

## BOOK REVIEWS

### *Transforming Vernacular Culture*

Matt Claybaugh

*The Soul of Surfing is Hawaiian.* By Fred Hemmings. Hong Kong: Sports Enterprises, Inc., 1997.

*Hawaiian Shirt Designs.* By Nancy Schiffer. Hong Kong, Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 1997.

*Hawaiiana: The Best of Hawaiian Design.* By Mark Blackburn. Atglen: Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 1996.

Three books, all out within the past two years, offer interesting glimpses into the history of tourist culture in Hawai'i. Fred Hemmings' *The Soul of Surfing is Hawaiian* is an eclectic collection of surfing's legendary faces, places, and events. The text incorporates historic and contemporary photographs, personal vignettes, myths and legends, with a sprinkling of Hemmings' unique world view to develop a loosely chronological depiction of surfing culture. Hemmings' work explores the evolution of surfing from its cultural roots in ancient Hawai'i, through its recreational popularity in Waikiki and the famous north shore of O'ahu, to maturity as a professional international sport. A former world champion surfer and pioneer promoter, Hemmings offers insights into marketing techniques which placed the sport on a global stage and simultaneously advertised the natural beauty of Hawai'i.

Surfing provides an interesting context from which to examine the relationship between indigenous art forms and their global representations. Through Hollywood's appropriation of surf imagery, many have come to associate surf culture with California. Furthermore, the internationalization of professional surfing has disassociated it from its Hawaiian roots. *The Soul of Surfing's* greatest asset is that it celebrates the personalities of surf culture, and reaffirms the sport's birthright by (re)locating its Soul in the islands.

The "Hawaiian Shirt" (or "Aloha Shirt") has long symbolized an excursion to the islands, and in *Hawaiian Shirt Designs* Nancy Schiffer explores the transformation of the material artifact from its origins as a plantation work shirt (*palaka*) to its present status as a Hawaiian icon. Although a few historical inaccuracies tend to mar the work, this primarily pictorial history provides a rich visual chronicle of Hawai'i's most discernible souvenir.

Schiffer writes, "the fact that these shirts became enormously popular in the middle of the 20th century indicates how people respond to the Hawaiian culture, which seemed exotic, romantic, and relaxing." Here, Schiffer accentuates a link values they elicit. To capitalize on the inherent popularity of aloha wear, official and unofficial advertising followed. Hawaiian Products Week was initiated by the Hawai'i Chamber of Congress in the 1930s (replaced by Aloha Week on all islands in 1947), with residents being encouraged to dress in Hawaiian print shirts and *mu'umu'u*. The popularity of these events furthered marketing and solidified the product's iconography. Schiffer's work offers a visual reconstruction of a culture in transition, whereby the values associated with the material artifacts influenced external as well as internal perceptions.

Mark Blackburn's *Hawaiiana: The Best of Hawaiian Design* captures the shifting focus of Hawai'i's material culture by providing full color images of representative products. As a collector and retailer of such items, he describes the book as "a look at the Hawai'i of the Golden Age of travel." Primarily depicting wares produced for tourist consumption, the work catalogs such diverse Hawai'i collectibles as menus, postcards, broadsides, fashions, figurines, musical instruments, quilts, furniture, and jewelry and assigns approximate value to each. Intermixed with the primary text are tidbits of island facts, such as the number of flowers in an *ilima lei*, the cost of living, and the tallest coconut tree on record.

Although beautifully designed, the book's questionable spelling, inexact use of Hawaiian terminology, and historical inaccuracies diminish its authenticity. The illustrations, however, are spectacular. By including an appraisal of each item, Blackburn's work serves to validate the intrinsic worth (cultural and monetary), of such historical keepsakes. An excellent survey for those interested or involved with Hawaiian collectibles.

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***Paradise Remade: The Politics of Culture and History in Hawai'i.*** By Elizabeth Buck. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993.

Reviewed by Kevin M. Roddy, Public Services Librarian at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo.

Elizabeth Buck's fine addition to Hawaiian history examines Western impact on Hawaiian society by looking at gradual changes in *hula* and *oli* (chant); however, this book is not a history of *hula* or *oli*. In a clear, well-written introduction, Buck suggests that the "continuous productivity" of *oli* in Hawaiian society, coupled with the changes brought to it by Western influence, might afford an interesting view of the dynamic of political and cultural change over time.

It is difficult for modern-day thinkers to "conceptualize social relations and institutions in societies in which economic, political, and ideological practices were not shaped by the forces of capitalism" (p. 19), so in chapter 2, "Thinking about Hawaiian History," Buck invites the reader to make such constructs using Marxist-informed and post-structuralist theories. Chapter 3, "Hawai'i before Contact with the West," requires no prior knowledge of Hawaiian history or culture for essential arguments to be understood. In Buck's opinion, the notion of Hawai'i as "paradise," promotes a limited and simplified view of a very complex and rich pre-contact social and political structure.

Precontact Hawai'i was sometimes a brutal and scary place, one certainly not immune to the foibles of human passions—greed, power struggles, political conflict, and class hierarchy. Buck examines the transformation of Hawaiian communal structure prior to Captain Cook's arrival from one that was centered on the *maka'ainana* (commoner) to one that favored the *ali'i* (chiefs), sometimes at the expense of the *maka'ainana*. Though historian David Malo documented the occasional *maka'ainana* victory in struggles between the two classes, the uncompromising political dynamic of *ali'i* as ruler and *maka'ainana* as commoner was never seriously threatened. This intermittent tension, a minor fray in the social fabric, however, did make Hawaiian society more susceptible to manipulation by merchant and missionary alike, which led to eventual rapid decline.

In chapter 4, "Western Penetration," Buck recounts the sad story of Western merchants essentially turning the *ali'i* into merchant middlemen, the *Māhele's* commodification of land, and the

Hawaiians' steady alienation from their own lands (which many scholars and Native Hawaiians believe to be the single greatest tragedy in Hawaiian history), along with the theft of crown lands and the seizing of political power by Western big business.

In chapter 5 ("Transformations in Ideological Representations: Chant and Hula") and chapter 6 ("Transformations in Language and Power") Buck's thesis is fully realized. After Western contact, changes to *hula* and *oli* were inevitable. Buck observes that both were vulnerable, yet resilient to Western contact. Much of the ancient *hula* tradition passed down to the present day was conducted secretly by individuals and *halau* on the outer islands and in the remote districts of rural O'ahu, far from prying missionary eyes. Missionary suppression and Western devaluation of the *hula*, along with rapid economic changes in the society, contributed to Hawai'i's second greatest tragedy—the alienation of the Hawaiians from the Hawaiian language. Prior to Western contact, *oli* was a political and social form of expression. Suppression of the Hawaiian language would be certain death to *oli*. Though Kalākaua revived these ancient arts, the overthrow of Lili'uokalani ended the *oli's* political power. The political nature of *oli* was a threat to Westerners, who recognized the enormous power of the Hawaiian language and were determined to annihilate it. *Hula* and *oli* again went underground. For centuries, Hawaiians encrypted many if not all *oli*, with *kaona*, or hidden meanings. Transparent to Western eyes, *kaona* preserved the messages of those who composed them, enabling many *oli* to survive.

Buck also notes that the change from orality to literacy was a formidable political tool that greatly impacted the Hawaiian language, as foreign morals and ways of thinking were introduced at a monumental point in Hawaiian language history. Languages of other societies have also been corrupted this way, with equally devastating results. Fortunately, the Hawaiians have been able to reclaim and reinvigorate the one remaining thing that is theirs alone, the Hawaiian language, and are moving forward.

Elizabeth Buck's book is an important contribution to research and public library collections. Buck's style and readability will appeal to researchers and general readers. She has faithfully maintained Hawaiian orthography with the proper use of *kahakō* (macrons) and *ʻokina* (glottal stops) for Hawaiian words and has made a fascinating, complex part of Hawaiian history accessible to a wide audience.

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