

Short Paper 1:

The Relevance of Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park

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The evolving history of museums has led to the advent of unique museums emerging in the modern world. While colonialism has dramatically shaped the history of our world, museums help preserve some of the history of the indigenous peoples that have been conquered and ruled over the centuries. Hawaii is no exception to this law of the land and way of the world. The unique attributes the Hawaiian landscapes and culture offer the world is shared by way of tourism, museums, and parks. The preservation of indigenous Hawaiian culture would be less effective without the existence of the U.S. National Park Service (NPS), who owns and operates the Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park. This park allows natives, local residents, and visitors from all over the world to engage in appreciation of the Hawaiian culture and its unique qualities, contributing to the preservation and awareness of indigenous cultures. Hawaiian and American cultures converge in the Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, where the colonized Hawaiians could both operate and enjoy the sites of their homeland.

The NPS has been preserving national parks in America since 1916, accomplishing their mission which “preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations” (NPS, 2025). The same year this agency was created the Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park was established, August 1, 1916, being the 15th park in the NPS system (NPS, 2025a). While much of the Hawaiian culture might have been lost in the lava fields and long history of warfare amongst Hawaiian tribes and later visitors, museums like these increase the global awareness of the Hawaiian people and the rich relationship Hawaiians have with their environment. Public education from parks like these attract the attention of local and global students alike, contributing to the perpetuation of continuous learning.

While providing access to two of the world's most active volcanoes, Kīlauea and Mauna Loa, the native Hawaiian connection to the land, *Kānaka Maoli*, is “shared with visitors driving the roads, hiking the trails, visiting historic districts and buildings, and the use of archive and museum collections” (NPS, 2025a). This cross-cultural sharing echoes the Aloha Spirit Hawaii is revered for, which allows access for numerous geological, astronomical, scientific, historical, and cultural explorers from all over the world. This park has the largest mountain in the world, Mauna Loa, and meets the criterion to be a World Heritage Site, with “the area as an outstanding example of ongoing geological processes that advance understanding of the earth's evolution” (Purdy, 2024).

The Native Hawaiian, *Kanaka 'Ōiwi*, student should be educated on their “sovereignty” and “indigenous history” and these “instructional practices must also clearly embrace Indigeneity” (Kawano, 2023, p. 891). As a “de-colonial vision” of local culture-based education increases “indigenous unity” when “teachers and students uplift *Kanaka 'Ōiwi*,” they also “support similar efforts for the liberation of all Indigenous Peoples” (Kawano, 2023, p. 891). With more local native awareness increasing, Hawaiians are equipped with a “critical lens to combat oppression through knowledge about self-determination, Ea [sovereignty, life], decoloniality, or praxis” (Kawano, 2023, p. 864). This is how Hawaiians continue *Imua Me Ka Hopo Ole*, forward without fear, overcoming adversities like subjugated education manipulation by educating themselves (University of Hawaii, 2021). Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park staff educate public visitors and also provide field trips, park ranger visits to schools or institutions, and contains a “park archive” that “contains approximately 1,350 linear feet of National Park Service records” (NPS, 2025a).

Colonization by way of American Missionaries began eighty years before Hawaii became incorporated into a U.S. territory in 1900 and the attempt of the U.S. to “Americanize Hawai’i’s majority nonwhite populace” failed after sixty years (University of Hawaii, 2021). Native Hawaiians were only able to succeed against the Americanization of their education system and the attempt to “rewrite Hawaii’s past.. through their active participation in the very institution trying to assimilate them: schools” (University of Hawaii, 2021). This blend of assimilation and independence serves as an example to other colonized indigenous peoples and how they could, and perhaps should, hold onto their sovereignty and dignity as a nation before they were conquered. Museums like Hawai’i Volcanoes National Park allow Hawaiians to hold onto something of theirs while simultaneously sharing it with the world, although it belongs to the NPS and America, for now.

Museums and parks like the Hawai’i Volcanoes National Park serve as critical institutions that foster cross-cultural awareness, scientific discovery, local tourism and job options, heritage preservation, and cultural awareness of a population still living under the influence of colonialism. Although Hawaiians have been colonized, many *Kanaka ‘Ōiwi* still “treat knowledge as dynamic and responsive to changes in place, space, and time,” which “is a gift that flows to and from elders, families, communities, and the natural world” (Kawano, 2023, p. 864), maintaining their *Kānaka Maoli* and self-identity. Sharing this knowledge of Hawaiian ancestry with the world shares the memories, stories, culture, and beauty of the Hawaiian Islands and the ancestors who discovered and first inhabited these islands. While reasonable critical views on American colonialism remain, the NPS does its best to preserve the cultures of the indigenous people’s they colonize.

Speaking to locals and natives that reside in Hawaii provides divergent views that mirror the divergent population that reside in Hawaii today, which also reflects the generational gaps of knowledge from the natives that did not become part of the diaspora. Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park has seventy-nine full-time staff members and “the most recent NPS report shows that 1.6 million visitors in 2023 spent \$155 million in communities near the park. That spending supported 1,590 jobs in the local area” (NPS, 2025a). The presence of this park empirically supports local businesses and the local economy, which directly supports the community of *Kānaka Maoli*.

Although the Kingdom of Hawaii has been colonized since the nineteenth century, institutions like the NPS could lead to an indigenous population remaining endangered rather than becoming extinct. While sentiments will always remain as conflicted as human history has over tribal territories, the NPS has allowed the *Kanaka 'Ōiwi to Imua Me Ka Hopo Ole* and Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park welcomes visitors from all around to bear witness and participate in the preservation of the Hawaiian Islands and its people's culture. As Aloha is used as a greeting or farewell (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), just as Hawaiians had to say Aloha to the arrival of colonialism, one day they will also say Aloha when it is gone, having been preserved by institutions within the institution that colonized them to begin with.

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