

THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD, PART 1

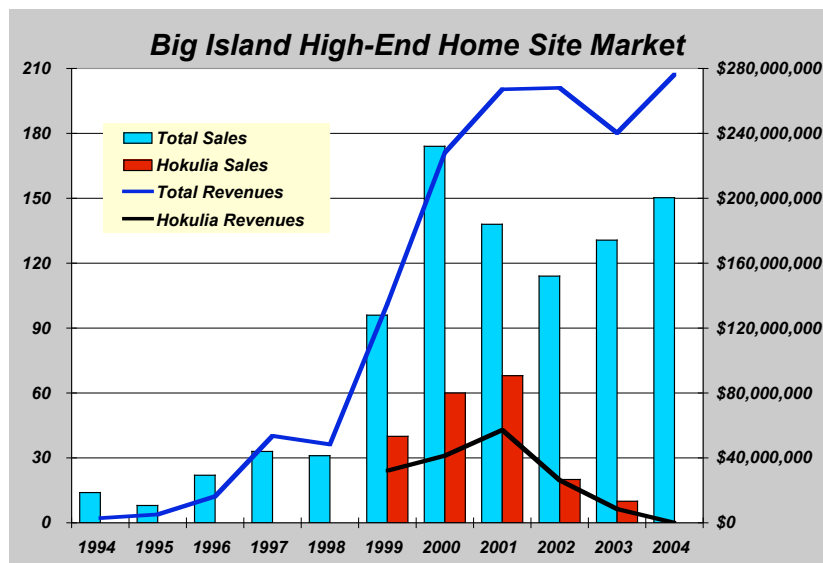
Next to "THE MEANING OF LIFE*," this is my all-time favorite movie title, comedy category, hyperbole subsection. I allude to it here, because someone asked me to write a short exegesis on the history of the housing market on Oahu. In my humble opinion, I am the right one to graph such an epic, but the wrong one to write it up. The problem? I got a 'D' in Western Civilization in 9th Grade... being too hyper to sift through the details, philosophy, science, art and context that goes into historian-ship.

But the part that appeals to me of such an assignment is playing God. It's easy: start with sweeping statements, spoken in theatrical tones, something I practice everyday with the wife and kids. Therefore, after playing Salomon, playing God should be a piece of cake for me, even if it means telling a his-story. I'll try to make historical and hysterical sense of what was the biggest real estate controversy of the year: the murder of a golf course residential development called Hokulia** on the Big Island.

Catchy word, huh, Murder? I'm sure some people see it otherwise, such as (again, spoken in Godly tones):

- ***Righting a Wrong.***
- ***The Redemption of the Aina.***
- ***The Rise and Fall of the Greedy.***

But these are stories best told by others. And, in this space I'm God, and I say it's a first degree homicide. I'm also a statistician, and a graph-istorian, so let me show you murder on a chart. It's the red bar (and the black line) that goes to zero in 2004... after being as high as half the market in 2001 (for sales, a quarter to a fifth of gross revenues).



You see what death looks like on a chart? From 1999-2001, Hokulia was the top selling project out of all the Big Island resorts, the General Motors of its market. Today, it is dead in the water,

with homes that are almost complete unable to be occupied... because the county cannot issue a certificate of occupancy.

A historical aside: note how Hokulia kicked mule by being the low-price leader in the marketplace, being at a lower price point (\$850,000ish) than the two Cadillac's of Kohala's Gold Coast, Kukio and Hualalai, who averaged \$5 and \$2.2 million per lot sale over the last few years. Interestingly, what came out in the press was that their lots were all over a million dollars (and, given a few more years of this boom, and \$850,000 will truly look moderate).

Anyway, enough of my hogwash about God and the press misconceptions, this column is about the murder of a market leader, an industry pacesetter. Wow, you say? What a headline, say I. Should I safeguard the movie rights to this story? Remember that the movie Saturday Night Fever came out of a New York Magazine story on the disco craze (so why not the Big Island land craze???)... But, if I'm going to get big bucks from a studio, or small bucks from Chris Lee at UH's Film School (no bucks?), this pig better have some lipstick. Like a plot.

So, what's the story. If there was a murder, who done it? The suspects are: The judge, who ruled in favor of the litigants charging that Hokulia was illegal. The litigants, who were on the attack for other reasons, including desecrating ancient gravesites and restricting public access. Also, for growing grass and garages (Yikes!!) on a barren hillside (Double Yikes!!!!) within an agricultural subdivision (Ah-ha, a clue).

If you examine the details of the crime, you find a lot of pain (no, not in terms of the murder weapon, a writ in the back... but pain in the butt, which comes from reviewing too many details). At the end of it all, you might conclude that maybe it wasn't Murder, but an inadvertent Suicide, given that the developer chose certain routes that were dead-ends (pun intended): like publicly attacking the impartiality of the presiding judge, not coming to a final settlement during mediation, deciding (on the advice of legal council) not pushing this project through the mists and quick-sands concerning the agricultural subdivision process of the LUC (another clue?) (or is this the murder weapon).

After all this, you may find the story is not even be a drama, but a comedy of errors. Except that there are real-life consequences. Serious ones. People lost their jobs. Others lost their money. Roads were built, but now are going nowhere. Golf course holes were built, but now aren't much enjoyed.

People on both sides lost their dreams. Both sides? No, not the pros and the cons of the issue, but both sides of the economy: the "supplies" and the "demands." The "supplies" are those who would have built a home on these homesites, supplied the homeowners with groceries, and sold 'Them' movie tickets. And the 'Them' are the "demands"... those people who bought the homesites, who worked with local architects to design their ideal getaway, who visited Kona again and again... And who paid an airport tax, a property tax, and a bunch of sales taxes.

In my God-like eye, the tragedy of this murder is that the community lost a chance to grow. History will show that Kona's shops will not be as populated, nor its schools. There will be fewer roads, and less tax revenue will go to keep up the local parks, finance the salaries of the local firemen and policemen. To be sure, there will be less traffic, and fewer houses, but also fewer opportunities for our children to make a living in Hawaii. I don't know who was responsible for the murder of a bigger, brighter future for the keikis in Kona, but shame on them.

* By Monty Python, who I used to work for

** By Lyle Anderson, who I never worked for