

## "The Bankrupt State"



People treat each other less well than they treat plants these days. I work with the kupuna, racing to save seed stock and propagate more plants for endangered species. Too bad someone isn't working to propagate patience and tolerance for endangered peace in the community.

Two decades ago, residents talked about the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots in Hawaii -- between the "housed and the housed-not." But all the solutions called for tough political and economic decisions, and the 90's drifted into the 00's (the aughts) and nothing was done. The inequities increased as in-migration to Hawaii increased -- the older wealthy folks from the mainland and Asia came to enjoy the sun and the mild climate and live on small "ranch" estates, while the political, economic, and environmental refugees from Asia and the Pacific came looking for new opportunities. They didn't find them.

As the population and cultural diversity increased, so did the pressure the resources, the economic inequity, and the community conflict and crime. Recent immigrants relied on extended families and neighborhood enclaves of previous immigrants when job hopes and social services failed them. Tensions rose between neighborhoods as different cultures clashed and the language barriers were too high to allow negotiation of crimes against privacy, property, or person. Unemployed youth, with little money and less hope, turn more and more to recreational drugs and virtual reality addictions. With the collapse of hope, and of their traditional worldviews, many people developed a sort of social tunnel vision, limiting their daily focus to mere survival. Consequently, the need for social and psychiatric services exploded. Unfortunately, the state was unable to meet this heightened demand -- increasing needs for public programs and services and decreasing revenues immobilized most state agencies.

Pressure on resources resulted in massive environmental degradation. Tourist arrivals slowed to a trickle in the 10's, and state revenues collapsed. The few tourists who do arrive now received leis made only of silk flowers. The decline in native species and environmental quality fed into the increasing schisms among Hawaii's ethnic communities, fueling an increasingly aggressive Hawaiian sovereignty movement. In 2008, backed by Earthfirst and the expansive membership of the Aloha Green Party, young Hawaiian leaders raised in the traditional ways took violent control of several ahupua'a, becoming in effect bioregional warlords, for the good of the ecosystem.

The action shocked many more moderate folk into action. Plans have recently been implemented to expand the state LOTTO game -- already available in five languages -- and use one-quarter of the revenues to set up environmental and cultural stewardship programs. These programs will provide jobs for the unemployed under the direction and tutelage of kupuna. Another quarter of the revenues will go to customize neighborhood schools -- more language are in use publicly, and more languages will be used in instructing children and in vocational training programs. Communities have begun to work together to set up "ethno-museums," celebrations of their native culture which also serve to teach their neighbors about their values and traditions.

Hawaii suffered greatly in the transition from the 20th century to the 21st. But people are working now to profit from their differences, and one immediate product of the strife and tension that much of the world has come to appreciate is the creative outpouring from graphic artists, writers, musicians, and dramatists that has

resulted from the exhilarating, if occasionally violent, explosion of cultural diversity here. And the message of much of that art points to the new relationship between people and nature being forged of necessity and hold traditions.

**Trends:**

- \* increased in-migration, explosion in cultural diversity
- \* increased social and economic inequities
- \* loss of native plant and animal species

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