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Colonization of American Samoa and Hawaii

American Samoa and Hawaii have different stories, but they both reflect a broader pattern of U.S. expansion. Hawaii was once an independent kingdom with its own government, culture, and international recognition. In the late 1800s, however, U.S. business interests—particularly in sugar and pineapple—started to tighten their grip. The turning point came in 1893, when the queen was overthrown in a coup backed by U.S. marines and American settlers. The queen's goal had been to restore more power to the Hawaiian monarchy and reduce foreign influence which is why the U.S. backed the coup. According to the U.S. Department of State, "The overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii began with the establishment of the 'Committee of Safety' by American residents to protect their interests" (Annexation of Hawaii).

It is important to note, that because the coup was American backed the natives had no say and initially resented the annexation of Hawaii. In fact, they protested heavily. Thousands signed petitions opposing the annexation, but their voices were ignored. It was a takeover, not a peaceful transition. As a product of many native Hawaiians still view that statehood as illegitimate. They've lost land, culture, and political power. In schools, many kids didn't even learn their own language until recently. From about the mid 1800s to the late 1900s, cultural appropriation was at large, where the language, hula, and other important cultural aspects of their life went missing. Eventually a wave a revitalization of Hawaiian culture happened causing a shift back to the original state.

American Samoa's story is a little different. Instead of being overthrown, Samoan chiefs signed treaties with the U.S. in the early 1900s. The islands became a strategic naval base, especially during World War II. But just because it was signed doesn't mean it was truly fair. Today, American Samoa remains an unincorporated territory. As the U.S. Department of the Interior explains, "American Samoans are U.S. nationals but not U.S. citizens," meaning they cannot vote in federal elections or hold certain government jobs, despite serving in the military in high numbers (American Samoa).

Hawaii and American Samoa have rich traditions and strong identities—but the U.S. government often ignored or actively suppressed them. Native Hawaiians were seen as obstacles to sugar profits. Samoans were treated like military assets. Even today, there's still a struggle for recognition, reparations, and self-determination.

Although I knew generally how each place came to be, it is an important to remember how the U.S. did participate in colonization and expansion. A lot of the focus goes to the U.K. but the recognition of the U.S.'s involvement is important. Another aspect to focus on is the revitalization of Hawaiian culture. Although the cultural appropriation was strong – culminating in an Elvis Presley film *Blue Hawaii* – the culture was able to be reclaimed. It gives hope to reclaiming Samoa culture and identity.

Works Cited

“American Samoa.” *U.S. Department of the Interior*, Office of Insular Affairs, www.doi.gov/oia/islands/american-samoa. Accessed 14 Apr. 2025.

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