

30 Aloha Oe

Aloha is a traditional greeting in the Hawaiian language.



What is a missionary?

The name Hawaii is sometimes written with an apostrophe between the two i's: Hawai'i. This reflects the native pronunciation of the word—the simplest way to describe it is that it sounds like a slight pause or hesitation: "huhwye...ee." Both spellings are correct; the spelling here is Hawaii, without the apostrophe. Ka'iulani is the way a Hawaiian princess's name is often written.

A Hawaiian surfer in the 1880s—long before the Beach Boys, California girls, and fiberglass boards.

Mark Twain called them "the loveliest fleet of islands that lies anchored in any ocean." He was talking about the Hawaiian Islands, which are moored in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. But the first American missionaries to the islands—led by Hiram Bingham of Vermont and Asa Thurston of Massachusetts—didn't see loveliness. They came to save souls and were horrified by what they found.

"The appearance of destitution, degradation, and barbarism among the chattering, and almost naked savages...was appalling," wrote Bingham. "Some of our number, with gushing tears, turned away from the spectacle." It was March 30, 1820, and Hawaii would never be the same again.

The islands are actually mountains—volcanic mountains—built up from the sea bottom. Poking above the water like a crescent of jewels in the enormous Pacific, they include eight major islands and 124 islets. Polynesian sailors discovered them long before Magellan set sail, maybe a thousand years before. How they did it is still a mystery. The Polynesians came from the Marquesas Islands (more than 2,000 miles away) and they had no compasses or maps or sextants. But they were skilled navigators, and they traveled back and forth across a vast triangle of ocean—from New Zealand to Tahiti to Easter Island to Hawaii. For those long voyages, they lashed together two huge canoes, using cords made from coconut fiber, and rigged them with sails woven of leaves. Some of their vessels held 200 peo-

ple. A 17th-century buccaneer called them "the best of any Boats in the World." Another sailor wrote, "These Canoes run us nearly out of sight...they sail about 3 miles to our two."

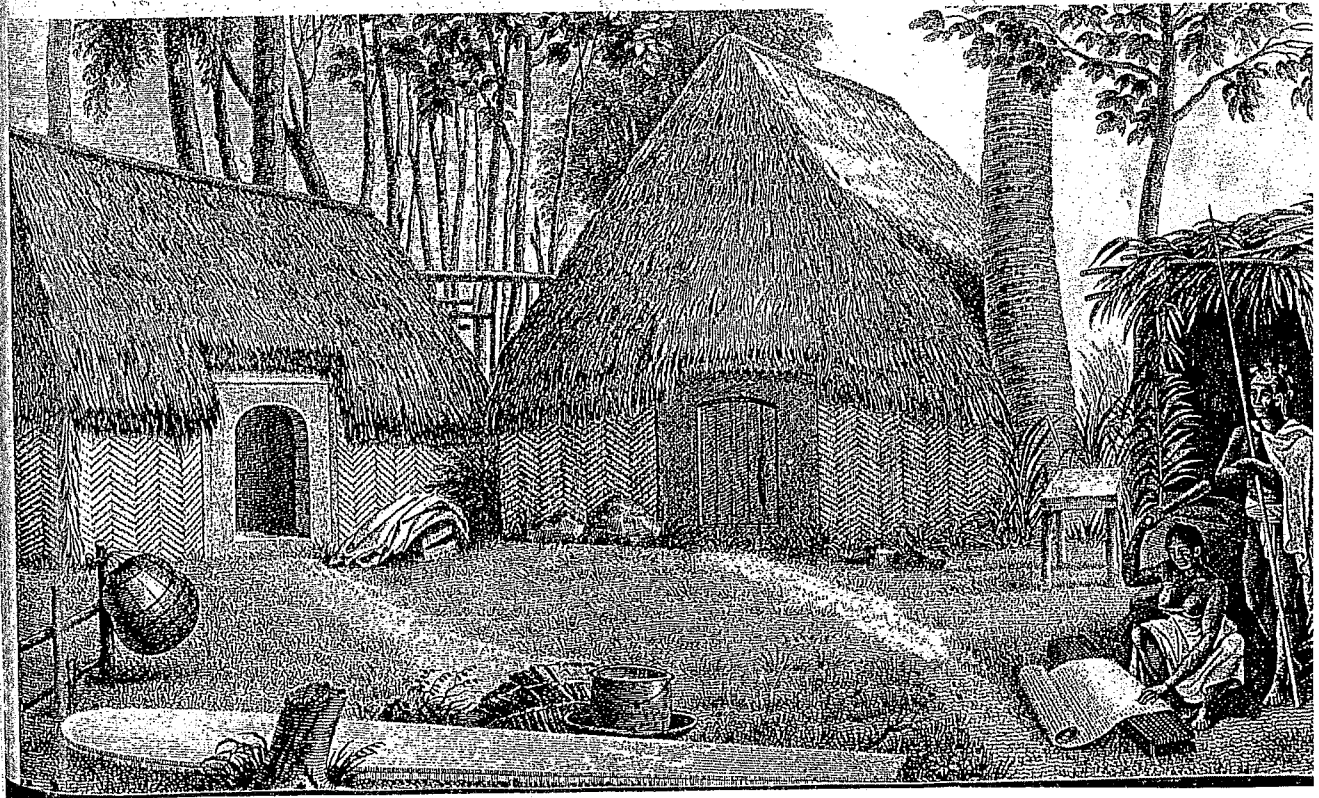
The Polynesians settled the islands and, for about 900 years, kept in contact with their home islands. Then the voyages stopped. Those who had come to Hawaii were on their own. By this time, powerful chiefs and priests were ruling what was a feudal society. Just as in Europe, the feudal lords bickered and fought in brutal wars that were often over land rights.

But fighting was only one part of the story. The Hawaiians developed a rich oral culture (there was no written language) that passed on myths, historic tales, and practical knowledge. On irrigated plantations, they grew taro (an edible root) and cultivated groves of coconut and banana trees. The Hawaiian religion was centered on a system of *kapu*—taboos. These were complicated rules of daily life that couldn't be broken. If you did break a *kapu*, you were insulting God. That usually meant death. But there was a way out. The islands had refuges (REFF-yu-jiz), places where gods gave sanctuary; if you went to one you were safe. The problem: the sanctuaries were extremely difficult to reach. It was a test of valor to get there.

The first European to discover the Hawaiian Islands was said to

You can visit Puuhonua o Honaunau National Historic Park on the island of Hawaii and see one of the ancient sanctuaries.

A woman makes *kapa* (mulberry bark cloth) in the courtyard of high chief Kalanimoku's house in this 1819 engraving. That's a surfboard by the tree stump. The metal cooking pots (acquired in trade), and the wooden doors (mimicking European houses), were new in Hawaiian life. By the late 19th century, Chinese and European fabric had replaced *kapa*.



Hawaii is now the southernmost state in the United States.

Sandalwood is yellowish and aromatic, and especially fine for carving and making furniture. It produces an oil that is used in some perfumes. Sandalwood trees (there are several varieties) are native to tropical Asia.

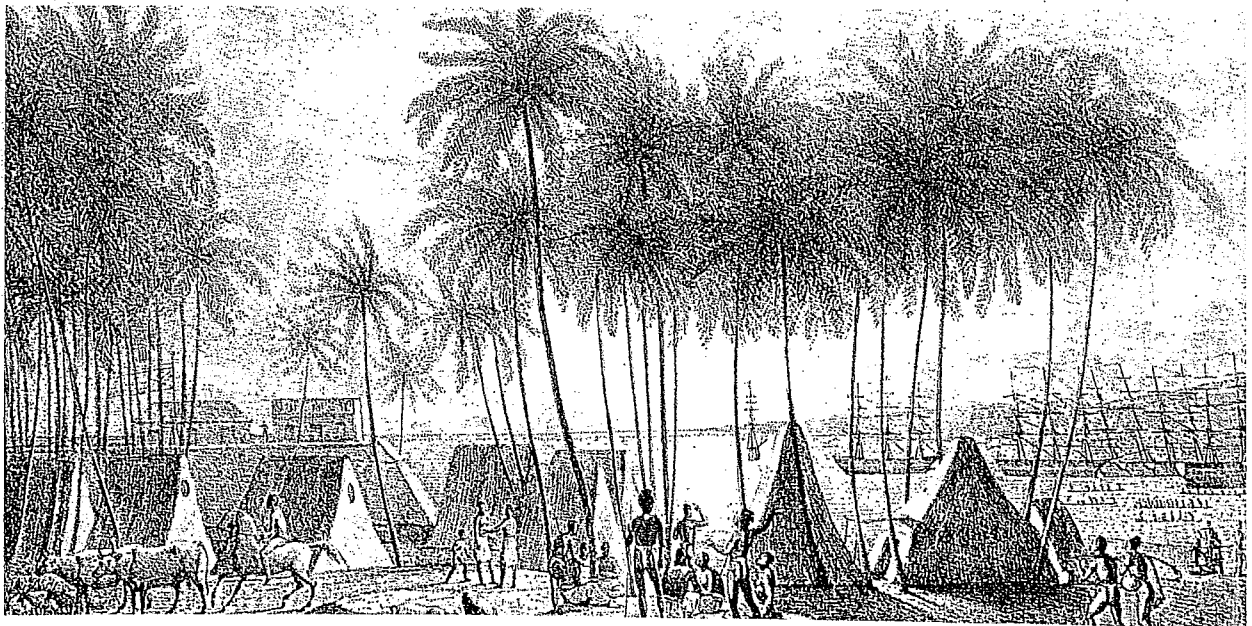
The port of Honolulu, filled with European or American ships, in a French lithograph from 1822. The palm trees are still there, but the Hawaiians' simple houses are long gone, replaced by luxury hotels.

be a 16th-century Spanish explorer. But he didn't leave a written record of that contact, so he doesn't get credit. England's Captain James Cook does. It was 1778, and Cook was looking for a northwest passage through the American continent. He sailed up the west coast of North America, surveying as he went. When he reached Icy Cape in the Bering Strait, he turned south; he needed supplies and food. That's when Cook ran into those gorgeous islands. He named them the Sandwich Islands, after a British aristocrat, the Earl of Sandwich, who was helping to pay the bills for his trip.

If you want to learn about a great sailor, scientist, and explorer, read about Captain Cook. He was an original. At first the Hawaiian people thought he was a god. They treated him with awe. But that soon changed to anger, after fighting began between sailors and natives. The details of what happened are still disputed, but not the outcome: Captain Cook was killed.

The outside world now learned of the Hawaiian Islands. Ships soon came calling. In the Hawaiian Islands they could find food, wood for ship repairs, and a place to rest in the midst of the enormous ocean. New England whalers began to spend their winters in Hawaii. Merchants vied for the islands' rare sandalwood, which was prized in China. (It was soon depleted.) Fur traders, on their way to Asia, made Hawaii a stopping point.

The greatest of Hawaii's rulers held power. He was Kamehameha I, and, using guns and persuasion, he united the islands (by 1810). A shrewd businessman, Kamehameha promoted trade with the foreigners and earned a fortune for his kingdom. He paid attention to the



new ideas the foreign sailors brought with them, but he also guarded and encouraged traditional Hawaiian ways. When Kamehameha died in 1819, his son, Liholiho, succeeded him.

Liholiho became Kamehameha II, but he was a weak king, and often drunk. It was his mother who held real power. She wanted to end the *kapu* system. The *kapus* kept Hawaiians fearful and kept women subservient. Men and women were not allowed to eat together. The Queen Mother planned a big official dinner; foreign guests were included. Kamehameha II sat down between his mother and another royal female. The king began to eat. The women ate, too.

Nothing happened. The gods did not send bolts of lightning. But the Hawaiians at the dinner felt as if they had been struck by lightning. They couldn't believe what they were seeing. Then they went wild. All over the islands, people who had lived in fear went on a spree. They broke every rule they could. And nothing happened. Except that now there were no rules, no laws, no customs to turn to. Kamehameha II officially abolished the old religion and ordered the destruction of all idols and temples. Then he and his wife sailed off to England. They came home in coffins, victims of measles.

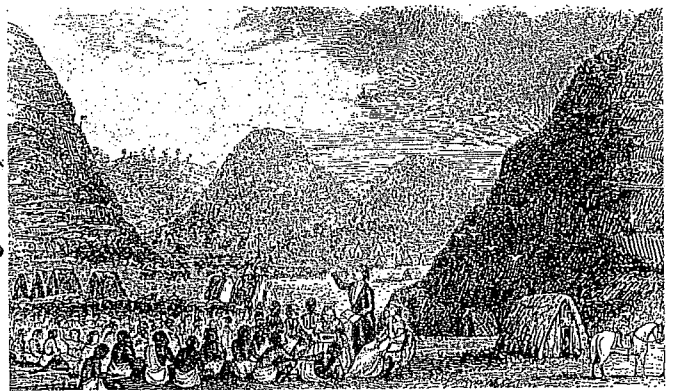
Imagine that everything you've ever believed is suddenly wrong. Your leader is gone. Where do you turn? The Hawaiians were lost.

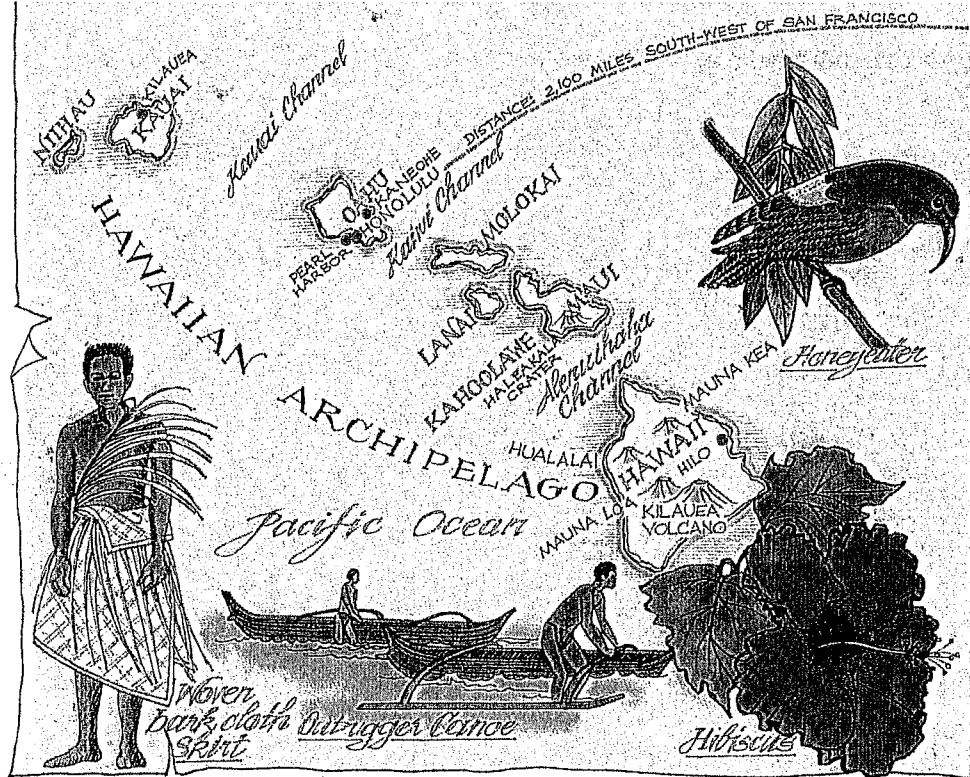
And that was just when those missionaries—remember Hiram Bingham and Asa Thurston?—arrived. They found many Hawaiians eager to become Christians. The Hawaiians turned to the Americans for advice on laws, on other matters of government, and even on dress and ways of life. The missionaries were part of a world influenced by England's Queen Victoria. That meant they had rigid ideas of their own about clothing, about sexual behavior, about religion. That meant they were horrified by many native practices. They wanted the Hawaiians to wear clothes that covered their bodies. And they outlawed the hula dance because the movements seemed indecent to them. Their intentions were good, but they destroyed much of the native culture.

The religious missionaries weren't the only



The ancient hula dance wasn't tourist entertainment: it was a religious ritual. Christian missionaries—like the man preaching (*below*) before the queen and her subjects on Oahu in this 1847 woodcut—tried to ban the hula, along with other traditional Hawaiian arts. Dancers practiced in secret until the reign of King Kalakaua (1874–1891), who gathered the best artists at his court, where they created a new form of hula. *Above*: Pauahi, one of the king's dancers (*center*), with Ai-ala (*left*) and an unnamed dancer, in a studio pose, around 1890.





newcomers who came to the islands. Merchants, and others who saw opportunity, began arriving. Europeans came as well as Americans. Planters established big sugarcane plantations. By the middle of the 19th century, there were frame houses, schools, churches, stores, taverns, and written language—Western culture was taking over. Some of that culture—like drinking, using guns, and trading for profit—would help to destroy

Of the eight major islands that make up Hawaii, Oahu is the most populous. Honolulu, the state capital, is a port of the island of Oahu. Hilo, the second-largest city, is on the island of Hawaii.

In Hawaii today, there is no majority racial group—everyone belongs in a minority. The term “Hawaiian” is reserved for those of Hawaiian/Polynesian ancestry, who now make up about one-eighth of the total population (about 1.2 million people). People of Asian origin comprise 62 percent of the population; whites make up 33.3 percent.

Hawaii’s traditions. Some of it—like schooling and writing—would help preserve what survived.

In 1848, a Hawaiian land commissioner introduced the Western idea of private ownership of land; much of the islands’ territory was soon bought up by the newcomers. (That land exchange was called the Great Mahele.) Then the outsiders (called *haoles*) began to want more than just land; they wanted political power.

The diseases they brought to the islands helped their cause. The Hawaiians had no immunity to Western diseases; for them they were killers. Much of the native Hawaiian population got wiped out. That meant there were few workers for the sugarcane plantations. So the planters brought in Chinese laborers; they were followed by Japanese, Filipino, Korean, Portuguese, and Puerto Rican workers.

The Americans and the Europeans attempted to get along with the native Hawaiians and the other Asian peoples, but they never considered them equals—not for a minute. Today we would call them racial bigots; then, their ideas reflected their times.

In 1891, a new ruler came to the throne. Her name was Queen Liliuokalani. A brilliant, determined woman, she intended to restore power to the Hawaiian people. Liliuokalani worked secretly on a new constitution. Only native Hawaiians would be able to vote. She called her cabinet in session. The Royal Hawaiian Band played.

Hawaiians marched. The queen read a proclamation announcing the constitution. But the world had changed; Liliuokalani didn't understand that business interests now had more power than kings and queens.

And the planters weren't going to let a native leader make rules for them. Especially a woman! They employed thousands of workers. They determined Hawaii's economy. Asa Thurston's grandson, Lorrin, led a revolution. The American minister to Hawaii (the government's secretary in charge of Hawaiian affairs, not a religious leader) was part of it; he had U.S. Marines land at Honolulu. A new government was set up; its leaders (the *haoles*) appealed to Washington; they asked that the United States annex the islands.

President Grover Cleveland didn't know what was going on in Hawaii, and he was a cautious man. The queen's niece, Princess Kaiulani, arrived in Washington and told the president that her country had been wronged; Cleveland sent a congressman to the islands to investigate. The congressman's report wasn't what the revolutionaries expected. It advised that, in the name of justice, the monarchy be restored.

But that didn't happen. Queen Liliuokalani had tried to return to a past that is no more. On July 4, 1894, Sanford B. Dole, a leading businessman, proclaimed himself president of the Republic of Hawaii. Liliuokalani was imprisoned in the royal palace (for eight months). The Hawaiian monarchy was finished.

Manifest Destiny came to Hawaii with the next president. Although there was much opposition in Washington, William McKinley signed a resolution annexing Hawaii to the United States. It was 1898, and the American flag now flew over the islands.

The Hawaiian story is complicated and filled with emotional and often heartrending moments. To better understand it, I suggest you do some more reading on the subject. And, if you don't live there, and you get the chance, visit the islands. All those people who came to Hawaii—the Asian workers, the missionaries, the planters, and those simply lured by the beauty of the place—created an astonishingly diverse society where people of all backgrounds have come to power. In 1959, Hawaii became the 50th state. The more you read history the more you will notice that sometimes the right things happen for the wrong reasons, and vice versa.

P.S. Mark Twain was right.



Liliuokalani, the last queen of Hawaii, was an early advocate of women's rights. She composed more than 200 songs, including the well-known "Aloha Oe."