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Documentary reviews of *O Hawai'i: Of Hawai'i from Settlement to Kingdom*; *Nation Within: The Story of America's Annexation of the Nation of Hawai'i*; *Hawai'i's Last Queen*; *1946: The Great Hawai'i Sugar Strike*; *The Great Hawaii Dock Strike*; *The 442nd: Duty, Honor, and Loyalty*

THE TELEVISION DOCUMENTARY preceded the person and talent of Ken Burns, but over the past two decades Burns and the Public Broadcasting System have given the historical documentary a huge new audience. Burns' *The Civil War*, *Baseball*, *Jazz*, *The Story of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, *Thomas Jefferson*, *Lewis and Clark*, to name a few, have given the form new legitimacy—so much so that they have spawned new cable television stations devoted all or in part to history.

Academics have embraced the new documentary. At the University of Massachusetts, for example, Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King biographer Stephan B. Oates has developed a wildly successful undergraduate course on the Post-World War II United States based on PBS videos. Few who profess for a living fail to recognize that a Ken Burns or a David Grubin (who specializes in PBS video biographies) can tell a historical figure's story in film better than professors with their dry-as-dirt lecture notes. And dry-as-dirt lectures are going increasingly badly with the younger, wired generations.

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The best of the documentary filmmakers, like Grubin and Burns, use period photographs, observations of historians, contemporaries when possible, a well-written narrative, and music to tell their stories. As a result of *The Civil War* series, for example, historian and novelist Shelby Foote gained a certain cult status among the PBS crowd.

Documentaries cost enormous amounts of money to produce. Public television, its supporters, and its corporate underwriters have given generously to make possible the productions of people like Burns and Grubin.

Costs don't go down for the documentary film makers in a small state. The equipment is just as expensive to buy or borrow, the number of people to be paid grows daily, and the facilities needed to put it all together charge high rents.

Thus the maker of a historical documentary needs financial backing, and for those who practice their craft in a small state for a small audience it often comes from people with a direct interest in the subject of the documentary. Thus four of the six videos reviewed below have been funded completely or in large part by folks interested in the perspective taken by the film maker. The dangers in such a connections are obvious, but the producers of all of the films discussed appear to have avoided them.

Although independent producers Tom Coffman and Chris Conybeare and Hawaii Public Television director Joy Chong-Stannard enjoy little reputation beyond the state of Hawaii, their work is of the first order.

A former daily journalist, Tom Coffman made his name among historians of modern Hawaii with his book *Catch a Wave*, a lucid, insightful account of the 1970 gubernatorial election in which John A. Burns turned back challenges from fellow Democrat Tom Gill and Republican Sam King to win a third term. In Coffman's analysis, the key to Burns' 1970 victory was a half-hour campaign film entitled *Catch a Wave*.

Soon after the appearance of his book, Coffman left print journalism and embraced visual media himself. He founded Coffman Multimedia, where he produces commercial slide presentations, commercial video, and historical documentaries.

His first historical documentary, *O Hawai'i: Of Hawai'i from Settlement to Kingdom* (1995) attempts to revise the European view of Hawai-

ian history, arguing that Hawaiians had a rich, complex, and dynamic society long before Capt. James Cook and subsequent Europeans and Americans arrived on Hawaii's shores.

Coffman succeeds admirably. He begins with the proposition that in the years immediately following World War II Hawaiian culture had reached its low point and that the western view of Hawaiian history was the only view available.

Then came Mary Pukui who, in the early 1950s, went into Hawaii's rural areas to record native speakers of Hawaiian, their stories, and their culture. Pukui and Samuel Elbert produced their Hawaiian-English dictionary, and the renaissance of Hawaiian culture took root. Nineteenth century works like David Malo's *Hawaiian Antiquities*, Abraham Fornander's *An Account of the Polynesian Race*, and S. M. Kama-kau's *Ruling Chiefs of Hawaii* were rediscovered as sources of traditional Hawaiian history and culture.

Along with Pukui's work with Hawaiian language came the pioneering carbon-dating done by Kenneth Emory of the Bishop Museum. Suddenly Polynesian settlement of Hawaii came out of the "mists of history" into the bright light of skilled archaeologists. Interest reawakened in the manner in which the Polynesians came, i.e., the double-hulled Hawaiian canoe. Hawaiian artist Herb Kane drew the plans for *Hokulea*, and his other paintings from Hawaiian history recur throughout *O Hawai'i*.

Coffman uses archeologist Tom Dye effectively to explain Polynesian settlement patterns: the *ahupua'a* as an economic unit and the pressures a growing population after A.D. 1000 began to place on it. Rubellite Johnson and the late George Kanahale help explain rivalries between chiefs and the wars to unify the Hawaiian Islands.

*O Hawai'i* remains throughout a distinctly Hawaiian history. Coffman passes quickly over the arrival of Captain James Cook, and ends his story once Kamehameha finishes unifying the Islands. Each section of the film is framed effectively by *kupuna* John Keola Lake teaching a group of young Hawaiians about their heritage. The result is an excellent, 57-minute introduction to Hawaiian history before European contact. It is suitable for any age level, from middle school through Ph.D. Indeed, it should be required viewing for every citizen of the state.

So too should *Nation Within*, though as a film it is less successful

than *O Hawai'i*. Another co-production of Coffman and Hawaii Public Television, *Nation Within: The Story of America's Annexation of the Nation of Hawai'i* suffers from two weaknesses. First, much of it deals with tortured diplomatic negotiations; and diplomatic history is pretty bleak stuff. Second, its original 90-minute version is too long. A 60-minute cut is now available, but not to this reviewer.

Coffman builds *Nation Within* on the research of scholar Noenoe Silva. Silva discovered petitions signed by 22,000 Hawaiians protesting the annexation of Hawaii. She also has evidence that another petition containing the signatures of 17,000 more Hawaiians existed, although a copy cannot be found. Says Silva in the film, "almost everyone, every last Hawaiian opposed annexation"—a truth too often overlooked in the standard telling of Hawaii's history.

Almost no one with a claim to citizenship in the Islands wanted annexation to take place.

But as *Nation Within* makes clear, their opposition meant little in the face of late 19th Century American imperialism. A "Maine mafia" made up of Secretary of State James G. Blaine and American minister to Hawaii John Stevens wanted Hawaii. So too did Capt. A. E. Mahan, the preeminent United States Naval strategist of the age of ships powered by steam. So too did Theodore Roosevelt, whose jingoism as Assistant Secretary of the Navy under William McKinley did much to initiate the Spanish-American War and thus the annexation of Hawaii.

While the "missionary boys" and their overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893 have their role *Nation Within*, its strength lies in placing Hawaii's fate as an independent nation within the much larger context of American imperialism. Historian Jon Osorio characterizes it in the film as "a deal between a small group of Americans."

Vivian Ducat came at some of the same material in her *Hawaii's Last Queen* (1997). The film received a citation the following year from the Organization of American Historians. A mainland producer, Ducat made the film for WGBH Boston, perhaps the largest Public Television Station in the country, as part of PBS's "The American Experience." She enjoyed the generous financial backing of the national PBS and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

The film's focus is on the person of Queen Lili'uokalani, from her missionary training at the Chiefs' Children's School to her abdication with the annexation of Hawaii to the United States. Ducat had the

good sense to find historians to fit Lili'uokalani's various interests. Lili'uokalani was an accomplished composer, and Royal Hawaiian Band Director Aaron Mahi comments on her music. Former Iolani Palace curator James Bartels speaks of Lili'uokalani and the palace that became her prison. Historians Davianna McGregor, Glen Grant, and Malcolm Chun also speak movingly of *Hawaii's Last Queen*.

Chris Conybeare and the The Center for Labor Education and Research at the University of Hawaii–West Oahu have produced two documentaries of note: *1946: The Great Hawaii Sugar Strike* (1996) and *The Great Hawaii Dock Strike* (1999). The latter, of course, deals with the 177-day 1949 strike of the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union against Hawaii's Big Five companies.

Both tell labor's story well. People named "Cotton" Fujioka, "Fat" Nakata, "Shirley" Shiroma, Mitsue "Butch" Thompson, "Romeo" Toma, "Yasu" Arakaki, and a dozen more former ILWU members are the stars of *1946*. They are the old timers, now in their 70s and 80s, who walked out of the sugar mills and fields in 1946 to demonstrate that the age of plantation paternalism was over.

The film presents each of the old timers as they appear in 1996, then goes to a picture of them as they appeared in 1946. In a similar fashion, the film uses old newsreel footage of a parade of strikers down Hilo's main street, then shows a group of old-timers—white-haired, stooped, some with canes—walking the same street.

The 1946 strike was one of Hawaii's first non-racial strikes. The ILWU organized Filipinos and Japanese, Hawaiians and Koreans—any of the 28,000 who worked on the 34 sugar plantations operating in Hawaii in 1946. Wailua Union organizer Eddie Lapa tells of meeting a fellow worker in the restroom and passing a union membership card from one stall to the other to get it signed. When the strike was called, everyone walked out.

The strikers organized fishing parties to provide food for strikers. They begged fresh vegetables from their friends. They sat through endless meetings as the union insisted on democratic decision-making. And the union impressed on its members the importance of political activity.

By letting the old timers speak, Conybeare gives the viewer a sense of the authenticity of the issues. There is an eloquence in the old timers' description of the pre-union plantation, a sense of how hard a

place it was to work. Yet they also communicate a sense of warmth, of family, that is now long lost.

In *The Great Hawaii Dock Strike* producers Conybeare, Chong-Stannard, and Teresa Bill attempt something bold indeed: the use of actors to depict some of the major figures in the wrenching 1949 Hawaii dock strike. Actors portray labor leaders Bob McElrath and Louis Goldblatt, a young striking dock worker and his wife, editor Lorrin P. Thurston of the *Honolulu Advertiser*, an upper-class Caucasian lady active with the anti-union Broom Brigade, and others.

The acting is uniformly good, and it brings a liveliness to the documentary form. Film makers want emotion, and the actors provide it. But their presence also undercuts the sense of authenticity so much in evidence in *1946*. Somehow the use of actors leaves the viewer questioning just how accurately the film makers have depicted the strike.

The historical record appears intact: Lorrin Thurston's red-baiting of the union, asserting on the front page of his newspaper that the strike was the work of the international communist conspiracy; the sense of vulnerability felt by island residents as shortages of everything from auto parts to toilet paper occurred; the anger the strike engendered against union families as those shortages mounted and much more. While *The Great Hawaii Dock Strike* doesn't feel as authentic as *1946*, it teaches labor history in an engaging and accurate manner.

*The 442nd: Duty, Honor, Country* (1998) tells the now familiar story of the all Japanese-American unit that fought in Europe during World War II. The young men who made up the 442nd, if they were from the mainland, were the sons of interned (read imprisoned) parents; if from Hawaii, they were the sons of largely disenfranchised and marginalized plantation workers.

Worse, they had to beg to fight. It was not until February 2, 1943, that Franklin Delano Roosevelt announced the formation of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. The Army sought 1,500 volunteers from Hawaii; 10,000 came forward. Mainland Japanese-Americans where 120,000 AJA families were interned proved understandably less enthusiastic. Still, 1,246 of them signed up.

And fight they did—up the Italian peninsula and into southern France. The 442nd's reputation grew with every battle. General George Marshall called the unit "superb." One officer characterized

the AJA troops as “the best goddam fighters in the U.S. Army. If you’ve got more, send them over.”

The 442nd’s most famous action took place in southern France. Through heavily-forested, rain-soaked, mountainous terrain, the 442nd fought alongside other units of the 36th Division to take the town of Bruyeres. The battle against Nazi SS troops was savage; the 442nd took 800 casualties.

But there was more fighting to come. A battalion of Texans, 275 of them, found themselves surrounded by German troops. The 442nd was sent in to rescue the Texans. After three increasingly hard days of fighting, the 442nd broke through German lines. The AJA troops would fight for nine more days in the region before being relieved. Their final casualty report read 161 dead, 43 missing, and 2,000 wounded.

Before the fighting ended with the 442nd back in Italy in 1945, the unit’s members would earn 3,600 Purple Hearts. When they stood in front of President Truman in Washington in 1946, he said, “You’ve fought not only the enemy; you fought prejudice and you won.”

There’s nothing fancy about *The 442nd: Duty, Honor, Loyalty*. It contains little but old wartime footage, voice-over narration, and an occasional comment by a 442nd veteran like the late Sakae Takahashi.

Nevertheless, it is a moving and fascinating story—as are all the stories contained in *O Hawai’i, Nation Within*, *Hawaii’s Last Queen*, *The Great Hawai’i Sugar Strike*, and *The Great Hawai’i Dock Strike*. Hawaii has many stories to tell—of tragedy and triumph, of courage and deceit, of brotherhood and prejudice. Documentary film makers have only begun to tell them, but these six films are a good beginning.

