

SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION IN HAWAII

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Hawaii may be thought of, from one point of view, as an area of profound and widespread social disorganization, a region in which cultures are breaking down and moral systems are losing their influence. As in other places where different races and cultures meet, the building of a common order in which all may participate is contingent upon a certain disruption of established customs and values—in short, of what we ordinarily mean by social disorganization. The price of Americanization, of a working unity in an immigrant situation of diverse cultures is always a greater or less degree of temporary disorder and disorganization. This is perhaps self-evident, but like so many truisms, it is frequently overlooked.

But the extent and character of the disorganization has obviously varied from time to time and from place to place. We cannot speak of the deflections from the conventional norms of behavior during the adventurous Sandalwood days as being in quite the same category, let us say, as the secularization and individualization of conduct which is going on today. Nor is it particularly enlightening to discuss the wild and variant behavior of the early womenless and homeless labor immigrants to Hawaii as being of the same character as the gradual emancipation of the second generation from the rigid rules of the first generation ghetto. The flaunting of conventional American sex mores by the *malahini* tourist in Flappers' Acre and the casual slipping in and out of common-law marriage relations in Hell's Half Acre may both be regarded as "problems" by different groups of observers.

Social workers, teachers, public-minded citizens, and even tourists are constantly calling attention to "problems", social situations which distress and disturb them, and about which "something ought to be done". They have included all of the phenomena just mentioned and a great many others ranging from nude bathing to suicide. A classification of these "problems" would doubtless be revealing as to the common conception of social disorganization in Hawaii, but unfortunately there is too little agreement as to what constitutes a "social problem". For what is one man's vice is another man's pleasure.

The common element in the "problems" with which we shall be concerned in this paper is the dissolution or malfunctioning of the accepted rules of behavior in the Hawaiian community. The breakdown of social controls is, of course, never complete as long as society continues to function at all, and it is always accompanied by the correlated rebuilding and reorganizing tendencies in the community. The special function of this article is to block out some of the major factors which contribute to social disorganization in Hawaii.

The social forces released with the discovery of Hawaii in 1778 were responsible for a series of social dislocations which are still marked in the Islands. The decadence of the *kapu* system,

"keystone of the arch that supported the traditional culture of old Hawaii," was thought by many students to be complete before the arrival of the missionaries. Actually the more significant, if less dramatic, phases of the process occurred as late as the nineties. During the greater part of the last century the system of moral values and of institutions which had given meaning and direction to the lives of the native Hawaiians during the generations prior to Captain Cook was gradually losing its effectiveness under the steady impact of Western influences—trade, particularly, but also the missionary effort and the plantation system. This collective demoralization, measured by the widespread loss of confidence in the old system of values, had probably reached its peak nearly a century ago.¹

There was on the other hand the disorganization typified by the sailor and beachcomber who left their morals at home. The accounts of drunken brawls and riots which fill the pages of Hawaiian journals and memoirs during much of the nineteenth century are a reflection of the wild expressive behavior of young men away from home and family controls, as well, perhaps as of the reaction to the rigid discipline and monotony of life at sea.

Both of these types of disorganization have their counterparts in the experience of the subsequent immigrant groups. First in point of time has usually been the individualized expression—the riotous behavior of the recently arrived immigrant who has been released from the restraining influence of the mores of the homeland and is not yet initiated or responsive to those of the new. Without exception each of the various ethnic groups has been subject to criticism for the moment of disorder occasioned by its single men soon after their arrival in Hawaii.² The rigorous control of the plantations served to diminish but not to eliminate such vices as prostitution, gambling, and the use of drugs, but in the urban communities particularly these forms of variant behavior found expression. Usually the arrival of a sufficient number of immigrants with the same cultural heritage and the establishment of a stable family life in the new community brought about a reorganization of life largely on the basis of old-country standards.

The demands of the new situation however, placed serious obstacles to the smooth functioning of old-country morals in Hawaii. For however well organized the immigrant community might be, its members usually secured their livelihood outside the racial ghetto under circumstances which compelled some critical evaluation of their own moral standards. Merely to discover that there are different conceptions of right and wrong, different modes of securing and treating a marriage mate, of controlling and rearing children, of conceiving of life itself, naturally calls

1 Cf. E. S. C. Handy, *Cultural Revolution in Hawaii*; A. W. Lind, "Modification of Hawaiian Character", in E. B. Reuter (ed.) *Race and Culture Contacts*.

2 On the grounds of such behavior, the immigrants have frequently been criticized as being the dregs of their own society, the biological off-scourings of their home land. With the possible exception of one of the ethnic groups in Hawaii, there is no evidence that the immigrants represent biological selection inferior to that of the home land.

into question the sanctity of the old values. Continued contact with peoples of widely differing culture systems leads inevitably to moral relativism and the individualization of behavior. The urban setting particularly, with its greater freedom of movement and emancipation from conduct-defining groups such as the family, church, and neighborhood greatly intensified these disorganizing tendencies, and we may anticipate a continuation of these trends as the plantations and other rural areas are increasingly brought within the sphere of urban influence.

The so-called "second-generation problem" represents one of the more dramatic aspects of the disorganization arising from the meeting of several cultures in Hawaii. For the Island-born children of alien ancestry conduct becomes a matter, not of blind adherence to customs, but of choice between the rigid standards of their parental culture and the somewhat flexible moral definitions of the American community. That in the process many should avoid the dilemma by following merely their own inclinations and desires is surely not surprising. As in other areas of extensive immigration, the second generation contribute much more to crime and delinquency in proportion to their numbers than do the first generation, and there is evidence that the ratios are increasing as the process of Americanization continues.

A new element has been injected into the Island situation as it affects social organization and disorganization through a fundamental shift in the economy. Whereas a generation ago Hawaii was clearly a region of "open resources" where the means of securing a livelihood were open to all able-bodied persons in the community, within the past fifteen years definite limitations to the occupational opportunities within the territory have begun to appear. There is evidence of a differential rate of maturation of island economy as between industry and population, with a consequent state of disequilibrium. For the first time in history, Hawaii's labor problem has shifted from one of providing an adequate supply of workers for an expanding industry to one of finding sufficient employment for an expanding population. It is estimated that under conditions which existed in 1930 an excess of approximately 5,000 persons were being added annually to the employable population over fifteen years of age, while at the same time the total employment remained practically stationary.³ For the first time during the past eight years, unemployment has been a reality in Hawaii. Territorial planners estimate that there are between four and five thousand unemployed at present (May, 1939) and the number is expected to increase by another two thousand in the near future. The effect of widespread unemployment upon individual and community morale in a region where self support is still part of the mores is not difficult to imagine.⁴

The problem may be conceived somewhat differently in terms of the mounting surplus of adults with vocational and economic

³ Assuming natural growth only and no migration.

⁴ It should be observed that the disorganizing aspects of unemployment in Hawaii is not yet so much a reality as a prospect. In terms of the total employable population, it is not over three per cent.

hopes and aspirations which cannot be realized under the existing economy. Hawaii has been for long a land of opportunity, where the penniless immigrant found not only a livelihood but frequently also a road to wealth, that it is difficult now to accept the reality of a changed situation. Less than one fifth of our employed population are engaged in the so-called "preferred positions"—professional, proprietary, and clerical—and there is little prospect of this ratio increasing materially. The bulk of our vocational opportunities, over 65 per cent, fall in the least desirable fields of unskilled and domestic labor. Certainly the preferred fields in Hawaii cannot accommodate even the major portion of the 3,000 annual graduates from our public and private high schools.⁵ The misplaced hopes and ambitions and the subsequent disillusionment of youth in Hawaii are perhaps similar to those of other areas, but the greater magnitude of the striving of Island young people intensifies all the more the loss of confidence, not only in the social system, but in themselves, when their hopes prove futile.

Still another and closely related form of social disorganization in Hawaii which has attracted public attention only within the past few years is the problem growing out of industrial conflict. The political character of the plantation, with its system of perquisites, bonuses, contracts, and private policing, has served to discourage the over expressions of labor unrest. Labor, on the other hand, because of its racial and cultural cleavages, its lack of a tradition for organization, has failed thus far in achieving a solid front in its struggles. Within the past five years, however, as a consequence of a growing class consciousness on the part of an educated and vocal citizenry whose expectations of individual advancement along the economic ladder had been rudely shaken, and as a consequence of mainland legislation, labor organization in the urban centers has greatly increased.⁶ A number of serious strikes and lockouts have occurred both on the plantations and in the urban centers.

As the lines between labor and capital are more sharply drawn, and classes are more effectively organized for *conflict*, the dangers of community disorganization obviously increase. The immediate future is almost certain to increase the points of friction at which public interests suffer. It is still too early to predict the manner in which the conflict may be resolved.

Finally some attention should be directed to the problem of race prejudice, from which Hawaii has been relatively free thus far in its history. The historical accidents responsible for what Dr. Adams calls "the unorthodox race doctrines of Hawaii" or its "mores of racial equality" need not particularly concern us here.⁷ What is significant, however, is the appearance of a

5 During the years from 1935 to 1938, the number of twelfth grade students in public and private high schools in Hawaii increased from 2200 to 3360, and this trend is likely to continue for another four years at least.

6 The 1939 report of the Hawaiian Education Association Committee on Social and Economic Plans provides a brief history of organized labor in Hawaii, an appraisal of unionism today, and a detailed account of recent industrial conflicts in Hawaii.

7 Romanzo Adams, "The Unorthodox Race Doctrines of Hawaii," in E. B. Reuter (ed.), *Race and Culture Contacts*, 1934.

number of intrusive factors in the local situation—the mounting influence of the military and the *malahini* tourist population with their traditions of a racial caste system, the diminishing opportunity for occupational advancement, and the corresponding rise of a large lower class citizenry—which now constitute a definite challenge to Hawaii's system of race relations. Despite the steady process of assimilation, assisted by the forces of school, press, and political party, barriers to full participation are likely to evoke and intensify the latent prejudices within the racial situation. The strength of the older Hawaiian tradition of race relations will unquestionably serve to defer and mitigate the dangers of this form of community disorganization, but they can scarcely prevent it entirely.

The correlated process of reorganization, without which this picture of the Island situation is obviously incomplete, will be discussed in subsequent issues of *Social Process in Hawaii*.



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