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to convert and convince the monarchs and the other aristocrats first. And by sucking up to the ruling class, one major impact the missionaries had on society at large was convincing the Hawaiian government to outlaw fornication and adultery and to regulate liquor. Just as the first New England missionaries arrived, the first New England whalers started to show up as well. These whalers had pretty much opposite goals than the missionaries, and so the Hawaiians got to witness Americans at our worst, at both our most puritanical and our most Orlando spring break.

Then, when the missionaries and their offspring started the sugar plantations, that completely revolutionized the Hawaiian landscape. They built these complicated, engineered irrigation ditches and diverted water so that places that had been dusty dry plains and near deserts became green with sugar cane. In traditional Hawaiian society, land had been held communally and was managed by the chief in concert with the commoners, but with the sugar trade, it became the American capitalist system of plantations overseen and owned mostly by white people and worked mostly by foreign workers. The native Hawaiians were increasingly shut out of their land and the Hawaiian population was decimated by as much as 80, maybe 90 percent, just by disease, so its hard to overemphasize how much impact the haoles had on Hawaiian life, government, culture, everything.

R.A.: You write about David Malo as a figure who embodies the transitional period of Hawaiian history between traditional culture and Westernization. How does his life and work capture this?

S.V.: Well, he's a really interesting figure, and probably because he's a writer, I really identify with him. When the first missionaries showed up, he was pretty old. He was nearing 30 when they taught him to read and write, and he happened to be, luckily, one of the Hawaiians who had been the keepers of the oral tradition. So he knew all the old chants and genealogies and was intimately aware and knowledgeable of all the old customs and the stories of the old chiefs and priests and the old religion. So after the missionaries taught him to read and write, he wrote "Hawaiian Antiquities." He also became a very devout Christian and was eventually ordained as a minister.

But later in life, he still had nostalgia for the old ways even though he (was) a true servant of Jesus Christ. He wrote this rather melancholy letter to some Hawaiian friends that I quote in the title to my book: "If a big wave comes in, large and unfamiliar fishes will come from the dark ocean and when they see the small fishes of the shallows they will eat them up." And it turned out to be the truth. When he died, he asked to be buried up this hill that was really hard to get to because he just wanted

to be where no white man would build a house. But his book is really quite beautiful.

R.A.: The events leading up to the U.S. annexation of Hawaii were driven by the opposing ideals of Lorrin Thurston and Queen Liliuokalani. Can you explain the political and cultural conflicts between these two figures?

S.V.: Lorrin Thurston's major problem with Queen Liliuokalani was just that she was a queen. Even though he was born in Hawaii and because he was a descendant of the missionaries, the whole idea of monarchy was just something to disdain. And that is something I can kind of identify with. To me, there's no inherent value in monarchy. That said, the Hawaiian kingdom was an established constitutional monarchy and as monarchies go, it was wildly inclusive. I mean, the Hawaiian monarchs welcomed all these foreigners into their kingdom and into their government, including Thurston.

Although to me there's nothing inherently great about a queen, she was, I think, for that time and place, pretty much the ideal ruler. She was an impressive person who was schooled by the missionaries, so she was a very devout Christian who at the same time was a very proud and knowledgeable native Hawaiian. So by the time the queen became the queen she was plotting to reverse that constitution which had also severely limited native Hawaiians' right to vote for their representatives. That's when Thurston and his pals conspired to oust her to support their own sham of a constitution. Even though she had overwhelming native support, the native population was in such decline that there just weren't enough of them to put up much of a fight.

R.A.: You write about a double-sided view of American history that you have come to know through your own experience. How does Hawaii represent this notion of America as two places at once?

S.V.: I'm part Cherokee and was born in Oklahoma because some of my ancestors were forced by the U.S. Army at gunpoint to march across the country in what came to be called the Trail of Tears. So, that's always been a little bit of a caveat to the story of American exceptionalism that I was certainly taught in school. You know, I'm all for self-government and the First Amendment and all that stuff – but there's always a part of me that knows firsthand about the failures of those ideals.

The annexation of Hawaii, as many of the dissenters at the time pointed out, really does contradict the ideals put forth in the Declaration of Independence. In 1898, when the U.S. annexed Hawaii along with Guam and Puerto Rico and invaded the Philippines and Cuba, we became a global empire overnight. A group of Americans, a lot of them in the highest echelons of the

government, were more concerned with power and greatness than our core ideals of republican forms of government. One of those men was Henry Cabot Lodge and he gave (this speech) in 1900 to poo-poo all of the anti-imperialist sissies where he just demolished the idea that consent of the governed is even possible. He talked about Thomas Jefferson, the author of that phrase, being the greatest expansionist in American history who, when he negotiated



Queen Liliuokalani. "Even though she had overwhelming native support, the native population was in such decline that there just weren't enough of them to put up much of a fight."

PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKI COMMONS

the Louisiana Purchase, acquired the biggest chunk of land at once that we had ever acquired, and it didn't even occur to him to ask the consent of all the French colonials and Indians who were living out on that vast continent he had just taken over. So, I think Lodge sort of has a point.

It is interesting to me that throughout American history, this idea of government based on the consent of the governed is at our core, but also this contradictory process of expansion. The Hawaiian annexation definitely is a part of that because the Hawaiian people, once annexation was afoot, they rallied and collected thousands and thousands of signatures and sent them to Congress, protesting annexation. It was definitely something that the Hawaiian people were completely against and yet the United States annexed those islands anyway. So, I guess in that sense it jibes with my view of the country as having these lofty ideals that we frequently betray.

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