3.3-Native Hawai'ian Sovereignty Movement

The Asian American Education Project

Grade Levels	6-12
Lesson Overview	Good Americans (1950 – 1960s). This lesson provides an overview of Hawai'i's history as a kingdom, the development of the plantation economy in the 19th century, and the shift to statehood in the 20th century. Since the overthrow of the Hawai'ian monarchy in 1893, Native Hawai'ians have been seeking sovereignty from the United States. And with the gradual influx of Asian immigrants to the island as laborers to work on sugar plantations, Native Hawai'ians have seen their island's population change, and with it, a shift in the economic and political dynamics between the indigenous people and Asian Americans.
Lesson Objectives	Students will learn about: • The history of Hawai'i before it became the fiftieth state of the United States in 1959. • The shared experiences of immigrant plantation workers in Hawaii that led to a mixed local culture and the growing political influence of Asian Americans. • Different points of view regarding Hawai'ian statehood by Asian Americans and Native Hawai'ians. • The Akaka Bill. • Current events regarding Native Hawai'ians' fight to protect their sacred land. • Challenges faced by Native Hawai'ians in fighting for independence and to save their land.

Background Essay:

Before Hawai'i became the fiftieth state of the United States, it was an independent kingdom. Its distinct culture had emerged on an archipelago in the Pacific Ocean by the 12th century with multiple kingdoms across islands. The civilization remained isolated until 1778 when British explorer James Cook arrived. In 1795, King Kamehameha I consolidated rule over the islands and started the unified Kingdom of Hawai'i.

Since 1893, Native Hawai'ians have been seeking sovereignty when their monarch, Queen Liliuokalani, was overthrown in a coup by American sugar planters and the threat of U.S. military force. In 1898, the island was annexed as a U.S. territory. Although recognized by the United Nations in 1946 as a non-self-governing nation, the Admission Act (Hawai'i Statehood) in 1959 removed Hawai'i from that registry, hindering the international recognition of the Native Hawai'ian sovereignty movement.

Today's Hawai'ian population is comprised of not only Native Hawai'ians, but also Chinese, Portuguese, Japanese, Filipinos, and Pacific Islanders. This however was not always the case.

During the 19th Century, Americans and Europeans saw the profit potential in the island nation's sugar cane plantations and hired contract laborers from Asia due to the lack of native labor. The first Chinese contract laborers arrived in 1852, followed by the Japanese in 1885. In 1890, the Chinese and Japanese made up a third of the population. Concerned American colonizers and Native Hawai'ians established a commission in 1894 to investigate the growing Chinese and Japanese population, concluding that although the growing Asian population was not good for the island their labor was nevertheless necessary. By 1900, Asian Americans were 65% of the population, while Native Hawai'ians shrank to just 24%.

By the 20th Century, Asian Americans became a majority of the population, while the white ("haole") population became the minority. This shift in the population gave rise to the political influence of Asian Americans, including the island-wide strikes of the Hawai'i Democratic Revolution of 1954 which led to the

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overthrow of white minority rule, better working conditions and statehood. Compared to Asian Americans however, Native Hawai'ians suffer from lower income, higher poverty, incarceration, and high school dropout rates or don't attend college. Due to their limited access to land, they are disenfranchised economically and socially.

The Native Hawai'ian sovereignty movement continues to seek to reclaim the lost land and culture of the native people. In 1921, the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act allowed the homesteading for people of 50% or more Hawai'ian ancestry.

In 1993, President Bill Clinton signed the Apology Resolution, admitting the United States' responsibility in the overthrow of the monarchy and that the native people did not directly relinquish their land. However, in 2009, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that several clauses in the Apology had no binding legal effect in terms of land claims by Native Hawai'ians.

From 2000 to 2009, Senator Daniel Akaka proposed a series of bills, the Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act (Akaka Bill), to gain U.S. federal recognition of indigenous Hawai'ians similar to Native Americans.

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Vocabulary:

- **Archipelago:** a group of islands[1]
- **Haole:** someone not descended from the aboriginal Polynesian inhabitants of Hawai'i; and used to describe white people, whether or not they are Hawai'ian-born[2]
- **Homesteading:** obtaining ownership of government land, based on legislative action that promoted the settlement and development of that land[3]
- **Plantation:** large agricultural property dedicated to planting a few crops on a large scale[4]
- **Sovereignty:** freedom from external control; the ability to rule over oneself without outside interference[5]

[1] Definition adapted from Merriam-Webster Dictionary
[2] Definition adapted from Dictionary.com
[3] Definition adapted from Encyclopedia Britannica
[4] Definition adapted from Vocabulary.com
[5] Definition adapted from Merriam-Webster Dictionary and YourDictionary.com

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Discussion Questions:

- How did social, political, and economic factors lead to a rise in immigrants from Asia to Hawai'i?
- Why were immigrants from different countries able to work together, both in the fields and in workers' rights movements?
- How did the passage of the Hawaii Admission Act impact Asian Americans and Native Hawai'ians differently?
- How did the labor movement lead to a "political revolution" in 1954?
- What are the benefits and disadvantages of the Akaka Bill to the ongoing Native Hawai'ian sovereignty movement?

Activity 1: Native Hawai'ian History

Students will learn about Hawai'i's history in order to understand the social and political implications to the island's indigenous and foreign population and later becoming a state of the U.S.

Distribute the Native Hawai'ian History Timeline Activity handout. Explain to students:

- Use the dates at the bottom of the handout. Enter a date to a corresponding historical event in the Date/Time Period column.
- Show the Native Hawai'ian History Timeline Activity slides which are also available in PDF. For slides use sorter mode for students to see all eight images on one screen.
- Ask students to enter the image # in the Image Number column.
- Once the timeline is complete and checked for accuracy
  Native Hawai'ian History Timeline Activity Answer Key: Image Number order: 4, 6, 3, 1, 5, 8, 2, 7

After the class has completed the timeline, discuss the following questions:

1. What impact did European and American relations have on the Kingdom of Hawai'i?
2. How did social, political, and economic factors lead to a rise of immigrants from Asia to Hawai'i?
3. Why did plantation owners hire laborers from different countries instead of one place?
4. Why were immigrants from different countries able to work together, both in the fields and in workers' rights movements?

Activity 2: Hawai'ian Statehood

In 1959, the Hawaii Admissions Act established Hawai'i as the fiftieth state of the United States. Although the shift to statehood was a huge boon to the political progress of Asian Americans on the island, it simultaneously complicated the chances of sovereignty for Native Hawai'ians.

Divide students into groups of three to four and have them conduct research on the following labor movement events:

- Hawaiian Sugar Strike of 1946 – What happened and why? What was the result?
- Hawaii Democratic Revolution of 1959 – What happened and why? What was the result?

Groups will conduct research on the Hawaii Admissions Act ballot vote, including support and opposition by different demographic groups on the island using the below fact sheet and other sources. Students will analyze the issues that matter to each of these groups.

Fact Sheet

- Japanese, Filipino, Chinese, Korean, and Mixed Asian groups would benefit from statehood. As descendants of immigrant laborers, many of whom are laborers themselves, they want to ensure they

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have representation on the U.S. federal level to protect the workers with rights they have been fighting for.

- Puerto Rican laborers, who came to Hawai'i after Puerto Rico's own sugar plantation industry was affected by two hurricanes in 1899, would benefit from statehood for similar reasons as stated above, but with the added caveat that while Puerto Rico was also a U.S. territory, it was not being considered for statehood. And so achieving statehood in Hawai'i would grant Puerto Ricans more political representation than they would receive elsewhere.
- Caucasians are split. Many see statehood as a way to improve foreign relations within Asia, where Communism was on the rise. So a stronger American presence in the Pacific would benefit the U.S. Additionally, granting Hawaii statehood would challenge the accusations of colonialism in a post-colonial world. However, some would see the possibility of more non-white members of Congress as a disruption of the status quo, which mainly benefits white citizens.
- Native Hawai'ians would generally not benefit from statehood, as they see the overthrow of the Hawai'ian monarchy as illegal, and, thus, U.S. annexation should be seen as illegal, too. Statehood would solidify America's control over the islands. Native Hawai'ians preferred an option to vote for "Independence" on the ballot, but there was none provided.

As a whole class, have a discussion on the following questions:

1. What was the Hawaiian Sugar Strike of 1946, and how did it lead to multi-ethnic worker solidarity?
2. What was the Hawaii Democratic Revolution of 1954, and how did it lead to Hawai'ian statehood?
3. How would Hawaiian statehood assist America in the Cold War?
4. How did the passage of the Hawaii Admission Act impact Asian Americans?
5. How did the passage of the Hawaii Admission Act impact Native Hawai'ians and their struggle for sovereignty?

Activity 3: **Akaka Bill**

Since the last sovereign Hawai'ian government was overthrown by American businessmen in the late 19th century, native Hawaiians have been denied the right to self-determination. Beginning in 2000, Senator Daniel Akaka, the first U.S. Senator of Native Hawai'ian ancestry, has proposed various versions of what is now the Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act of 2009, more commonly known as the Akaka Bill. The bill would give Native Hawai'ian recognition by the federal government, similar to an Indigenous American tribe, and provide for negotiations between the United States and the proposed new Hawai'ian government entity. If passed, the bill could give Native Hawai'ians a legal means to fight for their rights and sovereignty.

Assign students to research the Akaka Bill to discuss the benefits and disadvantages of the bill, as seen from the point of view of Native Hawai'ians. Students will answer the following questions for a whole class discussion:

1. In your own words, what is the goal of the Akaka Bill?
2. How is the bill a response to events you learned about in Hawai'ian history?
3. What connections can you make between the political progress made by Asian Americans and Native Hawai'ians in the 1950s and '60s, and the Akaka Bill (2000-2009) today?
4. What are some arguments *for* passing the Akaka Bill?
5. What are the arguments *against* passing the Akaka Bill?
6. Do you think it is possible for the U.S. to one day recognize a Native Hawai'ian government? Why or why not?

Extension Activity: **Protecting Sacred Land**

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In 2019, Native Hawai'ian advocacy groups made headlines by protesting the construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope on Mauna Kea, a dormant volcano considered to be sacred in Hawai'ian religion and culture. The summit was chosen for its ideal location for capturing images from deep space. The protests at Mauna Kea are an extension of the continued contention between the native Hawaii population and the U.S. government over the legitimacy of the overthrow of Hawaii's monarchy and its annexation.

Students will conduct research on the Protect Mauna Kea movement by Native Hawai'ians, and answer the following questions for a whole class discussion:

1. Why is Mauna Kea an ideal spot for an astronomical research center?
2. Why are Hawai'ians protesting the construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope?
3. How might this protest be related to the struggle for Native Hawai'ian rights?
4. How does this event connect to the larger themes of this lesson, such as sovereignty or political power?

Further Information

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