

Lately I have been traveling in Hawaii. During my travels, I have encountered a racial based political faction, which goes by many names including Hawaiian Separatists and Hawaiian Sovereignists. One of the claims of these groups is that the Hawaiian Language was outlawed. This is such a widely held belief, that everyone I spoke to thought the language had been outlawed. I thought that an article showing the outlawing of a language would be a good article to share with the class, so I looked for one. In my search, then and now, I never found a reference to any law outlawing the Hawaiian language; instead I found an interesting article by Kenneth R. Conklin, Ph.D. (1) debunking this myth.

I found the article a convincing argument, as it listed many laws, which had a Hawaiian language requirement. For instance, in 1901 all laws were required to be published in a Hawaiian language paper. In 1919 it was required to offer Hawaiian as a language in all Hawaiian High Schools, and in 1935 it was a requirement of certain elementary schools. Given that Hawaiian language newspapers were printed until 1950 (1) and a cultural renaissance of the language started in the 1970's (7), there does not appear to be a whole lot of time in which the language could have been outlawed.

Nonetheless, the concept that Hawaiian had been outlawed is widely believed. Encouraged by such poorly written copy in the National Geographic as "... Later, the Hawaiian language was also banned."(7) The origin of this misinformation is an 1896 law.

1896 Laws of the Republic of Hawaii, Act 57, sec. 30: "The English Language shall be the medium and basis of instruction in all public and private schools, provided that where it is desired that another language shall be taught in addition to the English language, such instruction may be authorized by the Department, either by its rules, the curriculum of the school, or by direct order in any particular instance. Any schools that shall not conform to the provisions of this section shall not be recognized by the Department." [signed] June 8 A.D., 1896 Sanford B. Dole, President of the Republic of Hawaii.(1)

Requiring schools to teach in English is not the same as outlawing Hawaiian.

Since I now do not believe the Hawaiian Language had ever been outlawed, I intended to explore how this difference of belief between potential ADS clients and me might best be handled. However, I have been instructed that tracing the decline of the Hawaiian Language, would be more relevant.

“Prior to the arrival of the first Europeans in 1778, the Native Hawaiian people lived in a highly organized, self-sufficient, subsistent social system based on communal land tenure with a sophisticated language, culture, and religion,” (3) or so it is claimed. Cultural highlights of pre-contact Hawaii include nearly 300 years of constant civil war, human sacrifice, and a Kapu system. The Kapu system being itself the height of “enlightenment” with death being the seemingly preferred punishment for such transgressions as a woman eating a banana, a man eating the wrong fish, or anyone, stepping on a ruler’s shadow.(6) Perhaps, unsurprisingly, the Hawaiians were delighted with western contact. They were introduced to things they had never seen before

including steel, guns, big ships, the written word(2), and perhaps most importantly the concept of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” The Hawaiians invited the foreigners in, and did everything possible to emulate them. This included adopting the English language. In fact, as early as 1840, the Kingdom government had a stated policy of teaching English over Hawaiian. (1) English was the language of technology and trade, the language of the future.

In the mid 1800’s most Hawaiians spoke Hawaiian. Today few do. What has caused the change? I believe the Hawaiian Language died out, due to the superior social and economic benefits of speaking English. Before I go into that, it is worthwhile to discuss schooling and missionaries. Also, while Hawaiians are not American Indians, and many of their experiences are different, some conclusions on American Indian language loss will be included.

By 1856, there were both Hawaiian and English language schools in Hawaii. English language schools cost about \$5 more to attend. When this charge was eliminated, there was a shift in enrollment to English language schools as they were considered better. (1) In 1896 all schools in Hawaii became English only. Hawaiian could still be taught and spoken, just not in school during non-Hawaiian language instruction. It should be noted that Japanese immigrants sent their children to after school Japanese language programs (1). Hawaiians could have, but they did not. It should also be noted that in an article friendly to Navajo’s (8), it is stated of the BIA boarding school era that attendees “remained fluent speakers of Navajo” “although often their children do not.” Furthermore, “boarding school ‘survivors’ recall proudly their defiance of English only rules.” As such, although English language education could not

possibly have increased the use of Hawaiian, by itself it there is no reason to believe that it was a dominant force in the decline of the Hawaiian language.

In speaking of Missionaries, I believe it is important to once again point out that Hawaiians practiced human sacrifice. Given the choice of practicing a religion where one might be the sacrifice or one in which the sacrifice has already been made (Christianity), I myself, find a compelling personal benefit in practicing the latter. Before the first Missionaries landed in Hawaii, the old Kapu system had already been overthrown (6) (9). The Missionaries did practice cultural elitism, and outlawed the hula (7). Certainly anything having to do with the old religion was either suppressed or denigrated. Some must have believed in the concept of “social evolutionism” whereby culture advances thru stages, and targeted language, a marker and transmitter of culture for suppression (8). I have not unearthed any evidence of this practice for this reason in Hawaii (not yet anyhow). However, this was a BIA stated policy. “Kill the Indian...and save the Man. Killing the language was seen as a necessary means to this end.”(8) Like many beliefs, there were concurrent opposing points of view. Many Missionaries favored working in the Indian tongue. Even where cultural suppression was a stated goal, working within the Indian language was often seen as a requirement to teaching Indians. (10) It is, after all, hard to convert someone, if one cannot communicate with him or her. In support of this, I point to the Bible being written in countless languages, including Hawaiian. Before the first Missionaries landed in Hawaii, Henry Obookiah, a Native Hawaiian, had already translated the Book of Genesis into Hawaiian(5). I don't have any great personal need to defend Missionaries, however I simply was not confronted with

any examples of wrong doing of Hawaiian Missionaries nor are they blamed by Hawaiian Separatists for the disappearance of the Hawaiian Language.

It makes sense at this point to make a small side trip into the complaint of Hawaiian separatists. The complaint is that Westerner's took over, not that they came in the first place, or the changes they made. The analogy of the stolen house is a grievance over title to the house, not what has happened. (4) The government apology law 103-150, no doubt written and sponsored by the Hawaiian representative, doesn't mention language suppression, it's about land ownership.(3) I mention this here as a way of pointing out that wholesale subjugation of the people, massacres, or enslavement did not happen in Hawaii, otherwise it would be mentioned in both of these documents.

So what did happen? Why don't Hawaiian's speak Hawaiian? The simple reason *{IHMO}* is that English is/was more useful. Very soon after contact, English became the language of technology, trade, and the law. If one wanted to be a material success, English was the language to learn. There is the reasonable belief that learning a second language is a distraction to the primary language (8), and many people are not suited to learning multiple languages *{I only know the one}*. By 1900, Native Hawaiians were already a minority (29,779 of 154,001). (2) The majority at this time were the Japanese (61,111) (2), who chose to school their children in both English and Japanese, but not Hawaiian. Thus the Hawaiian language was already in minority usage as quickly as 125 years after contact. New immigrants who spoke neither Hawaiian nor English, were more likely to speak English (1), as it was the language of trade. In time the dominance of English and rarity of Hawaiian hit a critical point at which it was no longer useful to speak Hawaiian. At church, in the family, and other social functions youngsters raised in

English would cease to understand Hawaiian and there would be social pressure to do all communication in English (8). Once Hawaiian left these last outposts, there was no reason to learn Hawaiian in the first place.

If the Hawaiian language had not died out a generation or two ago, it would most certainly still be dying out today. In modern America, social isolation keeps secondary languages alive (8). Even long ago, Hawaiian was the proto-typical melting pot. More importantly, of the Indian languages, it is hypothesized only Navajo will survive as a working language (8). Native language loss accompanied by a switch to English is driven by economic opportunity, mass media (including radio, TV, movies, and magazines), and “social identifiers”.(8) It is perhaps most interesting to note that the social identifiers work as both a push and pull away from the Native languages. English is seen as the language of progress and success successful while Native Indian languages are often seen as markers of low social status and a lack of ability to cope. (8)

A stated policy of the BIA was to “Kill the Indian...and save the Man.” I would put forth that in Hawaii this has been achieved, far more profoundly than even the Hawaiian Separatists might imagine. A final reasoning in the saga of language loss is the adoption by Native Americans of the Western philosophies of Individualism, Pragmatism, and Materialism. Speaking English is best for the individual, it is the most effective way to communicate (in the modern and Territorial Hawaii), and it is the best path to material success. (8) I know the Hawaiian Separatists have adopted these philosophies because their main goal is land. They want land for themselves (individualism), using any means possibly to achieve their goal regardless of fairness or historical accuracy (pragmatism), and the reason they want the land is to charge rent (materialism). Maybe the Separatists I

have spoken with are non-representative, but the ones I have talked to don't talk about knocking down the building in Waikiki, they talk about collecting rents. My belief is that they long for the good life, living it high and large. I would put it to you that there is absolutely nothing more American than the Hawaiian Separatists plan of stealing another's land *{or stealing back their own}* and living off the profits. If the Hawaiian Separatists get their way, who knows; maybe someday while sitting at the beach, as a young white bellhop brings them a Mai Tai, they might just bother to relearn the language their grandparents forsake. It is, after all, the American Dream.

*{If I have an apology or addendum to add to this, it would be that after living in Hawaii for some time (I wrote this in 2005 for a Multi-Culturalism Class in pursuit of an Addiction Studies Certificate, while I moved to Hawaii in 2006), I came to realize how widely spoken Hawaiian is, that there are currently Hawaiian only schools, and perhaps would mention that speaking Hawaiian is (or at least, I perceive it to be) a gateway skill-set needed for certain cultural/anthropology/tourist based jobs -- i.e. that the language has far more economic value than I would have ever guessed.}*

(1)

<http://www.angelfire.com/hi2/hawaiiansovereignty/hawlangillegal.html>

Was Hawaiian Language Illegal? Did the Evil Haoles Suppress Hawaiian Language As A Way of Oppressing Kanaka Maoli and Destroying Their Culture?

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(2)

<http://www.angelfire.com/hi2/hawaiiansovereignty/fullpartners.html>

Were non-kanaka maoli historically full partners in Hawai'i, or only second-class guests?

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(3)

<http://www.hawaii-nation.org/publawall.html>

UNITED STATES PUBLIC LAW 103-150

103d Congress Joint Resolution 19

Nov. 23, 1993

(4)

<http://www.angelfire.com/hi2/hawaiiansovereignty/stolenhousecar.html>

Analogy of the Stolen House and its mutation, Analogy of the Stolen Car

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(5)

[http://www.hawaiichristiansonline.com/henry\\_oookiah.html](http://www.hawaiichristiansonline.com/henry_oookiah.html)

THE MEMOIRS OF HENRY OBOOKIAH

Introduction

by C. Scott Berg

(6)

<http://www.angelfire.com/hi5/bigfiles/opukahaia.html>

(The above angelfire webpage, includes a cut and paste (among other things) of the following webpage.)

[http://www.hawaiichristiansonline.com/spiritual\\_history.html](http://www.hawaiichristiansonline.com/spiritual_history.html)

(I utilized the angelfire source, as it consolidated the fragmented hco/spiritual website)

Portions of a spiritual history of Hawai'i, consisting of excerpts from Daniel I. Kikawa's book PERPETUATED IN RIGHTEOUSNESS. Introduced by C. Scott Berg.

(7)

National Geographic, Dec 2002 v202 i6 p2(40)

Hawaii. (Industry Overview) Paul Theroux.

Full Text: COPYRIGHT 2002 National Geographic Society



(8)

<http://faculty.ed.umuc.edu/~jmatthew/seven.html>

G. Cantoni (Ed.) (1996), Stabilizing Indigenous Languages

Flagstaff: Center for Excellence in Education, Northern Arizona University

Seven Hypotheses on Language Loss: Causes and Cures (2) James Crawford

(9)

<http://www.hawaiischoolreports.com/history/timeline.htm>

History of Hawaii - Timeline of Hawaiian History

(10)

<http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/BOISE.html>

American Indian Language Policy and School Success

Jon Reyhner