

Oceania Societies and Cultures

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Due to the popular images of Polynesian football players (e.g. Troy Polamalu), Hawaii as a tourist destination, and Pacific themed movies (e.g. *Lilo & Stitch*), the general public is basically familiar with the Pacific region and its people. However, the perception is often based on stereotypes perpetuated in the media and popular literature. For example, it is often assumed that they are a singular “race”. The romanticized images of gentle natives, islands, palm trees, and sandy beaches also masked their struggle against colonial regimes (e.g. native Hawaiians), climate change (e.g. Micronesian atoll nations), nuclear waste (e.g. Marshall Islands and Tahiti), and racial politics (e.g. Fiji). It is equally important not to simply cast the islanders as powerless victims, as they are the descendants of masterful seafarers and traders who utilized the ocean to establish connections and whose rich traditions of arts and performance are still being practiced today, despite the challenges from colonialism, missionization, and globalization.

Starting from the great migration of the Pacific Islanders and the complex regional interactions, this course examines the traditional and contemporary cultures of the three major areas of the Pacific, Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia, and briefly covers Australia. It includes a geographical and historical introduction to the Pacific as well as an exploration of vital issues of identity, nation-building, religion, hierarchy, environment, kinship, and economy that are crucial to their survival and cultural revival today. Through this course, students will be able to see the Pacific beyond stable categories and to appreciate the entangled histories and practices of the Pacific Islanders.