

CHAPTER 2

POPULATION SIZE

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*“Can we limit the size
of our population to its
current level?”*

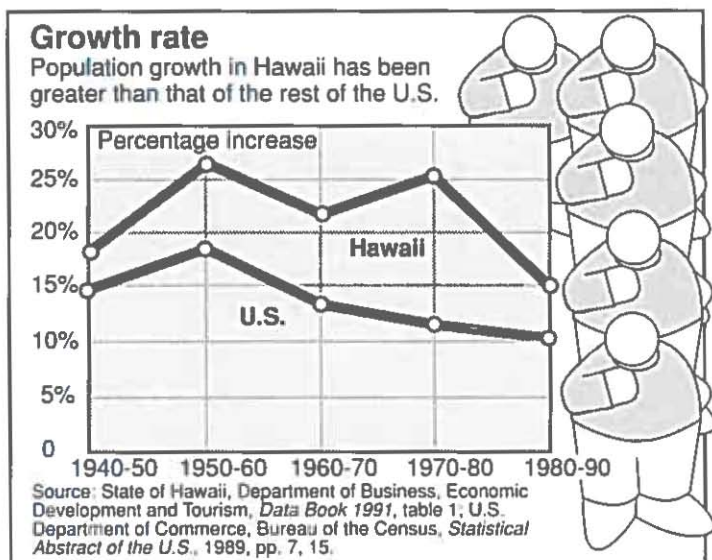
On April 1, 1990, the date of the last census, 1,108,229 people were counted in Hawaii. This included 115,268 members of the armed forces and their dependents. It did not include tourists. The total was almost 44 percent higher than a generation earlier in 1970. That's a lot of people. But before we can reasonably conclude it is “too many,” we have to determine the optimum population for the state.

About 20 years ago, Earl Babbie, a professor of sociology at the University of Hawaii, published “The Maximillion Report.” In it Babbie looked at such dimensions of “quality of life” as ecological balance, health and safety, human freedom and dignity, cultural variety, economic variety, self-sufficiency and natural beauty. He then examined the effects on these areas of trends in personal income, government costs, crime rates, number of automobiles, agricultural self-sufficiency and recreation. He found evidence of a steady decline in the quality of life in Hawaii.

“Optimum” population. At the end of his booklet, Babbie concluded, “In many respects, we seem to have already exceeded our

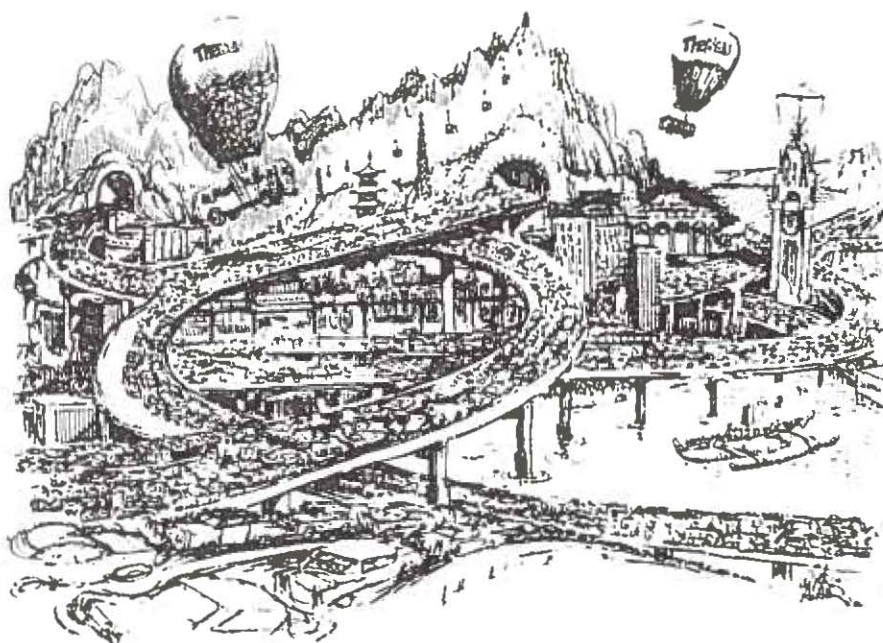
optimum population." He proposed that the state immediately establish a population ceiling of one million and work to stay within that limit. Hence the term, maximillion.

Of course the goal was not established, and the million mark is history. If Babbie were writing today, he would probably come to the same conclusion he came to 20 years ago: population growth has been an important factor in the decline of the quality of life in Hawaii.



Not everyone agreed with Babbie's conclusions then, and not everyone would agree now. Certain industries and interests, such as construction, depend on continual population growth. More generally, population growth is often seen as a sign of economic and social well-being. "Stagnant" is usually used to describe places where the population is no longer growing.

As Babbie noted, "every reader will agree that there is *some* finite limit to the population which these islands can support with a reasonable quality



of life." Regardless of what one's chosen optimum is, then, at some point population growth must be stopped or quality of life will plummet.

So the answer to the question, "Are there too many people in Hawaii?" is, "It depends." But if growth continues, ultimately everyone must answer "Yes!"

Why population grows. Only two factors can possibly affect population growth: natural increase (the difference between the number of births and the number of deaths) and net migration (the difference between the number of migrants to and from the state).

Between 1970 and 1980, there were roughly 83,000 more births than deaths in the civilian population. Between 1980 and 1990, the difference dropped slightly to about 79,000. In the first of these two decades, natural increase accounted for approximately 44 percent of total civilian growth of 190,000. In the more recent decade, natural increase, while lower, accounted for almost 53 percent of our 149,000 civilian growth.

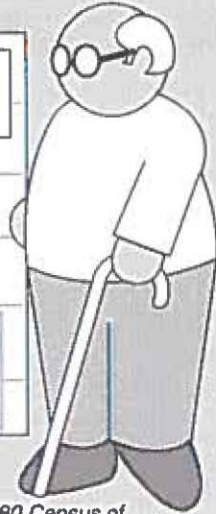
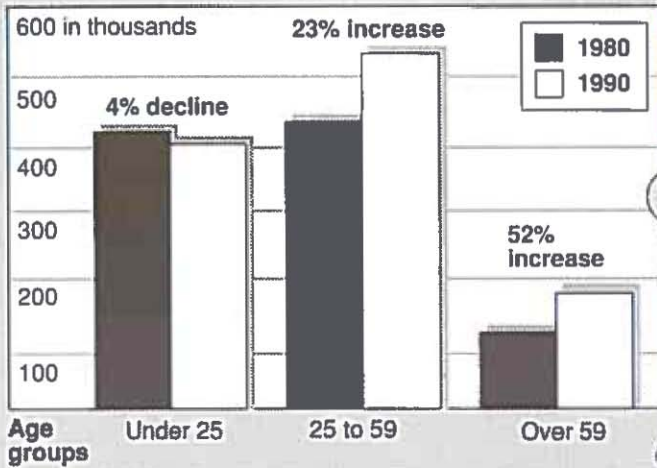
Net civilian migration between 1970 and 1980 was approximately 106,000; between 1980 and 1990 it was roughly 71,000. In the first

decade, this amounted to almost 56 percent of total civilian growth, while in the second it was almost 48 percent.

The above figures show that population growth in recent decades has been fueled by both natural increase and net migration. Does this mean that, if we want to slow growth, we can “attack” on either or both fronts? Surprisingly, no.

Growing old

Hawaii's population continues to get older. The number of young people in Hawaii actually declined in the 1980s.



Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *1980 Census of Population, General Population Characteristics, Hawaii, PC80-1-b13* (July 1982), Released CB91-133 (April 22, 1991).

The surplus of births over deaths, although real, is misleading. Civilian women in Hawaii have been having children at a rate that, if continued, would result in a near balance of births and deaths. Births have outnumbered deaths because Hawaii still has a relatively young population, with a high proportion in the child-bearing ages. If current civilian fertility rates continue indefinitely (and if the population continues to “age”), natural increase will contribute less and less to Hawaii's growth.

Migration is main source. This would leave net migration as the most important source of population growth. The current balance is

positive, but a number of people do leave the state (some of them undoubtedly because of the declining quality of life). In 1987 and 1988, for example, approximately 2.5 percent of the civilian population thought there was a good chance or almost a certainty of living elsewhere within one year.

Out-migration receives relatively little notice, however; attention usually focuses on the migrants from the Mainland ("in-migrants") and from abroad ("immigrants"). Immigrants who gave Hawaii as their intended residence for the five years 1986-1990 totaled more than 36,000, roughly half of the ten-year total net migration. Does this mean that our net migration is due to immigrants? No. Immigrants are a notoriously mobile group, and undoubtedly many moved on to the Mainland (or returned home), ultimately contributing nothing to net migration.

Other figures give us a different picture of the balance of immigrants and in-migrants. Data from U.S. Government surveys for the period 1981-1989 show that, of people living in Hawaii who had lived elsewhere one year earlier, usually about 80 percent had been in another state, only 20 percent in a different country. Almost exactly the same figures were obtained in 1985 about residence five years earlier. It thus appears that our migrants (the people here now who weren't here before) are predominantly from the Mainland.

These figures indicate that net migration was lower during the 1980s than the 1970s. Nevertheless, there is still substantial net migration to the state. If it continues, this will be the major factor in future population growth. This conclusion is bolstered when we consider that migrants often are young adults. Continued net migration might retard the "aging" of the population and thus keep the natural increase well above zero, in spite of relatively low fertility per woman.

Limit size? To limit the size of our population, we would have to affect natural increase or net migration. To affect natural increase, we would have to affect mortality or fertility. No one is about to suggest increasing mortality, so that leaves lowering fertility. But we have already seen that fertility in Hawaii is just about at the proverbial two-child-family "replacement" level and is unlikely to fall much.

Many people think we should limit migration into the state. This means either limiting in-migration from the Mainland, or limiting immigration from abroad, or both. It turns out that "we" (the state

government) are pretty helpless when it comes to limiting migration of either kind, at least legally.

The U.S. Constitution guarantees the right to move freely among the states. It does not seem likely that any plea that Hawaii is a special case would receive much of a hearing. Similarly, the state cannot impose any restrictions on new in-migrants; a policy of not hiring newcomers in state jobs was declared unconstitutional 20 years ago.

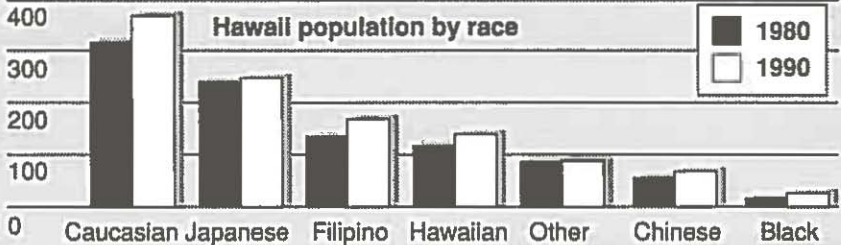
We can't restrict immigration, either. In the nineteenth century the states were allowed different immigration rules, but the federal government has long since preempted the field. Hawaii can say nothing about the number of immigrants entering the state.

What about the "poor, unskilled aliens" who seem to dominate the immigrant flow to Hawaii? Why don't we keep them out? Well, we can't keep out any single class of immigrants anymore than we can keep out immigrants in general: it's a federal issue. True, the new (1991) U.S. immigration law places more emphasis on qualifications than did the preceding law, so that the mix of occupations and levels of training may change. On the other hand, most immigrants since 1965 have come to the United States under family reunification provisions of the law, and this promises to remain true. Besides, the "poor, unskilled aliens" provide much of the cheap labor for Hawaii's important tourist industry.

People move to Hawaii because of its attractions. Many of these attractions are the same ones that attract tourists. If the quality of life in these islands declines because of, among other things, population growth and its effects, the consequences might be fewer migrants and fewer tourists. At some point we might reach a balance with no net migration and essentially zero natural increase. However, if this is accomplished "naturally," Hawaii might be a far less pleasant place in which to live. And, as we have seen, it is not likely that we can reach zero growth "unnaturally" (through legislation), because our hands are tied. We are faced with the same dilemma that Babbie faced two decades ago, only with a much larger population.

Hawaii's mixed plate

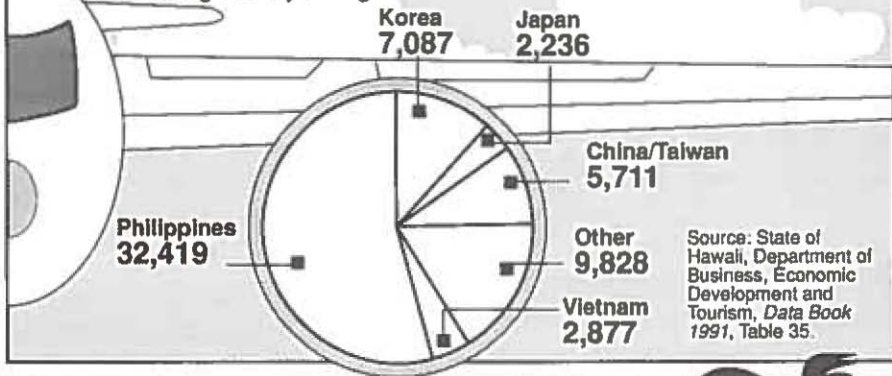
While Caucasians represent the single largest ethnic group in Hawaii, no one group is in the majority.



Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *1980 Census of Population, General Population Characteristics, Hawaii PC80-1-b13* (July 1982), tables 15 and 16; Release CB91-42 (February 1991) and Summary Tape File 1A.

Coming to Hawaii 1983-1990

Most foreign immigrants to Hawaii came from Asia with the Philippines being the leading country of origin.

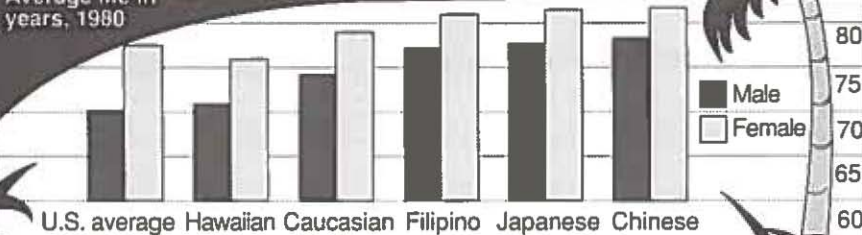


Source: State of Hawaii, Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism, *Data Book 1991*, Table 35.

Living longer

Life expectancies in Hawaii are relatively high.

Average life in years, 1980



U.S. average Hawaiian Caucasian Filipino Japanese Chinese

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the U.S., 1989*, table 108; Gardner, Robert W., *Life Tables by Ethnic Group for Hawaii, 1980*, Hawaii State Department of Health, R+S Report, March 1984.

