

COPYRIGHT NOTICE
Diamond/American Aloha

is published by University of Hawai'i Press and copyrighted, © 2008, by University of Hawai'i Press. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher, except for reading and browsing via the World Wide Web. Users are not permitted to mount this file on any network servers.

Introduction

During the last week of June and first week of July 1989, a visitor to the National Mall in Washington, D.C., could have been transported to some intriguing destinations, including the Caribbean, the Great Plains, the Mississippi Delta, and the American Pacific. That year, the thirteenth annual Festival of American Folklife (FAF; renamed the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in 1998) juxtaposed four programs: French traditions in America, the Caribbean, Plains Indians, and Hawai'i. The French and Caribbean programs honored the two-hundredth anniversary of the French Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man. The Hawai'i program marked the thirtieth anniversary of Hawai'i's transition from a U.S. territory to the fiftieth state. Twice the size of the other programs, the Hawai'i site was located across the Mall from the Plains Indians and French sites. In between stretched a buffalo pen and a lacrosse field as well as booths in which recordings and crafts relevant to all the programs could be purchased.

The Hawai'i program was alluring and memorable. Festivalgoers wandering through might have watched a *hula* performance; listened in on a miked discussion about tourism or *'ukulele* music styles on the porch of the store; salivated over island foods being prepared; talked to craftspeople making feather *lei*, a canoe, or a quilt; learned about Hawaiian *paniolo* (cowboys); caught some Hawaiian slack-key or Puerto Rican *katchi katchi* music; and watched a Korean masked dance. Depending on when they arrived, festivalgoers might have been lucky enough to catch a glimpse of the magnificently flower- and fabric-bedecked *pā'ū* riders in the opening parade or gotten a mouthwatering whiff of roast pig as a group of men unearthed an *imu* (underground pit). On any given festival day around 3:00 P.M., they might have joined in with various Hawai'i residents and Festival visitors answering the call to participate in a Japanese *bon* dance. All that was missing was the

ocean, and there were net-throwing demonstrations and canoe building to evoke even that.

The SFF is staged annually in America's most public physical site—the Washington, D.C., Mall—by the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (CFCH; formerly the Office of Folklife Programs) in conjunction with the National Park Service. The Festival was originally the idea of James Morris, director of Museum Services and later of the Division of Performing Arts, and was developed under its first director, Ralph Rinzler, with the strong support of Smithsonian Institution secretary S. Dillon Ripley.¹ Each summer, the Festival presents folklife to throngs of domestic and international visitors on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., for ten days during a two-week period that extends over the July 4th holiday. It is free to the public and claims to host approximately a million domestic and international visitors each year. Most years the SFF juxtaposes three or four simultaneous programs.

According to CFCH director Richard Kurin, the Festival was founded as an addition and alternative to the national museums, as “a way of telling the story of the diverse peoples who populated the nation but whose cultural achievements were not represented in the museums or their collections” (Kurin 1998, 54). On the other hand, the SFF is, in large part, constructed and operated according to museum precepts. Since its inception in 1967, the SFF has problematized static notions of tradition and heritage by defining folklife as dynamic, inclusive, and contemporary. As its rhetoric reveals, the SFF is at heart a scholarly endeavor created by professional folklorists with a social agenda. Its goals, as stated on the SFF website, are to celebrate cultural diversity and to advocate cultural conservation (SFF 2005). It does much of this work through fieldwork-based research that identifies culture bearers and offers public presentations and interpretations of their cultural contributions. The diversity it constructs is shaped by the complexity of folklore studies precepts and not solely on the ethnic categories invoked in most American multicultural venues; rather, the SFF's vision of diversity juxtaposes communities—occupational, regional, and ethnic—that are marked by shared values, beliefs, experiences, practices, and so forth. These SFF “communities” are most often represented through aspects of their expressive culture, specifically music, dance, foodways, and material culture. Occupational and ethnic groups have generally been organized and framed according to state and/or region while thematic programs, such as those on cultural conservation, have served to establish common threads between cultural groups. Using multiple modalities

to achieve its educational goals, the SFF defies convenient categorization and invites, yet baffles, theorizing. It contains aspects of the zoo, museum, theme park, carnival, concert, community center, and traveling theater. Presented on national sacred ground and incorporating sacred ritual, it often takes on a hallowed and reverential aura. It might be argued that what it least resembles is an actual festival, if one were to define festivals as “collective phenomena” serving “purposes [that] are rooted in group life” (Stoeltje 1992, 261).

The SFF blurs the boundaries of both museum and tourism presentations that rely on clear demarcations between viewers and viewed. It uses a conversational model that is grounded in a concept of hosts and guests while avoiding the rhetoric of tourism. Performers, in the role of hosts, are referred to as “participants,” while tourists are called “visitors.” An idealistic, innovative, populist-based experiment in cultural democracy, the SFF brings culture from the margins to the nation’s symbolic center, where it sets the stage for dialogue between the visitor and the cultural practitioner presumably coming from, and therefore representing, different walks of life. Its exhibition space is designed with permeable boundaries that encourage interchange between participants and visitors. In Washington, D.C., it also seeks to enable conversations among the national museums, politicians, and communities. Notwithstanding these efforts to break down the barriers and hierarchies of museum representation, the Festival is also laden with museum interpretation in the form of themes, site design, presenters, signage, program books, and media coverage.

The SFF comprises many of the contradictions inherent in American cultural ideals and politics. Organizers claim a lineage based in American populism and New Deal projects and objectives (Bronner 2002, 42–45). They view its concept and production as an intervention in cultural homogenization and as a subversive enactment of American democratic ideals designed to “scare away [the] evil” of cultural intolerance (Kurin 1998, 48–51). At the same time, it is subject to corporate funding, local governments, special interest groups, and the whims of changing administrations as they impact arts and museum funding. These tensions permeate the Festival. The SFF expresses the highest ideals of cultural diversity and tolerance, and many cultural groups and practices that are otherwise undervalued are valorized at the SFF. However, if visitors do not get below the celebratory surface, American (and international) pluralism can be absorbed as a benign, cohesive, and de-politicized fact that belies the actual histories and socioeconomic circumstances of many of

the represented groups. The Hawai'i program's construction and performance teetered on this dilemma.

The central focus of this book is a critical view of the poetics and politics of festival making as seen through an ethnographic history of the 1989 Hawai'i program at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, D.C. By making the underpinnings of this event transparent, this account sheds light on the linked themes of public sector folklore culture brokering, cultural tourism, ideas about multiculturalism, the role of tradition in national image making, and the impact of cultural intervention on local communities. What does the fact that the largest national tourist event in the United States is devoted to educating the public about traditional culture say about the construction of a national image and the valuation of tradition in the national imagination? On another level, this study highlights the process behind an event that is generally viewed as simply a performance. It looks at who orchestrates this annual event, how it is constructed, what happens behind the scenes, how participants engage the frames of performance, and the long-term effects of such a production. Finally, this book raises important questions about the stakes surrounding the politics of tradition and multiculturalism and emphasizes the importance of looking critically at how peoples and places are represented through cultural agencies.

By turning a critical lens on the processes of cultural intervention, this study delves into the role of "culture brokers" and the impact of "cultural intervention" in the politics of representation. Folklife festivals are cultural interventions in that they shape and mediate culture, and they are staged by culture brokers—public sector culture workers who operate between ethnographic subjects, sponsoring agencies, the media, and the public. Ironically, the business of successful culture brokering depends on invisibility as opposed to transparency, and this may be why most of the material available on culture brokering is generated by culture brokers themselves (e.g., see Kurin 1998; Baron and Spitzer 1992; Sommers 1994; Baumann 1992). That the efficacy of folklife festivals as a tool of cultural conservation and public awareness is contested is clear from the self-reflexive writings of culture brokers. For example, in 1980 two folklorists who were actively involved in staging folklife festivals published an article titled "Six Reasons Not to Produce a Folklife Festival" in which they stated that "folklife festivals (which require enormous amounts of money to produce) do not create the widespread public knowledge and sensitivity that they are intended to create, and thus do not work to solve the social and cultural problems they are intended to

solve” (Camp and Lloyd 1980). Richard Kurin, director of the CFCH, replied to these and other critics in his 1998 book, *Smithsonian Folklife Festival: Culture Of, By, and For the People*. These interchanges have created a lively debate, but one conducted mostly among insiders who are invested in the business of culture brokering. They testify that fieldwork, ethnography, and representation methods have evolved to incorporate self-reflexivity and professional ethics, but some scholars insist that this is not enough to ensure that folklife festivals actually accomplish what they claim to do.

Critics of cultural intervention practices in general have interrogated the ethics of fieldwork practices of the past, demonstrating that cultural intervention has not always had happy consequences and has often served the interests of sponsoring institutions over those of culture bearers and their communities (Whisnant 1983; Filene 2000). By looking at long-term outcomes, these views of the past reveal that there are sociopolitical factors implicated in cultural intervention and public representation of folklife that cannot easily be addressed through improved fieldwork ethics and more sensitive interpretation. What they emphasize in particular is that when culture brokers have dealt with culture in isolation from politics, both cultural expressions and communities have been misrepresented. They also suggest that drawing public attention to folklife can result in ethnographic subjects being in a position of increased vulnerability to various forms of appropriation and exploitation, from aestheticization to commodification.

Culture brokering, especially at the national level, is not disconnected from hegemonic institutions and nationalism. Robert Cantwell has argued that “a folklife festival . . . reframes folk culture as an element of a legitimate, polite, or elite culture typically under the auspices of institutions representing those interests” (1992, 263). In 1989, the year of the Hawai‘i program, a pitched battle was being fought in Congress over National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) funding for allegedly blasphemous and obscene art. Despite its genesis as a disruption of the museums and a challenge to cultural homogeneity, in contrast to debates over provocative artworks challenging the status quo, the SFF appeared a virtuous (read: conservative and politically safe) endeavor. After all, its emphasis was on cultural conservation within a frame of national unity.

Folklife festivals are embedded in politics, and the liberal goals of the SFF to subvert cultural elitism and hegemony are always in danger of being co-opted by conservative causes that see tradition as a stable

alternative to real political change. In an edited volume on cultural conservation published in 1988, David Whisnant was the lone critic calling for culture brokers to pay attention to the dangers of state appropriations of tradition. He advocated “tougher politics” to counter public sector folklore’s tendency to flatten and gloss over socioeconomic disparity and political conflict and warned that “it appears to be a characteristic of modern times that the imperial flag is so regularly and so firmly planted in the midst of the territory called tradition” (1988, 244–245). He echoed earlier observations that traditions cannot only be invented, but are often appropriated in the service of a dominant narrative (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1984).

The Festival represents “tradition.” In a mercurial global culture-scape dominated by media and movement, tradition is often either posed against the modern (by modernists) or invoked as a stay against change, a constant in a shifting world (by traditionalists). From a modernist perspective, the terms “tradition” and “traditional” are often used dismissively to connote resistance to innovation (Williams 1983, 319). Contrarily, these same terms are often used nostalgically and reverentially by those who see society changing for the worse and who romanticize tradition as an alternative (Bauman 1992, 31). Although “tradition” is still commonly used to imply static, unchanging, conservative, and even outdated cultural relics, folklorists have come to understand tradition as something much more fluid, as both cultural product and the processes through which it is created, transmitted, altered, and put to use. In folklore parlance, ideas about tradition have evolved away from a “view of tradition as a cultural inheritance rooted in the past” and toward an understanding of “tradition as symbolically constituted in the present” (Bauman 1992, 31). These conflicting views were a critical part of the negotiations in the 1989 Hawai‘i program.

So why foreground tradition in a national festival? In part, the Festival puts the Smithsonian’s abuses of the past to right. The history of ethnographic spectacle in the United States implicates the powerful Smithsonian in a number of endeavors that showcased the traditional practices of people considered cultural outsiders in ways that emphasized Anglo-Saxonist and social Darwinist ideologies. For example, the Smithsonian Bureau of Ethnography was involved in turn-of-the-century World’s Fair exhibitions where Native Americans and residents of the Philippines were exhibited and studied as ethnographic specimens, and “tradition” was used to demonstrate degrees of savagery to barbarism. The SFF cleanses this past by presenting a paradigm of cultural

democracy and pluralism in which multiple belief systems and cultural practices are publicly recognized as significant and beautiful, and community stories are told as valuable parts of the national story.

Significantly, the SFF is the brainchild of professional scholars who study tradition. “In the approximately 150 years since the discipline began, folklore has been based in the study of tradition” (Sims and Stephens 2005, 64). Because traditions create and confirm identity for small communities, it makes sense by extension that traditional culture has been construed as an important component in national identity. Traditional culture—such as heroic legends, foodways, holidays, and material culture—has historically been the raw material of an American national image (Bronner 2002, 3–78). While academic views have changed from an emphasis on locating/creating a unifying American folklore to an appreciation of the diversity of folklore in America, and academic, national, and vernacular definitions and evaluations might disagree on what it is and its value, discussions of tradition have remained central to paradigms of American culture.

The politics of tradition and authenticity take a different spin in the Pacific, where they converge in post-colonial debates over ownership of culture, authenticity, identity, and sovereignty. In Hawai‘i, many of these issues have crystallized around ethnography and tourism sites in which representation of culture has historically been done by outsiders. Following the leads of Maoris in New Zealand and Native Americans in the continental United States, Native Hawaiian activists have asserted their right to interpret their culture from an insider perspective alongside their ownership of cultural properties tangible and intangible. In some cases this has led to heated internal and external disputes over authenticity and cultural invention (Jolly 2000, 274–329; Trask 2000, 255–263; Keesing 2000, 232–254).² The year 1989 was an important midpoint in this politicization process: an active Native Hawaiian movement was in progress, Hawai‘i had a Native Hawaiian governor, and 1988 had been declared the Year of the Hawaiian. The Hawaiian sovereignty movement gained momentum immediately after the Hawai‘i program and its local restaging in 1990. It made headlines and major news coverage in 1993 when a conglomerate of Hawaiian organizations staged a public reenactment of the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy on the grounds of the former royal residence in Honolulu.

Despite the Festival’s flexibility and adaptability, the presentation of Hawai‘i posed unique questions and logistical problems. Hawai‘i is both within and outside mainland America—geographically and cultur-

ally.³ It is strategically situated midway between the continental United States and Asia. It has an independent past as a sovereign nation and an incorporated presence as the fiftieth state. Its multiculturalism is distinct from that of the mainland due to a continuous occupation by its indigenous population, its location as a mid-Pacific crossroads, its colonial legacy, and the distinctive histories of immigration and commerce in the islands (Kent 1983). Many immigrant groups from Asia and elsewhere in the Pacific retain strong transnational identifications and affiliations and, as a result, hold definitions of tradition that conflict with the academic and continental rhetoric of the CFCH. It should be no surprise that Pacific and continental U.S. multicultural paradigms collided in the Hawai‘i program.

In addition to its cloudy political history vis-à-vis the continental United States, Hawai‘i holds a unique position in terms of the American imagination. Hawai‘i has functioned as a gendered, eroticized, and primitivized playground for continental America (Desmond 1999).⁴ Hawaiian cultural products—music, dance, dress, food, and language—have been exported to other destinations where they have been enjoyed, desired, appropriated, misinterpreted, and consumed. Both Hawai‘i the tourist destination and Hawaiiana are the stuff of imagination and desire. Ironically, presenting Hawai‘i in the Folklife Festival’s terms of traditionality required unpackaging the imagined Hawai‘i to assert and reinvent a more “authentic” version of the “real Hawai‘i.” In other words, rather than conceptually packaging Hawai‘i to import tourists, state and national culture workers aimed to divest Hawai‘i of its slick, manufactured image, reinvent it according to its self-definitions, and pack this new/old version for export to the mainland. Additionally, these efforts had to accord with state and national parameters while navigating the potentially volatile 1980s politics of cultural identity in Hawai‘i.

This book first contextualizes the Hawai‘i program within the history of cultural intervention in Hawai‘i. The first chapter traces the history of institutional intervention in traditional arts in Hawai‘i. The Smithsonian project in 1988–1989 fit into ongoing negotiations over ethnographic authority. At the end of the monarchy, traditional arts were politicized and collected as a way of establishing a record of indigenous civilization in relation to nineteenth-century ideals held by European powers. Native arts were subsequently suppressed under the territorial government, only to be encouraged as tourist fare. Beginning in the 1920s religious institutions and national and local government have played a critical role in shaping ethnic identity by sponsoring eth-

nographic studies and cultural revivals. Since the 1960s collaborations between the HSFCA and the NEA have established programs for cultural conservation based on assessments of traditional culture as both valuable and endangered. While the usual purpose of officially sponsored cultural intervention has been cultural revitalization, the attendant codification of traditional culture can also reshape community self-images and relations in unintended ways. In the 1988 planning meetings between the Festival directors, the HSFCA, and community scholars, debates over variant histories and cultural authority were resolved in the interests of presenting a unified Festival view. Local politics was deliberately sidestepped, and the themes of cultural hybridity and creolization were chosen as a way to transcend ethnic tensions.⁵

Subsequent chapters cover the chronology of the Hawai'i program process: planning, fieldwork, performance, and legacy. Chapter 2 examines the construction of ethnicity and multiculturalism through definitions of tradition. Between October and December 1988, twenty-seven local fieldworkers were selected, briefed, and dispatched to survey and report on Hawai'i folklife. My account of the fieldwork process points to some of the disjunctions between Hawai'i and mainland cultural paradigms. The records indicate that the question of "who can speak" for a community by way of a cultural practice was inflected by predetermined notions of authenticity and traditionality, as well as on notions of officially sanctioned authority.⁶ The HSFCA followed its previous categorizations to divide ethnic groups into Polynesian, Asian, and Other categories. In application, ethnic definitions slipped between racial, cultural, and national categories. In the final selection, nine ethnic groups were chosen based on "cultural value" and contributions to island culture and linked through a historical master narrative.

Chapter 3 outlines how "authenticity" was mediated through the rhetorical and spatial constructions of the program production. Festival performance is ephemeral, but performance occurs in a built environment. The careful deliberations that crafted the Hawai'i program Festival environment underline the Smithsonian's concern for the educational mission of the Festival and indicate the potential for site design to influence Festival interactions and guide festivalgoers' perceptions. Through a variety of spatial and textual devices, the Hawai'i program site design located Hawai'i in relation to the rest of the nation, a geographical exercise many continental residents still cannot do. Using a design that encouraged permeable boundaries between visitors and program participants, the program design employed an interactive, dialogic model

that made space for tradition bearers to speak. Ironically, the organizers' concerns with authenticity and overcompensation for touristic images had the effect of fixing culture in ways that encouraged performers to transgress the limitations of the site and festival cultural categorizations once the framework was inhabited.

While much analysis of festival/public culture concentrates on what is seen by the public, chapter 4 argues that this was not the only locus of meaning for participants and staff. In fact, much of what performers and staff found memorable about the Festival happened out of the public eye altogether. Spontaneity did erupt at the Festival, instigated by participants, but in the program's seams much more than onstage. The spatial and rhetorical constructions that directed the tourist gaze became the edges transgressed in performance. Whereas the fieldwork and production phases of the Festival had homogenized pluralism into an institutional counter-narrative of cultural harmony expressed as creolization and cultural resurgence, the Festival actually became multi-vocal only in the sum of its parts. In its totality—front, back, and offstage, as well as contexts—it embodied conflict, negotiation, and community in forms that eluded cooptation.

The final chapter presents the legacy of the Festival in its restaging, national and local offshoots, and memory and reflects on the local impact of national cultural intervention. In 1990 the Hawai'i program was restaged as a local production in Honolulu. The local version of the Smithsonian program, sponsored by the HSFCA, underwent several subtle changes to adapt it to its local context. These changes demonstrate a shift in audience assessment as well as program educational goals. There were also efforts to continue the collaboration with the Smithsonian in the form of an Asia/Pacific research center. The joint proposal was advanced as far as the Hawai'i State Legislature, but failed when the political and economic winds changed in both Washington, D.C., and the state of Hawai'i. Meanwhile, Native Hawaiian politics heated up in Hawai'i, culminating in a 1993 restaging, called the Onipa'a, of the monarchy's overthrow. A comparison of this grassroots spectacle to the orchestration of the Hawai'i program at the Festival reveals a very different narrativization of Hawai'i history and a different agenda for politicization of indigenous cultural practices. The Festival and the 1990 restaging reinforced the notion that geniality, hospitality, reciprocity, and inclusivity are qualities inherent in Hawai'i lifestyles. The Onipa'a, on the other hand, revealed that this cohesive picture of Hawai'i multi-

culturalism precluded separate agendas for Hawai'i's ethnic groups and masked grief, loss, and anger over the past.

Because the Festival is an instrument of healing and peace, organizers intentionally leave little room for conflict. As a tool of peaceful dialogue and intercultural understanding, it is an impressive undertaking. I applaud the devotion and professionalism of the CFCH staff and the willingness of culture brokers like Kurin and Kennedy to not only listen to criticism, but also to ask for it by encouraging research on past and current programs. Public sector folklorists do not agree on what a festival should do or be, but they are not unaware of the political implications of what they do. Culture brokers who operate at the national level know that they put their thumbprints on what they present, and they are willing to debate effects and directions. My intent in interpreting the Hawai'i program has been to contribute to this debate by using a folklife festival that was enacted in a "hot spot," as Kurin referred to Hawai'i, to illustrate how power relationships operated during a transitional period in the interpretation of culture.⁷ By extension, this book then speaks to how power relationships continue to be enacted through public culture presentations that mediate the meaning of tradition.