



Hawaiki Rising: Hokule'a, Nainoa Thompson, and the Hawaiian Renaissance

Sam Low PhD

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Attuned to a world of natural signs – the stars, the winds, the curl of ocean swells - Polynesian explorers navigated for thousands of miles without charts or instruments. They sailed against prevailing winds and currents aboard powerful double canoes to settle the vast Pacific Ocean. And they did this when Greek mariners still hugged the coast of an inland sea and Europe was populated by stone-age farmers. Yet by the turn of the twentieth century, this story had been lost and Polynesians had become an oppressed minority in their own land. Then, in 1975, a replica of an ancient Hawaiian canoe – *H?k?le'a* - was launched to once again sail the ancient star paths and help Hawaiians reclaim pride in the accomplishments of their ancestors. *Hawaiki Rising* tells this story in the words of the men and women who sailed aboard *H?k?le'a*. They speak of growing up at a time when their Hawaiian culture was in danger of extinction and their future in their own land was uncertain. We join the founders of the Polynesian Voyaging Society as their vision of *H?k?le'a* takes shape in a Honolulu shipyard. We sail on the first voyage from Hawaii to Tahiti in 1976; experience the heartbreaking loss of Eddie Aikau in a courageous effort to save his crewmates when *H?k?le'a* capsized; and are present as new leaders vow to continue sailing to honor Eddie' life. We are with Nainoa Thompson as he searches the heavens to rediscover ancient star signs and we sail with him as he guides *H?k?le'a* to Tahiti – the first Hawaiian to navigate the Pacific without charts or instruments in a thousand years. When Hokule'a crew member Sam Ka'ai carved the male *ki'i* (sculpted figure) that adorns the canoe's starboard hull, he envisioned modern day Hawaiians in the figure of a blind man reaching to the heavens. "This is an effigy of how we are after so many years of oppression," Sam tells us. "Blind to our past, we reach up to grasp heaven one more time. The same stars are rising as they did for our fathers for many, many generations. So if you lose your way - remember that you once sailed on your mother's lap and you were never lost. The stars turned minute by minute, hour by hour, dawn and dusk and you always came home or your kind wouldn't be here. This is an effigy of the *H?k?le'a* experience – the *?ohana wa'a* - the family of the canoe. He is reaching above himself, beyond himself, to the story that has not changed, the forever and ever story. He is showing that we are taking hold of the old story once again." *Hawaiki Rising* is the saga of an astonishing revival of indigenous culture by voyagers who took hold of the old story and sailed deep into their ancestral past. (Sam Low)

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