CHAPTER 1

He'e Nalu

A Hawaiian History of Surfing

In 2004, Sony Pictures Classic released Stacy Peralta's *Riding Giants*, a historical documentary of surfing and big-wave riding in particular. It was one of only a few surf films to play in mainstream theaters across the United States. The film starts with surfers from ancient Hawai'i, where chiefs and kings developed the sport over centuries. Then, after quoting eighteenth-century voyagers who confirmed Hawaiian expertise on the waves, the film explains that Calvinist missionaries banned the sport, thus causing its extinction. "Fortunately," the script continues, "the extinct Polynesian pastime was then re-introduced in the early twentieth century by Alexander Hume Ford, a globe-trotting promoter who set about reviving island tourism by romanticizing surfing at Waikīkī."[1] The film then spotlights modern surfing icons. First is Duke Kahanamoku, an expert swimmer and surfing champion who took he'e nalu to Australia, California, and New York. As the "father of modern surfing," Duke's ceremonial passing of the he'e nalu torch to white Americans and Australians is a critical juncture in the surf history narrative. According to the film, Tom Blake, the first to run with it, became "one of the twentieth century's most influential surfers."[2]

As if they stopped surfing or existing altogether, Native Hawaiians have little place in the story from this point on—in common surf history narratives generally and in this film particularly. Instead, the film focuses on the evolution of surfing at the hands of converted Californians, from Greg Noll and Gidget

to northern California surfers in the 1980s. Despite the fact that Hawaiians continued to surf, the film explains that California surfers brought big-wave surfing to the Hawaiian Islands in the late 1950s. Ironically, the Hawaiian surf is first portrayed as Mecca and later as a site of discovery. The story of Noll stumbling onto an unoccupied North Shore surfing paradise is confounded by the fact that Native Hawaiians are still living in the backdrop. The film then accentuates the heroism and primitive manliness of Californians risking their lives at places like Pau Malū (called Sunset Beach) and Waimea Bay. Such surfing history narratives erroneously suggest that surfing was extinct until resurrected by haole surfers in the early twentieth century.

This chapter also chronicles a history of surfing, but from a Hawaiian perspective. First, I chart centuries-old histories of Hawaiian surfers from ka wā kahiko (times of old, prior to 1778) to show that Hawaiian pride in he'e nalu has deep historical roots. Here I draw from several mo'olelo (history, legend) not previously recorded in popular surf histories and found in Hawaiian-language sources. Although much of this book emphasizes male identity construction in the waves, this chapter spotlights several stories about Hawaiian women. While surfing was arguably a male-dominated sport in the twentieth century, in ka wā kahiko women had a strong presence in the po'ina nalu and were the primary characters in most of surfing mo'olelo. Through these histories we not only learn about human relationships in the waves, but can also contextualize the sentiments of Hawaiians in the twentieth century to better understand their feelings of ownership of and identification with he'e nalu—even with Hui Nalu and Hui O He'e Nalu surfers in the 1900s.

While twentieth-century Hawaiian surfers battled colonialism in the waves, they often found cultural continuity in the surf. Although surfboard technology and wave-riding maneuvers had evolved by the close of the twentieth century, Hawaiian surfers still saw it as inherently Hawaiian.[3] Through these convictions, we better understand Hawaiian reactions to Californian, Australian, and other visiting surfers. For Kanaka Maoli surfers, it was presumptuous and disrespectful for haole to claim birthright to a Hawaiian cultural practice still in full swing. My second objective, then, is to refute key myths generated by popular versions of surfing history. By showing that Hawaiians continued surfing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I argue that he'e nalu's "extinction" at the turn of the twentieth century was indeed a fallacy. Thus Alexander Hume Ford did not resurrect surfing, as is often purported, but rather learned to surf from Native Hawaiians like George Freeth, who had been surfing and continued to do so in Hawai'i during this so-called restoration

period. Furthermore, throughout the 1900s and despite construed historical memory, Hawaiian surfers still ranked as top performers and competitors in the world surfing arena—even on the North Shore in the 1960s, 1970s, and today. Thus Hawaiians took offense at a continual lack of recognition by haole surfers who assumed dominance in a surf zone already run by Hawaiians. In this chapter I often draw from previously ignored accounts of he'e nalu found in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Hawaiian-language newspapers, as well as oral history research, to support my arguments.

Ka Wā Kahiko

Although Pacific Islanders throughout Oceania have most likely been riding waves on wooden boards for over the last couple thousand years, the more developed form of he'e nalu, standing while riding, is estimated to have begun in Hawai'i and perhaps Tahiti about fifteen hundred years ago.[4] Hawaiian mo'olelo passed down from ka wā kahiko are filled with epic tales of heroic surfers, daring competitions, romantic surfing encounters, and lessons of betrayal in the waves. David Malo, a nineteenth-century Hawaiian historian, described he'e nalu as a Hawaiian national sport, one that Hawaiians often competed in and gambled over.[5]

But surfing was more than competitive sport; it was a cultural practice embedded within the social, political, and religious fabric of Hawaiian society. For example, Hawaiian prayers were believed to summon and control ocean swells,[6] ho'okupu (offerings) were presented on altars at heiau or temples on behalf of the surf,[7] and chiefs were commonly valorized and validated in stories of great surfing feats. Although some great men have been highlighted in Hawai'i's past, many have erroneously classified he'e nalu as the sport of kings. In truth, contemporary class and gender boundaries had no place in the waves. Though a few waves were designated for ali'i (chiefs), all Hawaiians could enjoy wave riding regardless of status, age, or gender.[8] Malo explains, "Surf riding was one of the most exciting and noble sports known to the Hawaiians, practiced equally by king, chief, and commoner. . . . It was not uncommon for a whole community, including both sexes and all ages, to sport and frolic in the ocean the livelong day."[9]

Although surfing was an egalitarian sport, in Hawaiian mo'olelo gods and ali'i were also celebrated as great surfers. Under the ancient Hawaiian religious system there are four primary gods: Kū, Kanaloa, Kāne, and Lono. God of fertility and sport, Lono was also an expert surfer. When Lono looked

down upon the earth, he marveled at its beauty and wished to marry a woman from such a beautiful place. Searching mountains, forests, and valleys from Kaua'i to Hawai'i, he finally found Kaikilani, a beautiful woman who lived by the great waterfall Hi'ilawe in Waipi'o Valley. Riding from the heavens down to Waipi'o on a rainbow, Lono disguised himself as a chief. Shortly after their marriage, the couple relocated to Kealakekua, Kona, to enjoy surfing when the west winds blew and fishing by torch at night. Of the many things that Lono was venerated for, his surfing prowess was top among them.[10]

Although several men, gods, and chiefs surfed, female surfers were far more popular in Hawaiian histories. One example is Hi'iakaikapoliopele (Hi'iaka in the Bosom of Pele), the youngest sister of the fire goddess Pele. While traveling around the island of O'ahu, Hi'iaka had an unfriendly encounter in the surf in the Ko'olauloa district on the east side of the island. When Hi'iaka and her traveling party approached Kahana Valley, she appropriately called out to the chiefs of that area with an oli kāhea (a greeting/protocol chant asking permission to enter). Palani and his wife Iewale, known as the surfing chiefs of Kahana, were in the ocean surfing at the time. Perhaps annoyed by the oli, Palani answered Hi'iaka with contempt, shouting,

> Ae, o Palani au o ke'lii hee nalu o keia aina o Kahana nei. Owai hoi oe e na wahine hookano o kau hele ana mai nei a kahea mai ia'u? Ua ike mai no paha oe ia'u e heenalu ana me ka 'u wahine, he wahine ike ole no ka oe ia'u, o ka'u puni no nei, owai hoi oe?[11]
>
> Yes, I am Palani the surfing chief of this land, Kahana. Who are you, conceited women who have come and called out to me? Perhaps you have seen me surfing here with my wife; you are an unfamiliar woman to me; I rule this place; who are you?

Angered by Palani's disrespectful response, Hi'iaka caused the waves to quickly rise. As both Palani and his wife tried to catch the fast-growing surf, the giant waves overcame them, eventually consuming and killing them both.[12]

Kapo'ulakina'u, a surfer and sorceress of Kaua'i, was another Hawaiian woman who demanded respect in the Hawaiian surf. Determined to find suitable husbands for her nine companions, she escorted them to a famous surfing break in Wailua, Kaua'i. Upon their arrival they were greeted by a handsome surfer called Kaumaka'amano. After describing the bending wave conditions at the esteemed Makaīwa, he lent his eight-foot koa board to

Kapoʻulakinaʻu. With impressive form, she quickly paddled the heavy board into the surf zone and began conversing with a group of surfers. Causing the waves to become small, Kapoʻulakinaʻu drew their attention to the beautiful women on land. Enchanted, eight of the men rode to shore to meet them. Kapoʻulakinaʻu then paired each man with one woman and sent them all back into the surf so the men could court their new spouses-to-be. Meanwhile, Kaumakaʻamano had already fallen in love with the ninth woman, Kahalaiʻa. Assured that her female companions would be cared for, Kapoʻulakinaʻu anticipated the prospect of her own future and began thinking of pursuing a lover. But shortly thereafter, all the women (except Kahalaiʻa) returned to shore without their surfing partners. After they explained each man's excuse for not marrying them, Kapoʻulakinaʻu's relief quickly turned to rage. She charged out into the surf and challenged the eight men to a surf competition. "What are the stakes?" the men asked. "Our bones," she replied.[13] Intimidated but still interested, the men tried to keep up with the surfing sorceress. She then called the great waves of the deep ocean with her pōhuehue vine and chanting. As the waves grew, only she was able to ride the monstrous surf. The waves eventually consumed the men and buried them in the Makaīwa surf forever. Today eight submerged rocks symbolize these surfers and stand as a reminder to men to be both respectful of and committed to women.

As seen in both ancient and modern times, Hawaiian surfers have placed a high value on the notion of respect in the waves. Like Hiʻiaka and Kapoʻulakinaʻu, Hawaiians in the twentieth century took offense at surfers who failed to create and reciprocate relationships of respect and exchange. Although many assume that most tension in Hawaiian waves is attributed simply to brute territorialism, I disagree. Disrespect and a lack of recognition are the core issues that ignite most conflicts in the Hawaiian surf.[14] In the story of Iewale and Palani, for example, it was Palani's failure to recognize and respect Hiʻiaka as an individual (and goddess) that got him into trouble—not necessarily his claim over the territory of Kahana. In both ancient and contemporary Hawaiʻi, recognition is still critical in social settings. Recognition of one's family, community, and origins are essential to social relationships, even in the surf.[15] Thus Hiʻiaka, as a visitor to Kahana, followed proper protocol by recognizing Palani's family and status before she asked to enter. She was angered when Palani failed to reciprocate in the social exchange.

Throughout most of Oceania, Native peoples have historically relied on relationships of exchange in their various social systems. In such systems exchanges of love, respect, mutual assistance, and nurturing sociospacial ties

are core principles in maintaining healthy social relationships.[16] Focusing on the vā, "the social or relational space connecting people," Tevita Kaʻili explains that most Pacific Island societies value the maintenance of such social spaces with their "commitment to sustain harmonious social relations with kin and kin-like members." He continues, "Such nurturing ties between individuals and kāinga [family] generally involves reciprocal exchanges of economic and social goods."[17] Thus when those sociospacial ties were ignored and undermined in the Hawaiian surf, people like Hiʻiaka, Kapoʻula, and others felt disrespected, offended, and angry. The concept of honoring others, respecting individuals, and reciprocating benevolent relations resonated in several moʻolelo. They also uncover specific values and rules within a Hawaiian surfing hierarchy. For example, Hiʻiaka and Kapoʻula expected recognition and respect because of specific status markers they both held. Genealogy (who your family is and where you are from), social/political rank, and surfing skill were all criteria for ranking a person in a surfing lineup. Although it evolved, some of these criteria for defining hierarchy still existed in twentieth-century Hawaiian waves.[18]

Moʻikeha was a surfer remembered for maintaining healthy sociospacial ties on Kauaʻi. After traveling to Kauaʻi from Raiatea, Moʻikeha fell in love with Makaīwa's bending waves and two surfing sisters, Hoʻoipoikamalanai and Hinauʻu. Unlike the eight Makaīwa surfers, Moʻikeha committed himself to both surfing and family life—he eventually married the sisters.[19] These new commitments anchored Moʻikeha to his new community, and instead of returning to Raiatea, he moved his Tahitian sons to Kauaʻi as well. Finding favor with his father-in-law, Moʻikeha inherited the chiefly title to the island.

Through Hoʻoipoikamalanai, Moʻikeha had a daughter (or granddaughter) named Kaʻiliokalauokekoa (The Skin of the Leaf of the Koa Tree).[20] Growing up in the surf, Kaʻili became an accomplished surfer. However, as a youth she lived a sheltered life. After her birth, a seer prophesied that she would one day leave, fall in love with a godly man, and stop listening to her parents. In that relationship, the prophecy continued, she would find misery and finally death. Because of this prophecy, her parents kept a close eye on Kaʻili, but not close enough. One day she left home to find the man who had persistently appeared to her in her dreams. While she and her attendant searched, Kaʻili heard someone chanting with a flute, calling to her, "O Kaili, O Kaili-e, you have slept and you have heard."[21] Following the sound of the flute and chant, they went to the uplands of Pihanakalani, where the godly man Kauakahialiʻi lived. When they arrived at his impressive home

of lehua flowers, he called to Kaʻili to come to him, and the two were married shortly thereafter. But just as foretold, their relationship was filled with drama, mainly because they were both unfaithful to one another.

Since living far from the ocean was difficult for a surfer like Kaʻili, she began hiking down to Makaīwa while her husband performed his daily task of catching birds in the mountains. He approved of her surfing exploits as long as she returned home in the evenings. Over time, and particularly when Kaʻili began sleeping on a separate bed, Kauakahialiʻi became suspicious of his wife's surfing excursions. So one day he followed and spied on her. Watching from a distance, he learned that Kaʻili was both a skilled surfer and a popular wahine at Makaīwa.

Kaʻili was a better surfer than any of the other women in Wailua, and because of this all the chiefs admired and desired her. As time passed, Kaʻili grew increasingly fond of two young brothers named Kalehuakuikawaokele and Kalehuakuikawao. One day Kaʻili rewarded the persistent brothers with kisses while they were in the water on their surfboards. But it did not end there; Kaʻili then returned to their home, where they proceeded to make love.

On the day that her husband was spying on her, Kaʻili was again in the brothers' home. Kauakahialiʻi's heart sank as he watched all three exit the home and enter the surf together. As Kauakahialiʻi watched in disillusionment, a woman named Makaweli approached him on the trail, recognized who he was, and confirmed that his wife was indeed sleeping with the brothers. Although he was troubled by his wife's infidelity, Kauakahialiʻi himself was no innocent victim.

Shortly after this experience, Kauakahialiʻi became fond of Makaweli, the woman on the trail, and devised a plan to be with her. One day he told Kaʻili that he would be hunting birds in a special place, where he could go only at night. He then explained that if he was unsuccessful, his god would become angry and kill him. "So do not worry if I do not return," he explained. "I will need a day, a night, and another day to catch these birds." But of course this was just a ploy—instead of hunting for birds at night, he was sleeping with Makaweli. This continued for six months, until Kaʻili learned of his deeds from a bird in one of her dreams. After she confronted Kauakahialiʻi, he confessed.

> He oiaio no kau moe, no'u nae ka olelo a ka hihio i ka po, a no hai ka olelo o ke ao, mai manao oe i ka ka po olelo he oiaio, e hele no au i kau hana, ua ike no oe i kau kane iloko o ko kaua mau la, aole au i haalele ia oe ua noho no au me ka maluhia a hiki i kou haalele ana iaʻu, o oe no o kaua kai lalau, a o wau no ko kaua i hoaa aku ia oe, a loaa oe iaʻu iloko o ka papai kilu me na kane elua, nolaila, mai aua oe iaʻu.[22]
>
> Your dream is true. But I was the one who spoke in the dream; someone else spoke during the day. Don't think what was said at night is true. I went to your work, you saw your husband in our days; I didn't leave you. I was just residing with peace until you left me; you are the one that strayed and I am the disconcerted one. I caught you inside of the small kilu hut with the other two guys, so don't you hold a grudge against me.

After the argument, Kaʻili decided she would watch Kauakahialiʻi more closely, instead of divorcing him. So she did not allow him to leave home unless she accompanied him. Over the next three days he brooded, wishing he was with Makaweli. After Kauakahialiʻi pleaded to go to work, Kaʻili released him to go bird hunting, but she followed him and watched as he sneaked to the surfing area to meet Makaweli. Kaʻili's heart sank as her husband lingered in Makaweli's home. When the door finally opened, the secret lovers sat together, and with Kauakahialiʻi's head on her lap, Makaweli stroked his hair and nibbled on his shoulder. Kaʻili fell into a depression, ran home, and hanged herself with Kauakahialiʻi's malo (loin cloth) from their front door. Later, Kauakahialiʻi found his wife's body and mourned deeply, consumed with regret. Seeking to escape the grief, Kauakahialiʻi searched the islands for a woman as exceptional as Kaʻili. He eventually found a beautiful surfing chiefess on the southeast side of Hawaiʻi island. Her name was Lāʻieikawai.

The legend of Lāʻieikawai explains that Lāʻieikawai (Lāʻie of the Water) was born in Lāʻie, in the moku (district) of Koʻolauloa (the North Shore of Oʻahu). Moments before she was born, her mother, Mālaekahana, told her husband that she craved ʻōhua fish—a tall order for any fisherman. However, this was merely a ploy; in truth, she wanted to conceal her newborn daughter, since her husband had wanted a son and would not accept another girl. While he was away, Mālaekahana gave birth to twin girls. Lāʻielohelohe (Obedient Lāʻie), the first born, was raised far away in Wahiawā, while Lāʻieikawai was hidden from her father in a nearby underwater cave called Waiʻāpuka. After persistent rainbows exposed her secret location,[23] she escaped with her guardian, Waka, to Keaʻau, on Hawaiʻi island, to live at Paliuli—a house made of yellow bird feathers in the middle of a beautiful ʻōhiʻa forest. While living in Keaʻau, Lāʻieikawai would often surf the waves of Hāʻena, and she became

fond of he'e nalu. Although she was regularly pursued by various men, most were unsuccessful at winning her interest.[24]

Shortly after Ka'ili died, Kauakahiali'i learned of Lā'ieikawai's whereabouts from one of his servants, and he desired to marry her. He first heard of her beauty after his servant stumbled upon Lā'ie's bright-yellow feather house and met with her. Hurriedly, the boy asked if she would marry his master, Kauakahiali'i. Lā'ie flatly refused, but she agreed to meet his chief later that night behind her house. She instructed the servant to first listen for the voice of the 'Elepaio bird, then the 'Apapane, and finally the yellow 'I'iwi, and then she would come to see Kauakahiali'i. But Lā'ie was toying with the chief and his servant, and left them waiting in vain.

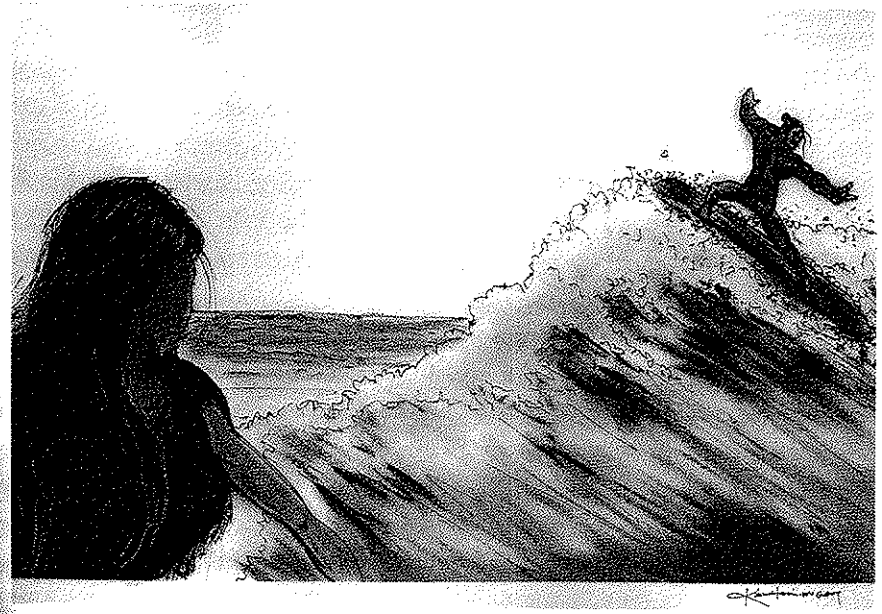
While Kauakahiali'i was struggling to meet Lā'ieikawai, Ka'ili was resurrected by Kauakahiali'i's cousin and her magical bamboo flute. Upon recovering, Ka'ili traveled to Hawai'i island and restored her relationship with Kauakahiali'i, thus leading him to abandon his pursuit of Lā'ie. Ka'ili and Kauakahiali'i then returned to Kaua'i. Although they lived out their lives as rulers of Kaua'i, the chief did not forget Lā'ieikawai. Later, he told stories about the beautiful surfing chiefess to other Kauai chiefs.[25]

'Aiwohikupua and Kekalukaluokēwā listened intently to Kauakahiali'i's stories. 'Aiwohi was enchanted by the story of Lā'ie and hastily embarked on a quest to win her heart. After painstaking attempts to impress her—with boxing matches, a feather cloak, his five sisters, gentle and sweet like Maile vines—he ultimately failed. Kekalukaluokēwā, on the other hand, was more successful, and was even engaged to Lā'ie for a short while.

Before he died, Kauakahiali'i told Kekalukaluokēwā to marry Lā'ie after he and Ka'ili were gone. Then, he said, Kekalukaluokēwā and Lā'ie could rule together in his stead. Later, after the passing of Kauakahiali'i and Ka'ili, the new chief traveled to Hawai'i to meet Lā'ie. Shortly after his arrival, Waka encouraged Lā'ie to see the handsome Kaua'i chief and decide for herself. After four days she went to the shoreline with her attendant and watched a group of Kaua'i surfers ride the waves in Kea'au. But Lā'ie could not determine which surfer was Kekalukaluokēwā. Wisely, her attendant suggested that they wait for the men to return to shore. The one who did not carry his own board, she explained, would be the chief. After discovering his identity in this manner, Lā'ie returned home and told Waka she had agreed to marry him. The ceremony was planned by Waka and would take place in the surf, on their boards. Waka's instructions were very specific, and she was adamant that protocol be meticulously observed. On the day of the ceremony,

Kekalukaluokēwā first entered the surf, and Waka caused a great mist to cover the Puna area. Then Lā'ie was carried out to the surf break on the wings of birds, where her husband-to-be awaited her. Lā'ie was instructed not to speak to anyone until after they had surfed their first wave together and then kissed. After the kiss, and after having ridden four consecutive waves together, the couple planned one last ride before returning to Paliuli (Lā'ie's sacred home of feathers) to consummate their marriage. But on their fifth and final wave, a young Hawai'i island local surfer interfered with the ceremony.[26]

Hala'aniani, with the help of his sister, Mali'o (Dawn Light), devised a scheme to snatch Lā'ie from Kekalukaluokēwā. Aware of Waka's plan and with her own cunning sorcery, Mali'o blinded Waka and sent her brother into the surf during the wedding ceremony. Knowing that the fifth wave would be their final one, Hala'aniani remained behind and grabbed Lā'ie's feet just as she and Kekalukaluokēwā began to catch it. As the Kaua'i chief rode the wave to shore alone, Hala'aniani convinced Lā'ie (who, perhaps because of the heavy mist, believed him to be Kekalukaluokēwā) to ride the longer waves farther out in the ocean. After he impressed her by riding high on the crest of the largest wave (perhaps doing a long floater), the two were married and returned together to Paliuli.[27] When Waka discovered the two sleeping in



Lā'ieikawai. (Drawing by Halam Ah Quin)

their home, she removed her magical powers from Lāʻie and publicly scorned her for her mistake. It took Halaʻaniani only a couple of months to betray Lāʻieikawai, when he inappropriately propositioned his wife's twin sister, Lāʻielohelohe, to have sex with him. Many years later Lāʻie's second husband, Kaʻōnohiokalā, restored Lāʻieikawai's honor and punished her offenders.

Like the stories of Kapoʻulakinaʻu, Kaʻili, and Lāʻie, the moʻolelo of Kelea highlight the mana (power) and agency of Hawaiian women. Keleanuinohoʻanaʻapiʻapi was a high-ranking woman of Maui whose long, ʻehu- (reddish) tinted hair fluttered, birdlike, while she masterfully rode waves.[28] In her youth Kelea enjoyed the large waves of Wailuku, Kekaha, and Hamakuapoko, on Maui. But while surfing one day, she was lured onto a waʻa kaulua (double-hulled canoe) piloted by a group of Oʻahu chiefs who impressed her by surfing with their canoe. Shortly after she boarded the canoe, they were blown out to sea by a fast-approaching squall. Several hours later, one of the chiefs, Kalamakua, explained to her his quest to find a wife (as great as she) for his high-ranking cousin, Lo Lale. Kelea consented to marry Lo Lale, but secretly Kalamakua wished to marry her himself. Lo Lale was a good man, but ever since his childhood sweetheart had drowned, he suffered severe grief and depression. Kelea left him to his grief after ten years of marriage and searched for a happier life near the surf—Wahiawā (in central Oʻahu) was not an ideal place for a surfer. On the day she left, Kelea asked her attendants to take her surfing in Waikīkī. Once she arrived at Kawehewehe, she asked for a papa heʻe nalu (surfboard) and skillfully made her way out to where the largest waves were breaking. She then proceeded to out-surf the Waikīkī locals. As the community cheered, Chief Kalamakua rushed to the shoreline—he assumed they were cheering the surfing chiefess from Maui. Wondering why it had taken her so long to leave Lo Lale, the Waikīkī chief (an accomplished surfer himself) asked Kelea to marry him and be a mōʻī wahine (chiefess/queen) in Waikīkī.[29] She agreed.

The central characters in most surfing moʻolelo are empowered women. Such stories not only reflect the human agency of women in old Hawaiʻi, but also contrast sharply with contemporary surfing narratives on women and gender roles. In contemporary media, "surfer girls" and islander women are often portrayed as lifeless images that wear bikinis and sell products as sexualized bodies. While I confront these representations in chapter 5, I draw attention to such imagery here to highlight how they contrast with ancient Hawaiian histories. For example, Kalamakua's attraction to Kelea was kindled while he surfed and sailed with an impressive ocean expert. Although

Kelea is remembered as beautiful, at no point in the story does her physical image overshadow her human character. Likewise, women like Kapoʻula are portrayed as powerful. While men were often defeated and overpowered by women in these surf stories, these moʻolelo remind readers that many contemporary gender-based stereotypes had little place in surfing moʻolelo.

In the story of Kahikilani we find another example of empowered women of old Hawaiʻi. Although most of the moʻolelo abridged in this chapter are about surfers on Hawaiʻi, Kauaʻi, Maui, and at Waikīkī, Hawaiians of ka wā kahiko also surfed the giant waves of Oʻahu's North Shore. Among the many breaks to surf, Kahikilani favored the large, fast waves of Pau Malū, or Sunset Beach.[30] Traveling from his home island of Kauaʻi, Kahikilani worked to master these challenging waves. While surfing one day, a maid with supernatural bird powers watched him from a nearby cave. She sent her bird messengers to give Kahikilani her lehua lei and lure him to her dwelling place. Kahikilani remained with her during the summer months, but could not resist Pau Malū when the large winter waves swelled again. Vowing never to kiss another woman, Kahikilani returned to the thundering surf. But he broke his vow by accepting a lei and a kiss from another wahine at Pau Malū. Although he thought little of the kiss, the heartbroken maid confronted him, tore off the lei, and ran for the hills. He chased after her, but halfway up the hill, Kahikilani turned to stone.[31]

Hawaiian surfers regularly caught the attention of admirers from shore, and those who had never before witnessed heʻe nalu were especially intrigued. European voyagers to Hawaiʻi marveled at Hawaiian surfers in the late 1700s. From early January to the middle of February 1779, the British ships HMS *Resolution* and *Discovery* anchored in Kealakekua Bay on the southwest coast of Hawaiʻi. Captain James Cook's crew, while living among the Hawaiians, were astonished at locals who rode large winter waves on wooden planks. Perhaps even more perplexing were the "young boys and girls of nine or ten years of age playing amid such tempestuous waves that the hardiest of our seamen would have trembled to face."[32] In other accounts, like this one from Cook's first lieutenant, James King, Hawaiian surfers are described as both fearless and coordinated.

> As soon as they have gained, by these repeated efforts, the smooth water beyond the surf, they lay themselves at length upon their boards, and prepare for their return. As the surf consists of a number of waves, of which every third is remarked to be always larger than the others, and to flow higher on the shore, the rest breaking in the immediate space, their first

> object is to place themselves on the summit of the largest surge, by which they are driven along with amazing rapidity toward the shore. The boldness and address, with which we saw them perform these difficult and dangerous maneuvers, was altogether astonishing.[33]

In addition to their amazement with surfing, voyagers also remarked on the strong character of Hawaiian women in Hawaiian society, who often performed seemingly masculine exploits like surfing. Analyzing the perspective of Cook's men toward Hawaiian women, Karina Kahananui Green explains that they characterized Hawaiian women as masculine because wahine blatantly contradicted European imaginations of Native women as sexually and socially submissive to men. Unlike later portrayals of Hawaiian women through tourism, Hawaiian women's "strength and power were not limited to her sexuality."[34] Furthermore, Green argues, "The power of the Hawaiian woman extended to more direct action."[35] Thus many voyagers viewed Hawaiian women as powerful and active in society as they participated in politics, fought in wars, boxed in matches, and surfed large, intimidating waves—similar to the way oral Hawaiian histories, or mo'olelo, remembered them.

Myth of a Dead Sport and Nā Nūpepa

Although fewer Hawaiians were surfing in the decades after the first Europeans arrived in Hawai'i, neither Hawaiians nor he'e nalu were extinct. While others have pointed to cultural colonialism as the cause for this decline, there were fewer wave riders in the nineteenth century because diseases introduced by foreigners ravaged Hawaiian society. According to David Stannard, the population in Hawai'i just before Captain Cook arrived was 800,000.[36] While some critics say Stannard's numbers are too high, more conservative estimates still place the population near 500,000. Although these calculations have been disputed, the 1823 census, which determined the Native Hawaiian population to be at 134,925, has not. Whether the Native Hawaiian population was reduced by 365,000 or 665,000 between 1778 and 1823, these deaths were nonetheless catastrophic. The first wave of diseases swept through Hawai'i after initial encounters with Cook's men in 1778. Illness continued to bombard the islands as more human carriers disembarked onto Hawaiian shores. Diseases like syphilis, tuberculosis, measles, Hansen's disease, and many others unleashed what some scholars called a holocaust in Hawai'i.[37] Naturally, such rapid depopulation inevitably thinned crowds at even the more popular

surf breaks. However, of the many Hawaiians who survived the ailments of the 1800s, many continued to surf.

Additionally, some missionaries disregarded he'e nalu and discouraged Native Hawaiians from surfing. The first American Calvinist missionaries, who arrived in Hawai'i in 1820, were an especially conservative brand of American who considered Hawaiian cultural practices savage and immoral.[38] While early mission leaders like Hiram Bingham believed surfing promoted idle and sexual behavior, this idea was not expressed in all publications, but mostly in particularly conservative missionary-run newspapers. For example, in 1838 the Honolulu-based, missionary-supported newspaper *Ke Kumu Hawaii* ran an article in which a teacher castigated Hawaiian surfers as lazy "pigs" who were careless and negligent by surfing instead of doing their schoolwork.

> Eia kekahi, o ka lilo loa o na kanaka i ka heenalu a me na wahine a me na keiki i ka lelekawa i ka mio. Eia ka hewa o ka lelekawa a me ka heenalu a me ka mio, o ka huipu ana o na kane a me na wahine me na keiki i kahi hookahi, e like me na holoholona; haluku pu lakou i ke kiolepo hookahi.[39]
>
> Furthermore, the men, women, and children are engaged (or lost) in he'e nalu and lelekawa [cliff diving] and mio [another diving game]. The problem (or sin) of lelekawa, he'enalu, and mio is that men, women, and children do this together in a single location like animals; they are like pigs that wallow together in the mire.

However, while some missionaries and teachers rebuked he'e nalu, many Hawaiians ignored their admonitions. The fact that teachers in the mid-1800s wrote letters and newspaper articles in an effort to dissuade people from surfing suggests that it was popular among many Hawaiians—enough, at least, to disturb mission schoolteachers. Despite what their teachers called them, Hawaiians continued to enjoy their aquatic haven during a so-called period of surfing extinction.

In contrast to most mission publications, journal entries from other missionaries and visitors described surfing as a pastime commonly practiced by Hawaiians in the nineteenth century. While some missionaries and converts continued to scorn he'e nalu in the 1840s and 1850s, others celebrated the Hawaiian sport and recognized its livelihood. Even some haole Christians deemed surfing healthy. For example, in 1851 Reverend Henry T. Cheever, on Maui, admiringly described the sport as "so attractive and full of wild

excitement to the Hawaiians, and withal so healthy, that I cannot but hope it will be many years before civilization shall look it out of countenance, or make it disreputable to indulge in this manly, though it be dangerous, pastime."[40] In 1866 Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) came to Hawai'i as a reporter for the *Sacramento Union*. Reporting mostly on Hawaiian trade, industry, and labor, Clemens also spent time at the beach. Mesmerized by Hawaiian men and women who surfed with skill, Clemens himself was determined to learn the Hawaiian art of wave riding. After several attempts, however, he explained, "None but the natives can master this sport."[41] More than just funny commentary on his surfing bloopers, Twain's letters also convey the livelihood of he'e nalu in the 1860s. At the very least, this account demonstrates that surfing was visible enough for visitors like Twain to notice from shore. Perhaps because of visitors like him (too uncoordinated to participate in surfing but fascinated by it nevertheless), Hawaiian author J. Waiamau explained in an 1865 Hawaiian-language newspaper article how surfing is properly performed.

> O ka heenalu, oia kekahi paani nui loa o Hawaii nei, mai na'lii a na makaainanana. Penei nae hoi ka hana ana o keia hana: Ua hoomakaukau e ia ka papa mamua, oia hoi ke koa, ke kukui, ke ohe, ka wiliwili, a me kekahi mau laau e ae no i kupono no ka hana ana i papa. I ka hana mua ana nae hoi, oia no hoi ke kalai ana i ka wa hou o ka. laau, a pau hoi ia, waiho hou aku a maloo, alaila, hana hou a maikai loa, me ka paele ana i ka mea eleele, a wahi hoi i ke kapa a paa, a kauia ma kahi kupono; a hiki mai hoi ka wa e, lealea ai i ka heenalu, o ka hele no ia i ka heenalu. Penei nae hoi ka hana, i ka wa e au a hiki i kahi o ka uahi e hai mai ana, alaila, nana no hoi a ka nalu kupono i ka pae, alaila no hooino iho, a o ka pae no ia. He ekolu no hoi wahi e hee ai; hee iloko o ka hua, a o kekahi hoi, hee i ka muku, a o ke kolu, hee iluna o ka opuu; a o ka papa kupono iluna oia nalu, oia hoi ka olo, he elua anana a oi aku ka loa oia papa; ina e hee iluna oia nalu, aole no e poi mai ke kai maluna o ke kanaka.[42]
>
> Surfing is one of the most popular games in Hawai'i for both royalty and commoners. Here is how it is done: A board must first be prepared; koa, kukui, ohe, wiliwili, and some other woods are used for making boards. The first thing that needs to be done is carving the board; when the wood is fresh it is left to dry, then it is worked on again until it is ready, [then] it is blackened and wrapped in tapa and left to settle in a suitable place. After some time has passed it is ready to have fun by surfing; let's go surfing. Here is how it is done: swim out to the place where the mist is coming in, then watch for where the waves break; this is the dangerous part, the break. There are three places to surf: surf in the whitewash, another place is to surf on the crest, and thirdly, surf on the swell; there is a specific board for this type of riding, the olo board; it was two fathoms [about twelve feet] long; if this was ridden on the wave, the wave would not break over the person.

Hawaiian-language newspapers highlight a clear picture of he'e nalu; it remained important to Hawaiians in the 1800s, and it was a hot topic in those newspapers of the 1860s. In addition to articles—like J. Waiamau's—that gave detailed descriptions of surfing, the newspapers are filled with exhaustive accounts of Hawaiian surfers, both contemporary and ancient. In fact, most of the stories highlighted earlier in this chapter were first printed in these Hawaiian-language papers. While Hawaiian mo'olelo were passed down orally for centuries prior to the 1800s, in the middle of the nineteenth century Hawaiian authors laboriously transcribed these traditions onto paper. Noenoe Silva explained that 1861 marked a shift in Hawaiian newspapers, and newly established papers were often deemed opposition or resistance literature.[43] Hawaiians who wrote for these opposition papers labored to meticulously preserve culture and history, wrote in very nationalistic tones, and spoke out against haole influence in the Hawaiian kingdom.[44]

Ka Hoku o ka Pakipika (Star of the Pacific) was a quintessential Hawaiian opposition newspaper, run by Native Hawaiians who used print media not only to preserve Hawaiian history, but to advocate Hawaiian pride and resistance. As Hawaiians were one of the most literate people in the world in the 1860s, the majority read the papers. Between the years 1861 and 1863, *Ka Hoku o ka Pakipika* painstakingly gathered and published extensive Hawaiian oral histories, many written in series, published in the newspapers over several weeks or sometimes months. For example, the mo'olelo of Ka'iliokalauokekoa is nine chapters long, published in *Ka Hoku o ka Pakipika* over a period of four months. Mo'olelo presented in this chapter from these papers are mere abridgments of lengthy stories and can only scratch the surface of a vast collection published in the papers. Stories of other surfers like Kawelo, Pueo, 'Umi, Pamano, Kihapi'ilani, and more abound in *Ka Hoku o Ka Pakipika* (and other Hawaiian papers). The popularity of surfing mo'olelo in the 1860s, printed in Hawaiian national opposition papers, not only reveals that surfing still held value in the 1860s, but also suggests that he'e nalu was heavily associated with both Hawaiian cultural pride and resistance.

Although fewer newspaper articles were written on surfing in the 1870s and 1880s, many Hawaiians still frequented the waves during those decades. Even busy traveling members of the royal family found time to surf in the 1880s. While attending St. Matthew's Military School in San Mateo, California, three Hawaiian brothers—Prince Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana'ole, Prince David Pi'ikoi Kupio Kawananakoa, and Prince Edward Kawananakoa—surfed at a beach outside the mouth of the San Lorenzo River on redwood surfboards. A Santa Cruz newspaper reported, "The young Hawaiian princes were in the water, enjoying it hugely and giving interesting exhibitions of surfboard swimming as practiced in their native islands."[45] Prince Jonah Kūhiō was an avid surfer in the late 1800s and early 1900s, a prominent figure whose influence was felt not only in the surf, but in Hawaiian Territory politics as well. While I analyze Kūhiō's influence in chapter 3, I mention him here to show that Hawaiians were still surfing in the late 1800s, a time when surfing was supposedly extinct (or nearly extinct). Kūhiō had other relatives who surfed during this period, namely his cousin, Princess Ka'iulani. Growing up in her Waikīkī 'Āinahau estate, Ka'iulani enjoyed surfing not far from her pristine garden. Today, one of her surfboards is on display at the Bishop Museum in Honolulu.

The Bishop Museum's extensive collection of historic surfing photographs confirms that Hawaiians were indeed still surfing in the 1890s and early 1900s. In the recently published book *Surfing: Historic Images from Bishop Museum Archives,* archivist Desoto Brown showcases some of his favorites. While there are several photos of Hawaiians riding waves on wooden boards at Waikīkī in the 1890s, there are also pictures of Hawaiians surfing on the outer islands. This is significant for two main reasons. First, these images show that more people were surfing in Waikīkī in the 1890s than previously assumed. Second, they demonstrate that Waikīkī was not the last remaining habitat for the endangered he'e nalu species; rather, surfing was done in the 1890s at various breaks throughout the Hawaiian Islands. In one particular shot taken in Hilo, estimated to be from the 1890s, two Hawaiian men are shown exiting (or perhaps entering) the surf in Hilo Bay with their papa he'e nalu (surfboards).[46] In contrast to some turn-of-the-century postcards that promoted the islands with staged, posed, and de-contemporized Natives[47]—as a way of promoting a nostalgic, primitive past—this picture is a snapshot of real surfers enjoying a real swell in Hilo Bay.

Although fewer people surfed in the late 1800s than in centuries prior and after, he'e nalu was neither extinct, nor even nearly extinct, as often purported.[48] He'e nalu was witnessed by visitors, written about in newspapers, captured in photos, and performed by chiefs and chiefesses (like the Kalaniana'ole brothers and Ka'iulani) and commoners around the island chain during this time.

Twentieth-Century Surfing in Brief

Surfing gained more popularity at the turn of the twentieth century with Native Hawaiian surfers like George Freeth, the Kahanamoku brothers, and many others. The sport found its greatest popularity in densely populated, ocean-based communities. During this time Hawaiian surfers increasingly rode Honolulu waves and gained global attention as a burgeoning tourist industry witnessed their exploits in Waikīkī. As Hawaiian surfing surged, American visitors such as promoter Alexander Hume Ford and author Jack London became increasingly drawn to it. Although Ford and London did seek to promote surfing and tourism to other haole visitors, they have been erroneously credited with restoring surfing in general at the time. In reality,

Hilo Bay surfing in the 1890s. (Courtesy of Bishop Museum)

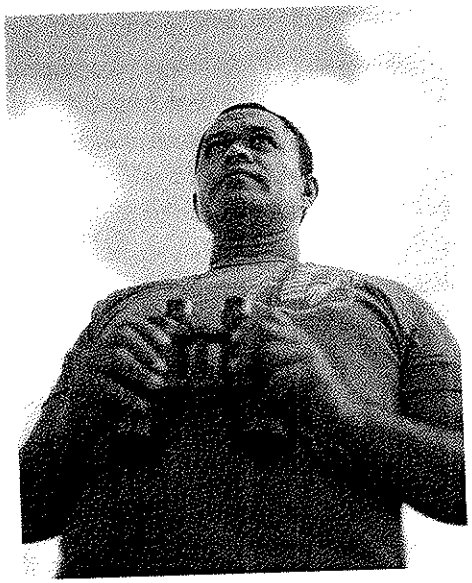
the two were merely boosters—promoters who saw the economic potential of marketing the sport and Waikīkī to other tourists. Rather than being innovators, Ford and London in fact learned to surf from an already established cohort of Hawaiian surfers in 1907. By that time surfing's resurgence was well under way, led by Hawaiians who had formed the Hui Nalu club in 1905. In London's own writings he extolled at least one of these Hawaiian surfers as "brown mercury." He recognized them as experts who not only excelled in the waves, but who also inspired visitors like Ford and himself to learn.[49] These "brown mercuries," then, kindled the boom in he'e nalu at the turn of the century. Ironically, or perhaps tellingly, after Hui Nalu surfers taught Ford and London to surf, Ford established an exclusive whites-only surf club called the Outrigger Canoe Club. In reaction, Hawaiian surfers, also great in number and surfing skill, challenged these racist haole in the Waikīkī surf—as I explain in chapter 3. It was from that group of Hawaiians that the first twentieth-century surfing legends and icons—like Duke Kahanamoku and the Waikīkī Beachboys—were born.

Even after Duke and the Beachboys introduced surfing to much of the outside world in the twentieth century, they continued to thrive as surfers in Hawaiian waves. Thus they did not "die off," as some surf films and histories subtly suggest. Whereas the Beachboys made surfing popular with haole visitors throughout the twentieth century, it was Kahanamoku who introduced the sport to the East Coast of the United States and to Australia while en route to the Olympic Games and other global events. On one of his many overseas trips in 1915, Duke gave a swimming exhibition at Manly Beach, Australia. Then, after making his own board from a native Australian sugar pine tree, he amazed spectators with he'e nalu. Ben Marcus explains that at this particular event Duke "single-handedly put Australia on a path to superpower status in the surfing world."[50] Later, between 1922 and 1929, while pursuing an acting career in Hollywood, Kahanamoku regularly surfed in southern California, inspiring others to take up the sport. In many surf history narratives, Hawaiians disappear shortly after Duke brought surfing to Australia and America—as seen in films like *Riding Giants*. In this story, haole surfers not only inherited the Hawaiian art of kings from an "extinct" culture and people, but go on to dominate it. In truth, Hawaiian surfers thrived in their own right, and surfing remained a common practice for many Kānaka Maoli throughout the twentieth century. Kahanamoku himself lived until 1968 and remained, until his death, a surfer who roused others, including Hawaiians, to move the art further. In Waikīkī the Hawaiian surfing scene

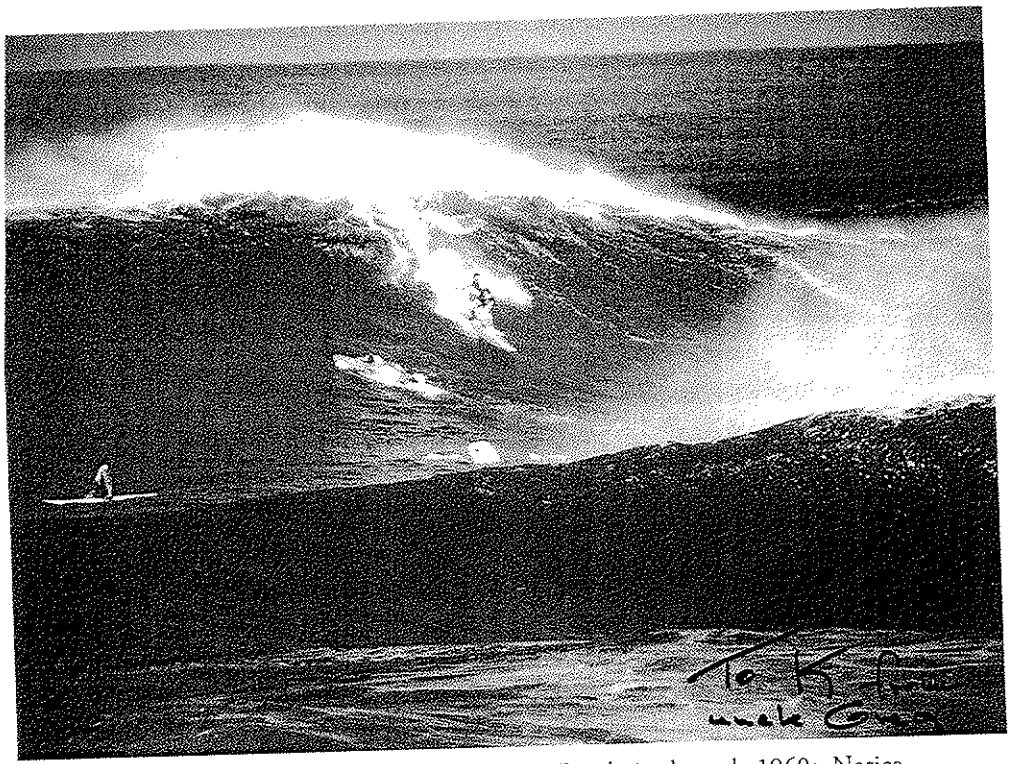
remained strong during the prewar years and regained momentum shortly after World War II. In the mid-1900s Mākaha continued to be a hotspot for surfers, a place where Beachboys like Rabbit Kekai and Mākaha residents such as Buffalo Keaulana received accolades in both free and competitive surfing. As Rabbit has explained, several Hawaiian surfers, including many from Waikīkī, often rode North Shore waves at places like Pau Malū, Pipeline, and even Waimea Bay in the 1940s.[51] While Hawaiian surfers have been erroneously and unjustly relegated to third-rate status under Australian and Californian superpowers, in reality they continued to lead twentieth-century surfing into the modern surfing era.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s Hawaiian surfers rode the dangerous North Shore surf alongside legendary Californians like Greg Noll. However, in a key scene in *Riding Giants* Noll and his California cohort are depicted as discovering the North Shore in 1957. In this version, after plowing their way through rugged canefields, Noll and his gang reach a clearing on a bluff and pause. Looking on in amazement, they behold the "seven-mile miracle" (a phrase commonly used by surfers to describe the North Shore), a scene of one perfect surf spot after another. Life on the North Shore for these exploring Americans was reminiscent of eighteenth-century imaginations of Pacific places—where men enjoyed a Rousseau-like, carefree, noble-savage existence of sleeping under the stars and surviving on fish, papayas, and surf. And similar to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European explorers, these California surfers had "discovered" nothing but a place already occupied by ocean experts. While fewer Hawaiians surfed on the North Shore in the late 1950s and early 1960s than in centuries prior, there were still those who did, most memorably Kealoha Kaio.

Mentioned only briefly—and with his name mispronounced—in *Riding Giants,* Kealoha Kaio charged the same treacherous waves that Noll and his friends did in the early 1960s. A resident of the North Shore community of Lā'ie, Kealoha was an expert surfer and fisherman. Possessing an astounding lack of fear in large waves, he comfortably rode ominous breaks like Third Reef Pipeline without the modern conveniences of ocean rescue crafts or surfing leashes.[52] According to his son, Kealoha Kaio Jr., Kealoha Sr. was known to catch the biggest waves deeper, and in the more critical part of the wave, than anyone else at that time.[53] And among local circles Kealoha is recognized as the first to make a hard bottom-turn at Waimea Bay.[54] Although Kealoha is rarely documented by surfing media, many surfers of his generation hold him in high regard. For example, Greg Noll described him as one of the best



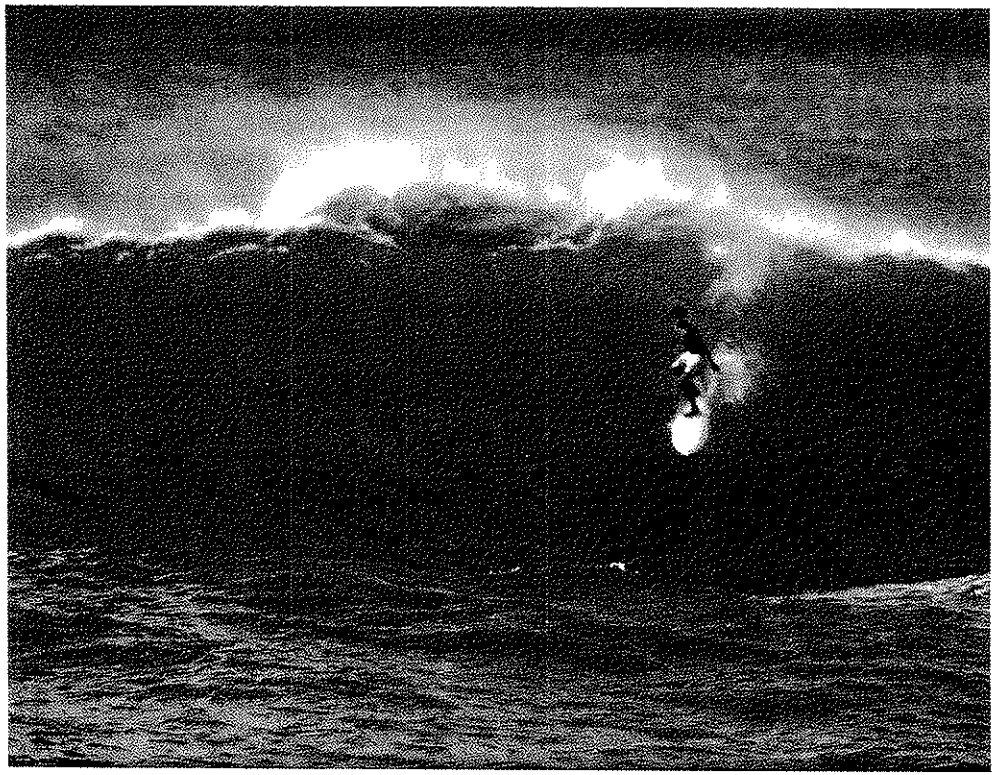
Kealoha Kaio. (Photo by Parry Medeiros)



Kealoha Kaio surfing at Pau Malū, or Sunset Beach, in the early 1960s. Notice young Eddie Aikau paddling up the face of the wave. (Courtesy of Kealoha Kaio Jr.)

big-wave surfers from that time, a man with a true Hawaiian heart, and a dear friend.[55] Professional surfers of the 1970s like Ben Aipa, Eddie Aikau, Clyde Aikau, and others were inspired by Kealoha's fearless approach to big waves, particularly the way he drew hard turns in large waves, which was advanced maneuvering for his time. But Kealoha was not the only overlooked Hawaiian standout of the early 1960s; other Hawaiian surfers like Samson Po'omaihealani, Kimo Hollinger, Tiger Espere, and others challenged the "big stuff" in an era dedicated mostly to Noll.

By the mid-1960s some Hawaiian surfers were finally recognized for their prowess through the Duke Kahanamoku Invitational Surfing Championships. In 1966 two young Hawaiian standouts, Eddie Aikau and Ben Aipa, were finally invited to compete in the most esteemed surfing competition of that time. In its formative years, and despite being named after a Hawaiian surfing icon, the Duke Invitational had a reputation for being an event primarily for Californian and local-haole surfers. In the first five events (1965–1969), an



Eddie Aikau surfing at Waimea Bay in 1973. (Photo by Parry Medeiros)

average of only two Native Hawaiian surfers out of twenty-four competitors was invited to compete in the Duke Invitational—and even those limited Hawaiian seats were difficult for locals to procure. For example, Aipa and Aikau were invited to participate in the event only after resorting to some creative solicitation. While the inaugural Duke event was running, they paddled out and surfed alongside the competitors to display their surfing talent and, they hoped, gain an invitation the following year.[56] In addition to this exhibition, Duke Kahanamoku apparently helped their cause by encouraging contest directors to invite the young Hawaiians in 1966.[57] In that event Aikau and Aipa skillfully advanced their way through to the finals. As the single-day competition in large and challenging Pau Malū (Sunset) surf came to a close, Aikau earned sixth place and Aipa seventh. At the awards banquet for that event the two young Hawaiians received accolades from their lifelong hero. As Stuart Coleman explains, when Duke Kahanamoku handed Aikau and Aipa their trophies, the experience was more like a torch-passing ceremony, from one generation of Hawaiians to the next. "Duke shook hands with the young man, looked into his eyes and smiled, and then he put his arm around Eddie's shoulders, embracing him like a son. Two proud Hawaiians, bridging different generations. Duke represented the glory of their past and Eddie the hope of their future."[58]

Both Aikau and Aipa not only inherited mana (spiritual power) from the father of modern-day surfing in 1966, but also opened the door for other local surfers to enter the professional surfing arena on O'ahu's North Shore. Over the years, more and more Hawaiian surfers were invited to compete in the Duke Invitational. For example, by 1970 Native Hawaiian surfers occupied four out of twenty-four slots, and by 1977 it was up to eight. From the mid-1970s until the final year of competition in 1984, an average of eight Native Hawaiians were invited to compete, but they ranked atop the list of winners, with Hawaiian surfers winning eight of the last twelve events. Furthermore, as Jared Medeiros found, after Hawaiian families like the Aikaus and Medeiroses helped to organize and run the competition, the Duke Invitational seemed to take on a more local flair.[59] For example, opening and closing ceremonies included Hawaiian cultural protocol and prayers. Meanwhile, many Hawaiian surfers gained more popularity through their participation in the event.

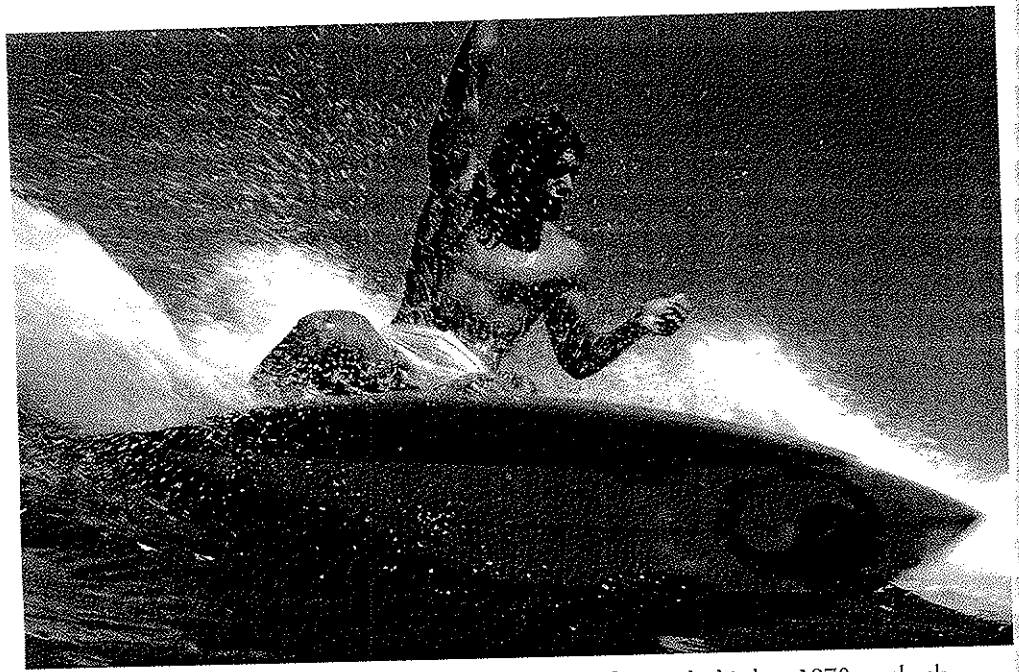
Although Eddie Aikau was not classified as a top short-board "ripper," other Hawaiian surfers in the 1970s spearheaded this new method of wave riding—an approach where surfers rip and shred waves with quick, powerful

Larry Bertlemann making a hard backside bottom-turn at Ala Moana bowls. (Courtesy of Merkel/A-frame Photo).

turns on short (five- to seven-foot) fiberglass surfboards. Despite the fact that recent films such as the 2008 *Bustin' Down the Door* erroneously suggest that radical short-board surfing was an Australian innovation, modern surfing often evolved at the hands of Hawaiian surfers like Larry Bertlemann, Michael Ho, Dane Kealoha, Buttons Kaluhiokalani, and others.[60] Commenting on the origins of short-board surfing and the myths promoted in *Bustin' Down the Door,* surfer Bryan Amona explained, "Don't believe all the hype about the Australians and *Bustin' Down the Door* and any of this stuff. He [Larry Bertlemann] was doing this, along with Buttons and Mark Liddell, way before anybody else was."[61] Old video footage of surfing in the mid-1970s corroborates Amona's claim. For example, in the film *Stylemasters* Buttons, Bertlemann, and Kealoha are shown performing the most innovative and before-their-time surfing in the mid-1970s, even in comparison to their non-Hawaiian peers. While the Australians and South Africans surf well in this film, Hawaiian surfers execute more radical and progressive maneuvers—as seen with Buttons' 360-degree frontside and backside turns.

Throughout the history of North Shore surfing competitions, Hawaiian surfers have earned more victories than most other surfers in professional surfing events. For example, in the 1970s Hawaiian surfers won six of ten Duke Invitational events. In the 1970s and 1980s Hawaiians like Clyde Aikau (Eddie's younger brother), Larry Bertlemann, Michael Ho, Barry Kanaiaupuni, Dane Kealoha, and others were among the world's top competitors—especially on the North Shore. As the Duke Invitational faded and the Triple Crown of Surfing (started in 1983) became the leading professional competitive series on the North Shore—and arguably the most prestigious title to win—Hawaiian surfers dominated there as well. For example, Hawaiian surfer Sunny Garcia has earned more Triple Crown titles than any other surfer in its history, holding a total of six (twice the number of any other competitor). Hawaiian surfers have also bested most others in professional long-boarding venues, and in the more recently developed standup paddle-surfing divisions.

While Hawaiian men thrived in the twentieth-century surf, women had a less conspicuous presence in ka poʻina nalu at that time. Women's surfing



Dane Kealoha leading the way in short-board surfing with this late-1970s cutback. (Courtesy of Merkel/A-frame Photo)

has, in more recent years, experienced an explosion in popularity, but in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ka poʻina nalu was a predominantly male space. The diminishing role of women in the surf at the time began in the nineteenth century, when Hawaiian women's roles were redefined by Western notions of gender. As new gender roles defined "proper" behavior for women, they simultaneously helped alter the gender demographics in the surf zone. According to such rules, initiated by missionaries who helped determine acceptable behavior for "ladies," Hawaiian women should not box, wrestle, or surf.[62] This is not to say that all women complied. Although many defied the new social norms, such categories nonetheless modified the gender balance in ka poʻina nalu, at least prior to the 1970s. While some women belonged to Waikīkī surf clubs like the Hui Nalu, in most of the twentieth century there were far fewer women surfing than men—especially in comparison to surfing moʻolelo. Nevertheless, by the end of the 1900s women's surfing experienced a resurgence of its own.

Especially since the turn of the twenty-first century, the popularity of women's surfing has exploded. While various women helped revive women's surfing in the twentieth century, Rell Sunn's contribution to its current popularity has been particularly noteworthy. Living on the predominantly Hawaiian west side of Oʻahu, Rell Sunn grew up surfing Mākaha with famous surfers like Buffalo Keaulana. Sunn has had a profound impact on professional women's surfing since 1975; she also helped establish the Women's Professional Surfing Association in 1979. Furthermore, her love of surfing and of her Hawaiian community is reflected in the Rell Sunn Menehune Surf Contest held annually at Mākaha Beach since 1976. In 1977 Rell Sunn became the first female lifeguard to work for the City and County of Honolulu. Later, as she battled cancer for fifteen years, she became a representative and ambassador of hope, aloha, surfing, and Hawaiian culture to surfers and women throughout the world.

Conflicting Identities

Although surf-history narratives have often ignored the prominent role of Hawaiian surfers in the twentieth century, its authors have ironically looked to Hawaiian culture in establishing a surfer identity. Since the mid-1900s haole surfers have looked to Hawaiʻi as a surfing Mecca, a cradle for the creation of their new identities as surfers. In the process they incorporated homemade versions of Hawaiian culture in developing a surfing culture and identity of

their own. In the 1950s and 1960s this haole surf culture drew from images of Hawai'i not only to distinguish itself from mainstream American society, but also to rebel against it. This is reflected in the 1959 film *Gidget*, in which Gidget's Malibu surfer friends find an escape from postwar American society through surfing. As they experience the primal pleasure of riding waves, these youth are also corrupted by their affiliation with a carefree Hawaiian culture. For example, they play the 'ukulele (although they do not pronounce the word properly), hang out in a grass shack on the beach, wear Hawaiian "tiki" carvings as pendants, and are led by a jobless, carefree surfer called The Kahuna. Though Gidget enjoys her new surfer friends, her family views their lackadaisical "native" lifestyle as lazy rabble rousing. Through films and other images like this, we find that haole surf culture has continued to grow an identity based on invented notions of what it means to be Hawaiian.[63] While much of this American surf-culture identity used Hollywood films like *Gidget* as their Hawaiian cultural informants, it is clear that they were not interested in authenticity. Umbrella drinks, tiki torches, and images of Hawaiian waves seemed "tradition" enough.

This Hawaiian-imagined American surf culture has led to several troubling assumptions. First, it assumes that haole surfers adopted the former Hawaiian pastime of surfing from negligent or dead Natives (negligent in the sense that Hawaiians supposedly abandoned their cultural practice of he'e nalu, and dead in that Natives were relegated to the past and deemed a dying race). Such assumptions helped establish haole surfers as inheritors of the sport at the expense of living Hawaiian surfers. For many haole surfers, especially in the 1960s and 1970s (and even today, as seen in films like *Riding Giants*), contemporary Hawaiian surfers were anachronisms.[64] Living Hawaiian surfers complicated the haole surfer identity because they challenged the assumption that haole inherited he'e nalu from an ancient and extinct people. Whether consciously or subconsciously, haole surfers have often turned a blind eye to contemporary Native surfers. Perhaps this explains why so few Hawaiian surfers were invited to participate in the first Duke Invitational competitions. How confusing it must have been for haole surfers to watch Hawaiians dominate surfing events for decades. In failing to recognize modern Hawaiians, their ideology also encouraged feelings of entitlement to Hawaiian waves, which has led to many confrontations with Hawaiian surfers. This perspective also promotes the myth that haole surfers have solely directed surfing's modern evolutions. While modern Hawaiian surfers in the second half of the twentieth century have been deemphasized to

clear the way for heroes of a stolen birthright, Hawaiian innovation has also been relegated to the grave, a place where all Hawaiians are presumed and expected to dwell. However, this formula is frustrated by the fact that living Hawaiian surfers have continued not only to exist, but to thrive in the surf. As "cool" as the haole surf-culture identity may have been in American beach towns, it has not gone over well in Hawaiian waves.

Much of the tension between haole and Hawaiian surfers over the last fifty years has resulted from clashing surfer identities. While haole surfers clung to their own brand of surfing culture, one that borrowed from invented notions of Hawaiian heritage, Hawaiian surfers held tightly to their versions of surfing tradition. From a Hawaiian perspective, surfing's historic roots ran two thousand years deep. Thus feelings of pride in and protection of ka po'ina nalu, especially in the politically tumultuous twentieth century, swelled in Hawaiian surfers. Hence, when haole surfers staked a claim to Hawaiian waves, culture, and he'e nalu, many Hawaiians were insulted and threatened. For haole surfers, Hawaiian reactions were extreme. Though at times they may have been, such reactions, when viewed in the context of history and in light of these conflicting identities, are better understood. Despite what surf-history narratives do to preserve this haole surfer identity in crisis, for many visiting surfers this narrative ultimately works against them—blinding them from seeing Hawaiian perspectives and thus inviting confrontation. The clash of these two surf cultures is critical to understanding tensions and frustrations in Hawaiian waves, especially in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Memory seems to serve surfing filmmakers and historians poorly. The idea that Hawaiian surfers were extinct in the 1800s and then replaced by generations of haole surfers in the absence of Hawaiians is perplexing. Additionally, given the constant and substantial participation (and often domination) of Hawaiian surfers in the waves for the last several centuries, this narrative is an obvious fairytale. And yet it has been regularly and vociferously replayed over the past few decades. Although surf histories have advocated the idea that he'e nalu was nurtured by adopted parents who kindly rescued the sport from negligent Hawaiian cultural practitioners, Hawaiians have remained active caregivers and innovators of the evolving practice called surfing.

Waves of Resistance

Surfing and History in Twentieth-Century Hawai'i

Isaiah Helekunihi Walker

University of Hawai'i Press
Honolulu
2011