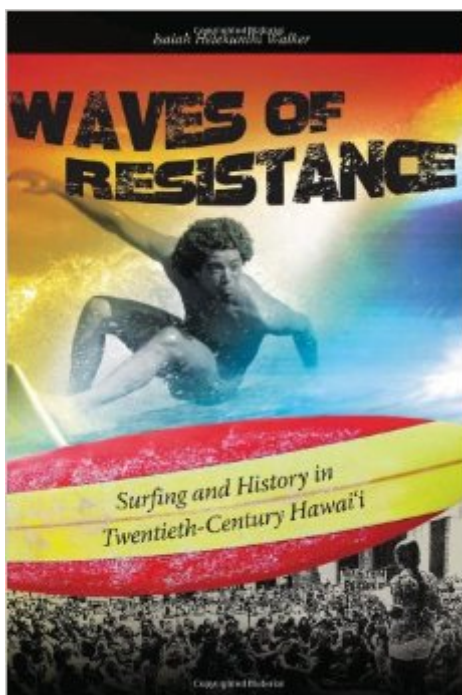


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# Waves Of Resistance: Surfing And History In Twentieth-Century Hawaii



## Synopsis

Surfing has been a significant sport and cultural practice in Hawai'i for more than 1,500 years. In the last century, facing increased marginalization on land, many Native Hawaiians have found refuge, autonomy, and identity in the waves. In *Waves of Resistance* Isaiah Walker argues that throughout the twentieth century Hawaiian surfers have successfully resisted colonial encroachment in the po'ina nalu (surf zone). The struggle against foreign domination of the waves goes back to the early 1900s, shortly after the overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom, when proponents of this political seizure helped establish the Outrigger Canoe Club—a haoles (whites)-only surfing organization in Waikiki. A group of Hawaiian surfers, led by Duke Kahanamoku, united under Hui Nalu to compete openly against their Outrigger rivals and established their authority in the surf. Drawing from Hawaiian language newspapers and oral history interviews, Walker's history of the struggle for the po'ina nalu revises previous surf history accounts and unveils the relationship between surfing and colonialism in Hawai'i. This work begins with a brief look at surfing in ancient Hawai'i before moving on to chapters detailing Hui Nalu and other Waikiki surfers of the early twentieth century (including Prince Jonah Kuhio), the 1960s radical antidevelopment group Save Our Surf, professional Hawaiian surfers like Eddie Aikau, whose success helped inspire a newfound pride in Hawaiian cultural identity, and finally the North Shore's Hui O He'e Nalu, formed in 1976 in response to the burgeoning professional surfing industry that threatened to exclude local surfers from their own beaches. Walker also examines how Hawaiian surfers have been empowered by their defiance of haole ideas of how Hawaiian males should behave. For example, Hui Nalu surfers successfully combated annexationists, married white women, ran lucrative businesses, and dictated what non-Hawaiians could and could not do in their surf—even as the popular, tourist-driven media portrayed Hawaiian men as harmless and effeminate. Decades later, the media were labeling Hawaiian surfers as violent extremists who terrorized haole surfers on the North Shore. Yet Hawaiians contested, rewrote, or creatively negotiated with these stereotypes in the waves. The po'ina nalu became a place where resistance proved historically meaningful and where colonial hierarchies and categories could be transposed.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I didn't know what to expect when I started this book and was pleasantly surprised with the breadth that this book covers. Among many other topics, it covers the true history of surfing in the 20th century, correcting many misnomers and outright errors in the "commonly understood" history of the sport. Then it takes you on an enlightening tour of the history of Hawai'i, its impact on the culture and spirit of the islands which leads you into very unique coverage of some of the more widely known events in and out of the surf. This book is a must read for those surfers who truly love the sport and its spirit, it will give you a new found respect and admiration for the culture and people who created the sport and those who continue the tradition today. It will also open your eyes to a native people's struggle to keep their culture alive and their spirit intact.

I appreciate the book for all the reasons others have already stated. For those who criticize it as a "racist rant," consider why you might see it this way: conventional histories are almost always told (and read) through perspectives rooted in the colonial foundations the US was built on. They are usually not questioned but become part of larger patriotic narratives that conveniently overlook the dark underbelly of American imperialism. It's always true in Native history-telling, and it's especially true in Hawaiian history. It's no less true in surfing historical narratives. Walker's methodology is an indigenous one in that he tells it from the perspective of the indigenous experience. To call it "racist" is just an easy way to justify the denial of looking at tougher historical realities. Sure, it might kill your colonially-privileged buzz if you are not of indigenous ancestry, especially if you live in Hawaii. It even undermines the facade of legitimacy of Hawaii as the 50th state. But make no mistake--that's the point.

It's rare, in my chosen genre of surfing book reviews, to find a book that is controversial. After all, most of the books I review are full of nice pictures and stories about surfing. Very soft stuff. Isaiah

Walker's new book *Waves of Resistance*, however, is something else entirely. Walker is a surfer and Hawaiian academic from Oahu's BYU campus. In his book, he pulls no punches as he outlines an argument that native Hawaiians have for over 100 years successfully used the surf zone as a forum for fighting colonial oppression. Walker starts with a dry summary of Hawaii's early surfing history, and then pushes into the period of early Western contact, the missionary invasion/exploitation, and finally the creation of the Hui O He'e Nalu (aka black shorts). In each phase, Walker demonstrates how Hawaiians overcame subjugation through active control of the surf zone. Some folks will read this book and label it as a racist rant against white people. Others will find themselves agreeing and empathizing with Walker's arguments that Hawaiians have had a very raw deal. My perspective is that *Waves of Resistance* is a well-researched and argued book, even if its thesis is slightly undermined by some apparent bias. Frankly, my largest issue with this book is the academic nature of the presentation, which makes it tough for anyone who was looking for an easy read. If you are interested in some unvarnished Hawaiian history and one of the more interesting summaries of the black shorts, this is a good book. It's also a solid primer for gaining a deeper understanding of the modern local perspective on haole incursions into the North Shore surf zone. For more surf book reviews, visit [The Waterman's Library](#).

Five stars Finally, the Island perspective and from the host culture. Read our Island history. Then maybe you will understand the under-current.

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