

Why Can't Hawaiians Afford to Live in Hawaii?
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZvKsfcmO0M>
Transcript: <https://dontveter.com/ec/hawaii.homeless.pdf>

I've never been homeless before, this is my first time.

Sometimes I feel no matter how hard you try there's not, there's always a barrier here in Hawaii.

Native Hawaiians are being priced out of Hawaii.

No way could I afford to even live here, just me alone and that's the sad part of it.

We can't afford to be here.

Hawaii is the most expensive state to live in in the US and out-of-state buyers continue to turn housing units into vacation rentals or second homes as tourists flock to the state's resorts, golf courses and beaches, local residents are facing a housing affordability crisis.

They want a million dollars for prisons. This in Maui, it's not like you can drive to another island.

Rent is also increasing and salaries are not keeping up with the rising cost of living.

Gentrification isn't new, but for native Hawaiians being priced out can mean being forced to move off island entirely, thousands of miles away from their ancestral lands.

This is our land. It was stolen from us in 1893. We're the indigenous peoples that belong here, yet we can't even afford to be here.

This is Maui, homeland of the Kanaka Maoli, who were branded native Hawaiians during colonization.

Usage Note: The word Kanaka simply means "human being" in the Hawaiian language. Among Native Hawaiians, however, it is often used today as a term of ethnic pride, especially in the form Kanaka Maoli, a traditional Hawaiian ethnonym which can be translated as "true human being" or "real person."

On one side of the island, tens of thousands of tourists are concentrated into condos and high-end hotels, on the other side, Jessica Lau is living in her car partly because she couldn't afford to rent.

I mean I have family that offered me to stay with them but they're on HUD housing and I'm not trying to get anybody to lose their home because of me.

Yeah, but I like it here, this is where my mom scattered.

She uses the facilities at the boat harbor to shower and get ready for work.

My dad got me to be a member here, so I use the restroom here.

And if I wanted to use it they have a gas stove in the inside that they say I can use.

So I use either use their hose or I bring my hose here.

Jessica worked as a tour bus guide and operator for over four years but long days on jungle roads meant she often couldn't use the bathroom for hours at a time.

To prevent more serious bladder and kidney issues she quit.

She now works at a temp agency.

This is what it's like to be unsheltered in Hawaii.

But it will be a matter of time, you know what I mean?

To come up with first month, last month deposit with the pandemic and the pay rate down.

Right now it's hard, I have to be at work at five, I get off at 1:30 and then I would go to another job in the evening.

Jessica ran out of money so she moved into her car to avoid an eviction on her record.

Even without Jessica's obstacles an average salary from tourism isn't enough to afford rent on a two-bedroom apartment so now Jessica parks with a few other unhoused individuals at the harbour.

From where she sleeps, she can see where she used to live.

Here, I used to live here, I was paying 1450 for a two-bedroom then the owner decided to sell, so then I moved to the next building which the rent came up to 1600.

Hawaii has one of the highest rates of homelessness in the US.

While the government sponsors programs like shelters and housing subsidies, relief is often temporary with a waitlist of up to five years and in general there just aren't enough permanent affordable housing units.

Short-term solutions that exist elsewhere in the States aren't available in Maui.

In California you can stay at a motel and pay \$46 a night and not have to be homeless.

Here in Maui they don't have ~~no~~ [any] motels or anything, they only have hotels here and those hotels can cost on average 500 dollars per night.

The US government took control of the Hawaiian islands in 1898.

The majority of Kanaka Maoli protested the move is illegal.

The US never provided them with reservation land but they did sponsor a program called Hawaiian Homelands which is meant to provide land for them to lease.

There's currently a backlog of 28,000 applicants on the waitlist, like Carolee Kamakona [who] has been waiting for decades.

You can see this where it lists as of December 2020 for the different islands.

You can see, this lists the Maui waitlist here. I went on the waitlist in 2002. This is 2021 so 19 years I've been on Maui's waitlist.

An average price for a home in Maui hit a record 1.1 million dollars this summer.

Lee would like to buy a home but without government help it would be impossible.

She now lives with her elderly mother and adult son because none of them can afford rent on their own.

These homes can run about 850 and up to a mil not because of the houses and the way they look, but because of the location of the houses. {what is 850m in Spanish, what is it in English?}

Is that affordable for a Kanaka Maoli? No, not even if you're working three jobs with two incomes in the household.

So that's why Kanaka Maoli have a lot of multi-generational homes where you have two, three, possibly even four generations living in one household just so that we could survive and live.

Here at home my mom she's 87, for me I'm 64, and my son is 30.

So three of us live here in a three-bedroom, one-bath house.

No way could I afford to even live here just me alone.

My son with what he makes in the tourism industry wouldn't be able to rent the house.

Carol Lee has seven children and none of them are eligible to apply for Hawaiian Homelands.

Applicants need at least 50% native Hawaiian blood quantum to qualify.

I have the 50%, my kids don't have 50 because of an interracial marriage so they're less than 50, so I cannot give it to them, none of my kids.

Even if Carol Lee's name was called the lease offer would only be temporary with no pathway to actually own the land.

The plots can be expensive with homes on them that can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars which she couldn't afford.

So I have to wait for them to give me a lot.

When that happens in my lifetime you think? Probably not.

This probably means that my kids will never ever get a chance to buy a home here because once I die, once my mom dies, there is no more 50 blood quantum for my family.

It's genocide, it's a way to get rid of the people.

Six out of seven of Carol Lee's children already live on the mainland but for Carol Lee, leaving is not an option.

Even my kids ask, mom, just come already, you guys can live with us.

I don't want it, I love my home here.

One in three Kanaka Maoli households is at risk of homelessness.

As the government works on long-term solutions, Jessica is still living in her car.

Lori Tshaku director of the county department of housing and human concerns said that some of the unsheltered are employed but their income is insufficient to afford rent.

It is true, like, I don't have a problem paying rent or working, but to come up with first month and last month and deposit is hard for many of us guys especially during this pandemic.

I make half of what I used to make when I did tours so anywhere between 13, 14, 15 dollars that's what I'm making now versus the 24-52 back then.

Jessica also doesn't have any plans to leave despite her struggles at her old job. Jessica enjoyed being able to share her love for Maui as a tour guide.

She hopes to find a way back to the industry while still protecting her health.

This mountain right here besides us is Haleakala mountain.

That's the mountain I drove around for four and a half years, 129 miles and that's how you get around the island.

The goal I look forward to is going back to is that occupation.

In the meantime I'll just take whatever needs to be taken so I can be able to stay above water and not have to suffer.