

Hawaiian Sovereignty: A Futurist's Perspective

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I do not deserve to be on this panel. I agreed to join it in order that I might learn more about the future of Hawaii from those who know far better than I. And I am even more reluctant to be the first speaker, with so many wiser and nobler persons beside me who should be speaking first. So please accept my apologies. I am only doing what the organizers of this panel have told me to do.

Moreover, while, for the 25 years I have lived in Hawaii I have been fully involved in the local politics and concerns of this place, and wish myself to be fully a part of its future, I have also had the opportunity to visit many other parts of the world, and see how the present, and more importantly, the future, looks from the perspective of many different peoples and cultures around the globe. So I offer my tentative thoughts this evening as a person who "thinks locally but acts globally," to reverse the usual futurists' slogan.

One of the responsibilities of a futurist is to try to look a little farther into the future than most other people usually do (though all people can and should learn to do the same), and then to tell them about Emerging Issues--about new problems and new opportunities lying just ahead, but perhaps hard for most to see, over the horizon.

As I am sure you all know, this morning's *Advertiser* on the front page published a public opinion poll about Hawaiian Sovereignty. You may not know that the lead editorial inside said:

"Prior to 1992, authors of *The Advertiser's* landmark Hawaii Poll didn't even think to ask a question about Hawaiian sovereignty. It's one measure of the progress Hawaiians have made towards self-determination that in just two short years the issue has moved to the forefront to public discussion."

That is probably true, but in a workshop I gave in 1977 about the future to members of the Hawaii Judiciary, I specifically listed the emergence of activism by young Hawaiians as a likely "Emerging Issue" which would become a more visible "Trend" in about 20 years.

And I know many of you here today were dreaming of and acting for Hawaiian sovereignty well before 1977.

Among other things, that should tell you that newspapers are not a very good source of news about the future. They focus on comparatively trivial and commonsense problems of the present, or maybe the past, and fail miserably to help you understand what you need to know about the future.

For example, buried in an inner page of the *Advertiser* today, with a headline guaranteed to trivialize the issue, the dire warnings about the future made by the very respected scientist David Pimental before the prestigious American Association for the Advancement of Science were noted. The headline said, "Planet to poop out in 2100." Great! Whose going to read an article with a headline like that? But well before the planet "poops out" in 2100, 15 billion people will live in "absolute misery, poverty, disease, and starvation," Pimental told the assembled scientists--something which I also told the Hawaii State Legislature in 1970, and which has been totally ignored--indeed hastened--by almost every act and inaction of the Hawaii State Legislature, and its citizens, subsequently!

But that is not what I am here to talk about this evening. Rather, I will cast my brief remarks around three themes: First, I will mention some of the forces which I believe favor Hawaiian sovereignty. Second, I will mention some of the forces which may hinder Hawaiian sovereignty; and Thirdly, I will touch on some of the forces which may make Hawaiian sovereignty passé--arguably the wrong goal to pursue, given what the future might bring.

1. Pro indigenous forces

Hawaiian sovereignty is clearly riding a rising wave of future:

I have been engaged with people from the State of Pohnpei within the Federated States of Micronesia for many years, discussing their thoughts about succeeding from the FSM and going it alone. If a polity as small and physically remote from all others as is Pohnpei can think responsibly about independence, then why not Hawaii, indeed?

During the time, in the 1980s, I was the head of the World Futures Studies Federation, I spent a great deal of time in the

then-communist countries of Eastern Europe and the USSR, as well as in China and North Korea. The people who invited me into their countries were clearly unhappy with their present, and sought to use "the future" as an arena within which to voice their yearnings for a better life. While this did encourage some of them to unite, resist, and overthrow communist rule, whether their future is, or will be, significantly better is a major issue because they failed to ask, "What's next? What should this place be like AFTER we get rid of communism?" They were so intent on the overthrow that they were incapable of building something clearly better afterwards, and so, in my view, have been swallowed by various forces of global capitalism on the one hand, and internal ethnic and mob violence, on the other. Their present may be better than their past, but not nearly as good as they imagined or hoped, but did not work beforehand to assure.

Indigenous people are learning from each other.

One of the most startling episodes in my life occurred when I boarded a plane in Paris to fly to Geneva for a conference with the World Health Organization there. First one Hawaiian activist, then another, and then an entire planeload of them came on board, each one asking, as they saw me, "Are you going there too?" Since I assumed they meant "to Geneva", I said that I was. Then Hayden Burgess sat down beside me, and I learned that he and the rest were going to Geneva to attend a meeting of the Indigenous People's World Congress meeting there. I think they were all relieved that I was not passing myself off as a "Hawaiian activist" by attending their meeting!

This was not their first time attend the Indigenous People's Congress in Geneva. They had been there so often that several of them had rented a dwelling they had noticed before so they could be away from the distractions of the official hotel. And they were talking about all the great places to eat. This, however, was my first trip to Geneva.

My point is, that indigenous politics and sovereignty movements are global activities. Indigenous people are in touch with each other all over the world, and the existence of fax, and, more recently, email, is making it easier and easier for them to communicate with one another and share tactics and strategies.

It may seem like a purely local movement, but it is clearly global in every way.

The apparent failure of industrialism and capitalism demonstrates that humanity desperately needs alternatives to the present cancerous political and economic system. Recall the quotation from Pimental, above. The long-sustainable lifestyles of indigenous peoples may provide essential guideposts towards sustainable futures for the entire planet.

2. There are many powerful anti-indigenous forces as well:

Lingering global reach of capitalism.

Lingering power of nation-state system, especially when backed by the US military.

Lingering strength of racism (but note that there will be dramatically fewer "white people" in future because of decades-long differences in fertility worldwide.)

Lingering grasp of patriarchy.

But I am especially concerned about the apparent failure of Hawaiian activists, and indigenous movements in general, to ask "What next?" So what if you achieve sovereignty? What old problems will that solve? What new problems will that create? Who will rule whom with what legitimacy and via what forms? What economic system will be in place.? These may seem like trivial, distracting questions now, but please consider what happened, and is happening, in Eastern Europe, Russia, and Yugoslavia, as well as post-colonial history in general, after the Second World War, for example.

3. So I think we should consider some "post indigenous" forces abroad:

Globalization. We seem to be moving "beyond the nation-state", implying a dubious future for "international law" within which all current notions of "sovereignty" are embedded.

Postmodernity. Once upon a time, we could speak of "traditional" vs. "modern" ways of life, but now both contrast with people arguably living in a "postmodern" world. "Sovereignty" seems locked in the old struggle, and not engaged in the new.

How important will "land" and "blood" be by the early 21st century? I know these are crucial, key, emotional issues for many people here, now, but what about tomorrow?

Western science and technology brought Western colonialism and global domination during the 19th and 20th centuries. What might be the dominant forces of the future? Western civilization will not be among them, in my opinion. What cultures might dominate the 21st Century, and what is Hawaiian sovereignty in relation to them?

I also think that major technological forces of the immediate future--especially electronic communication technologies--and those of mid 21st century and beyond--especially genetic engineering and nanotechnology--may come to occupy our political consciousness and actions, as homosapiens moves, perhaps, towards various forms of post homosapiential life and cultures.

4. I know most of you discount this, and may think my comments are a diversion from the more pressing problems of present.

OK, most of you go ahead and continue to focus on the immediate future, but I beg someone to focus also on the longer view. If you do not do so, then, like so many liberation movements which have failed to look ahead, you may achieve your dream, only to wake up and discover it was an empty dream, and that you are even more subtly and fully oppressed in the future than you are now.

Beware the futurist's curse: "May your dreams come true!"

Maybe you think my ideas are merely stupid. Well, it is the job of a futurist to be ridiculous. But remember how stupid, indeed dangerous, my ideas of Hawaiian sovereignty appeared to be 20 years ago--or even, apparently, two years ago--and yet even most non-Hawaiians in Hawaii seem to support them now.

How much longer will non-Hawaiians be supportive unless we continue to articulate, as we are now, peaceful means towards mutually-agreeable peaceful goals?

We need more than this: For any kind of Hawaiian sovereignty to succeed, as it should, I believe it is very important for us to develop a plausible vision of a future for this place which is better than the clearly wretched present, as well as the even more wretched future forecast by David Pimental and many others. That is a difficult, but not impossible task, and I am eager to join with you in trying to envision and create such a future for Hawaii.