

SUPPORTING EMERGENCE

The Contribution of Native Hawaiians to the Survival and Thriving of All People

An emergent paper, June 7, 2016 draft



For the most part, the relationships that indigenous people have with dominant nations are imperfect experiments with horrific pasts. Indigenous people are the endangered species of the human race. From a scientific point of view, we have come to understand that living beings – plants and animals – that are endangered hold keys to the survival and thriving of the entire ecosystem. We have also learned that it is not enough to just protect a species, and that restored habitats make it possible to move from survival to thriving. In its thriving state, the species can carry out its/their unique present and future role in the health and functioning of the environment.

Restoring and strengthening self-determining indigenous governance is the act and process of restoring the roles of indigenous people in the future needs of this planet. Working with native people to do so isn't only a movement for reconciliation and justice, it is an investment in the future of all peoples.

Let's take the emergent case of kanaka maōli (the indigenous people of the Hawaiian archipelago).

Decimated by dislocation and disease, the native people of Hawai'i numbered less than 60,000 at the time of their loss of self-governance in 1893, as juxtaposed to the nearly one million who lived sustainably in the Hawaiian archipelago at the time of western contact in 1778. Juxtaposed against these dramatic numbers is the remarkable comeback story –



more than half a million people claimed their Native Hawaiian identification in the last U.S. Census (of which about 50% now reside on the continental U.S.). Native Hawaiians are on track to comprise and then surpass 20% of the state's population.

Survival has had its costs. In addition to having to leave the islands, primarily for economic reasons,



less than 25% of Hawaiians in the state can sustain a rural life. Native Hawaiians are significantly and consistently over-represented among the homeless, uninsured and underinsured, suffering from chronic disease, and those sentenced and incarcerated. Native Hawaiians comprise 40% of the public school population which, like many educational systems, struggles to meet the needs and aspirations of its children.

This is a reminder that genocide isn't the only way that indigenous people are driven from the human species. It can happen through absorption – also known as assimilation. And, decades-long, losing fights with assimilation without finding a unique way to be both differentiated and a productive part of the dominant culture can also finish what genocide started.

The modern story of Native Hawaiians is complex – a comeback story that defies the odds.

Native Hawaiians have also, in a twenty-five year community driven push, tripled the number of native speakers, reversing the trend of the disappearance of 'olelo Hawai'i. Native musicians, artists, and cultural schools are internationally recognized. Hawaiians have led and/or participated in nearly every significant environmental fight in Hawai'i. Hawaiians can be found among business, union, activist,



cultural, legal, educational, health, and political leaders. Forty years after the traditional sailing canoe Hokule'a first sailed, she is making her way along the Atlantic coast of the U.S. as part of a world-wide voyage to seek out and encourage modern day navigators to Malama Honua – care for Mother Earth. Forty years after the occupation of Kaho'olawe to end its bombing and spiritual desecration, the continuing restoration of the island is an inspiration for many land struggles throughout the world. Hawaiians have never given up, never let go of their pride and determination to carry out their kuleana (their responsibility) to their people and to the land. In many ways, the modern experiment by and for the indigenous people of Hawai'i has gone as far as it can go within the existing system.



The self-empowerment and sustainability of indigenous communities is critical to the cultural history and future vibrancy of a place. This is the belief and practice of Native Hawaiians – that the indigenous people of Hawai'i have many practices, much knowledge, and many values to offer all of the people of Hawai'i and the world, whether you are indigenous or not. Local (and indigenously local) control of lands and resources in a limited land base like the Hawaiian islands will create more sustainable local economies.

Under the U.S. constitutional framework, indigenous people require specific governance structures and relationships in order to have their/our own schools, cultural practices, traditional access, and other rights. Those who promote assimilation are determined to curtail and reverse the advancement of Hawaiian rights. In a series of federal legal actions, it became clear that Native Hawaiians would have many of their political gains for rights and programs at the state level reversed, unless they sought and successfully achieved “nation within a nation” status. Organizing for self-determination has met with resistance. Using the U.S. Constitution as its weapon, conservatives are opposing the modern reconstitution of a native government by asserting that the rights of non-native people – i.e. non-Hawaiian voters – are violated unless they are included in the process. There is an argument for assimilation.

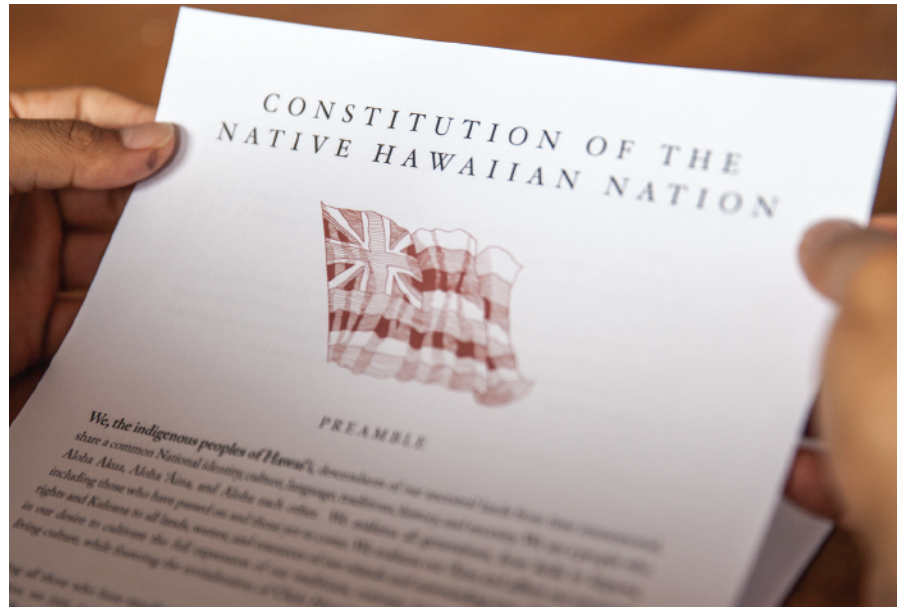


In the massive organizing required to build the modern nation, Native Hawaiians are engaged in a community-based effort that any social movement might envy. Over 105,000 Native Hawaiians are registered to participate. Faced with a U.S. Supreme Court stay (5-4) of announcing the election results for delegates to a Constitutional ‘Aha, the election was suspended and all candidates offered a chance to meet. Over 120 participants in the February 2016 ‘Aha – gathering – ranged from ages 20 to 90, representing different points of view, organized and wrote a document in twenty days, passing it in a vote of 88-30-1.

The values expressed in the proposed Constitution speak to collective rights, for the aloha and responsibility to land, ancestors, spirit, and children not yet born. It calls for restorative justice, the education and health of its people, and the living development of culture and language. This modern governance document is built around collective rights, the recognition of cultural and experiential wisdom, stewardship of the land, the responsibility of the government for the education, health and cultural vibrancy of the people. It is built on the holistic premise of community in sustainable

relationship to the land. It is a hopeful declaration of using ancient wisdom to reclaim a more integrated, sustainable, and healthy world... and it is perceived as a threat to at least one version of the American Dream.

The Native Hawaiian constitutional statement, crafted by four generations of people from all walks of life, is a declaration of what it may mean to live on an integrated basis, sustainably, striving to thrive while bringing the best of cultural integrity... in modern times. It is a work in progress that may serve as a living example to other peoples.



Over the next few months, the community is organizing around this mission: to take the next steps for ratification of the constitutional document, and assuming an affirmative vote, to elect the first officers of its modern nation. The following projects are underway: fundraising, outreach and organizing, continued registration of Native Hawaiians, and the processes of election.

The road ahead will be complex and difficult. The learning curve and expectations alone are daunting. The indigenous government seeking to lead the self-determination of its people will be creating its own pathway while navigating relationships in the close quarters of an island state. And, we – indigenous and not – should cheer on and support this Aloha Movement! It is rare for activism and governance to come together in such a generative and powerful way. Perhaps Hawai'i will lead the way.

The Ask

\$2 million is needed to support two elections – the ratification of the Constitution, and presuming an affirmative vote, the election of the nation's first governing officers. Individual and organizational donations to the Aloha Lahui Collective Action Fund of the Tides Foundation will be dispersed for education and organizing efforts as well as the administering of both elections. The fundraising seed began with small contributions from the community.

The multi-year effort that brought this work to the current moment was largely funded by trust revenues from lands that were once indigenous lands. Conservatives are bringing legal challenges, characterizing these funds as 'public' is a part of their challenge to stop self-determination as an unconstitutional process that violates the rights of non-Hawaiians. Therefore, the community is raising private funds to advance the next few steps. Upon organizing of the modern government, the legally recognized political status of Native Hawaiians will better protect and sustain the ability of Native Hawaiians to be both uniquely indigenous and a part of the greater community of Hawai'i, the U.S., and the world.



Go To:

www.HawaiianNation.com – up to date information on the ratification effort

to see and download a copy of the Constitution, go to
www.HawaiianNation.com/constitution/

www.AlohaLahui.com – crowd-funding site

www.Kanaiolowalu.org – registration of Native Hawaiians to participate
in the governance effort