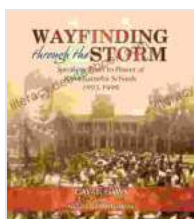


# Challenging the Powers that Be: Speaking Truth to Power at Kamehameha Schools 1993-1999

Nestled amidst the lush greenery of Honolulu, Kamehameha Schools has long been a revered institution, established in 1887 to provide educational opportunities for Hawaiian youth. However, throughout its history, the school has also been a crucible of tension and conflict, as Hawaiian students have grappled with the complex legacy of colonialism and sought to reclaim their cultural identity and self-determination.



## Wayfinding through the Storm: Speaking Truth to Power at Kamehameha Schools 1993-1999 by Gavan Daws

★★★★☆ 4.2 out of 5

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The period from 1993 to 1999 marked a particularly tumultuous chapter in Kamehameha Schools' history, as students emerged as a powerful force for change, challenging the school's administration and advocating for educational reforms that would better reflect their unique needs and aspirations.

## **A Legacy of Colonialism and Resistance**

To understand the roots of the student movement at Kamehameha Schools, it is essential to delve into the school's complex historical context. Founded by Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop, the last descendant of the Kamehameha dynasty, the institution was intended to perpetuate Hawaiian culture and heritage. However, over the years, the school gradually adopted Western educational practices and values, marginalizing Hawaiian language and culture in the process.

This cultural assimilation was part of a broader pattern of colonialism in Hawaii, which saw the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893 and the subsequent annexation of the islands by the United States. The colonization process resulted in the suppression of Hawaiian language, culture, and political rights, leaving a deep legacy of trauma and alienation among Hawaiian people.

Within Kamehameha Schools, the legacy of colonialism manifested itself in various ways. Hawaiian students often felt disconnected from their own culture and history, while the school's administration was perceived as unresponsive to their concerns. This sense of alienation and frustration eventually erupted into open resistance in the early 1990s.

## **The Rise of Student Activism**

In 1993, a group of Hawaiian students at Kamehameha Schools founded a student organization called Ka Lahui Hawaii (The Hawaiian Nation).

Inspired by the indigenous rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, Ka Lahui Hawaii sought to empower Hawaiian students and advocate for their cultural and political rights.

The organization quickly gained momentum, attracting hundreds of members and becoming a vocal critic of the school's administration. Ka Lahui Hawaii members organized protests, demanded changes to the curriculum, and challenged the school's policies on Hawaiian language and cultural education.

One of the most significant protests led by Ka Lahui Hawaii was the "Kahoolawe Reclaimed" movement, which began in 1993. Kahoolawe, a small island off the coast of Maui, had been used by the U.S. military as a bombing range for decades, leaving the island devastated and contaminated. Ka Lahui Hawaii members joined forces with other Hawaiian activists to demand the return of Kahoolawe to the Hawaiian people.

### **Confrontation and Dialogue**

The student activism at Kamehameha Schools was met with both resistance and dialogue from the school's administration. Some administrators dismissed the students' concerns as youthful idealism, while others recognized the need for change.

In 1994, the school appointed a new president, Michael Chun, who was more open to working with the students. Chun initiated a series of meetings with Ka Lahui Hawaii members, listening to their concerns and acknowledging the school's historical responsibility to Hawaiian culture.

Through these dialogues, both sides gradually came to understand each other's perspectives. The students realized that the administration was not necessarily opposed to their demands, but was bound by certain constraints and obligations. The administration, in turn, recognized the

importance of addressing the students' concerns and respecting their cultural identity.

## **Educational Reforms and Cultural Renewal**

The dialogue between students and the administration led to a number of significant educational reforms at Kamehameha Schools. The school increased the emphasis on Hawaiian language and culture in the curriculum, established a Hawaiian Studies department, and created a new school motto, "Ua Mau Ke Ea O Ka 'Aina I Ka Pono" ("The life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness").

Beyond the curriculum, the school also made changes to its governance structure, giving Hawaiian students a greater voice in decision-making. The school established a Native Hawaiian Advisory Council and a Hawaiian Advisory Board, both of which provided input on school policies and programs.

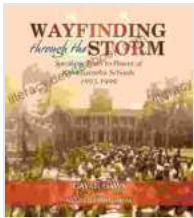
These reforms had a profound impact on the school community. Hawaiian students felt more connected to their culture and empowered to participate in their own education. The school's cultural renewal initiatives also had a positive impact on the broader Hawaiian community, helping to revitalize Hawaiian language and culture.

## **Legacy and Impact**

The student-led movement at Kamehameha Schools from 1993 to 1999 was a watershed moment in the history of the institution and in the indigenous rights movement in Hawaii. It demonstrated the power of young people to speak truth to power and demand change.

The educational reforms and cultural renewal initiatives that resulted from the student activism have had a lasting impact on Kamehameha Schools and beyond. The school remains a leader in Hawaiian language and cultural education, and its commitment to indigenous rights continues to inspire Hawaiian students and activists.

The legacy of the Kamehameha Schools student movement is also a reminder of the ongoing struggle for indigenous rights in Hawaii and around the world. It is a story of resistance, resilience, and the power of education to transform lives and communities.



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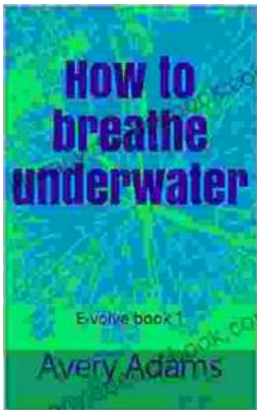
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