

THE HAWAIIAN FAMILY

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The Hawaiians constitute a branch of the Polynesian family, which includes the Maori of New Zealand, the Samoans, the Tongans, the Tahitians, the Cook islanders, and the Marquesans. These people originally emigrated from India and other Asiatic areas and inhabited the island groups between Sumatra and Luzon. By the first centuries of the Christian era, when they began to organize expeditions into the Pacific, they were already a mixed race. During the sixth century A.D., many of them reached the Hawaiian Islands and for about half a thousand years remained there in complete isolation. Then began a period of great voyages which lasted between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries. These voyages were followed by a new period of isolation which was interrupted in 1778, when Cook visited the Hawaiian Islands. At that time the population of these islands was about 300,000, but the coming of the haole (whites, i.e., foreigners) disrupted adjustment between the natives and their resources, and the population soon began to decline rapidly. The number 300,000 was reached again in 1925, when the economy of the islands was already capitalistic.

Before Cook's visit, Hawaii had a feudal system characterized by a precise hierarchy, the chieftain (alii) and priest (kahuna) class controlling the commoners (makaainna) almost completely. The language of these natives, a variant of that spoken by the Polynesians and one of the most musical in the world — because it had only seven consonants and every syllable ended in a vowel — had never assumed a practical written form.

According to L.H. Morgan, in ancient times the Hawaiians were promiscuous. When the evils of promiscuity were perceived, however, a new family type, the Punaluan (Hawaiian word for «dear friend»), was invented. Under this system, «the brothers are the common husbands of several sisters, but not of their own»¹. Nevertheless, it is

1. C. N. Starcke. *The Primitive Family in Its Origin and Development*, New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1889, p. 176.

doubtful whether promiscuity was ever in existence in these islands. Morgan's assumption was merely based on the Hawaiian practice according to which children called every man «father». He believed, therefore, that each generation married promiscuously within it self and that all young men and women were mates, while the members of the older generation were their fathers. This interpretation, however, seems incorrect, in view of the fact that the word «father», to the Hawaiians, meant merely a member of the older generation, not a biological father. In other words, this term was employed for the purpose of distinguishing between generations, not between family members.

In old Hawaii, as in ancient Egypt and Peru, dynastic incest, in the form of brother-sister marriages, was prevalent. The purpose of this practice, which was dominant even during the last decades of the nineteenth century, was to preserve the purity of the royal line.

Among the lower classes the family was not strictly organized. Both spouses were free to terminate their partnership at will, since divorce was not forbidden and the form which it usually assumed was mere quitting. Female infanticide and abortion were also very common-cases of infanticide were reported even as recently as 1860.

The women of Hawaii did not enjoy a high socio-economic status. Their usual activities consisted in the care and early training of children, the plaiting of mats, and the preparation of clothing from bark cloth. Sex hospitality was very prevalent and women were frequently lent to sailors and other visitors. Visitors could also buy young girls at a very low price. Such purchases occurred not only in 1792, during Vancouver's visit, but also as late as 1820.

In 1820, when the first New England missionaries arrived in Hawaii, the Christian faith began to spread among the natives quite rapidly. The acceptance of the new religion, however, was superficial. The missionaries, although they had been successful in inducing the natives to cover a greater area of their skin with conservative clothing, were unable to control immorality. Indeed, the Christian standards of chastity were rejected almost completely. The Hawaiians, for instance, continued to participate in mourning ceremonies which, especially after a chief's death, were accompanied by an orgy of sexual licence. Moreover, they still played *ume* and *kilu*, two native games which involved sexual relations, and they still danced the *hula*, which the missionaries considered highly erotic; but were unable to suppress. In fact, such attitudes toward sex were not only maintained, but also reinforced, due to the frequent visits of lascivious sailors, who were

attracted to the islands by the practice of sex hospitality. Consequently, the missionaries' work became more difficult and more dangerous. In 1825, for example, when Reverend William Richards and Reverend Hiram Bingham protested against sex hospitality, a group of frustrated American sailors did not hesitate to employ physical violence against both of them. It is little wonder, therefore, that during the second half of the nineteenth century Iwilei, near Honolulu Harbor, became one of the most notorious brothel districts in the entire Pacific.

As a result of such international and interracial contracts, mixed marriages soon became very common in Hawaii¹. This may be indicated by the fact that, although there were only 2,119 foreign residents in the islands in 1853, the number of those who were part-Hawaiians was 983 — the total population in the same year was 73,134. Later the number of foreigners began to increase rapidly and by 1941, those of Japanese descent constituted the largest racial group in Hawaii. By 1948, however, the number of the Japanese was 176,280, whereas that of the Caucasians was 180,480, and that of the Hawaiians only 10,650. In the same year there were 30,530 Chinese in the islands. The entire population of Hawaii — which was 300,000 in 1778, and 82,035 in 1850 — had risen to 423,330 in 1940. In the same year the 179,000 residents of Honolulu — 15,000 in 1875 — represented 40 per cent of the entire population. Only 8 years later this number rose to 277,129 — 51.3 per cent of all inhabitants. It is no wonder, therefore, that at present this fairly Americanized city is in transition, with 20,000 of its residents — mostly Orientals — living in slums.

The Americanization of Hawaii has been promoted not only by the presence of Americans in the islands, but also by its modernized education. In 1853, for instance, the legislature began to encourage the study of the English language, and by the next year, there were already 10 English schools in the islands. Interest in the education of Hawaiian girls was also increased during this period. Consequently, in 1859 the first school for girls was founded in the city of Honolulu by Catholic Sisters of the Sacred Heart. In the same year Miss Maria Ogden founded the Makiki Family School for women, also in Honolulu. One year later the legislative assembly authorized the board of education to establish girls «family schools» for domestic training in the

1. Concerning the attitudes of Hawaiians toward various races and nationalities, see Panos D. Bardis, «Social Distance Among Foreign Students», *Sociology and Social Research*, 41 (November-December, 1956), p. 113.

English language. As a result of this policy, by 1868 there were 9 such schools in Hawaii, with 300 pupils.

These educational developments soon helped Hawaii's women to gain freedom and independence. Their status was especially raised when they became economically emancipated. Due to this emancipation, notwithstanding the conservative ideologies of the thousands of Oriental immigrants, the family of Hawaii became more liberal. At the same time the percentage of interracial marriages began to increase very rapidly and by 1934 it was as high as 30,1 per cent. The divorce rate also increased considerably. Furthermore, the Hawaiian-born boys and girls began to rebel against the custom of arranged marriage, which their parents had transplanted to Hawaii from China and Japan, most of them now preferring individual choice of mate and American courtship patterns.

In general, due to modernized education, urbanization, the introduction of Western athletics and other types of recreation, and the tremendous influence exercised by thousands of American servicemen stationed in this area during World War II, the Hawaiians soon became the most Westernized Oceanic group. As a result of this rapid and radical transformation, even the various churches were forced to adopt less conservative measures. At present, for example, most of the denominations no longer disapprove of native music and dancing.

Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to conclude that the Hawaiian family has become as liberal as the American. It is true, of course, that around 1930, when the Hawaiian-born began to rebel against their Chinese and Japanese parents and the Oriental practice of arranged marriage, this and other conservative family customs entered a period of rapid decline. Arranged marriage, however, has not disappeared completely. Some Hawaiian-born have males even practiced Japanese yoshi, a custom according to which the oldest daughter of a family that has only female children marries matrilocally and her husband takes her name¹. Between 1931 and 1936, for instance, the Governor of Hawaii issued 96 decrees of change of name to Hawaiian-born Japanese, 35 of whom mentioned yoshi as the reason. Furthermore, Hawaii has also had a few cases of Japanese shinju i.e., double suicide for love. In 1938, for example, a Hawaiian-born Japanese couple

1. «The practice of naming a non after his wife» is known as gyneconymy. See Panos D. Bardis, «Four New Concepts in Family Sociology», Alpha Kappa Deltan, 27 (Winter, 1957) p. 16.

committed shinju when their immigrant parents disapproved of their relationship. It is interesting to note that the letters left behind by these two young people indicated considerable influence by American courtship patterns and romantic ideals.

In brief, the Hawaiian family is in transition ⁴. The conflict between the conservative ideals of Oriental immigrants and the American ways of the Hawaiian-born is still going on. The latter, however, are already more dominant and it is almost certain that the Hawaiian family will soon be as liberal as the American.

4. Panos D. Bardis, «Attitudes Toward Dating Among Foreign Students in America», «Marriage and Family Living», 18 (November, 1956), pp. 342-43.

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