



Past Shapes the Present

Voices of Native Hawaiian Resistance

Historical Context

In the late 1800s, Hawaii was a proud and independent kingdom led by Native Hawaiian monarchs. Queen Lili'uokalani [pronounced: lee-lee-oo-oh-kah-lah-nee] was ruling monarch of Hawaii in 1891. She cared deeply for her people and wanted to restore power to the Hawaiian government, which had been weakened by foreign influence, especially from US businessmen and sugar plantation owners. In 1893, a group of these businessmen, with support from the US Marines, overthrew Queen Lili'uokalani in a coup and created a provisional government. The Queen was forced to surrender, but she never gave up her belief that Hawaii should remain independent. By 1897, the United States was preparing to annex Hawaii, creating a new US territory in a strategic Pacific location. Queen Lili'uokalani wrote a strong letter of protest to the US government. She declared that the annexation was wrong and that the Hawaiian people did not agree with it. Along with her protest, more than 21,000 Native Hawaiians signed petitions against annexation to show their strong opposition. Despite their efforts, the United States annexed Hawaii in 1898. The Queen's letter is still remembered today as a powerful symbol of resistance, a reminder that many Native Hawaiians never wanted to lose their land, culture, or independence. Her protest continues to inspire current movements for Hawaiian rights and self-determination.

Connection to Habit

Students can recognize how the historical injustices of colonization, military occupation, and economic exploitation continue to shape the lives of Native Hawaiians and the environment today. Understanding this history allows for more informed discussions about sovereignty, environmental justice, and sustainable solutions for Hawaii's future, as well as modern consequences of other territories' imperial pasts

Discussion Questions

Queen Lili'uokalani's Protest Letter (1897)

- What was Queen Lili'uokalani asking the United States to do in her letter? Why do you think she believed it was important to speak on behalf of the Hawaiian people?
- How does her letter show the values and identity of the Hawaiian Kingdom and its people?

The Mauna Kea Movement - Modern Protest (2019)

- What are Native Hawaiians protesting at Mauna Kea, and why is that mountain so important to them?
- How does the video show the connection between Hawaiian culture and the land? Why is that relationship important?

Connecting the Past to the Present

- What similarities do you see between Queen Lili'uokalani's resistance in 1897 and the Mauna Kea protests today?
- Why is it important to listen to Indigenous voices when decisions are made about land, culture, and government?
- How do both protests show the idea that the past shapes the present”?

Suggested Activity

Materials Needed:

- Letter: [Liliuokalani, Queen of Hawaii to U.S. House of Representatives protesting U.S. assertion of ownership of Hawaii, December 19, 1898](#)
- Video: [“Why Native Hawaiians Are Fighting to Protect Mauna Kea”](#)
- Small poster board or construction paper
- Notebook Paper
- Pencil/Pen

Step 1: Compare and Contrast [20 mins]

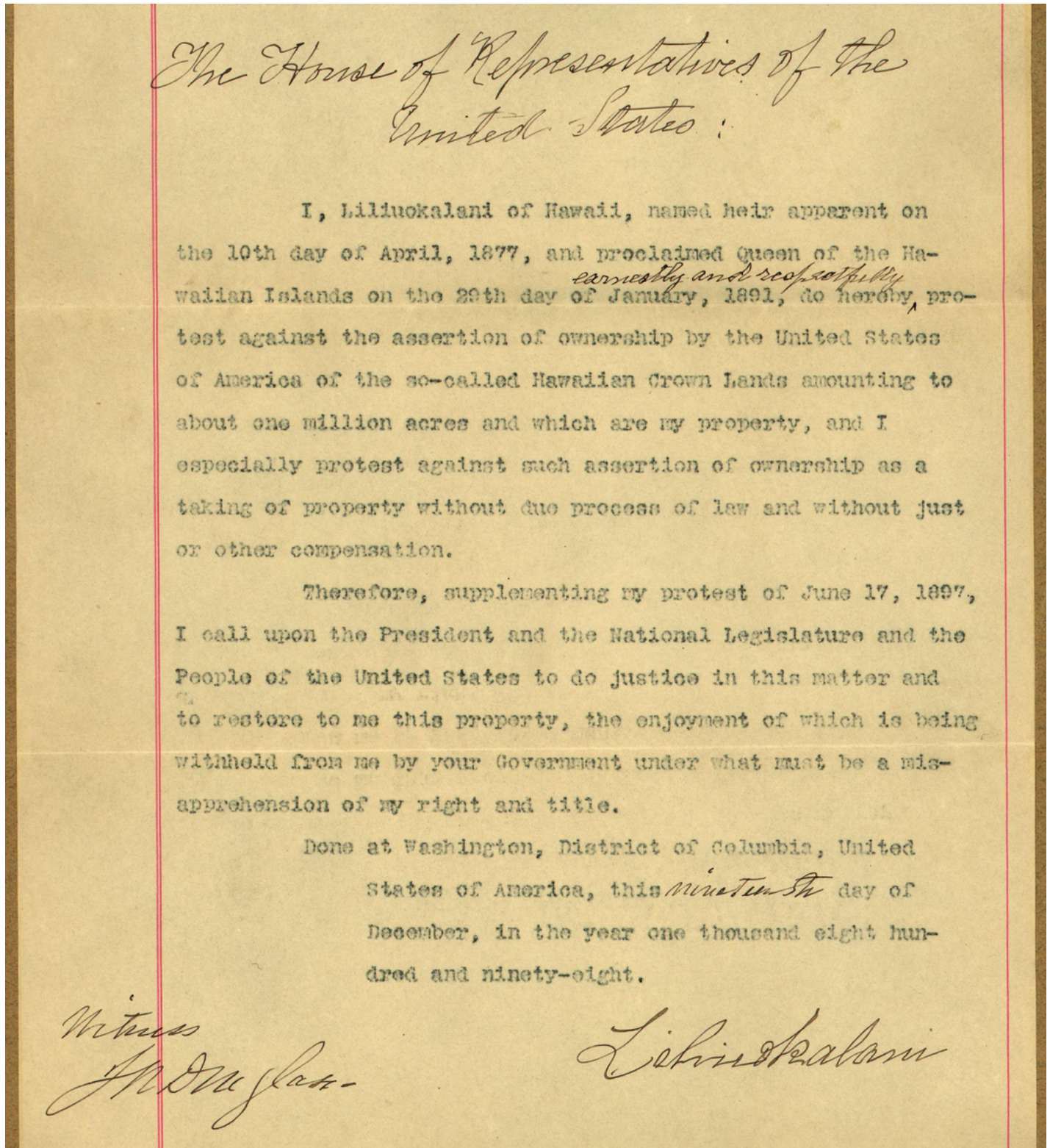
Have students create a compare and contrast chart after reading [Queen Lili'uokalani's 1897 protest letter](#) and watching a 10 minute video of modern-day Indigenous Hawaiian movements [“Why Native Hawaiians Are Fighting to Protect Mauna Kea”](#)

Step 2: Mini-Poster Activity [20 mins]

Distribute or project Queen Lili'uokalani's letter for students to close read. Students will design a symbol or mini-poster representing what Queen Lili'uokalani was fighting to protect based on her protest letter (i.e. Hawaiian land, culture, identity, or independence.) The mini-poster should include 1–2 words or a short phrase. Use drawings, colors, and meaningful shapes (i.e. mountains, a crown, ocean waves, a locked gate, or chains being broken).

Primary Sources

Source 1: Letter - Liliuokalani, Queen of Hawaii to U.S. House of Representatives (1898)



Source: Letter from Liliuokalani, Queen of Hawaii to U.S. House of Representatives protesting U.S. assertion of ownership of Hawaii, December 19, 1898

Source 2: Video - "Why Native Hawaiians Are Fighting to Protect Mauna Kea"