

# Imperialism and America

## MAIN IDEA

Beginning in 1867 and continuing through the century, global competition caused the United States to expand.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

During this time period, the United States acquired Hawaii and Alaska, both of which became states in 1959.

## Terms & Names

- Queen Liliuokalani
- Pearl Harbor
- imperialism
- Alfred T. Mahan
- William Seward
- Sanford B. Dole

## One American's Story

In 1893 **Queen Liliuokalani** (lə-lē'ə-ō-kə-lä'nē) realized that her reign in Hawaii had come to an end. More than 160 U.S. sailors and marines stood ready to aid the *haoles* (white foreigners) who planned to overthrow the Hawaiian monarchy. In an eloquent statement of protest, the proud monarch surrendered to the superior force of the United States.

### A PERSONAL VOICE QUEEN LILIUOKALANI

"I, Liliuokalani, . . . do hereby solemnly protest against any and all acts done against myself and the constitutional government of the Hawaiian Kingdom. . . . Now, to avoid any collision of armed forces and perhaps the loss of life, I do under this protest . . . yield my authority until such time as the Government of the United States shall . . . undo the action of its representatives and reinstate me in the authority which I claim as the constitutional sovereign of the Hawaiian Islands."

—quoted in *Those Kings and Queens of Old Hawaii*

U.S. ambassador to Hawaii John L. Stevens informed the State Department, "The Hawaiian pear is now fully ripe, and this is the golden hour for the United States to pluck it." The annexation of Hawaii was only one of the goals of America's empire builders in the late 19th century.



▲ Hawaii's "Queen Lili" announced that if restored to power, she would behead those who had conspired to depose her.

## American Expansionism

Americans had always sought to expand the size of their nation, and throughout the 19th century they extended their control toward the Pacific Ocean. However, by the 1880s, many American leaders had become convinced that the United States should join the imperialist powers of Europe and establish colonies overseas. **Imperialism**—the policy in which stronger nations extend their economic, political, or military control over weaker territories—was already a trend around the world.



### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Effects

**A** How did European imperialism affect Africa?

**GLOBAL COMPETITION** European nations had been establishing colonies for centuries. In the late 19th century Africa had emerged as a prime target of European expansionism. By the early 20th century, only two countries in all of Africa—Ethiopia and Liberia—remained independent. **A**

Imperialists also competed for territory in Asia, especially in China. In its late-19th-century reform era, Japan replaced its old feudal order with a strong central government. Hoping that military strength would bolster industrialization, Japan joined European nations in competition for China in the 1890s.

Most Americans gradually warmed to the idea of expansion overseas. With a belief in manifest destiny, they already had pushed the U.S. border to the Pacific Ocean. Three factors fueled the new American imperialism:

- desire for military strength
- thirst for new markets
- belief in cultural superiority

**DESIRE FOR MILITARY STRENGTH** Seeing that other nations were establishing a global military presence, American leaders advised that the United States build up its own military strength. One such leader was Admiral **Alfred T. Mahan** of the U.S. Navy. Mahan urged government officials to build up American naval power in order to compete with other powerful nations. As a result of the urging of Mahan and others, the United States built nine steel-hulled cruisers between 1883 and 1890. The construction of modern battleships such as the *Maine* and the *Oregon* transformed the country into the world's third largest naval power.

**THIRST FOR NEW MARKETS** In the late 19th century, advances in technology enabled American farms and factories to produce far more than American citizens could consume. Now the United States needed raw materials for its factories and new markets for its agricultural and manufactured goods. Imperialists viewed foreign trade as the solution to American overproduction and the related problems of unemployment and economic depression.

#### Background

In the late 1800s, new farm machinery greatly improved grain production. For example, plows, harrows, threshing machines, and reapers increased corn production by 264 percent and the wheat harvest by 252 percent.

**In the early 1900s, the Navy's Great White Fleet, so named because its ships were painted white, was a sign of America's growing military power. ►**



### KEY PLAYER



#### ADMIRAL ALFRED T. MAHAN 1840–1914

Alfred T. Mahan joined the U.S. Navy in the late 1850s and served for nearly forty years. In 1886, he became president of the newly established Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island.

Throughout his lifetime, Mahan was one of the most outspoken advocates of American military expansion. In his book *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783* (published in 1890), Mahan called for the United States to develop a modern fleet capable of protecting American business and shipping interests around the world. He also urged the United States to establish naval bases in the Caribbean, to construct a canal across the Isthmus of Panama, and to acquire Hawaii and other Pacific islands.



**BELIEF IN CULTURAL SUPERIORITY** Cultural factors also were used to justify imperialism. Some Americans combined the philosophy of Social Darwinism—a belief that free-market competition would lead to the survival of the fittest—with a belief in the racial superiority of Anglo-Saxons. They argued that the United States had a responsibility to spread Christianity and “civilization” to the world’s “inferior peoples.” This viewpoint narrowly defined “civilization” according to the standards of only one culture.

## The United States Acquires Alaska

An early supporter of American expansion was **William Seward**, Secretary of State under presidents Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson. In 1867, Seward arranged for the U.S. to buy Alaska from the Russians for \$7.2 million. Seward had some trouble persuading the House of Representatives to approve the treaty. Some people thought it was silly to buy what they called “Seward’s Icebox” or “Seward’s folly.” Time showed how wrong they were. In 1959, Alaska became a state. For about two cents an acre, the United States had acquired a land rich in timber, minerals, and, as it turned out, oil. **B**

### MAIN IDEA

#### Developing Historical Perspective

**B** How did time prove that the purchase of Alaska was not an act of folly?

## The United States Takes Hawaii

In 1867, the same year in which Alaska was purchased, the United States took over the Midway Islands, which lie in the Pacific Ocean about 1300 miles north of Hawaii. No one lived on the islands, so the event did not attract much attention.

Hawaii was another question. The Hawaiian Islands had been economically important to the United States for nearly a century. Since the 1790s, American merchants had stopped there on their way to China and East India. In the 1820s, Yankee missionaries founded Christian schools and churches on the islands. Their children and grandchildren became sugar planters who sold most of their crop to the United States.

**THE CRY FOR ANNEXATION** In the mid-19th century, American-owned sugar plantations accounted for about three-quarters of the islands’ wealth. Plantation owners imported thousands of laborers from Japan, Portugal, and China. By 1900, foreigners and immigrant laborers outnumbered native Hawaiians about three to one.

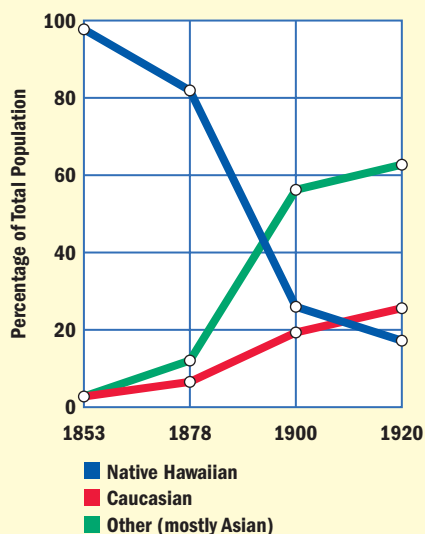
White planters profited from close ties with the United States. In 1875, the United States agreed to import Hawaiian sugar duty-free. Over the next 15 years, Hawaiian sugar production increased nine times. Then the McKinley Tariff of 1890 provoked a crisis by eliminating the duty-free status of Hawaiian sugar. As a result, Hawaiian sugar growers faced competition in the American market. American planters in Hawaii called for the United States to annex the islands so they wouldn’t have to pay the duty.

U.S. military and economic leaders already understood the value of the islands. In 1887, they pressured Hawaii to allow the United States to build a naval base at **Pearl Harbor**, the kingdom’s best port. The base became a refueling station for American ships.

### Vocabulary

**annex:** to incorporate territory into an existing country or state

**Hawaii’s Changing Population 1853–1920**



Source: Robert C. Schmitt, *Demographic Statistics of Hawaii, 1778–1965*

### SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Graphs

1. What were the most dramatic changes in Hawaiian population between 1853 and 1920?
2. How might these changes have affected the political climate there?



**THE END OF A MONARCHY** Also in that year, Hawaii’s King Kalakaua had been strong-armed by white business leaders. They forced him to amend Hawaii’s constitution to grant voting rights only to wealthy landowners. But when Kalakaua died in 1891, his sister Queen Liliuokalani came to power with a “Hawaii for Hawaiians” agenda. She proposed removing the property-owning qualifications for voting. To prevent this from happening, business groups—encouraged by Ambassador John L. Stevens—organized a revolution. With the help of marines, they overthrew the queen and set up a government headed by **Sanford B. Dole**.

President Cleveland directed that the queen be restored to her throne. When Dole refused to surrender power, Cleveland formally recognized the Republic of Hawaii. But he refused to consider annexation unless a majority of Hawaiians favored it.

In 1897, William McKinley, who favored annexation, succeeded Cleveland as president. On August 12, 1898, Congress proclaimed Hawaii an American territory, although Hawaiians had never had the chance to vote. In 1959, Hawaii became the 50th state of the United States. **C**

**MAIN IDEA**

**Analyzing Events**

**C** What factors led to the annexation of Hawaii in 1898?

**Alaska, 1867, and Hawaii, 1898**

United States and its possessions

0 800 1,600 miles  
0 800 1,600 kilometers

**GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER**

- 1. Location** Where do the Hawaiian Islands lie in relation to the United States?
- 2. Human-Environment Interaction** Given their geographic location, why were Hawaii and Alaska of value to the United States?

**SECTION 1**

**ASSESSMENT**

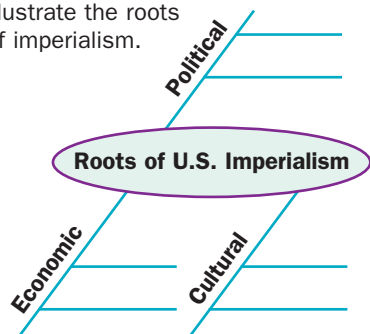
**1. TERMS & NAMES** For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Queen Liliuokalani
- Alfred T. Mahan
- Pearl Harbor
- imperialism
- William Seward
- Sanford B. Dole

**MAIN IDEA**

**2. TAKING NOTES**

Copy this web on your paper and fill it in with events and concepts that illustrate the roots of imperialism.



Choose one event to explain further in a paragraph.

**CRITICAL THINKING**

**3. DRAWING CONCLUSIONS**

Manifest destiny greatly influenced American policy during the first half of the 19th century. How do you think manifest destiny set the stage for American imperialism at the end of the century?

**4. EVALUATING**

In your opinion, did Sanford B. Dole and other American planters have the right to stage a revolt in Hawaii in 1893? **Think About:**

- American business interests in Hawaii
- the rights of native Hawaiians

**5. ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES**

In the following passage, how does Indiana Senator Albert J. Beveridge explain the need for the U.S. to acquire new territories?

**“Fate has written our policy for us; the trade of the world must and shall be ours. . . . We will establish trading posts throughout the world as distributing points for American products. . . Great colonies governing themselves, flying our flag and trading with us, will grow about our posts of trade.”**

—quoted in *Beveridge and the Progressive Era*