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Hawaii: The Cultural Crossroads of Sport

Oddly, the most racially diverse state has received minimal attention. Hawaii served as an early stop in Anglo globalization efforts and its concurrent cultural imperialism. Missionaries began transforming Hawaiian culture, including native sport forms in the 1820s. Contests of strength, skill, and chance that provided natives with pride, self-esteem, and social status earned admonition from preachers. Canoe racing and bowling fostered wagers, and gambling proved more offensive to the Christian emissaries, who reserved their greatest harangues for the hula dances and communal sharing of families, which they deemed lewd and lascivious.

Further impositions on native culture accrued as Christians gained advisorial positions with the monarchy, transforming Hawaii's economy, society, lifestyles, and religion. Anglo sports began to replace traditional ones, but natives resisted, then adapted such incursions. A pluralistic labor force, imported to man the expanding sugar cane plantations, further added to the cosmopolitan populace and brought an infusion of their own pastimes. Hawaii soon became multicultural in its society as well as its sporting practices.

When nationalistic King Kalakaua tried to restore Hawaiian traditions and stem the cultural flow he met with Anglo opposition. His equally strident successor, Queen Liliuokalani, was overthrown in 1893 by a coup headed by a minority of American businessmen. Despite annexation by the United States government in 1898, native Hawaiians continued resistance, often joined by a multiethnic, multiracial, imported and exploited labor force. Sport became a means of social control, but also required the integration and cooperation of disparate groups long before such efforts in the continental U. S.

Such a negotiated sporting culture resulted in gains for natives and workers. Anglo sports were adapted to local

conditions, traditional sports such as canoe racing enjoyed a resurgence, and the native pastime of surfing reversed the flow of cultural migration by exporting it to an international audience. By the 1970s a pluralistic resistance movement changed the political landscape and won concessions from Washington, including a formal apology 100 years after the coup. Environmental groups thwarted developers, natives won land grant cessions, including the entire island of Kahoolawe, a military bomber training site, and reinstatement of the banned Hawaiian language in the school curriculum. This paper intends to show the role of sport in the process of such cultural negotiations and the resultant changes achieved by colonizers and colonists. It examines a previously little studied region and its populace, thereby adding to a new knowledge base.
