



**OCEAN
SPEAKS**

*OREGONIAN VOICES
FROM THE
MIGHTY PACIFIC*

**A TOOLKIT TOWARDS
PACIFIC ISLANDER
SELF DETERMINATION**



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PACIFIC ISLANDERS ARE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE



Oceania is a geographic region in the Pacific Ocean that includes three ethnographic regions: Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. Pacific Islanders (PI) are indigenous to Oceania, “representing approximately 30 Pacific nations and more than 20,000 islands. NHPs are deeply rooted in [our] shared languages, traditions, and heritage of Oceania voyaging.”
- Kekoa Taparra



These shared traditions and connection to one another is something lines on a map cannot reflect. It is important to note that these distinct ethnographic regions were imposed on Pacific Islanders by European explorers. However, utilizing these distinctions is important as we analyze how power and resources have been distributed in the United States (U.S.).

Some shared practices of our many PI communities include:

1. Oral traditions to pass on knowledge, skills, abilities and wisdom typically in the form of storytelling, song, spoken word, chanting, and more;
2. Respect for elders and a commitment to future generations as a form of cultural preservation;
3. A sense of collective responsibility to share resources and take care of those in need. This is not just across one’s nuclear family, but across multiple families, generations, and even the broader PI community to which someone belongs.

Prior to Western contact, Queer and Trans Pacific Islanders (QTPIs), were honored teachers, healers, and leaders in many Pacific Islander cultures. The purposeful exclusion of QTPIs, through Western teachings, is a tool of colonization to erase our practices as indigenous people. The acceptance of QTPIs across different PI cultures and communities varies greatly. Regardless, OPIC is here to assert QTPIs rightful place in our communities. We cannot talk about colonization and cultural preservation without acknowledging this.

1914

Japan colonizes and settles within Micronesian island territories including: Northern Mariana Islands, Caroline Islands, Palau, and the Marshall Islands.

- 1947: Post World War II the United Nations assigns the United States authority over the Trust Territories in Micronesia, making the U.S. administratively responsible for each territory.
- As a result, the Northern Mariana Islands became a commonwealth, Guam became a separate U.S. territory, and other territories became sovereign nations under Compact of Free Association (COFA) agreements.

1985

The islands of Chuuk, Yap, Kosrae, and Pohnpei join together to form the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM).

- Palau and the Marshall Islands were invited to join the FSM, but decided to create their own sovereign nations.
- The Republic of Marshall Islands COFA agreement was approved this same year.

1994

The Republic of Palau and the U.S. reach a COFA agreement.

- The government of Palau originally resisted COFA status due to the nuclear testing devastation that they witnessed in the Marshall Islands.
- The Palauan government was the first in the world with a constitution declaring their island as a nuclear-free zone. The U.S. claimed that Palau's nuclear-free status threatened national security.
- After several years of negotiations, Palauans voted to remove antinuclear status in favor of economic survival, finalizing negotiations on a COFA agreement.

The result is a number of different political statuses for Pacific Islanders that impact their ability to vote and access critical resources in the U.S.

For example, COFA Citizens are tax paying citizens, but cannot receive federal resources such as: aid for college student tuition, SNAP benefits or military veteran benefits. For nearly 25 years, COFA Citizens were not eligible for Medicaid until it was restored on December 21, 2020. This system of disinvestment drives health inequities for COFA Citizens. Despite being one of the hardest hit PI communities during COVID-19, COFA Citizens could not apply for FEMA's COVID-19 funeral support.

Additionally, American Samoa is the only U.S. territory where its people are considered non-citizen nationals, unlike Guam or Puerto Rico. This has denied American Samoans the right to vote or the ability to run for political office. This unique, "non-citizen national" status has also denied American Samoans the ability to petition for immigrant status on behalf of their family members.



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**THANK
YOU.**