

Editorial.....Political Status, Tourism, High Crime Rate Two Of A Kind---Guam And V.I.?

Sometimes it must seem to the casual reader that we have an obsession with the Virgin Islands, its problems, goals, and life style.

But the fact is that Guam and the V.I. are so similar in so many ways that this is only natural. Our political status, for instance, is exactly the same, each being U.S. unincorporated territories with little prospects for statehood because of their small sizes, and populations, and because of their non-contiguous status. As the only two territories in this category, both were granted a moderate degree of self government in 1970, when both were allowed to elect their own governors. Two years ago both territories made yet another stride forward, when they were allowed a U.S. Representative in Congress.

Area-wise, and population-wise, Guam is slightly the larger of the two. Both are deeply involved in tourism, as befits tropical islands, not far from the land mass of heavily urban areas. In the Virgin Islands, however, tourism is the only economy, while on Guam, the military establishment still makes the largest input into the economy, while tourism is a fast-rising, but still distant second.

Both islands were long dominated by foreign powers. Both are caught-up in the increasingly difficult transition into modern, western civilization, which brings with it dramatic cultural changes, racial problems, crime problems, traffic problems, and pollution problems in exchange for creature comforts, TV, high mobility, and increased educational demands.

Guam and the Virgin Islands both have lived for many years under a largely benevolent United States rule that pretends to abhor colonialism, and certainly doesn't know how to handle it. As far as we can see, the U.S. has never had a policy on how to deal with its territories, or what their eventual future will be. There is nothing specifically stated in any constitution, or Congressional action that would imply that Guam or the Virgin Islands

would either become a state, or would be allowed to determine their own political future.

Last August, and practically every year before, the 24-nation United Nations Committee on Colonialism asked the United States to set up a program of political education to teach the Virgin Islanders (and presumably Guam) about alternatives to U.S. control. Their report said an "urgent need remains" for Virgin Islanders to discuss alternatives, because there has been "a lack of significant constitutional progress towards self-determination and independence."

A recent article, written by staff member Austin Scott, appeared in the Washington Post, detailing the "St. Croix Problems: Tourists and Crime," spelling out some of the unhappy circumstances of that normally pleasant place. We'd like to print some excerpts from that article—not to scare anybody into believing that a similar situation could occur here, but just because the parallels are so evident between the two territories.

"The problem is deep and worrisome, the kind everybody avoids mentioning until a visitor makes it clear he already knows, and then a flood of pent-up emotions begin to pour out.

"Why don't you guys write something nice about us for a change?" snapped a businessman whose investments were suffering.

"Mrs. Leona Watson, who, unlike the businessman, was born on this island, takes a ferocious pride in her position at the other end of the spectrum: 'Every time I hear of a hotel closing, a business closing, I feel happy. Because I feel we—the natives—will survive... I will survive on my land.'

"On the surface, the way the government and business people would prefer to talk about it, the problem is defined as rising crime and the publicity that has kept tourists away from this lush island in droves.

"The tourist business, which Gov. Melvin Evans calls a 'mainstay' of the economy is down as much as 70 percent in some areas. That makes some native-born Cruzans ecstatic, but revenues from tourism are down too, and the economy is hurting.

"There is evidence that the real roots of the problem lie in social dislocations caused by the 15 year economic boom which a growing tourist industry brought with it to St. Croix. The tourist boom began at the end of the 1950s, when St. Croix was still an agrarian island and a playground for a limited number of the rich. It more than doubled the population over the next decade, eventually tripled the school population and produced an economic growth rate of more than 20 percent in some years."

As writer Scott pointed out, the economic boom produced a lot of unexpected problems—many of them similar to those on Guam. Yet, there are strong differences. Native-born black Cruzans complained that "white-only" signs and other anti-black attitudes from the prevailing stateside culture were creeping onto their island. We don't believe that this is happening in Guam, or at least we've never seen any indications of it. In St. Croix,

Scott says, beaches and other once open areas such as land around new condominiums suddenly became off limits—in attitude, if not in law. Again, that doesn't seem to be happening here, and certainly every precaution should be taken to prevent such a disaster. The only "off-limits" signs on Guam are military—and in some cases, such as security, there are reasons for these.

In St. Croix other Caribbean islanders, known as "aliens," were imported by the thousands to fill the bottom-level tourist industry service jobs, as well as construction jobs, resulting in bitter feelings and a crisis in the already overloaded public school system. There is, of course, an interesting similarity on Guam, but because of the distances involved, and the costs, few "alien" families have been brought to Guam, so the school enrollment problem hasn't been quite as difficult.

The Virgin Islands school system, which also employs many "stateside" or "continental" teachers is in dire straits. They have announced there will be no money for paper, or pencils or books for the third quarter. Some schools are on triple sessions. The dropout rate in the island's only high school is placed at 20 percent by some, and around 50 percent by the principal. In the high school there are less than a dozen mainland children, with all the rest going to private schools. The St. Croix commissioner of labor reports that 65-70 percent of last year's graduates are still looking for their first jobs. Hundreds of students are refused admission each year because there is no space to put them. Youngsters reading as low as second-grade level have been graduated from 8th grade.

In the V.I., as in Guam, the cultural changes have come down hard on the youngsters, with the police blaming young people under 25 for 75 percent of the burglaries, robberies, and assaults. Families have complained that this generation is growing up unusually frustrated and rootless. The focus of the problem, writer Scott says, is that native-born Cruzans have become—within the one generation of the tourist industry boom—a minority on their own island. While the 1970 census asked no ethnic origin questions, estimates are that native-born black Cruzans make up no more than 28-30 percent of the 55,000 people on the multi-cultural island. Another source said 20-22 percent are native born Puerto Ricans, children of migration workers that came in the '20s to work on the sugar fields. Fully half the population results from the tourist boom—the 20 percent who own most of the tourist industry, primarily the "white continentals" from the mainland and the 30 percent "aliens" who make beds, serve food, tend bar and clean up. It is possible, Scott says, for the tourist to spend a week in St. Croix, talk to the black people who clean his room, serve his meals, fix his drinks, and wait on him in stores and still go away without having spoken to a native-born black Cruzan.

The impact in the V.I. is seen mostly in the children. "Psychologically the kids are chiefly reacting to it with violence," said Mario De Chabert, a politically active Cruzan attorney. "They don't understand the complacency of their parents and political leaders well enough to deal with it effectively, so naturally their next victim is monied whites."

In turn that violence, in such lurid examples as the Fountain Valley Golf Course murders in which seven people were shot to death, has all but ruined the St. Croix tourism, and thrown hundreds out of work. It has also had an adverse affect on governmental incomes, forcing cut-backs in services and budgets.

Scott also reports: "There are complaints of leniency in the court system on an island where native-born blacks tends to be interrelated and the judge is likely to know the family of whatever youths come before him.

"There are complaints of inefficiency and favoritism in the government, which has been the traditional employer of native-born black Cruzan, most of whom will not do the manual labor and service jobs that the tourist industry imports 'aliens' to do. The government employs roughly 70 percent of all working Cruzans, and by its own statistics—thought to be low—hires 21.0 percent of the entire Virgin Islands labor force of 40,000."

Scott reports that one man, Mario Moorhead, has founded a black awareness organization on St. Croix in 1969, and has now founded a new political party, the United People's Party. Its goal is independence from the United States and Cruzan control of the island's economy, as well as its politics. How close it may come to capturing the spirit of the things Cruzans are worried about won't be clear until the fall elections. The party intends to put up candidates for governor and a number of seats in the 15 member Senate.

Surely, there are as many dissimilarities on Guam as compared to the V.I. as there are similarities, but it seems to us that there are some lessons to be learned here. For one thing, it seems evident that the Guamanian, like the Cruzan, is far too governmental oriented. It seems imperative that we develop more of the local people into business, and especially tourism careers, so that this vital industry doesn't always remain in "outside" hands. There is no way, obviously, that you can tell a hold-up man to cool it, because this doesn't look good for the tourists. But it is plain that a high rate of crime does adversely affect tourism, and thus, our crime prevention and detection systems need upgrading.

Finally, it is becoming increasingly plain that this political void of unincorporated status is having a dismal effect upon the people of the Virgin Islands and Guam. It seems that the time is coming where the United States is going to have to make some hard choices, and more important, the people of the two territories are going to have to make choices as well. JCM.