

American University

## The Hawaiian Land Back Movement

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Over the last couple of decades, the phrase “Land Back” has gained more and more popularity as a rallying cry for Indigenous activists. The Land Back movement has emerged as a unifying praxis of indigenous liberation, demanding that land and resources that were stolen by American imperialism are returned to the control of Indigenous groups. One notable location where strong Land Back organizing is happening is Hawaii. The exploitation of indigenous Hawaiians, or Kanaka Maoli, has been met with strong resistance and organizing that is well worth discussing. First, I will explore some of the major issues and historical events that affect Indigenous Hawaiians to this day that are causing the Land Back Movement. Then, I will explore some of the most notable Indigenous activism that has occurred, as well as protests and movements that are occurring right now.

### **Negative Effects of Colonialism and Statehood on Indigenous Hawaiians**

#### **Healthcare Disparity in Hawaii**

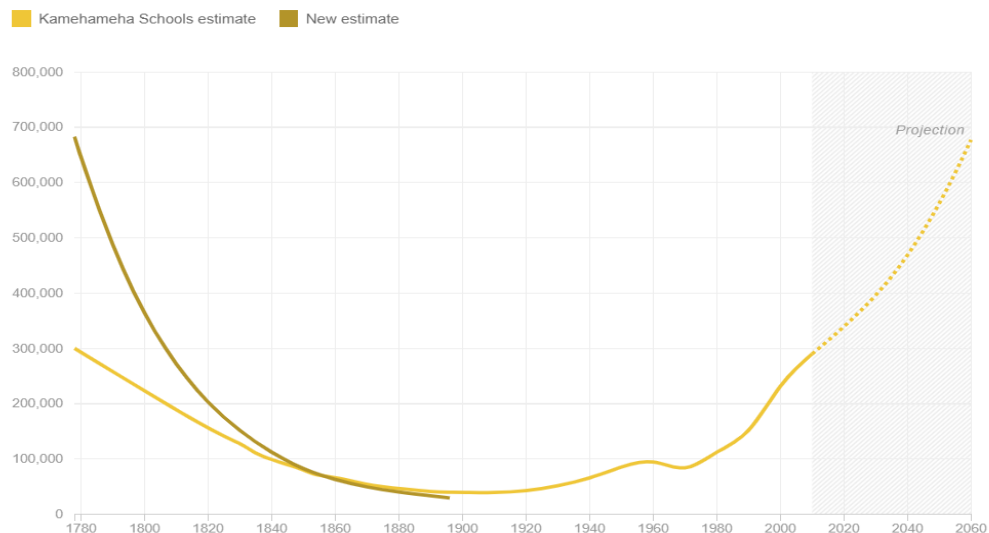
Despite the common perception that Nordic countries and Europe invented free universal healthcare, Hawaii had a universal Health Care system around 100 years before Nordic countries did with 1859’s Queen’s Hospital. According to Henry Whitney, “Native Hawaiians are admitted free of charge, while foreigners pay from seventy-five cents to two dollars a day, according to accommodations and attendance (Whitney 21). This Healthcare system was ahead of its time and was successful in keeping Indigenous Hawaiians relatively healthy.

Compare this with how Indigenous Hawaiians are treated in the Healthcare system now. A report by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs in 2017 stated, “Today, Native Hawaiians are perhaps the single racial group with the highest health risk in the State of Hawai‘i. This risk stems from high economic and cultural stress, lifestyle and risk behaviors, and late or lack of access to health

care (Native Hawaiian Health Fact Sheet 2017, p. 2).” This is in addition to the Healthcare system as a whole having systemic issues. According to the Wall Street Journal, “Hawaii has among the fewest hospital beds per capita of any state and the 10th longest emergency-room wait times. For years it has wrestled with a severe doctor shortage and a lack of specialty care in its rural areas.”(Akina) This disparity would not have happened if the United States had not willfully damaged and destroyed Hawaii’s existing universal healthcare. According to Dr. Keanu Sai, “In 1909, the government’s interest in Queen’s Hospital was severed and native Hawaiians would no longer be admitted free of charge... Gradually native Hawaiians were denied health care unless they could pay. This led to a crisis of native Hawaiian health today.”(Sai)

#### Measuring Hawaii’s Native Hawaiian Population

A new analysis estimates that there were far more Native Hawaiians on the island than previously thought when Capt. James Cook landed in 1778.

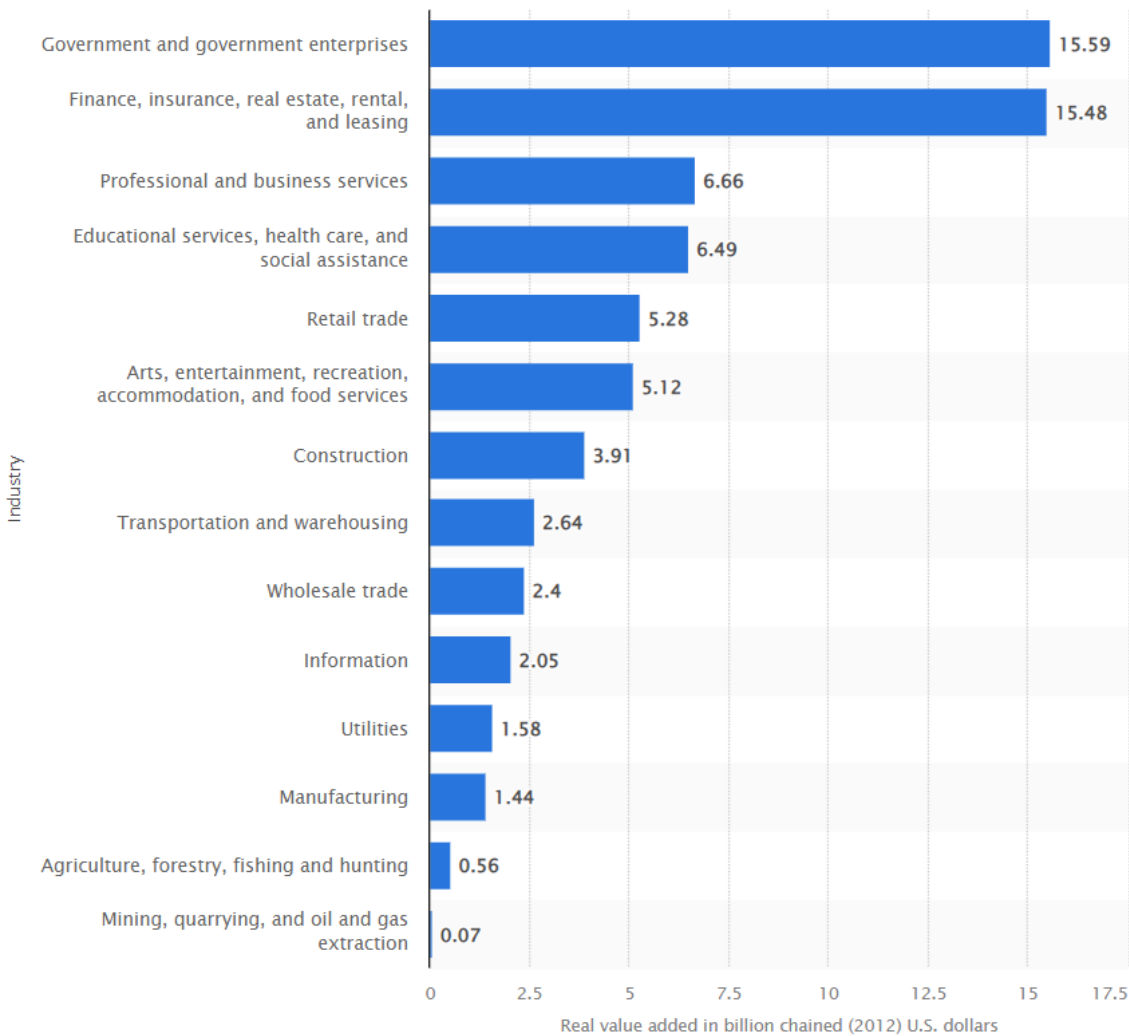


In addition, diseases introduced by colonization resulted in a massive reduction in the Native Hawaiian population. The chart above shows just how drastic the population decline really was, with more recent data showing that the population of Hawaii was likely even higher before US intervention. Faced with the fact that the United States’ colonization caused all of this

death, it is unacceptable that there is this healthcare disparity between Indigenous Hawaiians and settlers.

### **Economic Exploitation**

According to National Geographic, “Native Hawaiians have among the highest poverty rates on the islands and make up some 20 percent of Hawai‘i’s houseless population. Meanwhile, Japanese residents earn the highest per capita income at \$32,129, followed by white residents at \$31,621. Both groups dominate the racial make-up of Hawai‘i’s current government.”(Altemus-Williams) In addition, Samoans, Tongans, and Filipinos struggle with low per capita incomes, while more than half of Hawai‘i’s Marshallese population are impoverished. Black residents do slightly better financially but account for nearly a third of the state’s reports of race-related employment discrimination. (Altemus-Williams) This wage inequality is doubly worrisome when the Economy of Hawaii profits especially from the natural resources of the island that were stolen from Indigenous Hawaiians.



(Statista)

Looking at the above distribution of the Hawaiian economy, we can see that some of the largest sectors of the economy are Government Expenditures, Real estate, and Entertainment, each of which is in direct opposition to indigenous Hawaiian interests and exists because of the land and natural resources of Hawaii. The military, real estate, and tourism all rely on the land of Hawaii, but this wealth is not shared with the indigenous people of Hawaii that the land was stolen from.

## Denationalization of Hawaii

The exploitation of Hawaii goes deeper than just an exploitation of material resources. The United States through Denationalization exploited Kanaka Maoli psychologically as well as materially. Denationalization was codified by the Commission on the Responsibility of the Authors of War and Enforcement of Penalties as a war crime in 1919. According to the commission, denationalization was “Attempts to denationalize the inhabitants of occupied territory”(Commission on the Responsibility of the Authors of War and Enforcement of Penalties) Despite this, The United States has denationalized Indigenous people of Hawaii through Public Education and propaganda. According to the book *A Nation Rising*,

The Hawaiian nationalist press was largely extinguished. Control of the national landbase was wrested from the Hawaiian Kingdom. The Hawaiian language was banned. For most of the twentieth century Hawai‘i did not have a single school in the islands that made the Indigenous Hawaiian language or culture central to its curriculum. Stories of Hawaiian resistance to American takeover were hidden, overwritten by American historical narratives fabricated to make people believe there was a legal merger between the Hawaiian Kingdom and the United States.- (Goodyear-Ka’opua et al. 5)

When the US occupied Hawaii, they instituted “Programme for Patriotic Exercises in the Public Schools.” Which aimed to Americanize indigenous Hawaiians, banning speaking Hawaiian, and instituting patriotic drills. According to a 1907 description of the Hawaiian school system,

“The little regiment stood fast, arms at sides, shoulders back, chests out, heads up, and every eye fixed upon the red, white, and blue emblem that waved protectingly over them. ‘Salute’ was the principal’s next command. Every right hand was raised, forefinger extended, and the six hundred fourteen fresh, childish voices chanted as one voice: ‘We

give our heads and our hearts to God and our Country! One Country! One Language!  
One Flag!’ (Inglis)

The excuse of “educating” Kanaka Maoli is disputed by Hawaii being the fifth country in the world to have universal education. The Hawaiian Kingdom provided compulsory education for all youth in 1841, which predated compulsory education in the United States by seventy-seven years. (Sai) Just like Universal Healthcare was stripped from Indigenous Hawaiians, education was as well.

The repercussions of these educational policies and other policies last to this day, with Land Back Organizers having to combat over 100 years of denationalization efforts in order to gain support even amongst other Indigenous Hawaiians.

### **Racist Origins of Statehood:**

While Hawaiian Statehood seemed like a way to give Hawaiians, and to some extent Indigenous Hawaiians, a stronger form of representation in the US Government, the motivations were not as pure as they might have seemed. According to National Geographic,

Politicians touted Hawai‘i as a society of “colonial progress” where Asians and Native Hawaiians could culturally assimilate and become “model minorities,” an argument that eventually led to Hawai‘i’s statehood”(many Native Hawaiians and non-Hawaiian locals alike often refer to the islands as a “fake state” given the lawless process involved)...The concept of a racial utopia was being weaponized to undermine Black struggles on the continent and demonize people of color on the islands for “disrupting racial harmony,” especially in the cases of Myles Fukunaga, who was hanged for murder in 1928, and Joseph Kahahawai, who was falsely accused of rape and murdered in 1931.  
(Altemus-Williams)

In other words, United States politicians saw Hawaiian statehood as a tool to attack the growing Civil Rights movement in America. This led to both increased punishment of anything that may disprove the model minority myth in Hawaii, as in the aforementioned cases of Joseph Kahahawai. Joseph Kahahawai's murder was praised by news across the country as a valiant and necessary response to a nonwhite threat, and the reaction to the murderers being found guilty were vitriolic, as "The prosecutor, John C. Kelly, received hate mail from around the country, including one letter reading, 'Should you have a daughter, may she be ravished by ten brutes... you ought to be hung from a lamppost and a fire set under it.'" (PBS) This vitriol shows how deeply deviations from the model minority myth, specifically Indigenous Hawaiians not assimilating into American culture, was seen as an existential threat. This was one of the reasons Statehood was pushed for at the time it was, to further American control over Hawaii and to further denationalize Indigenous Hawaiians.

### **Notable Indigenous Activism in Hawaii**

#### **State of Hawaii vs OHA**

In 1993, the United States passed a resolution to acknowledge the 100th anniversary of the January 17, 1893 overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii, and to offer an apology to Native Hawaiians on behalf of the United States for the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii. This resolution acknowledged that the Hawaiian people and government never relinquished their sovereignty or national lands to the United States, saying it is a joint resolution to "acknowledge the 100th anniversary of the January 17, 1893 overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii, and to offer an apology to Native Hawaiians on behalf of the United States for the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii." (SJ Res 19) The Resolution went on to detail how the United States illegally overthrew Hawaii. Because of this admission of guilt by the United States, Indigenous Hawaiian



activists believed that they deserved to renegotiate the status of Hawaiian lands owned by the US government.

A 2009 Supreme Court Case between the Office of Hawaiian Affairs and the State of Hawaii dealt with the aftermath of the resolution, asking whether the “Joint Resolution to Acknowledge the 100th Anniversary of the January 17, 1893, Overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii” means that the State of Hawaii no longer has the right to sell lands given to it by the federal government until they renegotiate with Indigenous Hawaiians. The Supreme Court sided against the OHA, saying “The Apology Resolution did not strip Hawaii of its sovereign authority to alienate the lands the United States held in absolute fee and granted to the State upon its admission to the Union.” (Hawaii et al. V. Office of Hawaiian Affairs et al.) According to *A Nation Rising*,

In essence, the Court’s decision stated that despite U.S. Public Law 103-150—the 1993 resolution in which the United States apologized to the Hawaiian people and acknowledged that the Hawaiian people and government never relinquished their sovereignty or national lands to the United States—the United States and state of Hawai‘i still had sovereign authority and absolute title to those stolen lands. (Goodyear-Ka’opua et al. 29)

The loss and humiliation felt by Indigenous activists because of this decision was exacerbated by the treatment of one of the plaintiffs, Jonathan Kamakawiwo‘ole Osorio. According to *A Nation Rising*,

Adding insult to injury, when plaintiff Jonathan Kamakawiwo‘ole Osorio, a Hawaiian historian and contributor to this volume, refused to settle the case, the state moved to disqualify him on the basis of blood quantum. The state attorney general’s official

position was that Osorio has no standing because he has “less than 50 percent blood quantum”—and therefore is not legally native Hawaiian.” (Goodyear-Ka’opua et al. 29)

In response to the use of blood quantum to discredit and weaken indigenous activism, Activists have used the terms Kanaka Maoli and Kanaka ‘Ōiwi to showcase a more cultural relationship to the islands of Hawaii and distinguish them from other residents, instead of the legal definition of Native Hawaiian that has been used as a way to attack Kanaka Maoli activists. According to *A Nation Rising*,

The reemergence of ancestral ways of describing ourselves also disrupts the racialized, U.S. legal definition of “native Hawaiian,” which uses blood quantum measurements that do not emerge from Hawaiian culture... the terms “Kanaka Maoli,” “Kanaka ‘Ōiwi,” or simply “Kanaka,” “Maoli,” or “‘Ōiwi,” to refer to the autochthonous people of the Hawaiian archipelago—the original people who emerged from this place.<sup>1</sup> These terms indicate our genealogical relationship to the lands and waters of our islands and distinguish us from other residents. (Goodyear-Ka’opua et al. 2)

This shift to a cultural definition of indigeneity has been able to strengthen the movement and help fight against the use of blood quantum to silence activists.\

The loss of the Hawaii vs OHA case set a legal precedent that despite acknowledging the illegality of an occupation, nothing needs to be done to rectify it. The United States admitted to crimes, but also stated that they are above the law. This decision is a huge roadblock for any goals of achieving Land Back through the courts.

### **Home Lands Recovery Act:**

Attempts to achieve Land Back for Indigenous Hawaiians also occurred in congress. In the 1990’s, U.S. Sens. Daniel Inouye and Daniel Akaka pushed for the US Government to return

the land that they had stolen from Indigenous Hawaiians. This culminated in 1995 when Congress passed the Hawaiian Home Lands Recovery Act, which stated that “There are authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary for compensation to the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands for the value of the lost use of lands.” (Hawaiian Home Lands Recovery Act) After three years, a settlement was reached between the federal government and the trust and nearly 1,000 acres were to be returned to Hawaiians.. However, according to ProPublica, “within a few years, one transfer fell through, and today the U.S. government still owes millions of dollars of land to the trust. (Perez, “The U.S. Owes Hawaiians Millions of Dollars Worth of Land. Congress Helped Make Sure the Debt Wasn’t Paid.”)

How did the execution of the Hawaiian Home Lands Recovery Act fail? According to investigations by ProPublica, the Act was willfully undermined by other legislation:

Between them, Hawaii’s members of Congress voted for at least six laws authorizing the federal government to sell dozens of excess properties to private parties rather than offering them to a Hawaiian trust established to repatriate the land. In one must-pass military spending bill spanning more than 500 pages, lawmakers slipped in a single sentence that helped a handful of nonprofits to acquire the land. In another, they added language that effectively put the need for military housing ahead of the need for housing Hawaiians. (Perez, “The U.S. Owes Hawaiians Millions of Dollars Worth of Land. Congress Helped Make Sure the Debt Wasn’t Paid.”)

These add ons to other popular bills allowed Congress to have their cake and eat it too. They could both say that they passed a bill that gave land back to Indigenous Hawaiians while also undermining the bill to the point that the bill was worthless in ways that would not receive media

attention. Even the champions of the Act, Daniel Inouye and Daniel Akaka, intentionally undermined its effectiveness, as

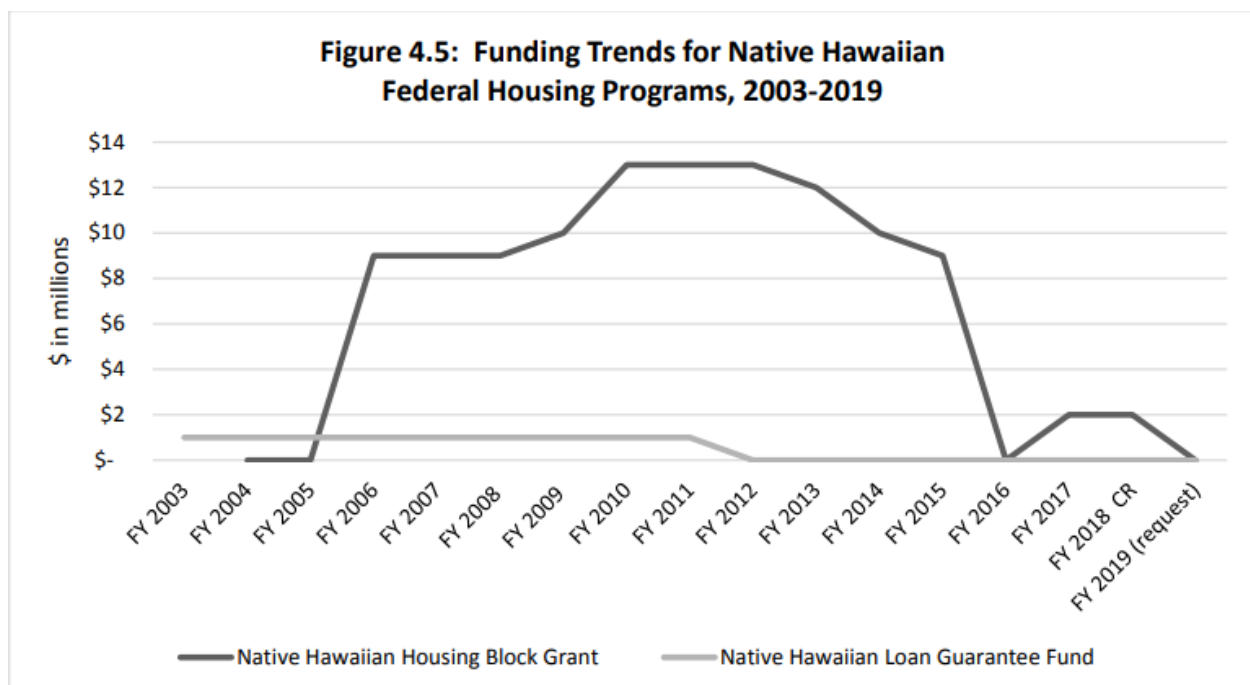
“an investigation by the Honolulu Star-Advertiser and ProPublica has found that those same senators [Daniel Inouye and Daniel Akaka] voted several times each to support must-pass legislation that included provisions undermining efforts to repay millions of dollars in land debt to Hawaiians. At least six other current and former members of Hawaii’s congressional delegation have supported such legislation one or more times.”(Perez, “The U.S. Owes Hawaiians Millions of Dollars Worth of Land. Congress Helped Make Sure the Debt Wasn’t Paid.”)

This investigation makes it seem that the Hawaiian Home Lands Recovery Act was more of a PR stunt than anything else, with even the people championing it working to undo it. Indigenous Hawaiians still face severe housing inequality. According to a Congressional Report by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights,

Homeownership rates among Native Hawaiians tend to be slightly lower than those of the state’s residents overall (55 percent versus 58 percent, respectively). This disparity is particularly pronounced in Hawaii County, where the homeownership rate of Native Hawaiians is about 10 percentage points lower than that of Hawaiian residents overall. Research indicates that lack of access to mortgage financing is a common barrier to homeownership for Native Hawaiians, and that lower income and poor credit often block such access. Native Hawaiians are also more likely to live in older buildings and experience “facilities deficiencies” (inadequate plumbing, kitchens, electrical or heating systems) than those in the general Hawaiian population. In Hawaii, overcrowding has

been consistently more prevalent in Native Hawaiian households than in general households overall. (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 152-153)

It seems that despite these heavily publicized attempts to give land back to Indigenous Hawaiians, nothing substantial has actually been done. The disparity between passes legislation and the legislations actual effects is extremely drastic in the below chart by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights showing the disparity between the Native Hawaiian Housing Block Grant of 2000 and what actually was spent by the government.



(U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 153)

Despite this failure to house Indigenous Hawaiians, land deals with outside corporations continued to chug along. According to Propublica,

Congress was undermining its pledge of redress by passing at least half a dozen pieces of special legislation allowing land deals to go around the recovery act. Over the past decade, the federal government has authorized roughly 40 such sales to private parties without offering the land to the trust, a practice one Hawaiian who has been on the

homesteading waitlist for nearly a decade called “a slap in the face.” (Perez, “The U.S. Broke Its Promise to Return Land to Hawaiians. My Family Knows Something about Land Loss.”)

Even when legislative goals are passed, the United States Government refuses to actually do what the bills they pass say. This presents a very difficult roadblock for indigenous activists, making legislative activism seem like a dead end in terms of achieving land back or even the most basic forms of reparations.

### **Bombing of Kaloowe and Subsequent Protests**

One of the most well known Indigenous protests in Hawaii was at the island Kalo’olawe. Kalo’alawe was a sacred island to Kanaka Maoli, with historical ties to seafaring and stargazing. However, during US occupation, the sacred island was turned into a bombing range. At first, due to martial law being declared in Hawaii after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the island was used to test bombs for World War II, but the United States Military continued to use the island well after the war. According to Lacy Deniz,

Weapons testing started almost immediately with ship-to-shore bombardment and later with American submarines testing torpedoes by firing them at shoreline cliffs.... In 1965, the infamous "Sailor Hat" tests were conducted on the island: Three tests of 500 tons of TNT were detonated to simulate the blast effects of nuclear weapons on shipboard weapon systems. (Deniz)

The bombing of Kalo’olawe lasted all the way until 1993, completely destroying the vegetation of the island, with eight feet of top soil blasted up and washed away into the ocean.

In 1972, A.L.O.H.A, or Aboriginal Lands of Hawaiian Ancestry, was Founded. This group supported a bill that granted reparations for native Hawaiians, but it was not taken

seriously by congress. A.L.O.H.A decided in 1976 to raise awareness of the bill and the movement for restoring land to Native Hawaiians by beginning a series of occupations on the island of Kalo'olawe. (Vox) The protestors were intercepted by the Coast guard, but one of their boats managed to sneak past and land on the island. The Coast Guard caught up to them, but two activists, Dr. Emmet Aluli and Walter Ritte, decided to run away deeper into the island where they hid out for two days exploring. Upon seeing the destruction of the island firsthand, Dr. Emmet Aluli said that "I have never seen such destruction of land before and just waste and bombs all over the place, all the bays all around Kaho'olawe were just darkened with red mud." (Deniz) The two were eventually escorted out of the island by the coast guard, now more determined than ever to protect the island. (Vox)

After this, A.L.O.H.A. merged with with another organization named Hui Ala Loa (Long Road Organization) to create PKO, or Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana. According to their website,

Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana is a grassroots organization dedicated to the island of Kaho'olawe and the principles of Aloha 'Āina throughout Hawai'i. In our work to heal Kaho'olawe, we strengthen our relationship with the land and pay respect to the spirits of the land. On our other Hawaiian islands, we work to protect the natural and cultural resources of our ancestral lands. (Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana)

The organization staged many more occupations of the island. Two men, George Helm and Kimo Mitchell, were lost at sea while returning from a trip to Kaho'olawe. Walter Ritte and another activist, Richard Sawyer, stayed on the island for 35 days. The military, despite knowing the two were still on the island, continued to bomb Kalo'olawe. (Deniz) The organization also sued the US Navy. After the lawsuit, the Navy decided to stop the bombings, and in 1993

Congress voted to completely end the bombings and return the island of Kahoʻolawe to the state. (Deniz)

However, the destruction and debris of the decades of bombing remained. While the US Military had a contract to clean up the island, a huge amount of the cleanup was done by Indigenous volunteers with Protect Kahoʻolawe ʻOhana. As of 2018, 25% of the debris is still uncleared. (Deniz) "There's probably never going to be an absolute clean-up of the island," said Mike Nahoopii, of the Kahoolawe Island Reserve Commission. "Once you start using a piece of property for military bombing, you're never going to remove every single bomb." (Deniz) Despite the difficulty of the cleanup, thousands of volunteers still go to the island to help it heal and clear up debris. (Deniz) Unlike the previous examples, Protect Kahoʻolawe ʻOhana's actions have resulted in significant gains for Indigenous Hawaiian communities and the Land Back movement.

### **Malama Makua Activism**

Protect Kahoʻolawe ʻOhana is far from the only group of activists working today towards land back and reparations. There are many organizations with unique goals and methods to subvert colonization. One of these organizations is the Makua Village Council, also called Malama Makua. Similar to Protect Kahoʻolawe ʻOhana, the Makua Village Council seeks that the United States military stop its activity on the island of Makua. According to the organization's website,

The Makua village council, or "Mālama Mākua, organized in 1996, strives for the preservation, community access to and return of Mākua Valley, which has been occupied by the U.S. army since World War II, for culturally appropriate use... Sacred Mākua is a place where Papa (Earth mother) and Wākea (sky father) created human life, a place of



healing and refuge, not a place for bombs and bullets or military training by the US military. Mākua is calling us home. Hele mai! (Makua Village Council)

This refers to how in Kanaka Maoli oral tradition, the Makua valley was where life was created. (Knodell) Despite its immense cultural importance, this area has been a military training site since World War II.

The story of the United States Military's control of Makua Valley is extremely similar to what happened at Kaho'Olawe. According to Kevin Knodell,

The military began using parts of the valley for live-fire training in the 1920s, when the islands were governed as a U.S. territory. After the Pearl Harbor attack and the U.S. entrance into World War II, the military imposed martial law in Hawaii and took control of Makua and the island of Kahoolawe for training. It was meant to be temporary — local farming families displaced by the training were told most would be able to return when the war was over. But in 1945 the War Department asked Hawaii's Territorial Government for the transfer of 6,608 acres at Makua for training. In 1964, five years after statehood, the Army paid \$1 for a 65-year lease from the state to continue training on Makua and other areas. (Knodell)

This use by the military has damaged the land and started many wildfires. While the Military has decided to stop the live fire training that caused these wildfires in addition to training people to protect cultural artifacts, they still refused to pull out of the region because of its important strategic location. In fact, the cultural preservation methods of the US Military often come in conflict with the desires of Malama Makua. According to a member of Malama Makua named Justin Hill, "There's a mindset among the military that Makua is a museum essentially, that it's something to be put in mothballs and just be preserved and it's not something that is a vibrant

living thing... We were told not too long ago that the military was protecting Makua and the sites from us — from damage from us.”(Knodell) The United States Military seems committed to conserving Indigenous Hawaiian cultural artifacts while not letting actual Indigenous Hawaiians access them. The exclusion of Indigenous Hawaiians from the cultural restoration process is the source of a lot of the current protests of Malama Makua.

In addition to their religious and cultural reasons for wanting the island back, the organization also wants to protect the endangered wildlife of the region. According to the Makua Village Council “Many of those endemic and native plants and animals, however, have been threatened by invasive species, development, climate change, and, tragically, are endangered. In places like Mākua, these species have been further endangered by live-fire military training and the wildfires that are started by that training.” (Makua Village Council) This goal showcases how the Kanaka Maoli movements often center environmental issues

Although Malama Makua is focused specifically on Makua, It also does a lot of work to maintain solidarity with other Kanaka Maoli movements across Hawaii in addition to Indigenous Liberation and Land Back movements around the world. According to the Makua Village Council’s website, “Mālama Mākua has set its eyes beyond Mākua, through Mākua, as we look to be in solidarity with other Indigenous Peoples throughout the world whose lands are threatened by all manner of settler-colonialism, whether it be through militarism or settler-colonial land grabs.” (Makua Village Council) This organization is able to both center its specific mission while working towards collective liberation for all indigenous groups throughout the world, showcasing how both local and global activism interconnect and work together.

## Other Kanaka Maoli Activism

There are numerous other organizations and activists in the Kanaka Maoli Land Back movement. One very notable activist is Puanani Burgess, known affectionately in the community as Auntie Puanani Burgess. Auntie Puanani Burgess is a poet, community development consultant, grassroots activist, and facilitator. She lives and organizes mainly from the Wai‘anae Coast of O‘ahu. According to *A Nation Rising*,

She has been involved in a number of sovereignty and ‘āina-based struggles throughout Hawai‘i, including Ka-ho‘olawe, Sand Island, and the process to renegotiate taro farming leases in Waipi‘o Valley. She worked to minimize the “West Beach development”—known today as Ko Olina and, most recently, the site of Disney’s Aulani resort— and drew ire from those who wanted to preserve the coastline and those who wanted to build over it. Despite this, the settlement reduced the allowable development size and resulted in funding Indigenous community programs.

(Goodyear-Ka’opua 21)

Puanani Burgess worked with the system while still getting material gains from corporations and the State. She was able to go toe to toe with Disney, one of the most powerful corporations in the world, and still got them to compromise with Kanaka Maoli interests.

Other Activists have different approaches to organizing. Two notable activists in the Kanaka Maoli community, Puhipau and Nani Rogers, had histories of organizing with the state, but decided that that strategy was of no avail. The book *A Nation Rising* states that

Puhipau writes of how he and other Sand Island residents made every attempt to work with state officials. And yet state forces turned people’s homes to “smoking rubble.”

They went to court and then to the legislature to try and establish recognition of Hawaiian

rights to be on the land, but to no avail. At that point he stopped letting his life's work be about negotiating with or reacting to the state. Instead he has spent the last three decades changing popular consciousness through film. Similarly, Nani Rogers has used radio to build networks and spread awareness. When 'āina is threatened, such as the desecration of iwi kupuna (ancestral bones) in Naue, Kaua'i, by a haole landowner with permission from the state, she will kū'ē, stand in direct opposition. (Goodyear-Ka'opua 21)

Puhipau, Nani Rogers and many others like them have decided that building support for their cause through communication is the best strategy to achieve Kanaka Maoli Liberation and Land Back.

While it may seem that the Kanaka Maoli liberation movement is fragmented, these activists are still able to have common ground and have a united front. Activist Dr. Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua urges to “resist knee-jerk criticisms that suggest Hawaiians cannot or should not have land and sovereignty because ‘They just cannot agree or get together.’ As a political goal and praxis, EA is unifying while also open enough to allow for a robust expression of differences.” (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua 2) The Kanaka Maoli liberation movement is able to have all of these smaller movements and disagreements on strategy while still being united by a common desire for EA, which means Political Independence.

These activists are continuing to fight in protests happening right now. Over the past couple of years Kanaka Maoli activists have been protesting the building of a large telescope on sacred Mauna Kea Land. Activists were smeared as anti-science, with the governor claiming that the protests would “end astronomy.”(Richardson) Early in March, HB2024 HD1 SD1 passed the Hawaii house which aims to form a committee called the Mauna Kea Stewardship and Oversight

Authority. Negotiations and protests are happening right now as the fight for Mauna Kea rages onward.

### **The Deradicalization of Decolonization in Mainstream Thought**

As these efforts to Decolonize Hawaii grow, there has been a wide spread acceptance of the word decolonization in academic circles and in popular discourse. However, the term has in many ways been devalued. People say things like decolonize the workplace and decolonize the classroom when what they mean is make these places slightly more diverse. Scholars Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang discuss this phenomenon, arguing that this metaphorical use of the term decolonization does far more harm than it does good. According to them:

Decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools. The easy adoption of decolonizing discourse by educational advocacy and scholarship, evidenced by the increasing number of calls to “decolonize our schools,” or use “decolonizing methods,” or, “decolonize student thinking”, turns decolonization into a metaphor....The metaphorization of decolonization makes possible a set of evasions, or “settler moves to innocence”, that problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity. (Tuck 1)

Decolonization will be a painful, violent process, and pretending it isn't is devaluing the term.

Tuck and Yang go on to go into specifics about how institutions co opt this language, saying that

One trend we have noticed, with growing apprehension, is the ease with which the language of decolonization has been superficially adopted into education and other social sciences, supplanting prior ways of talking about social justice, critical methodologies, or approaches which decenter settler perspectives. Decolonization,

which we assert is a distinct project from other civil and human rights-based social justice projects, is far too often subsumed into the directives of these projects, with no regard for how decolonization wants something different than those forms of justice. Settler scholars swap out prior civil and human rights based terms, seemingly to signal both an awareness of the significance of Indigenous and decolonizing theorizations of schooling and educational research, and to include Indigenous peoples on the list of considerations - as an additional special (ethnic) group or class. (Tuck 2)

In academia and in other social justice circles, Decolonization has been twisted and deradicalized into a catch all for social change and inclusion. The term itself has gotten more accepted but the actual goals of decolonization have been ignored. Tuck and Yang, as well as many other Decolonization activists, fight to actually challenge the United States as a colonial project, not just advocate for more indigenous representation in colonial systems. As this capstone paper has explored, while Indigenous activism through the Courts have been shut down and Indigenous activism through congress has been intentionally subverted, direct protestings like that done by Protect Kalo’Olowe Ohana and other organizations have resulted in material gains for Kanaka Maoli. In order to support the advancement of these interests, people should make sure to take the term Decolonization and the concept of decolonization seriously. It means material return of land and resources to indigenous groups, and that goal should be the goal of everyone committed to decolonization.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the odds being stacked against them and institutions like the Supreme Court and Congress either shutting down Kanaka Maoli debands or lying about achieving them, the kanaka Maoli Land Back movement exists as a unifying praxis of indigenous liberation. Activists like

Protect Kaho'olawe Ohana, Malama Makua, and others have worked to demand that land and resources that were stolen by American imperialism are returned to the control of Kanaka Maoli Indigenous groups. As these struggles rage on, it is important that they are not ignored or co-opted. The world is in a time of immense change, and now is as good of a time as any to reexamine the colonial nature of the US government and ask whether or not its ownership and distribution of land is just.

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