

# THE LIBERATION AND CONQUEST OF

# Micronesia

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During the past three years, the United States' administration of the Trust Territory of Pacific Islands has entered its final stages. Meetings between United States and Micronesia representatives, though set by numerous problems, have established the basis on which to find the U.N. Trusteeship Agreement, to establish a new Micronesian government, and to negotiate a new definition of the American role over our part of the Pacific.

When American military forces swept ashore in Micronesia, near the end of World War II, they came as both liberators and conquerors. They ended a Japanese dominion which, had it been permitted to continue its complete control, almost all aspects of Micronesian life would have all but obliterated Micronesian races and cultures within one more generation.

During the past 25 years of American control in Micronesia, many Micronesians have fashioned nostalgic memories of the Japanese rule: the colonial cities it built, the roads it cut through jungles, its initiative in mining, and agriculture. They remember Japan for its discipline, its industry, its sense of purpose—qualities which have frequently been lacking in the American Trusteeship.

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Whatever its usefulness for rhetorical purposes this is not a nostalgia in which I, or most other Micronesian leaders, choose to participate.

Japan's assimilation of Micronesia could have resulted in the permanent loss of our cultures, and our ethnic identities. Since our whole purpose in recently negotiating with the Americans has been to resist such an assimilation—by Americans I will not pretend that we would have welcomed it—or would welcome it today—at the hands of the Japanese.

Whatever criticisms are registered against America, I will not fault it for having broken—if only by accident—the Japanization of Micronesia.

If the Americans came as liberators, they were surely also conquerors. As numerous administrators, visiting congressmen, task forces in Washington have rarely failed to remind us, control of Micronesia is "purchased" at a high cost in

American blood.

Of course this argument overlooks certain crucial Micronesian claims: that the basic ownership of Micronesia's islands is a right of the Micronesian people; that the islands were not and are not for sale for blood or for money; that the blood which was spilled "coming over the reef" — another favorite phrase — was not spilled at the request, or for the benefit, of the Micronesian people.

Still, we realize that the conquest of Micronesia and the control that resulted from that conquest remains a paramount factor in America's thinking about Micronesia.

Americans came as liberators and conquerors and, as such, they have remained. Both these roles figured importantly in the U.N. Trusteeship Agreement which, since 1947, has

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provided the basic terms of America's control of Micronesia.

The role of liberator was reflected in the economic and social goals of the agreement, in its provision for the education and well-being of the people of Micronesia and, most importantly, in its specification that Micronesia be brought to the point where our people would themselves determine an appropriate new political status: "self-government or independence."

The role of conqueror, however, was reflected in the designation of Micronesia as a strategic trusteeship, in the proviso that enabled the United States to alienate and to fortify our islands and to veto any change in our political status which challenged the control it won during the war.

America's roles as a conqueror and liberator have often clashed and, when this has happened—at Kwajalein, at Eniwetok and Bikini, in the year-to-year freedom of the trusteeship agreement, and even in our recent status negotiations with American representatives—the role of conqueror has always prevailed.

Whether America will ever be able to sort out and reconcile such a diversity of interests, such cross-purposes, remains to be seen, although I am sure they have my best wishes, and the best wishes of Micro-

nesia, in this undertaking.

Meanwhile, however, we Micronesians who have lived under the trusteeship and who now are witnesses to its finale have our own diversity of interests, our own cross-purposes, to sort out and to reconcile.

Like most Micronesian legislators who now find themselves across a negotiating table from U.S. representatives, I am a product of the American period in Micronesia. In my generation and in myself I can find evidence of the various aspects of the United States trusteeship—and of the tension and turmoil that result from the conflict between the best and the worst that America has accomplished in our islands and in ourselves.

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I suspect that the best aspect of the American period was the administering authority's willingness to educate Micronesians.

To be sure, the educational system they brought to our islands was often ill-suited to Micronesia. Many early textbooks and programs and teachers came no closer to the reality of Pacific life than California. But there was never any question about America's basic willingness to fully educate Micronesians.

Unlike the Japanese, who generally offered nothing more than a grade-school education and some highly circumscribed vocational training, the United States determined to educate at least some Micronesians as far as it was possible for them to go. They sent us to re-

gional high schools, to colleges abroad, and kept us there.

And there—in the Trust Territory dormitories in Guam and Hawaii—Micronesia's battle for a new political status was begun.

It was there that we learned the familiar lessons of unity, democracy, sovereignty and self-government, the lessons which generations of American students have absorbed and taken for granted, the lessons which—upon our return to our home islands, to the crowded district centers, to the equally crowded government offices—we found could not be satisfied in Micronesia.

Our expectations could not be fulfilled: not in a strategic trusteeship, not in a U.S. territory, not by an administrator who uneasily alternated between his role as conqueror and his role as liberator.

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Now I come, as all of us who returned home came, to the worst aspects of the American trusteeship. We quickly found that the options we had believed were open to us were actually foreclosed.

They were foreclosed not only by the terms of the trusteeship. They were also foreclosed by the economy that was then developing in Micronesia, an economy which already was racing away from the self-sufficient, subsistence economy of our fathers to a system in which imported goods, some of them necessary, many of them trivial, were making inroads on Micronesian life.

We were witnessing the birth of an economy which would soon be—and today now is—thoroughly dependent on imported goods, contracted skills, and annual outside aid. It was not a pleasant process to contemplate and the most troublesome thing about it was we were its products, we were its educated imports. In Micronesia, the life of our fathers was being lost and the ideals of their sons could not be realized.

There may be a way out of the predicament I have just described. I believe that we are beginning to discover it.

I am not sure that, at first, I would have believed that the Congress of Micronesia was to be the instrument of our escape. When it began in 1965, the Congress was more an advisory council than a true legislature; its laws were subject to vetoes which could not be overridden, it had almost no power of the purse, and practically all of its members—myself included—were also employees, middle-level and white collar, of the executive branch of the Trust Territory government.

We were a Congress of amphibian creatures, half-government executive, half-elected congressmen, and we were almost equally powerless in both our chosen elements.

One thing of true value did result from the Congress, however: the slow definite growth of unity among the various Micronesian leaders who converged on the congressional chambers on Saipan. It was a unity which any previous foreign administration in Micronesia would have taken pains to discourage, an unprecedented unity with incalculable implications for the future of the islands.

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There are two other points to remember about the Micronesian unity that developed in our Congress, however. First, it was a unity sponsored—financed—by our administration. Second—and paradoxically—it was a unity that derived, in large part, from our common opposition to that administration.

Over the past three years, we have endeavored to persuade the United States that Micronesia ought to become a self-governing state in free association with the United States. This relationship of free association involves four basic principles and legal rights. These are Micronesia's right to self-determination, to make its own laws, to control its lands and to end unilaterally any future relationship with the United States.

We particularly insisted on the right of unilateral termination as an indispensable safeguard for a small island state in a relationship with a global superpower. Unilateral termination is a final insurance not only against our being abused or ignored but also against our being embraced to death.

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After some initially discouraging responses, the United States has acceded, or substantially acceded, on all for of these crucial matters.

The United States, in turn, has demanded sweeping ~~power~~ over Micronesian foreign affairs and defense and has already requested certain continuing military base rights and options in Micronesia. These are troublesome requests, but we are now more confident than we have ever been that there exists a basis for self-government in Micronesia and for an honorable future partnership with the United States.

And there is some hope that, with Micronesian control of government, we may find our way out of the economic as well as political difficulties that confront us, that we might yet strike a decent, stable non-exploitative balance between the freedom and expectations of the 20th century life and the Micronesian values we will always cherish.

There remains one great, nagging footnote to this story, however, and

I would be giving a false report if I did not record it.

We all have heard how scattered are the islands of Micronesia, a mere 700 square miles of land in 3 million square miles of sea; how divided are its peoples, by distance, by religion, by their six major ethnic groups, by nine mutually unintelligible languages. This, all of this, is true.

Under American administration however, we have been unified; our support from our liberator and opposition to our conqueror united us.

We were united first by his very presence here; we were united by the trusteeship which bound us together; we were united in the schools we were sent to and in our reaction to the society we returned to; we were united in the Congress our administrator sponsored and we were united in our Congressional criticism of the programs our administrator proposed.

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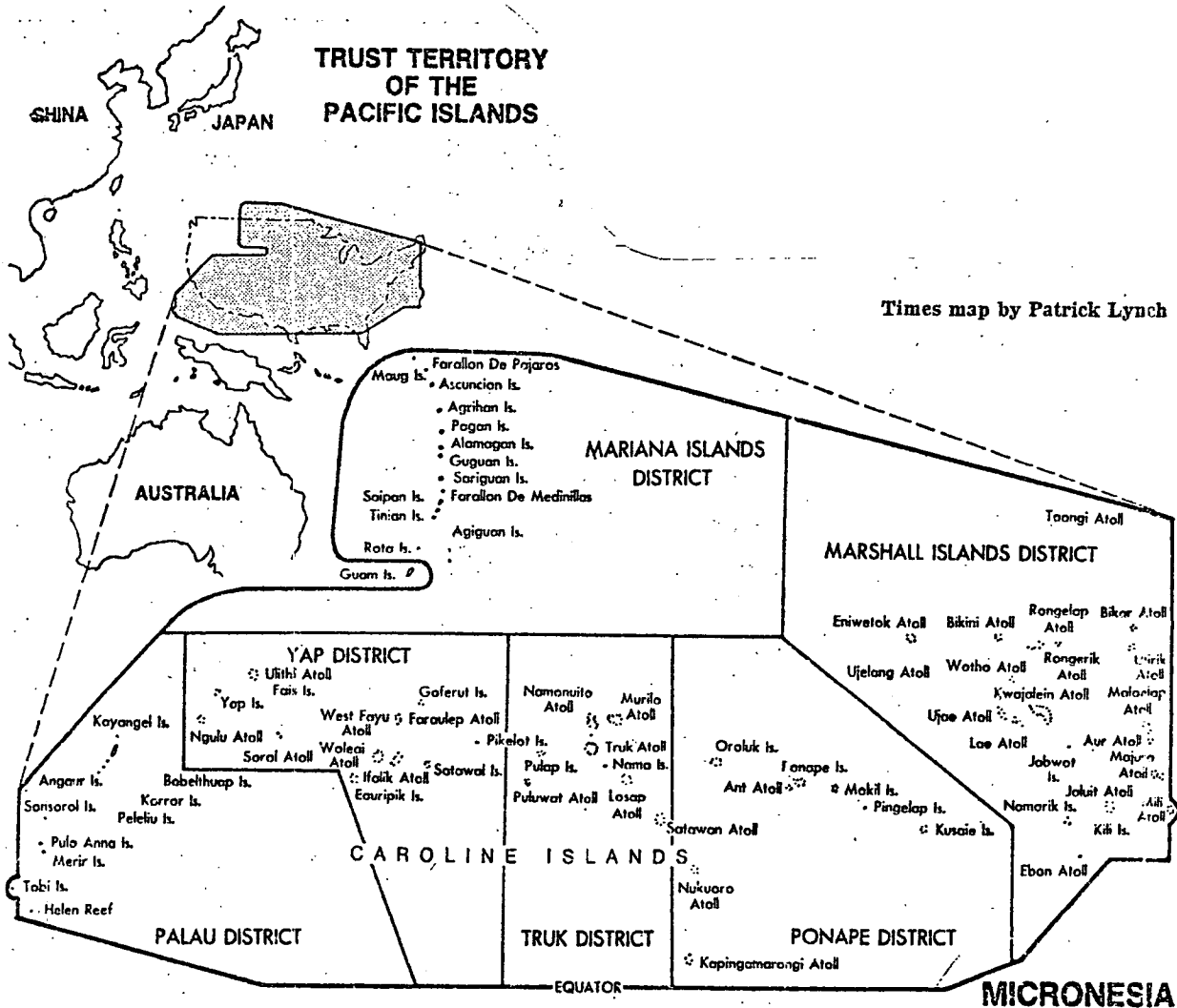
We were united in seeking a change of status and now—as we approach agreement on status—we are beginning to lose our unity.

Separatist tendencies flare up again in Micronesia. Already one district long-oriented towards close membership to the American territorial system has sought its own negotiations with the United States, and others consider separate negotiations for their own purposes.

We must concede that thus far in our history, it has always been the threatening presence of foreigners, of conqueror-liberators which has united us. Fear of what others might do to our islands has united us. And yet, perhaps Micronesians would do well to remember that no matter what status we achieve, our islands will always be small, our numbers will always be limited.

Micronesia will always be threatened and, for this reason, we must always remain united. The interests of the great powers swing back and forth like a pendulum over our islands; the pendulum swings from one side to another, moving away and returning, but never ceasing to hang above us, never forgetting our presence down below.

In the days and years to come there will be ample reason for our islands to remain together and there is hope, only hope, that in time we may find something more than fear to unite us.



Times map by Patrick Lynch