

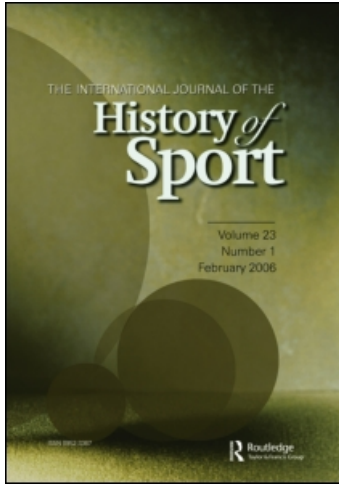
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Jim Nendel ^a

^a Pennsylvania State University,

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Surfing in Early Twentieth-Century Hawai'i: The Appropriation of a Transcendent Experience to Competitive American Sport

Jim Nendel

Surfing is an ancient Hawaiian sport that in its Hawaiian roots and style holds strongly to a transcendental nature. However, in the early twentieth century it underwent numerous changes which reduced its connections with traditional Hawaiian values and was appropriated by white or haole leaders as a marketing tool for the islands. This transfer of meaning through the experience of this long-cherished Hawaiian symbol of prowess altered the sport, leading to the development of modern surfing. In this paper, I will investigate the role that American cultural expressions such as film, the media and celebrities altered the meaning of the sport of surfing. While the act of surfing may bear similar resemblance today to the 'royal sport' of ancient Hawai'i, the appropriation of the activity by American promoters drastically changed the essence of surfing and it developed into a modern competitive sport bereft of the richness it once held in the Kingdom of Hawai'i.

Polynesians participated in the ancient sport of surfing for thousands of years. They referred to it as *he'e nalu* (*he'e*: to ride; *nalu*: the surf). However, after the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy and annexation of Hawai'i to the United States as a territory, white promoters of Hawai'i used well-known Hawaiian figures to appropriate surfing. Over the course of the next century, the meaning of surfing changed drastically from a sport girded in cultural and religious significance to one resembling the same competitive and commercial values of other American sports such as baseball, football and basketball. These promoters used the sport to sell real estate, tickets and products associated with a modified and marketable view of Hawai'i and its culture.

Jim Nendel, Pennsylvania State University. Correspondence to: jnendel@gmail.com

The father of modern surfing, Duke Kahanamoku, explained 'in ancient times the Polynesians lay great spiritual importance to their surfing. The stages involved in selecting a proper tree, cutting it down, preparing the wood, treating it, and finally launching it as a finished surfboard, added up to a process that was fraught with labor, complexities and ceremonies.' [1] In fact, for ancient Hawaiians, when selecting the tree to cut down for a board, ceremony dictated that a board-builder place a red fish at the trunk. After the tree had been cut down the fish would be placed in a hole dug around the roots with a prayer as an offering to the gods for the board they were about to shape. [2] Each of these boards was hand-cut and the dimensions adapted for the rider making them custom-built and tailored. *Kahunas* or priests would pray over the board, thereby sanctifying the sporting tool. Kahanamoku clarified that, 'by the time the surfer took the board into the water, it had taken on a personality and significance which entailed reverence from its owner'. [3]

The economy of building the board as described by Kahanamoku and the personal interaction are reminiscent of the transcendental act of Henry David Thoreau's building of his cabin at Walden Pond and the attention to detail that Thoreau wrote about. Building the board, in much the same way as Thoreau encourages us to build our own house, or clearing our own land brings us closer to a state of ownership in his vision of economy. [4]

It also speaks to Ralph Waldo Emerson's ideals of history, that 'there is nothing but is related to us, nothing that does not interest us, kingdom, college, tree, horse, or iron shoe, the roots of all things are in man'. Emerson asserted that 'the true poem is the poet's mind and the true ship is the shipbuilder'. [5] In some ways the reverence and care for the surfboard unites the surfer to the board and the board reflects the true character of the rider and of humanity.

For Hawaiian surfers, the building of the surfboard gave them access to their history and to 'the one' as it was a sacred act. As Kahanamoku recounted of the ancient Hawaiians, 'they were recognized for their athletic talents, so the leaders constantly trained and schooled themselves in athletic activities in order to be strong enough to maintain their positions of command. Surfing rated high on their athletic agenda, and they strove for perfection in that field.' [6]

In this manner, surfing embodied Emerson's insistence that 'all public facts are to be individualized, all private facts are to be generalized. Then at once History becomes fluid and true and Biography deep and sublime.' [7] The surfboards became the physical representation of Hawaiian history and biography.

In addition to the building of the board, the act of surfing for Hawaiians held a deep spiritual connection to the water and the waves. Its adherents describe the Hawaiian surfing event as 'dancing with the waves'. This style is a graceful, flowing method in smooth rhythm in the direction that the wave is going. This technique follows a Polynesian approach to understand the direction of inertia and go with it. Hawaiian surfer Gerry Lopez summed up the simplicity of this ideal in commenting that 'it's easier to ride the horse in the direction that its going'. [8] This Hawaiian style of surfing had its impetus in the long boards used by the traditional surfers and

was deeply connected to religious ritual. Some of these boards were over 15 feet in length, with a thickness of 6½ inches and weighed 160 lb. Incredible strength was necessary to manoeuvre a board of such magnitude, and *kahunas* (priests) had blessed these boards in ceremonial fashion. [9] For Polynesians ‘surfing was a also a metaphor for skill, sex, and displays of courage’. [10] Due to the significance of surfing in respect to physical prowess and religious observance, the act of surfing carried with it opportunities to experience oneness with the world and especially the ocean wave. ‘Dancing’ with this ‘natural energy form’ allows the dancer to share an intimate rapport with nature.

The religious connections of surfing led to banning of the practice in the 1800s through the influence of Christian missionaries in the islands. [11] Surfing held profound religious significance to ancient Hawaiians. The study of the wave was referred to as *ka nalu* and surfing feats were celebrated through chants and *meles* (songs) dating back to the fifteenth century. [12] While Hawaiian chiefs or *aliʻi* were noted as excellent surfers, the sport was open to all – men, women, young and old. While no one god is known to be assigned to the sport of surfing in Hawaiʻi, as is the case with Huaouri in Tahiti, the religious significance of the sport is easily seen in at least one stone temple on the island of Hawaiʻi dedicated to surfing. *Kuʻemanu Heiau* at Kahaʻlu Bay on the Kona coast existed where one might pray for good surf as well as watch surfing contests held just offshore. *Heiaus* are ancient Hawaiian shrines or places of worship and this one, and possibly others such as *Keolonāhihi Heiau* where King Kamehameha learned to surf, hold special significance for the ancient sport of surfing. [13] Surfing innovator Tom Blake noted that from their experiences of surfing ancient Hawaiians ‘came to recognize the great harmony and rhythm that permeates all things’. Blake believed that with each successful ride the ancient Hawaiian surfer ‘experienced a feeling of spiritual achievement; he came into harmony with nature; and nature for all practical purposes is God’. [14]

While Blake’s vision of nature equalling God may not truly depict ancient Hawaiian religious beliefs, the connection is worth noting, and missionaries in the nineteenth century undoubtedly realized that surfing held deep religious meaning due to the connection of the ocean and its status as the god Kanaloa. Early missionaries would also have frowned at the amount of gambling that pervaded surfing contests in Hawaiʻi when they arrived. Surfing historians Ben Finney and James Houston note that betting on contests became a ‘fanatic pastime that occasionally overshadowed the sport itself’. [15] In addition to the religious connection and gambling, early missionaries abhorred the sexual connotations associated with the sport. Surfing through legend and in practice held great status as a formal and informal courting tool. Chiefs and chiefesses would often use their surfing prowess to gain the attention of a favoured suitor. In addition, it was a well-known tradition that if a man and woman rode the same wave together, ‘custom allowed certain intimacies when they returned to the beach’. [16] It is no wonder that due to these factors early missionaries believed surfing impeded their work of converting the natives to Christianity. The missionaries viewed surfing as an unwholesome act of

play which failed to bring one closer to God or to the modern work ethic. As a result, surfing all but disappeared from the islands in the mid- to late nineteenth century.

In 1882, Honolulu writer Nathaniel B. Emerson lamented that surfing had 'felt the touch of civilization and today it is hard to find a surf board outside of our museums'. Emerson noted that surfing, which had been practised by both sexes, 'was found to be discountenanced by the new morality'. [17] In the late 1880s, King David Kalakaua attempted to restore some of the traditional Hawaiian games and pastimes. To that end, when writing down many of the oral legends of Hawaiian history into a book in 1888, he included a chapter entitled 'Kalea, The Surf-Rider of Maui,' to illustrate the importance of the sport in Hawaiian culture. [18] Because of Kalakaua's influence and insistence on the recovery of native Hawaiian traditions, surfing along with other pastimes such as the hula began to resurge. An interest in native Hawaiian traditions by natives accounted for some growing interest in surfing, but the allure of tourism in the early twentieth century, which the *haole* elites realized could turn profitable, also contributed to an easing of restrictions on the practices. [19]

Alexander Hume Ford, an early Hawai'i promoter and publisher, realized the potential of reviving Hawaiian traditions. He founded the Outrigger Canoe Club in 1908 in order 'to give an added and permanent attraction to Hawaii and make Waikiki always the Home of the Surfer'. [20] Ford loved surfing. He and George Freeth began to introduce the sport to tourists. Freeth, whose mother was a Hawaiian native and whose father was an Irish sailor, was regarded as the top surfer on the beach at Waikiki. Ford had arrived in the islands in 1906 just weeks before Jack London made his infamous trip to Hawai'i. While vacationing in the islands London wrote 'A Royal Sport', highlighting the art of surfing through the feats of George Freeth whom Ford introduced to the author.

A travel writer by trade, Ford met and befriended London in Honolulu. Ford arranged for London to learn to surf with Freeth. Through his discussions with London, Ford realized the great potential of surfing in the paradise of the Pacific and in 1908 leased property to establish the Outrigger Canoe Club. To get the club off the ground, Ford asked Freeth to loosely organize the boys on the beach. Those boys had traditionally met under a *hau* tree, and gathered to surf almost daily. With the influx of boatloads of tourists to Waikiki and the establishment of hotels along the beach for them to stay in, Ford realized that teaching those wealthy visitors to surf could bring in a great deal of money. He acquired a lease from the Queen Emma estate for an acre of land on the beachfront and built a club house. Soon thereafter tourists began to flock to the club for surf lessons, food and drink, board rentals and other sundry items. The club also provided a gathering place for *haole* (white) elites in Honolulu and soon the Outrigger Club became the haven for wealthy Honolulu businessmen and leaders of the territory. Ford even created a carnival in the summer of 1908 in honour of an American battleship visiting the islands.

However, while the local Hawaiian boys who helped teach surfing lessons were valued as employees of the club, they were excluded from membership. The very same young men who had helped re-establish the sport of their ancestors and create

the first club devoted to wave riding in the world were left outside its walls. Other clubs also arose such as the Healanis. However, Duke Kahanamoku and others soon discovered they were not welcome in every circle of Hawaiian society. He competed for the Healanis in a paddling race as an unattached member when they needed him for victory, but when he later applied for full membership, his ethnicity led the club to reject him. Deeply offended, Kahanamoku started his own club called the Hui Nalu, which had no ethnic or class barriers. [21] There were full-blooded Hawaiians and *haoles*, beach boys and Congressional delegates, such as Jonah Kuhio Kalanianaʻole, who were all members of Hui Nalu. [22] In an autograph book of Kahanamoku's at the Bishop Museum Archives is a beautiful page of calligraphy and a drawing which explains the 'why of the Hui Nalu.' It contains the three names of the original members, 'Duke P. Kahanamoku #2, William A. "Knut" Cottrell #3, Kenneth S. Winter #1' at the top of the page. The document notes that the Hui Nalu was 'Founded by the Three of us at Waikiki Beach July-1908-'. It then follows with a section entitled 'Fellowship – (The why of the Hui Nalu) by J.J.Y. Riley', which testifies:

When a man ain't got a cent and he's feeling kinda blue. And the clouds hang dark and dreary and won't let the sunshine through. It's a great thing, O my brethren, for a fellow just to lay his hand upon your shoulder in a friendly sort of way. It makes a man feel queerish, it makes the teardrops start. An' you sort o' feel a flutter in the region of your heart; you can't look up and meet his eyes; you don't know what to say. When his hand is on your shoulder in a friendly sort of way. O, the worlds a curious compound with its honey and its gall. With its cares and bitter crosses, but a good world after all. And a good God must have made it – Leastwise that is what I say. Then a hand is on your shoulder in a friendly sort of way.

In Friendship-Fidelity-Fealty to you old gal, and 'Meke ke Aloha pau ole,' Knute #3 3-16-16. [23]

The Hui Nalu represented for Kahanamoku the kind of brotherhood and friendship that Kahanamoku believed should exist in athletic and social endeavours. When troubles came and times were hard, those around you would put their hand on your shoulder and support you regardless of your ethnicity, race or social standing. Surfing meant more to Kahanamoku and the other boys than just making some money and the Hui Nalu represented their attempt to express those values.

The Hui Nalu continued to meet under the *hau* tree and compete against the Outrigger Canoe Club and the Healanis in competitions, but for them it was not a money-making venture, it was a gathering of those who shared a love for the sport of surfing. In their simplistic world view they had no idea that the sport they so loved would change so drastically from that time on.

London published 'A Royal Sport' when he returned to the mainland in the fall of 1907, creating a market for Ford's endeavour. In London's tale, millions of Americans read for the first time of the wonders of Hawai'i and this new 'royal sport'. [24] The surf craze soon drew tourists from around the world. Pictures and artwork

capturing the thrill of surfing exploded in the media, driving the popularity of the sport. Surfing graced the covers of magazines such as *Sunset*, *Mid-Pacific Magazine* and *Outing*. [25] The appropriation of the sport as an American spectacle and a commercial venture had begun.

London's article made Freeth famous. Henry Huntington heard about this marvel who could ride the waves of the ocean. The rail baron sent representatives to Hawai'i to entice the young man to come to California to promote Huntington's new community at Redondo Beach. Surfing historian Nat Young explained that Huntington had brought Freeth over to the mainland 'to demonstrate surfboard riding as a publicity stunt to highlight the opening of the Redondo-Los Angeles railroad', which Huntington also owned. Freeth's athletic ability on the surfboard amazed Huntington and the crowds that he attracted to watch the spectacle. After auditioning for Huntington and performing a few exhibitions, Freeth chose to stay in California rather than return to Hawai'i. He became the first lifeguard at Huntington Beach. [26] Freeth performed twice-daily shows at Huntington's hotel. Advertised as an epic of 'biblical proportions', tourists were encouraged to take the train out to the hotel and watch the 23-year-old Hawaiian 'walk on water'. Freeth, the king of the beach at Waikiki, spread surfing throughout California. [27]

Freeth was not the first to introduce the sport of surfing to California. That honour actually fell to Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana'ole and his brothers David and Edward. The three princes attended St Matthew's Military School in San Mateo, California in 1885. They were nephews of Queen Kapi'olani and King Kalakaua and during the year visited Santa Cruz. They surfed on boards made from redwood that summer. [28] However, the commercial viability of the sport went unseen and their feats were mostly forgotten. The combination of Freeth's powerful presence and Huntington's business acumen ignited interest in surfing in California.

Ironically, another Hawaiian, Olympic champion swimmer Duke Paoa Kahanamoku, is regarded as the 'Father of Surfing' and is recognized as such in the very town in which Freeth introduced the sport and became its first surfer and lifeguard. At the Huntington Beach Surfing Walk of Fame, Kahanamoku was the first elected inductee in 1994, with no vote needed to certify his status as the inventor of modern surfing. Despite introducing surfing to California, Freeth has not been elected into the Surfing Hall of Fame. This is especially noteworthy considering Freeth paved the way for Kahanamoku's success. [29] Freeth moved to California years before Kahanamoku did. He established the use of surfboards as a sporting vehicle as well as a tool for use in surf lifesaving. In fact, in an almost eerie coincidence Freeth won a Carnegie Medal for bravery as well as a Congressional Medal of Honor in a rescue that foreshadowed one of the legendary moments in the building of Kahanamoku's reputation as a hero. Young reported that 'in December, 1908 Freeth made three trips through mountainous surf to rescue seven Japanese fisherman'. [30] In actuality, there were reportedly 11 fisherman on board and Freeth did not use a surfboard for the rescue as Young intimates.

George Freeth had established the first lifeguard stations on the southern California coast. On 16 December the 11 Japanese fishermen had ventured out in a

storm in Santa Monica Bay only to be overwhelmed by the waves and the sea. Freeth dived off from the pier and swam out to their skiff, reportedly seizing the rudder, standing up and surfing the skiff through the furious waves back to the beach. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that, ignoring 'a mad and crazy sea', Freeth had accomplished a 'Herculean task'. [31] The Japanese fishermen returned to Venice the next day showing their appreciation for Freeth by giving him \$50 and a gold watch and contributed \$37 to the sick benefit fund of the lifesaving corps that Freeth had started. [32] Freeth's bravery also earned him a Congressional Medal of Honor as well as a Carnegie Medal. [33] There is no doubt that word of Freeth's heroic rescue would have made it back to the gang at Waikiki and the Hui Nalu club. Interestingly, Kahanamoku would once again followed his friend and mentor's footsteps when he made his surfboard rescue.

Seventeen years later Kahanamoku, not acting as a paid lifeguard but on a surfing trip during a storm at Corona Del Mar with friends, saw a 40-foot pleasure yacht named the *Thelma* violently overturned by the enormous waves. Acting out of his sense of compassion, Kahanamoku grabbed his own surfboard and braved the surf to save those who had been thrown into the raging surf. Seventeen people who had rented the boat for a fishing expedition suddenly found themselves thrown overboard. The Hawaiian swimming champion made three trips from the shore to the capsized boat and back, saving eight of the passengers. Two of Kahanamoku's friends, Owen Hale and Gerard Vultee, also grabbed their boards and were able to rescue another four victims. [34] Unfortunately, five people perished, a fact that bothered Kahanamoku terribly. [35]

The exhausted surfer turned lifesaver struggled with the fact that he could not save everyone on board and retreated from the media who clamoured to know more about the rescue on the surfboard. That night Kahanamoku recalled that he found sleep fleeting as the 'wails of those lost haunted him, their plaintive eyes still stabbed'. [36] Kahanamoku's exploits were big news in the Los Angeles papers as well as in Honolulu. An editorial in the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* announced that 'Mr Robert B. Booth, a lifelong friend of Duke's father, and his uncle Piikoi' would act as 'Chairman of a committee to raise the very modest sum needed for a suitable medal' to honour Kahanamoku's heroism. Interestingly, the paper could not resist noting the latent racist feelings in the territory by noting in the editorial that the two men were 'fine types of Hawaiian mankind', thus justifying their leadership regardless of their Hawaiian ethnicity. [37]

In California the issue of ethnicity was less apparent in the media coverage, but newspapers highlighted the usefulness of surfing. The Newport Chief of Police, J.A. Porter, noted the utilitarian usage of the surfboard by stating: 'Kahanamoku's performance was the most super-human rescue act and the finest display of surfboard riding that has ever been seen in the world.' [38] In a book he later wrote about surfing, Kahanamoku commented that 'good sometimes comes from the worst of tragedies', pointing to the result that 'boards became standard equipment on the emergency rescue trucks as well as at the towers'. [39] Both Kahanamoku and Freeth

were denied honours resulting from their rescues. Kahanamoku was never awarded Congressional nor Carnegie medals for the rescues as Freeth had been. However, while receiving the medals Freeth was denied the honour of competing in the 1912 Stockholm Olympic Games because as a lifeguard he was considered a 'professional'. Freeth, regardless of his own personal restrictions on joining the Olympic movement, arranged for Kahanamoku and Vincent Genoves to come to the mainland and compete to attempt to earn a spot on the American Olympic team. [40] As a result of Kahanamoku's Olympic success he became far more famous than his older mentor and friend Freeth, and his name became more closely associated with surfing worldwide. In Freeth's absence in Hawai'i, Kahanamoku also became the primary focus for Ford's surfing promotional campaign.

With the absence of Freeth, his fellow surfer and conduit into Hawaiian surf culture, Ford developed new relationships with the locals that Freeth had rounded up. With the establishment of the Outrigger Canoe Club, Ford utilized the expertise and exotic nature of these local boys to promote the club to tourists. Ford's love for surfing and friendship with Freeth had allowed him an entry point with local surfers. Through those connections came his admiration for a youngster who would replace Freeth as the king of the beach at Waikiki, Duke Paoa Kahanamoku.

Alexander Hume Ford surfed and hung out with these young surfers and began to understand the allure of Hawai'i and the potential commercial prospects for selling Hawaiian lifestyles. Ford founded *The Mid-Pacific Magazine* in January 1911, devoting the journal to the promotion of Hawai'i and its culture to a curious world. [41] In the very first issue of this magazine, a young man named Duke Paoa wrote an article entitled 'Riding the Surfboard'. It is unclear why Ford did not use Kahanamoku's last name but Duke Paoa is clearly Kahanamoku. It may have been because Kahanamoku was commonly referred to as Paoa, his mother's last name, by his friends and family, and that Ford simply felt no need to use his father's last name as well. While extolling the sport of surfing in this article, Paoa stated that in Hawai'i 'bronze skinned men and women vie today with the white man for honors in aquatic sports once exclusively Hawaiian, but in which the white man now rivals the native'. Kahanamoku seemed to be promoting the idea that white men had proven their superiority in athletic endeavours by now challenging the native at their indigenous water sports such as surfing. In the same way, Jack London had also made Ford and Freeth equals at the art of surf-riding. In *The Cruise Of The Snark*, London made it clear that Freeth was merely assisting Ford in helping London to learn how to master the waves. In fact, London notes how after two days of surf riding he had conquered the larger waves in the blue water. [42]

While Kahanamoku wrote well, especially considering that he had dropped out of high school to help his family, it is possible that Ford ghost-wrote the article and simply used his name to give the impression of a native perspective. This seems highly probable due to the tone of the article and its acknowledgement of the white man mastering even the native sports. To have a native authority writing an article on the mastery of his own sport would lend greater credence to the idea that if white

men put their minds to anything that they would succeed. Regardless, the article illustrates how white capitalists used Kahanamoku even before he had gained access to the worldwide stage through swimming as a representative of Hawai'i and its culture. This article was published almost a year before Kahanamoku would dazzle the swimming world with world-record times in Honolulu Harbor and become a world-renowned figure. He had already dazzled Ford with his surfing ability and the promoter of the islands realized that the bronze-skinned Kahanamoku would be a perfect marketing tool to sell surfing and Hawai'i around the world. [43]

Kahanamoku came along at the perfect time for *haole* leaders such as Ford. As Kahanamoku gained worldwide acclaim through his surfing and swimming exploits, he symbolized Hawai'i and the romantic allure of these islands. Hawaiian officials were more than willing to have him help promote their interests. When Kahanamoku represented Hawai'i at the 1912 Olympics, W.T. Rapono of the Oahu Baseball League wrote a letter to the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*. Rapono stated that 'what will be good for Duke Kahanamoku will be good promotion work for *Hawaii-nei*, our beloved Hawai'i'. [44] In another article in the *Advertiser*, Walter G. Smits reported that tasks of the Hawai'i promotion committee for the upcoming Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco included sending out massive amounts of literature, preparing and 'helping out various bands of Hawaiian singers and Duke Kahanamoku'. [45]

As soon as he won Olympic gold, Kahanamoku became a modern symbol for promoting the rising territory of Hawai'i and the sport of surfing. Due to his fame, tourists continued to pour into the islands and take surfing lessons from the beach boys at Waikiki, including Kahanamoku and his brothers. Kahanamoku also gained an invitation to compete in swimming races in 1914–1915 in Australia. While there, Kahanamoku introduced surfing to Aussie crowds at the beach. He built a board and rode it at Freshwater Beach, teaching others to ride as well. Swimming allowed Kahanamoku entry to society through the avenue of sport, and yet surfing remained Kahanamoku's passion. After the Olympic Games of 1920, Aileen Riggan remembered that the Hawaiians taught everyone how to surf in the Atlantic Ocean near Calais, France. [46] It seemed that wherever he went he introduced surfing to the locals and expanded the influence of the ancient Hawaiian sport.

While Kahanamoku obviously followed Freeth in the development of surfing to the West Coast of the United States, legend holds that Kahanamoku introduced surfing to the East Coast while in New York City waiting to sail to Sweden for the 1912 Olympic Games. [47] He demonstrated the sport both in Atlantic City, New Jersey and at 38th Street in Rockaway Beach, 'a southerly strip of land in New York City's borough of Queen's'. Unfortunately, 38th Street, where Kahanamoku introduced surfing to New Yorkers, fell into the hands of 'drug dealers, addicts and hoodlums' in the late 1980s and due to safety issues, New York City Council 'sanctioned surfing some 50 blocks away, off 91st and 92nd streets in a safe, grassy, beachside neighbourhood of apartments and small shops'. [48] New Yorkers renamed the 91st Street beach after Kahanamoku. [49] The 38th Street site continued to be remembered by surfers in

Rockaway on or around Kahanamoku's birthday. They would gather for only a few moments at sunset at the spot where the council had approved a sign designating the area 'Duke Kahanamoku Way'. The sign, advocated by members of the community led by surf-shop owner Tom Sena, James Breslin, son of New York newspaper columnist Jimmy Breslin, and nuns from the St John's Home for Boys as well as 'Rockaway's "beach priest"' Reverend Bob Lawsine, struggled to survive at 38th Street due to vandalism and a housing project which displaced the sign. [50]

Kahanamoku's connection to Rockaway formally disappeared in 2004, however, as the sign at 91st Street Beach was replaced by another in honour of a fallen firefighter from the 11 September 2001 World Trade Center tragedy. Gail Allen, the mother of Richie Allen, petitioned for her son to be honoured by having the 91st Street Beach named after him, only to find that the beach already had been named after Duke Kahanamoku. Allen had been a lifeguard at the beach during his college years, and as a surfer had loved the area. Interestingly even Tom Sena, who had fought for the Kahanamoku tribute earlier, altered his story regarding Kahanamoku, claiming that the Hawaiian never actually surfed at Rockaway, but merely swam there in 1912, disputing decades of memories passed down by neighbourhood residents. As the *New York Times* commented, 'the memory of Sept. 11 quickly proved more powerful than the Duke's legend' and the council voted in favour of the Allen family. [51] Ironically, the only area where Kahanamoku had truly been the first to introduce surfing in the United States ultimately would erase the official memory of that event from public acknowledgement in favour of honouring a victim of terrorism. In some ways this is symbolic of the full turn of appropriation of surfing into a purely American sport that a local hero who surfed is recognized over the man who many hold responsible for the worldwide development of the sport.

It is hard to argue against Kahanamoku's influence on the sport of surfing and yet as he grew older the sport changed in the values assigned to it as it became more Americanized. Whether he realized it or not, his promotion contributed to the dissipation of it as a deeply spiritual practice into a competitive American sport. Kahanamoku lobbied for surfing to become an Olympic sport and willingly gave interviews to magazines and newspapers explaining the techniques of the sport he loved. In the 1920s the idea of surfing a wave was a fantasy only available to those near the ocean and with access to a surfboard. Still, surfing provided excitement and thrills even for those dreaming about the experience. Kahanamoku helped to expand those dreams through articles about the sport. *The Youth's Companion* carried an article written by Kahanamoku entitled 'Full Speed Ahead!'. The magazine catered to young Americans and told tales of adventure while advising them about the virtues of American life and culture. [52]

In an introduction to an article written by Kahanamoku, the editors noted that 'no other sport can furnish quite the thrill and healthy exhilaration of surfboarding. Dashing through foaming green and white breakers at express-train speed is an experience not to be missed.' They commented that Duke Kahanamoku 'is a member of the picturesque Hawaiian race and is a sportsman of the front rank, whose prowess has

made him an Olympic champion and holder of so many swimming titles that it would make you dizzy if we quoted them.' The editors glowingly predicted that Kahanamoku's article 'will be an inspiration to you when next you visit the seacoast'. [53]

The article itself described the sport of surfing and gave advice and information regarding how to ride a wave and to study the breakers. Kahanamoku also elaborated on body-surfing and on the best ways to accomplish feats on a wave without a board. Kahanamoku exhorted the young readers that 'if you are proficient on skis, you will make a good surfboard rider. The two sports are very similar.' He also noted that in his experience as an instructor 'women, as a rule, make better surfboard artists than men' due to the superior balance of females. An interesting comment written in a magazine marketed to boys. [54]

Despite Kahanamoku's passion for surfing and his consistent efforts to introduce the sport around the world, it still remained an exotic hobby in the minds of most Americans. Surfing in the 1920s was not a threat to other 'true' sports such as baseball, football or even swimming. Ironically while it was intriguing, surfing could be the domain of the Hawaiian champion with minimal resistance as it held little chance of competing against sports where white Americans reigned supreme. In essence, it became a safe haven for the American media to popularize the swimming champion. Kahanamoku, however, saw surfing differently. Throughout his life championed for the sport to be included in the docket of Olympic sports. [55]

Regardless of Kahanamoku's insistence that surfing was a sport worthy of Olympic status, the reality remained that in the eyes of most Americans it existed as a recreational endeavour unworthy of extensive media coverage and most likely a passing fad. If women were truly better at the sport than men as Kahanamoku had claimed, then the manliness of the sport could also be questioned in a male-dominated culture. Surfing could pose no true threat to baseball or football, sports where ruggedness reigned supreme. [56] As a result, Kahanamoku's role as the king of surfers created no threat to white-dominated society and its sports.

Regardless of its ability to challenge more mainline sports, Ford continued to promote Hawai'i and encourage people around the world to participate in this sport of kings. Jack London realized the commercial prospects of the sport and Ford's role. In 1916 he explained that with surfboarding 'a California real estate agent, with that one asset could make the burnt barren desert of the Sahara into an oasis for kings.' London claimed that only through American visionary eyes could the potential be realized. He claimed that the native Hawaiian had forgotten about the sport and that 'just as the sport was at its dying gasp, along comes one Alexander Ford from the mainland. And he talked. Surfboarding was the sport of sports. There was nothing like it anywhere else in the world.' Through surfing London believed hotels would fill and new residents flock to Hawai'i. [57]

There were logistical problems with surfing however, besides the obvious need for ocean surf. The boards that Hawaiians used were large and required great strength to handle. They also were labour-intensive in the traditional way they were created. For an American populace used to ever quicker rewards and looking for recreation

without labour, the sport had drawbacks. New advocates of the sport would soon change all of that, however – the most notable being Tom Blake, who had read a magazine about the exploits of Duke Kahanamoku while growing up the Midwest. After meeting Kahanamoku, in 1920 in Detroit, Blake endeavoured to make his way to Hawai'i. He eventually made it and befriended Kahanamoku there. Blake would move to California and become not only a surfing pioneer but one of the greatest innovators of the surfboard. Blake began to play with hollowing out the wooden style board to reduce the weight in order to make it more accessible to more people. [58]

Later Blake's designs were used as templates for building solidified plastic foam boards, allowing the design to become shorter, lighter and more dynamic. He also was the first to design fins for the bottom of the board to allow for greater mobility on the wave. Blake's innovations led to the possibility of mass production of surfboards and an industry that would revolutionize the sport. [59] The board shape also allowed for new approaches to the sport. Rather than dancing with the wave, and becoming one with it, surfers could now challenge the wave and conquer it, a method much more appealing to mainland Americans who loved to control their recreational activities, and lives, in every sense. With mass-produced boards available for purchase in retail stores, surfers never developed the oneness that building one's board allowed ancient Hawaiians. The spiritual essence of the sport was lost in the process. For Westerners, nature was something to be conquered utilizing whatever new technologies were available. New boards were now being mass-produced in factories far away. The personal contact of building the board and the essence of man's relationship with nature was threatened. The new styles of surfing also threatened the Hawaiian values inherent in their sport. As Westerners appropriated the sport of surfing, the ideal of dancing with the waves moved to one of dancing on the wave in order to conquer it. The spiritual essence of an activity that represented the cultural heritage of a people with a long history became a by-product that was discarded by white Westerners as they appropriated the indigenous sport of Hawaiian surfing and recreated it in the image of American ideals.

Ironically, Blake never intended for that outcome to occur. Of all mainland surfers in history Blake is regarded as the one who held most dearly to the old ancient Hawaiian values that surrounded the sport. In 1935 he even wrote a book originally titled *Hawaiian Surfboard* (later changed to *Hawaiian Surfriders*) which detailed the practices of ancient Hawaiian surfing so that they would not be forgotten. [60] Blake, like his hero Duke Kahanamoku, unwittingly assisted in the appropriation of surfing from native Hawaiian traditions and values through his love for the sport and desire to promote it and make it more accessible to all. With the mass production of surfboards more people took up the sport on the mainland and developed a very different style than that advocated by adherents of traditional Hawaiian surfers, who still hold onto the richness of the experience as being paramount. However, as the sport became more and more commercialized, it followed in the developmental path of American competitive sport. Surf competitions and even a professional circuit followed by television audiences, sponsorships and world championships now dominate the casual

observer's understanding of the sport. Little is spoken concerning the ancient traditions rituals or religious significance that even Kahanamoku and Blake held essential to the experience of surfing.

Notes

- [1] Kahanamoku and Brennan, *Duke Kahanamoku's World of Surfing*, 19.
- [2] Finney and Houston, *Surfing*, 48.
- [3] Kahanamoku and Brennan, *World of Surfing*, 21.
- [4] Thoreau, 'Economy', 285–6.
- [5] Emerson, 'History', 14.
- [6] Kahanamoku and Brennan, *World of Surfing*, 21.
- [7] *Ibid.*, 16.
- [8] Lopez, 'Attitude Dancing'.
- [9] Kahanamoku and Brennan, *World of Surfing*, 19–21.
- [10] Goldsberry, 'Introduction', 11.
- [11] Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 16.
- [12] Young, *The History of Surfing*, 31.
- [13] Finney and Houston, *Surfing*, 48–9.
- [14] Blake, *Surfing: He'e Nalu Hawaiian Proverbs and Inspirational Quotes*, 70.
- [15] Finney and Houston, *Surfing*, 47.
- [16] *Ibid.*, 38.
- [17] Emerson, 'Causes of Declines of Ancient Polynesian Sports', 57–60.
- [18] Kalakaua, *The Legends And Myths Of Hawai'i*, 57–8, 229–46; Dixon, *The Complete Book of Surfing*, 14.
- [19] Ford, 'Aquatic Sports', 19.
- [20] Cisco, *Hawai'i Sports*, 277.
- [21] Brennan, *Duke*, 22–3.
- [22] 'As An Honorary 'Wave', *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 21 Aug. 1911, 4.
- [23] 'Hui Nalu Page'. In Duke Kahanamoku's Autograph book, Box 8, Duke Kahanamoku Collection MS Group 254 [hereafter referred to as DKC], Bishop Museum Archives, Honolulu, Hawaii [hereafter BMA].
- [24] London, 'Riding The South Sea Surf', *Women's Home Companion* 35 (Oct. 1907), 9–10, reprinted later as chapter 6, 'A Royal Sport', in London, *The Cruise of the Snark*, 75–90.
- [25] 'Girl Surfing With Red Dress', *Sunset Magazine* 14 (July 1911), front cover; 'Surfing Keiki', *Mid-Pacific Magazine* 2 (Sept. 1912), front cover; Charles Sarka, 'Tahitian Surf-Riding', *Outing* 23 (Jan. 1908), front cover. These are just a few examples of magazines that highlighted surfing on its covers.
- [26] Young, *The History of Surfing*, 43.
- [27] Ian Whitcomb, 'The Father Of Surfing', *American Heritage Magazine*, Aug. 2000, available online at http://www.picklehead.com/ian/ian_txt_surfing.html, accessed 24 June 2005.
- [28] Finney and Houston, *Surfing*, 81.
- [29] Artist unknown, 'Duke Kahanamoku', engraving on tile, 1994, Sidewalk Surfing Hall of Fame, corner of Main Street and the Pacific Coast Highway (PCH), Huntington Beach, California. Under Duke Kahanamoku's name is the title 'Father of Surfing', which probably applies more accurately to Freeth.
- [30] Young, *The History of Surfing*, 43.
- [31] 'Japanese Fishermen Saved By Life-Saving Corps', *Los Angeles Times*, 17 Dec. 1908, 1.
- [32] 'Give Their Gifts To Their Saviors', *Los Angeles Times*, 18 Dec. 1908, 5.

- [33] Whitcomb, 'The Father Of Surfing', 22.
- [34] 'Duke Kahanamoku Honored For Helping Rescue Twelve', *New York Times*, 26 Dec. 1925, 12.
- [35] Brennan, *Duke*, 155.
- [36] *Ibid.*, 151–5.
- [37] 'Duke A True Hero', *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 30 June 1925, 5.
- [38] Brennan, *Duke*, 156.
- [39] Kahanamoku, and Brennan, *Duke Kahanamoku's World of Surfing*, 82.
- [40] 'Hawaiian to Swim at Olympic Games', *New York Times*, 14 Jan. 1912, sec. C, 7.
- [41] Finney and Houston, *Surfing*, 62. Finney and Houston give the name of the magazine as *The Pride of the Pacific*, but pictures of the cover of another magazine published by Ford and established on the same date show the title to be *The Mid-Pacific Magazine*. It is possible that Ford established two separate magazines on the same day, but unlikely.
- [42] London, *The Cruise Of The Snark*, 90.
- [43] Paoa, 'Riding the Surfboard', 1.
- [44] W.T. Rapono, 'More Money for Kahanamoku Fund', *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 27 July 1912, 30.
- [45] Walter G. Smits, 'Promotion Work for Hawaii', *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 23 July 1912, 9.
- [46] Aileen Riggan, 'An Olympian's Oral History: Aileen Riggan'. interview by Dr Margaret Costa, Honolulu, Hawaii, 11 Nov. 1994, published in Rivera, *An Olympian's Oral History*, 31.
- [47] Robert T. Worth, 'Of a Local Legend, Surfing, and How To Honor The Past', *New York Times*, 12 April 2004, sec. B, 2. Worth argues that Kahanamoku never surfed at Rockaway but merely swam there in 1912.
- [48] Phil Mayer, 'Surfers at Rockaway Love the Duke', *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 9 July 1990, sec. A, 4.
- [49] Earl Maikahikinapāmaikalā Tenn, 'Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee, c/o Stamp Development: Duke Paoa Kahanamoku (August 24, 1890– January 22, 1968)'. In Earl Maikahikinapāmaikalā Tenn Personal Collection, Honolulu, Hawai'i (list compiled April 1999), 1.
- [50] Mayer, 'Surfers At Rockaway'.
- [51] Worth, 'Of a Local Legend'.
- [52] Kahanamoku, 'Full Speed Ahead!', 330.
- [53] *Ibid.*
- [54] *Ibid.*
- [55] Fran Reidelberger, 'World's Best Known Hawaiian Still Young at Heart: It's 75 Candles For The Duke', *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 23 Aug. 1965, sec. D, 1.
- [56] For information regarding the cultural attraction of baseball and football, see Rader, *Baseball: A History*; Oriard, *King Football*.
- [57] Finney and Houston, *Surfing*, 59.
- [58] Malcolm Gault-Williams, 'Legendary Surfers: A Definitive History of Surfing's Culture and Heroes', available online at http://www.legendarysurfers.com/surf/legends/l07_blake.shtml, accessed 7 July 2008.
- [59] Finney and Houston, *Surfing*, 69.
- [60] Blake, *Hawaiian Surf Riders*

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