Islands at Stake

Trade, naval power, and the annexation of Hawaii

USH.C.3.1.C "Explain the economic and military justifications for the annexation of Hawaii, including the impact of Admiral Alfred T. Mahan's vision for American naval power."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline an economic reason for annexation, circle a military reason, and number two details that connect Mahan's ideas to the military argument.

Why Annex Hawaii?

1. In the 1890s, a steamship carrying Hawaiian sugar toward California crossed more than 2,000 miles of ocean. Sugar plantations, many owned by Americans, tied the islands' economy to the United States. American business leaders wanted reliable access to U.S. buyers and feared tariffs that could make Hawaiian sugar more expensive. They argued that annexation would bring Hawaii inside U.S. tariff borders and protect their investments. That argument was economic: it concerned sales, prices, and profits, not the defense of warships. Yet plantation owners did not speak for all Hawaiians, many of whom opposed losing their independent country.

2. Warships made the same islands look valuable for a different reason. Steam-powered fleets needed coal, supplies, and safe harbors on long voyages. In his influential 1890 book, Admiral Alfred T. Mahan argued that a strong navy and overseas bases were essential to national power and trade. U.S. officials saw Pearl Harbor as a possible base where ships could refuel and operate across the Pacific. The United States had gained exclusive rights to establish a naval station there in 1887, but annexation promised firmer control. From this military viewpoint, Hawaii was not just a market connection; it was a strategic stop for a fleet.

3. In 1893, a group of American and European residents overthrew Queen Liliuokalani while U.S. Marines stood nearby after landing in Honolulu. Many Native Hawaiians protested the loss of their monarchy. In 1897, thousands signed petitions against annexation. The Senate did not ratify an annexation treaty, but the Spanish-American War in 1898 increased interest in Pacific naval routes. U.S. forces sailing toward the Philippines stopped in Hawaii for coal and supplies. Congress then approved annexation by joint resolution in 1898. Supporters cited trade and naval security, while opponents challenged taking the islands without the consent of their people.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did annexation seem to solve a problem for American sugar investors? Explain the link between tariffs and profits.

2. Why did steam-powered ships make control of Pearl Harbor a military argument for annexation?

3. How did Mahan's view of naval power strengthen supporters' case for annexing Hawaii?

4. How did the Spanish-American War strengthen the military case for annexation, and why did some Hawaiians still reject it?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write 4 to 5 sentences as a senator speaking against annexation in 1898. Acknowledge an economic argument and a military argument tied to Mahan, then explain why you would vote no using evidence of Hawaiian opposition.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline an economic reason for annexation, circle a military reason, and number two details that connect Mahan's ideas to the military argument. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did annexation seem to solve a problem for American sugar investors? Explain the link between tariffs and profits.	**Investors feared tariffs would raise the price of Hawaiian sugar for U.S. buyers. Annexation would put Hawaii inside U.S. tariff borders, helping protect sales and profits.**
2	Why did steam-powered ships make control of Pearl Harbor a military argument for annexation?	**Steam-powered warships needed places to refuel and resupply. Firmer control of Pearl Harbor would give the U.S. fleet a dependable Pacific base.**
3	How did Mahan's view of naval power strengthen supporters' case for annexing Hawaii?	**Mahan argued that a strong navy needed overseas bases to support national power and trade. Supporters saw Hawaii, especially Pearl Harbor, as a useful base.**
4	How did the Spanish-American War strengthen the military case for annexation, and why did some Hawaiians still reject it?	**U.S. forces stopped in Hawaii for coal and supplies on their way to the Philippines, showing its value on Pacific routes. Many Native Hawaiians opposed annexation because it would take away their independent country without their consent.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I understand why sugar investors want Hawaii inside U.S. tariff borders to protect their profits. Mahan's argument for overseas naval bases also makes Pearl Harbor attractive to a country building its fleet. But thousands of Native Hawaiians signed petitions against annexation after their queen was overthrown. I would vote no because trade and naval plans do not justify taking an independent country against the wishes of many of its people.

Accept explanations that clearly distinguish the economic case from the military case and connect Mahan to the need for overseas naval bases. In Part 3, students may weigh the arguments differently if they follow the assigned opposing viewpoint and support it with passage evidence.