

Writing in the Path of Our Ancestors

Ke Ea Hawai'i Student Council

Kau'i McElroy

E iho ana o luna	<i>The high will be brought low</i>
E pii ana o lalo	<i>The low will be lifted up</i>
E hui ana na moku	<i>The islands will be united</i>
E ku ana ka paia	<i>The walls will stand upright</i>

Kapihe, 1814, at the birth of Kauikeaouli, Kamehameha III

It was a 6 a.m. wake-up call.

Nine students from nine Hawaiian schools prepared for sunrise protocol at Pōlolu Valley Lookout. 'Iwa birds greeted their voices, together chanting the sun above the clouds on the horizon. E Ala E. Then each student chanted alone, on behalf of a community, starting with Kumukahi and ending with Ni'ihau. As their voices layered in the morning light, it was undeniable there were signs that these students were on the right path that their kūpuna intended them to be on. The huluhia was in motion.

I was one of those nine students. At that moment I felt like the huluhia was happening, and I was one of those lucky nine to be a part of it. I had a good feeling about what we were about to embark on, but even more so today, I see the value of why we started Ke Ea Hawai'i.

Ke Ea Hawai'i has grown to become an interscholastic student council composed of one elected representative from each of fifteen Hawaiian-focused charter schools across three islands: Hawai'i, O'ahu, and Kaua'i. This middle and high school council strives to be unlike an American student body government, which often replicates inequality, with a President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary who plan social activities that boost school spirit. In Ke Ea, every school representative has an equal role. The council focuses on collective liberation through health, language, education, land, economic, and governmental initiatives.

Its mission is to give a voice to the unheard generation. It allows the youth who everyone talks about to sit at the table when we discuss Hawai'i's future, instead of having others decide for us, without us.

When we started Ke Ea Hawai‘i in 2013, I was a junior at Samuel Mānaiakalani Kamakau Public Charter School. It was time to think about which college I would apply for and what career I wanted after high school. I had just gotten my first job working at a movie theater the previous year. It was exciting to taste what “adulthood” was like, but that work was not aligning with my foundation of ‘ike Hawai‘i.

Ke Ea Hawai‘i is what brought me back to my piko when I needed to regroup myself and align with my kūpuna. At times, I would second guess myself and ask if I was holding too much on my plate with all the kuleana I had. But somehow I knew that it would be worth it in the end. I knew creating and nurturing Ke Ea was bigger than I could understand at that time.

Creating this council has opened the door and shown many Hawai‘i leaders that young minds have valuable perspectives to offer. We have planned more than ten youth-led conferences and represented Hawai‘i on the world stage at various times. Perhaps our largest contribution is still in its infancy.

The Hawaiian Kingdom Weekly and *Ke Aupuni Hawai‘i* are student news shows in English and ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i that synthesize and serialize important events each week. The project evolved out of our council’s desire to hui ana nā moku, to unify our peers and communities, toward common goals through social media.

We felt that Facebook was underutilized as a place for consistent, reliable news. Social media posts are not fact-checked or archived the way newspapers once were. Meanwhile, we witnessed Hawai‘i newspapers, radio, and television networks conglomerate under massive corporations run by stockholders. This is the opposite of the Hawaiian nūpepa era, when competition for power over mass media used to rival competition for public office. Newspaper scholar Dr. Rubellite Kawena Johnson captured this idea in the epigraph to one of her anthologies when she quoted former US President Thomas Jefferson, who said “were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.”

Our demand for sovereign government in Hawai‘i must coincide with a demand for mass media control. We do not expect *The Hawaiian Kingdom Weekly* and *Ke Aupuni Hawai‘i* to compete with Nexstar or Black Press. We foresee social media technology opening space for a healthy number of small-market news programs in Hawai‘i similar to what we saw in the 1800s. Many weekly shows have indeed emerged in 2020 thanks to social media technology, including Nā‘au News Now’s *The Darkside of Hawaiian Politics*, Kanaeokana’s *Lei Ānuenuē*, and OHA’s *Ola Ka Hāloa*. Our niche is youth and education.

The Hawaiian Kingdom Weekly and *Ke Aupuni Hawai‘i* are produced by a team of ten students: news anchors, reporters, videographers, scriptwriters, and a social media team connecting viewers on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. Our intent is to provide our lāhui with updates on what is happening around the world from a Hawaiian kingdom perspective. So far, we’ve produced twenty-five episodes, one per week every week since January 2020.

Shows like these are crucial for our lāhui, considering the imbalance of information in the mass media and dominant society. Shows we produce ourselves help correct this imbalance, so we can decide what we should know, and can talk about issues the media corporations are not addressing. Social media has been an excellent platform for stories that news corporations do not cover. There is universal access to consume but also to produce news with the click of a “post” button.

Just as our kūpuna were excited about nūpepa, it is once again an exciting time for Hawai‘i, as so many people can share news that travels instantly across the pae ‘āina. No matter if it’s good news, bad news, riddles, or funny stories, it belongs to us.

Being an alumna of a school whose namesake played a vital role in nūpepa for our lāhui, my appreciation continues to grow for what our kūpuna accomplished through newspapers. After reading S. M. Kamakau’s stories from multiple angles, it is clear he was writing not just for the people of his time, but to preserve the past and the present for the future, so we have a solid source of information from someone’s own eyes. Who are the modern-day historians who will document the stories in our time for posterity?

I think what we are creating is a part of the huluhia because we are making technology work for us, so future generations will have regular, consistent, reliable sources of news to look back on. Consider Mauna Kea. Despite the network news stations continuing to frame kia‘i as “protestors,” through social media many people were made aware of the desecration and disregard for law. Social media encourages other communities around the world to stand together in solidarity against irresponsible and illegal development projects that people are otherwise unaware of until they are completed. Mauna Kea organizers learned from previous movements, and then inspired other communities to stand up together for their ‘āina and for one another, including Ihumātao in Aotearoa, Hong Kong, Wet’suwet’en, and Black Lives Matter.

I believe if we use social media for the right reasons it can really bring people around the world together to work hand-in-hand and change the structure of the broken systems around the world that were not made for us, but for a system built on racial hierarchy. I think media holds value that benefits all generations, old and young, and yet to come. Creating our shows, *The Hawaiian Kingdom Weekly* and *Ke Aupuni Hawai‘i*, we usher in a new era of nūpepa, and we make our kūpuna proud.

Work Cited

Johnson, Rubellite Kinney, editor. *Kukini ‘Aha‘ilono (Carry on the News)*. Topgallant, 1976.

Kau‘i McElroy was born and raised in Ko‘olaupoko, O‘ahu, and is a 2015 alumna of Ke Kula o Samuel M. Kamakau.