

# Multicultural by Design - Sort of

## (The Law of Unintended Consequences)

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Planted Seed Cane Before Being Covered

If Hawaii is a multiracial society, it is by design – although it is not exactly the design that was anticipated. The credit goes to the sugar industry.

In the early 1800s, and for the next 125 years, sugar plantation owners needed workers for the field and their mills. The initial workers were Hawaiians, but the Hawaiian culture was far too lacking in discipline to be good field workers.

The plantation workers needed to work from 6 AM until 4:30 PM with short breaks for lunch, and all in the heat of the Hawaiian sun. Hawaiians are not by nature or nurture accustomed to hard work, or long work. After all, Hawaiians invented surfing.

So the plantation owners imported some Chinese workers who were accustomed to hard agricultural work, and who needed to flee war and famine in China. These Chinese workers, mostly male, but females as well, signed a contract for four years or so, and they were good workers. Obviously, the Chinese were not all “happy campers” because they were more accustomed to working their own timetables, on their own property... but overall they were a productive advance over the cultural laziness of native Hawaiians.

As the Chinese came to an end of their indentured servitude, some went home to China and others established small businesses in the local towns and became entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs provided the plantation workers with laundry services, food services, and even off-duty gambling.



There were obvious communication problems between white owners and their Hawaiian and Chinese workers. That communication would not be improved by the next move...bringing in Japanese field hands.

To keep the Chinese from forming unions to demand higher wages, the owners brought in Japanese fieldworkers. That was certainly a successful ploy to keep union organization down, but it considerably complicated the communication problem.

Pidgin English was established to provide a common language for multilingual communication. It is still spoken regularly on the streets of Hawaii...in a sense it makes Hawaii a bi-lingual society – tri-lingual if you consider Hawaiian. In many ways, today's Pidgin English is like Ebonics, the lower-class Black language...it is barely understandable to mainland speakers of English.

Like the Chinese before them, the Japanese worked the fields six days a week, and upon finishing their contract many left the fields for home, or the local community. Slowly these communities became multicultural with whites, Hawaiians, Chinese, and Japanese establishing what is now Hawaii.

But it didn't stop there. As times got better in Japan, or China, other venues for importation of workers opened. Filipinos were imported when necessary, and workers were also imported from Korea, Germany, Spain and several other countries. Generally, Europeans were used as "lunas" or field managers. It did not take long to recognize that workers were happier, and worked harder if they had wives to support, so contracting with couples was preferred. Many wives worked in the fields, although at a lower pay rate.

There was a class system, driven more by the plantation owner's need for efficiency than any preference for one nationality over another. The plantation wanted 26 working days a month, but seldom got as high as 20 due to laziness, alcohol, opium, and gambling.

The workers worked six days a week, basically from daylight to dusk...but it was no worse than schools at that time. Upper-class students at the still-famous Honolulu Punahou School also went to school from 7 AM until 4:30 PM six days a week, then worked in the school gardens until "two stars appeared in the sky" – after which they had an hour of study hall. It could be argued that the field workers had it better, since they had Sunday off, while the school students had to attend church and take a Sunday night exam on the contents of the sermon!

This multicultural mix was successful at keeping labor peace among the workers because they were generally from countries that were not friendly. The Asian countries were natural enemies, and so were their workers. The Chinese have always believed that they own the earth, and the Japanese were a completely closed society that didn't believe China even existed. The Japanese conquered nearby Korea and subjugated the people so harshly that the Koreans working on the plantation thought it was their duty to make money and plot the future overthrow of the Japanese conquerors.

This basic disunity worked well for the plantation owners, who could play off the nationalities for greater production, and count on no labor unity which would pressure for higher wages.

Eventually, when their term of employment was up, these workers went home in the greatest number,[ some continued their indenture to the plantation, but many remained in the local town. Even though the

various nationalities continued to segregate themselves into separate communities, the communities were small and interaction between the communities was necessary.

Because of the natural tendency of cultures to marry within their own community, there were only a few inter-cultural marriages. In the general pecking order...as established by the whites since they controlled the money, the schooling, and the newspapers, whites (American and Europeans) were on the top level, with Hawaiians second – it was, after all, their country. Next came the Japanese, Chinese, and finally Filipinos and Koreans.

Sexual relations among the Hawaiians and the whites (*haoles*) had been going in HUGE numbers since the first ships arrived, fueled by happy confluence of strong young men seeing beautiful young Hawaiian women after as much as a year at sea – and beautiful young women whose society encouraged sex with anyone, anywhere, at any time. The islands were filled with *hapa haoles* (part white) just nine months from the first landfall, and the mixture continued for the next ten or twelve generations – augmented slowly by Japanese blood, and Chinese blood, and...

Families that have lived in “the Islands” for generations are accustomed to many hues at family reunions. Some nationality mixtures are visible in facial characteristics, and some by name. And some of the names are very melodic – my favorite Hawaii TV news name is Jade Moon. That same TV station had a beautiful woman who does weather and is now part of a San Diego TV station, and her name is fantastic! In San Diego she is known as Aloha Taylor – but her real name is even more melodic Ku’u’aloha (Coo – oooo-aloha) Taylor.

The major political influence in Hawaii is now Japanese, the major cultural influence is appropriately Hawaiian, and the major economic influence is American. Under so many influences, Hawaii is a true multicultural society.

