



Shoal of Time: A History of the Hawaiian Islands

Gavan Daws

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Gavan Daws' remarkable achievement is to free Hawaiian history from the dust of antiquity. Based on years of work in the documentary sources, Shoal of Time emerges as the most readable of all Hawaiian histories.

Shoal of Time: A History of the Hawaiian Islands Details

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From Reader Review Shoal of Time: A History of the Hawaiian Islands for online ebook

Cora says

it took me ages to finish this, but at least i didn't take a whole year (yikes)

I am truly amazed this book even exists to be honest - and I'm sure the copies of it are rare, so it's even more incredible I had the chance to read it at all.

The writing is deeply moving for me, a perfect blend of humor and striking truth that exposes the beauty and brutality of Hawaiian history in a way I would never have expected.

It's a shame it was published in 1974, since I'd love to know more contemporary history as well.. but the amount of research for the time span is phenomenal - so much detail is put into this history that at any moment you feel completely at home in the narrative, as if it was just a carefully crafted plot instead of real events.

also! reading it in hawaii was even more interesting since it made me so much more aware of the impact of Hawaiian history on the land today. (ex: the names of places like Dillingham Airfield or seeing the impact of big industries).

Andrea Pulaski says

Don't read this if you are white and want to enjoy Hawaii. It may very well take all the joy out of it for you. Very well chronicled and very accurate. There is a byast against the white man, (for good reason.) Written by an Australian used as a Text book in Hawaiian History classes today but reads like a novel.

Kara says

This might be the original "comprehensive" history of Hawaii, but boy is it a dull and tedious read. I did appreciate how much ground Daws tries to cover, as many other Hawaiian histories focus on the short-lived monarchy and the period of annexation, whereas he covers the pre-Captain Cook era through the granting of statehood post-WWII. However, his monotonous litany of facts, unbroken by nary an interesting anecdote, made it difficult to absorb the information or concentrate on the text for long periods of time. I also found Daws' skimming of certain historical periods a strange decision; Liliuokalani is only given a bit part, for example. Perhaps his treatment of Liliuokalani is symptomatic of his necessarily limited perspective as a white male writer; indeed, I found Daws' treatment of non-white and/or female historical figures problematic, as many of them are presented as caricatures, or (in the case of the women) hardly acknowledged at all. If you're trying to see how scholars have documented Hawaiian history differently through the ages, your sort of have to read this book. But if you're just a regular reader looking to know more about the history of Hawaii, I'm sure you can find a less biased (and more entertaining!) modern read.

Terry Brooks says

Shoal is the history of the Kings of Hawaii from Kamehameha 1 to the end of the monarchy in the late 1900s. The story is true, but the events are incredible and compelling. How the Hawaiian Islands were discovered and eventually subverted by the US and the European powers makes for great storytelling.

James says

After living in Hawaii for 4 years, I got sick of not being able to answer questions from friends and family about the history of the islands. I was looking for a readable book that would take me from Captain Cook to statehood, which is exactly what Daws has written.

When I was looking for books, I found a few reviews of this volume that said it was biased against Native Hawaiians, so I was cautious when I started reading. After getting through a few chapters, I realized that the problem is not that Daws is unfair to Native Hawaiians, but that he is brutally honest about all parties involved in Hawaii's complex history. For every time he points out a poor political decision made by the Hawaiian monarchy, he also makes sure to note that many of the white business men were racist, self-interested, and narrow-minded. Rather than take sides, Daws seems interested in helping the reader understand that the annexation and Americanization of Hawaii was not as black and white as people today like to think. He does a good job exploring the complex and long-lasting relationship between Hawaiians and Europeans and explaining how the intersection of multiple political motivations resulted in statehood.

Regardless of how you feel about Hawaii's history, this book is a good read. Daws paints the picture of a thriving, impressive culture that is (perhaps prematurely) thrust on to the Western political stage and forced to adapt. Both good and bad come of it, and I think any student interested in Hawaiian history should read this book if only to understand that the path to take was not always obvious, and that the characters involved were not inherently good or inherently bad.

Dan McCarthy says

It was mostly a political history of Hawaii. Information I am glad I now know, but not very entertaining.

David Bjelland says

Considering that I was born there, my mom's side of the family has lived there for multiple generations, and I have a Hawaiian middle name, I can't help but feel shamefully overdue in finally seeking out a substantial history of the place, and this book happened to present itself the last time I was back at my parent's house and browsing around for something to read (it was a gift to my Mom from her librarian at Punahou, when the book was still fairly new).

It's one thing not to be curious for so long about a place whose history is inseparable from that of your own family, but the more nagging motivation for eventually hunting something like this down might honestly be plain-old white guilt - the knowledge that my recent ancestors were complicit in the gradual, mundane domination of the native Hawaiians, sitting uneasily in the back of my mind since the onset of Political Awareness Puberty. It seems appropriate and necessary that at some point I should figure out what that process really looked like, but alas, Shoal of Time is no People's History of Hawaii, for better or worse.

Daws possesses what's normally considered an admirable sense of personal removal from his topic, and while I wouldn't necessarily call him an apologist for imperialism in the Hawaiian Islands, he does treat some of the graver injustices with an analytical, fatalistic tone that's hard to distinguish from tacit approval.

On the plus side: gee whiz does this guy know how to hunt down documents. If it seems like he has no personal opinions on certain characters or events, it's because he doesn't *have* to to fill up a dense, 400 pg. book, relying instead on a stupifying body of diaries, letters, diplomatic cables, court proceedings, pamphlets, etc. (...Or maybe that's where the bar for most historians is, and I just don't read enough of the broad, thorough, non-pop stuff? Will have to work on that). Nonetheless, a unique and perceptive critical voice still sneaks in between the cracks of all the citations; one that's content to poke at human folly without getting its feathers ruffled over it.

Jeffrey says

Hands-down the best one-volume political history of modern Hawaii ever written. It's difficult to write a history of the islands since Captain Cook's arrival through US annexation and statehood without "taking sides" in the struggle between the natives and haoles - and the book's point of view definitely does have its clear heroes and villains - but Daws makes an honest effort to provide context for all the warring factions in the book and avoids turning it into a one-sided screed as it could have been.

Two warnings to prospective readers. One - this is a political history, not a cultural one, so don't read it to learn about native customs and traditions. Second - the paperback edition has no pictures, maps or illustrations; and this is a book that would deeply benefit from having them.

These caveats aside, the book is highly recommended to anyone with an interest in the history of Hawaii from 1778 to statehood in 1959.

Steven Kent says

Gavan Daws knows his Hawaiian history and he knows how to write. *Shoal of Time* is a mesmerizing survey of Hawaiian history from the days of Kamehameha to the modern era.

This is not the most detailed look at Hawaiian history, but it is a reader-friendly introduction to a long and fascinating tale.

Bruce says

"Shoal of Time" is an "ok" introduction to Hawaiian history, thorough in some areas, but glaringly thin and/or dated in others. Only recommended for background reading as part of a broader palette of histories, texts and cultural texts offering differing viewpoints.

Other books and historical texts that I recommend for a more complete cultural and historical view include:
"The Voices of Eden"
All Volumes of "The Hawaiian Journal of History" (Hawaiian Historical Society)

"For Whom the Stars"

"Must We Wait in Dispair?"

Anything written by Mary Kawena Pukui but particularly including:

"The Hawaiian Dictionary"

"The Polynesian Family System in Ka'u"

"Place Names of Hawaii"

Handy, Handy and Pukui's "Native Planters in Old Hawaii"

"The Fornander collection of Hawaiian Antiquities and Folklore", Volumes IV, V and VI

Anything written by Samuel Kamakau but particularly:

"Ruling Chiefs of Hawaii"

Anything written by Patrick Vinton Kirch but particularly:

"On the Road of the Winds"

"A Shark Going Inland Is My Chief: The Island Civilization of Ancient Hawaii"

"The Evolution of Polynesian Chiefdoms"

"Unwritten Literature of Hawaii"

"Hawaii's Forgotten History"

"Voyage of Rediscovery"

"An Ocean in Mind"

"We the Navigators"

"N? Inoa H?k?"

"Presstime in Hawaii"

Bishop Museum Bulletins

I'm missing a ton of other titles and authors that should be on this list including several covering the plantation era, post-world war II and Hawaiian renaissance but the above is not a bad start.

Luke Peterson says

I bought this book back in 2004 while I was in Honolulu, laid up with terrible sunburn.

It is THE book on Hawaiian history since their "discovery", tracing the political and cultural history of the islands from their first western contact to the modern day.

If flying to Honolulu from the east coast, you're going to be on a plane for 12 hours and you'll likely be wide awake. Read this book, your tour guides aren't that complicated. Also, for terrific and cheap surfing lessons anywhere on Oahu, call my groovy buddy Roger: 808-734-4558 (cell).

Aloha!

Scot says

This book is widely considered to be the definitive text when it comes to the modern history of Hawai'i. Certainly, no other text attempts to take on such a broad swathe of history in such detail. If you're interested in the history of Hawai'i and/or the imperialist history of the U.S. in the Pacific, Shoal of Time is a must read. However, beware, I found that the book has some pretty big flaws.

First of all, every historical account can only be told from the perspective of the historian who tells it, and this historian is definitely one who has an "all's well that ends well" point of view about the colonization of Hawai'i and all that was lost in the process. In addition there are some historical inaccuracies and exclusions that make a real difference to one's understanding of just what, exactly, happened here.

On the second point, Daws gives short shrift to what many refer to as the "Great Dying," the historical sweep of 80 or so years during which more than 95% of the Hawaiian people died, due largely to contracting diseases brought to Hawai'i by its colonizers and to which Hawaiians had no immunity. This catastrophe could not but have shaped the worldview of the Hawaiian people, including our relationship to our religion and religious leaders, opening the doors to many significant changes that are presented as though they were easily chosen by Hawaiians. For instance, when everyone around you is dying, you might think your gods were failing you, making the notion of trying on a new god or two kind of appealing, especially when the missionaries bringing you the word of said god are taking advantage of the situation and suggesting that you are all dying of sin.

Also on this point, Daws at one juncture suggests that plantation life in Hawai'i was similar to that of the antebellum southeastern U.S. but for, though not in so many words, the slavery and threats to white women by black men causing unrest and acts of retaliation like lynchings. I accept that slavery is different than peonage, which is more along the lines of what immigrant workers experienced in Hawai'i, but the notion that lynchings in the south were acts of retaliation is just b.s. The whole notion of the sexually depraved black man is a myth created by white men in the south in order to justify acts of violence that were really committed in order to intimidate slaves and prevent them from rebelling (not to mention subsequent generations of African Americans in order to quell challenges to white supremacy). I'd call that a pretty big gaff, and one that reveals a lot about the Daws point of view on issues of race. That point of view comes across now and then throughout, though I believe unintentionally.

But, again, all in all, no other book goes as far, nor into as much detail, at least where English language resources are concerned, as this one. For a history of Hawai'i that delves into Hawaiian language resources which tell a very different story, check out *Aloha Betrayed* by Noenoe Silva in my books.

Beth Cato says

Shoal of Time may be tedious at times, but it's also incredibly comprehensive and fascinating. It took me weeks to make it through this book, and in the process, I created dozens of bookmarks for research purposes. The approach of the book feels very fair in its treatment of haoles (whites), native Hawaiians, and the islands' history of misunderstanding, racism, and political corruption. It goes into detail on the first arrivals of foreigners, to Kamehameha, to the takeover of haoles and sugar companies and American annexation, to the attack on Pearl Harbor, to Hawaii gaining statehood. I had no idea that statehood was delayed for years because Hawaii, with its heavy populations of "foreigners" and union labor, was regarded as a hotbed of communism. The book contains a lot of interesting data like that.

While the book did require skimming in spots, it was a good read overall, and I can see why it has stayed in print for decades.

Dan says

4.5 star review.

If you want to gain insight into the extraordinary human diversity of Hawaii, this is a fantastic read. This one volume history, now 40 years old, covers Hawaii from Captain Cook's arrival to Barack Obama's birth.

I found the book to be highly informative and very well written. Because it covers so much, the stories are at best vignettes but there are so many nationalities represented in Hawaii's history that it is absorbing.

The middle to latter portions of the book are well documented, the earlier portions are thinly referenced but that is to be expected. If you want to understand the role that the missionaries played or if you want to know what a horrible person Sanford Dole was, this book tells some relatable stories.

While the book is not written from a native Hawaiian perspective it harbors a good deal of disdain for the white American imperialists, justifiably I might add.

Otherwise 5 stars, but a little dated.

surfurbian says

Damn that was a long book. I enjoyed the ancient history the most as that is where my interests are. Even still it is useful to have read this book as a way of understanding Hawaiian culture today and much of the animosity directed at Haoles.
