

Haumāna

Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo‘ole Osorio

I have never doubted the value of the University of Hawai‘i to the haumāna ‘eleu. I know how it transformed me from an aimless, cynical, and self-aggrandizing twenty-year-old into a being with a sense of purpose and value to others. And from the moment I began teaching for real at Kapi‘olani Community College with stories about human beings struggling to live good lives while caught in the wheels of imperial ambitions, racist and sexist bigotry and the laws that gave teeth to those bigotries, and money—always money everywhere beckoning the ambitious and the naive alike to forget about whatever ethics they were taught as children and take care of number one—I always sensed from my students both the struggle to understand, and a true delight in hearing an older adult reaffirm things that their own spirits found credible.

Now, after a twenty-five-year career in teaching and three years in administration, I can say without qualification that if anything defines the mana and extraordinary promise of the university, it is not the faculty or the chancellor. It is the student who defines and graces this place. I have worked with excellent faculty and there is real kinship among those of us who take this profession and its responsibilities seriously. But honestly, when I am remembering my life in this place, my mind goes immediately to haumāna, and while I could not possibly name them all here I will mention a small few who are part of a huge number of students who taught me.

Moon Kauakahi, Darlaine Māhealani Dudoit, Mamo Kim, John Ka‘imikaua, Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, Kaho‘onei Panoke, Micky Huihui, Tom Pōhaku Stone, Na‘ālehu and Punihei Anthony, Pua Lincoln, Jocelyn Doane, Kamaoli Kuwada, Kamana Beamer, Aiko Yamashiro, ‘Ilima Long, Andre Perez, Keala Francis, Julia Morgan, Willy Kauai, Joseph Salazar, Jesse Kaho‘onei, Logan Narikawa, Kawēlau Wright, No‘eau Peralto, Justin Keli‘ipa‘akaua, Mailelauli‘i Vickery, Heoli Osorio, Nanea Lo, Li‘i Nahiwa, Makana Kāne Kuahiwinui, Ke‘alaanuhea Ah Mook Sang, and Kaipu Baker. What is remarkable about these people are the ways that they used their time as students to intervene in our society—to organize, teach, petition, and protest. They are heroic, because their faith in the things that we brought before them in this university caused them to act with courage and determination.

As faculty we intentionally disrupted their lives and left them with the responsibility of reconnecting themselves to ideals and values that we did not always understand ourselves. Unsheltered by resources, reputations, tenure, and academic freedom students have always done the hard work of unraveling the contradictions

between what we teach and their own life experiences, and then making the heroic decisions to act upon what they had learned.

This is why the incredible activity on Mauna a Wākea this past year was such an historic and life-changing event for all of us in Hawai‘i. For as spontaneous as those gatherings may have seemed, there was planning and logistics, fundraising, governance, social services, and public education everywhere you looked. And how could we from UH Mānoa not have been enthralled by the way that the *kia‘i*, quite a number of them graduates and current students of our university, enabled people from everywhere to declare their love for the *‘āina* and defy the government, the intimidations of a militarized police, and the constant notifications from the press that we were a minority, holding up progress and development.

I was proud of the way most of us on the faculty and administration dealt with this protest 250 miles away and right outside of the offices of the UH President on Wise Field. I was impressed with how many faculty were willing to learn from our students, though that sentiment was anything but unanimous. It was interesting to me that when professors from the Physics Department were audio-taped making *ad hominem* and racist commentary about Hawaiians, the prevailing reactions from faculty and administrators was to be ashamed of those professors. That alone demonstrated that our *haumāna* in speaking to our better selves, even in the face of scorn, are changing our intellectual culture and ethics.

It would be sad indeed if a member of this faculty spent their career in this place with either a dim knowledge or a contempt for the ways that undergraduate and graduate students here have embraced and challenged the things we taught them, and insisted on applying them to their own lives, the lives of their families, home communities, and the larger society. It would be useful to recount a genealogy of student engagement with the University of Hawai‘i, and with wealthy and powerful companies and even with the American military. In the 1960s, students and faculty from the newborn Ethnic Studies Program helped organize farmers in Kalama Valley, Waiāhole and Waikāne, Kahalu‘u, and Ota Camp. In the late 70s, political science and law students joined Maui and Moloka‘i community members to save Kaho‘olawe from military bombing, and Hawaiian Studies *haumāna* marched in 1993 to remind the world that our nation was still alive, vitally alive.

From Kalama Valley and Waiāhole in the 1970s to Sherwoods and Kahuku in 2019, students have abruptly left the classroom and answered a call to bring their education to the assistance of others. In doing so, they are the ones to remind us that the purpose of this great academy of ours should be to address the needs of our society and our world, and to direct our best efforts to the places and lives most in need of our protection.

If we allow them, our *haumāna* will help this university train its attention and resources not on simply advancing science and technology, or studying the glorification of science and technology in the literature and histories of Europe and America, but attending to these islands, oceans, and the grand diversity of beings that live here. If we heed the *haumāna*, we might shift our ambitions from seizing

the means of production and spending our lives growing wealth to sharing those means, while allowing ourselves to grow in generosity and compassion.

And could there be a more critical moment for a transformation in our sciences, our economies, and in our values than this moment, with the American ideological contradictions shaking that country to its core while a dangerous and as yet unpredictable virus exposes not just the weaknesses in American society but modernity itself? Perhaps now, in the shadow of this great pandemic that afflicts anyone but is lethal to the elderly and to the poor, undernourished, and unsheltered, does the actual proximity of mortality finally begin to demonstrate how thoroughly dependent we are on one another? Does this disease finally disclose what a waste our societies have made not merely of ecosystems and diverse species, but of people's lives, those who died in poverty and in wealth alike?

Indeed, we might ask ourselves, what ways of life to which we have become accustomed will not be changed, and changed utterly? And if we ask that question, should we not also ask, who is best suited to demonstrate and lead us to new ways of living, feeding, sheltering, and educating one another: a sixty-nine-year-old historian and university administrator, or a thirty-year-old graduate student who helped design and conduct a whole educational curriculum on the bare slopes of a mountain, with no money?

For those of us who are university faculty, professionals, and administrators, we must be prepared to acknowledge the need for change, massive change in this institution, and that this will require a tremendous negotiation of resources, directions, and methods with the communities we serve. That includes farmers in West Maui demanding the restoration of water to their streams, with unsheltered families in Wai'ānae, and shopowners in Hilo, and also the bureaucrats at the State Capitol, who are somehow being expected to lead Hawai'i into an economy that does not require ten million tourists a year, or that must threaten the health of the aquifer at Moanalua because we are so dependent on US military spending.

But in the end, we must consult with our haumāna, because they have been the one consistent voice over a half a century calling to protect our working communities, to protect our forests, streams, and beaches, to sustain our cultural practices. They have been the ones who occupied Bachman Hall to protest a ruinous war in Vietnam, to restore Hawaiian language classes, and to disengage from military research and from patenting kalo and other life forms. They have sacrificed to protect a whole island and a sacred mountain. Students have been reminding Hawai'i of what is precious, over and over. And they have always been right.

Finally, we need to listen.

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