



# Unfamiliar Fishes

*Sarah Vowell*

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Many think of 1776 as the most defining year of American history, the year we became a nation devoted to the pursuit of happiness through self-government. In *Unfamiliar Fishes*, Sarah Vowell argues that 1898 might be a year just as crucial to our nation's identity, a year when, in an orgy of imperialism, the United States annexed Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and Guam, and invaded Cuba and then the Philippines, becoming a meddling, self-serving, militaristic international superpower practically overnight.

Of all the countries the United States invaded or colonized in 1898, Vowell considers the story of the Americanization of Hawaii to be the most intriguing. From the arrival of the New England missionaries in 1820, who came to Christianize the local heathen, to the coup d'état led by the missionaries' sons in 1893, overthrowing the Hawaiian queen, the events leading up to American annexation feature a cast of beguiling, if often appalling or tragic, characters. Whalers who will fire cannons at the Bible-thumpers denying them their god-given right to whores. An incestuous princess pulled between her new god and her brother-husband. Sugar barons, con men, Theodore Roosevelt, and the last Hawaiian queen, a songwriter whose sentimental ode "Aloha 'Oe" serenaded the first Hawaii-born president of the United States during his 2009 inaugural parade.

With Vowell's trademark wry insights and reporting, she sets out to discover the odd, emblematic, and exceptional history of the 50th state. In examining the place where Manifest Destiny got a sunburn, she finds America again, warts and all.

Read by the author a cast that includes Fred Armisen, Bill Hader, John Hodgman, Catherine Keener, Edward Norton, Keanu Reeves, Paul Rudd, Maya Rudolph, and John Slattery. Music by Michael Giacchino with Grant Lee-Phillips. The score contains excerpts from "Hawai'i Pono'i" (words by David Kalakaua and music by Henri Berger) performed by Grant-Lee Phillips.

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