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The Heart of 'Ōlelo Hawai'i

E nā lei 'ohu'ohu o nā moku 'ewalu, ka lehua lihilihi 'ula, ka roselani 'ala onaona, ka pua kukui lahilahi makamae, ke kauna 'oa kau po'ohiwa, ka hinahina kū kahakai, ka 'ilima kū lana ali'i, ka moikahana hua pōina 'ole, a me nā pūpū u'i like 'ole, 'ae 'ano 'ai kākou a pau loa! To most people that sounds like a bunch of gibberish, but if I am to write a paper about the language of my people, I have to do it right out of respect for my culture. This is a greeting that acknowledges every mukupuni (island) within Hawai'i starting with Moku 'o Keawe (The Big Island) and ending with Ni'ihau. In Hawaiian culture, knowing about the place you come from and its ancestry/history is important.

The Hawaiian language was not a written language until later after the missionaries came and helped the Hawaiian people create the written language we know today. In ancient Hawai'i, the language, traditions, and cultural practices were passed down through hula (traditional style of dancing), 'oli (chanting), mele (songs), and mo'olelo (stories). Each of these traditions shares common ground: 'Ōlelo Hawai'i is the heart of the Hawaiian people.

Aloha mai kākou 'O wau 'o Noah Matai olelau'ele'ele
Kamakanamaikalaninokamālamalama'aname ka 'o ia a me Kealoha Seleni Dycus. No Kalaepōhaku mai au, noho au ma Hawai'i Kai. My experience with 'Ōlelo Hawai'i stems from being surrounded by it my whole life. Ever since I was a little kid I was immersed in Hawaiian culture. I was raised on the island of Oahu and I come from a long line of Hula dancers and have

kūpuna (ancestors) that date back to the time of Kamehameha the Great. As I grew older I wanted to be more involved with my culture so when I had the chance I took ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i for a couple of years just to get a very basic understanding of the language to the point where I was able to read and comprehend ‘Ōlelo being spoken to me. But learning the language proved to be quite the challenge so instead I immersed myself in Hawai‘i tradition, I danced hula for most of my high school career at Saint Louis, where we would be involved in a number of hula performances across the island. We would also visit different cultural spots around the island so we could learn and study the history and culture of the Kanaka maoli as well as being involved in many cultural practices around campus for example being a part of Makahiki (Hawaiian season of rest and celebration) which entails a full day of ceremony and celebration filled with Oli, Hula and all sorts of Ancient hawaiian games and practices. While doing this I came to a better understanding of the language, culture, and how ancient Hawai‘i was back in the day because it was being taught to us mostly in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i but also in a way that we could understand. After all, we weren't very advanced at speaking the language.

‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i. A language that thrived through a flourishing kingdom and was used in school facilities to educate the ‘ōpio of Hawai‘i. Kamehameha III made sure that our people were educated through the use of the Hawaiian language. It is said that Hawai‘i is the oldest educational system west of the Mississippi and the only system created by a sovereign monarch. Unfortunately, this was a language that was almost forgotten, and its culture along with it, ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i was banned from being used by its people in 1896, this was due to the arrival of the missionaries. If you simply spoke it in school you would receive severe discipline that could range from writing the same sentence repeatedly to physical abuse from teachers. Imagine being prohibited from speaking your mother tongue or the language that you identified with your entire

life. This was what my kūpuna had to endure for many years and because of it, our language almost went extinct. Thankfully the lāhui of Hawai‘i came together to revitalize the engine of our culture, immersing future generations in the language by creating Papa ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i (Hawaiian language class) in schools, and various cultural events for the community to partake in learning and understanding their culture and where they come from..

Without language, there's no culture. It is how my kūpuna passed down their ‘ike (knowledge) and carried on the mo‘okū‘auhau (genealogy) of not just my lineage, but the lineage of Hawai‘i itself. It's the mo‘olelo of our people, how we came to be, the struggles we went through to stay alive. Language is life. It is how we connect, how we share, and how we stand out! To know the language is to know the culture. The amazing thing about the Hawaiian language is the deeper mana‘o (meaning) behind it.

Hawaiians were intellectual thinkers, there's a saying that my uncle always used when teaching me about Hawaiian language and it goes, “If it has multiple meanings, it's important.” Most times within ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i many words can be interpreted in multiple different ways and most times the more meanings the word has, the greater its importance, For example everyone's favorite word ALOHA! The word aloha has over 20 different meanings in the Hawaiian language. Aloha can mean hello, goodbye, i love you, sympathy, kindness, mercy, etc... Aloha is one of the most important words in Hawaiian culture. I love being a part of this culture because of the knowledge that comes with it. If it wasn't for nā kanaka Hawai‘i (the Hawaiian people) coming together and fighting for our right to our language ‘Ōlelo Hawaii would have gone extinct along with the traditions and cultural practices.

Out of all the languages, the Hawaiian language is one of the more underrated languages in the world, not many people care to learn about the Hawaiian language or the culture. We are

just a tourist attraction to most people around the world. The truth is why would you care? It's only spoken by the Hawaiian people and that consists of a very small group of people because the majority of Hawaiians can't even speak their language. But to na Kanaka Maoli, our language is our life force, it is what keeps our culture alive and flourishing to this day. The Hawaiian culture and language may not be what it used to be back in old Hawaii but it's still alive and it will live on because the Hawaiian people will continue to pass down the cultural practices and ancient traditions to future generations so that maybe one day Hawaiian can be restored to its former glory.