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Author(s): George W. Baker, Jr.

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Benjamin Harrison and Hawaiian Annexation: A Reinterpretation

GEORGE W. BAKER, JR.

The author is assistant professor of history at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

ON JANUARY 28, 1893, Benjamin Harrison received news of a revolution overthrowing Queen Lydia Liliuokalani of Hawaii. By February 15 he negotiated a treaty of annexation with commissioners representing the revolutionary government and consequently appeared to historians to be an ardent expansionist. Carl Russell Fish, for example, was among the first historians to point out that because Harrison negotiated the treaty "without delay," he was clearly on the "path of empire."¹ Charles and Mary Beard perpetuated this conclusion in their famous textbook by stating that "the envoys were cordially received by President Harrison and within a few days a treaty adding Hawaii to the American empire was laid before the Senate."² More recently, the diplomatic historian Thomas A. Bailey has also maintained, in his text essay entitled "Rush-Order Annexation," that Harrison's hasty negotiation of the treaty made him an expansionist.³ Finally, Julius W. Pratt, who has explored Hawaiian annexation more than anyone else, has cogently argued that Harrison was an expansionist not just because of his rapid negotiation of the treaty but more importantly because of his probable support of the revolutionary movement that led to the overthrow of the queen.

The historians are partially justified, if only because of the annexation treaty, in calling Harrison an expansionist. But their conclusion must be modified in two respects.

¹ *The Path of Empire* (New Haven, 1919), 77; see also Scott Nearing and Joseph Freeman, *Dollar Diplomacy: A Study in American Imperialism* (New York, 1928), 76-77.

² *The Rise of American Civilization* (2 vols.; New York, 1927), II, 360.

³ *A Diplomatic History of the American People* (New York, 1955), 470-471.

First, their conclusion must be limited to the last few months of his tenure of office. Prior to that he did not behave as an expansionist. For over three years, his secretary of state James G. Blaine, secretary of navy Benjamin Tracy, and minister to Hawaii John L. Stevens had tried to persuade him to annex Hawaii, but until December, 1892, they had had no success.

Secondly, the conclusion must also be restricted as to the degree Harrison pursued annexation in his last months in office. For, although both Harrison and his second secretary of state John W. Foster sympathized with the Americans in Hawaii and prepared the annexation treaty in the relatively brief period from February 4 to February 15, they were, as will be seen herein, so cautious and circumspect that it appeared as though they hesitated to expand even when the opportunity to do so was ripe. Moreover, Harrison and Foster then were more reluctant annexationists than one would gather from Julius W. Pratt's further contention that the "administration sympathized with Stevens' ideas and wishes [for a revolution and annexation], and took steps to prepare public opinion for a change in the Hawaiian situation." Pratt's conclusion is based upon the rather weak and circumstantial evidence that the President, in his annual address of December, 1892, remarked that "our relations with Hawaii have been such as to attract an increased interest, and must continue to do so," and that the United States should lay a cable for naval and commercial purposes. Pratt also points out that the State Department released news tips. Even granted that the administration took these steps, it will be shown herein that they were so inadequate in preparing public opinion for an allegedly American-sponsored revolution and annexation that contemporaries were not certain how the administration stood on the Hawaiian question until the annexation treaty was submitted to the Senate. Moreover, Pratt's only proof that the administration officially spurred on the revolution to pave the way for annexation is that in December, 1892, when Secretary of Navy Benjamin Tracy ordered Rear Admiral Serrett to Honolulu to protect American life and property in the event of a revolution, he said that the "wishes of the Government have changed. They will be very glad to annex Hawaii." Although that was the first time that the administration showed itself more sympathetic to the American-descended Hawaiians, Pratt's intimation that the administration, through Tracy, was thus encouraging the revolutionary activity is not true. Tracy himself was such an

ardent imperialist that he was not averse to implying American support of a revolution, but he was not speaking for the administration.⁴

Why have historians had the tendency to imply that Harrison was an expansionist? In the first place they have simply deduced that because a "new Manifest Destiny" akin to the old Manifest Destiny of the 1830's and 1840's was in the air before Harrison took office in 1889, and because certain members of the Harrison administration played an important role in fostering this new age of imperialism, Harrison himself was also a leader of the movement. Unquestionably, Harrison's administration, between March, 1889, and March, 1893, did much to change the United States from an inward-looking, isolationistic nation to a budding world power. Unlike previous administrations that were preoccupied with Reconstruction problems, frontier expansion, and industrial development, Harrison's administration, as the director of a highly industrialized nation seeking raw materials for its hungry machines and markets for its wares, was being gradually impelled by economic forces both to engage in the rivalry for colonial empire and to champion the businessman's cause as a competitor in the world market.

Moreover, as in the old Manifest Destiny, the economic forces were only a part of the fever of national expansionism that was driving the Harrison administration to play a leading role in world affairs. Recalling the old Manifest Destiny in which the United States had lofty motives of Christianizing Indians (and Mexicans) and of democratizing the backward areas of the American continent, a small but influential coterie of men, including Josiah Strong, James G. Blaine, Alfred Thayer Mahan, Benjamin F. Tracy, Theodore Roosevelt, and Henry Cabot Lodge, were seeking not just economic supremacy but also moral and political leadership of the world. Now driven by the compulsive needs to Christianize pagan Africans and Asians and to democratize tribal and monarchical governments, these men not only helped convince the American public of the need to assert American power, they also did much to influence the official policy of Harrison.⁵

⁴ Julius W. Pratt, *Expansionists of 1898: The Acquisition of Hawaii and the Spanish Islands* (Baltimore, 1936); for Tracy's remark, see *Foreign Relations, 1894*, Appendix II, 476.

⁵ On the nature of the new Manifest Destiny, see A. K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny* (Baltimore, 1935); Fred Harvey Harrington, "A New Manifest Destiny," *An American History* by Merle E. Curti and others (New York, 1950), II, 306-314; A. T. Volwiler, "The Early Empire Days of the United States," *West Virginia History*, XVIII (1957), 111-127;

Because of their important cabinet posts, Blaine and Tracy, as power-conscious and imperialistic statesmen, were ideally placed to leave indelible marks on Harrison's foreign policy. With his "spirited" diplomacy so manifest everywhere Blaine was nicknamed "Jingo Jim." In Latin American affairs, he was very much of an economic imperialist. Quite conscious of the area's potential wealth, which was even then being exploited by European and American entrepreneurs, Blaine resuscitated the idea of Pan Americanism in order to turn the Latin American neighbors' eyes northward and to win their commerce from European competitors. Blaine also had the far-fetched notion of annexing Canada but had to content himself with merely standing up to both British and Canadian diplomats to protect the Alaskan fur-seals from pelagic sealers. He also rigorously protected American rights in the *Baltimore* incident. When American sailors were killed while on pass in Valparaiso, Chile, Blaine induced Harrison to go to the brink of war to obtain due respect for the American flag. Likewise, in Pacific affairs, he was instrumental in persuading Harrison to ally with Great Britain to stand up for American rights when Germany sought to oust both the American and British and make its authority paramount in the Samoan Islands.⁶

Blaine's success in many of his endeavors was due in part to the able work of Secretary Tracy through which America was rapidly becoming a first-rate naval power. At the behest of Blaine and under the influence of Alfred Thayer Mahan's *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, Tracy did yeoman service in making a great American navy a reality. He won both presidential and congressional support. By the end of the 1890's, the United States was well on its way to rivaling Great Britain as a naval power.⁷

How did President Harrison stand with respect to the new Manifest Destiny and its vigorous exponents? Unlike Blaine and Tracy, Harrison at first more nearly typified the still inward-looking Ameri-

Milton Plesur, "America Looking Outward: The Years from Hayes to Harrison," *The Historian*, XXII (1960), 280-295.

⁶ On Blaine, see Alice Felt Tyler, *The Foreign Policy of James G. Blaine* (Minneapolis, 1927); Joseph B. Lockey, "James Gillespie Blaine," *The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy*, ed., Samuel Flagg Bemis (New York, 1928), VIII; David Saville Muzzey, *James G. Blaine* (New York, 1934); A. T. Volwiler, "Harrison, Blaine, and American Foreign Policy, 1889-1893," *American Philosophical Society Proceedings*, LXXIX (1938).

⁷ Harold and Margaret Sprout, *Rise of American Naval Power, 1776-1918* (Princeton, 1946).

can public which needed a rationale to justify imperialism. As in the old Manifest Destiny, when Americans had lofty missionary motives of spreading Christianity and democracy, a crusading spirit had to be instilled in them before they were ready to extend their blessings to less fortunate peoples. By 1898, the propaganda spread by the Reverend Josiah Strong and others like him was influential in moving the Americans to go to war to liberate the Cubans from Spain. In 1889, however, the American people, including Harrison, had not yet been sufficiently aroused to a crusading mood.⁸

Gradually, Harrison was persuaded by his advisers to pursue a strong course in international affairs. He supported Blaine's "spirited" diplomacy, he signed into law the Naval Act of 1890 to create a strong navy, and he even prepared to go to war against Chile and Germany to sustain American integrity. Only when it came to territorial expansion into Hawaii did he balk. Psychologically unprepared, Harrison could not be moved by Blaine's persuasions to take this step.

When in March, 1889, Harrison's administration came to power, Secretary Blaine believed that the time was ripe for annexing the Hawaiian Islands. Just two years earlier, the American-descended Hawaiians, aided by other foreign elements, had planned to overthrow the native king and seek annexation to the United States. Although President Grover Cleveland had frowned on these plans, the would-be annexationists continued toward their objective. With but a boost from the United States, Blaine thought, Hawaii could be annexed.

Second, American interests in the islands were so great that annexation seemed but the climax of a century of commercial and missionary penetration into the islands by American pioneers. While building economic and political power, the Americans had remained as aloof from the islanders as in a caste society. From the time the pioneers came to the islands, they and their sons developed trade and a sugar and pineapple economy and, to protect their wealth, began to assert their will over the native government. In 1840, they gained a strong voice in the government by compelling King Kamehameha II to establish a constitution based upon property

⁸ That Harrison was in fact inward-looking can be seen by looking at his life up to the time of the Presidency (Harry J. Sievers, S. J., *Benjamin Harrison: Hoosier Statesman* [New York, 1959]). For a provocative view on psychological readiness, see Richard Hofstadter, "Manifest Destiny and the Philippines," in Daniel Aaron, ed., *America in Crisis* (New York, 1952).

ownership. In the succeeding half-century, their political power grew proportionately with their wealth until they were in a position to wrest power entirely away from the native monarchs.⁹

During this same century the United States step by step showed more interest in the islands. In 1820, its first agent, John C. Jones, was appointed. In 1826, its naval diplomat, Thomas ap Catesby Jones, concluded a treaty of amity and commerce which, despite America's extensive commercial interests, was defeated in the United States Senate lest the treaty be construed as recognition of Hawaii's independent status.¹⁰ Should Hawaii be so recognized as a sovereign nation, the United States could not easily colonize or, if the occasion arose, make it a territory. Not until the British and French recognized Hawaii and began to make inroads by concluding commercial treaties in 1842 did President John Tyler declare that the United States considered Hawaii to be an independent nation and would remonstrate against any foreign interference in its government.¹¹

In the 1850's, the decade of filibustering, the United States' acquisition of California made apparent its strategic stake in the islands, and the Franklin Pierce administration went so far as to negotiate a treaty of annexation. This treaty failed because of a change in the islands' regime and because the islands were still considered by most Americans to be too remote to make annexation desirable.¹² During the Civil War, the United States was too preoccupied to consider annexation, but afterward Secretaries of State William Seward under President Andrew Johnson and Hamilton Fish under President Ulysses S. Grant viewed Hawaii as a prime area for expansion. As a first step toward this goal, they sought a reciprocity treaty allowing Hawaiians to ship in duty-free sugar in return for lower tariffs on American-manufactured products. At first the American Senate opposed this treaty,¹³ but in 1876, when the Americans and other for-

⁹ Harold W. Bradley, *The American Frontier in Hawaii: The Pioneers, 1789-1843* (Stanford, 1942); Ralph S. Kuykendall and A. Grove Day, *Hawaii, A History from Polynesian Kingdom to American Commonwealth* (New York, 1948); John W. Foster, *American Diplomacy in the Orient* (Boston and New York, 1903).

¹⁰ Bradley, *The American Frontier in Hawaii*, 110.

¹¹ Daniel Webster to Haalilio and Richards, Hawaiian Agents, Dec. 19, 1842, *Foreign Relations, 1894*, Appendix II, 44-45; for the "Tyler Doctrine," see Sylvester K. Stevens, *American Expansion in Hawaii, 1842-1898* (Harrisburg, 1945).

¹² William Marcy to David L. Gregg, Jan. 31, 1855; Marcy to Gregg, not sent, Instructions, Hawaii, National Archives; William M. Malloy, ed., *Treaties, Conventions, International Acts, Protocols, and Agreements between the United States of America and Other Powers* (Washington, 1910), I, 908-915.

¹³ William Seward to James McBride, Feb. 8, 1864; Seward to Edward M. McCook, Sept. 12, 1867, Instructions, Hawaii.

eign elements dominated the election of King Kalakaua and intimated that they were ready if necessary to turn to England for support, Fish won his treaty.¹⁴

Although the Rutherford B. Hayes administration temporarily reversed the trend toward annexation by its indifference to Hawaiian affairs, the succeeding James Garfield administration, with James G. Blaine in the State Department, pursued the most imperialistic policy since the Pierce administration. Blaine sought to bring about annexation by sponsoring American emigration not only to revitalize the economy but more importantly to provide a stronger foothold to protect the already developed American interests. He failed to achieve his goal because of the death of Garfield and his own resignation, but he had at least kept alive American interest in Hawaii.¹⁵

The succeeding Chester A. Arthur administration negotiated for a renewal of the Treaty of 1876 but conservatively drew the line at annexation.¹⁶ Even though the Cleveland administration followed through with the renewal of the reciprocity treaty, acquiring in the bargain exclusive rights to Pearl Harbor, and admitted that the islands were "virtually an outpost of American commerce and a stepping stone to the growing trade of the Pacific," it too insisted upon noninterference in Hawaiian affairs. In fact, it was Cleveland's administration which rejected the bid for annexation from the American-dominated rebels who, in 1887, attempted to oust King Kalakaua. After this rejection, the rebels had to be content with wresting further power from the king by forcing him to sign the so-called "Bayonet Constitution" and awaiting a more amenable government in Washington.¹⁷

The would-be revolutionists justifiably had their hopes aroused when the Harrison administration with "Jingo Jim" again in the State Department took office in 1889. No sooner did Blaine learn of the discontent in the islands than he personally selected a sympathetic expansionist, John L. Stevens, to serve as the American minister. Stevens did not fail Blaine or the revolutionists. In the following

¹⁴ Fish to Henry Peirce, March 25, 1873; Fish to Peirce, Oct. 15, 1873, *ibid.*; James M. Callahan, *American Relations in the Pacific and the Far East, 1789-1900* (Baltimore, 1901), 114-134.

¹⁵ Lockey, "James Gillespie Blaine," *American Secretaries of State*, VIII, 120.

¹⁶ Frederick Frelinghuysen to James M. Comly, May 31, 1882, *Foreign Relations, 1882*, p. 343; Phillip M. Brown, "Frederick Theodore Frelinghuysen," *American Secretaries of State*, VIII, 34-35.

¹⁷ Lester B. Shippee, "Thomas Francis Bayard," *American Secretaries of State*, VIII, 82-84.

years, he sent to Washington numerous and detailed reports of the growing discontent over the economic dislocation caused by the passage of the McKinley Tariff Act of 1890 and the alleged tyranny of the new queen, Lydia Liliuokalani. The McKinley act had virtually abrogated the favored position of Hawaiian sugar in the American market by granting a two cent per pound bounty for American producers and then permitting all countries to ship in duty-free sugar. On November 20, 1892, Stevens informed Blaine's successor, John W. Foster, that in the past two years, "the loss to the owners of the sugar plantations and mills . . . has not been less than \$12,000,000" and that unless "some positive measures of relief be granted, the depreciation of sugar property here will continue to go on." "Wise, bold action by the United States," Stevens concluded, "will rescue the property holders from great losses."¹⁸

If this was not enough to prostrate the planters, Stevens reported to Blaine and later to Foster that since Queen Liliuokalani came to power on January 20, 1891, she had become a despotic tyrant who was squeezing the life-blood out of the people. Stevens repeatedly appealed to Washington to alleviate the economic suffering and the political suppression of the people by annexing the islands. In this way, Stevens contended, the islanders would be aided economically by a bounty on sugar and would win political freedom by the ousting of the queen.¹⁹

During the three years that Stevens sent these reports, Blaine vainly tried to persuade Harrison to intervene, but the President, no doubt fearful of popular and political opposition to such a predatory move, demurred. Well he might; neither the press nor the public was aroused in behalf of the islanders. The newspapers rarely noted the discontent in the islands, and in administration circles, the only jingoism on the Hawaiian question was in the minds of Blaine, Stevens, and Tracy.²⁰

Harrison officially ignored Lorrin Thurston, an antimonarchist, who visited Washington in May, 1892, seeking sympathy and support for the American-descended Hawaiians' aspirations for freedom and annexation. Instead of setting into motion the revolutionary movement by cordially receiving him, Harrison only indirectly,

¹⁸ *Foreign Relations, 1894*, Appendix II, 382-383.

¹⁹ On Stevens, see Pratt's *Expansionists of 1898*, pp. 74-109.

²⁰ Blaine's and Stevens' correspondence may be found in The Papers of Benjamin Harrison, Library of Congress, and in *The Correspondence between Benjamin Harrison and James B. Blaine*, ed., Albert T. Volwiler (Philadelphia, 1940).

through Secretary Tracy, let Thurston know that he was personally "exceedingly sympathetic" to the foreigners' plight but not prepared to intervene.²¹

Blaine resigned in June, 1892, to seek the Republican nomination for President and was replaced by John Watson Foster. A career diplomat who was rather pedantic regarding proper protocol in international relations, Foster at the outset was not imperialistic. He duly kept the President informed on the Hawaiian situation, but unlike Blaine, he was not an advocate of intervention. In fact, in November, 1892, when Stevens sent a particularly strong note to win sympathy for the planters' cause, Foster admonished him to tone down his proplanter and antimonarchist sentiments in view of the possible publication of his despatches. On the other hand, Foster's failure to recall Stevens at this time suggests tacit approval of the minister and growing sympathy with the Americans in Hawaii. Later, in December, his refusal to deny rumors that he had discussed the topic of annexation with the Hawaiian legate, J. Mott Smith, a reputed annexationist, indicated that Foster was earnestly seeking possible solutions to Hawaiian-Americans' grievances. Still, he did not officially encourage the revolutionary movement which was rapidly coming to a head.²²

Harrison did not permit anyone in the administration to officially succor the revolutionary movement.²³ Although, in his annual address of December, he stated that "our relations with Hawaii have been such as to attract an increased interest, and must continue to do so," he was by no means preparing the public for either a revolution or the annexation of Hawaii.²⁴ Nor did Harrison intend to aid the revolutionists when he sent the U.S.S. *Boston* to Honolulu to protect American life and property in the event of a revolution. Secretary Tracy implied this in his remark to Admiral Serrett,²⁵ but it is doubtful in light of Harrison's previous opposition to the revo-

²¹ Lorrin A. Thurston, *Memoirs of the Hawaiian Revolution*, ed., Andrew T. Farrell (Honolulu, 1936), 230-232.

²² The John W. Foster Papers, Library of Congress, are not helpful, but Foster's *Diplomatic Memoirs* (New York, 1909) reveal his temperament; copies of Stevens' dispatches may be found in Harrison's papers and the naval reports in Department of State, Miscellaneous Letters, National Archives; Foster to Stevens, Nov. 8, 1892, *Foreign Relations*, 1894, Appendix II, 376; Department of State, Notes to Hawaii, Jan. 15, 1850-June 29, 1898, National Archives; Pratt, *Expansionists of 1898*, p. 70.

²³ Harrison, Foster, and Benjamin F. Tracy Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁴ Benjamin Harrison, "Fourth Annual Message, Dec. 6, 1892," *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, ed., James D. Richardson (Washington, 1898), IX, 316.

²⁵ *Foreign Relations*, 1894, Appendix II, 476.

lutionary movement. Rather, as concluded before, it seems more likely that Tracy took it upon himself to send this message to encourage Stevens to take advantage of the presence of the *Boston*.

The revolution came on January 17, 1893; Stevens immediately directed the commander of the *Boston* to land marines to protect American life and property. Fortuitously, but also by Stevens' design, the troops became a buffer protecting the revolutionary Committee of Public Safety from the queen's forces. The revolution succeeded. Harrison later officially disavowed Stevens' use of the troops.²⁶

The Harrison administration did not learn of the revolution until January 28 and then did no more than direct Minister Stevens to keep it informed on the turn of events.²⁷ During the following week, the administration kept a "discreet silence" with respect to the revolution and the possibility of annexation.²⁸ This silence was in accord with diplomatic propriety and may have been politic in light of the controversy in the press over whether the administration had sponsored the revolution. E. L. Godkin's *Nation*, for example, was foremost in pointing out that the Hawaiian revolution was not a political upheaval in behalf of freedom and democracy but a conspiracy of a few American sugar planters and the American minister who were seeking annexation at any cost.²⁹

Although there is certainly some substance to these charges, considering Minister Stevens' role in the revolution, there is no evidence whatever that the revolution had in fact been inspired or directed by Harrison for the purpose of annexing the islands in behalf of American sugar interests. As a matter of fact, the administration kept publicly and privately silent regardless of the significant support for annexation among newspapers and other groups that foresaw great commercial and strategic benefits accruing from annexation.³⁰ The administration gave no encouragement to Stevens,

²⁶ Pratt, *Expansionists of 1898*, pp. 74-109; William A. Russ, Jr., *The Hawaiian Revolution* (Selingsgrove, Pennsylvania, 1959); Queen Lilioukalani, *Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen* (Boston, 1898), 243-250.

²⁷ Foster to Stevens, Jan. 28, 1893, Instructions, Hawaii.

²⁸ *Baltimore Sun*, *New York Times*, and *Washington Post*, Jan., Feb., and March, 1893.

²⁹ *New York Herald*, *Nation*, and *New York Sun*, Jan., Feb., and March, 1893; William A. Russ, Jr., "The Role of Sugar in Hawaiian Annexation," *Pacific Historical Review*, XII (1943), 339-350; Richard D. Weigle, "Sugar and the Hawaiian Revolution," *ibid.*, XIV (1947), 41-58.

³⁰ Theodore Roosevelt to Jesse S. Clarkson, April 22, 1893, *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, ed., Elting Morison (Cambridge, 1951-1954), I, 313; Henry Cabot Lodge, "Our Foreign Policy," *Certain Accepted Heroes and Other Essays in Literature and Politics*

who had to argue repeatedly that annexation was necessary both for the sake of the Hawaiians and for the strategic interests of the United States. Stressing that the Hawaiian pear was ripe, Stevens strongly intimated that if the United States did not do the plucking, Japan or Great Britain might.³¹

The administration was even then debating what action to take with regard to Hawaii, and it was not until Foster postponed his departure for the fur-seal arbitration hearings, scheduled for the beginning of February, that the press speculated that the administration would probably pursue annexation.³² Although a cabinet meeting was held on February 3 on the annexation question, the administration remained indefinite and noncommittal. One news service reported as follows:

Secretary Foster stated after the meeting that there was nothing new in the situation and that there could be nothing until after the delegation arrived. The scope of the discussion by the cabinet and what they decided to do was a matter only for the President to announce, he said, but the Secretary intimated that nothing transpired that in any way indicated what line of policy to be followed would be finally determined. Secretary Foster and Secretary Tracy are both in favor of annexation, and it is said that they strongly advocated it before the President and their fellow cabinet officers at today's meeting.³³

On February 4 Foster met for the first time with the commissioners representing the provisional government. Although the *Washington Post* headlined "Annexation or Nothing," it reported the next day that "after the interview Secretary Foster said he had nothing new to communicate, and owing to the press of other business he was unable to see newspaper men."³⁴

Even with the commissioners, Foster had been quite pessimistic on the possibility of annexation, in light of the opposition of both the press and the President-elect. Lorrin A. Thurston, a leading commissioner, has related in his *Memoirs* that in response to the desire of the commissioners that Hawaii be admitted as a state,

(New York, 1897), 243; Alfred Thayer Mahan, "Hawaii and Our Future Sea Power," *Forum*, XV (1893), 1-11; *Washington Post* editorial on January 29, 1893; *Chicago Daily Tribune* editorial on Feb. 3, 1893; Ernest R. May, *Imperial Democracy* (New York, 1961), 13-16.

³¹ Stevens' despatches are in *Foreign Relations, 1894*, Appendix II.

³² *Baltimore Sun*, Feb. 4, 1893.

³³ *Washington Post*, Feb. 4, 1893.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, Feb. 4 and 5, 1893.

Foster said that although he had no personal objection to Hawaiian statehood, he believed that the “main problem was to secure annexation.”³⁵

In the days that followed, Foster held meetings with the commissioners, but he continued to remain noncommittal both to them and to the newspapers. Certainly this was not the way to arouse the public to the necessity for annexing the islands. Indeed, the *Baltimore Sun*, a Cleveland supporter, considered the issue virtually dead and was doing its best to keep it that way by relegating Hawaiian news to the inner pages while emphasizing the inaugural preparations. The *Washington Post*, apparently quite jingoistic, continued to report whatever news it could unearth. On February 8, for instance, the paper reported that Foster had had a private interview with Senator John T. Morgan of Alabama, “an earnest believer in annexation.”³⁶

Unquestionably, the *Post* was right in assuming that Foster was proceeding with annexation. But Foster, unlike contemporary European and Asiatic imperialists who were then carving out colonial empires indiscriminately, was obviously leading his nation’s novitiate into imperialism as cautiously as possible. By conferring with Queen Liliuokalani’s representative, Paul Neuman, he assured himself that the revolution had been entirely successful and that restoration of the queen was impracticable.³⁷ He also sounded out Great Britain, Russia, Germany, France, and Japan on their views “adverse to or confirming our position of predominant interest.” On Diplomatic Day in Washington, Foster was pleased to hear the representatives of Germany, Russia, Japan, and France express favorable views on American control of the islands. He was disturbed, however, because the British remained silent. Although Lord Rosebery, the British Prime Minister, intimated that his government might protest, his government later decided to accept the primacy of America’s claims to Hawaii and did not protest when the Harrison administration submitted a treaty of annexation to the Senate.³⁸

Finally, Foster’s cautious handling of the Hawaiian annexation question was also evident in his reaction to the news on February 10 that Stevens had declared a United States’ protectorate over the islands. Although the *Post* headlined, “A Diplomatic Coup,” it was

³⁵ Thurston, *Memoirs of the Hawaiian Revolution*, 283–284.

³⁶ *Washington Post*, Feb. 8, 1893.

³⁷ Stenographic notes of the interview, Feb. 21, 1893, Notes from Hawaii.

³⁸ Foster to Charles D. White (circular note to major powers), Feb. 1, 1893, Instructions, Russia; Robert Lincoln to Foster, Feb. 10, 1893, Harrison Papers; Stenographed item, Feb. 2, 1893, Notes from Hawaii and Harrison Papers.

misleading its readers. In reality the administration was embarrassed by the action and publicly stated that it was taken without instructions from the Department of State.³⁹ Moreover, Foster chastized Stevens for his precipitous action:

So far, therefore, as your action amounts to according—at the request of the *de facto* sovereign government of the Hawaiian Islands, the cooperation of the moral and material forces of the United States for the protection of life and property from apprehended disorders, your action is commended. But so far as it may appear to overstep that limit, by setting the authority of the United States above that of the Government of the Hawaiian Islands, in the capacity of a Protector, or to impair in any way the independent sovereignty of the Hawaiian government by substituting the flag and power of the United States, as the symbol and manifestation of paramount authority, it is disavowed.⁴⁰

Despite this reprimand, the administration submitted to the Senate on February 15 a tight, substantial treaty which, though fulfilling the conditions of the commissioners, secured for the United States irrevocable terms of control of Hawaii. In presenting the treaty the administration asserted that this was the alternative to anarchy or monarchy, either of which would cause needless suffering for the Americans in Hawaii. Moreover, the administration made the treaty appear to be a well-deliberated and a properly negotiated transaction for fear that any intimation of imperialism would provide grist for the mill of the vocal anti-imperialists.⁴¹

Considerable opposition to rash imperialism and colonism was soon evident when the periodicals intensified their anti-annexationist campaigns.⁴² The *Nation* particularly accelerated its editorial campaign against annexation, for its editor and publisher, E. L. Godkin, privately expressed his fear that the United States would be acquiring, after a brief waiting period for statehood, a new batch of “ignorant, superstitious, and foreign tongue voters.”⁴³

In the Senate the treaty provoked heated debate. The Republicans,

³⁹ *Washington Post*, Feb. 10, 1893.

⁴⁰ Foster to Stevens, Feb. 11, 1893, Instructions, Hawaii.

⁴¹ Benjamin Harrison, “Letter of Transmittal of the Hawaiian Treaty to the Senate,” Feb. 15, 1893; Richardson’s *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, IX, 348–349; Foster, *American Diplomacy in the Orient*, 375–384; Foster, *Diplomatic Memoirs*, II, 166–175; Thurston, *Memoirs of the Hawaiian Revolution*, 291; Treaty of Hawaiian Annexation, Report of the Committee on Foreign Relations Relative to Hawaiian Matter, 1894, *Senate Report*, 227, 53rd Cong., 2d sess., II, 1010–13.

⁴² *New York Herald*, *New York Sun*, and *Nation*, Feb. and March, 1893.

⁴³ William R. Armstrong, *E. L. Godkin and American Foreign Policy, 1865–1900* (New York, 1957), 177.

in the majority, generally stood behind the administration. They held that annexation was in the best interests, both commercial and strategic, of the country. So enthusiastic were the senators on the Foreign Relations Committee that they rushed through the treaty in two days and strongly presented their case on the Senate floor. Staunchly opposed to the treaty, however, were the Democrats who were following Cleveland's private dictate that he wanted the treaty blocked until he took office.⁴⁴ Joined by some Republicans, who opposed the expansionism as the work of predatory imperialists or ambitious politicians, they successfully blocked the treaty.⁴⁵

That there was, nevertheless, considerable support for annexation became evident when President Cleveland reversed Harrison's annexation policy. Cleveland withdrew the treaty for the "purpose of re-examination," and sent James H. Blount of Georgia to Hawaii "to make an impartial investigation of the circumstances attending the change of government and of all the conditions bearing upon the subject of the treaty."⁴⁶ After this investigation, Secretary of State Walter Q. Gresham reported that the Harrison administration's disavowals that it supported the revolution "are utterly at variance with the evidence, documentary and oral, contained in Mr. Blount's reports. They are contradicted by declarations and letters of President Dole and other annexationists and by Mr. Stevens' own verbal admissions to Mr. Blount."⁴⁷

Cleveland decided, on the basis of Blount's reports, that the United States was obligated to make amends to the deposed queen by restoring her throne. When he attempted to carry through his restoration policy, however, he experienced so much harsh criticism that he was forced to back down. Indeed, because popular feeling against

⁴⁴ *Congressional Record and Senate Journal*, 52d Cong., 2d sess., 1892-1893; G. R. Dulebohn, *Principles of Foreign Policy under the Cleveland Administration* (Philadelphia, 1941), 40.

⁴⁵ Ernest R. May correctly maintains that since there was neither a true national movement nor even Republican party unity on annexation, Harrison vacillated on annexation (*Imperial Democracy*, 13-16). The leading Republican opponent of annexation was Carl Schurz, who later helped establish the Anti-Imperialist League in 1898. He opposed Harrison's making of "party capital" out of the Hawaiian question. Schurz misunderstood the President's role. Carl Schurz, "Manifest Destiny," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, LXXXVII (1893), 738.

⁴⁶ Grover Cleveland, "Messages to the Senate, March 9, 1893," Richardson's *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, IX, 393; Allan Nevins, *Grover Cleveland* (New York, 1933), 552.

⁴⁷ Memoranda of conversations with the Secretary of State, 1893-1898, National Archives; Gresham to Cleveland, Oct. 18, 1893, *Foreign Relations, 1894*, Appendix II, 459-463; Matilda Gresham, *Life of Walter Quintin Gresham* (Chicago, 1919), II, 750-755.

the restoration policy ran so high, it appeared that the Harrison administration might have effected the annexation of Hawaii if it had vigorously sought the treaty. Americans were not disposed to restore monarchs, and even the usually reticent Harrison could not fail to note to Foster that "the pulling down of the flag in Honolulu has created a very intense feeling throughout the country against Cleveland."⁴⁸

The queen was not restored, and in 1894 Cleveland recognized the Republican government of Hawaii. Four years later, during the Spanish-American War, President William McKinley, signing a joint resolution of Congress on July 7, 1898, welcomed the territory of Hawaii into the American union.⁴⁹

It seems, then, that regardless of Harrison's assertion of national power, he had not only for nearly four years opposed encouraging the Hawaiian annexationists, but also had been overly cautious in pursuing annexation even when the Hawaiian pear was ripe for plucking. To be sure, Harrison may have showed political astuteness in realizing that although he had personally undergone a metamorphosis from his earlier opposition to a sympathetic view on the Hawaiian question, the public was still hostile to outright expansionism. Yet, the historian can only wonder whether Harrison could have annexed Hawaii had he really made the matter a rush order.

⁴⁸ Harrison to Foster, May 1, 1893, Foster Papers.

⁴⁹ It was Foster's draft treaty which became the core of the later treaty, *Diplomatic Memoirs*, II, 170-172.