

**The campaign to influence policy change: #Tautokothepanthers**

During the Dawn Raids, an activist group, known as the Polynesian Panthers were formed. Based in Ponsonby in Auckland, the Panthers united to be the leading voice in Pacific advocacy. Even 50 years after the initial attacks, they continued to promote an apology from the New Zealand government or to simply acknowledge the injustices of the Dawn Raids. Despite the efforts of the Polynesian Panthers, there was little social traction gained towards getting an apology.

#Tautokothepanthers was a campaign that illustrates the next generation of Pasifika activism adding further weight to the cause.

In August 2021, the campaign was created, #Tautokothepanthers, which was led by Josiah Tualamali'i and Benji Timu with an aim to change this policy for the better of their people.

They had a number of goals to influence the government on. The most important to them and the community they were standing for was a formal apology for the Dawn Raids. Backed up by the experiences of member of the panthers, Tigalau Ness, who states that, in relation to an apology, "It's time. Fifty years is a long time to wait, we've had enough". Through the campaign, #tautokothepanthers they aimed to influence official government strategy and procedure for addressing historical injustices, as there are strict criteria that cabinet needs to apply when making these decisions. By asking for an apology, #Tautokothepanthers was focused on influencing government procedure by making a clear case that the Dawn Raids meet the criteria. Alongside this, they also called for parliament to "crucially to have a special debate. This is because it was important to have a record of the apology. Parliament has a record of every word spoken within it since day dot. Without a debate in Parliament there would be no written record of the apology. We wanted it recorded and a debate would be the vehicle."

Another of #Tautokothepanthers aims was for government to "acknowledge and reflect on what happened during the dawn raids and promise that there will be no uncertainty from everyone in parliament that this will never happen again". Part of this was also the goal of ensuring the government would set up and promote "culturally responsive trauma informed wellbeing spaces". They also wanted "a financial legacy in trust, similar to the Chinese poll tax apology enabling some putea to be stewarded by the community to support more national education about this significant part of our history, and also to work to address some of the trauma and complications of what has happened". This, alongside the earlier point calls for the government to build a full reconciliation strategy and make a strategic commitment to addressing the hurt that occurred, including making appropriate budget allocations.

**Involvement of individuals****Josiah Tualamali'i:**

"What I'm fighting for is the right for all New Zealanders to have their voices heard", Josiah Tualamali'i is a social justice advocate and a leading voice for his Samoan culture. Influenced by his immediate family, Josiah published an article on Newsroom in 2021, explaining how when his father moved to Aotearoa to support family financially back home, he learned "You had to be extremely careful around authorities who could not be trusted to treat you fairly." This was a decade after the Dawn Raids, and it was clear racism still roamed our country. This ultimately influenced Josiah, making him feel the need to make things right for the Pasifika community. Josiah wasn't part of the Panthers but saw them as the "spark for this action," leading him to contribute through encouraging tweets and starting the letter-writing campaign to Parliament.

Josiah dedicated his work to aiming for financial and educational gains from the apology. From his personal experience growing up in Aotearoa, he "did not hear about the Dawn Raids at school," and it wasn't until university that the conversation came up among his peers, showing the stigma around the Dawn Raids. Josiah recognised former Prime Minister Helen Clark setting up the Chinese Poll Tax Heritage Trust, which totalled \$5 million in 2002 as a "gesture of reconciliation in support of the formal apology." Considering the Pasifika community wanted a formal apology, Josiah insisted the

petition include a request for a legacy fund, seeing as it would “significantly help to address the community-wide impact.” His decision to join the #TautokoThePanthers campaign came from cultural influences around him, identifying the trauma on those impacted within his community and noticing what they deserve as an outcome of the formal apology.

### **Benji Timu:**

Benji Timu is a digital content creator and filmmaker who states, “Being a filmmaker enables me to tell our stories better both online and on the screen.” Through this profession, he is motivated to share his experiences and the stories of others with the media, which explains why he was inspired to help create the #TautokoThePanthers campaign. His experience as a Samoan/Niuean living in New Zealand demonstrates his willingness to help change policy. One example he shared in his NZ Herald article was when a cop pulled him over and searched his belongings at the age of 18 after studying at the library. “Racism doesn’t just exist in spaces like the KKK or alt-right groups, it exists in everyday behaviour and attitudes.” Withholding the social justice perspective and prioritising the rights of Pasifika, Benji contributed significantly to the policy-change campaign alongside Josiah. His experiences with racism today demonstrate his drive to be an activist involved with this campaign, wanting to continue challenging the government to benefit the lives of minority groups in our country. He recognises the injustice of ‘hiding’ Parliament’s actions towards the Pasifika community and sees the benefit in discussing real-life experiences of Pasifika communities that faced harm. Experiencing the negative impacts of racism as part of a minority group, his perspective comes from hurtful experiences, believing that having no apology from Parliament is them “taking the easy way out.”

### **Actions in the campaign:**

The first action for the #TautokoThePanthers campaign was promoting the hashtag through social media outlets such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Social media is a strong way to promote a campaign because it can easily reach a wider, more diverse audience. We’ve seen how successful social media campaigns have been, such as the social justice campaign #BlackLivesMatter following the death of George Floyd by police brutality in May 2020 and the #MeToo campaign in 2006 that effectively highlighted sexual harassment and assault. By creating viral campaigns through social media, it can amplify voices and facilitate real-time engagement, foster community support, and enable the sharing of information and resources across communities. The #TautokoThePanthers hashtag was first used on Twitter by Josiah Tualamali’i on March 14th, 2021, where he said, “The Polynesian Panthers have issued the call for an apology for the racist Dawn Raids. Please whanau and friends, let’s lift our voices to #TautokoThePanthers call.” The word ‘Tautoko’ means to support and endorse in Te Reo Māori. In this case, Josiah was advocating solidarity amongst the Panthers, the Pasifika community, and the people of New Zealand. Social media can have negative perspectives on concepts such as social justice. In Facebook comments under news articles about the Dawn Raids or social justice for Pasifika communities, there are many racist and ignorant comments. Facebook user Quinn Olsen said under a 1News post about the government’s apology in 2021 that “If you broke the law, there were consequences. The police were doing the job they were told to do,” disregarding the fact that there was police brutality involved. Another user called Ray Treadaway said, “They knowingly broke the Law of The Land....and back in the day...50 years ago the Police were doing the right thing. Today, customs and norms have changed...cannot apply today’s values against yesterday’s events...it just does not stack up.” They claim that the police were enforcing immigration laws as they existed at the time, downplaying the fact that law enforcement was discriminating against Pasifika people, and they are saying that the apology is unnecessary because the police and government were acting according to the laws and social norms of that era. Using social media connects to the idea of social justice because it can be used to spread awareness, mobilise action, challenge power, and build solidarity.

The most important and influential social action the #TautokoThePanthers campaign took was the use of online petitions to Parliament. Josiah Tualamali’i and Benji Timu created a petition calling for an official government apology, saying that the government should “apologise for the Dawn Raids,

and state that they should never happen again, and set up a legacy fund to allow education about them to continue." The petition was created on May 17, 2021, only one month after the first tweet was posted by Josiah on March 14th, and the government announced their apology a week after the petition closed with 7,366 signatures on June 14th, 2021. On June 23rd, 2021, the petition was presented to and accepted by Te Pāti Māori co-leaders Debbie Ngarewa-Packer and Rawiri Waititi outside the Beehive in Wellington. The reason Josiah and Benji chose to present their petition to Te Pāti Māori was due to their connection and representation of the Māori/Pacific Islander community, as well as their solidarity with the Polynesian Panthers. Debbie Ngarewa-Packer said that "It's an absolute honour to be here in the shadow of our Polynesian Panthers, in the shadow of all of our whānau, our tangata moana whānau - who we stand in solidarity with." A petition was an effective way to take social action because it gave thousands of people the chance to show their support in a formal and organised way. It also put pressure on the government by showing that this issue mattered to a large number of New Zealanders, making it harder for them to ignore the call for an apology. Combining the hashtag with the petition was even more effective because social media helped spread awareness quickly and encouraged people to sign.

## Consequences

The biggest consequence of the #TautokoThePanthers campaign was the official apology for the Dawn Raids by the New Zealand government in 2021 at Auckland Town Hall. It was held in Auckland rather than Wellington, the capital city, because that's where the majority of the raids occurred and where the highest population of the Pasifika community lives. More than 1,000 people attended the three-and-a-half-hour ceremony, including original members of the Polynesian Panthers such as Dr Melani Anae, Pauline Vaeluaga Smith, Reverend Alex Toleafoa, and Tigilau Ness, government officials including Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, who delivered the speech, Her Royal Highness Princess Mele Siu'ilikutapu Kalaniuvalu Fotofili of Tonga, and students, educators, and members of the Pasifika community directly or generationally affected by the Dawn Raids. Jacinda Ardern wore a leaf and flower lei around her neck, set against a traditional tapa background. This brought her closer to the Pasifika community by representing their culture, not just her own. Following the first part of her speech, spoken in many Pacific languages (including Samoan, Tongan, and Te Reo Māori), she went on to say, "The government expresses its sorrow, remorse, and regret that the Dawn Raids and random police checks occurred and that these actions were ever considered appropriate."

After the apology, the New Zealand government gave the Pasifika community \$2.5 million worth of tertiary scholarships, \$1 million worth of training scholarships, and provided resources for schools and kura that wished to teach the history of the Dawn Raids, including histories of those directly affected. The Ministry for Culture and Heritage and Ministry for Pacific Peoples also committed to supporting Pacific artists and historians to work with communities to develop a comprehensive historical record of the Dawn Raids period as an additional goodwill gesture of reconciliation.

## Evaluation and Modification

The campaign was a large success, gaining a formal apology on behalf of the New Zealand Crown, but we can recognise its potential to be more effective in creating long-term, concrete change beyond acknowledgment of past historical injustices. While Ardern announced financial scholarships to offer further opportunities for Pasifika youth, a change that could have made the campaign stronger was ensuring the Dawn Raids were embedded within the school curriculum. In her speech, Ardern stated there would be resources given to schools "for schools who choose to use it," when it should be a compulsory part of the curriculum.

**The student used footnoting throughout and provided a full reference list. These were removed for brevity.**