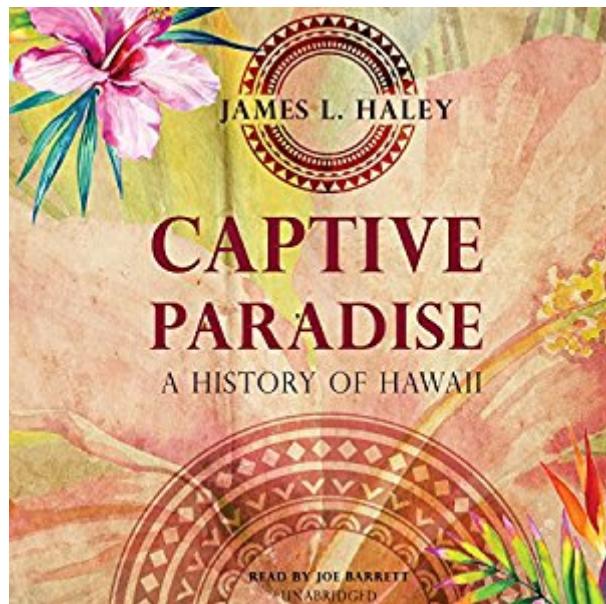


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# Captive Paradise: A History Of Hawaii



## **Synopsis**

In the tradition of Nathaniel Philbrick and David McCullough comes the first full-scale narrative history of Hawaii, an epic tale of empire, industry, war, and culture. The most recent state to join the union, Hawaii is the only one to have once been a royal kingdom. After its discovery by Captain Cook in the late 18th century, Hawaii was fought over by European powers determined to take advantage of its position as the crossroads of the Pacific. The arrival of the first missionaries marked the beginning of the struggle between a native culture with its ancient gods, sexual libertinism, and rites of human sacrifice and the rigid values of the Calvinists. While Hawaii's royal rulers adopted Christianity, they also fought to preserve their ancient ways. But the success of the ruthless American sugar barons sealed their fate, and in 1893 the American Marines overthrew Liliuokalani, the last queen of Hawaii. Captive Paradise is the story of King Kamehameha I, the Conqueror, who unified the islands through terror and bloodshed but whose dynasty succumbed to inbreeding; of Gilded Age tycoons like Claus Spreckels, who brilliantly outmaneuvered his competitors; of firebrand Lorrin Thurston, who was determined that Hawaii be ruled by whites; of President McKinley, who presided over the eventual annexation of the islands. Not since James Michener's classic novel Hawaii has there been such a vibrant and compelling portrait of an extraordinary place and its people.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"That Hawaii would one day end up a possession of an imperial power seems inevitable." Thus

concludes James L. Haley in *Captive Paradise: A History of Hawaii*. Hawaii was a pawn in an era of shifting global power, a central theme of Haley's book. He discloses upfront and unapologetically his intent to present Hawaii's saga with objectivity, no easy feat given the controversial nature of his subject. Haley opines that there was a time when political correctness meant telling the Hawaii story as one of America's greatness, rationalizing the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands in paternalistic terms. More recently, the trend has been to focus on the plight of Hawaiian natives, condemning the exploitative behavior of imperialists. Haley argues convincingly that reality lies somewhere in between these two perspectives. Before the arrival of the imperialistic powers, native chiefs and kings at times inflicted unspeakable horrors on the common people; in the imperialistic era, European powers, and later Americans opportunists, exploited the simple and trusting people of Hawaii in a power struggle that ended with American domination. Haley captures the breadth of this complicated and troubled history in a seemingly balanced manner. His writing is a bit dry, but his facts are well researched and presented. The book is slow to engage the reader, perhaps in part because the names of people and places are so dissonant to most of us. But eventually *Captive Paradise* does engage. For anyone interested in more than the stunning beauty of Hawaii and its storied beaches, I recommend persevering and reading Haley's book through the final chapter. It will not disappoint.

I just read Gavan Dawes' *Shoal of Time* and was hoping for a different look at Hawaiian history. This was disappointing from that standpoint. It pretty much plows the same ground as Dawes does -- really a political history with heavy focus on all the inside baseball of Hawaiian royal families. Haley provides a slightly different perspective, but it is essentially the same story. And despite being published in 2014 the history pretty much stops at the time of annexation -- even Dawes went further than that. On the other hand Haley does provide some personal perspective on the events, which was interesting.

This book is truly a gem. It was very well written (which means readable despite having immense amounts of information). It appears to be well-researched. And it does not seem to have a particular axe to grind. Instead it looks at the talents and flaws in everyone who lived in, ruled, and influenced Hawaii from the pre-contact period onward. It explores all of the internal forces that led to and helped shape change through the period. And it does not portray Hawaiians as victims but rather as quite successful (but not perfect) navigators of a century (the 19th) in which they did a whole lot better at maintaining their sovereignty and culture than did most Pacific, African, or southeast Asian peoples.

This is an important book, and it should be read and argued over by everyone who is interested in understanding the dynamics of the period.

The author does an excellent job of relating the chronology of the Hawaiian islands. As with any historical account, an educated analysis is more valuable than the facts. That is where the author succeeds brilliantly. While trying to relate the facts in a neutral voice, allowing the reader to come to their own conclusions, he purposely avoids the whitewash that seems to permeate current historical analysis. This refreshingly lends a perspective that counter-balances current academia's sensitive extremes. The first portion of the book sets up the detailed account of the final portion, the illegal overthrow of the royal government. I honestly couldn't put it down, even knowing the eventual outcomes.

An easily accessible read on the general history of Hawaii. The prose is a welcoming harbor for the person with little knowledge in the subject while also being sophisticated enough for a college student not majoring in history. While the post annexation period is covered rarely briskly, the coverage of the two main dynastic periods is balanced and rich enough so that the reader can see the implications of cultural interaction (and in this case Imperialism) with the tragedy that befell the Hawaiians. The author provides some strong insight from the writings of native personalities and historians of the time as well as from the different waves of fortune seekers and missionaries who settled in the islands. Overall, a pleasurable read that I would recommend to others.

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