

Excerpt from American Aloha: Cultural Tourism and the Negotiation of Tradition

Heather A. Diamond, 2008

The overthrow [of the Queen] and annexation [by the United States] ... lead to attempts to reactivate restrictive policies towards Hawaiian traditions. Practices such as the *hula*¹, which [King] Kalākaua [1874-1891] had reinstated as central to Hawaiian cultural and political identity, were seen by the *haole*²-controlled provisional government as [hostile] to Americanization and thus suppressed. The power of dance to embody political insurgence was therefore [crushed]. Hawaiian language was evaluated as a political threat, since there were many Hawaiian-language newspapers [which were seen as] an obstacle to Americanization. In 1896 the territorial government mandated compulsory education in English and in 1900 shut down Hawaiian public schools... effectively interrupting and devaluing the Hawaiian language, the principal means for conveying oral traditions [from generation to generation]. New generations of young Native Hawaiians were subsequently schooled in English rather than Hawaiian, accelerating their assimilation away from Native Hawaiian traditions and enforcing a sense of cultural inferiority on Hawaiian-language speakers. This process was probably further [intensified] by the importation of more virulent forms of American racism... As a result, young Native Hawaiians were given little incentive to follow the cultural practices of the past.

[After annexation] the new government in Hawai'i took a different approach to [presenting Hawaiian culture at international exhibitions]³ in the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in Seattle and the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco, producing a whitewashed version of Hawai'i for international consumption. In 1909 the Hawai'i Pineapple Growers Association [used beautiful part white, part Native Hawaiian girls] to represent the industry by serving juice... In San Francisco as in Seattle, a major [Hawai'i Promotion Committee] goal ... was the solicitation of the "right" kind of immigrants, in order to shift the population balance [towards white Americans]. [In Promotional brochures] the Chinese population is carefully not mentioned, and Japanese and Native Hawaiians are presented as an available force of unskilled labor. Native Hawaiians are redeemed as a "stalwart, healthy race." They are said to be "generous, pleasure-loving, natural musicians and orators, usually well-educated" people who "were never cannibals" and who speedily embraced early visitors, Christianity, and Americanization. To differentiate them from black and Indians, the publication claims they were "barbarians but not savages at the time of the arrival of the white men"...

Participation in the exhibitions had been intended to market Hawai'i as a business proposition, but the government's efforts to manage the image of Native Hawaiians and Hawaiian culture through scripted exhibition [*hula* dances and *ukulele* playing] had unintended results in another direction. The Panama-Pacific Exposition kicked off a Hawaiiana craze that swept the United States and set off an era of mass appropriation and consumption of Hawaiian culture... Hawai'i culture was a popular phenomenon, and everyone wanted to "go native" and play '*ukulele*, sing *hapa-haole* songs (predominantly English lyrics with some Hawaiian words), and dance *hula*... it led to the misrepresentation of Hawaiian cultural practices and exploitation of many performers [that continues today].

Consuming Hawai'i: Anne Keala Kelly on the Appropriation of Hawaiian Culture⁴

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Traditional *lū'au*, before the U.S. overthrow and occupation of Hawai'i ... had Hawaiian food, like *poi* and *kalo* or taro dishes, coconut dishes, fish, pork. Depending on who it was for it could be a large all day affair, wherein it could take hours to get through the meal. That would be normal for *ali'i*, which means royalty or chiefs... In the early part of the 20th century, as tourism started to become normalized in Hawai'i, the *lei* wasn't so much appropriated from the traditional Hawaiian use of it as it was overtly [commoditized] and turned into a mechanized thing. Even though real people make them, it's mostly about money now. *Lei* have always been for greeting people from far away, but when there are millions of them and only a couple hundred thousand of us it isn't about *aloha* anymore. Traditionally they were, and still are, for celebrations and ceremonial events. Back in the pre-invasion

¹ *Hula kabiko* are hula composed prior to 1894 which do not include modern instrumentation (such as guitar, `ukulele, etc.)... Many hula dances are considered to be a religious performance, as they are dedicated to, or honoring, a Hawaiian goddess or god. This is different, from the *hula 'auana*, the modern hula with ukulele music, grass skirts, and stories that focus on events since the 1890s which tend to be less genuine.

² A Hawaiian word for a person who is not a native Hawaiian, especially a white person.

³ The government before annexation had presented Hawaiian culture at exhibitions two times previously. The first time they presented Hawaiian culture as evidence of the Native Hawaiians as "barbarians" the second time as evidence they were becoming "Americanized" – these exhibitions were less than a decade apart.

⁴ Anne Keala Kelly is a Native Hawaiian documentary filmmaker

times, *lei* were involved when political agreements were reached between warring parties, and they were often worn during *hula* performance. There probably wasn't an occasion that wasn't celebrated with some kind of *lei*. If you look back at old photos of the *ali'i* at *lū'au*, you will see them wearing *maile lei*, a leafy vine, sometimes along with flower *lei*. *Maile* are more ceremonial, but they're harder to get these days because there are less people willing to keep up the traditional gathering of the *maile*. So they are very expensive now...

Embedded in every American theft is the denial of that theft, be it theft of land, culture, nationhood, all the things that define a people, all that they need to survive as a people. The exploitation and appropriation of Hawaiian identity and cultural identifiers, like *lei* and *lū'au* is in keeping with that centuries old tradition... it's a nasty American pastime to ridicule Hawaiian culture. Making a mockery of us, and our beautiful tradition of generosity and love (and a dance called *hula*) undermines our sense of worth as a people. And that's been going on for generations. At the same time it's a twisted appropriation of our identity, and identity theft is really prevalent. If people want to stand with us, it would help if they understood that cultural appropriation is what follows the physical appropriation of our land and government, and the psychological appropriation of our way of being. Cultural appropriation is a form of settlerism—and in that sense, it's the last frontier for America

I'd like to say, on behalf of every unapologetic Hawaiian whoever did or will live, the following: when people throw those [luau] parties and give [plastic] lei, they look like they're eating vomit, culture vomit to be exact. Because that's what it is. It's so clearly intended to mean as much as one of those party favor whistles you can find at a kid's birthday celebration. And yet, it's a specific appropriation of something traditionally Hawaiian...

Homework

1. What are the differences between the two types of *hula*? Why is this significant in the context of Hawaii's history?
2. What is the definition of *haole*?
3. What did the provisional government do to restrict Native Hawaiian culture? Why was this restriction successful?
4. How did the government attempt to persuade people to move to Hawaii?
5. What happened because of the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific and Panama-Pacific exhibitions?
6. How does Anne Keala Kelly feel about the appropriation (the action of taking something for one's own use, typically without the owner's permission) of Hawaiian culture such as the *hula*, *lei*, and *lū'au* – do you agree? Why or why not?

** Please answer these questions on a separate sheet of paper, I will be collecting them!