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National News

COLUMN ONE

# Superferry sets off the battle of Kauai

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Dennis Fujimoto / Garden Island

Residents of the island of Kauai protest the arrival of the Hawaii Superferry in August. Islanders, in the face of Coast Guard gunboats, formed a floating blockade at the harbor entrance and, after a three-hour standoff, forced the \$85-million ferry to turn back to Honolulu.

## Longtime residents of the Hawaiian island have found a focus for their resentment of nonstop development and tourism.

By Tomas Alex Tizon, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer  
October 9, 2007

LIHUE, HAWAII -- The woman in the sun hat wants to crack someone in the jaw. It's been a bad day. Actually, for Kaiulani Huff, it's been a bad few decades.

She has watched as her home, the island of Kauai, changed from a wild garden of secret places to -- in her eyes -- an overcrowded amusement park for rich people.

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**Hawaii Superferry**  
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"Welcome to Disneyland," she says one day while driving around the island. "See the natives. Watch us dance the hula. Clog up our roads. Buy up all the good land. And please, help yourselves to our beaches!"

Development on Kauai has been so unrelenting that Huff's sentiment has become widespread among longtime residents, although until recently it was a quiet simmering.



**Surfer**  
[click to enlarge](#)

In late August, with the arrival of the Hawaii Superferry, the first inter-island car-carrying ferry, the simmering boiled over. Islanders, in the face of Coast Guard gunboats, formed a floating blockade at the harbor entrance and, after a three-hour standoff, forced the \$85-million ferry to turn back to Honolulu. The protest had turned into a citizen uprising.

The crowd represented a motley army of beach bums and businessmen, lawyers and ex-cops, dopers and doctors, and at least one college instructor -- many of whom discovered for the first time that they shared the same concerns. How many tourists and resorts and subdivisions can a little island take?



**Voice of protest**  
[click to enlarge](#)

"The population is saying, 'Enough already,' " says Dennis Chun, 57, who with his surfboard had helped lead the human flotilla.

At the forefront of that protest was Huff, her face covered in war paint, like her Polynesian ancestors going into battle. Unlike her ancestors, she wore a bamboo sun hat.



**Island rebellion**  
[click to enlarge](#)

Wearing the same hat this afternoon, she drives around the island's north shore in bumper-to-bumper traffic and ends up in another confrontation. She stops her pickup at what used to be a favorite secluded spot, now part of Ha'ena Beach Park. The lot overflows with cars, and the beach swarms with people she doesn't know. At one end, Huff spots an old-timer selling baskets made of coconut leaves. She pulls over to visit with him.



**The future?**  
[click to enlarge](#)

Within seconds, a young couple, cameras dangling, slip into their rental car. The driver backs up, but Huff's truck is blocking the way. The driver tells Huff to move her truck.

"Just cool it, brah," Huff tells him. "This isn't New York. This is Kauai. We'll be leaving in a few."



**GRAPHIC**  
**Intended routes**  
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The driver backs up another several inches. He glares at Huff.

There was a time, when Huff was younger and rowdier, when she might have turned on the impatient driver. Instead she tells herself to breathe. She buys three baskets, moves her truck.

The couple speeds off.

Later in the drive, Huff says she wanted to ask the couple:

*Is your ohana from here? Did your family gather at this white-sand beach for generations, before it became a park, before the dune was paved over, before the signs warning of riptides went up? Did your family swim in the warm blue salt water and then race across the road to the cold freshwater pond that formed from the river that flows down from Mt. Waialeale, and then plop down on the sand for hours on end -- with no one else around?*

"My family did," Huff says.

She is 45, a striking, pale-skinned, black-maned "island girl" (her label) and a jack-of-all-trades whose list of former occupations includes flight attendant, bank executive, hula dancer and helicopter refueler. Making a living on a tiny island often means taking whatever job comes along.

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Now Huff spends most of her time at home, caring for her quadriplegic teenager son (injured in a diving accident), while her husband, a carpenter, works to support the family.

They live in a modest, oft-remodeled rambler inland of Kapaa (population about 10,000) on the east shore, next to a goat pasture. The house sits among other modest homes inhabited mostly by locals.

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