



## **AlterNative Ways of 'Belonging' Around the World**

By: The Oneida Trust and Enrollment Committee

*This series of articles is designed to inform Oneida citizens about enrollment issues. The total number of Oneida enrolled members is expected to decline within the next 10 years. The goal of these articles is to generate community conversations about citizenship and belonging so that we may explore our options.*

The Oneida are not alone in their struggles to define 'who belongs.' These struggles can be seen in indigenous cultures around the world: Aborigines in Australia, Maori in New Zealand, and Natives in Hawai'i. With how fast the modern world is changing, defining the boundaries of a cultural group can be like drawing a line in the sand. However, there are some inspiring examples of indigenous communities that are defining belonging in new ways: through language, land, and legal battles.

### **Language - The Maori of New Zealand**

The Maori ("MAOW-ree") have lived in New Zealand for over 7,000 years. New Zealand is an island country east of Australia. Think Whale Rider. For the Maori, language defines a people, and to keep a language alive, it must be used in every day life. Today they have one of the best language recovery programs in the world. New Zealand's 1987 language policy has increased usage of the Maori language in education, government, and business. Maori children, beginning in preschool, must demonstrate language proficiency. As a result, enrollment and honors graduation rates in Maori bilingual schools have significantly increased over the last decade. There are also two television stations that broadcast in 100% Maori. Today, more Maori can speak their native language. Most importantly, the language policy has fostered a positive attitude toward the language and culture among both Maori and non-Maori people. Bilingualism (speaking both Maori and English) is becoming a valued part of New Zealand society.

### **Cultural Connection to Land - Australian Aboriginals**

As of 1998, anyone in Australia can legally label themselves "Aboriginal", as long as that person is "accepted by their community." Land, rather than blood quantum, gives Aboriginals a sense of belonging. Aboriginal peoples are called the "traditional owners" of the land. Connections to land are ranked by the person's "cultural association" with land. Registration as a traditional owner is strict; limited to those who are directly descended from the original Aboriginal inhabitants of the area and have rights to their land that come from their traditional laws and customs.

Traditional owners receive land rights and traditional “membership.” This system excludes “historical peoples;” those who were removed from their original lands by Europeans. Historical peoples occupy a space between worlds. However, the entitlement system has improved. Although traditional owners still rank first, historical peoples’ claims to land now rank higher than claims to land for economic reasons. Though imperfect, this ranking system shows there are multiple origins, rights to land, and therefore, multiple ways of belonging as an Aboriginal.

## **Legal Battles - Native Hawaiians**

The state of Hawai‘i currently defines “Native Hawaiian” by the “50 percent rule” which is “...a descendant with at least one-half blood quantum of individuals inhabiting the Hawaiian Islands prior to 1778” (European arrival). This definition stems from when the U.S Congress leased small plots of land to “eligible” Native Hawaiians. Many believe that the 50 percent blood quantum rule was made in the hope that someday no one would be “Hawaiian enough” to hold onto the plots. To date, less than 6,000 Native Hawaiians hold leases to these lands, and over 30,000 people have died while on the waiting list. But there is hope: in 2009, Native Hawaiians won a class-action lawsuit against the State of Hawai‘i for failing to award land lots. As a result 2,700 Native Hawaiians will receive land allotments owed to them.

The “50 percent rule” is a divisive issue for Native Hawaiians. One response is the Kana‘iolowalu petition; a year-long campaign to bring Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians together to create a base roll of Native Hawaiians to participate in the formation of a sovereign government. Supporters see it as the next step in self-determination. Critics say the initiative is a scam because it attempts to “give” Hawaiian sovereignty. But you can’t give what was never taken away. In any case, the initiative is a game-changer because it stresses citizenship over blood quantum. Roll signers formally declare: 1) their intent to participate in the process of self-governance; 2) a significant cultural, social or civic connection to the Native Hawaiian community, 3) lineal descendancy to people who lived in Hawai‘i prior to 1778 (the year Europeans arrived). 14,800 have registered and that number is rising.

Examining these different cultures is a good lesson for Oneida. There are many definitions of “belonging” and Oneida must decide which approach works best.

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