

## Considerations of Culture, Community, Change, and the Centennial

*M. Melia Lane-Kamahele*

The first two thousand years have brought us to the edge of tradition. The next two thousand require that we step over.

— *Imaikalani Kalahale*, 1998<sup>1</sup>

TRADITION IS A FUNNY THING. It can be enriching and constraining, a brake on change and a platform upon which to create innovations. And, it operates on a vast range of time scales. Those of us who work for the National Park Service are about to invest a great deal of time, effort, and money into celebrating a tradition that goes back a mere hundred years. Those of us who work for the National Park Service in the tradition of public service and representing the public trust, and who also happen to be members of an indigenous community, celebrate traditions that go back many hundreds, even thousands, of years. My frame of reference is from the perspective of a Native Hawaiian woman, wife, mother, aunt, and sister who also happens to be a career federal employee with the National Park Service, proud to wear the green and grey. So I have more than a passing interest in how NPS traditions intersect with those of my people and our places, and of Native people generally.

As NPS celebrates its centennial in 2016, we will be comparatively young as an organization, not even half as old as America itself. In Hawai'i, where I currently reside, we have immigrant communities that have been contributors to the history and development of these islands for more than 100 years, reflected in their families, cultural traditions, and businesses, over multiple generations. So it is perhaps arrogant of us, the NPS, to think that we are the only game in town, and that we do management of park lands and special places best. We do

---

*The George Wright Forum*, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 107–116 (2013).

© 2013 The George Wright Society. All rights reserved.

(No copyright is claimed for previously published material reprinted herein.)

ISSN 0732-4715. Please direct all permissions requests to [info@georgewright.org](mailto:info@georgewright.org).

a good job, but we can, and must, do better. In 2016, I will celebrate 30 years on the job, decades that seem to have raced by at the speed of light. As my career has unfolded, I have come to realize that as an organization we must change to survive. We need to be more humble, to step back and put ourselves in perspective as we hurtle toward our next century. That perspective must include a willingness to look at other traditions and adopt insights from them whenever and wherever they could be valuable. In this essay I will explore ways NPS can do this, focusing on Native Hawaiian examples but with the understanding that the principles could be applied to all indigenous and other local communities that have a long association with particular places.

### **A voyaging canoe and a found generation**

I am a myriad of parts that have come together and blended in an amazing process over many years, one that has defined and shaped my life, perspectives, and thoughts. As an adoptee I grew up away from Hawai'i on the West Coast, in a city that was paternalistic, colonial, cold, hard, racist, and rainy. Upon graduating from high school (where I was one of six minority students in a graduating class of 1,200!), I returned to Hawai'i to attend the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, working on a BA as a geography major with a Hawaiian studies minor.

During this time (the mid-1970s) the "Hawaiian Renaissance" was underway. At the forefront was the work of the Polynesian Voyaging Society and its double-hulled sailing canoe, *Hōkūle'a*, whose journeys continue to help define and redefine what it meant and means to be Hawaiian. The 1976 Hawai'i-Tahiti voyage of *Hōkūle'a* was undertaken to prove that Pacific Islanders could and did navigate the open ocean relying only on the wind, waves, and stars, and it sparked a cultural reawakening for my generation of baby boomers and for new generations that followed. Now, it is possible to attend school and get an education from preschool through a PhD entirely in the Hawaiian language, celebrate hula on an international stage through venues like the Merry Monarch Hula Festival, and see fine contemporary examples of traditional arts and crafts reflective of a high level of societal development. Our Hawaiian language and culture are grounded in place and tradition, yet are dynamic, changing, and adapting to ensure our survival.

The idea that my ancestors undertook voyages across the vast Pacific Ocean to Tahiti and beyond, and then safely returned to Hawai'i, was fascinating and reassuring to me. It complemented my understanding of Hawaiians as sailors, voyagers, and explorers on journeys to new places and cultures. Researching my MA thesis about the Hawaiian community who had integrated into a small area of southern British Columbia between 1810 and 1869, and how their lives helped shape and support the developing industries of trade, lumbering, fishing, farming, and mining, helped to validate the discovery process about myself and the rich maritime heritage of my ancestors. The lessons taught by this community, whose experience resonated so much with my own, helped me as I struggled with what it meant to be part-Hawaiian, what it meant to be adopted, and how to be part of something that I didn't really understand and feel comfortable with for a long time.

In hindsight, it has taken me many years to attain some level of personal comfort with my heritage and respect for the immense tradition and *kuleana*<sup>2</sup> we each carry. I promised that my child would never grow up feeling as awkward and culturally alone and isolated as I had.

My son attended Hawaiian language immersion school and was educated in a culturally competent and appropriate setting that utilized the Hawaiian language and incorporated a sense of place and culture to facilitate holistic, integrated, complementary learning. He is grounded and confident, and bridges two worlds with ease and grace; as he prepares to embark on a maritime career, he is blending Native Hawaiian seafaring traditions and culture with modern navigation and change.

Upon completion of my graduate degree, specializing in historic geography and cartographic production, I entered the work force in the Honolulu private sector for several years. While I had good mentors and learned a lot of good skills and much about the business of landscape architecture and land planning, I was always uncomfortable philosophically and morally with the tasks—land planning, developing, and building subdivisions and luxury resorts were not for me. When a classmate from my college cartography program called to share that he was moving into a permanent NPS position on the mainland and inquired if I would be interested in his job as a cartographic technician at the National Park Service office in Honolulu, I was thrilled and applied. That was more than 25 years ago.

### ***I Ulu No Ka Lālā I Ke Kumu*<sup>3</sup>**

So let's get back to thinking about tradition, change, culture, community, and the centennial as they relate to NPS. It is an organization founded on a military tradition, uniforms, chain of command and all. The mission of the National Park Service is, in a nutshell, the non-impairment of the resources in special places in perpetuity for the enjoyment of everybody.<sup>4</sup>

As this is written, the national park system has just expanded to include more than 400 units. As we move into the next century of the agency it will become more important for us to expand and shift the foci of these units, and those yet to be created, to deliberately include people, places, and events within a larger continuum of meaning that goes beyond each park's enabling legislation.

For example, at Kalaupapa National Historical Park on the island of Molokai, the focus is Hansen's Disease (leprosy): the history, places, and people that are part of the story. What has not been formally recognized, interpreted, or included by NPS until fairly recently is the story of the larger Native Hawaiian community and families who were removed from their traditional lands to make way for the original Hansen's Disease Settlement, established in 1866 at Kalawao. Their stories are an integral part of the larger processes that have shaped, and continue to influence, how the park is managed and a range of future strategic planning efforts. We need to do better at making, supporting, sustaining, sharing, and expanding those connections.

When national park units in Hawai'i were created beginning in 1916, the paternalistic intention of NPS (which, it must be remembered, was modeled on the military) was to preserve Hawaiian environments, culture, and history in encapsulated, delineated areas of the landscape—with dotted artificial boundary lines, operating within statutes, laws, regulations, policies, and directives that were completely foreign to Native Hawaiians. The process set aside places and resources and created somewhat isolated pockets that serve, as we now know, as treasured spaces that are loved to death. Though well-intentioned, the creation of park units has also divided indigenous communities and separated them from their lands. We need to

find better ways to connect communities, culture, and traditional landscapes and seascapes back together.

Fortunately, NPS park planning processes are undergoing rapid change. Planning is now shifting away from general management plans that cost a great deal of time and money and toward smaller, more versatile modules such as foundation statements and state-of-the-park reports. In this transition, it is critical that Native Hawaiian biocultural<sup>5</sup> perspectives be integrated into the process so that plans and their documentation are representative compilations of collective community perspectives.

Consider, for example, what a culturally appropriate foundation statement might look like in a Hawaiian context. Foundation statements are intended to capture the essence of what the park is all about. Rather than using a written template, for Hawaiian parks the foundation statement could instead be represented through the Native oral tradition of *oli*, elaborate chants composed to record important information.<sup>6</sup> *Oli* can be about a place, and are composed by the community that is, in fact, the basis for the place. In this conception of foundation statements, we would let the paper and Web versions be complementary processes, not the primary means of delivery. As Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, we should be bolder and assert our methods of expression that capture and share the Western planning tradition in culturally appropriate, alternative ways.

Even well-established NPS management models are in transition. Nowhere is this more evident than in the recently completed final general management plan and environmental impact statement for the South Unit of Badlands National Park. In this groundbreaking document and in the framework and process, NPS recognizes a government-to-government relationship and an equal partnership with the Oglala Sioux, moving away from the previous paternalistic model of park management on behalf of somebody, and toward forming the nation's first tribal national park, led by the tribe. By embarking on formal co-management agreements, NPS's playing field is shifting.

What does that mean for national park units in Hawai'i and elsewhere in the Pacific? While Native Hawaiians are not federally recognized, there is no reason that we cannot work to bring co-management options to our parks that support and respect our culture. Each of the 11 national park units in the Pacific are being challenged to find ways to integrate diversity, be relevant and respectful of traditional learning and knowledge, and encourage change. Described here are only a few examples, but there are numerous examples that reflect varying stages of this transition and set the tone for a new cross-cultural paradigm in our communities.<sup>7</sup>

**Pu'ukoholā Heiau<sup>8</sup> National Historic Site** now operates under a management model that is community- and culturally based. In August 1991, the Hawaiian community reaffirmed its commitment to the *heiau* for seven generations to follow and started down a path to educate, immerse, communicate with, and engage people with the process of integrating native Hawaiian culture, values, and protocols. The group celebrated the bicentennial of the consecration of the *heiau* by Kamehameha the Great. A ceremony of unification, *Ho'oku'ika-hi*, reunited and reconciled two clans representing the descendants of the great Hawaiian chiefs. In 2009, a magnitude 8.6 earthquake severely damaged the Pu'ukoholā Heiau site. Restoration work was completed using traditional methods of dry-laid masonry, i.e., stacked

stone without mortar, integrated with ceremonial protocols by members of the Hawaiian community who came together from across the Pacific. Communities reasserted their right to engage, be accountable, and be culturally appropriate and respectful, acknowledging their collective past, present, and future.

**Kaloko-Honokōhau National Historical Park** honors the Honokōhau Settlement, and was brought to life as a park unit in 1974 through the *Spirit of Kaloko-Honokōhau Report*,<sup>9</sup> prepared by the community to ask Congress to establish a park unit that would perpetuate Native Hawaiian culture, community, resources, and spirit. Furthermore, it was a process that brought the park to life through the voice of the indigenous community in their own words and based on tradition and the need to perpetuate culture through the intangible linkage of people, community, and landscape. The federal government authorized and appropriated funds that allowed land acquisition for the park to occur. A number of innovative approaches were implemented, including proposed management based on the *ahupuaʻa*<sup>10</sup> system, live-in cultural preservation programs that were compatible with NPS management policies, and hiring preferences that targeted a population who had the cultural competencies to provide stewardship and management.

Public Law 95-625 was signed by President Jimmy Carter on November 10, 1978, establishing the park in order “to provide a center for the preservation, interpretation, and perpetuation of traditional native Hawaiian activities and culture, and to demonstrate historic land use patterns as well as to provide a needed resource for the education, enjoyment, and appreciation of such traditional native Hawaiian activities and culture by local residents and visitors.” Over many years the park has transitioned from a quiet shoreline area with fishponds, a fishtrap, and many archeological and cultural sites to an urban park being squeezed between housing, roads, shopping centers and other development on three sides, much like a *kīpuka*<sup>11</sup> in the middle of a lava flow.

As the vision for the park from the *Spirit Report* is being implemented, the goal to reunite the Hawaiian community with the lands forming the park and the activities of past generations is now coming alive through the completion of the repairs to Kaloko fishpond and its main seawall. Masons who practice the tradition of dry-laid masonry are in charge and are training new generations as masons and stewards of the ponds. The restoration of fishpond aquaculture programs, the dream of a Cultural Live-in Center, and the use of Aimakapa Fishpond as wetland habitat for native and endangered species are all supportive of the park’s mission.

As the first Native Hawaiian employee of the park, I spent a year on the ground learning about the park’s resources, researching and assembling background data for planning. It was an opportunity to bring together my personal and professional sides and make a contribution towards the future of the park. With the support of many people, mentors, and leaders, I worked in a job that represented a new generation of park planning and management staff. We must do more of this kind of encouragement to ensure that we set the direction for a new century of leadership. For all of our Pacific parks, the answers to future challenges of sustainability and empowerment will come from new generations of stewards and *konohiki*<sup>12</sup> of the area as they implement biocultural management through the integration of the best of traditional ecological knowledge, respectful cultural protocols, and Western science.

**Haleakalā National Park**, on the island of Maui, has a long history: it was established in 1916 as part of Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, within one week of the creation of the National Park Service.<sup>13</sup> The park has active resources management and interpretive/education programs that are led by local community members and lineal descendants of the area and a robust next-generation leadership program, which was one of the “lamps along the path” cited in *Imperiled Promise*, the 2011 review of the NPS history program, as an example of what the National Park Service is doing right. Through a cooperative agreement the park is able to partner with a living farm run by a nonprofit organization, the Kipahulu 'Ohana, to support the restoration and adaptive reuse of *taro lo'i*<sup>14</sup> and water systems such as *'auwai*<sup>15</sup> in the coastal unit of the park. This process engages multiple generations in learning and sustaining the critical life arts and skills of farming, planting, and harvesting, strengthens ties to the land and the water, and perpetuates the next generation of farmers and cultural practitioners.

**Pu'uhonua o Hōnaunau National Historical Park**,<sup>16</sup> established in 1955, has an entirely different relationship between park operations and the community: more established, intimate, and integrated, but also a teeming interface where NPS and Native Hawaiian traditions collide. The park has third-generation Native Hawaiian employees and, like all Pacific parks, is facing the challenges of management succession and leadership. In the next century, the relationship of the lands and area encompassed by the park will change to be more dynamic, interactive, and place-based, and leading this transition will be fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-generation NPS employees who are cultural and lineal descendants from the Honaunau area—who better to lead the park into the next century?

At **Kalaupapa National Historical Park** on the island of Molokai,<sup>17</sup> which has long been held as the *piko*<sup>18</sup> of Hawaiian culture and community, the next century will bring profound change to the park with the transition of the Hansen's Disease patient community, the variety of challenges in the management of the resources on the peninsula, and the integration of long-term strategic planning, which will have impacts on the local, regional, national, and international stages. Place-based learning, respectful use and appreciation of history and culture, the magnificent power and spirit and the environment—all of this will set the stage for the next chapters of the shifting and evolving co-management process. While the philosophical hope is that the peninsula and community remain as a “snapshot in time” and a living memorial to the pre-settlement Native Hawaiian population, the Hansen's Disease community, and the strength and lifelong contributions of two saints (Damien DeVeuster and Marianne Cope),<sup>19</sup> ultimately this *wahi pana*<sup>20</sup> will once again reflect the values and expectations of a dynamic, changing island within an archipelago undergoing serious transition politically, economically, and culturally.

The **National Park of American Samoa** embodies integrated co-management in its basic structure: the indigenous community is in the lead role and NPS provides support. NPS does not own title to the resource base of the park (either terrestrial or marine); lands in the three units are leased over 65 years. The leased lands include some that are managed cooperatively and communally by the villages, the American Samoa government, and NPS, along with other partners, which share the unique stories and culture of *fa'asamoa*.<sup>21</sup> In the next century of NPS, we will see further development of a distributed network of partners and programs from across the Pacific who remain actively engaged in collaborative resources management.

## Conclusion

By the time of the NPS centennial in 2016, I will have spent more than half of my adult life as a civil service career employee working for the National Park Service. It has been a challenge, an honor, and a privilege to bring a Native Hawaiian perspective to the table, to represent new possibilities, and, many times, to be the only voice at the table to carry alternative, minority messages and perspectives for consideration—and to insert them loudly and often.

Whatever emotion you may feel toward the federal government or the National Park Service, whether you like us or despise us, I am comfortable with my role as a career employee. It has been challenging and multi-faceted. I have had to weigh the regulations and rules along with appropriate cultural considerations and protocol to resolve issues that in some cases required sensitivity, and in others, nerves of steel. I have balanced my way along the dotted line between tradition and the future and taken the big step over. That said, I have always gone back to fundamental, basic human instincts: truth, honesty, integrity, responsibility, accountability, and lots of communication to help guide and shape my responses. In time, the shifting role of NPS in the new century and in the parks in Hawai'i and the Pacific will reflect this change that I have represented, and there will be many more voices regularly at all the tables and conversations.

We will have succeeded in the next century of NPS if we simply follow our own rules and achieve our stated goals, which already commit us to respecting diversity, increasing relevancy, and achieving integration and community through communication and engagement. The letter of the law is in place, but we still need to challenge ourselves as an agency to move beyond our own traditions and create new ones. To give one more example, we will need to adjust and adopt our regulations on uniforms to allow employees to wear their family and traditional tattoos with pride while on duty, and to allow male employees to wear their hair as long as female employees; we need to have uniforms that represent who we are, like staff at the National Park of American Samoa with their NPS *puletasi*<sup>22</sup> for the female staff and the dress shirt, badges, name plates, flat hats, Sam Browne belts, and the regulation green *lavalava*<sup>23</sup> for the male employees.

There will be many ways in which the crucial conversations about parks, places, and people occur. Let these interactions reflect the proud traditions and cultural expressions of Native peoples, such as through the Hawaiian traditional *ho'oponopono*<sup>24</sup> process, or the principle of *fa'amaulalo*<sup>25</sup> to accomplish a meaningful outcome, or the consultation with *kupuna*<sup>26</sup> and elders. In those exchanges we must strive to move beyond our comfort levels to listen, learn, and share. We must respect and integrate native Hawaiian culture and grow our next generations who will bear the *kuleana* of leadership and change.

When we as an agency find a way to change our culture and traditions to be truly inclusive and equal, and when we truly represent the diversity of the American public, we will have succeeded in the new century. It is my hope that when we accomplish that transition to fully empowered cooperative management, the National Park Service will be in a position to support Native communities in managing their own special places, in their own special ways, in perpetuity for the benefit of all.

## Endnotes

1. Imaikalani Kalahahele is a celebrated poet, playwright, performance and visual artist, musician, and activist who has also dedicated much of his life to organizing exhibitions and readings for the Hawaiian arts and literary community. He is from Nu‘uanu, O‘ahu, and currently lives in Kalihi. In 2002, he published *Kalahahele* with Kalamakū Press. Kalahahele’s artwork has been exhibited at the Bishop Museum and the Hawaii State Museum of Art. He has also designed book cover art for fellow poet Joe Balaz’s *Ho‘omānoa: A Contemporary Anthology of Hawaiian Literature*, and for his own collection. His artwork and poetry has been featured in the Polynesian anthologies *Whetu Moana* and *Mauri Ola*, in issues of *‘Ōiwi: A Native Hawaiian Journal* and more.
2. *Kuleana*: Personal responsibility and obligation.
3. “The branches grow because of the trunk” (without our ancestors we would not be here). Mary Kawena Pukui, *‘Olelo No‘eau: Hawaiian Proverbs and Poetical Sayings* (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1983).
4. The National Park Service [Organic] Act, 1916: “...to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”
5. Biocultural perspectives integrate place, traditional science, culture, and community to inform and complement each other.
6. Hawaiians devised various methods of recording information for the purpose of passing it on from one generation to the next. The *oli* were one such method. Elaborate chants were composed to record important information, e.g. births, deaths, triumphs, losses, good times and bad. In most ancient cultures, the composing of poetry was confined to the privileged classes. What makes Hawai‘i unique is that poetry was composed by people of all walks of life, from the royal court chanters down to the common man.
7. For more information about park units in the Pacific, see [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov).
8. *Heiau*: A temple or other place of worship that is strategically located and dedicated to a variety of entities and forms. Pu‘ukohola Heiau is significant because of its role in the unification of the Hawaiian Islands in 1791 by King Kamehameha I. Pu‘ukohola Heiau was declared a national historic landmark in 1962 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a national historic site in 1966. The park was established as a unit of the national park system in 1972.
9. For more information see [www.nps.gov/kaho/planning](http://www.nps.gov/kaho/planning).
10. *Ahupua‘a*: A traditional land division overseen by a *konohiki*, or land manager, usually extending from the uplands to the sea, that was managed to provide residents with a variety of products that could be consumed or traded.
11. *Kīpuka*: An area of land surrounded by one or more younger lava flows. They form when lava flows on either side of a hill, ridge, or older lava dome, and provide an ecological niche for plants and animals.
12. As noted above, *konohiki* were individuals who were designated as resource managers for specific areas that included resources stretching from the top of the mountains to

the shoreline and out into the ocean. Under a calendar based on fishing and harvesting they controlled access to, and the collection and use of, terrestrial and marine resources under a strict set of seasonally based guidelines.

13. See [www.nps.gov/hale](http://www.nps.gov/hale).
14. *Lo'i* are traditional, irrigated wetland ponds or terraces used to grow *kalo*, a staple root crop.
15. *Auwai* are ditch or canal systems to carry water from streams to *lo'i*.
16. See [www.nps.gov/puho](http://www.nps.gov/puho). The 420-acre site was originally established in 1955 as City of Refuge National Historical Park and was renamed on November 10, 1978. The name was changed by the Hawaiian National Park Language Correction Act of 2000 so as to observe the Hawaiian spelling. It includes the *pu'uhonua* and a complex of archeological sites, including temple platforms, royal fishponds, sledding tracks, and some coastal village sites. The Hale o Keawe temple and several thatched structures have been reconstructed.
17. Two tragedies occurred on the Kalaupapa Peninsula, located on the north shore of the island of Moloka'i. The first was the removal of indigenous people in 1865 and 1895. The second was the forced isolation of sick people to this remote place from 1866 until 1969. The removal of Hawaiians from where they had lived for 900 years cut the cultural ties and associations of generations of people with the *'aina* (land). The establishment of an isolation settlement, first at Kalawao and then at Kalaupapa, tore apart Hawaiian society as the kingdom, and subsequently, the territory of Hawai'i tried to control a feared disease. The impact of broken connections with the *'aina* and of family members "lost" to Kalaupapa are still felt in Hawai'i today. See [www.nps.gov/kala/historyandculture/people](http://www.nps.gov/kala/historyandculture/people).
18. The center of life connection, like a navel, which links people, places, culture, history, and tradition.
19. See [www.nps.gov/kala](http://www.nps.gov/kala). Both of these individuals gave their lives as members of religious orders serving at Kalaupapa with the Hansen's Disease patients.
20. *Wahi pana*: Sacred space; places that encompass significant meaning.
21. *Fa'asamoa* translates to describe "the traditional Samoan way" and integrates the socio-political and cultural aspects seamlessly.
22. A *puletasi* is a traditional item of clothing worn by women in American Samoa consisting of a long skirt over which is worn a fitted hip-length tunic with sleeves.
23. A *lavalava* is a traditional item of clothing worn in many Pacific islander communities. It is a rectangular piece of cloth tied at the waist resembling a skirt, worn by both males and females.
24. *Ho'oponopono* can be described as a process of mediation in which relationships are righted and realigned (made *pono*) through prayer, discussion, mutual respect, and forgiveness.
25. *Fa'amaulalo* is the Samoan concept of humility. Along with *faia* (relationships and connectivity between parties) and the power of *fa'aaloalo* (respect) are all considered highly regarded values of *ali'i* (hereditary chiefs) and qualities of leadership (Papalii Dr. Failau-

tasi Avegalio, Editorial, *Samoa News*, March 31, 2013).

26. *Kupuna*: Traditional elders who are greatly respected and bring wisdom, knowledge, and perspectives that guide, enrich, and complement all activities.

**M. Melia Lane-Kamahele** manages the National Park Service's Pacific Islands Office in Honolulu, Hawai'i.