

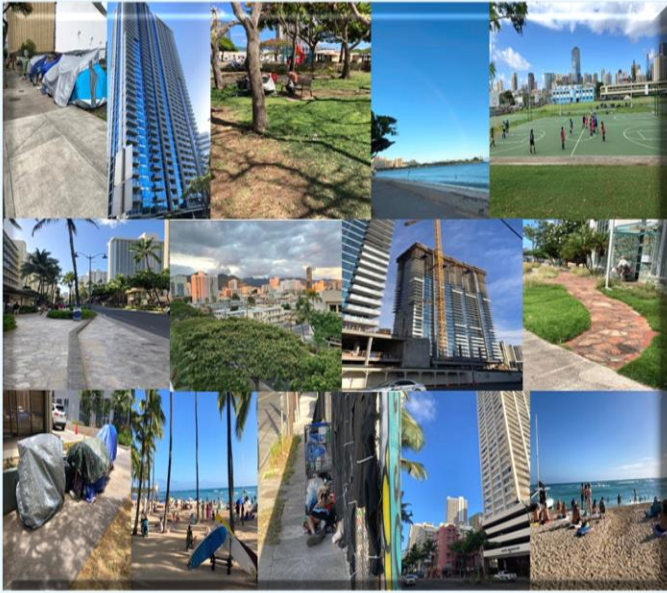


**BlackEconomics.org®**

***Black Americans and Hawaii:  
An Assessment with Emphasis on Housing  
Related Industries, Homelessness, and  
Climate Change***

Brooks Robinson, Ph.D.

©July 2024



## **Black Americans and Hawaii**

### **BlackEconomics.org Assessment for Hawaii: ↓**

*History: Assessment: ↓*

*Fiscal Conditions: Assessment: ↔*

*Demographics: Assessment: ↓*

*Commercial Enterprises: Assessment: ↓*

*Corruption: Assessment: ↓*

*Homelessness: Assessment: ↓*

*Climate Change: Assessment: ↓*

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>A Brief Assessment of Hawaii (History, Fiscal Conditions, and Demographics)</b> .....	3
<i>History</i> .....	3
<i>Fiscal Conditions</i> .....	3
<i>Demographics</i> .....	5
<b>Industrial Operations: Free and Fair Enterprise, Corruption, and Racism</b> .....	7
<i>Overview</i> .....	7
<i>Commercial Enterprises</i> .....	8
<i>Corruption</i> .....	11
<b>Hawaii's Special Problems: Homelessness and Climate Change</b> .....	13
<i>Overview</i> .....	13
<i>Homelessness</i> .....	14
<i>Climate Change</i> .....	19
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	20
<b>Appendix I</b> .....	22

## Introduction

Until July 2023, Black Americans (Afrodescendants) had no separately identifiable long-term strategic plan prepared for us by us.<sup>1</sup> However, the plan that was prepared, the *Long-Term Strategic Plan for Black America (LTSPFBA)*, while detailed in many respects is just a starting point and guidance for evolving and implementing a more comprehensive plan. The *LTSPFBA* should prove to be very beneficial for a variety of reasons, none more important than chronicling our responses to important events that we encounter. The plan will enable us to address issues, concerns, and problems naturally by drawing on our systematic records of our progress. We can avoid expending energy reconsidering nearly identical issues, concerns, and problems repeatedly. Also, we can help ensure a perpetual upward trajectory, as opposed to experiencing the *status quo* and the continuous Black-White conflict cycle of: Crisis; protests; negotiated improvements; marginal change; conflict amnesia; return to the status quo; and then crisis renewal.

Because “America’s business is doing business,” we know that our most important, relatively small, but potent weapon is our discretionary purchasing power.<sup>2</sup> We have expressed elsewhere the need to: “Treat spending as personal protests or economic warfare-related actions.”<sup>3</sup> As in war, a critical and

---

<sup>1</sup> Long-Term Strategic Plan Panel (2023). *Long-Term Strategic Plan for Black America*. Honolulu;

[https://www.ltspfba.org/LTSP/fin\\_ltspfba\\_071223.pdf](https://www.ltspfba.org/LTSP/fin_ltspfba_071223.pdf) (Ret.052824).

<sup>2</sup> This quote is from US President Calvin Coolidge. See Ellen Terrell (2019), “When a quote is not (exactly) a quote: The Business of America is Business Edition” (January 17). [https://blogs.loc.gov/inside\\_adams/2019/01/when-a-quote-is-not-exactly-a-quote-the-business-of-america-is-business-edition/](https://blogs.loc.gov/inside_adams/2019/01/when-a-quote-is-not-exactly-a-quote-the-business-of-america-is-business-edition/) (Ret. 052824).

<sup>3</sup> Brooks Robinson (2024). *Merida Musings*. BlackEconomics.org. Honolulu. p. 40.

fundamental requirement for deploying our dollars as weapons, we must know when, where, and how to shoot (spend and invest). As an example of success in this regard, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) has expressed concern about the treatment of Black Americans and has issued advisories concerning travel to certain states and/or locales.<sup>4</sup> These advisories have been idiosyncratic—typically appearing when crises arise. However, as already noted, we should move beyond the Black-White conflict cycle. Hence, we propose that this assessment of the State of Hawaii serve as a prototype for developing similar analyses (assessments) for all 50 states (and even selected municipalities) to determine whether they are favorable or unfavorable places for Black Americans to do business in any form. While we may not have all the desired tools readily at our disposal to promulgate this economic warfare, we have more than enough tools to get started and to build support and capacity as we move forward and enjoy increasing success.

This assessment can be tweaked to accommodate specific requirements for states (or cities), which are all unique. The following topics are covered:




1. An assessment of Hawaii (i.e., the state's history, its fiscal condition, and demographic outcomes—some of which are troubling).
2. Industrial operations that handcuff free and fair enterprise and do not halt corruption, and the anti-Black bias that blocks Black American access to opportunities.

---

<https://www.blackeconomics.org/BEAP/memu041924.pdf> (Ret. 052824).

<sup>4</sup> It is common knowledge that the NAACP has participated in economic actions since it provided support for the Montgomery, Alabama Bus Boycott in 1955 up to a March 2024 advisory by the NAACP for Black American student athletes to reconsider engaging with colleges and universities in the State of Florida.

3. Two important outcomes that are unfavorable for Black Americans: Homelessness and Climate Change.

After reading this assessment, the reasons for adopting our stated position concerning Hawaii as a place for Black Americans to do business should be clear. For this and subsequent assessments, we will present the “evidence,” and then insert one of the following three symbols without further elaboration [ consider further engagement;  consider holding engagement steady (neither increasing or decreasing engagement); and  consider decreasing/discontinuing engagement].

## **A Brief Assessment of Hawaii (History, Fiscal Conditions, and Demographics)**

### *History*

Given the history of European theft worldwide, it is not surprising to find that Hawaii is on the list of those sacred and beautiful places that were stolen. A visit to the Bishop Museum in Honolulu will enable a full account of the deceit and trickery used to take control of the home of essentially an African People.

**Assessment:** 

### *Fiscal Conditions*

Our research reveals that the State of Hawaii only makes available to the public one intra fiscal year (FY) report and it coincides with the midpoint of the FY. Hence, we consider fiscal statistics for FY 2024 which conclude at the end of June 2024 using a December 2023 report. Given a balanced budget requirement, revenues and expenditures balance at about \$19.0 billion. However, it is instructive to note that six

state departments account for over 80% of spending:<sup>5</sup> (1) Budget and Finance (25%); (2) Human Services (22%); (3) Education (13.2%); (4) Transportation (7.2%); (5) University of Hawaii (6.9%); and (6) Health (6.1%).

Further analysis shows that proportional expenditures-by-type (operational and capital) for the State of Hawaii relative to total expenditures are often **not** comparable to expenditure proportions by type for other states. Nevertheless, we performed a few proportional expenditure-by-type comparisons between Hawaii and averages for all other US states. The proportional comparisons are made using Census Bureau *Annual State and Local Government Finance Survey* data for FY 2021. For *Higher Education* (-4.04%), *Corrections* (-1.06%), and *Interest on Debt* (-0.007%), Hawaii under expended other US states on average.<sup>6</sup> We also compared Hawaii's and all other US states' levels of *Outstanding Debt* as a percentage of *General Revenue* (21.1%); i.e., Hawaii's *Outstanding debt-to-General Revenue* ratio was substantially higher than other states on average.<sup>7</sup> We should not forget that 2021 was the second year of the Covid-19 Pandemic. However, when we made an internal comparison of Hawaii's primary level of *Outstanding Debt* for FY 2021 and FY 2023, we found that it only increased slightly from \$12.5 billion to \$12.7 billion.

---

<sup>5</sup> Department of Budget and Financing (2023). "The Operating and Capital Budget Statement Summaries." State of Hawaii. <https://budget.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/06.-Operating-and-Capital-Budget-Statewide-Summaries-FY-25-SUPP.7H0.pdf> (Ret. 061724).

<sup>6</sup> Census Bureau (2023). "Table 1. State and Local Government Finances by Level of Government and by State: 2021." *Annual Survey of State and Local Government Finances*. US Department of Commerce; <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/gov-finances/tables/2021/> (File: 21slstab1.xls; Ret. 061724).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

On the other hand, *Revenue* increased from \$13.5 billion to \$17.3 billion.<sup>8</sup>

Because the State of Hawaii does not egregiously underspend for important and selected functions relative to other states, but reflects a higher *Outstanding Debt-to-General Revenue* ratio, we conclude that the state should not be ranked too highly as a potential destination point for Black Americans. A relatively high debt-to-revenue ratio can only portend higher future taxes. This conclusion is buttressed as we cover other aspects of this assessment, especially in the section entitled: “Industrial Operations: Free and Fair Enterprise, Corruption, and Racism.”

**Assessment:** ↔

### *Demographics*

History infers that ethnocide occurred in Hawaii just as it did in North America with its indigenous people. According to Pew Research, the Native Hawaiian population may have been above 680,000 when the infamous naval explorer Captain James Cook arrived in the islands in 1778. That population witnessed a steady decline until about the 1920s when it began to grow slowly again.<sup>9</sup> In mid-2023, the

---

<sup>8</sup> Accounting Division (2024). *State of Hawaii Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2023*. Hawaii Department of Accounting and General Services.

<https://ags.hawaii.gov/accounting/annual-financial-reports/> (Ret. 061724). Further clarification is being sought about these estimates.

<sup>9</sup> Sara Kehaulani Goo (2015). “After 200 Years, Native Hawaiians Make a Comeback.” Pew Research.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2015/04/06/native-hawaiian-population/#:~:text=A%20new%20demographic%20analysis%2C%20using,as%20high%20as%201%20million.> (Ret. 052524).



Native Hawaiian population was 47,819.<sup>10</sup>

However, given that 24.7% of residents of Hawaii reported “Two or More Races” in 2023, and that a significant proportion of those selecting the “Two or More Races” classification possess Native Hawaiian heritage and have some allegiance to it, it may be reasonable to conclude that those with allegiance to the Native Hawaiian population is substantially above the 147.8 thousand mark just cited.

Besides Native Hawaiians (10.3%), the state is mainly populated by Asians 37.1%; Whites 21.3% (including Hispanic or Latino Whites, 25.2%); and the already mentioned “Two or More Race” (24.7%).<sup>11</sup> The broad Asians category hides a “multitude of ethnic groups” (Japanese, Filipino, Chinese and Indo-Chinese, and Korean).<sup>12</sup>

In 2023, Black Americans constituted just 2.2% of Hawaii’s population.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, and consistent with the knowledge that Hawaii is a high-cost-of-living state, Black Americans are well positioned vis-à-vis our counterparts on the US mainland in a few important respects. For example, Black Americans in Hawaii enjoyed a more than \$20K higher level of median household income, an over 8% higher level high school completion rate, and an over 15% higher level of bachelor’s degree completion rate than our counterparts on the mainland.<sup>14</sup> Yet compared to other

---

<sup>10</sup> Brooks Robinson (2024). “Tools for Fighting Inequalities,” BlackEconomics.org; <https://www.blackeconomics.org/BELit/tffi030124.pdf> (052324). The statistics appear in the following file: [https://www.blackeconomics.org/BELit/hcchdata\(030124\).xlsx](https://www.blackeconomics.org/BELit/hcchdata(030124).xlsx).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. (State of Hawaii Population worksheet).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. (State Government Employment, Department of Education).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. (State of Hawaii Population).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. (Summary Table).

racial/ethnic groups in Hawaii, Black Americans are third from the bottom in median household income (just above Native Hawaiians and American Indians and Alaska Natives).<sup>15</sup> This despite the fact that Black Americans in Hawaii reflect the second highest rates of high school completion and college graduation just behind those who are White Alone.<sup>16</sup> It is worth noting that the favorable position of Black Americans just mentioned does not generally result from our evolution in Hawaii. Rather, it largely reflects our academic and other achievements prior to our arrival in the state.

Keeping in mind that Black American residents of Hawaii accounted for about 2.2% of the 2022 population, we were 2.7% of K-12 public school students;<sup>17</sup> an unidentifiable percentage of students at the state's flagship university;<sup>18</sup> but at least 7.8% of those arrested by the Honolulu Police Department in 2022.<sup>19</sup>

**Assessment:** ↓

## **Industrial Operations: Free and Fair Enterprise, Corruption, and Racism**

### *Overview*

Economically, the state continues to plant the seeds of its own demise. In the face of disappearing beaches, bleaching coral, and fires largely due to drought conditions (all primarily the result of Climate Change), the state continues to emphasize and give deference to hospitality/tourism

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. (State of Hawaii – Household Income).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. (State of Hawaii Educational Attainment).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. (State Government employment, Department of Education).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. (State Government employment, University of Hawaii System).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. (Honolulu Police Department HPD Arrests).

industries. Admittedly, change may be in the offing. The current governor recently announced the formation of a taskforce of the state’s “best minds” to consider and recommend responses to the state’s mounting problems. Unfortunately, he selected a retired real estate executive to head the task force—not a social or physical scientist, who can analyze sufficiently and effectively the state’s new world problems.<sup>20</sup>

### *Commercial Enterprises*

On tourism, our lived experience is that Black Americans probably punch above our weight in visitation to Hawaii. However, after enquiring about available statistics concerning the ethnicity of visitors from the US mainland, the Hawaii Tourism Association (HTA) reported that no such statistics are collected, and we were told to get in que to request that the questionnaire used to collect tourism data be modified to collect such statistics.<sup>21</sup> Apparently, there is little-to-no interest in knowing about Black Americans’ utilization of Hawaii’s tourism industry—just interest in benefiting from Black American spending.

According to the US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis’ estimates of gross domestic product (GDP) by state for 2022, four private sector industries (*Real estate, Accommodation, Retail trade, and Construction*)

---

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Gomes (2024). “Hawaii Governor Forms Team to Address Disasters and Climate Change.” Honolulu Star Advertiser. <https://www.staradvertiser.com/2024/05/03/hawaii-news/hawaii-governor-forms-team-to-address-disasters-and-climate-change/> (Ret. 052824).

<sup>21</sup> This information is documented in a February 5, 2024, email message from the Director of Tourism Research in the Hawaii Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism. The message is available from the author upon request.

plus all three government subsectors (*State and Local*, *Federal Civilian*, and *Federal Military*) drive economic outcomes in Hawaii—each valued at over \$5.0 billion. Hawaii’s total GDP for 2022 was \$101 billion.

The top four private sector industries operate in concert to attract potential real estate buyers, and then throw them for a loop. We believe that the loop runs thusly: (1) The *Real estate* and *Construction* industries collaborate to develop mainly expensive condominium and other housing units; (2) Real estate developers, property managers, and government collaborate to suppress maintenance fees and taxes to facilitate housing sales; (3) given item 2, condominium properties, in particular, are permitted to go into disrepair to “justify” the construction of newer properties and their sale; (4) after about 15 years, property managers sound the alarm on deteriorating conditions of older properties motivating special assessments and/or large increases in maintenance fees bringing those fees up to the level of new condominium properties; thereby further reducing prospects for selling older condominiums. Local governments appear to assist in the process by constraining property tax rates, but ensuring near continuous and unjustified increases in properties’ assessed values.

These shenanigans are permitted by the Associations of Apartment Owners (AOAOs) governance law (Hawaii Revised Statute (HR) 514B), which regulates the *Real estate* industry (including property managers, who manage AOAOs), but not AOAOs. The state collects, but does not tabulate, compile, and publish financial statistics on AOAOs for comparison purposes. Without financial data, AOAOs cannot be properly compared and assessed accurately.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Rest assured that the Hawaii State Legislature is aware of, and participates in, this real estate game. We have also corresponded with the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

Also, it is noteworthy that HR 514B mandates a clear and clean handoff of properties from developers to AOA's self-governing bodies (Boards of Directors (BODs)). However, the law makes no provision for preventing developers from returning to a controlling position of an AOA as President of a BOD to reap benefits from that vantage point.<sup>23</sup>

Although Hawaii's economic growth forecasts are subdued for the near- to medium-term, the *Construction* industry is faring well now as previously available cheap (low-interest) funds continue to reverberate through the economy. Several new residential construction projects are underway in Honolulu. This building activity anticipates success in attracting new and wealthier residents to the state, which may not occur—at least not at prices desired by developers.

On costs, Hawaii remains among the nation's highest cost-of-living states. It is nearly impossible to identify in a grocery store a loaf of bread, a half-gallon of milk, a dozen eggs, or a pound of butter at prices that do not exceed significantly \$5.00 each. This says nothing about the cost of electric power that is expected to soar because the monopoly utility is under pressure to, *inter alia*, make large investments to address Climate Change driven conditions that can cause very destructive outcomes. For June 2024, the cost of non-peak residential electricity was 40 cents or above

---

concerning this matter. The inability to accurately assess condominium properties specifically may result in HUD's violation of the US Code concerning appraisals for HUD mortgages. HUD is an important mortgage lender for condominium purchases in Hawaii. Unfortunately, there appears to be a widespread aversion to rewriting the AOA governance law.

<sup>23</sup> If developers retain ownership of a unit(s) within properties that they develop, then they are permitted to serve on the related BOD and to be elected President of the BOD.

per kilowatt hour (kWh).<sup>24</sup> The per kWh price of electricity for most US states is less than 20 cents. Besides Hawaii, only two states (California and Rhode Island) reflected per kWh prices that were above 30 cents in June 2024.<sup>25</sup>

**Assessment:** ↓

### *Corruption*

Corruption is a longstanding concern in Hawaii. As an example of the state's history of corruption, there were already at least two legal proceedings at the midpoint of 2024 involving prominent past state and local officials, who were accused of violating the public trust.<sup>26</sup> It does not bode well when the state government acknowledges a need to improve its financial management system (FMS), but reports that \$20 million spent on an effort to improve its FMS produced absolutely nothing of value.<sup>27</sup> It is difficult to believe that there is serious interest in improving corruption in the state when, Hawaii, like most (if not all) other states have no special fiscal audit program targeting fraud that is

---

<sup>24</sup> Hawaiian Electric (2024). "Time-of-Use (TOU-RI) Enrollment." Hawaiian Electric Company.

<https://www.hawaiianelectric.com/products-and-services/save-energy-and-money/shift-and-save/time-of-use-rate-history> (Ret. 061824).

<sup>25</sup> ENERGYBOT (2024). "Electricity Rates for Every State in the US." ENERGYBOT.com. <https://www.energybot.com/electricity-rates/> (Ret. 061824).

<sup>26</sup> The fact that the local government official was exonerated may reinforce for some the idea that corruption is endemic.

<sup>27</sup> Andrew Gomes (2024). "Hawaii Financial Management System in Need of Upgrade after halting botched work." *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*, January 21.

<https://www.staradvertiser.com/2024/01/21/hawaii-news/hawaii-financial-management-system-in-critical-need-of-upgrade/> (Ret. 061624).

akin to the ongoing program at the nation’s Government Accountability Office (GAO).<sup>28</sup>

There are two additional important areas where the State of Hawaii’s performance is unfavorable from a Black American perspective. First, the state is among the nation’s top 15 per pupil spenders on public pre-K-12 education, but students’ academic performance is inconsistent with that spending.<sup>29</sup> The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) reports for 2022 that Hawaii’s 8<sup>th</sup> Graders scored 3 points less than the national average in Mathematics, but scored on par with the national average in Reading. The scores for both subjects were in the “not proficient” range.<sup>30</sup> Note that “people who matter in Hawaii” do not enroll their students in public schools. Rather, they pay a handsome price for private school enrollment. However, they reap the benefit on the backend because their students are accepted often into some of the nation’s top colleges and universities. Afterwards, they are positioned to embark on lucrative work careers.

---

<sup>28</sup> Government Accountability Office (2024). “2018-2022 Data Show Federal Government Loses an Estimated \$233 Billion to \$521 Billion Annually to Fraud, Based on Various Risk Environments;” <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-105833#:~:text=GAO%20estimated%20total%20direct%20annual.losses%20fell%20in%20this%20range> (Ret. 061624). According to the GAO, up to 5 percent of US Government annual expenditures could involve fraud.

<sup>29</sup> S. Cornman, *et. al.* (2022). “Revenue and Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary Education FY 20. National Center for Education Statistics.” <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2022/2022301.pdf> (Ret. 061824).

<sup>30</sup> The Nation’s Report Card (2024). “State Profiles.” National Assessment of Education Progress. [https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/stateprofile/overview/HI?cti=PgTab\\_OT&sub=MAT&chort=2&st=MN&sfj=NP&sj=HI](https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/stateprofile/overview/HI?cti=PgTab_OT&sub=MAT&chort=2&st=MN&sfj=NP&sj=HI) (Ret. 061824).

Second, Hawaii spent more than 21 other states per incarcerated (\$62.4K) during FY 2021.<sup>31</sup> This level of spending infers that jail and prison conditions should be of reasonably good quality. However, it is common to see press stories about very unfavorable conditions in the state's corrections facilities.

**Assessment:** ↓

## **Hawaii's Special Problems: Homelessness and Climate Change**

### *Overview*

Amidst the abundance enjoyed by many in the state, homelessness is rampant. Homelessness is not a problem for visitors to the extent that their heartstrings are not strummed to produce a very somber blues every time they pass a houseless person on the street. However, for the average citizen living in Honolulu, who respects their fellow humans, it is a sickening scenario. There are unclean, disheveled, often smelly, and sometimes persons wrestling with obvious mental health challenges all over Honolulu, except in exclusive neighborhoods that are set apart from multiuse areas (commercial and high-rise residential areas of the city).

In addition, Climate Change cannot be denied. Weather patterns are changing. Severe weather conditions are occurring more frequently. The frequency and severity of flooding in low-lying areas is increasing and intensifying, respectively. Beaches are disappearing and houses are reported to be sliding into the ocean. Along the coast of Oahu

---

<sup>31</sup> USA Facts (2023). "How Much do States Spend on Prisoners?" USAFacts.org. <https://usafacts.org/articles/how-much-do-states-spend-on-prisons/> (Ret. 061824). The value cited is just below the national median.



Island, efforts are undertaken to reengineer roadways to prevent sea level rise from washing them out. Large sums must be spent in the near-to-medium term to preserve this paradise.

Both homelessness and Climate Change signal additional future funding requirements, which will undoubtedly translate into higher taxes and other financial obligations.

### *Homelessness*

The media reports that homelessness is a growing problem in the US mainly because of the following reasons: (i) Housing and living unaffordability; (ii) drug abuse; and (iii) mental health challenges.<sup>32</sup> In our view, each of these three reasons can be addressed effectively by sufficient financial resources. In other words, if all US residents received

---

<sup>32</sup> See Partners In Care (Oahu's Continuum of Care) (2024). Point In Time Count 2024 Comprehensive Report. Partners In Care. [https://partnersincareoahu-my.sharepoint.com/personal/pic\\_partnersincareoahu\\_org/\\_layouts/15/onedrive.aspx?id=%2Fpersonal%2Fpic%5Fpartnersincareoahu%5F%2FDocuments%2FPartners%20In%20Care%2FHFMIS%20%28CW%20%20%26%20Clarity%29%2FJF%2F2024%20PITC%20Report%2Epdf&parent=%2Fpersonal%2Fpic%5Fpartnersincareoahu%5F%2FDocuments%2FPartners%20In%20Care%2FHFMIS%20%28CW%20%20%26%20Clarity%29%2FJF&ga=1](https://partnersincareoahu-my.sharepoint.com/personal/pic_partnersincareoahu_org/_layouts/15/onedrive.aspx?id=%2Fpersonal%2Fpic%5Fpartnersincareoahu%5F%2FDocuments%2FPartners%20In%20Care%2FHFMIS%20%28CW%20%20%26%20Clarity%29%2FJF%2F2024%20PITC%20Report%2Epdf&parent=%2Fpersonal%2Fpic%5Fpartnersincareoahu%5F%2FDocuments%2FPartners%20In%20Care%2FHFMIS%20%28CW%20%20%26%20Clarity%29%2FJF&ga=1) (Ret. 061824). The report confirms media pronouncements and reveals that 12,441 persons were identified as homeless during 2023 on the island of Oahu alone. About 25% of these homeless persons suffered from a substance abuse disorder, and about 33% were afflicted with mental health conditions. In addition, although only a fraction of the state's nearly 6,000 social workers and counselor are employed to assist the homeless, the fraction is not likely to be miniscule. These workers receive median annual compensation in the \$40-to-\$50 thousand range. Consult the US Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics for more details. <https://www.bls.gov/oes/home.htm> (Ret. 060424).

appropriate training and had access to high-enough paying employment or other sources of income, then housing affordability would not be a concern. Also, higher levels of income could reduce the anxiety and despair that often leads to drug abuse. In many cases, mental health challenges dissipate with appropriate healthcare, which is out of reach for those with low or no income and no health insurance. It is transparent that those unable to cope in an economy that is evolving with lightning-quick speed are permitted to filter onto the streets and to homelessness.

At the same time, we should not fail to observe that the poor, who end up on the street, in jail/prison, or otherwise at the margin of society, create demand for social protection and/or public safety services—activities that can contribute to economic expansion.<sup>33</sup>

Our research revealed that the State of Hawaii is still finding its way on developing the most effective strategies for addressing homelessness. This is evident by the fact that, despite a considerable existing bureaucratic framework to tackle homelessness, a request for information concerning the total amount of spending to address homelessness was met with “we do not know” at state and county levels. The

---

<sup>33</sup> In the section on Hawaii’s *Fiscal Conditions* above, we reported that Hawaii’s Department of Human Services (DHS) accounted for 22% of the state’s spending for FY 2023. Most of the state’s expenditures to assist with homelessness flow through the DHS. Also, according to Hawaii’s newly formed Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DCR), the total value of its expenditures for FY 2023 was over \$245 million, and it employed nearly 1,900 staffers. Note that DCR services directed at the homeless would only account for a fraction of these expenditure and employment estimates. DCR was inaugurated in 2024; therefore, the FY 2023 statistics reflect its portion of spending under the former Hawaii Department of Public Safety. Details concerning DCR’s FY 2023 operations were provided by a DCR official in a June 6, 2024, email message that is available from the author upon request.

state and counties were somewhat amenable to assembling information that could be used to estimate the amount of spending on the homeless.<sup>34</sup> Using the information provided by cooperating governments, Table 1 was prepared.

**Table 1.—Hawaii’s Unduplicated Homeless Expenditures/Appropriations, FY 2021-23<sup>35</sup>**

Line No.	Governments	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023
1	State (Expenditures from State and Federal Sources)	\$28,962,148	\$27,217,230	\$27,089,663
2	Kauai County (Expenditures from Non-State Sources)	\$3,049,038	\$908,841	\$121,773
3	Hawaii County (Expenditures from Non-State Sources)	\$0	\$0	\$3,983,023
4	Honolulu City/County (Appropriated from Non-State Sources)	\$43,863,000	\$13,859,283	\$19,980,290
5	Maui County	NA	NA	NA
6	Kalawao County	NA	NA	NA
7	<b>Total Expended/Appropriated (7 = Sum 1..6)</b>	<b>\$75,874,185</b>	<b>\$41,985,354</b>	<b>\$51,174,749</b>
8	Number of Homeless in the State for Year t "Point in Time" Count	6,213	5,967	6,223
9	Expenditure/Appropriated Per Capita Homeless (9 = 7 / 8)	\$12,213	\$7,036	\$8,223

Sources: Hawaii State and County Governments, HUD, and author’s visualizations

Related and important statistical caveats to the table are: These estimates do not include spending by Maui or Kalawao County; and the estimates represent a combination of actual expenditures appropriated funds.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> The author first lodged requests for information on homelessness spending in late March of 2024. The state and Hawaii, Kauai, and Oahu counties acted to fulfill our requests—at least in part. However, Maui County, which was under pressure to address matters associated with its August 8, 2023 fire, was unable to fulfill the request for information on homeless spending.

<sup>35</sup> These estimates are subject to revision.

<sup>36</sup> Correspondence with the four cooperating governments and the related spending statistics are available from the author upon request.

Emblematic of the homelessness crisis in the nation, researchers are hard-pressed to identify per capita homeless expenditures by governments.<sup>37</sup> The absence of such data clouds the picture of which governments are most effective and economically efficient. Consequently, there is no widely accepted yardstick against which to compare the estimates provided in Table 1 on per capita homeless spending in Hawaii.

Table 1 shows that FY 2021 witnessed the highest **per capita** homeless spending in Hawaii (\$12.2K), there was a substantial decline for FY 2022 (\$7.0K), followed by a moderate increase for FY 2023 (\$8.2K).<sup>38</sup> FY 2021 benefitted from a surge in funding for Honolulu City/County as COVID-19 funds rolled in from the Federal Government during the second year of the pandemic.

What is transparent is that, given Hawaii's high cost of living, the per capita homeless spending levels appear far too low for meaningful and reasonable quality levels of service. The per capita homeless spending is significantly less than spending per public school student and less than 25% of expenditures for the state's incarcerated. Accordingly, homeless spending in Hawaii appears to be intended as a

---

<sup>37</sup> While Brookings Institution Fellows, Hanna Love and Tracy Loh have performed extensive research on homelessness in the country, including at the municipal level, they either have not developed estimates of per capita homeless spending by cities, or they refuse to reveal the results. See the authors' correspondence to Brookings Institution in **Appendix I**. Brookings has not responded to date.

<sup>38</sup> The per capita spending estimates rest largely on estimates reported in HUD's Annual Report on Homelessness. We adopt a calendar year (CY)  $t = \text{fiscal year (FY)} t$  convention, as opposed to a  $\text{FY}_t = (0.5 \text{CY}_{t-1} + 0.5 \text{CY}_t)$  approach. Also, because the CY 2021 homelessness count only represents the housed homeless due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, we use the midpoint between CY 2020 and CY 2022 counts to prepare an estimate of the Total Homeless for CY 2021.

maintenance program (i.e., just enough spending to prevent a sizeable deterioration in homeless persons' conditions on average) that can double as a source of demand for services that require a substantial amount of employment and government spending to help sustain entrepreneurs and workers in selected industries. Clearly, current spending on the homeless is insufficient to resolve homelessness.

As highlighted earlier in the *Demographics* section, although Black Americans are favorably positioned economically in Hawaii relative to their mainland counterparts, it is notable that Black Americans are overrepresented among Hawaii's homeless. While the Black population was about 2.2% of the state's total during 2023, they accounted for 4.0% of the state's homeless.<sup>39</sup>

A logical conclusion to draw from the foregoing analysis of homelessness is that, while it may appear beneficial to be homeless in Hawaii climate-wise, efforts to address homelessness in Hawaii may not be sufficiently refined to solve the myriad concerns that the homeless confront, and the level of spending on homelessness is certainly insufficient to obliterate the crisis. Additionally, the relatively favorable economic condition of Black Americans in Hawaii may distance them from the homeless; thereby removing a potential source of support for Black American homeless persons that might exist on the mainland. Consequently, Hawaii is certainly not the most beneficial place for a Black American to be homeless.

**Assessment:** ↓

---

<sup>39</sup> HUD's Point In Time (PIT) counts by state for 2007-2023 are available at <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/3031/pit-and-hic-data-since-2007/>. (Ret. 042924). These HUD data provide estimates of the homeless by race/ethnicity.

## *Climate Change*

It is our belief that, unless dramatic changes are implemented in Hawaii, Climate Change will render much of what is attractive about the state too expensive to maintain and preserve. As vested business interests and their politicians conspire to implement piecemeal strategies to preserve and conserve their positions and material and financial resources, valuable time and a tremendous amount of financial and other resources are likely to be wasted. What is required is a realistic re-envisioning of Hawaii's long-term future and then the implementation of a rapid, bold, and comprehensive reengineering of the state's economy from top to bottom. It is suicide to keep one's head in the sand and not recognize that the entire world has changed. At this historical juncture paused on a cliff's edge that makes possible a dive into a new technological sea, every nation, state, firm, institution, and individual must decide whether to make the leap and endure the pain and then gain the potential benefits of change, or to cut losses and run to a different environment that offers potential survival of limited duration.

In our view, Hawaii is an exceptionally good candidate for future failure mainly because of its storied traditions and cultures that are highly valued among its people. However, the population's deference to elders and customs may preclude needed innovation and change. Also, earlier references to corruption serve as another ingredient for failure. Suffice it to say that as one assesses Hawaii's prospects for future success on the Climate Change or any other front, one should consider the State's leadership (business, political, and otherwise) that is positioned to address critical issues, and one is likely conclude that that leadership is not well suited for the tasks that lie ahead.

**Assessment:** ↓

## Conclusion

If Black America is to advance, we should discontinue operating randomly and as lone wolves. We should have a long-term strategy that is operationalized systematically and in unity. This is a first **BlackEconomics.org** assessment for a US state, which summarizes important information about the State of Hawaii.<sup>40</sup> It is not a “report card,” but it highlights obvious topical areas where conditions are not particularly favorable for Black Americans. Therefore, this assessment should serve as a signal concerning how Black Americans should or should not approach the State of Hawaii for opportunities of any kind.

### **BlackEconomics.org Assessment for Hawaii:** ↓

This assessment should be considered by Black American individuals, organizations, and institutions alike when determining whether to do business with the State of Hawaii. Certainly, through a unified approach to spending our financial and other resources, we can improve conditions and outcomes for Black Americans who reside in those states that provide a better environment for us. Also, our unified action can motivate states that are not favorable toward Black Americans to modify their actions toward us—whether we are residents of those states or visiting from other locales. This is not to say that Hawaii should be eternally off limits for Black Americans. Rather, the inference is that considerable change should occur, including an influx of selected Black Americans who are particularly

---

<sup>40</sup> While providing a brief and selected analysis of conditions in Hawaii, this assessment is not nearly as broad or comprehensive as the assessments we developed for four midwestern states (Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming) in Chapter five of our 2020 book *Exodus: A Book for Black Americans Suggesting a Way out and Up*. <https://www.blackeconomics.org/BEAP/exodus.pdf> (Ret. 052824).

well suited for existing conditions in Hawaii, before the state can be transformed sufficiently to serve as a favorable attraction for Black Americans of every rank. And even under those conditions, Black Americans who opt to relocate to, or remain in, Hawaii, should be prepared to concentrate/intensify our efforts to unify and ensure our survival and success—especially economically.



## Appendix I

### *Email Message Correspondence to the Brookings Institution*

**From:** robinson@

**Sent:** Monday, April 22, 2024 10:48 AM

**To:** esmedia@brookings.edu; gsmedia@brookings.edu

**Subject:** Hanna Love and Tracey Hadden Loh's work on Homelessness

**April 22, 2024**

**Dear Brookings Institution:**

Greetings.

My experience is that I should not expect a response to this message. Brookings' fellows appear to be benefiting richly from their ivory tower perches, deep in research, and too preoccupied to respond to queries about their work. It is important to add that such failures to communicate with the public constrain Brookings' reach. Those initially enamored with Brookings' products decide to not "spread the word" because they cannot obtain answers to one-or-two questions that would fully illuminate a topic and empower them to speak more authoritatively about it. Therefore, knowledge about Brookings' work stops at one and does not spread to many. However, logically, Brookings should not be expected to modify its operations until it is penalized for its shortcomings. At the same time, Brookings is so well connected and integrated with resources (financial and otherwise) that the probability of a meaningful (financial) penalty is small. The world keeps turning and high-quality information that could produce improved outcomes, simply dies on the vine. Yet, hope springs eternal.

The reason for this message is to reach Brookings' Fellows Love and Loh concerning their work on homelessness: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/despite-a-national-spike-in-homelessness-some-us-regions-are-finding-solutions/>.

I telephoned last week and left a voicemail message for Ms. Love to obtain an email address to pursue this topic, but I have not received a response. When I called today to follow up, the operator disconnected the call.

For their most recent release that compares homelessness in many of the nation's large cities, what appears to be missing is a comparative analysis of the cost efficiency of various municipalities in addressing homelessness. This is to clarify whether such analysis was considered and was not performed, or was performed but not reported?

Also, while the underlying database for their research includes the State of Hawaii, there is no mention of Honolulu in their article. Why not?

Further, it seems important to address antecedents to homelessness. The article in question discusses some of the reasons for homelessness at the point of homelessness. However, few articles on homelessness state simply that "it's largely about the unavailability of financial resources." Any social scientists will tell you that a very important and highly correlated factor for financial resources (income) is "education." [Is it not odd that the national database reflects no information about the educational status of the homeless? However, the database reflects replete data on race, ethnicity, age, gender, housing type, etc. (The omission of education appears to be purposeful.)] Yet few articles on homelessness discuss the educational status of the homeless. If researchers could focus on this aspect of the topic, then they might see enough light to ask: Why are the homeless typically less educated than the society at large? [Unfortunately, this conclusion is based on anecdotal, not statistical evidence.] Then they might comprehend Jesse

Jackson's advice decades ago: (paraphrasing) "The nation should expend a little more on the front side of life, so that large expenditures are not required on the back side of life." The fact that the nation does not heed Jesse's advice reinforces the reality that, in its attempt to continue creating jobs for some, the nation rejects providing assistance to others and then uses the others (their minds, bodies and souls) to manufacture those jobs. Keep in mind that the average salary of one working in the homeless industry is likely to exceed twice the amount expended to provide care for a homeless person. Interestingly and wisely, the nation must have realized that the prison industry was too costly to continue expanding it (the combined costs of prison workers' salaries and the cost of maintaining a prisoner are quite high). Hence, it is logical to expand the homelessness industry where the overall cost of production is lower than for the prison industry. The two industries achieve the same goal: They lock citizens out of participation in the full scope of potential activities. Over the past decade, we have seen a precipitous decline in prison populations and a simultaneous surge in the homeless populations.

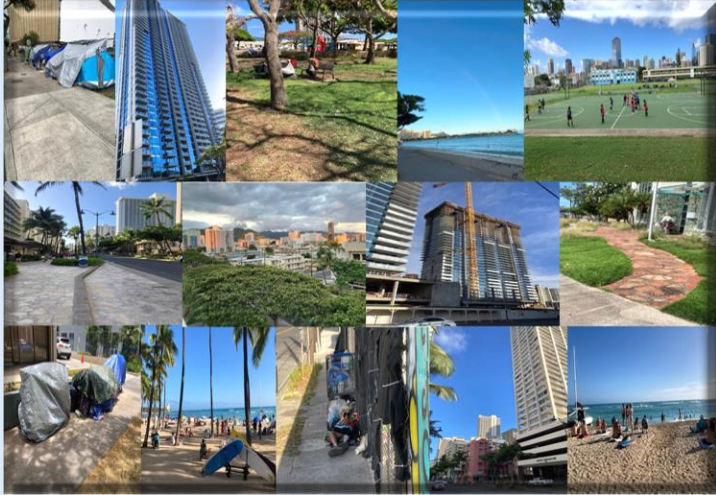
Finally, and this could be viewed as an important question (although diversity is losing its currency rapidly in the nation; as yet another example, read yesterday's WSJ <https://www.wsj.com/business/diversity-goals-are-disappearing-from-companies-annual-reports-459d1ef3>): Who is largely benefitting from this relatively new homelessness industry? We know that college graduates from less than top-flight post-secondary institutions with other than STEM-related degrees remain underemployed years after graduation. Is the relatively new and expanding homelessness industry largely benefitting White, Black, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, or "Other" workers who fit the just-provided description? Are young or older workers benefitting? Is it possible to drill down and consider these two questions from a hierarchical perspective? That is, what is the nature of the hierarchical distribution (from Senior management down to the lowest-level field worker) of

homelessness industry workers by race/ethnicity and age? The Bureau of Labor Statistics may be able to assist on this question using their statistics on occupations.

Thank you very much for your patience, consideration, and potential cooperation. I look forward to receiving responses at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Brooks Robinson



**BlackEconomics.org®**

***Black Americans and Hawaii:  
An Assessment with Emphasis on Housing  
Related Industries, Homelessness, and Climate  
Change***

Brooks Robinson, Ph.D.

©July 2024

BlackEconomics.org

P. O. Box 8848

Honolulu, HI 96830-8848

[www.BlackEconomics.org](http://www.BlackEconomics.org)