

## CULTURE, HISTORY, and LANGUAGES



L Frank Manriquez is an author, artist and language activist who co-founded Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival. L is from the Tongva Nation, whose homelands are in what is now known as Los Angeles. At contact with colonizers, the Tongva had about thirty-five thousand people. Two centuries later they were pronounced extinct, and not until 1994 did California enact Senate Bill 1134 recognizing the Gabrielino-Tongva's existence; the federal government did not. L is one of seventeen hundred Gabrielino Tongva Tribal members, and much of her work has been dedicated to reawakening her culture. "The linguists call our languages dead languages, except I just call them sleeping. Wanting them back is enough to wake them up. And the harder we work, the more we have...When I got my chin tattoos, my whole life changed, it was the best thing I've ever done. I was already on a responsible path, but now there's no way I could ever neglect that mark of responsibility to Tribe, our peoples, all peoples really, to the planet....This is who I am. We're never going to assimilate. We look like we're assimilating, but that's been to stay alive. It's a survival tactic."

### INVESTIGATION

How does language impact culture? How do clothes, tattoos and other body modifications function in relation to culture? How do we decolonize and re-Indigenize Turtle Island?

How can we educate society about the rich history, culture and languages of indigenous people, and use these traditions to shape our contemporary society?

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Holly Mititquq Nordlum is an artist, activist, and practitioner of traditional Inupiaq tattooing, and part of the ongoing effort to revitalize the tradition of Inupiaq tattoos as the organizer of Tupik-Mi (Tattoo People.)

"I work with an archeologist. We were in Greenland. They found five well-preserved eight hundred-year-old mummies and we were able to look at them. Their skin was so perfectly preserved. You could see all the tattoos, and those are our people. Same language, same tattooing techniques, same tattooing history. My great-grandmother was the last in our family to have traditional tattoos. Within her lifetime they went from being normal to almost completely dying away. The Seward's Agreement decided which religious factions were going to run towns.

They just circled parts of Alaska and were getting rid of culture. The social pressure to conform and succeed in this new system is what I attribute the loss of not just tattoo culture, but language, dance, everything. They kept things that were palatable to them. In Greenland they still had throat-singing. But it was too sexual, so they just got rid of it completely. It really mattered who our colonizer was, how fast things disappeared, and in Alaska it was religion. It's still happening. They don't want people to tattoo in certain villages because it's again what the Bible says."

"Tavlujun [chin tattoos] mean something different to each woman who wears them; they are markers of her life and the celebration of her milestones. In today's context they are a symbol of strength and culture and rejection of Western ideals of beauty and societal norms. They challenge and represent the loss of so much of our traditions and the literal death of our people and strength of each woman wearing them! Every clan or area was different, but the first few lines you could assume were their coming-of-age

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**Elsa Armstrong**

**“Right now, I think it’s learning Ojibwemowih, my language, while being away from home and at this institution. I often feel frustrated that I’m not learning faster and that I’m not learning faster and that I can’t speak with all of the people around me here. I also think Dartmouth as a whole is a great challenge for me as an Indigenous person, constantly having to navigate spaces created for white men. I get my strength from my language. My friends. My family. Seeing little kids back home speaking Ojibwe, and from other Indigenous women being their badass selves.”**

**Elsa stands in front of Thorton Hall on Dartmouth’s campus. Thorton Hall was one of the Dartmouth, an institution that originally intended to offer higher education for Indigenous students. However, by the turn of the nineteenth century, the school had graduated only Native students.**

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Kānaka Maoli people have been fighting to stop the construction of the thirty-meter telescope (TMT) since 2009, and in the summer of 2019 a resistance camp was established at Pu'u huluhulu. Kia'i (protectors) slept in a parking lot over a lava field at the bottom of the access road to the summit of Mauna Kea for nearly a year to stop construction of what would be the largest telescope in the Northern Hemisphere.

For Kānaka Maoli, the Mauna is considered the most sacred, deeply honored in their creation story and time honored in traditions. It is also the primary water source that gives life to the island and all its inhabitants. Since 1970, the Mauna has been assaulted time and time with the construction of thirteen telescopes (most of which have been abandoned and are being decommissioned). In 2009 the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) was proposed. TMT would be about eighteen stories high, sixty six meters in total diameter with a five acre footprint. Kia'i of the Mauna have been fighting the TMT since its proposal, using every avenue to defend the land and demand sovereignty for the illegally occupied nation of Hawai'i.

To learn more about the illegally occupied state of Hawai'i, check out @ainamamona, or listen to our All My Relations podcast "For The Love Of The Mauna" series. There, Matika dives into the history of the Hawaiian Kingdom, its illegal overthrow backed by the U.S. government, and the Kingdom's resiliency in the face of colonialism.

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Dr. David Keanu Sai is a scholar at the University of Hawaii and a founding member of the Hawaiian Society of Law & Politics. He's pictured here amongst the lava rock and trees on the road to the Mauna.

Dr. Sai was in the U.S. Army when he started looking at his lineage. His Tutu (Grandma) asked one thing of him before she passed on. "That you will know your genealogy. Because when you know your genealogy you will know who you are and what you need to do." When he started digging through records he found he was a descendent of High Chiefs in the Hawaiian Kingdom. But Dr. Sai had never heard of a Hawaiian Kingdom. It certainly wasn't part of the history lessons he was taught in school.

"What I was taught in class was the U.S. colonized Hawai'i, because we're uncivilized, in order to teach us to be better at governing."

When Dr. Sai learned of the prosperous Hawaiian Kingdom, its overthrow and then illegal annexation, he honorably discharged from the U.S. Army and got to work defending his nation. Since then he's used his extensive scholarship of the past to defend Kanaka Maoli rights in the present. This includes protecting sacred sites like the Mauna.

"The way I see our future is through the past. When you would tell a Kānaka Maoli 'look to the future, or come to an idea, or make a decision', it's always thought proper to look to the past first."

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Heoli Osorio (left), Malia Osorio and baby Kaleiwohi stand near Ka'ena Point, January 2022. Ka'ena Point is sacred, its lava shoreline is where departing souls jump off into the spirit world and meet their ancestors. With her hands shaped like the mountain, Heoli tells us "We Are Mauna Kea".

Heoli is an artist, activist and scholar at the University of Hawai'i. Heoli met her wahine, Malia chained to a cattle guard on the Mauna, blocking TMT construction vehicles' access to the road. Heoli and Malia were among the first on the Mauna at the start of the 2019 standoff. Heoli remembers the call to action:

"We got this secret text message saying 'If you love Mauna Kea come meet us at this place on Kona. No other details to be given out until then, bring warm clothes.'"

While they blocked construction, Kūpuna formed their line at the bottom of the access road. Heoli remembers looking around her, bodies chained to the guard and Kūpuna under arrest:

"This is what it means to be a Hawaiian in 2019, that in order to be Hawaiian, I have to chain myself to this thing and lay here all day. That our Kūpuna sit out in the cold at three in the morning, in like freezing temperatures, to be Hawaiian."

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Watching police forcibly remove Kūpuna from their Mauna was traumatizing. Their removal was a continuation of the violent violation Kānaka Maoli have overcome since the illegal occupation of their Kingdom. Malia puts it beautifully:

"As Indigenous, we all remember. Our blood remembers. The blood flowing through our Kūpuna during all those times captured those emotions, that trauma... and it was passed down. But there's something incredible about the blood also containing resiliency and everything the word represents."

It took hours for the police to arrest the Kūpuna that day. They lifted their bodies off the Mauna and carried them away, pulling them from the Mauna in vans.

But when the Kūpuna stood on the front lines to guide and guard their Kānaka, in the face of violent violation, they returned the community to a traditional Kānaka Maoli way of life. Kūpuna leading their Kānaka. Heoli remembers her time on the Mauna as a time of deep reconnection:

"The Mauna gives us an opportunity to come back into our humanity as Kānaka Maoli, to love and live on 'āina in the way that our Kūpuna did and to love each other the way that we were always destined to love each other. It's that deep feeling of commitment to each other that we felt in those lines, to the point where it became very clear to me within seconds, that I wasn't just standing there to protect the mountain, but that I would give my life to protect any other women next to me, most of them, I didn't even know their names."

Heoli and Malia continue their fight for the Mauna in their new roles as mothers to precious Kaleiwohi. Their future is in their arms and she will inherit a life that her elders fought for. A life that is full of love for her land and people, a life that is Indigenous, a life that is Hawaiian.

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# EXPLORATION

#1: Listen to some songs by Frank Waln, or other indigenous musicians.

**How does music and other forms of cultural expression help enrich the traditions of indigenous people?**

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#2: Listen to the All My Relations podcast episode Can Our Ancestors Hear Us? (7/2/2019).

**How does keeping indigenous languages alive help us relate to the history and culture of indigenous people?**

As Dr. Adrienne Keene says: Language contains so much of the cultural knowledge and worldview."

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#3: Read sections of the Native Appropriations blog by Adrienne Keene and listen to the All My Relations podcast episode Native Appropriations (4/17/2019). **What is "cultural appropriation?" How has cultural appropriation harmed Native American communities?**

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Give examples of where this happened in the Media and Entertainment world (ex. Halloween costumes, Johnny Depp as "Tonto in the Lone Ranger movie."

**How can one take steps to not engage in Native cultural appropriation when creating art?**

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#4 listen to our All My Relations podcast "For The Love Of The Mauna" series

**After learning about the illegal annexation of Hawaii, and the ongoing efforts to stop overtourism and the destruction of Mauna Kea, do you think it is ethical to travel to Hawai'i?**

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#5 Listen to All My Relations Podcast, <https://www.allmyrelationspodcast.com/>, Episodes on Native Appropriations, Thanksgiving or Thankstaking? **What is the actual story of the First Thanksgiving in 1621? Why are children taught a different tale in grade school?**

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# INVESTIGATION

How are body modification practices (dress, tattoo, hairstyles) linked to culture?

Why is tattooing important for some Native American people like Holly Mititquq Nordlum?

Why is indigenous language learning important for Native American sovereignty?

Do you feel like you fit in at your institution of learning? Why or why not?  
How can you honor indigenous communities when you travel?

Citation: <https://www.afar.com/magazine/how-to-honor-indigenous-communities-when-you-travel>

How has history been written to support systems of white supremacy?

When did institutions start using Native Americans as mascots? What steps can institutions take to change this practice?

Citation: <https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/faq/did-you-know>

What is Indigenous People's Day?

Citation: <https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/informational/columbus-day-myths>

