

Title – The Conversion of Hawaii: How Protestant Missionaries gave the United States the “Aloha” State

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This paper examines the effects of New England Protestant missionaries to the Hawaiian Islands. The Hawaiian Islands’ favorable location in the middle of the Pacific Ocean prompted several nations to annex them in the nineteenth century. While several nations would attempt to annex or conquer Hawaii, ultimately the United States would claim the archipelago. The annexation of the islands by the United States should be seen as a two-part process. First, Protestant New England missionaries descended upon the islands throughout the nineteenth century. They gained the islander’s respect and began reforming the culture. Their reforms were far reaching, and they successfully transformed Hawaii into a Western nation. Moreover, while missionaries are often portrayed as diminishing the native Hawaiian’s way of life, this paper argues that the missionaries actually preserved much of the native’s culture. The second step regarding annexation is the role played by missionary children. Most missionary children did not stay missionaries but took up careers in government and business. Being Protestant Americans, they favored the United States’ annexation. There is much controversy surrounding the role played by these missionary children, but this paper should bring some needed context to the debate. Even though other countries sought to annex the islands, the groundwork laid by the missionaries and the strong positions their children held guaranteed annexation by the United States. The research of this topic is of critical importance for several reasons. First, the Hawaiian missionaries, unlike many contemporary missionaries, were extremely successful. Examining the context surrounding their arrival is key to understanding their success. Second, the Hawaiian missionaries’ legacy is

frequently debated. Many secular scholars discount their intervention and view them negatively. Third, a large revival takes place on the islands in the mid-nineteenth century, roughly the same period in which large revivals were seen in the continental United States. Comparing these revivals sheds light on the effective methodology being used by continental preachers and Hawaiian missionaries.