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In 1976, native Hawaiians and others sailed the Hōkūleʻa, a replica of a Polynesian twin-hulled voyaging canoe, using only traditional navigational techniques, to and from Tahiti, two thousand miles in each direction. In doing so, they demonstrated the feasibility of earlier large-scale migrations by canoe throughout the Pacific. Equally important, their actions helped unite many indigenous Pacific peoples in a consciousness of their common heritage. Some fifteen thousand celebrants met the Hōkūleʻa when she entered Tahiti’s Papeʻete harbor the first time. “Now you have returned,” observed one orator addressing the canoe’s crew members in a reference to the ancient Polynesian origins of Hawaiians. “The people of Polynesia have been overjoyed to hear of your voyage,” he concluded, “you are brothers.” On her return voyage to the Hawaiian Islands the Hōkūleʻa carried representatives from New Zealand, Samoa, Tahiti, Tonga, and the Marquesas. After another roundtrip between Hawaiʻi and Tahiti in 1980, those in charge of the Hōkūleʻa undertook a still longer trip, which they labeled a “voyage of rediscovery.” In the mid-1980s, the Hōkūleʻa traversed twelve thousand miles of the Pacific, bridging seven archipelagos from the Hawaiian Islands to Tahiti, Tonga, and New Zealand. The Hōkūleʻa set sail from the fishing village of Miloliʻi on the southwestern coast of the island of Hawaiʻi on January 10, 1985, and returned to Kualoa, a sandy point on Oʻahu, over two years later on May 23, 1987.¹

Hawaiians were not alone in their movements through the Pacific. In 1988, far to the north, Russian and American officials permitted Alaskan Natives to pay ceremonial visits to their counterparts across the Bering Sea in the Chukotka region, where they were, according to reporters, “welcomed enthusiastically by hundreds of Soviet adults and school children.” Their trip was part of a movement toward visa-free visits by Russian and Alaskan Natives across national boundaries.² Since World War II, there has been an
increasing integration—perhaps “reintegration” is a more accurate term—of the Pacific, in part through the migration of people.³

Integration has taken other important forms as well: economic integration, especially through trade; social and cultural integration, encouraged among other means by the expansion of tourism; and growth in unity among Pacific peoples as they threw off what they viewed as the repressive yoke of western colonialism. Overarching much of the integration was the new and immense military and economic power of the United States in the Pacific. That strength was both a legacy of the increased presence of the United States in the Pacific during World War II and a result of recognition on the part of American officials of the importance of the Pacific for the Cold War. America’s growing Pacific presence must, in fact, be seen as part of the development of a cold war with the Soviet Union (which, like the United States, greatly increased its Pacific military forces after World War II) and the People’s Republic of China, with the vast region of the Pacific caught between the Great Powers.

While focusing on the post–World War II development of the Pacific as an “American lake,” this chapter begins by examining earlier developments. Before contact with westerners, many Pacific peoples lived in oceanic asso-
ciations and empires. To some extent, they inhabited in an integrated Pacific. Colonization of the Pacific by western nations, including the United States, disrupted native associations by dividing the Pacific into European territorial possessions. Only later, with changes wrought by World War II, the Cold War, and other developments, did reintegration occur. The long history of the Pacific played important roles in influencing how people regarded economic development matters and environmental protection issues and how they fought and cooperated with each other to make their visions realities.

Early Indigenous Integration and Later Colonial Disintegration

The Pacific Ocean is the largest geographical feature on Earth, covering one-third of the globe, host to more than twenty thousand islands, 80 percent of the world’s total. It is a “water continent.” With each square mile of land come 130 square miles of ocean. Scholars have emphasized the importance of the Pacific Ocean and its peoples to world history for at least a generation now. They have stressed how long-term trends have affected recent developments and have highlighted that those developments need to be seen through non-western eyes. Geographer Gerard Ward expressed the views of many scholars when he observed in 1989 that, while the Pacific seemed empty to most Europeans, it was anything but vacant for the people living there at the time of contact, “They were skilled navigators for whom the Pacific was neither trackless nor empty.” Writing in 1994, anthropologist Ben Finney, who had spearheaded work on the Hōkūle‘a, called on scholars to focus on more than just the rim of the Pacific by looking at interactions among peoples of the islands and relationships between island peoples and those living beyond the islands.

Scholars examining the Pacific have been keenly aware of difficulties in considering the Pacific as one region. After observing in 1989 that the Pacific is “a hard place to identify with—so much ocean, too many islands,” Greg Dening stated that he would have “fewer qualms about the term ‘Pacific history’ if by it we meant history in the Pacific rather than history of the Pacific, and if by history in the Pacific we were much more tolerant of all the varieties of histories there are.” Similarly, Arif Dirlik has stressed the diversity of cultures in the Pacific. After rejecting such conceptions as the Pacific Rim and the Pacific Basin because they leave out the Pacific Ocean and most of its islands, he has claimed that the “Pacific region is an idea,” with political and
economic structures coming from both Asia and America. Jocelyn Linnekin has also observed that “Clearly there can be no single, seamless history of the many peoples who inhabit the Pacific Islands.”

Increasingly, however, scholars have seen the Pacific Ocean as a comprehensive region, in much the same ways that they have viewed the Mediterranean Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Atlantic Ocean. As early as 1979, Kerry R. Howe, the editor of Pacific Studies, urged scholars to look at “the Pacific islands within the much wider geographic, economic, and political framework of the Pacific Ocean involving, as it must, its adjacent shores—the Americas, Russia, Japan, Korea, China, Southeast Asia, and Australasia.” Such would be, he observed, “an Oceanic as opposed to insular orientation.” In 2000, Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giraldez, the editors of a book series on the Pacific World, stated that their premise was “that the Pacific represents as coherent a unit of analysis as the Atlantic Ocean, the Indian Ocean, and the many seas throughout the world.” Typical of the scholars taking broad approaches to the Pacific have been historians Paul D’Arcy and John McNeill. Their recent works have contributed greatly to reconceptualizations of the Pacific.

D’Arcy has been a leader in showing that the Pacific was “no empty quarter” before the entrance of the first Europeans. People probably moved, he has noted, into “the western margins of Oceania . . . around 50,000 years ago,” when ocean levels were low because water was locked up in glaciers and ice sheets in this cool time. People may have also crossed into North America via a land bridge across the Bering Strait called Beringia. Warm temperatures brought oceans to near their current levels about ten thousand years ago, by which time “human settlement had spread to Australia, New Guinea, and some of New Guinea’s more accessible offshore neighboring islands in Island Melanesia.” The rest of Oceania, D’Arcy has observed, “seems to have been colonized in a 2,000-year period beginning around 3,500 years ago by what appears to have been a relatively coherent culture that is associated with the distribution of the Austronesian family of languages, a highly developed maritime culture based on outrigger sailing canoes, and a distinct style of pottery known as lapita ware.”

D’Arcy has cogently argued that the “seas of Oceania were bridges rather than barriers” and that “mobility was integral to the yearly cycle for most Oceanic communities.” The Tongan scholar Epeli Hau‘ofa made much the same point when he observed in 1994 that “Oceania denotes a sea of islands with their inhabitants.” Further, he noted, “The world of our ancestors was a large sea full of places to explore, to make their homes in, to breed generations
of seafarers like themselves.” Associations, even empires, held together by long-distance canoe voyaging, partially integrated large sections of Oceania before contact with Europeans. “The Pacific world was not one of isolated island worlds that were suddenly opened up by the arrival of European and American explorers and traders,” D’Arcy has concluded.¹³

While voyaging never completely died out in Oceania, it decreased with the acquisition of much of the region by European powers, especially in the nineteenth century. It may have been in some decline even earlier, as local societies matured and less in the way of voyaging was needed between them. Colonial prohibitions on long-distance travel and European control of the islands further broke up much of the earlier native integration of Oceania. Only much later, from the 1960s on, was long-distance canoe voyaging partially reestablished. With that reestablishment came some sense of unity among indigenous peoples of the Pacific. A peak was reached in 1992, when a Pacific Festival of the Arts was held in Rarotonga, with sailing canoes converging on the island from throughout Oceania to celebrate canoe voyaging.¹⁴

Like D’Arcy, McNeill has looked at relationships among people, flora and fauna, and environmental changes. In a seminal article published in 1994, McNeill observed, “The pattern of environmental history of the Pacific Islands exhibits eras of calm interrupted by spurts of torrential change,” with the pace of change “governed primarily by spurts and lulls in human transport and communication throughout the ocean.” For McNeill, the important stages in settlement and development were “the ages of the outrigger, the sailing ship, and the steamship.” He has emphasized the instability of island environments and the “transforming power of intrusive species, including Homo sapiens.” He has stressed that “Isolation over millions of years caused Pacific ecosystems to become labile, that is, prone to sudden change.” People moving into Oceania, perhaps especially Polynesians, “significantly changed the fauna of the islands they settled” by hunting birds and animals to extinction and by introducing new species. Similarly, their cultivation, which included the use of fire to clear lands, greatly altered the flora of the islands, as did the importation of chickens, pigs, dogs, and rats. “Some people,” McNeill has noted, “fondly maintain that islanders lived in harmony with their environments,” but he has concluded that “the weight of the evidence suggests that this is romantic exaggeration.” In fact, he has further observed, “Pacific islanders, wherever they were numerous, strongly shaped their environments and frequently degraded them,” for “they were people not ecological angels.”¹⁵
The coming of westerners to the Pacific further altered environments, especially after Captain James Cook entered the region for a decade of exploration in 1769. The Spanish were the first westerners to reach the Pacific, hailing land at Guam in 1521, but they had relatively little impact initially. Spanish galleons traveled back and forth between Acapulco on the west coast of New Spain and Manila in the Philippines from 1571 to 1815 without stopping elsewhere except at Guam. Captain Cook and those Europeans who followed him caused more extensive alterations.¹⁶ “The 1760s were to the Pacific what the 1490s were to Atlantic America,” McNeill has written. “Europeans brought to the Pacific a new portmanteau biota, and new economic principles and possibilities, all of which eventually combined to disrupt biotic communities, not the least human ones.” Following exploration, Europeans and Americans moved into the Pacific to exploit its natural resources, which they treated in an extractive, nonrenewable manner: sandalwood, sea slugs, fur-bearing animals such as sea otters and seals, and whales. Meanwhile, diseases unintentionally carried by westerners decimated indigenous populations of Pacific islands. The initial death rate was often 80–90 percent.¹⁷

European colonization followed hard on the heels of exploration. Historian Steven Fischer has aptly summarized the situation: “Britain assumed control of most of the southwestern Pacific, France dominated most of Eastern Polynesia, while Germany extended its authority over most of the equatorial and northern regions of the Western Pacific.” Australia came to exercise control over New Guinea and Nauru, and during World War I New Zealand took over control of German Samoa, which became Western Samoa. Many motives enticed Europeans into colonization. Trade in some items led to the acquisition of land for plantations to produce cotton, sugarcane, and coconuts for coconut oil. Worldwide imperial rivalries played important roles, especially after Germany emerged as a united nation in 1871. Then, too, Pacific islands were sought as coaling stations for naval ships and as stations for communications cables.¹⁸

The division of the Pacific into European empires shattered, or at least greatly eroded, earlier ties among indigenous peoples. Only Tonga and the Kingdom of Hawai'i remained independent in the late nineteenth century, and Hawai'i’s days were numbered. Hau'ofa has been most eloquent on this point, observing, “Nineteenth-century imperialism erected boundaries that led to the contraction of Oceania, transforming a once boundless world into the Pacific Island states and territories we know today.” As a result, “People were confined to their tiny spaces, isolated from each other. . . . No longer could they travel freely to do what they had done for centuries.” Instead,
“They were cut off from their relatives abroad, from their far-flung sources of wealth and cultural enrichment.”¹⁹

Nor were these changes limited to Oceania, as the arrival of Euro-Americans led to major alterations throughout the Pacific. Inspired by notions of Manifest Destiny and economic gain, Americans crossed the North American continent, displacing Mexicans in California. The Gold Rush brought hundreds of thousands of newcomers to California. In 1848, California’s population, exclusive of Native Americans, was about 15,000. By 1852, that population had exploded to roughly 223,000, and by 1860 it stood at 380,000. The world rushed into California, as historian J. S. Holliday has written; and California became a state of the Union in 1850. Disease, small wars of extermination, and other factors decimated the Native-American population. There were about 100,000 Native Americans in California in 1846, but a scant 30,000 remained in 1870, and just 16,000 in 1900. Early San Francisco became an American town and soon a city. It already had close to 300,000 inhabitants by 1890 and 417,000 by 1910.²⁰

Much the same story was played out farther north. Americans pushed aside the British in the Pacific Northwest. Retired British and American fur trappers had jointly occupied the Oregon country for decades, but the movement of American farmers overland to Oregon tipped the balance in favor of the United States, and the nation acquired the Oregon Territory in 1846. Founded in 1844, Portland had 46,000 residents by 1890 and 207,000 in 1910. Seattle was founded in 1851 and boasted 102,000 inhabitants by 1890; twenty years later it had 320,000.²¹ Still farther north, Russians moving eastward across their nation’s frontier of Siberia in the 1600s and 1700s crossed the Bering Sea into the Aleutian Islands and southwest Alaska. (They also moved southward into Japan’s northern islands.) Their hold on Alaska was, however, always tenuous, and the United States acquired the region in 1867. With the discovery of gold in parts of Alaska in the mid-1890s, the non-native population of the territory rose from 430 in 1880 to about 36,000 in 1900. Conversely, the number of Alaskan Natives dropped from 33,000 in 1880 to 25,000 in 1910.²²

Americans also moved beyond the North American continent into the Pacific, taking their cultural baggage and economic ideas with them. As a consequence of its victory in the Spanish-American War, the United States acquired Guam and control over the Philippines in 1898. The Hawaiian Islands became American in the same year and were organized as a territory in 1900. Even earlier, Americans had forced open trade with Japan. In the mid-1850s, ships of the U.S. Navy steamed into Tokyo Bay to end Japan’s
isolation from most western nations. As Japan successfully modernized in succeeding decades, it became as imperialistic as the United States and the nations of western Europe, taking much of Micronesia from Germany during and after World War I and integrating those islands into its growing empire in the 1920s and 1930s. With its defeat in World War II, however, Japan forfeited those islands to the United States, whose officials were active in their postwar reconstruction. Americans also took part in significant ways in the rebuilding of Japan’s home islands.

Americans thus played important roles in Pacific developments well before World War II, to the extent that some historians have considered the Pacific to have been a maritime frontier for Americans. American ships carried New England trade goods to the Pacific Northwest and Russian Alaska, where they were exchanged for furs, especially sea otter pelts. From Alaska, those ships sailed to the Hawaiian Islands to pick up sandalwood, which they then took, along with the furs, to China. The traders in turn carried Chinese tea, porcelain products, and other goods back to Philadelphia, Boston, and New York. By the early 1800s, about 10 percent of the furnishings of Philadelphian houses came from China. Slightly later, American whalers hunted in Alaskan waters, periodically putting into the Hawaiian Islands to refit. In the 1840s and 1850s, hundreds of the whaling ships wintered in Hawaiian ports. This trade lasted into the 1870s, when petroleum products replaced whale oil in many uses, especially lighting.

American Reintegration after 1945

Although Americans had long been involved in the Pacific, their engagement with the region increased during and after World War II. The American presence provided much of the impetus for regional economic growth and reintegration. Throughout much of the Pacific, trade and economic development came to revolve around American actions. Increased economic activity brought higher standards of living to many people in the Pacific. However, just as globalization has had many critics, so has development sponsored by the United States in the Pacific. America’s military activities at times also seemed overwhelming. Most Pacific peoples were glad to be rid of Japanese militarism and thanked Americans for that. However, by the 1960s memories of World War II had begun to fade, and opinions about the American military’s impacts on the Pacific to change. Despite positive contributions made by the military to economic development in some areas, a growing number
of local residents came to resent the American presence. Groups arose to oppose, for example, nuclear and thermonuclear testing in Micronesia and the Aleutian Islands, leading to the formation of transnational antinuclear movements, themselves integrating forces in the Pacific.²⁵

In summarizing the impact of World War II on Pacific Islanders, historian Stewart Firth observed, “The outside world—above all the American military machine—came to the Pacific in prodigious proportions, dwarfing anything that had ever come before.” In its impact on the Pacific, World War II resembled the importance of the Gold Rush to California. Echoing Firth and other scholars, Fischer concluded of Oceania, “Nothing in the region would ever be the same again.”²⁶ Much the same can be said for the other areas: Japan, certainly, but also the Hawaiian Islands, the Philippines, Guam, Alaska, and America’s Pacific Coast. World War II was a major watershed in the history of the Pacific. Changes were occurring well before the conflict, but the war altered economic and social systems in ways that changed how people thought about and sought to deal with issues of economic development and environmental protection. For instance, the perceived abundance brought to Oceania by Americans stimulated a desire for more material goods on the part of Pacific Islanders, many of whom had worked as laborers for the American armed forces or served in the armed forces. This demand in turn affected how Pacific Islanders viewed plans for economic development in their homelands.

One important change in the Pacific was the breakup of European colonies, just as also occurred in Asia and Africa. In 1962, Western Samoa became the first Pacific Island nation to reestablish its independence, and within a generation most of the territories held by Great Britain, New Zealand, and Australia had followed suit. Pacific areas under American trusteeship, mainly in Micronesia, gradually achieved more self-rule and, in some cases, independence. The Hawaiian Islands and Alaska became states in 1959, though heavy economic dependence on the mainland continued long after that time. Military connections increased with the Cold War. American rule of Japan ended in 1952, when that nation regained full independence, but collective security agreements and economic ties between the United States, Japan, and South Korea tightened. The situation was different in the areas controlled by France. Generally viewing their Pacific Islands as part of greater France, not as areas slated for independence, French politicians increased central control over them, yielding ground to local advocates of self-determination only very grudgingly.²⁷

While the end of World War II heralded the beginning, or in some cases
the resumption, of independence movements in the Pacific, it also vastly increased the presence of the United States in the region. Cold War concerns boosted American interest. The victory of communists in China in 1949 especially shocked many Americans, and the Korean War of the early 1950s drove home the point that the Pacific was of tremendous strategic value. As part of their containment policy enunciated in the late 1940s, American politicians looked anew at military and diplomatic issues in the Pacific. President Dwight D. Eisenhower told his advisers in mid-1954 that one of their main goals should be “to keep the Pacific as an American lake.” Accordingly, the United States built new military facilities or greatly expanded existing bases in Japan, South Korea, Alaska, Hawai‘i, the Philippines, and Guam. Clashes soon arose between local residents, especially indigenous peoples, and federal authorities over political, economic, and environmental matters.

The United States used parts of the Pacific as test sites for nuclear and thermonuclear bombs. The nation conducted above-ground tests in Micronesia between 1946 and 1958, most notably at the Bikini and Enewetok atolls. American atmospheric testing also took place on the Johnston Atoll, about eight hundred miles southwest of O‘ahu, and on Christmas Island, about the same distance to the southeast of O‘ahu, in 1962. Beginning in 1963, American testing went underground as the result of a treaty banning atmospheric tests signed with Great Britain and the Soviet Union, and shifted to Amchitka Island in the Aleutian Islands, where three below-ground tests were conducted between 1965 and 1971. Nor was the United States alone. Between 1946 and 1996, the United States, Great Britain, and France exploded more than 250 nuclear devices in the Pacific. This extensive testing, often carried out against the wishes of local residents, who in some cases were not warned beforehand of the tests, has led Firth to label the Pacific a “nuclear playground” for western powers. Antinuclear sentiments often blended with more general antiwestern thoughts, as locals sought to oust the American military from their areas.

America’s economic reach equaled its military extension into the Pacific. As historian Jean Heffer has observed, commercial exchanges between the United States and the Pacific region rose rapidly after World War II. Measured in current dollars, American imports from the Pacific soared from $1.5 billion to $200 billion between 1948 and 1990, and American exports to the Pacific increased from $2.3 billion to $130 billion during the same years. Texan ports and West Coast cities such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle increased their share of America’s foreign trade from 25 percent to 38 percent during the 1970s. “This accelerating trade in goods and services,”
Heffer has written, “transformed the Pacific into an economic zone no less vital to United States interests than the Atlantic.” In fact, by the mid-1980s the value of America’s trade with the Pacific exceeded that of its trade with Europe. In the early 1990s, the Pacific received 30 percent of America’s exports and accounted for an even higher 40 percent of its imports.³⁰ The openness of the American market to goods from Pacific nations spurred economic development in them, allowing those nations to pursue growth strategies based on developmental ideas other than ineffective import-substitution policies.

Not all regions of the Pacific shared equally in the economic growth fueled by American actions, however. Growth was uneven. Most of the increase in trade occurred in the North Pacific—commerce between the United States, Japan, Southeast Asia, and the “four little dragons” of South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. In 1990–1991, those regions accounted for 80 percent of the Pacific’s exports to and 83 percent of the imports from the United States. Trade with Oceania was much lighter. The same was true of direct foreign investment by American firms in the Pacific: the lion’s share went to Central America, Japan, and Australia, with much less going to Oceania.³¹

In part because of their legacy of colonialism and in part because of their failure to participate fully in trade with America, many of the smaller Pacific islands developed what have been described as MIRAB economies. These were (are) economies based on the Migration of people away from the islands to New Zealand, Australia, and the United States, Remittances that those migrants sent home, and foreign Aid which sustained the growth of government Bureaucracies. In other words, many of the islands failed to develop truly self-sustaining economies and were kept afloat only by wages earned elsewhere and foreign aid.³² Their small sizes, lack of resources, and great distances from major markets hindered economic growth.³³ Guam, American Samoa, and even the Hawaiian Islands long showed signs of having MIRAB economies. Many native Hawaiians, Chamorros, and American Samoans migrated to mainland America, and governments in all three areas, buoyed by federal spending, were important parts of the economies.

For parts of the Pacific, tourism seemed to offer pleasing prospects for economic growth at little environmental cost, as American and Japanese tourists flocked into the region seeking relaxation and imagined exotic sojourns away from reality. Writing in 1997, two economists observed, “It has now become a cliché to describe the Pacific as the world’s fastest growing region for international tourism.” Between 1980 and 1996, international tourist arrivals at Pacific Rim destinations rose from 76 million to 191 million, far
outpacing the overall growth in international world tourism arrivals, which increased from 286 million to 592 million, or the increase in tourism in any other single part of the globe. Tourism had become important for national economies in Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, accounting for 5 percent, 54 percent, and 9 percent respectively of the gross national products (GNPs) of nations in those regions.³⁴ By the 1970s and 1980s, tourism was quickly replacing military spending as the mainstay of the economies of Guam and the Hawaiian Islands, a circumstance that led residents in both regions to reassess the value of the military for their lives.

Residents of the Pacific were soon wrestling with issues stemming from tourism similar to those with which people in the American West had grappled for several decades: how to create or preserve various sorts of socioeconomic systems; how to provide infrastructures for those systems; and how to ensure a desirable quality of life. Far from being cost-free and “green,” tourism, they found, imposed significant burdens on host nations and regions. Land-use issues, water matters, and stress to an area’s infrastructure accompanied touristic developments in the Pacific. Tourism also raised questions about ethnic and national identities. As occurred worldwide, tourism often led to some homogenization of culture and identity throughout the Pacific, a trend that caused backlash against tourism and tourists in parts of the region, including Guam and Hawai’i, by local residents.³⁵ United Nations (UN) officials recognized that tourism did not offer easy answers to the economic challenges facing Pacific Island nations, especially small ones. A 2005 UN report observed correctly that, “Unregulated tourism practices could have adverse consequences for the environment and, in turn, the tourism industry itself.” The report also noted that, “if not well planned and managed, tourism can increase gender disparities and cultural erosion” and that “much of the wealth from the tourism sector does not trickle down to the community level.”³⁶

As they dealt with common economic issues, Pacific residents, like people throughout the world, worked through organizations, and these bodies contributed to the reintegration of the Pacific. Tangential to the parts of the Pacific dealt with in this study, but still significant, was the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) formed by Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Singapore in 1967. Set up originally as an anticommunist organization, this body pursued an “ASEAN way” of consensual decision making, and membership broadened in the 1980s and 1990s. More important in the early 2000s, however, was the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC), which embraced most of the Pacific in what has been de-
scribed as “an amorphous, unstructured grouping stretching over four continents.” Committed to trade liberalization, leaders of APEC encouraged commerce throughout the Pacific. By 2003, APEC officials were also beginning to address joint security concerns, such as the development of nuclear weapons by North Korea.³⁷

Organizations also dealt with economic issues of special concern for Oceania. Longest-lived was the South Pacific Commission, later renamed the Secretariat of the Pacific Community. Started in 1947 by Great Britain, France, the United States, the Netherlands, Australia, and New Zealand, the secretariat eventually included twenty-two Pacific states and territories committed to social and economic development. The South Pacific Forum was, however, more representative of the newly independent nations of Oceania. Founded by sixteen nations in 1971, it was based in Suva, Fiji, and was dedicated to opposition to colonialism and neocolonialism in economic and political affairs. Its work was instrumental in the creation of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty signed by representatives of ten nations in 1985. Still other organizations sought to deal with common environmental challenges, the South Pacific Action Committee for Human Environment and Ecology and the South Pacific Regional Environmental Programme, for example.³⁸

Migration has also bound together parts of the Pacific. As the editors of the definitive study have observed, “People of the islands—of Hawai‘i and Guam, Aotearoa [New Zealand] and Fiji, Kiribati and Papua New Guinea, and two dozen other island groups—have been moving from village to city, from island to island, and back and forth to the industrialized nations of the Pacific periphery, throughout the second half of the twentieth century.” While they have noted that this movement “is not an entirely new phenomenon” because “Islanders have been moving around the Pacific for as long as memory recalls, for many hundreds of years,” they have concluded that “the velocity and impact of such movements have increased dramatically in recent decades.”³⁹ This migration was part of an increase in the global movement of people after World War II following stagnation in such movements in the 1930s. As many nations, led by the United States in 1965, eased barriers to some forms of immigration, people around the world, but especially from Asia and the Pacific, moved to the United States, Canada, and Australia in large numbers.⁴⁰

Although the movement of temporary workers, refugees, and permanent settlers rose globally after 1945, it was probably most pronounced in parts of the Pacific. By the mid-1980s, about one-tenth of Pacific Islanders
lived outside of their home countries, searching for economic and social opportunities. Especially relevant for my study is the fact that by 1990 about 154,000 people identifying themselves as Pacific Islanders lived in mainland America. American Samoans, Chamorros, and native Hawaiians moved in large numbers to the mainland. There were more Chamorros living on the mainland than on Guam, and about one-third of all native Hawaiians resided on the mainland, especially in California and Nevada.⁴¹

Whether or not this movement of people would eventually create a new pan-Pacific identity remained uncertain in the early 2000s, but migrations had clearly led to cultural sharing.⁴² Two brief examples illustrate that trend. After the Second World War, native Hawaiians in the American armed forces introduced American-style football, with Hawaiian twists, as “barefoot football” to Guam. On Guam, some Chamorros eagerly adopted the game and added their own variations. Football thus served as both an assimilative force and as means by which locals maintained their own identities.⁴³ Another example also involved interchanges between native Hawaiians and Chamorros. Native Hawaiians used the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990) to preserve elements of their culture, blocking resort developments where they might disrupt ancient burial sites. Inspired by native Hawaiian successes, some Chamorros employed the congressional legislation in a similar way.⁴⁴

Flora and fauna, as well as people, have moved throughout the Pacific for thousands of years. People entering Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia took plants and animals with them from Southeast Asia. Others brought in the sweet potato from South America. Polynesians, in turn, carried pigs, dogs, chickens, rats, and some thirty-two plant species to the Hawaiian Islands in their voyaging canoes. The pace of biotic change accelerated with the entrance of westerners. As early as 1840, for example, westerners had introduced 113 plant species to the Hawaiian Islands. Introduced species dramatically altered environments, especially in the Hawaiian Islands, Guam, and Alaska, and those changes had ideological overtones for indigenous peoples, as they equated losses of their plants with erosions in their cultures.⁴⁵

Despite all the changes that have taken place since World War II, it would be wrong to overemphasize the integration of the Pacific. Caveats are in order. Oceania, for example, remains an identifiable subregion of the Pacific, with much of its own distinct history and present-day concerns. In the North Pacific differences based on nationalities linger. Anger over Japanese militarists’ actions in World War II, for instance, have hindered the development of a regional trading bloc there, as divisions and disagreements between
China and Japan have remained pronounced. Historian Roger Buckley has correctly observed that “it remains highly problematic to envisage an Asia-Pacific region of genuine cooperation and mutual respect for all members, whether large or small.” He has concluded that “The creation of a common future would require decades of diplomacy among rival states that to date have found it immensely difficult to work together.”

Conclusions

Historian John McNeill accurately pointed out in 2001 that “As yet there is no field of Pacific environmental history” though there is “a sizable scholarly literature devoted to environmental histories of various parts of the Pacific basin.” McNeill then went further than other scholars in discerning commonalities in environmental developments throughout the Pacific and in suggesting avenues for future research. He highlighted “threads that bind most if not all of the Pacific together,” ranging from natural ones, such as geological instability and the El Niño influence, to cultural connections and economic ties. He stressed the fragility of much of the Pacific and “the thread of biological change” as having “bound the shores of the Pacific together.” Other scholars have identified environmental issues of particular importance for Pacific peoples. They have often cited global warming as a special concern for several reasons: that rising ocean waters threaten low-lying islands with inundation; that salt water may infiltrate freshwater lenses under the islands, ruining the water supplies needed for human consumption and agriculture; and that weather patterns may be growing unstable. Researchers for the UN have recently also recognized the great vulnerability of much of the Pacific to environmental changes.

Informed by these analyses, my study looks at how people in America’s Pacific possessions have tried to balance economic development issues with environmental concerns, how residents and nonresidents have sought to shape their lives in an ever-changing region of the world, and what the results have been. In doing so, my work differentiates Pacific from global issues. Of course, global and Pacific matters have often overlapped. Rising sea levels threaten islands in the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean Sea as well as in the Pacific. The rights of indigenous peoples, especially their right to preserve traditional relationships to their environments, extend far beyond the Pacific. Economic integration is a global as well as a Pacific issue. Still, many matters have had distinct Pacific meanings. The American military and
economic integration of the Pacific, in particular, has formed bedrock upon which economic development and environmental protection conflicts have been resolved.

Let us begin our voyage with the Hawaiian Islands at the center of the Pacific. The next chapter examines developments on the island of Kahoʻolawe, one of the eight major islands in the Hawaiian archipelago. Here many of the issues running through deliberations about developmental matters were dramatically worked out in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Environmentally degraded by western ranching before World War II, Kahoʻolawe was further damaged by its use by the U.S. Navy as a shelling and bombing range during and after the conflict. As native Hawaiians and others came to oppose the continued use of Kahoʻolawe as a live-fire range, they raised issues that reverberated across the Pacific.