
The Hawaii Promotion Committee and the Appropriation of Surfing

ABSTRACT The advent of digital newspapers is providing critical historical information for subjects like surfing that have traditionally had so few primary sources available to researchers. A review of newspapers from the early twentieth century reveals important new evidence that the Hawaii Promotion Committee (HPC) helped support the growth of surfing by coordinating a transpacific marketing campaign to highlight the sport for the sake of boosting tourism. However, because the HPC and the newspapers in which it published its weekly reports represented arms of the colonial powers, much of that new information must be understood in the broader context of how the local Caucasian or *haole* population used the newspapers to promote their own imperial vision of surfing while often ignoring or suppressing Native Hawaiian voices that represented a critical counternarrative. For their part, Native Hawaiians actively resisted the racist and pro-territorial propaganda by publishing their own newspapers and by directly competing against *haole* in and around the surf. **KEYWORDS** surfing, Hawai'i, tourism, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Alexander Hume Ford

Alexander Hume Ford arrived in Honolulu on April 26, 1907 aboard the O.S.S. *Alameda*. The steamship held a hundred passengers and normally made the crossing from San Francisco in five-and-a-half days.¹ Ford checked into the Hawaiian Hotel in downtown Honolulu where he would soon meet

1. For Alexander Hume Ford's arrival, see "Shipping Intelligence," *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 27 April 1907, p. 10. For information on the *Alameda*, see E. Mowbray Tate's *Transpacific Steam* (New York: Cornwall Books, 1986), 52. The growing steamship service to the Islands would play an important part in the development of the Hawaii Promotion Committee (HPC) through the delivery of tourists and the payment of a wharf tax that directly supported the HPC. See "Tourist Bureau's Excellent Work," *Evening Bulletin*, 10 March 1904, p. 6. Most references to newspapers are found at the Library of Congress website, *Chronicling America: American Historical Newspapers* (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>). All newspapers, unless otherwise indicated, were published in Honolulu. References on the site invariably include both a "Page" and "Image" number: these usually align, so I include only the page number on individual article references. If no page number is given, I use the image number.

Pacific Historical Review, Vol. 89, Number 4, pps. 500–527. ISSN 0030-8684, electronic ISSN 1533-8584 © 2020 by the Pacific Coast Branch, American Historical Association. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Reprints and Permissions web page, <https://www.ucpress.edu/journals/reprints-permissions>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/phr.2020.89.4.500>.

the famous American writer Jack London. Traditional historical accounts have falsely credited the two men with being the primary force behind the repopularization of surfing in Hawai‘i, a sport London later described as “at its dying gasp” before Ford came along and convinced the local Honolulu Caucasian or *haole* community to organize a club to support it.²

The result of Ford’s avowed passion for surfing and his push to market the sport as a primer for the Hawaiian tourist industry was the founding of the Outrigger Canoe Club in Waikiki on May 1, 1908. The goal of the Outrigger, initially a whites-only club, was “to give an added and permanent attraction to Hawaii and make Waikiki always the Home of the Surfer.”³

Ford was the Club’s first president, and traditional histories credited him as the visionary of modern surfing: he was the man who came to Hawai‘i, learned how to surf at Waikiki, and immediately recognized the sport’s uniqueness and understood what apparently nobody else did at the time—surfing was so exciting and special, so uniquely Hawaiian, that marketing the sport would drive tourism and attract new residents to the Islands if only white mainlanders realized how fun, easy, and healthy it was to ride those gentle rollers in the shadow of Diamond Head.

Research over the past handful of years, however, has debunked as myth both Ford’s claims about saving surfing from extinction and the idea that surfing nearly died out in Hawai‘i.⁴ The availability of period newspapers in

2. The standard history of surfing and Ford’s influence begins with Ben R. Finney and James D. Houston’s *Surfing: The Sport of Hawaiian Kings* (Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1966): “Under the leadership of Alexander Hume Ford, this group promoted surfing’s potential in a new Hawaii” (70). This work is based on Finney’s “*Hawaiian Surfing, A Study of Cultural Change*” (Master’s thesis, University of Hawai‘i, 1959). Finney and Houston’s book was revised and republished as *Surfing: A History of the Ancient Hawaiian Sport* (Rohnert Park, Cal.: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1996). Ford’s role is emphasized more in this latter edition: “he took it upon himself to personally boost its revival and popularization” (60). Scott Laderman gives a nice overview of popular histories that support and expand upon Finney and Houston’s comment in *Empire in Waves: A Political History of Surfing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 18–19. Ford’s lodging: “Social Events of the Week,” *Hawaiian Star*, 27 April 1907, p. 7. Ford meeting the Londons: Charmian London, *Our Hawaii (Islands and Islanders)*, New and Rev. ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), 74–75. Some of this material first appeared in Jack London’s “My Hawaiian Aloha,” *Cosmopolitan*, September 1916, p. 170.

3. Harold H. Yost, *The Outrigger: A History of the Outrigger Canoe Club 1908–1971* (Honolulu: Outrigger Canoe Club, 1971), 38.

4. Patrick Moser, ed., *Pacific Passages: An Anthology of Surf Writing* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2008), 53; 108; Patrick Moser, “Revival,” *Kurungabaa: a Journal of Literature, History and Ideas from the Sea* 3 (July 2010): 54–57; John R.K. Clark, *Hawaiian Surfing: Traditions from the Past* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2011), 33 *et passim*; Isaiiah Helekunihi Walker, *Waves of Resistance: Surfing and History in Twentieth-Century Hawai‘i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i

searchable databases—particularly Hawaiian-language newspapers—has helped researchers to verify the continuity of surfing in the Native Hawaiian community. Historians have shown how Native Hawaiians maintained their cultural traditions and used surfing specifically to resist colonial power structures. The creation of the myth itself puts into play the complex dynamics that surrounded the sport in turn-of-the-century Hawai‘i, primarily the desire by a haole oligarchy to further U.S. imperialist and colonialist goals in the newly acquired Territory (designated as such in 1898). This article examines an organization that formed part of that haole power structure—the Hawaii Promotion Committee (HPC)—and demonstrates that the appropriation of surfing to further imperialist and colonialist practices began sooner than previously thought (i.e. well before Ford arrived in Honolulu). In fact, the promotion of surfing was a highly organized and coordinated effort by influential haole to reinforce their economic and political agendas.

Because the HPC recorded its efforts in weekly, quarterly, and annual reports that appeared in pro-Annexation Honolulu newspapers, my examination evokes the ambiguous role newspapers play in our understanding of surfing’s growth in the early twentieth century.⁵ On the one hand, these recently digitized period newspapers offer a trove of easily accessible information for surf historians—a great boon because the first significant book about the sport, Tom Blake’s *Hawaiian Surfboard*, didn’t appear until 1935. A history of surfing could certainly not be written today without the valuable resources of this growing archive. On the other hand, much of the newspaper information is suspect because it appeared in publications that were supportive of—and supported by—the imperial and colonial processes in Hawai‘i. Although haole-controlled newspapers furthered imperialist practices by ignoring or suppressing oppositional voices, Native Hawaiians for their part found ways to actively resist the racist and pro-Territorial propaganda by publishing their own newspapers and, with regards to surfing, by directly competing against haole in and around the surf.

Press, 2011), 26–31; Patrick Moser, “The Reports of Surfing’s Demise Have Been Greatly Exaggerated,” *Bamboo Ridge* 98 (May 2011): 195–204; Laderman, *Empire in Waves*, 8–17; Patrick Moser, “The Endurance of Hawaiian Surfing,” *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 125 (December 2016): 411–32.

5. See Helen Chapin’s *Shaping History: The Role of Newspapers in Hawai‘i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1996) for a list of pro-Annexation papers, including the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, *Hawaiian Gazette*, *Daily Bulletin*, *Hawaiian Star*, and *Kuokoa* (93). She mentions that the *Hawaiian Star* was the “official voice of the Provisional Government” (98).

SENSIBLE MANNER TO BOOM A COUNTRY

In the early twentieth century, the HPC was at the center of a powerful marketing gyre that sent pamphlets and brochures by the hundreds of thousands out across the Pacific with the goal of pulling tourists and new residents to the Hawaiian Islands. This massive current eventually included Hawaiians as well—surfers, musicians, ambassadors like Duke Kahanamoku—and was often directed at specific geographical audiences—journalists, lecturers, filmmakers, members of Chambers of Commerce—who could in turn spin the vision of Hawai‘i as a tropical paradise across their communities and continents. This nascent corporate tourism found success in promoting Hawai‘i and surfing at the expense of Native Hawaiians, whom it cast in the role of what Haunani-Kay Trask has called “tourist artifacts” to create the illusion that travelers would be transported to what another researcher, Jane C. Desmond, has referred to as a place of “white Edenic regeneration.”⁶ Additionally, my investigation of the HPC crosses the dynamic and contested territory of Native Hawaiian agency in the face of haole appropriation of indigenous culture and opens up questions of how seminal figures like George Freeth, for example, were able to negotiate and maintain their Native identity within the larger colonial machinations of the HPC.⁷

First, some background on the HPC. The organization was officially formed in February of 1903 after meetings between Honolulu’s Chamber of Commerce and Merchants’ Association.⁸ Perhaps one of the immediate triggers for the Committee’s formation was the arrival of the American

6. Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai‘i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1993), 17; Jane C. Desmond, *Staging Tourism: Bodies on Display from Waikiki to Sea World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 8.

7. George Freeth traces his Native ancestry through his mother, Elizabeth Kaili, who married Englishman George Freeth, Sr. See Arthur C. Verge, “George Freeth: King of the Surfers and California’s Forgotten Hero,” *California History* 80, no. 2–3 (Summer/Fall, 2001): 83–105; 153–55; Dina Gilio-Whitaker’s “Appropriating Surfing and the Politics of Indigenous Authenticity” in *The Critical Surf Studies Reader*, Dexter Zavala Hough-Snee and Alexander Sotelo Eastman, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 214–32. Dina Gilio-Whitaker’s essay is especially insightful concerning Freeth’s mixed-race identity and his stature in surf history (see in particular her note 68, p. 232).

8. “Work of the Hawaii Promotion Committee,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 10 March 1904, p. 3. See also the website “Hawai‘i Visitors & Convention Bureau,” <http://www.hvcb.org/corporate/history.htm>. An article in the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* reports the advice of San Francisco steamship owner Robert Dollar that Honolulu should start a tourist bureau: “To Boom Honolulu,” 16 July 1902, p. 3. Meetings of the Joint Tourist Committee of the Merchants’ Association and the Chamber of Commerce began in December of that year (“Will Report on Tourist Plans,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 16 December 1902, image 1).

Trans-Pacific cable in January of that same year. The cable vastly increased the amount and timeliness of world news to and from the Islands, situating Hawai'i firmly within an international communications network.⁹ Local business and political leaders must have recognized the golden opportunity the cable meant for tourism and immigration—initiatives aimed especially at Caucasians who could balance out the enormous Japanese population living in Hawai'i (the Asian population exceeded the white population by tenfold).¹⁰ Initial support for the HPC came from the Honolulu business community and the very top of the Territorial food chain: Governor Sanford B. Dole recommended that the Legislature fund the HPC for eighteen months with \$20,000 in appropriations for advertising and printing. Although only half of those funds were ultimately awarded, the HPC was subsequently granted revenue from a public wharf tax that helped ensure its office doors remained open for business. Because the HPC was partially supported by public funds, the Committee published its reports in Honolulu newspapers.¹¹ Although seven Hawaiian-language newspapers were active in 1903, the HPC issued its reports only in English-language newspapers that were supportive of the Territorial government.¹²

Part of the reason for the HPC's initial political support was the influence its member businesses had in the Territorial government. Elected annually, two members of the HPC were chosen from the Chamber of Commerce and two from the Merchants' Association. A fifth "at large" member, who belonged to neither the Chamber of Commerce nor the Merchants' Association, was elected by the other four as chairman of the Committee. The Committee also hired a salaried secretary as an executive manager to run the

9. Chapin also mentions that a direct result of the cable's arrival was to increase the number of newspapers in the Islands. Chapin, *Shaping History*, 7.

10. The Asians listed in the 1900 census were Chinese (25,762) and Japanese (61,115); the two largest categories of whites were combined under "Americans" and "Hawaiian-born [sic] Foreigners" (7,283): *Thrum's Annual for 1903* (<http://guides.library.manoa.hawaii.edu/c.php?g=105184&p=684693>).

11. "Work of the Hawaii Promotion Committee," *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 10 March 1904, p. 3.

12. For number of Hawaiian-language newspapers, see Esther K. Mookini's *The Hawaiian Newspaper* (Honolulu: Topgallant, 1974), 45. A word search in the Papakilo Hawaiian-language newspaper database (papakilodatabase.com) for "Hawaii Promotion Committee" or "Komike Hocueu o Hawaii" turns up very few entries. References to the HPC begin to appear in 1906 with regards to preparations for upcoming festivities in Honolulu (Kamehameha Day and the annual floral parade on Washington's birthday, for example). In one direct appeal, Wood has a letter in Hawaiian asking for help from the local *pā'u* society: "Makemake Ka Hui Ka Holo Pa-u I Mau Koku," *Ka Nupepa Kuokoa*, 13 April 1906, p. 4.

day-to-day operations. The businesses from which the members derived show the intimate connection between the HPC and the most powerful leaders in the Territory.¹³ The first Committee included, for example, a representative from Castle & Cooke (J. A. Gilman, elected Treasurer), one of the “Big Five” businesses that had long controlled the economic and political interests in the Islands.¹⁴ William Castle (of Castle & Cooke)—son of the missionary and later sugar baron Samuel Castle—had been a member of the infamous Hawaiian League that overthrew the Hawaiian Monarchy a decade before, along with Governor Dole himself (also a missionary son and cousin to James Dole of Dole pineapple fame) and residents like Sereno Bishop (another missionary son), who composed the inaugural tourist booklet for the HPC so that the Committee could start its global advertisements.¹⁵ The HPC, then, was well connected, well funded, and in general alignment with the political and economic interests of the Territorial government. This privileged position set the stage for the HPC’s major contribution to surf history: the development and coordination of an international marketing campaign that pushed the visibility and popularity of surfing in the early twentieth century. Key to the HPC’s venture, of course, was its reliance on the cultural and performance expertise of Native Hawaiian surfers in the waves.

By the time Harry P. Wood arrived in Honolulu in November of 1905 as the newly recruited secretary of both the Chamber of Commerce and the Hawaii Promotion Committee, the Chamber of Commerce and Merchants’ Association were ready for the HPC to take a new direction. The HPC had been active for nearly two years by then, and those in charge were not satisfied with the results obtained by the inaugural secretary, Edward M. Boyd. For starters, they thought Boyd’s goal of trying to induce East Coast professionals to migrate to the Islands was misplaced.¹⁶ Wood was hired to refocus the

13. “Work of the Hawaii Promotion Committee,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 10 March 1904, p. 3. The first members of the HPC: from the Chamber of Commerce—C.L. Wright of the Wilder’s Steamship Company and James A. Kennedy of the Inter-Island Steam Navigation Company; from the Merchants’ Association—W. W. Hall of O. Hall & Son and J.A. Gilman of Castle & Cooke. F.C. Smith of the Oahu Railway & Land Co. was chosen the member-at-large and elected Chairman.

14. Carol A. MacLennan, *Sovereign Sugar: Industry and Environment in Hawai‘i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2014).

15. Hawaiian league membership: Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo‘ole Osorio, *Dismembering Lāhui: A History of the Hawaiian Nation to 1887* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2002), 236–38. Sereno Bishop’s booklet: *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 10 March 1904, p. 3.

16. “Talk Of Reorganizing Hawaii Promotion Committee,” *Evening Bulletin*, 3:30 o’clock edition, 1 August 1905, p. 4.

HPC on tourism, especially from the West Coast. Wood had grown up in Hawai'i and worked in various businesses in the Kohala area on the Big Island before moving to San Diego in 1889. He was appointed Hawaiian consul for San Diego in 1894 and was subsequently elected as the Secretary of San Diego's Chamber of Commerce (1897), a position he held until 1905 when he moved back to Hawai'i as secretary of the HPC.¹⁷ It is unknown whether Wood ever surfed himself, but it is likely that he was exposed to the sport growing up on Hawai'i Island. By June of 1906—some eight months into his new job—Wood had already targeted surfing as one of the key Hawaiian traditions that would help boost tourism. He suggested publicizing “moving pictures” of Hawaiian surfing, canoeing, and pā'ū-style horseback riding.¹⁸ The three traditions represented distinctive elements of Native Hawaiian culture that Wood hoped would distinguish Hawai'i from other tourist destinations in the Pacific. Here we see the bitter twist of colonial discourse: activities that resurfaced publicly during King Kalākaua's reign (1874–1891) to support “a history that [was] particularly Kanaka,” as political scientist Noenoe K. Silva writes, were now being recast in ways that undermined Native Hawaiian identity and agency.¹⁹ Notably, Wood's recommendations appeared nearly a year before Ford arrived in Honolulu.

The “moving pictures” Wood mentions include the first film of surfing ever made: *Surf Riders at Waikiki* (1906).²⁰ The HPC recruited the New Jersey-based Thomas Edison film company to send its leading cameraman, Robert K. Bonine, to Hawai'i. “It will not be long. . . .” Wood reported, “before the residents of every village and city in the United States as well as across the Atlantic will have the opportunity of seeing life in Hawaii as shown on the screen by moving pictures thus creating a more general interest in our beautiful country than could be brought about in any other way.”²¹ The film was to appear in vaudeville theaters across the United States,

17. Advertisement: “Notice to Travellers,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 15 October 1881, image 4; “Island Notes,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 31 March 1885, image 2; “Local Brevities,” *Hawaiian Gazette*, 24 July 1895, p. 5; “Southern California Specials,” *Herald* (Los Angeles), 18 October 1897, p. 6.

18. “Will Ask For Money For Promotion Work,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 8 June 1906, p. 6.

19. Noenoe K. Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 121.

20. Albie Thoms, *Surfmovies: The History of the Surf Film in Australia* (Sydney: Shore Thing, 2000), 2–3, 6, 10. See also John Engle *Surfing in the Movies: A Critical History* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 2015), 36.

21. “Promotion Committee,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 12 July 1906, p. 2.

Canada, and Europe where the relatively new medium of “moving pictures” was becoming widely popular.²² Wood seized upon knowledge that Native Hawaiians had cultivated ever since their initial contacts with the crews of Captain Cook: riding waves on boards and in canoes fascinated travelers.²³ Wood’s contribution was to broker this knowledge in the new medium of film where he hoped action shots of surfing and canoe riding would catch the interest of mainland travelers.

Wood’s reports and interviews over the next year—all before Ford established himself in the Islands—provide an indication of the global network created by the HPC to propel Hawai‘i and surfing to the forefront of international tourism. These newspaper accounts reveal the significant role the HPC played in the development of surfing’s popularity. What surf historians have previously considered as unconnected or ad hoc events at this nascent stage in surfing’s growth—from surfing in film to contests and exhibitions in Hawai‘i and California—were in fact carefully coordinated by the HPC to create maximum impact on potential tourists and visiting tourists.

What were the HPC’s other initiatives? Because Wood had lived and worked in San Diego for some fifteen years, he understood the potential market that Southern California represented for Hawai‘i. He called Los Angeles “the great tourist gateway and clearing house of the country” and focused the HPC on cultivating the area’s media organizations.²⁴ One of his first accomplishments was to arrange for the Editorial Association of Southern California to visit Hawai‘i in September of 1906. The group of fifty Californians (editors and their family members) spent twelve days in the Islands—eight on O‘ahu and four on Hawai‘i. On Sunday, September 9, they were entertained at Waikiki with “[c]anoeing, surfing, bathing, listening to the music of Nainoa’s quintet club.”²⁵ The visiting editors represented two dozen publications ranging from San Diego and Long Beach to San Bernardino, Pasadena, Los Angeles, and Santa Monica. Edgar Johnson, the secretary-treasurer for the editorial association, wrote a glowing letter during the trip, published on the front page of the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* that indicates the success of Wood’s publicizing effort:

22. “Promotion Work Pushed By Wood,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 11 October 1906, p. 7.

23. Members of Captain James Cook’s crew, for example, commented extensively on surfing and even tried paddling surfboards themselves. Moser, *Pacific Passages*, 67–74.

24. “H.P. Wood Doing Promotion Work,” *Hawaiian Star*, 27 October 1906, p. 2.

25. “Editorial Visitors,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 30 August 1906, p. 6; “The Editors In The Surf,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 10 September 1906, p. 2.

Our editors and staff reporters are now writing long letters back to their respective papers, telling the hundreds of thousands of readers of Southern California of our entertainment by your charming people . . . We venture the assertion that there has been more talk about Hawaii in Southern California the past year than before in ten years. You can visit the Promotion Committee headquarters, the steamship and railroad offices and the hotels of Los Angeles, and you will find all of the advertising about Hawaii that is given out right here about Honolulu. . . Five or ten years ago California heard but little of Hawaii. Now it is getting to be a household word.²⁶

Hawai'i became a "household word" partly because of the editors' visit and also because the HPC had already circulated over 750,000 custom-made pamphlets and folders with such titles as "Honolulu, What To See and How to See it," "Hawaii as a Side Trip," "Beauty Spots of Hawaii," and "Hawaii, Its People, Their Legends."²⁷ This last work included pictures of surfers riding waves at Waikiki.²⁸ By 1906 the HPC had also established agencies in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, New York, and Boston.²⁹ Although Wood had specifically targeted Southern California as Hawai'i's richest potential source of tourism, the HPC also sent weekly bulletins and copies of the local magazine *Paradise of the Pacific* to fifty of the top hotels of Australia, New Zealand, China, Japan, and India and to railroads and shipping lines.³⁰ The HPC's advertising campaign spared no potential tourist, sending special letters blanketing "the entire Northwest reaching every banker and teacher and . . . every doctor, cattleman, miner, as well as thousand[s] of householders."³¹ The HPC's marketing gyre had begun in earnest: sending out advertisements, bringing in the media, stirring up enough interest in Hawai'i to swell the streams of revenue that had shrunk drastically since the steady decline of the sugar industry in the 1880s.³²

26. "Mr. Johnson Likes Us," *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 10 September 1906, p. 1.

27. For an instructive reading on the inclusion of Hawaiian legends in this promotional material, see Cristina Bacchilega, *Legendary Hawai'i and the Politics of Place: Tradition, Translation, and Tourism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); "Merchants Indorse The Promotion Committee," *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 15 October 1904, p. 2.

28. "Surf Boating and Riding at Waikiki," p. 15. Published by the HPC in 1904.

29. "What The Promotion Committee Thinks of Writers," *Evening Bulletin*, Part III, 20 September 1906, p. 15.

30. "Promotion Work Pushed By Wood," *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 11 October 1906, p. 7.

31. "Secretary Wood And Hedemann Report," *Hawaiian Star*, Second Edition, 12 July 1906, p. 3.

32. Along with fluctuating sugar exports, tourism represented an opportunity to diversify the economy and increase the Caucasian population. James Mak, "Creating 'Paradise of the Pacific':



FIGURE 1. Hawai'i, surfing 1907 (Waikiki). *Source:* UDI 463186, Jack London Photographs and Negatives, Huntington Digital Library. The Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif.

Wood intensified Hawai'i's connection to "the great tourist gateway and clearing house of the country" by hosting another delegation of influential Los Angelenos. This time, it was 250 members of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce in the spring of 1907. The visitors arrived in Hilo, Hawai'i, on March 1 and stayed for three weeks, spending a total of eight days in Honolulu, where the HPC had arranged for the visitors to see a regatta. *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser* reported, "there has never been such a large gathering of sightseers at Waikiki." The schedule of swimming and canoe races included "surf riding on boards [which] was an unusual sight to the visitors and some of the stunts were new even to the kamaainas. Harold Hustace, winner of this event, stood on the board, head up and head down and as an extra turned a somersault or two."³³ The HPC advertised the "surfing tournament" ("hookuku heenalua ma luna o na papa") and other events very early in the Hawaiian-language newspaper *Kuokoa*, perhaps to ensure the original plan of having Native Hawaiians and haole competing against one another.³⁴ Wood crowed a bit in his

How Tourism Began in Hawaii," Working Paper No. 2015-1, February 3rd, 2015 UHERO: The Economic Research Organization at The University of Hawai'i, 19–23 (http://www.uhero.hawaii.edu/assets/WP_2015-1.pdf).

33. "The Regatta Brought Crowds To Waikiki Beach," *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 17 March 1907, p. 13.

34. The regatta was originally intended to take place on New Year's Day, 1907. Unfortunately, stormy weather scuttled the event, which included a mix of haole and Hawaiian competitors,

quarterly report that the visitors had left “in all between thirty and forty thousand dollars in the islands” and that “this one accomplishment of the Hawaii Promotion Committee affords excellent proof of the value of the work to Hawaii.”³⁵ Clearly, the HPC recognized the leverage of the press in Hawai‘i and abroad to boost tourism. During the visit of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, the *Daily Breeze* of San Luis Obispo ran a column entitled “Sensible Manner to Boom a Country, Hawaii Promotion Committee Realize the Value of Newspapers.”³⁶ Newspapers themselves were part of the larger boom of U.S. imperialism, the former helping to ensure the latter’s spread across the Pacific.³⁷

Surfing—first as a spectator sport, later as a guided activity for visitors—became part of the “package” that the HPC developed as it brought in guests and showcased Native cultural activities that represented a kind of “primitive” foil for Euro-Americans’ emerging sense of modernity. The HPC’s marketing campaign pillaged indigenous culture to fabricate an idyllic, anachronistic image of Native Hawaiians. American Studies scholar Desmond notes a similar dynamic in turn-of-the-century depictions of hula dancers, one that she terms “decontemporizing”:

A specific decontemporizing representational tactic emerged at this time and continued up through the thirties. Written texts describing contemporary Native Hawaiian life were paired with visual representation of a practice (a way of dressing, an activity) said no longer to exist. Such a strategy lays bare the process of constructing the primitive as the necessary complement to modernity by denying the coevalness of the viewer and the viewed. In fact, the Native Hawaiian population (especially the elite class) was, in some ways, almost too “modern” to sustain the dichotomy. They were highly literate, often part-Caucasian, overwhelmingly Christian. Thus, decontemporizing became, for Euro-Americans, a necessary way of “nativizing” the Native Hawaiian population.³⁸

including sixteen-year-old Duke Kahanamoku. Wood arranged for the regatta to be held at Waikiki while the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce was in town. “Ka Papa Kuhikuhi O Na Heihei Waa O Waikiki,” *Kuokoa*, 1 March 1907, p. 8.

35. “For Bonded Warehouses,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 11 April 1907, p. 3.

36. *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 5 April 1907, p. 6.

37. Chapin, *Shaping History*, 15.

38. Desmond, *Staging Tourism*, 40.

Depictions of surfing followed this same pattern.³⁹ The sport was often described in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a Native practice that belonged to the past—“at its dying gasp” in the words of London. When wave-riding did surface in newspaper accounts, it was invariably dismissed as an anomaly, as in this 1903 article from *The Hawaiian Star*: “Ancient Hawaiian Sport Revived: Ex-Queen Liliuokalani celebrates her sixty-fifth birthday with an exhibition of surf board riding in which Papaheenalua stands on his surf board as it comes rushing in. . . . Papaheenalua was cheered to the echo, and many strangers and other guests of the Queen were attracted to the beach by the sight, and enjoyed the rarely seen spectacle.”⁴⁰ Clearly, the Native Hawaiian community still practiced surfing, as evidenced by the expert skills of Papaheenalua (whose name translates literally as “surfboard”). However, the newspaper article associated the sport with a tradition—and a queen, illegally overthrown a decade earlier—that belonged to the distant past. The exhibition was a sight, the article commented, “that has seldom been seen here for many years.” Sociologist Kristin Lawler has traced the “iconic image of the primitive” in representations of turn-of-the-century Native Hawaiian surfers to social theories of alienation and escape into libidinal, “oceanic” states that reconnect Westerners to nature.⁴¹ In a similar vein, political scientist Trask asserts that this “fictional Hawai‘i” created by haoles “comes out of the depths of Western sexual sickness that demands a dark, sin-free Native for instant gratification between imperialist wars.”⁴² Whatever the root causes of Western fascination with the primitive, the HPC used its privileged position to broadcast for profit and political gain a Hawai‘i that represented a sort of “Fantasy Island” of constructed illusions at the (literal, tax-paying) expense of Native Hawaiians.

The HPC’s campaign is all the more historic in these circumstances because it marks a drastic shift by the Honolulu haoles community at the turn of the century. Houston Wood calls this group the *kama‘āina*, a Hawaiian term that originally meant “Native born” but was adopted and transformed by non-Natives (i.e. haoles) to mean “island-born.” This linguistic

39. For period photographs and postcards of surfers similar to Desmond’s hula girls, see Timothy Tovar DeLaVega, *Images of America: Surfing in Hawai‘i, 1778–1930* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2011), 32 and the cover.

40. “Ancient Hawaiian Sport Revived,” *Hawaiian Star*, 3 September 1903, image 1.

41. Kristin Lawler, *The American Surfer: Radical Culture and Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 17–18, 64.

42. Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 137.

sleight of hand by Island haole created a distancing effect by obscuring “both their origins and the devastating effects their presence was having on the Native-born” in terms of the historical impact of disease, depopulation, and general cultural eradication.⁴³ With regards to surfing, the kama’āina suddenly realized that this Native sport—long denigrated by previous generations of haole because of its connection to a Native Hawaiian culture that Westerners had been systematically eradicating since the arrival of the missionaries in 1820—could be packaged to give tourists a unique experience they would encounter nowhere else in the world. But their appropriation required a similar distancing maneuver from the original Native Hawaiian practice that we see in their adoption of the term “kama’āina.” Soon, for example, Ford would arrive in Hawai’i and write of “improvements” in surfing technique that he insisted allowed haole to dominate Native Hawaiians in competition. He described water carnivals organized by the HPC where “practically every prize offered for those most expert in Hawaiian water sports were won by white boys and girls, who have only recently mastered the art that was for so long believed to be possible of acquirement only by the native-born, dark-skinned Hawaiian.”⁴⁴ The article went on to extol “the white man and boy . . . doing much in Hawaii to develop the art of surf-riding. Games and feats never dreamed of by the native are being tried.” Ford’s “improvements” were overstated, as was his focus on white domination in the waves. But such racist rhetoric allowed Euro-Americans to maintain the imagined distinction between the “primitive” Hawaiian and the “modern” haole.

The term “kama’āina” featured prominently in surfing. Recall that when Hustace won the surf contest in March of 1907, the newspaper reported that some of his stunts “were new even to the kamaainas.” Even Ford adopted the term. After having spent only a month in the Islands, he proposed the formation of a society to populate Hawai’i with Americans. “Forgive me if I have presumed to write these lines as though I were a Hawaiian,” Ford confided, “but it is to me as though I were a kamaaina, for I have learned to ride your native surf-board, and in memory of that victory and the toils and pains that accompanied it, I believe I may be fairly inscribed as one who has

43. Houston Wood, *Displacing Natives: The Rhetorical Production of Hawai’i* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 41. I am indebted to Isaiah Helekunihi Walker for his reading of how surfing at this time connects to Wood’s notion of the “kama’āina anti-conquest.” Walker, *Waves of Resistance*, esp. 61 *et passim*.

44. “Riding the Surf in Hawaii,” *Collier’s Outdoor America* 42 (17), 1909.

suffered sufficiently on your islands to love them and sympathize with them.”⁴⁵ Notably, Ford specifically adopted a kama‘āina identity through surfing. His reference to being “a Hawaiian” seems clearly aimed at his fellow haole rather than Native Hawaiians. His complimentary possessives (“your native surfboard”; “your islands”) assumes haole ownership of both, part of the general process Houston Wood outlines of the Caucasian community trying to erase both the Native Hawaiian community and the Caucasians’ own culpability in cultural genocide.

CONGRESSMEN GO SURFING WITH JACK

The last major initiative by H.P. Wood during this period was a political extension of the HPC’s marketing campaigns: he helped to host a delegation of U.S. Congressmen in May 1907. W.M. Gifford, president of the Honolulu Chamber of Commerce, mentioned in his annual report for 1907: “Probably the most successful undertaking of the Chamber this year was the inception and bringing about of the visit of the representative Congressional delegation, who are at this date still touring the Islands studying our needs and familiarizing themselves with conditions generally.”⁴⁶ As secretary of both the Chamber of Commerce and the HPC, Wood was instrumental in coordinating this event and hosting the Congressmen and their families. The group of twenty-six Congressmen and one Senator visited O‘ahu, Kaua‘i, Maui, and Hawai‘i.⁴⁷ The Chamber of Commerce hoped by inviting the group and showing them around the Islands that the politicians would award appropriations in support of infrastructure projects across the Territory. The Congressmen represented such influential committees as Rivers and Harbors, Territories, Appropriations, Inter-State and Foreign Commerce, Agriculture, Insular Affairs, and Military Affairs. For most of the Congressmen, the

45. “Hawaii’s Fortunes And How To Enhance Them,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 29 May 1907, p. 6.

46. “What Has Been During The Year,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 22 August, 1907, p. 6.

47. “Congressional Party Lands In Fine Form,” *Hawaiian Gazette*, 10 May 1907, p. 2. *A Souvenir of the Trip of the Congressional Party to Hawaii in 1907* indicates that twenty-five Representatives accepted the invitation, but the booklet lists only twenty-three (excluding Prince Kūhiō) (pp. 1–2). A second group of four Congressmen arrived in late June and stayed until mid-July: “Congressmen Pleased With Maui,” *Evening Bulletin*, 3:30 o’clock edition, 2 July 1907, p. 7. This second group also got a chance to experience aquatic sports at Waikiki: “this afternoon [the Congressmen] will be entertained at Waikiki beach with an exhibition of aquatic sports, canoe racing, surfing, etc.” “Congressmen Visit The Museum,” *Hawaiian Star*, Second Edition, 12 July 1907, p. 5.

junket was their first trip to the Islands. As part of their plan to ensure the visitors had a memorable experience, the HPC and the Chamber of Commerce included surfing in the program.⁴⁸

In an article titled “Congressmen Go Surfing with Jack,” the *Evening Bulletin* reported that Territorial secretary A.L.C. “Jack” Atkinson planned to give the visitors “a taste of surf riding” on their first day on O‘ahu. “He says they have all expressed a great eagerness to visit Waikiki Beach,” the article continued, “of which they have all heard a great deal.”⁴⁹ At this point in time the word “surfing” was still a new expression—shorthand in this article for “surf-riding in canoes.” But surfboards were part of the entertainment as well. The next day the *Evening Bulletin* offered more details: “Three and four surfing canoes were kept filled all the afternoon. The boys were also out riding surf-boards so that all hands were treated to an exhibition of sport to which canoe surf-riding is second only.”⁵⁰ Although official excursions were planned for the next day, the visitors had a free day on Friday, and the *Hawaiian Gazette* reported that word had gotten out about the fun at Waikiki, and those who had not gotten a chance to ride waves were expected to take their turn in the canoes.⁵¹

To summarize: from early 1905 to the spring of 1907, the HPC was directly involved in organizing festivals and regattas that highlighted Native traditions of surfing and canoe riding with the goal of creating a unique and memorable vacation experience for visitors. The HPC also coordinated the promotion of those activities and many others, along with the tropical beauty of the Islands, across the globe by networking with a film company, newspapers, magazines, lecturers, hotels, railroads, and shipping lines—any professional or private entity that could help boost tourism to Hawai‘i. The main goal of recruiting the U.S. Congressmen was to fund the infrastructure that would allow the Islands to welcome more tourists and potential residents to help the new Territory grow and prosper. The more federal funding the

48. In a letter to the Merchants’ Association dated Jan. 19, 1907, Kūhiō’s secretary George M. McClellan wrote: “Not a single members [sic] of the Rivers and Harbors or Territories committees of the House or the Senate Committee on Pacific Islands has ever visited Hawaii, though many of them have pointedly expressed the desire to do so.” *Hawaiian Gazette*, 5 February 1907, p. 8.

49. “Congressmen Go Surfing with Jack,” *Evening Bulletin*, 2:30 o’clock edition, 8 May 1907, p. 1.

50. “Jolly Afternoon for Enthusiastic Visitors,” *Evening Bulletin*, 3:30 o’clock edition, 8 May 1907, p. 3. See also a description of “surfers” (“ka poe heenalū”) in “Kipa Mai Na Hoa Hanohano O Ka Ahaolelo Nui,” *Kuokoa*, 10 May 1907, p. 1.

51. “Congressional Party Lands in Fine Form,” *Hawaiian Gazette*, 10 May 1907, p. 2.

Territory received—to develop Pearl Harbor, for example—the more entrenched the local haole power structure would become as it attempted to absorb and erase Native Hawaiians, their lands, and their cultural traditions.

AN ADVERTISEMENT FOR HONOLULU

Much has been written about George Freeth—the mixed-race Waikīkī surfer who gained recognition, as the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* wrote in 1907, for doing “more to revive surf riding and canoeing in [Honolulu] than anyone else during the past few years.”⁵² An all-around athlete especially noted for his success in competitive swimming, diving, and water polo, Freeth famously gave surf lessons to Ford and to writer London in 1907 and then exported the sport to California where he revolutionized lifeguarding and remained the most active ambassador of wave-riding until surf legend Duke Kahanamoku arrived in the Golden State.⁵³ For our purposes, we can cite Freeth as an intriguing component of the HPC’s broader plan to target the Southern California tourist market. Although the HPC has long been linked to Freeth’s seminal trip to California, newspaper reports evoke a complex relationship that highlights both Native Hawaiian agency in promoting surfing and the corporate influence of the HPC in securing Freeth’s employment with Abbot Kinney, the founder of Venice.⁵⁴

An article from the *Los Angeles Express* makes it clear that the HPC was behind Freeth’s hiring in Venice. The paper stated that the Hawaiian “comes to Venice through the agency of Mr. Childs, Honolulu representative in the

52. “George Freeth Off to Coast,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 3 July 1907, p. 6.

53. Verge, “King of the Surfers.” For a more recent overview of Freeth along with related source material, see Laderman, *Empire in Waves*, 33–36.

54. Most references to the HPC concern a letter of introduction that Freeth supposedly carried with him on his trip to California in July, 1907. He is also reported to have carried letters from Ford and London. Beyond Laderman’s helpful summary noted above, he shows surfers on a letterhead from the HPC (37), a logo that first appears in 1916. Peter Westwick and Peter Neushul’s *The World in the Curl: An Unconventional History of Surfing* (New York: Crown, 2013) notes correctly that Freeth’s trip was “a marketing venture for Hawaiian tourism,” but the authors refer to the HPC as “Alexander Ford’s Hawaiian Promotion Committee” (65). As my article shows, the two were entirely separate at this time. Kristin Lawler describes the founding of the HPC and its role in disseminating images of the “primitive” to boost tourism; she writes that Ford “used the newly formed Hawaii Promotion Committee to further his goals.” Lawler, *The American Surfer*, 30–32. Given the precedence and influence of the HPC, we might also say that the HPC used Ford to further its goals. Desmond’s *Staging Tourism* notes that the founding of the HPC “marked the inauguration of what would become an elaborate infrastructure to advertise the islands, transport tourists there, and cater to them on-site” (pp. 35–36).

Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce.”⁵⁵ H.P. Wood had hired Lloyd Childs in January of 1907 to establish an office in downtown Los Angeles and begin giving daily presentations on Hawai‘i. The presentations included screening the Edison films shot by R.K. Bonine the summer before. Childs had already worked with Kinney on Island matters. According to the *Hawaiian Gazette*, Childs “had made special arrangements” with Kinney to have the Hawaiian Glee Club—which had been playing in Venice under Solomon Moses—to be present when the Honolulu Shriners came into town. This happened in mid-May, a couple of months before Freeth and Kenneth Winter arrived.⁵⁶ Moreover, once the surfers landed in Long Beach in mid-July, Childs sent the HPC a status report. Included in that letter was news that Freeth and Winter had signed a contract with H.R. Hanna, Kinney’s manager.⁵⁷

The timing of Freeth’s arrival in California can also be partly attributed to the influence of the HPC. Secretary Wood always paid close attention to coordinating carnivals and exhibitions with the arrival of visitors. It is probably no coincidence that Freeth and Winter arrived in Los Angeles a couple of weeks after the Edison films—a live complement to what visitors in the HPC office in Los Angeles were seeing on the screen.⁵⁸ Summer would also have been an ideal time for the Hawaiians to arrive in Southern California because their exhibitions would stir up interest for the coming winter tourist season in Hawai‘i. Their visit aligned perfectly with Wood’s long-term plan to promote deeper relations between the Islands and Los Angeles.

Amid the HPC’s transpacific influence and business connections, however, we clearly see Hawaiian agency. *The Evening Bulletin* first reported on May 3, 1907, that the initial idea to offer surf exhibitions in Southern California had come from Freeth himself.⁵⁹ How did Freeth get the idea to go to Los Angeles, a place where he had never been? He presented his idea

55. “Surf-Riding At Venice,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 18 October 1907, p. 3. The same article states that Freeth will “introduce surf-riding on the American coasts as an advertisement for Honolulu.”

56. “Heavy Bookings on the Steamers,” *The Hawaiian Gazette*, 17 May 1907, p. 5. See also Verge, “King of the Surfers,” 88.

57. “Surfing in California,” *Hawaiian Star*, Second Edition, 2 August, 1907, p. 6.

58. “Report of the Chamber of Commerce Secretary,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 22 June 1907, p. 4. For a list of the films see “Promotion Work Bringing Results,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 11 July 1907, p. 2.

59. “Surf Riders May Go to Los Angeles,” *Evening Bulletin*, 3:30 o’clock edition, 3 May 1907, p. 8. An announcement also appeared the next day in the Hawaiian-language newspaper *Ke Aloha Aina* noting Freeth’s interest in going to Los Angeles if the HPC would cover their traveling expenses. *Ke Aloha Aina*, 4 May 1907, p. 8.

to the HPC just six weeks after the 250 members of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce had left the Islands. Freeth had given a diving performance at the Hotel Baths for a number of the visitors, and since Childs had also come on that trip, it's possible that Freeth had met him.⁶⁰ Southern California, and the Los Angeles area in particular, was in the air as a place of growing opportunity and exchange, and Freeth decided to take advantage of that opportunity. The HPC certainly would have looked favorably upon supporting his venture and would have timed his arrival to make the greatest impact on Hawaiian tourism.⁶¹

THE BOLD AND SKILLFUL RIDER

Ford fit perfectly into the HPC's promotional activities, which were all right up his alley. Energetic and idealistic, this writer and outdoor enthusiast would ultimately be credited with saving surfing in Hawai'i—a result of his own self-promotion and his close association with the well-known writer Jack London. Ford arrived in Honolulu about a week before the report of Freeth's idea to travel to Southern California. There's no known connection between the two men before this time. Did Ford manage to meet Freeth during his first week in Honolulu and urge him to go to Los Angeles? It doesn't appear so. Based on the movements of the two men during this time, it is likely that Ford met Freeth and took a surf lesson from him on or about May 8 or 9 before they both left for Kaua'i to join the congressional tour of the Islands.⁶²

Where was Ford afterward? He stayed in Honolulu until the end of June and then booked passage aboard the *Aorangi* headed for Fiji and Australia where he stayed for eight months, returning to Honolulu on March 3, 1908.⁶³ The spring of 1908 is when he began organizing the Outrigger Canoe Club. Described in Honolulu initially as a "magazine writer," Ford did pen a vignette of Freeth for the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* that appeared a week or so before he left for Fiji. He announced the Hawaiian's

60. "Aquatic Sports Great Success," *The Honolulu Advertiser*, 19 March 1907, p. 3.

61. One possibility for Freeth's leaving the Islands is family financial problems. Days before he left for California, advertisements appear for an auction at his mother's house: "At Auction," *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 2 July 1907 & 3 July 1907, image 8.

62. Freeth had been hired as a lifeguard for the congressmen and their families.

63. "News of The Waterfront," *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 29 June 1907, p. 9. Ford's return: "Port of Honolulu: Passengers: Arrived," *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 4 March 1908, p. 10. Within a couple of days of returning to Hawai'i, Ford is presenting promotion ideas to the HPC: "A. Hume Ford Has Good Idea," *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 6 March 1908, p. 2.

intention to travel to the East Coast for the summer and surf in Atlantic City where Freeth supposedly had been arrested for surfing years before. Ford provides a fictionalized retelling of that incident, accompanied by a photograph of Freeth taken by Ford—“the picture being pronounced the very best photograph ever taken of a surfer in action,” the article claims. There’s no mention of Freeth’s upcoming trip to Southern California.⁶⁴ Overall the piece—hyperenthusiastic and unreliable in its details—bears the imprint of Ford’s efforts at self-promotion.

The second photograph gracing the article encapsulates what we might call the “Ford effect” in surf history: flashy, but deceptive. It’s a shot of Ford himself above the tagline: “Surf-Rider—Balancing On The Crest Of A Breaker.” An earlier report in the same paper provides background to the photograph. The writer explains that Ford was writing articles for the magazine *Outing* to promote both surfing and Freeth’s visit to the East coast. To show mainland readers how easy surfing actually was, Ford had a picture of himself taken riding a surfboard. The article states, tongue-in-cheek: “The picture is a striking one and he can put beneath it the fact that the camera tells no lie. In this case, however, the picture machine couldn’t tell it all, for it failed to show the half-drowned Freeth under the board holding it steady while the bold and skilful rider balanced in a pose long enough to have the photograph taken.”⁶⁵ The circumstances of the photograph take on larger significance the following month—after Ford had left the Islands—when the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, in a report on the especially large number of beachgoers at Waikiki the day before, stated: “The fad for surfing with boards, which Alexander Hume Ford started and which Jack London has done much to keep up, is still at its height, and there were scores of people enjoying this exhilarating sport, which George Freeth has gone to Atlantic City to introduce on the Atlantic Coast.”⁶⁶ Though not written by Ford, the article has picked up his error-prone prose (Freeth was in Venice at this time) and self-aggrandizing style. Ford had been in the Islands all of two months, and yet he’s credited with starting “the fad of surfing.” The background

64. “Freeth Will Ride Atlantic Rollers,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 23 June 1907, p. 2. Ford’s reporting on Freeth usually stresses his intention to surf on the East Coast, which is probably another indication that Ford did not give Freeth the idea to work in Los Angeles.

65. “The Bystander,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 2 June 1907, p. 4. The date of the article places the photographs around the time Jack and Charmian London were with Ford and Freeth at Waikiki (June 1st and 2nd).

66. “An Out-Of-Door Day Yesterday,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 15 July 1907, image 1.

information renders Ford rather comical, but the photograph is emblematic of how haole in privileged positions could use the media to promote an illusion of success and accomplishment while obscuring the contributions of those who made their position possible—in this case, Native Hawaiian Freeth underneath the water literally holding Ford on his pedestal.

Another Native Hawaiian who remains obscure in the history of surfing's early twentieth-century growth is Prince Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana'ole, the Territorial representative to Congress from 1903 to 1922. A lifelong surfer, Kūhiō is mentioned as an “enthusiastic” supporter of Atkinson's idea to hold the inaugural regatta featuring Native Hawaiian sports on New Year's Day in 1907 (this event was actually held later that year in March to coincide with the arrival of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce).⁶⁷ Kūhiō was also instrumental in inviting the U.S. Congressmen to visit Hawai'i in May of 1907 and actively participated in organizing the details of their reception and entertainment, which as we know included surfing. When he toured the Islands with the delegates, at each stop the group enjoyed Native Hawaiian food, songs, and entertainment; and Kūhiō gave and listened to speeches in Hawaiian, which were translated for the Congressmen.⁶⁸ More research needs to be done on Kūhiō's influence during this critical time in surf history, but what we see generally is Prince Cupid, as he was known in the Islands, playing a part—similar to that of Freeth in California—in a complex process of both celebrating cultural activities like surfing *and* working with a Honolulu haole community that was appropriating the sport and other Native traditions to reinforce its political and economic power. An early goal of the HPC, for example, was to create in Hawai'i what the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* referred to as a “balanced community” of Americans, one populated with “the man who is comfortably well-to-do. The same kind of man who has built a mighty and prosperous commonwealth in Southern California. And it is to this class, more particularly, that promotion work appeals.”⁶⁹ Ford would leave the Islands toward the end of 1908 to participate in a broad

67. “Water Carnival Scheme Favored,” *Evening Bulletin*, 3:30 o'clock edition, 7 December 1906, p. 2. Kūhiō was one of the first documented surfers in California in 1885. See Finney and Houston, *Surfing*, 82.

68. Kūhiō inviting Congressmen: “Big Junket Proposed,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 3 February 1907, p. 5; and trip planning: “Program For The Visitors,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 7 May 1907, image 1; and events on Kaua'i: “Congressional Party Delighted,” *Hawaiian Star*, Second Edition, 13 May 1907, p. 5.

69. “Will Ask For Money For Promotion Work,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 8 June 1906, p. 6.

campaign to recruit white Americans to move to Hawai'i and help balance out the growing Asian population which threatened to become a dominant political force in the new American Territory.⁷⁰

HAOLES AND KANAKAS IN CANOE AND ON SURF BOARD TO BE TESTED AT WAIKIKI BEACH

I have argued elsewhere that the story of the founding of the Outrigger Canoe Club at Waikiki in May of 1908—traditionally hailed as the seminal moment in surfing's early growth—obscures the contributions of the Native Hawaiian community.⁷¹ The work of the HPC does this as well by promoting its own imperialist vision of surfing in English-language newspapers that often suppressed or ignored views that directly challenged that vision.⁷² Native Hawaiians, however, did make their voices heard during this period—by publishing traditional *mo'olelo* or stories that included surfing, for example, in Hawaiian-language newspapers.⁷³ These newspapers countered the propaganda of the Territorial press, Silva reminds us, “in sustaining the lāhui [“nation” or “people”] as one across the archipelago” and as “a site for the practice of freedom in a time of repressive policy by a colonial government.”⁷⁴ One particularly public protest against the work of the HPC appeared as part of the Native Hawaiian Independent Home Rule County Platform in *Ka Nai Aupuni* in October, 1906:

We denounce the Republican and Democratic parties for having declared in favor of a Territorial Appropriation for the purpose of assisting in the maintenance of the work of the Hawaii Promotion Committee while the Territory is still unable, by reason of lack of money to build proper and sufficient schools; to increase the salaries of teachers, and to pay the laboring man a better equivalent for his day's labor.⁷⁵

70. From Governor Carter's report dated June 30, 1907: “The most significant effort made during the past year as regards immigration has been the carrying out of a policy to offset the oriental population in Hawaii with Europeans and looking to the settlement of public lands.” *Report of the Governor of Hawaii to the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office), 524.

71. Moser, “Revival,” 54–57.

72. Wood and other members of the HPC were in fact closely involved in the founding of the Outrigger: “Outrigger Club Is Organized,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 25 April 1908, p. 3; “New Outrigger Club Will Build A Seaside Lanai,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 2 May 1908, p. 3).

73. John R.K. Clark notes that *Ka Mo'olelo o Hi'iakaikapoli'ole* “was featured as a daily series in the Hawaiian-language newspaper *Ka Nai Aupuni* in 1905 and 1906,” *Hawaiian Surfing*, 3.

74. Silva, *Aloha Betrayed*, 201.

75. “Independent Home Rule County Platform,” 29 October 1906, p. 3. (The platform appeared in English.)

Native Hawaiians also maintained their agency by directly contesting haole in the surf. One example occurred in a regatta organized by the HPC that brought together all of the principals who would influence surfing's continued growth in the coming decades: Native Hawaiians, the local haole population, the U.S. military, and the Honolulu newspapers.

The day of the regatta, July 19 1908, dawned with much fanfare in Honolulu. Theodore Roosevelt's Great White Fleet had arrived from San Francisco three days earlier—a historic flexing of imperial muscle as Roosevelt sought to parade U.S. maritime force by sending sixteen battleships on a fourteen-month circumnavigation of the globe. Such a peace-time deployment, according to Naval historian Mike McKinley, “had never been attempted by any nation before.”⁷⁶ The HPC assumed charge of the Fleet Committee, working with Governor George Carter to organize contests at Waikīkī in honor of the armada. Fairly late in the planning the organizers decided to transform a portion of Waikīkī into a traditional Hawaiian village to “present an appearance” as the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* reported, “such as it made years ago when Queen Emma kept her canoes there upon her own kuleana and used to go out herself, to ride upon the surf-board at which sport she was a past mistress.”⁷⁷ The location of the “village” (essentially a couple of grass houses) between the Seaside and Moana hotels was the grounds of the new Outrigger Canoe Club—founded two months earlier—which had been leased from the Queen Emma Estate. Along with grass houses the visitors would see Native Hawaiians engaging in traditional cultural activities and competing against local haole in canoes and on surfboards.

The newspaper accounts leading up to regatta day demonstrate a tussle between traditional and modern haole sensibilities. The more conservative-minded—what we might call the vestige of a missionary sensibility—declared there would be no funds provided for “intoxicants” and “resolved that there [was] to be no official hula nor any official recognition of the existence of any such thing as a hula.”⁷⁸ Before the HPC assumed control of the Fleet Committee, no Native Hawaiian sports had even been included on the program. The modern sensibility—those less influenced by the missionary tradition—

76. Mike McKinley, “Cruise of the Great White Fleet,” Naval History and Heritage Command website, at <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/c/cruise-great-white-fleet-mckinley.html>.

77. “Big Carnival of Water Sports Sunday's Event,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 17 July 1908, p. 3.

78. “Reception of the Big Fleet,” *Hawaiian Gazette*, 2 June 1908, p. 1.



FIGURE 2. Canoe-Sailing Race, Waikīkī Regatta, July 19 1908.
Source: Photo Archives, Naval History and Heritage Command.
Collection UB-178, donated by Jeff Meriam.

recognized the potential marketing value of Native Hawaiian culture and won the day with the Hawaiian village and a slate of native activities on shore and in the water.⁷⁹

An article in *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser* described both the tourist spectacle, and the great interest it generated:

All day long the officers of the several warships in port dropped into the [Outrigger Canoe] club to borrow boards or go out surfing, but almost invariably they stopped ashore to watch the doings at the Hawaiian village. To them there was a novelty in everything, the women preparing poi, the men fishing in the lagoon, and all dipping their fingers into the common poi-bowl. The entire day at Waikiki there was incessant mending of canoes, lashing on of out-riggers, and trial spins out to the surf and back . . . the public is invited to witness the events at Waikiki beach from two until five o'clock this afternoon and to assist in securing for our visitors special positions of advantage for seeing the unique events in water sports that Hawaii can offer the world.⁸⁰

The visitors were interested in traditional Hawaiian culture on land and sea. And they weren't the only ones. Native Hawaiians came out in force to welcome the visitors with traditional hospitality. *The Pacific Commercial*

79. Kristin Lawler has a nice discussion of this period and references the more traditional group as "missionaries and planters." Lawler, *American Surfer*, 32.

80. "Today's Aquatic Sports at Beach," *The Honolulu Advertiser*, 19 July 1908, p. 13.



FIGURE 3. The Six-Paddle Race, Waikiki Regatta, July 19 1908. Source: Photo Archives, Naval History and Heritage Command." Collection UB-178, donated by Jeff Meriam.

Advertiser estimated between four and five thousand people on the beach—“ten and twelve deep from the bandstand in the Moana grounds.”⁸¹ The article continued:

There were hundreds of sailors taking in the sport, more hundreds of haoles from this and other islands and tourists and malihinis [Island newcomers] in the crowds, but the majority of those who lined the sands and engaged in the sports were Hawaiians. It was the Hawaiians’ turn to entertain the visitors ashore, just as it was the Hawaiian day for fruit distribution among the sailors afloat, and right royally did the sons and daughters of the soil turn out and grow enthusiastic over the revival of their old sports in the surf.⁸²

By the end of the regatta it was clear that the Native Hawaiians had dominated the more than two dozen events, including the “race of the day” (the six-man paddle), which was won by Prince Kūhiō’s canoe. The *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* reported: “The visiting Kamehamehas won the big cash prize of the day [\$40], and the shouts of rejoicing that went up from the hundreds of Hawaiian men and women encamped about the grass houses on the Outrigger Club grounds compensated the losers, who were merely in it for a cup.”⁸³

81. “Hawaiian Water Sports Delight Great Crowd,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 20 July 1908, p. 3.

82. *Ibid.*

83. *Ibid.*

The competition between the Native Hawaiians and the haole of the Outrigger falls into what Isaiah Helekunihi Walker has championed as a pattern of Native resistance to colonial oppression: “*Ka po‘ina nalu* [“the surf zone”] became an intense zone where Hawaiians, including politically astute and elite ones, clashed with haole on a battleground over more than simply a Hawaiian sport, but their physical and cultural domain.”⁸⁴ The “shouts of rejoicing” mentioned in the article expressed a spontaneous communal pride the Native Hawaiians showed for their male athletes who won seven out of the ten events. Two of the more popular events involved Native Hawaiian women paddling canoes; because there were no haole women to compete against, three teams of Native women competed against one another. The two surfboard events were won by members of the Outrigger. The first event in large waves—described as “the most thrilling event”—was captured by Kenneth Winter and Sam Wight. Ten members of the Outrigger had originally signed up to compete in this event against three non-members (Jimmy Keolanui, Major Keaweaniahi, and Herman Mahi), although by regatta day twenty contestants were referenced.⁸⁵ The second event—a “boys’ surfing contest”—was captured by Lane Webster and Harry Steiner. The Outrigger seemed to have held the advantage both in numbers of contestants and in strategy since three of the four winners in the two events—Wight, Webster, and Steiner—had written the rules for the contests.⁸⁶ The names of such figures as Duke Kahanamoku (who would have been seventeen years old) and his brothers were strangely absent from the proceedings. Although the Native Hawaiian club Hui Nalu would not officially organize until 1911, members had been gathering informally for several years at Waikiki by the time of the regatta, and they relished competing against members of the Outrigger in traditional Native Hawaiian sports.⁸⁷

One might argue that the regatta made more of an immediate impact on surfing, and on tourism in general, than the founding of the Outrigger because it brought together several key populations. The Outrigger began as a local white-male-only club, and so a very restricted population benefitted from its founding in the early days. The regatta included that population

84. Walker, *Waves of Resistance*, 59.

85. “Waikiki Regatta Now Looming Large Ahead,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 14 July 1908, p. 3.

86. *Ibid.*

87. For an authoritative overview of the Hui Nalu and Outrigger competition, see Walker, *Waves of Resistance*, 57–67.

along with tourists, newcomers, Native Hawaiian men and women, and military personnel. Because the regatta was funded by the Territorial government, Native Hawaiian cultural events that had been denigrated by the local haole community for so long were given an official stamp of approval. Despite the theme-park presentation of a Hawaiian village, did official recognition of Native Hawaiians and their culture give the indigenous population additional cause to celebrate beyond their dominance in the ocean? More research needs to be done into the complex dynamics present that day, but pitting Native Hawaiians against members of the Outrigger as U.S. military personnel looked on certainly created a lively mix of competition and cultural pride. The winners of the first surf contest, for example, rode on newly developed fourteen-foot surfboards to stay on the waves longer than their opponents. “The effect from the beach of these two youths coming ever forward on the waves,” wrote the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, “was thrilling in the extreme, and it is safe to say that the fashion in boards, which has followed that of the Hustace boys for a year past, will now turn to something long, thick, and narrow.”⁸⁸ These words, “long, thick, and narrow,” accurately describe a traditional surfboard that Native Hawaiians had been using for centuries, another indication of the haole media awarding credit to its own community without acknowledging the contributions from the Native tradition. In terms of the visiting soldiers, more research remains to be done on the U.S. military’s impact on surfing. As with the sailors in the Great White Fleet, much of this influence began with simply exposing military personnel to the sport as they passed through Honolulu on their way to various wars in the Pacific from the end of the nineteenth century through the twentieth century.⁸⁹

What have we learned about the HPC and the popularization of surfing in the early twentieth century? The organization, funded by the Territorial government, represented an active arm of the local business community that realized it could market Native Hawaiians and indigenous cultural practices like surfing to enhance haole economic and political power by attracting tourist dollars to fill and replenish its colonial coffers. From the first surf

88. “Hawaiian Water Sports Delight Great Crowd,” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 20 July 1908, p. 3.

89. For an in-depth treatment of the impact of war technology on surfing, see “War and Surfing” in Westwick and Neushul, *World in the Curl*, 81–102. Surfing appeared, for example, in hundreds of papers during the WWI period for U.S. Navy recruitment: “See surf riding on the beach at Waikiki,” *The Clovis News* (New Mexico), 25 September 1919, image 10.

film in 1906 to the first modern surf contest at Waikiki in 1907 and Freeth's exhibitions in California that same year, the HPC orchestrated (or helped orchestrate) these events by virtue of its close associations to local and mainland power structures that included the media, transportation and entertainment companies, city and state agencies, and the U.S. federal government and its military.

At the same time, we see Native Hawaiians like Freeth, Prince Kūhiō, and the multitude who contributed their expertise in the many contests and surfing exhibitions organized by the HPC exercising clear cultural agency and pride in growing the sport locally and abroad. We can also include Duke Kahanamoku in this mix in the decades to follow.⁹⁰ Isaiah Walker has argued that such Native Hawaiians, and not haole, were the driving force behind surfing's renewed growth in the early twentieth century, flexing their indigenous power and identity in one of the few zones that remained open to them after annexation. Historians Peter Westwick and Peter Neushul have argued that, rather than crediting surfing's growth to particular individuals, the broader social force of an emerging tourism industry in Hawai'i was the dominant factor in surfing's popularization.⁹¹ Research into the actions of the HPC shows a social dynamic where both forces strive with and against one another, with individuals like Freeth demonstrating a particular knack for independent thought and action in propagating Hawaiian water sports in Hawai'i and California even as he is circumscribed by the broader colonial forces that whirl about him.⁹² His mixed-race heritage and family connections to the government of the Hawaiian Kingdom (his grandfather, William Lowthian Green, held several high offices in King Kalākaua's Cabinet) make him a particularly interesting catalyst for understanding how one negotiates individual identity within broader political and social forces. Although Freeth and Duke Kahanamoku both received the highest accolades working within the colonial dynamic—Freeth's Life Saving Gold Medal from the U.S. Treasury in 1910, and Duke's many Olympic medals—the life of each man was

90. For treatment of Kahanamoku's life and contributions to surfing, see Sandra Kimberly Hall and Greg Ambrose, *Memories of Duke: The Legend Comes to Life* (Honolulu: The Bess Press, 1995) and David Davis, *Waterman: The Life and Times of Duke Kahanamoku* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015).

91. Westwick and Neushul, *The World in the Curl*, 34.

92. I am indebted here to Gilio-Whitaker for her rendition of surfing's "revival" history as "one that by and large has been divorced from the conditions of imperialism that circumscribed its renewal and obscured it as a form of cultural appropriation, and thus as a tool of settler colonialism." Gilio-Whitaker, *Critical Surf Studies Reader*, 227.

dominated by chronic poverty. The financial benefits from surfing's renewed growth, to which both men contributed immeasurably, certainly fell on the side of colonial forces that promoted tourism in the Islands and across the Pacific.

Final questions: Did all of this marketing actually work? Did the HPC succeed in bringing more tourists to Hawai'i? The short answer is a guarded Yes. Wood remained as secretary of the HPC until 1915, so his longevity is an indication of perceived success.⁹³ One difficulty in answering the question is that accurate statistics on tourism were not kept until 1921. It is generally reported that about 2,000 visitors arrived annually to Hawai'i between 1872 and 1898. By 1902 that number had risen to 5,000—undoubtedly due to public interest after the formal annexation of Hawai'i as a U.S. Territory. In 1912, the estimated number of visitors was 6,200.⁹⁴ So we see a modest increase of travelers to the Islands during the era of steamship service. The HPC continued to receive annual funding from the Territorial Legislature, another indication of the perceived importance and success of its work.⁹⁵ By 1919—the year of Freeth's untimely death in the influenza epidemic—the HPC had a new name as the Hawaii Tourist Bureau, four new members to represent the major islands in the chain, and a budget of \$100,000.⁹⁶ Tourism had assumed the crown of Hawaiian industry, and surfing shone as one of its more precious imperial jewels.

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93. "Moves to Oust Wood May Win This Afternoon," *Honolulu Star Bulletin*, 2:30 edition, 22 June 1915, image 1.

94. Mak, "Creating 'Paradise of the Pacific,'" p. 4; Louis J. Crampon, *Hawaii's Visitor Industry: Its Growth and Development* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 1976), p. 228 (as cited in Bacchilega, *Legendary Hawai'i*, p. 190, note 3).

95. Mak, "Creating 'Paradise of the Pacific,'" p. 27.

96. Hawai'i Visitors and Convention Bureau website, <https://www.hvcb.org/corporate/history.htm>.