

TFH: E11: Surfing: A Complicated History (Dr. Scott Laderman)

LENGTH • 41:08

SPEAKERS

Tony Vega, Scott Laderman

Tony Vega 00:00

Transmissions from Hawaii is supported in part by Hawaii SHIP. Hawaii SHIP is a federally funded volunteer based program administered by the Hawaii Department of Health Executive Office on Aging. Their Medicare certified counselors provide free unbiased local counseling to beneficiaries, their loved ones, caregivers and soon-to-be retirees. They are recruiting multilingual volunteers to assist clients and translate brochures. Request a free consultation or join their winning team of volunteers on their website at Hawaiiiship.org, that's HawaiiSHIP.org. Transmissions from Hawaii.

Tony Vega 00:52

Producer Tony Vega here and welcome to Transmissions from Hawaii. Surfing. It's something that I can't do, because well, I can't even swim, but it's a topic that I've been wanting to cover on the show since before I even started the podcast. The thing is that I've been wanting to find an interesting angle to cover the topic. So the other day I was on YouTube when I happened to come across a very interesting video that was about the complex history of surfing. This was based on research by Dr. Scott Laderman, a Professor of History at the University of Minnesota Duluth. He's the author of a book called "Empire in Waves: A Political History of Surfing." And there's a lot of just fascinating information in there. And so thankfully, he agreed to come on the show. So today you're gonna get to hear a little bit about the history of surfing, as well as how it intersects with things like imperialism, racism and a few other things. So let's get into it.

Tony Vega 02:03

So what uh, what got you interested in, in surfing as this topic? I mean, it is a very interesting topic, but I'm wondering if there was a specific thing in your life or something that really caught your attention about it?

Scott Laderman 02:17

Well, I grew up surfing. I, you know, I teach now at the University of Minnesota Duluth, but I did grow up in Southern California, I was born in LA. I grew up surfing, you know, in the same way, well, I tell my students here the same way that you grew up playing hockey, I grew up surfing. And so you know, it's

been part of my life for the what the best part of my life, I still something I continue to do, and so I do you have that personal background in surfing. What got me interested in particular in the issues that I've addressed in "Empire in Waves," the book I wrote in 2014?! Well, you know, I, as a college student, this was in the early 1990s, became active in human rights issues. And there was one issue in particular that I became perhaps most active in and that had to do with the Indonesian invasion and occupation of East Timor, and the effort by the people of East Timor to oppose what effectively amounted to Indonesian colonization and the accompanying human rights abuses. And it occurred to me that from a human rights perspective, I was learning quite a bit about Indonesia. At the same time as a surfer, I knew quite a bit about Indonesia, because Indonesia, as most surfers are aware, premier international destination for people from outside the country to go visit and surf. But I, the things I knew about Indonesia as a surfer were very different from the things I knew about Indonesia as a human rights activist, and that question about why intrigued me. And so it's something that I put aside, at least in the back of my mind for quite some time, figuring that it's, I perhaps revisited it at a later time. And I did finally do so. I, as a college student, one summers spent, the summers as editorial intern at Surfer Magazine. And it was, it was great, I mean, it was a wonderful experience, the staff was terrific, it's always a fun job when you can go surfing with your boss. And, and, you know, when I was working there, I wasn't working in particular on anything Indonesia related, but I had conversations with the editors there about why it was that the Indonesia that came through in surfing magazines, and you know, as you may know, it was almost impossible to pick up a Surfer Magazine or a surfing magazine or just about any surfing related publication in the 1980s or 1990s without seeing some sort of an article on, on Indonesia, usually featuring just, you know, beautiful reef waves, often with no one on them, you know, warm water, tropical conditions, really just the the dreamscape for surfers. But I asked him, you know, why is it that the Indonesia that comes through and in surfing publications is so different from the Indonesia that most of the international community is aware of, which is Indonesia under the Suharto dictatorship, and one that's engaged in horrific human rights atrocities in East Timor. And I think he thought it was an interesting question, but nothing really worth pursuing at that point, you know, I think they sort of politely brushed me off.

Scott Laderman 05:46

A few years later, I was no longer an internet surfer, but a few years later 2 Timorese activists won the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts to oppose the Indonesian occupation. And so this received considerable international press coverage as the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize typically does, and I used that as an opportunity then to go back to the editors at Surfer and say, "Hey, you know, this has happened, the eyes of people around the world are on Indonesia and East Timor right now, how about I write something up about Indonesia that provides a more complex portrait of the country than the one that appears in the pages of Surfer?" To their credit, they said, "Sure, go for it, write something up." And so I did, I wrote up an article that I thought was a pretty good article, you know, I tried to interviewing people on all sides of this issue, the human rights folks were delighted to speak with me, people at the Indonesian consulate, not so much, I couldn't get anything out of them. But I wrote, I wrote up a piece that I thought was a pretty good piece, and I sent it down to Surfer, and then they never ran it. And, and, you know, I mean, this was disappointing to me, maybe I just wrote a piece that wasn't as solid of the pieces I thought it might have been. But it also seemed to me that something bigger was going on, which is that, you know, the surfing imagination didn't allow for that sort of complexity in how it

envisioned the rest of the world, particularly those parts of the world that were appealing to surfers. And so, you know, it's something that that I thought, well, you know, who knows, if I ever become a professor, maybe I'll come back to this and look into it. And then I became a professor. And so that, that had been the seed that was planted that led me to begin the research for the book that became "Empire in Waves."

Tony Vega 07:36

Interesting. Okay. All right. Well, yeah. So then it became a book, yeah. Okay, so then, where, how did you get started on all this? Because your interests kind of sparked by what was going on in Indonesia, but of course, the story is way bigger. There's so many components to it. Like, what, what was your approach, then?

Scott Laderman 07:57

Well, it occurred to me that what was going on in Asia was Indonesia was really only part of the story, that surfing, which is something, you know, that I knew, as an escape from the stresses of the real world, which I suspect is how many surfers approach the past time, is, in fact, you know, I realized a lot more complicated than that. That, you know, to trace the history of surfing is to trace the history of some of the major global developments that we've seen over the last couple of 100 years, from imperialism and colonialism, to globalization, the Cold War, the rise of mass tourism, the international human rights movement, including the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, you know, the rise of corporate neo-liberalism, all of these things are related in some way to the history of surfing. And so my goal, as a historian, was to try to pull all of these together and create some sort of a coherent narrative about the many ways that surfing history is global history.

Tony Vega 09:07

Hmm. So could you, I mean, it's a huge topic, but could you give us an idea of kind of like, where surfing kind of gets its start and, and some of these issues that come up along the way along its history? Just could you give us just a general overview of some of the things that you cover?

Scott Laderman 09:27

Sure, I'll well, I'll certainly do my best. Yeah, it is, it is a big question. Well, you know, so modern surfing, at least what we think of as surfing today, has its origins, really in the Polynesian islands, and most specifically, in Hawaii. There is evidence that surfing, or at least some form of board riding, was done elsewhere, too, most importantly, along the coast of West Africa. A historian in California by the name of Kevin Dawson has done really interesting and important work on this, but also along the west coast of South America, Peru in particular. But Hawaii really is the place where modern surfing has its origins. And in Hawaii surfing was a popular pastime that reflected the fact that Hawaiian society had managed to create a system where the material needs of the Hawaiian people were met, while also allowing additional time for leisure and pleasure. So that surfing emerged as a form of entertainment for the local Hawaiian people and one that in some ways was imbued with spiritual significance. And the same, you know, I should add in the same way that many surfers view surfing today is as something that's not just about, you know, getting wet and having fun in the water, but also finding, you know, one center,

recognizing one's place in the larger world, it almost takes on a transcendent element for a number of surfers. And so we could see this in, in early Hawaii, where surfing was something that was imbued with with particular and special meaning. At the same time, it was a pastime that when missionaries arrived in Hawaii, was viewed quite negatively because some of the practices associated with it. In particular, you know, the missionaries, these were Congregationalist missionaries, who were very culturally conservative, and tended to frown on things that appeared quite foreign to them - the missionary saw in surfing certain sinful elements. For one thing, many Hawaiians who surfed wagered on surfing, you know, who could catch the biggest wave, who could have the longest ride, you know, I imagine there were all sorts of different things that people bet on with respect to surfing. It also was a problem because, you know, these Congregationalist missionaries were quite conservative in their dress, and what they saw in surfing was local Hawaiian people who often entered the water, either unclothed or barely clothed. And, you know, this led to interactions between Hawaiian men, Hawaiian women, that often culminated in some sort of a sexual encounter, and this was, you know, just a horrifying thing to some of these early missionaries. At the same time, you know, surfing was not seen as particularly industrious. These were missionaries who felt that one had to always be working to improving oneself, to bettering oneself, and surfing was seen as a mindless form of entertainment. And so in this way, it took away from the personal and spiritual development of Hawaiian people, at least from the perspective of these missionaries. And so it's very much frowned on. The missionaries never, I should point out there are some popular histories that have claimed otherwise, but the missionaries, you know, we have not seen evidence that the missionaries ever, ever prohibited the local people from surfing, but they did certainly discourage people from surfing, I mean, by virtue of the fact that they they characterize it as a sinful activity, or at least many of the missionaries did. You know, this, the logical consequences of that for the Hawaiian people were really quite apparent.

Scott Laderman 13:26

Now, at the same time, that surfing was being frowned on by the missionaries who had arrived there together with, you know, other Americans and Europeans who had arrived but without the same sort of cultural baggage and, and just savor that the missionary saw in the activity. A number of foreign pathogens were introduced to the island, into the islands at the time. And this, as you know, most people in Hawaii are aware led to an enormous demographic tragedy in which, you know, greater than 90% the best estimates suggest of the native Hawaiian population perished as a result of these introduced diseases. And, you know, this moral approbation given to surfing together with the demographic tragedy meant that by the end of the 19th century, the number of surfers in Hawaii had shrunk considerably. It was a, you know, a mere fraction of what it had been previously. But Hawaiians did continue to surf, this was for them a practice that they continued. It was in the late 19th century, again as folks in Hawaii will know that the United States annexed Hawaii. This was in 1898, following the overthrow of the monarchy and in 1893. And as a result of that annexation process, a number of Americans began mobilizing to make Hawaii a state of the United States rather than simply a territory of the United States. And the problem that these local boosters saw was that Hawaii had a non-white majority at this point. Part of this was the native Hawaiian population. Part of this was laborers, especially from Asia who had been brought over to compensate for the fact that so many native Hawaiian people had died and that labor was needed to work the sugar plantations, pineapple plantations, and other industries that existed in Hawaii at that time. And these American boosters, white

American boosters, recognize that this was going to be a problem - that a non-white majority would make it difficult to create Hawaii as a state of the United States, that, that wouldn't sit well with white members of Congress, folks in the White House, because of the racist norms that existed at that time, this was a time of entrenched white supremacy, when it was considered perfectly normal and acceptable to see white folks as a superior race. And so what the folks who were boosters for Hawaiian statehood did was they endeavored to create a larger white population in Hawaii in order to, they hoped to at least achieve a white majority and thus make it viable for Hawaii to become a state. Now, they never succeeded in that, and what does any of this have to do with surfing? Well, surfing played a role in trying to create that white, white majority.

Scott Laderman 16:39

Surfing was seen as a touristic lure, as the United States took over Hawaii in the late 19th century, that it was an exotic pastime, that was something that men could do to demonstrate their manhood. This was at a time when Americans were greatly worried about what they considered the effeminacy of the American male population. In fact, you know, this is one of the arguments that's been made for why the United States went to war with Spain and in the Philippines in 1898. And surfing was a means of demonstrating one's manhood. So surfing was a way of bringing tourists from the mainland of the United States to Hawaii. And the hope was that these mainlanders coming over to Hawaii as tourists would see what a wonderful this place, place this was and make the decision to stay and live there. And so surfing, like hula, became a way of drawing those early tourists to Hawaii as an exotic practice and exotic pastime in an effort to create ultimately a white majority. So it was very instrumental in this very early tourist development of Hawaii and Waikiki in particular. Now, around that same time, two Hawaiians began the process of globalizing this sport. One of these was George Freeth, who was a mixed blood Hawaiian, who went to California in the first decade of the 20th century, he went over to seek work in some of the coastal resorts that were being developed in the South Bay, or more broadly, in the Santa Monica Bay, because Venice was part of that as well, in the Santa Monica Bay area of Los Angeles, and he found work doing a couple of things, one of which was putting on surfing demonstrations. And this was something you know that, that fascinated local people, in considerable part, because the ocean at that time was something that, that white Americans in particular, greatly feared. It was not the place where people went to enjoy themselves that we know it today, at least going actually into the water. Most white Americans could not swim. In fact, the greatest swimmers in the world at this time were people from Polynesia, such as Hawaiians, people in West Africa, non-white people were much more skilled swimmers than were white Americans. And so, what, what George Freeth did in addition to putting on these surfing lessons, as he also played an instrumental role in developing and professionalizing the lifeguarding service in Southern California. This was a means of ensuring that if people who decided to go into the water found themselves in trouble, that there would be professionals there to help save them. So in other words, it was a way of helping to, you know, demonstrate that, that this, the ocean can be a source of leisure and pleasure. And so this was, was one of the ways that surfing expanded beyond Hawaii when George Freeth brought it to Southern California. It had been done even earlier before that, there were three Hawaiian princes who came over and put on a surfing demonstration in Santa Cruz in 1885, but it didn't really stick, it didn't really take, but it was George Freeth who helped to plant those seeds and helped to develop, you know, the services that emerged in California, so that you know, by the second half of the 20th century, California became in

many ways, the center of global surf culture. Now another Hawaiian who played an important role in globalizing surfing was Duke Kahanamoku, who in the second decade of the 20th century, traveled to, well a number of places, including the mainland of the United States, but perhaps most significantly to Australia and to New Zealand. And Duke Kahanamoku this time had developed an international reputation as the world's fastest swimmer. He was an extraordinary swimmer, he swam in several Olympics winning, winning a number of medals. And Duke, when he would go put on swimming demonstrations around the world as in Australia, New Zealand, also put on surfing displays, and this helped to popularize surfing in Australia. Again, Duke Kahanamoku was not the first person to serve in Australia, but helped to popularize it there and plant the seeds for that, that surf culture that then soon emerged in in Australia, with Australia becoming probably, you know, outside of the United States, with the United States thinking here, both about California and Hawaii, Australia becoming, you know, the principal center of surf culture outside of North America and Hawaii.

Scott Laderman 21:20

And so that began that globalization process of surfing. It remains still a fairly marginal activity, really, until after the Second World War, at which point it, it exploded. And it did so for a number of reasons, having to do with the booming economy in the United States in particular, there was a massive expansion of the middle class in the immediate post war years. This brought people to California with the Cold War and the rise of the aerospace industry there. These were young men working as engineers who had families, their children now growing up by the coast in California, were looking for things to do, surfing became a popular outlet for that. Similar phenomenon existed in Florida. And what we see then is by the 1950s, a real explosion in surf culture, so that it wasn't just something that was done in Hawaii, it wasn't just something that was done a little bit in California, it really now begins to take off so that even by the late 1950s, Hollywood is starting to project surfing films on the big screen, the first of these is Gidget, which was based on a best-selling novel, and then a, you know, box office hit. You know, they're the beach party, movies of Annette Funicello and Frankie Avalon in the early 1960s. Now all of these were Hollywood's way of attempting to capture at least capitalize on this fascination with young people heading into the ocean to ride waves. But there wasn't really anything that captured the larger American public's attention that came out of that more organic surf culture until Bruce Brown's "The endless summer" in the 1960s. And that then became, you know, sort of the first, like I said, organic surf film, surf flick, you know, somewhat something made by a surfer here that surfers actually saw themselves as, as part of that really captured the American public's attention becoming, you know, up through the Michael Moore era, probably the most commercially successful documentary film until that time. So this is a little bit about the the globalization of surf culture, and finally, the explosion in surf culture in the post war era. There are other things I'm happy to discuss. But I know we only have limited time here.

Tony Vega 21:20

No, sure. Sure. No, that was a wonderful overview. So alright, so there's a lot of things that you touched on there, you know, that there's certainly you know, the, the elements of imperialism and all these things that you were talking about a little bit earlier. So I'm wondering, you know, like nowadays, like, surfing is seen as, by a lot of people, you know, people that may not necessarily know all the history, but, you know, as this kind of cool thing, you know, it's this X game sort of thing where, you know, you go out

and you ride the waves and, you know, Cowabunga Hill, this kind of stuff, but I'm wondering, like, what is something or maybe a couple things that you would like people to, you know, specifically understand about, you know, the complicated history of surfing that maybe does not get out as much as, you know, maybe it should?

Scott Laderman 24:33

Well, I, you know, it's a good question. You know, I think you're absolutely right, that that people's view of surfing, and I'm thinking here of, especially non-surfers, but even a number of surfers to people's view of surfing tends to be a very simplistic understanding of this pastime, that it is this mindless form of pleasure, that it's something that that young people in particular have taken up over the years in order to escape the realities of the material world, this could be, you know, getting out in the water, not having to worry about the fact that, you know, in the 1960s, you could be facing the draft for the Vietnam War, or you may be heading into a job that you're not thrilled about but you believe, well, it's expected that I'm going to work in this way and have a family. Surfing seems to be an escape from, from many of those things. But at the same time, surfing is, you know, as you mentioned, is has been very much caught up in things such as colonialism and imperialism in ways that I don't think much of the world appreciates and recognizes, including many surfers, that we can't genuinely understand the history of surfing without understanding the ways that surfing has benefited from some of those processes that have led to, for example, in imperial United States that we think about the diffusion of surf culture in the post World War II period, that diffusion is very much tied together with that dispersal of American power abroad. You know, in thinking about the origins of surf culture in Japan, for example, while we see the origins of that with the US military occupation of Japan, in the post war period, and that, of course, was part of this US effort to create, you know, a global order that was conducive to the principles of liberal capitalism. And so, when we think about how surfing has spread around the world, how it's taken off around the world, how surfers themselves become tourists seeking out these untouristic parts of the planet where they might find waves to themselves, all of this has caught up in certain processes, certain material and social realities that, that surfers have tried to ignore, but that it's really quite difficult to ignore. I mean, Indonesia is an example of this, you know, it's surfers may have thought they discovered a warm water surfing paradise in the 1970s, which for many surfers, it was but at the same time, Indonesia was impossible to not recognize that Indonesia was what Amnesty International, one of the world's major human rights organizations, called an Asian gulag at that time, you know, with tens of thousands of political prisoners, people being tortured and disappeared, widespread executions, you know, in 1975, as I mentioned before, you had the Indonesian invasion and occupation of East Timor that culminated in what human rights scholars call a genocide in that country. You know, surfers tried to turn away from these things, and I think surfing almost demanded it, right?! that you know, to, to recognize that one was part of a larger political world was to interfere with the transcendence of the wave riding experience. But to do so, surfers had to really turn a blind eye to what was happening and to their contributions to it. You know, if you were surfing in Indonesia, in the 1970s, you were spending money there, you were legitimizing the Indonesian government. You may not have wanted to think you were doing those things, but that's what it looked like, and certainly how it was interpreted by the Indonesian authorities who, in fact, you know, the Suharto dictatorship sponsored surfers traveling through the archipelago at that time, you know, seen surfing as a means of both providing legitimacy to this government that was detested by much of the Indonesian population while at the same time, surfers

were seen as spreading modernization and development to the far corners of the archipelago as they were searching for waves, spending money for acquiring lodging, eating in restaurants, availing themselves of local transportation options, you know, all of these things were helping to, to bolster and buttress the Indonesian regime.

Tony Vega 29:05

Mmhm. Yeah. Like another thing that, you know, I couldn't help but think about, you know, as we've been talking is kind of how the modern image of a surfer tends to be, you know, a young, Caucasian man, right?! But, you know, we talk about, like, let's go back 100 years, back to the days of Duke Kahanamoku, you know, like your, maybe the conception of a surfer was a young Hawaiian man, right?!

Scott Laderman 29:33

Totally.

Tony Vega 29:34

But, you know, that's changed totally. And, you know, yes. You don't have to know all that history. Yes. You don't have to know, you know, the, the origins in Hawaii and all that to be able to enjoy surfing, and yet, you know, like, it's innately connected to, you know, the Hawaiian culture, you know, centuries and centuries here, here in Hawaii, right. So, it's just interesting how the image has changed so radically.

Scott Laderman 30:01

It has. I, you know, it's really, it's, it's quite a remarkable development I think because you're absolutely right, you know, surfing originated with non-white people, non-white people have always been among those the most skilled and talented surfers. But the stereotypical image of a surfer is, you know, a blond haired white guy, who, you know, there are plenty of, of, you know, outstanding blond haired white surfers, but they seem to receive disproportionately, you know, the preponderance of attention, rather than, you know, the, the Hawaiians or others who have been among the most skilled people in this, in this sport, and certainly, of course, the originators of it. You know, this issue of race is one that really came to a head, probably most prominently in South Africa in the 1980s. South Africa, you know, was a country with an entrenched system of racial separation known as apartheid, and, you know, South Africa had also emerged by the 1980s, as together with the United States and Australia, probably, you know, at the center of global surf culture. You know, one of the world champion surfers in the 1970s, for example, was Shawn Thompson, a very talented South African surfer. But surfing in South Africa was racially segregated, just as I should point out, it had been in parts of the United States as well. But that was something that had, at least as a matter of law, ended in the United States years earlier. But by the 1980s, you know, given the apartheid system in South Africa and the fact that professional surfing, in particular, was viewing South Africa as one of the major stops on the surfing world tour, there was a long standing contest there known as the Gunston 500, for example, you know, it was almost inevitable that questions about race and surfing would arise. And they did so when, in the mid 1980s, a number of professional surfers, Tom Carroll was the first quickly joined by Tom Curren, and then Martin Potter. Carroll was an Australian, Curren was a Californian, and Martin Potter was, well, he was a British national, but had been raised in South Africa, the three of them spearheaded a boycott

movement of South Africa, in which surfers said, as long as apartheid exists, we're not going to compete in South Africa. I mean, these were three people who, either at the time or subsequently, would be world champions. And so we're talking here about three very pivotal and central figures in the history of professional surfing. And they forced surfing to come to terms with the fact that you know, by continuing to, you know, by the ASP, the Association of Surfing Professionals, continuing to sponsor contests in South Africa, to spend money in South Africa, that they were legitimising the apartheid system on the one hand, I mean, that was a tremendous concern. And then, of course, in doing so they were preventing South Africans of color, and that would be both South Africans who had their roots in, in Africa as well as South Africans who had their roots in in Asia, from being able to fully participate in the past time as well. Hawaiians in particular, became aware of this, probably know figure more so than then Eddie Aikau, who's a, you know, quite celebrated figure in modern Hawaiian surf history. Eddie Aikau traveled to South Africa, he won a trip there from placing highly in a contest in Hawaii. And Eddie Aikau is a dark skinned Hawaiian recognized when he got there, that his experience in South Africa was going to be very different from that of his Hawaiian teammates who were not native Hawaiians, but we're, we're haoles, who were there who enjoyed the privilege of their white skin. And so Eddie Aikau had frankly a miserable experience in South Africa, writing that he never been so scared as when he walked the streets there, you know, he was barred from being able to stay in the hotel where he had a reservation, you know, really just saw the injustice of apartheid firsthand. And you know, this created, or at least should have created some momentum toward the surfing world tour, again spearheaded by the ASP from perhaps reconsidering its participation in in South Africa in the 1980s but, but sadly did not it took a number of surfers again led by Carroll, Curren, and Potter to really get that boycott movement going and, and they they did, so they stuck with it much to their credit. I mean, you know, this was I think, really a high point in the history of surfing, you know, where surfers recognize that riding waves wasn't the end-all and be-all of surfing, that they also had responsibilities as citizens of a global community to do things that they saw as morally right, even if it interfered with their ability to surf. And as a result, they stayed away.

Tony Vega 35:14

Hmm, that's very interesting. I had no idea about, that's very cool. Just, just to wrap things up, but I'm wondering if, I mean, you already had a general, you know, understanding of some of the issues that might come up as you began to do this research, you know, for the book, and, you know, as a professor, but I'm wondering, like, what did you come to discover along the way? Was there anything unexpected that you uncovered anything that kind of expanded your view on this whole history and situation?

Scott Laderman 35:49

Yeah, you know, one of the most surprising things I discovered, and this may not be as interesting to other folks, but, you know, I spent, you know, my time today with you talking about surfing history, but there's another part of my professional life and that is as a historian of the Vietnam War. And, you know, surfing does have an interesting intersection with the Vietnam War.

Tony Vega 36:09

Oh, really.

Scott Laderman 36:10

During the, during the war, people were surfing in Vietnam, there was actually, you know, there were competitions, military competitions in Vietnam, during the war, there were R&R centers along the coast of Vietnam, that included the ability for people to use surfboards and, and ride waves there. And so, you know, in a, I don't want to, you know, make this a bigger deal than it is, but surfing did exist during the Vietnam War, which gives, you know, some credibility, although, not as it appeared on film, but some credibility to the film *Apocalypse Now* and the surfing scene in that film. You remember, may remember in *Apocalypse Now*, the most memorable parts, at least the most memorable, memorable lines from that film all seem to come from the surfing portion of the film, in which the Robert Duvall character, you know, recognizes that there's this young hotshot Californian in the unit and wants to allow him to surf. So to do that, Duvall goes in and destroys this coastal village in an effort to pacify it and make it possible for people to get out in the water and surf there. I mean, this is you know, the "Charlie, don't surf". You know, it's during this scene where Duvall, you know, utters his, his famous line, "I love the smell of napalm in the morning", and so on, right?! These, you know, very memorable moments from *Apocalypse Now* come from that film. But that line, "Charlie, don't surf" really, you know, is something of course "Charlie don't surf". You know, Charlie, here is a reference to Victor Charlie are the Viet Cong, which was the the pejorative name that the United States and the government in Saigon gave to the Vietnamese revolutionaries who were organized in something called the National Liberation Front. And I just took it as a truism, truism, of course that that you know, Charlie don't surf but I discovered in the archives, is I was doing research at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, just outside Washington, DC, I found a, a military intelligence report that that said that there were reports of members of the National Liberation Front using surfboards to move along the coast.

Tony Vega 38:30

Wow.

Scott Laderman 38:30

And that, frankly, surprised the hell out of me.

Tony Vega 38:33

Yeah.

Scott Laderman 38:33

You know, that, you know, I have no idea whether they were catching waves or riding waves. I like to think that they were but who knows. But, you know, when we when we think about that famous line from *Apocalypse Now*, "Charlie don't surf," well, it turns out, Charlie may have been surfing. And then, you know, that was I think, as someone who does a lot of work on on the Vietnam War, and particularly the cultural history of the Vietnam War, I found that really quite surprising and quite fascinating.

Tony Vega 39:04

To learn more about Dr. Laderman's research and the history of surfing, you can pick up a copy of "Empire in Waves: A Political History of Surfing," there will be a link in the show notes. Transmissions from Hawaii is a production of Wasabi Magazine. It's produced in the beautiful city of Honolulu, Hawaii by me, Tony Vega. Please remember to subscribe to the show so that you don't miss any future episodes. And don't forget to leave a rating and a review in your podcast app of choice. I have noticed that quite a few people have left ratings over on Apple podcasts, so thank you so much for that. By the way, if you want to hear more interviews done by me, I do have another podcast, actually I have two other podcasts, they're both focused on Japan though. So one of them is called Japan Station, and on that show I interview people who have some connection to Japan. There's a lot of, well, really interesting people that I've managed to interview, including a couple with connections to Hawaii, such as the comic book creator artists, Stan Sakai, who created a Usagi Yojimbo, so if you're interested in that, I do have an episode where I interview him. There's at least 89 episodes if not 90 by the time that this episode comes out, so a lot of content for you to listen to if you're interested in that sort of thing. I also produce another podcast called Ichimon Japan. That one is also Japan focused. It's also a little bit sillier, a little bit more fun and it involves us, me and my co-host, asking kind of fun questions about Japan and trying to answer them. So again, Japan Station is the main one that I produce interviews with people with some connection to Japan. You can find it at japanstationpodcast.com or wherever you get your podcasts. But of course, there is another episode of Transmissions from Hawaii coming so don't forget to subscribe on your podcast app of choice. Mahalo for listening and see you next time on Transmissions from Hawaii.