

CRITICAL PACIFIC ISLANDS & OCEANIA STUDIES FRAMEWORK FOR STOP AAPI HATE SUMMIT (JUNE 2022)

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How does one begin to describe the enormity of the Pacific Ocean? The most prominent geographic feature on this planet, it occupies one-third of the Earth’s surface area. How does one begin to describe the history of the first peoples to settle this watery region, who made sure that every one of the twenty thousand islands in the world’s largest ocean had been explored? How does one begin to honor and respect the layered, oceanic histories of peoples whose descendants today are some of the world’s most misunderstood and misrepresented groups? Where does one begin?

—Teresia K. Teaiwa, “Charting Pacific (Studies) Waters: Evidence of Teaching and Learning” (2017)

INTRODUCTION

Pacific Islanders are often left out of conversations about communities of color in America as well as within Asian American & Pacific Islander (AAPI) narratives. This framework is designed to be an introduction to the study of Pacific Islanders in the United States, while drawing connections to **Oceania**, which includes over 25,000 islands and 1200 distinct cultural languages, and the **Pacific Islander diaspora** more broadly. Its purpose is to **disaggregate** the AAPI umbrella term to honor the autonomy and **self-determination** of Pacific Islander communities, especially for our students. This framework centers Pacific Islander histories, identities, self-determination, and **sovereignty** in order to engage and continue building **solidarity** between Pacific Islander and Asian/American communities in the U.S.

**Bolded terms and phrases are key concepts in the framework provided below.*

This framework consists of the following three units:

Unit 1: History & Identity

Unit 2: Self-Determination & Sovereignty

Unit 3: Disaggregation & Solidarity

Each unit includes: 1) essential questions; 2) concepts with key points, definitions, quotes, and/or examples; and 3) resources for educators to utilize.

UNIT 1: HISTORY & IDENTITY

This unit defines the Pacific Islands as Oceania and gives a brief overview of the history behind the mapping of cultural regions Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. The goals of this unit are to convey the ways in which colonialism and American imperialism in the region affect Pacific Islander histories, (im)migration, narratives, and identity formation in the United States. This unit offers Indigenous perspectives of decolonization to frame how Pacific Islanders name and identify themselves in response to contexts of colonial histories, ongoing imperialism in the region, and everyday experiences living in diaspora in the United States.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Who are Pacific Islanders?
- What are Pacific Islander relationships to the United States?
- How do Pacific Islanders identify themselves in the United States?

CONCEPTS

Oceania
<p>Key Points</p> <p>This is a term used to shift the paradigm of how to view Pacific Islanders and the Pacific in a way that does not perpetuate the belittlement and isolation of Island people and cultures. “Oceania” is not only a term to denote a geographic region, but most importantly is a term and framework for looking at the connections between Pacific Islanders, or Indigenous peoples of Oceania. Rather than considering the ocean as what separates us, we look at the ocean as what connects us.</p>
<p>Quotes</p> <p>“‘Oceania’ connotes a sea of islands with their inhabitants. The world of our ancestors was a large sea full of places to explore, to make their homes in, to breed generations of seafarers like themselves. People raised in this environment were at home with the sea. They played in it as soon as they could walk steadily, they worked in it, they fought on it. They developed great skills for navigating their waters, and the spirit to traverse even the few large gaps that separated their island groups.”</p>

—Eveli Hau‘ofa, in “Our Sea of Islands” (1994)

“Oceania is vast, Oceania is expanding, Oceania is hospitable and generous, Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and regions of fire deeper still, Oceania is us. We are the sea, we are the ocean, we must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all hegemonic views that aim ultimately to confine us again, physically and psychologically, in the tiny spaces which we have resisted accepting as our sole appointed place, and from which we have recently liberated ourselves. We must not allow anyone to belittle us again, and take away our freedom.”

—Eveli Hau‘ofa, in “Our Sea of Islands” (1994)

Pacific Islands, Pacific Islanders

Key Points

“Pacific Islander” is an identity category that provides a surface-level point of reference and recognition for Indigenous people of Oceania in the U.S. However, there is a major difference between the ways we identify ourselves to each other (with very specific family names, connections to specific villages, island places, and the cities and neighborhoods we have moved to in the U.S.) to the ways Islanders identify as “Pacific Islanders” in order to be recognized in the U.S. When identifying ourselves to one another, we name ourselves, our islands, and our villages very specifically, or as specifically as we can.

- Ex: I am Tongan, my mother’s family comes from the village(s) of _____, and my father’s side comes from the village(s) of _____.
- Ex: I am from the Solomon Islands, my father is from the village(s) of _____ and my mother is from the village(s) of _____.
- Ex: I am Chamorro, my mother’s family comes from the villages of _____ and my father’s family comes from the villages of _____.

“Pacific Islander” is a category we have come to use when we are identifying ourselves in places and contexts outside of Oceania, or to people/communities unfamiliar with the specifics of our islands and villages. When we use the term “Pacific Islander” in the United States, we are referring to people whose genealogies are tied to the islands of Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia.

The term “Pacific” is a colonial term that comes from European explorer Ferdinand Magellan, who is credited with naming this ocean due to the calmness of its waters (‘pacific’ meaning peaceful). The term “Pasifika” is a transliteration of the word Pacific, and is a term used by Pacific Islander communities across Oceania and in diaspora to refer to indigenous Pacific Islanders. Like Eveli Hau‘ofa’s reframing of the term “Oceania,” the term “Pasifika” reflects how Pacific Islanders are indigenizing and reclaiming terms that have been placed on the region through colonial naming and mapping. “Pasifika” as a term highlights solidarity and coalition between

Pacific Islander communities.

“Pacific Islander” operates as an identity category outside of Oceania: this identity category is vast, extremely diverse, and is distinct from the categories of Asian and Asian American. Pacific Islander identities are variously shaped by intersecting factors such as geography, history, political, and social relationships that are listed throughout this framework.

Quotes

“There is a gulf of difference between viewing the Pacific as ‘islands in a far sea’ and as ‘a sea of islands.’ The first emphasizes dry surfaces in a vast ocean far from the centres of power. When you focus this way you stress the smallness and remoteness of the islands. The second is a more holistic perspective in which things are seen in the totality of their relationships.”

—Eveli Hau‘ofa, “Our Sea of Islands” (1994)

According to the 2020 Census, about 690,000 people identified as Pacific Islander alone, but almost 900,000 identified as Pacific Islander in combination with another race with a total of 1.5 million..

—Lindsay M. Monte and Hyon B. Shin, “[20.6 Million People in the U.S. Identify as Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander](#)” (2022)



“Cultural Areas of the Pacific” Map—Center for Pacific Islands Studies, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (2006)

Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia

Key Points

Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia are terms created by European cartographers in the 18th and 19th centuries based on the racial and gender categorization of Indigenous peoples of Oceania through European racial lenses. In 1832, French cartographer Dumont D’Urville published the paper “Sur le Îles de Grand Océan” and made these terms popular:

- Polynesia from Greek: “poly” (many) + “nesos /-nesia” (islands) = “Many Islands”
- Micronesia from Greek: “micro” (small) + “nesos / -nesia” (islands) = “Small Islands”
- Melanesia from Greek: “melas” (black) + “nesos / -nesia” (islands) = “Black Islands,” or “Islands of Black People”

These terms carved Oceania into “cultural regions” based on European perspectives, worldviews, and social structures that categorized personhood based on race and gender. The designation of

“cultural regions” in Oceania was done in order to categorize Indigenous people into groups based on their perceived distance or closeness to white European ideals and structures of “civilization”. While the classifications of Polynesians and Micronesians were predicated on both physical features and physical geographies of space, Melanesia was named based entirely on skin color: “mela”—black skinned people. The naming of “Melanesia” as a “cultural category” reflects colonial naming devoid of the large land spaces, resources, and cultural dynamism that continues to define these island places and peoples.

European naming, categorization, and construction of “cultural regions” is a process that aimed to overwrite and erase structures of connection between Indigenous Islanders across Oceania—such as navigation routes, trade routes, linguistic ties, etc.—which have crisscrossed Oceania for millennia, and are still being carried out today.

Today, “Melanesia,” “Micronesia,” and “Polynesia” are terms being reclaimed and critiqued by Indigenous Pacific Islanders who use phrases like “The Melanesian Way,” “Poly Pride,” “Micronesian Pride” to organize and gather communities to empower Indigenous Pacific identities and histories in Oceania and beyond.

Definitions

List of countries that are part of each region:

- **Melanesia:** West Papua; Papua New Guinea; Solomon Islands; New Caledonia; Vanuatu; Fiji
- **Micronesia:** Republic of Palau; Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI); Guåhan (Guam); Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)—Islands of Yap, Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei; Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI); Kiribati; Nauru
- **Polynesia:** Kingdom of Tonga, Sāmoa, American Sāmoa, Hawai‘i, Wallis & Futuna, Tokelau, Tuvalu, Aotearoa (New Zealand), Niue, Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Rapa Nui (Isla de Pascua/Easter Island), Pitcairn

While it is crucial to note the independence movements that created contemporary Pacific Island nation-states, the nation-state model has its limitations. One of the main limitations of focusing only on the nation-state as an indicator of sovereignty/independence is that this kind of organization tends to downplay the fact that many island places were, and still are, shaped by connections between people and communities that expand beyond national borders and cultural regions. For example, Fiji is a synthesis of Polynesia and Melanesia and its social organization is both hierarchical and egalitarian.

Indigenous Place Names and Diacritical Marks:

Indigenous Pacific languages use a vast variety of orthographies. Many languages include letters that do not exist in English orthography. For example, in many Indigenous Pacific languages, the

glottal stop is its own letter.

It is important to use correct orthography, including diacritical marks:

Examples:

Letters

- **Glottal Stop (‘) (≠ apostrophe):** Hawai‘i, Pape‘ete, Nuku‘alofa
- **Å/å:** Guåhan
- **Ñ/ñ:** Hagåtña

Diacritical Marks

- **Macron:** Sāmoa, Mānoa

Quotes

- The early European mapping of Oceania, especially the tripartite division into Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia, was fraught with essentialist, racist, and social-evolutionary elements. For centuries, Melanesia and Melanesians were generally represented in negative and derogatory way in scholarly and popular discourses. That perspective has, to some extent, been internalized by Pacific Islanders, including Melanesians. It has also influenced contemporary representations of and relationships with Melanesia and Melanesians.

However, since the 1970s, Melanesians have appropriated the term “Melanesia” and used it for self-identification, turning it from a derogatory term to a positive one: a source of pride and self-identification. They have appropriated a colonial concept and deployed it as an instrument of empowerment. Since the late 1980s, they have used it to mobilize through subregional organizations such as the Melanesian Spearhead Group and events such as the Melanesian Festival of Arts and Culture. This has enabled Melanesian countries to assert political and economic power in Oceania and to redefine and re-present themselves.

This has engendered “Melanesianism”—a process and a discourse (*toké storí*) that celebrates the idea of Melanesian. They have subsequently created “alter-natives” who are clawing their way out of the “ignoble savage” cocoon where they have been encased for centuries. Melanesians, armed with diverse and rich cultures, have captured the “ignoble savage,” turned it on its head, and used the term “Melanesia” to establish their place in Oceania and beyond, creating new and empowering images.

Melanesians are asserting their “place in the sun in Oceania.”

—Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, “Re-Presenting Melanesia: Ignoble Savages and

Melanesian Alter-Natives (2015)

- Paul Lyons: About the term Micronesia. We were reading Emelihter Kihleng's "The Micronesian Question" in class. Micronesia seems to be different in its implications depending on where one is located, and I wanted to ask whether you feel that the term is useful.

Jojo Peter: It is a pretty useful term, actually. If you look at the recent colonial history under the United States after World War II, our leaders then, who were very young at the time, were out at the forefront of local governance. And of course the United States didn't want to deal with strong elements of local governance. To them it was a territory, and they had a commissioner to administer that territory with the basic social programs. So in order to foster some kind of credible, meaningful mechanism for strong local unity, our leaders saw the need to have a unified front. They were trying to push for an independent Micronesia where they would hold together all of that area from the Marshall Islands to Palau and up north to the Marianas, not counting Guam because since 1898 Guam had been a territory of the United States. So what was then Trust Territory of the Pacific under the UN trust nation program. You could look at it from outside and say, OK, there's a unit and that unit needs to grow on its own because one of the requirements of the trusteeship arrangement is future political status, meaning independence. And you could not be independent if you were factionalized. We understood it then and we continue to understand that we have incredible diversity in our culture, and we don't want that to be lost on our young people or on anybody. The strategy then was apparent in the writing of the 1975 Constitutional Convention, where you have all of these groups trying to negotiate some kind of meaningful entity that could give birth to an independent Micronesia. And people have talked about that, like "yes, there is that diversity," and we don't want to undermine the fact that there are many languages and many different cultural backgrounds, of course. And there is the idea that regionalism is a foreign concept for Micronesia, Polynesia, and Melanesia, but at the same time, it's also a useful tool when you need it to be useful. You don't want to undermine the diversity that's a useful core value to have. You certainly don't want to lose all your languages, and those are very important concepts to us. And I know a lot of people have said, "Well you're Micronesian," and it depends on how it is used. Like over here, when people use that term in a problematic way, it undermines the rich diversity and communicates very negative connotations. It's packaged problematically when you use it that way, but if you asked our leaders back then, the people who were architects of the early self-determination movements, they really thought and continue to think that there is and there can be a meaningful Micronesian identity, just like "Melanesians." Of course there's incredible diversity in Melanesia, but at the same time they've come up with groups called "Melanesian Spearhead," and they have forged that to use for something that is totally meaningful to them. So, yes, I like that idea

that we should use that term, as long as we don't use it to bash people over the head. It's not our term, like with religion, but we have managed to use both concepts in ways that are very meaningful and helpful for ourselves. So I don't think it's an "either or thing." I'm a Micronesian. I like people to know that I am Micronesian. I am also Chuukese, and more importantly to me when I am sitting among my people, I am from the clan of Masalo. And these are important concepts—and while I am with my community I also want them to know that I am a devout member of our Catholic group here because I know there is a lot of value that holds that together. So in the layers of multiple identity, that is one of them. That is part of it. And I like people to say, "We're Polynesians." "We're Pacific Islanders." "We're Oceanians," and those are the layers and we have to use them in very respectful ways.

—Jojo Peter, "COFA Complex: A Conversation with Joachim "Jojo" Peter" (2016)

Indigeneity / Indigenous

Key Points

Indigenous Pacific Islanders are those who have genealogical ties to Oceania.

It is important to understand that the UN *definition* of Indigenous peoples in the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) is not all-encompassing and runs the risk of limiting the recognition of Indigenous peoples under legal statutes. Indigenous forms of self-definition and self-determination are expansive and complex.

Quotes

"Indigenous peoples are those who have creation stories, not colonization stories, about how we/they came to be in a particular place - indeed how we/they came to be a place"

— Eve Tuck & K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is not a metaphor" (2012)

Genealogy, Land, and Water

Key Points

Genealogy is foundational to the ways that Islanders connect, remember, and make meaning.

Genealogy is not just a recitation of a family tree or blood ties, but is a framework for naming connections that expands beyond genetic ties to include expansive and extensive community connections (much broader than the nuclear family as an organizing unit of society).

- Connections between families, villages, islands, and regions of Oceania are remembered through the collective recitation and memory of shared events, conflicts, movements,

births, deaths, and migrations.

- Genealogy is recited across generations to remember and revive responsibilities between our families and communities over time. The remembrance of connections—both familial and beyond—are part of the genealogical framework that defines our connections to each other and the worlds around us as Indigenous peoples of Oceania.

Genealogy also defines Indigenous Pacific Islander worldviews in which our specific lands and waters are part of our genealogy—lands and waters are both ancestors and homes.

- Land and water are fundamental to Indigenous Pacific Islander identities, knowledge bases, relationships, and histories.

Quotes

“This may be seen in a common categorisation of people as exemplified in Tonga by the inhabitants of the main, capital islands, who used to refer to their compatriots from the rest of the archipelago, not so much as ‘people from outer islands’ as social scientists would say, but as *kakai mei tabi* or just *tabi*, ‘people from the sea’. This characterisation reveals the underlying assumption that the sea is home to such people.”

—Eveli Hau‘ofa, from “Our Sea of Islands” (1994)

Imperialism

Key Points

The histories and processes of imperialism within Oceania are multiple and ongoing. The effects of imperialism on Oceanic peoples, cultures, politics, and everyday experiences are complex and specific to the colonial powers and their varied manifestations of control in the islands.

Definition

“Imperialism is: the policy, practice, or advocacy of extending the power and dominion of a nation especially by direct territorial acquisitions or by gaining indirect control over the political or economic life of other areas; broadly: the extension or imposition of power, authority, or influence.”

—Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, PACS 108 Lecture, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

Quotes

“For peoples who suffer the yoke of imperialism, it is a total system of foreign power where another culture, people and way of life penetrate, transform, and come to define the colonized society. The results are always destructive, no matter the praises sung by the colonizer. But the extent of the damage depends on the size of the colony, the power of the colonizing country and the resistance of the colonized. In the Pacific, tiny islands, large predatory powers—like the United States and France—and small Native populations all but ensure a colonial stranglehold.”

— Haunani-Kay Trask, “Politics in the Pacific Islands: Imperialism and Native Self-Determination,” (1990)

“The oppressed and the exploited of the earth maintain their defiance: liberty from theft. But the biggest weapon wielded and actually unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of no achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other peoples’ languages rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary, all those forces which would stop their own springs of life. It even plants serious doubts about the moral rightness of struggle. Possibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, ridiculous dreams. The intended results are despair, despondency and a collective death-wish.”

—Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o, “Introduction,” *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986)

Colonization / Colonialism

Definitions

The establishment, acquisition, maintenance and expansion of colonies in one territory by people from another territory. It is a process where a politically, economically & militarily powerful country claims sovereignty over the colony. The social structure, government, and economics of the colony are changed by colonizers from powerful countries. Colonialism is a set of unequal relationships between the metropolitan country and the colony and between the colonists and the indigenous population.

—Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, PACS 108 Lecture, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

Colonialism is a process that exists at multiple levels. At the outset it is a process of territorial or geographical expansion predicated on military might and conquest. Colonialism consists of multiple colonial projects. This includes but not limited to:

- a. land theft /seizure of native land/the dispossession of indigenous peoples of their land;
- b. violence, mass murder and attempted annihilation of indigenous peoples;
- c. and the denigration of indigenous cultures, and the erasure of indigenous epistemologies;
- d. militarization;
- e. the belittlement of peoples, spaces and places.
- f. the establishment of plantation economies/ cash crop economies that require large scale agriculture for exports such as sugar, cotton, coffee, cocoa, for consumption and profit accumulation by Western colonial powers.

—Ponipate Rokolekutu, RRS 103 Lecture, San Francisco State University

The following concepts are the complex and varied rationales and processes by which colonial powers—Spain, Portugal, Britain, France, Germany, the U.S., Japan, New Zealand, Australia, Chile, and Indonesia—took and maintained colonial control in Oceania.

- Settler Colonialism: “settler colonialism is an inclusive, land-centred project that coordinates a comprehensive range of agencies, from the metropolitan centre to the frontier encampment, with a view to eliminating Indigenous societies.”
— Patrick Wolfe, “Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native,” (2006)
- Militarization: “step-by-step process by which something becomes controlled by, dependent on, or derives its value from the military as an institution or militaristic criteria”
— Center for Pacific Islands Studies iBook, “Militarism and Nuclear Testing in the Pacific” (2016)
 - Examples: military build-up, nuclear testing, bases, occupation, and recruitment
- Missionization: refers primarily to Christian missionary work in the Pacific that has led to a growth in Indigenous missionaries, missionary schools, churches, as well as the displacement of traditional religious institutions, practices, and rituals
- Capitalism: in this economic system, the purpose is to make a profit at the expense of the worker, and in turn this has led to a cash-based economy, displacement of traditional land tenure, and agricultural systems

(Im)migration & Diaspora

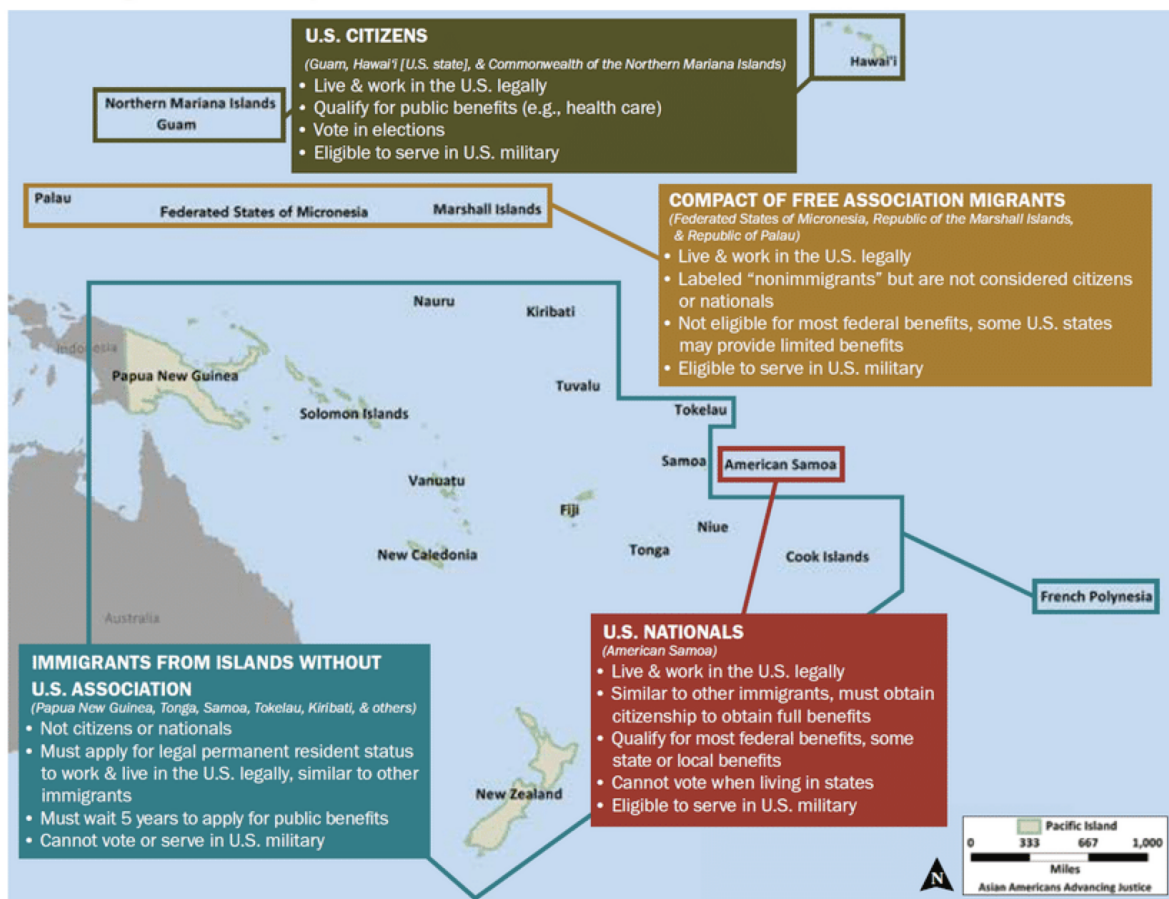
Definitions

- Immigration: movement to a country permanently, while migration is temporary
 - first-generation immigrants: those born outside of the U.S. or territories
 - second-generation: have at least one immigrant parent
 - third & higher: children of U.S. born parents, grandparents, etc.
- Diaspora: the (forced) movement of a people away from their ancestral home(is)land
- Transnationalism: a process where immigrants build multiple, social, economic, and cultural relations across geographic and political boundaries

Immigration Status by Pacific Island of Birth (see image below)

- U.S. Citizens: those born in Hawai'i, the Northern Mariana Islands, and Guam are considered U.S. Citizens that can live and work in the U.S., qualify for public benefits, and serve in the U.S. military
- Compact of Free Association Migrants: those born in Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, or the Marshall Islands are labeled nonimmigrants but not considered citizens or nationals with the right to live and work in the U.S., and serve in the U.S. military
- U.S. Nationals: those born in American Samoa are considered Nationals, that can live and work in the U.S., must obtain U.S. citizenship to have full benefits and cannot vote when living in the states, but are eligible to serve in the U.S. military
- Immigrants from Islands without U.S. Association: those born in islands throughout Oceania must apply for legal permanent resident status to live and work in the U.S., must wait five years to apply for federal benefits, cannot vote or serve in the U.S. military

U.S. Immigration Status by Pacific Island of Birth



U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, National Immigration Law Center, U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Insular Affairs; Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice; APIAHF "Access to Health Coverage for Pacific Islanders in the United States." Note: Smaller islands not labeled on map. Information provided on the chart is generalized information based on islands of birth. The information above may not be true for all immigrants born on these islands. Native Hawaiians living in Hawai'i are indigenous people and not immigrants. As indigenous people, Native Hawaiians qualify for other federal benefits through programs such as the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act.

Empowering Pacific Islander Communities. "Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islanders: A Community of Contrasts in the United States." Policy Report, Los Angeles, CA, 2014.

Key Points

Immigration is a perpetual colonial/white supremacist project of the denigration of BIPOC through the language of dehumanization which determines those who are included and excluded, legal and illegal, natural and unnatural.

However, the ways that Pacific Islanders move, ask for help and support one another, maintain connections across and in defiance of borders give us alternative models such as genealogical ties, prioritizing connection and relationships.

Quotes

“At the Honolulu Airport, while waiting for my flight back to Fiji, I met an old friend, a Tongan who is twice my size and lives in Berkeley, California. He is not an educated man. He works on people’s yards, trimming hedges and trees, and laying driveways and footpaths. But every three months or so he flies to Fiji, buys with eight to ten thousand dollars worth of kava, takes it on the plane flying him back to California, and sells it from his home. He has never heard of dependency, and if he were told of it, it would hold no real meaning for him. He told me in Honolulu that he was bringing a cooler full of T-shirt, some for the students at the University with whom he often stays when he comes to Suva, and the rest for his relatives in Tonga, where he goes for a week or so while his kava is gathered, pounded and bagged here. He would later fill the cooler with seafood to take back home to California, where he has two sons he wants to put through college. On one of his trips he helped me renovate a house that I had just bought. We like him because he is a good story teller and is generous with his money and time. But mostly because he is one of us.”

— Epele Hau‘ofa, “Our Sea of Islands” (1994)

U.S. Relations with Oceania

Key Points

In order to understand Pacific Islander experiences, histories, and meaning-making in the U.S., it is important to understand the history of the U.S. relationships with the Pacific Islands. There are specific imperial and territorial power relations that the U.S. continues to maintain in Oceania.

- Compact of Free Association: “The status of free association recognizes an island government as a sovereign, self-governing state with the capacity to conduct foreign affairs consistent with the terms of the Compact. The Compact places full responsibility for military defense with the United States. The basic relationship of free association continues indefinitely; the economic provisions of the Compact are subject to renegotiation at the end of 15 years.”

—U.S. Department of the Interior

- Unincorporated territory: “A United States insular area in which the United States Congress has determined that only selected parts of the United States Constitution apply.”
—U.S. Department of the Interior

Quote

“The relationship between the United States and the nations and territories that comprise the Pacific Islands is complex and has historical and continuing significance in international and global affairs. American involvement in the Pacific was and continues to be primarily structured by strategic interests in the region.”

—J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, “Imperial Ocean: The Pacific as a Critical Site for American Studies,” (2015)

Examples

- [Omai Fa'atasi](#). (Documentary)
- Kathy Jetnīl-Kijiner, “[History Project](#)” (Poem)
- Terisa Siagatonu, “[Atlas](#)” (Poem)
- Jamaica Osorio, Ittai Wong, Will Giles, Alaka'i Kotrys, “[Kaona](#)” (Poem)
- Travis T & Will Giles, “[Oral Traditions](#)” (Poem)

Pacific Studies

Key Points

Pacific Studies was established as an academic discipline in the U.S. during the 1950s at the East West Center, located on the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa campus. The original scope of the discipline was to create research and information that reproduced paradigms of the Pacific Islands as politically insignificant, far from centers of global power, and set to be forever dependent on foreign aid and infrastructure to survive. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that Indigenous Pacific Islander writers, scholars, and educators redefined the field of Pacific Studies by centering Pacific Islander stories, knowledge, and perspectives.

Quotes

- **Rationales for Pacific Studies**
 - **Pragmatic Rationale**
In the United States the need to know about foreign places, including the islands of the Pacific, became pressing during World War II, when area and language specialists were recruited to train military personnel in appropriate skills. According to Schwartz, this was “an enterprise designed to achieve an

encapsulated understanding of the unknown areas of the world in which we suddenly found ourselves engaged' (1980:15). After the war, the increasingly global nature of U.S. economic and political interests encouraged the rapid expansion of area and language programs, many of them modeled on their wartime counterparts. With the onset of the cold war, international education in the United States became geared to the competition with the Soviet Union for global influence (Heginbotham 1994:35-43). Funding for area studies programs came in large part from private foundations and the federal government, rather than from the universities themselves (Pye 1975:10-13).

The early history of Pacific Islands studies at the University of Hawai'i reflects these broad national trends. Several of the "founding fathers" of the program were involved in training or intelligence activities in the Pacific theater during the war, and the establishment of the U.S.-administered Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands in Micronesia in 1947 provided an early boost to Pacific Islands research on the Manoa campus (Quigg 1987:17). Until relatively recently, the program received much of its funding from external sources closely associated with the growth of area studies generally." A persistent theme in the applications for these grants is that Americans should know about this part of the world and that academic endeavors to this end are worthy of government and other support.'

—Terence Wesley-Smith, "Rethinking Pacific Studies" (1995)

- **Laboratory Rationale**

An alternative rationale for studying the Pacific Islands was outlined by Douglas Oliver two decades ago: "I suggest that because of their wide diversities, small-scale dimensions and relative isolation, the Pacific Islands can provide excellent--in some ways unique--laboratory-like opportunities for gaining deeper understandings of Human Biology, Political Science, etc." (quoted in Quigg 1987:91). Western scientists have long recognized this opportunity and the results of their investigations have profoundly affected a number of academic disciplines. For instance, information from early European voyages of exploration forced the reconsideration of some of the fundamentals of natural science (MacLeod and Rehbock 1988); the nature of Pacific Islands societies sparked debates about noble and ignoble savages which made their marks on European philosophy, art, and literature (Smith 1960, 1992). Perhaps the most sustained impact has been on anthropology, and Pacific materials have featured prominently in some of that discipline's most significant theoretical and methodological debates.

—Terence Wesley-Smith, "Rethinking Pacific Studies" (1995)

- **Empowerment Rationale**

Both the pragmatic and laboratory rationales for Pacific Islands studies largely reflect the agendas and priorities of outsiders, and both bear colonial and neocolonial taints. In the pragmatic frame, on the one hand, the ultimate purpose has been influence rather than understanding. The laboratory mode, on the other hand, can easily reduce Pacific Islanders to mere objects for study. A prime example was the Harvard-based study of population biology that scrutinized and probed thousands of Solomon Islanders in the 1960s and 1970s in the esoteric interest of science (Friedlaender 1975).

The decolonization of the region remains incomplete, but it has already changed the nature of Pacific Islands scholarship. The research agenda has been altered to reflect the emergence of a whole new range of economic, political, and social problems and issues. Disciplines such as Pacific history have attempted to become more “island centered” and less imperial in their concerns and emphases. More important, the former objects of inquiry have acquired the political and educational abilities to speak up and answer back. As Vilsoni Hereniko put it, Pacific Islanders are no longer “content to allow representations of themselves in print to be the preserve of foreigners” (1994:413). This new political environment has given rise to a third bundle of justifications for Pacific Islands studies that can be called the empowerment rationale.

The politics of Pacific Islands scholarship are complex. Everybody agrees that more indigenous voices and perspectives are needed, but there is considerable disagreement beyond that. For some, indigenous participation on the basis of equal opportunity is sufficient. But for others, the field will not be decolonized until Pacific Islanders are fully in control of a curriculum and research agenda long dominated by foreigners. It is sometimes claimed that this view is articulated only by a few forceful individuals and is not widely shared. However, it has its proponents on all the major campuses in the region, and many more sympathizers may exist among the silent majority of regional students and faculty. For example, Haunani-Kay Trask’s broadside (1991) against Roger Keesing for his “Creating the Past” article (1989) struck a responsive chord throughout the region, as did Epli Hau’ofa’s revisionist article (1994), “Our Sea of Islands.”

Western-trained social scientists who believe they are working in the interests of Pacific Islanders are often puzzled—even hurt—by such rumblings and tend to dismiss the “activists” as misguided, ungrateful, or simply power-hungry.¹⁴ Yet the Pacific advocates of “indigenization” are part of a global movement whose rationale deserves further scrutiny. For these scholars, the real problem is the way that social science is practiced in non-Western societies, by Western and

indigenous scholars alike. They reject the notion that social science as developed and practiced in the West is a neutral and universal discourse, and deplore the uncritical adoption of Western concepts and methodologies by Third World scholars. According to Syed Farid Alatas, indigenous scholars too often become the intellectual prisoners of their Westernized training, unable “to be creative and raise original problems . . . devise original analytical methods, and alienated from the main issues of indigenous society” (1993:308).

—Terence Wesley-Smith, “Rethinking Pacific Studies” (1995)

- “...‘Decolonizing Pacific Studies,’ is part of the more general theme of decolonization, which, for me, implies an attempt to reflect critically on the nature, scope, and processes of colonialism in the Pacific Islands (or Oceania), particularly its impact on colonized people and their environments. While much has been written about the impact of colonialism on Pacific economies, environments, politics, and social structures, little attention has been focused on its impact on people’s minds, particularly on their ways of knowing, their views of who and what they are, and what they consider worthwhile to teach and to learn.”

—Konai Helu Thaman, “Decolonizing Pacific Studies: Indigenous Perspectives, Knowledge, and Wisdom in Higher Education” (2003)

- For most of us who identify with Oceanic cultures, the theme of decolonizing Pacific studies is about our struggles, from kindergarten to university, to learn the dominant study paradigms and worldviews of western peoples who lived in other places at other times. This conference challenges us to look at our western educational legacies, their philosophies, ideologies, and pedagogies, which for nearly 200 years have not fully recognized the way Oceanic peoples communicate, think, and learn— ideologies that sought to destroy the values and belief systems underpinning indigenous education systems in which the majority of Oceanic peoples were and continue to be socialized. As a teacher who is still a learner, I think decolonizing Pacific studies is about reclaiming indigenous Oceanic perspectives, knowledge, and wisdom that have been devalued or suppressed because they were or are not considered important or worthwhile.

For me, decolonizing Pacific studies is important because (1) it is about acknowledging and recognizing the dominance of western philosophy, content, and pedagogy in the lives and the education of Pacific peoples; (2) it is about valuing alternative ways of thinking about our world, particularly those rooted in the indigenous cultures of Oceanic peoples; and (3) it is about developing a new philosophy of education that is culturally inclusive and gender sensitive.

—Konai Helu Thaman, “Decolonizing Pacific Studies: Indigenous Perspectives, Knowledge, and Wisdom in Higher Education” (2003)

Critical Pacific Islands & Oceania Studies

Key Points

In the late 1960s, students in the Black Student Union (BSU) and Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) organized to address racism at San Francisco State (SF State). Alongside their peers, faculty, and community members, the BSU & TWLF shut down the school in the longest standing campus strike to demand access to higher education, and funding for relevant and quality education directly connected to their experiences and communities. Their fight resulted in the first College of Ethnic Studies with the departments of American Indian Studies, Africana Studies, Latina/o Studies, and Asian American Studies. Ethnic Studies has continued to grow into a critical and interdisciplinary study of race, ethnicity, and indigeneity with a focus on the experiences and perspectives of Black, Indigenous, and communities of color in the U.S. But it has not necessarily included the voices of Pacific Islanders until more recently.

In the early 2000s, students at the City College of San Francisco challenged administrators to create a Pacific Islander course separate from an Asian Pacific Islander class offered on campus because of the lack of content and focus on their experiences. Since then, this course has grown into the first Critical Pacific Islands and Oceania Studies certificate and associate's degree program in the U.S. with multiple courses, faculty, and community partnerships, as well as a number of transfer students to SF State. In 2016, SF State students and faculty organized together to address budget cuts to the university, which resulted in a hunger strike and written demands to administrators. One of the demands from students in the Pacific Islanders' Club on campus included the push for a Pacific Islander Studies minor and faculty positions. Our work together has culminated in a Critical Pacific Islands and Oceania Studies minor program that includes two tenure track faculty members in the department of Race & Resistance Studies (RRS), that was previously split between the RRS and Asian American Studies departments.

[Critical Pacific Islands & Oceania Studies](#) is rooted in student activism in San Francisco, California and merges Pacific Studies and Ethnic Studies to ensure that academic and communal spaces reflect the work and needs of Oceanic communities in the bay area and globally. Its purpose is to honor Indigenous peoples, experiences, stories, epistemologies, and cultures of Oceania throughout the diaspora—and to privilege narratives that are often forgotten and placed in the margins. Currently, our courses focus on historical, cultural, and contemporary topics in relation to California, US-Pacific politics, and Oceania, with a critical analysis of imperialism, colonialism, racism, militarism, and globalization. Drawing from the work of Pacific Scholars including Teresia Teaiwa, Epeli Hau'ofa and many others, the past and present work of Pacific peoples is used as a compass to guide the work and local field forward.

Quote

“The misrepresentation and exclusion of people of color from traditional American education promotes the systematic oppression of students of color, thus perpetuating institutionalized racism in the United States. Denying students of color their history, sets them up for failure by not providing the tools necessary to understand themselves within the current socio-political climate. Ethnic Studies serves to reverse these damaging and inaccurate accounts of history and works to empower students on a personal and academic level. The failure to represent Pacific Islanders in Ethnic Studies is a tacit confirmation and acceptance of our systematic erasure. Establishing a Pacific Islander Studies program will allow students and faculty to explore and evaluate ways to bridge both cultural studies and experiences to the academic arena. This will help students apply critical and creative analysis to improve the wellbeing of the Pacific Islander community as a whole.”

—Pacific Islanders’ Club, “The stake Pacific Islanders have in Ethnic Studies” (2016)

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9. Jojo Peter, “COFA Complex: A Conversation with Joachim “Jojo” Peter” (2016)
10. Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, [“History Project”](#)
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16. Patrick Wolfe, “Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native,” (2006)
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18. Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, PACS 108 Lecture, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa
19. Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, “Re-Presenting Melanesia: Ignoble Savages and Melanesian Alter-Natives (2015)
20. Terence Wesley-Smith, “Rethinking Pacific Studies” (1995)

21. Terisa Siagatonu, “[Atlas](#)”
22. Travis T & Will Giles, “[Oral Traditions](#)”
23. United States Department of the Interior
24. [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)

FURTHER RESOURCES

1. Meta Sarmiento, [Finding Strength in a World Obsessed with Size](#)
 2. Damon Salesa, [Pacific Level Up: Defining the Pacific](#)
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UNIT 2: SELF-DETERMINATION & SOVEREIGNTY

This unit focuses on Pacific Islander movements of self-determination in relation to the United States. It examines different examples of resistance, independence, and sovereignty among Pacific Islanders to articulate our varied relationships to white supremacy and empire.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What are Pacific Islander definitions of decolonization?
- How do Pacific Islanders define self-determination, sovereignty, and independence?
- What are some examples of Pacific Islander sovereignty and self-determination?

CONCEPTS

Decolonization
<p>Definition</p> <p>“Decolonization has one clear and unambiguous meaning in the history of the international system of states since World War II. It refers to the withdrawal of the colonial powers from direct legal and constitutional control over their territories. The process by which the modern states system of Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands came into being is ‘decolonization’ as envisaged by the United Nations in the 1960 decolonization resolutions, which were passed at the height of international enthusiasm for the dismantling of the colonial empires.”</p> <p>—Stewart Firth, “Decolonization” in <i>Remembrance of Pacific Pasts: An Invitation to Remake History</i>, edited by Robert Borofsky (2000)</p>
<p>Quotes</p> <p>“Any real understanding of ourselves and our existing cultures calls for an attempt to understand colonialism and what it did and is still doing to us. This understanding would better equip us to control or exorcise it so that, in the words of the Maori poet Hone Tuwhare, <i>we can dream good dreams again</i>, heal the wounds it inflicted on us and with the healing will return pride in ourselves—an ingredient to vital to creative nation-building. Pride, self-respect, self-reliance will help us cope so much more creatively with what is passing or to come.”</p> <p>—Albert Wendt, “Towards a New Oceania,” (1976)</p> <p>“This artistic renaissance is enriching our cultures further, reinforcing our identities/self-respect/and pride, and taking us through a genuine decolonisation; it is also acting as a unifying force in our region. In their individual journeys into the Void, these artists, through their work, are explaining us to ourselves and creating a new Oceania.”</p> <p>—Albert Wendt, “Towards a New Oceania,” (1976)</p>

“For me, decolonizing Pacific studies is important because (1) it is about acknowledging and recognizing the dominance of western philosophy, content, and pedagogy that lives in the education of Pacific peoples; (2) it is about valuing alternative ways of thinking about our world, particularly those rooted in the indigenous cultures of Oceanic people; and (3) it is about developing a new philosophy of education that is culturally inclusive and gender sensitive.”

—Konai Helu Thaman, “Decolonizing Pacific Studies: Indigenous Perspectives, Knowledge, and Wisdom in Higher Education” (2003)

Sovereignty

Definitions

“An independent or non-independent jurisdiction which itself possesses or whose people possess in their own right the jurisdiction's supreme authority, regardless of the jurisdiction's or people's current ability to exercise that authority.”

—U.S. Department of the Interior

“As a category of scholarship, activism, governance, and cultural work, sovereignty matters in consequential ways to understanding the political agendas, strategies, and cultural perspectives of indigenous peoples in the Americas and the Pacific. This is not to suggest that all indigenous peoples within these diverse regions share the same understanding of what sovereignty is or how it matters, nor that all of their concerns and labor can be reduced to sovereignty as a kind of *raison d'être*. Rather, following World War II, sovereignty emerged not as a new but as a particularly valued term within indigenous discourses to signify a multiplicity of legal and social rights to political, economic, and cultural self-determination. It was a term around which social movements formed and political agendas for decolonization and social justice were articulated. It has come to mark the complexities of global indigenous efforts to reverse ongoing experiences of colonialism as well as to signify local efforts at the reclamation of specific territories, resources, governments, and cultural knowledge and practices.”

—Joanne Barker, *Sovereignty Matters* (2005)

Quotes

“...the power to define what counts as knowledge and to determine what our people should be able to know and do is a fundamental aspect of peoplehood, freedom, collective well-being, and autonomy.”

—Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, “Introduction,” *The Seeds We Planted: Portraits of a Native Hawaiian Charter School*

“It's sovereignty that gives us the right and the power to negotiate interdependencies.... Independence means reckoning interdependencies as well.”

Self-Determination

Definition

Self-determination denotes the legal right of people to decide their own destiny in the international order. Self-determination is a core principle of international law, arising from [customary international law](#), but also recognized as a general principle of law, and enshrined in a number of [international treaties](#). For instance, self-determination is protected in the [United Nations Charter](#) and the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) as a right of “all peoples.”

— [Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School](#)

Quotes

“The language of self-determination has been powerful for Indigenous and other oppressed or subordinated people because it carries the dual connotation of both individual and collective empowerment, both ‘rooted in the inherent sovereignty of Native nations.’ The health of the self as individual and the self as a collective are intertwined and reflected in one another. As Hokulani Aikau puts it, *self-determination* is a term that ‘can encapsulate structural changes such as political struggles for decolonization and independence as well as personal struggles to perpetuate cultural practices.’ This dual meaning is evidenced within native education to refer both to community control of programs, schools, research initiatives, and educational systems and to the decisions and behaviors of individual students who, for example, resist school environments hostile to their cultures and identities with an array of strategies.”

—Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, *The Seeds We Planted: Portraits of a Native Hawaiian Charter School* (2013)

Independence and Sovereignty Movements

The resources below give examples of Pacific Islander histories and movements for independence and sovereignty.

Independence Movements

- Free West Papua
 - [Benny Wenda’s Story](#)
 - [“Run It Straight” \(For West Papua\)](#)
- Mau Movement
 - [Samoa and the Mau Movement](#)

Cultural Revitalization

- [Papa Mau: The Wayfinder](#)

Social Justice

- [Polynesian Panthers](#)

Demilitarization

<p>Nuclear Free & Independent Pacific</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>A Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific</i> <p>Land Reclamation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Jamaica Osorio, “This Is The Way We Rise” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Kerri-Ann Borja, Address to the U.N. Special Political and Decolonization Committee <p>Environmental & Climate Justice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, “Statement and poem,” United Nations Climate Summit, 2014
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5. Konai Helu Thaman, “Decolonizing Pacific Studies: Indigenous Perspectives, Knowledge, and Wisdom in Higher Education” (2003)
6. Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School—[Definition of Self-Determination](#)
7. Noelani Goodyear-Ka’ōpua, *The Seeds We Planted: Portraits of a Native Hawaiian Charter School* (2013)
8. [*A Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific*](#)
9. [*Papa Mau: The Wayfinder*](#)
10. Stewart Firth, “Decolonization” in *Remembrance of Pacific Pasts: An Invitation to Remake History*, edited by Robert Borofsky (2000)
11. U.S. Department of the Interior—[Definitions of Insular Area Political Organizations](#)

FURTHER RESOURCES

1. Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai‘i* (1993)
2. [*Standing Above the Clouds*](#)
3. [UN Declaration on Indigenous Peoples](#)

UNIT 3: DISAGGREGATION AND PRACTICING SOLIDARITY

This final unit provides a rationale for the disaggregation of the Asian American & Pacific Islander (AAPI), Asian American / Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander (AANHPI), and Asian Pacific American (APA) categories. It analyzes the arguments, data, and practices of disaggregation to recognize the different racialized experiences of Pacific Islanders in the U.S. Ultimately, it acknowledges the genealogy of solidarity between Pacific Islanders and Asian Americans to recognize, address, and answer erasure in our communities.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How are Pacific Islander experiences affected by white supremacy, empire, and/or racism?
- Why is disaggregation important for Pacific Islanders in the US?
- What are some examples of solidarity between Pacific Islanders and Asian Americans?

CONCEPTS

Asian American & Pacific Islander (AAPI)
<p>Key Points</p> <p>While the term Asian American is rooted in the organizing of Asian ethnic groups to address orientalism, the history of Asian American & Pacific Islander as a coalitional name that acknowledges our separate communities is often unmentioned.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● In 1977, the term <i>Asian or Pacific Islander</i> was solidified federally in the U.S. Census under the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Directive Number 15.● The categories of Asian American & Pacific Islanders (AAPI) and Asian Pacific Americans (APA) exist only in the United States. This category not only masks the disparities between Indigenous peoples of Oceania and Asian / Asian Americans, but also erases the continued acts of colonialism in our home(is)lands.● The month of May is celebrated in the U.S. as Asian Pacific American Heritage or Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Heritage Month. In 1977, representatives Frank Horton (NY) and Daniel Inouye (HI) proposed resolutions to celebrate a heritage week that was extended to a full month in 1990. May was chosen specifically to commemorate Japanese immigration to the U.S. on May 7, 1843 and the completion of the transcontinental railroad by Chinese laborers on May 10, 1869.
<p>Quotes</p>

“The Pacific/Asian Coalition is an organization of people from different regions of the United States, representing the aspirations of these people, whose ancestors came from Asia and the Pacific Islands. We affirm and advocate the right of peoples' self-determination with mutual cooperation and respect. We are committed to the philosophy of participation in the coalition on an equal and parity basis by all Asian Americans and Pacific Island peoples. This coalition recognizes that Asian Americans and Pacific Island peoples are people of diversity in a pluralistic society; therefore, ethnically and geographically we will respect and work with each other to develop real unity and strength in order to assert our rights on all fronts. This coalition shall advocate on behalf of Asian Americans and Pacific Island peoples for issues and concerns which affect the well-being of Pacific/Asian peoples.”

—Lemuel Ignacio, “The Pacific/Asian Coalition: Origin, Structure, and Program” (1976)

“Two important issues to be noted about this early history of coalition that first produced a Pacific/Asian label/connection are its West Coast–centricity and its reliance on mostly Hawaiians, more rarely Samoans, and rarer still “Guamanians” to be the Pacific/Pacific Islanders in the political mix. Ignacio’s own answer to his titular question was that “there is no such ethnic group as ‘Asian Americans and Pacific Island Peoples.’ There are different ethnic groups under the general term. The only communality [sic] is a common historical experience as exploited people in this country.” He was adamant that coalition was the only model in which it made sense to connect the two groups.”

—Lisa Kahaleole Hall, “Which of These Things Is Not Like the Other: Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders Are Not Asian Americans, and All Pacific Islanders Are Not Hawaiian” (2015)

“It is important to know the origins and terms of Polynesia as a Western project not because it reflects the ‘truth’ about Polynesia or Polynesians, but because it is a form of knowledge production that structures settler colonialism in many parts of Polynesia. Additionally, attention to the history of race in regard to the Polynesian/Melanesian divide analytically shifts understandings of race in relation to Pacific Islanders beyond the common U.S.-based racial categories, in which Pacific Islanders (including Native Hawaiians, Māori, Tongans, Sāmoans, Marshall Islanders, Chamoru, and many others) are usually understood only in reference to the incredibly broad U.S. designation ‘Asian/Pacific Islander.’ Many scholars and activists have argued that Pacific Islanders are ill-served by the Asian/Pacific Islander, or its abbreviation API, label, given stark, documented inequalities between Asian American and Pacific Islander groups as well as the distinction that Pacific Islanders are Indigenous peoples (whereas some, but not all, of Asian Americans identify as Indigenous). Polynesian, Micronesian, and Melanesian can at times be labels preferred by Pacific Islander communities, since (despite their Western origins) these labels have been adopted in Oceania as identities of regional solidarity. These regional identities are often more relevant and grounded in local contexts than the Asian/Pacific Islander classification.”

—Maile Arvin, *Possessing Polynesians: The Science of Settler Colonial Whiteness in Hawai‘i and Oceania* (2019)

“national identification as "American" is national identification as a colonizer, someone who benefits from stolen Native lands and the genocide so well documented against America's Native peoples”

— Haunani-Kay Trask, “Settlers of Color and Immigrant Hegemony” (2000)

Native Hawaiian and/or Other Pacific Islanders (NHPI)

Key Points

Since 1977, many Pacific Islander leaders and organizations have pushed for the disaggregation of Asian or Pacific Islander as a racial category. This has resulted in another misnomer of Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (NHPI), creating another process of othering among Pacific Islander communities.

In 2010, 1.2 million people in the United States identified as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, either alone or in combination with one or more other races. In the 2020 Census, roughly 1.5 million people have identified as NHPI.

Quotes

“When a July 9, 1997, Federal Register Notice asked for public feedback on the federal racial categories, the OMB received about three hundred mostly handwritten letters on various issues and “approximately 7000 individually signed and mailed, preprinted postcards on the issue of classifying data on Native Hawaiians. [...] As a result of this public plea by Native Hawaiians, the OMB broke the “Asian or Pacific Islander” category into two—one called “Asian” and the other called “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander,” thus creating five minimum racial categories rather than the previous four.”

—Lisa Kahaleole Hall, “Which of These Things Is Not Like the Other: Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders Are Not Asian Americans, and All Pacific Islanders Are Not Hawaiian” (2015)

“In the United States, the NHPI label encompasses at least 20 distinct communities including larger communities such as Native Hawaiians, Samoans, Chamorros, Fijians, Tongans, and smaller communities such as Marshallese, Chuukese, and Tahitians just to name a few. [...] Since 1997, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the federal agency that provides standards for how race and ethnicity should be reported and collected, has required federal agencies to collect and report data on NHPI as a separate racial category. This policy is mandated by OMB Statistical Policy Directive No. 15 (OMB 15), which was revised to disaggregate NHPI data from the API

category as a result of advocacy efforts by the NHPI community. In 2000, the Census Bureau began disaggregating NHPI data from Asian American data to comply with OMB 15. Unfortunately OMB 15 has not been fully implemented in all facets of federal data collection and reporting, and the needs of NHPI remain masked in too many critical areas, inflicting harm on and perpetuating myths about the NHPI community.”

—Empowering Pacific Islander Communities, ‘Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders: A Community of Contrasts in the United States (2014)

Data Disaggregation

Key Points

As a U.S. based category, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) has obscured substantial disparities among Pacific Islander communities across the United States.

Quotes

According to the [2015 American Community Survey](#), 50% of Asian American and Pacific Islanders had a Bachelor's degree or higher compared to 14% of Latinos surveyed. However when looking at the disaggregated data among Asian American communities, this varied among the 75% of Taiwanese and 74% of Asian Indians and other Asian ethnic groups, compared to the 19% of Melanesians, 17% of Native Hawaiians, 16% of Guamanians, 15% of Fijians, 14% of Samoans, and 11% of Tongans that were surveyed.

“Between 2007 and 2011, the number of unemployed NHPI increased 123%, a rate higher than any other racial group. During the same time, the number of NHPI who were living in poverty increased 56%, a rate higher than any other racial group. Today NHPI fare worse than the national average across multiple measures of income. NHPI have a higher poverty rate, a greater proportion who are low-income, and a lower per capita income than average. Marshallese, Tongan, Samoan, and Palauan Americans, for example, have higher-than-average poverty rates and lower per capita incomes than any racial group. A larger-than-average proportion of Marshallese, Tongan, and Samoan Americans are rent burdened, spending more than 30% of their income on rent. NHPI have lower-than-average rates of homeownership and larger-than-average household sizes. Increasing social safety nets, creating living-wage jobs, and funding programs to address homeownership, small-business ownership and employment disparities can aid in helping many NHPI get back on their feet after the economic downturn.”

—Empowering Pacific Islander Communities, “Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders: A Community of Contrasts in the United States” (2014)

Example

In 2016, the state of California passed [AB1726, The AHEAD \(Accounting for Health and Education in API Demographics\) Act](#). This policy requires California Community Colleges, the

California State University, the University of California, the Department of Public Health, and the Department of Health Care Services to collect and release disaggregated demographic data among Asian American and Pacific Islander groups to also include data for Fijians and Tongans. This data includes information on admission, enrollment, graduation in education as well as disease rates, health insurance coverage, and birth and death rates in health.

Representation / (Re)presentation

Key Points

Despite advocacy by Pacific Islanders, the terms Asian American & Pacific Islander (AAPI), Asian American/Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander (AANHPI), and Asian Pacific American (APA) continue to cause erasure and invisibility across our communities. It masks the complex positionalities across our own communities, which include the experiences of Pacific Islanders that come from multiple islands, are multi-racial, have Asian ancestry, or are impacted by Asian colonialism in their own islands.

We view representation as the action of speaking or acting on behalf of someone and (re)presentation as the action of speaking and acting for oneself, in order to share your own narrative and experience. This is a central concept in our framework that challenges the ways that our communities have been historically excluded, even among the intentions and politics of inclusion.

Examples of Representation

- Betty Boop's [Bamboo Isle](#) (1932)
- *South Pacific*. Rodgers and Hammerstein, (1949) (Musical)
- *Bird of Paradise* Dir. Delmer Daves, (1951)
- *Hawaii*. Dir. George Roy Hill, (1966)
- Disney's *Moana* (2016)
- *Aloha*. Dir. Cameron Crowe, (2015)

Examples of (Re)Presentation

- My Fa'aSamoa. Dir. Ursula Ann Siataga, 2011. Documentary (2011)
- [Deep Pacific Podcast](#)
- [Toki Ukamea: The Story of William Mariner](#)
- [The Sha Nanigans Podcast](#)
- [Pasifika By Design](#)
- [For The Cultures Podcast](#)

White Supremacy

Key Points

There is an assumption that all Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are impacted by white supremacy in the same way. From the complex histories of imperialism, to the ways that Pacific

Islanders have been incorporated into the United States, our racialized experiences also differ across Pacific Islander groups as well.

Quote

“white supremacy is a historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege.”

—Elizabeth ‘Betita’ Martinez, “What is White Supremacy?” (1998)

Settler Responsibility

Key Points

A settler responsibility, or settler ethic, can be a framework that spans personal self-reflection and action to broader, collective, structural change based on principles whereby non-Indigenous people learn and understand how settler colonialism—based on the logics of elimination and exclusion (defined below)—deeply structures all our lives. Part of settler responsibility is to develop understandings of ongoing colonial structures, especially our different complicities in these systems as settlers. Another part of settler responsibility is to nurture relationships and responsibilities to Indigenous sovereignty and survivance through the deeply personal as well as collective processes of understanding and dismantling colonial structures and logics such as heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism.

Indigenous people in diaspora also have a particular relationship to settler responsibility. As Indigenous peoples outside of the lands and waters we are genealogically tied to, there is also a responsibility we have to the Indigenous peoples, sovereignty, and survivance in the lands that become our homes. This responsibility requires Indigenous people in diaspora to reckon with our own positions as settlers on other Indigenous lands, and to do both the deep self-reflection and collective critique/resistance to structures of colonialism.

Below are two historical and political processes that are critical to understanding settler colonialism. Understanding these logics is critical to developing personal and structural practices of settler responsibility that confront and interrupt the following:

- Logic of Exclusion:
 - “A logic that operates as a barrier within national culture to protect and reinforce settlers' social and political control. This works to maintain and reinforce the settler colonial state through practices such as segregation, disenfranchisement, exclusion, exploitation, police brutality, detention, and imprisonment.”

—Iyko Day, *Alien Capital* (2016)

- Logic of Elimination:
 - A logic “driven to eradicate an indigenous population rather than controlling it through various exclusionary measures.”
—Iyko Day, *Alien Capital* (2016)

Quotes

“Co-existence through co-resistance is the responsibility of settlers, and we achieve it in part by making change in our own systems and among other settlers, taking our cue from Indigenous action and direction. For settler allies, having a place to land relationally creates a stronger rationale for unsettling established systems: knowing and being with Indigenous peoples, even if it is just to be welcomed to stand alongside at marches and rallies, or to join the drum dance circle, creates a tangible bond. Relationship creates accountability and responsibility for sustained supportive action. This does not mean requiring Indigenous energies for creating relationship with settlers; it means settlers taking initiative to live on a personal level what they claim on a political one.”

—Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, [“#IdleNoMore: Settler Responsibility for Relationship”](#)

“...both settler and Indigenous people must take part in dismantling the structures that prohibit sustainable Indigenous self-determination and caring for lands upon which all depend for life.”

—Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, *The Seeds We Planted: Portraits of a Native Hawaiian Charter School* (2013)

“How can Indigenous and settler peoples work in solidarity to transform structures of invasion? How might we live in ‘constructive engagement’ with one another? One way might be for Indigenous and settler peoples to work at replacing the logics of settler colonialism with logics and ethical practices that nurture Indigenous survivance.”

—Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, *The Seeds We Planted: Portraits of a Native Hawaiian Charter School* (2013)

Solidarity

Key Points

Solidarity is more than acts of inclusion and recognition. Solidarity acknowledges individual and collective power to address decolonization, self-determination, and liberation. Solidarity is therefore meaningless without naming and understanding structures of power—specifically colonialism, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism—and how those structures of power affect different communities in different ways.

Outside of reading and applying the resources in this framework, solidarity from non-Pacific Islanders must engage in authentic conversations and actions of disaggregation in naming, data, policy, funding, opportunities, positions, and more.

Quotes

“We argue that the opportunities for solidarity lie in what is incommensurable rather than what is common across these efforts. We offer these perspectives on unsettling innocence because they are examples of what we might call an ethic of incommensurability, which recognizes what is distinct, what is sovereign for project(s) of decolonization in relation to human and civil rights based social justice projects. There are portions of these projects that simply cannot speak to one another, cannot be aligned or allied. We make these notations to highlight opportunities for what can only ever be strategic and contingent collaborations, and to indicate the reasons that lasting solidarities may be elusive, even undesirable.”

— Eve Tuck & K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor” (2012)

“A decolonizing pedagogy of solidarity must shift the focus away from either explaining or enhancing existing social arrangements, seeking instead to challenge such arrangements and their implied colonial logic. In particular, solidarity in relationship to decolonization is about challenging the very idea of what it means to be human, and by extension, the logics of inclusion and exclusion that enforce social boundaries, including notions of social, political, and civic solidarity. It is about imagining human relations that are premised on the relationship between difference and interdependency, rather than similarity and a rational calculation of self-interests.”

— Rubén A. Gaztambide-Fernández, “Decolonization and the pedagogy of solidarity” (2012)

“Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people--they manipulate them. They do not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress.”

—Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*(1970)

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 2. [The Mauna Kea Syllabus](#)
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 4. Stephanie Nohelani Teves and Maile Arvin, “Decolonizing API: Centering Indigenous Pacific Islander Feminism” (2018)
 5. [The State of Higher Education California: Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders](#) (2015)
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