Aloha America: Hula Circuits through the U.S. Empire

Adria L. Imada
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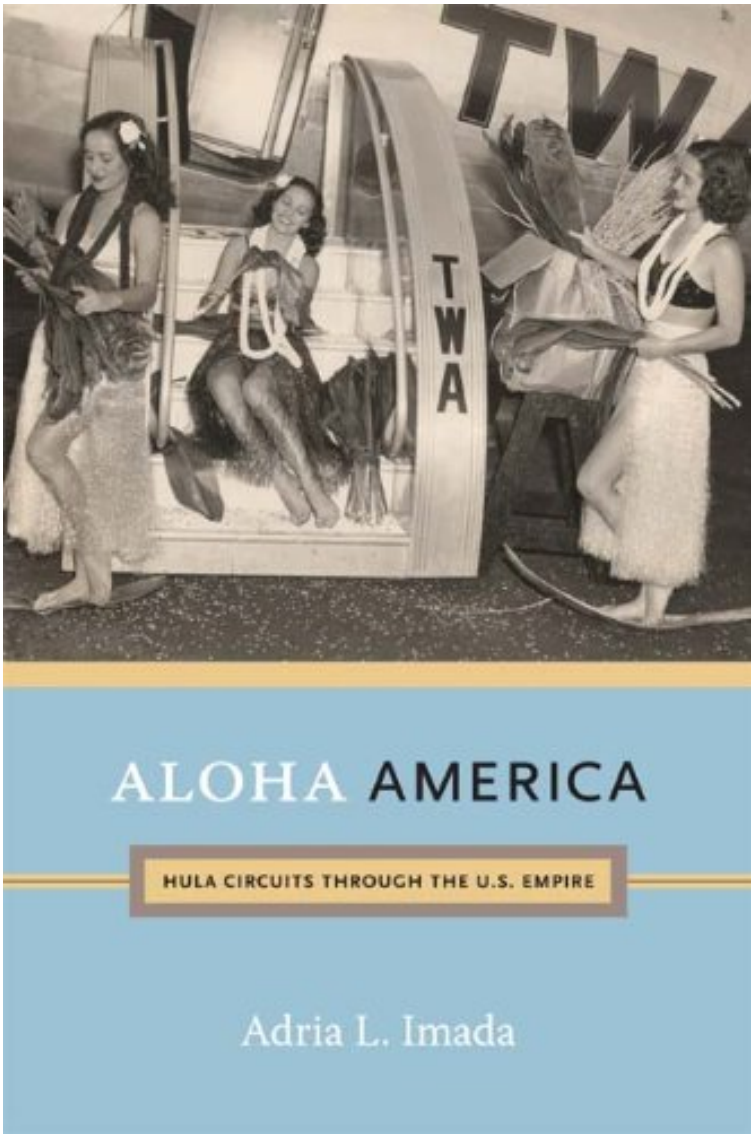

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Adria L. Imada : Aloha America: Hula Circuits through the U.S. Empire before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Aloha America: Hula Circuits through the U.S. Empire:

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"Aloha America: Hula Circuits Through the U.S. Empire" ldquo;examines U.S. imperial interests in Hawailsquo;i through the circulation of hulardquo; (pg. 5). Imada argues that performers ldquo;deployed kaona [veiled language] as a cultural and political resource in their colonial performances and travels; it served as a productive disguise for subtle and more dramatic political critiques and struggles against colonial incorporationrdquo; (pg. 18-19). Imada uses a large cache of personal records and mementos from traveling hula dancers throughout the twentieth century. Chief among these are the scrapbooks and private collections of Kini Kapahukulaokam?malu. Additionally, she draws upon the work and theories of Edward Said, James C. Scott, and Michel Foucault.Deploying the tools of cultural history in examining the early colonial period, Imada writes, ldquo;Culture was the terrain on which politics were argued, for Americans sympathetic to the U.S. annexationist cause treated Hawaiian cultural practices as indisputable empirical evidence of the political failures and inherent deficiency of Hawaiiansrdquo; (pg. 30). Of the Hawaiian response, Imada writes, ldquo;Hula kulsquo;i serves as an apt metaphor for the imaginative responses to change by Hawaiian performers. They were not passive recipients of Western ideas and products, but were flexible innovators who appropriated what they desired from the outside and blended it with the familiar to arrive at something novel and unexpectedrdquo; (pg. 45). As a subversive cultural product, ldquo;The hularsquo;s affiliation with sensational dime-museum and vaudeville fare helped to camouflage the inherently political content of the dance: a hidden transcript or kaona (veiled meaning) of the public script. Performing sacred and secular hula in tourist venues may have been a productive outlet for polsquo;e hula that had been under surveillance from missionary sonsrdquo; (pg. 73). Hawaiian performers maintained these anti-colonial themes during the period of annexation, even with non-Hawaiian influences in their work. Imada writes, ldquo;Hybridized forms of Hawaiian popular music after the overthrow were critical to public and hidden transcripts of resistance to U.S. colonizationrdquo; (pg. 124). In this way, ldquo;Hawaiians were incorporated into an expanding U.S. empire, but insisted on crafting paths for themselves as metropolitan pioneersrdquo; (pg. 151). Even after tourism became the dominant industry, ldquo;Hawaiian cultural practices were highly politicized, for whoever brokered the presentation of Hawaiian culture influenced Hawailsquo;i's political and economic futurerdquo; (pg. 154). The role of tourism cemented colonial images of Hawailsquo;i as a willing maiden for white tourists and officials, opening up the role of gender in imperialism.With her focus on female performers, Imada spends a great deal of time examining gender roles. She writes, ldquo;Hula was an intercultural strategy and a way for women practitioners to navigate between multiple worlds and positionsrdquo; (pg. 31). In terms of tourism, Imada writes, ldquo;The idea of Hawailsquo;i as a site of hospitality was owed to the already robust cultural imaginary produced during fifty years of hularsquo;s circulation in the United States, but World War II activated this idea fullyrdquo; (pg. 219). The government-organized hula performers represented one part of the sexualized entertainment available to soldiers (the other being legalized brothels staffed primarily by white women from the mainland) (pg. 221). Of these performers, Imada concludes, ldquo;At the same time Hawaiians were interpellated by the state as hosts, they were also working as critics, archivists, and producers of their own extensive collections. Through a reading of these alternative, if not oppositional, archives, hula performers can be seen reappropriated the militouristic [military tourism] gaze through their use and circulation of photographsrdquo; (pg. 250). Looking at modern hula, Imada writes, ldquo;Rather than altogether rejecting tourism, these performers savvily negotiate the seeming contradiction between Native self-determination and their participation in a market-oriented economy that has commodified their land, bodies, and cultural practicesrdquo; (pg. 262).

Winner, 2013 Best First Book in Women's, Gender, and/or Sexuality History by the Berkshire Conference of Women HistoriansWinner, 2013 Lawrence W. Levine Award, Organization of American HistoriansWinner, 2013 Congress on Research in Dance Outstanding Publication AwardAloha America reveals the role of hula in legitimating U.S. imperial ambitions in Hawai'i. Hula performers began touring throughout the continental United States and Europe in the late nineteenth century. These "hula circuits" introduced hula, and Hawaiians, to U.S. audiences, establishing an "imagined intimacy," a powerful fantasy that enabled Americans to possess their colony physically and symbolically. Meanwhile, in the early years of American imperialism in the Pacific, touring hula performers incorporated veiled critiques of U.S. expansionism into their productions.At vaudeville theaters, international expositions, commercial nightclubs, and military bases, Hawaiian women acted as ambassadors of aloha, enabling Americans to imagine Hawai'i as feminine and benign, and the relation between colonizer and colonized as mutually desired. By the 1930s, Hawaiian culture, particularly its music and hula, had enormous promotional value. In the 1940s, thousands of U.S. soldiers and military personnel in Hawai'i were entertained by hula performances, many of which were filmed by military photographers. Yet, as Adria L. Imada shows, Hawaiians also used hula as a means of cultural survival and countercolonial political praxis. In Aloha America, Imada focuses on the years between the 1890s and the 1960s, examining little-known performances and films before turning to the present-day reappropriation of hula by the Hawaiian self-determination movement.

"Attentive to global forces of U.S. imperialism and to the agency of discrete cultural producers, Adria L. Imada conceives of Hawaiian hula as constitutive of colonial relations involving collaboration and resistance. Moreover and

significantly, 'hula circuits' outside of Hawaii, she suggests, sustained Hawaiian culture (and hence nationhood) even as they transformed itmdash;an astute and provocative contention."mdash;Gary Y. Okihiro, author of Island World: A History of Hawairsquo;i and the United States