

Respecting the Host Culture: Why Are Guests' Values More Important?

[Native Hawaiians should not have to explain their religion or articulate why they view Mauna Kea as sacred. That which is most sacred is often beyond articulation] [From Civil Beat Newsmagazine "Connections"] June 11, 2015

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The most important two words of Gov. David Ige's speech of May 27 on Mauna Kea were the words "host culture."

"I believe our core values need to be: 1. The importance of respecting our host culture," the governor said, in part.

How does one respect a "host culture?" Well, what is a "host?" A host is the family or group that gives a party, or the bride and groom who host a reception, or any organization, reunion class, gang of workers that hosts a celebration. The host usually provides the place, food and drink, entertainment and an atmosphere of friendship and good times.

But, the guests, too, have responsibilities. Sometimes they bring gifts, such as at wedding,. Often they contribute food and drink. But always they bring the appropriate attitude — one of respect, gratitude and friendship. Guests do not make up their own rules. They abide by the general outline provided by the host. If there is to be no diving in the pool, such a rule a rule is respected.

By "host culture," Gov. Ige was clearly referring to Native Hawaiians, their values, their culture and their ways of life. He said it must be respected. So, how do you respect a "host culture?"

As guests, you do not gather and plot to proclaim the host's residence to be your house. Second, you do not call in the police to enforce your claim to title to the premises. Third, you do not conspire with outsiders to write your own deed to the property. Fourth, as guests, you do, at some point in time, leave. You do not stay forever. It is not your house.

That is just the basics. Gov. Ige should know. He is of Okinawan ancestry. Okinawa was once its own kingdom, separate and apart from Japan. It was invaded by Satsuma forces in 1607 and finally annexed by Japan in the middle of the 19th century. Today, the United States military

continues to occupy Okinawa and faces massive Okinawan protests seeking to block the United States' takeover of Oura Bay, a sacred site to Okinawans. Ige met with the mayor of Okinawa last week. The mayor was on his way to Washington to plead for relief from American occupation of Oura Bay. Did they not discuss both Mauna Kea and Oura Bay? Did David Ige not see the similarities?

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So, Ige should certainly understand. He should understand that when one is a guest in an Okinawa house and has brought flowers for the host, if there is no vase for the flowers, one doesn't turn to the urn containing Uncle Masaki's ashes and say to the host, "Let's borrow the urn for the flowers, just for now, we can replace the ashes later." That would horrify the host. Could he or she explain why Uncle Masaki's ashes are sacred? Possibly, but probably not. Desecration is a case of "I know it when I see it."

That which is most sacred is often beyond articulation. It just "is." The sacred is where explanation stops. Centuries of common values that bond a community become the guiding rule. Jews do not use the real name of God in their services. One would never build on the western wall in Jerusalem. One would not build on the Arizona memorial or put a condo on Punchbowl cemetery. Why not? Because it cannot be explained. Respect of elders is universal. It needs no explanation. Mauna Kea is an elder.

The East and the West have different conceptions of nature. To the East, the earth, or here in Hawaii, the "aina," is sacred — it is not made sacred by a bold sacrifice of human life. In the West, "the earthly realm" is "dirt" (See Carlton Ching) that is "profane," until it is made sacred by human deed — like bold and noble sacrifice. In Japan, Fuji San (not "Mount Fuji," but rather "Mr. Fuji") is sacred as is. Indeed, mountains themselves are sort of sacred — Japan has a "mountain creed."

To Native Hawaiians, Mauna Kea is a central part of the Kumulipo, the Creation Chant of Native Hawaiians. America has its Creation Chant. It is called the "Constitution." It defines our values and behavior. The Constitution is heavily guarded at the National Archives. But I also have one in my office. As Justice Hugo Black stated:

"The United States is a born of and only of the Constitution."

America's creation was its Constitution. America is thus very young —not three centuries old. There are many basic values that cannot be articulated in the American creed, hence the judicial notion of "I know it when I see it," and "Due process is the process that is due." The Native Hawaiian creation chant is thousands of years old. Mauna Kea is central to that creation chant. One does not disprove its spiritual importance by showing Hawaiians do not regularly visit the mountain, or that there are sporadic shrines on the mountain.

One never laughs when a fundamental value cannot be explained. One does not laugh when a Supreme Court Justice says, "Due process is the process that is due." No explanation need be

given for taking one's hat off in church. These are the culmination of community values over generations — they cannot be articulated because language cannot go where our fundamental core values reside.

It is thus more than “rude” to demand Native Hawaiians explain their religion. The “aina” and Mauna Kea are sacred to Hawaiians. Action and attitude show it is sacred. Nobody has to prove Arlington, Ground Zero or Calvary are sacred to the West — these are the hushed places of enormous sacrifice. In the West, places where the brave have given their lives are sacred. Arizona monument? No more needs to be said.

In this controversy over Mauna Kea we are not acknowledging two things. First, we fail to take note, as the governor pointed out, that Native Hawaiians are the host culture. Second, guests must respect the rules of the host. This has been forgotten. Thus, we have defined this controversy as one where the values of the host are less than the values of the guest.

The Case for Naming Mauna Kea ‘Protected’

There is one man who could step in and resolve this. His name is Barack Obama. He grew up in the “host” culture. He says the values of Hawaii and Hawaiians formed his early personality. With a stroke of his pen, he could declare Mauna Kea protected, as did George Bush for Papahānaumokuākea under the Antiquities Act of 1906. (However, President Obama should not make the mistakes made at Papahānaumokuākea — such as extreme limitations on access which exclude the host culture.) The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument was established by Presidential Proclamation 8031 on June 15, 2006 under the authority of the Antiquities Act (16 U.S.C. 431-433). President Obama could do the same for Mauna Kea.

Today, Papahānaumokuākea has reached the highest designation of protection and sanctity in the world. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Mauna Loa and Kilauea are also UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Indeed, Mauna Loa and Kilauea were made National Parks in 1916. Why did the United States leave out Mauna Kea? Mauna Kea is as sacred as Mauna Loa and Kilauea. Wakea and Papahānaumokuākea created the ruling chiefs and the islands of Hawaii, Maui and Kauai. Why doesn't Mauna Kea deserve the same lofty legal protections?

Mauna Kea should be on the UNESCO world heritage sites —like Fuji San. Fuji San is not subject to attack under the minimal protection of the rules applicable to a state conservation district. Those protecting Fuji San do not have the same burden of proof foisted on the protectors of Mauna Kea to show that Mauna Kea is presently “used” and thus “sacred” in a western sense.

Conservation districts do not protect; they are the refuge of exceptions, exceptions arranged by political pull to allow development of agricultural lands and the mansions of “gentlemen farmers.”

Why is the standard for the protection of Mauna Kea set so low — a standard written by the guests — when Mauna Kea is so sacred to the host culture?

Barack Obama can do one significant thing for Native Hawaiians — and it is not to declare federal recognition as to Native Hawaiians or changing the Hawaiian Home Commission Rules. Our president, born in Hawaii, could show his knowledge appreciation, and learning acquired from his birthplace by acknowledging that Mauna Kea is one of the most sacred sites of the Hawaiian “village” that raised him and taught him the one of the most important values in life — that of aloha aina.