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Fit for Annexation but Unfit to Vote?

Debating Hawaiian Suffrage Qualifications at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

In the wake of Hawaii's annexation by the United States, congressmen engaged in a series of intense debates about the suffrage laws that would govern the new territory. This article documents how these 1900 congressional debates contributed to a growing schism between the territorial definition of the state and the sociopolitical definition of the nation. The state officially expanded beyond the North American continent while the definition of the nation remained racially restrictive. A simultaneous espousal of inclusive, universalistic principles and exclusive, racist preferences characterized efforts among European American policy makers and political observers to exercise political domination over indigenous Hawaiians while, at the same time, maintaining white control of political power.

In 1898, the United States annexed the Hawaiian Islands via a joint resolution of Congress. This highly controversial act revealed as well as exacerbated deep tensions between U.S. officials who favored annexation as a form of geographical and market expansion and those who opposed it due to the racial character of the Hawaiian population that would become eligible for U.S. citizenship. The annexation also exposed widely shared, racist beliefs among imperialists and anti-imperialists alike. Those who favored Hawaiian annexation were no less racist than those who opposed it. They were simply more confident that it would be possible to balance racially based restrictions on political power with the acquisition of additional territory for the United States.

The annexation of Hawaii and subsequent debates about its political status as a U.S. territory challenged conventional assumptions about what it meant to be American. It forced politicians and political observers from both the continental United States and Hawaii to reexamine and publicly articulate their understandings about what it meant to be part of the U.S. nation and state. Why did Hawaii's new political status pose such a challenge to prevailing definitions of Americans and America? How did debates in Congress and among political observers in Hawaii contribute to changing understandings of U.S. nationhood and statehood?

In this article I will argue that debates about Hawaii's new government following annexation exposed and contributed to a growing schism between the sociopolitical definition of the nation and the territorial definition of the state. The nation, in this context, refers to an idealized (some would say imagined) collectivity whose members share a commitment to political sovereignty linked to a particular territory and are eligible to participate actively and fully in its governing processes (Anderson 1991). In addition to their shared political principles and commitment to the homeland, members of nations generally define themselves, explicitly or implicitly, in terms of specific ascriptive criteria such as race or ethnicity.

The state refers to the set of administrative institutions that govern a specific territory and that maintain dominant control over military, political, and other forms of power in that territory. One major goal of modern political leaders has been to create nation-states in which the sociopolitical boundaries of the nation match the territorial boundaries of the state. In other words, they have sought to make state territories the exclusive homes of homogenous nations. Sometimes, however, as was the case during the imperialistic era in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, other ambitions interfere with pursuit of this goal. The annexation of Hawaii, for example, represented the culmination of an expansionist impulse that led some U.S. policy makers to push for an enlargement of U.S. territory as a means of increasing the country's economic and political power despite the fact that this expansion involved the annexation of an indigenous population whom policy makers were reluctant to incorporate as full members of the nation.

The comments of most participants in the 1900 debates about Hawaii's future government revealed racist components in prevailing views of the nation that defied their more liberal exterior. Debates about self-government

for Hawaii were not debates between racists and antiracists. They were debates between those who were afraid that granting full self-government to Hawaii would threaten their concept of a racially exclusive nation and those who believed that white supremacy could be preserved within the framework of an American government in Hawaii. In other words, those who advocated full self-government for Hawaii envisioned an expanded state combined with an exclusive nation.

Approaches to U.S. Citizenship and National Membership

Within the large and diverse literature on citizenship that has emerged in recent years, the “multiple traditions” approach has exercised a growing influence among political scientists and scholars of law and society (Smith 1997: 6–9, 35–39; King 2000: 286–92). According to this approach, first introduced by Rogers Smith, there are three conflicting visions of U.S. citizenship that have vied for prominence throughout the country’s history. The liberal vision conceives of citizens as engaged in a voluntary contract and focuses on protecting individual rights. Liberalism, in Smith’s view, attributes equal rights to all citizens considered capable of self-government. It values individuals who demonstrate they are economically productive, rational, and self-possessed. The republican vision places greater weight on the collective responsibilities that citizens have toward each other and toward the state. It rewards virtue defined in terms of participation in the sociopolitical sphere and contributions to the public good. Finally, the ascriptive vision advocates that the full rights and responsibilities of citizenship be granted only to those people who possess certain ascribed traits such as whiteness or maleness. According to Smith (1997: 37–38), ascriptive approaches reassure constituents that they are members of a special group on the basis of “inborn characteristics” and regardless of individual accomplishments.

The articulation of these three different approaches to U.S. citizenship is helpful in illuminating various components of the complex and often contested definitions of what it meant to be American at the turn of the twentieth century when debates about Hawaii’s future were taking place. Echoes of all of these approaches were present in those debates although they often sounded more entangled and interdependent than separate and conflicting.

One can trace the same three general approaches outlined in the multiple

traditions theory of citizenship in prevailing definitions of property. Liberal and republican approaches to citizenship shared the assumptions that the institution of privately owned property was a necessary prerequisite for the establishment of a democratic state and that the most valuable form of property was land. Both of these assumptions were reflected in the arguments in favor of property requirements for suffrage expressed during the debates about self-government in Hawaii.

From the liberal perspective, property functioned as a privately owned possession, the value of which lay in its marketability. Property formed the basic unit of an individualistic, rational system of exchange in which self-interested, industrious men worked hard to increase its worth (see Alexander 1997; Rose 1994). From the republican perspective, by contrast, the value of property depended on its ability to serve the public good. It fulfilled this function by serving as a marker of the sociopolitical and economic status of its owners within the community. According to the proprietary, republican vision, property owners had a governing role to play within their political communities (see Alexander 1997; Rose 1994).

At least one commentator linked his perception of the need to restrict voting among native Hawaiians to such a proprietary understanding of property. He equated property ownership with political competence and argued that making property ownership a requirement for suffrage guaranteed the public good by ensuring that those who governed the Territory of Hawaii were not susceptible to gross corruption (Bishop 1900). This was a common argument among those who held that allowing suffrage among populations with few economic resources would encourage the practice of buying and selling votes.

These ideas about property were intimately and institutionally connected to assumptions about race in ways that ensured the perpetuation of white supremacy. Critical race scholars have observed that whiteness itself represents a form of property, a possession that has significant value (Harris 1995). At the turn of the twentieth century, whiteness functioned as a type of property in both the possessive individualist sense associated with liberalism and the proprietary sense associated with republicanism. In other words, whiteness served both as a valuable, individual possession that conferred specific benefits and privileges on its owners and as an asset that signified its owners' proper role in the sociopolitical order. As the comments of

participants in debates about Hawaii's postannexation government suggest, U.S. policy makers and political analysts were likely to view those people who possessed whiteness along with land as the people who were most fit to govern.

Analysis of debates about Hawaiian suffrage suggests that in contrast to the multiple traditions theory, liberal, republican, and ascriptive approaches to citizenship were not as ideologically autonomous as they might appear at first glance. Instead, these debates indicate that approaches to U.S. citizenship were often complicated and interwoven. Ascriptive assumptions about what it meant to be a citizen, and particularly a full member of the nation, were often deeply intertwined with liberal and republican sentiments.

These entangled values led to some embarrassing moments for Republican participants in the debates about Hawaii when their Democratic colleagues accused them of hypocrisy, pointing out that the same men who advocated universalistic principles in one context insisted on racially restrictive policies in others. Whereas earlier they had expressed liberal values when they favored the abolition of slavery and supported granting African Americans citizenship and equal individual rights, at the turn of the twentieth century, Republicans tended to be the strongest supporters of U.S. imperialism, defending territorial expansion as necessary for market growth and the projection of a prominent, international political presence (on the commercial aspects of imperialism, see Bell 1984: 12–21; Pratt 1936: 230–78). Their imperialist ambitions often conflicted with the ultimate reluctance of most Republicans to extend full citizenship rights to the indigenous residents of the nation's so-called new possessions, reflecting the ascriptive limits of their liberal ideals.

Democrats, who held a more republican conception of citizenship and made no effort to hide their opposition to extending full citizenship rights to African Americans and to other nonwhites on racial grounds, pounced on the apparent contradiction in the Republican position. Most Democrats opposed all manifestations of U.S. imperialism overseas, including the annexation of Hawaii, in large part because of their opposition to including more nonwhites within the boundaries of the state or nation.

Thus, on the one hand, both Republicans and Democrats supported racially exclusive entrance requirements to the nation. On the other hand, proposed requirements of this sort exposed the ascriptive dimensions of both

liberal and republican principles in imperialist contexts, provoking tensions between the parties and within the Republican position.

Historical Background to the Congressional Debates about Hawaiian Suffrage

The 1900 congressional debates about Hawaiian suffrage took place in the wake of Hawaii's annexation by the United States during an era of unprecedented overseas expansion. Hawaii was one of several new "possessions" that the United States conquered and occupied during this period, but it was the only one to be formally annexed to the United States at the time. The decision to grant Hawaii the status of a formal U.S. territory rather than simply designating it a protectorate provoked intense controversy among U.S. policy makers. In addition, questions arose about whether the same suffrage guidelines that had been adopted in continental U.S. territories in the past would be applicable to the first noncontiguous territory to be incorporated into the United States.

The development of the relationship between the United States and Hawaii has been well documented (see Bell 1984; Loomis 1976; Merry 2000; Osborne 1981; and Pratt 1936). U.S. involvement in Hawaii began in the nineteenth century when Christian missionaries flocked to the islands, intent on converting the indigenous population. U.S. businessmen and land speculators followed them, confiscating enormous tracts of land and establishing sugar plantations run by Asian contract laborers.

Calls for annexation by the United States began as early as the 1840s as Hawaiian residents of U.S. descent became increasingly eager to consolidate their economic and political power (Bell 1984: 13). In 1876, the United States signed a reciprocity treaty with the king of Hawaii, guaranteeing duty-free importation of Hawaiian sugar to the United States in exchange for Hawaii's promise not to grant territorial concessions to any other countries. Renewal of the treaty over the subsequent decade strengthened Hawaii's economic relationship with the United States and also provided exclusive U.S. access to Pearl Harbor for use as a naval station.

In 1887, political and militant groups representing the interests of the white elite of U.S. descent forced the Hawaiian king to abdicate much of his power and implement the so-called Bayonet Constitution. This new constitution severely reduced the monarch's control of the government, in part

by revising the rules for selection of members of parliament. The Bayonet Constitution equalized the size of the two parliamentary bodies and declared that only those who passed a high property qualification were eligible to elect members of the House of Nobles. Previously, the king had appointed these members. Such changes substantially increased the political power of property-owning, white Hawaiian residents of U.S. descent.

Queen Liliuokalani, who assumed power after the king's death in 1891, sought to replace the Bayonet Constitution in an effort to restore greater power to the monarchy but was immediately opposed by both white and indigenous politicians. Her attempt to regain political power aroused concerns among politically active whites of U.S. descent who favored annexation. On January 17, 1893, the Annexation Club, backed by U.S. sailors and marines, forced the queen to abdicate her throne.

The ensuing years were marked by political turmoil as U.S. policy makers argued over whether to annex Hawaii, maintain the islands as a U.S. protectorate, or restore power to the queen. During this period, an oligarchic republic, led by President Sanford Dole, was established to govern Hawaii. In 1894, the Woman Suffrage Committee tried to persuade members of the constitutional convention set up to construct a temporary government to extend voting rights to women in Hawaii, but its plea was rejected on the basis that it would increase the existing majority of "undesirable" indigenous voters (Grimshaw 2000: 570). As one historian remarked, this group of white women "appeared oblivious to the irony entailed in their applause for the republic that removed a queen and other high-born Hawaiian women from positions of authority, while they lamented this same new government's denial of women's suffrage to themselves" (*ibid.*: 571). Meanwhile, elite Hawaiian women who had enjoyed considerable political power under the monarchy lost that power under U.S. rule and did not regain even the right to vote until 1920 (*ibid.*: 572).

In addition to refusing to extend the vote to women, the Hawaiian Republic instituted a number of new voting restrictions, including a property requirement, which decreased the number of eligible voters from 14,217 in 1892 to 2,693 in 1893 (Moore 1973: 8). The latter figure represented approximately 1.2 percent of the total population in Hawaii. The Organic Act ultimately adopted by the U.S. Congress raised this number to 11,216 in 1900, approximately 7.8 percent of the population (*ibid.*: 13).

In the final decade of the nineteenth century, the Hawaiian popula-

tion was composed of 3,086 Americans, 4,161 Europeans, 15,191 Portuguese, 21,616 Chinese, 24,407 Japanese, and 39,504 Hawaiian natives or part-native Hawaiians (*ibid.*: 8). (Portuguese were counted separately from other Europeans due to their status as contract laborers.)

The Congressional Debates

Congressmen involved in the 1900 debates about Hawaii's political future after annexation generally agreed that U.S. citizenship should be extended to all Hawaiian citizens but should be withheld from foreign-born Chinese, Japanese, and Portuguese residents who made up the majority of the population in the islands. The latter group of residents historically had been treated as temporary contract laborers who had no citizenship rights. U.S. congressmen sought to abolish the practice of using contract labor, which they acknowledged as tantamount to slavery, but saw no need to make existing laborers U.S. citizens. Nevertheless, under the *jus soli* principle of citizenship operative in the United States, approximately 700 Asian residents born in Hawaii would become eligible for U.S. citizenship (*ibid.*: 11).

The decisions to deny U.S. citizenship to the majority of Hawaii's population and to extend the Chinese Exclusion Act to the Hawaiian Islands provoked little if any controversy. By contrast, the decision to grant U.S. citizenship to native Hawaiians raised considerable concerns among many members of Congress, including both Republicans and Democrats who feared that such an extension of citizenship, particularly if not limited through such measures as suffrage qualifications, had the potential to jeopardize the political dominance of the white, propertied elite.

Proponents of the Cullom bill, which proposed a new, American form of government for Hawaii, tried to reassure their fellow congressmen that granting U.S. citizenship to native Hawaiians in no way guaranteed the right to vote. In fact, those who most ardently supported the proposed government for Hawaii also tended to be the strongest supporters of extensive suffrage restrictions. In addition to the usual age restrictions, members of Congress assumed that suffrage would be restricted to men. Beyond these customary qualifications, supporters of the Cullom bill, including the Republican senator from Illinois, Shelby M. Cullom himself, wanted to impose both educational and property restrictions on prospective voters in order to ensure that political control remained firmly in the hands of the small minority of

white, wealthy men of U.S. descent who made up the current government. While the debates about suffrage focused on issues of race, they also were entangled with concerns about class. Indeed, some categories of Europeans, such as Portuguese contract laborers, were viewed as less qualified for participation in the polity than select members of the indigenous Hawaiian elite, based on their class status within Hawaiian society.

The desire of white policy makers to construct legal means to keep political power out of the hands of indigenous citizens was by no means unique to Hawaii. As other scholars have documented, efforts on the part of white elites of European ancestry to block indigenous peoples from access to political power were widespread in colonial settler societies, such as Australia and New Zealand (see Evans et al. 2003 and Grimshaw et al. 2001).

The suffrage debates suggest that a number of congressional members consented to admitting native Hawaiians as U.S. citizens so that they could be *governed by* the United States but opposed allowing native Hawaiians a right to suffrage that would grant them the possibility of actively *participating in the government* of the islands that had once belonged to them. Putting this distinction into practice, however, proved to be challenging. One of the less controversial suffrage restrictions proposed in the Cullom bill was an educational qualification stating that in order to vote, one was required to be able to read and write in either English or Hawaiian. Many congressmen hoped this restriction would be sufficient to exclude the majority of the native Hawaiian population. In fact, however, as members of Congress who had studied the matter pointed out, native Hawaiians had a very high level of education and a high literacy rate, so few were likely to be disqualified by the educational qualification. Nevertheless, most congressmen continued to support it.

In explaining his support for the provision, Republican representative William Knox from Massachusetts drew a racialized distinction between what he perceived as the dangers of the “ignorant” ballot and the safety of the “intelligent” ballot.

If there is any danger in this country today, it is the ignorant ballot. If there is any safety for the people of Hawaii in the future, it is the intelligent ballot. Thus we propose to create and to give to these people a government of a free, representative, United States Territory, founded on justice and equality, and depending for its preservation and advancement upon the intelligent ballot of the United States citizen. (U.S. Congress 1900a: 3705)

According to Knox's logic, freedom, justice, and equality in the U.S. Territory of Hawaii could be preserved and advanced only by implementing unequal, restrictive suffrage laws that limited voting eligibility to those who were literate in either Hawaiian or English. These assumptions seemed to be unproblematic for the majority of congressmen.

Local Hawaiian Republicans echoed these assumptions. An editorial in a major Hawaiian daily representing the Republican perspective (*Pacific Commercial Advertiser* 1900a) argued that suffrage qualifications were necessary in order to preserve the "American principle of self-government." In other words, the only way to guarantee the implementation of liberal, universalistic principles of government was to restrict their use at the ballot box:

A discriminating ballot would insure, or go far to insure, honest government in great cities—a condition which must be brought to pass, else the very essence of the American principle of self-government will be poisoned. Naturally, the prejudice of the thoughtless voter and his agent, the time-serving legislator, revolts against the idea of classified voting. These gentry prate of "one man, one vote," and regard it as a guarantee of liberty and progress that the ignoramus, the vagabond, and the demagogue should, in proportion to their numbers, have as much to say about the conduct of government as the wise man, the industrious citizen and the publicist. (Ibid.)

"Honesty" here served as a proxy term for white just as "intelligent" did in the previous quote. In other words, the "intelligent ballot" referred to the white ballot, and "honest government" meant white government. The author of the latter remarks implied that adherence to abstract, universalistic principles was a luxury that only those to whom he contemptuously referred as "gentry," members of an elite removed from the concerns of everyday life in Hawaii, could afford. Those local Hawaiian Republicans who had to live with the consequences of these policies did not have the luxury of couching their racist principles in the "refined" language of universalism. Rather, they bluntly asserted that exclusive suffrage restrictions were necessary in order to prevent the possibility that "the ignoramus, the vagabond, and the demagogue" might gain control of their government (ibid.). Their remarks resonated with a common refrain among Democratic senators that the only reason certain Republican senators clung to the universalistic principles of the U.S. Constitution was because they did not have to contend with the prac-

tical realities of local situations in which nonwhite, usually African American, voters threatened their political power.

Many Republican and some Democratic congressmen agreed that the educational qualification was an insufficient restriction and sought to further limit the vote by supporting the implementation of a temporary property qualification for voting for local senators in Hawaii. The property qualification proposed in the Cullom bill, though not ultimately adopted in the Organic Act, stated that voters for senators must own at least \$1,000 in “real property in the Territory” or receive at least \$600 in income in the year prior to voting and must pay all of their taxes (U.S. Congress 1900b: 1920). This was a less restrictive version of the property qualification that had been introduced under the Hawaiian Republic, according to which voters for senators were required to have at least a \$600 annual income, \$1,500 in “real estate,” or \$3,000 in “personal property” (*ibid.*). The rationale for maintaining a property qualification was that while a broad base of voters, including native Hawaiians, might be permitted to vote for members of the lower branch of the local legislature, it was important to restrict those eligible to vote for senators in order to preserve white political dominance throughout the islands.

According to a report prepared by a subcommittee of the Hawaiian Commission composed of Senator John T. Morgan, Democratic senator from Alabama, and Judge Walter Francis Frear, a justice on the Hawaiian Supreme Court appointed by the president, the proposed property qualification was necessary as a temporary measure. The report asserted that “to materially reduce the qualifications below what it is now proposed to make them would be to practically turn the legislature over to the masses, a large portion of whom have not yet fully learned the meaning of representative government, and to practically deprive the more conservative elements and property owners of effective representation” (*ibid.*: 1922). The property qualification proposal caused great controversy in the U.S. Congress. The positions adopted by members of both political parties regarding the proposal were paradoxical and problematic.

Republicans generally supported Hawaii’s status as a U.S. territory because of the potential commercial gains they expected to achieve through territorial expansion. Their belief that additional territorial property would be of value to the United States outweighed concerns that an annexational policy might compromise the highly valued whiteness of the U.S. citizenry. At the same time, they held fast to white supremacist principles and feared

that the political and economic domination of Hawaii by white men of U.S. ancestry would be undermined if native Hawaiians were allowed to vote in large numbers. Republicans, therefore, sought ways to restrict the native vote while simultaneously proclaiming their commitment to universalistic, democratic principles.

Senator Cullom stated that both the Hawaiian Commission of which he was a member and the Committee on Foreign Relations were convinced that a property qualification for suffrage should be adopted in addition to the educational qualification. He quoted a report by the late attorney general of Hawaii that stated, "With an excessively large native vote without property qualifications, the government of the islands would be in the control of the natives, to the great detriment of the interests of the whites and of the Territory" (*ibid.*: 1921). Republican Senator Orville H. Platt from Connecticut asserted bluntly that without a property qualification, "there is great danger that all Anglo-Saxon influence there may be overturned" (*ibid.*: 1922).

Opponents of the property qualification denounced the idea that a man should have to demonstrate wealth in land or money in order to vote, but they continued to assume that voting would be restricted to white men. Senator Morgan, for instance, referred to one's "natural powers and rights as a white man" as the only legitimate criteria for determining suffrage eligibility (U.S. Congress 1900d: 2193). Morgan said he believed "in the right of every white man who has got moral status enough to cast an honest vote having the right to vote" (*ibid.*). In other words, according to Senator Morgan, one of the few Democrats to actively support the annexation of Hawaii, whiteness was the only property that he would require of prospective voters, but possession of this property would be an indisputable prerequisite for suffrage (see Fry 1989 on Morgan's support for annexation). Whiteness conferred "natural powers and rights," including the right to vote, on those men who possessed it. Morgan supported Hawaii's incorporation into the United States in order to enhance the veto power of the South and its allies in Congress and provide a place for blacks to emigrate from the South in order to make more room for whites (*ibid.*: 105–24).

In general, Democrats in Congress tended to be even more supportive than their Republican counterparts of the proposed property qualification. Representative John Sharp Williams of Mississippi, for instance, remarked that he thought the proposed suffrage restrictions were "admirable in their character—almost a transcript of the Mississippi constitution and tend-

ing strongly toward the preservation of white supremacy and civilization in Hawaii” (U.S. Congress 1900a: 3708).

According to the *Congressional Record*, such remarks were sometimes greeted with laughter from fellow congressmen. They recognized that southern Democrats found the proposed property qualification for Hawaiian suffrage similar to provisions they supported in their own states to restrict African American voting but were prohibited from enacting by the Civil Rights Amendments. The Fourteenth Amendment prohibited state laws that denied citizens equal legal protection and due process of law while the Fifteenth Amendment stated, “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

Yet it was the Democrats, and one Democratic senator in particular, who ultimately rendered the proposed property qualification unacceptable to the vast majority of congressmen. Senator Ben Tillman from South Carolina was an outspoken and controversial southern Democrat who achieved great political power by appealing to economically disenfranchised whites and by advocating overtly and violently racist policies against blacks (see, e.g., Kantrowitz 2000a, 2000b; Moore 1973; and Simkins 1937). He often gave public voice to sentiments that many other politicians, especially Democrats, privately shared but were too conscious of the refined norms of public discourse to state out loud. Tillman addressed audiences across the United States, arguing for the subjugation of blacks (Simkins 1937: 161). According to one historian, “he used the history and language of white manhood to suggest that only white male producers were entitled to govern” (Kantrowitz 2000b: 498).

Senator Tillman offered loud, vulgar, and repeated objections to the Republican proposals for suffrage restrictions in Hawaii. It was not that he objected to the proposed restrictions themselves, however. In fact, he wholeheartedly supported them. The object of his derision was the hypocrisy inherent in the Republican position. Senator Tillman pointed out that it was Republican congressmen who had insisted on adopting the constitutional amendments that protected the voting rights of African Americans. These amendments and their implementation had greatly angered him and other southern whites, many of whom openly acknowledged their belief in white supremacy—something Republicans were often reluctant to do. But now, Republicans in Congress were proposing to implement voting restrictions in

Hawaii that would limit suffrage along racial lines in much the same way that proposed voting restrictions would have excluded African Americans from suffrage in the South had they not been prohibited by Republicans.

Each time the issue of suffrage qualifications for Hawaii came up in the Senate, Senator Tillman rose to challenge his fellow Republican senators. He was quite direct in stating his case:

What I object to, gentlemen, is the hypocrisy of those in this Chamber who stand up here and contend and contend and contend that the South must be treated differently from those people; that the colored race must be differently treated in the Philippine Islands, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico from what they are treated in our States of Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Alabama, and South Carolina. If it is good to have white supremacy in the Hawaiian Islands, why is it not in my State? I do not object to those white men in Hawaii being protected, but do not protect them with hypocrisy and cant. Be men! Stand up! Come out and say why you do this thing. (U.S. Congress 1900d: 2184)

Senator Tillman provided stark, racist accounts of the many ways in which he and others had attempted to prevent blacks from voting in South Carolina, including the use of violence and other illegal methods. His repeated calls for Republican senators to acknowledge their acceptance of the doctrine of white supremacy and the hypocrisy in their differential treatment of suffrage in the South and in Hawaii, however, met with silent resistance.

Senator Platt was the only congressman to acknowledge even the slightest possibility that his support of suffrage restrictions in Hawaii might be inconsistent with a literal interpretation of the liberal, universalistic principles to which his party adhered.

I do not complain of this bill because it proposes in its provisions to commit the government of those islands practically to the 4,000 Americans who reside there. . . . They have been the class which redeemed the islands from savagery and barbarism, and made them what they are—Americanized the islands and set up American institutions there, and, at last, an American Government there; and *though it seems arbitrary, and though it seems to contradict to some extent the principles upon which our free Government is established here*, I do not complain of the bill on that account. I do not complain of the provision which requires that per-

sons, in order to vote for senators, shall have a property qualification of a thousand dollars. . . . The purpose of it is to perpetuate the government in the hands of the American citizenship of the islands. (U.S. Congress 1900c: 2023; my italics)

His candor notwithstanding, Platt was nonetheless reluctant to state openly his support for the doctrine of white supremacy. Rather, he substituted the word “American” for white, thus suggesting a profoundly racialized definition of the U.S. nation and state.

Meanwhile, Senator Tillman continued his attack on Republican senators in the debates about Hawaii’s government, accusing them of proposing to treat inhabitants of the new island possessions worse than southern whites treated blacks. Tillman told his fellow congressmen:

You deal with the Filipinos just as we deal with the Negroes, only you treat them a heap worse. You deal with the Puerto Ricans just as we deal with the Negroes only you treat them a heap worse. . . . We of the South have never made any pretense of considering the Negroes our equals or as being fit for suffrage. We fought to keep them slaves and protested against their enfranchisement. You of the North contended that they were equal to white men and should have all the rights of citizens, and you framed the three amendments to carry it into effect. There is no inconsistency in our reminding you of these things and calling attention to your change of attitude toward the colored races. (U.S. Congress 1900e: 2244)

Tillman and other Democratic congressmen succeeded in exposing the hypocrisy of Republican congressmen, but rather than force them to change their views concerning voting provisions in the southern United States, Tillman pushed the Republicans toward a more liberal position that made the notion of a property qualification in Hawaii untenable. He succeeded in exposing and exacerbating the tensions between the liberal, universalistic principles that Republicans publicly espoused and the racist, exclusive principles that privately informed many of their positions and policies. Once these tensions were revealed, Republican senators apparently felt they had no choice but to renounce positions that might bring allegations of racism or hypocrisy in order to maintain their integrity and ideological credibility. When a vote on the property qualification for Hawaiian suffrage finally took

place in the Senate, only Senator Platt voted in favor, although many more had supported the notion during the debate. The requirement that all voters be able to read and write either in English or the Hawaiian language was somewhat less controversial, although still a departure from most voting laws in the continental states, and it remained in the bill.

After it became apparent that the property qualification would not pass, U.S. congressmen changed the original laws for the appointment of justices to the Hawaii supreme court, granting this responsibility to the president of the United States and not the Hawaiian governor and senate (Armstrong 1900a). Some Republican congressmen even suggested that it would be preferable for Hawaii not to have a delegate in Congress than to have one elected by a majority of native Hawaiians. “Without a property qualification,” one congressman argued, “the mob in Hawaii will not send a trustworthy or capable delegate” (quoted in Armstrong 1900b). The suggestion to eliminate the position of delegate, however, was immediately dismissed by other politicians in Washington, DC.

Hawaiian Republican Responses to Proposed Suffrage Qualifications

Local Hawaiian Republicans, members of the white, male elite of U.S. descent who exercised political control over the islands, were particularly strong supporters of the property qualification proposal for suffrage in Hawaii and were devastated by its defeat. Their frustrations mounted as debate about the proposal took place in the U.S. Congress and it became increasingly evident that the suffrage restriction would not pass. Sereno Bishop, a descendant of one of Hawaii’s leading missionary families and an outspoken commentator, reflected the popular, late-nineteenth-century, evolutionary view of civilization when he suggested that “American liberty” was not a right that all citizens should automatically enjoy. Rather, it was a privilege that should be withheld from members of “underdeveloped and weak races,” despite their U.S. citizenship, until they had been properly educated—a process that he predicted would take generations (Bishop 1900). According to Bishop, “Treating these feeble and childish souls as grown and strong men, by at once giving them unrestricted suffrage . . . were as great a blunder as to put a child to run the engine of an express train” (ibid.). Bishop’s commentary read in part:

The excellent Commission who came and studied our situation in 1898, Messrs. Cullom, Morgan and Hitt, clearly discerned the extensive political incapacity of the voting population. They perceived the absolute necessity of limiting the suffrage by the property qualification and incorporated it in their bill for organizing a Territorial government for Hawaii. We now learn that while the Senate Committee favor this provision, a majority of the House Committee are throwing it out as being “un-American.”

America is entering upon a new experience in governing and educating underdeveloped and weak races, lifting them to higher things out of past slavery. It seems incredible that she should begin with the idiotic blunder of treating these feeble and childish souls as grown and strong men, by at once giving them unrestricted suffrage, regardless of their unhappy heredity of weakness from ages of barbarism and slavery. (Ibid.)

Bishop’s remarks reflected several widely held sets of beliefs. First, his comments provide a classic example of the frequent infantilization of native Hawaiians by European Americans (see Merry 2000: 20). Describing native Hawaiians as children was a common means of emphasizing their relative lack of development within a racist, evolutionary, sociopolitical hierarchy that also treated them as only slightly removed from barbarians and slaves.

Second, Bishop’s assertion that voting rights should be withheld from native Hawaiians due to their political incapacity and *despite* their U.S. citizenship echoed the perspective held by those who believed that land allotments for American Indians should be held in trust by the U.S. government because Indians were not sufficiently politically competent to be granted the power to sell or lease them. In both of these cases, the involved indigenous populations technically held U.S. citizenship. This fact, however, did not prevent European American policy makers from exerting strenuous effort to deny indigenous populations the most basic rights generally associated with citizenship—the right to vote and the right to own land. In other words, these white policy makers advocated a drastically diminished form of citizenship for those whom they viewed as racially inferior.

Herbert Williams, an East Coast reporter and senior member of the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*’s staff, shared the proprietary understanding of the role of property ownership in guaranteeing the public good voiced by Bishop. “It should be distinctly understood that this is not a question of rich

vs. poor, but of good government vs. bad, of clean government vs. corrupt, of public spirit vs. selfishness,” Williams (1900) wrote. “All things concerned, it is obvious to the careful and impartial observer that a Government controlled in the last resort by the respectable people will be the best for all concerned” (*ibid.*). Williams thus linked the concepts of goodness, cleanliness, public spiritedness, and respectability to the restriction of suffrage and political control by white men of U.S. descent.

In addition, Williams implied that being an American in Hawaii was synonymous with being a white man. He explicitly contrasted Americans with Hawaiians, evidence of his belief that despite their legal status as U.S. citizens, native Hawaiians lacked the racial qualifications to be considered American.

In spite of the large number of Hawaiians and Orientals on these islands this is essentially an American community. White men, chiefly Americans, have built it up from nothing and have made it one of the most prosperous and modern and progressive places in the world. Hawaii is an almost ideally ordered community, with a very efficient and exceedingly clean government. . . . The people who have built up these islands from nothing, and who have in them everything they possess, naturally desire that this kind of government should be continued. To that end, they consider that while the House of Representatives should, of course, be elected by the suffrages of all the population able to read and write, the Senate should be composed of men elected by those who have a definite stake in the country, some definite interest in the suitable protection of property. . . . At first blush the suggestion of a property qualification for voting for Senators sounds un-American, and probably whatever opposition it may meet will be based upon this assumption. But the plain truth is that its introduction will foster Americanism, and its absence will tend to help on everything distinctly opposed to the American idea. (*Ibid.*)

Williams also emphasized the critical role that the institution of property played in the definition of an American. He described Hawaii before it was colonized by U.S. missionaries as “nothing”—a vision similar to that of European Americans who colonized the North American continent. Williams regarded Hawaii as a vacant, empty space that white, American men built into a modern, progressive community through the imposition of European American political and economic institutions, most notably the concept

of private property. Having turned Hawaii from “nothing” into a “prosperous” place, with an “ordered community” and a “clean government,” the white men of U.S. descent who colonized the islands now claimed to be its rightful owners and governors. Williams suggested that they had the right to control Hawaii’s government in order to protect their investment in the islands. This investment rested primarily in their transformation of Hawaiian land into private property and their purchase, control, and cultivation of this new property. These white men of U.S. descent, according to Williams, were the only people who had a “definite stake in the country,” that is, a “definite interest in the suitable protection of property,” and, therefore, the only people who should be allowed to govern (*ibid.*).

Williams alluded to alternative definitions of Americanism when he acknowledged that a property qualification might sound un-American at “first blush” but nevertheless asserted that a property qualification was necessary to “foster Americanism.” This reference points to a growing tension between the definition of Americanism as linked to a set of universalistic political principles and the growing understanding of Americanism as a European American way of life premised on the institutions of white supremacy and private property and threatened by the expansion of the boundaries of citizenship, nationhood, and statehood.

In an editorial entitled “Ruining the Territorial Bill,” the *Advertiser* (1900b) scoffed at the former definition of Americanism and suggested that its institutionalization by U.S. congressmen in the bill for Hawaii’s new government would only benefit “native and foreign haters of things American.” According to the editorial, the United States could only afford to implement universalistic principles in places where there was a clear, white majority who would inevitably exercise political control in local government. In all other contexts, restrictions along racial lines were necessary in order to protect civilization.

Equal suffrage forsooth! When did America ever grant equal suffrage to its aborigines—even its trained and educated ones who live in the haunts of civilization? There are States where suffrage of any kind does not extend to the illiterate or to the very poor. There is a group of great commonwealths where by the active propaganda of the Democratic Party and the tacit acquiescence of the Republican Party, nearly a million voters, upon whom the Constitution specifically confers the right of

suffrage, have been denied the voting privilege by unlawful force. Let us hear no more about equal suffrage being American until the rule “One man, one vote” holds good from Maine to the Apache reservations of Arizona and from Washington state to the cotton fields of Mississippi. . . . There is no place under the American flag and there never will be one, where white civilization will permit itself to pass under a yoke imposed by alien races. (Ibid.)

The *Advertiser* defined the Hawaiian Republicans as the American Party and distinguished them from the allegedly un-American Home Rule Party, which was committed to the preservation of native Hawaiian rights. The definition of the American nation, according to the editorial (ibid.), was synonymous with “white civilization,” and equal suffrage could not be allowed to threaten its boundaries, which firmly excluded members of “alien races.”

Conclusion

Debates about Hawaii’s government after annexation reveal that despite significant ideological differences, Republicans and Democrats in the continental United States and Republicans in the new territory of Hawaii shared a racially exclusive vision of the nation. Regardless of whether or not they favored Hawaii’s official incorporation into the United States, they all expressed significant discomfort with the prospect of an indigenous Hawaiian citizenry gaining political power.

The United States had always included within its borders residents who were not full members of the nation, but debates about suffrage in Hawaii forced policy makers to confront this disjunction directly. Republicans sought to implement educational and property qualifications for suffrage in order to guarantee white political dominance in Hawaii. Democrats argued that if African Americans had access to full citizenship rights, a requirement that Republicans had advocated on the basis of liberal, universalistic principles of equality and justice, then theoretically those same rights should be extended to the indigenous citizens of Hawaii. Alternatively, they suggested that Republicans lay down their liberal masks and openly acknowledge that they were just as supportive as their Democratic counterparts of racist restrictions on political power. Whereas the presence of a mostly indigenous citizenry in Hawaii had led most Democrats to oppose annexation in the first

place, it had prompted Republicans to seek limits on the citizenship rights of the annexed, indigenous residents.

With the incorporation of Hawaii into the United States, the boundaries between the sociopolitical nation and the territorial state drifted further apart. The territorial state, that set of governing administrative institutions that maintain dominant control over military, political, and other forms of power, had officially expanded beyond the North American continent within the context of an imperialistic era that included the occupation of many other new “possessions,” such as Puerto Rico and the Philippines. At the same time, the definition of membership in the nation remained racially restrictive. Only whites were eligible for complete membership in the nation, although occasionally for political purposes the boundaries of membership were expanded slightly to include nonwhites who accepted or were willing to acquiesce to the premise of white supremacy.

This growing rift between state and nation required more sophisticated rationales for allowing certain populations into the state through annexation while denying them full access to the political power associated with membership in the nation. The voting restrictions proposed by Republicans represented one effort to institutionalize a tiered system of citizenship that would racially divide those eligible *to govern* from those eligible only *to be governed*. Accusations of hypocrisy by their political opponents, however, ultimately led to the adoption of suffrage provisions that were far more liberal than members of either political party desired.

Despite the intense debates over the Cullom bill that took place in both the Senate and the House, the ultimate version of the bill that became the official Organic Act included no property requirements for voting. The Organic Act granted the right to vote to all registered male voters who resided in Hawaii and were literate in English or Hawaiian. The relatively liberal suffrage qualifications included in this act reflected the unexpected outcome of political negotiations that took place in the U.S. Congress rather than the beliefs or preferences of individual policy makers in either party.

The ambivalent attitudes of most congressmen toward the incorporation of Hawaii into the United States and suffrage for native Hawaiians are reflected in the fact that Congress did not grant Hawaii statehood until 1959. Reverberations of the history of annexation and U.S. discrimination against indigenous Hawaiians have more recently been expressed in the context of the Hawaiian Independence Movement, whose supporters seek to

increase knowledge of Hawaiian history and gain greater political and territorial autonomy for the islands.

The Hawaiian suffrage debates suggest that liberal, republican, and ascriptive ideological commitments inherent in prevailing attitudes toward U.S. citizenship were far less autonomous than multiple traditions theory implies. Most Republican participants in discussions about Hawaiian suffrage saw no contradiction in their simultaneous espousal of liberal and ascriptive principles. Viewing these principles as competing approaches to citizenship is thus an insufficient means of depicting the complex attitudes about what it meant to be American and part of America that characterized the perspectives of U.S. policy makers and political analysts engaged in debating the future government of a newly annexed Hawaii. Rather, as this article has shown, the simultaneous espousal of inclusive, universalistic principles and exclusive, racist preferences was a central component of efforts among European American politicians and political observers to exercise political domination over a territorially expanded United States. The goals of territorial expansion and restriction of political power to a racially defined elite were common to many settler states, as were the inevitable contradictions that accompanied them, particularly when these states sought to define themselves as democracies.

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