

Sermon by Al Tringali  
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## Many Stories One Identity

By 1819 after the death of Kamehameha the First the religious practices of Hawai'i were disavowed and resulted in a void for the Hawaiian people. Christian missionaries arrived in Hawai'i at this time and found that they could exploit this void and fill it with their own ideas. These missionaries introduced a religion whose teachings facilitated the destruction of the cultural practices of the indigenous population that resided in the islands at the time. This action opened the doors to allow foreign exploitation and colonial takeover of the Hawaiian Islands. The way of life for the Hawaiian people was replaced with Capitalism, Christianity and politics of the Western world modeled in the American system. The Hawaiian people were devalued and the lifestyle that connected them to the land and each other was belittled and the Western system of land ownership disenfranchised the population and drove most of the Hawaiians into abject poverty. By the time the Hawaiian government evolved into the Kingdom of Hawai'i nearly 90% of indigenous Hawaiians were decimated by diseases that they had no resistance to. The Hawaiian people were reduced to 25% of the total population.

By 1893 the Hawaiian Kingdom had been taken over by a group of 13 citizens who betrayed their queen with the aid of US Marines. Some of those traitors were descendants of those American missionaries who arrived in Hawai'i in 1819. Nearly 7 years after the overthrow the islands were annexed to the US as a territory

Although I am a native Hawaiian I was not born there. I like to say I was made in Hawai'i, born in San Francisco and returned to be raised in the islands. The reason for

this as my mother told me, she was not sure that being born in a territory would insure my US citizenship. Another reason was that she had health problems and she was advised to have me born on the continent.

As we moved toward statehood we learned a lot about the US in grade school. When I was 12 years old in 1959 the territory was admitted to the union as the 50th state..

When it was announced that Hawai'i had earned statehood there literally was dancing in the streets.

The various ethnic groups living in Hawai'i at the time were now guaranteed the same rights as every other American across the United States. My early school memories are filled with daily recitals of the pledge of allegiance and the singing of patriotic songs at assemblies. American history took a good part of class time. We had an annual school wide play and I was proud to play the role of Uncle Sam in the fourth grade. My speech was at least 5 minutes long and I had such a hard time memorizing the lines I nearly got fired until my mother sat me down and we worked and worked until I knew the part by heart. "I am Uncle Sam, I stretch from the Atlantic to the Pacific were the opening lines. I wondered why they never said, "and Hawai'i too". School for me was filled with constant reminders that being an American was a responsibility that should not be taken lightly. I never felt prouder to be an American.

My ethnic mixture is Hawaiian, Chinese, English, from my father who was born and raised in Hawai'i. German, Japanese from my mother who was born and raised in Colorado . I was just a kid living in Chinatown Honolulu and had playmates that were just as mixed as I was or they were full blooded Filipino, Chinese , Japanese. or

Portuguese. I did not know any white kids. The treatment I received as a part-Hawaiian from some of my friend's parents who were pure blooded was less than ideal. But that did not stop me from being friends with their kids. After all it was a free country, at least that is what we always said when we were told something we disagreed with.

I think that since Pearl Harbor was attacked and brought the US into WWII Hawai'i held a special place in the history of the country. The Japanese residents of Hawai'i were ultra patriotic to the US to prove their loyalty and so many other residents of the islands felt the same way. The postwar years in Hawai'i was very pro American.

I have had and still do have mixed feelings about this American thing. I remember my dad telling me to not be Hawaiian. Hawaiians were no-good and they were lazy. They were looked down on by the rest of the community. I should not learn the music or the dances of Hawaiian people. Don't speak the language and just be a good American. But most of my closest friends were part Hawaiian like me so that advice did not sit well. I could not understand why I should deny my Hawaiianess. I did not understand ,at the time, how oppressed and dehumanized the Hawaiian people were and my father's reaction and counsel were an effort to teach me to survive in a place that required straddling both worlds

The war in Viet Nam afforded an opportunity for most of us to seriously question the policies of the US government. My friends and I never questioned the government and it actions before. We were not alone.

There were many things going on in the country with the Feminist Movement, Civil

Rights, Black Power and the Anti war protests being some of the examples of what was happening. But ever since the Viet Nam war I have been anti war and I still am. By 1970 a resurgence in Hawaiian pride was beginning to take hold. It started with a renewed wider interest in Hawaiian music that had not been enjoyed since the 1930's. What started then has now become a concerted effort to regain Hawaiian sovereignty that will prosper in the framework of the US system. And it is ironic that all these things could not happen except in the USA with its foundation in freedom and liberty for all. I vote in every election and I am a liberal progressive. I agree with Bernie Sanders for the most part and I support the under dog. I support Hawaiian sovereignty as well. I appreciate the liberty and the opportunity that being American bestows on me and my fellow Americans.

I am an American but I am one that hopes that the country will work toward equality and justice for people of all colors. US imperialism was based on the dehumanization of people of color and the demeaning of indigenous cultures by white European men. As an Hawaiian I see my people still suffering from this attitude of 'Manifest Destiny' today.

I believe as an American we should all work to acknowledge American fundamental principles of equality and justice for all and work to make it happen. Which means people of all races and cultures who are American.

What I was taught way back in school now serves to guide me in my life today. That is the kind of American that I am.

