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Hawaiian Names and the People Who Carry Them: An Exploration of Diasporic Hawaiians Navigating Yale University

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Abstract: Traditional Hawaiian names are foundational to Hawaiian culture. Following the linguistic resurgence of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i during the Second Hawaiian Renaissance, Hawaiian personal names came back into use for the first time in nearly a century. Today, Native Hawaiian students and faculty navigate Yale University with a piece of their ethnic, and in most cases cultural, identity encapsulated by their name. Through the lens of personal names, this capstone highlights experiences of language and identity among Native Hawaiian Yale community members. The first half of this capstone is a creative scholarly essay on Hawaiian culture and resistance to settler colonialism. The essay contextualizes the second piece of this capstone: a multi-media art exhibition honoring the experiences of Native Hawaiians at Yale. With art and testimonies coming directly from Hawaiians, this exhibition holds space for Native Hawaiians in the Yale community and raises awareness of their unique experiences at this institution.

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This capstone is a work of Yale student research. The arguments and research in the project are those of the individual student. They are not endorsed by Yale, nor are they official university positions or statements.

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Definitions

I developed the definitions below from my personal experience, and I will mention them throughout my capstone. I encourage you to refer to this page as you read. While my paper will offer context, do not hesitate to seek further understanding from outside sources. The Native Hawaiian experience has been erased from dominant narratives throughout history and learning about Hawai‘i in a critical way is new for many people. It is necessary to give this history, and its current manifestations, the time and energy they require for deep engagement. Note: In the context of this project, ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i is not a foreign language, so I do not italicize Hawaiian words.

Aboriginal

From a time prior to the arrival of colonizers.

Diasporic Hawaiian

Ethnically Hawaiian people living outside of Hawai‘i, sometimes referred to as “off-island Hawaiians.”

Haole

Colloquial term to describe white people.

Kānaka Maoli

Descendants of the aboriginal indigenous peoples from the Hawaiian archipelago. Kānaka Maoli people are not to be confused with those who moved to the Hawaiian Islands after colonization in 1778. Even if the person has never lived in Hawai‘i, their aboriginal descendants make them Kānaka Maoli. In this paper, I will refer to Kānaka Maoli people as “Kānaka” or by the English translation: “Native Hawaiian.” For simplicity, I will also refer to Kānaka folks as “Hawaiian,” however this term is sometimes used colloquially to denote people who are live in the Hawaiian archipelago but are not necessarily indigenous.

Kūpuna

Term for Hawaiian elders in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, referring to those alive and ancestors who have died.

Mainland

Colloquial term used describe the continental United States.

‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i

The language used by people indigenous to the Hawaiian archipelago. Throughout this paper, I will refer to this language as “Hawaiian,” “‘ōlelo Hawai‘i” or, simply, “‘ōlelo.”

Tutu

Term for grandmother or, sometimes, grandparent in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i. Spelled “Tūtū” in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i.

Acknowledgements

I would like to share my gratitude for the people and experiences that have guided me towards this project. My capstone builds on the very first class I took at Yale: Native Americans and Higher Education, a History course taught by Professor Ned Blackhawk. The course focused on various American Indian tribes and their ways of resisting colonial education. These stories of settler colonialism were analogous for the ones I knew about Hawai‘i, but the syllabus itself overlooked any commentary on the activism of my people. So, I sought to educate myself on this history through the final assignment. In it, I researched a boarding school on ‘Oahu and its path towards indigenous language revitalization. This assignment inspired the focus of my Education Studies Capstone.

Throughout my Yale experience, I have infused my coursework with explorations and ruminations on Native Hawaiians past and present. In this capstone, I see glimmers of this practice: a comic strip I designed about the use of Hawaiian Pidgin in Farrington High School for Effective Teaching in Secondary Classrooms, a proposal for community education through story sharing between kūpuna and preschool children for a course on American childcare, exploring the importance of personal names for toddlers in Child Development. I am grateful for the professors who encouraged me to delve into my identities through their courses. I am also grateful for the mentors I’ve picked up along the way, especially Janna Wagner who has offered me endless support throughout this project. I am indebted to my classmates who offered feedback on the many iterations of my writing: Alex, Peyton, Nora, and Jonathan. Finally, mahalo to the artists who shared their work in our art exhibition: Hauanuawaiu, Kealoha, Ka‘imi, Emily Kahani Noe, Micah Kulanakilaikekaialeale, Mikiala Anuhea, and Olivia Uahilo‘iaikeahoakealoha. Your creativity and openness to build new relationships will continue to inspire me even after I leave Yale.

Introduction

My name is Melia Keahiokeola Young. I have brown hair, green eyes, and fair skin. But when I'm back home on Maui, the sun presses streaks of golden blonde into my hair and spreads a tan over my shoulders like a cape. Leaving for school in the fall means transforming into a body I don't quite recognize, with layers of clothing the humid air in Hawai'i would never permit. The only piece of me I bring from home is my name, which has become an invitation to share myself with everyone I meet.

I was a junior when another Kanaka student, Kala'i, joined my residential college. Suddenly, I began running into someone every day who addressed me with the proper pronunciation of my name. He would say the first syllable of my name gently: "Meh," like my tutu does. Running into Kala'i made me wonder if his friends pronounce his name correctly. *Does he explain that the apostrophe in the middle of his name is actually an 'okina? Does he tell the story of who gave it to him, that the name prophesizes he has healing abilities? Does he feel far from home here? Does he feel far from himself?*

Every year, more Native Hawaiians come to Yale. But each experience is different, especially since not all Native Hawaiians grew up in Hawai'i. This capstone project compiles stories from Kanaka students and faculty at Yale, particularly focusing on their experiences with a piece of Hawaiian resistance embedded as their names. With my capstone, I hold space for Hawaiians—including myself—to reflect on our experiences and facilitate a way for us to share them with other community members.

Methodology and Scope

The primary question guiding my project is: *What would it look like for a group of Native Hawaiian Yale community members to create an art exhibition that explores language and identity in the context of Hawaiian names?* To answer this question, I compiled testimonies from Native Hawaiian students and faculty at Yale. These testimonies span a variety of mediums depending on the person's preference: poetry, photography (digital and cyanotype), graphic design, printmaking, and painting. The creative scholarly essay below provides context and an impetus for the exhibit. I included a condensed version of the essay as a Curator's Note, which was printed onto brochures and displayed at the entrance of the exhibit. See Page 30 for the

Curator's Note. The exhibit was housed in the Native American Cultural Center's gallery space and was open for New Haven community members to immerse themselves in the diversity of Native Hawaiian experiences at Yale. The exhibition opened on April 8 with a small reception. The show lasted for the final four weeks of the Spring 2023 semester (April 8-May 7).

The Native Hawaiian experience is unique and necessary for grasping the history of Yale and the United States. However, Kanaka voices have been deliberately suppressed by people in power. Visibility of Native Hawaiians on Yale's campus is particularly sparse. Hawaiian students don't quite fit into the Native American Cultural Center nor the Asian American Cultural Center. Yale also has only two faculty members who identify as indigenous Hawaiian, neither of whom hold tenured positions. This quiet group, rumbling beneath the noise of institutional bureaucracy, is woven into the fabric of Yale and has been for more than 200 years. It is necessary to hold space for Kanaka community members, especially without any filters. In the essay below, I share stories of Native Hawaiian joy and survival through the lens of language and identity. And, with the exhibition, visitors experienced these stories from the source.

Part 1: Creative Scholarly Essay

I began this project by writing a creative scholarly essay, which begins on Page 9 This essay overviews Hawaiian history, specifically focusing on language and naming practices. It then discusses education, and laws against education, as an assimilation mechanism employed by the American colonial regime. Next, the essay traces how Hawaiians resisted colonization by preserving 'ōlelo Hawai'i and its continued revitalization throughout the mid-20th century. The essay ends with a brief history of Yale's colonial presence in Hawai'i, opening the question of how Kanaka students and faculty make sense of their Hawaiian identities on campus today.

To write this essay, I reviewed scholarly articles through databases at Yale and the University of Hawai'i. I also spoke with my grandmother and mother, who both attended an all-Hawaiian boarding school but had very different experiences. My goal was to infuse this essay with my own voice to show the reader my personal stake in this project. By the end of the essay, I hope the reader will see the historical connection between language and settler colonialism and the need to understand it further.

Part 2: Collecting Stories

I began the creative component of this project by searching for Kanaka students, alumni, and faculty members at Yale who have Hawaiian names.¹ To find these artists, I contacted my network of Hawaiian friends and asked if they had any ideas of people who might be interested in contributing to this project. I also cold-emailed people who I knew were Native Hawaiian and affiliated with Yale. In the end, four undergraduates, two alumni, one professor, and a child of a Yale fellow agreed to submit their artwork to this exhibit.² I met with most of the artists to explain the goal of this capstone and discuss ideas for their pieces. These coffee dates were one of the most memorable aspects of this capstone because they allowed me to connect deeply with Native Hawaiians who had similar experiences as me—some of whom I knew peripherally but had never met. In speaking with these artists, I also realized how many Hawaiians at Yale have made art based on their experiences, but the pieces were scattered throughout campus and the web (a mural in Pauli Murray College’s basement, through the YDN and DOWN Magazine, for course assignments, etc.). Our exhibit is unique because it holds all our stories in one place.

In this exhibit, I wanted to ensure that each artist’s voice was expressed because Hawaiian voices are rarely represented authentically in the mainstream. So, I deliberately encouraged the artists to contribute pieces in the medium(s) of their choosing. This allowed them to reflect in their own personal way, giving them control of their story. To the same end, I preserved each art piece without any editing.³ The main manufactured aspect of this exhibit was its presentation in the physical space, which I curated based on the gallery’s unique layout.

Part 3: Amplifying Stories

Once I gathered the art pieces, I constructed an exhibit to encapsulate the many experiences of being Kanaka at Yale. First, I spent Winter Break learning about artistic curation.

¹ So, I will be working with ethnically Hawaiian members of the Yale community, even those living outside the Islands.

² See Page 21 for photos of the art pieces.

³ In one poem, I decided to print the words in large font and cut the poem into fragments. I then displayed the fragments onto a wall. The artist expressed that this poem was meant to be spoken word, so we decided this format would capture the pace of speaking most effectively. The other curatorial decision I made was to not frame the prints and woven tapestries. This allowed the guests to view the texture of each piece, without being obstructed by glass.

I have experience in creating art but little understanding of how to present multiple pieces in a narrative-style. Next, I secured the logistical components necessary for our exhibit. I chose to use the third floor gallery space at the Native American Cultural Center (NACC). The NACC is home to Native Yale community members and is open to friends who want to support their indigenous peers. However, few non-Natives from Yale have been inside of the NACC. I wanted to bring non-Natives into a space where indigeneity is dominant and valued, an experience many people have never had.

I received funding for this exhibit through the Creative and Performing Arts Award and Senior Mellon Forum. I used the money to print posters and brochures, order frames and hooks to display the pieces, and provide refreshments at the opening reception. I launched a publicity campaign one week before the exhibition's opening. This campaign included posts on the Native American Cultural Center and Education Studies Instagram pages, a blurb in the Yale Arts online calendar, and fifteen posters that I hung around campus. For a copy of the poster I used, see Page 29.

I decided to call our exhibit Hui. This is the Hawaiian word for "gathering," "meeting," or "community." In Hawaiian Pidgin, it also is a way to get people's attention. The exhibit plays on both meanings of this word: it gathers Hawaiian artists together while telling our Yale community, "Hui! We're over here!"

To curate Hui, I started by framing the art pieces. I had planned to display them based on theme, but many of the themes intersected and I did not want the sections to appear separate from one another. Instead, I grouped pieces based off the general style, medium, and ideas. Mikiala, one of the artists and an Art major, helped me with this task. At the entrance of the exhibit, I welcomed visitors by leaving brochures with a short Curator's Note, found on Page 30 of this document. I also pasted a large poster board onto the wall near the exit, asking visitors to reflect on what they call home. I left colored pencils, crayons, pens, glitter glue, and paints for the visitors to use. I wanted to mimic the collaborative nature of this exhibit while also giving visitors a space to direct their inspiration and contribute their own voices.

I hosted an opening reception on April 8 to celebrate the artists. People from across the Yale community attended, with alums traveling from as far as Massachusetts. I provided light refreshments and Hawaiian music. The opening reception was a community event for Native Hawaiians, which is rare at Yale. See Page 28 for pictures from the reception.

**Creative Scholarly Essay:
On Language and Resistance in Hawai‘i**

*To name is to identify. It is to make real; to give a name is to recognize. When no name is given, or a name is forgotten or confused with another, then there is no existence. One is rendered invisible—insignificant, unworthy.*⁴

Dr. Christina Gómez, 2012

I live with my tutu on Maui every summer. As I stand curbside at the airport, the puakenikeni lei hanging from her rearview mirror sticks out in a sea of white trucks. The drive home is filled with monkeypod trees that stretch towards one another, creating a tunnel of leaves and twigs and bird matter. Tutu was raised beneath these trees. One of four children, she was a rascal who would play football with her dad all day. Back when Hawai‘i was occupied by the American military but was not yet a state, she drove around an abandoned army Jeep.

I was named after Tutu: Keahiokeola. Tutu was seven when she received her name. Granny, Tutu’s tutu, had taken her to the capital of Hawai‘i. There, Tutu and her Granny met with an old Hawaiian woman. Tutu remembers hearing Granny and the woman speak from across the room. As they left, Granny told Tutu: “The woman says your name is Keahiokeola. Use it.”

Keahiokeola means “the fire of life,” which Tutu interprets as, “the spark that ignites the flame.” Mom says Tutu’s name foretold her ferocious activism for Hawaiian rights in the 1960s and 70s. Our name fits Tutu; she’s a leader who people follow. I still haven’t figured out where the meaning of our name will play into my life. This is a mystery I am eager to uncover.

Naming practices like these have always been at the heart of Hawaiian culture. Traditionally, children are named at birth by kūpuna or other leaders in their community, such as kumu hula (dance instructors).⁵ These names might arrive in the form of a vision, chosen to

⁴ Christina Gómez. “Telling Our Stories, Naming Ourselves: The Lost María in the Academy.” In *Transforming the Ivory Tower: Challenging Racism, Sexism, and Homophobia in the Academy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2012), 54.

⁵ Kim Crinella, “Traditional Hawaiian Names,” A Friend in the Islands Hawaii Resources and Online Island Gift Shop. <http://www.alohafriends.com/traditional-names.html>.

commemorate a recent event, or handed down by an ancestor.⁶ Hawaiian names can also be given well into adulthood. King Kamehameha's great granddaughter, Bernice Pauahi Bishop, received the name "Pauahi" after swiftly escaping a fire which took the lives of five others (pau means "finished" and ahi means "fire").⁷ These naming methods reveal how Hawaiians view a sense of connection between themselves and the world around them. Almost two centuries after Pauahi died, Hawaiians remember the event documented by her name.

Regardless of how they are given, every Hawaiian name is significant. In 'ōlelo Hawai'i, names are living things: one asks, "*Who* is your name?" as opposed to "What is your name?" The link between a person and their name progresses through life. Hawaiians believe that "one's name *becomes* that person. It's not something that should be taken lightly."⁸ So, Hawaiian names are just as vital to the culture as the people who carry them.

* * *

The foundation of Hawaiian culture rests on 'ōlelo Hawai'i, the indigenous language of Hawai'i. This is nothing new; Hawaiians have spoken 'ōlelo for more than two thousand years. Using 'ōlelo Hawai'i, aboriginal Hawaiians developed every aspect of their society, including their government, religion, educational system, and scientific innovations that led to irrigated crops and sea travel. In the early 1800s, missionaries from the American northeast started to colonize Hawai'i. Native Hawaiian scholars soon composed a spelling system for 'ōlelo and, using printing presses brought by missionaries, dispersed newspapers across the islands. King Kamehameha II covered the financial difference of these newspapers as part of a literacy campaign. By 1834, 95% of Native Hawaiians could read 'ōlelo Hawai'i, making Hawai'i one of the most literate nations in the world at the time.⁹

In the mid-19th century, however, Hawaiians had to challenge American colonizers who tried to uproot the local educational system. Threatened by the American military presence in

⁶ "What is the importance of names?" *National Ocean Service*. Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, July 30, 2020. <https://www.papahanaumokuakea.gov/heritage/kapainoa.html>

⁷ Mary Hannah Krout. *The Memoirs of Hon. Bernice Pauahu Bishop* (Albany: Knickerbocker Press, 1901), 19-20.

⁸ Lehia Apana. "Defining Identity," Maui Nō Ka 'Oī Magazine. 2018, <https://www.mauimagazine.net/defining-identity/>.

⁹ Donaghy, Keola. "'Ōlelo Hawai'i - A Rich Oral Past; A Bright Digital Future." *Cultural Survival Quarterly*. 1998, <https://www2.hawaii.edu/~donaghy/eng/csq.html>.

Hawai‘i, King Kamehameha III complied with writing a written constitution in 1840. He also complied with pressure from the American government to appoint Reverend Richard Armstrong, an American missionary, to lead Hawai‘i’s public schools.¹⁰ Armstrong selected a Board of Education made up entirely of White men who made every educational decision for the nation of Hawai‘i.¹¹ Armstrong and his board began by establishing the first common school west of the Mississippi River, Lahainaluna Seminary.¹² Missionary schools in Hawai‘i’s, like Lahainaluna, were based on the common school system in Massachusetts, which Horace Mann founded three years before.¹³ Today, Lahainaluna is a high school which still stands just miles from Tutu’s house on Maui.

Missionaries used these early public schools to strip Native Hawaiian children of their identity and assimilate them into American culture.¹⁴ They created rigid lesson plans that focused on indoctrinating Native students with American liberalism and Christianity.¹⁵ Students were forced to abandon their ways of moving through space, forced to practice “how to get ready, to stand, to speak out” like an American adult.¹⁶ The missionaries made the students orally condemn the gods they worshiped at home, instead memorizing stories from the New Testament.¹⁷ The missionaries tried, and failed, to replace Native Hawaiian culture with “100

¹⁰ Maenette Kape‘ahiokalani Padeken Benham. “The Voice‘less’ Hawaiian: An Analysis of Educational Policymaking, 1820-1960.” *Hawaiian Journal of History*, Vol. 32 (1998), 123.

¹¹ Michelle Morgan. “Americanizing the Teachers: Identity, Citizenship, and the Teaching Corps in Hawai‘i, 1900–1941.” *Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Summer 2014), 149. <https://doi.org/10.2307/westhistquar.45.2.0147>.

¹² Peter Young. “Lahainaluna High School.” Images of Old Hawai‘i. February 2, 2020, <https://imagesofoldhawaii.com/lahainaluna-high-school/>.

¹³ Maenette Kape‘ahiokalani Padeken Benham. “The Voice‘less’ Hawaiian: An Analysis of Educational Policymaking, 1820-1960.” *Hawaiian Journal of History*, Vol. 32 (1998), 123.

¹⁴ It is important to note that the initial implementation of these common schools was sixty years before Hawai‘i was annexed by the United States.

¹⁵ Benham. “The Voice‘less’ Hawaiian,” 125.

¹⁶ Samuel Manaiakalani Kamakau. *Ruling Chiefs of Hawai‘i* (Honolulu, Kamehameha Schools Press, 1992), 270-71.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

percent Americanism.”¹⁸ With such a radical and violent change in the childrens’ mannerisms, religious and political beliefs, many young Hawaiians felt alienated from their homelife. Ann Laura Stoler, a postcolonial theorist, calls this mechanism of infiltrating family dynamics with colonialism the “intimacies of empire.”¹⁹

Despite colonial efforts, Native Hawaiian students and their families fought back against the common schools. They especially rebelled against schools shifting towards all-English instruction.²⁰ The Hawaiian monarchy felt pressure by the American government to replace ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i with English throughout the mid-nineteenth century. In 1863, King Kamehameha IV signed an act that criminalized the use of Hawaiian first names: “[a]ll children born in [and, according to a later section, out of] wedlock after the passage of this Act shall have their father’s name as a family name. They shall, besides, have a Christian name suitable to their sex.”²¹ The Hawaiian monarchy regulated these names by requiring parents to “report the name or names of such child to the Registrar of Births for the district in which such child was born, within three months after the birth of such child.”²² To preserve the language and identity of children, many Hawaiians hid names in ‘ōlelo as middle names, which did not appear on birth certificates at the time. This practice is still seen today as Hawaiian middle names are four times more common than Hawaiian first names.²³

Greedy for Hawai‘i’s fertile soil, low exportation tax, and proximity to Japan, Americans continued to colonize the nation. In 1895, American troops illegally invaded Queen

¹⁸ Eileen Tamura. *Americanization, acculturation, and ethnic identity: The Nisei generation in Hawaii* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 54.

¹⁹ Ann Laura Stoler. “Intimidations of empire: Predicaments of the Tactile and unseen.” In *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822387992-001>.

²⁰ Taira, Derek. “Colonizing the Mind: Hawaiian History, Americanization, and Manual Training in Hawai‘i’s Public Schools, 1913-1940.” *Teachers College Record*, Vol. 123, No. 8, 70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01614681211048625>.

²¹ “Law on naming, 1863.” *Nupepa Hawai‘i*. October 30, 2017. <https://nupepa-hawaii.com/2017/10/30/law-on-naming-1863/>

²² Ibid.

²³ “Hawaiian Name,” Wikimedia Foundation, last modified September 14, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hawaiian_name

Liliuokalani's 'Iolani Palace and placed the queen on house arrest.²⁴ They established the Republic of Hawai'i, a group composed entirely of White businessmen who maintained power by exploiting Hawaiian agriculture. Just months after arresting Queen Liliuokalani, this group enacted Act 57, which outlawed the use of Hawaiian language in public schools. And, an accompanying piece of legislation outlawed Hawaiian language instruction as a whole.²⁵ This law remained in effect until 1967, just three years before my mom was born. It is important to note that the criminality of 'ōlelo Hawai'i began in public schools before reaching the rest of Hawaiian society. This shows how essential education was to the colonial apparatus.

In protest of Act 57 and to resist being annexed by the United States, Native Hawaiians petitioned with a letter to show their unified support for the sovereign nation of Hawai'i. Passed throughout the eight Hawaiian Islands in just one week, the Kū'ē Petition received 21,269 signatures, 64% of the Native Hawaiian population at the time.²⁶ A group of Kanaka activists traveled to Washington DC to deliver this letter to President William McKinley and the United States Senate. With complete disregard to this community protest, President McKinley annexed Hawai'i in July of that year, 1898. President McKinley cited the alleged "success" of common schools in Hawai'i as evidence that the nation was ready to become an American territory.²⁷

²⁴ To support her subjects while trapped in her palace, Queen Liliuokalani composed songs in 'ōlelo to protest America's illegal claim on her nation. For further reading on this act of resistance, see: Jane Recker. "How the Music of Hawai'i's Last Ruler Guided the Island's People Through Crisis," Smithsonian Magazine. March 26, 2019. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/how-music-hawaiis-last-ruler-guided-islands-people-through-crisis-180971783/>

²⁵ U.S. Congress. House. *English Made the "Medium and Basis of Instruction" for All Schools*, Act 57, Section 30. 1896. <https://coe.hawaii.edu/territorial-history-of-schools/document/act-57-section-30-1896-english-made-the-medium-and-basis-of-instruction-for-all-schools/>

²⁶ "Petition Against Annexation of Hawai'i, 1897." Committee on Foreign Relations from the 55th Congress; Petitions and Memorials, 1817 - 2000; Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46; National Archives Building, Washington, DC. <https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/petition-against-annexation-hawaii>; David Swanson. "A new estimate of the Hawaiian population for 1778, the year of first European contact." *Hūlili: Multidisciplinary Research on Hawaiian Well-Being*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Honolulu: Kamehameha Schools Press 2019). https://kamehamehapublishing.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/38/2020/09/Hulili_Vol11.2_Swanson.pdf

²⁷ Morgan. "Americanizing the Teachers," 159.

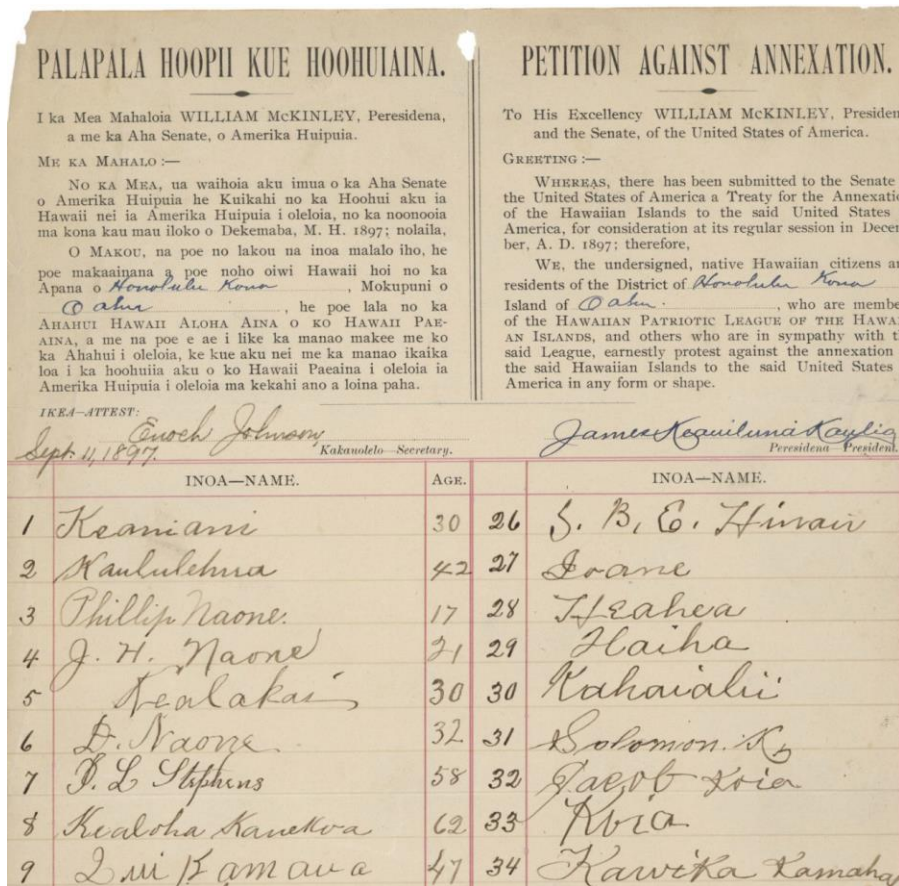


Image 1. Kū‘ē Petition, 1897

The United States failed to adequately “control” their newly acquired Hawaiian Islands, especially when it came to education. The American government wanted to hire a teacher force from the Mainland to ensure Hawaiian students were assimilated quicker. However, they lacked the funds to hire enough teachers from overseas and, even among those hired from the Mainland, most returned to the continental U.S. within two years.²⁸ The government’s main priority in hiring teachers was to ensure the workforce had proper control of the English language. Schools “evaluated [a teaching] applicant’s capacity to speak and write Standard American English

²⁸ Official correspondence from 1916 calls these “tourist teacher[s].” While this term is no longer used, the phenomenon still persists today. Michelle Morgan. “Americanizing the Teachers: Identity, Citizenship, and the Teaching Corps in Hawai‘i, 1900–1941.” *Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Summer 2014), 151. <https://doi.org/10.2307/westhistquar.45.2.0147>; U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of education, *Survey of Education in Hawaii* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1920), 39.

(SAE) as a measure of his or her ability to assimilate students.”²⁹ Colonizers in Hawai‘i “believed effective citizenship required fluency in SAE” and held teachers accountable for preparing young Hawaiians for their lives as Americans.³⁰ Meanwhile, the Hawaiian students leaned on Hawaiian-English pidgin, a dialect that combatted the ever growing erasure of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i.

The American government modeled Hawaii’s early-twentieth century public schools off ones they had established for American Indians and enslaved people in the South. Like other groups colonized by the United States, Hawaiian

“students received training designed to regulate gender roles and keep them economically marginalized. Vocational curricula in Hawaii emphasized homemaking for girls and agriculture for boys, including courses on cane and pineapple cultivation. Haole planters and businessmen hoped such programs would instill American gender roles and provide a perpetual plantation labor source, reinforcing the social and economic hierarchy of the islands and reflecting both the economic and gendered nature of settler colonialism.”³¹

American colonizers relied on agricultural labor from Hawaiians and enslaved Black people. These colonizers used schools to indoctrinate students with the “idea of an inseparable relation” between their education and labor.³² Like enslaved Black southerners, Kanaka children were made to believe plantation labor was a dignified profession essential to their community. This is another way the United States used education to advance their colonial enterprise.

When Tutu was a student in the 1950s, this colonial educational model was still intact. Tutu attended a boarding school for Hawaiian children called Kamehameha Schools. Princess Pauahi, one of the last Hawaiian monarchs, established Kamehameha to educate Native Hawaiian children. But, with the fall of the Hawaiian Kingdom, Kamehameha was seized by Christian missionaries who maintained control of the school throughout Tutu’s tenure there. These missionaries sought to strip Tutu and her classmates of their Hawaiian identities.

²⁹ Morgan. “Americanizing the Teachers,” 148; Kingdom of Hawaii, Department of Public Instruction, *Biennial Report of the President of the Board of Education to the Legislative Assembly, Session of 1890* (Honolulu, 1890), 48.

³⁰ Morgan. “Americanizing the Teachers,” 148.

³¹ *Ibid*, 164.

³² James Anderson. *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 88.

Kamehameha only served “American” meals, such as beef and potatoes, which they presented on white tablecloths. Tutu remembers feeling anxious as housemothers watched to make sure the children passed their plates counterclockwise. Worst of all, however, was that despite the completely indigenous student body, school administrators prohibited students from communing over their Hawaiian culture. Tutu tells me she felt deeply misunderstood by the adults at Kamehameha. She took comfort in her bonds with fellow classmates, especially those from smaller islands outside of cosmopolitan O‘ahu. These friendships, and a regained emphasis on cultural studies, were paramount in Tutu’s decision to send my mom to Kamehameha Schools.

Between Tutu and Mom’s tenures at Kamehameha, the school and the wider Hawaiian populace changed immensely. Tensions rose in the continental United States with the desegregation of schools, legalization of interracial marriage, protests against the Vietnam War, and popularization of hallucinogenic drugs. Tutu remembers hearing about these events early in her adulthood. Even from an ocean away, Tutu and her generation of Kanaka peers felt moved by these acts of bravery and began to reflect on the status of their own civil rights. They realized it was time to “reestablish what it meant to be Hawaiian.”³³ Tutu was particularly involved in the Protect Kaho‘olawe ‘Ohana, which protested the American military’s use of Kaho‘olawe to test nuclear bombs. Tutu’s house on Maui was near the island of Kaho‘olawe, and she housed Kanaka activists fleeing from FBI raids on Kaho‘olawe. Other Hawaiians organized around water and land rights throughout the island chain. Many helped revitalize traditional Hawaiian practices, such as pre-colonial sea travel via hokule‘a.

With the revival of Hawaiian culture came grassroots organizing to see ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i in schools, courthouses, and other official spaces. The 1978 Hawai‘i State Constitutional Convention amended the constitution, making commitments “to the preservation and promotion of Native Hawaiian culture.”³⁴ One of these amendments made ‘ōlelo another official language of Hawai‘i alongside English. The same activists who advocated for the constitutional changes also pressured the Hawaiian Board of Education to pilot immersion public schools for learning

³³ Diane Ho. Personal interview, November 9, 2019.

³⁴ Shari Nakata. “Language suppression, revitalization, and Native Hawaiian identity.” *Diversity and Social Justice: The Forum*, Vol. 2 (Fall 2017), 14-27. <https://www.chapman.edu/law/files/publications/2017-dsj/nakata.pdf>

‘ōlelo. The culmination of these human rights efforts in Hawai‘i is called the Second Hawaiian Renaissance.³⁵

Kamehameha Schools remained stagnant throughout the early Second Hawaiian Renaissance but radically shifted its institutional programming after realizing the colonial model had detrimental effects on student learning. In 1967, Kamehameha Schools funded an investigation into their performance after falling behind the other private schools on O‘ahu. The report found that the school’s “overly Westernized approach to education was counterproductive.”³⁶ This report, backed by decades of student advocacy, was the impetus for Kamehameha Schools to completely transform their educational model. By the time my mom attended the school in the 1980s, Kamehameha had become a leading cultural hub for Native Hawaiians across the eight islands.

Mom attended a Kamehameha whose curriculum was infused with Hawaiian culture. Middle and high school students were required to enroll in Hawaiian history courses and had the option to learn hula (traditional dance). Kamehameha also developed a language program for ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i. This concentrated language revitalization is still thriving, even in public schools. Today, 21 public schools offer ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i immersion programs.³⁷ As more Hawaiians become fluent in their Native language, the community is seeing a generational shift towards naming practices that were criminalized for much of the twentieth century. Tutu jokes that her grandchildren compete for naming their children the longest Hawaiian names. Her most recent great grandchildren are named Kepaulelenuiikapunawai and Lanakilamaikahaku, which refer to playful ancestral waters and having a victorious mind, respectively.

Hawaiian names are also becoming appropriated in American mainstream culture. Perhaps the most prominent example is President Barack Obama’s daughter, Malia, whose name

³⁵ The first cultural renaissance refers to King Kalakaua’s emphasis on maintaining Hawaiian culture during English occupation in the late 19th century. Shari Nakata. “Language suppression, revitalization, and Native Hawaiian identity.” *Diversity and Social Justice: The Forum*, Vol. 2 (Fall 2017), 14-27. <https://www.chapman.edu/law/files/publications/2017-dsj/nakata.pdf>

³⁶ Melia Young. “Kamehameha Schools and the Resurgence of Hawaiian Culture.” History 017: American Indians in Higher Education. Class Essay at Yale University, New Haven, CT, December 13, 2019, 8.

³⁷ Sara Kehaulani Goo. “The Hawaiian Language Nearly Died. A Radio Show Sparked Its Revival.” [Audio podcast episode]. In *National Public Radio*. June 22, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2019/06/22/452551172/the-hawaiian-language-nearly-died-a-radio-show-sparked-its-revival>.

means “peaceful” in ‘ōlelo and sometimes refers to the English name Mary. Another example is Kai, meaning “ocean” in Hawaiian, which is the 71st most popular baby boy name of 2022 in America.³⁸ Phrases in ‘ōlelo have also been popularized outside the islands, from the use of ‘ohana (family) in *Lilo and Stitch* to Bing Crosby’s song *Mele Kalikimaka* (Merry Christmas). In these ways, the Hawaiian language has a subtle presence even outside of Hawai‘i.

While ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i appears occasionally on the Mainland, I struggle to carry my Hawaiian first name in non-Hawaiian contexts. My mom always assumed she would raise her children in Hawai‘i. But when I was born, she realized my dad’s career would keep them on the Mainland indefinitely. Giving her daughter a Hawaiian first name was nonnegotiable for my mom; it was a luxury Hawaiians had been deprived of when the language was illegal. Mom’s first choice was to name me Malie (ma-LEE-eh). She worried, *wouldn’t haole people butcher the pronunciation?* So, she considered Malia (ma-LEE-uh). *Wouldn’t it be too common when we move back to Hawaii? She can’t be the third Malia in her friend group!* Mom settled on naming me Melia (meh-LEE-uh), which is the name for a little white and yellow flower that grows all over Hawai‘i. She reasoned, *less common than Malia but no one could possibly mess up this pronunciation!*

But my mom had too much faith in people who do not speak Hawaiian. People have mispronounced my name for as long as I can remember. Even if I teach them the correct pronunciation, I worry that they will forget how to say it. And if they forget my name, won’t they forget me too? I used to wish for a convenient name, one that didn’t elicit questions. And, when people do ask me about my name and Hawai‘i, they say, *What percent?* and *What’s the best season to visit?* and *Will you affirm that my travel plans don’t make me a bad person?* (Short answer: they do).

These questions and my experience growing up as a diasporic Native Hawaiian in California haven’t changed since arriving at Yale in 2019. Friends, classmates, and teachers here are equally curious about the Hawaiian experience, especially regarding big news headlines like the protests against the TMT telescope and the volcanic eruption of Mauna Loa. While I feel uncomfortable speaking on behalf of all Hawaiians, I take questions about Hawai‘i very seriously. I try to answer in a way that aligns with my beliefs while ensuring that my words are kind and constructive. But it’s hard to mention topics like settler colonialism and exotification

³⁸ “Baby Boy Names: Kai.” *Name Berry*. <https://nameberry.com/babynames/kai/boy>.

with strangers or, worse, classmates. My tricky experience as a Hawaiian at Yale, however, is not unique.

For almost as long as the United States has been a colonizing presence in Hawai‘i, so has Yale University and its community members. The relationship between Hawai‘i and Yale began in 1809, when Henry ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia sailed from the Big Island to New Haven, Connecticut on a trade ship. An undergraduate student “found [‘Ōpūkaha‘ia] on the steps of a Yale building... ‘nobody gives me learning’ he [allegedly] wept.”³⁹ The student brought ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia to Timothy Dwight’s office, who was the President of Yale at the time. Dwight housed ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia and tutored him in Christianity. Dwight refused to address ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia by his Hawaiian name, renaming him “Obookiah.” Just one year after meeting ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia, Dwight founded the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Hawai‘i henceforth became a site of Christian colonization by Yale graduates, with ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia having translated the Book of Genesis into ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i.⁴⁰

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Yale graduates became even more disruptive to Hawai‘i. Hiram Bingham, a graduate from Yale, led the first mission trip to Hawai‘i in 1819.⁴¹ Both Bingham and Dwight have prominent Yale buildings named after them: Timothy Dwight residential college and Bingham Hall, a first-year dormitory on Old Campus. It was another Yale graduate, Ellery Chun, who stole the design for Hawaiian plantation worker uniforms, mass producing them as “aloha shirts” for consumer fashion across the continental United States. Chun also trademarked the term “Aloha,” which means “love” and is used as a greeting in ‘ōlelo.⁴²

Today, Yale is trying to make its admissions process more accessible for Hawaiians, but many hurdles exist for Kanaka students and faculty who want to build community. Native Hawaiians now make up the largest indigenous population in the Class of 2026 at Yale—a stark

³⁹ Judith Ann Schiff. “Aloha Blue.” *Yale Alumni Magazine*. 2004, http://archives.yalealumnimagazine.com/issues/2004_07/old_yale.html.

⁴⁰ Edwin Welles Dwight. *The Memoirs of Henry Obookiah*. (Columbus: N. Whiting Publishing: 1819).

⁴¹ Simonetta Carr. “Henry ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia and the Birth of Christian Missions in the Hawaiian Islands.” *Place for Truth*. November 17, 2020, <https://www.placefortruth.org/blog/henry-opukahaia-and-the-birth-of-christian-missions-in-the-hawaiian-islands>.

⁴² Aloha is a Hawaiian word that refers to the sharing of breath two people exchange upon meeting. Common English translations include “hello,” “goodbye,” and “love.” Judith Ann Schiff. “Aloha Blue.” *Yale Alumni Magazine*. 2004, http://archives.yalealumnimagazine.com/issues/2004_07/old_yale.html.

increase from my matriculation in 2019. Given Hawai‘i’s geographic location, it was difficult for admissions officers to visit schools in person. The COVID pandemic helped people learn how to connect remotely, allowing admissions officers to meet with more Hawaiian students. Once Hawaiians matriculate, however, it is difficult to find an affinity group. Native Hawaiians are automatically invited to participate in the Native American Cultural Center (NACC), but some might feel disconnected from students in the NACC because their experience of indigeneity is so different. Some Hawaiians might choose to engage in the Asian American Cultural Center (AACC) instead. The AACC, however, has such a broad population that many Hawaiians feel misplaced there too. This lack of a community space on campus aligns with larger trends of Native Hawaiian erasure. Most recently, Hawaiians have been clumped in the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) category. Dr. Lisa Kahaleole Hall notes the harmful effects of this term as it directly threatens the Hawaiian sovereignty movement.⁴³ Thus, an event that brings together a breadth of Native Hawaiian experiences was an urgent and necessary intervention on Yale’s campus.

While an art exhibition would not reconcile the traumatic relationship between the United States and the sovereign nation of Hawai‘i, it did provide a space for Native Hawaiians at Yale to share their experiences in the format that feels most authentic to them. In my conversations with potential contributors to the exhibit, I had learned that many of us had already grappled with our diasporic experiences artistically. This exhibition not only encapsulated various experiences of language and identity on Yale’s campus, but it also served as a community event where Hawaiians and their loved ones could spend time together. For generations Native Hawaiians have resisted cultural genocide through art, language, and togetherness. My capstone is an extension of this tradition.

A hui hou (“Until we meet again”)...

Melia Young, April 2023

⁴³ Lisa Kahaleole Hall. “Which of these things is not like the other: Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders are not Asian American, and all Pacific Islanders are not Hawaiian,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 67, No. 3 (2015), 726-747. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/593313>.

The Exhibition: Photos of Artwork



Image 3 (above). Papahānaumoku a me kāna mau kaikamāhine – Mother Earth and Her Daughters by Mikiala Anuheā Ng, Pierson '24
Acrylic on canvas.

Image 2 (below). Ku‘u Ipo by Mikiala Anuheā Ng, Pierson '24
Charcoal on paper.

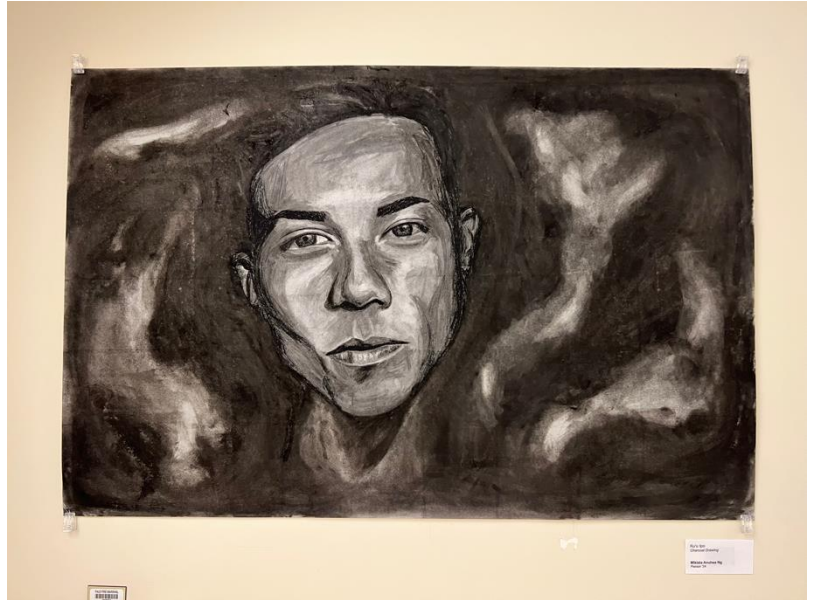


Image 4 (right). Restoring the loko i‘a in He‘eia, O‘ahu; Homesteading in Kahikinui, Maui; and Kalo Lo‘i in Kahakuloa, Maui by Kealoha Freidenburg, Director of Undergraduate Studies in Environmental Science
Digital photography.



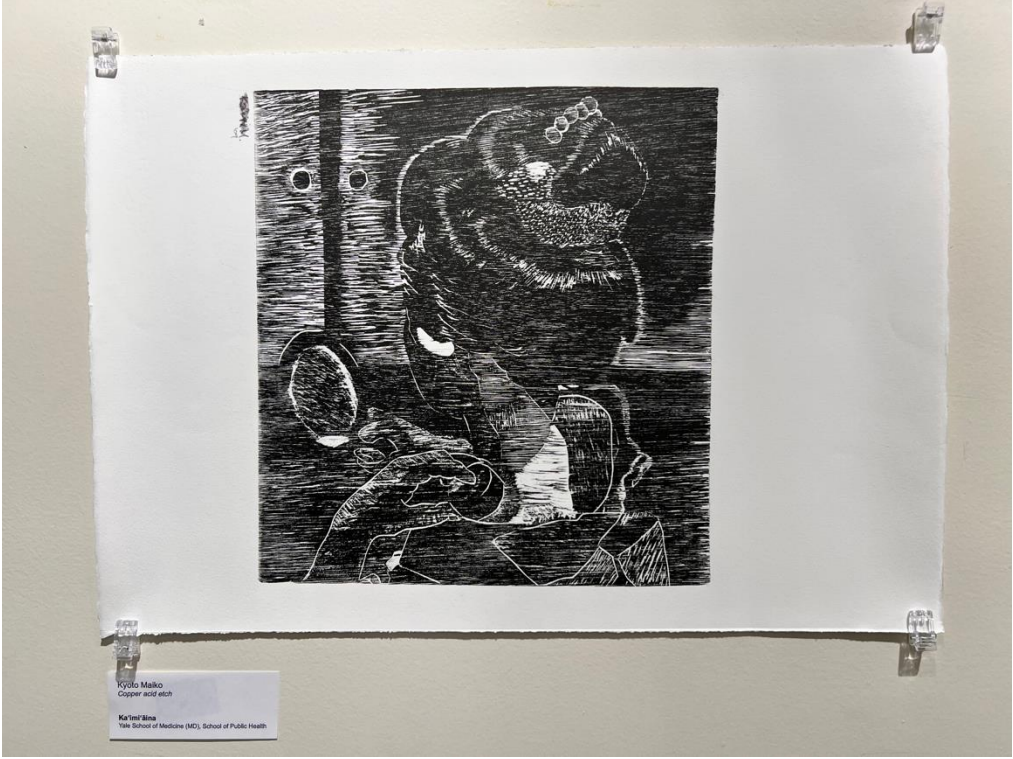


Image 5 (left). Kyoto Maiko by Ka'imi'aina Masunaga, School of Public Health
Copper acid etch.



Image 6 (left). O+; Tetralogy of Foucault; and Kardia Kaleidoscope by Ka'imi'aina Masunaga, School of Public Health
Woodblock print; plexiglass etch; and kapa relief.



Image 7. [Ko'olaupoko] In the Car With Mom by Hauanuawaiu Hobart, daughter of Dr. Hi'ilei Hobart Assistant Professor of Native and Indigenous Studies.

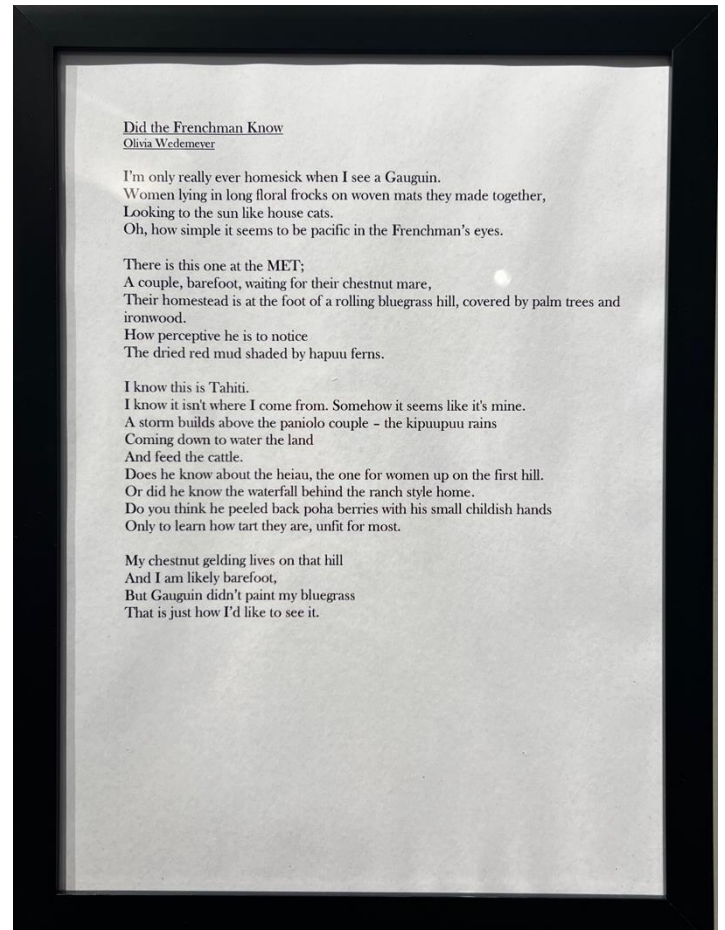


Image 8. Ghost Dance 2 by Melia Keahiokoeola Young, Berkeley '23
Cyanotype on plexiglass etching.



Image 9. Crumpled, Melted by Mikiala Anuheha Ng, Pierson '24
Acrylic on canvas.

Image 10 (below). Did the Frenchman Know by Olivia Uahilo'iaikeahoakealoha Wedemeyer, Stiles '25
Poem.



Did the Frenchman Know
Olivia Wedemeyer

I'm only really ever homesick when I see a Gauguin.
Women lying in long floral frocks on woven mats they made together,
Looking to the sun like house cats.
Oh, how simple it seems to be pacific in the Frenchman's eyes.

There is this one at the MET;
A couple, barefoot, waiting for their chestnut mare,
Their homestead is at the foot of a rolling bluegrass hill, covered by palm trees and
ironwood.
How perceptive he is to notice
The dried red mud shaded by hapuu ferns.

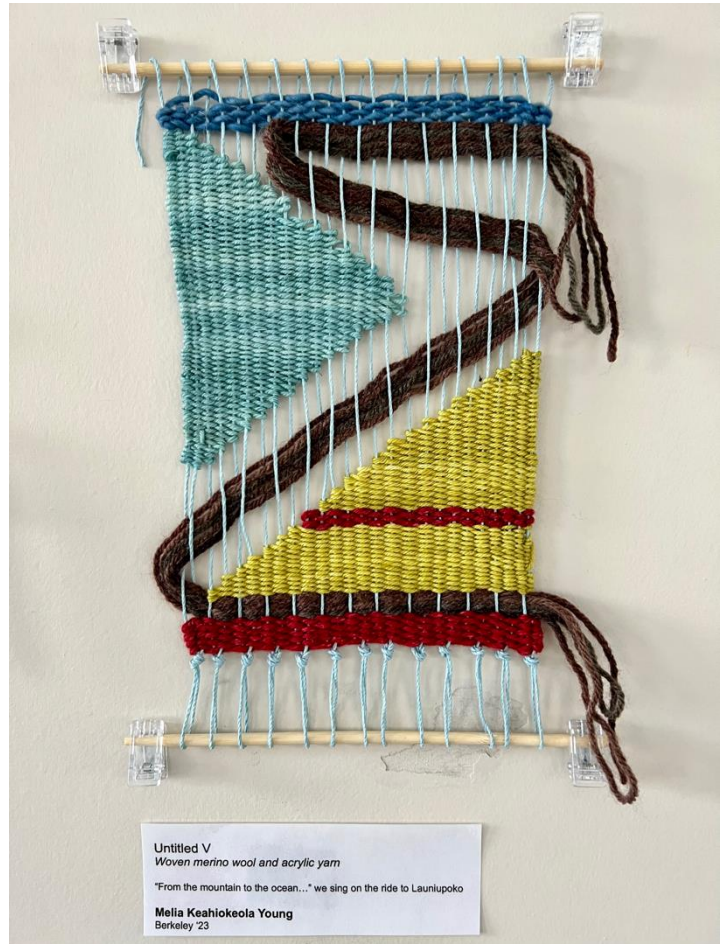
I know this is Tahiti.
I know it isn't where I come from. Somehow it seems like it's mine.
A storm builds above the paniolo couple - the kipuupuu rains
Coming down to water the land
And feed the cattle.
Does he know about the heiau, the one for women up on the first hill.
Or did he know the waterfall behind the ranch style home.
Do you think he peeled back pohu berries with his small childish hands
Only to learn how tart they are, unfit for most.

My chestnut gelding lives on that hill
And I am likely barefoot,
But Gauguin didn't paint my bluegrass
That is just how I'd like to see it.



Image 12 (above). Untitled IV by Melia Keahiokeola Young, Berkeley '23
Woven merino wool and cord.

Image 11 (below). Untitled V by Melia Keahiokeola Young, Berkeley '23
Woven merino wool and acrylic yarn.



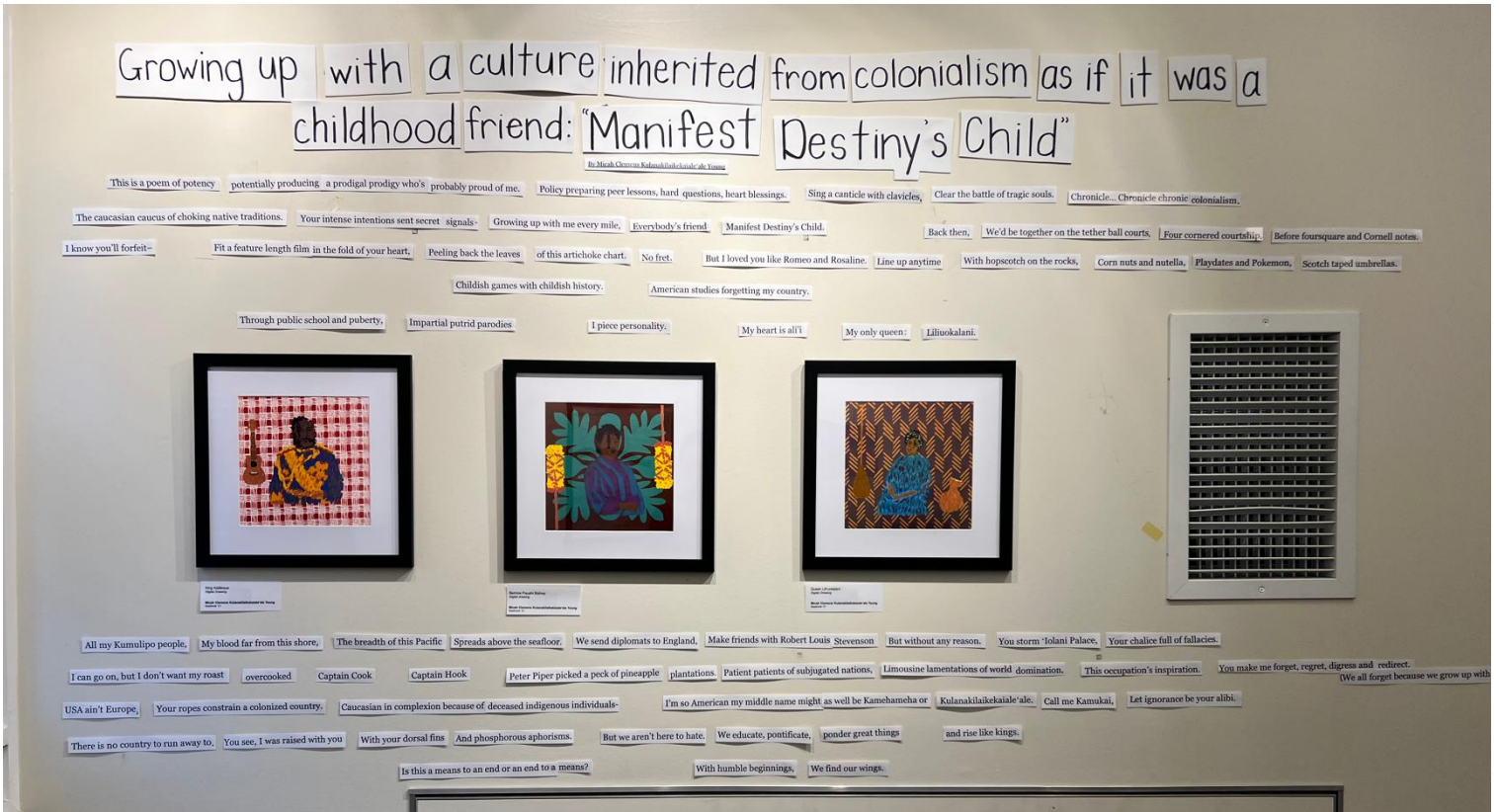


Image 13 (above). Manifest Destiny's Child; King Kalākaua; Bernice Pauahi Bishop; and Queen Lili'uokalani by Micah Kulanaʻikilakeaialeʻale, Saybrook '21. Digital drawings and poem.

Image 14 (below). Ka'ililauokekoa in a Lo'i by Emily Kahani Noe Lau, Murray '24. Watercolor on paper.

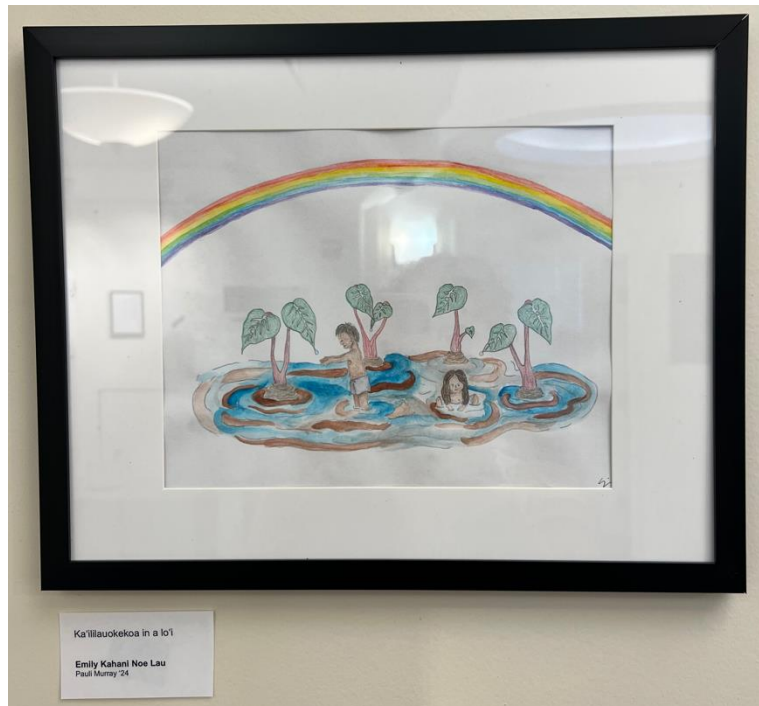




Image 15. Cloud Dance by Mikiala Anuhea Ng, Pierson '24 Acrylic on canvas.



Image 16. Lo'i Kalo by Ka'imi'aina Masunaga, School of Public Health Chine collé.

The Exhibition: Opening Reception



Image 17. Friends from across Yale visited to celebrate the exhibit's opening on Saturday, April 8. I had taken off my shoes to set up for the event. People arrived early and started taking off their shoes, too. This practice is customary in Hawaiian houses. The gallery space immediately felt like home.



Image 20 (above). Two undergraduates and a graduate student view Mikiala and Micah's pieces. Micah's poem, which we displayed in chunks lining the back wall, was especially captivating to many viewers. Refreshments (shown in the bottom right corner) were provided to visitors.



Image 21 (left). Melia and Ka'imaina stand in front of their artwork. Ka'imaina is a Yale alum who drove down from Cambridge, MA. Melia is wearing a fresh carnation lei, made for her by Mikiala.

Image 22 (above). Every step of this show was a team effort, including curating it. This is a photo of me talking through the setup with Ellika, who has experience in art curation. Mikiala, one of the artists whose work is on the far right, was another art major who offered her expertise in positioning each piece.



The Exhibition: Reflection

This exhibition was incredibly transformative for me. I learned not only about displaying art but also the importance of building community, even when it seems like an insurmountable task. I was shocked by how many people—strangers and longtime friends—came out to support the opening of our exhibit. Between the Hawaiian music, comfortable seating, and endless food, the experience reminded me of home in a way I had never experienced on the East Coast. It wasn't until a few days after the reception that I realized I hadn't been in a room with that many Hawaiians outside of Hawai'i before! My biggest worry was that there wouldn't be interest in this event (both from potential artists and visitors), but this project showed me that there are lots of Hawaiians and allies who are yearning for community.

If I host an event like this in the future, I might shorten the reception time so that attendance would be more concentrated. But above all, my major regret is that I didn't create a project like this sooner. I am shocked by the outpouring of love I experienced at the reception and throughout this project. Mahalo.



Image 23. Nora, me, and Michael. Reminiscing about when this exhibit was just an idea, we all started to tear up.

Word Count: 8,239

Appendix A: Publicity Flier

**Native American Cultural Center
26 High Street
April 8-May 7**



HUI

A NATIVE HAWAIIAN ART EXHIBIT


This project was made possible through the generosity of Yale's Creative and Performing Arts Award

**Opening reception on
Saturday, April 8 from 2-5 pm**

Appendix B: Exhibition Brochure

HUI


A NATIVE HAWAIIAN ART EXHIBIT



Yale University
Native American Cultural Center
26 High Street

A Note from the Curator:

Melia Keahiokeola Young



Aloha nui loa. Welcome to *Hui*, a collaborative exhibition made by Native Hawaiian (also known as Kānaka Maoli) artists. In ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, "hui" denotes people gathering. It’s also used in Hawaiian Pidgin as an interjection to get people’s attention. This exhibition embodies both meanings of the word "hui": bringing together Kānaka Maoli artists from Yale’s past and present to say, “Hui! We are here!”

Native Hawaiians have been part of the Yale community since the 18th century. For much of Yale’s history, our stories from this diaspora have been erased to maintain systems of power. This exhibition demonstrates how Native Hawaiians at Yale—students, alumni, and faculty—make sense of our identity in an educational context that has not often supported us. This show holds our stories of survival, adaptation, and joy all in one place. I’m excited to share these pieces of ourselves with the wider Yale community.

A hui hou (“Until we meet again”)...

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