

A thousand little cuts to genocide

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 Commentary
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The first in a series of three open letters to the citizens of Hawai'i

Me, I'm a Hawaiian. I'm an artist and a playwright. I'm not a politician, lawyer, or historian. So, I'm gonna tell you here how I feel from my na'au - my guts.

Then in my next articles, I'll try to unwind my guts to figure out how I end up feeling this way and possible directions I see open to us.

My opinion: The things many of you say and do amount to 1,000 little cuts against us. And these cuts represent a subversive, long-standing cultural genocide against the Hawaiian people. Cultural genocide against the Hawaiian people.

Nobody executes us. No one lynches us. No government enslaves our children or rapes our women. No citizenry chains us up and drags us from the backs of pickup trucks. No homicidal maniac gassing us. Just 1,000 little cuts to our self-esteem, self-identity, cultural pride - to our souls.

Rather than obliterating the people, like so many Hitlers have tried, simply obliterate the glue that binds them: culture. Just enough slices to leave blood on the scene, but no actual bodies.

Nobody will come out publicly and say, "Screw Hawaiians" - that's not "Politically Correct." But you and I know many feel this way. It's cultural genocide in 1,000 little back-yard, back-handed, unofficial cuts. A slow bleeding to death through 1,000 tiny cuts that no one knows how to stop and nobody will admit to doing.

So, here's my take on what many of you honestly think and feel, but dare not say in public. Here are the cuts:

Concerning the two new federal lawsuits continuing the attack on Hawaiian assets, rights and entitlements, Barrett v. Cayetano and Carroll v. Nakatan (If they prevail, the Hawaiian Homes Commission, Office of Hawaiian Affairs, and native Hawaiian gathering rights will be found unconstitutional), I hear this:

"Blah, blah, blah. Yada, yada, yada. So what. Damn Office of Hawaiian Affairs has been a sorry mess since it began anyway. Hawaiians didn't suddenly die off in great numbers when everyone voted and a non-Hawaiian got in! Hell, Hawaiians didn't even raise a fuss. And why should one ethnic group get monies from a pot of land that's supposed to be everyone's! Bunch of dysfunctional Hawaiians - take it down!"

That's what you think, isn't it? An easy, juicy, seemingly well-deserved cut to Hawaiian self-governance.

How about Hawaiian Home Lands? I hear:

"Give us a break! What a sorry legacy that's been. Remember Kaponu's song, "Sonny's been waiting." Well, thousands are still waiting, people still dying on the lists - but the earth doesn't stop turning and plenty of people are homeless! Why should Hawaiians get singled out? Why

J-1

should one ethnic group get land practically free, and cheap loans to build their houses, while the rest of us Hawai'i-loving, tax-paying citizens gotta work for ours?

What's up with that? And you know those lazy, stupid Hawaiians are using the extra money they save on their mortgages on Hawaiian Homes to do drugs, get drunk, rip each other off, and kick the crap out of their wives and kids! That's why they stay on the bottom of all those damn social indicators. Hawaiian Home Lands are Hawaiian ghettos, for crissakes! Cut it DOWN!"

This is what you feel, isn't it? Cut the closest thing we've got to a nation, and our self- and social-esteem all in one blow. Excellent cut.

Gathering rights? You grumble:

"Why is everything connected to Hawaiians about taking? Taking state money, taking state land, taking state resources! Why should they have a right to go on private property and take, take, take? Isn't private property as sacred and American as democracy itself? Isn't this right to own our own land free and clear what our veterans fought and died for? Cut that one down!"

Come on, admit it, that's what you say to each other at your kitchen tables and out at the country clubs. Cut off access to maile, heiau, koa, and pōhaku so we can't define ourselves as different, continue to force us to assimilate under the guise of "equal rights for all." Make it illegal to gather the things we need to define ourselves as different, and then argue that we voluntarily gave up our cultural practices. Brilliant, "Catch 22" cut.

1,000 tiny slashes that make us unable to be who our kĀpuna told us we are. By the way, my grand-aunt had to wear a sign around her neck in elementary school that said, "Do Not Speak Hawaiian to Me."

So the outright murder of Hawaiians doesn't happen - that would be racist genocide and so un-American. The murder of Hawaiian culture, though, happens every day, slowly: tens of millions of state dollars go every year to the Hawai'i Visitors and Convention Bureau, which sells us, Hawaiians, as the "Host Culture" to market the state, but there's never been a state-recognized, state-funded hula halau.

The state will pay a highly respected Japanese artist from Maui more than \$300,000 to do a bronze sculpture of a scantily clad, mythic Hawaiian man offering water to all the tourists at the convention center, but there was not one native Hawaiian artist commissioned in the original artwork plan.

The Advertiser stated in a recent editorial:

"... the task for Hawaiians ... for self-determination now is to set aside the past and work toward a unified future. This means ... less dwelling on the far-distant past - the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom - and more attention to the future. What happened happened. It was an unhappy moment for many, but more than a century has gone by."

More than 600 years had passed before we "remembered" our trans-oceanic voyaging and launched the Hokule'a. Hula was banned in public in the 1800s. Use of our native language was effectually destroyed by the provisional government in public and private schools in 1896 and in government in 1900 by the territorial government.

If we can forget the overthrow because it happened in the "far-distant past," then let's forget Hokule'a, hula, and 'olelo Hawai'i. Wouldn't like that, would you? So how come it's okay to "remember" all the things that make money through tourism and marketing, how come we get to "renew" all the happy, fun stuff: hula, paddling, voyaging, etc., but are shut down

consistently when we remember the stuff that's going to cost something or make someone uncomfortable?

Well-intentioned, educated, sympathetic, influential cuts that mask a greedy, hypocritical, arrogant, decidedly American ideology. American ideology is to forget the past because America was largely built on land stolen through government-sponsored genocide against native Americans and wealth garnered from slavery. While this generation benefits, it doesn't want any moral responsibility for those atrocities. And, in Hawai'i, many flat-out deny any connection between the past and present: Hawaiians aren't suffering now because even if wrongs were committed, "... they were done to your ancestors, and you've benefited greatly by being American."

In other words, "No dead bodies, so shut up!"

The genocide of Hawaiian culture may not be complete for another 20, another 50 years, but it will happen - unless we re-establish our sovereign nation.

People with Hawaiian blood will still be here, but my culture - distinct and unique from everyone else - will have bled to death.

So, are you, the citizenry of the Aloha State, arrogant enough to think that without Hawaiian culture this place will still be the same, that there will still be aloha? I know many of you believe that.

I hear many local people, people who have been here for generations, people like Uncle Ben who've pulled themselves up outta Kalihi by their own bootstraps and into Washington Place, people who "feel" Hawaiian, believe they've got this "aloha" thing down and that we've become moot: Hawaiians and Hawaiian culture aren't necessary for this multicultural society. That, to me, is a big gamble. If you're wrong, and we are necessary, then the residents of Hawai'i will have truly destroyed paradise - both the land and the spirit.

But you are willing to gamble that, aren't you? Because if we're not needed then that saves a helluva lot of land and power. Land and Power. This is all about Land and Power, baby.

So, of course you've got to take down Hawaiian Homes, OHA and gathering rights. And then you'll take Kamehameha Schools, Queen Emma's Trust, and Queen Lili'uokalani's Trust too, because that's an obscene amount of land and power. And why wouldn't you want Hawaiians to have land and power? "Because if those Hawaiians ever do manage to unite their sorry asses together, those assets and ali'i trusts will provide them the financial and political clout to sue us for some 1.8 million acres - with back rent, plus interest - from 1959, when the Territory made a deal with the U.S. called the "Statehood Act." Hell, with that kind of land and power consolidation, they could successfully sue the U.S. for reparations and completely overthrow the islands' power structure!"

Now you know why there's never been a complete inventory of the ceded lands.

If this isn't what many of you think, then why are we where we are? Why didn't you speak out against Rice? Why aren't you speaking out against Barrett, Goemans, Carroll, Burgess, Twigg-Smith, Conklin, et. al? Responsibility belongs to everyone who lives here, and being passive does not release you from responsibility.

So, now this educated, moderate, peaceful kanaka is taking the P.C. gloves off and cutting back. Paper cuts only, mind you. But I gotta let you guys know, I'm feeling like so much has been, and is being, ripped from my na'au that I've got nothing to lose.

You wanna "feel" Hawaiian? Come, feel 1,000 tiny cuts. We were once warriors too, you know - and I hope for all our sakes we aren't forced to using more than pens because of everyone's passivity or denial of responsibility and reality.

Ho`iho`i Mai

Kauluwēhi

Return

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