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## **Making Patriots of Pupils: Colonial Education in Micronesia from 1944-1980**

Julia Taylor

***Abstract:** This article explores American colonial education in Micronesia from the final months of World War Two to the late 1970s. The primary research question concerns American usage of education to pursue political and military goals, and how this affected multiple dimensions of Indigenous life. Although the dominant narrative at the time blamed Indigenous people for difficulties in implementing American education, the Western values permeating the American consciousness significantly inhibited the possibility of success as Americans defined it. This article details American motivations and efforts to implement an educational system as part of a larger goal of “economic development” and analyzes the effects that this imposition had on Indigenous populations, particularly in consideration of the fact that the creation of “Americanized” Micronesians and a cooperative political unit in the Pacific were highly desirable for American strategic interests. Indigenous adoption of American education demonstrated that they were active participants in this process, though, and adoption of foreign institutions secured avenues of advancement for many Micronesians. This ability to use education for their own means ultimately became a centerpiece of both cultural and political independence movements. The number of concerned parties and players coupled with the realities of globalization and peripheralization make this story complex, if not paradoxical, at times. As a result, the role of education in the region is still contested today and the various effects that it had on Indigenous peoples make it a living remnant of the colonial past.*

Education, a cornerstone of the Western tradition, has impacted all who will read this paper. A crucial part of the Enlightenment, it has been hailed as the key to civilizational progress as well as individual advancement. Linked to the lofty ideals of liberal democracy, it boasts the ability to create a populace capable of thinking critically and using its skills towards a teleological end of society.<sup>1</sup> With such moral underpinnings, it is no surprise that education has been adopted as one of the tools of imperialism when a colonial power sees a population in need of “advancement.” Injudicious implementations of education, though, have disrupted Indigenous lifestyles through ostensible goals of “development.” The research exploring cross-cultural contact during colonization is extensive, but I will investigate the specific ways that education was used as an extension of the American empire in Micronesia during the second half of the twentieth century.

I incorporate many of historian David Hanlon’s ideas regarding “development” in Micronesia to my analysis, as he has made a convincing argument that economic development was a means to justify American involvement in Micronesia whilst maintaining a national identity as a benevolent caretaker and beacon of democracy.<sup>2</sup> I situate myself beside Hanlon’s work by arguing that education was an important component of “economic development” and was used to achieve strategic American political goals. I have also incorporated the extensive body of work of Francis Hezel, a Jesuit priest and historian,

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<sup>1</sup> David Hanlon, *Remaking Micronesia: Discourses over Development in a Pacific Territory 1944-1982*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1998): 218.

<sup>2</sup> Hanlon, *Remaking Micronesia*, 34.

that describes Micronesian responses to American education.<sup>3</sup> However, I also use educator-historian David Kupferman's contributions, which argue that the American definition of education was fundamentally different to that of the Micronesians', to push against what can be seen as Eurocentric themes that run through Hezel's work.<sup>4</sup> I employ a postcolonial method of analysis to a variety of primary sources to investigate the political, social, and cultural dimensions of American intervention and ultimately argue that, through education, "economic development" necessitated fundamental changes to Micronesian ideas and ways of life.

The scope of this project is limited temporally from the mid-1940s to the late 1970s, when American planners and administrators had the greatest control over education in Micronesia. I have elected to not use the dates when Free Association Contracts or Commonwealth Unions were established as end dates because, as many Micronesians and Pacific Islanders have argued, these agreements have not ended dependence on the United States.<sup>5</sup> Rather, I will conclude the bulk of my analysis during the time when Micronesians were becoming conscious of the role that education had in their growing independence movements. This is not to say that the impact of education concludes with the close of the century, as education has produced a significant

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<sup>3</sup> Francis X. Hezel, "In Search of a Home: Colonial Education in Micronesia," *Topics of Culture and Learning* (1975): 125-131.

<sup>4</sup> David W. Kupferman, "Power and Pantaloons: The Case of Lee Boo and the Normalizing of the Student in Micronesia," *Journal for Cultural Research* 17, no. 1 (2013): 37-68.

<sup>5</sup> Hanlon, *Remaking Micronesia*, 226.

restructuring of Micronesian values and identities that are still grappled with today.

### **An Encounter Based in Difference**

Micronesians and Americans had very different value systems that informed the economies they established, the cultures they had, and the identities they held. These differences would become clear when the two parties collided and an unequal distribution of power gave the administrators from the United States the leverage to manipulate Micronesian value systems in order to achieve their own goals.

The American value system was influenced significantly by Western capitalism; David Hanlon argued that American culture and politics were based in values created by capitalist economics.<sup>6</sup> Informed by Hegelian ideas of a teleological human history that ultimately concludes with the triumph of capitalism, Americans adopted the view that progress was inextricably linked to a market economy.<sup>7</sup> As the cultural foundation to the Western tradition, capitalism prescribed liberal democracy, which valued private property and individual rights, as the only proper form of government. This marriage between liberal democracy, capitalism, and progress led Americans to believe they were responsible for advancing less “developed” societies by spreading democracy and capitalism. Ultimately, Americans came to Micronesia with teleological notions of progress and assumed that their political and economic systems must be imposed upon other societies in the

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<sup>6</sup> Hanlon, *Remaking Micronesia*, 161.

<sup>7</sup> Hanlon, *Remaking Micronesia*, 5-8.

name of “progress.” Thus, concepts of “development” necessitated distinct changes to Micronesians’ lifestyles and ideas.<sup>8</sup>

The Micronesian value system was informed by a much different history than that of the Americans. While Micronesians were incredibly diverse and each island varied in their specific traditions and beliefs, they shared common ideas and values because of the interconnected nature of their islands.<sup>9</sup> Especially important to consider is their emphasis on the community over the individual and the value of collective harmony.<sup>10</sup> Micronesians had what Western economists would call a subsistence economy, one which resembled the agrarian societies of Europe before the Industrial Revolution.<sup>11</sup> They did not hold teleological views of history with explicit links between production and progress. Furthermore, their notions of political concepts were centered in small communities and did not employ Western definitions like “sovereignty,” “self-determination,” or “democracy.”<sup>12</sup>

### **American Strategic and Political Motivations**

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<sup>8</sup> Hanlon, *Remaking Micronesia*, 41; David W. Kupferman, *Disassembling and Decolonizing School in the Pacific: A Genealogy from Micronesia*, (Springer, Dordrecht, 2013): 44.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel A. Kelin, “Vitalizing Culture in Youth,” *Micronesian Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 4, no. 1 (2005): 52-57.

<sup>10</sup> Francis X Hezel. “A Teacher’s Tale.” *Micronesian Counselor* 78, (2009).

<sup>11</sup> Hanlon, *Remaking Micronesia*, 37.

<sup>12</sup> Eugene F. Bogan, “Government of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 267 (1950): 167.

It is worth prefacing a discussion of the colonial institution of education with the strategic and political interests that the United States had regarding Micronesia. At the end of World War Two, President Harry Truman asserted that the Navy's control over the islands was necessary to ensure a buffer between American military bases in the Pacific and Japan.<sup>13</sup> Later, in line with the containment rhetoric of the Cold War, Micronesia was seen as a potential sphere of influence to spread democracy and protect against the expansion of communism from the Soviet Union and China.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, it was valuable as a space for nuclear testing given its status as a political periphery, its remoteness, and its sparse population.<sup>15</sup>

In order to protect these interests, the United States needed to justify its presence in Micronesia through "development" and the establishment of Micronesian governments. This would legitimize their dealings in the area and prevent international condemnation for actions that contradicted the anti-colonialism that it claimed to stand for. The Solomon Report, created by the United States government in 1962, revealed these political and strategic goals by identifying "the movement of Micronesians into a permanent political relationship with the United States as the ultimate objective of all American effort and

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<sup>13</sup> Bogan, "Government of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands," 170; Hanlon, *Remaking Micronesia*, 34.

<sup>14</sup> Abul Hasan Sahir, "United States' Trust Territory in the Pacific Islands: A Potential Sea-State," Master's thesis (University of Hawaii at Manoa, 1966): 10.

<sup>15</sup> Mark D. Merlin and Ricardo M. Gonzalez, "Environmental Impacts of Nuclear Testing in Remote Oceania, 1946–1996," In *Environmental Histories of the Cold War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 168.

initiative in the Trust Territory.”<sup>16</sup> These efforts included political, economic, and social “development” that would encourage a permanent association with the United States.<sup>17</sup> By ensuring that Micronesians had an ostensibly free and “self-determined” political unit, Americans could reconcile their identification as a force for democracy and freedom with their strategic and political interests.

### **Justification of “Economic Development”**

When American troops landed on Micronesian islands in 1944, they found populations ravaged by aerial bombings and the shortages of war. A handbook for teachers in Micronesia from 1955 described this as “the dark ages for Micronesia,” where “the natives lived in abject misery and fear” until the arrival of American forces.<sup>18</sup> A memo passed in 1944 instructed the Navy to return the islands to “their normal degrees of self-sufficiency” by distributing food and supplies, increasing sanitation, and instituting schools and municipal governmental bodies.<sup>19</sup> Navy officers and anthropologists as early as 1948 acknowledged that a capitalist economy would not be successful in Micronesia due to the islands’ isolation, climate, lack of natural

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<sup>16</sup> United States Survey Mission to the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, *A Report by the U.S. Government Survey Mission to the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, 1963*, Scholar Space of University of Hawai’i at Manoa, 2011, 3. Hereafter referred to as ‘Solomon Report.’

<sup>17</sup> Hanlon, *Remaking Micronesia*, 92.

<sup>18</sup> Bernice B. Lawrence, “Handbook for Teachers in Micronesia,” Master’s Diss. (Long Beach State College, 1955): 837.

<sup>19</sup> Hanlon, *Remaking Micronesia*, 28-29.



resources, and Indigenous attitudes towards creating a market economy.<sup>20</sup> Rather than question their own worldview, though, Americans elected to pursue an initiative of “economic development” that would remake Micronesian society into one conducive to capitalism. Unable to square their preconceptions with the realities on the islands, Americans began to fundamentally restructure the Indigenous value systems that had served them for so many years.

This transformation was engineered to preserve the Americans’ identity as a global force for good. “Development” was a benign term that accentuated humanitarian motivations rather than the political and strategic goals that necessitated American presence in the region. This was further bolstered by early claims that self-sufficiency and self-determination were the chief goals of development.<sup>21</sup> The United Nation Trusteeship Council, created in 1946 and composed of several colonial powers to manage decolonization, approved the Strategic Territorial Trust Agreement in 1947. Under it, the islands became the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands with the U.S. Navy, and later the Department of the Interior, as the administrative power.<sup>22</sup> The agreement, which tasked the Americans with developing the Micronesian islands, legitimized the American presence and granted

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<sup>20</sup> Hanlon, *Remaking Micronesia*, 15, 38.

<sup>21</sup> “Francis Sayre Praises T. T. Progress,” *Micronesian Monthly*, September 1952, Accessed February 4, 2021, <http://www.pacificdigitallibrary.org/cgi-bin/pdl?e=d-000off-pdl--00-2--0--010---4-----0-11--10en-50--20-text---00-3-1-00bySR-0-0-000utfZz-8-00&a=d&cl=CL2.3&d=HASHb4b56f883c14480dedd14f9>; Bogan, “Government of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands,” 174.

<sup>22</sup> Hezel, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, 284.

them considerable power to define “development.” Micronesian culture was blamed for the challenges that the Americans faced in establishing a capitalist economy, implying they had to be fundamentally changed in order to “progress.”<sup>23</sup> As the Trust Territory administrator, though, the United States faced pressure from the United Nations to guarantee self-determination and freedom for the Micronesians. With their strategic concerns still at the forefront, American officials turned to education to create a population that had ostensible political sovereignty yet would still serve American interests.

### **Education as Economic Development**

As a form of economic development, the administrators of the Trust Territory used education to guarantee a favorable view of the United States, promote democratic ideals and self-government, and to foster a pan-Micronesian identity and political unification. “Development,” including the institution of schools, sought to prove to the international community and to Micronesians that the United States should remain in the region as an administrative body.

American education intentionally familiarized Micronesians with American ways of life and encouraged them to respect United States citizens. A 1945 directive from the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Ocean Area stated explicitly that the schools were intended to “inculcate respect for and loyalty to the United States by teaching the history, customs, and beliefs of the United States and its people.”<sup>24</sup> The

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<sup>23</sup> Hanlon, *Remaking Micronesia*, 59.

<sup>24</sup> Hanlon, *Remaking Micronesia*, 48.

Solomon Report reaffirmed this idea in the 1960s, stating that “Washington should facilitate the general development of Micronesian interest in, and loyalties to, the United States by various actions, [including] introduction in the school system of United States oriented curriculum changes and patriotic rituals.”<sup>25</sup> The report acknowledged education’s cultural influence, stating that “schools, more than any other public institution and agency, [are] the vanguard of a deliberate program of cultural change.”<sup>26</sup>

The use of American curriculum further promoted familiarity with American culture and transformed America’s image from that of a colonizer to an integral part of Micronesian life.<sup>27</sup> This was exacerbated by a general lack of funds that prevented a more “island-oriented” curriculum, resulting in the frequent use of second-hand American textbooks.<sup>28</sup> Establishing friendships with Americans themselves was also encouraged by the schools. An article from *Micronesian Monthly* detailed how Micronesian students received Christmas gift boxes from American students. The recipients were encouraged to correspond with the pupils who packed the boxes so that, “a real live acquaintanceship among children of the United States and the Trust Territory [would be] generated.”<sup>29</sup> The schools thus served as

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<sup>25</sup> Solomon Report, 54.

<sup>26</sup> Solomon Report, 131.

<sup>27</sup> Lawrence, “Handbook for Teachers in Micronesia,” 147.

<sup>28</sup> Jon G. O’Neill, “Education and cultural change: A view from Micronesia,” *International Journal of Educational Development* 28, no. 2 (2008): 206-217.

<sup>29</sup> “Red Cross Gift Boxes are Received,” *Micronesian Monthly*, September 1952, accessed February 4, 2021, <http://www.pacificdigitallibrary.org/cgi-bin/pdl?e=d-000off-pdl--00-2--0--010---4-----0-11--10en-50---20-text---00->

a method of inculcating affection in the Micronesian students for both American ideas and Americans themselves.

The secondary goal of American-sponsored education was for Micronesians to learn democratic ideals and eventually transition to self-government. A majority of educational initiatives put into place followed the theme of pursuing economic development by imposing democracy through the schools and encouraging self-government.<sup>30</sup> A case in point is a yearbook from an intermediate school in Palau from 1955. It contains the school's student council, complete with a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer, whose purpose was to familiarize students with democratic proceedings at a young age.<sup>31</sup> The schools also sought to produce politically interested, individualistic citizens well-suited to a liberal democracy. A handbook for Micronesian teachers from 1955 enumerated "Citizenship Responsibilities" for the students, insisting that they understand their history, the values of citizenship, and the concept of nationhood.<sup>32</sup>

High Commissioner Nucker of the Trust Territory emphasized the link between education, self-government, and economic self-sufficiency when he spoke at the dedication of PICS in 1959. After a

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<sup>30</sup> Karen Peacock, "The Maze of Schools: American Education in Micronesia," *History of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands: Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Pacific Islands Conference* (1985): 84-88; Bogan, "Government of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands," 167.

<sup>31</sup> Ninth Grade of Palau Islands Intermediate School, *The Endless Horizon* (Koror, Palau: Graduating Class of 1955), Pacific Digital Library.

<sup>32</sup> Lawrence, "Handbook for Teachers in Micronesia," 447, 670.

barrage of patriotic references to the likes of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln, he told the students, “You people well may wonder why Americans consider education to be so important to Micronesians. The answer is very simple. If there is to be government by the Micronesians, then Micronesians must be well enough educated to govern.”<sup>33</sup> Francis Hezel, speaking from his experience as an educator in the region, attested that one of the roles of the schools was to provide a “mental enlightenment that will enable future voters to understand a democratic government and to make wise and constructive choices in the future.”<sup>34</sup> Just who this government would be constructive for, though, remains a subject of debate.

There was a concerted effort on behalf of the Trust Territory government to consolidate Micronesia into a single political unit and to produce what I have dubbed a “pan-Micronesian identity.” This identity, though, contradicted the findings of ethnographers and anthropologists who had already informed the Trust government that the islands were diverse and differed culturally and ethnically.<sup>35</sup> The Solomon Report, recognizing this reality, identified the need to build a national conscience. Emphasizing how the districts were divided by distance, culture, and language, the report stated: “The Mission found little consciousness among the people of the Trust Territory of

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<sup>33</sup> “PICS is Dedicated,” *Micronesian Monthly*, December 1959, Accessed February 4, 2021. <http://www.pacificdigitallibrary.org/cgi-bin/pdl?e=d-000off-pdl--00-2--0--010---4-----0-11--10en-50---20-text---00-3-1-00bySR-0-0-000utfZz-8-00&a=d&cl=CL1.7&d=HASH018f9bcb9f042688015b6e58.7>.

<sup>34</sup> Hezel, “In Search of a Home: Colonial Education in Micronesia.”

<sup>35</sup> Douglas Osborne, “Archaeology in Micronesia: Background, Palau Studies and Suggestions for the Future,” *Asian Perspectives* 5, no. 2 (1961): 156-163.

themselves as ‘Micronesians’ and no emotional nationalistic feelings. There are no traditions of unity but rather a history of individual island cultures.”<sup>36</sup>

This pan-Micronesian identity was to be developed through the schools, leading American planners to interpret the minimization of differences between islanders as a sign of progress. One of the earliest examples of schools functioning as a vehicle towards a pan-Micronesian identity is found in an account from Cy Pickerill, principal of PICS in the 1950s. In an article from *Micronesian Monthly*, she said that in the early days of the school, fights between the children were often along island or district lines. Over time, though, the schools created more harmony and cohesion: “Gradually PICS has come to be the primary ‘melting pot’ of the Trust Territory, and today it is not uncommon for a fellow's best friend — girl or boy — to be from a district far from his own home island. No longer do students engage in fist fights on an island basis.”<sup>37</sup> The 1955 handbook for teachers in Micronesia revealed how a pan-Micronesian identity was also encouraged through curriculum. Teachers were instructed to emphasize the following to students:

1. The districts have a common background and common interests.

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<sup>36</sup> Solomon Report, 15.

<sup>37</sup> “PICS in the Early Days,” *Micronesian Monthly*, December 1959, accessed February 4, 2021, <http://www.pacificdigitallibrary.org/cgi-bin/pdl?e=d-000off-pdl--00-2--0--010---4-----0-11--10en-50---20-text---00-3-1-00bySR-0-0-000utfZz-8-00&a=d&cl=CL1.7&d=HASH018f9bcb9f042688015b6e58.16>.

2. There is great importance and value in the similarities between the districts.

3. There should always be understanding, unity, and harmonious relationships between the islands and the districts.<sup>38</sup>

This harmony and “melting pot” metaphor may be attractive with the modern tendency to celebrate multiculturalism, but one must be critical of how these changes were imposed on the Micronesians and perversely fed into Western preconceptions about Oceania that artificially grouped Indigenous populations together despite their differences.<sup>39</sup> Further, the education system ensured that this “melting pot” came together under American auspices and students had to bond over a shared knowledge of American culture and the English language. Thus, this blending of cultures was not a celebration of individuality, but a means to eliminate difference in order to produce more Americanized students.

The use of boarding schools underscored this initiative of assimilation, as they removed students from their Indigenous settings and brought them into one controlled by American administrators.<sup>40</sup> The Solomon Report identified boarding schools as particularly effective at encouraging a pan-Micronesian identity, saying, “a valuable service

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<sup>38</sup> Lawrence, “Handbook for Teachers in Micronesia,” 681.

<sup>39</sup> David Hanlon, “The “Sea of Little Lands”: Examining Micronesia’s Place in “Our Sea of Islands,”” *The Contemporary Pacific* 21, no. 1 (2009): 99; Ninth Grade of Palau Islands Intermediate School, 14.

<sup>40</sup> Donald F. Smith, “Micronesian Education: A Decade of Change,” *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development* (1971): 494-496; “PICS - Twelve Years,” *Micronesian Monthly*, December 1959.

performed by the Pacific Island Central School and by Xavier High School at Truk is to bring together intelligent Micronesians from all districts where the only common language is English and where students can learn about the rest of Micronesia.”<sup>41</sup>

### **Why Micronesians Adopted American Education**

It is necessary to explore why Micronesians accepted American schools and other forms of economic development. A sweeping generalization of Indigenous acceptance implies a superiority of Western ways and fails to acknowledge that Micronesians had legitimate reasons to adopt foreign institutions. Beyond the lack of basic commodities in Micronesia following the war, American military and economic advantages allowed them to impose their own constructs of power onto the islands. As a result, Americans had the power to define success as well as control avenues of advancement through education and employment.

As mentioned before, the Micronesians were in a desperate state when the Americans arrived. Shortly after their arrival, the majority of Micronesian chiefs determined that, as it would benefit their people, they would accept an expansion of aid. The motive for accepting these initiatives of “economic development” was the acquisition of commodities, a recurring theme evidenced by Indigenous affinities for American consumer goods.<sup>42</sup> Although some Micronesians

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<sup>41</sup> Solomon Report, 48-49.

<sup>42</sup> Hanlon, *Remaking Micronesia*, 62; Hezel, “In Search of a Home: Colonial Education in Micronesia.”



were skeptical of American intentions, the majority accepted Western aid, including schools, of their own volition.<sup>43</sup>

A Micronesian student at PICS in 1959, Bermin Weilbacher, demonstrated the enthusiasm that students had for adopting education and his sense of privilege at being granted a place at the schools. He described visiting the campus: “I felt more than ecstasy... Now that I'm in the position of my long-dreamed wish, I feel proud. I believe PICS has the most beautiful set of buildings ever erected in the whole Trust Territory. This gives me a clear idea of how important [sic] education is.”<sup>44</sup> A genuine desire for education, echoed by many other Indigenous students, is not necessarily surprising when one considers that it was essentially a prerequisite for success in the economic and political system that the Americans imposed.

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<sup>43</sup> Lawrence, “Handbook for Teachers in Micronesia,” 837; Hanlon, *Remaking Micronesia*, 26.

<sup>44</sup> Bermin F. Weilbacher, “Ecstasy,” *Micronesian Monthly*, December 1959, accessed February 4, 2021,

<http://www.pacificdigitallibrary.org/cgi-bin/pdl?e=d-000off-pdl--00-2--0--010---4-----0-11--10en-50---20-text---00-3-1-00bySR-0-0-000utfZz-8-00&a=d&cl=CL1.7&d=HASH018f9bcb9f042688015b6e58.28>. See also Anibar Timothy, “What I Think of PICS,” *Micronesian Monthly*, December 1959, accessed February 4, 2021, <http://www.pacificdigitallibrary.org/cgi-bin/pdl?e=d-000off-pdl--00-2--0--010---4-----0-11--10en-50---20-text---00-3-1-00bySR-0-0-000utfZz-8-00&a=d&cl=CL1.7&d=HASH018f9bcb9f042688015b6e58.29>, and See also Katharine Kesolei, “My Arrival at the New PICS,” *Micronesian Monthly*, December 1959, Accessed March 8, 2021, <http://www.pacificdigitallibrary.org/cgi-bin/pdl?e=d-000off-pdl--00-2--0--010---4-----0-11--10en-50---20-text---00-3-1-00bySR-0-0-000utfZz-8-00&a=d&cl=CL1.7&d=HASH018f9bcb9f042688015b6e58.17>.

Americans controlled Micronesian advancement by giving the highest-paying government jobs to those who were educated and spoke English. The Trust Territory of the Pacific government was the largest employer as early as 1949 and, as they provided American currency, government positions were highly desirable.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, just as many Americans do today, Micronesians saw education as a way to avoid a life of hard labor.<sup>46</sup> In order to reap the material benefits from education, though, the Micronesians had to enter an American-dominated school system.

Americans used language to control avenues of social, economic, and political advancement. As the Trust Territory was more likely to hire English-speakers in roles that would boost their political and economic status, Micronesians had reason to adopt the language and advocate for more English instruction. A belief that “Indigenous tongues” were inadequate in the modern world resulted in “development” being defined as the degree of English acquisition; thus English became the primary language of instruction.<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, it was advocated for by Micronesians themselves. Pacific historian Karen Peacock wrote, “Proponents of the new emphasis [on English instruction] could point to much support from Micronesians who had for years been clamoring for increased English in the classrooms. To

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<sup>45</sup> Hanlon, *Remaking Micronesia*, 58.

<sup>46</sup> Francis X. Hezel, “Who Shall Own the Schools?,” *Reflections on Micronesia: Collected Papers* (1982): 63; Solomon Report, 44.

<sup>47</sup> Donald Smith, “American Education in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands,” *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development* (1969): 71-79; Peacock, “The Maze of Schools,” 87, 93, 95.

Micronesians, English and further education meant the chance for government jobs and a secure future for their children.”<sup>48</sup>

A fitting metaphor for English acquisition as a prerequisite to personal advancement comes from the 1955 Handbook for Micronesian teachers. One of the lesson plans instructed the teacher: “sometimes when the pupils are playing various outdoor games, have them try to use English rather than their own language... If the teacher hears a pupil using the native language, he is put out of the game.”<sup>49</sup> The same could be said for Micronesians who were put into the professional business sector or the political arena. Those who refused to adopt democratic, Americanized ideals and the English language were effectively “put out of the game” and would likely never be hired to positions of power. Even those who would later speak out about American colonial tendencies and advocate for autonomy were products of American and Western educational institutions.

### **Education’s Effects on Indigenous Epistemologies and Culture**

The adoption of American education and resulting Westernization unarguably changed Indigenous epistemologies and cultures. These changes, particularly in the ways that they produced an “Americanized” younger generation that was more critical of traditional ways, fed into a contentious generational divide. The differing opinions about how Micronesia ought to be developed, varying across age groups and educational backgrounds, were a

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<sup>48</sup> Peacock, “The Maze of Schools,” 93.

<sup>49</sup> Lawrence, “Handbook for Teachers in Micronesia,” 739.

reflection of how the school system produced different ways of thinking and of conceptualizing Micronesian identity.

Micronesian educational systems and epistemologies did not resemble those of the Americans, with Francis Hezel going as far to describe colonial education as “alien” to traditional values.<sup>50</sup> David Kupferman also agreed that Western schooling was “a fairly recent phenomenon... and is therefore not a concept that is indigenous to the islands nor necessarily compatible with island contexts.”<sup>51</sup> A report on Indigenous life in Palau stated that wisdom was passed down orally, through chants and songs, and in the mastery of skills.<sup>52</sup> The education was gender-based; typical skills for boys were fishing, wood carving, or building canoes, and girls were educated in raising children, taro gardening, and handcrafts. Furthermore, education took place in the home with the primary educators being the child’s parents and maternal uncle.<sup>53</sup> These methods of education, although didactic in nature and tailored to Micronesian life, were not recognized as true education by the Americans.<sup>54</sup>

David Kupferman argued that Americans assumed that Micronesians lacked education because they did not have formal

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<sup>50</sup> Hezel, “In Search of a Home: Colonial Education in Micronesia.”

<sup>51</sup> Kupferman, *Disassembling and Decolonizing School in the Pacific*, 3.

<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth de Jong, “Palauan House: Curriculum Revision as a Vessel for Sustaining Palauan Lifeways,” Master’s thesis (University of Hawai’i at Mānoa, 2016): 11. <http://hdl.handle.net/10125/45562>.

<sup>53</sup> De Jong, “Palauan House,” 144.

<sup>54</sup> O’Neill, “Education and cultural change: A view from Micronesia.”; Kupferman, *Disassembling and Decolonizing School in the Pacific*, 7.

schools. This was a product of preconceptions that education “is somehow an ontological experience that is universal, essentializable, and coincidentally American. In other words, the proper way, and indeed the only way, to ‘educate’ Micronesians is by employing American... schooling habits and practices.”<sup>55</sup> He continued to argue that this narrow definition foreclosed any alternative methods of education, including incorporation of pre-existing Indigenous methods that arose from an island context.<sup>56</sup> Schools were seen as the only method of education, undermining Indigenous concepts of knowledge and education. Kupferman’s analysis seriously calls into question if even the most “island-oriented” schools could capture Indigenous epistemologies because, by definition, they reflected the Western tradition and Western epistemologies. Furthermore, efforts to objectively measure intelligence of Micronesian students revealed a troubling theme wherein American control over education led to an imposition of their definitions of knowledge, education, and intelligence as objective realities.<sup>57</sup>

Kupferman’s work reveals a disagreement within the existing historiography of this topic. Challenging Francis Hezel, who continues to be a dominating force in the literature of Micronesian education, he argued that a faith in American education for modernization is problematic because it “betrays a teleological faith in western

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<sup>55</sup> Kupferman, *Disassembling and Decolonizing School in the Pacific*, 3.

<sup>56</sup> Kupferman, *Disassembling and Decolonizing School in the Pacific*, 4-6.

<sup>57</sup> G. D. Jordheim, and Inger A. Olsen. “The Use of a Non-Verbal Test of Intelligence in the Trust Territory of the Pacific,” *American Anthropologist* 65, no. 5 (1963): 1122-1125.

developmental models.”<sup>58</sup> He criticized Hezel’s analysis which partially excused the actions of the American administration by suggesting that the schools “liberated the minds” of the Micronesians.<sup>59</sup> On Hezel’s end, he was able to imply that the normalization of Western schooling was objectively good due to its “modernizing” nature and the fact that Micronesians advocated for its expansion. A different perspective, though, is that this desire for American education was a result of American impositions of new power structures, not an objective superiority of American education. Kupferman, likely drawing influence from Hanlon’s arguments in “Beyond ‘the English Method of Tattooing’,” implied that an expansion of the definition of education itself reveals that Micronesians indeed had their own educational system: one which was better suited to their cultural context and produced individuals who were educated in their own right.<sup>60</sup>

Adoption of American education also affected Micronesian culture. An article on education and cultural change in Micronesia reported that Micronesian children’s tastes in food, drink, and entertainment fell more in line with international trends than traditional choices. It attributed these changes to American-oriented curriculum, English instruction in schools, and “a shift away from traditional family-based cultural education to a more formal school-based

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<sup>58</sup> Kupferman, *Disassembling and Decolonizing School in the Pacific*, 5.

<sup>59</sup> Kupferman, “Power and Pantaloons: The Case of Lee Boo and the Normalizing of the Student in Micronesia,” 55.

<sup>60</sup> David Hanlon, “Beyond ‘the English Method of Tattooing’: Decentering the Practice of History in Oceania,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 15, no. 1 (2003): 19-40; Kupferman, *Disassembling and Decolonizing School in the Pacific*, 51.

model.”<sup>61</sup> It also mentioned the role that American teachers had in spreading American culture to Micronesian students.<sup>62</sup> Perhaps the Westerners working in Micronesia were not individually at fault, as many were Peace Corps volunteers with pure intentions, but their presence in the schools led students to identify less with their Indigenous cultures and more with the near-omnipresence of American culture.

An article entitled “Self Reliance School” revealed a generational divide that resulted from these cultural and epistemological changes. The Modeknegei elders, an Indigenous Palauan cultural and religious group, were creating a school to address what they saw as the concerning “disintegration” of traditional Palauan culture.<sup>63</sup> They described a “familiar litany of disturbing trends among young Palauans — lack of respect for Palauan customs, loss of traditional knowledge, loss of personal identity, and growing problems of drinking and delinquency.”<sup>64</sup> Reflecting frustrations with American schooling’s individualistic nature, the school was to serve the whole community and resemble a traditional Palauan village so as to foster cultural and communal identification for all generations. Furthermore, Palau would be the primary language of instruction, echoing another

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<sup>61</sup> O’Neill, “Education and cultural change: A view from Micronesia.”

<sup>62</sup> O’Neill, “Education and cultural change: A view from Micronesia.”

<sup>63</sup> “A Truly Micronesian School: The Palauan Modeknegei Learning Center.” *Friends of Micronesia*, Fall 1974, accessed January 15, 2021, [https://www.loc.gov/resource/afc2014008.afc2014008\\_ms1107/?sp=72&r=0.015,0.126,0.506,0.354,0](https://www.loc.gov/resource/afc2014008.afc2014008_ms1107/?sp=72&r=0.015,0.126,0.506,0.354,0).

<sup>64</sup> “A Truly Micronesian School: The Palauan Modeknegei Learning Center.”

frustration with how students returned from school with a greater appreciation for English than their Indigenous language.

The Solomon Report of 1962 showed that accelerated cultural change through the schools was intentional at the administrative level: “[the schools] will help to break down traditional patterns of behavior which inhibit raising living standards... will reduce the parochial attitudes now prevalent within each district and will increase dependence on a common culture based around the English language and modern ways.”<sup>65</sup> Francis Hezel, in his article, “Who Shall Own the Schools,” excused this deliberate socialization by implying the superiority of Western ways: “If the school is intended to subvert certain traditional aspects of the society, it is only because these are seen as retarding economic and social development. The school is the incubator of new attitudes and values, among them a taste for material progress and the blessings it confers.”<sup>66</sup> Thus, Hezel interpreted the generational tensions as proof of the “primitive” nature of Indigenous Micronesian culture.

### **How Education was Used to Express Indigenous Agency**

Although Americans did grant access to means of advancement, they only did so after restructuring Micronesian life and definitions of success in a way that made Indigenous lifestyles less valued. Many Micronesians went through the education system enthusiastically, though, and used it to advance as individuals,

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<sup>65</sup> Solomon Report, 48.

<sup>66</sup> Hezel, “Who Shall Own the Schools?,” 67.



recognize the faults of “economic development,” demand more political autonomy, and even realize the ways that education itself had reshaped Micronesian identities and ways of life. It is important to recognize this as a form of Indigenous agency even if the system they were working within was dominated by a foreign power. Although Francis Hezel’s work can be criticized for Eurocentrism and even white saviorism, I incorporate his ideas to show that American education did allow Micronesians to adopt the social, intellectual, and political tools necessary to challenge colonial power structures as well as to assert new identities on their own terms.<sup>67</sup>

As early as 1952 it was evident that American education had become a means of personal advancement for Micronesians. An article from *Micronesian Monthly* wrote, “The first Ulithi student, Ramon by name, has departed from Yap to PICS to ‘pick up a leattle [sic] English’... We hope to see him as the first Ulithi doctor.”<sup>68</sup> This hope for the schools to produce individuals with higher standing in their society was confirmed by Francis Hezel, who wrote that the schools “supplied a small stream of men and women equipped to take over the first government positions. These young Micronesians would in time become the ruling elite in the islands.”<sup>69</sup> High-ranking jobs in education, politics, and health were becoming more available to those who had

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<sup>67</sup> Hezel, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, 288-296.

<sup>68</sup> Richard E. Drews, “Yap Highlights,” *Micronesian Monthly*, September 1952, accessed February 4, 2021, <http://www.pacificdigitallibrary.org/cgi-bin/pdl?e=d-000off-pdl--00-2--0--010---4-----0-11--10en-50---20-text---00-3-1-00bySR-0-0-000utfZz-8-00&a=d&c=CL2.3&d=HASHb4b56f883c14480dedd14f.12>.

<sup>69</sup> Hezel, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, 291.

received a Western education, thus making the schools a conduit to political power.<sup>70</sup>

The newsletter *Friends of Micronesia* released a series of articles in 1973 which showed that education gave the new Micronesian political elite the tools to express political dissent. Invoking democratic ideals and notions of self-determination, they called for greater political autonomy; for example, Carl Heine used his college education from San Diego to become a prominent political figure as well as the first published Marshallese author.<sup>71</sup> The article, “US Censors Political Ed.,” detailed how he had been actively calling for more political education for Micronesians and challenging the educational plans coming from Washington.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, his book criticized the Trusteeship under the United States and questioned Micronesia’s political future.<sup>73</sup> This challenge to American dominance when planning the future of Micronesia can be attributed to his access to education.

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<sup>70</sup> M. Roseamonde Porter, “The Micronesian Teacher Education Center: A Six-Year Overview,” *Educational Perspectives* 7, no. 4 (1968): 24-31.

<sup>71</sup> Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, “Remembering Uncle Carl Heine,” *Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner* (blog), May 25, 2011, <https://www.kathyjetnilkijiner.com/uncle-lan-aka-carl-heine/>.

<sup>72</sup> “US Censors Political Ed,” *Friends of Micronesia*, Fall 1974, accessed 4 February, 2021,

[https://www.loc.gov/resource/afc2014008.afc2014008\\_ms1107/?sp=4&r=-0.584,0.039,2.169,0.821,0](https://www.loc.gov/resource/afc2014008.afc2014008_ms1107/?sp=4&r=-0.584,0.039,2.169,0.821,0).

<sup>73</sup> Heine, *Micronesia at the Crossroads: A Reappraisal of the Micronesian Political Dilemma*.

John Mangefel, the first man from Yap to earn a college degree, was also part of the first wave of educated political elites. He was a member of the Congress of Micronesia, the Governor of Yap, and later a senator in the Trust Territory government, using his positions to argue that colonialism had stripped Micronesians of their political sovereignty.<sup>74</sup> Also part of the educated elite was Senator Roman Tmetuchl, who demonstrated an understanding that education had a key role in Micronesian independence movements. Speaking to Indigenous high school students in the early 1970s, he encouraged independence and self-rule by saying, “God did not create us to be under some other people... In this world you have to struggle to survive and unless we fight we will be overwhelmed by selfish foreigners... Now is the time to rule ourselves and to have our own identity.”<sup>75</sup>

Beyond their frustrations with American administration, Micronesians used the powers conferred by education to assert a new pan-Micronesian identity.<sup>76</sup> In Micronesia, this identity was encouraged by some Indigenous politicians as part of an effort to ensure more economic self-sufficiency and freedom from political dependence. Sasauro Haruo from Chuuk believed that, even though Micronesia had

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<sup>74</sup> “Who Do You Trust?,” *Friends of Micronesia*, Fall 1974, accessed 4 February, 2021, [https://www.loc.gov/resource/afc2014008.afc2014008\\_ms1107/?sp=6&r=0.225,-0.067,0.679,0.478,0](https://www.loc.gov/resource/afc2014008.afc2014008_ms1107/?sp=6&r=0.225,-0.067,0.679,0.478,0).

<sup>75</sup> “Independence for Palau?,” *Friends of Micronesia*, Fall 1974, accessed February 4, 2021, [https://www.loc.gov/resource/afc2014008.afc2014008\\_ms1107/?sp=33](https://www.loc.gov/resource/afc2014008.afc2014008_ms1107/?sp=33).

<sup>76</sup> See also Epeli Hau'ofa, “Our Sea of Islands,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 6, no. 1 (1994): 148-61.

been artificially constructed, the people had a real sense of unity that could serve them in their efforts to become independent from the United States.<sup>77</sup> Unlike the pan-Micronesian identity that the schools enforced, this identity was created by Micronesians and meant to serve their own purposes.

Similarly, Micronesians used education's benefits to protect their own cultures within the Westernized reality constructed in the Pacific. For example, English transcriptions were used to preserve pictorial engravings and Indigenous legends from a building in Palau.<sup>78</sup> Another example exists in the creation of the Palau Modekneigi Learning Center in 1973. Recognizing the shortcomings of the American education system, particularly how it produced graduates that were not keen to do labor or remain in the islands, Micronesians began to wrest control back from the Americans in the educational realm.<sup>79</sup> With a fundamental theme of self-reliance, the school aimed to "reinforce and transmit native culture while also preparing students for useful lives in a rapidly changing society that has taken a place in the global community." Its repeated calls for self-sufficiency and independence, rhetoric adopted from American education, imply a

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<sup>77</sup> Hanlon, *Remaking Micronesia*, 137.

<sup>78</sup> "MANILA CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION: Palauan Women Feels They Gained New Social Concepts," *Micronesian Monthly*, February, 1955, accessed February 9, 2021, <http://www.pacificdigitallibrary.org/cgi-bin/pdl?e=d-000>

<sup>79</sup> Fran Hezel, "Unholy Mackerel & the Almighty Buck," *Friends of Micronesia*, Fall 1974, accessed February 4, 2021, [https://www.loc.gov/resource/afc2014008.afc2014008\\_ms1107/?sp=37&r=0.016,0.573,1.315,0.498,0](https://www.loc.gov/resource/afc2014008.afc2014008_ms1107/?sp=37&r=0.016,0.573,1.315,0.498,0).

growing understanding of how American education had manipulated Indigenous culture, epistemologies, and ways of life.<sup>80</sup>

Schools would slowly come to be run almost completely by Micronesians, as it was planned by the Solomon Report to withdraw American teachers and administrators once the Indigenous were “properly equipped” to educate the next generation. The Micronesians would go on to struggle with the same questions that the American educational planners did, such as how much English should be incorporated, how much focus should be given to technical skills, and how to integrate island culture appropriately.<sup>81</sup> What is key, though, is that Micronesians were making these decisions for themselves. However, it is also important to note that the Micronesians in power were educated in Western institutions, explaining why there was not a return to traditional education. It is also inaccurate to suggest that Micronesian schools became fully independent from foreign influence. For example, the largest colleges throughout the region were accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, an organization based in Northern California.<sup>82</sup> The reality remains that the fundamental ideologies and philosophies guiding curriculum development and administration of schools continued to be heavily influenced by Americans.

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<sup>80</sup> “A Truly Micronesian School: The Palauan Modeknegei Learning Center.”

<sup>81</sup> “A Truly Micronesian School: The Palauan Modeknegei Learning Center.”

<sup>82</sup> Kupferman, *Disassembling and Decolonizing School in the Pacific*, 94.

## **Conclusion**

Education has had a pervasive influence on Western culture and, as an extension of colonialism, the entire world. An uncritical acceptance of its powers to “civilize” or “progress” non-Western populations betrays a Eurocentric worldview that fails to acknowledge the validity of other epistemologies. Equipped with more expansive definitions, one can see that Micronesians indeed had their own methods of education and American administrators’ failure to recognize them stemmed from their own preconceptions. These led Americans to impose Western-style schools as an extension of “economic development” in order to mold Micronesians’ cultures, identities, and epistemologies so as to be conducive to political and strategic goals that emerged from a tense global setting. Micronesians had considerable incentive to adopt American education, though, as an imposed capitalist economy meant that government positions served as paths to social, political, and economic advancement. Although the schools considerably transformed and detracted from Indigenous culture, the value of American education became ingrained in the Micronesian conscience. However, Micronesians did use the powers conferred by education to recognize the effects of Western education and advocate for independence.

The ongoing desire for American and Western education in Micronesia is a fitting, yet somewhat paradoxical conclusion to our story. Carl Heine, a Marshall Islander, captured the Indigenous understanding of the complex nature of colonial education in his novel from 1974: “As a Micronesian, I am colonized... The Americans may someday leave Micronesia, but they will long be remembered, for despite all their shortcomings in governing Micronesia, they made possible a new phenomenon in Micronesia, the ‘liberation of the

mind'."<sup>83</sup> The pervading nature of education, with its ability to transform identities and definitions of knowledge itself, is demonstrated in the modern reality that the effects of colonial education still impact everyday life in Micronesia and continue to raise questions of Indigenous identity. The ways in which it has fundamentally transformed Micronesia are a testament to its power to produce indelible change as well as the fact that colonial impositions extend far beyond the apparent departure of the colonizer.

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<sup>83</sup> Carl Heine, *Micronesia at the Crossroads: A Reappraisal of the Micronesian Political Dilemma*, (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1974): 93.

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