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**Sarah Miller-Davenport.** *Gateway State: Hawai'i and the Cultural Transformation of American Empire.*

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In 1959, after decades of debates and hearings, Congress voted in favor of statehood for Hawai'i. The discussion took place in the context of Cold War debates about how well the United States was living up to its self-proclaimed reputation of democracy and equality, at a time of civil rights mobilization at home and decolonization abroad, that brought Hawai'i to the attention of white Americans who otherwise would probably have been indifferent. Quickly, the story of Hawai'i statehood was spread across the world and offered up as "proof" that the United States practiced what it preached by granting statehood to a former territory with a significant non-white population. Sarah Miller-Davenport's *Gateway State: Hawai'i and the Cultural Transformation of American Empire* takes up the ambitious task of exploring "how and why Hawai'i was invested with such significance at the height of American Cold War hegemony" (2).

The book begins with how the postwar congressional debates on Hawai'i statehood were ultimately successful in achieving their goal when they moved away from earlier arguments of sameness. The basis of this earlier argument was that the people of Hawai'i were *just as* American as those on the mainland. The shift to an argument of difference and exceptionalism asserted that Hawai'i's racial and ethnic diversity was unique and offered hope for racial harmony in the United States. While the sameness argument was used to counter racist claims in the United States that non-whites were less fit for government, ineligible for citizenship, or prone to communism, this new emphasis on difference was envisioned to offer a counterpoint to Soviet claims that the U.S. was racist and colonialist.

To bolster this argument of racial progress, pro-statehood officials began crafting a new national story that highlighted the success of Asian Americans in Hawai'i while minimizing any inequalities or Native Hawaiian opposition to statehood. To make their argument that the U.S. was not colonialist, statehood proponents had to engage in what Miller-Davenport calls "rhetorical acrobatics" to suggest that granting statehood would be anticolonial without ever admitting that Hawai'i was an American colony in the first place (36). Their goal was to suggest that the United States' relationship to Hawai'i was "consensual" and democratic (21). As compelling as the narrative may have been to Cold Warriors, Miller-Davenport argues that the idea that statehood would demonstrate America's commitment to decolonization was itself an "implicit confession of America's role as an imperial power" (36).

Ultimately, the successful statehood campaign helped create a national reputation that offered up Hawai'i as a model of racial harmony for mainlanders and even a "refuge" (59) from the intense racial violence in the southern United States that was gripping America. One of the book's many strengths is that its chapters include wide ranging examples and sources: from the black press, middlebrow intellectuals, popular writers like James Michener, films, television, musicals, university administrators, social scientists, tourism advertisements, and even cookbooks. Miller-Davenport argues these cultural producers were working "in parallel with liberal policymakers" to spread the message of racial tolerance to white Americans (69).

One of Miller-Davenport's more unique contributions is her look at white middle-class American women's fascination with all things "Hawaiian"—for example, backyard luaus, Hawaiian inspired recipes and cookbooks, tiki bars, films, and apparel such as the muumuu. These commodities and experiences, Miller-Davenport argues, offered mainland women a "virtual" cross-cultural exchange where they could envision themselves as liberated overseas travelers. Having a backyard luau, for example, offered white women a way to safely challenge postwar gender norms, express new sexual freedoms, and assert their racial liberalism without giving up their white privilege or even questioning their own racial biases (147-148). At the same time that white women on the mainland were embracing what they perceived to be 'Hawaiian' culture in their own homes, people of color were excluded from entire neighborhoods and housing developments through redlining and residential covenants. As black Americans were being denied these economic opportunities in the postwar period, Asian Americans on the mainland and in Hawai'i were held up as America's "model minority" (180). By connecting Asian American success to Hawai'i, statehood was seen as an opportunity to transcend the more publicly fraught black-white race relations dominating the mainland. Any progress in race relations was claimed as a foreign policy achievement. The reported success of Hawai'i's Asian Americans was meant to showcase American benevolence to the people of Asia, a move that represented a larger pivot toward Asia and the Pacific during the Cold War. Even so, Miller-Davenport includes some examples of racial discrimination affecting Asian Americans in Hawai'i that are meant to demonstrate that Hawai'i's reputation was based on fantasy and overlooked inequalities caused by decades of American colonialism (53).

One of the clearest ways that Miller-Davenport demonstrates how Hawai'i was used during the Cold War—not just as an idea but the place itself—is her discussion of three institutions: the East-West Center that was run by the State Department and housed at the University of Hawai'i, a Peace Corps training program, and an Asia Training Center that was operated by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Each program asserted that Hawai'i was uniquely situated as a bridge between the West and East where cultural exchange could take place between Asians and Americans. Cultural diplomacy was emphasized as mutual and an alternative to military force, yet Miller-Davenport argues that in practice these programs promoted American ideologies (101) and U.S. foreign policy interests (79) by having Americans training Asians, not the other way around (95). Both the Peace Corps and USAID noted that Hawai'i's culture and geography resembled Asia and thus made it an attractive place for training, as U.S. foreign policy increasingly pointed toward Asia. American Peace Corps volunteers would get training in Hawai'i before heading to East Asia and the Pacific and the U.S. military used mock villages on O'ahu to prepare soldiers for guerilla combat in Vietnam (111). These examples are crucial to understanding how Hawai'i was sought out by the U.S. government and military to enhance their more aggressive foreign policy objectives. Although government officials emphasized their cultural diplomacy over military force, we cannot deny that they were both happening simultaneously. I would have liked to see Miller-Davenport engage even more with the growing research on U.S. militarism in Hawai'i during the Cold War because it illuminates the varied ways in which Hawai'i mattered to U.S. policy makers.<sup>1</sup>

Miller-Davenport's final chapter is pivotal in showing the clear opposition by Hawai'i's residents to the progressive narrative that Hawai'i exemplified racial harmony and cooperation. Her prime example is the activists at the University of Hawai'i (UH) who were instrumental in creating the department of Ethnic Studies. Not only did they challenge the narrative of racial progress by charging the state and university with perpetuating racism, but they also challenged the assumption that the U.S. and Hawai'i had a natural or consensual relationship (198). Miller-Davenport's purpose in this final chapter is not only to offer a counter to the official narrative of the state, but also to show that civil rights activism in Hawai'i related to movements on the U.S. mainland and sometimes mirrored them. For example, she argues that like their counterparts on the mainland, African Americans were leading the charge for Ethnic Studies at UH. She also notes a similarity in that radical students of color at universities throughout the U.S. were distancing themselves from the New Left, particularly the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), which they criticized for being dominated by whites in Hawai'i and whites on the

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<sup>1</sup> See Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez, *Securing Paradise: Tourism and Militarism in Hawai'i and the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Simeon Man, "Aloha, Vietnam: Race and Empire in Hawai'i's Vietnam War," *American Quarterly* 67:4 (December 2015): 1085-1108; Brian Ireland, *The US Military in Hawai'i: Colonialism, Memory and Resistance* (Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); and Angela Krattiger, "Hawai'i's Cold War: American Empire and the Fiftieth State" (PhD diss., University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, 2013).

mainland (195). These examples demonstrate that Hawai‘i was not free from racism and was not exceptional when compared to the U.S. mainland; instead they proved that American colonialism in Hawai‘i had left its own stain of racial inequalities. While I can understand Miller-Davenport’s organizational choice to make this the final chapter, there is also a risk in it unintentionally suggesting that these critiques by people of color in Hawai‘i are fringe opinions or less significant than the mostly white politicians and policymakers who helped craft this Cold War narrative of American exceptionalism vis-à-vis Hawai‘i.

Miller-Davenport’s book is a well-researched political history of how the U.S. government chose to highlight a particular variation of Hawai‘i’s history in order to serve its Cold War political interests. She relies heavily on archival sources from powerful individuals and institutions in Hawai‘i and the U.S. mainland. These documents, as the author acknowledges, are produced from the state and federal government and have a clear agenda to achieve statehood. Miller-Davenport briefly reflects on her sources and methodology when she writes that she has tried to maintain a critical eye without casting prejudice. She writes that she takes seriously the utopian discourses around Hawai‘i because she believes they come from “deeply held ideological assumptions,” and are not meant to hide ulterior motives or nefarious activities (9). Yet she also acknowledges throughout her book that Hawai‘i’s connection to Asia was “strategically deployed” after WWII to “suit the demands of American expansion in the decolonizing world” (10). Whether these policymakers believed that Hawai‘i’s reality was as good as they purported is hard to know. What is clear, though, is that members of Congress felt that Hawai‘i’s value to the Cold War was compelling enough to support statehood. This then led government officials to share Hawai‘i’s story with the world in hopes that it would boost the United States’ reputation while pursuing its political and economic global interests. Regardless of intentions, this history that Miller-Davenport so clearly documents is a meaningful pursuit.

Miller-Davenport’s book is an important addition to the Hawai‘i historiography in terms of how it documents the significance of Hawai‘i to U.S. history and international Cold War history. One way is by offering examples of how Asian Americans were recruited as “helpmates” (212) in Cold War foreign policy attempts to expand U.S. influence in Asia and the Pacific. Similar to the African American jazz musicians that Peggy Von Eschen writes about,<sup>2</sup> Asian Americans from Hawai‘i were recruited and sent to Asia as American ambassadors. By “delocalizing” (9) Hawai‘i’s history in the postwar period, Miller-Davenport makes it relevant and accessible not only to scholars of Hawai‘i.

Another recent book that centers Hawai‘i statehood is Dean Itsuji Saranillio’s *Unsustainable Empire: Alternative Histories of Hawai‘i Statehood*.<sup>3</sup> His focus is less on the rhetoric of the most powerful policymakers and government officials, and more about how knowledge and power defined and limited the voices that were heard.<sup>4</sup> Saranillio argues that ultimately the Cold War narratives in favor of statehood were propaganda created and sold to Hawai‘i’s politicians and university administrators by the nationally renowned publicist Edward L. Bernays.<sup>5</sup> Saranillio makes a persuasive case for why a discursive analysis is necessary when looking at pro-statehood voices. Miller-Davenport mentions agencies like the United States Information Agency (USIA) and Voice of America, which we associate with Cold War propaganda aimed at ‘winning the hearts and minds,’ playing their part in telling Hawai‘i’s story. I think it is important to note that the messages spread to the Third World via the USIA and Voice of America were almost identical to the ones shared with Americans domestically via newspaper articles, tourism ads, magazine cover stories, and films (chapters 2 and 3). This is further proof that Hawai‘i and the Cold War are worthy of our attention. Despite the persistence of synchronized foreign and domestic campaigns to

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<sup>2</sup> Peggy Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Dean Itsuji Saranillio, *Unsustainable Empire: Alternative Histories of Hawai‘i Statehood* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Saranillio, *Unsustainable Empire*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Saranillio, *Unsustainable Empire*, chapter 4.

emphasize Hawai‘i statehood as proof of American exceptionalism and anticolonialism, the question continues to be raised: was Hawai‘i statehood in fact a repudiation or a continuation of American colonialism?

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