

DEVELOPMENT OR DEPENDENCY:
AMERICAN POLICY IN THE
TRUST TERRITORY OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

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INTRODUCTION

The period from the late 1950s through the 1960s saw the demise of colonialism in several areas of the world, most notably in Africa and Southeast Asia. In the Pacific, colonialism began to decline in the 1970s, as some territories and protectorates negotiated their independence from, or formed new ties with, their former administering countries. Other territories, however, were unable to change their political status and remained under the administrative authority of foreign governments.

With their independence, new nations found themselves in the unenviable position of trying to catch up with the rest of the world by developing modern economic, political, and technological systems. However, this course of social action was characteristic not only of new nations; it was also incorporated into policies initiated by administering governments into those territories which remained under foreign rule. One such territory is the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands administered by the United States, which includes the Eastern and Western Caroline, Northern Mariana, and Marshall Island groups, and is more commonly known as Micronesia.

This paper will examine policies the American administration has implemented in the Trust Territory and ask whether these policies were intended to stimulate political and economic development leading toward eventual independence for the territory, or rather to structure social institutions in such a way that the territory would become permanently dependent upon and therefore closely linked to the United States. In addition, the social effects on Micronesia of some American policies will be explored.

THE COLONIAL HISTORY OF MICRONESIA

Micronesia has been under colonial rule for more than 400 years, longer than any region in the Pacific. In the latter half of the 16th century, Spain claimed the entire area, now known to include more than 2000 islands and atolls stretching over three million

square miles of ocean yet Spanish influence was greatest in Guam in the Mariana Island group.

Spanish galleons used Guam as the primary re-supplying stop on the trade route between the New World and the Philippines. The indigenous inhabitants of the Marianas, whom the Spaniards called Chamorros, did not experience the full impact of Spanish rule until late in the 17th century. It was during this period that Jesuit priests arrived and established a colonial mission on Guam in order to begin converting the Chamorros to Christianity. When the Chamorros resisted, war ensued which, in addition to disease, had decimated the native population by the end of the 18th century.

While Spain focused its influence on the Marianas, Germany began its thrust into other areas of Micronesia. In the late 1860s, German copra companies established themselves in the Marshall Islands and on several islands in the Eastern Carolines. Following the Spanish-American War, Germany secured all of Micronesia except for Guam, which was claimed by the United States (Wenkam and Baker 1971: 20-23).

Germany governed Micronesia until the outbreak of World War I in 1914, when the Japanese took the opportunity to seize the archipelago (Heine 1974:14). Japan attempted to annex the islands after the war, but because the United States refused to ratify an international agreement that would have permitted the move, Japan had to settle for a League of Nations mandate over the territory (Wenkam and Baker 1971:27). Japanese policies in Micronesia were based upon four major objectives: 1) to develop fully the islands' economic potentials; 2) to colonize the territory with Japanese citizens, thus alleviating population pressures in Japan; 3) to extend Japanese culture throughout the islands, primarily through education; and 4) to establish a military staging area in preparation for war (Heine 1974: 14). Japan was successfully accomplishing these objectives in Palau, an island in the Western Carolines which is closest to Japan. Just how far the Japanese could have carried out their overall plan for Micronesia will never be known, as World War II brought their mandate over the islands to a close.

THE AMERICAN COLONIAL PERIOD

The United States gained military control over Micronesia during the final years of World War II. When war ended in 1945, the U.S. Navy became the administrative authority over the area under the supervision of the U.S. Defense Department. During the Navy's period of administration, it had to help the Micronesians rebuild what was left of their war-torn islands. Among other things, the Navy provided free medical care and services, food, and help in reconstructing the villages and towns destroyed in the hostilities.

I have headed this section "The American Colonial Period" because, as I shall discuss later on, the Trust Territory is a modified version of colonialism.

The Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands evolved out of the newly formed United Nations in 1947, which granted the United States a trusteeship over Micronesia designated as a strategic trust. This designation was a compromise solution to a problem that had developed when the U.S. captured the islands from the Japanese. U.S. military officials recognized the highly strategic position of Micronesia, as the Japanese had earlier by making it the launching point for their attack on Pearl Harbor. Therefore, the Defense Department realized that Micronesia had to remain under U.S. military influence, specifically for the defense of Hawaii and the coastal states, and wanted the islands annexed to the United States. However, the State Department knew that such a move would draw severe criticism from the United Nations - and especially from the Soviet Union - so it sought a trusteeship over Micronesia through the United Nations. Both departments compromised on the concept of a strategic trust, which the U.N. accepted (Adams 1972:80).

The strategic trust, the only one of its kind, gives the United States total control over Micronesia. Two unique features of the strategic trust are that it allows the United States to maintain military fortifications on the islands and to prohibit the entry of other foreign governments into the territory for activities of any kind. Further, the United States was (and still is) obligated to promote economic and political development in Micronesia, development that should lead the Trust Territory toward economic self-sufficiency and self-government. To achieve these goals the American administration introduced several institutional changes into Micronesian societies, which will be examined in another section of this paper.

Returning to the notion of American colonialism, although Micronesia is legally a trusteeship granted to the U.S., in reality it is clearly not a colony in the classical economic sense as portrayed in European colonialism of the 18th and 19th centuries. In Political Development in Micronesia (1974), Daniel Hughes and Sherwood Lingensfelder provide a good characterization of Micronesia's colonial status, using a definition of colonialism formulated by H.C. Brookfield, who defines it as:

...a thoroughgoing, comprehensive and deliberate penetration of a local or "residential" system by the agents of an external system, who aim to restructure the patterns of organization, resource use, circulation and outlook so as to bring these

into linked relationship with their own system (1972:1-2).

Following this definition, Hughes and Lingenfelter maintain that by observing historical and recent events in Micronesia, one must conclude that American interests in the Trust Territory are colonial in design, if not in publicly prescribed doctrine, and that the fundamental objective of American policies is to create a "linked relationship" between Micronesia and the United States (1974:25).

I shall now describe the current political structure of the Trust Territory, and then review the development policies of the American administration to determine whether they are directed toward Micronesian or American interests.

In 1951, the American government transferred the administrative authority over the Trust Territory from the Defense Department to the Department the Interior. For administrative purposes, Micronesia had been divided into six districts, each one of which was administered by a comissioner who was responsible to a high commissioner of the territory as a whole.

American administrative policy toward Micronesia from the beginning of its designation as a territory was that the Micronesians would be allowed the highest degree of self-government they could assimilate, and that the role of the U.S. administration would be to assist them in conducting their government and managing their affairs within the framework of their own sociopolitical institutions and traditions. However, later on the policy was reinterpreted to one which actively inculcated American-style democratic processes and institutions on all levels of government. The idea of Micronesian self-government became equated with American-style democracy, which was a direct contradiction in motive of the original policy (Hughes and Lingenfelter 1974:21).

Establishing an American-style democratic political structure was the only significant feature of American administrative policy directed toward developing a self-governing Micronesia. With regard to the development of economic self-sufficiency, the American administration did very little to rebuild the fairly well-established economic enterprise the Japanese had developed in Micronesia, which had of course been destroyed by the war (DeSmith 1970:134). When the United States did try to stimulate economic growth in the Trust Territory, it was not until 1962, and even then it came in the form of increased federal aid (Wenkam and Baker 1971:38). This raises the question of just how self-reliant the American government wanted Micronesia to become.

In Victims of Progress (1975), John Bodley expresses the very strong opinion that the American government, through its economic and political policies in Micronesia, is essentially trying to change the traditional Micronesian subsistence-based economy into one based on a cash and market system, which would put Micronesia in a highly dependent relationship to the United States. Bodley reaches this conclusion after referring to the "massive free gifts" which the Navy gave to Micronesians during the Naval administration of the territory directly after the war. These gifts (clothes, food, medical aid, etc.) were introduced to many Micronesians who subsequently developed a need for them, as well as for other Western goods, all of which would have to be imported from the United States. Bodley argues that similar dependencies developed as a result of education and health programs started in the 1950s, which further disrupted traditional Micronesian ways of life (1975:138-139).

I do not agree completely with Bodley's conclusion, inasmuch as it suggests a planned, calculated effort by the United States to transform Micronesia into a dependency. The Navy's disbursement of food, clothing, and medical care is consistent with the kind of aid the U.S. supplies to any society that has been disrupted by war or natural disaster. If Micronesians acquired a "need" for Western goods, it was at a time when conditions made it very difficult for them to produce subsistence and material goods themselves. Where the U.S. may be faulted is in not making an effort to discourage Micronesians from relying so heavily on imported goods. Why this effort was not made leads us to consider two things: first, the general model of development employed by the American administration in the Trust Territory; and second, the particular institutions which were established initially and the rationale for their development.

AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

As I mentioned earlier, the American political authorities in the Trust Territory had originally planned to allow Micronesians to use their own sociopolitical institutions. Later on, however, the administration reconsidered and imposed an American style democratic political structure on the Micronesians. It seems that the American administration decided that Micronesia's traditional political structure would not facilitate their efforts to initiate other policies in the territory.

Hughes and Lingenfelter present what they consider to be a number of basic assumptions made by the American administration, assumptions that appear consistently in the history of political changes in the Trust Territory. Some of these assumptions are that:

- 1) traditional forms of government are unrepresentative and there-

fore bad; 2) the traditional political structures are not compatible with the demands or needs of the American administration; 3) traditional leaders oppose planned change and are thus obstacles to development; and 4) the superior knowledge and political expertise of the administering government must necessarily be transferred to the colonized in order for them to adapt effectively to the modern world (1974:34). Robert McKnight, an anthropologist who served in the territorial government, maintains a similar view of the political situation in Micronesia. McKnight believes that the American authorities maintained a unilinear evolutionary model of development when formulating policies for the Trust Territory. His point of view is consistent with that expressed by Hughes and Lingenfelter, that American officials generally believed that traditional Micronesian institutions would be a hindrance to change and development. Therefore, American models of political organization were applied throughout the Trust Territory (McKnight 1974).

Judging by these observations, the American administration was clearly using a liberal model in formulating its development policies in Micronesia. Three component features characterize a liberal model of development: 1) the notion of lineality, which assumes that newly developing countries must travel along the same course - experience specific changes in political and economic organization - as industrialized Western nations; 2) the assumption that societal change is systematic, so that change in one sphere of a society will cause comparative changes in other spheres; and 3) the endogenist assumption that change is derived only from within the structure of society, so that traditional sociocultural systems are considered to be barriers to externally initiated change.

All of these features are evident in the policies implemented by the American administration in Micronesia. Installing an American-style system of government in the territory is an indication that the administration believed not only that traditional Micronesian political systems would be inadequate for developing the territory, but also that traditional institutions were such serious obstacles to change that they would have to be eliminated. However, establishing a foreign system of government in a society could lead to disastrous consequences if the system were misused. For this reason, the American administration, hoping to transplant their political values, had to make sure that the Micronesians learned how to use the political system properly. Establishing a sound educational system obviously was the next thing that had to be accomplished.

This educational system, then, became the key institution through which Micronesians could be taught the fundamentals of American-style democracy. It was also considered a crucial factor in promoting economic development in the territory. An evaluation of

the educational program in Micronesia, and its influence on both political and economic development will, therefore, now be presented.

David Nevin makes several significant observations regarding Micronesia's educational system in The American Touch in Micronesia (1977). In the initial stages of the educational program implemented by the American administration, the educational director emphasized the notion that early training must begin in the child's native language. This idea was based on the belief that severing a child from his/her own language would undermine the child's understanding of his/her own culture. Thus, for the first four grades teaching was done entirely in the local language, with English introduced as a course in grades five and six. This policy was followed for a while, but later the educational programs were changed and teaching at all levels was conducted in English. The change in policy occurred as a result of a deepening American conviction that Micronesian education should be oriented toward American values, and that most of the teaching materials used were identical to those employed in schools in the U.S. Micronesian education was therefore based on American models, regardless of their value or appropriateness to Micronesian lifestyles (1977:89-91).

Inculcating American values into Micronesian modes of thinking began to take precedence in administrative policies. John Singleton, who served as an educational specialist in the Trust Territory, writes that the American administration measured political development in Micronesia by the extent to which Micronesians learned and adopted the American-style political framework. He maintains that early American use of the term "development," "seemed to mean that the more the formal structures and symbols of national governmental systems corresponded to the U.S. pattern, the more developed they were considered" (1974:74). Therefore, if development in the political sphere was to succeed in Micronesia, it had to be based on the American model. However, Singleton discovered that Micronesians were not learning the "content" of the American system; they were being introduced to conceptual notions pertaining to systems of municipal, district, territorial, and international government, but were not being taught to understand them and to use them within their own social context (1974:84-85).

In a summary of the U.S. Commercial Company's Economic Survey of Micronesia which was taken in 1946, Douglas Oliver (1951) notes the importance of providing an educational system in Micronesia because of its relevance to economic planning. Several principles were proposed in the survey regarding the role of education in Micronesia: 1) English should replace Japanese as the commercial contact language; 2) school courses should be oriented toward the practical needs of Micronesians; 3) emphasis should be placed on training Micronesians as teachers to train other Micronesians; and 4) training

in agriculture and technical crafts, such as carpentry for housebuilding, should be started immediately (1951:86-87). Some of these proposals were subsequently adopted; for example, English language teaching was initiated, schools were founded for training Micronesian teachers, and an agricultural center was started. However, general educational courses were not necessarily oriented toward the practical needs of living in an island environment. As Nevin pointed out, American values and ideals - most of which are not oriented toward island lifestyles - were being taught in the schools.

Before attempting to stimulate economic development, the American administration believed they had to produce, through the educational program, a "managerial class" that would be able to cope with modern economic systems. After obtaining a degree, however, Micronesians seeking employment discovered that the only jobs available that would allow them to utilize their special skills were in the government administration. From 1962 to 1974, the number of Micronesians employed by the territorial government tripled (Nevin 1977:34, 76, 137, 185). Even though the administrative government was the largest employer in the Trust Territory, jobs were limited, and many educated Micronesians found themselves unemployed. The anxiety and frustration caused by unemployment has led to an increasingly high rate of alcoholism among young Micronesians, which Mac Marshall examines in his recent book Weekend Warriors (1979).

CONCLUSION

American policy in the Trust Territory is best characterized by the title of Donald McHenry's book Micronesia: Trust Betrayed. Altruism vs. Self Interest in American Foreign Policy (1975). The numerous statements and opinions presented in this paper support the allegation implied in McHenry's title, that American administrative policies carried out in Micronesia have been directed toward the interests of the USA. This brings us back to the general question asked in the introduction: whether American policies were intended to develop Micronesia politically and economically, or to make it dependent upon the United States.

I must conclude that in its desire to maintain close political ties with Micronesia, as well as to continue its strategic military presence in the islands, the American government has made Micronesia a dependency. This state of dependence is not only political and economic, but also cultural. Let us first consider economics.

To my knowledge, the American administrative government has never made a major attempt to establish an economic base in Micronesia, nor has it allowed private American investors to develop industry without severe restrictions which limited their chances for

growth. Some experimental programs aimed at developing agriculture and a fishing industry were implemented. However, U.S. government aid programs had provided Micronesians with so many Western convenience items, such as canned foods, for which Micronesians developed a preference, that they felt it unnecessary to return to production of local foods. Perhaps an attitude developed that there was no point in growing or catching food when the U.S. was giving it away. The American administrations's failure to develop industry, in addition to the fact that private investors were restricted and foreign investors were barred, left the administrations's government bureaucracy and the U.S. military, which established several Air Force and Naval installations in Micronesia, as the only major alternative sources of employment. Thus, Micronesians were almost totally dependent upon the U.S. government to provide them with a livelihood.

Micronesia's political dependence upon the United States is obvious from its status as a Trust Territory. However, under the conditions of the U.S. trusteeship agreement, the United States was obligated to steer Micronesia towards eventual independence. By imposing on Micronesia an American-style system of government, as well as American political values and ideals, the American administration has assured itself of some kind of relationship with Micronesia when the trusteeship expires. Because of Micronesia's strategic position in the Pacific, the American government can not afford to let Micronesian political sentiments deviate too far from its own.

When the American government assumed control over Micronesia, it found the islands inhabited by relatively small societies with distinct cultures. A major consequence of the American administration's educational program, one which eventually was based entirely on the American model, was that it taught all Micronesians a single tradition of values, morals, and expectations, namely American culture. This, more than anything else, made Micronesia dependent upon the United States. Placed in this situation, Micronesians have few alternatives other than to maintain a very close, or perhaps even a linked relationship with the United States when the trusteeship expires in 1981.

In Micronesia, American interests have been promoted with relatively few signs of protest from Micronesians. However, this cannot be said for the people of other cultures with whom the United States has dealt, such as those in the Middle East and Latin America. If American foreign policy makers continue to promote the interests of the United States at the expense of the needs and desires of other peoples, as was the case in Micronesia, then the altruistic virtues proclaimed by the American government may become even more seriously doubted throughout the world than they are now.

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