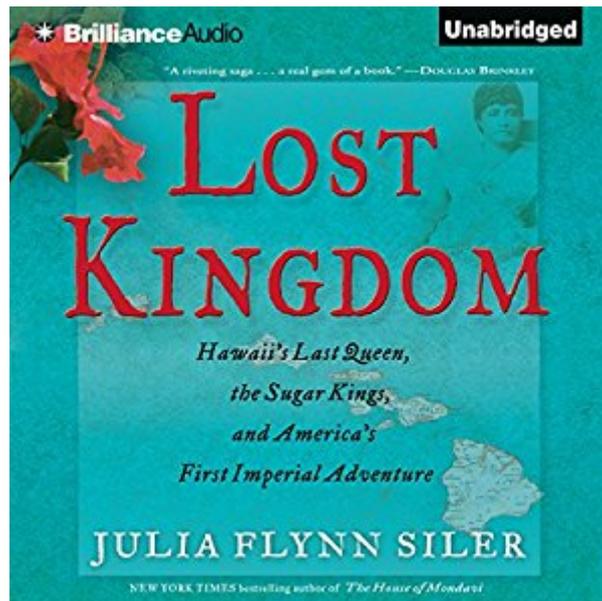


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# Lost Kingdom: Hawaii's Last Queen, The Sugar Kings, And America's First Imperial Adventure



## Synopsis

First colonized around 200 A.D. by intrepid Polynesian islanders, Hawaii existed for hundreds of years in splendid isolation. Foreigners did not visit the islands until 1788, when Captain Cook, looking for the fabled Northwest Passage, stumbled upon this nation with its own belief system and culture. Three decades later, fourteen Calvinist missionaries left Boston bound for Hawaii, and when they arrived they converted the royal family to Christianity, and set up missionary schools where English was taught. A thriving monarchy had ruled over Hawaii for generations. Taro fields and fish ponds had long sustained native Hawaiians but sugar plantations had been gradually subsuming them. This fractured, vulnerable Hawaii was the country that Queen Lili'uokalani, or Lili'u, inherited when she came to power at the end of the nineteenth century. Her predecessor had signed away many of the monarchy's rights, but while Lili'u was trying to put into place a constitution that would reinstate them, other factions were plotting annexation. With the help of the American envoy, the USS Boston steamed into Honolulu harbor, and Marines landed and marched to the palace, inciting the Queen's overthrow. The annexation of Hawaii was extremely controversial; the issue caused heated debates in the Senate and President Cleveland gave a strongly worded speech opposing it. This was the first time America had reached beyond the borders of the continental U.S. in an act of imperialism. It was not until President McKinley was elected and the Spanish-American War erupted, that Hawaii became a critical strategic asset, and annexation finally passed Congress in 1898.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As the author of a book on the history of Hawaiian traditions published by the Bishop Museum, I appreciate a mainland journalist and publisher taking interest in our history. Perhaps their hearts were in the right place, but this book fails on many levels. It contains numerous errors, both major and "minor." Human sacrifices were not made to the goddess Pele (p. xix), and ancient Hawaiians did not have a tradition of bodies lying in state for weeks (21). In recounting the riots after Kalakaua got elected, the author says that the people in the streets rioted against the Legislature which had elected him in "effectively a race riot," implying that the legislators were all haole, but she never talks about the racial makeup of the Legislature. In fact, almost 3/4 of the legislators were Hawaiian. Yes, Kalakaua was preferred by Americans but also by Hawaiians in the Leg. If anything it was more of a class riot than a race one. More important, this book fails the most critical duty of a history book, which is to place events in context. It fails to do this in two, opposite, ways. First, because the book jumps into the middle of history, it does not explain Hawaiian tradition before white contact. In perhaps an effort to bring that tradition into the narrative, the author makes it sound like the modern Hawaiian kings and queens descended from barbarians and continued to be "uncivilized." One paragraph (31) begins by describing the wood-framed home of King Kamehameha IV and his wife, Emma, and ends noting that they wore the latest fashions from London.

The merit of this book is that it tells a story that we all should know more about, vividly and with empathy. It is judicious in presenting what happened without moralizing, taking political sides or putting players into hero and villain categories. This has the merits of letting readers draw the messages out for themselves and having the events encourage interpretation, not any authorial advocacy. It is a sad tale, that needs no embellishing or melodrama; what stands out is almost the inevitability of the decline of royal control and its takeover by one of the imperial powers - Britain, France or Japan. Everything was against Hawaii's retaining real independence, as contrasted to some titular client relationship. All that glorious land, the sugar, the chance for outsiders to grab political influence, the money to be made, and finally the strategic location of the Pearl basin as a deep water port and supply center as the geopolitics of empire spread across the Pacific. The Spanish-American war sealed its doom. As one player noted, when Commerce and Defense came together, Hawaii had no chance: "Annexation is manifest destiny and we are bound to have it." One of the attractions of the book is that the tale is very different from, certainly, what I expected and, probably, for most general readers. It's centered on the kings and queens of Hawaii who were caught up in the drift of historical forces and their interactions with the power players in the game about who would have real authority. These royals were not the stereotypical war paint, girth and

feathers of so many images. Hawaii was a sophisticated society, with well-educated and cosmopolitan leaders. The palace had electricity years before the White House. The elite travelled widely, and was urbane and educated. They met with U.S.

"Lost Kingdom" by Julia Flynn Siler tells the sad history of Hawaii's subjugation by sugar planters and its annexation by the United States in the 19th century. Ms. Siler has extensively researched the most relevant people and events to help bring us back to an unique time and place that has passed into memory. Written with precision, perceptiveness and humanity, Ms. Siler's fascinating book should appeal to everyone interested in U.S. history and the Hawaiian islands. Ms. Siler centers her narrative around the remarkable family and person of Lili'uokalani, who was born in 1820 and served as Hawaii's last reigning queen. Without overtly romanticizing the native people, Ms. Siler does suggest that the Hawaiians were wholly unprepared for the complexities of western culture. On the one hand, Lili'u's own writings confirm that she whole-heartedly embraced the message of love taught to her in the Christian Missionary schools in which she was raised. On the other hand, Ms. Siler documents how the monarchs who served over the course of Lili'u's lifetime became progressively less effective as they became compromised by western business interests who ceaselessly worked behind the scenes to slowly erode their powers. Ultimately, the humiliating Bayonet Constitution institutionalized a government that was effectively controlled by the sugar barons, leaving Lili'u's brother Kalakaua as a mere figurehead. For her part, Lili'u assumed the throne in 1891 and conspired in a failed counterrevolution in 1895 which led to her imprisonment. In the aftermath of this unrest, the U.S. decided to settle matters permanently by annexing Hawaii in 1898, crushing Lili'u's hopes for justice for herself and her people. Apart from recounting the facts (which she does extraordinarily well), Ms.

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