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Legal and anthropological evolution of southern California “aloha” culture through semiotics

Films such as *Gidget*, *Ride the Wild Surf*, and *The Endless Summer* have promoted idealistic norms within Southern California surfing communities that are, in large part, “island-centric”: music, fashion, surfboard styles, and riding techniques have all been influenced by perceptions of Hawaiian culture. But so too have behavioral codes based on the notion of the “*aloha* spirit.” Such regulatory devices – both customary and legal – have long been determinants of the surfer’s behavior both in and out of the water. Or have they?

Societal perceptions based largely on media stereotypes have traditionally portrayed surfers as the ocean-going equivalents of beatniks and bikers, cultural antagonists in the great saga of American individualism. But as the numbers of those taking up surfing have increased (due in large part to technological innovations and ease of travel), informal codes of group regulation have become more systematized. *Aloha* culture, it seems, has transformed and regularized.

How does a countercultural movement evolve into a mainstream sport? How do regional norms, values, and beliefs become “commodified” into a multi-billion dollar industry? And how do self-imposed regulatory traditions become codified? Based, in part, on multi-generational interviews, this study examines quantifiable aspects of change, particularly within the formalized system of rules – now laws – of *aloha* culture.