

# **Aloha for Their Violence: Locating the NFL'S Pro Bowl within Contemporary Hawai'i and the Deeper Hawaiian Past**

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## **Abstract**

The concern of this paper is a critical location of the NFL's Pro Bowl within the contexts of both contemporary Hawai'i and the deeper Hawaiian past. A sellout every year but one since its move to Honolulu in 1980, the Pro Bowl continues to figure prominently in the State of Hawaii's plans to revitalize the lagging local economy through the promotion of sports and recreational tourism. The Pro Bowl's link to tourism and militarism bring it into tension with a number of Native Hawaiian sovereignty groups seeking to reassert control over the land, other national resources, and general government of the islands. This paper reads the Pro Bowl as a cultural text infused with deep, multiple, shifting, sometimes ambiguous, and even conflicting messages relating to colonialism, nationalism, and identity.

**Key words:** colonialism, Hawai'i, militarism, nationalism, sports culture

## **How Meaningless is the Pro Bowl Really?**

I write about the convergence of a globalizing, multi-billion dollar, professional sports business with a Pacific island which, for thirty continuous years, had been the site of that sport's annual all-star game. The sports business is the National Football League or NFL; the island is 'Oahu in the Hawaiian Islands group; and the all-star contest under study is the Pro Bowl. It is a game that many understand as having no real meaning or significance.

At the end of a deeply disappointing 1997-1998 season in which the New England Patriots had failed to match their Super Bowl appearance of the preceding year, a newspaper reporter for The Boston Globe wrote that the only thing remaining was for the team's star quarterback to travel thousands of miles to play a meaningless, anti-climactic all-star game on a Hawaiian beach in February (BORGES 1998). Another commentator thought the Pro Bowl didn't amount to a passing thought in die-hard football towns such as New York, Denver, and Buffalo (EMMETT 1996). The timing was all wrong; the country

was “footballed” out after the Super Bowl, the NFL’s championship game. Most importantly, there was the reluctance of the athletes, themselves, to compete with any real enthusiasm or energy because of the fear of injury.

Andrea Kremer said much the same thing in an electronic column for ESPN’s Sportszone (KREMER 1998). “Here’s all you need to know about the Pro Bowl,” she wrote. “The league office sent out a memo recently to its head coaches reminding them to say only positive things about the game. In other words, don’t admit it’s a sham, a risk to players and that you question the value of it, anyway.” Kremer went on to call it the clearly most meaningless of the four major professional sports all-star contests. Joe Posnanski of the Scripps Howard News Service wrote that games of chess played under covered benches along Waikiki Beach were more Hawaii’s real sporting scene on Pro Bowl Sunday (POSNANSKI 1996). More recently, ESPN sports commentator Jim Rome argued that it was “time to take this dog (the Pro Bowl) out back and blast it once and for all” (ROME 2008).

To be sure, the National Football League’s Pro Bowl falls short in matching the attention, audience, revenues, and drama of the playoffs or even many regular season contests. It is anything but a meaningless game, however. As the formal conclusion to the professional football season, the NFL offers the Pro Bowl as a promotional spectacle designed to dissolve the violence, frustrations, and disappointments of a hard, physically grueling, emotionally draining season with a celebratory performance of athleticism and camaraderie in what is advertised to the world as a gentle, welcoming, paradise-like island. Held in Miami, Florida the week before the 2010 Super Bowl, the Pro Bowl will return to Hawai‘i in 2011 and 2012. The long-term future of the game in Hawai‘i, however, remains the subject of negotiations between the National Football League and the State of Hawaii. This paper examines the complex history of the game between 1980 and 2009 against the historical and contemporary contexts of ‘Oahu and the other Hawaiian islands.

A sellout every year but one since its move to Honolulu in 1980, the Pro Bowl has figured prominently in the State of Hawaii’s plans to revitalize the local economy through the promotion of sports and recreational tourism. The Pro Bowl’s link to tourism brings it into tension with a number of Native Hawaiian sovereignty groups seeking to reassert control over the land, other natural resources and the general government of the islands. No where is this tension, in both its contemporary and historical dimensions, more visible than around the actual site or venue for the Pro Bowl; namely, Aloha Stadium.

The stadium stands near the southern terminus of the H-3 highway, the most expensive stretch of federally funded road ever built in the United States. Constructed over a twenty-eight year period and at a cost of \$1.2 billion dollars, the 16.1 mile-long highway passes through the Koolau Mountains to connect the Kaneohe Marine Corps Base on the windward side of ‘Oahu with Pearl Harbor (ARAGON 1997). A large section of the road traverses Halawa Valley, an area associated with Papahanamoku, the goddess who gave birth to the Hawaiian Islands. Significant numbers of Native Hawaiians opposed the building of this highway because of the desecration and destruction of sacred sites within the area of construction. Equally telling is Aloha Stadium’s location within a half-mile radius of the military facilities and memorials serviced by the H-3 Highway on the Halawa Valley side;

these include the headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Command (CINCPAC) and Pearl Harbor with the Arizona Memorial and the U. S. S. Missouri. The location of the site at which it is played thus links the Pro Bowl with larger, complex histories of militarism and colonialism as well as that of tourism in Hawai'i. It is the Pro Bowl's connections to these histories of intrusion, violence, and disruption that I seek to explore in this paper.

Much has been written about the role of violence in sports from a sociological perspective. There is nothing subtle or hidden about the violence in professional football. Former professional football player Paul Zimmerman expresses little patience or interest for those who intellectualize or think too deeply about football and in so doing, deny or diminish the brutality of the game (ZIMMERMAN 1970). I am not so much interested in analyzing the violence of professional football as I am linking that violence with other and larger patterns of violence in Hawaii's past. The "aloha" in the title of this paper refers not to gentle Hawaiian greetings and appreciations for the artful, athletic and violent play of professional football. No, the "aloha" of which I write is a commercial construct that legitimates the commodification of Hawaiian culture. There is this kind of aloha - a highly commercialized aloha - for a sports performance that has generated considerable revenue within the state and whose televised broadcasts have promised more profit through the promotion of Hawai'i as a prime tourist destination.

### **Reading the Pro Bowl**

Nationalism, power and culture are issues that come into play in any critical assessment of the Pro Bowl in Hawai'i. How might we begin to link the Pro Bowl to these larger issues? Mark Dyreson proposes a different way of understanding the relationship between sports and nationalism, an approach sensitive to the ways in which sports can be made to serve explicit political purposes such as the formulation and promotion of a national identity (DYRESON 1998). Sports offers a vehicle for the development of a community, one of the fundamental requirements for the emergence of a nation. Participation in sports then, as either players or audience, provides access to an essentially political process. Dyreson's study of sport as a technology for the construction of a nation is focused on the period between the founding of the American Republic and the end of World War I. It would not require too imaginative an extrapolation to see an invitation to sports as a tool for assimilating the colonized into the metropolitan nation, for remaking them in the image and likeness of the colonizer, and with an acquired test for the colonizer's forms of play, entertainment, and amusement. Sports as a technology for nation making offers a partial understanding of how football in general, and more particularly the Pro Bowl in Hawai'i, might, among other things, promote the assimilationist agenda and cover the more disruptive features of the islands' colonization.

Related to a consideration of the role sports might play in nation building and colonization are issues of power and culture. John Hargraves situates sport within the

contexts of power and culture (HARGRAVES 1986). He writes about the ways in which sport is employed in the maintenance of a particular structure of power and social authority through society. Hargraves points out that power is diffuse in character and circulates through the social body; it can take different forms ranging from coercion to the simple withholding of an action or decision. Hargraves notes too that power relations are never total in their scope, or totally one way in their effects. Agents of power can never wholly predict or control the consequences of their actions or decisions. Indeed, the exercise of power over people can often bring about opposition and resistance. Here, then, is an analysis elastic enough to recognize that sports contests or performances can contain both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic statements. Despite disparities of power, a performance or game can have varying, even conflicting meanings and messages for different constituencies.

How then to read a professional all-star game deemed largely meaningless and insignificant by many but actually fraught with unsettling associations for the island on which it is played? Michael Oriard suggests approaching football as a cultural text (ORIARD 1993). A study of football as cultural text, argues Oriard, reveals that meaning does not reside exclusively with authors, readers, texts or contexts, but in the complex negotiations among all of these constituencies and factors. While the Pro Bowl may be meaningless to some, there are other, more local readings of its place and importance in contemporary Hawai'i and the deeper Hawaiian past. Borrowing from Oriard, I propose to read the Pro Bowl as a cultural text infused with deep, multiple, shifting, sometimes ambiguous and even contesting messages relating to colonialism, nationalism, identity, power, and history.

### **Red, White and “Blue Hawai'i:” The American Military in the Hawaiian Past**

The United States military looms large in the islands' past and present, and in the NFL's Pro Bowl too. Up to 25 percent of the land on 'Oahu is owned or controlled by the United States military, while military personnel and their dependents make up roughly sixteen percent of the island's population (FERGUSON & TURNBULL 1999). Military vehicles crowd Hawai'i's skies, waters, and highways. The names of military facilities such as Fort Schafter, Schofield Barracks and Pearl Harbor appear on freeway signs and as destination sites for city buses. There is a strong military presence in most public activities ranging from parades and holiday celebrations to such sporting events as the Pro Bowl. Military activities often fill local news broadcasts and newspaper pages. Roads such as the H-3 Highway are built and other public facilities fashioned with strong attention to military needs and usage; the demands of the military presence weigh heavily on Hawaiian resources. So prominent and pervasive is the military presence in Hawai'i that it has become normalized and unremarkable for most.

As Ferguson and Turnbull write in their *Oh, Say, Can You See: The Semiotics of the Military in Hawai'i*, there is a long and extensive history to the United States military's presence in Hawai'i. This history begins with United States naval vessels serving as bill

collectors for early nineteenth American merchants who had extended credit to Hawaiian chiefs in return for pledges of sandalwood and land. It includes the periodic visits of naval vessels throughout the nineteenth century to secure the goodwill of Hawaiian monarchs and to insure the property and welfare of American citizens living in the Hawaiian kingdom. An increasing American presence ultimately brought intervention and annexation. There was the deployment of 150 American marines in 1874 to quell protests following the unusual election of David Kalakaua as king over Queen Emma, widow of the previous monarch, Alexander Liholiho or King Kamehameha IV. In 1893, four boat loads of marines from the *U.S.S. Boston*, acting with the approval of the United States Minister to Hawai'i and in behalf of an American-dominated Committee of Safety, intervened in support of the overthrow of Lili'uokalani, the Hawaiian queen and successor to Kalakaua. In 1898, the United States officially annexed Hawaii.

Initially granted access rights to Pearl Harbor in 1886 under the terms of renewal for the Reciprocity Treaty with the Kingdom of Hawai'i, the United States Navy undertook the development of this most strategically advantageous of Pacific sites. The construction of a naval base commenced with the dredging of Pearl Harbor in 1900; formal opening ceremonies took place on 14 December 1911. The construction of other military facilities followed; Forts Shafter, Armstrong, DeRussy, Rugger, Kamehameha and Weaver, and the Schofield Army Barracks were all completed before the start of World War I. By the mid-1930s, the island of Oahu was now defended by, in the words of one military official, "a ring of steel, with mortar batteries at Diamond Head, big guns at Waikiki and Pearl Harbor, and a series of redoubts from Koko Head around the island to Waianae."

The Japanese attack upon Pearl Harbor and the outbreak of World War II in the Pacific would only enhance the military's presence in and influence over the life of the islands. Hawai'i was placed under martial law, and its civilian government subordinated to the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Area Command. The end of hostilities would not diminish the U. S. military's role in Hawai'i; that role continues into contemporary times and prominently so. The CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF HAWAII (2006) reports that military expenditures for 2005 amounted to \$5.2 billion and supported employment for approximately 125,000 state residents. These figures do not tell the whole story, however. Ferguson and Turnbull argue that the book keeping practices of state government and local businesses define "costs" in a very narrow sense, limiting it to certain kinds of financial data and excluding many of the of social, economic and environmental costs resulting from the military's presence in the state.

Sports is intricately bound to the twentieth century history of the American military and to the history of the American military in Hawai'i. Wanda Ellen Wakefield identifies America's rise to the status of imperial power in 1898 as the beginning of a long, slow, steady growth in the authorized strength of its armed forces (WAKEFIELD 1997). In the immediate aftermath of the crisis of 1898, military commanders came to realize that athletic competition built men by developing in them an aggressive and physical masculinity. Athletic competition came to be seen as a necessary component of training for leadership on the battlefield. Military commanders, in particular, began looking to athletics as a crucial

part of preparation for war. During World War I, intramural athletic competitions were engaged in by American troops as signs of their physicality and capacity for purposeful and directed violence. Later, when athletic competitions were staged between American and allied teams, American successes were seen as justifying the continued freedom of the United States military to operate under its own command. Americans used their athletic prowess to show the superiority of the style of sport played in the United States, and to reinforce the message that battlefield success was born of the masculinity developed through sport. By the end of World War II, sports competition and athletic training had become an integral part of military life.

At times, athletic training and competition could prove dangerous to the development of morale, camaraderie and national identity. While the U. S. military was still segregated, athletic competitions between groups of black and white soldiers threatened to divide the military from within. The challenge posed by feminism, particularly by the increased presence of women in the military, has only made more crucial for some the links between sports and masculinity. In the words of a book title, The Stronger Women Get, The More Men Watch Football (NELSON 1994). Amidst the dissent and division over the Vietnam war, sports, especially professional football's Super Bowl, advanced a type of focused, aggressive and nationally defined masculinity that sought to rally support for America's intervention in Southeast Asia. As Wakefield argues, the Super Bowl, during the Vietnam War years, provided an effective spectacle for the reinforcement of patriotism and for the then, much needed bolstering of the military's public image. This enhancement goes on. At Super Bowls, fighter jets fly high over the field prior to the commencement of the game; the national anthem is sung; red, white and blue are the colors of the day; and national unity is affirmed through a common focus on the game, itself.

The Pro Bowl, played in Hawai'i, continues the display of these same themes but in a different, more culturally complex, and historically troubled location. The intimate relationship between professional football and the military shows in the Pro Bowl Week festivities held at military facilities or in conjunction with military sponsors; in the flags that are parachuted into the stadium at the start of the game; in the patriotic and assimilationist themes that often mark the halftime show; and on the uniforms of players that are, in combination, red white and blue and that have printed above the numbers on the front of the jerseys those politically potent words "National" and "American" for the National Football Conference and American Football Conference all-star teams, respectively.

Consider too that before there was a Pro Bowl in Hawai'i, there was the Poi Bowl, a one-time only all-star game played on January 7, 1945 at the instigation of Admiral Chester Nimitz (KWON 1991). As a respite from the war, the game pitted a team of former collegiate and professional football players then serving in the Navy against a competing squad made up of Air Force athletes and local Hawaiian players. The game drew a largely military crowd of 300,000. Said one commentator; "Few civilians were in sight; the majority of them were the women friends of the officers." In its location, its patriotic themes, its heavy military associations, and its minimal inclusion of Hawaii's local population as either players or spectators, the Poi Bowl proved an apt precursor of the Pro Bowl.

The presence of military and patriotic themes is in evidence at each Pro Bowl, but can vary in prominence and emphasis from year to year. The 1991 Pro Bowl, for example, was especially notable for its strong show of support for Desert Storm as evidenced on the sidelines, in the stands, during the halftime show, and in the televised broadcast of the game itself (HONOLULU STAR BULLETIN, 4 February 1991, A1, HONOLULU ADVERTISER, 4 February 1991, A1). In the 1990s, the Pro Bowl also reflected the on-going national desire to bring closure to the Vietnam war and the myriad of issues associated with that closure, including survivors' benefits, the plight of former prisoners of war, and the fate of those still listed as missing in action. During the 1994 Pro Bowl, Derrick Thomas of the Kansas City Chiefs became the focus of both print and broadcast media; his relationship with a father he never really knew, a fighter pilot lost in the skies over Vietnam when Thomas was an infant, was narrated as a story of love, courage, heroism, Black family values, and an individual's triumph over adversity (KANESHIRO 1994). Near the core of coverage were also messages about racial, generational, and national reconciliation. More recent Pro Bowls have evidenced strong support for the war on terror and the invasion of Iraq, and with the added, not necessarily unintended effect of silencing or at least overriding other less comforting and less heroic histories in Hawai'i.

### **Native Hawaiian and Immigrant Histories**

There are other histories in Hawai'i of which the Pro Bowl is a part; histories of Native Hawaiians and of other peoples who came to Hawai'i in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; histories that resist easy incorporation into the heroic and nationalist visions of the nearby war memorial at Pearl Harbor or of Hawai'i as the fiftieth and Aloha State (DAWS 1968, KAME'ELEIHIWA 1992, KENT 1983, KUYKENDALL 1938, 1953, 1967, LINNEKIN 1997, OSORIO 2002). Disease emptied the lands of Native Hawaiians; 75% of the native population perished in the seven decades following first contact with the Western world in 1778. The Great Mahele, a division of land rights that began in 1848, disenfranchised the survivors in favor of foreign entrepreneurs who sought to use the land for more productive purposes. A series of statutes, passed in 1850, accelerated the change in land holdings and land usage.

One law gave commoners the right to receive private titles to their small holdings. A second allowed foreigners the right to buy, own and sell land in the kingdom. Another law made mandatory the payment of taxes in currency rather than in produce or pigs, thus forcing subsistence cultivators into the cash economy. As anthropologist Jocelyn Linnekin notes, these 1850 statutes "could not have been better designed to facilitate the demise of the Hawaiian subsistence economy and the growth of commodity agriculture. Hawaiians were free to sell their lands precisely as foreigners were able to buy them" (pp. 221-222). In short, the dispossession of Hawaiians from their land, by disease and legal statute, enabled the phenomenal growth of the sugar industry in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Masters and Servants Act, also enacted in 1850, provided for the importation

of foreign labor to work the sugar plantations now established on large tracts of these recently purchased lands.

Asia served as the principal source of labor for Hawaii's plantations. The Chinese were recruited first, with Portuguese enlisted as their overseers. There followed the recruitment of Japanese, Okinawans and Filipinos with smaller numbers of workers brought in from other areas of Europe and Asia. Hawai'i became an archetypal plantation colony controlled by "a white (*haole*) minority elite, tightly linked through intermarriage and the interlocking directorates" of the territory's five major corporations (LINNEKIN 1997). Paternalist policies and a system of deliberate ethnic stratification ordered and directed life on the plantations.

From this paternalist dominance and ethnic stratification emerged rhetoric that was both racialist and racist. During Hawai'i's territorial period, members of the white elite denigrated foreign workers and Native Hawaiians for their alleged flaws and failures while these same groups often stereotyped and maligned each other. Federal laws and regulations reified these racial and ethnic categories, thus reinforcing the emerging ideologies of racial separateness. The discourse of Hawai'i thus centered about the concepts of race and ethnicity, which were often used interchangeably, and was the product of a hegemonic system of racial and ethnic rankings and privileges.

World War II in Hawai'i would exacerbate, in many ways, tensions around the racial and ethnic ordering of life in the islands. The attack upon Pearl Harbor and the outbreak of war resulted in the imposition of martial law that trampled upon the civil liberties of all residents of Hawai'i. The burden was especially hard on people of Japanese ancestry who were the victims of plans contrived specifically to contain the "Japanese menace" through a program of surveillance, martial law and the internment of local community leaders (OKIHIRO 1991). By dint of their race, Japanese in Hawai'i were seen as enemy collaborators in a racial war for dominance in the Pacific between a white America and Imperial Japan.

Rooted in the hierarchy of plantation society, these stereotypes have carried over into recent times and help explain the persistence of ethnic tensions and antagonisms in contemporary Hawai'i. The push for statehood and the rise of tourism created a public ideology of interethnic harmony or "Aloha" supposedly based on Hawaiian notions of respect, affection, welcome and hospitality. This ideology serves to mask rather than replace suspicion, segregation, prejudice, and the histories that created them. The image of Hawai'i promoted by the state government and the tourist industry purposefully elides these local histories that grate against the potential for profit or image enhancement. Given its associations, the Pro Bowl becomes complicit with, even a part of, the governmental, commercial and military forces that would reduce Hawai'i and its past to the wrongful but useful image of a hospitable, welcoming, and harmonious paradise on earth.

The Pro Bowl in Hawai'i has taken place amidst an increasingly charged political environment in which the issue of sovereignty for Native Hawaiians resounds quite strongly. By one count, there are at least three hundred Native Hawaiian groups concerned with issues of autonomy, sovereignty and self-government (DESMOND 1997). Positions vary. While not all Native Hawaiians support sovereignty, a majority of Native Hawaiians



favors some form of restitution for the taking of native Hawaiian lands by U. S. interests and some form of Native government. Some urge a “nation-within-a-nation” structure, not unlike the model of government adopted by many Native American groups. This approach is embodied in proposed legislation currently before the United States Congress and known as the Akaka Bill. Others propose secession from the United States and the establishment of an independent government for Hawai'i. I am aware of no direct Native Hawaiian protest against the Pro Bowl. There have been, however, numerous and repeated protests by various Hawaiian groups against many of the institutions, entities and practices with which the Pro Bowl is linked; namely, the military, the tourist industry, the Hawaii state government, the construction of Aloha Stadium, and the H-3 Highway.

### **A Quick Tour of Tourism's History in Hawai'i**

The Pro Bowl intersects with tourist as well as military histories on `Oahu (DANKYI 1996, FARRELL 1982, FINNEY & WATSON 1974, KENT 1983). In the early decades of the twentieth century, Hawai'i served as a playground for only the very wealthy because of the time and money it took to reach the islands by luxury liner. The development of long distance commercial aviation helped make Hawai'i a more accessible and popular tourist destination. The stagnation of the sugar and pineapple industries gave rise to an economy dependent upon tourism and related land development. Tourism, in short, became a “new kind of sugar.”

From 1953 through 1991, visitor arrivals to Hawai'i grew at a nearly exponential rate (MINNERBI 1996). Total visitor arrivals had surpassed the one million mark in 1957 and, by 1990, approached the 7 million mark. Annual personal expenditures by visitors increased 71 times and the annual number of visitors 24 times between 1960 and 1990.

The Gulf War, periodic increases in airfares, the problems in various Asian economies, the aftermath of 9/11, and spikes in the price of oil have caused the number of visitors to Hawai'i to fluctuate over the last two decades (HAWAII VISITORS AND CONVENTION BUREAU 2000). The decline in visitors from Asia, who have accounted roughly for more than half of all tourists to Hawai'i since 1993, had a disproportional effect on tourist revenue as Asian visitors have tended to outspend and stay longer in Hawai'i than visitors from other destinations. Tourism rebounded in the period from 2003 to 2007 with 7,494,600 visitor arrivals in 2007 (BANK OF HAWAII 2009). The end of 2008 witnessed a drastic downturn in tourist numbers caused by the global financial crisis. Nonetheless, the travel and tourist industry continues as a vital source of employment and state tax revenue. Estimates suggest that tourism accounts for one-third of all jobs in the state, and more than a quarter of the gross state product and total tax revenue. The importance of tourism to the state economy and the repercussions of any long-term decline in that industry cannot be overstated.

The Pro Bowl, appreciated for its contributions since 1980, has become increasingly important to a state that looks to new forms of sports and recreational tourism to revitalize a vulnerable economy and its principal industry. In 1993, the State Department of Business,

Economic Development and Tourism, in conjunction with the Hawaii Visitors Bureau, sought to better market the Pro Bowl locally and maximize its impact on local revenues by developing a week of community-related and charitable events called "Hawaii Pro Bowl Superfest" (LYNCH 1993). The effort has paid off, it seems. Figures provided by the Hawaii Tourist Authority indicated that the 2006 Pro Bowl generated up to \$33.25 million in total spending, added \$3.25 in tax revenue to state and county treasuries, and brought more than 20,000 visitors from the North American Mainland to Hawai'i (UENO 2007). While these and other figures cited to underscore the importance of the game to Hawai'i's economy vary in consistency and exactness, the game is seen as valuable, even vital to the state's economy not only for the immediate income it provides but because of the advertising and imaging of Hawai'i as a national and international tourist destination.

To secure the Pro Bowl against the efforts of other communities on the Mainland such as Orlando, Florida, the State of Hawaii has had to pay, and increasingly, for the privilege. A 1997 deal between the state government and the NFL kept the game in Hawai'i through the year 2002 (ARNETT 1998). Under the less than clear terms of the deal, the State of Hawaii was required to provide Aloha Stadium rent-free to the NFL and to pay the league annual fees for the life of the agreement that began at \$2.5 million for the first year, and progressively increased thereafter over the life of the agreement. Whatever the actual merits of this deal, state officials were aggressive in their endorsement. Mufi Hanneman, then Honolulu City Councilman and chair of the State's host committee for the Pro Bowl, defended the agreement and the added payments required by the State; "Not in a million years could we compete with what they were able to offer. Orlando was offering big bucks, so we can't rely on just sun, surf and sand to keep the Pro Bowl". The State of Hawaii is reported to have paid the NFL a fee of \$4 million dollars to host the 2009 Pro Bowl; improvements to Aloha Stadium have also been required in recent years, and will most likely constitute a key feature of any agreement to return the Pro Bowl to Hawaii on a long-term basis (SHAPIRO 2009).

### **Imaging Hawai'i: Hula and the Pro Bowl's Halftime Shows**

The Pro Bowl not only figures into the economics of tourism, but into its politics as well and around the imaging of Hawai'i projected in advertisements for the game. The actual broadcast of the game is replete with lead-ins and close-outs that depict Hawai'i as an island paradise with its beautiful scenery, tropical climate and accommodating population. And there is the halftime show that often includes local bands, hula troupes and that stages a performance dissolving Hawaii's ethnic and cultural differences in favor of its place as one of the fifty states. The performative politics of the Pro Bowl were particularly evident during the 1998 halftime show.

Rows of hula dancers occupied the center of the playing field at Aloha Stadium. They were flanked on each side by a dozen lines of dancers in more modern garb. Dressed in brightly colored costumes designed to evoke the feel and spirit of a tropical playground,

these more contemporary dancers performed a combination of gymnastic movements and modern dance steps that prefaced the performance of hula at center field. The hula itself was a quicker, up tempo, more modern version called *auwana*. Toward the end of the hula performance and to the left of the rows of hula dancers, two close lines of marines moved into position carrying a large furled American flag. Upon signal, the further right of the two marine lines began running between the rows of hula dancers at once unfurling the large flag and covering the dancers with it. With the run of the marines complete, there now appeared at center field a large and full American flag. With the flag unfurled, there was then released a large pack of balloons to which was attached a sign that read in large capitol letters "ALOHA." The meanings of this halftime performance were neither subtle nor new. Hawai'i, land of aloha, of hula and of other distinct cultural practices, was nonetheless easily, willingly and totally subsumed by a larger America. The halftime performances at subsequent Pro Bowls have incorporated this cultural, political, and nationalistic blending.

The imaging of Hawai'i that takes place at the Pro Bowl's halftime shows is part of a well-established tradition of representing the islands as feminine, compliant, entertaining and submissive. The image most associated with Hawai'i is that of a beautiful woman, clad in a hula skirt, with soft dark eyes, a teasing smile, and supple, swaying hips that suggest if not promise sex. As Hawaiian nationalist, Haunani-Kay Trask has noted, the imperialist narrative in Hawai'i and elsewhere links soft primitivism and gender (TRASK 1999). Race is also a part of this imaging.

Jane Desmond has noted that tourist productions, such as the Pro Bowl's halftime show, depend upon unstated racializing discourses to produce the concept of "cultural" difference; the bodily presence of live hula dancers serves as a "guarantor" of this cultural difference (DESMOND 1997). Tourism in Hawai'i requires the display of natives in visual forms, be those visual forms printed material, televised broadcasts or live performances. Whether or not the dancers are actually Hawaiian - and often times they are not - they are nativized as "Hawaiian" through the visual and verbal structures of the performance. In the symbolic economy of tourism, Hawai'i becomes a place where "native" Hawaiians live and do native things, like hula. Desmond writes;

"The complex histories of immigration, colonialism and cultural change - involving early Polynesian voyagers; European traders; European and Euro-American missionaries and businessmen; Chinese, Japanese, Filipino and Portuguese plantation workers; U. S. servicemen; as well as more recent arrivals from Samoa, Tonga, and the U. S. mainland - are mostly left out of this symbolic economy. The result is a greatly simplified notion of 'Hawai'i' and 'Hawaiian'" (p.85).

Hawaiian cultural marketing is not wholly restricted to indigenous Hawaiian culture, however. At times, and on very specific occasions, the islands' diversity is touted, more specifically its multiculturalism. The halftime show for the 1981 Pro Bowl, for example, featured Hawaii's ethnic diversity with performances from various ethnic groups, including a Filipino troupe doing a bamboo dance (HONOLULU ADVERTISER, 2 February 1981, C5).

Though historically quite debatable, the notion of larger Hawaiian society as ethnically diverse but harmonious and accommodating has become a dominant ideology. Local discourse today characterizes Hawaii not as a melting pot but as beef stew or tossed salad; in this model, the different cultures or ethnic groups mix but retain their individual and separate identities. This emphasis on ethnic harmony finds reinforcement of late in a broader American ideology that continues to idealize, at least in theory, cultural diversity. As Jocelyn Linnekin writes, a more critical historical interpretation of race relations in Hawai'i might note that Hawai'i's relative peacefulness is based upon decisive power disparities (LINNEKIN 1997). Hawaiians were dispossessed and outnumbered, Asian migrant workers were barred from full citizenship, and the plantations structure set up strong barriers to interethnic alliances. The effects of this dispossession and discrimination have not gone away. While more often produced around Native Hawaiian cultural practices, the halftime performances at the Pro Bowl acknowledge, even endorse this idealized representation of diversity while avoiding any reference to histories that would contest or disturb it.

### **Other Stories and Histories on Display at the Pro Bowl**

A product of certain histories, the Pro Bowl has brought with it to Hawai'i other histories, stories and issues. On various occasions, the Pro Bowl has provided a forum for debates over racism, abortion, gender equity, the plight of the Afro-American family, drug usage in the NFL and larger society, and gay rights. Conversely, the Pro Bowl can engage with and affect more local debates and controversies. During much of 1997 and 1998, Hawai'i became a national stage for the debate over same-sex marriage. Opponents of same-sex marriage supported a referendum in the state's November 1998 elections calling for a constitutional amendment giving the state legislature the power to reserve marriage to opposite-sex couples only; the amendment was designed to prohibit the Hawaii Supreme Court from legalizing same-sex marriage, which it seemed poised to do. The referendum, which ultimately passed by a wide margin, attracted national media attention and national advocacy groups on either side of the question.

A prominent spokesperson for the Save Traditional Marriage group at the time was the late, twelve-time NFL Pro Bowler, Reggie White of the Green Bay Packers. White had filmed a short television spot urging Hawai'i voters to support the referendum against same-sex marriage (KRESNEK 1998). Foremost in the minds of those opposed to White's intervention was a speech he had given earlier in the year to the Wisconsin state legislature in which he called homosexuality "one of the biggest sins in the Bible." White's efforts drew considerable criticism from the local Protect Our Constitution alliance that favored the legal recognition of marriage between same-sex couples. Former State Representative Jackie Young said of White's televised message, "This isn't about letting the people decide, it's about political extremists coming into Hawaii, donating money and time . . . to argue an issue that is about basic civil rights, and dividing our community." A spokesperson for the Save Traditional Marriage group, Noelani Foster, responded in defense of White; "Reggie

feels a connection to the Islands since he's played in the Pro Bowl (at Aloha Stadium) for the last twelve years."

Still other, more locally focused stories are told, printed or broadcast during Pro Bowl week in Hawai'i. There are moral stories for local audiences about NFL athletes who overcame adversity, prejudice and disease to achieve all-star status. The most poignant stories are those about athletes who grew up in Hawai'i, perhaps played football at the University of Hawai'i, and have returned as all-star performers in the Pro Bowl by vote of their peers and coaches. Most of these local players are of Samoan ancestry; they include Jesse Sapolu, the late Mosi Tatupu, and the late Mark Tuinei. Their stories are particularly important to local audiences for the statements they make about worth, identity, being from Hawai'i, and negotiating and competing successfully with a much larger world while remaining local. And as Hawai'i tells its stories to a larger audience, so too does the NFL endeavor, through a careful, managed and annual public relations campaign, to appear as an appreciative and reciprocating guest through gifts to local charities and through the annual visits of Pro Bowl players to the Kapiolani Medical Center for Women and Children (SCHWARTZ 1998).

### **Localizing the Pro Bowl**

I have endeavored in this paper to describe an all-star football game whose presence and meaning in Hawai'i are complicated by the histories of colonialism, militarism and tourism in the islands. Conventional studies of the relationship between sport and ethnicity in North American history and culture have tended to focus on sport as a social and cultural institution through which various ethnic and racial groups have attempted to gain social and psychological acceptance, and cultural integration (EISEN & WIGGINS 1994). This approach, I believe, overlooks the ways in which that integration has remained incomplete. Hawaii's colonial history and the efforts of Native Hawaiians to secure sovereignty complicate any history of sports as a simple vehicle for cultural and political integration. Sports as a form of cultural imperialism or sports as promoting of community at both the global and local levels are tempting, if conflicting modes of analysis that fail to address the multiplicity of meanings, readings and histories that football has in Hawai'i (GUTTMAN 1994). Indeed, a critical reappraisal of the Pro Bowl in Hawai'i might want to include the histories of football in the state.

One of the most fundamental dimensions of the Pro Bowl's presence in Hawai'i involves the interaction of local ways of life with national or more globalizing forces. Rob Wilson has argued that the global, with its dynamic and deep flows of material, technological, ideological, and financial capital, threatens to overwhelm local communities and cultures, subsuming them into a homogenous world order that confuses, misrepresents and ultimately obliterates difference (WILSON 1998). Locales such as Hawai'i struggle to be acknowledged in all of their particulars and complexities, and against the forces of a global capitalism that have little interest or patience for true difference and diversity. Yet,

“Hawai`i is not,” as Wilson writes, “just a trope of the South Pacific. It is not just a primitive myth of eros or native essence, nor a backdrop for Tom Selleck or Jack Lord .... Hawaii is not just real estate; not just the site of ‘gee-ain’t-it-beautiful’ postcards and plumeria-laden love lyrics” (p.329). Hawai`i is not as it’s advertised, represented or understood by those who put on the Pro Bowl. Conversely, to understand the Pro Bowl in Hawai`i, it becomes necessary to better understand the Hawai`i in which it is played, and the histories that have preceded, made possible, and even challenge its playing.

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