

Author Interview

In your opinion, what are the biggest changes to Hawaii since the 1960s?

Two things. The advancement of the tourist industry, and the rise of part-Hawaiians. These two developments have changed the face of Hawaii in ways that didn't exist in the 1960s. Back then, only about one million tourists visited the Islands each year. It was a controllable situation. Tourism was already a big part of the economy, but tourists tended to stay in designated areas, and only ventured out when they drove around the islands in their hotel rental cars. Now with tourism having surpassed seven million visitors a year, the situation is much more intrusive. Development is overrunning the Islands, and Hawaii is in danger of becoming a theme park. My friends on Oahu and Maui tell me I wouldn't recognize either place anymore, and I believe them. When I was living at Kihei Beach on Maui in the 70s, the jungle next to my house was already giving way to a shopping mall, so I dread to think what that island is like now.

What about the rise of part-Hawaiians?

Part-Hawaiians were a hidden class in the 1960s, but all that changed during the 70s when part-Hawaiians asserted themselves politically and socially. The Constitution of 1978 sent shockwaves throughout society. Suddenly Hawaiian culture was in the forefront again, which was a challenge to both the white and Asian cultures in Hawaii. Since then, the Hawaiian cultural renaissance and the Hawaiian sovereignty movement have changed the domestic personality of Hawaii altogether. It is a very exciting development, in my opinion, and something that happened in Honolulu after the 1960s, so I missed it.

Where were part-Hawaiians before the 70s?

Part-Hawaiians were a hidden class in the 1960s because it was not fashionable to be Hawaiian in those days. They were also a hidden class because they were often visually indiscernible from whites and Asians. Asian part-Hawaiians tended to look Asian, while white part-Hawaiians tended to look white. Part-Hawaiians in fact have always needed to announce their ethnicity because visually they are often no different appearing than other Asian mixes or other white mixes. Even today, when it is very fashionable to be part-Hawaiian, it is almost impossible to determine part-Hawaiian ethnicity by appearance alone. Which is why the Office of Hawaiian Affairs requires documentation of Hawaiian genealogy in order to be placed on its Hawaiian Registry. John Waihee III, for example, the governor of Hawaii from 1986 to 1994, is three-quarters Hawaiian but his ethnicity is not readily observable by his appearance. Just looking at him, he could just as easily be a white-Filipino mix or a white-Puerto Rican mix or maybe even 100% Portagee. All of which makes me wonder how many people I failed to recognize as part-Hawaiian in the 1960s.

What do you think of the recent conservative backlash against part-Hawaiian institutions such as the Office of Hawaiian Affairs?

I don't agree with it, but I understand it. Hawaiians seem to blend very well into other ethnicities, so conservative whites sometimes get riled when part-Hawaiians with only a tiny bit of native blood in them refuse to identify themselves as whites or Asians and instead identify themselves as part-Hawaiians first and foremost. Part-Hawaiians don't want to lose their Hawaiian ancestry, and to me that is understandable, and a natural consequence of the fact that full-Hawaiians are practically extinct. On the other hand, the situation is complicated and getting more complicated

all the time. Just recently, some conservative part-Hawaiians filed a lawsuit against the Office of Hawaiian Affairs demanding that it stop assisting natives who are less than 50% Hawaiian.

Why have you been away from Hawaii for over twenty-five years?

It broke my heart to see what was happening to the Islands. The malls, the shopping centers, the housing developments, the freeways, the resorts. I wanted to remember it the way it was, and not see all the recent changes. I actually haven't been to Oahu since the late 60s, and Maui since the late 70s. I would love to visit both again, but I'm afraid because I understand the march of time. Maui now has a fancy aquarium that rivals the one in Monterey, California, and there is a public library next to the house where I used to live in Kihei Beach. I'm all for aquariums and libraries, but really, I would rather remember Maui the way it used to be. All old and rundown, and magically dilapidated. An almost totally rural and rustic experience. I've dreamed of going back to Hawaii for a long time now. But if I ever do go back, it will be to a different island, one on which I have never resided before, so I won't notice all the changes, and maybe won't care that there are shopping centers everywhere. It's a possibility for my retirement. Besides, I'd like to take up native causes, especially with regard to the few remaining full-Hawaiians. I'd like somehow to do an exact head count of full Hawaiians who still survive today, and I'd like to know if there is anything that can be done to save them from extinction. If full-blooded young people still exist, for example, can they be convinced not to intermarry with other ethnicities? On the other hand, if there are so few full-blooded young people around that inbreeding would pose a significant health risk to their offspring, then full Hawaiians for all intents and purposes are already extinct. Anecdotal evidence suggests that most full Hawaiians are old and just waiting to die off, so it would be interesting to find out if there are still enough young people around to make a comeback.

One last question, and this goes back to early times. How exactly did whites originally take over in Hawaii if not by military conquest?

Well, there was always the *threat* of military conquest, and other factors came into play as well, because early contact between these two different peoples was complicated. But the short answer to your question is that whites introduced a Western form of government and then they infiltrated it. By King Kalakaua's time, they ran everything, and just a few years later the old Hawaiian Monarchy was ousted entirely. It's a sad commentary, but it makes sense. Foreigners invade a chain of beautiful tropical islands, are infatuated by the people, the place, and the opportunities, and decide to stay. Slowly they come to take over everything, and the natives are pushed out. It's not a new story, but something typical of 19th century American history. Today, rational people—both white and native—are trying to make amends. It's all in my book, as you know, so I hope everybody takes the time to read it.