

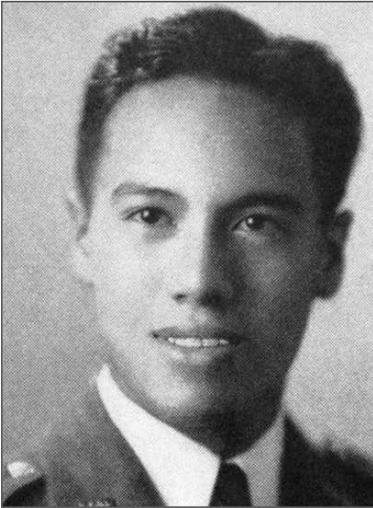
KEKUNI

Nālani Minton

The meaning of Kekuni expresses the mana of a special healing light from the fire of the lama wood, which carries the power to reverse negativity. For those of us who knew Kekuni Blaisdell and remain close in spirit, and for those who are forever affected by his light, we have all felt the impact of his aloha, his spirit, his soul, and that eternal light in our lives. In honor of Kekuni and all that he stood for, worked for, and manifested, we honor him most by carrying that light forward in our collective lives, work, and continuing kuleana of aloha ‘āina, ‘āina aloha...

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Kekuni's senior yearbook photo
KAMEHAMEHA SCHOOLS, 1942

At Kekuni's ho'olewa, many oli, mele, and mo'olelo were given with pilialoha for his life and legacy. One of the mele, "He Lama 'Ā Ho'okahi," composed by Dr. Keawe Kaholokula, speaks of this light that emanates from a leader like no other.

HE LAMA 'Ā HO'OKAHI

Mele inoa for Dr. Richard Kekuni Blaisdell

He Lama...

He Lama 'ā ho'okahi

I Kapālama, mai Kilolani

He kilohana ka 'ike 'ia 'ana

O ka Lama kū o ka loea

An enlightenment...

A torch burning like no other

In Kapālama, from Kilolani

A desire for learning was sparked

A path to excellence was undertaken

He Lā'au...

He Lā'au kū ho'okahi

He mu'ō, he kupu, e ulu a'e

Pa'a ka mole i ke one hānau

He lau, he lālā, he kumu pa'a

A tree (also reference to medicine)...

A tree (Dr.) that stands like no other

A bud, a shoot, growing forth

Until his roots were firmly planted in his birth sands

A leaf, a branch, a mature tree now stands strong

He Lehua...

He Lehua u'i ho'okahi

Pa'apū 'ia aku i ke kahua

He kumu muimuia i ka manu

I ka waohele, i uka, i Nu'uuanu

An expert (especially warrior)...

An expert with beauty like no other

The foundation has been covered with many Lehua

A fine Lehua tree that attracts many birds

In the forest, in the uplands, in Nu'uuanu

He Alaka'i...	<i>A leader...</i>
He Alaka'i ka'i ho'okahi	<i>A leader that leads like no other</i>
Mai moku Keawe a Kahelelani	<i>From Hawai'i to Kaua'i</i>
He pouhana nui o ka hale,	<i>He is like a center post that keeps the house standing</i>
Mai nā kūpuna ke ko'o pa'a	<i>From our ancestors comes his strength to do so</i>
He Leo...	<i>A voice...</i>
He Leo hea ho'okahi	<i>A voice that beckons like no other</i>
Wawā 'ia ka Lāhui i Hawai'i	<i>His voice echoes throughout our Nation</i>
He lono i ke kāhea	<i>A call goes out</i>
Heahea aku la, e onipa'a	<i>He calls to all to stand firm</i>
He Kanaka...	<i>A man...</i>
He Kanaka hano ho'okahi	<i>A man who distinguishes himself like no other</i>
Nui ke alo, Ha'aha'a ke 'ano	<i>Enormous is his presence, but humble is his demeanor</i>
He aloha nui aku nā pōki'i	<i>A great admiration is bestowed upon him by all</i>
I Waokanaka ka noho 'ana	<i>In the waokanaka where he resides</i>
E Ola...	<i>Live...</i>
E ola! E ola! E ola mau e!	<i>Live, live, live long!</i>
No ka hanohano o Kekuni!	<i>It is said in honor of Kekuni!</i>

—Keawe Kaholokula, haku mele

“E Ho'okahi,” the oli I gave, as the only daughter of his beloved sister 'Iwalani, was given to me in spirit at the time of Ka Ho'okolokolonui Kānaka Maoli—The Peoples' International Tribunal, Hawai'i, which Uncle Kekuni convened in 1993. He had asked me to oli as a ho'okupu at every site of the testimonies of Kānaka Maoli on the ancestral lands of six islands. “E Ho'okahi” is a call for unification to mālama each other and our collective vision in our mana'o, our pu'uwai, our mālama pono, and our aloha mau...as a people and as a nation in support of our beloved Hawai'i nei, our keiki, and our future.

E HO‘OKAHI

Oli for Uncle Kekuni Blaisdell

E ho‘okahi kahi mana‘o, e ho‘okahi pu‘uwai, e ho‘okahi
mālama pono, e ho‘okahi aloha mau

E mau ke ea ‘o ka ‘āina i ka pono, mālama pono,
mālamalama,

Nānā i ke kumu, no nā keiki...e aloha mau, e aloha mau, e
aloha mau...

—Nālani Minton, haku mele

MAOLI CULTURAL CONTEXT

It is the spirit of our people that protects the land and all that nourishes us, through our right intentions, right actions, and right outcomes.

Evidence of Uncle’s life of devotion to our lāhui aloha ‘āina was given in his kōkua for many stellar achievements: the creation of the UH Medical School and the Department of Hawaiian Studies, the organization of Ka Pākaukau and the Native Hawaiian sovereignty movement, and the passage of US Congressional legislation to create the first Native Hawaiian health organization, E Ola Mau; the Native Hawaiian Healthcare Improvement Act; and the Native Hawaiian Healthcare System, Papa Ola Lōkahi. He and my mom worked in tandem as two of the kūpuna of the era known as the Hawaiian Renaissance, where kūpuna emerged to guide and support many young leaders, scholars, and authors to advocate for, educate, and mālama our people.

As the convener of The Peoples’ International Tribunal, Hawai‘i, Uncle Kekuni inspired people to give voice to power and create solutions to dire disparities and inequities which, decade after decade of not improving, had “radicalized” him as a physician to advocate for a pathway toward health, stability, and thriving again in our own homeland through cultural and political self-determination. This inspiration gained US national attention in the 1993 Apology Law (Public Law 103-150), which Uncle helped to coauthor, and which was signed by President William Clinton and passed as a joint resolution of the US Congress only three



Kekuni in ROTC uniform, 1940s
ILLUSTRATION BY KAHEALANI MAHONE-BROOKS

months after the Tribunal was held. Both of these powerfully worded documents—from the Tribunal and Apology Resolution/PL 103-150—garnered international acclaim—at the UN Geneva Decade for Indigenous Peoples working group meetings—as historic firsts in the documentation of violations by a superpower of an Indigenous people and nation with historical standing as a kingdom/nation-state with international treaties. PL 103-150 is the first Apology law by the United States of America to an Indigenous people and nation that acknowledges both our inherent sovereignty and our rights of and to self-determination.

During this decade (1992 to 2002), I was designated by Uncle Kekuni as the representative of the Tribunal at the UN Geneva Working Group for Indigenous Populations meetings, for which I became known and referred to as the *‘elele pono* of the Tribunal kuleana. Also, during this Decade for Indigenous Peoples, well-known leaders and participants of the Tribunal, along with hundreds of Indigenous delegates, participated in the drafting of new international law through the creation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a new standard of human rights for Indigenous Peoples worldwide, which was formally adopted by the United Nations in 2007. Uncle Kekuni and the Tribunal inspired an Indigenous movement for UN Decolonization that continues today, as evidenced by the excerpt below from The Peoples’ International Tribunal, Hawai‘i.

**Ka Ho‘okolokolonui Kānaka Maoli—
The Peoples’ International Tribunal, Hawai‘i**
*Charges, recognitions, findings, and recommendations
from the 1993 Tribunal*

Nine charges were brought against the United States at the Tribunal:

1. Impermissible interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign people and nation.
2. Aiding and abetting a foreign coup d’état against the government of a sovereign people and nation.
3. Annexation of a sovereign people, their nation and territory, without their free and informed consent.
4. Imposition of statehood on a people, their nation and territory, without their free and informed consent.

5. Illegal appropriation of the lands, waters, and resources of the Kānaka Maoli.
6. Economic colonization and dispossession of the Kānaka Maoli.
7. Acts of genocide and ethnocide against the Kānaka Maoli.
8. Destruction, pollution, contamination and desecration of the environment of Ka Pae ‘Āina [the Hawaiian Archipelago].
9. Violations by the United States and its subsidiaries of their own established trust responsibilities and other obligations toward the Kānaka Maoli.

As the nine-day proceedings closed, the judges issued the following recognitions and findings:

1. The United States violated nā kānāwai (Kānaka Maoli law) and elements of customary international law, as well as its own Declaration of Independence.
2. The United States accelerated its interventions in the internal affairs of Ka Lāhui Kānaka Maoli, abridging and impairing its sovereign functioning and right to self-determination. The U.S. also violated the terms of at least three ratified and binding treaties: the 1826 Convention between Commodore A.P. Catesby Jones of the U.S. and Kauikeaouli (Kamehameha III); the 1850 Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation between Kamehameha III and the U.S.; and the 1875 Treaty of Reciprocity between the Hawaiian Islands and the U.S.
3. In 1893, the U.S. openly supported a coup d’état conducted by [foreign settlers] against the legitimate government of Ka Lāhui Kānaka Maoli. Thereafter, for a period of five years, the U.S. openly supported the usurping regime by use of armed force against the Indigenous population of Hawai‘i. In 1898, the U.S. annexed Ka Pae ‘Āina (the Hawaiian Archipelago), neither obtaining the consent nor consulting the Kānaka Maoli.

4. Following annexation, the United States forcibly subordinated, degraded and systematically dispossessed the Kānaka Maoli and incorporated Hawai'i into the Union as a State.
5. Under provision of Article 20 of the Charter of the Organization of American States, all U.S. assertions of jurisdiction and property title in the Hawaiian Islands are legally invalid.
6. Kānaka Maoli sovereignty has not been extinguished by the illegal actions of the United States. The overthrow of 1893 and purported annexation of 1898 merely changed the nature of the operative state but did not remove the inherent right of the people to sovereignty.
7. The Kānaka Maoli are morally and legally entitled to reassert their right to self-determination under provision of UN General Assembly Resolution 1514.
8. Blood quantum is ethnocidal and is contrary to the virtual entirety of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.
9. The Kānaka Maoli have been subjected to ongoing processes of genocide, both physical and cultural, at the hands of the U.S. government and the government of the State of Hawai'i, which violates nā kānāwai as well as the 1948 Convention for Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.
10. The Kānaka Maoli have exhausted all existing peaceful avenues for rectifying the multiplicity of wrongs done to them. Consequently, they are entitled on an urgent basis, to explore potentially more productive approaches, such as mediated negotiations with the U.S. Department of State [nation to nation].

Additionally, the Tribunal concluded with the following recommendations:

1. The U.S. and the world recognize the sovereignty and right to self-determination of Lāhui Kānaka Maoli under provision of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, among other elements of international law.
2. The U.S. and the world should acknowledge the right of Lāhui Kānaka Maoli to decolonization under provision of United Nations Resolution 1514.
3. Kānaka Maoli lands, including all ceded lands, Hawaiian Home lands, and all other lands to which they have a claim, should be returned to the control of Lāhui Kānaka Maoli without delay. Land restoration should be construed as including restoration of water rights.
4. Jurisdiction over restored lands should be transferred to Lāhui Kānaka Maoli at the time of restoration.
5. Blood quantum standards of identification should be immediately suspended. Lāhui Kānaka Maoli itself should determine the composition of its citizenry, free from external interference.
6. All other wrongs suffered by the Kānaka Maoli at the hands of the United States and its subsidiaries should be rectified in a manner deemed satisfactory to the people themselves.
7. The United States, in negotiations and other interactions with Lāhui Kānaka Maoli, should observe the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the minimum standards to be followed.
8. The United States should immediately effect a valid ratification of and adherence to the 1948 Convention on Punishment and Prevention of the Crime of Genocide.

The judges' recommendations called for two main actions: (1) the return by the United States of all stolen Kanaka Maoli lands, without delay, to the Kanaka Maoli people and nation; and (2) the start of talks between the United States and the Kanaka Maoli people, observing the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the minimum standard, and recognizing the right to decolonization and the subsequent withdrawal by the United States from its illegal occupation of Hawai'i nei.

As powerful as this strong verdict is, are the testimonies of the people themselves. George Helm once wrote, "The defense of the nation is in the spirit of the people." Hundreds of testimonies were recorded at the Tribunal that can be read in texts and seen in video submissions, in the film *The Tribunal*, in Chapter 13 of *A Nation Rising*, and on several websites.¹

INDIGENOUS CULTURAL CONTEXT

It is not enough to think about justice, we must act to protect those without a voice... including the earth, the natural world, the cosmos, creation, including peoples, and future generations.

Uncle Kekuni was extraordinarily courageous in identifying the origins of disparities and inequalities and in encouraging people to stand up for their rights as human beings for the common good. His leadership included examining the impact of historical wrongs and injustices, trauma, and grief, as part of recovering our language, culture, lands, identity, sovereignty, self-determination, values, kuleana, and ways of life.

INTERNATIONAL LAW CONTEXT

Inherent in the protection of those most at risk is the protection of us all...a basic tenet of human rights and common humanity.

Uncle taught us to aloha kuleana...to become the educators, healers, protectors, and practitioners of our cultural ways of life and values, and to infuse them in all that we are and all that we do. Uncle mentored us to dedicate our lives to our recovery from historical genocide, trauma, and grief and to become the change agents of the socioeconomic transformations and social justice initiatives that will allow us to thrive again in Ka Pae 'Āina. He instilled in us the importance of being fearless in creating fairness and positive outcomes that impact those most in need by improving their lives and opportunities as contributing members of the lāhui.



The activist at home, Kā'ohinani, 2012

Thursday nights at Uncle K's were legendary. These were open forums that provided the safety for people to come together from all walks of life, ideologies, and political ideals to express and share their mana'o with each other. Every question and request for assistance in understanding and clarifying historical facts and reasoning was considered with respect and meaningful responses. Renowned kūpuna like Marion Kelly, Ramon Lopez-Reyes, Soli Niheu, and Uncle Tommy Maunupau were regulars, as well as students, friends and family, sovereignty leaders and critical thinkers, and visiting activists from other islands and nations throughout the Pacific and the world.

In addition to expanding the dialogue of Indigenous intellectualism and increasing the dissemination of important documents and original thinking from an Indigenous perspective, Uncle Kekuni helped to organize rallies, protests, and advocacy for important issues such as evictions from ancestral lands, water

protection and use, and anti-bombing of sacred lands. Informal education and freedom of expression were also mixed with humor, wit, poetry, music and song, laughter, the latest news, and an abundance of food, shared family-style by everyone who gathered.

With his beautiful compassion, generous heart, and genuine love of people, Kekuni touched the lives of thousands of patients, students, health professionals, colleagues, family, and friends with his joyous sharing of music, life, and learning. He blessed us with his idealistic enthusiasm to holomua, to forge ahead, upward and onward, into a better future for everyone, by positioning leaders to be successful in all areas of life. Even in the last few weeks of his life, he was known for his thumbs-up approach to those who visited and cared for him. And he was always thrilled to hear about the latest activities and achievements of others and the visionary steps forward in singular and collective efforts to protect the life sources of our beloved Hawai‘i nei.

Uncle came from a family legacy of cultural practitioners, musicians, and healers. It is said that Thomas Pu‘uohau—a konohiki of Pololū Valley on Hawai‘i Island and Kekuni’s great-grandfather—came to O‘ahu where his daughter and her husband, and six of their twelve children, died of an infectious disease. Thomas was able to give the remaining six children to Queen Lili‘uokalani before he also died. They were among the hundreds of families who relied on the ali‘i to care for those orphaned by introduced diseases that we had no immunity for. They were also one of the hundreds of families who were forced to leave their original lands and, from Pololū, relocated in Waikiki, Hamohamo, and Kālia, along with other relatives such as the Paoas, Kahanamokus, Kaeos, Harbottles, and many other ‘ohana who remained close and provided protection and support for each other in their new location. Thus Uncle’s devotion as one of the first Kanaka Maoli physicians, thus his devotion to both Queen Lili‘uokalani and Queen Emma and to the Queen Lili‘uokalani Children’s Center and the Queen’s Hospital, thus his devotion to Kānaka Maoli and our nation, our sovereignty, and our self-determination. Uncle practiced our family tradition of singing “O Makalapua” at the end of every gathering, in honor of our beloved Queen Lili‘uokalani.

Uncle Kekuni was always taking photos of everyone, and he wrote in hundreds of pocket-sized tablets over his lifetime, documenting the genealogies and relationships of Hawai'i families as one 'ohana. He knew that we are all related throughout time, and especially since the 1920s, when there were only twenty-three thousand Kānaka Maoli left. He wanted to contribute to the evidence of our connectedness and found great solace and truth in this concept:

*Because of ho'ohihi...(our interconnectedness) we are timeless...
for in a sense, I/we have always been, and in a sense, I/we will
always be...it's a very reassuring, comforting, and strengthening
thought that we're not alone...hopeless or helpless...that there is
no need for despair, because we are connected to everything...*

Kākou, a continuum of interconnectedness throughout time...all of us part of the great oneness...that continues forever. In this way, Kekuni's light, life, and legacy continue in his great aloha for us all, and ours for him...and ours for him.

E aloha mau.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nālani Minton has worked in Native Hawaiian health and education programs for forty years. With master's degrees in clinical psychology/human development and Indigenous/Vedic knowledge, her focus is on recovery from intergenerational trauma through cultural healing and education. Nālani is the founding director of 'IKE AO PONO, a social justice initiative and support program for Native nurses, which Nālani developed into a permanent program integrated within the School of Nursing and Dental Hygiene (SONDH) at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Nālani is the first Native Hawaiian faculty member to be tenured at the SONDH since its beginnings in the 1930s. 'IKE AO PONO has supported the graduation of more than four hundred nurses in fifteen years. Eō.

NOTE

1 More information about the Tribunal can be found on a DVD of the Tribunal proceedings produced by Nā Maka o ka 'Āina (www.hawaiianvoice.com) and in Chapter 13 of *A Nation Rising*, edited by Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, Ikaika Hussey, and Erin Kahunawaika'ala Wright.