

Hawaiian Kingdom Constitution and US Governance Documents

Beginning with Kamehameha I, Hawaiian chiefs had been keenly aware of the vulnerability of Hawai'i and they knew that the sheer numbers and military might of the Western powers could not be resisted by Hawaiian defenses.

"The [chiefs] were engaged in a search for sovereignty in Euro-American terms. In order to maintain their independence, they created a nation that would be recognized as sovereign by other civilized nations."

"As Britain, France, and the United States vied for power and influence in the Pacific, each sent warships to the islands demanding special treatment for its resident citizens and threatening to take over the kingdom."

"In response to these pressures, Kamehameha III and the high-ranking chiefs were engaged in transforming the Hawaiian system of law and governance into an Anglo-American political system under the rule of law."

"William Richards, an [American Protestant] missionary, became an important resource for the chiefs".

"[H]e explained how the law was a thing to bring good government and peace to the land for both chiefs and commoners, and how the chiefs should stop laying burdens upon the poor."

The Chiefs asked Richards to become their teacher, chaplain and interpreter. "Richards' initial service in his new position was a course of lectures to the chiefs on political economy and the general science of government."

"Richards was the mapmaker, but the ali'i were the captains who made the crucial decisions about what direction to sail the ship of state."

"The Hawaiian ali'i (chiefs) and their Hawaiian advisors developed the pathbreaking 1839 Declaration of Rights and 1840 Constitution with instruction and guidance from William Richards".

Hawai'i's Declaration of Rights was influenced by Christian fundamentals, as well as rights noted in the US Declaration of Independence.

That Hawaiian Kingdom Constitution introduced the innovation of representatives chosen by the people (rather than as previously solely selected by the Chiefs.) This gave the common people a share in the government's actual political power for the first time.

In addition, the 1840 Constitution recognized rights of the people; its preamble read, "'God hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the earth,' in unity and blessedness. God has also bestowed certain rights alike on all men and all chiefs, and all people of all

lands." "Absolute monarchy had come to an end in 1840."

How does the Hawaii Constitution compare with the US governance documents? The US Declaration of Independence proclaims the sovereignty of the 13 American colonies from British rule, while the Hawaiian Constitution asserts the sovereignty of the Hawaiian Kingdom.

The US documents state that all individuals are endowed with certain unalienable rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Similarly, the Hawai'i Constitution guaranteed various rights to its citizens, such as the right to due process, freedom of speech, and religious freedom.

The US documents and Hawaiian Constitution establish a governmental framework, delineating the roles and responsibilities of different branches of government. Both acknowledge the concept of natural law.

This broadsheet is dedicated to the 250th Anniversary Celebration of the Declaration of Independence for more information visit the National Society Sons of the American Revolution website at: www.sar.org

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