

Hawaiian Sovereignty: Do the Facts Matter?

Thurston Twigg-Smith

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Reviewed by Tadashi Hama

One notes from the current rioting in America not only how rapidly American racial minorities escalate to raw violence in response to alleged injustice but how tightly enveloped they are in victimhood culture. "Victimhood culture" is belief in externalities beyond one's control is responsible for one's failings. In the US, the White majority ruling class "oppresses" non-Whites via "institutional racism". Thus, tearing down White institutions and overthrowing the White ruling class will lead to a brighter future for non-Whites. Black Americans have denounced White American social, cultural, and political institutions and aim to shape America to their liking. There are other non-Whites who will go beyond rejecting White culture. Chicanos claim the southwestern US as a homeland, Aztlán. Some Native Americans have called for separation from the U.S.

Native Hawaiians, specifically, the race that existed in the islands prior to the arrival of European explorers, have also called for secession from the US and restoration of the Kingdom of Hawaii, which ceased to exist with the abdication of the last sovereign, Queen Liliuokalani, on January 17, 1893. As with other racial minorities, Hawaiian sovereigntists aim to replace White American institutions with "traditional Hawaiian culture". (One should note that many of the modern day Hawaiian sovereigntists have White American ancestry.) The mass media constantly reminds us of how White Americans "stole" Hawaii, "oppressed" Hawaiians, and eventually annexed Hawaii. The media further tells us that the current generation, regardless of ancestral connection to old Hawaii, must pay reparations to current native Hawaiians, who make up a tiny fraction of the population of Hawaii.

However, Thurston Twigg-Smith's book tells a different tale. Former publisher of the *Honolulu Advertiser*, Twigg-Smith was the great-great-grandson of one of the first missionaries to arrive in Hawaii and grandson of a former cabinet member chosen to serve by Hawaiian monarchy, who later took part in the Hawaii "revolution" of 1893 which led to the end of the Hawaiian monarchy. Few visitors, as well as locals, know any of the true history of Hawaii and Twigg-Smith gives reads an unflinching look at the real past.

Perhaps it is a truism that people are the same everywhere, and after reading Twigg-Smith's book, one can say that vices and virtues found in Westerners can be found even in the people of Hawaii, isolated as they are in the Pacific. Twigg-Smith demonstrates that the last Hawaiian monarchs were exceedingly corrupt. King David Kalakaua, elected by the Hawaii Legislature in 1874 to head the Kingdom, surrounded himself with "unscrupulous

advisors who played to his ego and desires for power, pomp and ceremony..." and was particularly profligate. As King, "much looseness crept into the administration of public affairs. Funds were transferred from one legislative appropriation to another ... appropriations were made for fantastic enterprises and for the personal aggrandizement of the royal family..." The book notes that the cost to maintain Kalakaua and his family rose three-fold, at the height of his reign in 1886, compared to the cost of maintaining his predecessor and his family. Kalakaua's coronation, held nine years *after* he took the throne, was \$50,000 (value at the time)¹. His coronation was "boycotted by Queen Emma, Princess Ruth, [Princess Bernice] Pauahi Bishop and by a large part of the foreign community, as an expensive and useless pageant."

Kalakaua was reported to have "supplied cheap gin to flood the districts" during the 1884 and 1886 legislative elections in support of his candidates. Kalakaua had supplied potential voters with gin that was duty-free—at the time "no duty was levied on goods imported for use by the King of the royal family..."

One of the acts that finally triggered a rebellion against Kalakaua in 1887 by the people of Hawaii was his approval of the importation and sale of opium, which had been previously prohibited. Kalakaua initially accepted a "gift" (bribe) from the highest bidder for such a license from Chinese planter Tong Kee, but eventually granted the license to a Chinese businessman who paid even more. (The financially strapped Kalakaua eventually returned the money to the Tong Kee family.)

Queen Emma, "who was Kalakaua's opponent in the legislative election of a monarch after Lunalilo's [the previous king] death and whose lines of descent were called impeccable, saw Kalakaua as an "arrogant pretender, using paid genealogists to give substance to his flawed pedigree."" U.S. Minister to Hawaii Henry Pierce "called Kalakaua "ambitious, flighty and unstable. Very energetic; but lacks prudence and good sense.""

Kalakaua visited Japan in 1881, ostensibly, as others have claimed, "to put Hawaii under the protection of the Empire of Japan"² and during his visit he offered to "arrange a marriage between his niece [Princess] Kaiulani and Japan's Prince Yamashina [Higashifumi Yorihiro]." (The book incorrectly calls the Prince the "son of the Emperor of Japan.") Others, including Twigg-Smith, suggests that the two acts were related—marriage to bind the two royal families together in an alliance, but the real reason for this possible union is not clear. (While most single out the US as a threat to Hawaii, other European countries with Pacific colonies had designs on the Hawaiian Islands.) In fact, Kalakaua sought to

¹ By 1884, the Kingdom's budget deficit was over \$800,000. Kuykendall, R.S. (1976) *The Hawaiian Kingdom, Vol. 3*. Honolulu: Univ. HI Press.

² <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2020/02/10/commentary/japan-commentary/japan-former-kingdom-hawaii/>

establish a "Union and Federation of the Asiatic Nations and Sovereigns" or a "great Polynesian Confederacy," with himself as its head, with or without Japan's assistance. Eventually, nothing came of Kalakaua's one-time attempt in binding Samoa into a Polynesia "confederacy". In the midst of the Meiji Revolution, the Japanese leadership likely had other concerns, such as domestic development, over meddling in Pacific power politics.

Goals of the Hawaiian sovereigntists include "self-governance" and "self-determination". While these are in fact key underpinnings of a modern liberal democratic state, the Kingdom was anything but a liberal democracy. Before the arrival of Westerners, the Hawaiian royals, *ali'i's* (chiefs) and common people followed separate sets of ancient rules and rituals which dictated daily living, which included infanticide, human sacrifices and segregation of men and women. The Hawaiians had no written language—American missionaries developed one, thereby preserving the Hawaiian language. Prior to the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, law making was the king's domain. The first Constitution and Laws of the Hawaiian Islands (1840) guaranteed equal rights to both commoners and chiefs, property rights and establishment of a House of Representatives, which "shall have a voice in the business of the kingdom". However, according to the Constitution, the sovereign still held considerable power, such as the power to levy tax, head the Supreme Court, appoint and dismiss members of his cabinet, sign treaties with foreign countries and to make war. Kamehameha III's Constitution of 1852 enumerated specific rights, echoing those within the US Constitution, including freedom of speech and the protection against unreasonable search and seizure. Citizens, 20 year-old, tax-paying male residents, either "native or naturalized" were given the right to vote. Kamehameha V "abrogated the constitution of 1852 and replaced it with a new Constitution that [strengthened the political power of the monarchy] and introduced a property ownership requirement for voting." Property ownership was also required of those wishing join the Legislature. Furthermore, Kamehameha V included authority for the Legislative Assembly "to punish by imprisonment... every person... who shall be guilty of disrespect to the Assembly... or who publish any false report... or insulting comments..." offsetting the clause concerning freedom of speech.

Kalakaua, and later Queen Liliuokalani, who succeed Kalakaua, proposed further changes to the Constitution that would reduce the rights of subjects and allow the sovereign to freely meddle in government affairs. In 1887, citizens, both Hawaiian and non-Hawaiians, demanded and received from Kalakaua a new constitution that enhanced the rights of subjects and further reduced the power of the sovereign. In the case of Queen Liliuokalani, her subjects, Hawaiians as well as non-Hawaiians, demanded her abdication rather than compromise.

It should be noted that the Constitution of 1887 had the following stipulation for voters: "every male resident... of Hawaiian, American or European birth or descent" and "he shall

be able to read and comprehend an ordinary newspaper in either the Hawaiian, English or some European language..." Thus, Asians were excluded from voting. While not mentioned in the book, given Liliuokalani's plan to further roll back constitutional rights for non-Hawaiians, it is likely that she would have not extended the franchise to Asians.

Behind the story of Hawaii's final days as a monarchy is an interaction of numerous Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian personalities and competing agendas. Numerous non-Hawaiians were in fact loyal to the Kingdom and worked with the monarchy to preserve and continue Hawaii's independence in the face of encroaching European powers. When the rulers failed their subjects, non-Hawaiians, as well as Hawaiians, put the interests of the people of Hawaii first. Not all subjects with an American background or lineage were staunchly pro-American or pro-Annexation. In fact, some members of the monarchy and royal family were in favor of close ties with the US, even annexation, whereas others favored close ties with Britain. The Hawaiian monarchs were shrewd politicians by any standard—today's sovereigntists consider them dupes of foreign influence, but on reading Twigg-Smith's account, this is patently false. Twigg-Smith's book is an island of measured and calm facts in a sea of emotional propaganda.