

Four Futures For Hawaii

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I. Through the Rearview Mirror: Racing Backwards Into the Future

Hawaii continues to muddle through with no guiding vision, not really failing, but not excelling in anything either.

Tourism hangs in there, but rather like Coney Island or Atlantic City--a tattered reminder of earlier, grander times. Waikiki becomes shabbier and shabbier, attracting only tourists who come from parts of the world more wretched than it is. While some of the neighbor islands continue to develop very upscale facilities for the rich and famous, these are owned and managed by off-island interests, so most of the untaxed profits flow out as quickly as the money flows in.

Airlines continue to cut back on their service since Hawaii is no longer profitable per se. Persons who once would have flown first class or business class, now travel in their own private jets. Most seats in commercial airlines to Hawaii are filled with people using their frequent flyer miles--which is basically the only reason airlines continue to fly to Hawaii at all (as a perk to lure customers to their other, profitable, routes). But more and more airlines decide to give up on Hawaii and so the price of actual tickets for ordinary local flyers on the two remaining airlines (State-subsidized Hawaiian and Aloha) rapidly increases to represent the true cost of flying to and from Hawaii, so fewer and fewer locals can afford to fly anywhere, even to the other islands.

Once-proud forms of governance, adopted immediately after Statehood (when centralized governmental structures were considered to be progressive and good) remain, with a large but disillusioned civil service. Democrats continue to rule, but with no discernible policy. It makes more sense to consider Hawaii to be a "no-party state" instead of a Democratic Party state.

Issues which do make it into the State's formal political process tend either to be matters of personal morality which should be of no interest to the State (such as the old same-sex marriage issue) or else various specific pork barrel measures which grease local palms and activities and win votes for individual legislators, but which may or may not serve any broader community purpose.

Taxes continue to be cut and to become increasingly regressive so that the number of working poor increases along with the number of very rich who spend their wealth on items imported from the mainland or elsewhere overseas (whence also most profits flow), and on investment in overseas stocks, land, and developments--rather than on any thing which would enable the wealth to spread and grow in Hawaii. Nonetheless, governmental officials continue to give handouts and tax breaks to "lure" mainland/overseas companies and operations here--rather than using tax money to invest in people already living in Hawaii--especially in creating the best educational system in the world (instead of a system which is "second to none" at all, which it is rapidly becoming).

However, with so much local money going to outside interests (who are quite willing to come to Hawaii for a while and take as much from Hawaii as they can, and then leave), both the DOE schools and the University of Hawaii system continue to slide downhill towards becoming mediocre educational institutions in one small, isolated community lost in the oceans of the world.

II. At Home in the Global Village: Too Global to be Local

Like many other small rural (especially, Pacific Island) communities, Hawaii becomes for most locals just a place in which to grow up or die. The population of Hawaii is composed overwhelmingly of the very young and the retired. Local young adults and middle aged people go elsewhere in the world to seek their fortune hoping that, when they make it, they can afford to "return home" to retire. In the meantime, if they can, they send their children to grow up here, cared for by relatives or

grandparents, but knowing for sure that their own children, too, will move away when they come of age.

Remittances from these "overseas locals" becomes a significant source of income for locals remaining in Hawaii.

However, Asia returns to a roaring high-growth economy, the economic prosperity of a united Europe continues and expands, and the Long Boom in the United States means that many rich people come to Hawaii to live a life of leisure in the sun. They have no interest in local cultures or needs whatsoever. The elderly rich come to retire and die in peace while the younger idle rich simply use Hawaii as one of their many jet-setting residences.

The situation in Hawaii thus is very much like the Japanese boom years of the 1990s, except that the newcomers now are much richer and more culturally-varied, while state taxes are so low that the local community does not receive much if any benefit from the presence of the super-rich.

Most of the newcomers are primarily from the Chinas, Korea, Malaysia, and India, as well as Japan, though many also are from Europe and North America.

Schools in Hawaii thus become even more two-tier than they are now--public schools warehouse people until they are old enough to move off-island for whatever jobs they can find. Private schools educate those who can afford it--as all newcomers (the few who have children) and some locals can--to the best world-class standards.

III. The Best Little Backwater on the Planet: Too Local to be Global

Hawaii makes a virtue out of its being out of step with the world. We reject as many of the trappings of modernity and post-modernity as possible. We restore Hawaii everywhere to what it was before mass tourism destroyed it--for some that means to Hawaii of the 1940s, 50s and early 60s; for others it means the 19th Century; and for others, it means even earlier.

We get rid of all fast-food franchises, big box stores, "made in (anywhere but Hawaii)" tourist trinkets, and the like, and (much to the delight of tourists who came to see something different, and not what can be found in every other tourist trap in the world) restore plate lunch wagons and stalls, mom and pop grocery and sundry stores, and other locally-based and run operations all using local materials and craftspersons only. Small diversified agriculture, fishing, and fish-farming return as major occupations, providing more and more of the food for locals and tourists alike

Education is focused on preserving and enhancing local lifestyles. Schools are run mostly out of doors in a relaxed, tutorial, hands-on way. Practical attitudes and skills are demonstrated and taught. Reading and writing are de-emphasized (but not totally neglected) while talking things over thoroughly, caring for and about others, anticipating and mediating disputes before they escalate, and cooperating in group tasks rather than striving to excel in individual endeavors are the real "basics".

As children get older, more time is spent in the fields and ocean, learning not only how to derive a living from the land, but also how to live gently with the land. Respect and care for the aina is shown to be as important as is respect and care for each other. Traditional preservation and conservation attitudes and skills are carefully lived and taught.

At secondary and tertiary educational levels, basics of mechanical operation and repair are taught as is the use and care of the most sophisticated electronic or biological technologies available anywhere in the world. But most modern technologies are rare, and are clearly subordinate to time-tested, traditional ways of doing things in these islands.

The country is kept "country" or restored to what it was before the postwar mass tourist boom.

No new mass tourist facilities are built, and many of the largest and/or most "unHawaiian" of the older ones are torn down with the same glee monuments to Marx, Lenin, and Stalin were toppled by

citizens when communism collapsed. The remaining tourist facilities are restored to what they were like when they were new (somewhat as was done with the Moana Hotel, but less gaudy and more faithful to how they originally were).

The fundamental land-use, economic, and governing basis in Hawaii is the traditional ahupua'a. Government thus becomes substantially more decentralized, economies become largely self-sufficient on a much smaller scale, and lifestyle and cultural diversities proliferate between community and community.

Issues of "sovereignty" have not been officially resolved. The US has not relinquished control of Hawaii. It remains, formally, a state within the US. But at the same time, Hawaii has become so out of step with the mainland, and so economically (and militarily) unimportant to the US, that Hawaii is left free to go its own way with minimal interference from the US government, economy, or culture. Thus, various groups with differing notions of what sovereignty might entail, occupy different ahupua'a regions, living the kind of lives they choose, while permitting others, just on the other side of the mountain ridge, to live differently, if they so choose.

All of this makes Hawaii vastly more attractive as a "tourist destination." But at the same time, tourism is very strictly limited, and restricted to those who are willing to pay the most to be the least intrusive by their presence. Thus a unique kind of local "ecotourism" evolves which is based neither on false notions of a "Polynesian Paradise" on the one hand, nor on hedonistic "sex, sun, and surf" activities on the other, but rather on appreciation of one spot in the world where time is blissfully standing still, happily frozen at various blessed times in history

IV. Virtual Hawaii in a Virtual World

(Note: I was recently asked to write something about the future of the University of Hawaii for Malamalama (a UH publication). Here is what I wrote. It captures most of what I intend for this fourth alternative future for Hawaii):

In 2030, Hawaii is a newly independent state whose citizens are not only locally based but also globally dispersed. They are, in short, not only citizens but also netizens. The process of the devolution of large nation-states into smaller geographical and networked communities, just beginning in 2000, is in full force everywhere, including the former "United States". While Hawaii is "sovereign" (if I can continue to use that obsolete word from the old industrial era), it is also aligned with other "sovereign" communities into a larger cultural community called "Oceania."

The University of Hawaii similarly is everywhere and nowhere. There is a physical presence, which takes the form of scores of what might in the old days have been called "community colleges" spread throughout the Hawaiian Islands. Most provide a kind of meeting place for ad hoc learning projects or face-to-face tutoring. Others provide facilities for ad hoc research groups, formed on what would in the past have been considered a "multi-disciplinary" basis, although most old academic disciplines have long since vanished. Some of these research groups are brought together to address issues of basic, theoretical concern. Others--the vast majority--are of an applied and practical nature. There are also a large number of intellectual ronin/monks and nuns--scholars of the truly old school who, living with relatively no concern for worldly goods or profit, still teach and do research on matters of interest only to themselves. Their "crazy ideas" often provide breakthroughs and insights for others later.

However, the heart and soul of "higher education" in 2030 is what was misleadingly called in 2000 "distance education". Learners have access to material in highly sophisticated, personalized, interactive, "virtual reality" modes. While some of the form and content is created by curriculum-providers located in Hawaii, most of it is developed, in vast and spectacular profusion, usually by the very best (but sometime by the very worst) scholar-producers in the world. Each learner may start whatever course of study she wants, wherever she wishes to enter it, and can proceed as far and as fast as she wishes in any specific direction, branching out into other related areas through what were called "hot links" in 2000. Each person thus has individualized and utterly unique (and endlessly ongoing and evolving) knowledge and skills.

Just as "Where you graduate?" was the question each local young adult used to ask of any person on first encounter, so now is finding out what people know, and don't know, and sharing and learning from each other in face-to-face (or virtual) encounters a major interpersonal preoccupation--almost a fad.

What was once called "intramural athletics" has replaced the semi-professional NCAA programs of the old days. Each local "community college" has its own teams of true "student athletes" which have developed wonderful rivalries with the other "colleges." These contests are enormously popular. However, persons who are primarily focused on physical activities can still find online and inperson programs and facilities in the Islands, which enable them, if they have the skill and the will, to compete at worldclass levels. Most games and competition occur in cyberspace and not in what was once amusingly called "reality."

Probably the most exciting new development for UH was the creation, only a year ago, of a "branch" of the University of Hawaii on Mars. Because of this development, an additional verse has been added to our Alma Mater, which proclaims:

In Valles Marineris our Alma Mater waits
For Martian songs and laughter to ring its opened gates.
So come and join your children! The journey's now begun
For wider truth and service, in world's beyond our Sun.