

autograph

COMMENTS MADE BY SIR PETER BUCK AT A MEETING WITH THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE

PEARL HARBOR, 6 DECEMBER 1949.

Though a British subject, I have been associated with research work into the manners and customs of native races of the Pacific for over twenty years with the Bishop Museum and for over twenty years before that in New Zealand as Medical Officer of Health and later Director of Maori Hygiene in the Department of Health.

The first reaction of the civilized races towards the peoples of the Pacific was to exploit them and their islands for what material benefits they could get. Now the pendulum has swung to the opposite extreme and the various governments having interests in the Pacific are primarily concerned about the physical and material welfare of the natives living in their various spheres of influence. There is a danger that we may try to do too much before the people can understand our changed attitude. In the early days of contact, the native had to study the white man but now at this late stage it is the accepted policy to study the native in order to administer native affairs more smoothly.

It was the knowledge that the United States would have to capture the islands of Micronesia from the Japanese that led to the establishment of special schools with courses in anthropology and government to prepare students to take up positions in administering native races. I wish to pay a tribute to the United States Navy for its wholehearted support of the schools by sending officers of various grades to be indoctrinated by courses which would be of service when the time came.

When Micronesia was captured, the U. S. Navy was left to administer the area. It was natural because the Navy had played the principal part in taking the islands and they had the ships and planes for transport and communication as well as medical service which could serve the native population in cases of need. There had to be an armed force in occupation until matters settled down.

In 1946 a Conference was held in Washington under the auspices of the National Research Council to consider some scheme for promoting scientific research work in the Micronesian area. As a result, the Pacific Science Board was formed. The Navy was anxious to have research work conducted in the area under its administration, but a scientific agency was needed to screen the various projects that might be offered. The need was met by the Pacific Science Board.

The Navy, fully realizing the value of a knowledge of native manners and customs to its administrative officers, proposed that research in the Pacific Islands should first be directed towards a study of the native inhabitants of the various island groups in Micronesia. With the advisory assistance of the Pacific Science Board a scheme was drawn up and termed the Coordinated Investigation of Micronesian Anthropology, more briefly known as CIMA.

The Navy from its surplus stores at Pearl Harbor supplied scientific equipment in the form of cameras, wire recording implements, etc., to the Honolulu Committee of the Pacific Science Board and these were kept at the Bishop Museum together with full supplies of office equipment, including desks, file cabinets, typewriters, etc., for the use of scientists passing through to or from the field.

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Speaking as a field anthropologist of some experience, I would point out that the CIMANA project commencing in 1947 was the largest and best organized scientific investigation of native culture ever launched by any country at any time. No less than 42 trained anthropologists, geographers and linguists from 21 Universities and Museums took part. The first contingent of 26 was flown from the mainland to Honolulu by the Navy. After a week's indoctrination in Honolulu and being fitted up with scientific instruments supplied by the Navy, they were flown to Guam by the Navy.

At Guam, the scientists were fitted up with clothing, and field equipment of various kinds from Navy surplus stores. They were then flown by plane or conveyed by surface craft to the various island groups they were to study. The Navy also supplied provisions on the Navy scale to the various groups for the length of time they proposed to remain.

When the various parties finished their field work, transport back to the mainland was provided by the Navy. The Navy also gave grants-in-aid to provide for provisions in the field, cost of interpreters and any native assistants, and aid in preparing final reports of the work done in the field. All final reports were submitted to the Pacific Science Board and through the Board to the Navy. The Navy was thus provided with expert reports on the native culture of the whole area which had to be administered.

I have mentioned the part taken by the Navy in the CIMANA project somewhat in detail, to show how everything was done to help the scientists to devote their full time to the study of the people. No Government department in the United States or any other country could have accomplished what the United States Navy did. They had the ships, planes, equipment, food, and, above all, the desire to accomplish.

Now that so many preliminary steps have been taken, I can only say from my own experience, make haste slowly. In our haste to benefit our less advanced neighbors we may try to give them more than they can assimilate at the beginning. It took the native peoples centuries to arrive at a balance in which they are perfectly happy. We should be careful not to disturb that balance unduly lest we endow them with some of the troubles which exist in our own civilization.

In reply to Representative Crawford:- I know that Civil Government should not be the permanent duty of the Navy, but in this Trust Territory of a vast expanse of ocean with widely separated groups of islands, the Navy has had better means of administration than any other Department. However, change should be slow and gradual until a new administration has had time to prepare for its new duties.

In reply to Delegate Farrington:- I think the native people living under American jurisdiction in American Samoa and Guam should be granted American citizenship.

In reply to Representative Crawford:- I am in favor of the Samoans of Eastern and Western Samoa being combined under one administration. I do not see how the granting of American citizenship to the people of American Samoa would prevent the future joining of the two Samoas under one administration. The amalgamation is such a long view prospect, that I do not see why American citizenship should be indefinitely postponed. I do not think that the Samoans will be ready to administer their own affairs as an independent country for years to come. The relationship with other countries is too complicated for them to handle without aid from America or Great Britain.