

Integration in Hawaii's Schools

How well have the schools of Hawaii, serving the varied social classes and cultural groups of the islands, achieved their objectives?

HAWAII, with its more than half million people, is truly one of the most mixed communities in the world.

Only 180 years ago the Islands were occupied by approximately 300,000 isolated neolithic Polynesians living in a feudal type of society. The discovery by Captain Cook in 1778 brought the inevitable forces of civilization, good and bad. Beginning in 1820 New England missionaries arrived and left their mark—Christianizing these folk people and rapidly transforming them from a pre-literate to a literate society. It was also largely, although not exclusively, Yankee initiative which laid the groundwork for a new economy based on trade, and sugar and pineapple plantations. Primarily, during the period from 1875 to 1925 the needs of the plantations for field hands led to the recruitment of laborers from all over the world.

In recent years, however, the major movements of population have been mainly to and from the U. S. mainland, mostly Caucasians, called "haoles" in Hawaii, but also of Orientals and some

Negroes. While the racial complexion of Hawaii's population is thus always fluid, the present proportions can be roughly summarized as follows: A large fifth of the population is of pure Caucasian descent; a smaller but rapidly increasing fifth has varying proportions of Hawaiian ancestry; almost two-fifths are of Japanese origin; and the remaining fifth consists of Filipinos, Chinese, Puerto Ricans, Koreans, American Negroes, and Samoans, pretty much in that numerical order. By common usage these are the "races" of Hawaii (2:27).

Because of this polyglot population, the public schools of Hawaii have in former years assumed two basic tasks: First, transforming a stone-age folk people to a literate people capable of taking their part in the modern world; and second, assimilating to our industrial urban American way of life the children of a large number of Asian and European immigrants of peasant background and foreign culture.

By briefly examining the history of education in Hawaii one can see how these tasks were accomplished. The children of the missionaries, the mixed children of haole fathers, and the children of Hawaiian chiefs, occupying a distinctly higher status than the commoners, had special educational needs which led to the establishment under

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private auspices in the 1830s and 1840s of schools for these children (3:224-31). Some of the early private schools later became public schools, accepting haole children, as well as mixed and aristocratic Hawaiians. For the majority of commoners the missionaries organized common schools, first for adults then for children. By the 1850s these common schools had evolved into a governmentally supported school system, but it was not until 1888 that the public schools were "free" (4:83).

Changing Program

During the last decades of the nineteenth century the common schools gradually changed over to English in response to the requests from Hawaiians who wanted their children to learn English. How thoroughly these schools accomplished this task is indicated by the fact that Hawaiian is a dying language in the Territory. The first American-type public high school was established in Honolulu in the nineties, drawing at first mainly haole children.

When children of the foreign labor immigrants reached school age, they entered the public schools, which had become English schools. This new group, largely of Oriental ancestry, rapidly became the dominant element in the public schools. In 1910 somewhat less than half the children in public schools were of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino ancestry. By 1920 they constituted 60 percent of the enrollment.

These second-generation children had serious difficulties with the English language. To meet this problem they were funneled into Receiving Grades where they were introduced to the English language and customs before being admitted to integrated first grade classes. As a result of the heavy influx of immi-

grants, the Receiving Grades were continued on a Territory-wide basis from 1896 to 1930.

Because of the continued concern over language problems and the increased immigration of haoles in a lower income bracket than formerly, the so-called "English standard" schools were established in the early 1920s as part of the public school system. Enrollment was on the basis of passing an oral English examination. These schools were first at the elementary level and then extended to the secondary level. During the three decades of their existence, only nine English standard schools were organized throughout the Islands. While non-haole children were not excluded, the schools had a predominance of haole children until the outbreak of World War II, when the number of haoles decreased because of evacuation to the U. S. mainland. Their places were rapidly filled by children of Hawaiian and Oriental extraction.

In 1947, when 7 percent of all public school children were attending these standard schools, the Orientals constituted 39 percent, the haoles 30 percent, the Hawaiians, pure and mixed, 24 percent of the English standard school enrollment¹ (1:85).

While at the height of the English standard system, children of Oriental ancestry who had been excluded sometimes felt they had been discriminated against on a racial rather than a linguistic basis, there is little objective evidence to indicate that this ever occurred. Cer-

¹ The remaining 7 percent were of mixed ancestry or did not fall into any of the categories used.

*Lunch time at Jefferson School,
Waikiki, Hawaii.*



PEGGY NICKOL, DEPT. PUB. INSTR., HAWAII

tainly it was never in any sense policy. The English standard school enrollment statistics for 1947 cited above as well as observation of the present enrollment at the one remaining English standard high school—official racial statistics are no longer compiled—believe any charge of racial discrimination. In order that the impression not be gained that the Caucasian children who were enrolled in the public schools were confined to the standard schools, it must be pointed out that only one-fifth of them were in the standard schools.

In the late forties a political issue developed around the need to continue the English standard school on the ground that it was “undemocratic” and that the problem of linguistic lag was being solved in other ways. Consequently, the legislature mandated elimination of these schools on a year-by-year basis. By 1961 English standard schools will be a thing of the past.

Integration

In order to see the extent of integration in the public schools, let us examine the evidence. The total enrollment statistics by race for the public school system were last available in 1947. In percentages, the 82,874 children were divided as follows (1:86):

Hawaiian, pure and mixed	21.3%
Caucasian	10.7
Chinese	4.8
Japanese	47.0
Korean	1.1
Filipino	10.1
All others	5.0

Here we see clearly the presence of all races in Hawaii's integrated public schools, although certain races, particularly the haoles and the Chinese, are underrepresented.

The professional staff of the public schools as well as the Commissioners of Public Instruction are also integrated groups. The present Commission chairman is an American of Japanese ancestry. Almost half of the professional staff in the territorial office and approximately three-fifths in the district offices are non-haole. More than a third of the principals in the 213 public schools are Americans of Oriental descent. At the remaining English standard high school a quarter of the faculty is of Japanese, Chinese, or Hawaiian ancestry.

We can say categorically that racial segregation has never been the practice of the public schools of Hawaii. To explain this fact more clearly, let us now turn to the private schools, for they also played a distinct role in the integrative process.

As noted above, the earliest private schools in Hawaii were first established for special groups of children—children of the missionaries and of the Hawaiian nobility. Schools for the former were necessary; otherwise, the missionaries would have had to send their children around the Horn to the Eastern seaboard. In order to keep their children close by and to prevent their “contamination” with the Hawaiian language, they welcomed the establishment of a local boarding school, Punahou, in 1841.

Punahou soon began to accept non-missionary haole children as well as Hawaiian and mixed children who could meet its standards. Later in the century the school met the pressure of large numbers of Chinese children with inadequate English speech desiring admission by the establishment of an informal quota of 10 percent for Orientals. This quota was maintained into the 1940s but has now been abolished. Punahou School, more than any other

school in the islands, has been the symbol of the "haole" school, and the sporadic object of anti-white feeling. However, it is gradually losing this character and tries to maintain a representative balance of all races in the community. Punahou now admits anyone who meets its academic requirements (with preference to children of alumni).

If Punahou has been the "haole" school, Kamehameha is the "Hawaiian" school. Established in 1889 by the will of Bernice Pauahi Bishop, the last surviving royal descendant of the great King Kamehameha, this school is the sole beneficiary of her estate, which owns 9 percent of the lands of the Islands. Only children with an eighth or larger proportion of native Hawaiian ancestry are admitted to Kamehameha. Public or private, it is the only school to which the term "racially segregated" might appropriately be applied. Yet its students, numbering 1,500, show all degrees of mixture, some looking Hawaiian, some Oriental, some white, some exotically mixed and in this sense the campus is more interracial than racial. Any criticism that exists in the wider community of this institution, with its increasingly high standards, grows out of the "segregation," which, the critics claim, protects the students from the general competition which they must meet when as adults they enter the multi-racial community where segregation is less and less characteristic of every phase of life. The defenders, of course, argue that Kamehameha has helped the Hawaiians and part-Hawaiians in their painful and difficult transition to urban civilization.

Other private schools are mainly under religious auspices: Catholic, Episcopal, Seventh-Day Adventist, Baptist, Lutheran, Buddhist, Mormon. Some have a colorful history which takes them back

into the last century. Others are quite recent. The Catholic parochial schools have experienced marked growth in the last quarter century, accounted for by the great strength of the Roman Catholic Church, which claims almost 40 percent of the total population. Some of the schools discussed in this paragraph have become non-denominational schools and most are quite interracial.

In 1947 the 23,201 private school children showed a racial distribution somewhat different from that in the public schools (1:84, 86):

	Private Schools	Public Schools
Hawaiian, pure and mixed	28.9%	21.3%
Caucasian	31.0	10.7
Chinese	11.6	4.8
Japanese	16.8	47.0
Korean	1.2	1.1
Filipino	6.5	10.1
All others	4.0	5.0

What stands out is the over-representation of children of Caucasian, Hawaiian, and Chinese ancestry attending the private schools. The Chinese are over-represented in the private schools because this Oriental group has been in Hawaii longest and is, in some respects, the most assimilated. The Chinese have sought private school instruction at Punahou or elsewhere over a longer period of time and in large numbers than other Oriental groups up to now. It must be added that the Japanese, who followed the Chinese to the Islands, appear to have started following this pattern.

The interest of Oriental parents in sending their children to private schools reflects a striving for the best in education, for escape from earlier hardships, for improved status. It reflects marked upward mobility. There are, however, indications that as members of upper

middle class neighborhoods participate in planning their local public schools, all races are willing to send their children to these public schools. One might say that since World War II the interracial character of both public and private schools has accelerated and there is strong indication of the lack of effective demand for racially segregated education.

In summary, in Hawaii the common schools, established over a century ago for Hawaiian children, developed into the public school system of today. To the task of educating the children of a preliterate folk society was added the task of educating the children of many Oriental immigrants. Because of the linguistic, cultural and class differences separating these children from those of the middle and upper class Caucasians, the latter attended private schools primarily. This practice continued into this century, but since the 1920's the proportion of Caucasian children attending public schools has risen as has that of middle and upper class non-Caucasian children in private schools.

Today, it is because the public schools have accomplished their assimilative tasks with the Hawaiians and the non-white immigrants that racial integration is being accepted as natural and is increasing in both the public and private schools. Caucasian parents of moderate means now accept the public schools more fully than ever before and private schools are less and less identifiable by race.

Further, one might credit the public schools with playing an important role in helping to make racial integration a fact in the community at large. In politics and government, community organiza-

tions of all sorts, highly active PTAs, Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis Clubs, in church work, in neighborhoods—in all phases of life, integration is being strengthened.

However, there are still a few racial tensions and some resistance to the process of integration in the schools and community. Nevertheless, the fact that there is such a small amount of racial tension in Hawaii may be attributed in large part to the successful role that the schools have played in bringing about racial and cultural integration in Hawaii.

At the risk of oversimplification we might say that education in Hawaii has passed through four overlapping stages in its history. The first was to reduce the Hawaiian language to a written form, Christianize the Hawaiians, and make most of the adult population literate within a decade. The second was to teach the Hawaiians English and to supplant the Hawaiian culture with the American. The third was to spearhead the cultural assimilation of Oriental and European immigrants. The fourth, in which we are now, is the strengthening of U. S. mainland cultural values and curriculum standards and bringing about the completion of racial integration in the schools. The fifth stage, to which we look forward, will be to develop patterns of public education for Hawaii's fully integrated community to which both East and West will look for guidance.

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