis of Senator Proctor’s Cuban Speech and William Harpine’s study of William Jennings Bryan’s “Cross of Gold” speech also provide useful pieces of the puzzle, but they leave significantly more to say on the rhetoric of imperialism.¹¹

A few rhetorical scholars have taken broader approaches in accounting for the era. Jeff D. Bass and Richard Cherwitz, for example, have offered a theoretical discussion of the myths and ideologies employed in American and British imperialist rhetoric. They conclude that imperialists’ success in both countries resulted from their ability to link imperialism to sacred myths that identify or define “important aspects of people and their cultures.”¹² Examining Albert Beveridge’s rhetoric, Bass and Cherwitz argue that embedded in his imperialist language was “the notion that man’s actions are bound to the gospel and commands of the Lord, and must, therefore, remain consistent with certain pre-ordained ideals.”¹³ Although they associate such religious appeals with imperialist myths, anti-imperialists such as Senator George Frisbee Hoar of Massachusetts and even Queen Liliuokalani of Hawaii also employed religious appeals. They argued that imperialism was inconsistent with those same Christian ideals. Bass and Cherwitz suggest that anti-imperialists like Carl Schurz were, in retrospect, more logical and should have won the debate but were overwhelmed by the power of the myths deployed by the imperialists. Yet I suggest that the imperialists and anti-imperialists appealed to many of the same myths, demonstrating how significant these themes were for both sides of the issue.

Robert Ivie’s work on the rhetoric of imperialism and war offers a stronger account of how the expansionists prevailed. Focusing on William McKinley’s efforts to win popular support for the annexation of the Philippines during the election of 1898, Ivie shows how McKinley portrayed annexation of the Philippines as not merely economically or politically expedient, but as a matter of honor and moral responsibility—as a duty that went along with the nation’s rise to world leadership. Hinting at the “progressive” appeals underlying the case for imperialism, Ivie summarizes McKinley’s basic argument: “Since world leadership, especially moral leadership, implies a responsibility in international affairs, America must respond positively to these grave questions by annexing the liberated Spanish colonies.”

Picking up where Ivie left off, my project elucidates how similar appeals were invoked by multiple expansionists in both subtle and overt ways, and how this rhetoric evolved out of the United States’ earliest interventions in the Pacific.

Theodore Roosevelt is one of the few figures of this era who has received a lot of attention from rhetorical scholars. Most have concentrated on TR’s presidential leadership, but Leroy Dorsey has also paid close attention to Roosevelt’s earlier writings (most notably *The Winning of the West*) and his explication of the importance of the frontier for national identity. By connecting the Puritan mission “to the more modern notion of Western expansion,” according to Dorsey, Roosevelt helped to “explain and popularize” his distinctive views on “immigration, assimilation, race, ethnicity, and national identity.”

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question of imperialism, but his work provides a good model for examining race and racism in relation to American identity and nationalism in this era. My discussion of Theodore Roosevelt is limited, but I also view Dorsey’s approach to public address as a useful model of how to engage racist beliefs by examining the values they embody.

Political theorist Paul T. McCartney has likewise developed some lines of analysis useful to my study of American identity in the Age of Imperialism. Although not a rhetorical scholar, McCartney argues that expansionist policies were always linked to conceptions of U.S. nationalism, and he proves his point by examining the discourse of U.S. foreign policy since the founding of the nation. According to McCartney, the nation’s foreign policy has always been driven by a sense of mission, and the Spanish-American War “embodied the full spirit of the idea of American mission—including its assertion of American exceptionalism.”

McCartney also touches on the issue of race. Showing how expansion was justified through a racialized conception of Social Darwinism, he explains how racial hierarchies informed foreign policy decisions throughout the nineteenth century. My efforts articulate how these themes were particularly present in the 1890s.

The importance of race in the rhetoric of imperialism has received some attention, but the role of gendered discourses during the era has largely been ignored by rhetorical scholars. A handful of scholars outside of the field have touched on the issue, including historian Amy Greenberg. While she focuses primarily on expansionism in the

17 McCartney, *Power and Progress*, 47-64. Dorsey too discusses race, but primarily in terms of how Roosevelt attempted to provide African American and immigrant populations access to the American dream while balancing white fears about these groups.
antebellum period, Greenberg notes the importance of gendered conceptions of U.S. nationalism during the broader Age of Imperialism. Greenberg writes, “The Spanish-American conflict, and especially the heroic vision of Teddy Roosevelt’s Rough Riders, a voluntary cavalry division made up of Harvard intellectuals and frontier cowboys, helped to energize a militant vision of masculinity that suggested that the easy life of American middle class was emasculating its boys.”

Historian Sarah Watts likewise has recognized the importance of “manly duty” in the rhetoric of Theodore Roosevelt.

Yet Roosevelt was not the only figure in the era to invoke masculinist images, and gendered discourses functioned in other ways as well. Political cartoons from the era, for example, depicted national anti-imperialist figures like Senator George Frisbee Hoar as hysterical “Cassandras” or out-of-touch grandmothers. Filipino leader Emilio Aguinaldo, although more commonly depicted as childlike, was also feminized as a Pacific island woman, indicated visually by a grass skirt. In addition, gendered discourses helped to break down resistance to America’s annexation of Hawaii, as the islands’ leader, Queen Liliuokalani, was both masculinized and dehumanized in ways that made her seem “uncivilized,” while the Hawaiian culture itself was portrayed as inviting U.S. domination via the hyper-sexualized image of the hula girl. As political theorist Noenoe Silva has concluded, these sorts of portraits not only invited American intervention but also helped undermine native resistance to American control.

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girl also demonstrates how the discourse that created these sorts of racialized and
gendered associations was not only verbal but visual.

The study of visual rhetoric has become popular in rhetorical studies in recent
years, but has yet to be applied to the rhetoric of imperialism. Postcolonial scholar
Servando D. Halili Jr. has looked at some of the iconographic images from the period, but
his study focuses only on the Philippines. Halili concludes that “although economics,
geopolitics, and religion played significant roles” in the formulation of U.S. policies
toward the Philippines, “the intersection of race and gender likewise played equally
central and important roles in the formulation and implementation of such policies.”

Through my analyses of photographs and political cartoons, I hope to be able to say more
about the role of visual imagery in the rhetoric of U.S. imperialism.

Studies like Halili’s are rare. Most of the available research on the Age of
Imperialism (primarily from historians and political scientists) has focused on economic
and geopolitical explanations for U.S. foreign policy. But overlooking the role of gender
and race in the rhetoric of U.S. imperialism misses relevant themes that help explain
policy decisions, and it leads to misunderstandings of the ways America’s collective
identity functioned as an appeal for expansion. Ignoring gendered and racial appeals also
limits what we might learn about the similarities and differences between the rhetoric of
imperialism and the rhetoric of American foreign policy today.

Critical Approach

The Age of Imperialism extended from the late eighteenth century through at least
the first part of the twentieth century. Obviously, it would be impossible to analyze all of

21 Servando D. Halili Jr., Iconography of the New Empire: Race and Gender Images and the American Colonization of the Philippines (Quezon City: The University of Philippines Press, 2006), 16.
the speeches, books, articles, and other artifacts that contributed to the rhetorical culture of that time. Instead, my project focuses on a foundational moment to the period—the time in which the United States officially shifted from its policy of “no entangling alliances” to expand into Samoa and Hawaii. In this period, I identify key figures and texts that shaped the United States’ new national identity and propelled the country to become a leader among nations. I focus on a particular transformative moment in the development of the nation’s expansionist policies, showing the ideological tensions within progressive politics and demonstrating how racialized and gendered conceptions of U.S. nationalism shaped expansionist policies. I identify the dominant themes relating to progressive imperialism and show how they were manifested in two episodes of U.S. territorial expansion from 1889-1900: United States’ action in Samoa, and the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii. An initial chapter examines the ideology of expansion crafted by Alfred Thayer Mahan and Fredrick Jackson Turner that primed the country to seriously consider expansion beyond the continent. The time span of my study ranges from 1889 when the U.S. began extending its protection over Samoa, and concludes with the annexation of Hawaii in 1898 and its immediate aftermath. A final chapter will clarify how ideas about expansion and national identity evolved during the debates surrounding the Spanish American War and the annexation of the Philippines and will suggest how remnants of the Age of Imperialism are still evident in the rhetoric of U.S. foreign policy.

In examining each case study, I will focus on key figures and rhetorical artifacts that reflect the themes and tensions of “progressive imperialism.” These artifacts also document the emerging national identity of the United States as an expansionist world
power. To provide context and interpretive frameworks for my examination of these primary texts, I draw from secondary sources in history, post-colonial studies, feminist theory, and rhetoric. My collection of primary sources includes congressional reports, speeches, literature, and images reflecting how the discourse on American expansion permeated the entire rhetorical culture. My selections are driven both by a desire to illuminate the breadth of public appeals and the necessity of examining closely particularly relevant texts that helped shape the nation’s identity.

While I take an interdisciplinary approach to studying U.S. foreign policy, I see my project as primarily growing out of the public address tradition. Specifically, it reflects Ernest Wrage’s emphasis on how rhetorical history and criticism might contribute to the “history of ideas.” Advocating an “idea centered” rather than speaker-centered approach, Wrage urged rhetorical scholars to focus on the substantive content of rhetorical texts rather than the biography of speakers or the short-term effects of speeches on particular audiences. The result, according to Wrage, is criticism that “yields knowledge of a more general interest in terms of man’s cultural strivings and heritage.”

The project accounts for how, in the Age of Imperialism, ideas about expansion shaped the country’s rhetorical culture and its sense of mission. It also examines the idea of “progressive imperialism” and what it meant for American identity and the country’s foreign policies during this period.

My critical perspectives have been shaped by other influences as well. As I touched on above, I am particularly interested in focusing on the gendered and racial

22 Ernest Wrage, “Public Address: A Study in Social and Intellectual History,” Quarterly Journal of Speech 33 (1947): 455. My definition of public address is broader than Wrage’s. I focus not just on speeches but various types of rhetoric “addressed” to the public.
implications of the rhetoric of U.S. expansion. Krista Ratcliffe, a feminist rhetorical scholar, has suggested one way of doing that, by teasing out the racial and gender implications not only of what is said, but what is not said—that is, by “listening” for who and what is being silenced in the discourse. Ratcliffe suggests that critics contextualize rhetorical analysis “within an accountability logic,” analyzing “claims as well as the cultural logics within which these claims function.”

Ratcliffe suggests ways of examining the sometimes implicit themes in rhetorical texts that implicate race and gender and to connect those ideas back to prevailing cultural norms. She reminds us that “Because gender and race are words, they function as do all words—not as transparent descriptors of thought that stipulate only dictionary definitions but rather as tropes (i.e. as rhetorical figures) that suggest multiple meanings.”

Finally, my critical perspective has been significantly influenced by my own background and experience. As an indigenous woman researching a topic dominated by white men, I feel attuned to seeing ways that women and brown bodies are uniquely implicated in the discourse of the era. While racism and sexism certainly abound in these texts, to simply dismiss them because of their prejudices would be to ignore what they can teach us about rhetoric, about the motivations for imperialism, and about American identity. By investigating how race and gender are implicated in debates over expansion, I hope to better account for the history of expansion at the turn of the twentieth century, enrich discussions of race and gender in rhetorical studies, and contribute to our theoretical understanding of collective identity and U.S. nationalism.

24 Ratcliffe, Rhetorical Listening, 9.
Outline of Chapters

My first substantive chapter explores the ideological foundations of the Age of Imperialism and helps clarify how the country radically shifted its foreign policy during the 1890s. As Bass and Cherwitz have noted, the rhetoric of the era rested upon myths and ideologies that suggested that the United States had a unique character and a special destiny in the world, and two of the most important figures behind the emergence of those ideas were Alfred Thayer Mahan and Frederick Jackson Turner. Mahan’s 1890 book, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, developed a strategic vision for U.S. domination of the Western Hemisphere. Turner’s 1893 address to the American Historical Association at the Chicago World’s Fair, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” indirectly developed a rationale for—and imparted an urgency to—U.S. expansion into noncontiguous lands.

Mahan’s book worked to persuade the country of its potential as a great world power. Growing out his lectures on the subject at the U.S. Naval War College, the book developed a theory of world history that emphasized the importance of military strength and offered a vision which cast the United States as a potential world leader. As the country considered its position in the world in the aftermath of the Civil War and Reconstruction, Mahan’s text suggested that the future rested on naval strength, and such strength in turn demanded expansion for the purpose of establishing coaling stations and naval bases. Mahan not only planted the seed of a grand vision of U.S. domination of the Western Hemisphere and Pacific, he also described exactly how that might be done.

If Mahan’s work was largely strategic and pragmatic, Turner’s helped to clarify the psychological significance of expansion to the United States’ character. For Turner,
as historian Richard Hofstadter has noted, “It was the frontier that had produced American democracy and individualism, that had been the main source of American opportunity.” Through the trials of conquering the frontier, according to Turner, Europeans had severed their identity to their homelands and developed a uniquely American character—that “can do” spirit of grand ambitions, courage, and perseverance in the face of challenges and setbacks. Cited by Theodore Roosevelt as a rationale for expansion and widely reprinted and circulated around the country, Turner’s essay became “the most famous and influential paper in the history of American historical writing.”

The context of his delivery is also significant. It was presented at the Chicago World’s Fair on the four-hundredth anniversary of “Columbus’ Discovery” of the so-called “new world.” The fair included numerous exhibits illustrating western progress. Some even featured Native Americans displaced by Western expansion.

My second chapter focuses on how Mahan and Turner’s ideas were manifested in U.S. expansion into the Pacific. In 1889, the United States began fighting for its first Pacific outpost—Samoa. Through the 1890s, the United States, England, Germany, and the indigenous population vied for control over the two major islands. The U.S. officially gained the eastern island of Samoa in 1899. A small, relatively poor area, it still provided a valuable military base, and the U.S. considered it important that Germany and other European powers be denied the full claim to such a strategic outpost in the Pacific. Its acquisition was thus pragmatic and consistent with Mahan’s vision of U.S. naval

26 Hofstadter, Turner and the Sociology of the Frontier, 3.
27 Germany received the western islands in 1899 and in return the Germans ceded their claims on Tonga to Great Britain.
dominance. Yet control over Samoa was presented to the American people as a moral obligation and a step forward in the “progress” of civilization.

During this conflict over control of Samoa, short story writer Robert Louis Stevenson appealed to the Western public on behalf of the people in the islands. In 1892, he published his accounts of living in the islands, *A Footnote to History: Eight Years of Trouble in Samoa*. His book described a humanitarian crisis he saw as largely caused by the mismanagement of the islands by the Germans. In many ways, this text helped set the tone for how later advocates of expansion would appeal to the U.S. public, particularly with respect to Cuba. Stevenson’s account also rested within the dominant racial logic of this period, portraying indigenous peoples in generally positive tones yet also suggesting that they needed Western help to progress toward civilization. U.S. support could provide moral uplift and guidance. In that sense, Stevenson’s rhetoric anticipated the rise of “progressive imperialism.”

Four years after U.S. warships were first called to Samoa, Hawaii followed a similar trajectory, which my third chapter documents. The United States had officially controlled Pu’uloa (Pearl Harbor) since 1887 and had established trade in the islands long before that. The government of the independent nation of Hawaii had United States-born counselors in its cabinet, and the Hawaiian constitution largely imitated its mainland counterpart. But ever since New England missionaries arrived in Hawaii in 1820, some Americans had grander designs on the islands. Although U.S. citizens owned land, benefited from sugar cane plantations, and served in the Hawaiian government, many believed that only U.S. annexation of the islands could secure American interests in Hawaii. With the presence of U.S. marines, American citizens overthrew the Hawaiian
monarchy in 1893 and Queen Liliuokalani stepped down to avoid bloodshed and the 
annihilation of the dwindling indigenous population.28

Because the United States had already secured a military base, commercial lands, 
and an active trade partner in Hawaii under the indigenous government, the rhetorical 
justification for more complete domination of the islands was often particularly racist. 
Unlike Samoa, Hawaii had especially embraced western influences. The queen was well-
educated, spoke English, and was Christian. Yet, focusing on the non-white population 
and Queen Liliuokalani herself, advocates of U.S. annexation suggested that the 
indigenous population was inherently savage and incapable of becoming sufficiently 
civilized to govern itself. According to advocates of U.S. annexation of the Islands, 
Hawaiians needed a stronger U.S. presence to protect them from themselves.

Hawaii did not enter into the United States’ fold without resistance. In 1898, 
Queen Liliuokalani published her memoir, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*. This 
book refuted claims in U.S. newspapers and in the Congress about the nature of Hawaii 
and its relationship to the United States. The text strikingly revealed the contradictions in 
U.S. narratives about the rights of “civilized nations” and the abilities of non-white 
nations. The memoirs also showed that appeals to American’s revolutionary tradition, its 
principles of liberty, and Christian duty were not the sole domain of mainland 
expansionists. In her memoirs, the Queen turned those appeals back on the United 
States, but by the time her book appeared the issue of Hawaii had been overshadowed by 
the Spanish American war. Hawaii was annexed in July of 1898.

28 Native Hawaiians, like Native Americans, were decimated by diseases introduced by outsiders. Less 
than one hundred years after the first western contact, the Hawaiian population had dropped by as much as 
ninety percent.
In a final chapter, I will outline how action in the Pacific set a tone for how the United States conducted its foreign policy during the remainder of the Age of Imperialism. The debate over the Spanish American War brought to a fever pitch some of the earlier sentiments about expansion. Passion-filled stories and extreme images depicted the plight of the Cuban people under Spanish rule and motivated the U.S. sense of obligation toward other countries. Theodore Roosevelt argued that the Spanish American War presented a clear test of whether the United States was ready to lead the world; it was a test of the country’s strength and fortitude, and it was our “manly” duty. Victory over Spain did not settle the question of what to do with these countries, of course. Some who had supported the war, including William Jennings Bryan, opposed annexing the new territories. Those who favored annexation argued that it was the next natural step in the “progress” of the nation—an increasingly common theme in the rhetoric of American foreign policy during this time. Some also saw the United States’ swift success against Spain as symbolizing God’s will that the country take a stronger position in world arena. Providence seemed to suggest that Americans were uniquely endowed to lead the non-white populations of the world toward “civilization.” Several key texts from these debates we still remember today. Albert Beveridge’s campaign speech, the “March of the Flag,” in 1898 and William Jennings Bryan’s “Acceptance Speech” from the 1900 presidential campaign, echo many of the ideas first raised in the debates over Samoa and Hawaii.

This chapter also briefly addresses the legacy of Age of Imperialism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. By the time the United States entered World War I, expansionist urges had faded, although the United States added more territory after the
war, the Virgin Islands. By mid-century, the experiment in the Philippines had ended, and the Filipinos won their independence on July 4th, 1946. The country remains connected to the United States by economic interests, but the United States finally lived up to promises made since 1898 that the Philippines would someday regain its sovereignty as an independent nation. Others, however, have not followed in these footsteps. Particularly in Hawaii, independence movements continue to fight against U.S. domination.

We can still learn from the Age of Imperialism. Although the situations differ significantly, the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have raised many of the same questions about whether humanitarian crises invite intervention, and the United States continues to claim the right to act in what it identifies as the best interests of citizens in foreign lands. Arguments about American exceptionalism, “progress,” and “civilization,” and even arguments about our moral duties, continue to shape U.S. foreign policy.

The United States is certainly different today than it was in 1889, but the rhetoric and actions of that earlier era shaped both the physical characteristics and the collective identity of the nation. Many in the United States forget that the country is more than a collection of fifty states. Hawaii, of course, proved to be special, and it became a state in 1959. Yet Puerto Rico, Guam, and American Samoa continue to feel disconnected, and their relationship to the continental mainland is still debated. *Building an Empire, Defining a Nation* aims to remind people of those tens of thousands of other “Americans” and to clarify why it is important to include them in the discussion of what it means to be an American.
Chapter 2: Alfred Thayer Mahan, Frederick Jackson Turner, and the Ideology of Expansion

In 1893, the four-hundredth anniversary of Columbus’ “discovery” of America was celebrated among the lights and grand architecture of the newly constructed “White City,” gleaming on Chicago’s lakefront. The Columbian Exposition demonstrated U.S. industry and progress and the general advancement of civilization. Thirty-six nations and forty-six states and territories of the United States were represented at the Exposition, not to mention hundreds of private organizations.¹ The Exposition celebrated continued exploration and expansion and although the event was a tribute to Columbus, it also celebrated the United States. “The anniversary of his first voyage provided a compelling excuse to grandstand,” explains Judy Sund, “and the bold pursuit of new horizons that his image evoked struck the right chords in a country that prided itself on expansion . . . .”²

Yet amidst all the celebration, one young historian was lamenting the end of this first chapter in American History at a small meeting of the American Historical Association held during the fair. “Up to our own day American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West,” declared Frederick Jackson Turner. “The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development.”³ But now, “four centuries from the discovery of America . . . the frontier has gone, and with its

going has closed the first period of American history.” In short, according to Turner, the frontier was now “closed.” And while Turner himself offered no specific vision of the future, he did help set the stage for the next important chapter in U.S. history: the pursuit of empire.

Some historians argue that the United States was always expansionist in character. Well before independence, colonists pushed at the borders and seemed eager to search for more land and greater opportunities. During the nineteenth century, the United States boomed, folding Texas, the Oregon Territory, and millions of acres into its continental land mass. Although Alaska did not directly border the states, it was purchased by the United States in 1867. The U.S.’ influence in government, religion, and trade in the Pacific (and particularly Hawaii) was also already established by the mid-century. Noncontiguous expansion had thus begun in earnest well before the 1890s.

Despite these trends, many within the United States still thought of the country as isolationist. Secretary of State William Seward wrote in 1863 “Our policy of non-intervention, straight, absolute, and peculiar as it may seem to other nations,” was a tradition that “could not be abandoned without the most urgent occasion, amounting to a manifest necessity.” For leaders such as Seward, contiguous land could naturally be seen as part of the United States. Seward himself led the effort to acquire Alaska. And although the country had influence in the Pacific, the United States did not exercise sovereign control of those regions before the turn of the century. If America was to

4 Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier,” 60.
5 For example, Robert Kagan’s core argument is that the United States has been historically viewed by the international arena as dangerous because it continued to expand even as it touted isolationism. See Kagan, Dangerous Nation (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).
expand more aggressively in the 1890s, its “traditional” understanding of its own character had to change.

Two thinkers who figured prominently in reconceptualization of American identity were Turner and Alfred Thayer Mahan. These men shaped a vision of the United States that not only justified the country’s eventual expansion into the Pacific, but made expansion seem necessary, even inevitable. They were able to establish a rationale for expansion into noncontiguous areas by subtly redefining what constituted “expansion” and by linking expansion to nationalistic themes. These themes depicted expansion as an innate quality of the American spirit and as an important test of the strength of the American character. If the United States shrank in fear from its duty to assume a leadership role in the world, the country’s steady path of progress would come to an abrupt end.

Mahan and Turner came from very different backgrounds, but their writings implied a similar path for the nation. Turner was a young historian and professor at the University of Wisconsin. His 1893 paper, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” argued that the United States’ unique character had been forged by the experience of taming the Western frontier. The closing of the frontier thus threatened the United States’ very character—its identity and its sense of self. Turner did not connect expansion with contemporary events, nor did he directly advocate specific policies. But the implications of Turner’s “frontier thesis” were clear: if the United States did not find new frontiers to explore and conquer, it risked losing the distinctive character that had made it great.
Captain Alfred T. Mahan taught and served as president at the Naval War College. His lectures became the basis of his influential 1890 book, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*. While Mahan’s book focused on European military history, it suggested a larger lesson for the United States: that national strength depended on naval power, and naval power required island outposts. More significantly, he suggested an entirely new way of thinking about the great oceans—as global highways that connected the far reaches of the world rather than as barriers that separated nations. Mahan’s book has been lauded as one of the most significant works from the turn of the century. William E. Livezey writes that “Mahan shares with Frederick Jackson Turner the honor, among American historians, of being the creator of a new philosophy of history.”

Although neither Turner nor Mahan explicitly called upon the country to expand into noncontiguous areas of the world, together they crafted an ideology of expansion that demonstrated that access to new lands overseas was necessary for the United States to remain strong and to “progress.” They suggested ways that expansion could be seen as perfectly consistent with U.S. national identity, rather than as incompatible with its isolationist traditions. Both authors also grounded their appeals in prevailing understandings of the nation’s history, racial make-up, and masculine virtues. My purpose is to clarify how these texts helped construct the U.S. national identity in a way that not only justified expansion but made it seem necessary and inevitable.

The Significance of the Frontier in American History

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Fredrick Jackson Turner was born in 1862. His mother was a school teacher and his father owned and operated a local newspaper in Portage, Wisconsin. The young Turner worked and traveled with his father, and his father helped push him to further his education. He was an attentive student, and particularly applied himself as an orator and debater. Turner’s speeches won top marks both in high school and later at the University of Wisconsin, where he studied history. He completed his doctorate in history at John Hopkins and returned to teach at the University of Wisconsin in 1889.

Turner’s ideas about the significance of the frontier began to form well before he assumed his position at Wisconsin. Portage itself was something of a model of his ideas about the impact of the frontier. When Turner recalled his boyhood, according to Allen Bogue, he remembered “Indian ponies and dogs on the streets, their owners come to town,” and in the evening German women would drive “their cows to and from pasture on the city outskirts.” Turner spent his youth outdoors and recounted encounters with members of the Winnebago tribe: “There were still Indian Winnebago tepees where I hunted and fished.” Turner’s frontier thesis was thus, in some ways, his own family’s story—Yankee men making their way west to settle Wisconsin among more recent immigrants and the swiftly disappearing indigenous population. Yet, had this been only Turner’s personal story, it might not have struck a chord with so many. Lacy K. Ford

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8 For a more complete account of Turner’s oratorical skill (and for a collection of his speeches) see Ronald H. Carpenter, *The Eloquence of Frederick Jackson Turner* (San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1983).
explains that Turner’s history “captured the popular imagination more than any other sweeping explanation of how the American national character was formed.”

But just how did Turner capture the nation’s imagination? In part, the context explains his success, but Turner was also a gifted storyteller. His narrative of Western expansion was an engaging story about what it meant to be an “American.” Turner offered his audience an appealing explanation of history because it offered them an appealing place in history. Ronald H. Carpenter argues that Turner’s portrayal of the American frontiersmen “struck the responsive chords in readers that conduce to a persuasive myth.” Three themes of that “persuasive myth” helped Turner connect with his audience: the idea of progress, the significance of the United States’ racial characteristics, and, implicitly, his characterization of American “manliness.”

Turner studied rhetoric, and he appealed to his audience by giving them a clear sense that their country was special. From the very beginning of his paper, he invoked appealing images of the “American life” and the “American character.” After citing a census bulletin indicating that there was no longer a “frontier line” in the American West, Turner noted, “This brief official statement marks the closing of a great historic movement.” That end of that “great movement,” he explained, meant the end of the progress that had made America a dynamic and distinctive nation. As Turner explained, “The peculiarity of American institutions is the fact that they have been compelled to

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adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people . . .”  

While all societies progressed in some fashion, Richard White explains that Turner “extended the meaning of progress.” Progress meant not only material wealth but was also cultural, it meant “growing democracy, greater equality, more opportunity.”  

What made the United States great was that its institutions and its people were forged by the necessities of conquering the frontier.

Turner further argued that westward expansion inspired the nation to be uniquely creative. The frontier gave the country “perennial rebirth, fluidity of American life,” and provided the nation with an endless supply of “new opportunities.” Through its “continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society,” the nation forged a “dominating American character.”  

Expanding across wide-open territory, American frontiersmen were continually challenged to redefine and recreate themselves and their institutions. “Since the days when the fleet of Columbus sailed into the waters of the New World,” Turner concluded, “America has been another name for opportunity, and the people of the United States have taken their tone from the incessant expansion which has not only been open but has even been forced upon them.”  

The closing of the frontier threatened to end this creative cycle of exploration and rebirth and damage America’s character.

One of the dangerous implications of Turner’s portrait of the frontier as a blank canvas of endless opportunities was how it dehumanized the indigenous peoples of the

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American West. For Turner, the native peoples were not so much competitors for the land as part of the land itself, an element of the frontier environment that Americans needed to conquer if “progress” was to continue. At first, Turner wrote, the “wilderness masters the colonist.” He continued: “It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin. . . . Before long he has gone to planting Indian corn and plowing with a sharp stick; he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion.”20 But “little by little,” the European settlers tamed the Wilderness; they overcame an environment that the natives themselves could never overcome. In Turner’s portrait of the West, the native peoples were not separate nations or cultures, they were the environment. What made the white colonists special was that they were challenged by the environment yet not entirely determined by it. Jacobs concludes that “This misconception of Turner’s, confusing culture with nature, was undoubtedly not intentional, but it permitted Turner to give support to the violence and prolonged wars against native people . . . .”21

Jacobs is perhaps too generous in his reading of Turner. Turner’s evaluation of Native Americans may have valorized them as a worthy challenge of the frontier, but it also dehumanized them and demeaned their culture as “savage.” Turner’s understanding of the country’s social evolution began “with the Indian and the hunter” and moved through “the disintegration of savagery,” ending finally with “the manufacturing organization with city and factory system.” He made clear that the country had to continue progressing toward urbanization and industrialization, and he treated the

21 Jacobs, On Turner’s Trail, 55.
indigenous population of the United States as merely one obstacle to the country’s march forward.

In Turner’s historical narrative, Native Americans had a positive effect on the country’s development, but only because they forced the settlers to come together and forge a distinctively American identity. The “Indian frontier,” according to Turner, acted as “a consolidation agent” which demanded “united action.”

Melding white Europeans from different countries into one people, the fight against Native Americans created a distinctively American character forged of British, Scots, Irish, and German settlers, among others. “In the crucible of the frontier,” Turner explained, “immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race, English in neither nationality nor characteristics.” In overcoming the formidable resistance of the Native Americans—in displacing and in some cases actually eliminating whole tribes—frontiersmen from all over Europe became uniquely American.

Turner’s valorization of the “primitive” and difficult life of the frontier reflected the importance of “manly” strength in the cultural understanding of the late nineteenth century. Leroy Dorsey explains that Turner’s thesis tapped into an appealing self-image among many Americans—the image of Americans as a “dynamic, strong, reasoned, and uniquely capable people who had dominated their surroundings through their strength of body, mind, and character.”

Turner himself concluded his essay by reminding his audience that the “American intellect” owed its “striking characteristics” to the frontier experience. A certain “coarseness and strength,” combined with “acuteness and

23 Turner, “The Significance on the Frontier,” 47.
inquisitiveness,” came to define that intellect, along with a “masterful grasp of material things” and a “restless, nervous energy” and a “dominant individualism.” Of course, these traits—“strength,” “masterfulness,” “dominant individualism,” and the like—were primarily masculine. The frontier experience had made Americans more “manly” than their European ancestors. After their “Promethean struggles against the untamed wilderness,” as Carpenter summarized Turner’s frontier thesis, Americans emerged “triumphant” and “capable of coping with any subsequent problem.”

Several aspects of the context in which Turner wrote also helped strengthen the popularity of his rhetoric. Turner’s narrative was compelling, in part, because it drew from prevailing theories of social development and progress. Darwinism, for example, was increasingly popular not merely as a way of explaining biological development, but as a method for describing human development and the progress of whole societies more generally. Just three years after Turner pronounced his frontier thesis, Brooks Adams, in his Law of Civilization and Decay, would advance a theory of history celebrating the superiority of “martial man” over “economic man” in the progress of civilizations. Like Turner, Adams implicitly invoked Social Darwinism as an explanation for why some civilizations thrived and progressed, while others sunk into decay and historical oblivion.

28 Jacobs notes, “In 1878, the year Turner entered college, barely twenty years had passed since Darwin had put forth his ideas, and they had become the current doctrine to be followed in the social sciences and the humanities as well as in the science. Turner . . . readily absorbed this teaching as part of his intellectual development.” On Turner’s Trail, 35-36.
Other thinkers had already raised the idea that the frontier experience helped make the country great. Turner himself quoted Lyman Beecher, a famous early nineteenth-century preacher, who wrote “It is equally plain that the religious and political destiny of our nation is to be decided in the West . . .”

Theodore Roosevelt, in his four volume series *The Winning of the West*, provided Turner with concrete examples of how the West shaped the character of TR and other Americans. In 1889, TR wrote of his experiences in the Dakotas, that “wild country in which we dwelt and across which we wandered,” in similar tones to those used by Turner to describe frontier life. Like the earlier pioneers who settled in the Alleghenies a century before, TR found himself confronted by the most fundamental of challenges: “We guarded our herds of branded cattle and shaggy horses, hunted bear . . . established civil government, and put down evil forces . . . exactly as did the pioneers who a hundred years previously built their log-cabins beside the Kentucky or in the valleys of the Great Smokies.”

Roosevelt also wrote of the “perennial rebirth” experienced by those living on the frontier, and he came to a conclusion quite similar to Turner’s frontier thesis: “Much had been accomplished by the deeds of the Indian-fighters, treaty makers, and wilderness-wanders; far more had been accomplished by the steady push of the settler folk themselves, as they thrust every westward, and carved States out of the forest and prairies . . . .” For Roosevelt, as for Turner, the frontier experience shaped the distinctive character not only of the individual settlers but of the nation as a whole.

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In addition to the intellectual climate that helped make his thesis so popular, Turner’s ideas tapped into a growing sense of economic and political crisis. John Mack Faragher notes that Turner’s “brilliance was to speak directly to the sense of crisis enveloping the intellectual discourse of the nation in 1893.” The stock market had crashed, six hundred banks had closed that year alone, and unemployment had risen to “levels greater than any time in living memory.” People looked for solutions, and Turner’s ideas “about the closing of the continental frontier offered an explanation for the crisis—the United States had reached a critical watershed in its history—and to many it also seemed to suggest a way out.”32 That way out would be the exploration of new frontiers, if not in the American West, then wherever new frontiers could be found.

It was more than just coincidence that Turner presented his paper at an American Historical Association (AHA) meeting held during the Columbian Exposition. Richard Hofstadter notes that Chicago outbid Eastern cities for the honor of hosting the celebration of Columbus’ Anniversary, and Turner’s thesis served as “an expression of this rising western self-conscious.”33 It was also no accident that the AHA held its meeting at the Exposition. “While some sophisticates deplored an AHA role amid the amusement and whoopla of the world’s fair,” Carpenter notes, Turner viewed the event as “an opportunity to prove that prairies produced more than corn and Populists.”34 Challenging historians who valorized the East and emphasized the U.S. connection to Europe,35 Turner insisted that it was the West that had shaped America’s unique

32 Faragher, Rereading Fredrick Jackson Turner, 3.
34 Carpenter, “Frederick Jackson Turner,” 120.
35 James D. Bennet, Frederick Jackson Turner (Boston: Twayne, 1875), 35.
character. “The frontier and the image of the American West as a land of boundless promise reinforced American’s conviction that they inhabited a special land,” observes Paul McCartney.\(^{36}\) That “special land” had, in turn, made the American people “special.” This view of American exceptionalism, rooted in the frontier experience, would come to serve as a major justification for U.S. intervention abroad.

The theme of the Columbian Exposition itself was consistent with Turner’s thesis and emphasized American progress.\(^{37}\) *The Book of the Fair*, written by Hubert Howe Bancroft and published in 1893, began with a grandiose declaration of the fair’s historical significance: “Gathered here are the forces which move humanity . . . and shape the destinies of mankind.” The preface continued: “Evidenced on every side are subordinations of the physical and the enduring supremacy of mind, while ready at hand are all those contrivances of civilization which help to elevate and ennoble man . . . and further his deliverance from the despotisms of nature.”\(^{38}\) Consistent with Turner’s thesis, the fair, like America’s Westward expansion, was all about overcoming “the despotisms of nature.” The vast frontier tested the United States and shaped its people, and their success at overcoming those challenges proved their superiority.


The visual imagery of the Columbian Exposition also reflected the ideals and values implicit in Turner’s frontier thesis. In the Certificate of Commission for the Exposition (see figure 2.1), for example, Columbus was depicted holding the rudder of an ornate canoe, as women representing different continents rowed the boat. He looks up at the maiden figure meant to represent the New World (Columbia), who lounges gracefully. In her hand is the olive branch of peace, and she rests against a bison. Sund argues that the bison “symbolizes her unique and untamed—if not truly ‘untenanted’—
Western plains." Columbia was not alone, as she rests with three children seemingly meant to represent the different peoples of the United States. The White child is reading, looking over his shoulder appears to be an African American boy, holding a flower. Standing and looking into the distance is a Native American boy, feathers in his hair with an unstrung bow. Behind them is pictured Chicago’s White City. The Columbian Exposition thus pulled visually from themes similar to Turner’s thesis, depicting the West and the indigenous population as significant elements of the mythic illustration of the country and showing how Columbia mastered nonwhite populations. The Indian boy and the bison are no threat to Columbia, and she can oversee the white child’s efforts at education (and the African American child’s efforts to gain access).

Turner’s frontier thesis, and the Exposition at which it was first delivered, planted seeds for a new ideology of American exceptionalism and noncontiguous expansion. Turner’s audience in Chicago may have been small, but the following year the paper was published by the Wisconsin State Historical Society, and in 1920 he expanded his ideas into a book-length work, *The Frontier in American History*. Well before these publications, however, Turner’s frontier thesis already had struck a cord. For example, Theodore Roosevelt wrote to Turner in 1894 that “you have struck some first class ideas, and have put into definite shape a good deal of thought which has been floating around rather loosely.” Turner’s frontier thesis, as already suggested, reflected Roosevelt’s own interpretation of Westward expansion in *The Winning of the West*. Now, as Leroy

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40 Sund, “Columbus and Columbia,” 443.
41 Carpenter, “Frederick Jackson Turner,” 117.
Dorsey explains, Turner had given “scholarly credibility to the frontier imaginings of popular storytellers such as Roosevelt.”

Moreover, Turner had set the stage for other thinkers to suggest how, in the modern world, the United States might hold on to its unique national character. Turner had identified the problem; it was now up to others to suggest solutions. Among those who did just that was a young naval officer named Alfred T. Mahan. Like Turner, Mahan’s reflections on history would have an enormous influence on Theodore Roosevelt and others who enacted the ideology of American expansion in the Age of Imperialism.

The Influence of Sea Power upon History

Alfred Thayer Mahan was born into military life. His father was a professor at the United States Military Academy. Mahan was born at West Point and named after his father’s commanding officer. In 1856, at the age of sixteen, Mahan entered the Naval Academy, and he graduated in 1859. Although he eventually made captain, his accomplishments as a naval officer, even by his own account, were not great. In 1886 he joined the newly created Naval War College. In his studies he had already begun to research and think about the significance of sea power in history, and his lectures at the War College reflected this. These lectures were also already influencing a new generation of naval officers. By 1888, Mahan had finished a manuscript based on his lectures. Two years later, he published The Influence of Sea Power upon History.

Mahan’s book is now renowned, but he worked hard for its success. Some prominent figures (such as Roosevelt) responded immediately and enthusiastically to the

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43 Dorsey, We Are All Americans, Pure and Simple, 21.
44 Livezey, Mahan on Sea Power, 4.
book. Reviews overseas were even more favorable. Although he initially fought orders that took him back to Europe in 1892, his naval tour of the Old World helped build his personal reputation, particularly in England. Livezey explains, “The attention paid Mahan during this European cruise did much to convince his skeptical brother officers and his indifferent fellow citizens that the sea-power studies were works of first order.”

Even early on, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* was translated into German, Japanese, French, Italian, Russian, and Spanish, and it was widely read. Mahan also courted political support for his book, sending copies directly to Secretary of Navy Benjamin Tracy and Representative Henry Cabot Lodge. Carpenter argues that Mahan was influential because “he made compelling historical sense to guide future action.”

Although focused on history, the book clearly implied the failings of America’s naval strategy of “coastal defense” and suggested the importance of modernizing the navy. Mahan argued that “the practical object of this inquiry is to draw from the lessons of history inferences applicable to one’s own country and service.”

Well after his 1890 book, Mahan continued to preach that same gospel. In articles and later books, Mahan continued to advance his thesis that naval power was the key to national greatness.

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45 Actually, Roosevelt completed the text in two days and wrote Mahan immediately of his support. For more on their relationship, see Peter Karsten, “The Nature of ‘Influence’: Roosevelt, Mahan and the Concept of Sea Power,” *American Quarterly* 23 (1971): 585-600.
51 *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812* (two volumes, 1892) and *The Life of Nelson: The Embodiment of the Sea Power of Great Britain* (two volumes, 1897).
Mahan was not the first to make that point, of course. Roosevelt may have been
influenced by Mahan, but he was also a naval historian of some repute himself,
publishing the well-received book *The Naval War of 1812* in 1882. In addition, the
Naval War College had been founded well before Mahan published his book, and for
some time it had been specifically dedicated to promoting more modern conceptions of
naval power. Even in 1870, President Grant warned congress that it could “hardly be
wise statesmanship in a government which represents a country with over four thousand
miles of coastline on both oceans . . . to rest with such inadequate means of enforcing any
foreign policy either of protection or redress.” Grant concluded “our navy is our only
means of direct protection to our citizens abroad, or for the enforcement of any foreign
policy.”

“Mahan,” Jon Tetsuro Sumida notes, “caught a rising tide of public interest in
and discussion about navies, economics, and international relations.” *The Influence of
Sea Power upon History* tapped into—and helped to define—that growing interest in the
role of sea power in foreign policy. But he alone did not create that interest, nor did he
offer a specific plan for American expansion in the twentieth century.

Like Turner’s frontier thesis, Mahan’s theory of sea power rested, in part, on the
assumption that the United States had reached the limits of growth on the North
American continent. Ivan Musicant explains, Mahan believed that the “productive
capacity of the nation had grown too large for the strictly continental market to absorb.”
Having “lost the landed frontier,” it would inevitably “turn to the sea, its ever present,

52 President Grant as quoted in George Herbert Ryden, *The Foreign Policy of the United States in Relation
to Samoa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928), 43-44.
strategic geographical frontier.” However, in order to do that it needed to develop its sea power, and that, according to Mahan, required control over “production, with the necessity of changing products, shipping, whereby the exchange is carried on, and colonies, which facilitate and enlarge the operation of shipping and tend to protect it . . . .” In Mahan’s vision of the future, the sea would become a great highway, not a barrier to trade, and the great nations would control those highways through naval dominance, protecting the distribution of goods. For Mahan, as Livezey concludes, “sea power and mercantilistic imperialism became virtually synonymous.” Yet while few proponents of expansion missed the economic implications of Mahan’s history, there was more to Mahan’s vision of American expansion than the promise of new markets.

Viewing the sea as a highway also affected the nation’s own image. If oceans were viewed as highways rather than buffers, the rationale for America’s isolationist tradition no longer held. Reconceptualizing the oceans as highways meant that the United States could re-imagine its national ambitions. Albert Beveridge’s famous 1898 speech, “March of the Flag,” reflected just how far these implications could be extended. Delivering a campaign speech in the center of the continent—in Indianapolis—did not preclude Beveridge from imagining how these ocean “highways” would someday extend the nation’s influence: “The ocean does not separate us from lands of our duty and desire—the oceans join us, rivers never to be dredged, canals never to be repaired. Steam joins us, electricity joins us—the very elements are in league with our destiny.”

Responding directly to the historical argument that only contiguous lands should be the

56 Livezey, Mahan on Sea Power, 49.
object of American expansion, Beveridge went so far as to proclaim Hawaii and the Philippines natural objects of U.S. desire: “The oceans make them contiguous.” In effect, Beveridge redefined America’s borders in terms of the reach of our naval power.

Mahan’s thesis also reflected the Darwinian philosophy underlying much of the social and political thought of the time. As Charles D. Tarlton has argued, Mahan’s views rested upon the assumption that nations, like species, were in a deadly competition for survival: “Each nation, in attempting to get as much as possible form the finite supply of the world’s wealth, was locked with every other nation in a struggle over the very stuff of national life.” Building on this assumption, Mahan demonstrated how historically the nations with the strongest navies had prevailed not only militarily but economically. And for Mahan a strong navy required not only offensive, seagoing battleships, but also outposts across the seas to coal and repair such ships.

Overseas naval bases were important for protecting the U.S. navy. Without such bases, Mahan argued, the United States would be “like land birds, unable to fly far from their own shores.” In order to be a true naval power, the United States needed “resting-places” for its ships, “where they can coal and repair.” Mahan believed that “one of the first duties of a government proposing to itself the development of the power of the nation at sea” would be to secure such bases. Comparing battleships to birds and suggesting that they merely needed “resting-places” downplayed the aggression involved. Why would these “birds” need to leave their homeland in the first place? For what

59 Mahan, The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 83.
actions did they need to “rest up”? Mahan merely emphasized how a strong navy helped maintain peace. “Even for a peaceful solution,” he wrote, “that nation will have the strongest arguments which has the strongest organized force.”

Mahan also saw American expansion as not just in the nation’s economic or military interests, but as particularly appropriate given the country’s national character. Directly addressing the logistics of expansion, he did not advocate that the United States become a colonial power—at least in the traditional European sense. Colonization was not essential to his vision of sea power. If the United States only obtained the outposts needed for naval bases, Mahan argued, sea power would “not long delay its appearance.” Then America’s “instinct for commerce” would take hold, with “the pursuit of gain” and Americans’ “keen scent for the trails that lead to it” inevitably creating greater economic development. If in the future there was a need for colonization, Mahan noted that Americans would surely prove “inherited aptitude for self-government and independent growth.”

The United States did not need to colonize foreign lands to enjoy the military and economic benefits of sea power but they were also particularly primed to direct the “backward” peoples of the world. Mahan thus sidestepped the debates over annexing territories that dominated American politics for the next two decades. Americans had a “keen scent” for economic opportunity and an “inherited aptitude” for good government, but they had no need to become an imperial power like Great Britain.

Not everybody in the United States was so restrained in their ambitions. Directly articulating a racist rationale for annexing the Philippines, Senator Beveridge argued in 1900 that “the reign of law must be established throughout these islands, their resources

60 Mahan, The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 325.
developed and their people civilized by those in whose blood resides the genius of administration”—by which he meant “all Teutonic and Celtic people.” Mahan never went quite that far, but he did argue that as the “waste places of the world have been rapidly filled,” and that there was now a need for strong, civilized powers to assure order and stability in those “forsaken regions” where only “nominal” political authority had been established. When the governments in foreign lands were “of a character so feeble that it cannot rely upon itself alone for support or protection,” Mahan argued, it would be up to the United States to guarantee order. Mahan later elaborated on this duty to what he called “disordered States”: “So long as—to use a familiar expression—they hurt no one but themselves, this may go on; but for a long time the citizens of more stable governments have been seeking to exploit their resources, and have borne the losses arising from their distracted condition.”

Thus, it was both a moral duty and in the nation’s economic interest to protect weak or uncivilized nations from the predation of other more advanced powers. And sometimes that meant protecting those backward nations against what he viewed as the follies of their own misguided leaders. Mahan specifically noted that in Central and South America, the “constant anxiety about the maintenance of internal order” was seriously interfering “with commerce and with the peaceful development of their resources.” Such a view imposed the interests and values of the United States and other advanced industrialized nations on those allegedly backward nations.

63 Mahan, The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 324.
64 Mahan, The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 325.
65 Mahan, The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 325.
Mahan’s attitude was clearly paternalistic, suggesting that “backward” countries could not be trusted to take care of themselves. Like children, they needed protection from a parental authority, and that relationship frequently was manifested visually in political cartoons that depicted the United States as the father of a bunch of unruly children. At the time, however, Mahan’s views were seen as merely pragmatic. If the United States did not maintain order and/or develop an economic relationship with these backward countries, some other advanced power inevitably would. It was a matter of the survival of the fittest. And Mahan, like many others at the time, was asking an obvious question: if backward nations were inevitably going to be dominated by more powerful, seagoing nations, why shouldn’t the United States act?

Conclusion

Mahan and Turner built an intellectual rationale for expansion beyond U.S. borders, and their suggestions were picked up by others in positions of political power. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, for example, was an active proponent of expansion, combining the sentiments of Turner and Mahan concisely in his arguments for expansion. In 1899, he wrote: “For thirty years the people of the United States had been absorbed in the development of their great heritage. They had been finishing the conquest of their continent, and binding all parts of it together with the tracks and highways of commerce. Once this work was complete, it was certain that the virile, ambitious, enterprising race which had done it would look abroad beyond their boundaries and seek to guard and extend their interests in other parts of the world.”

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66 As quoted in McCartney, Power and Progress, 179.
reached the end of the Western frontier’s development and agreed with Turner and Mahan that the next step was to look beyond the country’s horizons.

By comparison to others in their day, Turner and Mahan’s rhetoric of expansion was quite restrained. But they helped shift definitions of U.S. nationalism, and we cannot overlook the importance of their ideas for later imperialist actions. Advocates of expansion often couched their arguments in the themes established by Turner and Mahan, such as progress, the duties of race, and the importance of “manly” strength. For example, Beveridge’s “March of the Flag” was in many ways just a more extreme version of Turner’s argument that the United States must continually expand in order to progress.

Progress was the trump card of the period, celebrated both in Turner’s work and at the Columbian Exposition. But Turner’s notion of progress was complicated. White explains, “Turner defined American culture as progressive, but the progress he envisioned was achieved, paradoxically, by retreating to the primitive along successive frontiers.”67 The United States thus had to find new “primitive” lands, and Samoa and Hawaii fit the bill. On the other hand, Mahan’s idea of progress was more traditional. If oceans were connecting highways, technological progress demanded coaling stations in order to reach distant destinations and again, Samoa and Hawaii fit neatly into this vision.

Progress and expansion also contained a common idea—movement. At the center of Turner’s and Mahan’s ideas was the importance of dynamic force and active struggle. The United States had to remain strong, and resistance developed strength. No one capitalized on these ideas more than Theodore Roosevelt. In 1899 he declared: “I wish to

67 White, Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill, 25
preach, not the doctrine of ignoble ease, but the doctrine of the strenuous life, the life of
toil and effort, of labor and strife; to preach that highest form of success which comes,
not to the man who desires mere easy peace, but to the man who does not shrink from
danger, from hardship, or from bitter toil, and who out of these wins the splendid ultimate
triumph.”68 Life in the wilderness was a struggle, so was mastering the navigation of vast oceans. Roosevelt’s own involvement in the Spanish American War made clear that armed conflict was also an appropriate trial.

Roosevelt’s speech, “The Strenuous Life,” reflected many of the ideas and impulses of Mahan and Turner’s writings. Like Turner, Roosevelt valorized “manly” struggle—indeed it was the central thesis of his speech. “We do not admire the man of timid peace,” he argued, but those who have “those virile qualities necessary to win in the stern strife of actual life.”69 Frontiersmen, as Turner powerfully explained, had done just that. Roosevelt took Turner’s ideas even further, arguing that “the over-civilized man” was a real danger to the nation because he shrank from “seeing us do our share of the world’s work.”70 Turner argued that the frontier had helped reinvigorate American men through their constant contact with primitive forces. On the other side of that same coin, Roosevelt argued that the loss of the frontier had made American men weak and terrified of the “manly” challenges to the country.

TR’s “The Strenuous Life” also echoed some of Mahan’s ideas. Roosevelt specifically argued that one duty Americans had shrunk from was the duty of building a strong, seagoing navy. Just as Mahan argued that the people of the U.S. were uniquely

69 Theodore Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life.”
70 Theodore Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life.”
qualified to govern colonies, Roosevelt declared that “The guns that thundered off Manila . . . left us a legacy of duty.” If the country did not take up its burden “Some stronger; manlier power would have to step in and do the work.”71 Roosevelt’s views on the nation’s attitude toward the Philippines echoed Mahan’s earlier statements about the influence of sea power upon history.

Roosevelt was a leader especially primed to promote Turner and Mahan’s ideas, in part because he too had written about the significance of the West and about naval history. But he was not alone in picking up these sentiments. Not every argument in the great debate about expansion at the turn of the twentieth century can be traced back to the ideas of Turner and Mahan. Still, they set a powerful tone for discussions about the destiny of the United States, its development, and its relationship to the rest of the world. The themes of progress, racial differences, and masculine strength resounded in the much of the rhetoric of the era, as did ideas about the importance of new frontiers and naval power. Not surprisingly, these impulses would soon be manifested in the nation’s first efforts in building an empire—its expansion into the Pacific.

71 Theodore Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life.”
Chapter 3: Entanglements and Empire:

The United States and Samoa

Since the country’s inception, Frederick Jackson Turner wrote, “America has been another name for opportunity.”¹ But according to Turner, that opportunity required the ability to expand. Mahan suggested that the country would need to look overseas—to the oceans—to find new prospects. Expansion into Samoa fit both needs perfectly. This solution was also consistent with the general feeling of the times, for the nineteenth century was a period of exploration, not only for the United States but for the rest of the world. European powers had charted the hidden depths of Africa, Asia, and the Pacific Ocean. Although Samoa was “discovered” by the West in the 1700s, it was the waves of traders, whalers, and missionaries in the first half of the nineteenth century that put the island chain officially on the map. American citizens came to the islands looking to make money, to save souls, and to escape the demands of civilization. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the United States was looking for new prospects in the Pacific.

In the late 1800s, the United States, England, Germany, and the indigenous population vied for control of Samoa. The three Western countries spent twenty years trying to balance their competing commercial and military interests in the islands with native power, but cooperation proved difficult. The Treaty of Berlin in 1889 created a condominium that attempted to allow the three powers to retain their unique interests. It also allowed the nations to help guide native leaders by overseeing their judiciary system and by advising their King and Prime Minister. The agreement, however, proved too

complicated and collapsed within ten years. In 1899 Samoa was divided between the United States and Germany; the United States officially annexed the eastern islands of Samoa in 1900.⁴ Although these islands are relatively unpopulated and extremely distant from the mainland, they remain “American Samoa.”

Historically, Samoa provided a valuable military base, and the United States considered it important that Germany and other European powers be denied the full claim to such a strategic outpost in the Pacific. The islands lie “about midway between Honolulu and Auckland” on commercial routes connecting San Francisco, Panama, Sydney and Japan.³ Samoa’s acquisition was pragmatic and consistent with Mahan’s vision of U.S. naval dominance. The debates about Samoa also show how the United States was rethinking its tradition of isolationism, as Samoa became one of the first obvious exceptions to the nation’s isolationist tradition.⁴

In addition to foreign policy concerns, Samoa attracted U.S. attention because the islands were presented to the American people as a confused and backward nation in need of guidance. Westerners portrayed Samoans as a naturally meek and a thoroughly Christian people who needed direction for their own security and prosperity. In the 1870s, a few U.S. government officials advocated aiding Samoa, but many Americans remained unwilling to become entangled in Samoa’s affairs. Toward the end of the

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² Germany received the western islands in 1899 and in return the Germans ceded their claims on Tonga to Great Britain.
⁴ While this is debatable, many Americans felt that ventures in Alaska and Hawaii were consistent with a need to protect the continent and did not view those as a break from a policy of “no entangling alliances.” Many also believed that the policy of nonintervention really only applied to dealings with Europe. In the case of Samoa, the United States had to negotiate the status of the island with Germany and Great Britain and the treaty of Berlin in 1889 essentially made Samoa a protectorate of the United States.
nineteenth century, sentiments began to change, a process facilitated by the writings of
the popular Scottish-born novelist, Robert Louis Stevenson.

Best known for *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and the
adventure novel *Treasure Island* (1883), Stevenson also wrote travel accounts and
histories. Stevenson traveled extensively throughout the Pacific, and in 1890 he made
Samoa his home. He fell deeply in love with the tiny, relatively unknown country. His
own health suffered, and he found peace among the “gentle” natives and temperate
climate; Samoa offered an escape from civilization. By every account, Stevenson’s love
of Samoa was reciprocated. Samoans respected him and called him “Tusitala,” the teller
of stories.\(^5\) When Stevenson found that all was not perfect in paradise, he took it upon
himself to tell Samoa’s story. *A Footnote to History: Eight Years of Trouble in Samoa*
was published in 1892.

Samoa proved to be a particularly interesting case in international policy. Unlike
other Pacific nations, the Samoan Islands lacked a strong centralized leader, and thus its
story had to be presented to the world by an outsider. Because three Western powers had
competing interests in the islands, the question of its possible annexation was
complicated. And unlike many of the other foreign peoples who eventually would come
under U.S. control, many indigenous Samoans welcomed and even sought out Western
intervention. Well before arguments about the need for U.S. protection and guidance in
the territories gained in the Spanish American War were heard on the floor of the U.S.

Congress, the small island nation of Samoa was pleading for such assistance on strikingly similar grounds. Stevenson’s rhetoric captured these complications.

Stevenson’s rhetoric thus anticipated the rise of “progressive imperialism.” He portrayed the indigenous people in generally positive tones, while also suggesting that they were simple and almost primitive. Stevenson did not support annexation outright, but his rhetoric suggested that Westerners might provide Samoans useful models of behavior and moral uplift. Of course, Stevenson’s picture of Samoa was incomplete. But in an age when knowledge about the Pacific region was limited, it helped to complete the picture of Samoa painted by U.S. government officials on the islands. By first analyzing official government documents relating to Samoa through 1880, and then turning to Stevenson’s rhetoric, we can get a clearer picture of the context for U.S. intervention in Samoa and a better understanding of the mindset that led to the United States’ first experiment in empire.

Discovering Samoa

Fourteen islands compose Samoa. Of these, five are uninhabitable and only three are of “appreciable” size. Just south of the equator, the Samoan Islands lie two-thousand miles southwest of Hawaii and a similar distance northeast of Sydney. Early explorers probably made contact with Samoa, but they were officially “discovered” by the Dutch in 1721. By the early nineteenth century various Westerners were developing permanent relationships in trade and whaling in Samoa. Missionaries were soon to follow.

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6 The degree to which all chiefs (let alone all commoners) sought U.S. influence undoubtedly differed. But, at least in the period of 1870-1900, several chiefs sought U.S. protection and some even invited U.S. annexation.

7 George Herbert Ryden, The Foreign Policy of the United States in Relation to Samoa (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928), 1
Even to those who made early contact, Samoans seemed an amiable people able to work with Westerners. George Herbert Ryden explains that "the natives of Samoa appeared handsome and gay and betrayed no indication of being savage in their speech or manners." 8 Joseph W. Ellison called them "cheerful, polite, and hospitable." 9 In 1766, when the French "discovered" Samoa they were so impressed by the natives' seafaring abilities that they called Samoa "Navigator’s Islands"—a label used to describe the archipelago through much of the nineteenth century. 10 Ethnically, Samoans are Polynesian, and some believed them to be the best of Polynesia. Writing in 1934, Sylvia Masterman noted, “Of all the islanders, the Samoans are reputed to be the gentlest, least fanatic, and most courteous. Their gods were mild and demanded no brutal sacrifices nor hideous images of themselves.” 11 These characterizations of the Samoans proved significant for future foreign policy.

However, Samoans had two significant flaws, at least in Western eyes. First, they were perceived as lazy. “The Samoans were found to be entirely unsuitable as labourers, indeed in any menial work,” Masterman explained. The Samoan rejected the “general scramble for wealth that so characterized his civilized white brothers,” Masterman continued, preferring “hours of leisure” and enjoying “his freedom to hunt and fish and swim, or merely to lie idle enjoying his pleasant surroundings . . . .” 12 Life was communal in Samoa, with families working together to provide basic food and shelter

8 Ryden, United States in Relation to Samoa, 6.
9 Joseph W. Ellison, Opening and Penetration of Foreign Influence in Samoa to 1880 (Corvallis: Oregon State College, 1938), 14.
10 Ryden, United States in Relation to Samoa, 8.
12 Masterman, The Origins of International Rivalry in Samoa, 22.
and in a temperate climate this allowed for leisure.\textsuperscript{13} While the leisurely attitude and lifestyle of the Samoans may have appealed to some, it frustrated Westerners attempting to establish plantations on the islands, many of whom complained about the work ethic of the natives.

The second flaw Westerners perceived in Samoans was their lack of any central political authority. In Samoa, land was shared by families who were organized under local chiefs. They had no central system of administration. Had every chief supported the same man (and only men had political power), he could have served as king, but this did not happen. Power was often shared by a handful of chiefs, but until the late nineteenth century, Samoans were never unified under one ruler. Initially, the absence of a strong government was a both blessing and a curse for foreigners doing business in Samoa. Individually, many whites prospered because of the lack of central authority, as they were able to buy land at extremely low prices.\textsuperscript{14} But it also meant that there was no government to help build necessary infrastructure or to secure access to resources. Roads were particularly a problem. Samoans traditionally built their homes and villages near rivers or coastlines and navigated by boat.\textsuperscript{15} Expanding trade required more infrastructure, which required not only some central authority but also Samoan labor.

The lack of a centralized government also complicated resolving controversies over Westerners’ rights. Of the three foreign powers that had strong influence in Samoa, German citizens owned the most land. Great Britain was vested in the islands because of its proximity to New Zealand, which was also the home base for many of its

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} Ellison, \textit{Opening and Penetration of Foreign Influence in Samoa}, 15.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Masterman, \textit{The Origins of International Rivalry in Samoa}, 25-26.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ryden, \textit{United States in Relation to Samoa}, 3.
\end{itemize}
missionaries. The United States’ interest in Samoa initially focused on whaling. Each of these nations jealously guarded their positions in Samoa and wanted no other nation to have legal authority over their citizens. For their part, Samoans worried over how to maintain their own native control while meeting the demands of the foreign nations. The chiefs’ powers were limited, and when pressed, they had little ability to enforce their own laws, let alone the Westerners’ conception of law.

From 1850 to 1870, the United States stationed consul representatives in Samoa, but their influence was limited. Although Samoans cooperated with the U.S. government and believed trade to be mutually beneficial, some Americans felt the need for greater influence to protect their interests. For example, if a German citizen stole from an American, neither the local chief nor the American consul had the clear authority or the means to arrest, convict, fine, or jail the culprit. In 1870, U.S. consul Jonas Coe wrote that the situation had become critical, “damaging to American trading interests” and creating “a feeling of insecurity to person and property” which hindered whaling efforts.16 As Ryden summarized the situation: “In the absence of any power to take punitive measures against American criminals and to prevail upon the chiefs to punish Samoans for criminal attacks upon Americans, the only alternative was to have American ships of war visit the islands from time to time to back up the consul.”17 Once U.S. warships began docking in Samoa, the next step seemed logical: the United States needed a naval base in the Samoan archipelago.

16 As cited in Ryden, United States in Relation to Samoa, 40.
17 Ryden, United States in Relation to Samoa, 38.
Consul Coe’s advocacy of a naval base in Samoa was initially ignored back on the mainland, but support grew as the trade relations increased.\textsuperscript{18} In 1871 the U.S. government sent Commander Richard W. Meade to Samoa to survey the harbor of Pago Pago. Meade believed that there was need for haste to keep the harbor from falling into the hands of Great Britain or Germany. He explained in a letter to the Secretary of the Navy, “I think some kind of treaty with the native chiefs will be necessary to forestall foreign influence which is at present very active in this matter to secure the harbor.”\textsuperscript{19} Meade described the harbor as an ideal coaling station for steamships running between San Francisco and Australia. In 1871 Meade signed a treaty with a local chief, Mauga, which would have granted the United States privileged access to the harbor in return for “the friendship and protection of the great Government of the United States of America.”\textsuperscript{20} Meade, however, lacked this authority and the treaty was never ratified.

Meade did not view the harbor treaty as a precursor to annexation, but he did suggest that it could be the first step toward greater U.S. influence in Samoa. Meade told the Samoans that the United States would “from time to time send ships of war (and they have many) to your islands and also no doubt wise persons to assist you in framing good laws for yourselves and the foreigners who may settle among you and will aid you by its influence and protection to establish a sound and stable form of Government under which the Samoan people can grow prosperous and happy.”\textsuperscript{21} Like so many other foreigners, Meade believed the Samoan people to be promising candidates to become wards of the

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\textsuperscript{18} Speculators from California and New York ship builders interested in steamship service particularly pressured the government to do more to protect trade. See Ryden, \textit{United States in Relation to Samoa}, 44. \\
\textsuperscript{19} Ryden, \textit{United States in Relation to Samoa}, 57. \\
\textsuperscript{20} As quoted in Ryden, \textit{United States in Relation to Samoa}, 63. \\
\textsuperscript{21} As quoted in Ryder, \textit{United States in Relation to Samoa}, 66.
\end{flushright}
United States. With U.S. help, they could become a productive and capable nation. For their part, the Samoans did not view Meade’s words as threatening (despite his talk of “many warships”). While individual whites often took advantage of natives, Samoans seemed generally trustful of U.S. government officials.

In the 1870s, however, the United States was not yet ready to become entangled in Samoan politics. The document giving U.S. harbor rights in Samoa was introduced in the U.S. Senate but died in committee. Nevertheless, many in Samoa acted as if it had been ratified. Chiefs from several districts came together to recognize the “treaty” and pledged “to form a league and confederation for our mutual welfare and protection.”

Thus, even though the United States did not recognize any sort of formal relationship with Samoa, the most powerful chiefs operated as if they had. The harbor in question remained largely undeveloped until the turn of the twentieth century, when eastern Samoa officially came under U.S. control.

Unsurprisingly, Germany and Great Britain protested Commander Meade’s initiatives in Samoa. The German consul told Chief Mauga that the Germans would refuse to recognize any agreement between Mauga and Meade as legal (even if the treaty passed). Maugu sought out Meade for protection in case Germany acted in Pago Pago. The United States was understandably unwilling to send any military support to Samoa since the Senate had failed to ratify the treaty. This reaction was less than Mauga and the other chiefs anticipated.

Samoans thus continued to push for an even stronger relationship with the United States. In 1872, a group of “chiefs and rulers of Samoa” sent a petition to the U.S.

22 Ryden, _United States in Relation to Samoa_, 67.
government requesting that the islands be annexed “for our future and well-being and better establishment of Christianity, free institutions, fellowship of mankind, protection of life and property, and to secure the blessings of liberty and free trade to ourselves and future generations.” Later proponents of expansion would suggest that these goals justified U.S. imperialism abroad—here Samoans were actively asking for U.S. intervention in terms of America’s own cherished values. The language of the petition appealed to the sentiments of progressive imperialism: it suggested Western influence had benefited Samoans in the past, and that additional guidance would lead them even further toward civilization. President Grant responded positively to the idea of greater U.S. influence in Samoa. While the petition did not lead to new legislation, it did inspire Grant to send Colonel Albert B. Steinberger to Samoa in 1874 on a fact-finding mission. Steinberger was charged with gathering more information about the islands, especially the harbor of Pago Pago. Grant would act on the basis of his report.

Steinberger’s report was exhaustive. The report discussed the geographical terrain, the general qualities of Samoans, and the cultural and political situation across the island chain. He also claimed that a majority of Samoans were in favor of a stronger relationship with the United States. Of the Samoans, Steinberger wrote, “The eye is black, soft, and pleasing, giving that melancholy air and ‘meekness’ of expression” and their skin resembled “polished copper” though “the prominent chiefs and better families

23 Ryden, United States in Relation to Samoa, 83.
24 The Samoan petition followed a somewhat questionable path in its travels to the U.S. It was not sent to the president directly but rather a U.S. captain delivered it to a prominent ship builder to bring to the president’s attention. It is likely the captain helped direct the chiefs in the construction of the petition, but other documents show that Samoans were also eager to develop a closer relationship to the United States. Ellison, Opening and Penetration of Foreign Influence in Samoa, 42.
are much lighter with smoother skin.”26 By portraying Samoans in these racial terms, Steinberger reinforced impressions of their passivity, their seemingly inherent desire for domination. The very character of Samoans invited colonization. Their leaders were even visually distinctive, with lighter skin signifying the better classes.

Steinberger’s report went on to portray Samoans as superior to other ethnic groups in the same region: “Present indications are that these people will soon occupy a much higher place in the scale of minor nations than most of the Polynesian islanders.”27 Samoans were uniquely endowed to work well under U.S. guidance and oversight. As the report concluded, the Samoans “aptitude” was “evidenced by the facility with which they receive and retain the teachings of the missionaries, learn the habits of foreigners, and comprehend the power of the whites from unity, organization, and industry.”28 In other words, Samoans proved their potential by mimicking white behavior and, as noted elsewhere in the report, by their embrace of Christianity.

In addition to the “natural” tendency of Samoans to desire foreign influence, Steinberger’s report also documented that many chiefs had sought out U.S. guidance and control. In Apia he met with a chief who expressed “his earnest hope that Samoa would establish a government, or that the United States would take them under her wing.”29 Until “the hour of my departure from the islands,” Steinberger reported, “the chieftains would seek me, asking advise, and detailing their plans for the creation of government and establishment of laws.” As this “feeling became diffused throughout the islands,” the

26 Albert B. Steinberger, “Message for the President of the United States, Transmitting a Communication for the Secretary of State, and the Report by which it is Accompanied upon Samoa or the Navigator’s Islands,” 43rd Congress, 1st Session, Ex. Doc No. 45. Accessed through Google Books (June 28, 2011).
27 Steinberger, “Message for the President of the United States,” 23.
29 Steinberger, “Message for the President of the United States,” 35.
“Alie Amerika” came to be “known as their friend.”  Steinberger argued that no other foreign power was better equipped to support Samoa. The Prime Minister of the native government told Steinberger of “their helpless position if foreigners should unjustly demand fines, and an English or German war-vessel should come to collect.” He offered “an earnest prayer that ‘Amerika’ would extend protection over them and instruct them in law-making.”

While there was some evidence that Samoans had, indeed, suffered at the hands of German officials (as Stevenson would later documented), there was little further explanation for why the Samoan people thought the United States was uniquely positioned to help them.

Why Samoans were so eager for U.S. guidance is thus not entirely clear. As noted above, however, the traditional political structure of the islands lacked the ability to build infrastructure, enforce the laws, or meet foreign threats. The Samoans had no formal experience with central administration and perhaps no interest in developing a central government of their own. As their islands became a part of a larger global struggle for influence, Samoans had to fundamentally change their entire economic and political structure to meet the expectations of foreign powers. When this proved impossible, it perhaps seemed more sensible to simply turn to the foreign powers themselves and ask them to govern the nation.

It is also likely that missionaries influenced the indigenous population to see foreigners as better suited for certain tasks, like the administration of government. A letter from the House of the Government of Samoa to the “Principal Chief of the

30 Steinberger, “Message for the President of the United States,” 36.
31 Steinberger, “Message for the President of the United States,” 37.
32 During this period, we only really have access to the rhetoric from Samoan Chiefs so it is also unclear if these feelings were widespread throughout the populace.
American Government” supports this reading. It concluded: “As is the story in the Bible: God made man, then the body was whole; but it was only a laying down, there was no living health in it. Then God breathed into it, and that is the cause of its moving about and being alive. In the same way Samoa and the laws are the person. We are exceedingly desirous that you should breathe into Samoa. Be pleased to bring your wisdom, and the goodness and beauty of the American Government to teach our government, and to aid Samoa in the matter of laws.”33 Samoans apparently felt that they had benefited from the guidance of missionaries and from the help of foreigners who directed them in industry and government. The biblical passages suggest they had picked up a second lesson from missionaries: that Samoans were inferior in their abilities to foreigners. If men were inherently inferior to God, then the analogy suggested that Samoans were inherently inferior to whites. Whites, after all, had brought them the word of God in the first place.

Even though the U.S. Senate refused to ratify the first formal treaty with Samoa, Steinberger’s report did have an impact. In 1878, the United States entered into a rather vague Treaty of Friendship and Commerce with Samoa.34 If problems “unhappily” arose “between the Samoan Government and any other Government in amity with the United States,” the United States promised to “employ its good offices for the purpose of adjusting those differences upon a satisfactory and solid foundation.”35 What exactly the United States promised to do on behalf of Samoa was not clear. Since Samoans lacked a

33 Steinberger, “Message for the President of the United States,” 46.
35 As quoted in Ryden, United States in Relation to Samoa, xii.
central government, it was not even clear what it meant to enter into a treaty with the “Samoan Government.” But for the time being, the United States resisted a more “entangling” relationship with Samoa, despite the pleas of the Samoans. The changing ideology of expansion in the 1890s, along with the publication of Stevenson’s book in 1892, helped inspire the United States to take more decisive action in 1899.

For twenty-five years the political situation of the Samoan Islands remained unstable, as foreigners watched each other suspiciously and Samoans struggled to balance the outsiders’ demands with their own interests. While Germany expressed anger toward the Samoan chiefs over the proposed harbor treaty with the United States in 1872, they too were unwilling to annex the islands at that point. In 1874 the governor of New Zealand wrote to Great Britain warning the British government that the United States would soon control Pago Pago if Britain did not act. Great Britain remained unpersuaded but continued to observe events closely. The instability in Samoa finally led various chiefs to take matters into their own hands, and the 1880s were marked by warfare. Into the developing chaos of these competing political interests strode an unlikely champion for the Samoan Islands, the popular writer of short stories and adventure novels, Robert Louis Stevenson.

Stevenson’s Story of Samoa

Born in Scotland in 1850, Robert Louis Stevenson’s early life did not hint at his later association with Samoa. Owners of a lighthouse, his family enjoyed limited wealth but some prestige in his native country. Stevenson was a sickly child, he grew-up thin and gangly, and he suffered from ill health for most of his life. Nevertheless, he was well-educated by private tutors, and at seventeen he began studying science and
engineering at Edinburgh University. His college career was “shaky,” however, and in his boredom he began to write stories.\textsuperscript{36} During the 1870s, Stevenson was generally unfocused in his work and in his life and he lived the life of a wandering bohemian. His health continued to be unpredictable, and he often sought warmer climates to improve his various lung illnesses. Stevenson met his future wife Fanny Osborne at an artists’ colony while traveling in France. She was older, American, and, unfortunately, married. Her husband had been unfaithful and she had come to Europe to escape her marital problems. In 1878, however, she returned to California—and to her husband. Back in America, Fanny again found her husband’s indiscretions too much to bear. In 1879 Stevenson left Scotland for California as Fanny finalized her divorce.\textsuperscript{37}

Moving to California was the first major step Stevenson took toward his life in the Pacific. In 1880, while living in San Francisco, he met the travel writer Charles Warren Stoddard, who presented Stevenson with his own book, \textit{South-Sea Idylls}, along with Herman Melville’s \textit{Omoo}, which also was set in Pacific. This apparently peeked Stevenson’s interest in the area.\textsuperscript{38} In the United States, Stevenson finally came into his own as a writer, publishing \textit{Treasure Island} (1883), \textit{Kidnapped} (1886), and \textit{The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde} (1886), among other successful works. He also published a collection of travel writings, \textit{The Silverado Squatters} (1883). His books sold well, but they were also frequently pirated, denying him royalties from their sales. His works were

\begin{footnotes}
\item[36] Frank McLynn writes “his attendance at classes was irregular, he followed no set curriculum, took little part in the work of the classes he did attend, and disrupted them when he became bored.”\textit{ Robert Louis Stevenson: A Biography} (London: Hutchinson, 1993), 33.
\item[38] Roger Robinson, \textit{Robert Louis Stevenson: His Best Pacific Writings} (Auckland: The National Library of Australia, 2004), 13
\end{footnotes}
also syndicated into American magazines. By the time he sailed for the Pacific in 1888, Stevenson had found literary fame, if not great wealth.

Stevenson became further interested in the Pacific after a chance conversation with S.S. McClure of *McClure’s Magazine*. During the conversation, Stevenson mentioned how much better his health was at sea, and the publisher offered to finance his travels to the Pacific in return for “stories of adventure and so forth.” Stevenson spent much of his life traveling, but in the Pacific Islands he found his dream home. “Few men who come to the islands leave them,” he explained in an article for *The Sun*, and no “part of the world exerts the same attractive power upon the visitor.” Stevenson believed that the task before him was “to communicate to fireside travelers some sense of its seduction.” He wanted “to describe the life, at sea and shore, of many hundred thousand persons, some of our own blood and language, all our contemporaries, and yet as remote in thought and habit as Rob Roy or Barbarossa, the Apostles or the Caesars.”

Much of Stevenson’s writing documented this allure of the islands, often through fiction, but he also took it upon himself to describe the political climate of the Pacific region, particularly in Samoa. For Westerners who were reading Stevenson’s work, these two types of accounts might have seemed intertwined. My focus, however, is on Stevenson’s non-fiction account of Samoa, *A Footnote to History: Eight Years of Trouble in Samoa*. In this book, Stevenson described the various struggles by Westerners and natives over power in the islands. He wrote of a well-meaning people, but the text described a growing humanitarian crisis, suggesting that Samoans needed to be protected from themselves and from those whites who would exploit their islands. Stevenson

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indicated that Samoa was merely a “footnote,” but Samoa set a precedent for the later efforts of progressive imperialists. The text helped set a tone for how advocates of expansion appealed to the U.S. public to act for the welfare of other nations.

*A Footnote to History* is not one of Stevenson’s most easily understood books. For a historical text, its details are sometimes imprecise, but it essentially provides an account of Samoa’s political struggles between 1882 and 1892. Stevenson did not live in Samoa until 1890. For the earlier accounts he relied on eye witnesses he talked to in Hawaii and recollections he gathered after he moved to Samoa. His account particularly discussed German disputes over land in 1887-1889, the 1889 Treaty of Berlin, and the delays in implementing the treaty.

The significance of Stevenson’s text resolves around two topics—his description of Samoa itself, and his description of its people. Stevenson’s reflections on these two areas help us to understand how the West might have come to view Samoa after reading Stevenson’s text, and they help clarify how *A Footnote to History* might have encouraged more American involvement on the islands. *A Footnote to History* shows how even some of the most sympathetic observers in Samoa viewed the natives in ways that suggested that they could “progress” only by adopting the foreigners’ way of life. Stevenson’s rhetoric, while relatively benign in its intent, set a precedent that foreshadowed later arguments about moral uplift and the burdens of civilized nations.

*A Footnote to History* presented a mixed picture of the Pacific islands, portraying them as a tropical paradise, but also emphasizing the political chaos and conflict that had

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41 He arrived in December of 1889.
42 For a broader discussion of the historiography of the *A Footnote to History*, see Roslyn Jolly, *Robert Louis Stevenson in the Pacific: Travel, Empire, and the Author’s Profession* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 77.
prevented them from modernizing. Stevenson already had some experience with writing adventure stories set in idyllic tropical locations. *Treasure Island*, although set in the Atlantic, included adventure stories and dreamscapes of tropical islands. In writing about the South Seas, Stevenson contributed to the literary “archetype” of the Pacific which, Robert Irwin Hillier notes, “pervades our individual dreams and our collective thought giving us our clearest vision of paradise.” Stevenson was unique, however, in that he both worked within this archetype and challenged it. However, the tone of *A Footnote to History* belied his fascination with the islands and its native inhabitants and this contributed to the “exoticization” of the Pacific.

In his introduction to *A Footnote to History*, Stevenson explained that the book was a contemporary history, but he noted that Samoa’s story resembled the history of ancient civilizations. “The story I have to tell is still going on as I write,” Stevenson began. “The characters are alive and active; it is a piece of contemporary history in the most exact sense.” Yet for “all its actuality and the part played in it by mails and telegraphs and iron war-ships,” Stevenson continued, “the ideas and the manners of the native actors date back before the Roman Empire.” Samoans were “Christians, churchgoers” and even “hardy cricketers,” but in “most other points” they were “the contemporaries of our tattooed ancestors who drove their chariots on the wrong side of the Roman wall.” By suggesting contemporary Samoans were like these historical figures, Stevenson’s introduction already implied that they were backward and primitive. Comparing Samoans to ancient Western heroes may have made them easier for his

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44 Robert Louis Stevenson, *A Footnote to History: Eight Years of Trouble in Samoa* (1892; Reprint, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1895), 1.
audience to understand, but it also downplayed the significance of the contemporary political turmoil in Samoa. Furthermore, understanding Samoa through Western comparisons obviated any need to learn about the culture and norms of the islands.

Other parts of Stevenson’s text reinforced this stereotype of the Samoan people, representing them as almost charmingly primitive. “They are easy, merry, and pleasure loving,” he wrote, “the gayest, though by far from either the most capable or the most beautiful Polynesians. Fine dress is a passion, and makes a Samoan festival a thing of beauty. Song is almost ceaseless.”45 Samoans were the happiest Polynesians, which might have been surprising given the “eight years of trouble” his title suggested he was describing. Stevenson went to great lengths to describe their enjoyment of leisure: “Song, as with all Pacific islanders, goes hand in hand with dance, and both shade into drama. Some of the performances are indecent and ugly, some only dull; others are pretty, funny and attractive.”46 Stevenson made no effort to understand the purpose of these activities, and it is unclear if he himself knew their meaning. He presented them as they appeared to him—entertaining and part of Samoa’s mysterious allure, but of no real political or cultural significance.

The merriment of the Samoans was a double-edged sword, of course, and Stevenson’s comments reinforced negative stereotypes of the Samoans’ work ethic. Describing how they shared all possessions communally, he suggested that the culture gave no incentive for hard work or individual initiative. Stevenson illustrated his point with the following story: “We have a girl in our service to whom we had given some finery, that she might wait at the table.” But after visiting her family, she “returned in an

45 Robert Louis Stevenson, A Footnote to History, 11.
46 Robert Louis Stevenson, A Footnote to History, 11.
old tablecloth, her whole wardrobe having been divided out among relatives in the course of twenty-four hours.” Stevenson’s version it taught a negative lesson: “To work more is there only to be more pillaged; to save is impossible.” Stevenson’s rhetoric thus showed a tension; he clearly appreciated the leisurely lifestyle of Samoans, yet he critiqued the communal system that made that leisure possible. He did not praise the girl for sharing her wealth with her entire family; Stevenson described that she had been “pillaged.”

Stevenson’s concern over the work ethic of Samoans in part reflected his concern over the challenges he saw facing Samoa. “Seated in islands very rich in food, the idleness of the many idle would scarce matter,” he wrote, “and the provinces might continue to bestow their names among rival pretenders, and fall into war and enjoy that awhile, and drop into peace and enjoy that, in a manner highly to be envied.” But times had changed with the arrival of the Westerners. The idea that “they should be let alone” was “no longer possible.” Since Captain Cook visited the area in the late eighteenth century, wave after wave of whites had come to Samoa, and they had appropriated Samoan land and exploited Samoan labor to build their plantations. In Apia, the capital city of Samoa, according to Stevenson, a “handful of whites” now owned “everything; the native walk in a foreign town.” Stevenson lamented that the Samoans were naïve about whites, and he condemned those who took advantage of natives. Ironically, however, he was one of those foreigners who “had everything.”

47 Robert Louis Stevenson, A Footnote to History, 16.
48 Robert Louis Stevenson, A Footnote to History, 17.
49 Robert Louis Stevenson, A Footnote to History, 19.
50 Robert Louis Stevenson, A Footnote to History, 24.
Stevenson’s depiction of Samoa was therefore complex. He critiqued a system out of which he benefited. Compared to Western standards, Stevenson had little wealth, yet Samoans built him a home and later even built a road connecting his property with the town (a daunting task in the jungle environment). Also, some of Stevenson’s descriptions of life in Samoa seem like they were pulled right out of his fictional worlds: a backward and strange people, who he described would “fall into war” like children playing some game. His text suggest he showed appreciate Samoans’ kindness, but his descriptions nevertheless reinforced stereotypes of their culture as simple, naïve, and even childlike.

Samoans’ kindness to outsiders was often admirable and indiscriminate. Stevenson describes that in 1889 Germany, Great Britain, and the United States sent warships to the islands to help suppress violence as Samoa attempted to crown a new king. When a hurricane destroyed the warships from these nations, Stevenson wrote that Samoans put their own lives at risk to rescue the sailors, “whether . . . friend or enemy.”\textsuperscript{51} In this effort, they labored hard, even “nobly,” and after rope, wood, guns, and other valuable goods washed up on the shore, they did not keep the goods for themselves but returned them to their rightful owners. Stevenson had derided their work ethic, but Samoans put themselves at personal risk and engaged in difficult work to benefit foreigners.

Samoans’ deference to foreigners was evident in other incidents as well. When two rival chiefs, Tamasese and Laupepa, competed to become King of all of Samoa,\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{51} Stevenson, \textit{A Footnote to History}, 254.
\textsuperscript{52} Laupepa is also referred to as Malietoa in the text; Malietoa functions like a surname (although it precedes his personal name); Malietoa is also his political party. Both Tamasese and a second rival,
several other Samoan chiefs met and recognized Tamasese as their King, because he had the backing of Germany. Upon hearing this, Laupepa sent a “cry and prayer” for “this weak people” to the American consul. Stevenson did not describe the American response, but the incident nevertheless demonstrated the Samoans’ dependence on foreign governments. Although Samoa was still an independent nation at this point, its leaders were already pawns in a larger political game. Laupepa eventually gave up the fight, by his own account out of his “great love” for his country and his “great affection” for all Samoans.

Stevenson’s descriptions of Laupepa were sympathetic, but paternalistic. A Footnote to History explains that Laupepa was exiled by the Germans from 1887 to 1889, first taken to Germany itself but eventually held under German control on the Marshall Islands in the South Pacific. Upon his return, Laupepa recounted to Stevenson that while the Germans had treated him fairly well, they had deceived him. When he was moved from Germany to the Marshall Islands, the Germans led him to believe he was returning to Samoa. Stevenson elaborated: “No one could hear this tale . . . without admiring the fairness and simplicity of the Samoan; and wondering at the want of heart – or want of humour – in so many successive civilised Germans, that they should have continued to surround this infant with the secrecy of state.” This “infant” was the newly crowned

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Mataafa, at different points attempted to speak for the Malietoa, so I have chosen to refer to this chief as Laupepa. Tamasese likewise functions like a surname but this is the only name Stevenson uses for the chief and thus it is the only name I use.

53 As quoted in Stevenson, A Footnote to History, 76.
54 As quoted in Stevenson, A Footnote to History, 79-80.
55 Stevenson, A Footnote to History, 86.
Stevenson’s rhetoric regarding Laupepa was companionate, but it also depicted Laupepa as helpless and naïve.

Stevenson’s portrayal of Laupepa’s rival, Tamasese, likewise reinforced stereotypes of Samoan leaders as timid and childlike. Tamasese had German support, but when he learned that the British and American governments were displeased about his German backing, he became scared. Stevenson explained: “No native would then have dreamed of defying these colossal ships, worked by mysterious powers and laden with outlandish instruments of death.” According to Stevenson, Samoans were simply incapable of understanding these more advanced civilizations and their modern technologies, even though whites had been coming to the islands for at least one hundred years. He continued: “None would have dreamed of resisting those strange but quite unrealized Great Powers, understood (with difficulty) to be larger than Tonga and Samoa put together, and known to be prolific of prints, knives, hard biscuit, picture books, and other luxuries, as well as of overbearing men and inconsistent orders.” Stevenson, A Footnote to History, 153.

Samoans were at war and very much interested in guns and ammunition, but Stevenson portrayed them as dazzled by “hard biscuits” and “picture books.” Stevenson’s rhetoric was focused on criticizing the Germans for manipulating the native leaders, but in the process it also fed stereotypes that rendered Samoans as unfit to rule.

Stevenson’s text should not be read as simply pro-empire. Many passages showed his respect for the abilities of Samoans, including their leadership. Stevenson described chief Laupepa as “kind, gentle, patient as Job,” “well intentioned,” and “of

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56 Stevenson had elected him King during his exile. In the Berlin Treaty of 1889 Germany, Great Britain, and the United States authorized his position. He was subsequently returned to the islands.

57 Stevenson, A Footnote to History, 153.
charming manners.” Stevenson, A Footnote to History, 308.
59 Stevenson, A Footnote to History, 312.
60 Stevenson, A Footnote to History, 319.
61 Stevenson, A Footnote to History, 320.
assumptions of Western governments, not the experiences of Samoa. Stevenson wrote: “I am not asking what was intended by the gentlemen . . . I am asking what will be understood by a Samoan studying their literary work, the Berlin act; I am asking what is the result of taking a word out of one state of society, and applying it to another, of which the writers know less than nothing, and no European knows much.” Stevenson was right. Historian R.P Gilson explained, “In contemplating how Samoa should be governed, the Berlin conference took for its orientation the political and economic problems and interests of Europeans, leaving the Samoans’ affairs largely out of account . . .” The treaty helped strengthen Samoa’s judiciary, improved public finance, and attempted to make sure that “the Samoan Government had responsible and reliable European advisers.” Yet its purpose was not to protect Samoan independence; it was to direct Samoans in their interactions with Europeans. Also, although the treaty stipulated that the Samoans could elect one of their own as king, that king was to be advised by representatives from Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, diluting his authority. The three powers had put their support behind the exiled chief Laupepa, but his absence had prevented him from building a base of support among his own people. Given these complications, how could Samoans feel that they had a genuine stake or a real voice in their own government? A Footnote to History showed the confusion that the treaty caused and predicted that it would lead to continued rivalries among the chiefs.

62 Stevenson, A Footnote to History, 287.
64 While Germany was initially hostile toward Laupepa, they backed the former exile because the other chiefs had been involved in more sustained fighting against German forces.
For all the failures of Westerners in Samoa, the one figure that Stevenson praised as an effective leader in Samoa was a German ex-military officer and acting Consul, Eugen Brandeis. Brandeis had at least brought stability to the islands, according to Stevenson. While Stevenson admitted that Brandeis was not liked by Samoans (who still fought for native rule) or other whites (who thought he showed favoritism), Stevenson argued that Brandeis’ guidance of the Samoan government, “all in all,” was “the most promising that has ever been in these unlucky islands.” Thus, Stevenson, despite his criticisms of the Germans and his sympathy for the aspirations of the Samoans, ultimately held up a foreigner as the most effective leader of the nation during these tumultuous times.

In trying to understand Stevenson’s purpose in writing *A Footnote to History*, it helps to examine some of his other statements. For example, in a speech later published in *McClure*, he accused the chiefs of mismanaging the islands. Samoans had built a road from Apia to Stevenson’s home—no small task in a jungle environment where tools were sparse. It was named “The Road of the Loving Heart,” and it was intended as a tribute to Stevenson. In an address to the Samoan Chiefs after the road was completed, Stevenson thanked them for their efforts, but he also warned them of the need to take more responsibility for their own destiny. “I tell you, chiefs, that when I saw you working on that road, my heart grew warm,” he began, “not with gratitude only, but with hope. It seemed to me that I read the promise of something good for Samoa . . . .” Stevenson explained that only through greater industry and hard work could the natives “defend

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65 Gilson also notes that evidence indicates that Brandeis was actually more interested in the benefit of German land owners than Samoans’ welfare. *Samoa 1830 to 1900*, 388.
Samoa.” As he saw things, however, Samoans still lacked sufficient drive and industry. Stevenson argued: “What are you doing with your talent, Samoa? Your three talents, Savaii, Upolu, and Tutuila? Have you buried it in a napkin?” Stevenson criticized the Samoans for failing to develop the three major islands in their archipelago, giving them over to whites to be “trodden under feet of swine.” The speech referenced the biblical Parable of the Talents which suggested that if Samoa did not develop their land, they did not deserve it to keep it. Stevenson, of course, claimed he made these criticisms only out of his love for Samoa, but his conclusion was nevertheless patronizing: He concluded: “I wish every chief in these islands would turn to and work, and build roads and sow fields and plant food trees, and educate his children and improve his talents—not for love of Tusitala [Stevenson], but for the love of his brothers and his children and the whole body of generations yet unborn.”

Stevenson’s speech, which was also translated in Samoan, reflected much more than Stevenson’s appreciation; he also used it to express his concerns over the future of Samoa. Published in a U.S. magazine, however, it could be read by that very different audience as a rationale for U.S. intervention in Samoa. For this audience, it indicated that Samoans needed to change their behavior and that they were failing to take full advantage of the potential wealth of their country. Stevenson’s speech even foreshadowed future religious arguments for expansion, suggesting that because the natives had failed to act, the U.S. had a God-given right—even a duty—to intervene on their behalf.

69 Stevenson, “Robert Louis Stevenson Address to the Samoan Chiefs,” 175.
Scholars of Stevenson’s writings recognize that *A Footnote to History* was in many ways sympathetic to the Samoans. Literary scholar Rodger Robinson, for example, argues that Stevenson “believed the Pacific nations should have the greatest possible freedom to run their own affairs, however differently from European ways.”\(^70\) As we have seen, however, Stevenson’s rhetoric implicitly made the case for continued Western domination of Samoa. However, Stevenson offered no clear policy recommendations. He gave his readers a better understanding of the chaos that gripped Samoa, and he described how the struggle between Western powers and natives took lives, hurt trade, and even created international hostilities. Clearly, something had to be done, but Stevenson left it to the politicians to decide on a new policy.

**American Samoa**

Although Stevenson did not live to see it, there would soon be a clear break from the failed policies of the 1880s and 1890s. The Berlin Treaty of 1889 was meant to be temporary, and it had a ten year expiration date, but it had only exacerbated the problems that already existed in the islands.\(^71\) While the treaty recognized Laupepa as King, Mataafa continued to push for power. Stevenson’s advice went unheeded and no power sharing model reconciled Mataafa claims to authority. King Laupepa appealed to the Western powers to bring in forces to end the skirmishes between rival forces, and Mataafa and his followers were finally exiled to the Marshall Islands in 1893. When the fighting continued in Samoa despite Mataafa’s removal, the Western powers attempted to crack down on the smuggling of weapons into the islands—but this too did not end the

\(^70\) Robinson, *Robert Louis Stevenson: His Best Pacific Writings*, 144-145.
\(^71\) Stevenson himself served as chairman of a group of foreigners who made suggestions to the three ruling powers about how to better implement the Berlin Treaty. These suggestions led to some changes but could not save it. See Ryden, *United States in Relation to Samoa*, 532-533.
violence. Pressure from other chiefs in Samoa eventually led the United States to push for an end to Mataafa’s exile (since it had not stopped the violence), and in 1898 he and his chiefs returned to Samoa.

As early as 1894, the United States government had become convinced that the Berlin Treaty was doomed. Secretary of State Walter Gresham reported that he felt that the United States had not gained from its involvement in Samoa, but rather had just added to its expenses and responsibilities. A congressional report in 1894 concluded “that a many-headed administration of affairs in Samoa [was] in the long run untenable, and that it must lead to constant friction,” even when powers generally agreed. Thus, it was unsurprising that during a tripartite convention in 1899, the three powers (the United States, Britain, and Germany) finally decided to embrace a very different solution to the troubles of Samoa. In exchange for the United States and Germany renouncing claims on Tonga, Great Britain relinquished its claims on Samoa. The islands were then divided between the United States and Germany, with the United States gaining control over the eastern most islands, including Tutuila (with its harbor Pago Pago) and Germany gaining the western islands, including the larger Savaii and Upolu islands. During World War I, New Zealand took control of Western Samoa and continued to control it through much of the twentieth century. Western Samoa gained its independence in 1962.

Eastern Samoa’s transition into becoming a United States territory was difficult. Controlling the Tutuila Island was relatively simple, but the Manua Islands lacked a naval base, were inhabited by fewer Westerners, and initially fought the United States’

72 Ryden, United States in Relation to Samoa, xvi.
73 As quoted in Ryden, United States in Relation to Samoa, 547.
74 Gilson, Samoa 1830 to 1900: The Politics of A Multi-Cultural Community, 432.
authority. They were not officially annexed until 1904. President McKinley turned control of the islands over to the Department of the Navy upon their annexation. With such a small population, it was initially feasible to administer American Samoa with the armed forces, especially with the U.S. military presence in Pago Pago. Samoa remained under naval control until 1951, when they came under a new civil code of laws. Today, the population of American Samoa is still small, at just over 60,000. It now has a more established government roughly based on the U.S system. Its people are considered American nationals (though not citizens), although it is unlikely that many in the United States think of the people of Samoa as their “fellow Americans.”

Conclusion

As the United States’ first venture into empire, Samoa proved complicated. A cartoon published in *Punch* in 1899 captured that complexity, as well as the international power struggle, underlying the troubles of Samoa. While the debate over Samoa often depicted its people as childlike, the visual rhetoric of this cartoon captured another implicit understanding of Samoa’s plight—Samoa was feminized. The country is depicted as a woman in a tapa gown, barefoot and upset as three men struggle over her (see figure 3.1). The men represent Germany, Great Britain, and the United States (depicted as a cowboy). The title of the cartoon, “The tug of—peace,” suggested how the foreign powers viewed themselves on peace-keeping missions, but they were actually perpetuating the conflict. The three men were also armed and they were forcefully

75 Ryden, *United States in Relation to Samoa*, 576.
76 Tapa is a traditional fabric made from mulberry bark and often patterned with dark, bold geometric shapes, like the ones pictured here.
77 For additional commentary on this image (and additional cartoons that also feminize Samoa) see “Samoa 1899 as Portrayed by Punch,” http://www.zum.de/whkmla/sp/0910/yeonhwa/yeonhwa2.html (July 15, 2010).
pulling at Samoa. The caption reads “‘How happy could I be - alone! Were all these three charmers away’.” The political cartoon captured the idea that while these countries might have been “courting” Samoa and had her best interests at heart, they were really fighting among themselves. At the same time, the cartoon suggested how native Samoans were expected to be passive, meek, and subservient to foreigners; they were simply caught in the middle of a struggle larger than themselves.

Figure 3.1. “The Tug of—Peace,” Punch, April 26 1899.

In retrospect, it is unsurprising that Robert Lewis Stevenson, who did much to shape outside perceptions of Samoa, failed to fully grasp the complexity of Samoan culture. A Footnote to History offered a fairly balanced account of the political struggles in that distant nation, and Stevenson demonstrated respect for the Samoan people and condemned many of the actions taken by Western powers. In addition to his friendship

with Samoan leaders, Stevenson was involved in native politics in Hawaii and was particularly close to the half-Scottish heir to the throne in Hawaii, Princess Kaiulani. He certainly did not see native people in the region merely as backward savages, like so many in this period. Yet Stevenson did not fully escape the prejudices of his time, and his rhetoric reflected his frustration with the failure of Samoans to embrace the Western work ethic and with their naïve understanding of global politics. Stevenson was a sincere, but imperfect champion of the Samoan people, as his rhetoric reinforced the idea that Samoa could not progress and become a civilized nation without accepting Westerners values and Western help.

Of course, it was difficult to judge just how many read Stevenson’s book and understood these lessons. Although A Footnote to History never received the acclaim that much of Stevenson’s fiction did, there are reasons to believe that it had a significant impact. Stevenson’s attacks on public officials in Samoa led to threats of deportation and even a lawsuit for libel, but this only attracted more attention to the book. Stevenson also wrote several editorials about events in Samoa, which turned interested readers to his more complete account in A Footnote to History. Then, just two years after A Footnote was published, Stevenson died, bringing still more attention to his account of the situation in Samoa. Stevenson was only forty-four, but he was already a famous writer and it was his final book. Numerous obituaries discussed his life in Samoa and mentioned A Footnote to History, which also increased the impact of the book.

79 Jolly, Robert Louis Stevenson in the Pacific, 98.
80 Several of the people Stevenson wrote about in his text decided to write about him after he passed. A New York Times review from 1910 of H. J. Moors’ book about his friendship to Stevenson observed, “To the making of books about Robert Louis Stevenson there appears truly to be no end.”
A Footnote to History will never be remembered as a great literary work, but it does shed light on how Samoa became a part of the American story. A Footnote to History provides a good illustration of Alfred Mahan’s theory about the influence of sea power on history. Samoa may have consisted of just a few dots on a map, but for the United States, Great Britain, and Germany it was vitally important because of its location on trade routes and its excellent harbor. The conflict in Samoa was much more than civil unrest, and Western intervention was about more than simply restoring order and helping Samoa to “progress” toward “civilization.” It was part of a larger competition for control of the Pacific region.

Unfortunately for other nations in the Pacific, Samoa set a precedent for U.S. intervention. Foreigners portrayed Samoans’ as being subservient, perhaps other Polynesians were similar. Western powers attempted to protect the independence of the indigenous government for twenty years, and it largely proved to be a waste of lives and resources. Why would Great Britain, Germany, or the United States again attempt to work to preserve an indigenous government? Perhaps most importantly, the United States policies in Samoa broke the country’s tradition of nonintervention. Many believed the country was now in a position to usher in a new era of foreign policy. These changing ideas about the qualities of Pacific Islanders and about the United States’ obligations in world politics would prove disastrous for Hawaiian independence.

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Chapter 4: Determining Hawaii’s Story:

Senator Morgan’s and Queen Liliuokalani’s Conflicting Visions of Nationalism

Queen Liliuokalani, the last monarch of the independent Hawaiian nation, begins her memoir with a remarkable story. Her lineage traces directly to Queen Kapiolani, one of the first Christian converts, who plucked sacred berries from the slopes of the volcano, descended to the boiling lava, and “singing Christian hymns, threw them into the lake of fire.”¹ Her action, Liliuokalani explained, “broke forever the power of Pele, the fire-goddess, over the hearts of her people.”² One hundred years after their first Western contact, Liliuokalani proudly tells of how her people have progressed beyond the beliefs and rituals of their ancient traditions. In her memoir, she positioned herself as a leader of a modern, Christian people. She wrote in English and her story was largely directed to a U.S. audience. But her work was published on the eve of Hawaii’s annexation. For all of the ways that Liliuokalani seemed to embrace the changes caused by Western contact, her memoir argued for Hawaii’s independence and appealed to the United States to reinstate her sovereignty.

The Hawaiian people, like the Samoans, are Polynesian, and it can be tempting to draw parallels between the two nations and their political situations. Yet they were unalike in several important ways. Many Americans viewed U.S. interference in Samoa as a clear break from its policy of nonintervention. In Hawaii, no other Western power had as much influence as the United States, and intervention in those islands seemed less

¹ There are two Queen Kapiolanis. The later queen, who was the wife of King Kalakaua is generally the better known.
² Liliuokalani, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen* (1898; Reprint, Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tutle, 1964), 1-2.
like a break with tradition. Also, many in the United States viewed Hawaii as the natural extension of its Western Coast; they treated the islands almost as if they were part of the contiguous states. George Herbert Ryden argues that U.S. action in Hawaii did not breach the policy of noninterference because “Hawaii could not be regarded as outside of our political interests since that group of islands strategically must serve as an outpost of defense for our Western coast.”

In addition, Hawaii and Samoa differed significantly in terms of the lifestyle and politics of the native people. Samoa lacked a central governing authority, whereas Hawaii had been unified under one leader since the early nineteenth century. Samoa actively sought the aid of Western countries, whereas Hawaii bitterly fought for its independence. And while Samoa’s story had to largely be pieced together through the voice of an outsider (at least for Western audiences), Hawaii’s Queen herself told the story of her people. That story loudly denounced the American actions that had taken away her authority and dismantled her government.

Ever since New England missionaries arrived in Hawaii in 1820, many Americans had grand designs on the islands. The United States established trade in Hawaii in the early nineteenth century, and Americans had frequently been figures of importance within the country. U.S. citizens owned land and particularly profited from sugar cane plantations. By 1887 the United States even had exclusive harbor right to Pu’u’o—a better known as Pearl Harbor. For many, however, only U.S. annexation could secure American interests in Hawaii. When Queen Liliuokalani attempted to promulgate a

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3 Other nations, however, had attempted to annex the islands, including Great Britain, France, and Russia. Great Britain had the second strongest tie to the islands.
constitution that would have granted natives more power in Hawaii, whites living in the islands were quick to react. With the presence of U.S. marines, American citizens overthrew the Hawaiian monarchy in January of 1893, and Liliuokalani stepped down to avoid bloodshed and the annihilation of the indigenous population. The Americans immediately established a “provisional government,” which soon came under the protection of the United States. Hawaii was officially annexed by President McKinley in 1898.

Because the United States had already secured a military base, commercial lands, and an active trade partner in Hawaii under the indigenous government, the justifications for more complete control of the islands were often particularly racist. Even more than Samoa, Hawaii embraced Western influences. The islands were ruled by monarchs, yet the government’s very structure was based on the British and U.S models, with an elected cabinet and a parliament. Yet, focusing on the native population and Queen Liliuokalani herself, advocates of U.S. annexation argued that the indigenous population was untrustworthy, insufficiently civilized, and inherently savage. According to advocates of U.S. annexation, Hawaii needed a stronger U.S. presence both to assure the “progress” of the islands and to protect U.S. interests. Hawaii, however, did not enter into the United States’ fold without resistance.

In 1898, Queen Liliuokalani published her memoir, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*, which refuted claims made in congressional debates, newspapers, and political cartoons about the need for Hawaiian annexation. The text revealed the contradictions in U.S. narratives about the rights of “civilized nations” and the abilities of nonwhite nations. In her memoir, the Queen turned the attacks made by expansionists back on the
leaders of the United States, using their own language and values to argue for Hawaiian independence. Her rhetoric showed that appeals to the ideals of liberty and justice and the Western conception of Christian duty were not the sole domain of white men in power.

Unfortunately, Liliuokalani’s appeals were largely ignored. Some within the United States were even skeptical that Liliuokalani had truly written the memoir herself; after all, how could some primitive native write in such strong English? Many of Liliuokalani’s arguments also seemed politically naïve. How could the United States, which had won its own independence from the British King, reinstate a monarchy? To make matters worse, the memoir’s release was poorly timed. By the time of the book’s publication the issue had been overshadowed by the Spanish American War; Hawaii was annexed just one month before that war ended in 1898. Yet despite Liliuokalani’s ultimate failure, there are significant lessons we can glean from her efforts. *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen* is extremely useful for examining the ways in which indigenous populations resisted interference by the United States.² Because so many of her appeals were couched in terms similar to the expansionists, Liliuokalani’s story also clarifies just how powerfully ideas regarding race and gender tinged the arguments of this period.

**Hawaii and the West**

Hawaii consists of eight major islands located approximately 2000 miles from the United States mainland in the North Pacific. The islands became inhabited through several waves of Polynesian settlers beginning three hundred years before the Christian

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² Other native leaders gave speeches and wrote letters on behalf of the independence of their people, but few offered more extensive accounts. For a native woman to be the embodiment of the rights of a nation and for that woman to then attack the United States was uncommon.
calendar. The population before Western contact has been estimated at between 400,000 and one million people. Like Samoans, early Hawaiians were organized primarily through family units under chiefs. The highest ranking chiefs were advised by kahunas, who were elders of a priestly class. Life was communal and goods farmed and fished by commoners were distributed by the chiefs. Chiefs sometimes vied for power. Before Western contact, a chief named Kamehameha I was working to unify the islands under his leadership, but only after he acquired Western weapons was he able to crown himself the first king of a unified Hawaii in the early nineteenth century.

The popular story of Hawaii’s first contact with the West begins with British captain James Cook in 1778. Cook certainly made an impression. He traded extensively with native Hawaiians and made several trips between various Polynesian countries. In 1779, however, violence broke out between natives and Cook’s crew (the reasons are highly contested), which resulted in the death of many natives and Cook himself. His early contact already had introduced the greatest threat to Hawaiian life, Western diseases. By the time of Queen Liliuokalani’s rule one hundred years later, the native Hawaiian population had dropped to just 40,000.

Not long after Cook’s arrival, the first waves of foreign traders and whalers came to Hawaii; missionaries followed soon after. U.S. missionaries began to establish themselves in the islands in the 1820s. The missionary presence fundamentally changed the societal structure of Hawaii, as the island became more centralized around churches

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7 Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaii*, revised ed. (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1999), 4-5.
8 Earlier contact with foreigners is likely to have occurred. Silva, *Aloha Betrayed*, 18.
9 Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 6.
Christianity worked well in Hawaii. Christian ideals worked alongside traditional beliefs about taboos, which seemed compatible with the Christian notion of sin. Chiefs often worked with missionaries because churches and schools helped to organize Hawaiian communities, thereby stabilizing the chiefs’ power. Because of these connections, missionaries and their descendants were frequently members of the Hawaiian government. The Hawaiian ruling class (called ali’i) continued to forge strong connections with missionaries and their descendants over the subsequent decades. Once the Christian religion and education were well-established on the islands, the descendants of the missionaries felt less constrained by missionary boards that emphasized the importance of respecting native authority. These descendants became increasingly involved in business and agriculture on the islands. At the same time, sandalwood trade and other agricultural interests were growing alongside the whaling industry in the islands, bringing still more foreigners seeking profit.

Yet profits were hardly distributed equally. Commoners had worked collectively for chiefs, but the new capitalist system did not always reward work equally. Many of the high chiefs certainly initially profited from the growing industries, but even their wealth was moderated by short life expectancies (from Western disease), misdirection, and their own personal failures. Once land in Hawaii was privatized in 1848, many foreigners purchased large tracts and established plantations in the lush, bountiful islands. Natives underappreciated the value of land ownership and Westerners took advantage of this attitude. As the native population began to dwindle, white land owners imported cheap labor from Japan, China, and even Portugal to work the growing plantations. By

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the time of Liliuokalani’s reign, much of the land and wealth were held by Westerners. Yet her islands were filled with poor laborers from many countries.

By the close of the nineteenth century, political tensions in Hawaii were understandably high. Whites, including a significant number who had been born in Hawaii, had the greatest wealth. The native Hawaiian population, although larger than the white population, was still a minority. Chinese and Japanese laborers were increasing in number, but neither whites nor natives were willing to grant them political power. Westerners had long guided the Hawaiian royalty, and they helped create a constitution that severely limited the rights of the monarch. This produced a system that treated the ruling Hawaiians as mere figure heads, with the cabinet and legislature dominated by whites. The Hawaiian monarchy was expected to go along with these developments. Liliuokalani, however, refused.

Liliuokalani took the throne upon her brother’s death in 1891. King Kalākaua left many legacies, including a constitution that significantly limited the rights of the monarch and the voting rights of native Hawaiians. A local militia, consisting of mostly Americans, had pressured Kalākaua into signing this constitution; it is commonly referred to as The Bayonet Constitution of 1887. Liliuokalani’s first priority was to overturn this constitution, restoring the authority of the monarchy. She proposed returning to the pre-1887 constitution which would have given her more legislative power, denied resident aliens (who were white) the right to vote, and returned voting privileges to native Hawaiians (most of whom could not meet the property requirements of the 1887 document). Because of her efforts, whites living in Hawaii deemed her a “revolutionary” and began plotting to overthrow her. These actions exposed the greatest tension in the
islands: Westerners felt the need to protect their economic and political power at all costs. If the monarchy would no longer defer to their agenda, it had to be replaced. Although the Queen’s attempt to form a new constitution supposedly inspired the overthrow, reactions in the press and the U.S. Congress reflected the broader racist motives behind the conflict in Hawaii.

Condemning the Queen

Hawaii’s relative isolation meant that the overthrow of its queen caused a great deal of confusion in the United States. Liliuokalani had relinquished her power to a local militia backed by U.S. Marines, who presumably had been landed to protect American citizens in the event of violence. She protested officially to the United States that she had stepped down only out of fear for her life. President Harrison had been working to secure annexation, but his days were numbered, while his predecessor, Grover Cleveland, was anti-expansionist. Almost immediately the United States sent a delegation to investigate the events in Hawaii and the role of U.S. citizens and military forces in precipitating the overthrow. President Cleveland sent former Senator James Blount to Hawaii, and he arrived several months after the overthrow. Over the next five months, Blount met with officials throughout Honolulu, and in July of 1893 he issued a report concluding that the United States Minister to Hawaii, John L. Stevens, had acted illegally in requesting that U.S. troops be deployed to protect those involved in overthrowing the Queen. He also concluded that the United States ought to reinstate Liliuokalani.\footnote{“Blount Report,” U.S. 53\textsuperscript{rd} Congress, 3rd Session, 1894-1895, \textit{University of Hawaii: Special Collections}, libweb.hawaii.edu/digicoll/annexation/blount.html (February 1, 2011).}

Blount’s efforts came too late, however, and Liliuokalani’s supporters in both Hawaii and the United States were unsure how to proceed. Liliuokalani was initially

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\footnote{“Blount Report,” U.S. 53\textsuperscript{rd} Congress, 3rd Session, 1894-1895, \textit{University of Hawaii: Special Collections}, libweb.hawaii.edu/digicoll/annexation/blount.html (February 1, 2011).}
hostile toward Cleveland’s demands of amnesty for the members of the new Provisional Government, and within the U.S. there was a political backlash against Cleveland for even considering the Queen’s reinstatement. The Provisional Government flat out refused to follow Blount’s recommendations. Many also found Blount’s conclusions questionable and his methods of gathering information dubious. He had conducted his research alone (with only a stenographer) and mostly interviewed people sympathetic to Liliuokalani. Congress thus referred the whole matter to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, chaired by Senator John Tyler Morgan, a Democrat from Tennessee. It was thus left up to this committee to sort out the truth of what had occurred in Hawaii.

Morgan’s committee included four Republicans and five Democrats, and at least on the surface its members and procedures seemed fair. Yet if Blount failed to take into full consideration the viewpoints of the members of the Provisional Government, Morgan’s committee indulged their perspective too fully. Neither version of the events was without its biases. The final report of the Morgan Committee presented a much less sympathetic portrait of native Hawaiians and their cause than Blount’s version of the story, and it was left up to Queen Liliuokalani to answer with “a public education campaign” of her own.

The significance of the Morgan Committee’s report to Hawaii’s future was captured in political cartoons at the time, such as the cartoon from Puck reprinted below (see figure 4.1). The cartoon depicts a “shotgun” wedding, in which Uncle Sam is forced to marry a topless and barefoot woman representing Hawaii. President McKinley may be

serving as the priest, but it is Morgan’s figure that looms largest in the image, shotgun in hand and a revolver at his hip. Dressed in his Confederate uniform, Morgan is depicted as having the ultimate authority over Hawaii’s relationship with the United States. An examination of the report that emerged out his committee’s hearings in 1894 reveals why.

Figure 4.1. “Another Shotgun Wedding with Neither Party Willing,” Puck, December 1 1897.¹⁴

Morgan’s report, published in February of 1894, was an exhaustive (and exhausting) thousand-page review of the situation in Hawaii. It reviewed the history of Hawaii, reflected philosophically on the native Hawaiians, and argued for the significance of Hawaii in both commercial and military terms. It even included a report from Alfred Thayer Mahan. Mostly it consisted of interviews with leading U.S. figures who had spent time in Hawaii. The report attempted to clarify the events that took place

in January of 1893, assess the role of the United States in the overthrow of the Queen, and determine if any U.S. officials should be condemned for their actions. While some sections of the report were sympathetic to the native Hawaiian people, it ultimately made three major arguments against returning the Hawaiian Islands to native control. They were: that native Hawaiians were not capable of self-government, that the monarchy no longer served the interests of the people of Hawaii, and that native Hawaiians were a doomed race. The report also made more general arguments about the importance of Hawaii to the United States for commercial, military, and economic reasons. The portrait of the native people in the report and its discussion of the duties of the United States most clearly reflected the impulses of “progressive imperialism,” and they were also the arguments to which Liliuokalani responded.

Perhaps the argument most damaging to Queen Liliuokalani’s cause was that native Hawaiians were simply not capable of self-government. One facet of this argument was that Western influence helped to craft the existing government system in Hawaii in the first place, and that Westerners were thus responsible for any success that the government might have had in recent years. Morgan argued, “Civilization and constitutional government in Hawaii are the foster children of the American Christian missionaries.” As a matter of historical fact, he was correct. However, the report went further: “the Queen’s opposition to the missionaries and the white people was caused by her intention that the Kingdom should return to its former absolute character, and that the

15 The majority found the actions taken by U.S. Minister and the troops of the U.S.S. Boston in aiding the overthrow to be legal. The report also sided with the efforts of Senator Blount, although they disagreed with his findings. However, it was a 5 to 4 vote.
best results of civilization of Hawaii should be obliterated.”

By depicting Liliuokalani as fanatical in her determination to return Hawaii to its “backwards” past, the report distorted both her goals and the history of the islands. The constitution she attempted to promulgate would have granted her more power, but it would hardly have given her absolute rule. And in conflating the early missionaries who had helped “Christianize” Hawaii with all whites, the Morgan report implied that opposition to continued white rule meant a return to its savage and heathen past. Native Hawaiians, in short, were denied a modern life.

Beyond mischaracterizing Liliuokalani’s goals, Morgan argued that white missionaries deserved more credit for what they had accomplished in Hawaii. He wrote: “Citizens of the United States with wisdom, charity, and Christian faith, and a love of constitutional government, have patiently, laboriously, and honestly built up Hawaii into a civilized power under a written constitution, and they can justly claim the sympathy and assistance of all civilized people in resisting its destruction . . . .”

The public needed to recognize how hard missionaries had worked in Hawaii, the report suggested, and annexing Hawaii was portrayed as a suitable way to reward them for their efforts. These sentiments were echoed in the congressional floor debate over annexation in 1898. Representative Frederick H. Gillett of Massachusetts, for example, claimed that the people of Hawaii thrown off the bonds of “debauched monarchy” and were now showing their “love for their native country by asking to return to our allegiance. . . .” Gillett

17 Morgan, Morgan Report, 375.
even went so far as to suggest that they were offering “as a gift the rich and fertile province they have won” and desired to “share in the honor and protection of our flag.”

Implicit in these arguments was the notion that whites had to govern native Hawaiians because they were not capable of governing themselves. In his examination of witnesses, Morgan routinely asked if native Hawaiians were capable of self-government, and businessman, tourists, journalists, and soldiers all answered “no.” The Reverend Oliver Emerson (who was born to missionary parents in Hawaii), for example, explained that Hawaiians were “Kind-hearted and benevolent to a fault,” but if there was “one thing which those Hawaiians need taken away from them, I would say that they need less government affairs and more interest in business affairs, in industry.” Emerson also noted that the Hawaiians had made powerful strides as a race, but then concluded: “Well sir, they are Polynesians, and as Polynesians, bright and intelligent as they may be, they have certain marked defects of their character.” It simply was not in their blood to be leaders or politicians, Emerson suggested. They were destined to be governed by a more advanced race with higher character.

18 Frederick Gillett quoted in William Adam Russ, The Hawaiian Republic (1894-98) and its Struggle to Win Annexation (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1992), 311.
19 Reverend Oliver Emerson, Morgan Report, 539.
Figure 4.2. “When We Annex Hawaii,” *Judge*, 1893.\(^{20}\)

\(^{20}\) Photograph of the original. Courtesy of Hawai‘i State Archives. Kahn Collection, Pictorial: Prints & Drawings [37/32].

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This attitude was evident even in the anti-expansionist political cartoons of the
time, which depicted native Hawaiians as primitive and vulnerable. In the cartoon
reprinted in figure 4.2, the natives were represented as barefoot and wearing only loin
cloths or grass skirts. They were depicted as captivated by and subservient to whites. In
one of the images, the caption sarcastically declares that “when we annex Hawaii,” the
“bicycle will be in demand,” and a “great American institution will be at once adopted”
(with signs reading “swindlers” and “cheats”). Another caption reads, “Queen Lily will
have a great time” under a poster depicting her as a museum piece. An anti-expansionist
cartoon, the sentiments were hardly sympathetic to the native Hawaiian cause. Showing
Liliuokalani as some pre-modern relic denied her any moral authority. The cartoon may
have been intended to suggest that the United States should leave the savages to their
own devices, but the effect was to reinforce stereotypes that warranted annexation.

Witnesses before the Morgan committee often reinforced these sorts of negative
stereotypes and argued that Americans had been the only positive influence in Hawaii.
Zephaniah Swift Spalding was sent to Hawaii as a secret observer for the United States
government in 1867. He concluded that native Hawaiians were “naturally indolent and
careless about health or property. Kalakaua, the last king, was a good-natured indolent
sort of man.” Even though he had a “very fair education,” Spalding argued Kalākaua was
“a thorough native, and his idea of morality was not very great.”\(^{21}\) Spalding further
explained that if the throne “were placed in the hands of a native Kanaka [Hawaiian]
dynasty it would probably run back to where it was when Capt. Cook visited it.” In
Spalding’s view, then, any “progress” native Hawaiians had made over the past one

hundred years was due to the influence of whites. “When the King has been on the throne the brains of the white man have carried on the government,”22 Spalding concluded. He simply ignored the fact that native Hawaiians had controlled their own government up until the constitution of 1887, and during that time they had achieved higher literacy rates and lower poverty levels than the United States itself.23

Morgan’s report was littered with examples of whites deriding the leadership of native Hawaiians, but it also stressed that they were friendly and docile. Professor William De Witt Alexander remarked that native Hawaiians were “a kindly race” and that they were also “very docile people.”24 Spalding commented that they are “very easily governed” and “not prone to quarreling or fighting.”25 Native Hawaiians were thus portrayed as not only destined to be led by whites, but also as unlikely to violently resist annexation. Given that the United States had spent much of the past decade fighting violent wars against native Americans on the mainland, the likelihood that Hawaiians would peacefully submit became another argument for annexing the islands.

A second major argument for annexation focused specifically on Liliuokalani’s government and the claim that she had destroyed the integrity of the monarchy. This argument rested in part on the logic that Liliuokalani and her brother were less qualified to rule because they were not directly related to Kamehameha I, who had unified the islands. Morgan explained “When the Kamehameha dynasty ended, the monarchy in Hawaii was doomed to a necessary dissolution.” Morgan argued that the Kamehameha kings, with the help of missionary advisors, “maintained the progress of civilization and

22 Zephaniah Swift Spalding, Morgan Report, 671.
24 Alexander, Morgan Report, 324.
25 Spalding, Morgan Report, 598.
prosperity, but when Kalakaua was elected king, the most surprising and disgraceful corruptions infected the Government.”\textsuperscript{26} Kamehameha apparently had been a uniquely capable Hawaiian, able to overcome the limitations of his race. The racial logic of the period did not recognize that native Hawaiians could be capable rulers themselves. Kamehameha was an exception, and the end of his family’s reign meant that United States could no longer trust Hawaiians to govern themselves.\textsuperscript{27}

Other opponents questioned Liliuokalani’s heritage in a more general sense. Some claimed she had “negro” blood, while others just generically denounced her as “impure.”\textsuperscript{28} Political cartoons represented Liliuokalani in the same racist tropes that had been used to represent African Americans (see figure 4.3). Noenoe Silva argues that these sorts of cartoons functioned inter-textually, building upon the already accepted racist assumptions about African Americans.\textsuperscript{29} The “pickaninny” image, for example, was particularly popular and worked as “an infantilizing as well as racializing stereotype.”\textsuperscript{30} The caption of this image further shows the infantilizing work of the cartoon: “Hawaiian Topsy (to Miss Columbia)—I ‘spect you dunno what to do wif me, Miss ‘Phelia. Golly! I’se causin’ a heap o’ trouble.” The artist, Victor Gillam, frequently used the “pickaninny” trope and created at least two other cartoons depicting

\textsuperscript{26} Morgan, \textit{Morgan Report}, 367.
\textsuperscript{27} Native Hawaiians notions of family were unlike Western notions. In Hawaii, interfamily adoption was common. In conformance with Hawaiian traditions for royalty, Liliuokalani grew up with an adopted family: high chiefs connected by blood to Kamehameha I. Hawaiians would have seen this as connecting her to the great chief’s lineage.
\textsuperscript{28} Mr. Simpson, a business prospector in Honolulu stated Liliuokalani had “negro” blood in his statement in the \textit{Morgan Report}, 1147. Sereno Bishop claimed she was “impure.” “Are Missionaries’ Sons Tending to America A Stolen Kingdom?” \textit{The Independent}, November 23 1893, 3.
\textsuperscript{29} Silva, \textit{Aloha Betrayed}, 176-177.
\textsuperscript{30} Silva, \textit{Aloha Betrayed}, 177.
Liliuokalani in the same manner. He would later use the same technique to represent General Aguinaldo of the Philippines during the debate over annexing that country.  

A final argument suggested that, without U.S. annexation, native Hawaiians were a doomed race. Even if people believed that they might be capable of self-government, it was logical to transition Hawaii to American control because of the dwindling numbers of the native population. Empirically, there was a certain truth to this belief: even by

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31 “We Draw the Line at This,” Judge, December 2 1893; “Lili to Gover,” Judge February 17 1894. His image of Aguinaldo appeared in Harper’s Weekly in 1899.
conservative estimates the native Hawaiian population had dropped by at least 90 percent in one hundred years. Testifying before the Morgan committee, journalist and former State Senator Charles Mac Arthur noted: “It seems absurd that an American statesman should be willing to commit the future destinies of Hawaii to the rule of the monarchy of a race rapidly dying out, rather than to the vigorous and progressive auspices of the American Republic.” Rather than recognizing that the death toll was linked to Western diseases, many accepted Mac Arthur’s suggestion that it revealed more about the inherent weaknesses of native Hawaiians. Other witnesses described these flaws even more directly, citing everything from gambling, to alcohol abuse, to poor motherly instincts as the causes of the population decline.

Liliuokalani thus had much to answer for in her memoir. She had to prove that she was a good Christian and sufficiently civilized to rule in her homeland. She had to show herself as a capable ruler who would uphold values acceptable to Americans. She also had to balance conflicting ideas about natives, demonstrating that her people had a unique culture worthy of preserving, yet also show that they had embraced the “progressive” ideals of Western societies. Primarily, she had to demonstrate that native Hawaiians had a modern legacy—that they had progressed beyond their ancient traditions and could thrive in the coming new century.

Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen

Liliuokalani lived a relatively long life, from 1838-1917, most of which was recalled in *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*. The text offered a roughly chronological account, describing Liliuokalani’s life during King Kalākaua’s rule (1874-1891), during

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her rule (1891-1893), and up through the overthrow and her abdication in 1895. Two years after the overthrow a group of native Hawaiians attempted to forcibly remove the Provisional Government; they failed. The Government assumed the Queen was involved, and she was forced to officially abdicate to save the lives of those involved in the plot. The Provisional Government held a military tribunal and found Liliuokalani guilty of treason; she was imprisoned for eight months. After her imprisonment she travelled to the United States, discussing her cause directly with Americans while she completed her book. *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen* was published in 1898.

Queen Liliuokalani’s memoir combined an account of her own personal life with significant details about Hawaii’s struggle for sovereignty. It was both a private and a public memoir, bouncing back and forth between intimate descriptions of her relationships with friends and family and arguments against U.S. interference in Hawaii. This strategy may have stemmed, in part, from her desire to reach two different audiences. *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen* was a record of the native monarchy and captured the history of country’s royalty for the benefit of the people of the islands. However, her broader purpose was to defend Hawaiian independence to the U.S. public. Balancing the various goals and audiences makes the text sometimes seem unfocused, but the genre of autobiography allowed for these multiple purposes and audiences.

*Hawaii’s Story* also spoke with multiple voices. While Liliuokalani’s tone was generally detached, her final chapters were explicitly directed to the American public and were written in a more forcefully “persuasive” style. *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen* included an extensive appendix with materials such as the genealogies of several members of the Hawaiian royal family, the text of Hawaii’s annexation treaty, and letters
written by the Queen to members of the U.S. Senate and three U.S. presidents. The formal documents make a stark contrast to the more personal descriptions of Liliuokalani’s childhood and her married life, yet these texts helped establish the validity of her position.

_Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen_ documented the interference of various U.S. citizens in Hawaiian affairs, but it also established the Queen’s credibility as a leader. She did this both by showing her own personal ethos and the general strengths of native Hawaiians as a people. For example, Liliuokalani opened her memoir with an account of how her ancestors rejected the indigenous gods in favor of Christianity. The opening immediately established that Hawaiian traditions had changed drastically since contact with the West, and that she embraced these changes. But in her opening remarks, she also made two gestures to native understandings of ethos—remarking on place and genealogy. Liliuokalani described how she was born in Honolulu, at the base of the punchbowl, the visually dominating base of a volcano near Honolulu. Place is important to native identity and this demonstrated her deep connection to the land.\(^{34}\) Genealogy is also important,\(^{35}\) and Liliuokalani’s genealogy showed that she was related to one of the first Christian converts and that she was related through marriage to Kamehameha I. Because Liliuokalani’s book responded to American criticisms, most of her efforts seemed designed to secure her credibility in Western eyes. But among the passages were significant details that also established her authority to Hawaiians.

Part of Liliuokalani’s efforts to establish her ethos as a leader involved showing that she was well-educated. In 1842, at the age of four, she was sent to school with the

\(^{34}\) Kualapai, “The Queen Writes Back,” 46.

\(^{35}\) Traditional hula chants often recounted chiefs’ ancestry. Silva, _Aloha Betrayed_, 93.
children of other Hawaiian royalty. She was educated by missionaries who were “especially particular to teach us the proper use of the English language.” Education was also personally significant to the Queen, and she recalled how she had worked to advance the education of all native Hawaiians. In 1886, she organized an educational society for poorer children, “the intention of which was to interest the Hawaiian ladies in the proper training of young girls of their own race.” Liliuokalani actively worked so that her people benefited from education in the same ways that she had. Morgan’s report noted that native Hawaiians had good access to education, but Liliuokalani’s book made clear that the system was not simply the legacy of the missionary presence.

Liliuokalani’s brother, when he was King, followed her model. King Kalākaua issued a charter creating the Hale Naua, or the Temple of Science. Liliuokalani explained: “Under the work of this organization was embraced matters of science known to historians and recognized by the priests of our ancient times,” and it “held some correspondence with similar scientific association in foreign lands.” Some non-natives attacked these efforts, arguing that Hale Naua focused too much on ancient traditions and beliefs. Although Liliuokalani rebutted such claims, it is likely the organization was intended to serve dual purposes, archiving traditional beliefs about the natural world while participating in Western conversations about science. Ali’i commonly balanced an interest in foreign ways with a respect for Hawaiian traditions. Some critics saw any

37 Liliuokalani, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*, 113.
38 In 1878 she also visited Mills College in Oakland, California, which was then a seminary school for women and made efforts to establish a similar place of education in Hawaii.
39 Liliuokalani, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*, 115.
focus on native tradition as inherently anti-progress and anti-education, but Liliuokalani showed how it was part of an effort to reconcile those traditions with modern science.

In addition to being formally educated, Liliuokalani’s rhetoric also indicated that Hawaiian monarchs were also familiar with high culture and the finer details of civilized society. During her first trip to the United States in 1878, she recalled visiting “a most elegant mansion” belonging to “a prominent citizen” in Oakland, California. Describing the visit, Liliuokalani wrote that “her art-gallery made a great impression on me at the time,” and she recalled “the many beautiful paintings by prominent artists with which it was adorned.”\(^{40}\) Another passage described her attendance at Queen Victoria’s Jubilee in 1887. She noted that on the ship’s passage to England that she had: “recourse to the ship’s library, which was well supplied with books from the best authors,” and also that “two or three concerts were given in the main saloon of our great ship, and were well attended. Through them quite a sum was raised for sundry charitable objects.”\(^{41}\) Readers might understand these passages merely as a woman giving a personal account of an important time in her life. However, the passages also indicated her interest in fine art and her knowledge of key authors and music. And like elites in Western cities, she too participated in philanthropic work. Despite Hawaii’s distance from the United States and Europe, Liliuokalani showed that she was just as sophisticated and cultured as other (white) Victorian ladies.

Liliuokalani reinforced this identity visually in her text. *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen* contains more than twenty photographs, many of Hawaiian royalty in full regalia. The images suggested a level of propriety and sophistication comparable to

\(^{40}\) Liliuokalani, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*, 62-63.
\(^{41}\) Liliuokalani, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*, 132-133.
that of any Western European monarch (see figure 4.4). The text also included images of
the ‘Iolani Palace, completed by King Kalākaua. The palace was modern and met
Western expectations for beauty and architecture. These photographs challenged
stereotypes within the United States. Lydia Kualalpai notes, “Whereas nearly every book
published about Hawai‘i at the end of the nineteenth century depicts ‘hula-hula girls,’
‘grass huts,’ and seminude Natives pounding poi,” the queen’s illustrations presented “a
considerably more complex construction of Hawai‘i.”

Figure 4.4. “Her Majesty, Queen Liliuokalani, Constitutional Queen of Hawaii,” Hawaii’s Story by
Hawaii’s Queen.  

42 Kualalpai, “The Queen Writes Back,” 49.
43 Photograph of original. Frontispiece to Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen.
Liliuokalani’s memoir suggested that she had lived a proper Victorian life. Several passages detailed her attendance at religious services and her commitment to Christian charity. This commitment began with her early education: “We never failed to go to church in a procession every Sunday in charge of our teachers,” she wrote, and she and her family “occupied seats in the immediate vicinity of the pew where the king was seated.”\footnote{Liliuokalani, \textit{Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen}, 6-7.} Throughout her life, she was “a regular attendant” at Presbyterian worship services, “a constant contributor to all the missionary societies,” and a volunteer helping Christians “to build their churches and ornament the walls.”\footnote{Liliuokalani, \textit{Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen}, 269.} An avid composer, she also wrote many hymns. When she was imprisoned she was given a Book of Common Prayer. “It was a great comfort to me,” she recalled, “and before retiring . . . I spent a few minutes in the devotions appropriate to the evening.”\footnote{Liliuokalani, \textit{Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen}, 269.}

Liliuokalani also celebrated Christian principles, especially the principle of nonviolence. She wrote about her personal difficulty when she had to sign a death-warrant for a convicted criminal, because she did not want to take another life, even indirectly.\footnote{Liliuokalani, \textit{Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen}, 96-97.} When she was deposed as Queen, some of the natives were bent on forcibly reinstating her. But she dissuaded them: “Many a time have I heard that the Hawaiians would no longer submit to their oppressors, that they were about to appeal to fire and the sword; but I have always dissuaded them from commencing any such measures.”\footnote{Liliuokalani, \textit{Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen}, 255.} Even though she was sympathetic toward their views, Liliuokalani refused to endorse violence.
Passages like these countered suggestions in the U.S. press that Liliuokalani was inherently savage. An article from the *Maine Farmer* January 18, 1894, for example, declared that “Liliuokalani deserves to be made the queen of the cannibal islands,” as she was a woman with “blood in her eye and in her heart as well.”49 The comment reflected a common belief that she would likely behead members of the Provisional Government if she were reinstated. “That offensive charge was repeated to my hurt as often as possible,” she wrote, and she insisted “that I had not used the words attributed to me.”50 Liliuokalani admitted that she initially refused clemency to the members of the Provisional Government, but eventually she promised them full pardons. In fact, a week before its critical article, the *Maine Farmer* had published her statement of “a full pardon and amnesty” for “every person who directly or indirectly participated in the revolution of January 17, 1893.”51 The paper made no effort to resolve the conflicting accounts.

Even though some of her opponents portrayed her as bloodthirsty, Liliuokalani touted the Christian virtue of forgiveness. While in prison, she wrote the following hymn: “Your loving mercy, Is as high as Heaven, And your truth, So perfect/ I live in sorrow, Imprisoned, You are my light, Your glory, my support, Behold not with malevolence, The sins of man, But forgive, And cleanse/And so, o Lord, Protect us beneath your wings, And let peace be our portion/ Now and forever more, Amen.”52 The hymn’s title was “The Queen’s Prayer.” It was dedicated to her heir, Princess Kaiulani.

50 Liliuokalani, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*, 248. U.S. Foreign Minister Albert Willis reported Liliuokalani had made the statement.
Liliuokalani’s rhetoric could be critical and passionate, but she also insisted that her deep religious beliefs moderated any desire for revenge. For example, when she addressed the overthrow of the monarchy, she wrote: “It has been my endeavor, in these recollections, to avoid speaking evil of any person, unless absolutely demanded by the exigencies of my case before the public. I simply state facts, and let others form the own judgment of individuals.”53 Liliuokalani attempted to uphold the Christian ideal, “speak no evil,” even at the expense of her cause.

Beyond establishing her own credibility and defending herself against accusations in the U.S. press, Liliuokalani used her memoir to defend the Hawaiian monarchy as a legitimate and progressive governmental authority. In the process, Liliuokalani demonstrated the credibility of her race—or at least the ali`i. The monarchy would never be reinstated if she was viewed as the only capable ruler. She documented how three different Hawaiian monarchs, spanning nearly fifty years, had acted with dignity on behalf of the people of Hawaii. The Morgan report centered only on Kamehameha I; the Queen’s accounts showed the diverse ways Hawaii and its leaders had progressed.

One of the clearest indicators of how contact with Westerners had changed Hawaii was its governmental system. Liliuokalani recounted how King Kamehameha III wrote the first Hawaiian constitution in 1840 and another in 1852. She then noted: “Both these were doubtless drafted under the supervision and advice of the missionaries, of whom, even at the latter date, the Hawaiian nation was beginning to feel a little justifiable jealously.”54 These constitutions were modeled on those of the United States; they included a Bill of Rights and established a bicameral legislature. They also established

53 Liliuokalani, Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen, 243.
54 Liliuokalani, Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen, 20.
the monarch as more of a figurehead than as a sovereign leader. In 1864, Liliuokalani recounted, King Kamehameha IV decided to amend the constitution, for “he understood the needs of his people better than those of foreign birth and alien affinities.” Kamehameha IV traveled through the islands consulting his people and met with his cabinet extensively before drafting the new constitution. The result, according to Liliuokalani, was a better government, and “all parties had lived together in harmony throughout the Hawaiian Islands, under a constitution devised and promulgated by one man, and he of the race of the Hawaiian chiefs.” Although Hawaiians had learned about democratic government from the missionaries, they had demonstrated their own abilities to govern as well.

Importantly, Hawaiians willing adopted many aspects of the missionaries’ culture, including their language. One marker of their advancement, as noted in the Morgan Report, was how many of them had mastered the English language. This was especially true of the ali’i, and Liliuokalani explained that Kamehameha IV “personally translated the English Prayer Book into our language.” Not only did this prove that the King had a strong command of the English language, it also demonstrated his commitment to Christian doctrines. Thus despite the fact that this same king worked to lessen the influence of missionaries over the Hawaiian government, he clearly embraced aspects of their culture and their Christian teachings. Liliuokalani wrote her own memoir in English, showing her mastery of the language.

55 Liliuokalani, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*, 20.
56 Liliuokalani, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*, 21.
57 Liliuokalani, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*, 16.
The monarch whose credibility was the most crucial to establishing her overall argument for Hawaiian independence was that of her brother, King Kalākaua. In part because Kalākaua had named her as his successor, Liliuokalani’s authority was connected to his. As the heir apparent, she also stood in for him on occasion, most notably during a nine month world tour he took to “see the great and beautiful world which God made.”

While she gained experience as his stand-in, being associated with his leadership was also dangerous. Attacking Kalākaua was a popular pastime, as numerous political cartoons demonstrated.

Figure 4.5. “To the Rescue,” The Wasp, July 16 1887.

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58 Liliuokalani, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*, 76-77.
59 Photograph of original. Courtesy of the Hawai‘i State Archives. Kahn Collection, Pictorial: Prints & Drawings [37/32].
Figure 4.5 shows a cartoon summarizing some of the controversies surrounding Kalākaua. Politically, he was elected to the crown when the previous king had died unexpectedly and there was no clear heir. As a result, his leadership was frequently challenged by threats of revolution from natives who supported another heir and by subjects loyal to the United States (who eventually forced him to sign the Bayonet Constitution). In the cartoon, Kalākaua’s wife, Kapiolani, is shown on her way to Queen Victoria’s Jubilee, while in her absence her husband is helpless and drunk (a liquor bottle in his pocket). Opponents frequently cited his drinking as one reason he made a poor monarch, and testimony in the Morgan Committee suggested that Liliuokalani also suffered from this vice (although there was no evidence to support this). The scull of Captain Cook appears over Kalākaua’s throne and Kapiolani is barefoot. These details illustrate how political cartoonists of the time depicted Hawaiian monarchs as not only savage but immoral and undisciplined.

Liliuokalani did not respond to such attacks directly, but her memoir was threaded with defenses of Kalākaua. She argued that the Divine itself was represented in his coronation. She recalled that during the ceremonies—as a Christian minister moved to put the crown on Kalākaua—a “mist, or cloud . . . was seen to Passover the sun, obscuring its light for a few minutes; then at the moment the king was crowned there appeared, shining so brilliantly as to attract general attention, a single star. It was noticed by the entire multitude assembled to witness the pageant, and a murmur of wonder and admiration passed over the throng.”60 Although many Americans and non-natives in Hawaii viewed such a “pageant” as excessive, Liliuokalani defended the expense: “It was

60 Liliuokalani, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*, 103.
wise and patriotic to spend money to awaken in the people a national pride. Naturally, those among us who did not desire to have Hawaii remain a nation would look on an expenditure of this kind as worse than wasted.”

Of course, it was under Kalākaua’s rein that the most contentious issue of Liliuokalani’s career arose, the Bayonet Constitution. Liliuokalani vigorously defended her attempts to overturn the Bayonet Constitution; the people of Hawaii had demanded that it be abolished, and so she acted. Liliuokalani claimed that petitions had poured into the government immediately after she ascended to the crown, and she estimated that two-thirds of the registered voters in Hawaii wanted a new constitution. She argued, “To have ignored or disregarded so general a request I must have been deaf to the voice of the people which tradition tells us it the voice of God. No true Hawaiian chief would have done other than to promise a consideration of their wishes.” Liliuokalani thus portrayed her actions as a manifestation of both democratic ideals and the traditions of the great chiefs who came before her. Furthermore, she argued that she was well within her rights as Queen to promulgate a new constitution. She wrote, “The right to grant a constitution to the nation has been, since the very first one was granted, a prerogative of the Hawaiian sovereigns.” Historically, she was correct, but the Bayonet Constitution of 1887 was specifically passed as a repudiation of that legacy. She could defend her motives and show precedent for her actions, but ultimately neither argument answered the larger issue: should native Hawaiians have the right to self-governance at all.

61 Liliuokalani, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*, 105.
62 Liliuokalani, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*, 231.
63 Liliuokalani, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*, 238.
Nearing the end of her memoir, Liliuokalani’s tone shifted, as if she had suddenly become resigned to the fact that Hawaiian independence would not be reinstated. At this point, her memoir seems designed rhetorically for two purposes: to gain further sympathy for herself, and to use that sympathy to plead for the care of her people. One of the passages described the military tribunal of 1895 that tried her for her role in the attempt to overthrow the white Provisional Government. Although evidence of her involvement in the affair was sparse, Liliuokalani was convicted of treason, imprisoned in the palace, and told that if she did not abdicate, she and six men involved in the uprising would be shot. She claimed to have no fear for herself but explained: “Think of my position, — sick, a lone woman in prison, scarcely knowing who was my friend, or who listened to my words only to betray me, without legal advice or friendly counsel, and the stream of blood ready to flow unless it was stayed by my pen.”

Liliuokalani reached out to her readers for sympathy, portraying herself not as powerful royalty but as a widowed, vulnerable woman who was guilty only of trying to protect the people of Hawaii.

Thus, Liliuokalani’s rhetoric creates the self-portrait of a martyr. She claimed she had acted “at the request of the large majority of the Hawaiian people,” and was concerned only for “the will of my people and the welfare of my country.” Beyond asserting her innocence in the plot, Liliuokalani also claimed that the Provisional Government had no right to try her in a military tribunal and wrote to them: “In your actions you violate your own constitution and laws, which are now the constitution and laws of the land.” Beyond denying the legal authority of the proceeding, Liliuokalani also questioned the Provisional Government’s moral authority: “There may be in your

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64 Liliuokalani, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*, 274.
65 Liliuokalani, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*, 281.
consciences a warrant for your action, in what you may deem a necessity of the times; but you cannot find any such warrant for any such action in any settled, civilized, or Christian land.” Liliuokalani thereby turned the Western values of the Provisional Government against them. She also expressed her confidence that, in the end, justice would be done: “I would ask you to consider that your government is on trial before the whole civilized world, and that in accordance with your actions and decisions will you yourself be judged.”

Liliuokalani did not seem naïve about her prospects of success and perhaps she hoped only to persuade the Provisional Government and other Americans to treat her people well. Toward the end of her story she declared: “The happiness and prosperity of Hawaii are henceforth in your hands as its rulers. . . . May the divine Providence grant you the wisdom to lead the nation into the paths of forbearance, forgiveness, and peace, and to create and consolidate a united people ever anxious to advance in the ways of civilization outlined by the American fathers of liberty and religion.”66 When Liliuokalani was found guilty and kept under house arrest, she was denied visits even from her clergy: “Although my Christian (?) jailers denied to me their sacred ministration and actual presence, yet none the less were these good and true Christians there in the loving tokens of kind remembrance” during her imprisonment.67 In the end, however, Liliuokalani took ownership of Christian values and used them to judge the actions of the whites who had oppressed her.

Concluding sections attempted to educate the American people about the issue of annexation. Liliuokalani appealed directly to the people of the United States to think

66 Liliuokalani, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*, 285.
67 Liliuokalani, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*, 293.
twice before supporting the annexation treaty: “The voters of this great and good nation are too free from suspicion. They have no idea how they have been deceived, how much more than can be deceived.”\textsuperscript{68} She also reached out to them by casting the issue in moral rather than political terms, asking “But is it really a matter of party interest? Is the American Republic of States to degenerate, and become a colonizer and a land-grabber?” While she noted that the United States could no doubt dominate the islands and compete with European nations “in the race for conquest” and perhaps even become “a vast military and naval power,” she asked “Is such a departure from its established principles patriotic or politic?”\textsuperscript{69} In these arguments, Liliuokalani anticipated the anti-imperialist appeals of Senator George Frisbee Hoar and other opponents of annexation. Hoar was no defender of Hawaiian autonomy, but he too worried about the long-term effects of expansionism, once “the passions and the greed and the ambitions of a single generation have gone by and are cold.”\textsuperscript{70}

Liliuokalani’s moral appeal also may have reflected the gendered rhetorical conventions of the time. Liliuokalani undoubtedly had many women readers among her audience, and personal memoirs were considered an appropriate feminine genre.\textsuperscript{71} Her memoir included details of her work with women’s groups and of her relationships with other powerful women, such as First Lady Cleveland. For these audiences, political access was limited (since they were unable to vote), but women could engage the moral

\textsuperscript{68} Liliuokalani, \textit{Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen}, 361.
\textsuperscript{69} Liliuokalani, \textit{Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen}, 372.
\textsuperscript{70} George Frisbee Hoar, “April 17 1900 Congressional Speech.” Accessed through \textit{Google Books} (June 20, 2011).
\textsuperscript{71} One might argue that Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s autobiography from the same year as Liliuokalani’s text challenged some of the conventions of appropriate women’s writings. See Lisa Shawn Hogan, “The Politics of Feminist Autobiography: Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s Eighty Years and More as Ideological Manifest,” \textit{Women’s Studies} 38 (2009): 1-22.
issues. Liliuokalani hoped to convince the American public that her fight to restore her government was part of a larger moral crusade.

The Queen concluded her memoir with a moral appeal grounded in the Christian identity she shared with her readers. She cried out: “Oh, honest Americans, as Christians hear me for my down-trodden people!” Liliuokalani then warned her audience, “do not covet the little vineyard of Naboth’s, so far from your shores, lest the punishment of Ahab fall upon you.” 72 Pledging to fight for her people to “the last drop of my blood,” she declared it now “for the American people and their representatives in Congress” to determine whether her sacrifice had been in vain. Closing on a note of optimism, Liliuokalani expressed confidence that God would remember “His Hawaiian children,” and she urged her American readers to “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.” 73 Opening and concluding in this manner further underlined her Christian credentials. She reminded her audiences that while she might be a native Hawaiian, she and her people had come far from their heathen past.

Conclusion

Queen Liliuokalani’s memoir balanced the demands of various audiences, but the concluding paragraphs read as both extremely personal and rhetorically public. As a deposed queen, her final appeal to the people of the United States was both desperate and threatening and—with the hindsight of history—rather pitiful. 74 These passages read like a conversation between Liliuokalani and God himself, reminding Him of what she

72 Liliuokalani, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*, 373.
73 Liliuokalani, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*, 374.
74 Or, as one contemporary reviewer noted, “dignified and pathetic.” Charles A. Kofoid, “The Story of Hawaii’s Queen,” *The Dial*, April 1 1898, 231.
believed was due her people should others fail to listen to her cause. If her ancient ancestors were able to break the power of Pele over the people, Liliuokalani seemed to call upon the Christian God to make good on his bargain. Of course, Gods are not so easily moved. Liliuokalani’s desperation suggests that she sensed just how high the stakes were for her people—and how unlikely it was that their independence would ever be restored.

Passages of the memoir also reveal Liliuokalani’s seemingly omniscient power to foretell the future of Hawaii. After she was released from house arrest, Liliuokalani traveled to the United States to argue on the behalf of her people. While she had visited the United States before, its vastness overwhelmed her. Traveling across country by train, she observed, “Colonies and colonies could be established here, and never interfere with each other in the least, the vast extent of unoccupied land is so enormous.” She continued, “And yet this great and powerful nation must go across two thousand miles of sea, and take from the poor Hawaiians their little spots . . . must covet our islands of Hawaii Nei, and extinguish the nationality of my poor people, many of whom have now not a foot of land which can be called their own. And for what?” Warning that annexing Hawaii would give the United States “another race-problem” and create an “inconsistent foreign and colonial policy,” she predicted that under annexation “a friendly and generous, yet proud-spirited and sensitive race”—a race “capable and worthy of receiving the best opportunities for material and moral progress”—would be “crushed under the weight of a social order and prejudice.”

Liliuokalani’s words proved all too prophetic. As Haunani-Kay Trask notes, today more native Hawaiians “live below the poverty level

75 Liliuokalani, Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen, 310-311.
than any other ethnic group” in the Islands,\textsuperscript{76} and homelessness is also widespread among the native population.

Given its critical tone, it is unsurprising that \textit{Hawaii’s Story} received mixed reviews in the mainland. Yet the \textit{Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine} declared it “a record of self-sacrifice, courage, and patriotism, from one whose morality has been impugned, whose intelligence has been denied, and whose honesty of purpose has been lampooned by every scribbler on the continent, it is a revelation.” The review went on to argue that as the American public considered Hawaii’s annexation, the book “should command the attention of the reading and thinking public.”\textsuperscript{77} However, even these mostly positive reviews tended to emphasize the “partly romantic, partly historical” character of Liliuokalani’s account, thereby depoliticizing its message and diminishing its relevance to the political debate.\textsuperscript{78}

Other reviewers thought the text primarily valuable for its \textit{personal} insights and derided its political purposes. \textit{The Book Buyer} called Liliuokalani “the unfaltering champion of an over-thrown monarchy” and declared her memoir “as simple and ingenuous as a child’s might be.” Some advertisements even listed \textit{Hawaii’s Story} among “The Most Popular Juveniles of the Season,”\textsuperscript{79} thereby reinforcing stereotypes of native Hawaiians as child-like. One review concluded that while the “narrative is often picturesque” and the autobiographical sentiments “genuine,” the information in the book

\textsuperscript{77} “Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen,” \textit{Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine} (March 1898): 285.
\textsuperscript{78} “Books of the Week,” \textit{Outlook}, February 19 1898, 486.
\textsuperscript{79} Hawaii’s Story was so listed in \textit{The Literary World}, November 26 1898, 417, \textit{Congressionalist}, December 1 1898, 774, and \textit{The Bookman}, February 1899, 766.
was “colored by personal feeling.” Reviews of the Queen’s memoir praised her descriptions of her travels and her family, but cautioned against reading it as an authoritative history. *Current Literature* reprinted several pages of the text in September of 1898, but chose passages that described the beauty of Hawaii, not Liliuokalani’s arguments about Hawaiian independence. Some reviewers even denied that she was qualified to write about Hawaii’s history. Another reviewer concluded: “Although, owning to its warped and partial statements, the book has little value as reliable history, it is nevertheless a most important contribution to the literature of the Hawaiian question.”

Some reviewers even doubted that Liliuokalani could have written the book herself. “If Queen Liliuokalani were really the author of her Hawaii’s Story,” one reviewer wrote, “she would deserve a high mark of literary credit; for it is a well-written and interesting narrative.” But according to this reviewer, “between the lines” one sensed the work of “some dexterous secretary and man of letters, who is really responsible for what by courtesy is the ex-Queen’s performance.” Notably, the reviewer attributed the text to “a man of letters,” for while personal descriptions and romantic literature might be the domain of women writers, political history was not. As Kualapai writes, “The transfer of ownership” to a white man of letters was “accommodated by the colonial politics of language and its rules of decorum, as well as a long European and American tradition of devaluing women’s authorship.”

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80 “Hawaii’s Story,” *The Book Buyer*, June 1 1898, 436.
84 Kualapai, “The Queen Writes Back,” 44.
Although both Kualapai and Miriam Fuchs have established that Liliuokalani was, in fact, the author of her memoir,\(^{85}\) her mastery of English ironically cast doubt on her authorship. Some simply could not believe that a native Hawaiian could write such a memoir. But for her, modern ideals were not inherently white, nor were they inherently American. No less than the expansionists, she invoked “progress” and “Christian Duty” and professed her loyalties to Western ideals and traditions.

With *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*, Liliuokalani tried to insert herself into the political debate over Hawaii. And while she may not have saved her country from annexation, her account is an important part of Hawaiian history and has recently reinserted itself into political debates over Hawaii. In January of 1993, on the one-hundredth year anniversary of the overthrow of Liliuokalani’s government, much of the country paused to reflect on the monarch’s story. In November of 1993, the U.S. Congress even passed an “Apology Resolution” officially acknowledging that the overthrow of the native Hawaiian government had been illegal and apologizing “to Native Hawaiians on behalf of the United States for the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii.” The resolution specifically cited Liliuokalani’s statement that “by the Grace of God” she had been called upon to protest the actions of the provisional government.\(^{86}\) Liliuokalani’s account of her people’s history, along with the appendix to *Hawaii’s Story*, have thus once again become politically relevant. The Apology Resolution, however, did not answer Liliuokalani’s concerns for her people or her country; it was merely an

\(^{85}\) Kualapai, “The Queen Writes Back,” 32-62 and Miriam Fuchs, “Autobiography as Political Discourse: Lili‘iokalani’s *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*,” in *The Text is Myself: Women’s Life Writing and Catastrophe* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 64. Both authors compared the text with her diaries and found the style and subject matter consistent.

expression of congressional sentiment. Perhaps over time that validation of
Liliuokalani’s story will lead to real changes in the institutions and policies that affect the
lives of native Hawaiians.
Chapter 5: The Legacy of U.S. Imperialism

Imprisoned in ‘Iolani Palace in 1895, the deposed native leader of Hawaii, Queen Liliuokalani wrote, “Behold not with malevolence the sins of man, but forgive.”¹ As a native Hawaiian reexamining the Queen’s rhetoric one hundred years later, I find it difficult to understand her magnanimous response to the situation. As a rhetorical scholar, however, I have tried to make sense of her attitude and the arguments she articulated in her public discourse. Perhaps she recognized that, in the 1890s, the United States felt itself ready to assume a new role in world history, and that there was little that she could do to stop it.

The path that led to this new chapter began with the closing of the American frontier, but not of the frontier legacy. Frederick Jackson Turner (most directly) and Alfred Thayer Mahan were among those who argued that the nation needed to sustain its spirit of expansion and exploration and urged the nation to assume a more active role on the world stage. After all, while the nineteenth century had been tumultuous, the United States had survived its Civil War, celebrated its centennial, and in 1893 it was ready to officially commemorate Columbus’ “discovery” of the New World in Chicago. The United States was poised to begin a new chapter in its history, and the people of the Pacific seemed to cry out for direction from some Western power. Getting involved in Samoa was the first step in America’s new quest for empire, and the United States seemed to be both obligated and destined to help guide the tiny nation into the twentieth century. And since one Polynesian nation already had benefited from American direction, why not its close cousin, Hawaii? After all, Americans had been active in the

Hawaiian Islands for nearly one-hundred years, and some looked upon the islands as a natural extension of the country, even if they were noncontiguous. These changing relationships in the Pacific began the process of redefining America’s national character, its boundaries, and its role in the world.

Before summarizing the lessons gleaned from the rhetoric of imperialism between 1889 and 1900, let me review my purposes in this project. This period preceded the Progressive Era, but it was my goal to show how progressive appeals and values were already evident in the rhetoric of U.S. foreign policy, particularly in calls to help “uplift” the people of the Pacific and help them “progress” into a new century. A second purpose has been to broaden our understanding of “public address,” for the rhetoric that shaped the nation’s identity in this era was not limited to political speeches. It also included scholarly works, novels, and even cartoons. In my study, I have tried to maintain the traditional strengths of public address scholarship, as noted by Martin Medhurst in his account of the state of the discipline in 2001. I have conducted traditional textual analyses of speeches and government documents, but I also have endeavored to “reconfigure” the ways in which scholars previously have approached this era in U.S. history, and “recover” texts neglected in earlier studies of the Age of Imperialism. In *Building an Empire, Defining a Nation*, I have sought to bring forth new objects of analysis (such as memoirs and political cartoons), give voice to the voiceless (particularly Queen Liliuokalani), and link rhetoric to other disciplines (like Gender and Post Colonial studies). Without taking this broad approach, it is difficult to really account for

America’s early interest in the Pacific or to explicate the U.S. shift from isolationism to noncontiguous expansion, and indeed this may explain why Samoa and Hawaii have received so little attention in the existing scholarship. But the stories of the United States’ acquisition of Samoa and Hawaii are valuable for explaining the country’s self-definition, its involvement in the Spanish American War, and its subsequent rise to superpower status. The story of that shift toward expansionism and the nation’s assumption of world leadership remains important to understanding our national identity today.

Accounting for the Rise of Imperialism

Historian James Field has argued that the account of the Age of Imperialism is almost always “the worst chapter in any general history of American foreign relations.” He argues that scholars tend to oversimplify the era, depending too much on rational and unifying explanations in their analysis. They thereby overstate the effects of singular figures and underestimate the differences in U.S. policy across regions and time. In the preceding chapters, I have taken seriously the differences between specific eras and geographies, while also recognizing the common themes in the rhetoric of advocates like Frederick Jackson Turner, Alfred Thayer Mahan, and John Tyler Morgan. I have shown how writers like Robert Louis Stevenson and Queen Liliuokalani challenged these unified visions of America’s destiny and the prevailing stereotypes of the people of Polynesia. My study illuminates how United States foreign policy changed during this period and what that change meant for the forgotten first experiment in U.S. empire—expansion into the Pacific.

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Scholars in other disciplines have been reexamining United States history for some time with greater attention to questions about expansion and imperialism. Susan Gillman notes that American Studies has been answering a call “to rectify the absence of empire in the study of US culture.”5 She cites the one-hundredth anniversary of the Spanish American War and reactions to the Iraq War as the exigencies behind this trend. Concern over the violent action taken in the name of expansion certainly warrants scholarly attention.

Within Communication Studies, Dana Cloud, in her study of the use of imagery in the U.S. War on Terrorism, reminds us “Images of the oppressed in an ‘inferior’ civilization can prompt a paternalistic response alongside an aggressive one.”6 My project focuses primarily on that “paternalistic response” in the Pacific, not only because I believe it set a tone that later justified more aggressive actions, but also because I believe it has been under-examined precisely because it seems less threatening or less “imperialistic.” To study only the rhetoric that helped inspire aggressive and more militaristic U.S. policies would be to overlook how many of these territories were initially discussed in paternalistic tones.

While “Empire Studies” may have gained popularity in history and American studies, scholars of rhetoric have largely neglected the Age of Imperialism. This may be in part because rhetorical scholars have focused much of their attention on the Progressive Era, a period that most historians suggest began at the turn of the twentieth century and which has overshadowed the Age of Imperialism, at least in the scholarship.

Richard Hofstadter argues that progressivism arose in response to the swift industrialization of the late nineteenth century, which neglected the moral and physical health of the nation. “The distinguishing thing about Progressives,” argues Hofstadter is that “they argued that social evils will not remedy themselves, and that it is wrong to sit by passively and wait for time to take care of them.”

Progressive movements were marked by “civic alertness,” “realistic journalism,” and a belief that the government was not some “cold and negative policing agency,” but was responsible for the “poor and powerless.”

The logic underlying the rhetoric of progressivism was not restricted to domestic social reform. Sentiments about the responsibilities of the country extended beyond its borders and were manifested in the Pacific. Accounting for how these progressive concerns impacted foreign policy helps us to understand the roots of U.S. expansion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. David W. Noble remarks that the Progressive Mind was attempting to help middle-class America “resolve its identity crisis and reachieve a sense of vitality, a vision of a future that promised fulfillment rather than despair; a future in which new forms of order would emerge out of chaos.”

As the nineteenth century came to a close, the rhetoric of imperialism was part of the same effort to help Americans better understand themselves and develop a “progressive” vision of their nation’s role in the world.

The Spanish American War and the Annexation of the Philippines

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While early action in the Pacific helped Americans form new ideas about their nation’s character and its role on the world stage, the first big test of these changing ideas came with the Spanish American War. Developments in Samoa and Hawaii had already proven that the country was ready to assume more global responsibilities and take on the European superpowers. Richard Olney, a former Secretary of State, summed up the feelings of the time: “when our troubles with Spain came to a head, it had, it is believed, already dawned upon the American mind that the international policy suitable to our infancy and our weakness was unworthy of our maturity and our strength . . . .”\(^\text{10}\) The country was ready to assume its rightful place among the leaders of the world.

That the Spanish American War came to be known as the “splendid little war” reflected the significance of the United States’ victory in that conflict. With the war lasting only 109 days, America took its success as proof of the righteousness of its cause and confirmation of its moral duty to “help” backwards nations. The Republican Platform of 1900 stated: “The American Government must protect the person and property of every citizen wherever they are wrongfully violated or placed in peril.”\(^\text{11}\) Aiding the Cuban struggle for independence proved the righteousness of aiding small nations that were “wrongfully violated,” especially given the outrages reportedly committed by Spain against the innocent citizens of Cuba. Senator George F. Hoar of Massachusetts summarized this attitude when we declared: “The American people, so far as I know, were all agreed that their victory brought with it the responsibility of


protecting the liberated peoples from the cupidity of any other power until they could establish their own independence.”

Many politicians, such as Theodore Roosevelt, also celebrated how the Spanish American War had unified the country, bringing North and South together and healing the wounds caused by the Civil War. Reflecting on the war, TR wrote: “Our generals included not only men who fought on the Union side in the Civil War, but men who had with equal gallantry and equal devotion to what they deemed their duty, borne arms for the South.” According to TR, the country “took equal pride” in the soldiers from both the North and the South. Victory in the Spanish American War not only helped heal national divisions, but also cemented the country’s perceived obligations to protect other nations who aspired to emulate the democratic character of the United States.

The unfolding difficulties in the Philippines, however, posed a significant challenge to these aspirations. Fighting in the Philippines was fierce, and Filipino “insurgents” were striving to win their own independence from what they viewed as a colonial oppressor—just as America had won its independence from Britain. And if Samoa and Hawaii seemed distant and different than the United States, the American public knew almost nothing about the Philippines. Eight thousand miles from San Francisco, the Philippines consisted of more than 1,000 inhabited islands (out of nearly 7,000 islands total) with a population of 7,000,000 people, according to the first U.S.

The conflict cost the United States at least 4,200 soldiers, and more than 20,000 Filipinos died. Many more on both sides died of disease. It seemed a high price to pay for “helping” a backwards country.

Political opposition to the war in the Philippines was also intense and included such well-known figures as Andrew Carnegie, Mark Twain, and William Jennings Bryan. Pro-expansionists like Senator Albert Beveridge claimed that expansion into the Philippines was America’s destiny and that it was God’s will that the Philippines be annexed. In a speech in January of 1900 he declared: “We will not renounce our part in the mission of our race: trustee, under God, of the civilization of the world.”

William Jennings Bryan countered this type of appeal by arguing that God “never made a race of people so low in the scale of civilization or intelligence that it would welcome a foreign master.” Even some Republicans agreed and broke with their own party over the issue. In May of 1902, for example, Senator George Hoar spoke out against imperialism, declaring: “We crushed the only republic in Asia. We made war on the only Christian people in the East. We converted a war of glory to a war of shame. We vulgarized the American flag. . . . We baffled the aspirations of a people for liberty.”

Yet with the popular press (including political cartoonists) depicting Filipinos as backwards, childlike, and in need of U.S. help, America felt it had intervened in the

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Philippines on “progressive” and “humanitarian” grounds. Theodore Roosevelt deemed the Filipinos simply incapable of self-government and concluded: “It would probably be impossible to find any fairly competent white observer in the islands who regard the natives as able to maintain order here or to protect the persons and property of foreigners.”

Thus, it was up to the U.S. to restore order and “civilization” by annexing that troubled nation. Debate over the annexation of the Philippines was a great deal noisier than the debate over Hawaii or Samoa, and the natives were much more determined to violently resist U.S. control. In the end, however, a combination of “progressive” arguments and military might prevailed, and the Philippines were annexed by the U.S. in 1902.

While the rhetoric surrounding the Spanish American War and the annexation of the Philippines echoed many of the themes heard earlier in the Pacific, the context for the debate already had changed. The United States was no longer debating its role in the world and its tradition of “non-entangling alliances.” Americas still questioned whether they should interfere in the internal affairs of particular nations or expand into particular areas, but they no longer automatically rejected the very notion of playing a leading role on the world stage. In the 1890s, the United States had not yet decided whether it was appropriate to expand beyond the continental border, but by 1900 the U.S. already had annexed Samoa, Hawaii, Guam, and Puerto Rico. Thus, it comes as little surprise that the Philippines followed suit just two years later. The isolationist tradition was dead; the United States had become a global power.

Given the impact of the U.S. victory in the Spanish American War and the intensity of the debate surrounding the annexation of the Philippines, it is unsurprising that America’s earlier actions in the Pacific have been overshadowed. In retrospect, it might be surprising that Samoa represented the nation’s first venture into Empire and sent the country down the path of expansion beyond its borders. Yet perhaps no other country better embodied Alfred Thayer Mahan’s theory of the importance of sea power than this small island chain. Robert Louis Stevenson also gave expression to the idea that Samoa’s condition demanded action by the Western powers, and the United States was primed by thinkers like Mahan and Turner to take a more significant step toward expansion. Taking that first step toward Empire seemed relatively uncontroversial at the time. The Republican Platform of 1900 commended President McKinley for “releasing us from the vexatious conditions of a European alliance for the government of Samoa,” and for “securing to our undivided control the most important island of the Samoan group and the best harbor in the Southern Pacific.”

America clearly had benefited from leading that one Polynesian country into modernity, so it seemed only logical to likewise help Hawaii, which was, after all, closer and had even stronger ties to the United States.

Yet in hindsight Hawaii’s story seems ironic within the context of a “progressive imperialist” philosophy. In several respects, Hawaii already had achieved “civilized” status. The islands were once backward and savage, but Western influence had helped them progress and develop a government system comparable to that of the United States. Through American influence, they had adopted Christianity, developed high standards in

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education, and even used English widely. Today, of course, Hawaii has so fully fulfilled progressive ideals that it is one of our fifty states! Yet Queen Liliuokalani’s rhetoric complicates how we understand Hawaiian development. She too valued progress, religious morals, and “civilized” behavior. That her protests fell on deaf ears would seem to confirm that the ideals of Christian duty and progress remained the dominion of white men with power. One could not divorce the rhetorical power of those ideals from the political contexts and the very bodies that invoked them.

Historically, the ideals of “progressive imperialism” have been wielded by men who responded to the fears of the “Fin de Siecle” (end of the century),21 with the promise of new possibilities—new ocean highways, expanded borders, and access to bountiful lands. When figures like Queen Liliuokalani or, later, Senator Hoar, invoked the themes of moral duty and the advancement of liberty to attempt to halt American expansion, their ideas seemed reactionary, even backward. After all, the rhetoric of “progress” was a rhetoric of forward movement, and by the late 1890s those who argued against expansion seemed out of touch with what appeared to be the inevitable expansion of American influence and ideals.

While the language of “progressive imperialism” has continued to evolve over the twentieth century, America’s “Christian duty” is still implicit in rhetoric about America’s “moral obligations” to promote democracy, and the nineteenth century’s concern with “progress” is likewise manifested in modern rhetorics of economic and political “development.” President John F. Kennedy, in his Inaugural Address in 1961, echoed many of these sentiments. He argued, “To those people in the huts and villages of half

the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help
them help themselves, for whatever period is required—not because the communists may
be doing it, not because we seek their votes, but because it is right.” Kennedy’s pledge
reflected the same “progressive” commitment to “helping” those backward nations
struggling to be free. Promising to “convert our good words into good deeds,” Kennedy
everisioned a “new alliance for progress—to assist free men and free governments in
casting off the chains of poverty.”

George W. Bush is a more recent example of a president who invoked these sorts
of themes. After the attacks on September 11, 2001, the world looked to see how the
president of the United States would respond, and his address to Congress on September
20th drew heavily on Christian morals and the sensibilities of the “civilized” world. He
argued “Fellow citizens, we’ll meet violence with patient justice—assured of the rightness
of our cause, and confident of the victories to come. In all that lies before us, may God
grant us wisdom, and may He watch over the United States of America.”

Christian

values were no less evident in Bush’s rhetoric than they were one hundred years ago,
when they justified “progressive imperialism.” Bush also invoked the value of
“progress” in terms similar to those used by the early advocates of “progressive
imperialism” and by John F. Kennedy. In his 2002 State of the Union Address, Bush
stated “America needs citizens to extend the compassion of our country to every part of
the world. So we will renew the promise of the Peace Corps, double its volunteers over

22 John Fitzgerald Kennedy, “Inaugural Address,” Voices of Democracy,
23 George W. Bush, “An Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People (20 September
2001), Voices of Democracy, http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/bush-an-address-to-a-joint-session-of-
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the next five years and ask it to join a new effort to encourage development and education and opportunity in the Islamic world.” Bush continued: “History has called America and our allies to action, and it is both our responsibility and our privilege to fight freedom’s fight.” Importantly, President Bush’s speech was responding to a terrible attack on the country rather than suggesting that America take preemptive actions to defend freedom wherever it might be threatened. Still, the rhetoric was in some ways similar to Kennedy’s pledge to “pay any price” and “bear any burden” in the defense of freedom around the globe.24

Because the contexts have changed drastically since figures like Senator Morgan, Senator Beveridge, and Theodore Roosevelt invoked these themes, American orators are more careful now to voice respect for the sovereignty of other nations. In the same speech that he pledged to defend freedom, Bush declared: “America will lead by defending liberty and justice because they are right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere.” He then added: “No nation owns these aspirations, and no nation is exempt from them. We have no intention of imposing our culture. But America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law; limits on the power of the state; respect for women; private property; free speech; equal justice; and religious tolerance.”25 While these values may have struck some listeners as distinctively American (for example, private property and religious tolerance), Bush seemed aware that the effort to defend these values abroad might be perceived as imperialistic. Yet his commitment reflected the same propensity to impose the values of

24 Kennedy, “Inaugural Address.”
the United States on other nations that characterized the rhetoric of “progressive imperialism” one hundred years before.

President Obama’s address on Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2009 provides one last example of how the basic tenets of progressive imperialism remain embedded in the rhetoric of U.S. foreign policy. Obama warned in his speech that “Afghanistan is not lost, but for several years it has moved backwards.” No modern president would characterize another country as “backwards” as they did in the Age of Imperialism, but Obama did use the threat of Afghanistan becoming less “civilized” as a rationale for American intervention. At the same time, he was careful to assure the people of that nation that the United States had no colonial or expansionist designs on their country. He stated: “I want the Afghan people to understand – America seeks an end to this era of war and suffering. We have no interest in occupying your country. We will support efforts by the Afghan government to open the door to those Taliban who abandon violence and respect the human rights of their fellow citizens.” Of course, one might question how much Obama really respected native sovereignty when he authorized the CIA’s efforts in both Afghanistan and Pakistan to track down and kill Osama Bin Laden. Still, Obama’s rhetoric reflected just how far the United States had come from its earlier understanding of its role in the world arena. Obama himself noted these changes, stating that the “struggle against violent extremism will not be finished quickly, and it extends well beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan. It will be an enduring test of our free society, and our leadership in the world. And unlike the great power conflicts and clear lines of division that defined the 20th century, our effort will involve disorderly regions, failed states,
diffuse enemies.” Just as the world had changed, Obama seemed to be saying, so too must America’s attitude toward other nations.

In sum, the United States is clearly more sensitive to how rhetoric that defines the country as a global police force might offend other nations. Progress and moral duty are still important motivations for American foreign policy, but the United States is now more responsive to how that rhetoric sounds to the rest of the world. Of course, the legacy of the rhetoric of expansion includes not just the values appealed to by the progressive expansionists, but also the land itself that came under U.S. domination at that time. If today’s political leaders are more conscious of the ways they implicate peoples and undermine sovereignty with paternalistic rhetorics, they have yet to repudiate the material results of that rhetoric. Today, the United States retains sovereign authority over most of those early acquisitions in the Pacific.

Progressive Imperialism’s Legacy in the Pacific

In several respects, life in Samoa has changed little over the last one hundred years. Controlled by the Navy until 1951, Samoa is now overseen by the U.S. Department of the Interior. American Samoans are American nationals, though not citizens, and since the 1960s they have had their own constitution. Much of the everyday life in Samoa remains consistent with Polynesian traditions. Most of the land is owned by families who communally farm it and extended families frequently live together. These extended family units are still organized under chiefs who help determine the politics which regulate their communities. Most of the population speaks Samoan in the

home but also knows English. Samoans have modernized—they have access to schools, technology, and even television. It is a highly Christian nation; the American Samoan motto is “Samoa, Muamua Le Atua” (Samoa, Let God be First). The base at Pago Pago is still controlled by the U.S. Navy, and it houses 20,000 service personnel (American Samoa’s population is approximately 60,000).  

American Samoa’s isolation and rocky terrain have meant tourism is less developed than in other parts of Polynesia, and farming and fishing remain the island’s major industries.

While American Samoa is officially a U.S. territory, its relationship to the United States is special. Perhaps because American Samoa was only loosely managed by the navy for most of the twentieth century, Samoans have been largely left to determine their own political lives. Since adopting their own constitution, American Samoans have come to feel that, despite their official connection to the United States, they maintain their independence. In fact, when the United Nations attempted to include them in a list of non-self-governing territories, American Samoans were surprised and insulted. A 2001 UN Report on Decolonization quoted Eni Faleomavaega, the United States Congressman from American Samoa, as saying that although “the United Nations had helped to eradicate colonialism throughout the world,” it was “disturbing that the United Nations had assumed that American Samoa was a colony.” He felt that “the people of American Samoa had never had their rights suppressed,” and that the “mischaracterization of American Samoa as a colony had been perceived as an insult and an outrage by the people of that territory.”

American Samoa’s relationship to the U.S. is truly unique—

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the United States maintains its valuable base and the islands never fell under European control, but the people still feel largely independent and in touch with their native traditions.

Hawaii’s story is very different. Since Americans first ended the indigenous monarchy in 1893, native Hawaiians have protested American control. The nature and scope of the protests have varied over time, but they began with Queen Liliuokalani’s rejection of American authority and have continued ever since. Liliuokalani’s memoir also included evidence of how previous Hawaiian royalty fought to protect their own authority and how common citizens viewed native Hawaiian rule as preferable to American domination. In the 1990s, Noenoe Silva added to the Queen’s extensive historical record of protest by rediscovering an anti-annexation petition in the U.S. congressional archives from 1897 signed by nearly 100% of native Hawaiians. Many U.S. politicians at the time argued that native Hawaiians were pro-annexation, but this document irrefutably proves otherwise.

The Hawaiian Islands, of course, are not primarily known for their indigenous protests, or for the rhetoric of their deposed rulers. Rather, they are known for their beauty and their appeal as a tourist destination. Part of this appeal rests on exoticizing native Hawaiians and their culture. Native Hawaiians historically have been portrayed as pleasant, happy-go-lucky people, fond of dancing and singing, even in government documents like the Morgan report of 1894. While culturally there is some truth in these descriptions, these notions remain popular today mostly because of how images of the “hula girl” and similar exotic attractions advertised Hawaii to the mainland. Mainlanders
often view the native Hawaiian as “gentle, patient and circumspect,” notes Richard Halloran, and these behavioral stereotypes deflect discussions of their historical opposition to colonization. Georgia Ka’apuni McMillen explains, “We’re not supposed to be angry about the illegal overthrow in 1893 or the annexation, which violated all canons of international law and the US Constitution. We’re not supposed to demand amends or restitution or any form of recovery. That would be un-Hawaiian.”

In addition to political disenfranchisement, natives in Hawaii have suffered from other aspects of American control over their homeland. The Provisional Government of the 1890s made flying the Hawaiian flag illegal, and Hawaiian language schools were outlawed for much of the twentieth century. Health problems, poverty, and homelessness still affect many native Hawaiians. Haunani-Kay Trask documents that even in the twenty-first century many native Hawaiians still suffer from high infant mortality rates and abject poverty: “Below one year of age, the Hawaiian death rate is more than double the overall state average. Between one and four years of age, it is triple the state figure, and so on through early adulthood . . . . More Hawaiians live below the poverty level than any other ethnic group in Hawai’i.”

Like many other indigenous groups, native Hawaiians have suffered politically, economically, and even physically under U.S. control.

The United States government has taken some action in response to protests by Liliuokalani and later advocates for the Hawaiian people, but it has been limited. Native

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Hawaiians do not have the same “tribal” status as Native Americans or Alaskan Natives, but they do fall under some of the same legal policies. Land allocation has been a particularly contentious issue. In 1920, the United States Government put aside 200,000 acres for native Hawaiians (over 1.3 million acres of land had been under Liliuokalani’s care). Hawaiians who could document that they were of at least 50 percent native Hawaiian blood qualified to apply for grants of that land. In ninety years, fewer than 10,000 families have been awarded new homes as a result of this policy, while another 25,000 eligible natives are still on a waiting list.

In the last several decades the question of native Hawaiian rights has again drawn attention, primarily because of proposed legislation known as the Akaka Bill. Proposed by Senator Daniel Akaka of Hawaii, this legislation, formally entitled the Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act, would extend the “federal policy of self-governance and self-determination to Native Hawaiians, providing parity in federal policies toward American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians.” Its specific effects are unclear, but it would create a “roll call” of people defined as “Native Hawaiian,” and it might allow native Hawaiians to create a system like the mainland Indian reservations, giving more natives access to land. Proponents of the bill view its legacy as directly linked to Hawaii’s last monarch, and Akaka sees it as meeting the moral obligation “unfulfilled since the overthrow of Queen Liliuokalani.”

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2011, the bill was referred to the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs but it has yet to be passed by the Senate.

Despite the potential benefits of the Akaka Bill, many native Hawaiian activists oppose it. Native Hawaiians feel that they have been neglected by the State of Hawaii, but they fear that trusting their fate to the protection of the American Indian Bureau (a notoriously inefficient agency) might only further dilute their political power. J. Kēhaulani Kauanui notes other concerns: “While the US federal policy on Native Americans states that the federal government must consult with tribal governments . . . the US Congress has a long history of abusing its plenary power to subordinate tribal governments.” Others suggest that by embracing the Akaka Bill, they forfeit potentially better solutions to their problems. Hawaii was illegally overthrown, illegally annexed, and illegally made a state, according to native Hawaiian activists, and many native Hawaiians believe that working through the United Nations might lead to better solutions to redress their sovereignty claims.

Hawaii’s past has attracted more notice in just the last year as a new film about the last heir to the throne, Princess Kaiulani, along with a New York Times best-selling book, Sarah Vowell’s Unfamiliar Fishes, have renewed interest in Hawaiian history. Jeffrey Tobin also notes that, “Calls for sovereignty have grown so strong in recent years that the debate within the Hawaiian community has moved from whether self-

37 Hawaii was illegally annexed because the resolution to accomplish such was passed by a simple majority. The U.S. Constitution requires annexation treaties pass by a two-thirds vote. The U.N. dictates how non-independent governing territories become states, and this requires popular vote. The voting process in Hawaii for statehood did not meet U.N. standards.
determination should be sought to disputes over strategies for achieving it.”

Recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have also inspired some people to pause and rethink the country’s seemingly endless interventions in foreign nations. Sarah Vowel even asserts that there is “an identifiable link” between recent U.S. interventions in the Middle East and the U.S. policy toward Hawaii in the 1890s: the “American tendency to indulge in what trendy government lingo at the time was calling ‘regime change.’”

The comparison may be a stretch, but among at least some observers, there is a connection. Samoa and Hawaii may not be Iraq, and our interventions one hundred years ago differ from those we engage in today. Nevertheless, today’s foreign policy challenges should inspire us to carefully examine rhetoric that justifies interventionism with talk of our “duty to the civilized world” or the demands of “progress.” There are valuable lessons to be learned from the Age of Imperialism, and the critical evaluation of “progressive” rationales for U.S. interventionism will hopefully lead to more sound political action and more honest rhetorical appeals in the future.

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VITA

UNA KIMOKEO-GOES

EDUCATION

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**Dissertation:** Building an Empire, Defining a Nation: The Rhetoric of U.S. Expansion at the Turn of the Twentieth Century. J. Michael Hogan (Chair), Thomas Benson, Stephen Browne, Cheryl Glenn.

**MA, Communication Arts and Sciences.** Fall 2007. Penn State University.
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**BA, Humanities. Minor, Politics.** May 2003. Willamette University, Salem, OR. Cum Laude.

EMPLOYMENT

Instructor and Assistant Director of Debate. Willamette University. Fall 2010-Spring 2012
Graduate Assistant. Communication Arts and Sciences. Penn State University. Fall 2005-Spring 2010.

PUBLICATIONS


AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

Center for Democratic Deliberation Fellow. Fall 2009-Spring 2010. Penn State University.
Kathryn DeBoer Distinguished Teaching Award. Spring 2010. Penn State University.
Sparks Fellow. Fall 2005. Penn State University.