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Unfolding Futures: Indigenous Ways of Knowing for the Twenty-First Century



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Unfolding Futures: Indigenous Ways of Knowing for the Twenty-First Century

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Modern racism is the active writing of Indian people out of contemporary life.

– Stephanie Fryberg

The Supreme Court does not know even the very basics of Indian law.

– Maggie McKinley

Environmental researchers know that Indian people have important knowledge. But they think of it in terms of “the elders” rather than the twenty-five years of fisheries research carried out by the tribe.

– Kyle Whyte

What’s missing is not voices, but ears. University administrators, government officials, judges, leaders of nonprofits – they don’t even know what they don’t know.

– Shelly Lowe

In the summer and autumn of 2016, American Indian people¹ (re)entered American political consciousness in ways not seen since the takeover of the South Dakota village of Wounded Knee in 1973. Wounded Knee featured a seventy-one-day siege, the mobilization of the American military against Indian activists, and copious media reportage; and it came on the heels of the 1972 takeover of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C., the seizure and occupation of Alcatraz Island (1969 – 1971), and several best-selling books on Indian activism. In the early

1970s, Indian people and their challenges and possibilities achieved a political visibility that they had not held for a century.

In 2016, Indians reappeared once again. The occasion was the near-completion of the Dakota Access Pipeline, a 1,100-mile, 30-inch pipe built to carry oil from the Bakken Fields of North Dakota to a terminal in Illinois. Passing about one-half mile north of the Standing Rock Sioux reservation, the pipe would run underneath the Missouri River, jeopardizing the Tribe's water source; and it turned out that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which had jurisdiction over the land, had failed to adequately consult the Tribe.

The protests did not follow the patterns of the sixties and early seventies. Over the course of the spring and summer, a small prayer camp on the Standing Rock reservation grew into a vast protest city, with as many as ten thousand people occupying several camps. Lakota and Dakota peoples were joined by Indigenous peoples from across North America and around the world, as well as environmental activists and allies from a range of other social justice groups. Some came for a weekend; others committed to a long stay. The pipeline had been rerouted away from the city of Bismarck, North Dakota, in what seemed to be a clear case of environmental racism: the willing endangerment of an Indian community in order to distance a White community from danger. For environmentalists, the protest against Dakota Access was also part of a three-pronged strategy: trying to slow production, trying to change patterns of consumption, and trying to reduce oil infrastructure. They relished the opportunity to reprise their success in stopping the Keystone XL pipeline in 2015.

Beginning in the late summer and extending throughout the fall, the protests were met with an astonishing display of militarized police power. Camouflage, gas mask, and body armor-wearing, AK-47-

toting private guards, North Dakota law enforcement, and National Guardsmen faced down protesters. Unlike Wounded Knee, which had relied upon a now-simple world of network television coverage, Standing Rock was a viral story. It featured a proliferation of social media images documenting both the substance of the camps themselves – mostly spiritual and pacifist – and the dog attacks, teargassings, and bean-bag and rubber-bullet shootings that were being launched by the authorities.

A legal and political effort accompanied the camps. The legal story was marked by events that unfolded far from Standing Rock: federal court decisions in Washington, D.C., requests to halt construction from cabinet departments, a December 2016 revocation of the pipeline's permit, and, in June 2017, a federal court ruling that the Army Corps of Engineers had failed to conduct an adequate and consultative environmental study in relation to Sioux treaty rights. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe rightly claimed a kind of victory. But the pipeline was in full operation by then, and the judge refused to shut it down on what seemed to be mostly procedural matters. "Victory" seemed to belong in quotation marks, as the oil has continued to flow.

As scholars interested in the past, present, and future of Indigenous peoples in the United States and the world, we watched the events at Standing Rock and extracted lessons. Most non-Native people we talked with about the occupation could agree on the significance of sacred places, or the spiritual and environmental importance of clean, safe water, or perhaps arguments about cultural patrimony and history. These were the familiar tropes associated with the "American Indian." Most non-Native people also knew that it all had something to do with broken treaties – because there always is a story about a broken treaty. It is a hook on which hangs a vague feeling of

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national guilt, a well-meaning expression of sympathy, and a sad sense of the inevitability of it all.

Understanding the intricacies of the relevant treaties (1851 and 1868), agreements (1877 and 1889), executive orders (1875), and countless legal cases, laws, and administrative protocols proved challenging, even for the most dedicated advocates. They were confused by the shifting boundaries between treaties, by the provisions for approval of subsequent agreements, and by the possibility that not all Lakota and Dakota people had consented to the treaty in 1868. It was all quite complicated.

Media consumers were moved, however, by the images of young Indian people on horseback (sometimes painted), of tipi lodges jutting from the tent city, and of the magical day when bison appeared from over a hilltop and ran past the camp. Most observers had a picture of Indian people in their minds that did not align with contemporary Indian lives. Sympathetic viewers tended to latch on to images that evoked the past; they struggled to know the present and did not think overlong about the future. They did not know what they did not know about Indigenous life, and they could not begin to imagine Indian people *leading* non-Native America in any way. As usual, they assumed that Indians would, at best, reluctantly follow along into whatever it is that comes next.

But the images were part of a leading-edge Indian politics with lessons for everyone's future. Pictures of painted faces, horses, bison, lodges, and landscapes often reflected self-aware strategic essentialisms meant to drive politically powerful narratives that demanded engagement. They were beamed to the world via social media; indeed, one might argue that the occupation garnered much of its energy from a social media campaign launched by Native activists. The campaign went global, even as it recruited allies and partners with resources and net-

works of their own. A small prayer camp turned into an international cause.

In August 2016, as Standing Rock was heating up, six of us – Bryan Brayboy, Mark Trahant, Loren Ghiglione, Douglas Medin, Ned Blackhawk, and Philip Deloria – met at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences with a group of American Indian scholars and thought leaders. Although she was unable to attend that meeting, coeditor K. Tsianina Lomawaima quickly took on a lead role in the conversation. Together, we have followed in the footsteps of generations of other Indian thinkers: we tried to puzzle out this moment in time, when Indigenous peoples are crafting a new environmental-social-political alliance and new strategies for political action, while simultaneously being written out of much of contemporary life. This erasure, as Stephanie Fryberg noted at the meeting, is a particular form of modern racism directed at the Indigenous, though it has consequences for all. The epigraphs at the beginning of this essay – all uttered at that meeting – frame the issues well: Indian people continue to suffer from widespread ignorance and an assumption of their pastness. Shelly Lowe went so far as to frame that ignorance in Rumsfeldian terms: Americans did not have an inkling of what they did not know. Our mission was clear: to understand the contemporary dynamics of this modern racism and to try to create positive change in academia, in the legal system, among government and nonprofit actors, and in the intellectual and cultural life of the nation.

Those conversations at the American Academy helped shape and support this issue of *Dædalus*, which we have titled “Unfolding Futures: Indigenous Ways of Knowing for the Twenty-First Century.” In this volume, you will find serious reflection on many questions most important to Indian Country and the broader Indigenous world. We have tried to place research contributions at the center of many of these es-

says, to make “unknown unknowns” visible to non-Native audiences, and to speak to the unique status, the honest challenges, and the very real achievements of contemporary Indian people. We have organized the issue around key themes, and each essay will touch on one or more of these points: 1) Indians are *unique* – they are not simply another minority, but have a formal legal and political status in the United States; 2) Indian people are *sovereign* – they have collective rights to self-determination and self-governance; and 3) Indian people are *central* – they occupy a position at the very heart of critical issues spanning energy and bioethics to climate change. Finally, readers will note the consistent thematic ostinato: Indian people are engaged with history, to be sure, but they should not be viewed in terms of the past, but through the lens of *futurity*.

In Article I of the U.S. Constitution, the famous “three-fifths” clause outlines four categories of people: citizens, indentured servants, “all other persons” (the nonreference to African American slaves), and a fourth group, “Indians not taxed.” An Indian person paying taxes to the U.S. government would have presumably given up a different, non-U.S. form of citizenship, one based in a tribal nation. Because they were part of their own nations, Indians would be neither taxed nor counted for purposes of representation in the United States. They were members of foreign nations, in other words. That sensibility was reinforced in the Commerce Clause, in which Congress is given the power “to regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States, and with the Indian Tribes.” Here, the word “among” signals the internal nature of the states, while the word “with” suggests the external quality of both foreign nations and Indian Tribes. In key passages of the Constitution, then, Indian Tribes are framed as being outside the

Constitution. And, for Indian people, that fact has long suggested the importance of a third passage, the controlling logic found in Article Six – the Supremacy Clause – which names three bodies of law as supreme: the Constitution itself, the laws passed by Congress, and the treaties negotiated with external political bodies.

As inherent sovereigns, Native nations have for millennia exercised the prerogatives of self-government, self-determination, and self-education within their territorial land base. Settler colonial incursion and dispossession have constrained, but not extinguished Indigenous sovereignty (though not for lack of trying). The United States has extended its claims over Indigenous peoples – and more than one billion acres of land – through a complex interweaving of military force, diplomatic negotiation, and instruments such as treaties, as well as the unilateral assertion of jurisdiction and governance through legislation, executive orders, and court rulings.

Some of those rulings effectively established a different relationship – not rooted in autochthonous Indigenous political autonomy and a concomitant diplomacy, but in what has come to be known as the “trust relationship.” As a principle of law and nationhood, the trust relationship embodies the responsibilities of the federal government – as both the taker and the recipient of Indian lands – to provide basic services to Native people. Many treaties and agreements stipulate educational and health services as federal responsibilities to Native nations; even when not so stipulated, these services are embodied through the trust relationship.

The legal landscape of trust has been muddied by Supreme Court dicta (that is, opinion, not ruling) in the case of *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831), when Chief Justice John Marshall, in a burst of legal creativity, stated that the relation of Indians to the United States “resembles that of a ward to

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his guardian” (emphasis added).² A guardian’s powers over a ward are much more expansive and less constrained by law than the powers of a trustee over a beneficiary, and, over time, federal powers over Indians have frequently developed entirely unchecked.³ American Indians were consigned to the status of wards for nearly a century, from Marshall’s convenient articulation of the *resemblance* until Congress passed the American Indian Citizenship Act in 1924, conferring birthright citizenship on all Indians born within the territorial limits of the United States. Quite a few Indians (perhaps as many as two-thirds) were already citizens, naturalized through treaty, Congressional legislation, or other mechanisms.⁴

For so many Americans – the formerly enslaved or the immigrant – citizenship offered a path to civil rights, security, and empowerment. And Indian people too have recognized some of the advantages of U.S. citizenship (access to courts, for example). But in two decisions (*U.S. v. Sandoval*, 1913, and *U.S. v. Nice*, 1916), the U.S. Supreme Court also found that, for Indians, citizenship was not incompatible with wardship, and all of the federal powers and controls concomitant to it. The federal government, as a trustee, styles itself as the theoretical caretaker of Native assets and peoples, although, in reality, federal powers have more times than not stripped Native lands of resources and Native peoples of both land and wealth.⁵

The issue commences with a consideration of the concept of *sovereignty*: its origins, its contested meanings, and the way it positions American Indian people as unique within the political, economic, social, cultural, ethical, and administrative fabric of the United States. How did Indian sovereignty emerge historically, even as the United States introduced other concepts – “domestic dependency,” “guardian-ward” relationships, and “plenary power” – that worked to limit Indian self-determination?

Is sovereignty a Western concept, hopelessly contaminated by colonialism? Or is it a necessary and powerful tool in the service of tribal nations, now and in the future? Is it an inherent right that predates the U.S. Constitution? How might Indian people reimagine Indigenous sovereignty in the twenty-first century? Heidi Kiiwetinepine-siik Stark and Kekek Jason Stark frame their discussion through a Nenabozho story – an Objive trickster tale – that illuminates key questions: immanency, popular sovereignty, and the constant dialectical assertion and resistance surrounding legal and administrative structures (such as those demanding that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers adequately consult the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe). Placing the trickster Nenabozho in an ice-fishing shack, Stark and Stark offer both a philosophical narrative stressing relationality among living beings, including sovereign nations, and a case study grounded in sovereignty struggles involving treaty-based Ojibwe fishing rights.

Paradoxically, the exercise of tribal sovereignty rests, in some measure, on the recognition of a tribe by the federal government. Currently, there are 567 tribes with federal recognition, with many others enmeshed in the complex and difficult process of petitioning for acknowledgment; others are recognized by states, but not the federal government. Amy Den Ouden’s essay tracks a complex history of recognition efforts on the part of the Golden Hill Paugussett Tribe of Connecticut. Focusing on efforts in the early 1970s to navigate both state politics and federal recognition, Den Ouden reveals the ways in which racialization and erasure of the Native fundamentally shaped the discussion. Observers questioned Connecticut Indians’ “African” looks as somehow compromising Native political identity, even as legislators cracked jokes about dead Indians and “Indian givers,” and resisted the Paugussett’s bid for federal recognition, which was rejected in 2004, leaving

them a state-recognized tribe, a status confirmed in a 2009 legal challenge.

Recognition, which rests fundamentally on history, reveals a wide range of historically specific relations among Indian peoples and colonizers. The cases of Alaska and Hawai'i highlight that diversity, while stepping out of a purely continental perspective. Alaska's Indigenous peoples survived Russian colonization (1784) and then watched as their lands were "purchased" by the United States in 1867. As Rosita Kaahani Worl and Heather Kendall-Miller suggest, this history produced a unique land claim settlement strategy as Alaska moved from territory to state, and oil producers sought first to drill and then to build the Alaska pipeline. The settlement laid a new economic and political form – the Native corporation – over Indigenous life and politics. How were the Alaska Native peoples to navigate political sovereignty over tribal members and land and to establish relations with the federal government? A complex legal and legislative history underpins the contemporary relation between the corporation, the tribe, and the government, but it confirms both sovereign status and trust responsibilities.

Hawai'i, as Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua and Bryan Kamaoli Kuwada make clear, is the product of a very different kind of colonial, imperial, and Indigenous history, one defined only partially by American global, mercantile, and military interests, and more important, by an ongoing sovereignty not readily captured by federal recognition practices. Indeed, their essay focuses on a 2014 Department of Interior plan to create a process pathway to federal recognition for a Native Hawaiian political entity. Hundreds of Kānaka Maoli protested, noting the clear distinctions between Native America and Native Hawai'i, and insisting on an identity not only ethnic or geographic, but also national, in ways that demanded connection to the independent Kingdom of Hawai'i that exercised authority

for most of the nineteenth century. Using a Kanaka Maoli epistemology focused on the making of 'aha, or rope, Goodyear-Ka'ōpua and Kuwada argue for a political vision that braids past and present together to generate a new claim on futurity. In these cases, the United States has sought to erase both Indigenous peoples' rights and the nation's concomitant responsibilities to recognize, support, and fulfill those rights.

As Amy Den Ouden's essay affirms, tribes are not racial collectives, but political/legal ones, which means that they exercise the right to define their own citizenship. Even as outsiders frame Indian identities racially, so too do tribes themselves. One of the main ways that tribal citizenship has been defined has been through the racial marker of blood, handed down from the American assimilation policies of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the form of blood quantum membership requirements. "Indian blood" is a metaphorical thing that has often taken the concrete form of genealogical math. How many quarters or eighths or sixteenths blood does one have? What if your parents are from two different tribes? How much blood do you need to be enrolled as a citizen? The advent of genetic testing has opened up new questions about identity and ethics, which are the subject of Nanibaa' Garrison's essay. Indigenous peoples' genetic material ends up being coveted by researchers, even as new industries offer the average person a chance to "prove" Native ancestry and thus constitute a particular claim to identity, and perhaps even a claim on tribal enrollment. In this sense, Garrison observes, Indian people are central to contemporary bioethical debates that extend far beyond the question of tribal membership or research protocol. Garrison's essay highlights the complex interworkings and linkages between the social, political, cultural, and genetic nature of Native identity.

This fetish to "be Indian" dates back to the founding of the United States, and is

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visible in the tortured inversions of the “one drop rule”: if one drop of African blood taints the Whitest person as “Black,” then, at the same time, one drop of Indian blood will (often happily) make the Whitest person “Indian.” That desire to appropriate noble Indians has long been paired with its opposite: the denigration of Indian “savagery,” “backwardness,” and “inability.” Contemporary psychological research on the connections among culture, institutions, and individuals reveals the cumulative negative effects of such stereotypes, as both Indians and non-Indians internalize beliefs, constitute identities, and then make them material through actions and interactions. And yet, as Arianne Eason, Laura Brady, and Stephanie Fryberg argue, the same cycles can be changed through concentrated interventions. Indian people, they suggest, offer a critical point of centrality for the timeless challenge of driving cultural change in socially positive ways. As stereotyped images linger from the past and fuel negative outcomes in the present – such as the disproportionate removal of children from Native families – they can also be transformed in ways to help produce Indigenous futures.

Efforts on the part of Indian people to drive positive cultural belief systems among non-Native Americans invert an earlier campaign: that of White Americans to eradicate Native language, culture, social practice, and collective identity. These assimilation policies took shape around military power and physical containment on reservations, religious transformation, and a boarding school program that brutally suppressed the very notion of Indianness and Indigenous systems of education. As Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy and K. Tsianina Lomawaima point out, the legacy of that schooling practice remains with Indian people to this day, often in the form of multi-generational historical trauma. At the same

time, however, schooling also helped foster intertribal solidarities and created new conditions for political organizing and cultural reassertion. Today, the possibility for education and schooling to be *simpatico* – instead of in tension – is more profoundly possible. It is the future.

If closing the gap in K – 12 education offers a vital goal for Indian Country and the United States as a whole, it is also the case that tribal colleges have stepped into the breach, not simply as educational institutions, but as cultural and community centers and powerful collectives that fuse spirituality with institutional structure in novel ways. Today, thirty-seven tribal colleges and universities effectively serve over twenty thousand Native and non-Native rural students. As Cheryl Crazy Bull and Justin Guillory suggest, the tribal college movement indexes a critical expression of tribal futurity, offering culture-centered training in fields that are locally important, educationally traditional, and emergent with new possibilities for Indian cultures and economies.

Nor are tribal colleges the only institutional locations to be indigenized by Native peoples. Museums, for example, have long offered simplistic representations of American Indians, and often served as repositories for Indigenous human remains and cultural patrimony. Two critical interventions – the founding of the National Museum of the American Indian (1989) and the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990) – helped transform museum practice today. As Philip J. Deloria suggests, the decades that followed that legislation saw an explosion of excellent tribal museums and an increase in tribal capacity in both repatriation and cultural affairs. As the National Museum of the American Indian refreshes its permanent galleries over the next five years, it will explicitly argue for Native peoples’ centrality in the Amer-

ican story, and insist not only on survival narratives, but also on Indigenous futurity.

In that future, Indian people face many challenges, including the long-standing issue of health and wellness of tribal members. As Mark Trahanant recounts, the federal obligation to Indian health care has its origins in treaties, most of which provided for doctors and, in some cases, hospital care. A long history of poor performance, lack of funding, and socioeconomic inequity has produced significant health disparities between Native and other populations. And yet, as Trahanant argues, in the years following the 1976 passage of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, the Indian Health Service has closed a substantial number of health disparity gaps. One major feature in that success has been contracting out to tribal service providers. Trahanant observes that, precisely because they are still underfunded, many of the successful operations under the Indian Health Service actually offer prototypes for thinking about new forms of service delivery at a lower cost. In dealing with chronic underfunding, the Indian Health Service may find itself in a leadership role.

Indian people have long histories of leadership. As Gary Sandefur and Philip J. Deloria suggest, White Americans have often misread that history in terms of military resistance, creating a kind of “great man” understanding of Indian history. Leadership, Sandefur and Deloria argue, has been far more diverse: it has included women in important ways, flowed through colonial institutions such as the church, and taken shape in both local-tribal contexts and national intertribal organizations. Indian leadership has been adaptive, even as it has served as an important location for persistent assertions of cultural autonomy and self-determination. Like health services delivery, Indian leadership has not been without challenges, but it has also offered important models for the United States, a

nation fixated on leadership education that sometimes struggles to produce effective and ethical leaders.

Likewise, as Kyle Whyte suggests, Indian people offer both knowledge and leadership in understanding and addressing environmental crises. Whyte surveys a wide range of literature to identify an emergent field of Indigenous Environmental Science Studies (IESS) that seeks to take seriously the relationality, spirituality, and Traditional Environmental Knowledge (TEK). Whyte argues that Indigenous knowledge *is* science and has functioned as such in both past and present. But his is not an essentialist claim to privilege the Indigenous. For Whyte, the dialectical partnership between TEK and mainstream science offers the most potential for Native and non-Native futures in the face of climate change and ecological disaster.

Megan Bang, Ananda Marin, and Douglas Medin insist on a plurality of sciences, in ways that question the singular hegemony of Western science and make room for Indigenous sciences as both a powerful practice of knowledge-making in its own right and an important partner in a multisided scientific exchange of knowledge. And yet, the authors insist on a reciprocal and ethical relationship. It is not simply the case that Indigenous knowledge ought to be available to the full sweep of science; too often that has meant appropriation and new practices of colonial domination. Indigenous peoples insist that they will stand with the sciences, particularly in our moment of planetary crisis. They would simply like to know that scientists from all disciplines will stand with them as well.

If American Indian people – alive, active, and innovative in the present moment – offer possibilities to others in terms of political movements, representational politics, the production of scientific knowledge, the ethics of bioscience, and the management of institutions, it is also the case that main-

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taining self-determining tribal vitality and identity remains the key priority in Indian Country. Perhaps nowhere is that priority so challenged and so rich with possibility as in the question of language preservation and awakening. As Teresa McCarty, Sheilah Nicholas, Kari Chew, Natalie Diaz, Wesley Leonard, and Louellyn White argue, language reclamation fuses pasts, presents, and futures, even as it refuses colonizing imperatives for assimilation and disappearance. Language, they suggest, is central to individual and community well-being and sustainability, and to the larger claim to social justice. To that end, language repatriation will be one of the most significant goals for the Indigenous future.

The claim to social justice is central to the essays in this issue, as is the relation among past, present, and future. The United States has struggled to turn from old master narratives to new histories relevant to its present and future. In those old stories, Indians necessarily had to disappear. For the Puritans to found a City on the Hill – a story often framed as an American claim to religious freedom – Indians had to die, leaving their food and land behind; their disappearance was a sign from God. In the story of frontier settlement, Indians became part of nature, fleeing westward and then just vanishing, according to some conveniently imagined “law of nature.” In the story of European immigration, Indians were already assumed to be gone, their land simply available. In stories of the Civil War, Americans ignored Indians altogether, focused on the White-on-White bloodletting that would redeem the original sin of slavery. And even in the great contemporary counternarrative of African American struggles to move from slavery to freedom to civil rights, Indian histories and peoples find little traction. Americans don’t tend to tell stories in ways that leave room for Indian people. Indeed, the nation has, in many ways, come to

see slavery as America’s primary – or perhaps only – original sin, and national conversations on race, inequity, and the hurts of history tend to occur around a Black/White binary. But slavery required the taking of Indigenous land and the removal of Indigenous people. The United States was founded on dispossession. The stories of settler colonial conquest and slavery are interrelated and inextricable, and we should never forget it.

Land lies forever at the heart of America’s problem with Indians. The United States and the American dream – of freedom, democracy, a divine mandate to lead the world – are built on Indian land. Even by U.S. standards of law (often transparently self-serving), the history of “title transfer” for too much of that land has a rotten smell. It would be so much easier for the nation to congratulate itself if its claims to its territorial land base were more secure.

And so American settlement histories are of necessity deeply ideological. They frame Indian peoples around two distinct modes of disappearance: Indians can simply die or vanish; or they can assimilate into America, disappearing as distinct peoples into some vast melting pot. Americans have worked hard to bring both visions to pass. But in every one of those narratives, Indian people have been present differently, always contesting a colonization that aimed not (only) to extract resources but to plunder Indian lands; to colonize, settle, and then forget and move on. And so Indigenous politics is not about claiming civil rights through the mechanism of the American state. Rather, it is about preserving and operationalizing tribal distinctiveness and autonomy, as constituted through American law in the form of the Constitution and the treaties, and holding the nation to its obligations, embodied in the form of trust relationships.

American Indian people make up a small percentage of the population of the United

States, and it is easy to ignore them. This, our contributors suggest, is a tremendous mistake. Because of the distinct history of Indian people and their persistent survival – they are not going anywhere! – Indian peoples are central to the ways in which we need to think about the collective future. Indians may often appear marginal in relation to courts, Congress, and academic legal education, for example, but their unique legal and political status is critical to understanding wider issues of law and policy. Centering Indians in discussions of constitutionality, education and training, and actual jurisprudence will lead to understanding issues in new ways. Centering Indians in considerations of land claims and stewardship will cause non-Native anxiety levels to rise – in productive ways. And so with conversations about race, bioethics, environment, education, health care, governance, and more.

The point is not so much that Indigenous perspectives need to be included in the general politics of knowledge (though that is true); rather it is that the Indigenous itself is generative of that knowledge, not peripheral to it. Indigenous studies is not just about Indigenous people. It's also about ways of seeing and investigating the world that have proven central. The challenge for non-Native people lies in escaping the bad habit of viewing Indigenous people as relics of the past. And yet, it's not enough – as has been demonstrated any number of times – for Indigenous people to be content with the

shout “We are still here!” Even that important statement about survival and the present connotes bedraggled refugees from the past, dragging the archaic along with them into an ill-fitting present. Better to think about the ways that Indian people can contribute to a still-forming future.

We can imagine a future when the United States and its citizens commit to grappling with fundamental questions: What does it mean to live on Indian land? What does it mean that Indian people are still here? Moral, legal, ethical, and social issues and debates tumble out of those questions. But we can also imagine a nation and a citizenry strong enough to engage with these questions, strong enough to respect Native nations as inherent sovereigns, and strong enough to confront the mythologies and stereotypes that sustain a sense of national (and White) privilege and entitlement to everything that has been built on Indian land. If we can imagine that, we can also imagine a nation and a citizenry strong enough to face up to its history: the intertwined sin of enslavement and the legacies of immigration, exclusion, and racism. We can imagine a nation strong enough to grapple with the very definitions of citizenry: Who is included? Who is excluded? Why, and when, and how? We can imagine an inclusive nation bold enough to build a future on a complicated and painful past. In this task, one could do worse than to look to American Indian nations and Native institutions for inspiration and ideas.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Many Native nations prefer to use their own language to refer to the group: for example, *Diné* for Navajo. There is no ideal generic term to apply across nations. Editors and authors in this issue use the following terms interchangeably, with the noted caveats or preferences: American Indian and Indian (within the United States); Native Americans; Native; and Indigenous (often the global term of reference).

² *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, 30 U.S. 5 Pet. 1 (1893).

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⁴ K. Tsianina Lomawaima, "The Mutuality of Citizenship and Sovereignty: The Society of American Indians and the Battle to Inherit America," *American Indian Quarterly* 37 (3) (2013): 333 – 351.

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Nenabozho Goes Fishing: A Sovereignty Story

Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark & Kekek Jason Stark

Abstract: In this essay, we present a brief genealogy of sovereignty, outlining debates about the term itself as well as the challenging legal terrain facing Indigenous nations' assertions of sovereignty today. We draw on the experiences of the Lake Superior and Mississippi Bands of Ojibwe for examples of how sovereignty has been debated and defined, from treaty-making practices establishing a political relationship with the United States to subsequent struggles for recognition of Ojibwe sovereign authority accorded in those same treaties. We find that the courts and Congress have oscillated between protecting and diminishing Indigenous nations' ability to exercise sovereignty. We argue for a return to the relational paradigm used by the Ojibwe in their treaty-making as a remedy for the damage done by the courts and by Congress. Rather than a rights-based approach to sovereignty, a relational paradigm foregrounds responsibilities to one another and to creation, which sustains us all.

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Nenabozho cut a hole in the ice. Placing his decoy into the water, he reflected on the stories of his elders, stories that detailed times of deprivation and struggle. In those times, the animals, fish, and plants established relationships with the Ojibwe, giving their bodies to sustain the people. Nenabozho remembered the suckerfish who gave their lives to ensure the Ojibwe would survive the harsh winter. The Ojibwe fondly refer to February as the Suckerfish Moon to remember and honor this relationship.

Sitting in the ice shack, Nenabozho considered the leaders who came before him. His ancestors carried stories and treaty relationships with them as they traversed creation. They fulfilled their obligations and responsibilities to creation, offering tobacco and petitioning the animals, fish, and plants to take pity on them and give their bodies to sustain the people. The Ojibwe understood the world as deeply interconnected and drew on relational paradigms to account for their responsibilities to cre-

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ation and one another. Importantly, they taught these practices to their children and grandchildren, who in turn passed these traditions on to future generations, ensuring Nenabozho and his brother would know how to meaningfully enact their treaty commitments with creation.¹

Nenabozho and his brother grew up hearing the elders speak of their responsibilities to creation, noting that these obligations were also enshrined in treaties with the newcomers to this land.² His ancestors had ensured the Ojibwe would be able to continue the fulfillment of their responsibilities to creation while also making space for the newcomers to come into these same relationships with the land, water, flora, and fauna. Nenabozho contemplated these historic treaties. He knew his and his brother's right to fish had been protected in the 1837 treaty with the United States.³ While his elders spoke of the 1837 and 1842 treaties as agreements to share the land, he was concerned that the United States interpreted these treaties differently, as land cessions.

Nenabozho scoffed at the idea that the Ojibwe could sell their territories. He knew these lands were an inheritance from the Creator, a point Ojibwe leaders asserted as they negotiated treaties with the newcomers. As the last of creation to be placed on the land, Nenabozho understood that his relationships with the land, water, animals, and plants (all of whom preceded the Ojibwe) regulated how he could move through and interact with creation.⁴ Nenabozho knew he was thoroughly entangled in Ojibwe law.

"But what animates this law?" he wondered. Nenabozho again contemplated his elders' words about the Creator and creation. He was thankful that his ancestors had stressed the importance of living their responsibilities through their everyday interactions with creation. Nenabozho was grateful that his ancestors' words had been captured, to a certain degree, in their trea-

ties with the United States. Article 5 of the 1837 Treaty declared: "the privilege of hunting, fishing, and gathering the wild rice, upon the lands, the rivers and the lakes including in the territory ceded, is guaranteed to the Indians, during the pleasure of the President of the United States."⁵

But so much had changed since these words were written on parchment in 1837. Ojibwe enactment of their sovereign authority to hunt, fish, and gather increasingly provoked settler resistance, and Ojibwe were frequently arrested or had their gear confiscated when they hunted, fished, or gathered outside reservation boundaries.

Suddenly Nenabozho heard footsteps on the ice. Fear rose up in him when his gaze met the state game warden – but so too did excitement. For Nenabozho had achieved what he had set out to do. He had made sure to cross the imaginary line across the lake that marked the boundary of the reservation and sought to contain the Ojibwe people's relationship with creation. Technically, he was on contested waters, territory his ancestors had opened up to the newcomers. But he remembered that the treaties also protected Ojibwes' right to live on and with the land as they always had.

In this moment, Nenabozho did not intend to petition the fish to honor their treaties with the Ojibwe – he was not out to catch anything. He was fishing to assert his sovereignty and to remind the newcomers how to honor their responsibilities and obligations to the Ojibwe. Nenabozho handed the state game warden a copy of the 1837 treaty and, when the warden failed to acknowledge it, he accepted his citation. He knew he had the legal test case needed to bring the newcomers back to the treaty table, even if this time the meeting would take place in a courtroom.⁶

Ojibwe have numerous stories of Nenabozho, which recount his movements across Ojibwe country and detail the en-

during marks he left on the landscape and on those he encountered.⁷ Whether describing particular animals whose features were transformed or land that was molded anew, the stories teach us that we live in a deeply interconnected world. And the Ojibwe continue to bring new *Nenabozho* stories to fruition, through ongoing interactions with creation, one another, and the state. *Nenabozho Goes Fishing* is one of these stories. It details the heroic efforts of two brothers of the Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Ojibwe in their fight to protect their right to fish in 1974. The brothers, Fred and Mike Tribble, drew strength from their relatives and stood up against the tidal wave of state law imposed on their people, contravening the historic 1837 and 1842 treaties with the United States. They went to Chief Lake to fish off-reservation, to challenge that body of state law. The Tribble brothers were charged and found guilty by the state of Wisconsin of taking fish off-reservation, possessing a spear, and occupying a fishing shanty without a state permit.

The aftermath of this historic event was aptly named the “Walleye Wars.”⁸ The Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Ojibwe (Chippewa) filed charges against the Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Lester Voigt, challenging the state’s authority to regulate the Tribbles’ hunting and fishing off the reservation. This defense of Ojibwe treaty rights resulted in the 1983 *Lac Courte Oreilles v. Wisconsin (Voigt)* decision, which upheld Ojibwe rights to hunt, fish, and gather in their treaty territories. Litigation regarding the scope and form of these treaty rights continued until 1991, when U.S. District Court Judge Barbara Crabb ruled that the Ojibwe nations party to the 1837 and 1842 treaties had regulatory authority over their citizens’ exercise of treaty rights.⁹ But Judge Crabb tempered this regulatory authority, determining that the state also maintained regulatory authority over its citi-

zens’ hunting, fishing, and gathering practices. Thus, tribes and the state would need to work together to ensure the protection of natural resources.

As a result, Ojibwe tribes and the state collaborate on setting hunting and fishing quotas in accordance with Judge Crabb’s rulings. Yet each party regulates when and how their citizens can fill this quota. Following the recognition of their treaty rights, the Ojibwe increasingly exercised their long-standing spearfishing practices, fishing out of season and using methods the state prohibits its own citizens from employing. They did so in the face of extreme local and regional discontent among sports fishermen and resort owners opposed to Ojibwe spearfishing, an opposition that erupted into violent attacks against the Ojibwe.¹⁰ These protests began to subside in the 1990s, due largely to additional legal protections put in place to protect Ojibwe hunters and an extensive education movement. This movement sought to inform the broader public about treaty rights and to correct misconceptions about the impacts of spearfishing on the walleye population. It was based on joint studies carried out by the Lake Superior Bands, the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

This kind of confusion about and misperception of treaty rights is hardly restricted to fishing and hunting. Indeed, the broader American public has little knowledge of Indigenous nations’ sovereign authority and political status, whether it is expressed in the exercise of out-of-season fishing or in the operation of casinos. Americans continue to mistake the nature of Indigenous nations’ educational benefits, tax status, and licensing authority. These distinct political and legal rights are grounded in sovereignty. Yet sovereignty is usually misunderstood. The courts and Congress have

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only added to this confusion, for they have taken inconsistent, seemingly contradictory positions on the sovereign authority of Indigenous nations, often while simultaneously bolstering U.S. sovereignty.

Indigenous nations exercised sovereign authority long before European arrival. Indigenous political and legal traditions regulated internal matters and established and renewed political, social, and economic alliances with other Indigenous nations. Indigenous nations continued these practices with European nations, establishing new alliances while seeking to protect their lands and resources. The United States followed the traditions of their European predecessors, entering into over four hundred treaties with Indigenous nations, over half of which remain in legal force today.¹¹ Indigenous nations point to the treaties' double meanings: they clearly recognize Indigenous inherent sovereignty, as treaties are by definition agreements between two or more sovereigns, and express the political commitments made by the United States to their Indigenous treaty partners. Shifting federal Indian policies and law, however, have complicated the ways in which Indigenous nations are able to exercise sovereignty.

As U.S. settlement expanded westward, often outpacing treaty-making, the federal government struggled to control its citizens and keep individual states from encroaching on Indigenous lands and political authority. Indigenous resistance took many forms. Nations blocked access to their territories, taxed and fined trespassers, and called for the government to (re)negotiate treaties. Indigenous leaders simultaneously pursued U.S. legal channels in the hope that the federal government would restrain state powers and individual citizens who violated the treaties. For example, the Cherokee Nation sought an injunction against the state of Georgia for violating U.S.-Cherokee treaties and the 1827 Cherokee Constitution by as-

serting jurisdiction over Cherokee lands and people within state borders. Chief Justice John Marshall determined that the Court had no jurisdiction under Article III of the Constitution, arguing that tribes were neither states nor foreign nations. He described the Cherokee, instead, as a "domestic-dependent nation" whose relationship with the United States resembled that of a ward to its guardian.¹² In *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, he determined that the Cherokee, in placing themselves "under the protection" of the United States in their treaty, are *dependent* nations; because their territories fall within the United States' borders, they are also *domestic* nations. However, he noted that this protection also created a "trust responsibility" for the United States. This trust relationship has at times afforded protections for Indigenous nations – largely from the abuses of states – but has also empowered Congress to unilaterally impose legislation "in the best interest of tribes" and the courts to render decisions that have eroded Indigenous nations' abilities to exercise their sovereign authority to the fullest extent.

One year after *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, in 1832, Chief Justice Marshall again addressed the political status of the Cherokee, this time describing the Cherokee nation quite differently, as "a distinct political community, having territorial boundaries within which their authority is exclusive."¹³ Marshall found that Georgia laws had no force in Cherokee country. While seemingly contradicting his opinion of one year earlier, the distinction in his framing of Indigenous political status spoke more to his concerns about federalism than it did to his views of the sovereign authority of Indigenous nations. In *Cherokee Nation*, Marshall was intent on articulating federal supremacy over Indigenous nations, thus focusing his attention on Indigenous nations' "domestic-dependent" status. Federal supremacy was key to keeping his 1823 land-

mark Indian title case, *Johnson v. McIntosh*, intact. In that case, he asserted federal supremacy over Indigenous lands in contravention to individual states, in the process creatively framing Indigenous nations as having a “mere right of occupancy” to their lands in order to ensure that federal land grants executed prior to the extinguishment of Indian title would remain in force. In effect, Marshall had sought to make legal the United States’ self-proclaimed sovereignty over lands they had acquired neither by consent nor conquest. In this framing, U.S. sovereignty was not unbridled, but merely entailed a preemptive right of purchase over Indigenous lands *vis-à-vis* other European nations. Marshall was clear to note that U.S. title to the lands was “burdened” by Indian title and contingent on Indigenous nations consenting to “extinguish” their rights of occupancy via treaties.

In the 1832 case *Worcester v. Georgia*, Marshall turned his attention to the assertion of federal supremacy over the states, reminding the states that they had no authority over Indigenous lands and peoples and that the U.S. relationship with tribal nations was a federal matter. He also used this moment to expand on his earlier decisions, in many ways to qualify the powers acquired by European nations under the doctrine of discovery. He also sought to clarify the powers Indigenous nations retained, despite having placed themselves under the protection of the United States. He noted that the political authority of Indigenous nations was not impaired by the fact that they had placed themselves under such protection.

In his efforts to bolster and solidify U.S. sovereignty, Marshall issued contradictory decisions on the political status of Indigenous nations, enabling the United States to oscillate among varied positions: one positing that Indigenous nations retain all inherent sovereign authority not expressly relinquished in their treaties with the United

States, and another proclaiming that Indigenous nations’ political authority is subordinate to their “dependent” status and can be stripped if “inconsistent” with this status. These landmark cases became the foundation of the *tribal sovereignty doctrine*. This doctrine is further complicated by the twin doctrines of *plenary power* (detailed below) and *trust*, which have been employed by the United States to superintend the welfare of Indigenous peoples, with often devastating results for Indigenous nations in their exercise of sovereignty. These distinct and sometimes contradictory doctrines create a quagmire of federal Indian law that provides little clarity in efforts to understand Indigenous sovereignty.

Sovereignty is the most critical force animating a nation. However, the concept of sovereignty is difficult to define, both in the wake of shifting U.S. policies and laws and as globalization has illuminated the porous nature of state borders and exposed the fallacy of sovereignty as supreme and absolute. It is nearly impossible today to envision a nation whose sovereignty is not limited by its relationships and responsibilities, both internally to its own citizens and externally to its diplomatic allies.¹⁴ Indeed, the cases detailed above place considerable emphasis on the limitations of *both* U.S. and Indigenous political authority precisely because of their relationships and responsibilities to one another. Further, our understandings of sovereignty have been transformed and reoriented by the changing conditions and characteristics of the nations that have employed the term.¹⁵ Although the term is often attributed to the Westphalian state system derived from European theological and political discourse, it describes at its core the intrinsic political authority that enables the self-governance of all nations.¹⁶

Different social contexts generate a multitude of meanings of the term “sovereign-

ty.”¹⁷ A central variable common to many definitions is sovereignty’s *inherent* presence.¹⁸ Sovereignty cannot be granted to a people; rather, it derives from the collective will of the community – an important point contradicting U.S. claims that “tribal sovereignty” is necessarily constrained, incomplete, or dependent on U.S. grants of authority.¹⁹ Chickasaw scholar Amanda Cobb argues that “at base, sovereignty is a nation’s power to self-govern, to determine its own way of life, and to live that life – to whatever extent possible – free from interference.”²⁰ She emphasizes an Indigenous understanding of sovereignty as a people’s right to live in accordance with their own political and legal traditions.²¹ Lumbee political scholar David Wilkins similarly asserts that “tribal sovereignty is the intangible and dynamic cultural force inherent in a given indigenous community, empowering that body toward the sustaining and enhancement of political, economic, and cultural integrity.”²²

The legal and conceptual complications surrounding sovereignty speak to the term’s power and the battles that inevitably ensue when it is asserted.²³ Sovereignty is contested among Western political thinkers. It is contested between American Indians and the U.S. government. It should therefore come as no surprise that sovereignty is also contested among Indigenous scholars and activists. The term began to dominate Indigenous political discourse in the mid-1960s and has remained prevalent and powerful. But sovereignty is not without Indigenous critique: some scholars question the use of the term altogether. Taiiaki Alfred asserts that the United States’ and Canada’s positions on Indigenous nations’ sovereignty vary depending on context: sometimes they flatly deny it, and sometimes they theoretically accept it within a framework of federal Indian law that works to subjugate Indigenous political authority.²⁴ Alfred reminds us that the “actual history of our plu-

ral existence has been erased by the narrow fictions of a single sovereignty. Controlling, universalizing, and assimilating, these fictions have been imposed in the form of law on weakened but resistant and remembering peoples.”²⁵ Alfred critiques sovereignty for its alliance with Enlightenment theory, which weds sovereignty with supremacy, coercion, and homogeneity.

The history of American Indians’ pursuit of sovereignty within the American political system has been marked by both coercion and assertions of American supremacy. Though the United States continued to sign executive agreements with Indigenous nations into the early twentieth century, Congress effectively brought an end to treaty-making with tribes in 1871, making a significant shift away from negotiation to unilateral imposition of legislation and administrative oversight. By the 1880s, Congress aggressively moved to assimilate Indigenous peoples – to transform them and thus disappear their sovereignty. Allotment policies privatized Indigenous communal land holdings, resulting in an additional loss of 90 million acres of land.²⁶ Indigenous political authority was further undermined by the dismantling of Indigenous families: boarding schools separated Indigenous children from families and communities and attempted to “Americanize” children by stripping them of heritage cultures, languages, and traditions.

Despite these assaults, Indigenous nations fought to protect their sovereignty. Some turned inward, ensuring that the philosophies, traditions, and languages that give meaning to Indigenous legal and political traditions remained intact in the face of legislative assaults and rapid encroachment on Indigenous lands. Others turned to the courts again and again to call on the United States to honor treaties recognizing the sovereign authority of Indigenous nations over their lands and citizenry. Indeed, the courts were provided ample opportunity to define

the contours of Indigenous nations' sovereignty. The Supreme Court upheld tribal sovereignty in *Ex Parte Crow Dog* (1883), for example, recognizing tribal nations' criminal jurisdiction over crimes committed by one Native person against another within Indian Country. But in the final sentences of this decision, the Court noted that it could only depart from this treaty-protected authority if Congress made a clear expression of intent.²⁷

Taking the cue, Congress passed the Major Crimes Act one year later, granting federal criminal jurisdiction over Indigenous peoples within Indian Country. Indigenous nations protested this violation of their treaties. Instead of providing protection, the Court authorized Congressional powers over Indigenous nations. This birthed the legal doctrine known as *plenary power* by asserting that "the power of the General Government over these remnants of a race once powerful, now weak and diminished in numbers, is necessary to their protection, as well as to the safety of those among whom they dwell." Plenary power was expanded again in 1903 to support Congressional legislation, even if it directly violated treaty provisions.²⁸ These cases gave rise to the assertions that Congress had not just exclusive authority over Indigenous nations – a constitutionally supported claim – but also unlimited and absolute authority over Indigenous nations, despite the lack of constitutional support for this argument.

The tribal sovereignty and plenary power doctrines have placed tribal nations in a legal bind. The courts have protected tribes' sovereignty by recognizing that Indigenous law is not beholden to the U.S. Constitution,²⁹ by recognizing that tribal nations retain the authority to define their own citizenship, and by accepting that employment preferences in Bureau of Indian Affairs hiring are consistent with Indigenous peoples' unique legal status.³⁰ Congress has also restored some aspects of Indigenous sover-

eign authority that had been stripped by the courts.³¹ Nonetheless, the corpus of federal Indian law developed after the landmark Cherokee cases has created more confusion than clarity about Indigenous nations' political authority, complicating the meaning and exercise of sovereignty for Indigenous nations, the federal government, and states.

Indigenous nations have continually pressed for recognition of their sovereignty and protection of their treaty rights. Those nations include the Lake Superior and Mississippi Bands of Ojibwe – which takes us back to the Nenabozho story that opens this essay. In it, two brothers dropped their decoy through a hole in the ice outside reservation boundaries and invited arrest, because their ancestors had protected their right to do so in treaties with the United States. The courts upheld Ojibwe treaty rights first in the *Lac Courte Oreilles v. Wisconsin (Voigt)* decisions in Wisconsin and subsequently in the 1999 *Minnesota v. Mille Lacs* decisions, in which the Supreme Court affirmed that treaty rights had not been extinguished. These were important victories. But such tribal interests were upheld in only five of twenty-eight Supreme Court cases heard between 1991 and 2000.³² Thus, many Indigenous nations, including the Ojibwe, have sought other arenas in which to exercise and protect sovereign authority.

Following the *Voigt* decisions, the Lake Superior Ojibwe Bands created an inter-tribal natural resource management and regulatory agency, the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC), to conserve and manage the Tribes' treaty-protected natural resources, protect the habitats and ecosystems that support those resources, develop and enhance institutions of tribal self-governance, and preserve Ojibwe traditional and cultural pursuits. In these pursuits, the GLIFWC has effectively utilized Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) to negotiate and collaborate with various municipalities, fed-

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eral agencies, and service providers. For example, 2018 will mark the twentieth anniversary of an MOU regarding Tribal–USDA Forest Service Relations on National Forest Lands within the “ceded” territories of the 1836, 1837, and 1842 treaties. This mutually beneficial agreement facilitates cooperation among the tribes and the Forest Service while enabling the Forest Service to better meet federal trust obligations to the Lake Superior Ojibwe Bands. The MOU has been recognized at the regional and national levels for “its innovations and effectiveness at advancing relations between the Forest Service and the tribes,”³³ demonstrating that localized negotiations and collaborations may represent a better stage for sovereignty struggles than contentious litigation, which has produced wildly contradictory positions on the sovereign authority of Indigenous nations.³⁴ Nonetheless, one thing is clear: whether in negotiation, collaboration, or litigation, sovereignty remains a central issue in Indigenous-state relations.

For Indigenous nations, sovereignty animates relationships: relationships with the land, water, animals, and plants; and relationships with one another. When encroaching federal and state authorities have harmed the relationships among Indigenous lands and citizens, Indigenous nations have turned to the courts. Indige-

nous leaders remain hopeful, however, that we can move away from contentious litigation and limiting legislation and return to negotiation to build and renew mutually beneficial relationships.

That, indeed, is the lesson of *Nenabozho Goes Fishing*. When he cut his hole in the ice, dropped his decoy in the water, and invited the game warden to arrest him, Nenabozho meant to use the courts to establish recognition of a particular aspect of Ojibwe sovereignty – the right to fish – as guaranteed and protected in the 1837 treaty, an agreement between two sovereigns entailing rights for both. But Nenabozho was also simply *fish-ing*, thinking as he did of the larger world of relationships outside the world of courts and congresses, instead focusing on a relationship of laws and ethics and right behavior toward one another. He wanted us not to focus on *who* had authority to make decisions, but instead to consider *how* we might act.³⁵ He hoped to bring forward the older ways of relating to one another that were built into the early treaties with creation. He imagined a relationship that focuses not on the rights retained or attained via treaties, but rather on the responsibilities and duties we have to one another and to creation.³⁶ These are the relationships Indigenous people want with other sovereign political entities – relationships oriented toward a mutual future.

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Making ‘Aha: Independent Hawaiian Pasts, Presents & Futures

Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua & Bryan Kamaoli Kuwada

Abstract: We use Hawaiian methods of knowledge production to weave together contemporary and historical instances of Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) political resistance to U.S. imperialism and settler colonialism. Our departure point is the summer of 2014, when hundreds of Kanaka came forward to assert unbroken Hawaiian sovereignty and reject a U.S. Department of Interior (DOI) proposal to create a pathway for federal recognition of a reorganized Native Hawaiian governing entity. This essay situates testimonies from these hearings within a longer genealogy of Kanaka assertions of “ea” (sovereignty, life, breath) against the prolonged U.S. military occupation of Hawai‘i that began in 1898 and extends to the present.

He wen
look up again
you know
only the eyes move kine
putting one more
strand of coconut fiber
on to the kaula
he make one
fast twist
and said
The Kaula of our people
is 2,000 years old
boy
some time . . . good
some time . . . bad
some time . . . strong
some time . . . sad
but most time
us guys
just like this rope
one by one
strand by strand
we become the memory of our people
and we still growing.

– ‘Īmaikalani Kalahahele, “Make Rope”¹

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Kānaka Maoli, like the original nations of Turtle Island (an Indigenous name for North America), have faced forces of genocide at levels that can be characterized as apocalyptic. But still we rise. Our peoples continue to face (mis)representation as vestiges of a quickly fading and irrelevant past, but we know this is not our story. So often such discourses are tactics for expropriating Indigenous lands, waters, and creative capacities. In this essay, we focus instead on different stories. We aim to introduce readers to stories of Native Hawaiian future-making, drawing on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Kanaka Maoli archives, which are among the largest Indigenous-language archives in the Americas.

In a collection on North American Indigenous peoples, it is important to clarify that Native Hawaiians are not Native Americans. The category of “Hawaiian” signals both indigeneity and nationality. When we say we are Native Hawaiian, we mean that Kānaka Maoli are the autochthonous people of the archipelago known as Hawai‘i. Kānaka Maoli make up about one-fifth of the population in Hawai‘i at present, and about 40 percent of our people live outside of the islands. When we say Native Hawaiians are not Native Americans, we are therefore also referencing an ongoing struggle to (re)recognize Hawai‘i’s national sovereignty and contest U.S. claims to Hawaiian soil and waters.

Historically, “Hawaiian” is not only an ethnic or geographic identity, but a national one. By the late 1800s, the independent Hawaiian Kingdom government was recognized by all the major powers of the world, including the United States of America, which honored Hawaiian independence and entered into treaties and conventions with the Hawaiian government from 1826 to 1893. The Hawaiian Kingdom had its own national school system and boasted a literacy rate as high, if not higher, than all the major world powers of the time; it

also established over ninety legations and consulates in cities around the world. Hawai‘i’s national government exercised its authority over a multiethnic citizenry, including people from various backgrounds naturalized to Hawaiian citizenship and Kānaka Maoli, who composed a large majority of the archipelago’s population until well after the United States began its prolonged and ongoing occupation. A significant portion – though not all – of Native Hawaiian people today continue to assert that we are not American. In this essay, we discuss examples of independent Hawaiian futurities, as articulated by Kānaka Maoli of different eras.

Fururities are ways that groups imagine and produce knowledge about futures; thus futurities shape the horizons of possibility for specific futures. We see Indigenous futurities as practices of future-making that often disrupt the linearity of Western liberal-democratic understandings of temporality.² We foreground Kanaka Maoli enactments of relationalities of times and places that transcend settler temporalities and mappings, expressions that posit preferred Kanaka Maoli futures over U.S.-imperial ones.

The form of this essay aims to cultivate a Kanaka Maoli futurity that strengthens relations between Kānaka living, passed, and yet-to-come. The metaphor of making rope, or *‘aha*, aptly describes our method and objective. The Hawaiian word *‘aha* has numerous meanings: an assembly; a millipede; a needlefish; a design for garments; a ceremony for investing authority in a leader; and – most relevant to our essay – sennit rope that can be made from plant fibers, human hair, or animal intestines. *‘Aha* cord provided the material basis for countless functional elements of the complex society our ancestors developed in the Hawaiian Islands. Houses, canoes, tools, water containers, weapons, drums, burial goods, and symbols of chiefly rank: all of these and more depend-

ed on ‘aha. Anthropologist Scott Kekuewa Kikiloi discusses the ways that the ‘aha cord and ceremony were historically formalized in rituals with direct connections to natural cycles. Over time the ‘aha – as material object, metaphor, and prophesying practice – became a central means of legitimizing Hawaiian political leadership. Kikiloi explains that the ‘aha cord and ceremony “came to symbolize a historical record between the ancestors and their descendants,” such that political and spiritual power were not “accumulated within a single individual, but . . . continually accrued (or lost) over the span of generations.” Thus, the ‘aha ritual cycle supported self-determined Hawaiian political leadership that brought people together around common interests and that was “sanctioned by the ancestors in the afterlife.”³ The ‘Īmaikalani Kalahahele poem that opens this essay similarly implies that rope-making symbolizes the collective strength and survivance of Kānaka Maoli, and it is with such genealogical strands that we make our futures.

In September 2016, the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) under the Obama administration released its final rule setting out the procedures for establishing “a formal government-to-government relationship with the Native Hawaiian community,” within the confines of U.S. domestic law and subject to the plenary power of the U.S. Congress.⁴ Representatives of the state and federal governments lauded the rule as a historic step toward reconciliation. A relationship established under this rule, however, would be a fundamental break from history, as it would create a domestic-dependent quasi-sovereign nation out of a country previously recognized as independent. As the rule itself made clear, a new relationship “would have very different characteristics from the government-to-government relationship that formerly existed with the Kingdom of Hawai‘i.”⁵

As we discuss above, the Kingdom of Hawai‘i was a thriving sovereign country composed of a multiethnic citizenry in which aboriginal people were the majority. But in 1898, five years after militarily supporting an illegal coup by White sugar businessmen in what then-President Grover Cleveland later described as “an act of war,” the United States seized political control and roughly 1.8 million acres of Hawaiian national lands without the consent of the Hawaiian people. Since that time, not a single acre has been returned to Hawaiian sovereign control. The growing contemporary Hawaiian sovereignty and independence movement sees the ongoing occupation of Hawaiian land as a continuation of that original act of war.

There were no large-scale celebrations across the Hawaiian archipelago when the DOI released its 2016 rule, opening a doorway for federal recognition of a Native Hawaiian governing entity. This reaction might have seemed unusual compared to American Indian nations that have struggled for such recognition. As scholars of U.S. federal recognition have noted, since the United States established its current procedures for formal acknowledgment of Indian tribes in 1978, some tribes have invested decades of labor and millions of dollars into their petitions for federal recognition because they felt their peoples’ survival was dependent upon it.⁶ In contrast, the DOI’s final rule on Native Hawaiians was not the product of a long-fought, broad-based struggle by Kānaka Maoli for federal recognition; this recognition does not encompass the full sovereignty that many Native Hawaiians wish to reclaim. However, it must be said that some Native Hawaiian leaders with institutional power within the settler-state government have vigorously supported U.S. federal recognition.

In the summer of 2014, the Department of the Interior sent representatives to Hawai‘i to conduct public hearings on the pro-

posed rule. It was the first time the U.S. government held any public hearings in Hawai'i on federal recognition in well over a decade. At the fifteen DOI-led sessions held on six islands that summer, Kānaka packed auditoriums and school cafeterias in standing-room-only crowds. Speakers were limited to just three minutes of testimony each, and voices poured out like rain on a thin metal rooftop, even though advance notice on the proposed rule-making had been issued only days earlier. A stunning majority of the oral testimonies at each consultation asserted Hawaiian independence. When the DOI responded a year later with its Notice of Proposed Rule-Making, the notice completely marginalized these Kanaka voices, failing even to list a count of the oral testimonies. In this essay, we pull out a few of these voices and intertwine them with those of Kānaka from earlier times who expressed similar commitments to Hawaiian nationhood and visions for independent futures.

I'm really confused about why you're here in the first place, as I'm sure a lot of our people are. If you knew just a little bit about our nation's history and your nation's history and relationship with our nation, then you would see, like so many people have already been saying, that you have no jurisdiction here. And so I don't really feel a need to answer your questions in the first place, but because I know how your nation does things, I will say no, no, no, no, no... you have to go back and talk to the people who have the power in your nation. Or better yet, you know, if you want to give up your citizenship and come and join us, I'm sure we can talk story about that.

– Shavonn Matsuda, Hāna, Maui, 2014

Hawaiian futurities as articulated in the contemporary Hawaiian-sovereignty movement have typically operated on a logic of inclusive, nonviolent change through the power of education. In 1990, one could hardly say the words “Hawaiian” and “sov-

ereignty” together in polite conversation: people would react as though you had uttered profanity. But massive educational efforts to uncover the history of Hawaiian independence shifted the political grounds on which Kānaka stood. Over the past few decades, such education has taken place at both institutional and grassroots levels, drawing on elders' experiential knowledge as well as on the research of Kanaka Maoli scholars. As a direct result of these pedagogical efforts, grassroots Hawaiian movements refusing recognition frameworks and asserting Hawaiian independence have grown in the new millennium, particularly in the face of proposed federal recognition legislation.

Too often, refusals are interpreted as complete withdrawals of any possible participation in a future. But we highlight those Kānaka who articulated a politics of refusal in 2014 precisely because we are interested in the ways in which refusals can also be forms of futurity.⁷ In the 2014 hearings, we can see a style of thinking about the relationship between the past, present, and future of an independent Hawai'i that relies on a logic of continuity. The oral testimonies are but one practice of bringing such a future into being by asserting the knowledge of connections to a sovereign past. Knowledge about Hawaiian pasts and presents fuels a repudiation of settler-state attempts to rein in Hawaiian independent futures and to contain them within what K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa McCarty have called “safety zones”: settler state-sanctioned spaces in which some aspects of Indigenous culture can be practiced as long as they do not disrupt or threaten settler society.⁸ For a large segment of the Hawaiian movement and of the hundreds who testified in 2014, federal recognition is seen as such a mechanism of containment. Refusal of that containment is not only about assertions of political autonomy, but also about rejecting unsustainable ways of relating to the natural world. Hawaiian independent futurities assemble practic-

es of *aloha ʻāina* (love for the land) that assert that our ability to sustain generation after generation requires healthier relationships with our lands and waters.

We derive our strength from our ʻāina, and it is our deep aloha for our ʻāina that is the foundation for our liberation. We know our past, as you have seen over the past week and tonight, and while the U.S. may be part of our presence by its own power, its utter disregard for the well-being of our ʻāina and lāhui has deemed it necessary that we envision and enact a future for our children and grandchildren, in which our nation, ka lāhui kanaka, thrives independent of the United States again. “A ʻole mea ʻoi aku o ka waiwai e like me ke kanaka i noho kūʻokoʻa no ke aloha i kona ʻāina.” These are the words of our great Hawaiian independence leader from Puna, Joseph Nāwahī. There is nothing of greater value than Kānaka living independently for the aloha of our ʻāina. This is the political consciousness of our kūpuna, this is the foundation of our nation.

– No ʻeau Peralto, *Keaukaha, Hawaiʻi*, 2014

One of the most enduring strands of our ʻaha is *aloha ʻāina*, and Joseph Nāwahī is a name that always comes up when Kānaka of the present speak about this concept. Nāwahī was a painter, politician, newspaper editor, lawyer, and orator who was once described by Queen Liliʻuokalani as “a man who fearlessly advocated the independence of Hawaiʻi Nei.”⁹

Since the emergence of the sugar industry in the mid-nineteenth century, planters in the Hawaiian kingdom had been pushing for an expanded market for their crop. For many of them, the logical market was the United States, yet import duties put them at a disadvantage to American sugar, leading many to seek annexation to the United States. But the majority of Hawaiian people were emphatically against such a move. When King Kamehameha IV (Alexander Liholiho, who ascended to the throne in 1855) supported a reciprocity treaty with the Unit-

ed States to relax its import duties on sugar, it was not merely a way to provide new markets for Hawaiʻi sugar planters; it was a tactic to undercut these American-descended businessmen’s push for annexation.

The treaty came close to passing in several legislative sessions, but concerns over such a treaty’s effect on domestic industry and a lack of clear benefit to the United States kept it from passing. What finally piqued U.S. interest in the 1870s was the possible cession of Puʻuloa (an important and productive estuary and fishery that is now often called Pearl Harbor). Puʻuloa was the best option for a deep-draft harbor in the Northern Pacific, and the U.S. military eyed it as the key to maritime control of the Pacific region.

In 1872 Nāwahī was elected to the Hawaiian Kingdom House of Representatives to represent his home district of Puna. Nāwahī’s election came in the midst of the debate over the Reciprocity Treaty, and his staunch and consistent opposition to the treaty and the possible cession of Puʻuloa brought his voice to the fore as a champion of Hawaiian independence. After much negotiation and the passing of three monarchs, the treaty was ratified in 1876 without the cession of Puʻuloa and was set to go into effect pending the passage of a corresponding U.S. law.

That year, in a last-ditch attempt to stop the treaty, a small bloc of Hawaiian legislators called for the Hawaiian Kingdom House to have the final say over the treaty’s language. In a fiery and impassioned speech, Nāwahī exhorted his fellow legislators to recognize that what was at stake was greater than prosperity for plantation owners:

He wahi aupuni ko kākou i makaleho ʻia e nā Haole e lilo no lākou, akā, ua hoka wale nō ia mau hoʻāʻo ʻana a pau. He nui wale nō nā hoʻāʻo ʻana a lākou i loko o nā makahiki i hala aku nei, a ʻo ka hāʻawi ʻana iā Puʻuloa kā lākou hana hope loa i hoʻāʻo ai, a nele ihola. Akā, ʻānō, ke kāpili nei lākou i kiʻi lio lāʻau me ka hoʻokomo ʻia o ka ʻenemi i loko.¹⁰

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We are a small nation that the foreigners have cast a greedy eye upon, desiring that it pass into their possession, yet their efforts have met with only frustration. They have tried over and over again during these past years, and the attempted cession of Pu'uloa was their latest gambit, and nothing came of it. But here and now they have given us a wooden horse in which our enemies lay in wait.¹¹

Nāwahī's use of the Trojan horse image implies that Hawai'i was under siege not just by runaway business interests, but by a different model of being. The enemy Greeks hiding within the horse were damaging epistemologies and beliefs about commodifying and trading land. Kānaka Maoli in the late nineteenth century had a strong appreciation for Western cultural forms, and some of their governmental structures bore similarities to models introduced from the West. Yet Hawaiians of the time were also careful to ensure that the structures they employed continued to allow them to imagine a *Hawaiian* kingdom continuing into the future.

In a subsequent legislative session that same year, Nāwahī followed up his earlier refusal by emphasizing the important relationship between the kingdom's embattled present and sovereign past, one that predated European American-introduced understandings of state sovereignty and nationhood:

ke 'ōlelo nei au he ku'ikahi kā'ili aupuni a kā'ili pono lāhui kēia e ho'onele 'ia ai ka noho alii i i kona mana kumu mai ka pō mai.¹²

I say to you that this is a nation-snatching treaty, one that will steal from us our national rights and leave our throne bereft of its foundational mana, granted to it from the depths of Pō, the darkness.

Pō is the fecund and primordial darkness from which Hawaiians trace the world's descent. While American Protestant missionaries and their descendants hammered home the metaphorical connection be-

tween darkness and ignorance, evil, and sin, many Kānaka Maoli considered (and still consider) darkness to be generative, nurturing, and creative. In this way, Nāwahī's reference to Pō as the *mana kumu*, foundational mana (the power that exists in all things), is a reminder that the future flows from this darkness of the past. Legitimacy stems from the kumu (source) of Hawaiian sovereignty, and exceeds Western understandings of nation-state sovereignty. Descent from Pō is the reason for the independent kingdom's mana; that independence was to be protected to ensure the people's continuance. If futurities are created by assembling styles, practices, and logics for thinking about the future, Nāwahī was engaging a logic of Hawaiian futurity by evoking Pō.¹³ Refusal was the practice that gave content to that futurity.

The treaty passed, but the vocal resistance of people like Nāwahī and George Pilipō kept Pu'uloa off the negotiating table. After the initial seven-year term of reciprocity expired and the treaty became renewable on a year-to-year basis, the United States explicitly presented the exclusive use of Pu'uloa as a criterion for renewal. On July 6, 1887, a cabal of White militia and businessmen compelled King Kalākaua to sign a new constitution that severely limited the powers of his office and disenfranchised much of the Kānaka and all of the Asian electorate, the majority of whom supported the *mō'i* (monarch). Unsurprisingly, five months later, on December 9, even though he had strongly fought the cession of Pu'uloa, Kalākaua signed the treaty renewal, with an amendment giving the United States exclusive use of Pu'uloa.

In 1893, Queen Lili'uokalani, who had ascended the throne after her brother Kalākaua's death, was illegally overthrown by a European American-backed cabal. At this time, Nāwahī helped found the Hui Aloha 'Āina, a group that worked to restore the queen to the throne and oppose

annexation, and ran the newspaper *Ke Aloha Aina* with his wife Emma. A year after the overthrow, Nāwahī gave his most celebrated speech, a stunning call for refusal. Seven thousand people gathered at the Palace Square, and when Nāwahī appeared before them to great acclaim, he cried out:

Oiai hoi, no kakou ka Hale (Aupuni) e like me ka na Kamehameha i kukulu ai; aka, i ka la 17 o Januari, 1893, ua kipaku ia ae kakou e ka poe i aea hele mai, a komo iloko o ko kakou hale; a ke olelo mai nei ia kakou e komo aku a e noho iloko o ka hale kaulei a lakou i manao ai e kukulu iho a onou aku ia kakou a pau e komo aku. O ka'u hoi e olelo aku nei ia oukou, e o'u hoa makaainana, *mai noho kakou a ae iki*. [emphasis added]¹⁴

This house of government belongs to us, just as the Kamehamehas intended; yet on the 17th of January, 1893, we were kicked out by wandering trespassers who entered our house, and they are telling us to go and live in the lei stand that they thought to build and shove us into. But what I have to say to you, my beloved people, we dare not assent in the slightest!

Nāwahī called for the audience to know their past and refuse to participate in the present the foreigners were trying to thrust upon them. “*Mai noho kākou a ‘ae iki*” was not a foreclosure of action, but a call to live the alternative, to continue bringing a future rooted in Pō into being. The future of the Hawaiian people should not be a lei stand, a “safety zone,” but rather the house that the Kamehameha chiefly lineage built.

I am here to testify and affirm that the Hawaiian Kingdom continues to exist. We are Hawaiian subjects, as our kūpuna before us, who signed the Kū‘ē Petitions of 1897. They laid a firm foundation for us. And all we have to do is remember and stand together with courage and let the United States, the State of Hawai‘i, and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs know that we know who we are.

–Leilani Lindsey Ka‘apuni, *Keaukaha, Hawai‘i*, 2014

The Kū‘ē petitions constituted one of the largest acts of refusal in modern Hawaiian history, one that inspired many of the Kanaka expressions of refusal in the 2014 DOI hearings. After the 1893 overthrow, the *haole*-led provisional government (which later declared itself the Republic of Hawai‘i) pushed hard for Hawai‘i to be annexed to the United States. But two Hawaiian political organizations assured that no treaty of annexation was ever passed. Kuaihelani Campbell, who served as president of the women’s branch of the Hui Aloha ‘Āina, was a contemporary of Joseph Nāwahī. She was of a chiefly lineage from the island of Maui, a fiercely intelligent and financially astute woman who helped James Campbell build up his estate after their marriage, while maintaining her own large estate separate from the Campbell lands.¹⁵ She supported many elderly Hawaiian pensioners through her estate, in addition to paying the medical bills of many others who did not receive a pension from her directly.¹⁶ She was mother to Abigail (who became Princess Kawānanakoa) and Alice Kamokilaikawai, both of whom were leaders in their own right and played active roles in fighting for Hawaiians. She even insisted on a prenuptial agreement before she would allow her daughter, Abigail, to marry Prince David Kawānanakoa.¹⁷

As a young woman, Kuaihelani traveled to London and the United States, writing about her journey in the Hawaiian-language newspaper *Ka Nupepa Kuokoa*. She referred to herself as the “Eueu o Lahaina,” a title that evokes a provocateur of sorts: someone who stirs people to action or who is lively and excited.¹⁸ Kuaihelani Campbell indeed embodied all of these qualities, and she made good use of them as she grew older, particularly when she became the president of the Hui Aloha ‘Āina o nā Wāhine after 1893. Many different women’s *hui* (political groups) sprung up around Hawai‘i, all under the leadership of Kuaihelani and

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Emma Nāwahī, wife of Joseph Nāwahī and leader in her own right. They were a formidable pair, and Lili'uokalani called the Hui Aloha 'Āina o nā Wāhine one of the "societies much dreaded by the oligarchy now ruling Hawai'i."¹⁹

Representatives of the haole-led illegitimate government pushed hard for Hawai'i to be annexed to the United States. In 1897, Emma Nāwahī suggested to Kuaihelani that both the women's and the men's groups draft a petition refusing annexation, to be sent to President William McKinley.²⁰ That kicked off an archipelago-wide effort to garner signatures from the Hawaiian people. It was a massive undertaking, involving Hui Aloha 'āina members traveling throughout the islands and organizing small- and large-scale community meetings.

One such meeting took place at the Salvation Army Hall in Hilo and was attended by the American journalist Miriam Michelson, who was writing for the *San Francisco Call*. According to Michelson's account, the hall itself held three hundred people, but there was an even larger crowd gathered outside. Both Emma Nāwahī and Kuaihelani Campbell got up to address the crowd. Nāwahī asked of the crowd: "This land is ours – our Hawai'i. Say, shall we lose our nationality? Shall we be annexed to the United States?" This was not their imagined future, and the crowd shouted out their refusal: "'A'ole loa! 'A'ole loa!" *Never! Never!* Then Kuaihelani Campbell spoke:

Stand firm, my friends. Love of country means more to you and to me than anything else. Be brave; be strong. Have courage and patience. Our time will come. Sign this petition – those of you who love Hawai'i. How many – how many will sign?

As she spoke, she raised a gloved hand asserting she would refuse the United States through her signature, and when she asked how many would join her, "in a moment the palms of hundreds of hands were turned to-

ward her." The people of Hilo spoke with their words as well as their upraised hands, one man crying out from the back: "I speak for those behind me. They cannot come in – they cannot speak. They tell me to say, 'No annexation. Never.'"²¹

Though it was perhaps true that some of those gathered in Hilo were unable to speak at the meeting, they along with the vast majority of the Hawaiian population made their voices heard when the petitions were forwarded to the U.S. Congress. Michelson observed: "There are 100,000 people on the islands. Of these not 3 per cent have declared for annexation. To the natives the loss of nationality is hateful, abhorrent." The petition made this abhorrence clear, as twenty-one thousand men and women out of a population of forty thousand had signaled their refusal on the Hui Aloha 'Āina petitions.²²

Kuaihelani Campbell remained in Hawai'i, but representatives of the Hui Aloha 'Āina traveled to Washington, D.C., to present the petitions and succeeded in defeating the treaty. In its report, the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations echoed Michelson's earlier observation, pointing out that "if a requirement should be made by the United States of a plebiscite to determine the question of annexation, it would work a revolution in Hawai'i which would abolish its constitution."²³ The very next year, supposedly out of wartime necessity, Congress took this advice to heart and "annexed" Hawai'i through the Newlands Resolution, a joint resolution of Congress that skipped the plebiscite and required only a simple majority vote to pass.

Kuaihelani Campbell and the other presidents of the Hui Aloha 'Āina and the Hui Kālai'āina protested the Newlands Resolution in a lengthy declaration, part of which reads:

Ma ke ano hoi he poe elele no kekahi mahele nui a ikaika o na kanaka Hawai'i oiwi maoli

ke kua aku nei makou ma ka manao kulipolipo kukonukonu loa i ka hoohuina mai ma ke ano i manaolia a me ka ui ole ia mai hoi a loa aku paha hoi ka ae ana o ka lahuikana-ka o ko Hawai'i Paeaina nei.

Whereas we are representatives of a large and powerful segment of the native Hawaiian population, we hereby refuse with the deepest and most profound sentiment this annexation as it stands, having been done without the input or consent of the people of these Hawaiian Islands.

The U.S. Congress's final move of simulating annexation through the Newlands Resolution is widely held to have been illegal. The refusal outlined in this joint declaration undergirds the continuing protest against any connection forced upon the Hawaiian people by the U.S. government.

The English translation sounds like a much more straightforward refusal, but in a manner similar to the earlier speeches by Joseph Nāwahī, the Hawaiian text serves as more of an exhortation for the listener to remember the source of Hawaiian sovereignty rooted deep in Pō. The word *kūlipolipo*, which we translate here somewhat narrowly as "deepest sentiment," in actuality means something more like "standing in or upon the deepest darkness." It means that Hawaiians feel with the most certainty and conviction when they can rely on this connection to the darkness of Pō. Until her death in 1908, Kuaihelani Campbell held onto her mana'o kūlipolipo and continued to fight for her people, refusing to forget our deep connections to Pō and refusing to give up on a vision of a sovereign Hawai'i in control of its own destiny.

It is wonderful to know that one day when I put my kino in the ground, that I know that in the future, the faces of our young people that's here tonight, I can rest in peace, that you've come tonight to bring your voices, that you will stand for the journey that our people have set for you. Your

life is in – and the life of our people and our nation is in your hands. We trust you, we beg you to rise to the moment now and forever.

– Dawn Wasson, *He 'eia, O 'ahu*, 2014

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Kuwada

In this essay, we have collected facts of history, voices of past and present Kāna-ka Maoli, to make rope connecting past and present narratives of Hawaiian sovereignty. In our language, the general term for history and story is the same: *mo'olelo*. *Mo'olelo* weave past into present to help us envision futures that, to some, may seem unrealistic or unthinkable – these are practices of Hawaiian futurity.

Seneca scholar Mishuana Goeman writes, "The stories that connect Native people to the land and form their relationships to the land and one another are much older than colonial governments. . . . Stories create the relationships that have made communities strong even through numerous atrocities and injustices."²⁴ Such stories, as Indigenous futurities, are practices of liberation.

one by one
strand by strand
we become the memory of our people
and we still growing.
We cultivate
strength under duress
inner bark of unbreakable fibers
dried and bleached in mountain sun
impervious to the salt of sea
does not kink or stretch
will not break when tested
when put under load
when encircling water
when fine mesh grasps feathers
or long line grasps warrior fish
this 'aha is strength
the question is not whether
to break or to hold,
but what to carry
'aha

the thread running through ancestral ways of life
cord to sew together cracks running up wooden bowls
netting to equalize the weight of two full containers of water
lashing for our houses, our canoes, our drums
'aha,
cord, turned hand over hand, deft fingers
extending mana
'aha,
ceremony, completed to perfection
ritual binding us to this land.²⁵

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

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Hear Our Languages, Hear Our Voices: Storywork as Theory and Praxis in Indigenous-Language Reclamation

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Abstract: Storywork provides an epistemic, pedagogical, and methodological lens through which to examine Indigenous language reclamation in practice. We theorize the meaning of language reclamation in diverse Indigenous communities based on firsthand narratives of Chickasaw, Mojave, Miami, Hopi, Mohawk, Navajo, and Native Hawaiian language reclamation. Language reclamation is not about preserving the abstract entity “language,” but is rather about voice, which encapsulates personal and communal agency and the expression of Indigenous identities, belonging, and responsibility to self and community. Storywork – firsthand narratives through which language reclamation is simultaneously described and practiced – shows that language reclamation simultaneously refuses the dispossession of Indigenous ways of knowing and re-fuses past, present, and future generations in projects of cultural continuance. Centering Indigenous experiences sheds light on Indigenous community concerns and offers larger lessons on the role of language in well-being, sustainable diversity, and social justice.

In 2007, following twenty-two years of Indigenous activism, the United Nations General Assembly approved the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Among its provisions is the right of Indigenous peoples “to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures.”¹ This right goes unchallenged for speakers of dominant languages, but is systematically violated for speakers of Indigenous languages throughout the world. Of approximately seven thousand known spoken languages, 50 to 90 percent are predicted to fall silent by century’s end. Two-thirds of those would be Indigenous languages.² In these contexts, languages are not replaced but rather *dis-*

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placed through policies designed to eradicate linguistically encoded knowledges and cultural identifications with those associated with dominant-class ideologies. The result of state-sponsored linguisticide – which novelist and postcolonial theorist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o has called “the linguistic equivalent of genocide”³ – is worldwide Indigenous-language endangerment.

We take as foundational premises the inherent human right to learn, use, and transmit a language of heritage and birth and the fact that linguistic diversity is an enabling resource for individuals and society. However, more than universalist notions of linguistic rights and the quantification of Indigenous-language endangerment, we valorize an enduring tradition of Indigenous persistence in which linguistic diversity is the most reliable guide toward the future for Indigenous peoples. As Mary Hermes and Keiki Kawai’ae’a write, diverse Indigenous languages have persisted over many centuries, sometimes going “underground” during the most oppressive times; thus, it is ahistorical to speak of reclamation as “new.”⁴ We foreground the possibilities inherent in a vital Indigenous-language reclamation movement, which represents the forward-looking legacy of the survivors of assimilation programs. Centering Indigenous experiences sheds light on Indigenous community concerns and offers broader lessons on the role of language in individual and communal well-being, sustainable diversity, and social justice for all oppressed peoples.

We develop three themes in this essay. First, we privilege what Stó:lō scholar Jo-ann Archibald calls storywork: experiential narratives that constitute epistemic, theoretical, pedagogical, and methodological lenses through which we can both study and practice language reclamation.⁵ As method, storywork provides data in the form of firsthand accounts⁶ through which to gain insight into the *meaning* of language reclamation in diverse Indigenous communities.

Lumbee scholar Bryan Brayboy asserts the role of storytelling in theory building: “Locating theory as something absent from stories is problematic. . . . Stories serve as the basis for how our communities work.”⁷ And Paul Kroskrity notes, Native storytelling contains “an action-oriented emphasis on using . . . narratives for moral instruction, healing, and developing culturally relevant tribal and social identities.”⁸

Second, we distinguish between language and voice. Language, bilingual education scholar Richard Ruiz writes, “is general, abstract, and exists even when it is suppressed”; in contrast, “when voice is suppressed, it is not heard – it does not exist.”⁹ Like Ruiz, we equate voice with agency; as the storywork that follows illuminates, this is not simply an intellectualized experience of identity (it is not about language in a general or abstract sense), but an embodied experience of personal belonging and responsibility. From this perspective we explore the ways in which language reclamation is part of larger Indigenous projects of resilience, rediscovery, sovereignty, and justice.

Third, we argue that language reclamation is not about returning to an imagined “pure” form of an ancestral language. Instead we highlight the dynamic, multisited, heteroglossic, and multivocal character of Indigenous-language reclamation,¹⁰ underscoring that the “success” of these efforts must be locally defined but also externally shared – a movement toward mobilizing strategic new global alliances and protocols of collaboration.¹¹

We first present five narrative accounts of language renewal: Chickasaw, Mojave, Miami, Hopi, and Mohawk. The narratives represent “storywork in action”;¹² in telling individual and communal journeys, each author demonstrates the significance of stories as empirically grounded cultural resources for recovering and sustaining Indigenous knowledges and identities.¹³ We conclude with a final narrative that speaks to our

anchoring themes and the meaning of storywork for Indigenous language reclamation.

Chikashshanompa' is a Muskogean language spoken by less than fifty people, most of whom reside within the Chickasaw Nation in south-central Oklahoma. As Kari Chew relates, Chickasaw people consider Chikashshanompa' a gift "with which to speak to each other, the land, the plants, the animals, and the Creator."¹⁴ Though centuries of colonization have disrupted the continuity of intergenerational language transmission, the Chickasaw Nation is actively undertaking a multipronged language reclamation effort.

The story of language loss and reclamation in my family begins in 1837, when the U.S. government forced my great-great-grandparents from their Southeastern homelands to present-day Oklahoma. Their children, who attended English-language boarding schools, were the last generation in my family to learn Chikashshanompa' as a first language. I was raised in Los Angeles, where my grandparents relocated after leaving the Chickasaw Nation. Though it was important to my family to visit and maintain a connection "back home," the language was not spoken or talked about among my relatives.

I did not know my language as a child, but I believe it has always been within me – a gift from my ancestors and Creator – waiting to be resurfaced. In my young adulthood, during a college internship with my tribe, I had my first opportunity to take a Chikashshanompa' class. It did not take long for the language – my language – to captivate my soul. One phrase I learned was, "*Chikashsha saya*," "I am Chickasaw." Though I had said these words many times in English, they never fully conveyed my sense of who I was: saying them in Chikashshanompa', I had finally found my voice. The experience inspired me to continue learning the language and to use my education to support other Chickasaw people in their pursuit of language reclamation.

Throughout my work, I have built relationships with Chickasaw people deeply committed to learning and teaching Chikashshanompa'. One was Elder fluent speaker Jerry. While I knew Jerry as a patient and dedicated language teacher, he had not always been that way. For many years, Jerry was skeptical of younger generations' interest in Chikashshanompa' because he believed that the language was destined to perish with his generation. He asked those who approached him wanting to learn, "If I teach you, who are you going to speak to? There's nobody else that speaks it and I'm not going to live forever."

In time, persistent language learners convinced Jerry to teach them. Despite his initial reluctance, Jerry came to embrace language work as his life's calling. The younger people he taught were eager to learn and began to speak the language well. Seeing their dedication and progress made Jerry reconsider his perception of Chikashshanompa' as a "dying" language. He posed his question again: "If I weren't here anymore, who's going to carry [Chikashshanompa'] on?" But this time he had an answer: the younger generations of committed language learners "would carry it on."

Coming from a family that did not "carry" the language, I was thankful that Jerry wanted to give Chikashshanompa' to learners of my generation. Not only did Jerry teach me Chikashshanompa', he taught me about what language reclamation means: speaking the language proudly, and, most important, sharing it with others.

One of the ways Jerry envisioned sharing the language with future generations was through children's books. Inspired by Jerry, a small group of language learners and I created stories in Chikashshanompa' with beginning and youth language learners in mind. I couldn't wait to show Jerry our work. About two weeks before I planned to see him, however, I received news that Jerry had passed.

As I mourned the loss of a dear teacher, I thought also of the hope that Jerry held for the language. When I asked Jerry about what he thought would happen to the language during my lifetime, he said he foresaw a new generation of speakers. “Right now is just the beginning [of our language reclamation story],” he reminded me. “There’s a lot more.” While I never had the chance to share our stories with Jerry, I know he would be proud to see language learners sharing in his vision to give the language to emerging generations of Chikashshanompa’ speakers.

Pipa Aha Macav, The People With the River Running Through Their Body and the Land (the Mojave), trace their origins to Spirit Mountain near present-day Needles, California. Mojave is a Yuman language spoken by peoples indigenous to the southern California, Nevada, and Arizona desert. At Fort Mojave, there are approximately twenty tribal elders who learned Mojave as a first language. Natalie Diaz is one of a small group of young adults, parents, and youth who embarked on a journey to learn the Mojave language from the elders and to create a repository of language resources for future generations.

In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o writes, “the most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized. . . . To control a people’s culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others.”¹⁵

Language negotiates the way I know myself – what I believe I am capable of, how I know myself in relationship to others, what I can offer others, what I deserve from others in return. Language is where I am constructed as either possible or impossible.

To lose a language is to lose many things other than vocabulary. To lose a language is also to lose the body, the bodies of our ancestors and of our futures. What I mean is: Language is more than an extension of the body; it is the body, made of the body’s

energy and electricity, developed to carry the body’s memories, desires, needs, and imagination.

When a word is silenced, what happens to the bodies who spoke it? What happens to the bodies once carried in those erased words?

When a verbal expression of love is crushed quiet, how long can the physical gesture of love continue in such oppressive silence? How can the gesture answer if nobody calls out for it verbally?

In Mojave, the word *kavanaam*, which carries within it a very physical and caring gesture, was lost. We didn’t know it was lost, since we’d never felt it, never had it offered to us or acted out upon us. This is a small story of how we returned to *kavanaam* – first the word, and eventually the gesture.

In a language class, an adult learner told our Elder teacher, who was her aunt, “I want to tell my son ‘I love you.’” Many of us had already heard the teacher’s reply: “Mojaves don’t have a phrase for ‘I love you.’” We were given this data by White linguists who had studied our language, and found it scribbled in their numerous notes. Studying a language differs greatly and dangerously from feeling a language. Luckily, the learner did not accept a White linguist’s detached “knowing” of a language built in a Mojave body and meant to be delivered onto another Mojave body. The learner further shared that she’d never heard her father or mother say they loved her. She didn’t want her experience to be her son’s inheritance. She needed to tell him she loved him, in his Mojave language.

“What do you really want to say?” the teacher asked.

Emotional beyond words, the learner answered in gesture, reaching her hands out as if her son were in front of her, then returning her hands back to her own body, pressing them to her chest.

“Okay,” the Elder teacher said, “We have many ways to say this.”

And we learned those ways, none of which translated to “I love you.” Our ways were too urgent to fit within three small English words.

This is how we found kavanaam. Later that evening, the learner stopped by my mother’s house, still wanting to process the emotional moment from class. She shared another story about the last time she and her sister saw her father; he was being wheeled into the emergency room. Her sister said again and again, “I love you, Dad.”

He didn’t reply. He didn’t say, “I love you too.” Instead he reached out and pressed her arm repeatedly, squeezing his large hand around her forearm, wrist, and palm.

After a moment, my mother responded, “He told your sister he loved her, just not with words.”

My mother recounted how her mother, grandmother, and aunts pressed her and her siblings’ legs, shoulders, and arms, as babies in cradleboards and into their teens. My aunt pressed my great-grandmother’s body well past her hundredth birthday. This pressing was a gesture of care, of tenderness, a conversation between two Mojave bodies, a way of saying that was more powerful than words.

The next morning, when I visited my Elder teachers and told them this story, they remembered: kavanaam, to press the body. “I haven’t heard it in a long time,” my teacher said.

Mojaves didn’t say the English phrase “I love you,” but not because we did not feel tenderness. “I love you” meant little to us – how could we have trusted the English-language expression of *love* when its speakers had been so unloving to us, our human bodies, and the bodies of our earth and water?

When we lost our languages, we lost many ways of expression. We did not speak the word kavanaam and shortly thereafter we ceased to gesture or enact it. We were altered – our bodies were changed because the

ways we knew to care for one another’s bodies were changed. We couldn’t say the tenderness, and soon we began to believe our bodies did not deserve such tendernesses.

American violence inflicted on Indigenous bodies, throughout history and today, doesn’t define our capacity for tenderness. We found kavanaam where it had been waiting, in our bodies. We took back a part of our culture that held the Mojave way of perceiving ourselves and our relationship to the world. Yes, America has given us violence, and still we deserve tenderness – moreover, we are as capable of delivering it to one another as we are of receiving it from one another.

To reclaim a language is many things, one of which is to regain the verbal and gestured language of tenderness and the autonomy to love ourselves.

Myaamia – Miami – is a major dialect of Miami-Illinois, an Algonquian language spoken by peoples indigenous to the Great Lakes region. Multiple forced relocations, first into what is now Kansas and later into Oklahoma (then called “Indian Territory”), left in their wake diaspora, language loss, and massive population decline. Miami people today reside in forty-seven U.S. states, with approximately five thousand citizens enrolled in the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma and an estimated ten thousand more who may claim Miami or Illinois as a heritage language. This is the context for myaamiaki eemawiciki (Miami Awakening), a personal and community-based language and cultural reclamation process, described below by Wesley Leonard.

In his final State of the Nation address to the citizens of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma in 2007, my grandfather, akima waapimaankwa (Chief Floyd E. Leonard, 1925 – 2008), called for tribal elders “to teach those who are rising up to become the elders of tomorrow” and recognized the “many middle-age and young people who are working hard to gain knowledge of [Miami] culture, language and traditions.”

He acknowledged how a series of historical ruptures created a situation in which contemporary Miamis often must actively seek tribal cultural knowledge and learn our language, *myaamia*, as a second language. These ruptures include the forced removal of part of the Miami community from tribal homelands in Indiana, U.S.-run boarding schools in which Native American children were not allowed to speak their tribal languages, and the nearly complete silence of *myaamia* to the point where linguistic science erroneously labeled it “extinct.”¹⁶ In fact, we have been successful in bringing our language back into the community – a process that ironically began by applying tools of linguistic science to analyze archival documentation of *myaamia*.

By acknowledging both this history and the contemporary response, my grandfather referenced a core idea of my tribe and of other Native American groups, which is that the past informs the present and the present looks to the future (that is, today’s tribal youth will become elders). Appropriately, within the archival documentation of *myaamia* was our language’s grammatical particle *kati*, which marks that something will occur. This gives us the grammar to talk about the future, including learning, speaking, transmitting, and expanding *myaamia* in a way that aligns with changing Miami community needs and values.

My experience with wider society’s view of Native Americans and our many languages is that while nobody forgets the existence of the past (however inaccurate their accounts of it may be), the present and future are comparatively overlooked. While complex forces underlie this phenomenon, many of them can be captured by one word: colonization. By extension, our response must be *decolonization*. Today’s Miami people are engaged in decolonization as we reclaim our language, not only by learning and speaking it, but also by identifying beliefs and practices that

perpetuate colonial values and voicing alternatives to them, which I will now do.

Much of my work focuses on educating about how colonialism relegates Native American languages and peoples to the past and thus doubly silences Native languages, first through policies that coerce communities to replace their languages, and then through relegating those languages to “disappearing” or “extinct” status even when they are still spoken. (The latter sometimes still occurs with *myaamia*, even though *myaamiaataawiaanki noonki kaahkiihkwe* – “we speak Miami today” – and *myaamiaataawiaanki kati*.) Sadly, such erasure is frequently reinforced in academia despite its contemporary calls for inclusion, diversity, responsibility to communities, and broad inquiries into the arts and sciences.

In linguistics, my field of training, erasure can occur when linguists fervently document “the last speakers” of Indigenous languages and frame this work around preservation of the past rather than reclamation, which looks to the future. Though many linguists put significant effort into facilitating community language goals, this work tends to be marginalized within academia as superfluous or unnecessary in comparison with “pure” scientific work. Still worse is when community goals get removed from the discipline’s focus under the claim that “linguistics is the scientific study of language,” a phrase that demonstrates a failure to recognize that Indigenous peoples’ engagement with science may offer epistemologies that can expand the scope of scientific inquiry. For example, one *myaamia* language teacher defines language as “how a community connects to each other and how they express . . . themselves and their culture to each other.” By this definition, “community” becomes a vital part of language, and, following my grandfather’s call, helping today’s young people become the elders of tomorrow becomes a central part of linguistic inquiry.

McCarty,
Nicholas,
Chew, Diaz,
Leonard &
White

Hopiit, the Hopi people, a kin-based matrilineal society, are the westernmost Puebloans, residing in their aboriginal lands in what is now northeast Arizona. Contemporary Hopi village life continues to revolve around a rich secular and ceremonial calendar, which is the mainstay of this cultural community. Nevertheless, the Hopi language is rapidly losing ground to English. Here Sheilah Nicholas relates her personal journey to recover Hopi, her language of birth.

“Um tsayniiqe paas Hopiningwu.” (“When you were a child, you were fully Hopi.”) My mother directed these words to me as she observed me struggle to carry on a Hopi conversation as an adult. I recall turning to English and defensively yet feebly responding, “I’m still Hopi.” My mother’s words struck deeply and produced an acute linguistic insecurity. This brief linguistic exchange opened the floodgate to a critical consciousness about the intimate bond between language, culture, and identity and the profoundly affective nature of language.

When my mother reiterated a similar comment on another occasion, I countered with my memory that it was she who advised me to “put away” my Hopi so I could do well in school; yet she was now subjecting me to comments I interpreted as questioning my Hopi identity. My defensive retort was disrespectful, but she acknowledged that she should have advised, *“Pay um uuHopilavayiy enangni”* (“Along with [learning to use English], continue with your Hopi language”).

It would be many years before I would understand that I had misinterpreted her critical comments, which I perceived at the time as an assault on my cultural identity – how could a mother do this? Today, I acknowledge she was rightfully perplexed about my struggle to speak Hopi; it was my first language and I spoke it with ease as a child. My reinterpretation of her statement – “When you were a child, you were a *fluent speaker* of Hopi” – expressed her astonishment at my loss of fluency. Although initially pain-

ful, my mother’s words became the catalyst for my personal language reclamation journey – to assert that I have remained Hopi and to reclaim the ability to “describe the Hopi world, not only the physical in the sense of touch, sight, and hearing, but also mentally, intellectually, because the words conjure up . . . images that are not necessarily borne out by reality.”¹⁷ These images allow us to visualize and conceptualize the ontological perspectives of the Hopi world held by our ancestors transported through time and language.

My journey was inspired by two questions: What happened to my Hopi? Could I claim a Hopi identity if I could no longer speak or think in Hopi? Mentors at the American Indian Language Development Institute propelled me forward in my journey of language reclamation. Akira Yamamoto, in response to my first question, imparted hope, explaining that Hopi acquired in childhood still resided in the deep recesses of my mind and body; I only needed to “pull it up and out.” Emory Sekaquaptewa, also my clan uncle, provided the vehicle for my reculturalization: literacy instruction. While this journey has been an immense undertaking, the outcomes include reclamation of cultural identity and belonging, return and reconnection, responsibility and reciprocity, self-empowerment and self-determination, persistence – the right to remain Hopi – and agency and voice. For the most part, this was a solitary journey to rectify my “responsibility” to my children by ensuring that a strong cultural and linguistic foundation is there for them when they are ready to seek it out. This responsibility extends to the grandchildren I hope to have. A useful analogy for this pursuit is the emergency instructions on a passenger aircraft – you need to place the oxygen mask on yourself before assisting others. I cannot hope to foster Hopi reculturalization in my children and grandchildren if I have not taken the first steps myself.

This journey brings a profound understanding of the Hopi expression “*Hakso'onqa nimangwu*” (“One always returns home”), referring to the journey to elderhood and onward toward spiritual eternity. Many individuals in my parents’ and grandparents’ generation who guided me to this milestone have passed on; now it is my generation to which the younger generations will look for guidance. My journey led me back home to undertake the responsibilities of *Hopilavaynaa'aya* (attending to the Hopi language), and now of becoming family matriarch. I do not view these processes as separate. Both my ongoing work with community language practitioners and preparation for assuming the role of matriarch led me to reestablish connections in our Hopi world and refurbish my mother’s house in our maternal village, thus preparing a cultural place for our family to return to when they begin their journey homeward. In the Hopi perspective, this trajectory of reclamation is embedded in the Hopi word *itumalmakiwa*, “my lifework.”

Kanien'ke:ha – Mohawk, a Dutch barbarization of an Algonquian term – is a Northern Iroquoian language spoken by peoples indigenous to what is now upstate New York, southern Quebec, and eastern Ontario. As Louellyn White relates, the Indigenous self-referential term is Kanien'keha:ka, People of the Place of the Flint. The Akwesasne Freedom School about which she writes grew out of activist efforts determined to prepare Kanien'keha:ka children in the ways of their culture. The school remains one of the leading Indigenous language immersion-revitalization programs today.

“You’re *Onkwehon:we*¹⁸ just like me!” said my three-year-old son to his daycare teacher. She’s a *Kanien'keha:ka* substitute teacher from the community of *Kahnawà:ke*. He continued to tell her about “bad pipelines” and how they were going to “poison the water and hurt all the *Onkwehon:we*.” I didn’t think he paid much attention to my

rants about the controversial oil pipeline under construction near the Standing Rock Sioux reservation¹⁹ until he made his own “black snake”²⁰ by taping together empty paper towel rolls to resemble the pipeline and loudly sang out in English and Lakota, “WATER IS LIFE . . . *MNI WICONI!*”

It was a proud moment knowing my son was connecting to our language, *Kanien'ke:ha*, and understanding our relationships and responsibilities to the natural world. I had been consciously trying to use our heritage language at home as much as I could, which was in part a push-back against the French he was learning at daycare (I had migrated back to the Northeast after many years away and landed in French-speaking Quebec). I figured if he was going to learn French, I had better teach him what I could of *Kanien'ke:ha* too. So at bedtime I tell him about Creation and the story of Skywoman. He’s trying to make sense of himself when he says things like: “I came from the Sky” and makes up songs about “*Onkwehon:we* dogs” or “*Onkwehon:we* trucks” and *Sonkwiatisu* (Creator). So, in this way, my own journey in language and identity reclamation is reflected through my son’s journey. Like most *Kanien'keha:ka*, I don’t know how to speak or understand much of our language, but I’m making a conscious effort to pass on what I can in hopes my son will grow up with a stronger sense of self and cultural identity as *Onkwehon:we* than I did. Our journey of language reclamation goes beyond the mechanisms of language as communication and honors the ways that language encapsulates culture and identity.

I grew up in the homeland of the *Kanien'keha:ka* in the Mohawk Valley of central New York. Born to a mother of European descent and a *Kanien'keha:ha* father with roots in the community of *Akwesasne*,²¹ my upbringing lacked a strong cultural and linguistic connection to my Indigenous heritage. My father wasn’t a flu-

*McCarty,
Nicholas,
Chew, Diaz,
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White*

ent speaker of our language but he always made sure I knew my family in Akwesasne and I try to do the same for my son. My parents split before I was born, so growing up as the only Native in a dirt-poor household full of non-Native half-siblings wasn't easy. The burdens of poverty, abuse, and dysfunction compounded those of being mixed and were often difficult to bear; there was never enough of this, always too much of that. Over the years those burdens were made lighter and my connection to my identity stronger due in part to the research I conducted with the Akwesasne Freedom School,²² a pre-K through ninth-grade school with a Mohawk-immersion curriculum, long before my son was born.

Accurate estimates of Kanien'ke:ha fluent speakers are hard to come by. Some claim that out of seven Kanien'keha:ka communities within the geopolitical borders of the United States and Canada, constituting a population of about twenty-five thousand, 10 percent are fluent speakers.²³ Even though the language is currently spoken by all generations in some communities, it remains vulnerable. Thus, I became an advocate for Indigenous language reclamation through my work, which also led me back home to my community and helped strengthen my family connections and sense of belonging.

During my research on the intersections of language and identity within the Akwesasne Freedom School community, I was on a parallel path of learning my heritage language and culture, building community, and developing a stronger sense of my own identity. As this process unfolded, I struggled with the existential questions of life's meaning. I attempted to shift my focus from my personal struggles with identity to one of a higher purpose of understanding from a Kanien'keha:ka perspective. I still struggle with the uneasy feelings that accompany the balancing act of growing up without a strong cultural founda-

tion, but through my ongoing work with language and cultural reclamation I have found my way home and feel closer to where I belong.

It's my responsibility as Onkwehon:we to pass on cultural values to my son so he grows up with a strong sense of who he is, where he comes from, and where he's going. I have the same difficulties as any parent, but I know he's embodying what it means to be Onkwehone:we when he asks for the story of Skywoman at bedtime and he's learning about his responsibility to care for the earth when he sings lullabies to the spiders he finds hiding in our house and talks about Standing Rock. After I told him that the pipeline might be rerouted away from Standing Rock, he said, "Yay, I get to drink more water! But, are they going to build it near the elephants, the bugs, and the animals? They need water too."

We come to our final question: How can storywork help build a theory of language reclamation in practice? Stories and storytelling are central to "explaining and theory-building," Ananda Marin and Megan Bang maintain.²⁴ Theories through stories "are roadmaps for our communities and reminders of our individual responsibilities to the survival of our communities," Bryan Brayboy emphasizes.²⁵ The stories shared here possess explanatory power; when we "hear our languages, hear our voices," we gain insight into what language reclamation means in diverse Indigenous communities and for individual community members. Storywork provides both a theory and a guide for praxis.

It is clear from this storywork that language reclamation is about much more than matters purely linguistic; as Wesley Leonard notes for myaamia, language reclamation is not about preserving the past, but rather using accumulated wisdom to inform present action and future planning. Language reclamation is soulful work; as

Kari Chew relates her initial encounters in a Chikashshanompa' language class, "It did not take long for the language – my language – to captivate my soul." Language reclamation is also embodied work, as reflected in Natalie Diaz's account of finding *kavanaam*, love, "where it had been waiting for us," in Mojave gestures of tenderness and care. On the surface level we "know" we are Chickasaw, Mojave, myaamia, Hopi, Kanien'keha:ka, but, as the stories show, feeling that identity is deeply experiential. This speaks to a common metaphor in language reclamation research and practice: "We *are* our language."²⁶

Language reclamation is both individual and communal – a personal yet community-oriented responsibility, Sheilah Nicholas relates. "I was on a parallel path of . . . building community and a stronger sense of my own identity," Louellyn White reflects. "Though I had said 'I am Chickasaw' many times in English," Chew stresses, saying those words in Chikashshanompa', "I felt I had finally found my voice." Language reclamation is thus a journey of belonging, of restoring hope for cultural continuance by connecting youth and parents with the knowledge and wisdom of elders. Finally, language reclamation is decolonizing; it both *refuses* the dispossession of Indigenous ways of knowing and being,²⁷ and *re-fuses* and reconnects, pointing "a way home."

We close with a story from Teresa McCarty, a non-Indigenous scholar-educator and "allied other"²⁸ in this work.

What I share here grows out of teachings learned in the context of collaborative work over many years with Indigenous educators, communities, and schools. One of those teachers was a Navajo Elder, Dorothy Secody, whom I met early in my work on a bilingual-bicultural curriculum development project at the Diné (Navajo) Rough Rock Demonstration School. "If a child

learns only English," Mrs. Secody said in Diné, "you have lost your child."

Those words have stayed with me over the years. Indigenous-language reclamation is multifaceted; there are many pathways, as we see in the stories shared here and in accounts of language reclamation throughout the world. At the heart of these efforts is an intense desire and commitment not to "lose" the next generation – or the next, or the next – and to strengthen intergenerational connections through the ancestral language.

More than thirty years after Mrs. Secody spoke those words, a colleague and I were visiting an Indigenous Hawaiian-language immersion school, one of many Hawaiian schools dedicated to Indigenous-language reclamation. On the day of our visit, a nine-month-old child had just been enrolled in the infant and toddler program. As the teacher cradled the sleeping child in her arms, she explained that the infant-toddler program prepares children for the Pūnana Leo or "language nest" preschool. Once children reach preschool, "it only takes a few months for them to become fluent" in Hawaiian, she said. The infant-toddler program is "like yeast," we were told, providing the initial leavening for this rapid language development.

And so, as we listened and were guided through the school, I couldn't help but think back to the words of Dorothy Secody those many years ago. I wondered, what language and education trajectory awaits this young child, just launched on her first day of school?

If she is like other students we met at this school, she will go on to complete her entire pre-K–12 education there. The students in her classes will be peers she has known since infancy. "They are like family," a teacher told us as she looked out on her ninth-grade class. In her pre-K–12 education, I imagine this child will come to appreciate, in a profound way, a lesson we

*McCarty,
Nicholas,
Chew, Diaz,
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heard repeatedly expressed by older students: “One of the most important things we value is our genealogy.”

As the young child helps tend the gardens that produce food for the school, she will learn not only ethnobotany and the scientific language for traditional plants, but reciprocity; responsibility; belongingness; a sense of place; and respect for the land, the people, and the language. Those lessons were brought home to us by a senior when we asked about her postgraduation plans. “I want to start a Hawaiian photography business,” she told us. What motivated that career choice, we asked? Without hesitation, she replied: “I’m just trying to give back to my community and revitalize our language.”

To rephrase Dorothy Secody’s point, with which I began: If a child learns her ancestral

language, you have strengthened the links to countless generations – those who have passed, those present, and those to come.

Nearly twenty years ago Sam No’eau Warner, a Hawaiian-language scholar, educator, and activist, reminded us that language issues are “always people issues . . . inextricably bound to the people from whom the language and culture evolved.” Language reclamation is not about saving a disembodied thing called language, he insisted. Rather, it is about voice, community building, wellness, equality, self-empowerment, and hope. We leave readers with this broader lesson of language reclamation – a lesson, Warner emphasized, that contains within it the seeds of transformation and “social justice for all.”²⁹

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