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E kolo ana nō ke ēwe i ke ēwe (The rootlet will creep toward the rootlets)

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# E kolo ana nō ke ēwe i ke ēwe

## *The rootlet will creep toward the rootlets*

Of the same origin, kinfolk will seek and love each other.

*Sanoe Kinikela Marfil, Brandy Kalehua Kamohali‘i Caceres, LeReen Iko Aranaydo Carr, Courtney Pualani Perreira, and Pūhala Kelly Pe‘a Kamālamalama*

Community-Based Inquiry begins with relationships. Relationship to one another. Relationship to our natural and historical surroundings. Community-Based Inquiry for us is fueled by deep commitments to find the way back to our roots.

E Ka Mea Heluhelu, eia mai nā pōhaku niho o ka paepae o INPEACE:  
*Dear reader, here are the niho stones (cornerstones) of INPEACE:*

‘O Sherlyn Franklin Goo no O‘ahu a Lua, ‘o Alice Kawakami no Kaua‘i o Mano a ‘o Kathy Au no O‘ahu o Kākuhihewa nā wāhine na lākou i ho‘okumu iā Institute for Native Pacific Education and Culture (INPEACE) ma ka makahiki 1994.

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*[The guest editors arranged the essays to be read progressively. We suggest that readers first read the introduction and then approach these essays in their order. —Ed.]*

SANOE MARFIL is the Chief Program Officer (CPO) at the Institute for Native Pacific Education and Culture (INPEACE). She is responsible for leading INPEACE programs and projects and leads efforts to promote education and culture in the organization and within her community of Nānākuli. KALEHUA KAMOHALI‘I CACERES (‘ŌIWI) is a Program Director at INPEACE Keiki Steps program. An ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i (Hawaiian language) advocate, Caceres’ career includes serving as an early childhood language immersion teacher and preschool director. LEREEEN CARR is an Associate Program Director at INPEACE Keiki Steps program. Her leadership is fueled by an enduring belief in the transformative power of education, mentorship, and the influence of parents in shaping a brighter future for Hawai‘i’s keiki (children). COURTNEY PERREIRA is Kaua‘i Island Coordinator at INPEACE Keiki Steps program. She aspires to build connections within communities, positively impact families, and make differences in keiki’s lives, by coordinating high-quality educational services. PŪHALA KELLY PE‘A KAMĀLAMALAMA is an Early Learning Instructional Coach with Hawaii State Public Charter School Commission. She worked at INPEACE Keiki Steps program from 2007 until 2022 as an aide, site coordinator and island coordinator.

Sherlyn Goo of O‘ahu a Lua, Alice Kawakami of Kaua‘i o Mano, and Kathy Au of O‘ahu are the women who founded the Institute for Native Pacific Education and Culture (INPEACE) in 1994.

‘O Sherlyn Ho‘opi‘o Nui Goo ko‘u inoa. ‘O Oberlin, Ohio ku‘u one hānau. ‘O Olomana ku‘u mauna. ‘O Kuli‘ou‘ou ku‘u awāwa. ‘O Ka‘ōhao ku‘u kai.

*My name is Sherlyn Ho‘opi‘o Nui Goo. Oberlin, Ohio is my birth sands. Olomana is my beloved mountain, Kuli‘ou‘ou my beloved valley. Ka‘ōhao is my beloved ocean.*

‘O Alice Kawakami ko‘u inoa. ‘O Lihu‘e, Kaua‘i ku‘u one hānau. ‘O Wai‘ale‘ale ku‘u mauna. ‘O Hanapēpē ku‘u awāwa. ‘O Salt Pond ku‘u kai.

*My name is Alice Kawakami. Lihu‘e, Kaua‘i is my beloved birth sands. My mountain is Wai‘ale‘ale, and my valley is Hanapēpē. Salt Pond is my ocean.*

‘O Kathy Au ko‘u inoa. ‘O Honolulu ku‘u one hānau. ‘O Konahuanui ku‘u mauna. ‘O Pauoa ku‘u awāwa. ‘O Waikiki ku‘u kai.

*My name is Kathy Au. Honolulu is my birth sands. My mountain is Konahuanui, and my valley is Pauoa. Waikiki is my ocean.*

INPEACE was born out of the determination of these three brave wāhine (women) educators who endeavored to improve the quality of life for Native Hawaiians. Leveraging the strength of community partnerships coupled with culturally grounded learning opportunities for family members from pēpē (infant) to kūpuna (elder), INPEACE is driven to bring equity to Hawai‘i’s aboriginal people, ‘Ōiwi.

‘O Maile Keli‘ipio-Acoba ko‘u inoa. ‘O Biloxi, Mississippi ku‘u one hānau. ‘O Mā‘ili ku‘u kulāiwi. ‘O Ka‘ala ku‘u mauna. ‘O Lualualei ku‘u awāwa. ‘O Mā‘ili ku‘u kai.

*My name is Maile Keli‘ipio-Acoba. My birth sands is Biloxi, Mississippi. Mā‘ili is my beloved homeland. Ka‘ala is my mountain. Lualualei is my valley. Mā‘ili is my ocean.*

Under the leadership of Chief Executive Officer Maile Keli‘ipio-Acoba, INPEACE programs are created by ‘Ōiwi, operated by ‘Ōiwi, and implemented for the benefit of ‘Ōiwi.

## OUR COMMUNITY-BASED INQUIRY PROJECT—‘OHANA WITH A SHARED PURPOSE

As a people, our colonial history has systematically endeavored to strip us of our land, our language, our culture, and our identity as ‘Ōiwi. Who, then, are we as the living descendants of the original people of Hawai‘i? Our Community-Based Inquiry project, *E kolo ana nō ke ēwe i ke ēwe*, seeks to answer this very question of maui: *What is Hawaiian cultural identity?*

We have the honor of being the descendants of Mauliauhonua (*families and communities that have lived in a specific place for multiple generations*), who were skillful in keen observation of their island earth environment, astute in the connections between the natural phenomena of their homeland, and responsible stewards of natural resources. Our ancestors lived in harmony with all that surrounded them, understanding the tenuous balance between man and akua (*nature and natural phenomena*) and the cardinal tenet of kuleana ‘ohana (*responsibility for family*). It is, of course, paramount to note that kuleana ‘ohana to ‘Ōiwi extends beyond human relationships and includes family members that are ocean, land, stone, sea creature, plant, animal, bird, and insect. It also transcends the living and encompasses our ancestors who have passed on and our ancestral guardians that continue to protect and guide us.

As practical stewards of ‘āina (*that which feeds; land*) with the responsibility to preserve the finite resources of our island home for future generations of our families, our kūpuna were skilled at their ‘oihana (*occupation*). The ahupua‘a system (*land/resource management system*) allowed for our island resources to be shared across families within a bounded land division, an ahupua‘a, from the mountain to the sea. Providing sustenance for families to thrive, fishing and farming were important ‘oihana for those who lived near the ocean and those who lived inland. Trading between ‘ohana (*families*) and kauhale (*villages*) provided for the needs for all within the ahupua‘a.

Uhauhumu Pōhaku is the ‘oihana of traditional dry stack masonry with versatile utility seen in the walls of loko kuapā and loko ‘ume‘iki (*walled fishponds*), stone terraces of lo‘i kalo (*irrigated taro patches*), foundations of hale (*houses*), and walls of heiau (*places of worship*).

One very critical and functional stone structure built by our kūpuna was ko‘a. Ko‘a are piles of stone and coral used in ceremonies to increase fish and birds. Ko‘a also has contemporary uses. For example, in an effort to address jet fuel from a Navy base near Pu‘uloa (*Pearl Harbor*) leaking into the ground water and possibly contaminating the aquifer at Kapūkaki, ‘Ōiwi leaders from various communities around the island constructed a ko‘a outside of the front gate of the headquarters commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Makalapa Hill. This ko‘a is intended to increase people’s awareness of contamination of the aquifer and motivate people to take action to correct this travesty. By acting, people will increase their well being.

Our INPEACE Keiki Steps Community-Based Inquiry project focuses on the application of Uhauhumu Pōhaku and the framework of ko‘a. As an ‘ohana and as early childhood practitioners with a shared purpose, we are exploring our Hawaiian cultural identity. Building on the foundations of our ancestors and our history, we are constructing a ko‘a that is intended to nurture and increase Hawaiian well-being for ourselves, for the keiki of our lāhui and for the future of our hanauna (*generations of family*). Each of us will contribute stones to build our ko‘a.

Our kūpuna first teaches us to prepare ourselves for our specific function in our collective endeavor; to establish ceremonial space in which intention and purpose is made explicitly clear; to request the presence of our ancestors and ancestral guardians to guide our words, thoughts and actions; to actualize our goal, process, or endeavor.

The spirit of the stone is revered and acknowledged. Carefully selected for the desired properties to achieve the intended structure, the stone's permission is required in the process of traditional stone masonry. Once all necessary protocols have been completed, those who will build together will set out on their task.

Pōhaku (*stone*) can be gathered from all different areas on an island as well as from the depths of the ocean. Through the process of paepae pōhaku, stones are passed from one hand to the next in a line of individuals that may stretch several feet or several miles. Hand to hand, pōhaku is moved from the place where it is selected to the place where it will be joined together into a formation that will serve an 'ohana, a kaiāulu (*community*), or the lāhui (*nation*). This is how we will build our ko'a.

## OUR COMMUNITY-BASED INQUIRY TEAM: AN INTRODUCTION

Our Community-Based Inquiry project has set the five of us—the INPEACE Keiki Steps administration team—on a journey to intentionally select pōhaku, to invite many people to join us in paepae pōhaku to move our stones from the places of their origins to the space in which we will co-construct together, and finally to set pōhaku to build our ko'a. Our founders and chief executive officer are the erect niho stones (*cornerstones*), setting a solid foundation upon which we will build.

E Ka Mea Heluhelu, eia mai nā mea ha'i mo'olelo:

*Dear reader, here are our storytellers:*

'O wau nō 'o Sanoë Kinikela Marfil, keiki a Rudy Luke Tripp, keiki a Mele, keiki a Ho'okano, keiki a Ho'okano a keiki a David Puhi lāua o Namakaokaha'i Kekuanu'u. 'O Wai'anae ku'u moku, 'O Nānākuli ku'u ahupua'a, 'o Ka'ala ku'u mauna, 'O Waimea ku'u kai. Aloha!

*My name is Sanoë Kinikela Marfil, a child of Rudy Luke Tripp, a child of Mele, a child of Ho'okano, a child of Ho'okano, a child of David Puhi and Namakaokaha'i Kekuanu'u. Wai'anae is my moku and Nānākuli is my ahupua'a. Ka'ala is my mauna and Waimea is my Kai. Greetings.*

'O wau nō 'o Brandy Kalehua Kamohali'i Caceres, hiapo a Kelekolio lāua 'o Kanani, mo'opuna a Ka'ilihou lāua 'o Puiakeonaonaokaleimokihana a Kalani Nui lāua 'o Ku'ulei, wahine a Mana, makuahine o KekamamakoaaKa'ilihou, Keahe'āla'iianiikekamaehuoKahikikū, Kekamakeuākau'iikūha'oikala'i a me KahuakaokekamaaKawai, kupunawahine o Kānaioa.

'O O'ahu a Lua ku'u mukupuni, 'O Wai'anae ku'u moku, 'O Lualualei ku'u ahupua'a. 'O Mā'ili o ka ua Nihilaukukui ku'u 'ili. 'O Ka'ala ku'u mauna. 'O nā Pu'uohulu a me Mā'ili'ili ku'u mau pu'u. 'O Mā'ili ku'u kai a ku'u one hānau ho'i. 'O wau ke kahu o INPEACE Keiki Steps.

*My name is Brandy Kalehua Kamohali'i Caceres, eldest child of Kelekolio and Kanani, grandchild of Ka'ilihou Iki and Puiakeonaonaokaleimokihana and Kalani Nui and*

*Ku‘ulei, wife of Mana, mother of Makoa, Kamaehu, Hiehie and Kamana, grandmother of Kānaioa.*

*O‘ahu a Lua is my island. Wai‘anae is my moku and Lualualei is my ahupua‘a. My ‘ili is Mā‘ili of the Nihilaukukui rains. Ka‘ala is my mountain. My hills are Hulu and Mā‘ili‘ili. Mā‘ili is my ocean and the sands of my birth. I am the INPEACE Keiki Steps Director.*

*‘O LeReen Iko Aranaydo Carr ko‘u inoa. He wahine a makuahine a ku‘u mau keiki ‘ekolu au. ‘O Honolulu ku‘u one hānau. ‘O O‘ahu ku‘u mokupuni. ‘O ‘Ewa ku‘u moku. ‘O Wai‘ipi‘o ku‘u ahupua‘a. ‘O Wa‘ahila ku‘u ua. ‘O Waikōloa a Lihue ku‘u mau makani. ‘O Wai‘anae a me Ko‘olau ku‘u mau mauna. ‘O Launalani ku‘u awāwa. ‘O Pākīpika ku‘u kai. ‘O wau ke kahu hope o INPEACE Keiki Steps.*

*My name is LeReen Iko Aranaydo Carr. Wife and mother to my three keiki. My birthplace is Honolulu. My island is O‘ahu. My district is ‘Ewa. My ahupua‘a is Wai‘ipi‘o. My rain is Wa‘ahila. My wind is Waikōloa from Lihue. My mountains are Wai‘anae and Ko‘olau. My valley is Launalani. My ocean is the Pacific Ocean. I am the INPEACE Keiki Steps Associate Program Director.*

*Aloha mai. ‘O Courtney Pualani Perreira ko‘u inoa. ‘O Kaua‘i ko‘u mokupuni. ‘O Kona ko‘u moku. ‘O Lawa‘i ko‘u awāwa. ‘O Wai‘ale‘ale ko‘u mauna. ‘O Po‘ipū ko‘u kai.*

*Aloha. My name is Courtney Pualani Perreira. Kaua‘i is my island. Kona is my district. Lawa‘i is my valley. Wai‘ale‘ale is my mountain. Po‘ipū is my ocean.*

*‘O Pūhala Kelly Pe‘a Kamālamalama ko‘u inoa. No Hilo mai au. ‘O Hawai‘i ku‘u mokupuni. ‘O Mauna Kea ku‘u mauna. ‘O Puhī Bay ku‘u kai. ‘O ke alaka‘i kumu kamali‘i au.*

*My name is Pūhala Kelly Pe‘a Kamālamalama. I am from Hilo. Hawai‘i is my island. Mauna Kea is my mountain. Puhī Bay is my beach. I am an Early Learning Coach.*

*E ka mea heluhelu, eia kā mākou mau mo‘olelo.*

*Dear Reader, we present you our story.*

## OUR STORIES OF INQUIRY

**Eia ka pōhaku.**

*Here is the stone.*

**Sanoë Marfil**

In 2014, the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education returned to Hawai‘i on the island of O‘ahu. The Institute for Native Pacific Education and Culture was one of the early learning programs that attendees could come to do a site visit. At the

time I was the program manager for Kupu Ola, our Hawaiian Culture Based Program that provided hands-on learning opportunities and outdoor classroom experiences. We were brilliantly located in a Department of Education school that provided access to our sister program Keiki Steps. My desire to learn from and work with Dr. Tarajeau Yazzie-Mintz began in 2014. She visited our site, and we spent time together talking and sharing our respective work, all while making lei.

In the following years, we would see each other at different conferences in passing, and we would always exchange aloha. In 2020, Tarajeau asked about early childhood education program practitioners who were interested in learning and leading their own Community-Based Inquiry projects. With very little background knowledge, I immediately reached out at the opportunity for us to learn and grow. I knew at the time our Keiki Steps program was working on curriculum development and struggling with many different components of the curriculum including the staff's comfort with and openness to learning and implementing new ideas. The goal for me was to have an opportunity for staff to learn from like-minded individuals who serve their communities and have a cultural connection to their Indigenous culture through land and stories. My intention was also to provide an outlet for our Keiki Steps leadership team to be able to learn the power of community inquiry and to apply their learning to Keiki Steps.

In my journey through this process of community inquiry, I learned that when allowed the time and space to reflect, my thoughts are clearer and help me move forward. During the process, some of the questions that surfaced were: *What does it mean to be Hawaiian? How do we know that our community inquiry makes sense? Do we have all the community voices?* These questions played a role in the progress and the process of our journey together as a team, and because we had the time and space to refine the work, we accomplished more than we set out to do at the beginning. This journey for me was a way to seek Indigenous knowledges and realize my authentic self in order to lead effectively.

**Eia ka pōhaku nui a me ka pōhaku iki.**

*Here is the large stone and the small stone.*

**Brandy Kalehua Kamohali'i Caceres**

We are ocean people. In the middle of Moananuiākea, we call a small group of volcanic islands home. 'O Hawai'i ku'ū kulāiwi (*Hawai'i is my birth sands*). Kanaloa's currents ebb and flow, building momentum across a great expanse and gently bathing our sandy shoreline in the whitewash of its waves. Here in Mā'ili, I can see every hue of blue for as far as the eye can see, our waters reaching skyward at the horizon to embrace Wākea. A mist of sea spray wafts into the air, carried on the warm, gentle breeze, and dots my skin with saltwater droplets. I can smell the saltiness of the air, taste it on my lips. I close my eyes and allow all my senses to be lost, no, to be *found* in this place. As I push the soles of my feet deeper into the wet sand, I can feel the 'āpapa (*coral reef*) beneath me, sturdy, resilient, unwavering. I feel it well from deep within my na'au, and guttural sounds escape my throat. I chant to my akua (*gods*) and ask for knowledge to be granted. I pray to my 'aumākua (*deified ancestors*) as I call out the names of my

ancestors who were born and whose ashes were returned to Kanaloa in this very place I have planted my feet. ‘O kēia ku‘u one hānau, my birth sands.

But before I sought the solace of Kanaloa’s embrace along the shores of Mā‘ili, I found solace in another saltwater sanctuary. As I formed in my mother’s pū‘ao (*womb*), as she had once before and her mother before her, I was nurtured in the salt water of my first home, ku‘u ‘iewe (*placenta*). My being, my personhood, my maui began to form alongside my growing body as I developed in my mother’s womb. What then becomes of an ‘Ōiwi child born in the twentieth century, eighty-five years after the Kingdom of Hawai‘i was forced into a prolonged and belligerent occupation by the United States of America and nineteen years after “statehood”?

Our inquiry journey started much like all engagements do with ‘Ōiwi; it started with talk-story. A rich oral tradition, we continue to use this methodology of talking story to engage in casual and formal discussions, rooting out our commonalities with others to find connections to people, places, and things that share our time and space. Building pilina, relationships, is a cultural practice that allows casual acquaintances to become members of an extended ‘ohana, to be regarded as a part of our family.

Our initial talk-story session as part of the Indigenous Early Learning Collaborative centered around our commitments to one another, which included a mutual exchange that allowed for a historically significant event in INPEACE Keiki Steps collaborative agreement practices: the first Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) drafted, signed, and executed in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i (*Hawaiian language*).

At our very first meeting with our Indigenous Early Learning Collaborative mentors from First Light Education Project and Brazelton Touchpoints Center, we were immediately and unapologetically encouraged to lend *our* voice and *our* story to every aspect of the community inquiry project. The MOU would be the guiding document that described the way we engaged with one another. It outlined very typical elements included in an MOU: timeline, budget, deliverables, in a sense. However, far from the typical MOU, we were encouraged to insert language that acknowledged our cultural norms. The suggestion to draft an MOU in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i was made by Tarajeau. I recall being overwhelmed with emotion. No one had suggested this before. And I certainly never felt brave enough to insist that ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i be acknowledged and included in our MOUs. Until this point in time, I never even believed it was an option. I felt seen for the first time, welcomed into a professional setting to enter the discussion as myself. For the first time, someone had given me permission to not only use my language in an official capacity but to prioritize it over my use of English. My language was recognized as being important, as having a role in an educational discussion and having a restored function beyond the confines of my home and outside of a Hawaiian language classroom. Most importantly, however, is that I witnessed an opportunity for our communities of Hawaiian language speakers, Hawaiian Culture-Based schools, and Native Hawaiian organizations to enter into formal agreements inclusive of the use of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i.

‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i was outlawed as a medium of education in public and private schools in Hawai‘i in 1896 by the de facto government that illegally overthrew our Queen Lili‘uokalani and was replaced with English. Our language neared extinction.



The efforts of a small group of educators and parents took to task this act of injustice and inequity by creating language nests for preschoolers in 1983 that led to the revival of our language today forty years later. The reclamation of our language and restoring it to the language of our homes and schools, in places of business and in government buildings and proceedings is a testament to the tenacity of our people. This opportunity to elevate the status of our language in the practices of our organization by creating an MOU entirely in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i, and that it was encouraged by our Indigenous Early Learning Collaborative partners, affirmed a mutual understanding that allowed us to be “seen” and embraced as our authentic selves in the inquiry process.

The MOU was not only written in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i but also outlined the recognition of Hawaiian consciousness, worldview, cosmogony, epistemology, and spirituality articulating its importance in the ways that we engage with our IELC community both within and beyond Hawai‘i throughout the inquiry project. This document highlighted that which is deeply personal to our maui. The content and the context of the MOU acknowledged our ‘Ōiwi personhood, allowing us to collaborate, engage, and partner in a wholly authentic expression of self. The partnership did not require us to deny or hide a part of ourselves as we are all too often expected to do in our daily lives. It is my greatest hope that this singular event translates into many more similar agreements for INPEACE Keiki Steps that allows for ‘Ōiwi to enter partnerships and collaborations as ‘Ōiwi, where our language, values, and worldview are welcomed, not discouraged.

Talk-story sessions also took the form of guided discussions. This first allowed us to orient our world, to find ourselves in a continuum of time where we effortlessly transitioned between the space and time of our ancestors and our present day. It also clearly brought into focus the future and our enduring responsibility to the next generation of ‘Ōiwi. As a Native Hawaiian-serving early childhood program in the most vulnerable and disenfranchised low-income communities in our islands, we have a responsibility to our ancestors and the generations of our families that continue to struggle to thrive in Hawai‘i today. That we are *of* the communities we serve is not lost on us. We look, present, speak, and behave like our participants. We *are* our communities. We are also *responsible* for our communities. This is a family value passed through generations of our people best described in a simple ‘ōlelo no‘eau: “‘Ike aku, ‘ike mai. Kōkua aku, kōkua mai. Pēlā ihola ka nohona ‘ohana.” See and be seen. Help and be helped. *That* is family life.

Our collective of wāhine spent the greater part of our sessions coming to the realization that as individuals we have struggled at times with our own identity; that much of our adolescence and adulthood has been spent in pursuit of understanding who we are. Our unwelcomed birthright as ‘Ōiwi is the historical and generational trauma that we inherited from our kūpuna: our Queen illegally deposed and imprisoned in her palace, our Kingdom occupied by insurrectionists supported by American military forces, our land ripped from the hands of those who sustainably subsisted from it for hundreds of generations, our language beaten from the lips of our people. We have not forgotten. The beauty and the resilience of our people is coded in our DNA, and

it drives us forward. The ancestral voices are within us, a call to action to guide our steps forward.

As ‘Ōiwi community educators working with ‘Ōiwi families and their young children, it is imperative that we create a shared understanding and common language as co-learners. The impetus of this inquiry project was to identify the attributes of Hawaiian cultural identity to create a Hawaiian cultural curriculum framework for the Keiki Steps preschool program. However, it became abundantly apparent in this two-year project that Hawaiian cultural identity cannot and should not be limited to our preschool curriculum. Rather, it must be the salient foundation upon which the program is co-constructed by and for ‘Ōiwi.

*What is Hawaiian cultural identity?* This research question was formulated by our Keiki Steps administration team and our INPEACE program officer, all of whom are wāhine. This context is not lost on us. We recognize it as cosmic affirmation of both our ‘Ōiwi matriarchal society and our cosmogony of procreation. The kuleana of wāhine is to birth forth each new generation of ‘Ōiwi, whereby birthing a nation, the lāhui kānaka. It is aptly appropriate for our small group of wāhine to birth forth a program identity that supports the nurturing of ‘Ōiwi families in our collective reclamation of our individual cultural identities. This also lends itself to a greater end still, a ripple effect of the reclamation of ‘Ōiwi cultural identity in our families, our communities, and our lāhui.

In the visioning phase of our inquiry, we endeavored to engage multiple layers of community. The initial inquiry phase would remain intimate and include Keiki Steps staff, then branch out respectively to INPEACE programs staff, INPEACE leadership, community partners, the broader community, and cultural experts. However, as we began to move slowly through our visioning and planning stages, our monthly reflective sessions helped reveal one very important facet of our ‘Ōiwi culture: honoring our sense of time. Whereas we typically operate by the Gregorian solar calendar, academic school years, or budget years, we rarely have the opportunity to honor our own lunar, seasonal, or ceremonial time. Honoring our sense of time meant giving ourselves permission to listen to our na‘au (*gut—emotional center*), our waihona no‘ono‘o (*cognitive center*), our kino (*physical body*) and our pili‘uhane (*spirit*).

We have been and continue to be in a sustained mode of survival. The past two years have ripped open old wounds and trauma buried deep. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent government mandates both in Hawai‘i and under the federal government divided our communities and families. Our ‘Ōiwi communities, the most vulnerable and susceptible to the virus, had the highest rates of infection and the lowest rates of vaccination. Deep-seated mistrust of the American government resurfaced with conflicting media coverage and misinformation spread on social media. Our loved ones were gravely ill with this new disease; many did not survive. This was another reminder of a time when foreign diseases were brought to our shores and the loss of life to our ‘Ōiwi population was catastrophic.

Our organization took a very bold step requiring all staff to be vaccinated against the COVID-19 virus. Although both religious and medical exemptions were offered, this created tension and animosity within our organization. Some staff quit, while

others who were not compliant were let go. This news quickly spread throughout our small communities. We still do not know if the drop in enrollment over the past three years since the onset of the COVID pandemic is a result of the change in modality, the strain on families, or attitudes towards our COVID response.

Like most education programs around the world, Keiki Steps quickly shifted to an online modality. Our families struggled with meeting their day-to-day needs as Hawai‘i’s economic engine ground to a halt with the stay-at-home/work-from-home emergency proclamation. Our teaching staff was inundated with the demands of distance learning for their children while also providing online direct service programming for our enrolled families. We have not yet recovered from the hardships that we endured during the COVID pandemic. And yet, like our kūpuna, we adapted and endured.

The isolation during this time created a void of disconnection in our lives and in the lives of our staff and families. Ignoring this was not a solution. Nor was pressing on. Neither would be restorative by any means. Recognizing the arduous circumstances surrounding our staff and leaning in to our innate wāhine intuition to kūkulu kumuhana (*pooling together collective thoughts and prayers to solve common problems*) for collective and individual nurturing and healing, we created an online wellness retreat for our staff, inviting respected healers in our community to conduct workshops. Community practitioners trained in traditional healing practices who provide health services to our community through the Native Hawaiian Healing Center at the Wai‘anae Coast Community Health Center presented the history of epidemic diseases brought to our shores from foreigners such as smallpox, syphilis, and tuberculosis, which decimated our ‘Ōiwi population. Estimates indicate that upon James Cook’s arrival to Hawai‘i in 1778, 800,000 to one million ‘Ōiwi lived in ko Hawai‘i Pae ‘Āina (*the Hawaiian archipelago*). The staggering population decline due to foreign illness reduced the number of Hawaiians by half within twenty-five years. Within a century, the population was less than 50,000.<sup>1</sup>

During the reign of our Mō‘iwahine Lili‘uokalani, Sovereign Queen of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i, her response to the epidemic of illnesses in Hawai‘i was to establish a quarantine as well as to temporarily end transportation to and from Hawai‘i. Understanding the actions of our Queen to address the epidemic in Hawai‘i helped many of us to accept the federal and state mandates that were activated as emergency response measures to COVID. Reflecting on the history, actions, and behaviors of our people allowed us to reconcile with the loss of control and the immense loss in our communities due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another integral aspect of our wellness retreat was to learn about the importance of hā (*breath*) and breathing techniques. We focused on disciplined, purposeful, and intentional breath control through oli (*chant*) that we could utilize as a traditional method to our contemporary wellness routines.

The hardships we endured as a result of the pandemic gave rise to the absolute need to honor our sense of time. Honoring our sense of time meant taking a pause to collect ourselves. To nourish ourselves. To strengthen ourselves. Makahiki is a four-month time of preparation and peace dedicated to the god, Lono. Makahiki begins

when the Makali‘i constellation rises in our night sky, usually beginning in early November and lasting until February. It is the time of year dedicated to peace. In the twenty-first century, it is a time of thoughtful reflection, a time to assert boundaries and insist on wellness and well being. Our inquiry project empowered us to honor the season of Makahiki and to take the time off from any inquiry-related activities. We reconvened a few months later.

It was our responsibility to recognize the needs of our staff and to be part of a solution that poured back into them. As we struggled to understand our capacity to execute our original inquiry implementation plan despite the challenges and transitions that were occurring, it became apparent that there was a strong need for us to shift our focus to rebuilding connection among our Keiki Steps staff. Our solution to furthering the inquiry project while addressing our individual needs to restore self was to plan a staff retreat.

An intentional and purposeful two-day gathering of all staff on O‘ahu was planned, in part to conduct the community inquiry but also to strengthen and restore connections and relationships that suffered in isolation over the course of the COVID pandemic. We were cognizant of the cultural norms of our community in our inquiry approach with our staff. The act of asking questions without our cultural norms can have different meanings. Niele is to ply with frivolous questions. Maha‘oi is to be forward in asking questions. Neither Niele nor Maha‘oi are regarded as positive qualities in our ‘Ōiwi families. Our inquiry approach required a more nuanced approach if we wanted to ask questions that might be characterized as personal or invasive regarding our broader inquiry question, *What does it mean to be Hawaiian?*

Our administration team explored metaphors that might appropriately represent our Hawaiian cultural curriculum framework that is intended to facilitate the expression of Hawaiian cultural identity. Rather than focusing first on a product, we instead focused on a practice or process. Uhaulumu Pōhaku is the cultural practice of dry-stacking stone to create stone structures. Traditional stone structures varied from pā hale (*stone walls of homes*) to heiau (*temples*) to kuapā (*fishpond walls*) to kuahu (*altar*) to ko‘a (*shrine*). The preliminary work leading up to the retreat was watching an eight-part video series that included technical and cultural training sessions by a loa (*cultural expert*) of Uhaulumu Pōhaku.

The staff retreat was hosted on O‘ahu. The first day was spent on a huaka‘i. Huaka‘i means to travel (*ka‘i*) with an intention of yielding an outcome (*hua*). The term *huaka‘i* is often translated as “journey” and in the context of a school setting is translated as “field trip.” Our huaka‘i was really a journey with an intention to manifest a meaningful outcome. The rational aim of the huaka‘i was to visit and learn about different traditional stone structures. Staff visited Paepae o He‘eia, an 800-year-old fishpond; a shoreline altar in Kaupō, Waimānalo; Pahua Heiau, a temple in Maunaloa and a stone wall associated with a traditional hālau at Ka Papa Lo‘i o Kānewai. The primary outcome was to create a learning experience that encouraged staff to reflect on the four aspects of maui: ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i (*Hawaiian language*), ‘ike ku‘una (*traditional knowledge and knowledge systems passed down to subsequent generations*), lawena (*behaviors and attitudes reflective of ‘Ōiwi values*), and pili ‘uhane (*spirituality*).

The second day of the retreat was spent with a mother-daughter ‘Ōiwi team of cultural practitioners who facilitated staff discussions on cultural identity. It was important to honor the role of ‘ohana in our inquiry so an intergenerational approach to the facilitation methodology uplifted our ‘Ōiwi process. The makuahine (*mother*) of this duo is a respected elder in our ‘Ōiwi community but most especially in Wai‘anae and Hawai‘i. Having a respected elder and a familial dynamic helped to establish a pu‘uhonua (*sanctuary; place of peace safety*) for staff to be vulnerable in their discussions.

Eia ho‘i ka pōhaku loa a me ka pōhaku poko.

*Here is the long stone and the short stone.*

Pūhala Kelly Pe‘a Kamālamalama

Our kūpuna built many different types of structures such as walls, sacred grounds, homes, markers with rocks. The construction period lasted anywhere from a day to months and/or years. The specific structure that came to mind is one of the oldest heiau located on the northwest side of Hawaii island called Pu‘u Koholā. Pōhaku were carried by many over long distances who were subjected to scorching temperatures. None of the negative external forces such as weather or tiredness deterred the construction process. All were united not only physically but spiritually, which enabled them to operate at their most optimal levels to execute an enormous task beneficial to the whole island. Reflecting on the process of building, I see that if they had rushed through it, the structures wouldn’t be as strong and sturdy as they are today.

When reflecting on our inquiry project in our quest to answer the question, *What does it mean to be Hawaiian?*, our process and how we choose to proceed required time, but it also made me realize I had to address my own misunderstandings of what being Hawaiian meant to me. How can I “carry” and “work” when I lacked my own personal conviction of who I am as a Hawaiian woman? As the fifth child of seven children, I was constantly reminded to work and to accept the poor living conditions of our farm life as what it meant to be Hawaiian. As the youngest daughter of Howard and Charlene Pe‘a and granddaughter of John Lono Pe‘a, Mary Kaiawe Manuia, Charles Tirrell, and Katherine Loihana, it wasn’t acceptable for me to waver in my own personal identity. I am a descendant of these individuals who truly demonstrated to the world what it meant to be Hawaiian.

Unfortunately, I didn’t see or realize the value of what it meant to be Hawaiian until I was forty years old. If you asked the five-year-old Pūhala, *What does it mean to be Hawaiian?*, she would say it meant being poor. If you asked the twelve-year-old Pūhala, *What does it mean to be Hawaiian?*, it meant being poor and eating out of the slop cans used to feed our own pigs. If you asked the twenty-year-old Pūhala, *What does it mean to be Hawaiian?*, she would say it means to be poor and there’s no future for me here on the very land on which I was born and raised. Two decades later, if you ask the forty-year-old Pūhala, *What does it mean to be Hawaiian?*, she will humbly and proudly respond that she is enough. After obtaining three degrees and completing 327 credit hours, she realized that through this inquiry project she was able to confront her own false narratives head-on. She can not only acknowledge

her birthplace as her source of power but can finally stand firm in knowing that she comes with every descendant that walked this earth and prepared this time and land for her as a Hawaiian wāhine to serve and do all that is necessary to perpetuate our culture.

We were taught to be workers and we actively engaged in providing service to those who lived within our farming community. We weren't taught to speak our native tongue but were taught how to work hard and to always give service to whoever needs help. Being Hawaiian wasn't something I was proud of due to the trauma of growing up in a school and church setting that didn't accept my curls or Chinese smiling eyes. I wasn't comfortable with my own name due to the nonstop bullying and teasing that came with it. As we engaged in discussion within our team and participated in various workshops with knowledge-keepers of our island communities, I was able to find comfort and value in being "Pūhala." It's an indescribable feeling of relief and joy but also a renewed focus on not only this project but how I can contribute to the process. This, along with the recent passing of my father, also caused me to finally have the courage to step out of my comfort zone and agree to serve in another capacity for a state entity but fortunately within the same early childhood education (ECE) field.

This inquiry process has brought personal clarity and has served as an empowerment tool which I feel will truly benefit those who are also finding what it means to be Hawaiian and/or any other nationality. For far too many years we have been subjected to external powers and internal insecurities, but this project has provided the sacred time as well as space to reflect on what it means to be Hawaiian individually as well as communally. The task required for us is to also determine who to include in this process, to identify those who are willing to carry pōhaku with us.

**Eia nō ka pōhaku kaumaha a me ka pōhaku māmā.**

*Here is the heavy stone and the light stone.*

**LeReen Carr**

What makes it okay for me to embrace my cultural identity? How was I to teach Hawaiian Culture Based Education when I myself did not feel connected to my own cultural identity? Could I be culturally Hawaiian without being ethnically Hawaiian?

The pōhaku that I bring is one of Asian descent, Japanese, Filipino, and Okinawan. Growing up, I wanted to connect with my race through culture and traditions. I remember people asking my ethnicity and wondering why I would separate Japanese and Okinawan. They would comment asking, "Aren't they the same?" I would quickly answer saying that it's not, and I felt bothered that they would question my answer. But then that comment would also make me question who I am, what ethnicity do I identify with? I had friends who could fluently speak Japanese and Filipino and because I was not able to, I felt that I could not connect fully with them and with who I am. I was always navigating the question, "Who am I?" There was always this tug for me to 'imi na'auao, to seek knowledge. I would always be mindful when entering a space that there are different perspectives and lived experiences.

## *Learning the Hawaiian language and culture*

It was several fall seasons ago that I had attended a Native Hawaiian Early Childhood Education Consortium Conference. I clearly remember the feelings I had after attending a workshop and experiencing what a Hawaiian curriculum could look like. From that moment I decided I would fully change the way my lesson plans were set out to be. Was it a scary and daunting task? Of course, especially since this was all new for me. But I was determined and knowing that I had the support and encouragement of my aide and my program director, who were more knowledgeable in Hawaiian culture than I, gave me the confidence to teach what I felt was needed to be taught. To my pleasant surprise, and one that I wasn't anticipating because I was so focused on implementing my new curriculum, there were many positive outcomes. Yes, seeing the keiki grow and develop is what every educator wants, but the relationships that were formed, my growth, and learning the Hawaiian culture with the families were my greatest joys from that school year. I was able to demonstrate humility; I had the opportunity to collaborate with those around me. I was able to develop the Hawaiian culture and language that many of the families didn't realize they wanted and needed. I showed others they could be true to themselves, be proud of their culture. That journey allowed me to discover who I am and gave me a sense of place.

## *Legacy*

Having children of my own now gives me a different perspective on things. The loss of close and dear grandparents has me at times wondering if I'm teaching my children their history and if they will pass it down to their children. Reflecting on and sharing memories allows them to still be present in our lives.

I know I want my children to do better than I have done. I want them to know who they are and feel confident about it.

**Eia ka pōhaku pukapuka a me ka pōhaku pahe'e.**

*Here is the stone filled with tiny holes and the smooth stone without holes.*

**Courtney Perreira**

If I had to describe our work with one word, it would be "evolving." This word captures the ever-changing field of education along with the daily reflective practices that we utilize to shape our program. When we first began this inquiry project, it allowed us to take a step back and to intentionally dissect the components that we wanted to focus on. Working within Indigenous populations has opened doors for us to learn from one another and to highlight each other's strengths. We can use these strengths to collaborate, empower, and prosper. Our team works consistently through focused discussions and deep reflections. This helps to provide us with clarity, insight, perspectives, and strategic plans. These thought processes guide us within our inquiry to make informed decisions and improvements. Our reflections serve as a technique in which we can evaluate and further accommodate our services.

Building strong pilina (*relationships*) with members of our communities has allowed us to gain a deeper understanding regarding how effective our services are. We honor and respect all shapes and forms of diversity through inclusive practices. An example of inclusive practices that we have implemented includes giving families in our program time to highlight their own culture. A key way that we do this is by incorporating their Native language by learning how to greet one another, how to count, how to sing a song. Providing a safe space for us all to learn and value one another's culture has brought meaning and empowerment to our classrooms. It teaches our children that we are all different and exposes them to a healthy environment in which we respect one another. As we work intimately with families, we begin to better understand their needs. This helps us in knowing how we can continue to strengthen inclusive techniques. If there is a family that doesn't celebrate holidays, or doesn't participate in protocol due to their religion, we make any accommodations necessary so that they are still able to join us at Keiki Steps.

It's critical for us to eliminate our biases when making programmatic decisions. By remaining unbiased, we can overcome potential cultural barriers together. Through these understandings, we can adapt our pedagogies and methods. We carve time out of our daily schedules to thoroughly articulate our programmatic events, action plans, and approaches. Our goal is to further improve our organization while serving our communities in positive and impactful ways. We utilize surveys as a measuring tool to gather specific feedback from our participants and staff. Other ways that we collect information include organic conversations, assessments, interactions at sites or events, and family conferences. This helps to guide our next steps as we move forward within our program. Our staff work closely with families to provide helpful resources and supportive guidance. Due to the diverse communities that we serve, it is crucial to recognize individualized needs. These daily efforts strengthen pilina (*relationships*). Creating these connections fosters trust and encourages active involvement from families.

Our Keiki Steps program has shifted to a Hawaiian cultural curriculum. Cultural identity is something that we want to identify, develop, and strengthen. What is cultural identity? Cultural identity can be broken down into layers of history, beliefs, and other individualized experiences. It has been a topic that we have continued to explore and develop. Personally, cultural identity has taken on a deeper meaning of understanding who I am as a person. I believe this process helps you in discovering your past, current, and future self. It has been a vulnerable and eye-opening experience for me to acknowledge who I am and the identity that defines me. My focus is to dive deeper into learning about my culture because it allows me to understand who has come before me, why things happened, and where and how it leads to my present world. I believe there is power in truly knowing yourself. The directions that we take may evolve or change entirely as we continue to develop ourselves. We strive to empower our communities with accepting and creating their cultural identities. The intention of our cultural curriculum content is to educate families and to provide them with ways that they can apply or relate to their own world. By creating a safe space to discuss such topics, we aim to inspire and promote acceptance of one's cultural



identity. Focusing on these discoveries has impacted our work with families tremendously. It allows us to deepen our perspectives, provides valuable insight, and creates a reciprocal process of learning.

## THE ROOTLETS WILL CREEP TOWARDS THE ROOTLETS: HOW KO‘A AND OUR CULTURAL IDENTITIES ARE RECLAIMED

Our Community-Based Inquiry story and journey has many layers—in this article we share a central component of our inquiry story through each of our contributing reflections on the process and the use of the metaphor of the ko‘a. For example, each of us—Sanoe, Kalehua, LeReen, Pūhala, and Courtney—carried a stone and placed it in the ko‘a. These stones form the foundation of our Community-Based Inquiry.

Our ko‘a is not yet complete. We have pōhaku (*stone*) yet to add. Some stones we have not yet identified; others we have not yet found. We will continue to seek out pōhaku to add to our ko‘a. While we continue to await pōhaku to reveal themselves to us, we continue to set stone, continue to build.

In this story of our Community-Based Inquiry, we each have set our niho stones, the cornerstones of our ko‘a foundation:

Mo‘okū‘auhau. In order to understand who we are as ‘Ōiwi, it is of supreme importance to know who our forbears are. In knowing our ancestors, we come to know ourselves. As we recite their names and ask for their guidance through prayer, our ancestors have renewed purpose in the ‘ohana. They have function and are able to have everlasting life. As our Keiki Steps administration team uncovers the stories and histories of our respective family members, we contribute to the collective an elevated importance of mo‘okū‘auhau within the organization and within our early childhood programming. Incorporating the teaching of mo‘okū‘auhau of our ‘āina, our ali‘i and our people, becomes a lesson for our staff, students, and families to research their own genealogies and to make meaning of the histories of their own ‘ohana.

Honua. Our maui starts to form as we grow in our mother’s womb. The environments that nurture and feed, that we find solace in, these spaces and places influence our cultural identity. Our relationship to our lands, oceans, waters, and sky informs our personhood. It frames our perspective and our attitudes. Respect and reverence for all honua that nurture maui is cultivated through our intimate relationships with our ao kūlohelohe (*natural environment*). As our Keiki Steps administration team’s relationship with our ao kūlohelohe grew with intentional and regular interactions with our akua, we began to create purposeful learning opportunities for staff and families to do the same. The Community-Based Inquiry informed our process of developing opportunities for learning outside of the typical classroom and strategically centering those learning opportunities within our natural surroundings, encouraging staff and families to explore their own relationships with honua. Staff, students, and families research and recite ha‘i ‘ōlelo ho‘olauna (*introduction speech*). In these ha‘i ‘ōlelo, the names of their birth sands, land divisions, oceans, rivers, mountains, wind, and rain are spoken into life. Traditional land boundaries and names long forgotten are reclaimed within the mana of the spoken word.

Pilina. It takes a lāhui to raise ‘Ōiwi. Through our collective inquiry exploring our questions about who we are as Hawaiians, we have come to understand who we are as individuals in relationship to others. No ka pono o ka nui, for the betterment of the greater ‘ohana. Our identity is bound to the collective and the reciprocity of responsibility for one another. Traditionally, we lived in kauhale, every family member with a specialty, a carefully curated expertise that helped to provide for the needs of the family. Each family collectively leveraged their skill sets for the families of the greater kauhale; farmers provided the fruits of the land for the community, while fishermen provided nourishment from the sea. Communal sharing of goods and services ensured the health, safety, and well being of all members of the kauhale. While we no longer live in kauhale, as an organization and program we focus on the communal sharing of resources, talents, skills, and knowledge. We leverage our kānaka capital to move the greater community, our modern kauhale, forward. Our kumu have gained the ability to learn and understand each other’s strengths, and this has allowed the capacity of the program to increase. Through our programming, we welcome the knowledge and skills of families and students intricately woven with the knowledge and skills of our teachers to grow academic kauhale rooted in the teachings and values of our ancestors.

Kuleana. ‘Auamo kuleana, the fulfillment of responsibility, is a civic duty to ‘ohana and lāhui. It is the individual actions, behaviors and attitudes that we take on for the benefit of others. Our nuclear families consist of grandparents, parents, siblings, spouses, children, grandchildren, and community members. Our nuclear families include relationships by blood and relationships of responsibility. Thus, our kuleana is to be responsible to and responsible for the ‘ohana. We are responsible for ensuring a thriving lāhui.

E kolo ana nō ke ēwe i ke ēwe. Our inquiry project set out to answer the question, “What is Hawaiian identity?” Hawaiian identity is a complex root system. With the birth of every ‘ōiwi, our root system grows, adding to the ‘ohana system of the lāhui. These rootlets stretch back to time immemorial, intricately connecting us to one another. The genealogies, histories, stories, legends, prayers, songs, and lullabies hold the knowledge, values, traditions, attitudes, and behaviors of our people that remind us of who we are. It is our kuleana to remember. We only need to reconnect to the rootlets, to our lineage and kin. This connects us to the *knowing* of who we are. This is Hawaiian cultural identity.

In the two years since our inquiry project began, our individual understanding of our cultural identity and specifically Hawaiian cultural identity has evolved. Pronunciation, use, and confidence in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i has increased between staff and with participants. The increased use of Hawaiian language nūpepa (*newspapers*) as primary source documents of mo‘olelo (*historical accounts*) and ka‘ao (*legends*) as well as oli (*chants*) and pule (*prayers*) has become the niho stones (*cornerstones*) for the program and curriculum. Classroom materials, including a six-book bilingual series, are rooted, conceptualized, and executed from a Hawaiian world view developed by Hawaiians for Hawaiians in the Hawaiian language. Staff, families, and students have increased competency, fluency, and self-confidence to deliver their mo‘okū‘auhau (*genealogy*) and ho‘olauna (*cultural introduction of self*). Comfort and understanding

regarding cultural protocols and the ability to participate in opening and closing piko is clearly demonstrated in the full participation of families and teachers.

Keiki Steps now offers full Hawaiian language immersion and bilingual classes. We are working towards normalizing the use of our Native language in an educational setting within an ethnically diverse community of staff and participants.

As a collective, we are co-visioning and co-creating the Hawaiian cultural identity of the Keiki Steps program. The reclamation of cultural identity is the foundation to healing our lands, our waters, and our families from the drastic and oftentimes negative impacts brought about as a result of the occupation of our homeland.

**E ka mea heluhelu, paipai ‘ia nō ho‘i ‘oe e paepae pōhaku pū mai no ia ko‘a.**

*Dear reader, you are also encouraged to join us in transporting stones for this ko‘a.*

You have heard our stories, how who we are—as Hawaiian descendants—powerfully shapes our approach to this inquiry and our work with children and families. The questions we are asking, and the stones we carry to build our ko‘a, are inherently connected to our reclamation acts of language revitalization, historical clarity, and developing the rootlets for the next generation. It will take many hands over many miles over many years to address the historical and political trauma of our people, to heal our nation, and to give way to a thriving lāhui. As we set each pōhaku, we assert our reclamation over our ‘Ōiwi identity and birth forth the promise of a future in the image of our kūpuna.

**Eia ka pōhaku.**

**Eia ka pōhaku nui a me ka pōhaku iki.**

**Eia ho‘i ka pōhaku loa a me ka pōhaku poko.**

**Eia nō ka pōhaku kaumaha a me ka pōhaku māmā.**

**Eia ka pōhaku pukapuka a me ka pōhaku pahe‘e.**

**Eia ka pōhaku.**

*Here is the stone.*

*Here is the large stone and the small stone.*

*Here is the long stone and the short stone.*

*Here is the heavy stone and the light stone.*

*Here is the stone filled with tiny holes and the smooth stone without holes.*

*Here is the stone.*

## NOTES

1. David Stannard, “Western Diseases in Hawaii: An Interview with David Stannard,” interview by John Heckathorn, *Honolulu Magazine*, November 1989, <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~johnb/micro/m130/readings/stannard.html>.