

THE MARGINAL MAN IN HAWAII

Everett V. Stonequist

When two or more races and nationalities meet and live in a common territory under a single political and economic system, a series of profound changes, biological as well as cultural, are set in motion. At first, race relations assume a predominantly symbiotic or economic character, but with further time and acquaintance more intimate social relations develop. These include the mixing of blood and the transfer of culture. The trend of change is toward the dominant race and culture. If sufficient time is allowed a new racial stock and a new culture eventually arise out of this contact and interaction.

The processes of biological amalgamation and cultural assimilation do not proceed at equal speeds, nor do they embrace all persons to the same degree. Some individuals advance faster than others; they are pioneers in a racial and cultural sense. They may be of mixed blood, but they are always of mixed culture. Their advanced position exposes them to the higher temperatures of the "melting-pot"; in fact, the clash of cultures becomes a vital problem for them, more or less controlling the evolution of their personalities. As pioneers in the process of fusion, they live on the margins of two groups, and so are termed "marginal men."

The marginal person lives in two social worlds--sometimes three or even more in Hawaii. If he is of mixed race his very physical appearance usually indicates his bi-racial or multi-racial origin. Perhaps in his family life and traditions the diversity of cultural backgrounds operate in the conditioning of his personality traits. At a youthful age he becomes conscious of his diverse inheritance. In proportion as there are social distances and racial prejudices in the community he experiences these as personal problems. Where does he belong? To which racial group? Is he inferior because he is mixed? Just what is the significance of being mixed in race? Such questions may become of determining importance in shaping the flow of his thoughts, his deeper feelings about himself, and the direction of his social contacts and ambitions.

Race biologists are not agreed concerning the significance of race mixture. The race sociologist views the problem as primarily social and cultural. If the mixed person so often is supersensitive and self-conscious, harassed by uncertainty and inferiority feelings, and perplexed about his conduct and social relationships, the answer is to be found in the conflict of our social arrangements, rather than in the disharmony of the genes.

This hypothesis is not merely speculative. It seems to fit the facts. One method of check is to compare mixed races in various parts of the world. If in Hawaii, for example, the part-Hawaiians have made such good records, does it not reflect the relatively good opportunities and tolerance which exist here?(1)

Another check is to compare the situation of the "cultural hybrid" who is not a racial hybrid--particularly the children of

(1) The interested reader will find a fuller discussion of this subject, as well as the general theory of the marginal man, in a forthcoming volume.

immigrants who are assimilating a culture sharply different from their parents. In Hawaii the comparisons are ready at hand. The second generation Oriental, in particular, is in a marginal situation. He becomes Americanized in his school, play and work contacts, while in his family life he receives the influence of the ancestral culture. To which culture does he belong? And what is his status in the community? Many will echo the statement of a second generation Japanese: "We are not good Japanese in the eyes of our parents, and the Americans do not believe we are really Americans! Just what are we?" One notes that this situation--like that of the mixed blood--also produces dilemmas in conduct, a heightened self-consciousness and sensitiveness concerning racial status, and ambivalent moods and sentiments, varying in intensity according to the character of the individual's experience.

The problem should be viewed in terms of age and individual experience. The play-groups and the school-rooms of Hawaii are a period when race unconsciousness is the general rule. Here the "melting-pot" functions naturally and spontaneously. The prejudices of the adult world have not disturbed the racial democracy of the young people--except perhaps implicitly through separation by means of devices like the private school and selected residence. But the widening range of social contacts which come with adolescence brings about a consciousness of race which is quite disturbing. Premature encounters with race barriers hasten this race consciousness, but in any case the problem of making a career will eventually intrude itself and focus the attention upon the significance of the racial stratification.

What is the special character of the marginal person in Hawaii? The subject is too complex to describe here in detail. It involves an analysis of the peculiar system of race relations which has arisen in the Islands.

In a summary manner, Hawaii's system of race relations appears to be dual in nature: it contains a pattern of equality and friendliness, and a pattern of inequality and prejudice. The former is a product of the historic relationship between white man and Hawaiian; that of inequality emerged around the economic, political and social changes instituted by the plantation system during the latter part of the 19th century. Largely out of this system, with its importations of immigrant laborers, developed a hierarchy of races with white Americans in control.

The pattern of race equality is visible in the public relations of the various races and the correlated social etiquette, in the legal freedom of racial intermarriage, in the absence of a code of segregation such as may be found in the Southern United States, and in the local political traditions and institutions. The pattern of inequality is evident in the plantation system and the general economic and cultural predominance of the white population, in the social exclusiveness of the established white community and the surviving mores of the various races, and it is significantly implicit in the persisting territorial status of the Islands including their special relationship with Mainland public opinion as regards race relations.

The intricacy of this system is not apparent to the casual observer, and it is not clearly in the consciousness of many of the inhabitants. Race consciousness and prejudice are not open and public in Hawaii, and they are partly neutralized or driven underground by a real measure of equality and friendliness. But each race--some much more strongly than others--seeks to maintain a separate social life, marry within itself, and favor its members. The controlling position of the Nordic Americans, or haoles, is particularly important, for they not only possess overwhelming economic power, but also represent American civilization and symbolize American control of the Islands. The other racial groups are thus responding primarily to American cultural values. But here the dilemmas arise. Assimilation, or Americanization, proceeds successfully to the degree that no barriers of race impede the movement. The equality must be real and thorough-going. The feeling of many persons in Hawaii that the white American is favored here--that those of darker hue, particularly Orientals, can advance just so far, creates disillusionment and throws the individual back upon his own group. And then some Americans wonder why Americanization is not proceeding more swiftly! Thus the second generation Orientals must often contend with the restrictive attitudes of two groups: their parents who may view with much concern their rapid Americanization; and those haoles who urge Americanization and yet draw a subtle line beyond which their hospitality cools.

The problem of the Japanese second generation is more difficult than that of the Chinese: they are, on the average, more recently established and consequently less Americanized; their larger numbers render them more conspicuous to the public; and they feel the repercussions of the strains in the relations of Japan and the United States. Each racial group in Hawaii has a different position, and the marginal members of each reflect this difference.

It is out of the dual pattern indicated above that the chief problems of the marginal persons arise, whether these are conceived in terms of social contacts and intermarriage, or in political and economic adjustment. Some are acutely aware of their anomalous position, and highly sensitive to the concealed barriers. These are the more Americanized ("haolified") and ambitious individuals. Some accommodate themselves philosophically, satisfied with their measure of success, and even appreciative of those opportunities which Hawaii offers. Some (if of Oriental descent) go to their ancestral lands where their racial differences are not a problem--although this is not a solution for those who become so Americanized that as children they did not learn the mother-tongue. Many believe that present barriers will gradually give way and that the rapid rate of intermarriage and acculturation will produce a new Hawaiian race having a somewhat distinctive culture. If and as this develops, the marginal man--the racial hybrid as well as the cultural hybrid--will become the dominant group in numbers. Assuming that external interference and local economic crises can be averted, the future Hawaii will then be based upon this intermediate group which is now viewed as a problem.