

RESILIENCE SOURCEBOOK

Introduction

I have always felt at home at the American Museum of Natural History. My mother brought us, as children, to the Whale Room, a long time before it became the Milstein Hall of Ocean Life. Our family has been privileged to support this museum for two generations. Given that long history, it's a special joy to sponsor this Sourcebook and the Center for Biodiversity and Conservation's 2013 Milstein Science Symposium on which it is based.

Islands are planetary early warning systems. As such, this is a topic that takes on more urgency with each shift in climate and ecology, and each shift of the major and minor tectonic plates that undergird many of the world's islands. Since ancient times, islands have held a special place in our imaginations and literature – Homer's *Odyssey*, Shakespeare's *Tempest*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, to name a few.

But, islands are more than scenic locations. Their very form and isolation helps to shape narratives and exposes them to peculiar ecological and social stresses.

For three days in April 2013, world class scientists from the United States, Australia, India, Indonesia, the South Pacific, the Caribbean, Honduras, North and South America, and elsewhere came together at the American Museum of Natural History to address the theme of islands. The Symposium enabled a groundbreaking collaboration of experts from universities, foundations, civil societies and research museums.

Having returned from Hawaii shortly before the Symposium, I found the topic of islands to be particularly meaningful – not only because Hawaii is due north of Tahiti and the Cook Islands, areas that were discussed by the participants – but because of how human history relates to geologic time. Kure Atoll, the oldest of the Hawaiian Islands is 28 million years old. The Big Island is 400,000 years old and the newest island, Loihi, is still submerged and growing to the extreme southeast. In these formations, we witness a geological life cycle of islands from volcanic birth to subsidence through erosion - all taking place over a far longer time than humans have been on the planet.

On behalf of the Milstein family, I hope that you will make good use of this Sourcebook as you reflect on ecological and social resilience in island systems.

Howard P. Milstein

