

Other views

Self-determination ads should focus on the past as lessons for the future

Frankly, it sounds like something a 3-year-old would say — “It’s OUR land. It’s OUR ocean. It’s OUR turn.”

Yes, it is all those things for the Chamorro people. But if you press the mute button on your TV remote control, you’d think you were watching a tourism commercial rather than something that is supposed to inspire a vote for self-determination.

Instead of talking about us, us, us, perhaps these ads should focus more on why the Chamorro people need to make this choice about the future of their island. That question could best be answered by highlighting some of the critical points in Guam’s history and the lessons learned from them.

Shouldn’t that be the basis from which Chamorros choose the direction they want this island to take in the future?

If I were Chamorro, I think I’d want this campaign to remind everyone about how our ancestors suffered through Spanish colonization and how our manam’ko’ withstood the horrible Japanese occupation during World War II to get us to this point. It was the American philosopher George Santayana who said, “Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

Just look at how not remembering, or not knowing about history, played out in



Jayne Flores

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a Taipei restaurant last week. The restaurant had, amazingly, displayed pictures of Nazi concentration camp victims as part of its decor. The manager explained that the Taiwanese “are not very knowledgeable about what happened during the Holocaust and are not as sensitive about it as foreigners are.”

If people in Taiwan are ignorant of the horrors experienced by millions in eastern Europe during World War II, then it’s a safe bet that they know nothing about what happened to the Chamorro people on Guam during the war, even though many of them now vacation here.

If any one of us had experienced such horrors, you had better believe we’d be up in arms if someone attempted to trivialize our suffering.

The Chamorro people should be the only ones to vote on this self-determination issue. That way, they can put cen-

turies of struggle to rest once and for all.

Although, again if I were Chamorro, I would certainly be asking what happened to the “commonwealth” choice on the ballot. Just because Guam’s first commonwealth act failed doesn’t mean a new and improved version cannot be drawn up.

And whatever happened to that catch phrase we used so many times during the commonwealth negotiations — “...forge a new relationship with the United States”?

Why isn’t there an “other” choice on this ballot? Who says the Chamorro people can’t invent a new type of relationship with Uncle Sam?

The Chamorro people have every right to determine their own destiny. But that determination should be based as much on the past as it is on hope for the future.

This vote for self-determination should happen, not because it’s anybody’s “turn”, but because it was passed down to the present generation of Chamorros through the blood, sweat and tears of the people that walked this island before us as they struggled to regain control of their homeland.

That’s what the campaign for self-determination should reflect.

Jayne Flores, a resident of Sinajana, is a former investigative reporter.