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Na Kua'aina: Living Hawaiian Culture

Davianna Pomaika'i McGregor

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The word kua'aina translates literally as "back land" or "back country." Davianna Pomaika'i McGregor grew up hearing it as a reference to an awkward or unsophisticated person from the country. However, in the context of the Native Hawaiian cultural renaissance of the late twentieth century, kua'aina came to refer to those who actively lived Hawaiian culture and kept the spirit of the land alive. The mo'olelo (oral traditions) recounted in this book reveal how kua'aina have enabled Native Hawaiians to endure as a unique and dignified people after more than a century of American subjugation and control. The stories are set in rural communities or cultural kipuka - oases from which traditional Native Hawaiian culture can be regenerated and revitalized. By focusing in turn on an island (Moloka'i), moku (the districts of Hana, Maui, and Puna, Hawai'i), and an ahupua'a (Waipi'io, Hawai'i), McGregor examines kua'aina life ways within distinct traditional land use regimes. The 'olelo no'eau (descriptive proverbs and poetical sayings) for which each area is famous are interpreted, offering valuable insights into the place and its overall role in the cultural practices of Native Hawaiians. Discussion of the landscape and its settlement, the deities who dwelt there, and its rulers is followed by a review of the effects of westernization on kua'aina in the nineteenth century. McGregor then provides an overview of social and economic changes through the end of the twentieth century and of the elements of continuity still evident in the lives of kua'aina. The final chapter on Kaho'olawe demonstrates how kua'aina from the cultural kipuka under study have been instrumental in restoring the natural and cultural resources of the island.

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