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The Effect of Hawaii's Vast Diversity on Racial and Social Prejudices

By Alexandra Frigerio

Author Note

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Food is the universal language of the world, and Hawaiians speak SPAM. Hawaii is the largest consumer of SPAM in the world, with their own signature recipe, as well as an annual SPAM party which over 20,000 people attend. Hawaiian locals cannot get enough of the stuff, consuming more than 5 million pounds year. SPAM is just one of many beloved foods in Hawaii, all of which are from different cultures. Residents have access to Chinese rice and stir fry, Korean kimchi and marinated meats, Japanese sashimi and bento boxes, Portuguese tomatoes and chili peppers, Puerto Rican casseroles and pasteles, Filipino sweet potatoes and adobo, American macaroni salad and hamburgers, and Hawaiian taro and kalua pig. Food is just one aspect of a very mixed culture that borrows food, music, religion, and customs that are used every day. Diversity is not tolerated, but embraced in Hawaii.

What America considers as racial tolerance is very different from the rest of the world. And yet, as a state of America, Hawaii differs vastly in terms of what racial tolerance means. Like the state of Alaska or American Samoa, Hawaii is physically and culturally isolated from the United States, even though it is a state. Modern Hawaii is a case study for diversity and successful integration of many ethnic groups into one functioning society. While racial tolerance is defined differently in Hawaii and mainland United States, so is racial prejudice. Both areas have their struggles on this issue. Prejudices in the islands are more targeted at mainland Caucasians and, more recently, Micronesians from the Mariana and Marshall Islands region of the Western Pacific. Hawaiian racial diversity and racial prejudices are less understood due to Hawaiian isolation and its particular history. Having no racial majority, the sheer number of different peoples may have an effect on present-day prejudices. By examining where these cultural and ideological differences originated and developed, they can help to better explain racial and ethnic diversity in Hawaii and why they differ from that of Mainland U.S. The role of Hawaiian history and culture, the ways people identify themselves, and the integration of these peoples into a flourishing community is key in understanding these differences. This explains how Hawaii is a unique pool of mixed ideas and people, and its diversity is to be appreciated and learned from.

Hawaii has a long history of Pacific settlers and Eurasian immigrants arriving, bringing with them aspects of modern Hawaiian culture. Within this vast pool of diversity, identifying factors and characteristics must be modified to accompany this mix of peoples. Today, classification may be one of three options: Natives are Native Hawaiians, either full-blooded or partial; they are direct descendants of the original Polynesian and Tahitian settlers. Locals include the labor ethnic groups that have resided in the islands for generations. Haole is Hawaiian for "foreigner"; it can have a negative connotation, but is mainly used to neutrally refer to Caucasians. Relationships between these groups are integral in identification and interactions, whether positive or negative. Stephan notes that looking at Hawaii's history and present "highlights the variation in ethnic identity among individuals of the same biological heritages and the variations in the experience of ethnic identity" (16). Identity and interaction are major parts

in the peaceful activity of the community, yet such cultural differences between peoples can create tension. The level of diversity has affected Hawaiian society in both positive and negative ways, ways that will be examined and how they contribute to Hawaii today.

Hawaii's unique diversity is derived from an equally unique history; a mix of many origin stories that meld into a present-day culture that is exclusive from the rest of the world. This history goes beyond Hawaiian statehood and annexation in 1898, to Polynesian settlers arriving as early as 300 CE. Through historical linguistic study, Terrell, Hunt, and Gosden claimed that "[based on] their position on the Polynesian language family tree – that the first Hawaiians must have come from the Marquesas" (158). Current research by Terrell, Hunt, and Gosden "indicates that Hawaiians are [also] closely related to other island populations" in the southern Cook Islands and Easter Island (16). Through our understanding of linguistic development, we can understand how Hawaii became a settled area. Tahitian explorers arrived in 1200 AD, bringing with them the beginnings of the royal line and present-day Hawaiian culture. Chiefdoms developed and grew both in size and power as the population gradually increased. They established a hierarchal society and a code of conduct, as well as agriculture, religious beliefs, arts and crafts, aspects of which are still engrained in present culture.

On January 18, 1778, Captain James Cook found the islands of Oahu and Kauai and was the first reported European to contact the islands. European contact opened the door for European explorers, traders, and later whalers and disease, both of which had a significant impact on Hawaiian society. With no resistance, these introduced diseases "[decimated] the Native Hawaiian population by an estimated 90 percent" (Kana'iaupuni and Liebler 5). During this time, Kamehameha forcibly united the inhabited islands as the Kingdom of Hawaii, becoming King Kamehameha the Great. Unification of the islands meant consolidation of power for the Kamehameha dynasty and unity against competing western interest. The Kingdom of Hawaii was governed until 1838, when the monarchy was overthrown and Queen Lili'uokalani, the last monarch and only queen regent of Hawaii, was deposed. American and European businessmen occupied the islands, and a provisional government was established until annexation to the U.S. could be enacted. Soon thereafter, the Republic of Hawaii was proclaimed and recognized as a protectorate by the U.S. on July 4, 1894. Hawaii was admitted into the Union as the state of Hawaii, effective August 21, 1959.

Sugar had been a staple in Hawaiian agriculture and gained a significant foothold by the 1840s. European immigrants soon gained control of the bulk of agricultural land and ran the sugar cane and pineapple plantations. James Dole arrived in Hawaii in 1899, and by the 1930s had established Hawaii's reputation as the pineapple capital of the world. Western demand for sugar increased during the California gold rush and plantation owners rushed to meet this demand. Laborers for these sugar plantations were lacking in the islands, so owners turned to imported labor, mainly from Asia (Gerschwender, Carroll-Seguín, and Brill 516). These imported laborers arrived from countries including Japan, China, the Philippines, Korea, Puerto Rico, and Portugal. "Portuguese-Americans living in Hawaii today are descendants of the largest European group to enter Hawaii as plantation labor[...] Between 1878 and 1887, almost 12,000 Portuguese were brought to Hawaii from Madeira and the Azores"(Gerschwender, Carroll-Seguín, and Brill 516). The Portuguese are considered locals, along with the many Asian ethnic groups, and are separate from the Haole ruling class, despite a shared European ancestry. Eventually, sugar plantations went into decline, as labor costs increased significantly when Hawaii became a state. The hierarchal society established to separate ethnic groups began to collapse, ironically due to the integration of the ethnic groups. Laborers demanded better working conditions and wages and held strikes. Sugar production slowed, then stopped as Hawaii

transitioned to a tourism-based economy. The many varying labor groups brought over with them their individual cultures and customs, all of which were quickly integrated into Hawaiian society. Pidgin English is an example of an adaptation of the newly integrated society; a mix of all the labor group languages, it allowed people to communicate more easily (Labrador 80). Cuisine, music, religion, language and customs were shared across ethnic lines, even more so as different ethnic groups started intermarrying. Through this positive cultural diffusion, Hawaiian culture developed even further to incorporate new traditions.

As the labor ethnic groups further integrated, multiracial children resulted from intermarriage and became a common entity of Hawaiian society. Chinese-Hawaiian families are especially prevalent today due to the arrival of Chinese laborers working on sugar plantations. They were the first Asian labor group to arrive in Hawaii in 1850, and between 1852 and 1887, almost 50,000 workers immigrated to the islands. The Japanese arrived later in 1868, with almost 200,000 people. 7,300 Koreans arrived between 1903 and 1910, and 112,800 Filipinos arrived in 1906. These different ethnic groups all make up modern Hawaiian society and its “local” culture. Local culture is particularly interesting in that it is normalized on the islands, a result of the integration of the many ethnic groups that reside there. Because of a long-shared history, there are cultural characteristics of each group that have been made into stereotypes. These stereotypes, whether perceived or real, are seen not as offensive, but as funny. They celebrate these cultural differences and everyone can laugh, most of the time because the stereotypes are based on fact. “The Chinese are seen as penny-pinchers; the Japanese as stiff and nerdy; the Portuguese as stupid; the native Hawaiians as lazy; the Samoans as big and tough but not too quick; the Filipinos as lacking a robust sense of humor; and the haole as boring and out of touch with their bodily instincts” (Mindess 186). Ethnic humor in Hawaii is different in that it treats everyone fairly and no one group is teased more or less than the others. Ethnic stereotypes are used to good-naturedly poke fun and spread ideas about language, culture, and identity. Interactions between the local ethnic groups are also cause for the large proportion of mixed race individuals in Hawaii.

After the decline of sugar plantations, anti-miscegenation laws that prevented interracial marriages were repealed in 1967, causing the dramatic increase in interracial marriages and racial mixing (Shih and Sanchez 569). Anti-miscegenation laws originated during the colonial era of the English colonies, criminalizing marriage and sex between whites and blacks, because of economic dependence on slave labor. After American independence, anti-miscegenation was still enforced, and along with Jim Crow laws, became a precedent for future interracial couples charged with marriage and even cohabitation. This precedent allowed miscegenation to be normalized and remained until it was deemed unconstitutional in the *Loving v. Virginia* case in 1967. The case lifted all bans on interracial marriages and caused the increase of 2% in 1970 to 7% in 2005 and 8.6% in 2010.

In Hawaii, new immigrant groups arrived, and, according to Reed, interracial marriage occurred in three stages: “(1) Nearly all incoming persons are male and intermarry (with Hawaiians). (2) More females arrive and intermixture is discouraged. (3) Americanization, loss of parental influence on offspring, marital choice, and increased intercultural marriage takes place” (7). All ethnic groups are currently at the third stage. The long history of interethnic and interracial marriages explains the relatively positive view toward mixed raced children, who have been normalized by island attitudes and historical context. Today, just under 50% of all marriages in Hawaii are interracial, and there is no group majority (Stephan and Ybarra 261). As a result of this, the issue of racial identification has changed completely.

American society is seen as a mix of multiple ethnic groups, but these groups are usually

treated separately (Kana'iaupuni and Liebler 1). "Because race is an important social marker, [...] there remains a push, even for those who embrace their mixed heritage, to identify with only one race or ethnic group" (Kana'iaupuni and Liebler 1). However, identification is more fluid than previously believed. "The Hawai'i case provides some insights into the ways that identity is negotiated in a changing social, historical, and cultural context" (Reed 327). Children fasten their identity to certain groups to establish a sense of belonging (Reed 335). Attitudes toward multiracial identity are partially determined by the long history of interethnic and interracial marriage, and this identity is normalized (Reed 337). Stephen explains "The importance of the ethnic identity of mixed-heritage individuals stems from the fact that it may become an important determinant of the assimilation or separatism of many minority groups in the U.S." (Reed 274).

Today, identity is more of a personal choice, a huge shift from the racial separation of the plantation system. Plantation owners and supervisors purposefully kept ethnic groups separate so they couldn't gather and demand better wages and working conditions. "Planters used segregated work camps and work gangs along with differential pay to prevent the development of worker unity" (Gerschwender, Carroll-Seguín, and Brill 518). After the decline of the Hawaiian plantation system, there was a shift to a full tourism-based economy. However, Hawaii's tourism industry had been running since 1882, when Matson Navigation Company began to carry passengers to Hawaii along with goods from San Francisco. With an increased interest of vacationing in Hawaii by America's wealthiest families, Matson increased their fleet and built two hotel resorts to accommodate them. Only after earning statehood in 1959 did the economy fully shift to a tourism-based economy. After the decline of the agricultural-based economy, laborers were free to intermingle and even intermarry.

The descendants of these interracial marriages had the new challenge of identifying themselves. From a psychological approach, Shih and Sanchez found in clinical studies that mixed race individuals reported difficult experiences such as fear of being rejected or confusion in how they belong (Gerschwender, Carroll-Seguín, and Brill 572). In contrast to this, nonclinical populations showed little evidence that they were unhappy or dissatisfied with their racial identity, suggesting that they do not devalue their mixed identity (Gerschwender, Carroll-Seguín, and Brill 587). Present-day college populations have a much larger mixed population than previous generations. There is no precedent to this rapidly growing component of the American population. Because of its increasing commonality, the mixed identity is normalized in Hawaii, and has been for a long time. The Hawaiian cultural value of biological and familial ties, as well as remnants of effects of colonization, all make identification more significant in Hawaiian society (Kana'iaupuni and Liebler 21). A strong mixed identification is a result of structure set up by the parents. Parents who value their ethnic identity teach that to their children, and create a more supportive environment for children to establish their own identity, who are then less likely to experience confusion and isolation (Kana'iaupuni and Liebler 11).

The United States' racial majority is Caucasians. In Hawaii, they are a minority, just like everyone else. Hawaii has no racial majority, which may be a significant factor in interethnic interactions and tolerance. A study of how Hawaiian university students in California perceived their own groups as well as how the majority group mainland students perceived them was conducted through a questionnaire. From the results, Ichiyama, McQuarrie, and Ching note a shift from majority to minority group leads to shifts in ethnic identity, and students are aware of this shift (12). This leads to reduced favorability of how mainland students perceive Hawaiian students, and this attitude is internalized to a degree (Ichiyama, McQuarrie, and Ching 16). Evidence also "indicated a gradual weakening of ethnic identification over the course of college life in the mainland" (Ichiyama, McQuarrie, and Ching 13). This "change in social context

from majority to minority group status” (Ichiyama, McQuarrie, and Ching 16) and interactions between minority and majority groups are significant influences on individuals’ ethnic identification. Social context is important in how identity is created and should be considered as a factor in future studies.

Individual identification is also highly valued in Hawaii. By identifying to one or many groups, individuals claim membership, which includes all the customs and history of that group. Due to the value placed on identity, people take pride in their ancestry. Diversity is embraced, yet no place is perfect in this respect. Hawaii does have its issues with racism, which, a lot of times, are not addressed in what people think of when Hawaii comes to mind. In terms of complete integration and acceptance, Hawaii and its residents do have a head start, but are nowhere near it. As mentioned previously, remnants of an older class system that originated from the traditional caste system during Tahitian rule and the segregated rule of the plantation system still exist, as well as historical resentment of European entrepreneurial settlers. These are cause for a lot of present-day tension among Native Hawaiians, Caucasians, and more recently, Micronesians.

Today, many Native Hawaiians are socioeconomically disadvantaged, due to lower rates of postsecondary education and limited opportunities for employment. Because Hawaii is an island, resources are limited and competition for these resources is especially challenging for lower classes. This is some cause for resentment of the Caucasians living in Hawaii. Resentment also comes from military bases taking up valuable land, as well as from this history of the islands. Some people still take great pride in the Hawaiian monarchy, while others say that the land was “stolen” from them. By understanding Hawaiian history, cause for these resentments is not completely unreasonable.

Another cause of tension is when new people arrive and are in direct competition, as they are also socioeconomically disadvantaged. Recently, Hawaii’s new underclass has been waves of arriving Micronesians. First-generation immigrants are especially challenged because of a language barrier, as well as little or no education. Micronesians are in direct competition with Native Hawaiians for jobs and resources. They are discriminated against, being stereotyped as uneducated, dirty, and abusive of the welfare and healthcare systems, as Hawaii’s newest immigrant group. Eventually, this new wave of immigrants will be integrated just like every other group before, but for now, advocacy groups are providing what they can. People can always find commonalities and this will be a positive step in integrating Micronesians into Hawaiian society.

In examining racial diversity and hate-crime incidents, Espiritu examines the rising number of hate crimes in the United States by looking at ethnic and socioeconomic variables. Of the 7,876 hate crime incidents reported in 1999, 55% of them were motivated by racial bias (2). Intimidation, destruction, damage and vandalism of property, and assault are the most frequently committed offenses. Based on race, 4% of offenders were multiracial and 2% were Asian/Pacific Islander (3). Regression analysis “suggest[s] that [the] dropout rate and the number of Asians, Pacific islanders as a proportion of state’s population are significant predictors of hate crime incidents across state” (10). The analysis, however, does not explain whether this predicts Asians and Pacific Islanders to be the perpetrators or victims of hate crimes. The reported correlation of hate crime incidents to dropout rates suggests that prejudice is fueled by ignorance, something that can be changed. Socioeconomic status impact on hate crime incidents is statistically inconclusive.

The exponential growth of the multiracial proportion of the population is a clear indicator of Hawaii’s embraced diversity. Research on race and racial identity is rapidly growing to accommodate this new parameter. The people of Hawaii are welcoming and kind. They have built

an accommodating and open community, where they thrive and have grown for generations. The islands are a booming cultural hub for music, art, and athletics. The traditions of “aloha,” to live with love and respect for self and others, and “ohana,” a sense of family, are present in all aspects of life. With all these new modern pieces, old traditions still seem to fit into Hawaiian culture. The deep physical and spiritual connections to the land, the importance of family and ancestors, and the substructure of colonization are all significant factors in what makes Hawaii unique; and these factors are what can teach others about diversity and embracing it.

The United States is unique in that it has a long history of multiracial, multiethnic, and multicultural development and integration. Many Americans can trace their lineage to various ethnic groups and subsequently nationalities of their ancestors. Similar historical experiences and interactions united them together. As a result of the pooling of all ethnic groups and races in one area, there is mixing of these lineages, resulting in a mixed population with no precedent before it. Hawaii shares this characteristic with the very different mainland United States. A long history of settlers and immigrants has blossomed into a vibrant and unique culture that people are proud to belong to. The many individual ethnic groups and the mixes in between value their identity and interact peacefully as a mutually beneficial community. While they will always have conflict, both Hawaiian and mainland American societies are gradually learning to be respectful and understanding of what is considered foreign. America has an admirable reputation for accepting new things and incorporating them into its daily activities, and Hawaii is no different. European Americans are also to be included, in that they too have historical and cultural heritages that they can be proud of. “The ultimate goal [...] is to achieve the respect, understanding, and appreciation of the ‘human condition’” (Williams 3). There is the opportunity to adopt the positive aspects of acceptance of diversity and make it a strength instead of a detriment in present society.

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