

## **Ethnic Groups and Discrimination:**

### **Hawaiian People**

Immigration, discrimination, and racism are just a few words that have become all too common in the vocabulary of today's society. When I hear these words I automatically think about how such things impact me on a personal level, and I'm sure that many people have a similar reaction. I consider myself a Native Hawaiian (or Pacific Islander). My father is pure Hawaiian, and my mother is white. I consider myself a Native Hawaiian because that is how society sees me. I have become used to being portrayed as "not white," even though my mother is Caucasian. When I look in the mirror, I see naturally olive skin and almond shaped eyes, and I know that society can see these differences as well. It is these slight physical differences that form the fine line between being Caucasian and Hawaiian.

Hawaiians first came from the Polynesian Islands. They colonized what is now known as the Hawaiian Islands. Hawaii was initially led by a monarchy. Around the early 1800's white merchants began traveling to Hawaii to take advantage of the abundant amount of resources that the land had to offer. This was the start of the Hawaiian people's problems, and the beginning of the end to the freedom that the Hawaiian people once had.

In 1887 these wealthy merchants formed *The Bayonet Constitution* (AlohaQuest, 2008), which created many restrictions for Hawaii's monarchy. The suppression of Native Hawaiians truly began to take form. King Kalakaua was threatened by force to sign this constitution, which basically took away all of his power as Hawaii's rightful king. After this constitution was in place, Native Hawaiians became the minority, which left them virtually powerless.

Native Hawaiians faced many prejudices over the years, and most of these cases were fueled by greed and power. It goes without saying that Hawaii had no other choice but to be

annexed by the United States. Queen Lili'oukalani was the last monarch of Hawaii. Although she did not want to comply with the United States, she feared for the lives of her people. On July 7, 1898 United States President William McKinley signed the annexation of Hawaii (Hawaiian Roots, 2006). Throughout the years the United States has led people to believe that the annexation was in the best interest of the Hawaiian people. According to the facts, it seems as though the best interests of the Native Hawaiians were the least of the United States' worries.

Throughout the years there have been countless controversies over the annexation of Hawaii. Even today the Native Hawaiians hold grudges. Reverse discrimination is definitely an issue in Hawaii. After all the years of suppression, some Native Hawaiians have become highly territorial. Tourism is undoubtedly one of the main aspects of Hawaii. According to Ken Kobayashi, a journalist for the Honolulu Star Bulletin, one case of reverse discrimination took place when a Caucasian couple was beaten while at Waialeale Shopping Center in Hawaii. One teenager used the word "haole" during the altercation, which is a racial slur used by Hawaiians when referring to white people or tourists.

I am Hawaiian, and I am Caucasian. I know the facts about Hawaii's past, and I know that many things should never have happened to Hawaii and its people. Although I do identify and sympathize with Hawaii's past, I also identify with the United States mainstream culture. I feel somewhat torn between the circumstances that have resulted from years of discrimination, racism, and suppression. Many members of my Hawaiian family have strong beliefs and opinions about the United States and the way it wrongfully overtook Hawaii so many years ago. Most of these family members have lived in Hawaii their entire lives, whereas I only lived in Hawaii for the first few years of my life. My beliefs seem to be extremely different from theirs, and that is a result of the cultural environment that we have all been exposed to growing up.

Ethnicity is a sensitive issue for many people. There are many aspects to consider when analyzing one's own ethnicity and cultural identity. Society will always be very opinionated when it comes to issues like ethnicity, culture, racism, and discrimination. There are just some things in this world that are inevitable. Diversity is never-ending, and as long as diversity exists, there will always be people who discriminate against those who are different from them.

## References

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