

Polynesian Triangle

To understand Hawaiian native history and culture, one must understand the greater Polynesian phenomenon. Hawai'i is at the apex of the Polynesian Triangle, a region of the Pacific Ocean anchored by three island groups: Hawai'i, Rapa Nui (Easter Island) and Aotearoa (New Zealand). The many island cultures within the Polynesian Triangle share a similar proto-Malayo-Polynesian language used in Southeast Asia 5000 years ago. Furthermore, Polynesians share identical cultural traditions, arts, religion, and sciences. According to anthropologists, all Polynesians are related to a single proto-culture established in the South Pacific by migrant Malayo people. The eight main Polynesian cultures are from:

- Aotearoa
- Fiji
- Hawai'i
- Rapa Nui
- Marquesas
- Sāmoa
- Tahiti
- Tonga

Voyage to Hawai'i nei

Polynesians were skilled ocean navigators and mastered astronomic sciences long before most westerners understood it. They often traveled long distances on fleets of carefully crafted canoes that could withstand the harshest voyaging weather conditions.

It is believed that the first Polynesians probably arrived in Hawai'i in the 7th century from Tahiti and the Marquesas. They brought along with them clothing, plants and livestock and established settlements along the coasts and larger valleys. Evidently, they grew *kalo* (taro), *mai'a* (banana), *niu* (coconut), and *ulu* (breadfruit) as soon as they arrived, and built *hale* (homes) and *heiau* (temples).

Village

A traditional village of ancient Hawai'i included several structures, listed in order of importance:

- *Heiau*- temple to the gods. They were built on high-rising stone terraces and adorned with wood and stone carved idols. A source of great *mana* or divine power, the *heiau* was restricted to *ali'i*, the king and *kahuna*, or priests.
- *Hale Ali'i*- the house of the chief. It was used as a residence for the high chief and meeting house of the lesser chiefs. It was always built on a raised stone foundation to represent high social standing. *Kahili*, i.e., feather standards, were placed outside to signify royalty. Women and children were banned from entering.
- *Hale Pahu*- the house of the sacred hula instruments. It held the *pahu* drums. It was treated as a religious space, as hula was a religious activity in honor of the goddess *Laka*.
- *Hale Papa'a*- the house of royal storage. It was built to store royal implements, such as fabrics, prized nets and lines, clubs, spears and other weapons.
- *Hale Ulana*- the house of the weaver. It was the house where craftswomen would gather each day to manufacture the village baskets, fans, mats and other implements from dried pandanus leaves called *lauhala*.
- *Hale Mua*- the men's eating house. It was considered a sacred place because it was used to carve stone idols of *aumakua*, i.e., ancestral gods. Men and women could not eat with each other for fear that men were vulnerable while eating to have their *mana*, or divine spirit, stolen by women. Consequently, women ate at their own separate eating house, known as the *hale aina*.
- *Hale Wa'a*- the house of the canoe. It was built along the beaches as a shelter for their fishing vessels. Additionally, Hawaiians used the *hale wa'a* to store koa or mahogany logs used to craft the canoes.
- *Hale Lawai'a*- the house of fishing. It was built along the beaches as a shelter for their fishing nets and lines. Nets and lines were made by a tough rope fashioned from woven coconut husks. Fish hooks were made of human, pig or dog bone. Implements found in the *hale lawai'a* were some of the most prized possessions of the entire village.

- *Hale Noho*- the living house. It was built as sleeping and living quarters for the Hawaiian family unit.
- *Imu*- the communal stone pit. Dug in the ground, it was used to cook the entire village's food, including *pua'a*, i.e., pork. According to tradition, only men cooked using the *imu*.

Caste System

Ancient Hawai'i was a caste society. People were born into specific social classes and did not have the ability to move into another, except in the case of falling into outcast status. Each class had assigned duties and responsibilities to the greater society. The classes in order of social status were:

- *Ali'i*- the royal class. This class consisted of the high and lesser chiefs of the realms. They governed with divine power, presumably power from *mana*.
- *Kahuna*- the priestly class. This class consisted of the priesthood that tended the temples and conducted religious activities in the villages. Also, scientists and exceptional navigators were deemed to have *kahuna* status.
- *Maka'ainana*- the commoner class. This class consisted of the farmers, fishermen, craftsmen and their families. In a feudal society, they were charged with laboring for the overall economy.
- Outcast- the slave class. These were prisoners captured in times of feudal war and forced to serve the *ali'i*.

The caste fueled a feudal system relative to feudal systems found in Europe circa A.D. 1000. *Ali'i* gave lesser *ali'i* parcels of land who would in turn govern over them. The lesser *ali'i* divided the land into plots to be farmed and cultivated by *maka'ainana* families. Harvests were returned to the lesser *ali'i*, each taking a portion before being sent to the supreme *ali'i*.

Kapu System

Religion held ancient Hawaiian society together, affecting habits, lifestyles, work methods, social policy and law. The legal system was based on religious taboos, known as *kapu*. There was a correct way to live, to worship, to eat, and even to have sex. For example, one *kapu* included the provision that men and women could not eat together. Another *kapu* dictated that fishing was limited to specified seasons of the year. Perhaps

the most serious *kapu* required that the shadows of the *ali'i* must not be touched, as this was believed to steal a person's *mana*. In fact, violating *kapu* even by accident was punishable by death.

Kapu was derived from traditions and beliefs from Hawaiian worship of gods, demigods and ancestral *mana*. The forces of nature were personified as the main gods of *Ku* (God of War), *Kane* (God of Light and Life), *Lono* (God of Harvest and Rebirth). Famous lesser gods include *Pele* (Goddess of Fire) and her sister *Hi'iaka* (Goddess of Water). In a famous creation story, the demigod Maui fished the islands of Hawai'i from the sea after a little mistake he made on a fishing trip. In yet another story, Maui ensnared the sun from atop Haleakala, forcing him to slow down, which resulted in equal periods of darkness and light over Hawai'i each day.

Subsistence Economy

The ancient Hawaiian economy became complex over time. People began to specialize in specific skills. Generations of families became committed to certain careers: roof thatchers, house builders, stone grinders, canoe builders, and bird catchers who would make the feather cloaks of the *ali'i*. Soon, entire islands began to specialize in certain skilled trades. As a result, Oahu became the chief *kapa* (tapa bark cloth) manufacturer, Maui became the chief canoe manufacturer, and the island of Hawai'i exchanged bales of dried fish.

European Discovery

Discovery of the Hawaiian islands marked the official end of the ancient Hawaiian period and the beginning of Hawaii's modern era. In 1778, British Captain James Cook landed on Kaua'i and soon afterwards explored the other Hawaiian islands. When he first arrived, the natives believed that Cook was their god Lono. Coincidentally, Cook's mast and sails formed the cross that symbolized Lono in their religious rituals. Lono was the God of Light, which explained Cook's white skin. Cook was eventually killed during a violent confrontation between native Hawaiians and Cook's sailors after the sailors had accused the natives of stealing a boat. Cook's body was ceremonially cremated and his bones were buried in a sacred place. Even after his death, the natives believed that Cook was a deity and his bones had great *mana*.

Native Hawaiian Unit Online Homework

Directions: Answer the following questions as completely as possible by searching online for the necessary information. This is collaborative work, so work with your group members to find the answers.

1. Who were the first settlers of the Hawaiian Islands? Where were they from? How did they migrate to Hawaii? _____

2. What are the 8 largest Hawaiian islands? _____

3. Describe the religious beliefs of the Native Hawaiians. _____

4. Describe the Native Hawaiian diet. What plants and animals did they regularly eat? _____

5. Describe 3 important occupations in the native Hawaiian social structure. _____

6. Describe 3 Native Hawaiian sports. _____

7. What does the term “alii” mean? _____
8. Who was the first Hawaiian monarch? _____
9. Who was the last Hawaiian monarch? _____
10. Who was Captain Cook? Why is he an important figure in Hawaiian history? _____

11. What countries established whaling settlements in Hawaii during the 1800s? _____

12. How was Hawaii colonized by the United States? _____

Group Discussion Assignment

Directions: In your groups, students should work together to choose **2 different topics** from those listed below to research online for small group discussions in class. When doing your research, try to find as much interesting information as possible, take notes, and print out any necessary pages so that you can teach your group-mates about your Native Hawaiian topic. After deciding group member topics, notify Shawn.

Native Hawaiian Topics

- Native Hawaiian Alii
- Native Hawaiian Animals
- Native Hawaiian Arts
- Native Hawaiian Astronomy
- Native Hawaiian Language
- Native Hawaiian Medicine
- Native Hawaiian Myths and Legends
- Native Hawaiian Occupations
- Native Hawaiian Ocean Travel
- Native Hawaiian Plants
- Native Hawaiian Religion and Spirituality
- Native Hawaiian Social Structure
- Native Hawaiian Sports
- Native Hawaiian Villages
- Native Hawaiian Warriors

Hawaiian History Topics

- Captain Cook's "Discovery" of Hawaii
- Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement
- Overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom
- The First Settlers of Hawaii
- Whaling Industry in Hawaii