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COMMENTARY

Plight of Native Hawaiians not dire

By Cliff Slater

Among members of Congress there seems to be a misunderstanding that Native Hawaiians are a tribe, living together, speaking Hawaiian, poor, downtrodden and underprivileged. In short, that they are like Indian tribes as described by the 2003 U.S. Senate Budget Committee:ⁱ

“Regardless of where [native Americans] reside, however, they continue to rank at near the bottom of nearly every social, health, and economic indicators, as compared to all other groups of American citizens. They continue to suffer the highest rates of unemployment and poverty, live in substandard housing, have poor health, receive an inadequate education, and contend with disintegrating social systems.”

This is far from the case with Native Hawaiians, who have integrated themselves into the general population as evidenced by their lifestyle and living standards. A statistical review reveals more similarities to Hawai'i's general population than differences.

According to the state Data Book and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs Data Book, the average household income of Native Hawaiians is nine percent less than Hawai'i's people as a wholeⁱⁱ while the unemployment rate for Native Hawaiians is greater (6.4 percent versus 3.8 percent).

Native Hawaiian households with annual incomes of \$200,000 or more, are a smaller percentage than Hawai'i generally (1.4 percent versus 2.8 percent) with a smaller percentage earning \$50,000 or more (45.3 percent v. 57.3 percent).ⁱⁱⁱ And 18.3 percent of Hawaiians are below the poverty level versus 12.0 percent of average Hawai'i residents overall.^{iv}

Compare these data with the American Indians whose “unemployment rate hovers near 50 percent” and whose average annual per-capita income is \$8,284.^v

There is a Native Hawaiian underclass, as has developed with other minorities. This boosts the crimes and incarceration rates, single-mother birth rate, and drug use. However, remove this class from the statistical base, make due allowance for a lower-than-average age for Native Hawaiians,^{vi} and we find that they are, for the most part, remarkably similar to the rest of Hawai'i society.

Because there has been so much intermarriage by Hawaiians only one percent of Hawaiians are now pure-blooded,^{vii} and only 10 percent of Native Hawaiians have 50 percent or more Hawaiian blood.^{viii} A perusal of lists of Hawaiian names is a good

indicator. For example, of the nine Native Hawaiian trustees of the state Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) only two have Hawaiian last names.

Because so few qualify for the former legal definition of “native Hawaiian,” — those with 50 percent Hawaiian blood — what has evolved is the current definition of “Native Hawaiian” (capital N) for the Akaka bill as anyone having an indigenous Hawaiian ancestor. This means that anyone with as little as 1/256th Hawaiian blood is a “Native Hawaiian.” Many native Hawaiians (small n) object to this watering down of the definition.^{ix}

While 5 percent live on leased land in the Hawaiian Home Lands areas,^x the other 95 percent live outside of it in the larger community. Only 60 percent of Native Hawaiians even live in Hawai’i. The other 40 percent live in all of the other 49 states, Washington, DC and Puerto Rico.

Only 1 percent of Native Hawaiians speak Hawaiian as their primary language but even they also are fluent in English.^{xi} Thus, 99 percent of Hawaiians have English as their primary language. Most Native Hawaiians do not speak Hawaiian beyond a few words.^{xii}

The Akaka bill states:

“Despite the overthrow of the government of the Kingdom of Hawai’i, Native Hawaiians have continued to maintain their separate identity as a single distinct native community through cultural, social, and political institutions, and to give expression to their rights as native people to self-determination, self-governance, and economic self-sufficiency.”^{xiii}

With due deference to Sen. Akaka, that is a real stretch.

Since the 1970’s there has been a revitalized interest in Hawaiian culture but it has been by all racial groups.

For example, at the Women’s Correctional Center, classes on native plants, lei-making, and care of lo’i (taro patches) are being taught by a group of predominantly Caucasian people to inmates who are predominantly Native Hawaiian.^{xiv}

Native Hawaiians may engage in traditional Hawaiian activities such as hula and canoe-paddling, but so does the rest of the population.

We all enjoy Hawaiian music, but it is not aboriginal Hawaiian music. Instead, it is Western music that Hawaiians and others have modified and adapted. The favored musical instruments are of European origin. For example, the ‘ukulele originally was Portuguese and the guitar Spanish.

All of Hawai’i’s ethnic groups, the Filipinos, Koreans, Chinese, Japanese and more, engage in their own regular cultural activities.

Native Hawaiians are not a tribe anything like native American Indian tribes. That is because at the arrival of Western culture, Hawaiians embraced it enthusiastically rather than rejecting it. At the time of Cook’s arrival in 1778, the Hawaiian Islands were each governed by a separate chief, with an aboriginal culture and no written language. Within 60 years they had developed a reputation as one of the most literate nations in the world.^{xv}

Hawaiians openly embraced Western immigration, customs, technology and capital. The constitutional monarchy established in 1840 was modeled on Britain's. The Hawaiian monarchs had a palace and were received as royalty by Queen Victoria in England.

Despite the racism that prevailed at the time, the Hawaiians were treated differently. Inter-marriage with Caucasians was confined mainly to Hawaiians. While Hawai'i's leading clubs excluded Asians and other ethnic minorities, Hawaiians were not excluded. At the time of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which ended such exclusionary policies, the president of the exclusive Oahu Country Club was a Native Hawaiian.

The history and condition of Native Hawaiians cannot be equated with that of American Indians.

What should concern us is the excessive amounts of money that native tribes in the U.S. are spending on political influence — and the possibility that a Native Hawaiian government might do the same.

Professor Randall Roth and Judge Sam King's book, "Broken Trust: Greed, Mismanagement & Political Manipulation at America's Largest Charitable Trust" (University of Hawai'i Press, 2006) reveals a corrupt Hawai'i political environment that created, and allowed to continue, Hawai'i's Bishop Estate trustees taking million dollar annual salaries and engaging in other unsavory acts. If it had not been for the Internal Revenue Service forcing their ouster, those trustees would still be in office.^{xvi}

This should serve as a warning.

Time magazine reported four years ago that, "And leaders of small, newly wealthy tribes now have so much unregulated cash and political clout that they can ride roughshod over neighboring communities, poorer tribes and even their own members. The amount of money involved is staggering. Last year 290 Indian casinos in 28 states pulled in at least \$12.7 billion in revenue. Of that sum, Time estimates, the casinos kept more than \$5 billion as profit."^{xvii}

Abramoff and his partner collected \$80 million from some tribes for lobbying fees. California tribes spent over \$100 million influencing two different voter propositions.

What has happened in many states is that excessive contributions are made to elected officials by native American Indian tribes seeking to expand their reservations. Expanded areas are then used for tax-free retail gasoline and cigarette sales and some of the profits generated are used for more political influence ad infinitum.

This is very real influence. With gambling or without, a Native Hawaiian government will have a great deal of money in hand to influence political decisions.

It is likely to eventually have control of the 30 percent of Hawai'i's land that is held in trust for Hawaiians by various entities including the \$10 billion Kamehameha Schools (formerly Bishop Estate),^{xviii} the Hawaiian Home Lands Commission and the island of Kaho'olawe.

This land is separate from that owned by wealthy Native Hawaiian private estates such as the \$2 billion Campbell Estate and the thousands of individual Native Hawaiian families that own their own homes.

And then there is the cash hoard of \$400 million held by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, a quasi-state agency, which spends lavishly on Washington attorneys and lobbyists such as Patton Boggs.

The Akaka bill has never been voted on in Hawai'i, and rarely publicly discussed. Virtually the entire political establishment in Hawai'i supports the Akaka bill. However, while a few individual businesses have endorsed it, not a single business organization has taken a position on it.

Informal online and telephone polls indicate that informed Hawai'i residents, including possibly even Native Hawaiians, are opposed to it.^{xix}

If the people of Hawai'i are opposed to the Akaka bill but the politicians are wholeheartedly in favor of it, one might be forgiven for thinking that we should follow the money.

The surveys of people's major concerns by the Honolulu Advertiser and OHA resulted in similar responses; education, healthcare, housing, and the environment were foremost. The lowest priorities were Native Hawaiian rights, and lowest of all "Hawaiian nationhood" with Native Hawaiians' views differing little from the general population.^{xx}

After a protracted, and expensive, period of trying to sign up Native Hawaiians for a native roll, only 12 percent of Native Hawaiians signed and, ironically, many of these opposed the Akaka bill.

The last vote that Hawaiians cast on the issue of sovereignty was in 1959 when 95 percent of Hawai'i's citizens voted for statehood. A majority of Native Hawaiian voters then must also have voted for statehood.^{xxi}

In the end, we have to consider who is likely to benefit from a Native Hawaiian government. Judging from other American Indian governments, it will not be the least affluent. With no requirement for secret ballots, the elites will most likely control it, and they will be the ones to benefit.

The tragedy is that a better result would ensue if Native Hawaiians were to relinquish a race-based policy and instead adopt the Basques' policy of defining a Basque as someone who speaks the language and understands the culture.^{xxii} It would result in cultural revival, ensure that lower-income Native Hawaiians would get their due share of funds (along with other low-income people), and end the divisiveness that race-based policies always engender.^{xxiii}

Cliff Slater is a regular columnist for the Honolulu Advertiser. A footnoted version of this article is available at www.cliffslater.com

Endnotes:

i CONCURRENT RESOLUTION ON THE BUDGET FY 2003 REPORT of the COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET UNITED STATES SENATE at <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/cpquery/T?&report=sr141&dbname=107&>

ii For Native Hawaiians: <http://www.Hawaii.gov/dbedt/info/economic/census/Folder.2005-10-13.2927/sf4pop/sf4incpov2000sumnh.xls>

For total state population: <http://www.Hawaii.gov/dbedt/info/census/Folder.2005-10-13.2927/sf4pop/sf4incpov2000sumtotal.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ For Native Hawaiians: <http://www.oha.org/pdf/databook/2006/Databook2006EcoDev.pdf> p. 153.

For total population: <http://www.census.gov/prod/2005pubs/c2kbr-36.pdf> p. 6.

^{iv} For Native Hawaiians: <http://www.Hawaii.gov/dbedt/info/economic/census/Folder.2005-10-13.2927/sf4pop/sf4incpov2000sumnh.xls>

For total state population: <http://www.Hawaii.gov/dbedt/info/census/Folder.2005-10-13.2927/sf4pop/sf4incpov2000sumtotal.pdf>

^v <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/cpquery/T?&report=sr141&dbname=107&>

^{vi} http://www.oha.org/databook/databook1996_1998/go-chap1.98.html for Native Hawaiians and <http://www.Hawai'i.gov/dbedt/info/economic/databook/db2004/section01.pdf> for the total population.

^{vii} Some believe that the percentage is far less than one percent, see “Chief Maui Loa, the Hou Hawaiians, Open Letter to President Bush Opposing the Hawaiian Government Reorganization bill S.147, April 6, 2005 on Grounds that It Would Destroy the Special Rights of native Hawaiians of the Blood by Expanding the Definition of “Hawaiian” to Include Hundreds of Thousands of Low-Blood-Quantum People.” <http://www.angelfire.com/hi5/bigfiles/ChiefMauiLoa040605.html>

^{viii} 47,000 are 50% or greater <http://www.Hawaii.gov/dhhl/2005nhhp.doc>

Only 22,500 live on Hawaiian Homestead lots

The Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1920, as amended, a Federal act, established the Hawaiian home lands trust and defined the population eligible to reside on Hawaiian home lands as those native Hawaiians with at least 50% Hawaiian blood and their successors or assignees of less than 50% Hawaiian blood. For the purposes of this plan, this population is referred to as native Hawaiians (native spelt with a small n instead of capital N). Estimates of the native Hawaiian population, a subset of the Native Hawaiian population, range from approximately 45,000 to 70,000, although this number remains difficult to measure. Therefore, to identify this subset of native Hawaiians (50% Hawaiian blood or such lower percentage as may be established in Sections 207, 208 and 209 of the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1920, as amended) for the purpose of this plan, a population of 47,365 will be used. This reflects the number of individuals currently living on Hawaiian home lands (22,539) per the 2000 Census, plus the estimated number of occupants for homes built on Hawaiian home lands since the Census (3,408) and the number of applicants on the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands’ (DHHL) waiting lists as of December 31, 2004 (21,418).

^{ix} See Chief Maui Loa letter above.

^x Another five percent are on the Hawaiian Homelands waiting list.

^{xi} The 2000 Census does not report anyone speaking Hawaiian at home. See 2004 State Data Book, Table 1.42, at <http://www.hawaii.gov/dbedt/info/economic/databook/db2004/section01.pdf> See also <http://www.voanews.com/specialenglish/archive/2005-06/a-2005-06-13-1-1.cfm>

^{xii} <http://www.voanews.com/specialenglish/archive/2005-06/a-2005-06-13-1-1.cfm>

^{xiii} <http://akaka.senate.gov/public/documents/Substitute%20Amendment.pdf>

^{xiv} Honolulu Star Bulletin. 9/22/2005.

^{xv} OHA website: “1874 - David Kalakaua, known as the "Merrie Monarch," is elected to the throne. King Kalakaua abolishes voter property qualifications. Under his reign, the Kingdom of Hawai'i is counted as the most literate nation in the world. “http://www.oha.org/pdf/hookahua/hookahua_05/Hookahua_11-15-05.pdf

^{xvi} Randall Roth & Samuel King. *Broken Trust: Greed, Mismanagement & Political Manipulation at America's Largest Charitable Trust*. (University of Hawai'i Press, 2006).

^{xvii} <http://www.time.com/time/archive/preview/0,10987,1101021216-397526,00.html> Time magazine cover story, Dec. 16, 2002. Its coverage of Indian gaming began with, "Imagine, if you will, Congress passing a

bill to make Indian tribes more self-sufficient that gives billions of dollars to the white backers of Indian businesses and nothing to hundreds of thousands of Native Americans living in poverty.”

^{xviii} \$10 billion is an estimate. The endowment is about \$7 billion; that does not include current value of more than 350,000 acres of non-income producing land.

^{xix} The Grassroot Institute, whose two extensive telephone polls conducted by CC Advertising in Virginia, showed that Hawai'i residents oppose the Akaka Bill by two to one margins and Native Hawaiians also oppose it, but by a smaller margin. <http://www.grassrootinstitute.org>

^{xx} <http://www.angelfire.com/hi2/Hawaiiansovereignty/prioritieshawnonhaw.html>

^{xxi} For the 1959 Statehood vote there were 174,335 registered voters, of whom 140,744, or 81 percent voted. The vote split 132,773, or 94.3 percent, in favor and 7,971, or 5.7 percent, opposed. At the time there were 102,000 “Hawaiians” and “Part-Hawaiians” of whom half would have been of voting age. It is difficult to construct a scenario whereby a majority of Native Hawaiians voted against it. See Schmitt, Robert C. *Historical Statistics of Hawai'i*. University of Hawai'i Press. 1977. pp. 602 & 25.

^{xxii} <http://lava.net/cslater/Hawaiians.htm>

^{xxiii} For a detailed analysis of this subject read: Sowell, Thomas. *Affirmative Action Around the World: An Empirical Study*. Yale University Press. 2004.