

PACIFIC ISLANDERS, WHO WE ARE

(Source: Pacific Diabetes Today Guidebook)

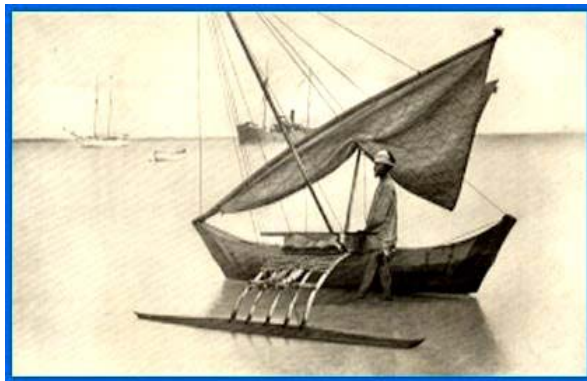


*Dr. Vita Skilling & Nelma Skilling
Kosrae, FSM*

We are **Pacific Islanders**. Our homeland is Moananui – the islands and the ocean seas that surround them. We are referred to as **Polynesians** and **Micronesians**. We are *Carolinians, Chamorros, Chuukese, Hawaiians, Kosraeans, Marshallese, Palauans, Pohnpeiians, Samoans, and Yapese*. We are a highly diverse population with diverse historical backgrounds, cultural traditions, and over 20 living traditional languages.

Our Story Begins with Creation in the Universe – Motion in Space and Time

In our creation, darkness becomes light. Sky Father (*Wakea*) and Earth Mother (*Papa*) unite. We are a part and parcel of and related to all things. All the ocean's living creatures and those on land and sky are *kinolau* (related) to one another and cousins to us. We come from the source – the clam, the soil, or the surrounding seas. The natural environment is part of us and we a part of it. Even our rocks carry within them the embodiment of our ancestors, faces from another time.



Canoe, Marshall Islands
Robert Louis Stevenson Collection

Our life is geared to the celestial movements of the spider (*ku'uku'u*), the octopus (*fe'e, he'e*), the butterfly (*pepe*), the worm (*riki*), and the moon (*masina*). Our road maps are the stars, the ocean currents, and the prevailing winds. The canoe (*wa'a, sakman*) is our transport system. It provides us with safety and gives us a vehicle to traverse the pathways of the seas (*ke ala o ke kai*).



Abba Thule, Belau (Palau)
Source: libweb.Hawai'i.edu

Our chiefs – Malietoa, Kamehameha, Makea, Takau, Abba Thule, Lamari, Linani, and Karakok – remain living legacies to our political past, a past marked by our more recent struggles with stronger political powers from the East and West including Spain, Germany, England, Japan, and the United States. In spite of initial repression and suppression by our colonizers, we remain steadfast to our heritage, which now includes not only our traditional culture but also semblances of these other intervening cultures. We wrestle with how best to incorporate these many semblances into modern societies that make sense to us.



Territory of American Samoa Seal

Today, we continue to struggle in developing political structures that make sense for us. We are independent countries, territories, and smaller political divisions within the fabric of larger nations.

We all come from the oral tradition. We are expert at hearing what is not said and understanding what is not written.

Our stories and legends contain our history, and we continue to excel in our abilities to speak the truth as we see it. We retain our values that have been shaped by thousands of years of living on islands, interdependent upon one another for survival, yet fiercely independent in terms of maintaining our space. Correct process and protocol are important and vital to our daily living.

Our families form the basis of who we are. We value our elders for their knowledge and experiences, remembering that we are but the most recent of generations and have multitudes of *kupuna* (elders) sitting upon our shoulders. We are the sum total of their former lives, and it is from them that we garner strength in times of need. Knowing our genealogy is the means by which we honor those who have come before us.



Aunt Betty Jenkins – Hawai'i
Cathy Guzman Nicholas - Guam



Nan Madol
Pohnpei - FSM



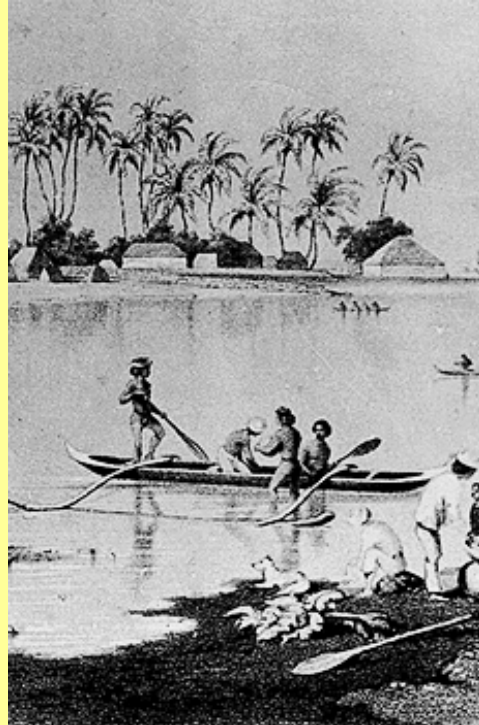
Latte Stones
Northern Marianas Islands



Kukaniloko – Birthing Stones
O'ahu-Hawai'i

We do best when we work together. Many hands make the task light. Our ancestors taught us this. Our works speak for themselves – *Lelu*, *Nan Madol*, *Latte* stone construction, and the *Taga Quarry*, *Tia Seu Lupe* (star mounds), *Kukaniloko*, *Heiau O Pu'ukohola*, *Pu'uhonua O Honaunau*, and *Kiki A Ola* – are but a few of our elders' legacies. These lessons teach us that the group is more important than the individual. True leadership emerges from the group and includes reciprocity. In order to lead, a leader must provide. We are spiritual people. We believe in what we believe. We respect and honor our family guardians and traditional practices, yet we are of this world and call upon today's religions for help and salvation. Our faith gives us hope and our culture gives us strength.

We are a healthy people made weak by behaviors foreign to our culture. Our culture survives through our dances, foods, crafts, traditional healing practices and medicine, relationships and values, spirituality, and languages. But our families have tasted the ill-effects of war and, more recently, nuclear testing. Our traditional sources of sustenance have been broken. Our children are entrenched in Western ways beamed into our communities through 'boxes' – radios, movie screens, televisions, and computers. Our *rai*, *udoud*, and *toluk* and our barter systems have been replaced by paper and metal coin. Though we live in changing times, we must find ways to hold fast to our cultural values appropriate for today's living. We must recapture our spirit and remold ourselves in ways that will provide us sustenance for our voyage in this new millennium yet keep us true to ***who we are***.



In times past, our canoe was small and fashioned for survival on one ocean. Our new canoe must be large enough to carry with it the hopes and dreams of all our people and their families across many oceans. It still is a voyage for survival. For this voyage, we need to be healthy and well. This is our challenge TODAY.