

— conversations on —
FOOD JUSTICE

A series hosted by
Share Our Strength and Food & Society at the Aspen Institute

SUMMARY TO ACTION REPORT
SESSION #5

SESSION DESCRIPTION

On May 19th, Share Our Strength, in collaboration with Food & Society at the Aspen Institute, hosted the fifth session of **Conversations on Food Justice**, a series examining the roots and evolution of the food justice movement and how it intersects with race and class, as well as health, educational, and environmental inequities. “Aloha ‘Āina: Food & Land Justice in Hawaii” featured speakers, Ka’iana Runnels, Marti Townsend and Daniel & Meala Bishop, and was moderated by Paula Daniels. The panel explored how community leaders are cultivating aloha ‘āina—“love of land”—in the struggle for Hawaiian sovereignty by restoring Native foodways, fighting to reclaim land and water, while educating future generations about the importance of connectedness to land and culture.

FEATURED PANELISTS

Ka’iana Runnels

Mahi‘āina Supervisor at The Kohala Center



Ka’iana Runnels is a mahi‘ai (cultivator of food and land) from the moku of Keawe, in the moku of Hilo ‘Akau. His passion is to collect, identify, document, cultivate, preserve, and spread the mea kanu (food crops) of his kūpuna (ancestors). His specific focus is on kalo, ‘awa, mai‘a, and kō. His ‘ike (knowledge) stems from a variety of kūpuna and hoa (friends). He first and foremost recognizes all those kūpuna who gave freely of their time and priceless na‘auao (wisdom). Along with his kuleana (duty, responsibility, right, privilege) to these mea kanu Hawai‘i (Hawai‘i food crops), he works to help our ‘ōpio (youth) navigate personal and national sovereignty starting with their minds, then their food, and ultimately, politically. He helps to educate ‘ohana (families) about food cultivation and the importance of ‘aipono (proper foods) in our everyday lives. Connect and follow the Kohala Center [@KohalaCenter](#) on Twitter

Marti Townsend

Chapter Director at The Sierra Club of Hawaii



Marti became the Director for the Sierra Club of Hawai‘i in June 2015 because she wants to build a movement to reverse the climate crisis. Prior to taking on this role, she served as Executive Director of The Outdoor Circle, KAHEA: The Hawaiian Environmental Alliance, Earthjustice and the Hawai‘i State Capitol. During those posts she was instrumental in establishing Hawai‘i’s Environmental Court, protecting Mauna Kea’s conservation district from overdevelopment, establishing the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument (and Northwestern Hawaiian Islands State Refuge), and combating environmental racism. Connect and follow The Sierra Club Hawaii [@sierraclubhi](#) on Twitter and Instagram.

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Daniel & Meala Bishop

Native Hawaiian rights activists and native planters



Daniel is a member of Onipa‘a Na Hui Kalo, a community-based organization dedicated to the reintroduction and rehabilitation of Kalo (Hawaiian taro) growing as a mainstay to the Hawaiian diet and way of life. He was the President of Kalo Pa‘a, a nonprofit that ran a Community Kalo Complex located in Waiahole Valley known as Waiahole Mauka Loi. Daniel is also a member of the ‘Taro Purity and Security Task Force.



Meala Bishop retired as a community arts specialist role in Ko‘olaupoko, O‘ahu after spending 23 years in the community, teaching, not just art, but many things impressed upon living in the islands oceans, mountains, and lo‘i. Meala says of her work: “Learning the truth of our Hawaiian epic, solace was achieved for me as water folk, advocate of the arts, kalo cultivator, pioneer for righting social injustices and an activist for natural resources.”

Ikaika Hussey

Community Organizer, Founder of Hawaii Federated Industries



Ikaika is the founder of Hawaii Federated Industries, a worker-led social enterprise aiming to strengthen Hawaii’s economy through projects in decarbonization, food security and local production. He is the former editor of Ka Wai Ola and the founder of The Hawaii Independent, Summit Magazine, and Maoliworld, and a co-editor of A Nation Rising: Hawaiian Movements for Life, Land, and Sovereignty, published by Duke University. Much of Ikaika’s energy is devoted to working on reversing climate change. He is a proud member of UNITE HERE Local 5, and a leader in The Aikea

Movement, a workers rights movement seeking to build power for Hawaiians. Ikaika lives in Kalihi, and was raised in Kaneohe. Connect and follow @IkaikaHussey on Twitter.

Paula Daniels

Co-Founder and Chair of the Center for Good Food Purchasing



Paula Daniels is Co-founder, Chief of What’s Next, and Chair of the Board of the Center for Good Food Purchasing. The Center for Good Food Purchasing uses the power of procurement to create a transparent and equitable food system that prioritizes the health and well-being of people, animals, and the environment, through the nationally-networked adoption and implementation of the Good Food Purchasing Program by large institutions. There are now over 50 institutions in over 20 cities across the US enrolled in this Program, which received a 2018 Future Policy award from the World Future Council, UN FAO and IFOAM Organics International. Paula

is a lawyer, and has held a number of senior positions in government in California and Los Angeles relating to water policy, coastal protection, municipal infrastructure, and food policy, including as Senior Advisor on Food Policy to Mayor Villaraigosa of Los Angeles. Connect and follow @paulaadaniels on Twitter.

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SUMMARY AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

“Power dynamics are central to any conversation about food or justice in general.” - Ikaika Hussey

Before western colonization, Hawaii had a robust food system rich in fish, fruits, and vegetables such as taro. From the late 18th to 19th century, the Hawaiian population significantly decreased, from about a million to 50,000, and traditional food systems were destroyed¹. The decrease in population was largely attributed to the spread of Western diseases, privatization of land, militarization and the plantations of pineapple, sugar cane, and macadamia farms. Today, Hawaiians are still struggling to regain their land and revitalize their native foods.

Much of Hawaii’s local and traditional food production has been replaced by imported foods. Panelist Ka’iana Runnels explained that 90% of the island’s foods are imported, making them extremely vulnerable should any disaster keep ships from bringing in supplies. According to a report by the Office of Planning- the State of Hawaii, replacing just 10% of the food that is imported, would amount to approximately \$313 million and result in 2,300 more jobs for Hawaiians². Danny Bishop, a taro farmer on the island of Oahu, is just one of the many farmers looking to restore Native Hawaiian agriculture. Consumption of native foods, like poi, is no longer a main staple of the Hawaiian diet. Panelist Marti Townsend further elaborated on the colonization of Hawaii noting, “When sugar plantations diverted the streams from East Maui for example, it not only took water away, it undermined taro cultivations, which helped to unravel the social networks that made for a strong, healthy, and safe community. And I don’t think this was by accident. We have to acknowledge there were conscious, racist attempts to undermine the Hawaiian way of life.” Restoring Hawaii’s food systems requires restoring landownership back to Native Hawaiians to farm, opportunity for Hawaiians to learn their genealogy, as well as decolonization of the mind.

Today, Hawaiians face the dual challenges of gentrification and over-tourism. Panelist Ikaika Hussey explained, “The people who really need to know our culture are Hawaiians. Tourists should support us by being in solidarity, economically, sure- if you look at the economics of tourism, zero hotels in Waikiki are locally owned. The benefit of ownership doesn’t come; the only benefits come through jobs.” Every effort should be made to give the land back to native Hawaii to restore their already vulnerable food systems.

While outsiders view Hawaii as a paradise, Hawaii’s history is marked by occupation, displacement and the struggle for control of land and water, which has rapidly depleted the islands’ once vast natural resources. From the proliferation of the sugar plantation economy that led to colonization and the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy, to the militarization of the islands following WWII, the legacy of foreign occupation has driven the Kānaka Maoli—the Native people of Hawaii—away from their lands and devastated Native foodways. Despite challenges facing Hawaiians, the movement to regain sovereignty by restoring Native foodways has gained significant traction, and holds promise for a more sustainable Hawaii.

¹ Miller, J. (2017, March 13). *The (Poi) Power of Hawaiian Food Sovereignty*. Sierra Club. <https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/2017-2-march-april/feature/poi-power-hawaiian-food-sovereignty>.

² Office of Planning Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism & Department of Agriculture. (2012). *Increased Food Security and Food Self-Sufficiency Strategy*. <https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/op/spb/INCREASED FOOD SECURITY AND FOOD SELF SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY.pdf>

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RESOURCES

Report: [Good Food For All](#)



Advancing health equity through Hawai'i's food system

Article: [The \(Poi\) Power of Hawaiian Food Sovereignty](#)



For some Hawaiians, reclaiming traditional food systems is a path to independence.

Journal: [An Introduction to the Rights of the Native Hawaiian People](#)



Ever since the illegal overthrow and annexation, the native people of Hawaii — identified as “Kanaka Maoli,” “Native Hawaiians,” or “Hawaiians” — have struggled to regain their culture, recover their lands, and restore their sovereign nation. This report explores the history and colonization of Hawaii and the Native people.

Book: [From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaii](#)



*Since its publication in 1993, *From a Native Daughter*, a provocative, well-reasoned attack against the rampant abuse of Native Hawaiian rights, institutional racism, and gender discrimination, has generated heated debates in Hawai'i and throughout the world.*

Documentary: [Climate for Change](#)



The two-hour special explores how the pandemic exposed Hawaii's food insecurity and the concerns of a system that requires almost all the state's food to be shipped in. It also highlights how climate change stands to worsen the situation and profiles community leaders and organizations sounding the alarms- and looking to make wholesome changes.

Book: [Jacked Up and Unjust](#)



In the context of two hundred years of American colonial control in the Pacific, Irvin and Umemoto shed light on the experiences of inner-city as well as rural girls and boys in Hawai'i. During their nine-year ethnographic study, teens openly discussed facing off against racism, sexism, poverty, and political neglect on a daily basis.

Book: [Hawaii's Story By Hawaii's Queen Liliuokalani](#)



An account of those difficult years at the end of the nineteenth century, when native Hawaiian historian David Malo's 1837 prophecy concerning "the small ones" being "gobbled up" came true for the Hawaiian Islands.

Book: The Hawaiian Kingdom (Volumes 1-3): [Foundation and Transformation](#), [Twenty Critical Years](#), and [The Kalakaua Dynasty](#)



The Hawaiian Kingdom, by Ralph S. Kuykendall, is the detailed story of the island monarchy. In the first volume, “Foundation and Transformation,” the author gives a brief sketch of old Hawaii before the coming of the Europeans, based on the known and accepted accounts of this early period. In the second volume, “Twenty Critical Years,” the author deals with the middle period of the kingdom's history, when Hawaii was trying to insure her independence while world powers maneuvered for dominance in the Pacific. It was an important period with distinct and well-marked characteristics, but the noteworthy changes and advances which occurred have received less attention from students of history than they deserve. The third and final volume of this distinguished trilogy, “The Kalakaua Dynasty,” covers the colorful reign of King Kalakaua, the Merry Monarch, and the brief and tragic rule of his successor, Queen Liliuokalani.

POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS

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[Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law & Economic Justice](#)



The Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice is working to build a Hawai'i where everyone has genuine opportunities to achieve economic security and fulfill their potential. We change systems that perpetuate inequality through research, policy development, education, coalition building, and advocacy.

CALL TO ACTION LIST

"Enough with the exploration and research and the grants. We know how to grow our own food." – Auntie Bishop

People often ask, what is the next step? If there is a right way to take the step, or if there is a formula. There is not, but we can all do something. Individual actions suggested by the panelists include the following:

- Support the youth seeking justice! They are the next generation of leaders
- Explore your genealogy! Get to know the history of your family, their roots, and how it connects you to the land.
- Educate yourself, your neighbors, and community members on farming! Teach people to grow their food.

We hope you will continue the conversations in your organizations and in your community! Please do not hesitate to let us know how you are keeping the conversations going or if you have thoughts or topics you would like to hear in the future. Reach out to us at foodjustice@strength.org Learn more about the initiative and upcoming sessions at <https://www.shareourstrength.org/program/food-justice-series>



Share Our Strength is ending hunger and poverty – in the United States and abroad. Through proven, effective campaigns like No Kid Hungry and Cooking Matters, we connect people who care to ideas that work.

<https://www.shareourstrength.org>



Food & Society at the Aspen Institute brings together public health leaders, policymakers, researchers, farmers, chefs, food makers, and entrepreneurs to find practical solutions to food system challenges and inequities. The common goal is to help people of all income levels eat better and more healthful diets—and to enjoy them bite by bite.

<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/food-and-society-program/>