

A Hawaiian View of

Thursday, July 15, 1982 Honolulu Star-Bulletin A-19

By Haunani

Professor of American Studies

YOUR JUNE 30 COMMENT on "Hawaiian Problems," by A. A. Smyser, editor of the editorial page, alluded to their historical origins but did not confront them. Despite Smyser's recognition of the plight of many native Hawaiians "in their own land," no discussion followed on the historical process by which Hawaiians came to be the only Polynesians without a land base, nor was there any sense of the continuing responsibility of both government and business interests for this land alienation.

Smyser chose instead to question the workability of Hawaiian cultural practices (i.e., mauka-makai use and access) within a larger (and, he implied, superior) system devoted to private property and profit.

He asserted, without supporting evidence, that "tourism . . . after all, has done a lot of good for the islands and for cultural revival."

Finally, he raised the specter of an undefined Hawaiian "militance against property or tourists or tourism development" without offering any analysis of either the causes for this militance, or of the real problems activist Hawaiians have underscored in their cultural critique of tourism.

IN THE INTERESTS of a more complete understanding of the conditions of native Hawaiian people, I suggest the following historical facts be considered.

Because of an economic system based in subsistence land tenure, Hawaiians prospered for over 1,300 years until the fateful coming of the West in the 18th century. They devised an ecologically harmonious culture in which a sharing of the fruits of their labors (poi, uala, fish) throughout a mauka-makai system ensured the health of the people and the preservation of the land, or 'aina. Like other indigenous natives, Hawaiians were innate conservationists because of their material and spiritual ties to the land.

Scholars of Hawaiian history (Malo, Kuykendall, Fuchs, Daws, Kelly) have recorded how Western contact brought economic chaos, spiritual devastation and physical death to native Hawaiians. It also brought increasing destruction of the environment.

Introduction of capitalist practices of private property and individual profit meant an end to communal sharing of the land and sea. The greed of haole (white) sugar planters for land led to the imposition of private property land tenure through the Great Mahele of 1848.

ANTHROPOLOGIST MARION KELLY has determined that for Hawaiians, the Great Mahele was the major event in their alienation from the 'aina. While sugar planters were enabled to buy vast acreages for plantations, maka'ainana Hawaiians (commoners) were made essentially landless (they received less than 1 percent of the total land area).

For some of them, as Kelly's research documents, the Great Mahele actually meant starvation since they could no longer cultivate taro patches or grow sweet potato on land claimed by others. Contrary to Smyser's assumptions concerning the benefits of private property, it was precisely this practice of land tenure which forced Hawaiians from their 'aina. The benefits of private property (production for profit) accrued to the haole sugar barons, not to the great majority of Hawaiians.

DURING THIS SAME PERIOD, Hawaiians also suffered a precipitous population decline. Between 1778 and 1860, Hawaiians were reduced by a ratio of 8 to 1; that is to say, for every six Hawaiians at the time of Western contact, only one remained by 1860. Both these factors—land alienation and the agonizing death of the native population due to introduced diseases—signalled the end of an ancient people.

Loss of political sovereignty in 1893 and annexation by the United States in 1898 were but final death blows in a process of colonization begun more than a century before by British adventurers and American missionaries.

This tale of demise, horrible as it is, comprises but one chapter in a much larger story of the colonization of indigenous people by America. I refer readers to the celebrated, monumental historical account by Professor Richard Drinnon titled, appropriately, "Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building," in which American expansion is carefully documented—from the slaughter of the Pequot Indians by the Puritans, through Jefferson's policy of "removal" of the Indians, to Jackson's policy of "forced marches" of Indians onto reservations, and, finally, to the continuous wars of conquest waged in the West to "open" it to white settlement.

BY CONSERVATIVE ESTIMATE, the American government exterminated between 6 million and 8 million Indians, a figure comparable to the number of Jews killed in the holocaust.

Having conquered the Indians and expropriated their lands, the American government then moved overseas taking the following territories as U.S. possessions by the first quarter of the 20th century: Hawai'i, Guam, Samoa, Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and the Philippines.

By 1950, the United States was an imperial power

Haunani-Kay Trask contends that the introduction of private property alienated Hawaiians from their own land and that tourism worsens the problems of Hawaiians.



with occupying military forces around the world, and with substantial economic interests in Africa, South America, Asia, Europe, and of course, the Pacific. In the 1960s, America waged war against Vietnam. By 1970, America had planted its flag of conquest on the Moon.

Despite this historical evidence of America's role as a colonizing power, Smyser apparently does not understand the casual connection between American imperialism and the existing plight of native Hawaiians.

TODAY, THE HAWAIIAN PEOPLE continue to suffer the legacy of imperialism—land alienation, occupational ghettoization and other forms of economic exploitation, the worst health profile in the Islands, deep psychological oppression that results in criminal behavior, or aimlessness from a personal sense of both loss and failure.

(Regarding land ownership, Hawaiian Homes land, Bishop Estate and other estate lands are not owned by Hawaiians. These lands are held in trust with actual title residing in the state or the various estates. Hawaiians do not own this land because they do not hold title to it. This arrangement has led to abuses by the state and others regarding their trust responsibilities to Hawaiians.)

The latest affliction visited on the Hawaiian people is the prostitution of their culture—especially

Hawaiian Problems

i-Kay Trask

University of Hawaii at Manoa

the hula—in the service of tourism.

Far from encouraging cultural revival, the tourist industry has appropriated and cheapened the accomplishments of a resurgent interest in things Hawaiian (i.e., the use of replicas of Hawaiian artifacts to decorate hotels).

Hawaiian women are marketed on posters from Paris to Tokyo promising an unfettered, "primitive" sexuality while Hawaiian men bare their bodies for the delight of sexually repressed tourists.

THIS TRANSFORMATION of cultural value into monetary value is called *commodification*. And while capitalist society commodifies nearly everything, the Hawaiian people suffer particularly because, in addition to all their economic and social burdens, their culture is plasticized for the international market of tourism.

Meanwhile, resort development continues to leach away the beauty and magic of the 'aina—polluting the landscape with hotels, condominiums, and "essential" services, such as fast-food chains, gas stations, golf courses, expensive restaurants and entertainment parks.

In this scenario, Hawaiians are confined to low-status, poorly paid service work.

Obviously, what has been good for business, has not been good for Hawaiians or the Hawaiian environment.

But during the past decade, Hawaiians have begun to reveal a new consciousness about their heritage, their subjugation to American imperialism, and their pride in being Hawaiian. Part of this expanding awareness can be seen in the recent movement for cultural and political rights which has erupted in local Hawaiian communities throughout the state, and which includes demands for restitution in both land and money from the American government. Other indications are the flowering of Hawaiian dance, the establishment of societies for Hawaiian artists, and a renewed emphasis on Hawaiian as a living, spoken language.

THE HEART OF THIS HAWAIIAN revival is the concept and practice of *aloha 'aina*—love for the land.

And confrontations between advocates of this practice and those who currently own and use the land in Hawai'i already have occurred in dozens of community land struggles over the past decade. These include upper-income housing (Kalama Valley) urban sprawl (Waiahole-Waikane); military land abuse (Kaho'olawe); resort development (Kuka'ili-moku Village in Kona; Nawiliwili-Niumalu, and Nukoli'i on Kaua'i; Puko'o, Kaluakoi and Mana'e on Moloka'i; Makena on Maui; Queen's Beach on O'ahu); state abuse of Hawaiian Homes land (Hilo Airport); state abuse of federal lands (Hale Mohalu); state abuse of land (Sand Island); federal abuse of National Park privileges (Kipahulu Valley on Maui).

After a decade of this kind of protest, critical public attention finally has been brought to bear on abuses of both the people and the 'aina of Hawai'i. Struggles for preservation of agricultural lands, for release of military lands, and for community control over resort development are part of the assertion of *aloha 'aina*.

So too are efforts to revive taro cultivation and poi factories.

In these ways, Hawaiians and other local people try to direct their future rather than allow it to be fashioned by the profit demands of a tourist industry controlled by Japanese and American and Canadian multi-national corporations.

BEYOND SPECIFIC ISSUES, the Hawaiian movement, like the black and American Indian movements before it, has highlighted more deeply

ed American dilemmas: a fundamental racism against dark-skinned people; a rapacious expropriation of other people's lands; and an irrational, ceaseless drive to use and to waste the earth and its bounty.

Given these detailed and general criticisms, I suggest that Smyser reconsider *who* benefits from tourism, private property and the business ethic of profit before social needs. I also suggest that he think through the position of Hawaiian activists that tourism brings overcrowding, pollution, crass development, scarring of the land, a heavy tax burden on residents, increased racial tensions, and insecure, poor-paying employment. Aloha 'aina offers an alternative ethic which places the needs of local people and their environment above the demands of a profit-driven industry.

Finally, I suggest that it is the historical oppression of native Hawaiians which has given rise to their militance.

But it is their larger criticism of the failures of the "entrenched order" which speaks eloquently of the wisdom of the indigenous alternative: preservation rather than exploitation of the land and her people.



PROPERTY HOUSE

NO BLOUSES:

WITH EVERY NIP AND TUCK
cy that! A man's formal suit was the
piration for the 'tuxedo' look women
to wear with for themselves.