

The Rainbow Nation

Miss Hawaii is Miss America, and a Filipina! A triumph of multiculturalism from the paradise of Multiculturalism?

Well, a paradise of multicultural living it ain't, but it is a pretty good start. Hawaii is not perfect multicultural harmony, but it is pretty good. There is plenty of looking down at other races and cultures on Hawaii, but there is less actual racial violence than you will find in any other American state.

This screed is prompted by a seminar this month in Honolulu, the subject of which is, "Who is a local?" That REALLY makes a difference in Hawaii, where the word Kama'aina (local) means something. A quick computer search of advertising would show that Kama'aina is the most often used word.



Among other things, Kama'aina get better prices almost everywhere. Qualifications for Kama'aina may be as stringent as requiring a Hawaii drivers license, or just asking where you live. How you pronounce words is a giveaway, and so is your dress. Kama'aina are pretty easy to pick out just by their looks...or at least tourists are easy to pick out and almost anyone else might qualify as Kama'aina.

I once pulled the old estate truck (1988 Jeep) I enjoyed driving into a gas station on the other end of the island. That truck has never seen a car wash. The attendant was confused...the truck denoted a Kama'aina, but something about me must not have been just right, so he asked. "Where you live?" When I replied "Kalihiwai Road", he immediately treated me as a local. He knew that road, the name had rolled off my tongue properly, and he knew no tourists were ever on that road. I still do not know what made him suspicious -- I was properly brown, my shoes had a sufficient amount of red dirt, my hair was long and unkempt, and I moved with the required sloveness of a local.

There is huge, and mostly unspoken, discrimination on the Islands. On our favorite

Island, you had better have a large amount of Hawaiian blood if you want to be a UPS driver – and you had better have a Japanese name if you run for public office.

There is a big debate going on at seminars on Oahu regarding, “Who is a local.” Being a “local” places one in a hierarchy far above a “part time resident”, a new arrival, or worst of all (ugh!) a tourist. At the good end of the scale is a “pure Hawaiian” – who are as scarce as a virginal Presidential intern.

The “usual” resident of many generations is a Japanese, Hawaiian, Chinese, Filipino, American, German who is married to a Filipino, British, Argentine, African, Australian. With the mixtures of blood, you might think that everything would be harmonious, but that would be wrong.

Only last month a group of Kanaka Maieles (at least 50% Hawaiian blood) stoned and shouted “Haoles” at cars driven by whites in Hanalai on this island. This without regard to how many generations the white family may have lived on this island. A car driven by a Wilcox or a Rice, venerated names of Missionaries and large landowners on this island, would have been equally treated without any regard to their history of philanthropy. For many years, public schools had a day called “Kill Haole Day” where those with light skin were regularly beaten, and while that practice has officially ended, the strain (and the actuality) is still there. People with relatively light skin are at the bottom of the “local” social scale on the Islands, but they are not likely to face many actual physical assaults, like they might in certain parts of the mainland.

Because Japanese are the dominant bloodline in Hawaii, they are also the dominant political power. The Mayor of Kauai went by her maiden name until she ran for Mayor, at which time she belatedly took her husbands last name, Kusaka. The Japanese vote is that important.

But the second largest ethnic group is Filipino, and a winning Miss America that is a great thing for that community. Not that there are ethnic communities in Hawaii. Except that there are.

But there are not many hate crimes here. Murder is down this year across America, except in Hawaii where murders doubled this year. It’s so nice that so few of those were “hate crimes” because so few were racial or sexual orientation... this being such a tolerant society.

It must make all those murder victims rest easier that they were not hated, at least by official definition.

This state talks a better “Rainbow” attitude than it lives.