

‘Āina Sermonette, Steve Lohse

Aloha! We are so lucky to live Hawai‘i for many reasons. Among these is the chance to experience the Hawaiian concepts of *‘āina* and *‘ohana*. *Oha-Na*, literally the spreading, thriving, or showing of joyous affection – *‘ohana*, family. And *‘āina*, *‘Āi-Na*, literally the eating or feeding – *‘āina*, the land that feeds us.

To appreciate Hawaiian culture is to appreciate the deep sense of connections that bind together all aspects of nature – plants, animals, mountains, sky, ocean, and people. *‘Āina* is about real estate and food, yes, but *‘Āina* is really about the deep interconnections from which we emerge, that make this world possible.

Social Justice starts with this concept of *‘āina*, the profound interconnections that give us life. If these connections are whole and healthy, then we expect social justice and community equity. If these connections are destroyed, then we can expect injustice, inequity, and a lot of unnecessary suffering by innocent people.

In fact, does it seem to you that we are systematically destroying our connections with *‘āina* and with each other? That we are deliberately waging war on our own environmental, biological, and cultural life support systems? Is this really how we want to live? Is this really the world we want to leave to futures generations?

I have a favorite example of the *‘āina* disconnect that we have come to. Water is life in Hawai‘i, right? Does anybody know how many agencies manage water in Hawai‘i? I’m an environmental scientist by trade, and I don’t know. We have federal, state, county, and private agencies. We have separate agencies for atmospheric water, for surface water, and for ground water. We have separate agencies for water quantity and for water quality.

We have agencies that slow down good water to recharge our mountaintop aquifers, but slowing down the water makes floods worse. So, we have agencies that speed up bad water to prevent flooding, but speeding the water out to sea makes aquifer recharge impossible. And it’s all the same water! Does anybody doubt that we are seriously disconnected?

So, I am celebrating today! I am celebrating that I am here today in the midst of a community actively engaged in NOT waging war on our own environmental, biological, and cultural life support systems. This community knows, in the words of John Muir, “Tug on anything at all and you’ll find it connected to everything else in the universe.”

This community knows, in the words of Yo-Yo Ma, “When we enlarge our view of the world, we deepen our understanding of our own lives.” This community knows, in the words of Jane Goodall, “We cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around us. What we do makes a difference, and we have to decide what kind of difference we want to make.”

We are gathered here today to celebrate the difference that we make! In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., “I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality.” Folks, we are in this together! Look to the neighbor on your left, look to the neighbor on your right, and get used to it.

Let us join together today and celebrate our shared Social Justice commitments, our active engagement with economic equity, education, housing, healthcare, political action, and yes, the *‘āina*. With the assistance of our young people here, we will also celebrate ourselves and the commitments that many of us make privately to a just and equitable world. Yes, we do make a difference.

So, let us celebrate our shared engagement with our *‘āina* right now. Let’s each take one sticky note from your OoS and put down one or two words describing something that you do or contribute that connects you to the health of our *‘āina*. Do you contribute to an environmental group, do you volunteer, do you teach, do you recycle – write it down, and while we listen to Hapa’s version of “Redemption Song” our young people will collect these notes and stick them on the *‘Āina* panel where we can all share and celebrate them.

Thank you.