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This Is the Way We Rise

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This Is the Way We Rise

Abstract

This is a review of the short film, *This Is the Way We Rise* (2019), directed by Ciara Lacy.

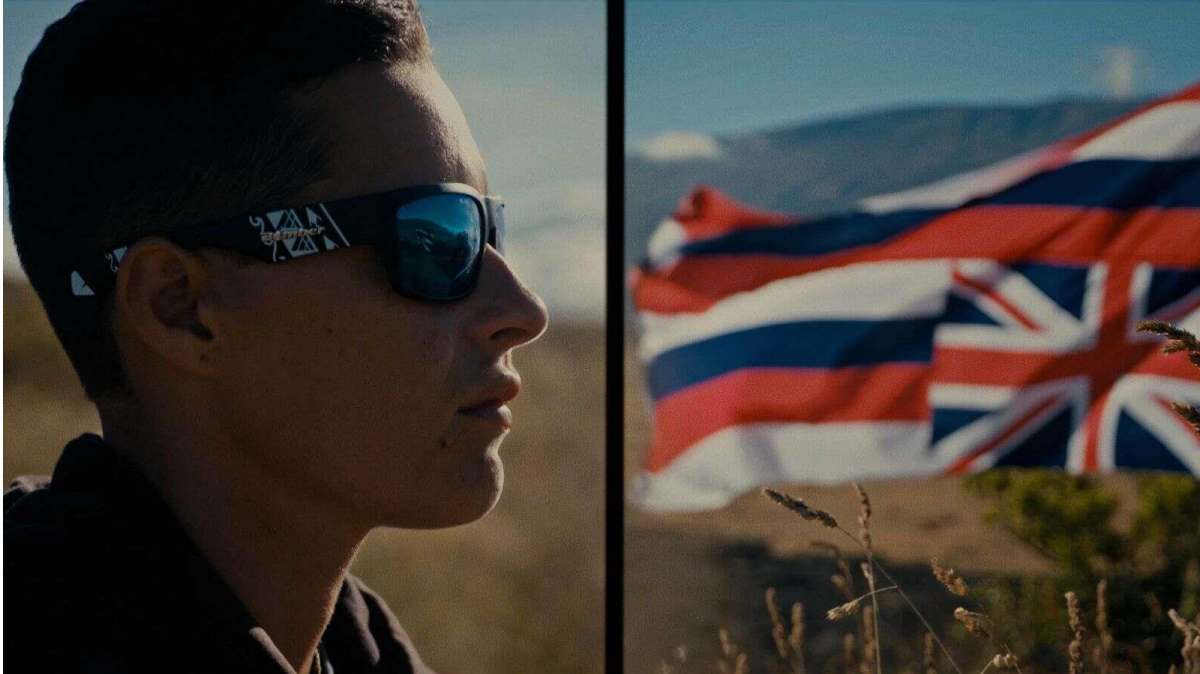
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Author Notes

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This Is the Way We Rise (2019), dir. Ciara Lacy

This Is The Way We Rise is a beautiful short film that vividly demonstrates in word and image the power of poetry and Indigenous Voices to challenge, decolonize, revitalize and resist. The film follows Native Hawaiian Dr. Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio, a Kanaka Maoli wahine poet, scholar and activist, through her rise on the slam poetry scene, to her performance of her poem, “Kumulipo,” at the White House in 2009 when she was eighteen, and eventually to the three years of silence as a poet that breaks open by taking part in the resistance movement on Maunakea, Hawaiʻi.

Osorio, in the film, explains that poetry has the “power to make you feel,” and her poetry, as indeed with her life and scholarship, is an expression of pilina (intimacy, relationship, connection). The genocide of Indigenous Peoples and Other-Than-Human-Persons extends from first contact to present day. *This Is The Way We Rise* succinctly expresses this in the Hawaiian context through Osorio talking about the 90% population loss of Native Hawaiians between 1778

and 1893 following first contact with Captain Cook, to a resulting history of threat and devastation, to the current and continued exploitation of Mauna Kea, which is Sacred, as a mountain for telescopes. As Osorio explains, the Indigenous Hawaiians who resist further construction of telescopes there are neither anti-telescope nor anti-science. Rather, they recognize that “science that requires desecration is not ethical and it’s not science. It’s development.”

Osorio deeply lives and embodies her poetry and culture. Despite first believing that poetry was for “old white dudes” and not a “young, queer, Hawaiian woman,” she quickly became a powerful voice and presence on the national slam poetry scene. Widely published and lauded, eventually Osorio encountered three years in which she felt she could neither write nor perform. Osorio’s voice is raised though when she joins the protectors at Mauna Kea and her community requests a poem. *This Is The Way We Rise* opens and closes with words for, and about, “the Mauna,” that express the Sacred nature of Mauna Kea and those who are in relationship with Mauna Kea and with each other. In one of the last poems in the film, Osorio conveys pilina through the words:

“As constant as the summit
With all your magic
Rising beside me
Holding out your hands to catch everything I am
And am not quite yet.”

“Do not forget us,” Osorio recited in her poem at the White House. *This Is The Way We Rise*, through beautiful visuals combined with the intelligence, strength, talent and deeply rooted Indigenous Voice of Osorio, ensures that we won’t.