



# The World in the Curl: An Unconventional History of Surfing

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**The World in the Curl: An Unconventional History of Surfing** Peter Westwick , Peter Neushul  
**The thinking-person's guide to surfing and the world it has created.**

For several semesters, the most popular course at the University of California at Santa Barbara was a team-taught lecture course on the history of surfing and, specifically, the cultural, political, economic, and environmental consequences of surfing's evolution from a sport of Hawaiian kings to a billion-dollar worldwide industry. Peter Westwick and Peter Neushul weren't surprised by the popularity of the class (UC Santa Barbara is a surfing school, after all, and together they have more than a century of experience in the water), but they were surprised that their non-surfing students outnumbered the surfers. There is something about surfing that people yearn to understand--and this is the book that examines the enduring worldwide appeal of the sport both in myth and reality.

Drawing on the authors' expertise as, respectively, a cold war historian and a historian of environmental history, *The Surfing Professors Explain the World* brings alive the colorful history of surfing by drawing readers into the ideas that have fueled the sport's expansion: colonialism, the military-industrial complex, globalization, capitalism, and race and gender roles. In a highly readable and provocative narrative history of the sport's signal moments--from the spread of surfing to the US, to the development of surf culture, to the introduction of women into the sport--Neushul and Westwick draw an indelible portrait of surfing and surfers as actors on the global stage.

## The World in the Curl: An Unconventional History of Surfing Details

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# From Reader Review The World in the Curl: An Unconventional History of Surfing for online ebook

## Geoffrey says

Rather academic, you'd have to be a serious surf fan to plow through it. (It is a text book after all). Interesting sections on Hawaii, and big wave surfing, reminded me of Shoal of time, by Gavan Davis, and The Wave, by Susan Casey. I am a windsurfer, and kitesurfer, and spend a fair amount of time kitesurfing Kailua on Oahu. Even with this interest level, I found myself skimming large sections of the book.

Good textbook, interesting, but not compelling read on surfing.

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## Vanessa says

This book is awesome. I don't think there are enough great books about surfing. I've gained new context for WSL commentary and the allusions to surfing legacies. I loved reading this and it has stuck with me.

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## Darcee Kraus says

As a surfer living in Humboldt County, California, this book lifted my soul. Most of what I have heard about legends, politics, and surfers throughout history was included by Westwick, as well as many interesting topics I have not heard much about. The World in the Curl allowed me to become more educated on the sport that I live and breathe, and for that Westwick, I truly thank you.

Darcee Kraus  
Mckinleyville, CA  
<http://www.etsy.com/shop/BlassGlass>

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## John says

I went to UCSB and kind of like that Westwick is a real historian dealing with the story of Hawaii and what really happened since it's exposure to Western culture. The Hawaiian's got screwed and they knew it way long time ago. This a balanced, and fair account of the loss of water skills by a dominant culture taken over by a technological one.

The Hawaiians were not surfing after the turn of the century because they were working the equivalent of 7/11. Not that there is anything wrong with working at 7/11, but that before contact, most Hawaiians had time to go surf and still make a living planting, fishing and generally living the good life. I liked that Westwick put to rest the false blame on the religious proselytizers and put is square on the Western culture of greed.

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## **Ron says**

Many thanks to Peter & Peter for writing this exceptional history of surfing.

I gagged at the chapter on ocean pollution and was amazed at how much money the surfing apparel industry makes.

The two Peters guide you through "the tension between the romantic and the modern, the natural and the artificial, the communal and the commercial.. ultimately, between the heart and the mind."

Well worth reading.

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## **Kim says**

I don't know how unconventional it is, but this book is quiet enjoyable. It approaches the history of surfing from a number of different perspectives, most of them external to the sport itself. I especially found fascinating the associated history of swimming. But really, the cultural and social history of the sport were excellent, as was the environmental history.

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## **R says**

The best historical review of surfing that I've read. It avoids cliches and indolent research and sets the avocation in a plausible and well-argued cultural/historical context. I was especially glad the authors didn't surrender to lazy and prosaic observation when commenting on the relationship between the Christian missions and early Hawaiian surf culture.

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## **David Ketelsen says**

I received this book free from Library Thing for review.

I really enjoyed this book. The authors, Peter Westwick & Peter Neushul, are both historians with the University of California system and their professionalism shows in this book. The first third of the book is a conventional history of surfing from ancient times in Polynesia to events in this decade. I loved this section. Their ability to make history readable and enjoying is commendable. I wish they had written the history textbooks I had to read in college.

The middle is kinda preachy and I got a little uncomfortable at being lectured about environmental concerns and misogyny. If you're not defensive about these topics I'm sure you'll enjoy this as well. Being an older white male made me too much of a target here. The discussion of Title IX is particularly illuminating.

The last section of the book analyzes the business of surfing and also addresses current trends in surfing and related sports. It's interesting how the authors trace how the sport of surfing has influenced extreme sports and so much of youth-oriented fashion.

All in all a very interesting book though the initial history section is the part that I liked the most.

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## **Sonia says**

This is a great book that takes a look at surfing culture from its Hawaiian roots through its bad-boy days in the late 20th century, to the present, where surfers and the industry that caters to them must respond positively to environmental and economic hard times, or perish. Much like a textbook (which it undoubtedly is) the authors draw a broad line around surfing's history, culture, and make suggestions for participatory responsibility to steward the shores at which it is practiced. I learned about so much more than "surfing" per se, including the history of Hawaii, the start of the aeronautical industry in California, and worldwide environmental issues that both drive and threaten tourism at beaches in the U.S. and around the world. This was a very easy and enjoyable read.

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## **Washington Post says**

Summer may be receding. But here's a book to keep the sun glowing in your bosom: SURFING! "The World in the Curl" seeks to explain surfing's transcendent appeal while putting the sport in its social and historical context. Peter Westwick and Peter Neushul trace surfing from its ancient Polynesian roots to its current incarnation as a "global commercial and cultural phenomenon." Along the way, they look at the connections between surfing and, among other things, colonialism, technology, Hollywood, advertising, fashion, real estate development, pollution, climate change — even Islamic fundamentalism. This grab-bag approach has its shortcomings, but the overall result is provocative and highly entertaining, if not always flattering to surfers.

Read our review:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinion...>

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## **LAPL Reads says**

While surfing on a warm day near Santa Barbara, two senior surfers, each having surfed over thirty years, and who were also scholars and historians, thought it would be fun and informative to teach a class on the history of surfing to students at U.C. Santa Barbara, known for its easy access to good surfing sites. The class was "inundated" with students and most of them were non-surfers. This book evolved from the class and covers the modern history of surfing as it originated in Hawaii. There are other parts of the world (Peru, West Africa, and Polynesia) where people surfed, but Hawaii is the link to today's sport.

Whatever the season or weather, "Surf's up!" are words that bring joy to passionate surfers. If the waves are flat, then a fair substitute is skateboarding, which on its own has become a common land sport that evolved from the water sport. Modern surfing is a leisure activity, but also a fierce, sometimes deadly one, that originated in Hawaii, and went through many ups and downs because of explorers, missionaries, and the sandalwood and whaling trades. Early missionaries to Hawaii were appalled at the sight of native surfers riding the waves completely nude, or wearing very little clothing. It was not the zealous missionaries who caused the sport to take a downturn, but contact with a mix of Europeans who brought a horrific group of diseases that killed off large numbers of the indigenous people. The Hawaiians were healthy, fit and isolated,

but during the mid-nineteenth century their death rate was very high. In the early part of the twentieth century, three key people helped to revive the sport: George Freeth, Alexander Hume Ford, and Jack London were enthusiastic boosters. Along with Duke Kahanamoku who is the father of modern surfing, the annexation of Hawaii, tourism, and the 1916 cover of Sunset magazine, the sport was jump started into the popular activity it is today, plus created a multi-billion dollar industry.

The unconventional aspect of this history is that Peter Westwick and Peter Neushul bring their scholarship and joy to a sport they love. Most surfing books write about modern personalities and places, but these two surfer dudes give us so much more: in a tightly arranged work they cover the worldwide popularity of the sport; how invasive water-pollution and climate change have affected surfing; the influence of modern technology, from the smallest advancement such as surfing leashes to improvement of boards, has helped popularize the sport; the attendant growth of clothing, paraphernalia, music and films; racism and sexism; the unique culture of the surfing world which has created its own jargon and mystique where people live to follow the waves. And they do answer a question many have asked as they visit our beaches or drive along the coast, and see bobbing bodies, straddling boards: What are they waiting for? Of course, it is the next wave, the perfect wave, and another after that, and another and . . .

Reviewed by Sheryn Morris, Librarian, Central Library

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### **Liam says**

"[S]ome of Waikiki's sand came from Manhattan Beach in California. That was only fair. Waikiki had already sent surfing to California, which helped turn coastal towns like Manhattan Beach into their own slices of paradise, in which surfing figured prominently. Hawaii gave California the beach lifestyle, and California gave back the beach itself." (64)

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### **Lissa says**

The history of surfing seems like it would be a one dimensional topic, however Peter Westwick and Peter Neushul do a good job of incorporating world events into the discussion. This book follows surfing beginning with its Polynesian roots to the present day. Along the way the book details the development of Hawaii and the Californian coast, two World Wars, Hollywood beach movies and the role of sex and race in surfing. There were a couple of really "dry" chapters, including a very long history of the wetsuit, that I really could have done without but overall this is a fascinating look at surfing and the industry that surrounds it.

This book was a Goodreads Firstreads Giveaway.

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### **Karen E. Garcia says**

I won this book in a Goodreads Contest. I am not a surfer but regardless found this book enjoyable. It does not focus much about the waves, boards, and emotions like a typical surfer but the history, technology, world events, and other topics that propel the sport into the world. Despite being text based, considering it being about its history, it was interesting to keep my attention. I can see this book not being for someone who

dislike history being heavy with facts and statements, or who is not a fan of surfing in any form. After finishing this book I had a deeper understanding of the foundation of surfing and a better respect for the sport in general.

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## **Biblio Files (takingadayoff) says**

The World in the Curl is a social history of surfing, but like many good studies of a micro-subject, it's about more than just surfing.

Surfers and university professors Westwick and Neushul have written this book as a textbook for the course they teach at UC Santa Barbara. They found that most of the people who take their class, even at a campus that is right on the beach, are not surfers. But like many of us, the students are mildly fascinated by the surfing culture they've seen on TV and in movies over the years.

The book is not written like a textbook, but like a popular history (a fairly rigorous one, so be prepared), and covers many aspects of surfing that I had not even considered, such as environmentalism and the influence the military and war has had on surfing (and vice versa). It also covers expected topics, such as surfing in mass media, sexism in surfing, and surfing's influence on fashion.

Most unexpected for me was that surfers, as a group, unlike their reputation as a counterculture, are much like the rest of the population as a whole. There are a few exceptional characters who further the sport and make it better for everyone, but most are unwilling to take action to preserve the beaches and oceans, and most are reluctant to welcome those they see as outsiders.

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