



The Annexation of Hawaii featuring Joseph Kekuku

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How did the annexation of Hawaii by the United States mark a significant turning point in Hawaiian history, and in the development of American music?

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will examine the history behind the annexation of Hawaii, and how that history impacted Joseph Kekuku, the inventor of the Hawaiian steel guitar who helped make slide guitar playing a foundational sound in U.S. popular music. To discover this history and Kekuku's contributions to American music, students will analyze primary sources such as testimonials, speeches, and news articles, as well as listen to excerpts of the podcast, Asian American History 101.



Stevens, John L, W. B Oleson, and Nellie M Stevens. Picturesque Hawaii; a charming description of her unique history, strange people, exquisite climate, wondrous volcanoes, luxurious productions, beautiful cities, corrupt monarchy, recent revolution and provisional government. Philadelphia, Hubbard Publishing Co, 1894. Pdf. <https://www.loc.gov/item/05012619/>.

There is no pure music. The development of musical genres is never static. It breaths, borrows, and becomes something new. Its beauty, richness, and appeal lies in its respect and homage to what came before it. There is no Metallica without Ozzy Osborne. There is no Beyoncé without Aretha Franklin. And there is no Robert Johnson without Joseph Kekuku.

By the mid 1800s, Hawaii had become one of the most significant global crossroads on the planet. The strategic and inviting location of the islands welcomed whaling ships, trading vessels, passenger ships, missionaries, and military. Sailors from across the world shared their musical culture with one another through portable instruments such as guitar and violin, and this wondrous fusion of music and culture blended with native hymns and chants to become Hawaiian music. Hawaiian musicians termed this melting pot of musical influences as *Hula-Ku'i*, which means “to join old and new.” Through Hawaii’s status as a cosmopolitan trade hub, Hawaiians became some of the most literate people in the world. By the turn of the 20th century, Hawaii had developed a cutting edge music scene—largely inspired by the steel bar guitar technique invented by high schooler, Joseph Kekuku. The young student Kekuku is said to have taken a nylon string guitar, changed the strings to metal, and fashioned a steel bar and finger picks to play his new variation that sat on his lap.



Around the same time Kekuku was experimenting with slide guitar, the United States government was fiercely debating the possible annexation of Hawaii. U.S. officials in favor of annexing Hawaii saw the islands as a strategic military location and a favorable place for trade and profit, while those opposed considered the idea immoral and a violation of American principles. For those opposed, Hawaiian annexation established a government without the consent of those being governed, and denied voice and vote to Hawaii's Indigenous peoples. Some in the Native Hawaiian population saw the possible annexation of Hawaii as an act of war and a subversion of democratic principles. At the time, the United States was struggling with the contradictory policies of Isolationism and Imperialism, and ultimately the lure of expansion prevailed—forever changing Hawaii.

The annexation of Hawaii was opposed in great numbers by Native Hawaiians, who felt the U.S. government was not serving their interests, but ultimately those of white settlers. This white settler community was largely comprised of the descendants of early missionaries who had grown up on the islands and sought more Hawaiian land for agriculture. White settlers also desired more foreign labor to work the land since between 1832 and 1890 the Native population dropped from 130,000 to 35,000 due to disease. This labor shortage created incentives to import workers from Japan and China, as well as cost saving benefits for settlers due to the imported cheap labor.

Joseph Kekuku was a young teenager in the years when fear of native resistance to the annexation of Hawaii resulted in a movement to strip the ruling Hawaiian Kingdom of its powers, limit native expression, and undermine Hawaiian self rule. The “Bayonet Constitution” imposed upon the Hawaiian Kingdom by U.S. business leaders and politicians set in motion the overthrow of the monarchy, and provided the pathway to annexation and statehood. Kekuku voiced his opposition to this takeover, and the music he created became a voice of resistance, pride, and originality.

Faced with the prospect of displacement and marginalization in his native Hawaii, Kekuku joined many other native Hawaiians and left his homeland to seek opportunities on the U.S. mainland. For Kekuku and his musician colleagues, this meant traveling the newly built transcontinental railroad to supply mainland Americans' growing infatuation with all things Hawaii, including the unique Hawaiian guitar sound. The lonesome, dreamy, and romantic sound of Joseph Kekuku's instrument rose quickly from a novelty tone to an essential sound in American popular music. Kekuku's important contribution remains a gift that should be credited to that string of islands in the middle of the Pacific.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- The history of the annexation of Hawaii
- The role Queen Liliuokalani played in the annexation of Hawaii
- The influence and impact of Joseph Kekuku's steel guitar playing on American music

2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE:

- Students will be able to assess how U.S. Imperialism led to the annexation of Hawaii by analyzing texts, examining media, and interpreting primary source documents.

ACTIVITIES

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Play the audio clip “Aloha oe” from the Library of Congress. Ask students:
 - Have you heard this song before?
 - Does this song remind you of anything?
 - What instruments do you hear?
 - Where do you think this song comes from?
2. Explain to students that this song was written by Queen Liliuokalani of Hawaii, and the guitar style that is being played was invented by the Hawaiian Joseph Kekuku. In the lesson, they will be more closely examining these two figures during the period when Hawaii became a U.S. territory.

PROCEDURE

1. Distribute to student groups **Handout - Hawaiian Annexation Graphic Organizer** (*Teacher's Guide*). Inform students that they will use this handout throughout class to take notes on the primary sources introduced in the lesson.
 - In what ways might Hawaii's location be strategic or beneficial to global trade? (*Its location makes Hawaii a natural meeting place for trade between Asia and the Americas.*)
2. Display **Image 1, Map of East Asia and Oceania**. Ask students to locate Hawaii on the map. Then ask students:
 - How would you describe where Hawaii is on the globe? (*It is located almost in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, between the Eastern and Western Hemispheres of Earth.*)
3. Display **Image 2, History of Hawaiian-Western Relations, 1778- 1875**. Ask students to read the timeline on the board or in Handout - Hawaiian Annexation Graphic Organizer, and individually or as a group, answer the

questions in the handout under document 1. Ask students to share their answers with the class.

4. Display **Image 3, Photograph of Queen**

Liliuokalani. Inform students that they will be reading a first hand account of Hawaiian Queen Liliuokalani, who was the last sovereign of Hawaii before annexation. Ask students to move to document 2 in **Handout - Hawaiian Annexation Graphic Organizer**. Allow them time to answer the questions after each excerpt. Then ask students:

- Who wrote this statement? (*Queen Liliuokalani*)
- Who were Queen Liliuokalani's primary antagonists? (*The Reform Party*)
- How would you describe the events detailed in Queen Liliuokalani's statement that led up to the takeover in 1893?

5. Inform students that as soon as the Queen was overthrown in 1893, the process of annexing Hawaii to the United States began. Ask students or student groups to examine documents 3 and 4 in **Handout - Hawaiian Annexation Graphic Organizer**. After they answer the questions on the handout, allow them to share their answers in class. Then ask students:

- What were some of the arguments for and against the annexation of Hawaii?

6. Ask students to examine document 5 in **Handout - Hawaiian Annexation Graphic Organizer**. After students read the document and respond to the questions, allow them to share their answers with the class. Then ask students:

- In addition to mandating English as the language of instruction at Hawaiian schools, various other ordinances banned other aspects of Hawaiian culture, such as music, dance, and surfing. What might have been the reasoning for such bans?
- After Hawaiian annexation, Queen Liliuokalani lived largely under house arrest, and spent her time writing songs and poems in the Hawaiian language. Why might have the Queen felt this was an important way to spend her time under arrest?

7. Play the above excerpt of the episode "The History of the Hawaiian Steel Guitar" from the podcast, Asian American History 101. Then ask students:

- Who was Joseph Kekuku? (*The Hawaiian inventor of the slide guitar style.*)
- How did Kekuku refine his musical talent? (*He was a student at the Kamehameha school for boys.*)
- How did Kekuku develop the steel guitar sound? (*According to the legend, he used a railroad spike on the guitar.*)

8. Play the next excerpt of the episode "The History of the Hawaiian Steel Guitar" from the podcast, Asian American History 101. Then ask students:

- What are some ways Kekuku's guitar playing became popular in the mainland United States? (*He migrated and performed throughout the United States.*)
- According to the podcast, why was Hawaiian culture popular in the mainland United States? (*There was a growth in*

interest in Hawaiian culture after Hawaii became a U.S. territory.)

- Has was Hawaiian music and culture presented in the United States? (*It was exoticized.*)

SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Play **Clip 1, Pedal Steel Noah, “Happy Together.”** Then ask students:
 - Have you seen this performer before? If so, where?
 - After releasing almost daily videos of pedal steel guitar covers, Pedal Steel Noah has become a viral hit. Before the age of 18, he has been profiled by *Guitar World* magazine and the *New York Times*, among others. He has also played at music festivals such as South by Southwest. What might Pedal Steel Noah’s popularity say about the slide guitar and the impact of Hawaiian culture today?
2. Display **Image 4, “Getting Through is the Best Revenge” Writing Prompt**, and ask students to follow the prompt.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Examine this historical map from the Library of Congress (<https://www.loc.gov/resource/g4380.ct003104/?r=-0.046,-0.025,1.138,0.772,0>), paying particular attention to the description in the middle. Write a short piece considering the tone of that descriptive paragraph, and how such a tone was related to U.S. Imperialism.
2. Explore Hawaiian Annexation more deeply by analyzing this collection of newspapers from the Library of Congress: <https://guides.loc.gov/chronicling-america-annexation-hawaii>
3. Listen to the full Asian American History 101 podcast episode, “The History of the Hawaiian Steel Guitar” here, and explore their other podcasts on Hawaiian cowboys (<https://asianamericanhistory101.libsyn.com/the-history-of-the-paniolo-aka-the-hawaiian-cowboy>) and Hawaiian cuisine (<https://asianamericanhistory101.libsyn.com/the-history-of-hawaii-regional-cuisine>).
4. Explore how the Hawaiian Steel Guitar became popular across genres by conducting a Hawaiian Steel Guitar listening party, drawing upon the following tracks:
 - “Your Cheatin’ Heart” by Hank Williams (1953)
 - “Sleep Walk” Santo & Johnny (1959)
 - “You Ain’t Going Nowhere” by The Byrds (1968)
 - “Teach Your Children” by Crosby, Stills, Nash, & Young (1970)



- “Tiny Dancer” by Elton John (1972)
 - “Something in the Orange” by Zach Bryan (2022)
5. Explore this Spotify playlist to hear more Hawaiian Steel Guitar: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6iCewp19GqCa2ztrVFnmHJ>



STANDARDS

COLLEGE, CAREER, AND CIVIC LIFE (C3) SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

History

D2.Geo.2.9-12. Use maps, satellite images, photographs, and other representations to explain relationships between the locations of places and regions and their political, cultural, and economic dynamics.

D2.Geo.11.9-12. Evaluate how economic globalization and the expanding use of scarce resources contribute to conflict and cooperation within and among countries.

D2.His.1.9-12. Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.

D2.His.15.9-12. Distinguish between long-term causes and triggering events in developing a historical argument.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

US2.30 Analyze the history, culture and government structure of at least two countries prior to American intervention (e.g., Hawaii, the Philippines, Puerto Rico).

US2.31 Analyze the domestic debates and decisions regarding foreign intervention and the United States' emergence as an imperial power (e.g., the Spanish-American War, Philippine-American War, intervention in Latin America, the annexation of Hawaii).

US2.32 Analyze reasons for and efforts of different nations to maintain or regain economic and political freedoms following American intervention using primary sources from the perspective of native communities (e.g., Hawaiians, Filipinos)

US2.33 Evaluate the role of mass media, sensationalism, white supremacy and propaganda in promoting American imperialism.

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE FRAMEWORK STANDARDS

Topic 7. Progressivism and World War I [USI.T7]

5. Analyze the causes and course of growing role of the United States in world affairs from the Civil War to World War I, researching and reporting on one of the following ideas, policies, or events, and, where appropriate, including maps, timelines, and other visual resources to clarify connections among nations and events,



CONNECTICUT SECONDARY SOCIAL STUDIES FRAMEWORK

US-3. Imperialism and World War I

US.His.4.b. Analyze how economic and cultural hegemony influenced American perspectives of imperialism at the end of the 19th century (e.g., Cuba, Puerto Rico, Spanish-American War, Annexation of Hawaii and Philippines, dispossession of Latino American lands in the American West).

NEW JERSEY STUDENT LEARNING STANDARDS - SOCIAL STUDIES

Era 6. The Emergence of Modern America: Progressive Reforms (1890–1930)

6.1.12.EconGE.6.a: Determine the role geography played in gaining access to raw materials and finding new global markets to promote trade.

SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change

Theme 3: People, Place, and Environments

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance

Theme 9: Global Connections

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

College and Career Readiness Reading Informational Text Standards for Grades 9-12

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.2 Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.3 Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.



CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.2 Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing for Grades 9-12

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening for Grades 9-12

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10



topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

LEARNING FOR JUSTICE SOCIAL JUSTICE STANDARDS

JU.9-12.13 I can explain the short and long-term impact of biased words and behaviors and unjust practices, laws and institutions that limit the rights and freedoms of people based on their identity groups.



RESOURCES

VIDEO RECOURCES

- Pedal Steel Noah - “Happy Together”

HANDOUTS

- Handout - Hawaiian Annexation Graphic Organizer
- Handout - Hawaiian Annexation Graphic Organizer (Teacher’s Guide)