Introduction

There are many histories of Hawai‘i. But there are no assessments of the role that newspapers have played in that turbulent and contested history. Yet newspapers have not just recorded events since their inception in 1834, they have been active agents in shaping Hawaiian history. By newspapers, I mean publications with titles and mastheads, without covers, appearing serially and regularly on newsprint. The size and content vary, but newspapers are recognizable by their format and topical subject matter.

To understand the role of newspapers, one should consider them within their own historical context. They are a relatively recent development in our lives. In prehistoric times, we gained information from each other through signs and the spoken word. About 3,500 years ago, the written word became a source of knowledge. But only since the fourteenth century in Europe and the invention of movable print by the machinery of a “press,” have literate societies come to rely upon print as a chief means of communication. And only since the sixteen hundreds, as a direct outgrowth of the industrial revolution, has the newspaper become a major source of information (Smith 1979).

A remarkably mobile medium, newspapers spread from England to America in the seventeenth century. Adapted by printers in the colonies, and continuing in the new United States, that model entered Hawai‘i with the American Protestant missionaries from New England, who installed a printing press in a thatch-roofed house at Honolulu, O‘ahu, in 1822. In 1834, they produced the first newspaper at Lahaina, Maui. The American-style newspaper immediately took hold in the Kingdom, to coincide with and abet the rise of American domination of the Hawaiian Islands.

An assessment of them is all the more necessary because newspapers held an information monopoly from their inception to the last quarter of this century. Their sheer number is astonishing. Even though many holdings cannot be found, making an exact count impossible, there is evidence of more than 1,000 separately titled...
papers appearing in time frames from daily to monthly in at least nine different languages. Newspapers remained the primary communications medium until 1976 and the introduction of live television news by satellite. After 1976, the newspapers began to diminish in influence. Today they are a secondary source of information, but in their heyday, the newspapers of Hawai‘i formed one of the most diversified, vigorous, and influential presses in the world. They acted upon a unique history that unfolded in the world’s most isolated archipelago, a history that spanned an independent country, a republic, a territory, and a state.

The role of these American-style papers is complicated by what has been defined as an inherent doubleness (Hynds 1980). This dual role emerged in the colonies with James and Benjamin Franklin’s *New England Courant* (1721–1727) when the colonial government attempted through licensing to control what was printed. The Franklins refused to accept such limitations for two reasons: it was their duty to inform the public, and they needed to make a living. The first cause, of providing information, was so important that the framers of the U.S. Constitution guaranteed freedom of speech and the press in the First Amendment. This guarantee is grounded in the belief that a democratic society depends upon the participation of informed citizens. The second cause, less lofty in principle but important nonetheless, is that newspapers are a business. This is yoked to the Protestant ethic in which profit is viewed as a reward for the deserving, not just in heaven, but on earth. In Hawai‘i, both causes have undergirded and shaped the function of newspapers.

Categories of Newspapers

The significance of newspapers to Hawaiian history is partly attributable to their operating within certain boundaries. Although they have been enormously diverse, they have all fitted into just four categories: establishment, opposition, official, and independent. These groupings are flexible, for newspapers sometimes shift or overlap categories as their roles change in the context of their times (Chapin 1984).

Establishment papers make up the first and by far the most numerous type. Also called the mainstream or commercial press, establishment papers exemplify the controlling interests of a town or city, region or country, and need not represent the majority of people. Rather, establishment papers, such as large city dailies and
community suburban papers, are part of a power structure that formulates the policies and practices to which everyone is expected to adhere.

The American Protestant Mission introduced an establishment press to Hawai‘i (Day and Loomis 1973). Mission editors in the Hawaiian and English languages promoted American culture and values. Almost immediately after their arrival, members of the tiny group from New England became advisors to the Hawaiian monarchy. As the English language gained dominance through the century, so, too, did establishment papers in English gain even greater power. By the end of the century, an alliance of missionary descendants and haole (Caucasian) American business interests, operating as an oligarchy, backed by the American military, and aided and abetted by the oligarchy’s newspapers, overthrew the queen and the Hawaiian government representing the majority population.

The oligarchy’s press, Republican in politics and capitalist and expansionist in conviction, dominated into the 1950s. In 1954, when a Democratic coalition overthrew the Republican oligarchy, power spread into a multiethnic establishment. An ardent Americanism remains, however, now linked to the promotion of Hawai‘i as a Pacific leader. Coinciding with and abetting this are formerly home-owned papers that are now controlled by huge absentee corporations with global economic agendas. If it is a truism that the powerful write history, so, too, do they publish papers. Over two centuries, the establishment press has exercised the dominant influence upon the history of Hawai‘i.

Opposition is the second category of newspapers. A paradoxical quality of the American press is that it fosters dissent, as it did during the American Revolution with Tom Paine’s *Crisis* papers in 1776. An opposition or alternative press has been a major force in Hawai‘i over two centuries, beginning in the 1830s when Americans outside of the mission set up their own business-oriented journals. After midcentury, Native Hawaiians and their sympathizers, speaking for the indigenous culture, created a Hawaiian nationalist press that challenged and resisted American political and economic domination. Taking a leaf from the pages of American Revolutionary journalists, this press articulated the arguments for autonomy and sovereignty. Ahead of their time by a hundred years, the opposition was defeated at the end of the nineteenth century, illustrating how most opposition papers eventually are absorbed or driven out by a better financed and united establishment press. But their argu-
ments resurfaced in the late 1960s, to force discussion of sovereignty into the mainstream press and successfully modify the latter's opinion.

Other opposition newspapers include ethnic language and labor periodicals. Ethnic papers—Chinese, Portuguese, and Japanese before 1900 and Filipino, Korean, African American, Jewish, Vietnamese, Hispanic, and Samoan after 1900—in themselves present a wonderful paradox. An American establishment usually considers these to be in opposition simply because they appear in languages other than English or represent ethnic cultures. Their dual function, however, is peculiarly American: fostering assimilation into the new society while helping to preserve ethnic identity (Heuvel 1991). Labor papers have also played an important and paradoxical role by fighting for American ideals of social and economic justice for an underclass to bring them into the mainstream. Since the 1960s, an alternative press has produced underground and counterculture papers that have challenged and changed conventional American values. Alternative papers are integral to Hawaiian history.

Official papers make up the third category. These are sponsored by governments, whether the system is a monarchy, republic, territory, state, city, or federal. In the nineteenth century, Hawaiian kings sponsored newspapers to maintain their country's autonomy. In the twentieth century, government-sponsored papers issued from city hall and military bases continue to advance official views.

Independent papers, not allied to any special interest, compose the fourth and smallest category. Almost all newspapers trumpet their own independence, but in actuality editors and publishers seldom take positions contrary to those of their paymasters. Truly “independent” means no organizational affiliation that, in turn, means few financial backers and advertisers. Independent papers live short lives, except infrequently, like Ka Leo o Hawaii (1922–), the University of Hawai‘i student paper that is supported by student fees and protected by an independently appointed Board of Publications which hires the staff and then leaves them alone.

There are interesting hybrids. Prison papers, an American phenomenon dating from the early 1800s and beginning in Hawai‘i in the 1930s, have been produced within the establishment by those opposed to it. During World War II, an omnipresent military government enforced an all-encompassing censorship over all four categories of the islands’ papers; so in effect there was a single, powerful official press.
To summarize, over the years a majority of the newspapers in Hawai‘i, regardless of category, have been competitive business enterprises. They thus have filled the time-honored role of American newspapers: to publish the news, to interpret it and thereby influence public opinion, and to succeed financially (Salmon 1923).

Criticism of the Press

The dual nature of papers—that they are a public service, yet a business—has led to demands upon the press and expectations of it that have impacted the kind of influence newspapers wield. Those who produce newspapers usually consider press freedom to be absolutely essential. In the nineteenth century, both religious and secular journalists imported the Jeffersonian ideal of a free press and pressured the Hawaiian monarchy to similarly protect newspapers. The Kingdom’s Constitution of 1852 guaranteed freedom of speech. An establishment press, protective of itself, however, sometimes betrays the cause of press freedom. In the 1890s, Native Hawaiians, who had fervently adopted the Jeffersonian belief, learned a bitter lesson—the oligarchy’s press claimed freedom for itself but strenuously denied it to others. Besides distorting coverage or failing to report important events, this power elite brought the economic force of libel suits down upon the Hawaiian nationalist papers to silence them. Libel suits are still used to stifle dissent. As A. J. Liebling, a journalist and pungent critic of the press has said, freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one (Liebling 1961).

Another group has demands and expectations—the public that buys or is affected by the papers. Although there was public distrust of the press in the last century—a distrust of journalism that violated privacy, destroyed reputations, and emphasized sex and violence in its drive for profit (does all this sound familiar?)—in recent years, nationally and locally, media bashing has increased (Fishman 1980; Shaw 1984; Isaacs 1986). Public unhappiness led in 1969 to the creation of the Honolulu Community Media Council to mediate disagreements between the public and the press. Media bashing may be self-serving or genuine. Those who engage in self-serving media bashing try to deflect close scrutiny of their own actions; when they say they want a “fair” press, they usually mean a positive one toward themselves. But criticism may be genuinely levied by a public that feels that the press makes too many mistakes and has too few regrets over these. The public resents, too, what it perceives as its manipulation through “managed news” (Cater 1959; Tuchman
Today, few love the newspapers.

A Newspaper Technology
Another factor that must be considered in any assessment of the role of the press in acting upon history is technology (Mott 1950; Dunnet 1988). One view is that technology is not revolutionary or cataclysmic but a gradual progress, a response to social relations (Winston 1986). Hawai‘i, however, defies that interpretation.

A newer technology spectacularly disrupts and abrades an older one and drives it into niches and even oblivion. Before the outside world’s invasion of the Islands in the 1770s, Hawai‘i was an oral, memory-based culture with a nature-based religion and a barter economy dependent upon food yields from the ocean and land. Contact with the West ushered in printing and literacy, private property, competition, Christianity, money, and a market economy. Communications expert Harold Innis has said that print itself is the great colonizer and empire builder. Further, the “bias of communication” is that a technology changes our habits and modifies the structure and functions of the society we live in (Innis 1951, 1972).

Print combined with newspapers washed over the isolated Hawaiian Islands, forever modifying the ancient rhythms of life. In the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s, the adventurous American roving printer brought printing presses with him to try his luck at producing four-, six-, and eight-page papers. News and advertising gathering was a personal, leisurely effort for weeklies and monthlies. Woodcut engravings reproduced by lithography accompanied columns of print. The editor or printer, often the same person, set type by hand and manually operated the wood and iron contraption that in an hour cranked out 100 pages, which were then distributed by foot or horseback or by interisland ships to locations where buyers picked them up.

By midcentury, first a steam driven cylinder press, then the web-perfecting press, which printed both sides of sheets of paper from a continuous unwinding reel, increased the numbers of pages and sped up production (Mott 1950). A half dozen or more people were needed to turn out a newspaper. Within three decades, workers in this labor-intensive industry organized the International Typographers Union in 1884, the first trade labor union in Hawai‘i and a harbinger of future labor-management conflict. In the 1890s, typewriters, telephones, and electric cylinder presses sped up the response to the
breaking news and deadlines. The Linotype set hot lead type mechanically, and editions of 20,000 copies of ten- to sixteen-page papers could be printed in two hours. Newspaper production was now an industry employing a large work force divided into departments: business, including advertising and circulation; editorial; and production. A publisher oversaw the entire operation. The newspaper became a vehicle of the streets, with newsboys hawking papers in cities and towns.

In 1898, the news of annexation to the United States filled the front pages—and took seven days by steamship to arrive. Illustrating Marshall McLuhan’s point in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) and *Understanding Media* (1964) that technology is as revolutionary as political events, it was the Pacific cable five years later, in 1903, that physically linked Hawai‘i to the mainland United States and annihilated distance. Electronic circuitry instantly cut through ocean barriers, and international wire services closed the gap between Hawai‘i and the rest of the world. The numbers of newspapers substantially increased on the major islands.

Another transported American invention, mass advertising, was made possible by a newspaper technology. By the 1900s, advertisements filled 60 percent of a newspaper’s space and provided the bulk of its revenue. From 1913 on, the Audit Bureau of Circulation compiled accurate figures so that businesses could contract for advertising space based on actual, not on fictitious or merely hopeful, estimates. Since World War II, immense amounts of advertising have created the 100-page-plus editions. Papers appear today that are void of editorial content and are given away [Brandsberg 1969]. Is the Shopper or the Penny Saver the truly “free” newspaper?

A more recent contrivance is linked to advertising and marketing and has a direct influence on the public. A joint operating agreement reached in 1962 by Honolulu’s two major dailies has allowed them to centralize business and production services through the Hawaii Newspaper Agency. “Marketing strategies” yield a product whose content is 70 percent advertising to 30 percent editorial; that is, news, features, cartoons, letters, and everything else besides ads. The product is marketed and zoned for delivery by van or air [Thorn and Pfiel 1987]. So central is advertising that a noted historian of journalism, Ernest C. Hynds, states that a primary goal of newspapers today is to foster development of the nation’s economy through advertising [Hynds 1975, 1980; Udell 1978].

Another revolutionary invention is the camera. Linked to news-
papers, photojournalism is the branch of photography that uses the camera to record and report events as they happen [Fulton 1988]. Photojournalism was introduced in the Islands by the Advertiser in 1900 and eliminated the laborious lithograph method that depended on an artist’s rendition. Social analyst Susan Sontag assesses photography’s influence on us as so enormous that it has replaced our looking at things directly and has become the way we “see” [Sontag 1973]. Photography has had another impact. Since the 1960s, increased use of photo-offset, a relatively inexpensive process that creates pages by indirect image transfer, has enabled the smallest to the largest enterprise to produce a newspaper more cheaply and quickly.

The time it takes for an older technology to be overtaken by a newer one has rapidly narrowed. In the 1970s, the computer and “cold type” virtually killed the old hot lead technology: “Look Closely—You Won’t See it Again” [Adv., July 30, 1973]. Reporters produce copy at video display terminals (VDTs), and editors send this to the presses that turn out 100,000 copies of 40-, 50-, or 100-page editions in two to three hours. Wire press and syndicated material enter directly into the computer. At the center of the plant’s operation is the central processing unit (CPU).

May 9, 1976, is a crucial date. That is when the news was first beamed to Hawai‘i by satellites 22,300 miles above the equator. Communication within the envelope of global space is pushed to outer space. A global information network encompasses Hawai‘i. The papers receive 1,000 words a minute of stock market lists or sports box scores. A full page including headlines and pictures transmitted by satellite can be set in six minutes [Emery 1975].

The Future?
Will there be a newspaper in the future? If there is, what will it be like? Those who produce papers assiduously target the young in hopes that Jessica and Johnny, Lani and Kimo will grow up buying the papers. Many papers have moved toward easier reading: shorter headlines and sentences, larger type, more white space and color. Their emphasis is on entertaining the reader. But the young prefer the experience of television.

Instant information has led to a decline in household penetration by the papers. Today, 97 percent of the Islands’ households have television, yet newspaper circulation remains at 1970s and 1980s levels, reaching roughly 20 percent of the Islands’ households. The precarious existence of newspapers is widely acknowledged.
The afternoon paper in particular is an endangered species, not only unable to directly compete with the evening broadcast news, but no longer able in many traffic-choked cities to be home delivered (Benjaminson 1984). The family- or individually-owned newspaper is almost an artifact of the past. At the end of World War II, 80 percent of daily newspapers were independently owned. By the 1990s, 80 percent were owned by corporate chains. Presently, national and international media groups control more than 70 percent of daily circulation in the United States, and daily papers directly compete with one another in fewer than 5 percent of U.S. cities.

There is another competitor for the public’s interest and money besides radio and television, the “international electronic superhighway.” Gannett, a major player in Hawai‘i, sees itself as a total information company rather than just a newspaper corporation. It is actively fighting the telephone industry’s involvement in the electronic information business. Other newspaper companies are pouring development dollars into multimedia presentation formats and the “electronic newspaper.” Multinational companies may eventually control the communications systems of the entire world (Shawcross 1992). Centralized “news management” and control of information by huge corporate media companies with direct lines into government may make the old questions of “press freedom,” not to mention democracy itself, seem quaint and antiquated (Bagdikian 1990).

Newspapers today are produced by a fraction of their formerly large work forces. Gone are the days of the grime of printer’s ink, the smoke of charred mats and hot metal, and the clacking and clamor of the print shop. The old Linotype is a museum piece—literally so in the Honolulu News Building on Kapi‘olani Boulevard. The new technology is quiet and clean, like the laser system in place at the Maui News, the most technologically advanced of the Islands’ newspapers.

Soon to be gone, according to photographer Terry Luke, are the darkroom, film, and prints (Luke 1993). The photojournalist once carried the Speed Graphic and his equipment on his shoulders, then adopted a more handy, lighter 35-millimeter camera. Electronic cameras now send images directly from the scene of the event to the newsroom and the production department and onto the press. Digital imaging systems make manipulations so easy that one cannot tell if the “photo” is a composite, heightening the public’s suspicion of the newspaper product.

The electronic age is restructuring the patterns of our personal
lives and social interdependence (McLuhan 1962, 1964; Smith 1980b). History professor and journalist Dan Boylan points out that leisurely reading of the morning paper at breakfast is almost an action of the past (Boylan 1992). Conversations no longer begin with, “Did you see in the paper?” Jeanne Fujikawa, who works at city hall, describes how she and her husband at the end of their work day, between picking up the children from school, juggling their after-school activities, and shopping for dinner, barely have time to catch the evening television news (Fujikawa 1992). In fact, there are journalists who themselves admit to no longer reading the entire paper but only their own stories.

There is another more positive vision, however, that views Hawai‘i as a center of information and information processing—a sort of electronic Pan-Pacific dream. Electronic circuitry gives us the “breaking news” or what is happening. Newspapers, still the source of hometown news and advertisements, document in detail what has happened. The customer may call up the paper for global or local information in print and on the computer screen.

Jim Dooley, Hawai‘i’s highly respected and best known investigative reporter since the mid-1970s, uses “computer assisted reporting” to glean research on computer tape and views Hawai‘i as “a journalism laboratory.” “The stories can’t run away,” Dooley states (Dooley 1993). The newspaper is still the memory of the community. That memory keeping is still alive to report the details of Saturday’s football game, complaints about government officials and the city transit system, births, and obituaries—the last, in veteran newsman Charles Frankel’s words, capsule histories of Hawai‘i’s people (Frankel 1993).

I would like to suggest another influence. In 1976, the year that Hawai‘i is projected into the information space age, newspapers chronicle the older, oral Hawaiian culture. Even as the satellite evening news flashes the event before us, the papers record for history the stunning achievement of Hōkūle‘a, the Polynesian voyaging canoe that has navigated, without instruments, over the open ocean between Hawai‘i and Tahiti, as Hawaiians had a thousand years earlier. The newspapers thus continue to document the stubborn persistence of “Idols of the Tribe”—our identification with our origins since we first evolved as humans: our body types, names, kinship, place, language, history, religion, and nation (Isaacs 1975). One recalls that print itself, even as it is used in computers, bears ethnic identification: Roman, Gothic, Egyptian, Arabic, Venetian, Dutch, Italic.
The Shape of This Study
My goal has been to chart how Hawai‘i’s newspapers have helped shape major historic events in the Islands from their introduction by American missionaries to contemporary times and how the newspapers have largely been in the service of and promoted American ideals and practices. The selections here are just that—selections of events in which newspapers played a significant or a typical role. There are, of course, many others. Nor is there an absolute way to separate or quantify a paper’s effect from the variety of other influences with which it exists (Strentz 1989). “News” implies immediacy. Influence, however, may be subtle, indirect, cumulative, even unintended.

Nevertheless, there are only so many kinds of stories that newspapers print: human interest, exposés or moral disorder, hero stories, “gee-whiz” or surprises, role reversals (Stephens 1988). I have chosen from among these a range of topics about which the public repeatedly shows a strong interest: land and development; education and schools; churches and religion; money, business, and labor; crime and the law; family and health; government and politics; race, class, and gender; sports and entertainment; war and censorship. I have also looked at placement, which is almost as important as content. Did coverage appear on the front page above the fold in the most eye-catching place in the upper right-hand corner? Or was the story or photo assigned to an inside page? What did the “cutlines” or captions for the photos say? Just as critical, why were there no reports or only distorted coverage of an important event?

I believe that even though we exist in a global community, it is premature to write off newspapers. As Advertiser executive Ann Harpham states, there will always be a need for a local paper (Harpham 1992). And the newspapers are the only retail service delivered daily door to door. Our parochial desire for information is as deep as ever. What movies are playing? What’s on sale this week in the stores? What government agency is being investigated for wrongdoing? Who’s ahead in the mayor’s race? Is the milk that our children drink contaminated? New papers still surface, such as gay-lesbian journals, as well as three papers on the island of Moloka‘i alone in the 1990s. Some are even successful, like the nicely named establishment Downtown Planet (1979—), the alternative African American Mahogony (1988—) and Honolulu Weekly (1991—), and the specialist Sports Hawaii (1994). The newspaper remains the first rough draft of history.