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Land Acknowledgements Intent, Spirit and Language



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Content warning

This presentation includes material pertaining to traumatic events such as land theft, genocide and forced removal

Objectives

- Briefly review the history and evolution of land acknowledgement
- Develop a broader understanding of the forces arrayed against the relationship between Indigenous peoples and ancestral lands
- Examine the modern practice of land acknowledgement and propose thinking of it as a broader process
- Nurture a richer, action-oriented philosophy beyond acknowledgment to include advocacy, cooperative engagement, support, and sustainable stewardship practices

Introduction

- Land acknowledgements
 - “Short statements that recognize both the land and the Indigenous people who lived — and in many situations continue to live — on the land prior to...colonial history.” *Canada Encyclopedia*
 - “...used by Native Peoples and non-Natives to recognize Indigenous Peoples who are the original stewards of the lands on which we now live.” *NMAI*
 - Australia – “Acknowledgement of Country”
 - In the United States, a growing movement since 1970’s



History – Indigenous land acknowledgement

- Ancient land recognition by Indigenous peoples served different purposes
 - Recognize the relationship between the people and the land, such as between Native Hawaiians, *kānaka maoli*, and the *āina*, literally “that which feeds”
 - The Māori and Moriori people of Aotearoa New Zealand are referred to as *tangata whenua*, “people of the land”
 - Responsibility of the people to care for the land, not just exist on it and benefit from it, and in turn be cared for by the land in a balanced ecology
 - The People are part of the natural ecology and have a special role to nurture and maintain it**

History – Loss & Displacement

- Attacking the bond between Indigenous peoples and the land
 - Genocide – traumatic loss not only of the people but elders' *knowledge and traditional customs*
 - Forced removal – severing the *physical relationship* between land and people
 - Loss of large portions of ancestral land – often the *most fruitful, resource-rich* and “desirable” tracts of land in Indigenous territory
 - Occupation and *extractive use* of land and resources through mining, fossil fuels, logging, commercial fishing, water diversion, big agriculture and tourism
 - Pollution and *destruction of the natural ecology* – uranium mining, crude oil spills, erosion, water pollution, human waste, release of carbon held in tracts of forest, sub-grade deposits and coal
 - Introduction of *non-native, often invasive*, species into the natural ecology

Contemporary Land Acknowledgement

- Verbal acknowledgements before events located on “non-ceded” or displaced Indigenous land
- Text acknowledgements on public materials and webpages
- Incorporation of Indigenous representative(s) to give the acknowledgement or “blessings”
- Architectural motifs and/or signage placed to permanently acknowledge Indigenous land stewards*

Hō‘oia ‘Āina

On behalf of the University of Hawai‘i–West O‘ahu, it is with profound reflection that we offer up this Hō‘oia ‘Āina, this Land Acknowledgement, acknowledging Hawai‘i as an indigenous space whose original people are today identified as Native Hawaiians.

The University of Hawai‘i–West O‘ahu aligns with the University of Hawai‘i’s commitment to foster the wellbeing of all our students within an indigenous lens through academic and social processes throughout a ten-campus, system-wide transformation we call Hawai‘i Papa O Ke Ao.

With much aloha, I, Maenette K. P. Ah Nee-Benham, Chancellor at our UH West O‘ahu campus – offer up this Land Acknowledgement to welcome all gathered in this ahupua‘a we call Honouliuli in the moku of ‘Ewa, within the mokupuni of O‘ahu

This is Hawai‘i nei.
Ano‘ai ke aloha.

Critiques and Opportunities

- What is the purpose?
- Who benefits?
- Acknowledgement without tangible benefits or action on behalf of Indigenous peoples or rights
- Inclusion of Indigenous people often seen as token or performative
- Concepts of ownership and the land are fundamentally different
- Real efforts at education of actual history, Indigenous culture and providing avenues and opportunities for action are seen as more productive and meaningful
- “When we talk about land, land is part of who we are. It’s a mixture of our blood, our past, our current, and our future. We carry our ancestors in us, and they’re around us. As you all do.”– *Mary Lyons (Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe)*

Purpose(s) of Land Acknowledgments

- “Recognition” – most common reason / verb / motivation in land acknowledgment statements & protocols
- Respect – another common stated goal of acknowledgements
- Include Indigenous people in activities and events happening on their land
- *Education – inform the audience and participants of the history of the land they’re on and the people who dwelt there first
- *Raise awareness of Indigenous rights including ongoing issues and challenges
- *Potentially call participants to action

Who Benefits?

- Are Land Acknowledgements for Indigenous people, or are they for the organizers?
- What do they accomplish regarding Indigenous rights, history and culture?
- Statements and Principles don't often have real-world effects
- Acknowledgement is *not a replacement* for Indigenous rights
 - Land
 - Religion
 - Cultural practices
 - Water and resource rights

Land Rights among Indigenous nations

- Australia
 - Early 20th C. most aboriginal land in hands of govt and private landowners
 - 1972 - Aboriginal Embassy protest led to Land Rights Act. Began process of reclaiming land rights. Still ongoing.
- Aotearoa (New Zealand)
 - Pre-Pākehā (European) arrival – collective whenua ownership / management
 - 17th & 18th C. European arrivals, followed by rapid dispossession of land
 - 1840 - Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi). Misuse allowed Crown to take most remaining Māori land 1900, aided by “Land Court” beginning in 1860
 - 20th Century – Massive urban migration of Māori, disconnecting them from whenua
 - 1975 - Waitangi Tribunal established to hear and settle Māori claims of breaches of Te Tiriti o Waitangi
- Canada
 - 70 *recognized* treaties between Crown and First Nations between 1701 – 1923; many misinterpreted, ignored or broken; long journey of reconciliation ongoing
 - 1982 – section 35 of the Constitution Act reaffirmed existing Aboriginal and treaty rights*
 - Assembly of First Nations advocates for treaty and other rights including land, health, climate, environment and community services

Acknowledgement as a process

- **Education** in local schools, workplaces and public institutions about the local Indigenous history, language and culture.
- **Authentic inclusion** of Indigenous people, craftspeople, elders, musicians, artists, etc. in public works and education
- **Specificity matters** – among many Indigenous peoples, identity and authority are tied to place, so naming and being aware of the specific place name(s) and their significance is essential
- **Language** – changing references and names to the ancestral words and meanings, e.g. *tangata whenua*, “people of the land”; also recognizing existing Indigenous place names in common useage
- **Enrich** signage and education to recognize Indigenous history and place, including historic names that have been shorn of their true meaning

Connecting words to action – Land back

- Array of efforts between First Nations and public / private organizations to return land, form new agreements and respect existing rights, cooperatively co-manage land and resources in a more sustainable fashion

Everyone Benefits from Multilayered Thinking

- Improved physical and mental health of Indigenous people and our neighbors
- Improved environment and resilience toward climate change
- Enriched relationships between Indigenous culture and broader community
- Often more sustainable agriculture, resource use and environmental stewardship can be found in Indigenous practices

Conclusions – How can we enrich our practice?

- Model thoughtful behavior around land and ancestry
 - Creates safe spaces for Indigenous patients and families
- Become culturally informed about your Indigenous families
 - Improves care, treatment plans and outcomes
- Provide cultural and Indigenous health educational materials in your office
- Sponsor local cultural events and Indigenous organizations
- Include Indigenous health initiatives and practitioners in comprehensive treatment plans
- Engage with colleagues in medicine, education and multidisciplinary teams to further awareness
- Advocacy - giving expert testimony, participation in public forums, support research on Indigenous health and translational medicine

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Whakawhetai koe

Philámayayapi

Marsee

Quyana

Nakurmīk

Chin'an

Merci

Thank you

yaw^ko

Miigwech

Mahalo

Kinahnaskomihtin

Megwich

Gunalchéesh

Yah wah oj



Epilogue - Land Rights Australia

- **Early 20th C.** most aboriginal land in hands of govt and private landowners
- **1972** - Aboriginal Embassy established, survived multiple attempts to make it illegal.
- **1976** - Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act – first legislation in Australia that enabled First Nations peoples to claim land rights for Country where traditional ownership could be proven
- **1985** - Hand back of traditional lands in Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park to the Anangu people
- **2019** - rock climbing no longer allowed on Uluru (Ayers Rock)

Epilogue - Land Rights New Zealand

- **Pre-Pākehā (European) arrival** – collective whenua ownership / management
- **1642** - Abel Tasman arrives, 1769 - Captain James Cook arrives
- **1840** - Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) between British Crown and assembly of Māori chiefs. Intended as a partnership, but allowed “preemption”- British purchase of Māori land. Misinterpretation and misuse led to decades of conflict
- **1840’s-1860’s** - New Zealand Wars – period of conflict often over breaches of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Much of remaining Māori confiscated by the Crown by 1900
- **1860’s** – Land Court established, provided a “legal arm” to dispossess Māori of their land title
- **1870** - Land Transfer Act est. Torrens System, “source of truth” for titles
- **20th Century** – Massive urban migration of Māori from ancestral lands to cities, disconnecting them from whenua
- **1975** - Waitangi Tribunal established to hear and settle Māori claims of breaches of Te Tiriti o Waitangi