



Ka‘akālai Kū Kanaka: A Call for Strengths-Based Approaches from a Native Hawaiian Perspective

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Migration to Hawai‘i: Drift versus Design

In 1956, Andrew Sharp published *Ancient Voyagers in the Pacific*, in which he hypothesized that the migration throughout much of Polynesia, including Hawai‘i, was accidental. Sharp argued that Hawai‘i was settled by (a) voyagers on a drifting canoe blown off its course while sailing between closely spaced islands; or (b) the fortuitous landfall by a canoe of exiles driven from their homeland and aimlessly floating around the Pacific until reaching shore.

Archaeologists and historians widely accepted Sharp’s theory as a simple solution to how Polynesians crossed 2,200 miles of open ocean on the world’s largest sea. His theory of accidental migration was much more palatable than intentional migration at a time when the Western world had an understanding of measuring latitude, but no reliable measure for determining longitude (Sobel, 1995). Researchers argued that both pieces of data were necessary to purposefully navigate between two tiny land masses separated by 2,200 miles of open ocean. It was unfathomable that Native Hawaiian¹ navigators may have solved this scientific problem before the invention of the chronometer.

The scientific community accepted Sharp’s theory without regard to cultural evidence documenting a purposeful and orderly migration from the central Pacific islands to Hawai‘i in a stepwise fashion. Hawaiian knowledge relied on oral tradi-

tions and to this day the voyage of these ancient mariners lives on in numerous ancient Hawaiian *oli*, or chants (Silva, 2004). They recount the travel of Hawaiian ancestors back and forth between Hawai‘i and Kahiki (Tahiti) as in the traditional *oli*, “Eia Hawai‘i”: Eia Hawai‘i, he moku, he kanaka, he kanaka Hawai‘i, he kama na Kahiki . . . Here is Hawai‘i, an island, a man, a man is Hawai‘i, a child of Kahiki. The *oli* goes on for another 29 lines and traces a route from Kahiki to Kau‘i. And this is just one example.

Other evidence of these first discoverers appears as early as 1938, when Maori scientist Te Rangi Hiroa (Sir Peter Buck) wrote in his book *Vikings of the Sunrise* that “From Hawai‘i, the mother of islands in the center of Polynesia, courageous navigators followed the constellation of Meremere (Orion’s Belt) for 2,400 miles north to discover and people a new Hawai‘i” (Buck, 1938, p. 246). Nevertheless, 18 years after Te Rangi Hiroa’s book was published, Sharp’s became the prevailing theory of Polynesian migration. It was only after the voyage of the Hawaiian canoe, *Hōkūle‘a*, successfully retraced the route across the Pacific using ancient techniques and without modern navigational aids, that Western science began to accept the accomplishments of Native Hawaiians. Simply put, Native Hawaiians mastered the science of navigating across the world’s largest expanse of ocean long before the Western world was able to overcome the longitude problem.²

This *mo‘olelo* (story) is one example of a Western theory of an indigenous people based on foreign perceptions of reality. It reaffirms that knowledge is power—and that power lies in the use of knowledge to advance one understanding of the world as opposed to another. In this article, I ex-

plore these ideas to underscore the compelling need for research about Native Hawaiians based on strengths, rather than deficits, and from a Native Hawaiian worldview. This call echoes mounting scholarship insisting on indigenous perspectives in research and action (e.g., Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Battiste, 2000; Mutua & Swadener, 2004; Welford, 2003). Although I do not present an exhaustive review of either the social construction of knowledge or the power and lasting impact of deficits theories in that construction of knowledge, I address both as powerful forces that affect indigenous peoples, in this case Native Hawaiians, their identity and their future. I begin with several broad arguments about the construction of knowledge and its use, and then examine the specific example of deficits approaches in indigenous education. As others before me have done, I end by calling for a new framework that brings to the fore Native Hawaiian strengths that have been too long misinterpreted, misrecognized, and undervalued.

The Construction of Knowledge as a Social Process

As one of my reviewers for this journal pointed out, some may dismiss this article thinking that scientists, at least most of us, are objective, impartial, value-free investigators who uncover the truths in the world around us. Some would argue that scientific knowledge gives us the facts, and that with the facts we will know what to do. But science cannot provide a complete basis for human judgment for two reasons, the most basic of which is that human judgment relies on much more than facts. Equally as important, though, is that science can never provide all the facts; it is, at best, a statement of probabilities, an

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approximation, a contingency statement. Even an atom is only a tendency.

In fact, the debate about whose science is valid has a long and intense history. Native scholars have persistently asked from whose perspective are the “facts” indeed fact. One of the earliest voices was Vine Deloria who in 1969 challenged the entire field of anthropology as applied to American Indians in countless studies portraying primitive and sometimes savage peoples (Deloria, 1969). Evidence gathered by revisionist scholars in feminist and race/ethnic studies also cautions us to consider purported truth carefully (e.g., hooks, 1992; Banks, 2002; Said, 1994). As one review argues, for two centuries “there have been scientists obsessed with proving that minorities, poor people, foreigners, and women are innately inferior to upper-class white males of northern European extraction” (Tucker, 1994, p. 4). They work almost as if “to make nature herself an accomplice to political inequality” (Condorcet, 1795 cf. Tucker, 1994, p. 5).

Yet, the construction of knowledge—and particularly how it is used to advantage some groups while openly or latently justifying the inferiority of others—is insidious in some ways. It is often uncontrollable and not immediately apparent. For example, we cannot control who creates knowledge, the lens from which historical and contemporary issues are portrayed, or the conclusions that are reached about the nature of society and peoples. Early Southern and European immigrants to the United States could not control the creation or use of Stanford IQ tests in Carl Brigham’s 1923 book, *The Study of American Intelligence*, which argued their intellectual inferiority (Brigham, 1923). Brigham retracted his book five years after publishing it, but not before it substantially influenced policy discussions.

Other examples abound. Consider the famous Tuskegee case now used in federal online educational efforts about the importance of human subjects protections in research. We recoil at the thought that African-American men deliberately were inoculated with syphilis so that American scientists could understand its effects. Less distasteful perhaps, but still carrying weight to this day, are perspectives made popular in the late 1960s that blamed the disease of poverty on culture. The poor were argued to suffer from inherent character

flaws—especially poor, racial minorities (e.g., Banfield, 1970; Lewis, 1959, 1966; Murray, 1984). The dubious science behind it: the poor are lazy and shiftless, thus they are poor *because* they are lazy and shiftless.

American Indians could not control the insertion of science between them and their cultural property. Scientific discourse about American Indians as a vanishing race made it easy for anthropologists and archaeologists “to believe that they—and not contemporary Indian people—were the inheritors and appropriate protectors and interpreters of Indian history” (Biolsi & Zimmerman, 1997, p. 8). A familiar story in Hawai‘i, this representation continues to challenge contemporary American Indians and Native Hawaiians in U.S. policy and legal repatriation questions about who has claim to material and human remains.

In another recent case, African Americans and other peoples of color could not prevent scholars Herrnstein and Murray (1994) from publishing with immense publicity (and without scientific peer review), *The Bell Curve*. The study used statistical data, albeit faultily (see Goldberger & Manski, 1995; Dorfman, 1995; Gould, 1994), to argue the genetic superiority of White intelligence over Blacks and Latinos and to sound the alarm about the future cognitive decline of the United States.

In addition to its construction, we could not control the use of knowledge to promote policies supporting the enslavement of Blacks, the denial of voting rights and citizenship to women and people of color, or the eugenics movement and widespread sterilization of Puerto Rican and American Indian women in the first half of the nineteenth century (Davis, 1983). We cannot control the use of knowledge to support blood quantum politics, assimilationist ideology, and legal maneuvering that continues to erode the identity and land rights of indigenous Hawaiians and other Native Americans (Kauanui, 2002; Osorio, 2001).

Until the landmark voyage of the *Hōkūle‘a* in the 1970s, scientists told us that Hawaiians were just migrants like everyone else, and migrants by chance at that. Clearly, what people saw as reality was a reflection of their own reality. It was informed by the historical knowledge of the day, however misrepresented that might have been. Early missionaries to Hawai‘i saw and wrote about a heathen people “whose heads and

feet and much of their sunburned swarthy skins was bare,” instead of properly clothed for the South Pacific (Pukui, Haertig, & Lee, 1972, p. 301). Rather than seeing constantly washed skin and hair, they saw the incrustations left from saltwater baths. “They saw, not a system of working in the cool morning and resting later, but people ‘lazy and indolent.’ Not the natural order of eating when hungry, sleeping when tired, but ‘an entire lack of system.’ Not hula of deep meaning, but a ‘heathen dance . . . connected with idolatry and licentiousness.’ They saw, the most rigid among them, not the ‘ohana system with its mutual support and harmony, but ‘inmates of little huts . . . who could not be called a family’” (Pukui, et al., 1972, p. 301).

Hand in hand with missionary accounts of lazy, indolent Hawaiians, eugenicist scholars and others since the late 1800s forewarned the extinction of the Hawaiian race based on the decline of full-blooded Hawaiians by death, disease, and intermarriage (Kauanui, in press). Although Western diseases, and to a lesser extent war, decimated the population to a mere 10 percent of its original size within 100 years after Captain Cook arrived, this was by no means the end (Nordyke, 1989). Most recently, more than 400,000 Hawaiians were counted in the Census 2000—a far cry from extinction. Nevertheless, politicians and others have used the vanishing race rhetoric to deny indigenous status to Native Hawaiians to this day.

So what is the problem? One might argue that new theories come and go; such is the nature of science. But, the damage is in how such knowledge is used. And in this case, it has been used to distort the continued debate over who is a Hawaiian aboriginal as opposed to who resides or was born in Hawai‘i, or worse, to the practice of non-natives in the continental United States who call themselves Hawaiian because they grew up or lived in Hawai‘i (Kauanui, in press). This same science also is used to question whether Hawaiians are, were ever, or should be viewed as, an indigenous people. The underlying politics motivating the question is, of course, whether the United States permits people of Hawaiian ancestry any sovereign rights and even more importantly, whether they are entitled to anything valuable, such as the land belonging to the Hawaiian kingdom.

Another mo'olelo: up until the last decade or so, Western historiographers had convinced the world of the general passivity and feeble resistance of Native Hawaiians against the loss of their nation and their culture (e.g., Daws, 1968; Ralston, 1984). By one account, "the Hawaiians, ingenuous as they were, gave away their women along with everything else they had" (Daws, 1968, p. 394). In the past decade, however, new perspectives of Hawai'i and its people refute this view. Relying heavily on the vast amount of literature printed in Hawaiian language newspapers and letters, indigenous scholars have documented the vigorous resistance that carried forward to this day (Trask, 1993; Osorio, 2002; Silva, 2004). The difference between these two views lies in who is doing the telling. Silva's (2004) recent book, *Aloha Betrayed*, is path breaking in its portrayal of the systematic work of Native Hawaiians to protect their nation. Silva uncovers petitions that were somehow lost in museum archives, which reveal the signatures of 95% of all living Kānaka Maoli in 1897 in protest of the annexation of Hawai'i by the U.S. government. Fully 38,000 of the estimated 40,000 Hawaiians remaining alive at that time signed the petition—men, women, and children. These petitions were hand-carried and presented by a Hawaiian delegation to President McKinley and the U.S. Congress in Washington, DC. Hardly an act of passivity, this protest nevertheless failed to prevent annexation. Yet, the knowledge of such a document—and the ability to trace family names on the petition—inspires hundreds of Hawaiians to renew their current struggle for self-determination.

In sum, research and science are social processes embedded in politics, economics, and ideology. Science is a human pursuit, and therefore subjective. Knowledge is socially constructed. What, then, can we do? What is the best way to draw out the benefits that research and science offer? How can we add to what is known in ways that reflect the diversity of perspectives that should and do exist? For starters, Native Hawaiians can enter the fray and enter it loudly. The native voice is crucial because, though past and present political rhetoric may seek to undermine it, Hawaiian "culture exists despite our good intentions, ignorance or apathy. It exists because we do" (Meyer, 2003, p. 5). Oth-

ers play a critical role in this process by creating spaces and supporting the voices that have and will continue to emerge, by ensuring Native partners in their research projects that address Native issues or peoples, and by honoring the appropriate methods that create culturally relevant findings that benefit the people they research. Echoing the call from other indigenous scholars and groups, "we must become involved in producing research rather than serving as subjects or consumers of research" (National Dialogue Project, 1989). Native peoples must have a voice, we must ask the questions and critique existing knowledge. We must not only be evaluated, we must evaluate. We must not be researched, but research. By cementing our presence in the production of knowledge, we can be vigilant over how it is used and the power that knowledge confers.

Warning Signs

Yet how do we recognize when knowledge is being used against us? How do we know when we are part of its misuse? Let's explore for a moment the deficit model and how it has reproduced inequality in our society. For example, a pervasive belief among many educators today is that indigenous and minority children are by nature low achievers and, as a result, uneducable (Howard, 2003; Valencia & Suzuki, 2001). Why? Why should we think that indigenous children are less capable?

In the context of Hawaiians, the belief persists for two reasons. First is the wealth of research evidence citing the compounded disadvantage or "risk" that indigenous children face in our educational system (see critique by Yellow Bird & Chenault, 1999). Study after study documents the disparities in achievement between indigenous and other students, as well as the correlations between their low socioeconomic status and outcomes related to low achievement and conduct disorders. Study after study reveals the limited resources plaguing teachers, families, and children attending schools in the low-income communities where indigenous peoples often live. Most of the evidence is correlational; few studies probe deeper into the causal mechanisms behind the relationship, yet it is part of our accepted, institutionalized knowledge about indigenous and minority populations (Lomawaima, 1999; Valencia & Suzuki,

2001). Everyday discussions in education casually throw out as self-evident facts that indigenous, minority, and low-income children are difficult to teach and low-achieving (Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999).

Even the president of the United States, as part of the controversial No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy, calls for a reduced income and race gap as measures of school success. In Hawai'i, school officials responded by explaining their inability to reach the expectations of NCLB because of the poor performance of low-income children (e.g., DePledge, 2004). It is not insignificant that Hawaiians are the largest share of these low-income children. Once again, the poor are treated as a monolithic group that fails to value education the way that it should. The diversity among these students is dismissed as irrelevant. The primary focus is on the aggregate relationship between poverty and school achievement which research tells us is a moderate correlation at best and one that explains relatively little of the overall gap in achievement (Valencia & Suzuki, 2001).

Second, poverty in the United States is intricately intertwined with race. Thus, Hawaiians, a population that is disproportionately poor relative to other groups in the state of Hawai'i, suffer the same broad generalizations that are applied to poor people: Compared to X normal group, they are lazy; they don't work (and children are neglected); they have low-paying jobs and must work too much (and neglect their children); they do not value education; they resist attempts of schools and service programs to involve them or to teach them healthier, more educated habits; their children lack proper nutrition; their homes need intellectual stimulation; they don't go to libraries; they have low aspirations; their kids get into drugs, steal, and break into cars; and they have too many children, too young. The underlying science is based on aggregate statistics that suggest some higher risk for these factors to occur in one group (and specifically, among certain at-risk members of that group), compared to another group (e.g., non-poor or non-Hawaiian). In the articulation and interpretation of these statistics in public, however, the relationships are applied to all members of the group, when really the majority of the group is no different from the comparison group (Maton, Schellenbach, Leadbeater, & Solarz, 2003).

Although framing the problem as a deficit calls attention to the need for interventions, systematic reform, and redistribution of resources, it also works its way into a classist agenda that disfavors poor and/or indigenous populations. Research that documents the “needs” of our people may be careful, it may be conscientious and well intended, and may even be fair. It may exhaustively indicate the limits of the data and cautiously interpret results. How it is used, however, is obviously another story.

In addition to potentially being misused, deficits-based approaches often miss the expertise that exists in our communities and families, viewing instead outside experts as the only ones capable of “fixing” our problems. As in the example of education, “deficits-based social policies often disempower individuals, families or communities facing truly difficult situations, and seek solutions by diagnosing, fixing, punishing, or simply ignoring those affected” (Maton et al., 2003, p. 5). For example, Deyhle and Swisher (1997) review how deficit ideologies of non-Native school teachers and administrators historically were used to argue that Indian homes and the minds of their children were empty and in need of enriching Eurocentric experiences. At the same time, educators were ignoring the failure of schools to meet the academic needs of Indian students. When given a voice through interviews, these same students shared a very different story of feeling alienated, dissatisfied, academically ill-prepared, and overburdened with family responsibilities.

Thus, we cannot control how deficits thinking works its way into legal, policy, and service delivery arenas—and eventually, most devastatingly, into the psyche of our people. Pukui et al. (1972) write, “it was inevitable that most Hawaiians would in time see themselves through missionary eyes—and see themselves as inferior” (p. 300). As Hall argues in the African-American experience, “not only were we constructed as different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes. They had the power to make us see and experience ourselves as ‘Other’” (Hall, 1993, p. 394).

Although probably not the intent of most scientists who analyze disadvantage and inequality in our society, the effects of deficits thinking can be debilitating: “Virtually every commentator on what it is like

to grow up Black in America, whether novelist or sociologist or memoirist, has reflected on the devastating effects of racism on self-confidence . . . When the real difficulties are compounded by the fears engendered by centuries of white propagandizing that white is smarter (and by elements of self-denigration by blacks), the result can be immobilization of even the most able and ambitious” (Murray, 1984, p. 187). Research shows that these feelings are reproduced in schools where negative stereotypes about certain groups threaten children in those groups, taking its toll on their self-esteem, achievements, and academic successes (Steele, 2001). In interviews, for example, Hawaiian and Pacific Islander children talk about being perceived as dumb and expected to be violent by teachers and peers, and about how they end up acting out those expected behaviors in school (Mayeda, Chesney-Lind, & Koo, 2001).

Again, what can we do? Do we advocate for more research and programs intended to ameliorate poverty and its miserable companions by documenting the deep suffering and historical mistreatment of Hawaiians that oppress them to this day? Or, do we present the strong face of our people, strong despite adversity, unfair practices, and poverty? The question for those of us who are insiders, advocates, people at-risk yet occupying a privileged space as scientists, is how to contribute most effectively, truthfully, and meaningfully without labeling our people and ‘ohana (families) with the doom and gloom that, as ‘ohana, pains us and, as scientists, may be difficult to move beyond. On the other hand, how do we, as scientists and advocates—and in many occasions as outsiders to communities among our own—help create a positive space for greater voice and empowerment of a marginalized collective? I argue that we, as Hawaiians, as Pacific Islanders, and as scientists, must call for a critical, strengths-based approach to research, creating knowledge that addresses the concerns of communities first, and then of policy-makers and science.

Researching the Antidote

What does it look like, this strengths-based approach? Whether we are talking about discrimination, violence, or friendship, one would think that a likely antidote for negative experiences is positive experiences.

Might not the same be probable in research? Strengths-based approaches, which have taken root in the field of social work, psychiatry, and business, make the case that drawing on the strengths of individuals is the best way to reduce the negative and increase the positive in individuals and families. How can we as native researchers, as well as other researchers and advocates, incorporate strengths-based approaches in our methods and what are the policy implications?

First, let’s be clear that by strengths-based, I do not mean glossing over problems in favor of a rosy picture. Strengths-based research, in my view, begins with the premise of creating social change. In contrast to the expert-driven, top-down approach assumed by deficit models, it means treating the subjects of study as actors within multi-layered contexts and employing the multiple strengths of individuals, families and communities to overcome or prevent difficulties. It is also about empowerment, where the purpose of strengths-based research and evaluation is to benefit the people involved in the study by giving them voice, insight, and political power (Fetterman, 2000; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). As such, it means engaging communities:

As participants in community development, researchers serve as both users and creators of knowledge; as such they need to reflect critically on the kinds of knowledge they produce and consume. When selecting a research topic or problem, they should ask how that research can potentially reduce oppression, injustice, brutality, and environmental destruction, and what information they need to create this impact. Such an approach must be partisan; that is, it should work for the emancipation of the excluded, rather than legitimate itself by reference to some “objective” social science that privileges professional discourse and elite domination. Producing knowledge does not demand a neutral, detached, “hands off” stance of “doing no harm.” Rather it requires a strong commitment by participating researchers and practitioners to share their expertise with the people, while recognizing that the communities directly involved must ultimately determine the direction and goals of change (Sohng, 1998, p. 187).

Although growing in momentum, strengths-based research in general still has its challenges and critics, including those who maintain that science is indeed ob-

jective and impartial. In addition, there are policy implications and other issues that deserve further scrutiny; for example, the credibility of research in indigenous communities, as discussed by Tuhiwai Smith (1999), as well as the credibility of strengths-based research among those who perceive it as advocacy rather than science. Each of these challenges, however, can be overcome by concerted, conscientious effort and by documenting the positive benefits to communities and societies that strengths-based approaches offer over deficits thinking.

A primary product of this approach is the counter-hegemonic practices that will emerge as people engage critically with issues in their daily lives. When individuals and social groups engage critically with historical discourses, social meanings, and power relations, they not only challenge sociocultural and political processes of domination, but also “redefine their experiences . . . and expectations within everyday life, and, ultimately, their position within society” (Rassool, 2004, p. 205). In short, with our mo‘olelo, our stories, we revive identity by reclaiming past histories. “Stories can validate identities to the self and the world by providing models of strength and empowerment” (Tusitala Marsh, 1999, p. 170).

Ka‘akālai Kū Kanaka: Conceptualizing Strengths in Hawaiian Individuals, Families, Communities

The power to narrate or to block other narratives from forming or emerging is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them (Said, 1994, p. xiii).

A first step is to name what we are doing, and to name it in Hawaiian. *Ka‘akālai Kū kanaka*,³ strengths-based approaches employ strategies based on competencies, capabilities, and expertise. Maton and colleagues (2003) write that individual strengths “encompass varied cognitive, affective, psychological, moral, and behavioral capacities, such as self-efficacy, positive coping, practical knowledge, special talents and persistence, to name but a few” (p. 5). From a Hawaiian perspective, these individual capabilities are grounded in the strengths of family and community relationships. This view resonates with the idea that

strengths are multilayered, reflecting individuals, families, and communities. Family and community strengths may include “varied instrumental, relational, structural, and cultural characteristics, such as providing culturally proscribed norms that regulate behaviors in healthy and purposeful ways, and facilitate a positive sense of belonging to a valued community, again to name but a few” (Maton et al., 2003, p. 5).

As individuals, Hawaiians offer unique contributions and talents that researchers must consider as part of the stories they tell. Hawaiians share a special sensitivity to the world around them. Manulani Meyer (2003) speaks of distinctiveness, a “Light,” and describes it as artistic, compassionate. The Hawaiian worldview stresses relationships first. It is spiritual, giving, and intimately bound to the land and genealogy. This worldview is a source of resilience and strength.

A key characteristic of Hawaiian individuals and families is compassion. “Aloha is the intelligence with which we meet life . . . Compassion—a sacred idea that connects us to spiritual traditions” (Meyer, 2003, p. ix). Compassion is what invokes values of a collective rather than individual good. These focal points of compassion and collective good are often at odds with Western values of individual ownership and advancement.

Research by Native Hawaiian and other scholars gives voice to the expertise of our kūpuna (elders) and culture as sources of community and family strength. Hawaiian culture promotes interdependence and strong families, the backbone of our people. The strengths of families include the connection and relationships borne through genealogy; treasured spiritual and practical links to the ‘āina (land) as resource and kin; and commitment to ‘ohana and to the ideals of reciprocity and inclusion that ‘ohana implies (Kana‘iaupuni, 2004). These resources of Hawaiian families and communities are evident in shared child-rearing and labor among adults. In addition, mutual exchange relationships and recreational activities revolving around the family and environment enhance active community networks of sharing and kinship (McGregor, Minerbi, & Matsuoaka, 1998; McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson, & Fromer, 1998).

Additionally, a closer look behind the negative statistics around poverty, educational attainment, drugs, and incarceration reveals the great adaptability and resilience among Hawaiians to endure generations of social and economic decline and the challenges of becoming a U.S. minority in their homeland. It finds the inspiring flames of cultural revitalization lit in the 1970s still spreading vigorously through the reemergence of respect for and practice of language, traditional knowledge systems, beliefs and customs. In Hawaiian families is found strength and hope in a society that all too often predicts cultural extinction for this people; a society where Hawaiian artifacts are placed on exhibit for tourists, while the needs of the indigenous people who form the basis of that industry go ignored (Halualani, 2002; Kana‘iaupuni, 2004).

Significant cultural strengths of Hawaiians also emerge in their unparalleled achievements in aquaculture and wetland agricultural techniques (Handy & Handy, 1972) and profound knowledge of celestial navigation, which has been recognized by Western entities such as the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA—see Kawakami, 2003). Strengths are found in our history. For example, despite the absence of written language until the early 1800s, Hawaiians became an extremely prolific and literate people with more than 100 newspapers published in Hawaiian language. Predating Western contact, this predisposition for written literature stemmed from the immense appreciation for and refinement of oratory practice among Hawaiians. If “by all accounts, the Hawaiians loved to read and eagerly bartered for the pages that came from the press” (Day & Loomis, 1997, p. 16), why is it that today many Native Hawaiian children struggle to read in our nation’s public schools (see Kana‘iaupuni & Ishibashi, 2003)? Surely the banning of Hawaiian language as the medium of instruction from all schools in 1896 played a role. And how can we draw from the cultural history of cherishing oral and written resources to rebuild that love today? What changes—instructional, behavioral, and cultural—must come into play?

These examples of individual, family, and community strengths are just a few of the kinds of focuses that can and should be brought to the fore of ka‘akālai kū kanaka

research on Hawaiians. Research must show the diversity of responses to adverse circumstances, not only generalized responses, and the strengths and resources that are needed to respond to or minimize adversities (Maton et al., 2003). These represent what Moll and colleagues have called “funds of knowledge,” offering diverse assets and ways to engage life (Moll & Gonzalez, 2001). Ka‘akālai Kūkanaka offers a path to much needed research on the interrelationships between individual, family, and community levels of functioning that together contribute to empirical realities or statistical relationships and that must together change to generate improvements. Whether we are talking about research in health, education, social sciences, even biology, building on strengths, not deficits, and critically examining the paths to greater wellbeing, is this call to action.

Conclusion

The creation of knowledge is critical to the self-determination of Native Hawaiians and other indigenous peoples. My purpose in this article is to encourage a greater voice in the pursuit of science from a Hawaiian worldview. By empowering Hawaiian communities in the process of analyzing both strengths and needs, they—and we—achieve new ground in defining a future that will build on and augment our strengths. In so doing, we also create new opportunities to show how cultural diversity and, specifically Native Hawaiian ways of knowing, strengthen scientific knowledge. We also reject prevailing views of Native Hawaiians failing to succeed in Western society. Let us return the gaze. Now, 35 years after his early critique of social science and indigenous peoples, perhaps Deloria is right that “it is now time to reverse this perspective and use the values, behaviors, and institutions of tribal or primitive peoples to critique and investigate the industrial societies and their obvious shortcomings” (Deloria, 1997, p. 220). What can we learn about social relationships, about families, about survival, about healthy environmental and ecocultural practices? All researchers, and especially kānaka maoli researchers, can give voice to the strengths of Native Hawaiian culture, using methods that honor and respect its indigenous people. Ka‘akālai Kūkanaka is one way to conceptualize a

pathway to new research and educational paradigms. In so doing, we create our own compelling vision for the future and forge our own path toward greater well-being.

NOTES

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¹ In this article, I use the terms Native Hawaiian, Hawaiian, and Kānaka Maoli interchangeably to refer to the descendants and members of the aboriginal people of the Hawaiian Islands.

² Current archaeological evidence suggests that Polynesian voyagers reached Hawai‘i by 400 AD or earlier (for a timeline see <http://leahi.kcc.hawaii.edu/org/pvs/migrationspart1.html>). John Harrison discovered longitude in 1770 (Sobel, 1995).

³ Ka‘akālai refers to approach, Kūkanaka is to stand tall as a Hawaiian human being, confident, strong, and victorious (Kanahale, 1986). Based on Pukui and Elbert (1986), *Hawaiian Dictionary*, and Kōmike Hua‘ōlelo-Hale Kuamo‘o-‘Aha Pūnana Leo (2003), *Māmaka Kaiāo*.

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