



WHERE IS FIJI?

Fiji is a tropical island nation located in Oceania in the South Pacific Ocean and comprises an archipelago of more than 332 islands, 110 of which are permanently inhabited. Sandwiched between Melanesia and Polynesia, Fiji is located about two-thirds of the way from Hawaii to New Zealand, and immediate neighbors include Vanuatu, Tonga, and Samoa.

- *Rotuma is also part of Fiji and is a group of islands whose inhabitants are of Polynesian Descent*

GEOGRAPHY AND GEOMORPHOLOGY

Fiji's geography is defined by its position on the Pacific Ring of Fire, with its islands primarily being volcanic in origin, though some are limestone or atolls. The islands feature mountainous terrains with sharp peaks, valleys, and plains, along with the remnants of ancient volcanoes like cones and calderas. The geomorphology includes both high, rugged volcanic islands and low, flat coral islands, resulting in diverse landscapes shaped by volcanic activity, sedimentary processes, and coral formations, including hot springs and coastal cliffs.

FIJIAN ECONOMY

Fiji is one of the most developed islands in the Pacific but is still considered a developing nation and is abundant in forest, mineral and fish resources. The country relies on Tourism and Sugar exports as it's main source of income and foreign exchange.

- *According to the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, for the year 2024, they recorded 982,938 arrivals into the country.*
- *In 2023, Fiji earned over 500 millions dollars from tourists on Holiday here in Fiji.*

FACTS

- There are 14 provinces (Yasana) in Fiji and 195 districts (tikina).
- Fiji has 3 official Languages: English, Vosa Vaka Viti (Fijian) and Fiji Hindi.
- According to our last census, we have 928,784 beautiful people.
- 2 Cities : Suva (Capital) and Lautoka (Sugar City)

ORIGIN STORY

THE KAUNITONI VOYAGE

- Lutunasobasoba is considered the common ancestor for all Fijians and everyone is said to be descendant from his children who settled in the various yasana here in Fiji.
- Kaunitoni is the name of the vessel that Lutunasobasoba, his wife and children and Degei had travelled on to come to Fiji.
- According to oral Tradition, they first landed in Western region of Fiji in a place called Vuda. It is here where Lutunasobasoba stayed and Degei continued his Journey to settle in Nakauvadra.

THE EGYPT NAD TAQANIKA THEORY

- This theory is linked to the Kaunitoni Voyage and according to some oral records Lutunasobasoba came from Nubian royalty that sailed from a place called TAQANIKA in Africa and Settled in Fiji.
- It is also said that this theory originated from an essay competition that was organised by missionaries who were looking for more interesting ways to explain the origins of Fijians.

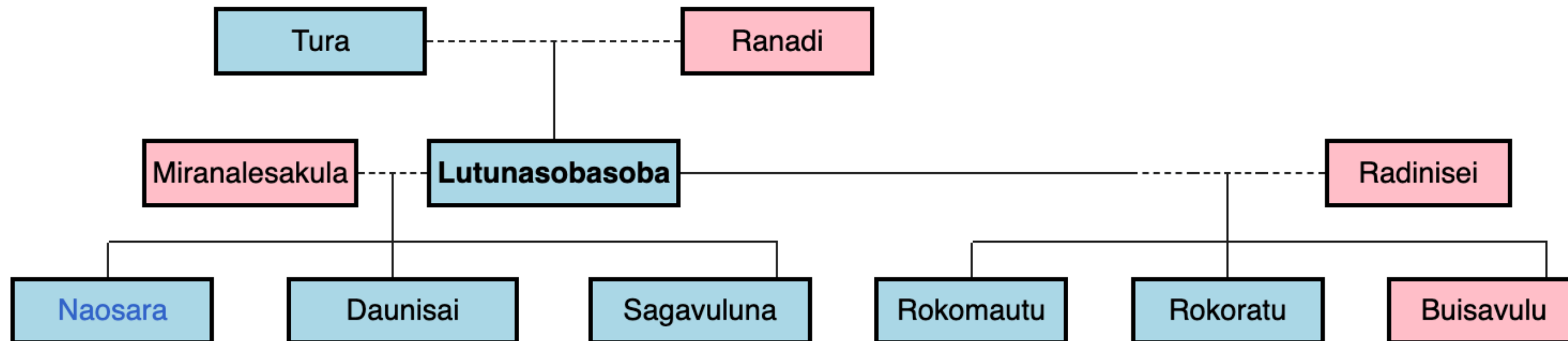
THE LOST TRIBE OF ISRAEL

- There's a small percentage of the Fijian population that firmly believe in this theory because of religious and cultural reasons.
- Over the years this theory has been used to push political ideals and has been the basis for many Fijian leaders.
- But there is no proper evidence to prove that we are the lost Tribe of Israel.

FAMILY TREE

THE KAUNITONI VOYAGE

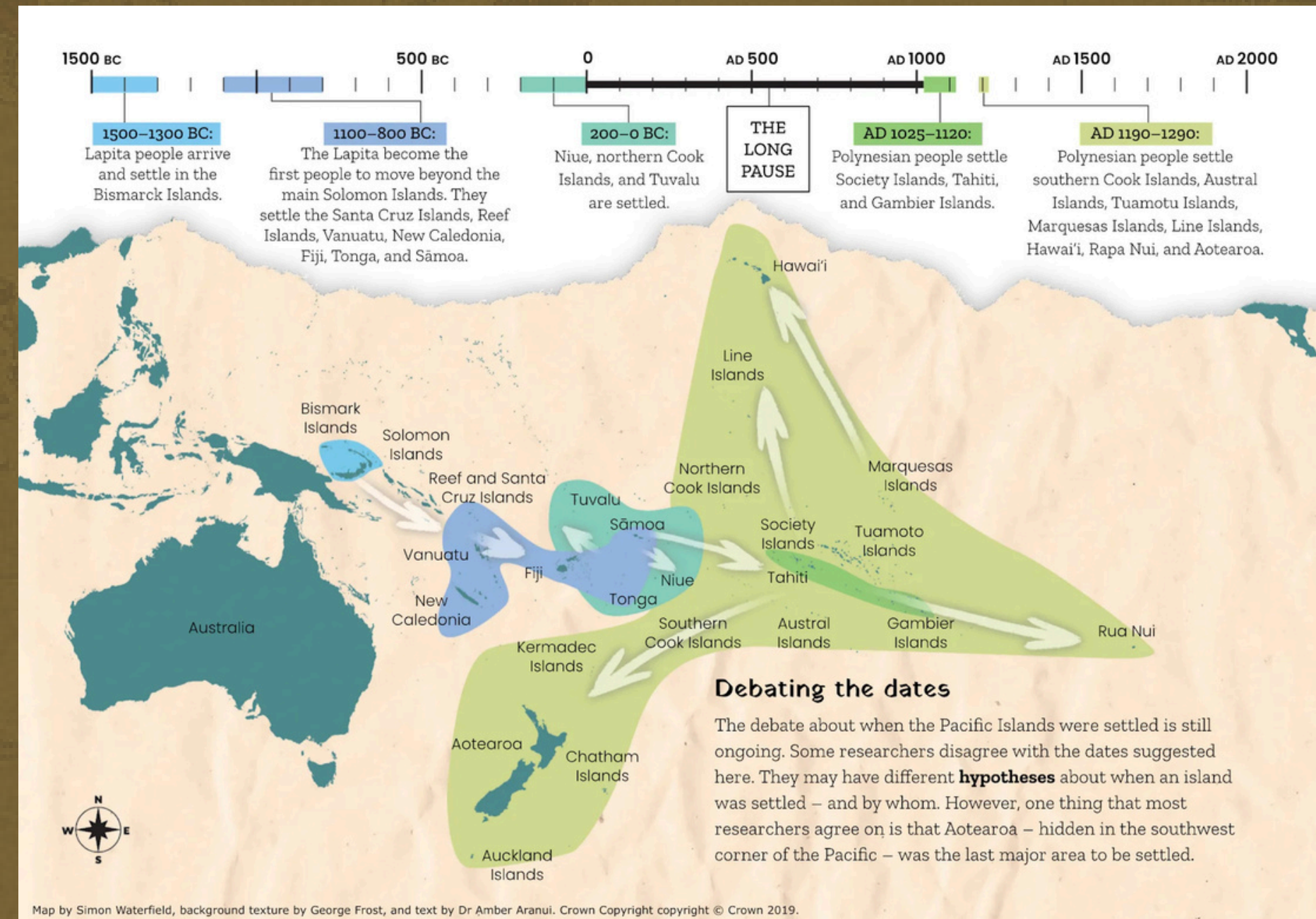
Family Tree of Lutunasobasoba



WAVES OF MIGRATION & THE PEOPLE OF FIJI

LAPITA I TAUKEI

- According to Academics, the first settlers of Fiji were the Lapita People.
- They arrived 3,500 years ago establishing settlements all over Fiji and the Pacific.
- They were well known for their pottery and their skills in navigation.
- They domesticated animals and plants, traded and bartered.



EUROPEANS

- The Dutch and The British were the first to “discover” Fiji. Abel Tasman was the first to sight Fiji in 1643. James Cook visited the Lau group in 1774 and William Bligh sailed by in 1789.
- The first settlers in Fiji were shipwrecked sailors and runaway convicts from Australia.
- In the 19th century, Sandalwood Merchants, Whalers, Beche-de-mer Traders and Missionaries were groups of europeans who came to Fiji to trade and settle.

ROTUMANS

- Rotuma is a remote, compact island measuring about 13 km by 4 km. It lies at the crossroads of Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia. The Rotuma Group includes several smaller, uninhabited islands and reefs.
- In 1881, Rotuma was Ceeded to Great Britain after religious conflicts between mssion groups ocured on the island.
- Rotuma is a self governing heptarchy.
- The Rotuman language is listed by UNESCO as one of the world’s most endangered, with only about 15,000 speakers globally.

INDENTURED LABOURERS

- Work in the peripheries was very labour intensive and the need for cheap labour was very high after slavery was abolished in 1833.
- The first girmits or indentured labourers were brought in from India in 1879 on the Leonidas.
- They were coerced and tricked by recruited and promised a better life and opportunities.
- Contracts lasted 5 years and girmits were forced to work in poor conditions and they lived in cramped housing.
- Recruitment ended in 1916-1917 with many girmits choosing to settle and continue living in Fiji. The remaining contracts were all cancelled in 1920.

BANABANS AND TUVALUANS

Banabans

- Banaba is located in Kiribati and it's people who once lived here are now the inhabitants of Rabi.
- In 1945, due to decades of British phosphate mining, inhabitants were relocated to Rabi because the island became uninhabitable.

Tuvaluans

- The Tuvaluans on Kioa are originally from Vaitupu Island.
- They purchased land in 1946 and began relocating in 1947 due to overcrowding.
- They purchased the island for 3015 pounds.

BLACKBIRDED MELANESIANS

- Blackbirding in Fiji was the practice of kidnapping or deceiving Pacific Islanders—predominantly from the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Kiribati—to work as cheap, often enslaved labor on cotton and sugar plantations between 1864 and 1911.
- Approximately 27,000 to 45,000 Pacific Islanders were brought to Fiji during this 46-year era.
- *Recruiters often used "black books" and reversed collars to pose as missionaries, enticing locals onto ships for religious services before kidnapping them.*
- *After recruitment ended in 1911, many who remained settled in specific areas like Wailoku, Caubati, and New Town on the outskirts of Suva.*

CHINESE MERCHANTS AND FARMERS

- The first Chinese settler arrived in Fiji in 1855 and was named Moy Ba Ling.
- British policies deliberately limited Chinese immigration into Fiji.
- European merchants in the colony saw the Chinese as a threat to their business interests. The colonial government, often influenced by the policies of nearby Australian colonies, tried to limit Chinese commercial activities through "indirect legislation," though this proved unsuccessful.

FIJIAN HISTORY CRASH COURSE

PRE CONTACT

- Before European contact in the 17th century, Fiji was a complex society shaped by ancient migrations, distinctive cultural practices, and hierarchical chiefdoms.
- Marriages were often used to form political alliances, but inter-group rivalry could also lead to instability. This volatile political landscape meant chiefdoms frequently rose and fell.
- Fijian traders traveled throughout the South Pacific, including regular expeditions to Tonga, Samoa, and other islands.



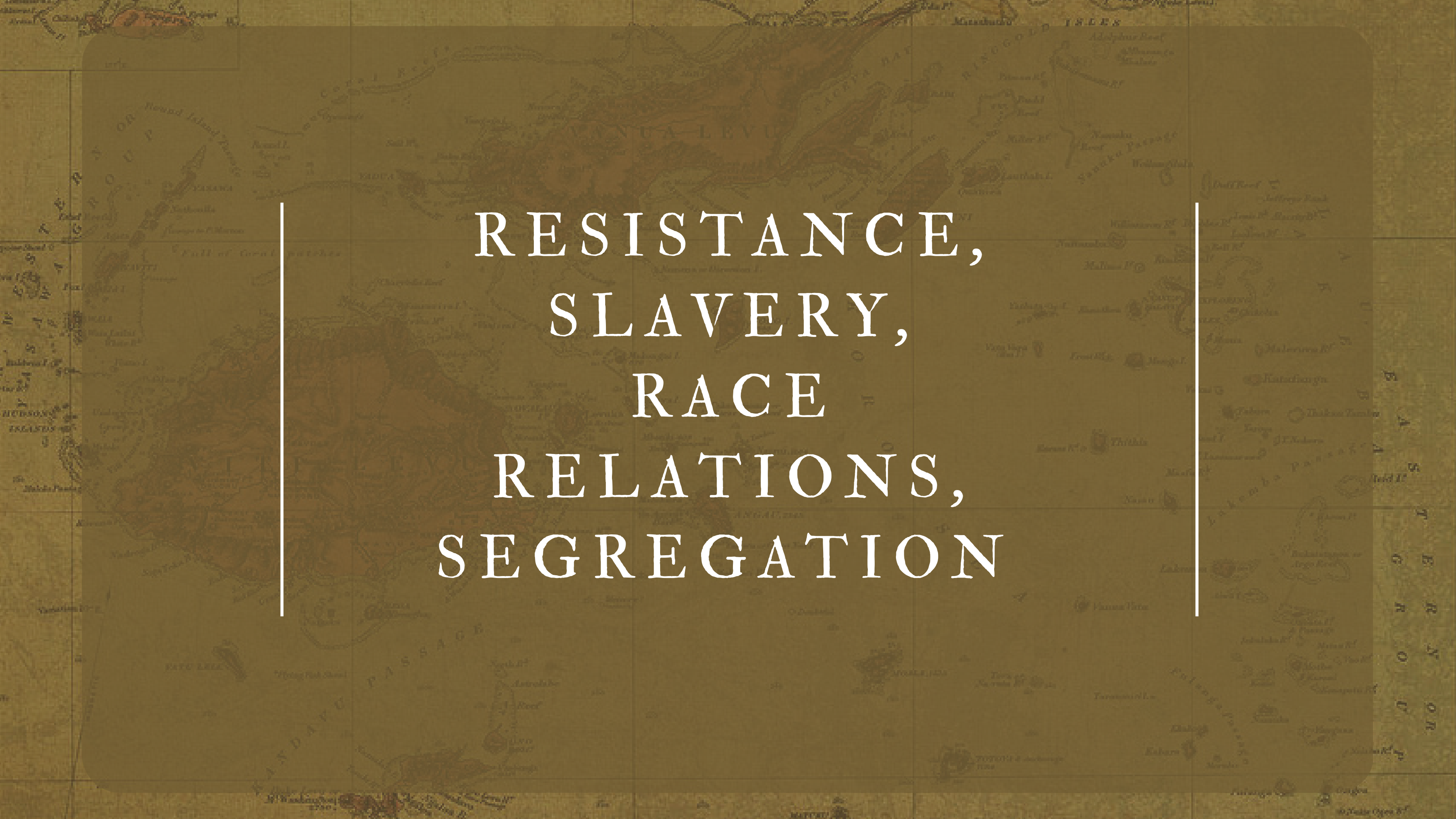
CONTACT & COLONIAL

- After interacting and trading with different groups of Europeans, the introduction of Christianity and fire arms gave some chiefs like Ratu Seru Cakobau the opportunity to expand the influence Larger scale.
- But his Kingdom was under threat and the only solution was to gather the chiefs and convince them to cede Fiji to great Britain.
- Fiji became a colony on the 10th of October 1874 with signed approval from 13 Chiefs. This decision was met with resistance but pacified through violence and force.
- Under leaders such as Sir Arthur Gordon and Ratu Sukuna Fiji began to grow and begin it's journey to self governance.



POST COLONIAL

- Fiji gained Independence on the 10th of October 1970.
- Ratu Kamisese Mara and SM Koya were two leaders who played a key role in advocating for Fijian sovereignty.
- Since independence we have had 3 coups and the last one was in 2006. This was led by Bainimarama who was the Prime Minister of Fiji for 16 years.
- Our current coalition government is led by Sitiveni Rabuka

A historical map of the Pacific Ocean, showing various islands, reefs, and passages. The map is rendered in a dark, muted color palette. Overlaid on the map is a large, semi-transparent dark rectangle containing the text. The text is in a white, serif font, arranged in four lines. The map includes labels such as 'HAWAIIAN ISLANDS', 'MIDWINTER PASSAGE', and 'TONGAREVA'. The text reads: RESISTANCE, SLAVERY, RACE RELATIONS, SEGREGATION.

RESISTANCE,
SLAVERY,
RACE
RELATIONS,
SEGREGATION



RESISTANCE

Resistance came before, during and after colonial rule and the sad thing about Fijian History is due to historical narratives being controlled and being Eurocentric, not much is taught in schools about this topic.

• COLO WAR

The Colo War (or Colo Wars) refers to a series of conflicts in the 1870s between the mountain-dwelling Kai Colo tribes of the interior of Viti Levu and the coastal authorities of the Kingdom of Fiji, and later the British colonial government.

The resistance was primarily a struggle against foreign intrusion, the imposition of Christianity, and the loss of tribal autonomy.

- After the Colo War resistance continued even in the western province of Nadroga. According to letters and journals entries this is a message that was given to the villages who resisted:

“annexation had abolished their laws and customs; that their laws for transmission of property no longer existed; that their cherished habits had become illegal; that their lands were now property of the Crown; and that they were now expected, even required, to labour on white men’s plantations”



• VITI KABANI

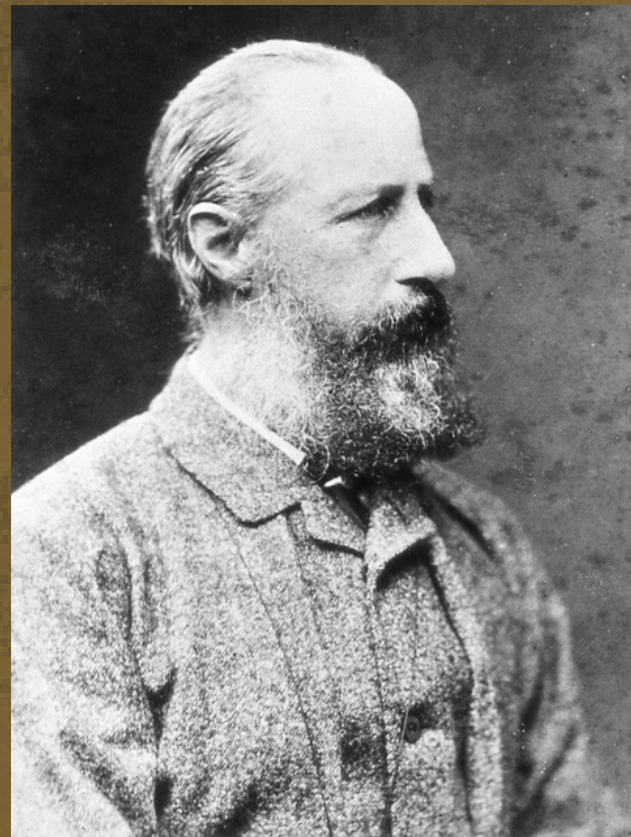
Apolosi Nawai's Viti Kabani (Fiji Company), founded around 1913–1914, was an indigenous cooperative and a powerful anti-colonial resistance movement in early 20th-century Fiji. It was designed to empower native Fijians by breaking the economic monopoly of European and foreign middlemen.



• PLANTATION RIOTS

During the Girit era (1879–1920) in "Indian Plantation Riots" were typically localized uprisings or strikes by indentured laborers (giritiyas) against the brutal conditions of the plantation system. While massive organized strikes were rare until after the abolition of indenture in 1920, several significant early confrontations occurred.

SEPARATE ADMINISTRATION PROTECTION OR SEGREGATION



- After Fiji was ceded to Great Britain in 1874, Sir Arthur Gordon became the first Governor General of Fiji.
- Sir Arthur Gordon's Fiji native policies established an indirect rule system, aiming to protect Fijian land and culture by prohibiting land sales, regulating labor, and setting up the Great Council of Chiefs (Bose Levu Vakaturaga) to administer through traditional structures, creating a unique colonial society with preserved Fijian customs and a separate Indian indentured labor force, an approach to governing that shape Fiji's future.

SEPARATE ADMINISTRATION PROTECTION OR SEGREGATION

- This approach to governance would shape the Fiji's future political landscape and would give rise to many issues concerning race and leadership.
- Gordon brought in indentured labourers from India and through out the duration of their agreement they stayed on the plantations and were overseen by plantation owners and drivers.
- Europeans were looked after by the colonial administration that was set up by the crown.
- The welfare of these three racial groups were all looked after by seperate administrations which meant there was little to no interaction between groups.
- Before and after independence, the social, economic and political climate of the country would be shaped by Gordon's decisions

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SLAVERY

INDENTURED LABOURERS

- The indentured labor system in Fiji, known as *Girmit*, was an oppressive bonded labor scheme that brought approximately 60,553 Indian laborers to Fiji between 1879 and 1916 to work on sugarcane plantations.

Historical Background (1879–1920)

- **Arrival:** The first ship, the *Leonidas*, docked at Levuka on May 14, 1879, carrying 463 immigrants. This marked the beginning of a system designed by Fiji's first substantive governor, Sir Arthur Gordon, to provide cheap labor for the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) while preserving the indigenous Fijian way of life.
- **Recruitment:** Many laborers (*Girmitiyas*) were recruited from impoverished rural villages in North India (Uttar Pradesh and Bihar) and later South India, often through deceit or false promises by agents known as *arkatis*.
- **Conditions:** Workers were subjected to "pseudo-slavery," living in cramped barracks called "coolie lines". They endured 12-hour workdays, physical abuse from overseers, and high rates of disease, suicide, and infanticide.
- **Abolition:** The system was officially abolished on January 1, 1920, after years of international pressure and local resistance.

SLAVERY

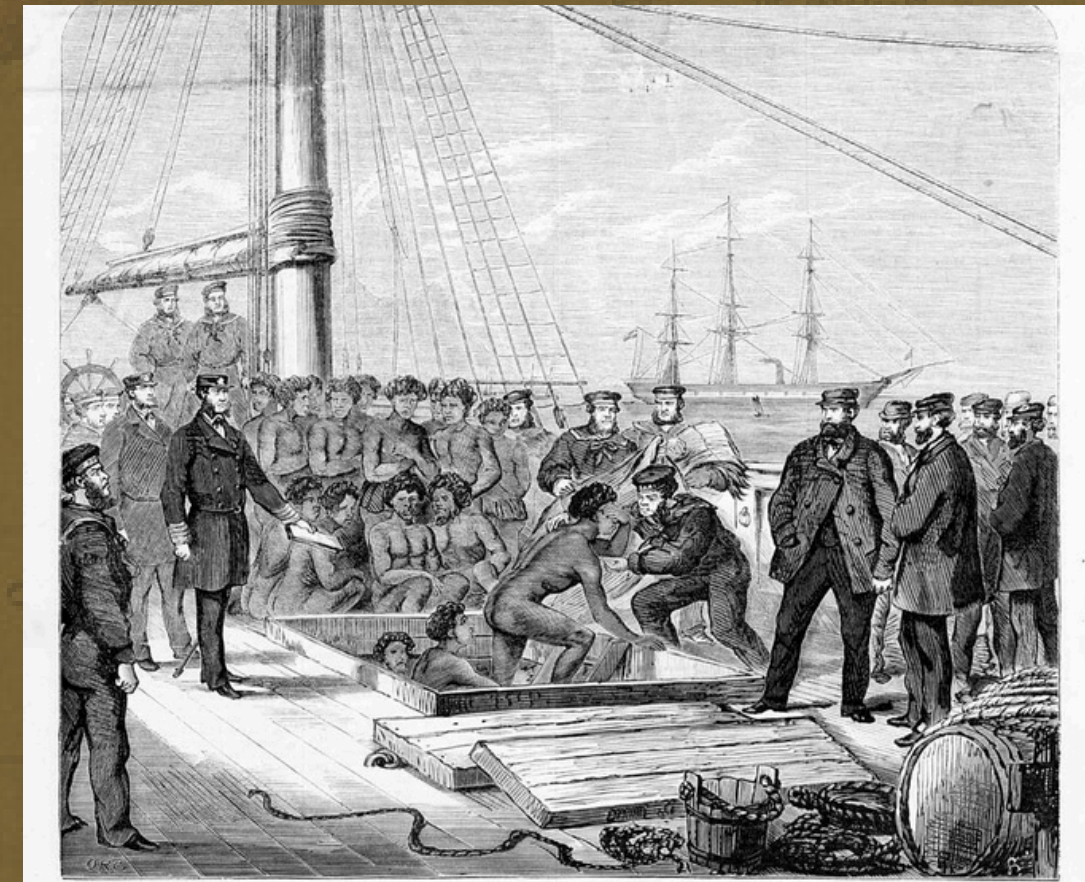
INDENTURED LABOURERS

- Demographic and Cultural Impact
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- Settlement: Although entitled to return to India after 10 years, roughly 60% chose to stay, eventually becoming the backbone of Fiji's commercial and agricultural sectors.
- Cultural Shift: The rigors of plantation life largely dissolved traditional Indian caste barriers, leading to a more unified community identity.
- Language: The merging of various Indian dialects (mainly Awadhi and Bhojpuri) resulted in the development of Fiji Hindi.
- Indo-Fijian Identity: Descendants of these laborers are now recognized as "Fijians" under the 2013 Constitution, sharing an equal national identity with other ethnic groups.
- Modern Recognition (2026)
- Girmity Day: As of 2026, May 14 is a national public holiday in Fiji to honor the sacrifices and contributions of the Girmitiyas.
- Demographics: As of early 2026, Indo-Fijians—primarily descendants of these laborers—comprise approximately 33% to 38% of Fiji's total population of roughly 937,000.

SLAVERY

BLACK BIRDING

- Blackbirding was the practice of coercing or kidnapping Indigenous people from the Pacific Islands to provide labour, primarily for plantations, during the 19th and early 20th centuries. In Fiji and across the Pacific, men, women, and sometimes children were taken—often through deception, force, or false promises—and transported to work in sugar, cotton, and copra plantations in places such as Fiji, Queensland (Australia), and Samoa.



SLAVERY

BLACK BIRDING

- In Fiji, blackbirding intersected with the broader colonial labour system, contributing to population displacement, trauma, and the disruption of traditional social structures. Although some labourers technically signed contracts, many did so without understanding the terms or under duress. Conditions were frequently harsh, with long hours, poor treatment, and high mortality rates.
- Across the Pacific, blackbirding had lasting impacts on Indigenous communities, including loss of life, cultural dislocation, and intergenerational trauma. Today, it is widely recognised as a form of forced labour that played a significant role in shaping the social, economic, and demographic history of the Pacific region.

RACE RELATIONS

FIJI AFTER YEARS OF COLONISATION

- In 2026, race relations in Fiji remain a central and complex challenge, characterized by a mix of historical tensions and renewed efforts toward national reconciliation.
- **Current Political Landscape (2026)** : The social climate is currently influenced by the lead-up to the 2026 general elections, which are viewed as a defining moment for the nation's identity.
- **National Reconciliation**: Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka's government has prioritized a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to address the scars of past coups (1987, 2000, 2006) which were largely driven by ethnic divisions.
- **Government Stance**: The administration maintains that Fiji is a multiracial nation where "unity and collaboration prevail," reintroducing the Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs to support minority groups.

RACE RELATIONS

FIJI AFTER YEARS OF COLONISATION

- **Indigenous Rights vs. Equality:** Tension persists between the “paramountcy of indigenous interests”—championed by nationalists and the Great Council of Chiefs—and the constitutional principle of substantive equality for all citizens.

Key Demographic & Social Trends

- **Declining Indo-Fijian Population:** Persistent outward migration has significantly reduced the Indo-Fijian population. This shift is changing political dynamics from a competition between two large ethnic blocks to a struggle to ensure a shrinking minority is not excluded from national life.
- **Social Integration:** While intermarriage rates remain low and cultural/religious barriers exist, daily life often displays high levels of multicultural harmony. Festivals and national celebrations frequently feature cross-cultural participation.

RACE RELATIONS

FIJI AFTER YEARS OF COLONISATION

- **Persistent Challenges:**
 - **Hate Speech:** Officials have warned of a rise in hate crimes and the use of digital platforms to spread racist propaganda.
 - **Economic Disparity:** Disputes over land tenure and agricultural leases continue to be a primary source of friction between indigenous landowners and Indo-Fijian tenant farmers.
- **Institutional Protections**
 - **2013 Constitution:** This framework remains the legal basis for equality, famously granting the common title of "Fijian" to all citizens regardless of ethnicity.
 - **Human Rights Commission:** The Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission actively monitors for institutional bias and discrimination, though some NGOs have raised concerns about "governance failures" in the past year.

REFLECTIONS

Both Fiji and the United States are multicultural nations shaped by migration, colonialism, and major political change. In each country, race relations have been influenced by difficult histories whether through colonial systems, slavery, or identity being used as a political tool. Yet in both places, everyday life often tells a more hopeful story: people connecting through food, music, sport, and shared community experiences.

REFLECTIONS

In Fiji, unity is found in village gatherings and national pride moments like supporting the Fiji national rugby sevens team. In America, cultural expression and civil rights leadership such as that of Martin Luther King Jr. highlight the ongoing pursuit of equality and belonging. Despite different histories, both societies show that diversity is a strength, not a weakness.

REFLECTIONS

Ultimately, both countries share the same lesson: multiculturalism thrives when people choose understanding over fear, connection over conflict, and celebration over division. By embracing culture, cuisine, sports, and music and by moving away from colonial mindsets and racialized politics. Fiji and the United States alike can continue building futures grounded in respect, empathy, and unity.

A historical map of the Pacific Ocean, showing various island groups and geographical features. The map is rendered in a sepia or brownish tone. Overlaid on the map is a large, rounded rectangular area containing the text 'Tiraka Takalevu' in a white, elegant cursive font. The map includes labels for 'VANUA-LEVU', 'TONGAREVA', 'TONGAREVA ISLANDS', 'TONGAREVA PASSAGE', and 'TONGAREVA ISLANDS'. Other visible labels include 'VANUA-LEVU', 'TONGAREVA', 'TONGAREVA ISLANDS', 'TONGAREVA PASSAGE', 'TONGAREVA ISLANDS', 'VANUA-LEVU', 'TONGAREVA', 'TONGAREVA ISLANDS', 'TONGAREVA PASSAGE', 'TONGAREVA ISLANDS'.

Tiraka Takalevu