



Ea, 'Āina, and 'Ōlelo Hawai'i Ji-bimendizoyang, Aki, miinwaa Anishinaabemowin Indigenous Sovereignty, Land, and Language

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Kingdom of Hawai'i

Contrary to the dominant narrative, Hawai'i is not a part of the United States. The Hawai'ian Islands continue to be a sovereign, independent nation despite the colonial efforts of the United States through a series of deceitful and illegal acts spanning the past 119 years.

The Kingdom of Hawai'i was overthrown in 1893 by United States diplomatic and military personnel. Their ultimate goal was the annexation of the islands to the United States. In 1897, Hawai'ian organizers collected over 21,000 native Hawai'ian signatures (more than half of the native Hawai'ian population) for the "Petition Against Annexation". Delegates and Queen Lili'uokalani lobbied Congress but were unsuccessful. The Hawai'i Kingdom was annexed in 1898. The Hawai'ian Islands remained a U.S. territory until 1959 when they were admitted to statehood as the 50th state.

Why Hawai'i?

As an indigenous activist and scholar, I am interested in the importance of cultural and linguistic revitalization in indigenous sovereignty. Despite the century of unlawful suppression of the Kanaka Maoli (the Hawai'ian people) by the United States government, generations of indigenous people and settler allies have raised their voices for justice, sovereignty, and for the life, love, and health of the land.



'O ka 'Ōlelo ke Ka' ā o ka Maui

Language is the fiber that binds us to our cultural identity.

I am passionate about the work of revitalizing my own indigenous language. The goal of my special studies project was to learn strategies to increase indigenous capacity for political and economic independence and to promote indigenous language revitalization as a cornerstone of indigenous political resurgence. I hoped to learn about the major political and social forces in Hawai'i over the past two centuries. As assimilation is a primary political tool used by the United States and other colonial powers, I connected with community members who are engaging in collective action based on aloha 'āina (love of the land). It was an inspiring experience to learn from these relatives what it means to restore kuleana (rights, responsibilities) and to work within, against, outside, and/or between settler colonial structures for the rights of indigenous people.

Community Partners

- Punana Leo in Hilo, Hawai'i
- Nawahiokalani'opu'u, public Hawai'ian immersion K-12 academy
- Ka Haka 'Ula Ke'elikolani College of Hawaiian Language at the University of Hawai'i-Hilo
- Papahuana Kuaola Lā Hana Waipao Mālama Hāloa- lo'i kalo maintenance
- Kamakukalani Center for Hawai'ian Knowledge at the University of Hawai'i-Manoa
- 'O Ka Po'e i Aloha I Ka 'Āina – The People Who Love The Land

Outcomes

I am currently writing a policy article for the American Indian Health and Family Services December newsletter advocating for the passage of the Native American Language Immersion Student Achievement Act (S. 1948). I have also accepted the position as Resource Developer for Bug-O-Nay-Ge-Shig Leech Lake Tribal School.

Skills Developed

- Advocacy
- Communication skills
- Analytical skills
- Greater nuanced understanding of U.S. foreign and domestic policy
- Community education

Classroom Connections

One of the most exciting moments I had as a student was learning about all of the work that former Punana Leo Executive Director Namaka Rawlins has done in her 30 years of Hawai'ian language medium instruction. The advocacy, grantwriting, fundraising, organizing, and community education work that she has done were all skills I have developed in my MSW program. Social Work 560 and Social Work 663 Grantwriting courses were the two courses that I reflected upon the most during my special study.

Career Connections

The community members I met re-inspired my commitment to language revitalization through their determination and love for the 'āina and 'olelo. I was able to visit successful schools and organizations that place native Hawai'ian language, values, and knowledge at the core of their work. Working together, I would like to learn from their best practices and continuing building an indigenous body of knowledge in the Great Lakes region through language and culture in education.



Lessons Learned

My special study reminded me that the dedicated work of a group of people can create change. Today there are over 4,000 native Hawai'ian students enrolled in public Hawai'ian immersion schools in Hawai'i and that number is continuing to grow. Strategic partnerships with schools, community organizations, institutions of higher education, and the state have amplified the voices of native Hawai'ians who are working for the life, love, and health, of their 'āina

Advice

- Advocate for yourself! Use the passion that you have for the work and community that you are engaged with to advocate for your learning opportunities.
- Be humble and open. Some of my most important and favorite lessons came from the cab driver and the men hanging around the fish market watching the morning catch come in.

Mahalo Nui Loa, Chi Miigwetch, Thank you

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