

Differences, Connections, and the Colonial Carousel in Micronesian History

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In retrospect, the 1975 Micronesian Constitutional Convention (ConCon) seems almost an impossibility, given the degree of opposition among the various island groups that came together to draft a constitution for the islands of what was then the United States Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (Meller 1985). And while only the peoples of the islands that went on to form the Federated States of Micronesia ultimately ratified the constitution drafted at that first ConCon, it was the constitutional process itself that shaped all the subsequent Micronesian political status negotiations with the United States. The very existence of that first constitution made it clear to the world that the Micronesians were ready to assume self-government. Many forces in the islands' immediate colonial history had conspired to nearly derail the 1975 ConCon; in this paper I hope to demonstrate that it was the intersection of long-term sociopolitical patterns in Micronesian life with the broader sweep of the islands' colonial history *in toto* that enabled the Micronesians to successfully draft a constitution, despite the United States' resolute opposition to Micronesian autonomy and independence.

Before I begin, however, I want to briefly explain my interest in U.S. colonial rule in Micronesia, which is what first brought me to the islands. I was sent to fight in Vietnam when I was a teenaged boy. I saw a good deal of combat and, given my impressionable age at the time, the war had a very powerful impact on me. My decision to become an anthropologist had much to do with that experience, and my ultimate choice of Micronesia as the site of my doctoral research (I had done fieldwork with North American Indians, and in Polynesia and Central America before I settled on Micronesia) was very much the result of my desire to study American colonialism—and to oppose it—as a means of atoning for the intense guilt I felt for having participated in that ill-starred war. My interest in the Micronesian ConCon, then, was not simply academic—I was deeply concerned about how the Trust Territory (TT) would be terminated. More than that, I had just completed a long period of ethnographic work on Pohnpei when I attended the 1975 ConCon and I was deeply immersed in Pohnpeians' concerns about how they were going to reclaim their autonomy from the U.S. I saw the ConCon both through American eyes (though in the sense of a quite total inversion of my government's outlook) and through Pohnpeian eyes, with all the colonial contradictions they had experienced in the preceding decades. These are the perspectives that shape this account.

Differences and Connections in Micronesian Culture History

It is a paradox of area studies, at least the sort that ethnologists and ethnographers undertake, that we focus simultaneously on similarities *and* differences, and grapple with what psychologists and cognitive scientists call the “figure-ground” class of optical illusions.¹ Which is it that first draws our attention and establishes the terms of our perception, the underlying

background—the similarities—or the overlying figure—the differences? And such a quandary is hardly peculiar to scholarship. In Micronesia, at least, people are deeply invested in both distinguishing themselves from their neighbors and, when need arises, emphasizing their similarities and close relations with them. Without elaborating on this at any length (I have done so in Petersen 2009), let me simply make the following points:

The islands of Palau, the Marianas, the Central and Eastern Carolines, the Marshalls, Kiribati, and Nauru appear to have originally been settled from multiple points. Much debate remains about just where these sources lie. While there is general agreement among linguists that the Palauan and Chamorro languages have distinct origins in the west, debate continues over just where in the west those origins lie—Taiwan, the Philippines, or Indonesia. Yap was settled from elsewhere, possibly, according to Ross (1996), from the vicinity of the Admiralty Islands off New Guinea's northeast coast. The remainder of the islands, whose inhabitants speak languages descended from Proto-Nuclear Micronesian, appear to have their immediate origins in the Southeast Solomons, perhaps in Te Motu province there.

The ancestors of all the islands' populations can be traced back to Austronesian roots. The occupations of the western groups probably occurred one to two thousand years earlier than the initial settlement of the eastern islands. The eastern high islands (Chuuk, Pohnpei, Kosrae) appear to have been first occupied nearly simultaneously with one another at the tail end of the first millennium BCE. Many of the atolls were still awash at that time and *may* not have been habitable until some time later.

All the islands lie within a relatively narrow range of latitude and could be reached by vessels sailing either before the prevailing winds or along with the short seasonal reversal in wind patterns. Archaeological evidence suggests that there was interaction among the islands from the outset of settlement, but this interaction increased exponentially in the second millennium CE. The entire area is characterized by much the same humid tropical climate, though there are significant rainfall differences, affected by latitude (islands on the northern and southern margins receive significantly less rain) and by topography (orographic rainfall makes the high islands much wetter than the atolls); it is also the case that the western islands are influenced by the continental monsoon regime and undergo more marked seasonal weather changes than those to the east. Typhoons continually threaten all the islands, but the atolls in general are more susceptible and the western islands are more frequently struck.

Islanders in the west rely more on taros as their staple crop; islanders in the east rely more on breadfruit. Variations in rainfall, however, cause significant inflections on these patterns, in both the east and the west.

For reasons I believe are closely tied to environmental conditions, in the most inclusive sense, this intertwining of differences and similarities has brought about a striking degree of sociocultural similarity across the region. There are of course local differences due to both natural and historical exigencies, but in a first approximation I am prepared to argue that there is in essence a single predominant pattern of social organization extending across all of Micronesia. This is the dispersed matrilineal clan. In briefest summary, every Micronesian is born into a matrilineage that is part of a larger clan. Each clan is composed of multiple lineages and at least some of these lineages are dispersed among multiple communities and islands. Every island and community has lineages from multiple clans residing in it.

In times of tribulation and environmental exigency individuals, families, households, and lineages are able to remove themselves from their homes, their lands, their communities, and often their islands, travel to distant communities and islands, and seek out and receive succor, hospitality, and temporary residence with fellow clan mates as a matter of right (cf Diaz; and Rauchholz in this volume). They do not have to make war, nor do they have to throw themselves at the mercy of others; they simply move in with relatives. Those who host visiting relatives under these circumstances understand that they will in turn be provided reciprocal hospitality when a typhoon or other disaster strikes them, as one is sure to do in the not-too-distant future.

Micronesians' ties to their land are as profound as they are to their clans. On both Chuuk and Yap there exist complex ideological notions of the land itself moving among social groups, but in the end, land physically does not move; through these fluid ties people can be rooted to several different places. And they are closely tied to all their relatives in those places—that is, they are tied both to family in their home communities and to family in distant communities. It is in the nature of this system that individuals have rights to reside and to farm in other places, but these rights are not quite the same as those of the people who live there, and migrants tend to be drawn back to from whence they came. People recognize that however closely they are bound to relatives in other communities, there are differences between them, and these differences are necessary for the system to work as it does.

All these linkages notwithstanding, people do make war and invade other communities, if not always in reality then certainly in the consciousness of myth, history, legend, and folktales. And given the vast distances between islands and a time scale of two thousand years, along with different points of origin, even small differences can grow into what appear to be substantial linguistic and cultural distinctions. The inhabitants of adjacent islands are viewed as being somewhat different, and possibly inferior or superior; people from more distant islands are seen as genuinely different. Pohnpeians say “Sohte pel en nan madau”; that is, clan-based incest taboos do not apply with the same force across the seas. They believe that while ties that bind exist, they are greatly diminished when the distinctions of distance and culture intervene.

Micronesians are voyaging peoples and across the breadth of precontact Micronesia, people interacted with each other. They sometimes invaded or fought with one another, but nearly always they depended on one another. To exist as a Micronesian required that there be other, different Micronesians.

Colonial Contexts

There was probably never a time when Micronesia was entirely isolated from Asia. Palauans used ceramic beads as a form of currency, and these came primarily from the Moluccas. Mythohistorical accounts and archaeology provide evidence of occasional visits from Chinese, Japanese, and perhaps other Asian vessels, fisherfolk, traders, perhaps even explorers. Long-distance voyagers from the central Caroline atolls were sometimes carried by the trade winds to the Philippines, where they would spend lengthy periods recuperating before re-outfitting themselves to return home; these voyages commonly included stops in Palau. After the Spanish established a port in Guam for galleons on the Manila-Acapulco route in the 1660s and then conquered all the Marianas, there were attempts to evangelize atolls in the Carolines as well as

canoe expeditions to the Marianas by Carolinians seeking iron and other exotic items. Several Spanish ships passed near Pohnpei and other islands, and possibly stopped briefly, during the 1500s. It is difficult to distinguish precisely, then, between pre- and post-contact periods. While the Marianas were colonized, exploited, and nearly depopulated by the Spanish in the 17th and 18th centuries, however, it was not until the 19th century that most islands experienced regular interaction with foreigners, initially traders and whalers. Some of these interactions were ephemeral, while others were catastrophic. Islands with ample fresh water and food supplies soon hosted resident beachcomber populations. Americans from the same Boston Congregational mission that evangelized Hawaii came to the Marshalls and eastern Carolines in the 1850s, and native Micronesian missionaries soon began proselytizing further west. While these missions cannot be classified as full-scale colonization efforts, they were nonetheless part and parcel of the colonizing process. The Boston missionaries sought to impose social, cultural, legal, economic, and political as well as religious regimes in the islands. Their missionary society at home lobbied the U.S. government for gunboat diplomacy to further enlarge the American presence in the eastern islands and hoped thereby to promote interest in developing more formal ties with the United States.

In the 1880s, as informal American influence was peaking, Spain and Germany began disputing over rights of access to the region. The Spanish government had long considered all the Carolines to be integral to the maintenance of their Guam colony, which was at this time still deemed a strategic outpost of the Philippines, but they had in fact ignored the Carolines for centuries. In the years since unification under the Wilhelmine Reich, on the other hand, Germany had begun its self-conscious pursuit of world power status by cobbling together a colonial empire out of the globe's last few vestiges of uncolonized territory. The Carolines and the Marshalls appeared available and German traders had been gradually filtering into the area, establishing plantations, trade depots, and shipping lines. When the Germans raised their flag on several of the Carolines in 1886, the Spanish crown immediately protested. A complex diplomatic dance, which reflected aspects of domestic European politics at least as much as the politics of empire, led to a papal decree establishing Spanish sovereignty in the Carolines, while granting the Germans trading rights. The Marshalls became a German imperial colony.

Spain was in fact much more concerned about American mission influence than German economic activity (its suspicions were certainly confirmed in light of the U.S. invasion of Manila a decade later). Tensions and disputes quickly escalated into open confrontation on Pohnpei, where several communities played Spanish Catholic missionaries, allied with the governor, against the well-established American Congregational mission and its local congregations. The 1890s saw a series of uprisings, ostensibly focused on opposition to road building. Some of these reached the level of pitched battles between Pohnpeians and Spain's mostly-Filipino troops. This reached its crescendo in the "war" (as Pohnpeians call it) at Awak, a large community which had converted to Catholicism and then found itself engaged in an escalating dispute with portions of the paramount chiefdom, U, of which it was a part. Spanish troops fought beside Awak's warriors against their neighbors and a Spanish gunboat occupied Awak's bay. The American conquest of Manila thoroughly confused the Spanish colonial government's situation on Pohnpei, however, and tempers cooled for a time.

Following Spain's surrender of the Philippines to the United States as war booty, the Germans purchased the remainder of Micronesia. While the U.S. avidly sought Manila Bay as a harbor, it was less immediately interested in the remainder of the Philippines. Following intense debate, the Americans finally annexed the entire Philippine archipelago, but the remainder of Spain's island holdings in Micronesia entailed even lengthier consideration. The U.S. Navy lobbied in favor of taking all of Micronesia, given its strategic location between the two new colonial holdings in the Philippines and Hawaii, but in the end only Guam, which the Navy had occupied at the outset of the Spanish-American War, was made an American possession.

The Germans, still bent on seizing their place in the sun, then purchased the remainder of the Micronesian islands and pursued an economic development program that included coconut planting on a much larger scale than traditional Micronesian land tenure patterns could possibly support. The German colonial era's greatest impact probably lay in efforts to radically transform Micronesian land ownership and inheritance, as a means of converting the islanders into peasant smallholders. Road building, a fundamental part of developing both the administrative and economic infrastructure, led once again to rebellion on Pohnpei.

It was only a decade after the indecisive end of conflict with the Spanish when the Sokehs chiefdom rose up in rebellion against the Germans. And while road-building was the immediate focus of the dispute that led to bloodshed, again a key facet of the conflict had to do with German fears about American influence. Many in the German administration were certain that Protestant missionary influence lay behind the uprising. Following the slaying of the German governor, a siege, a route, and skirmishing through the jungles, the entire population of Sokehs was exiled, first to Yap and then to Palau, and was kept from returning home until after the Germans had departed Micronesia.

And then, almost like clockwork, larger-scale forces once again intervened. This time it was the outbreak of World War One. Japan immediately occupied German colonial possessions north of the equator, while Australians took those to the south. Japan had for some time been sending superannuated samurai, displaced by the Meiji Restoration, to Micronesia, where several established families and small-scale trading operations. The islands, known in Japanese as *Nan'Yo*, were viewed as necessary stepping-stones in the implementation of Japan's *Nanshin-ron*, or Southern Expansion Doctrine. While the Spanish barely paid attention to their Micronesian holdings, and the Germans worked slowly and methodically, the Japanese immediately launched what were, at least by Micronesian standards, large-scale immigration and development programs. The terms of Japan's League of Nations Mandate precluded fortification of the islands, but the vast scale of the occupation had the effect of quickly marginalizing the islanders themselves. Although there was some intermarriage with local Micronesians, and a few young people found responsible jobs in the Japanese administration, most Micronesians who lived under Japanese rule reported in later years that they were deeply concerned not only about losing their land but also by what they saw as the real possibility of being entirely displaced by Japanese settlers (cf. Iitaka in this volume). The point became moot, of course, with the onset of World War Two. A number of the Pacific war's fiercest battles were fought in the islands, including those on Kwajalein and Eniwetok in the Marshalls, Peleliu in Palau, and Guam and Saipan in the Marianas. Virtually all of the larger islands were repeatedly bombed, and much of the environment and all of the economies were destroyed.

The U.S. Navy had first sought to establish American control in the islands in 1898 and again in 1918, but had failed to convince its government to do so in the wake of both the Spanish-American and First World Wars. A good deal of the political machinations entailed in establishing the United Nations had to do with the U.S. Navy's intransigence over preserving American control in Micronesia in the aftermath of World War Two. Ultimately, the islands became a U.S. Trust Territory, but with "strategic" provisions that gave the U.S. military *de facto* control while precluding any real UN oversight. For the first 15 years of American trusteeship, the islands were mostly neglected, with two key exceptions: Kwajalein was turned into a vast missile-testing complex and Saipan was used to train guerilla troops for a proposed invasion of mainland China. There was, however, a radical change in trajectory in the early 1960s. While the UN's Trusteeship Council ignored Micronesia (because of the trusteeship's strategic provisions), the General Assembly's Special Committee on Decolonization steadily increased its pressure on the U.S. to allow the Micronesian peoples to engage in some form of political self-determination. The Congress of Micronesia, created in 1965 with virtually no powers of its own, immediately began pressing for political status negotiations. Status talks between the U.S. government and the COM first began in the late 1960s and continued into the 1970s. An array of issues, pressures, conflicts, and dynamics collided in the summer of 1975, when the Micronesians held both a Constitutional Convention in Saipan and a "referendum" on political status throughout the Trust Territory.

The Colonial Carousel

This, then, is the "colonial carousel" I refer to in this paper's title. Its effects culminated in the events surrounding the constitutional convention. I shall briefly describe what I understand to be the crucial results of this colonial history before connecting them to resolution of the conflicts that arose at the ConCon. Resolution of these issues came about as it did, I believe, as a result of the classic Micronesian sociopolitical style I discussed earlier, the pattern of differences and connections among Micronesia's many island cultures and societies.

Put simply, no single colonial pattern or set of patterns shaped modern Micronesia's history. Language, religion, economics, politics, and culture: each was imposed, removed, and replaced so many times that contemporary Micronesian sociocultural life is completely an amalgam of different influences, styles, and structures. This is not always immediately apparent because of decades of American influence, but Micronesians, like the peoples of many Pacific cultures, tend to respect and defer to their elders, and members of the oldest generation surviving today—the generation that negotiated Micronesian political status with the Americans—were educated by the Japanese and grew up being influenced by elders who had experienced Spanish and German rule.

This is especially important when one considers the impact—or lack of it—on patterns of land-holding and the organization or division of labor. That is, outside the Marianas we find no imposition of a plantation economy drawing on large pools of migrant labor, no market-oriented smallholder peasantry, no heavy reliance on shipping out on fishing or trading vessels, no camp-followers clustering around military bases (although something like this does occur at Kwajalein and Guam). In much of the region we do see, however, a pattern of people moving in from smaller atolls to larger administrative centers, and consequently a marked inequality in

opportunities: those with roots in the centers can both farm their own land and take government or commercial jobs, while those from the atolls and high-island hinterlands have to reside in town, usually without access to land and are therefore significantly more dependent upon wage labor for their survival.

Contemporary Micronesian lifestyles become increasingly dependent not only on wage labor in the quasi-urban centers but also on emigration to Guam and the United States (cf Dvorak; in this volume). But in the lead-up to the 1975 ConCon this pattern was still a long way from becoming as prominent and predominant as it is today. Tosiwo Nakayama, who presided at the original ConCon and became the first president of the Federated States of Micronesia, was quite insistent in describing himself as a fisherman. As his name suggests, his father was Japanese, and President Nakayama was profoundly multicultural, as were a great many of his colleagues in the old Congress of Micronesia.

On the other hand, it is equally the case that nearly every Micronesian leader who participated in the ConCon was to some extent a product of an American education; the exceptions to this were the traditional chiefs who were delegates to the ConCon. Most of those who were American-educated had attended the University of Hawaii at some point, and their experiences in Hawaii had profound influences on them. They saw first hand what had happened to Hawaii's indigenous peoples when they lost their land to Americans; every one of these leaders I have spoken with cites this as a crucial influence on their commitment to self-determination. They very quickly came to a shared understanding that because Hawaiians had lost control over their lands, they had been cast aside in their own homeland, and then marginalized, disrespected, and disenfranchised.

More than anything else, these leaders told me, it was what they saw in Hawaii that gave them insight into what Micronesia's future would hold in store for their people if they were to assent to the American plan to annex their islands as a permanent possession of the United States. It was the combination of their formal and informal Hawaiian educations that enabled them to comprehend both how Americans see themselves and how they see the islanders. They understood that American negotiators were to some extent being sincere in their efforts to convince Micronesians of the benefits in store for them if they agreed to have their islands become permanent American possessions, but they also concluded that these same negotiators were quite blind to what the real consequences were likely to be for the Micronesians.

My point, ultimately, is that in the absence of either their traditional patterns or a more conventional colonial history, the Micronesians' hopes for decolonization would have looked very different. Moreover, it is important to understand that the future of the Micronesian states will be determined not only by their difficult economic situations and their dangerous environmental circumstances, but by the lessons they learned as they rode this colonial carousel, as well as the sociocultural patterns their ancestors created in dealing with perilous circumstances over the course of two millennia.

The 1975 Micronesian Constitutional Convention

In 1975 the Congress of Micronesia and the American administration of the Trust Territory together planned and implemented both a Constitutional Convention and a Referendum on Future Political Status. While they were designed as distinct activities, the fact that the referendum took place during the ConCon was generally interpreted as a signal that its outcomes would be advisory to the ConCon. But as the time for these two crucial events drew near, the intensity of the ongoing political status processes heightened markedly. The Marianas people, whose colonial history was distinctly longer and more dismal than the rest of Micronesia's, and who had experienced a great deal more economic and social development than the other islands because of their islands' role as the effective capital of the Trust Territory, did not wish to be incorporated permanently into a political entity with the other islanders; a majority of them instead preferred a closer relationship with the United States, more along the lines of Guam's territorial status. Before the Micronesia-wide referendum took place, the Marianas held its own plebiscite and approved a "commonwealth" relationship with the U.S., thus setting the stage for their islands to become the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas.

At the same time, many in the Marshalls, probably influenced by the Marianas precedent, began to call for separate negotiations with the U.S. to create a polity separate and distinct from that of the Caroline Islands to the west. (The names of the Marshalls and Carolines are of course colonial artifacts; the various cultural and language groups within the Carolines are no more closely related to one another historically than they are to the Marshallese.) The Marshalls were by that time receiving relatively large amounts of funding from the U.S. to pay for leases on the lands occupied by the missile range at Kwajalein atoll and as reparations for the destruction at Bikini and Eniwetok atolls, and the radiation sickness caused in adjacent islands by the nuclear testing there. Many Marshalls leaders believed their islands would be better served by breaking away from the rest of the Trust Territory and negotiating their own distinct relationship with the U.S.

There were similar sentiments in Palau. Though included in the broad-brush Caroline Islands cognomen, Palauans' antecedents were not closely related to those of the Central and Eastern Carolines peoples. Palauans, like the Marianas and Marshalls peoples, saw themselves as distinct from the other Micronesians, and their leaders were in the process of negotiating the terms for a large U.S. military outpost there, an amphibious warfare training range (which was cancelled in the wake of U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam). Palauan leadership, too, sought a separate political relationship with the U.S.

Majorities in the Marianas, Marshalls, and Palau saw themselves as likely to achieve a more satisfactory outcome to the political status process by dealing directly with the United States, rather than as part of a Micronesian whole. Each population believed itself to be culturally different from its neighbors and each thought it had independent means of financing its autonomy. To varying degrees these electorates boycotted the political status referendum. They were also ambivalent about the ConCon. The Marshalls and Palau sent delegations, but they were not entirely committed to the process. And because the ConCon took place on Saipan, in the Marianas, there were several individuals from the Marianas who claimed status as delegates and intermittently participated.

Given that they were not at all committed to a close relationship with the remainder of Micronesia, the Palauan delegation began the ConCon by presenting their colleagues with something close to an ultimatum. It proposed a structure for the constitution that would have established a highly decentralized national government, one that would allow Palau to act autonomously. If the rest of ConCon delegates were not willing to accede to this political model, the Palauans said, they were prepared to leave.

In the meantime, the U.S. government had been seeking to pressure all the Trust Territory's districts—that is, all the islands—into moving toward a resolution of the political status quandary that more closely matched its own political and military interests in acquiring the islands in perpetuity. Recognizing the crucial importance of land issues to all Micronesians, the U.S. negotiators had begun, in early 1975, to negotiate land-holding pacts with the individual districts. The Congress of Micronesia (COM) took this as a direct affront to the principle of a united stance in political status negotiations, and interpreted it as a direct attempt by the American government to destroy the Micronesians' unity and thus their ability to successfully negotiate an end to American rule in the islands. Since its inception in 1965, the COM had enjoyed legitimacy as the sole representative of the Micronesian peoples' aspirations, but this role was coming to a precipitous end just as the Micronesians were about to create their constitution, an act which was expected to empower the Micronesian leaders to bring the negotiations with the U.S. to a satisfactory conclusion.

It is important here to recognize the extremely low-key nature of Micronesian politics in general. While traditional Micronesian societies were by no means adverse to martial performances and cultural styles, and engaged in warfare, it remains that for most purposes, traditional Micronesian political activity was conducted quietly, formally, indirectly, and with the utmost respect. Palauan political discourse is referred to as “whispering,” and this style of engagement is the norm elsewhere as well. Despite the confluence of a great deal of conflict, to the untrained eye the mood in Saipan during the 1975 ConCon was calm, as befits the convening of leaders from throughout Micronesia. These leaders, most of whom had committed their adult lives to the pursuit of Micronesian self-government, were charged with the nearly impossible task of keeping Micronesia together long enough in order to let it fall apart. Or perhaps we might describe it conversely: they had to be willing to let Micronesia fall apart in order to hold the ConCon together long enough to draft a constitution that would allow the islands enough independence to break apart. It might have been an entirely impossible, and indeed inconceivable, task for many. But the Micronesians managed it with aplomb.

Conclusion

And this, then, is the point of my paper: it was the Micronesians' traditional skills in respecting diversity and difference, and exploiting them to provide themselves with a measure of security in a dangerous environment, that enabled them to cling together in order to break apart. The preamble of the constitution that came out of that 1975 ConCon states: “To make one nation of many islands, we respect the diversity of our cultures. Our differences enrich us. The seas bring us together, they do not separate us.”² This was drafted precisely as the delegates were grappling with the ConCon's highly contradictory goals.

The U.S. colonial administration had come to understand that while (outside the Marianas) there was widespread Micronesian resistance to the outright American annexation of the islands, the Micronesians' ability as a whole to resist was to a significant degree predicated on the solidarity of the different groups, promoted through participation in the COM. By offering differing packages to the different island groups, the American negotiators sought to break up that monolithic resistance. By the time the ConCon got underway, the Marianas, the Marshalls, and Palau had pretty much decided to go their separate ways. But for all the islands except the Marianas, which had opted for permanent ties to the U.S., it was still necessary to maintain a semblance of negotiating strength. Without a Micronesian constitution to use as their alternative position, the Palauans and Marshallese would have found themselves in much weaker positions vis-à-vis the U.S. It was in everyone's interests to hold together, as I have said, in order to break apart.

The Micronesians' fundamental familiarity with the need to develop, maintain, and cultivate intimate connections with distant islands, with their distinctly different populations, served them well. They were able to acknowledge their differences and continue to work together without exceptional fears of perfidy.

At the same time, the colonial carousel that had had such great impact on the Micronesians' modern history taught them that American protestations of benevolence were no more (nor less) to be believed than those of any of the other regimes that had occupied their islands. They had learned their lessons well. They understood that American involvement in Micronesia was entirely about American interests. The U.S. would not hesitate to exploit the area for its own purposes. No matter what the U.S. said about its willingness to educate the Micronesians, and to develop their economies, political systems, and social services, the fate of American Indians and Native Hawaiians made it clear who would ultimately benefit from the American presence in the islands. Micronesians had seen this with the Spanish, the Germans, and the Japanese; there was no reason to expect any difference under the Americans.

The only clear solution was to get out from under American rule, and this required of them enough Micronesian unity to create a viable constitution, something that would demonstrate to the world that the Micronesians were capable of self-government. Having accomplished that, they knew, they would then be free to go on and liberate themselves from control by other Micronesian peoples.

In the end the Marshalls, Palau, and the remaining Carolines, as the Federated States of Micronesia, each became independent republics. Their continuing relationships with the U.S. are by no means straightforward, but as full-fledged members of the United Nations they can now act on the world stage and are to an important extent insulated from arbitrary American rule. Given that the United States government had covertly insisted to the Micronesians that it would never permit them to achieve autonomy, this is a thoroughly remarkable outcome. And it came about largely because of lessons the Micronesians learned both from their successful adaptations to the environmental vagaries of their Western Pacific homelands and their successful weathering of the colonial carousel.

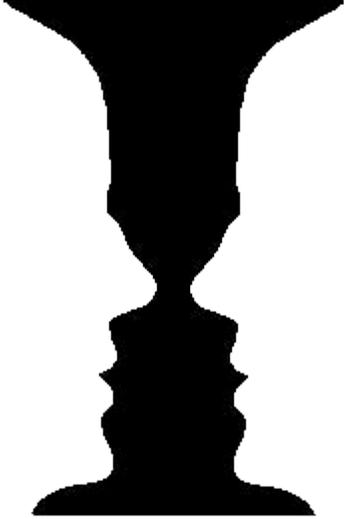
Bibliographic note: A book-length description of Micronesian adaptations and social organization can be found in Petersen 2009. Micronesian colonial history is thoroughly described in Hezel 1983 and 1995. The 1975 Micronesian Constitutional Convention is described in detail in Meller 1985. The relevant aspects of Micronesian political status negotiations with the U.S. are treated in Petersen 1999 and 2004. Social and cultural issues in contemporary Micronesia are discussed in Hezel 2001.

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Notes

¹ The following image is an example of a figure-ground problem.



² The formal wording of the preamble was drafted by a skilled American writer who had worked for the Micronesian Congress, but sentiments expressed were entirely the Micronesians'.