Pathways to the Present
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In the late 1960s and early 1970s, American fighter-bombers training for the Vietnam War repeatedly swept down on targets placed on Kahoʻolawe, the smallest of the eight major islands of the Hawaiian archipelago and the only one then being used as a live-fire range. Between 1968 and 1970, the warplanes dropped 2,500 tons of bombs on Kahoʻolawe, and in the latter year alone they bombarded the island for 315 days, solidifying its reputation as “the most bombed island in the Pacific.” The American military had used Kahoʻolawe as a target range since the 1930s, and even earlier, goats, sheep, cattle, and horses introduced by westerners had overgrazed the island, degrading its environment. The ground was severely eroded, and with much of its original vegetation gone Kahoʻolawe became home to alien plant species. Unexploded bombs made traveling on the island dangerous and fishing in nearby waters unsafe. Sediment from runoffs killed nearshore reefs.

Beginning in the 1960s, ranchers, environmentalists, native Hawaiians, and politicians throughout the Hawaiian Islands sought to return Kahoʻolawe to environmental circumstances before western contact. For native Hawaiians, restoration involved cultural renewal. George Helm, a major native Hawaiian leader, claimed that it was his “moral responsibility to attempt an ending to this desecration of our sacred aina [land] . . . for each bomb dropped adds further injury to an already wounded soul.” “What is national defense,” he wondered, “when what is being destroyed is the very thing the military is entrusted to defend, the sacred land of (Hawaii) America?” Similarly, Dr. Noa Emmet Aluli, another important native Hawaiian leader, observed: “The work to heal the island will heal the soul of our people. Each time we pick up a stone to restore a cultural site on the island, we pick up ourselves, as Hawaiians.” As native Hawaiians rediscovered their culture, the
restoration of Kaho'olawe along Hawaiian lines became a burning topic for them, a major catalyst for a native Hawaiian renaissance.²

This chapter looks at how disparate issues fused in the movement to halt the environmental degradation of Kaho'olawe. It begins by discussing the environmental changes that ranching and military usage brought to Kaho'olawe and then investigates how and why some Hawaiian residents began to oppose those alterations. Not particularly concerned initially with native Hawaiian rights, ranchers, environmentalists, and local politicians mounted the first challenges for reasons ranging from their dislike of federal government authority, to their desire to use Kaho'olawe as a park, to their hope that the island could be preserved as a pristine counterpart to touristic development taking place on the nearby island of Maui. In the mid-1970s, native Hawaiians became the most important group advocating change in the status of Kaho'olawe. For native Hawaiians, restoring the island physically and using it as a site for cultural renewal went hand in hand. Ultimately, they secured the removal of Kaho'olawe from American military control and its restoration to the State of Hawai'i, with the state pledged to give the island to them when they established their own sovereign nation. How they succeeded in convincing other Hawaiian residents to support their goals is an informative story of intergroup dynamics. The chapter closes by comparing developments with regard to the Hawaiian Islands to those surrounding the navy’s live-fire operations in Micronesia and the Caribbean.

In their movement to recover Kaho'olawe, native Hawaiians created a distinctive postcolonial variant of the United States’ environmental justice campaign. Viewing the United States as a colonizing power, they hoped to rid the island of its influence, especially that of the U.S. Navy. The attempt to restore Kaho'olawe resembled in some ways the work of residents of urban areas in the United States, often poor people of color, to keep their neighborhoods from being used as sites for landfills, sewage stations, electric power plants, and the like. However, far from being an urban area, Kaho'olawe was an unpopulated rural island, and efforts to end its use for bombing and begin its restoration show the working out of cleavages, as well as cooperation, within the ranks of environmentalists, native groups, politicians, and the general public.

At its heart, the success of native Hawaiians rested on a blend of culture, politics, and public policy—a combination of rediscovered native symbols, direct action, and astute use of courts. Native Hawaiians could succeed because federal law devolved some aspects of environmental management to locals, with lawsuits a major mode of management. While local in their ori-
gins, environmental actions to restore Kaho'olawe were nonetheless transnational in their implications. Many native Hawaiians came to see their labors as part of a wide movement to remove colonial controls over the lives of Pacific Islanders, and some native Hawaiians played active roles in antimilitary movements throughout the Pacific. They engaged in pan-Pacific organizing, contributing to the region’s reintegration.

Traditional Hawaiian Life and Western Ranching

The smallest and southernmost of the four islands of Maui County, Kaho'olawe lies seven miles off Mākena on southwest Maui and sixteen miles from Lāna‘i. About eleven miles long and seven miles wide, Kaho'olawe covers 28,600 acres. Pu‘u Mo‘a‘ulanui, the island’s highest point, rises to 1,477 feet, with smaller hills dotting the island. Kaho'olawe’s southern and eastern shores rise dramatically from the ocean, forming steep cliffs. The northern and western shores slope more gradually and contain small sand beaches. Surrounded by the ocean channels, Kaho'olawe is often difficult to approach from the sea due to winds and strong currents that frequently produce rough water. Northeastern trade winds blow for part of the year, exacerbating wind erosion on the eastern side and crest of Kaho'olawe. Erosion caused by overgrazing and bombing had removed six feet of topsoil from Kaho'olawe by the 1990s. Lying in Maui’s rain shadow, Kaho'olawe is arid, with rainfall generally limited to showers occurring during periods of southerly winds. Rainfall varies from about ten inches annually on the west coast to twenty-five inches at the summit. All of the streams on the island are intermittent. A 1988–1989 study estimated that 50–100 thousand gallons of water could be collected from rainfall annually, if catchment basins and storage systems were built. The study also concluded that groundwater impounded in a thirteen-square-mile aquifer might be tapped to supply an additional 500 thousand gallons per year.³

In pre-contact times, before Captain James Cook “discovered” the Hawaiian Islands in 1778, Kaho'olawe supported a semipermanent population. “Traditional habitation sites” developed on Kaho'olawe, according to a definitive report, “wherever potable water and/or food sources were available.” The earliest archaeological sites date to A.D. 900–1000, and as many as 300 people lived on Kaho'olawe as late as 1750. In the late 1700s and early 1800s, wars to unify the Hawaiian Islands by Kamehameha I combined with diseases unintentionally introduced by westerners to decimate the population
of Kahoʻolawe, which fell to about 160 by 1805. Traditional life on Kahoʻolawe revolved around fishing and, to a lesser extent, farming. Both offshore and near-shore fishing grounds were rich, with Hawaiians practicing long-line and net fishing in the former and net and pole fishing in the latter environments. Hawaiians gathered squid and limpets at the rocky shorelines. They also grew various vegetables, including sweet potatoes. However, the lack of reliable, year-round water sources precluded cultivating taro, the food staple throughout most of the Hawaiian Islands. Instead, residents of Kahoʻolawe traveled to Maui to exchange their fish for poi made from taro. Those on Kahoʻolawe usually suspended work during the rainy winter months to visit friends and relatives on other islands. Although arid compared to the other major islands of the Hawaiian archipelago, Kahoʻolawe supported fairly varied agriculture and vegetation. There may have been more rainfall on the island than in later times, for a “sky bridge” of moisture-bearing clouds often connected Maui’s high volcanic peak Haleakalā to the summit of Kahoʻolawe well into the nineteenth century.

Kahoʻolawe was important as a spiritual center and as a navigation marker. The island, scholars and native Hawaiian activists have noted, “was originally named Kohemālamalama O Kanaloa and just simply Kanaloa, after the Hawaiian and Polynesian god of the ocean currents and navigation. Kahoʻolawe is the sacred kino lau, body form of the god Kanaloa.” The island was, they observe, viewed as “one of the residences of Kamohoaliʻi, the shark god brother of the volcano goddess Pele.” Thus, Kahoʻolawe was considered to be a wahi pana (sacred place) by ancient Hawaiians and is so considered by many native Hawaiians today. Creation myths reinforce the island’s significance as a wahi pana, for they tell of the island as being born of the union of Papa, earth mother, and Wakea, sky father. Hawaiians also thought of Kahoʻolawe as a puʻuhonua (place of refuge). The only Pacific island named after a major Polynesian god, Kanaloa, the island was seen in a special light by Hawaiians. The name Kohemālamalama O Kanaloa, scholars and activists have maintained, “can also be interpreted as meaning the sacred refuge or puʻuhonua of Kanaloa.” Moreover, Kahoʻolawe, they have pointed out, “figured significantly in the long voyages between Hawaiʻi and Tahiti.” The island’s southern tip was a launching place and ceremonial area for such voyages. A strong southerly current runs through the Kealaikahiki Channel toward Tahiti and is still known locally as the “Tahiti Express.” The high central part of the island was the location of a traditional training school for navigators. Offering sweeping views of the Hawaiian Islands, the crest of
Kahoʻolawe housed a platform used as a navigational school and a dwelling for the *kahuna* (priests) who taught the students in navigation.⁶

A letter from a visitor in 1858, at the close of the period of traditional life on Kahoʻolawe, captured well what circumstances were like and suggested changes about to occur. William F. Allen, the Kingdom of Hawaiʻi’s minister of foreign affairs and a person soon to be deeply involved in ranching on Kahoʻolawe, noted the existence of “good soil” on various parts of the island and observed that “the natives have some Sugar Cane growing; melons, potatoes, and pumpkins grow well here.” He found the men “engaged in fishing, which is very good there most of the year,” and thought the Hawaiians lived in three villages. Foretelling a different future for the island, he concluded that it could support twenty thousand sheep and reported that “the natives are anxious to remain here, and some of them are willing to be employed as shepherds.”⁷

By this time, Kahoʻolawe’s physical environment had already begun to change.⁸ Significant ecological alterations were under way on the Hawaiian Islands in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Before the coming of the first people, there were about 2,700 species of plants, 4,000 species of insects, and seven species of land birds on the Hawaiian Islands. There was also one land mammal, the Hawaiian bat, but no reptiles or amphibians. In their colonization of the Hawaiian Islands, Polynesians introduced thirty-two plant species, including taro, sugarcane, bananas, breadfruit, and sweet potatoes, along with chickens, dogs, pigs, and rats. As they established plots for taro and other crops, and as their plants and animals competed with native species, Polynesian settlers changed the biota of the Hawaiian Islands. The clearing of lowland forests and more selective cutting in the uplands started to transform the composition of trees and plants on the islands. Some species of birds were driven into extinction, mainly large flightless ones, just as occurred with the coming of the Maori to New Zealand. In addition, new uses brought ecological alterations to Kahoʻolawe. During the 1830s and 1840s, the Kingdom of Hawaiʻi, which was created through the efforts of Kamehameha I and his successors, used the island as a penal colony. Expected to be as self-sufficient as possible, the prisoners planted gardens and altered the landscape in other ways. At the height of its use as a penal colony Kahoʻolawe possessed about eighty residents, but with the end of its use for that purpose only about seventeen remained. As Helm and other late-twentieth-century native Hawaiians believed, their ancestors lived close to the land on Kahoʻolawe, but in a very dynamic, not static, relationship.⁹
The pace of ecological change accelerated with the coming of westerners. Captain Cook’s men brought melons, onions, and pumpkins in 1778, and Captain George Vancouver’s crew added oranges, lemons, almonds, and grapes fourteen years later. Westerners introduced 111 plant species, including 65 fruits and vegetables, to the Hawaiian Islands by 1840. Altogether, westerners brought in about 5,000 species and varieties of plants by the 1980s. Westerners also introduced animals very destructive of native plants, even before ranching began. Vancouver introduced the first goats to Kaho‘olawe in 1793. As western sea captains did on many of the seemingly “unpopulated” Pacific islands, Vancouver dropped off the goats on Kaho‘olawe so that their progeny might be available as food sources for shipwrecked sailors. Or, according to some accounts, he gave the goats to a Maui chief, who sent some of them to Kaho‘olawe. By whatever means they arrived, the goats multiplied and began causing trouble. As early as 1850, they were damaging trees by chewing on their trunks. Sheep, cattle, and horses came a bit later, with attempts to establish ranching on Kaho‘olawe.¹⁰

Eager to raise funds for its operations, increasingly influenced by westerners, and not at the time overly concerned about the island’s cultural or spiritual importance, the Hawaiian government leased all of Kaho‘olawe to Robert Wyllie and Elisha Allen, the chief justice of the supreme court of the kingdom, in 1858. By 1887, about nine hundred head of cattle, twelve thousand sheep, and an unknown, but large, number of goats roamed the island. The destruction of vegetation through overgrazing and concomitant soil erosion were recognized as substantial problems by the late nineteenth century.¹¹

A concerned territorial governor, Walter Frear, publicized the destruction. Close to United States Secretary of the Interior James Garfield and Director of the United States Reclamation Service F. H. Newell, Frear was imbued with Progressive-era notions of conservation. In talking to a women’s group in 1908, Frear observed that “in Hawaii the relation between forest, streams and lands are [sic] closer than in most other countries.” Turning specifically to developments on Kaho‘olawe, he noted that “I saw more clearly than I had ever seen before the results of continued neglect and wastefulness in the use of forests.” The island, he continued, was “formerly covered with forest,” but now “for miles and miles the vegetation has been killed off and the soil simply blown away.”¹² Governor Frear signed a proclamation designating Kaho‘olawe a forest reserve in August 1910.

For the next eight years, Kaho‘olawe was one of a number of forest reserves in the Hawaiian Islands. Ranching was phased out, and about five
thousand goats and a number of sheep were removed or eradicated. Perhaps five hundred to a thousand goats and sheep remained on Kaho‘olawe as the island’s forest-reserve period came to a close. Archaeological work began, under the auspices of the Bishop Museum. Reforestation efforts accelerated in an attempt to stabilize the soil and halt erosion. There was also some hope that forests would bring back rains that had, by tradition, fallen from clouds connecting Maui to Kaho‘olawe (traditional chants called these na‘ulu rains). Kiawe, spineless cactus, ironwood trees, and candle and grape trees—all alien species—were used in this effort. Australian salt bushes were also introduced and spread widely. The use of alien species was a common response to forestry problems in the Hawaiian Islands and elsewhere at this time. For example, when a natural die-off killed 8,500 acres of forest in east Maui in the early 1900s, governmental officials and business leaders reforested the land with eucalyptus trees from Australia.¹³ In typical Progressive-era fashion, the goal was not to preserve a pristine native forest, but to put the land to productive use to avoid waste.¹⁴

The experiment of creating a forest reserve on Kaho‘olawe ended in 1918. Strapped for funds—the federal government failed to deliver the expected sums—the territorial government decided to lease the island once again for private ranching. An investigation near the end of the forest-reserve era concluded that ranching and conservation could coexist, that “under a carefully prepared lease of the island with due restrictions and limitations good use could be made of these [Kaho‘olawe’s grasslands] and at the same time goats could be required to be exterminated.”¹⁵ Conservation work would, it was hoped, continue in private hands. There was little doubt that such work was needed. Writing in 1916, C. S. Judd, the superintendent of forestry in Hawai‘i, observed, in words reminiscent of Governor Frear’s statement eight years earlier, “innumerable sheep and goats cropped the grass and other herbage so closely, that the sod cover was broken.” He continued, “the unprotected and exposed soil could not stand the force of the strong trade wind but was lifted little by little and carried southwest across the island and out to sea in a great red cloud.” As a result, Judd concluded, “the top of the island which was once covered with four to eight feet of good soil has been largely reduced to hardpan.”¹⁶

The territorial government leased Kaho‘olawe to Angus MacPhee in 1918. A former Wyoming cowboy, MacPhee had been the champion rodeo roper of the world between 1902 and 1907 and a top bronc buster in Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West Show. He had learned of possibilities on Kaho‘olawe in several ways. As the manager of a ranch on Maui, he could clearly see
Kaho'olawe across the ocean channel separating the two islands. What he saw disturbed him, his daughter later recalled, “By noon each day, the Moa’e Wind was sending a red-dust plume from the island to the western horizon.” As she remembered, her father told her, “much of the western land where I was born came to look like badlands too. Kaho‘olawe has life! Given the opportunity I could make the land blossom.” There was more to MacPhee’s decision to try ranching there than simply a desire to restore the island, however. He was a friend of the person who had leased Kaho‘olawe right before the island became a forest reserve and was well aware of the possibility of making a profit.¹⁷ Under the terms of his lease, MacPhee was to remove all of the goats and sheep before restocking the island with cattle. The lease’s provisions also limited the number of cattle that could be grazed on the island at any one time.¹⁸

Brash and full of optimism, MacPhee sailed for Kaho‘olawe on his newly acquired boat, the Kaho‘olawe Maru, with lumber needed to build redwood water tanks, so necessary for cattle raising in the arid land. MacPhee put in ten 10,000-gallon and several 5,000-gallon tanks. Other improvements came quickly, a ranch house and outbuildings. Perhaps most important initially, MacPhee constructed a seven-mile-long fence across the middle of the island to control goats and sheep. During his first two years there, MacPhee captured and sold or exterminated some twelve thousand goats and sheep—moves that greatly reduced but did not completely eliminate the animals from Kaho‘olawe. Twelve Hawaiian cowboys led by Jack Aina conducted these operations. For a time, remembered MacPhee’s daughter, “the land smelled horribly of death.”¹⁹ As required by his lease, MacPhee also worked to restore the land by planting trees and bushes. Some were alien species: eucalyptus trees, Australian salt bushes, and kiawe trees, for example. Others were indigenous, such as sandalwood and Hawaiian tobacco.²⁰

Pleased by the results of MacPhee’s labors, territorial officers renewed his lease in 1920. In the new lease, MacPhee was joined by Harry Baldwin, a member of a well-known missionary and landowning family. The two men formed the Kahoolawe Ranch Company. By this time, MacPhee had invested $38,000 in his ranching operations and was strapped for additional funds needed to continue making improvements. Baldwin initially paid in only $1 to the joint venture but was expected to soon invest much more. His interest in Kaho‘olawe was as a potential site for the raising of purebred cattle and thoroughbred horses. In 1929, severe storms hammered Kaho‘olawe, damaging or destroying many of MacPhee’s improvements, including a large cistern for water. Baldwin pumped tens of thousands of dollars into the ranch
over the next twelve years, until the total investment in the ranch had climbed to $190,000 by 1941.²¹ In 1939, there were a reported 500 cattle, 200 sheep, 25 goats, 17 horses, 3 mules, and 500 turkeys on Kaho'olawe.²²

Military Use of Kaho'olawe and Early Opposition to Live-Fire Operations

Another stage in western use of Kaho'olawe began as military training replaced ranching. As early as the 1930s, army pilots hanging out of the cockpits of their biplanes dropped hand-held bombs on targets on part of the island. Seven months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Baldwin and MacPhee subleased the southern tip of Kaho'olawe to the United States for use as a bombing range by the Army Air Corps in an arrangement to be renewed annually and not to run beyond 1954. With the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. military took over the entire island as a bombing and shelling range, and ranching ended.

Military use of Kaho'olawe generated criticism. As the Second World War continued, the Pacific front moved farther west, well away from the Hawaiian Islands, prompting the first questions about the military's use of Kaho'olawe; and those questions mounted once the war ended. MacPhee and Baldwin wanted compensation for the loss of tens of thousands of dollars' worth of improvements that they had made on Kaho'olawe. Moreover, they hoped to return to ranching on the island, a desire thwarted by the navy. The navy raised the rent it paid to them but did not allow them back on the island until 1945, and then only for a short visit. All they found of the ranch during that visit, wrote Inez Ashdown, were “heaps of rubble.”²³ Harry Baldwin died in 1945, but a year later MacPhee sued the United States government for eighty thousand dollars in compensation. When MacPhee passed away in 1948, his daughter kept up the pressure, but in the end received nothing.

The navy cancelled its lease of the island from the Kahoolawe Ranch Company in the fall of 1952. Some territorial officials joined MacPhee and Baldwin in questioning the navy's actions. As early as 1942, a few officials discussed how best to rehabilitate the island. Visitors noted that sheep and goats, which had been kept under control by the Kahoolawe Ranch Company, were increasing in number and again denuding the island. After the war ended, the navy nixed a proposal for joint usage of Kaho'olawe. The territorial government wanted to rid Kaho'olawe of goats and sheep and restock it with game birds for hunters. Noting that there were many unexploded
shells and bombs on the island, navy officials rejected that plan as unsafe. The
same logic led them to oppose returning the island to ranching. Then, too,
Cold War concerns combined with a very hot war in Korea seemed to justify
continuing use of Kahoʻolawe as a target range for bombing and shelling.²⁴

Navy officials believed that military requirements necessitated the reservation
of Kahoʻolawe as a live-fire range, and President Dwight D. Eisenhower
transferred the island to the jurisdiction of the navy by executive order in 1953. Although it kept Kahoʻolawe for the navy, Eisenhower’s order also contained provisions for environmental restoration, at the insistence of territorial authorities. The agreement specified that the navy would eradicate feral goats, or at least limit their number to no more than two hundred. Then, too, territorial officials were to be allowed “at reasonable intervals to enter and inspect the island to ascertain the extent of forest cover, erosion, and animal life thereon, and to sow or plant suitable grasses and plants under a program of soil conservation.” Very important in light of later events, when the navy no longer required the use of Kahoʻolawe, it was to return the island to the territory of Hawaiʻi in a condition “reasonably safe for human habitation, without cost to the Territory.”²⁵

The navy maintained an important presence in the Hawaiian Islands, but its significance lessened over time. America’s Pacific command (Commander in Chief Pacific or CINCPAC) was headquartered at Pearl Harbor. CINCPAC’s scope of operations extended throughout the Pacific and into the Far East, South and Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean. CINCPAC decisions greatly influenced environmental developments on Guam, for example. A unified command of the nation’s military services, CINCPAC was nonetheless mainly a naval show. In the late 1980s, the navy had 116 facilities and the marines another 98 in the Hawaiian Islands. Even so, the relative importance of the military to the Hawaiian economy declined over time. The number of military personnel in the islands came to between 50,000 and 60,000 annually from the early 1950s into the mid-1980s. Military personnel, including dependents along with civilian employees of the military and their dependents, composed about 35 percent of the population of the Hawaiian Islands in 1955. However, as the population of the islands increased and economic diversification occurred, they came to make up only about 20 percent of it by 1988. Military expenditures accounted for nearly one-third of the personal income of Hawaiian residents in 1949, but only 7.5 percent in 1988. By way of contrast, tourism accounted for just 2.4 percent of the personal income of Hawaiian residents in 1949, but nearly one-third by 1988. As the importance of the military to their economy declined and memories of
World War II faded, many Hawaiian residents rethought their relationships to the U.S. Navy. That reassessment had important consequences for how they viewed the continued use of Kahoʻolawe as a live-fire range.

As a 1972 report issued by navy officials explained, throughout the 1950s and 1960s the navy used Kahoʻolawe “for training in air-to-ground weapons delivery and shore bombardment.” The navy set up seventeen air-to-surface targets and twenty-one surface-to-surface targets on Kahoʻolawe, mainly at its center. Exceptional tests punctuated routine training. In 1965, for example, the navy simulated small atomic bomb explosions to explore the effects of blasts on ships anchored near the island. One detonation of 500 tons of TNT left a large ocean-filled crater that remains to the present day. Kahoʻolawe was especially utilized, however, by navy and marine pilots and gunners preparing for service in Vietnam.

Increased bombing, combined with a growing environmental awareness in the Hawaiian Islands, brought the first major opposition to the use of Kahoʻolawe as a military range. The passage of clean air, clean water, wilderness protection, and endangered species acts by Congress in the 1960s and 1970s and the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1970 signaled that environmentalism had reached a new stage of maturity in the United States. Many Americans came to see having a clean environment almost as a birthright, with the natural environment as something to be consumed in leisure-time activities. In the Hawaiian Islands, the explosive growth of tourism unified many local groups and people in early environmental efforts. In 1959, the coming of statehood and the arrival of jet airplanes boosted tourism. Between 1958 and 1973, the number of tourists visiting the Hawaiian Islands rose an average 20 percent each year, increasing from 171,000 to 2,631,000. This very rapid growth of tourism placed enormous stresses on the physical environment of the Hawaiian Islands and on established social and cultural practices. Land-use issues, water matters, community development topics, and quality-of-life concerns soon dominated politics and policy making in the islands.

Nowhere were these concerns more pressing than in Maui County, and particularly on the island of Maui, which experienced exuberant growth during the 1970s and 1980s. In 1956, just 29,000 tourists visited Maui, which possessed 247 hotel rooms. By 1964, 131,000 people were coming to Maui each year, housed in 885 hotel rooms. A scant thirteen years later 1.1 million visitors enjoyed Maui; and by 1980 the number had risen to 1.4 million. A peak came in 1990 with 2.5 million tourists visiting Maui, staying in 18,000 hotel and condominium rooms. Appalled by the rapid growth of tourism
on their island, many Maunians saw the navy’s use of Kaho’olawe, which was separated from their island by only an eight-mile-wide channel, as part of the more general problem of environmental protection.

Even as she kept up her ultimately unsuccessful effort to secure compensation from the navy for ranch improvements lost on Kaho’olawe, Inez Ashdown increasingly criticized the navy for its environmental insensitivity. Replying to navy officials who repeatedly declared that Kaho’olawe was an essential training target, she observed in an interview published in the Los Angeles Times in the fall of 1968, “Hogwash! Kahoolawe could be a paradise. It has gorgeous beaches, spectacular valleys, cliffs and ravines.” She continued, “If the U.S. Navy has its way, Kahoolawe will be bombed off the map. . . . The Navy is destroying Kahoolawe.”³⁰

Political leaders soon joined Ashdown in her opposition to the navy. Elmer Cravalho, a leading politician in the Hawaiian Islands, led the charge against the navy. As Maui County’s very forceful mayor, Cravalho came to view the bombing with a jaundiced eye. Bombs, he thought, were bad for business, especially tourism. A staunch believer in home rule, he also greatly disliked any actions of the federal and state governments that impinged on his local political power. In early 1969, Cravalho complained to Rear Admiral Fred Bakutis, commandant of the Fourteenth Naval District, that bombing might have an adverse “impact on development here.” As Cravalho explained, “We’re talking about the investment of millions of dollars on this coast in the next 20 to 25 years.” All bombardment should cease, Cravalho thought. Bakutis agreed to give Maui’s residents prior notice of any bombing activities and said the navy would look into relocating targets to the side of Kaho’olawe farthest away from Maui, but he insisted that the bombing continue.³¹

Ironically, this effort to end the bombing focused, not on the value of preserving Kaho’olawe as a pristine place, but on opening Maui to more tourism. How those opposing the bombing viewed tourism was complex. The initial objective of many opponents of the bombing was to make Maui more attractive to tourism. Yet attitudes changed. By the 1980s and 1990s, many pushing for the preservation of Kaho’olawe, particularly most native Hawaiians, came to see preservation as an antidote to what they viewed as all-too-successful resort development of Maui, a real shift in values from those of a few decades earlier.³²

Cravalho soon deepened his criticism to include environmental concerns. In September 1969, he called the navy to task for not eradicating the goats on Kaho’olawe, as specified by the 1953 executive order. Then came
a blockbuster discovery. An unexploded 500-pound bomb, accidentally dropped on Maui by a navy plane, was found on land in which Cravalho had a commercial interest. Navy technicians exploded it harmlessly, but the damage had been done. Cravalho attacked the navy for having “wantonly ravaged and destroyed” Kaho‘olawe. In a mixed appeal to preservation and use, Cravalho called for “productive use of the island” at a time “when the rallying cry of our citizens is focusing attention on the protection of our environment.” By mid-1970, he was suggesting the use of Kaho‘olawe as a park, saying “It’s an ideal place for just lying around, swimming or fishing; it’s a beautiful place.”³³

Led by Cravalho, other politicians came to oppose the navy’s bombing of Kaho‘olawe. In 1969, members of the Maui County Council (given the absence of city councils, the governing body in local politics) called for the termination of all bombing in 1969, a stance reaffirmed in later years. Three representatives of the state’s congressional delegation—Representative Patsy Mink, Representative Spark Matsunaga, and Senator Hiram Fong—like Cravalho greatly disturbed by the discovery of the bomb on Maui, urged Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird to halt all bombing on Kaho‘olawe to avoid, in Matsunaga’s words, “a major disaster.” In 1971, Senator Daniel Inouye joined his Hawaiian colleagues in Congress in urging that Kaho‘olawe be returned to the state of Hawai‘i. Inouye was an influential figure in Washington, and his opposition counted. Inouye was a veteran of the famed 442nd Regimental Combat Team, composed of Americans of Japanese ancestry, and his break with the navy on the bombing of Kaho‘olawe was telling. In opposing the navy, politicians such as Inouye were concerned about more than the environment. Like the political leaders of many western American states, they wanted to wrest control of their land from the hands of federal officials. Like Cravalho, they resented having others tell them what to do.³⁴

Grassroots environmental groups added their support. Most important was Life of the Land, an organization formed in 1968 to clean up beaches on O‘ahu. Led by the charismatic Tony Hodges, members of this group made halting the bombing one of their goals. In 1971, Hodges filed suit against the navy in federal court, charging that the use of Kaho‘olawe as a target range violated the National Environmental Protection Act of 1969, which required that federal agencies prepare and file for public comment environmental impact statements for any actions that might harm the environment. The navy, as Hodges noted, had failed to do so. Hodges employed sarcasm and irony in his public statements. “I hope the navy pilots have learned to recognize their targets a little better,” he told a newspaper reporter in a reference to
the bomb discovered on Cravalho's land. “Both I, and, I am sure, Alexander and Baldwin, would hate to see bomber pilots mistake the Wailea resort area for Kaho'olawe.” Wailea was a multimillion-dollar resort being constructed on South Maui directly across an ocean channel from Kaho'olawe. It was being built by Alexander and Baldwin, one of Hawai'i's “Big Five” agricultural firms then making a transition to tourism. Hodges concluded, “Perhaps A&B should include some sort of anti-aircraft batteries in its master plan.” Asked to join the suit against the navy, Cravalho was delighted to do so, observing that the navy's attitude was “arrogant” and that it had “completely ignored the County.”³⁵

Navy officials prepared an environmental impact statement in early 1972 in response to the lawsuit. The statement admitted that shelling and bombing hurt Kaho'olawe, stating that “the adverse effects are cratering, comouflets, sprays of shell and bomb fragments, ground disruptions, water pollution, destruction of vegetation and animal life, and other related effects.” Even so, the statement highlighted perceived “beneficial environmental effects of military use,” ranging from pulverizing the island's soil, thus making it amenable to the growth of vegetation, to the accumulation of rain runoff in bomb craters. Then too, navy representatives argued that “the mineral content per acre of the target sites, from [shell and bomb] fragmentations, might someday prove economically worthwhile from the standpoint of salvage and retrieval of some of the metallic alloy material involved.” “Unexploded dud ordnance” did constitute “a major problem,” but it was one “without noticeably adverse effect on the human population spread within the Hawaiian archipelago.” In short, according to navy officials, “thirty years of use of the island as a target site” had “slightly improved the balance of the island's ecosystems.”³⁶

Nor, according to navy officials, were alternative uses worthwhile. The navy's report claimed that Kaho'o'olawe “contains no areas of particular aesthetic value.” Unlike Cravalho, navy officials thought it unsuitable for picnicking, hiking, or hunting. The navy did increase its efforts to reduce the goat population and boosted its restoration work, planting fifteen thousand trees and shrubs, mainly alien species—eucalyptus and tamarisk trees—but also some native species, wiliwili and Acacia koa. However, many of these trees and bushes died when the navy failed to water them. Nonetheless, navy officials adamantly refused to yield on the main bone of contention: their right to bomb and shell Kaho'o'olawe. After surveying other possible sites in the Pacific and even debating the possibility of constructing an artificial island, navy officers concluded that no other option fit their needs. Cost considerations, ownership issues, distances from military bases, and the inability
to use other sites year-round ruled out the possibilities. Only Kaho‘olawe would do. Such would remain their stance into the 1990s. The federal court, satisfied that the navy had completed a meaningful environmental impact statement, dismissed the case in late 1972.³⁷

Native Hawaiians and Direct Action

In the mid-1970s, native Hawaiians became the leading opponents of military use of Kaho‘olawe, turning what had been a local conflict into a major statewide issue that attracted national and international attention. Their actions took place as part of the native Hawaiian renaissance, a movement that sought the return of lost lands, the revival of Hawaiian culture, and political sovereignty. Beginning in response to the removal of native Hawaiian farmers from lands on O‘ahu in the late 1960s, the movement later broadened. According to Haunani-Kay Trask, a faculty member at the University of Hawai‘i and a leading native Hawaiian activist, efforts expanded from “an ongoing series of land struggles throughout the decade of the seventies” to “a larger struggle for native Hawaiian autonomy” in the 1980s. The movement, she noted, also “branched out politically to link up with Ameri-
can Indian activists on the mainland, anti-nuclear independence struggles throughout the South Pacific, and international networks in Asia and at the United Nations.” The many sailings of the Hōkūle‘a helped to spread ideas and stimulate a shared consciousness.³⁸

By this time, native Hawaiians had lost most of their lands—the Hawaiian Islands contained 4.1 million acres—over a century and a half of western economic development. Western traders extracted sandalwood from Hawaiian forests to trade in China as early as the 1790s, leading Hawaiian chiefs to force commoners to harvest the wood but keeping most of the profits themselves. Further commercialization of the economy of the Hawaiian Islands followed in the 1830s and 1840s, as the islands became important supply points for whaling fleets plying the Pacific. Later in the nineteenth century, sugarcane replaced the supply trade as the major commercial enterprise in the islands. More than any other factor, the desire of planters to maintain their exports of sugar to mainland America led to the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i in 1893 and the annexation of Hawai‘i by the United States five years later. Sugar dominated the Territory of Hawai‘i, with pineapple developing as a secondary crop. With the spread of sugar and pineapple plantations, land ownership became concentrated, until by the early 1940s about one-half of the land in the Hawaiian Islands was owned by just eighty estates, corporations, or individuals. Most of the rest lay in the hands of the territorial government, which leased desirable tracts to planters at low rates. Native Hawaiians lost out as land was reapportioned. Congress passed legislation in 1921 to return about 200 thousand acres to native Hawaiians, but this measure proved ineffective. It was toward regaining their land base, and with it economic and political power, that native Hawaiians directed their rights movement.³⁹

Land loss and other factors, according to a detailed report prepared for Congress by native Hawaiians in 1983, had had important “psychological, social, and cultural consequences for Native Hawaiians.” They had the lowest life expectancy, the highest infant mortality rate, and the highest suicide rate of any ethnic group in the Hawaiian Islands. Only 4.6 percent of native Hawaiians completed college (compared to a statewide average of 11.3 percent), and 30 percent of native Hawaiian families lived in poverty. The report concluded, “by all major indices—health, education, income—Native Hawaiians display distinct disparities with their fellow citizens.” Many native Hawaiians left Hawai‘i. By 1990, about one-third of all native Hawaiians were living on the mainland, where they sought better social and economic opportunities, just as many Pacific Islanders in the South Pacific lived in New
Zealand and Australia. In Australia the number of Pacific Islanders more than doubled between 1976 and 1981, and the number of Pacific Islanders in New Zealand almost doubled between 1971 and 1981.⁴⁰

More native Hawaiians stayed, however; and an increasing proportion became involved in the native Hawaiian renaissance, and then in pan-Pacific movements. As Trask observed, native Hawaiian leaders—like some other indigenous Pacific peoples, such as some of the Maori of New Zealand—became proponents of a nuclear-free Pacific and took their antimilitary campaign from Kaho'olawe to other Pacific islands. The Maori also sought to reassert their control over lands lost to the British in the 1840s and later. Native American efforts, especially after the Second World War, aimed at regaining land, water, and fishing rights lost in broken treaties, objectives similar to those of many native Hawaiians. Ties between Native American and native Hawaiian groups were usually tenuous, however; for native Hawaiians identified much more closely with Pacific peoples and did not consider themselves to be a Native American tribe. Still, there were examples of cooperation, especially by the 1990s. Both groups made effective use of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, passed by Congress in 1990, to protect sacred burial sites from development, and in the early 2000s some native Hawaiians favored the passage of congressional legislation giving them many of the rights possessed by Native American tribes recognized by the federal government. In a meaningful division, however, some native Hawaiians opposed the proposed legislation, arguing that if they accepted it, they would be giving up their rights to political independence and sovereignty.⁴¹

Over time, a pan-Pacific, transnational identity began to form, largely based on indigenous peoples’ opposition to the American, and in some areas the French and British, military in the Pacific. Native Hawaiians involved in opposition to the U.S. military in Hawai‘i soon became engaged in anticolonial activities throughout the Pacific. This transnational Pacific identity was, in turn, part of growing global indigenous people's movements.⁴²

Some of the native Hawaiian opposition to the bombing of Kaho'olawe began with Charles Kaulewehi Maxwell. A resident of Maui, Maxwell organized a group of native Hawaiians as the Aboriginal Lands of Hawaiian Ancestry (ALOHA) in the early 1970s. As he informed the Maui County Council in late 1973, the ALOHA’s “primary objective is to seek land or money reparations from the United States Congress” in compensation for lands the body’s members thought had been taken illegally in the late 1800s. The “Island of Kahoolawe will be among the lands we are seeking,” Maxwell ob-
served. He lobbied Congress to allocate reparation funds for native Hawaiians to no avail. Upon returning to the Hawaiian Islands from Washington, DC, Maxwell focused his energies on Kahoʻolawe, largely as a result of an epiphany he experienced in the summer of 1975. Despite a navy prohibition of the activity, he was hunting with several friends on Kahoʻolawe when they were surprised by a navy helicopter flying overhead. As his friends hid under *kiawe* trees, Maxwell stood his ground. The thought came to him, Maxwell explained: “I am a native Hawaiian. I have prior rights. . . . I should not hide, this was my land, my aina.” He took off his shirt and waved it at the helicopter, which, however, ignored him. While looking out over the ocean from a cliff on Kahoʻolawe that evening, he “felt that the presence of my ancestors was very close to me.” Maxwell returned to Maui and, in his words, “started this movement of Kahoolawe.”

Maxwell was not alone. In 1975, native Hawaiians on the nearby island of Moloka’i formed Hui Alaloa (the Group of Long Trails), an organization that soon became important in the fight to change how the navy treated Kahoʻolawe. Hui Alaloa sought to regain public access to the trails, roads, and beaches, which was being cut off by large landowners involved in economic development activities. Hui Alaloa was aided by Cravalho, who as the mayor of Maui County sought public beach access. The organization’s founders noted that they had “recovered part of the dying Hawaiʻi culture.” Hui Alaloa soon turned its attention to Kahoʻolawe, which was quickly becoming the preeminent symbol, in the eyes of many native Hawaiians, of their oppression. Writing to presidential candidate Jimmy Carter in 1976, Walter Ritte, Jr., the head of Hui Alaloa, explained why the bombing seemed to them so heinous: “The Hawaiian people recognizes Kahoʻolawe as a place where their culture is being desecrated as bombs blow up their sacred heiaus, or places of worship, destroy many koas or fishing shrines along the shore, wipe out the historical village site of old, kill the reef surrounding the island which was teeming with food, and especially killing the entire Hawaiian island.” Ritte voiced the thoughts of a rapidly growing number of native Hawaiians. “The renaissance, which is going on in Hawaii today, has picked Kahoʻolawe as the place of revival of a living Hawaiian culture.”

Following the initial work done by ALOHA and Hui Alaloa, landings on Kahoʻolawe led to the formation of additional organizations and challenges to the navy. Influenced by the seizure of Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay by Native American militants in 1969, native Hawaiian groups sponsored unauthorized—the navy called them “illegal”—landings on Kahoʻolawe to protest the bombing of the island and to dramatize their demand for the
island’s return to native Hawaiians. In 1976 and 1977, as Ritte and Walter Sawyer explained, there were “five symbolic landings on Kaho’olawe . . . chosen to represent the five fingers of limahana (the working hand).”

The first landing was timed to coincide with the bicentennial of American independence. Before dawn on January 4, 1976, as Maxwell later recalled, the protestors set out in several boats from Maui for Kaho’olawe. Many of those sailing for Kaho’olawe were members of Hui Alaloa and wanted to secure native Hawaiian access to the island. Others were fishermen irked by the closure of the island’s waters most of the time. Near Kaho’olawe they were turned back by the coast guard. Only nine people, who became known as the “Kaho’olawe Nine,” returned later on the same day to “occupy” the island, including a Muckelshoot Indian from the Pacific Northwest who was visiting the Hawaiian Islands for a Native Claims Association meeting. Seven of the nine protesters were quickly captured, but Aluli and Ritte remained at large for two days.

Within two days of their forced departure from Kaho’olawe, Aluli, Ritte, and George Helm spearheaded the formation of a new group, soon named the Protect Kaho’olawe ‘Ohana (PKO; ʻohana means family), which became the leading body in the fight against the navy. The PKO sponsored two more landings in the winter of 1976. Even as the landings occurred, navy officials displayed continuing insensitivity to native Hawaiians. In March 1976, they denied a request from five Moloka‘i kūpuna (elders) to visit Kaho’olawe, saying that unexploded ordnance made a visit too dangerous. In the same month, a particularly heavy bombing run rattled homes on Maui, alarming that island’s residents. A South Maui resident was reported as exclaiming, “We ran out of our house, we thought it was an earthquake.” The mayor’s office, police stations, and the coast guard were deluged with calls asking whether a natural disaster had occurred. A bit later, the marines came out with a T-shirt bearing the slogan “Bomb the Kahoolawe Ohana.”

Public opinion throughout the Hawaiian Islands began to turn against the navy. The state’s leading newspaper editorialized in early 1976: “It’s not a question of whether Kahoolawe will be returned. The question is when.” After holding discussions throughout the Hawaiian Islands, members of an investigatory committee of the state legislature concluded that most residents favored the goals of the PKO, reporting that “the majority of the people meeting with the Committee expressed their strong support for the ʻOhana on seeking the return of the Island and a stop to the bombing.” Support for the PKO was not unconditional, however. Many people, including many native Hawaiians, disliked the group’s tactics. “Many disagreed,” the commit-
tee observed, “with the methods of the ‘Ohana including trespass and any other law breaking.” Some older native Hawaiians, in particular, said that they thought that the actions of PKO members “destroyed the dignity and grace for which Hawaiians had long been known.”

The work of the PKO, especially its dramatic landings, helped change attitudes, but so did altered economic matters. Simply put, the navy was becoming less important to Hawaiian life, and memories of World War II were growing distant (or completely nonexistent for young people). In 1976, the Hawaiian Chamber of Commerce, the state’s leading business organization, came out publicly against the navy’s bombing. The chamber had earlier been a staunch supporter of the navy, mainly on economic grounds, but now the chamber changed its stance. The growing significance of tourism may well have influenced the decisions of chamber members, as, like Cravalho, they came to see the bombing as bad for tourism. The investigation by the committee of the state legislature reached findings backing up the altered position of the chamber. The committee concluded that claims by the navy of large economic losses to the state should the navy be forced to abandon its activities on Kaho‘olawe were “unsubstantiated” and should be ignored.

The campaign to end the bombing broadened as more groups found common cause, but such was not always the case with regard to environmental issues in the Hawaiian Islands. Native Hawaiians, environmentalists, and developers often found themselves at odds. They differed, for example, on the proposed construction of a large geothermal electric power plant on the island of Hawai‘i. Many environmentalists favored building the facility as a way to free the Hawaiian Islands from dependence on oil-fired plants, but many native Hawaiians opposed the proposition because it would have to be built in an area they considered to be sacred to their volcano goddess, Pele. No plant was built. Environmentalists, resort developers, and native Hawaiians also disagreed about how a part of South Maui right across the strait from Kaho‘olawe should be treated. Developers wanted to put in a new hotel; native Hawaiians hoped to preserve their shoreline trail; and environmentalists wanted to create a state park, even if doing so meant relocating the trail. Eventually, a compromise was worked out, with Cravalho acting as mediator. Nonetheless, as late as 1988 Aluli viewed the agreement with dismay, stating that it was “just another compromise for us. It says our culture is for sale, our water’s for sale. Our concerns have been sold out.”

Thus, cleavages often divided native Hawaiians, environmentalists, and other Hawaiian residents—but not over ending the use of Kaho‘olawe as a live-fire range. The island’s geography and lack of reliable water supply made
resort development unlikely, and by their actions native Hawaiians were able to convince environmentalists and others that the island was special for them. Many questions remained. How and when might a transfer occur? How would the island be used in the future? What would cleaning up the island cost? A new environmental impact statement in late 1977 suggested that it would cost about $5,000 per acre to clean up the island, for a total of $78 to $131 million, depending on how much land was cleaned—figures navy officials stood by two years later.⁵¹ More immediately, there was the question of how to convince federal government authorities to relinquish Kaho'olawe and return the island to the state, for navy officials remained adamantly opposed to any such action.

George Helm increasingly led the opposition to the navy, especially for native Hawaiians. Born in 1950, he was raised on rural Moloka‘i, the son of a part-native Hawaiian father and a native Hawaiian mother. Music was an important part of his life. His father gave Helm a ukulele and, as one commentator observed, “passed on to George, Jr., his love of Hawaiian music.” At the age of fifteen, Helm moved to Honolulu to attend high school. He continued to find time for music, studying as a vocalist with a well-known teacher of Hawaiian chants. Within a few years of graduating from high school, Helm pursued a career in music, playing in leading clubs and restaurants in Honolulu. Performing songs important to native Hawaiians was part of his act. That move into performing music full-time was a major turning point in his life. From then on, as his mother later observed, Helm “spent any spare time he had reading and researching his Hawaii culture,” traveling to “other islands to meet with the kupunas and Hawaii people to learn first hand all that was true Hawaii.” It was a short step for Helm to become an activist. His brother Adolph introduced him to others who were starting Hui Alaloa and the PKO. Helm was a bundle of energy, researching native Hawaiian land claims, speaking at community gatherings, and helping his compatriots when the navy took them to court for trespassing. He was, by all accounts, charismatic, with a lilting, melodic voice that projected well. Beyond Helm’s specific words lay an intensity and impatience to get things done, leavened by a sense of humor. His message, if often fuzzy, was powerful. When asked in early 1977 about long-range plans for Kaho‘olawe, he replied that it would be a “spiritual place,” where native Hawaiians could “discover themselves,” and “experience the ocean, the aina,” a place where he and others might “spread our thoughts out, see and experience ourselves as Hawaiian.”⁵²

Two meetings at which Helm presided stand out. At an early 1977 gathering with Hawaiian elders on Maui, Helm overcame initial resistance through
music. At first dismissed as “hippies” and “radicals,” Helm and his friends won acceptance by singing old Hawaiian songs. The elders responded positively: “You boys are not radicals, you are hui o ho'oponopono, those who will set things right.” Later that year, Helm addressed the Hawaiian state legislature—the first time a nonmember had been allowed to do so—calling for the ending of bombing and the return of Kaho'olawe to the state. “Helm moved his audience, some of them to tears,” one Hawaiian resident recalled. That same day the legislature approved a resolution urging the navy to halt the bombing and return Kaho'olawe to Hawai'i.

Nonetheless, navy officers remained intransigent, and federal officials dragged their feet, leading to additional landings on Kaho'olawe. The fourth landing was destined to be the longest and most tragic. On January 30, 1977, Helm, Ritte, Sawyer, and two others landed on the island. Within a few days, all but Ritte and Sawyer had given themselves up to authorities. Ritte and Sawyer remained until March 5, when they surrendered by flagging down a navy helicopter. Meanwhile, unaware that they had left the island, Helm returned to Kaho'olawe to aid them. Helm recruited James “Kimo” Mitchell of East Maui. A graduate of Fresno State University, Mitchell was a twenty-five-year-old ranger in the National Park Service. Helm and Kimo Mitchell in turn linked up with Billy Mitchell (no relation to Kimo) and Polo Simeona, a Honolulu fireman who provided a boat. Around 2:30 a.m. on March 6, the group set out for Kaho'olawe. Upon nearing the island, Helm and the Mitchells went over the side of the boat onto two surfboards.

On reaching the shore of Kaho'olawe, Helm and the Mitchells searched for Ritte and Sawyer. When a pickup boat failed to arrive, the three men attempted to paddle back to Maui on their surfboards in the early morning of March 7. Exactly what transpired at this point is unclear. Billy Mitchell, the only survivor, later said that he last saw Kimo Mitchell and Helm struggling in the surf near Molokini, an islet in the channel separating Kaho'olawe from Maui. Unable to help them, he returned to Kaho'olawe. After hiking across the island, he convinced a group of marines to aid him. By that time, however, almost two days had passed. The navy mounted a search, but no trace of Kimo Mitchell or George Helm was ever found. The weather was stormy, and Helm and the Mitchells were already tired when they attempted to paddle back to Maui. Most likely, they were lost at sea.

The deaths of the two activists thrust the PKO into the limelight. Although in momentary disarray after the disappearance of Helm and Mitchell, PKO members soon rallied. A 1978 report by the state government offers an incisive contemporary look at the PKO. “The ‘Ohana,” the report
obscerved, “is not the kind of group that is run on the basis of by-laws or headed by an elected group of officers.” It was, instead, “a rather nebulous group held together by the belief in a common goal—the cessation of the bombing of Kaho‘olawe and its return to the State of Hawai‘i.” As the report explained, concepts of ‘ohana (family and cooperation), aloha ‘aina (love of the land), pule (prayers), na‘au (gut feelings or emotions), and ho‘oponopono (a desire to make things right) permeated the work of the organization. A loose organization, the PKO had a membership that fluctuated greatly over time, probably with several hundred members as its core constituency and several thousand others as strong supporters.

The PKO encompassed disparate groups. Many native Hawaiian leaders were young, urban, and college-educated—similar to the leadership of some Native American groups such as the American Indian Movement (AIM). However, far from all PKO members fit that mold. Coming from distinctly rural areas such as Moloka‘i, many had to overcome what one observer in 1977 called “a traditional Hawaiian ‘crab mentality’ and a ‘make no waves’ ethic.” It was at a series of meetings that members of the PKO resolved their differences. There, older native Hawaiians, or kūpuna, played significant roles, as many of the younger activists looked to them for instruction in Hawaiian culture. At an important meeting on Moloka‘i in April 1977, those present were divided on how to proceed after the deaths of Helm and Mitchell. Ritte appealed to Aunty Clara Ku, the oldest kupuna in the room, “Aunty, give us your na‘ao.” According to a reporter at the meeting: “Out comes a voice like a lioness: Have you forgotten yourself? . . . We are here to save that aina. That aina is being bombed and you all here hukihuki [are quarreling] . . . we have to listen to our hearts.” After Ku sat down, the members of the PKO voted unanimously to stand firm on their demand for a six-month cessation of all bombing, long enough for a joint committee of Hawaiian residents and congressmen to study the situation.

At many such PKO meetings young and old worked together to alter how Kaho‘olawe would be used. Both “heart” and a savvy understanding of federal legislation guided their next steps. As the PKO matured, the body broadened its leadership. Working to advance what was fast becoming their cause, native Hawaiians followed new leaders. Dr. Noa Emmett Aluli and Harry Mitchell typified the diversity of those leaders.

Aluli combined in his life urban and rural approaches to activism. Born in 1944, he grew up on O‘ahu. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science from Marquette University in 1966 but, drawn to medicine, returned to his homeland to graduate in the first class of the John A. Burns School of Medicine.
at the University of Hawai‘i in 1975. After completing his residency there a year later in an integrated surgery/family medicine program, Aluli moved to Moloka‘i to join the Family Practice Clinic. As Aluli later explained, he hoped “to deliver health care to rural areas.” Some of the professors with whom he had studied were, Aluli remembered, “interested in developing an alternative approach, one that was more Hawaiian,” which included “la‘au lapa‘au, or the use of herbs.” Aluli was early drawn to Hawaiian rights issues and became deeply involved in them on Moloka‘i. Working with Helm and others, he was one of the founding members of the PKO and a participant in the first landing on Kaho‘olawe. He became one of the foremost leaders of the PKO in the 1980s and 1990s, eventually heading the commission overseeing the regeneration of Kaho‘olawe.⁵⁸

The kupuna Harry Mitchell, the father of Kimo Mitchell, shared many of Aluli’s concerns. Born in 1919 in Ke‘anae, a traditional area in East Maui, he worked as a taro grower, cowboy, fisherman, and hunter. Mitchell also became a renowned native healer, skilled in the use of plants and herbs. Active in Hui Alaloa’s efforts to gain beach access, he helped start the PKO, becoming especially convinced of Kaho‘olawe’s significance as a spiritual place.
for native Hawaiians. Mitchell opposed military exercises on Kaho'olawe, even making a solo surfboard trip to the island at night to protest shelling and bombing in 1982. Mitchell instructed the younger generation of native Hawaiians in their cultural, linguistic, and healing practices. From Mitchell, Aluli learned some of his geographic knowledge of Kaho'olawe, including ancient meanings of place-names there. Mitchell also connected with Aluli as a native healer. Throughout his work, Mitchell stressed that people needed to “give back to the aina.” He is perhaps best remembered as the author of “Mele o Kaho'olawe,” a chant/song, which became the unofficial anthem of the PKO.⁵⁹

Like many others in the PKO, Aluli and Mitchell took the message of native Hawaiian activists abroad. Together they served as ambassadors from the PKO to nuclear-free-Pacific conferences on the island nations of Fiji and Vanuatu. At one meeting a smiling Mitchell held up a banner reading “No More Hiroshimas.” Mitchell also testified on behalf of Greenpeace activists in Japan. Aluli, Mitchell, and other native Hawaiians came to consider their work in the Hawaiian Islands as part of a broader movement to remove western military powers from the Pacific. As people of color, they saw the federal government’s efforts to maintain its control over Kaho'olawe as a form of cultural repression. Ending the bombing and winning control of the island became part of a Pacific-wide, anticolonial movement. At a large rally in Honolulu on May 26, 1984, “Nuclear Free Pacific” banners intermingled with “Malama K” [“Care for Kaho'olawe”] and “Aloha Aina” banners in the crowd. Marchers in that demonstration chanted, “Make the Pacific Nuclear-Free.”⁶⁰

The Native Hawaiian campaign had taken on transnational meanings.

Changing Navy Policies and Native Hawaiian Use of Kaho'olawe

While the actions of the PKO raised public consciousness about the bombing of Kaho'olawe, environmental results nonetheless depended upon legal decisions and sympathetic judges. In 1976, the PKO filed suits in federal court against the secretary of the navy and the secretary of defense for violating clean air, clean water, historic site, and freedom of religion laws. The suits claimed that the navy’s 1972 environmental impact statement was inadequate and that the navy was not complying with a court order calling for the protection of archaeological sites on the island. In 1977, the judge hearing this case told the navy to follow the order and to identify sites on Kaho'olawe that might be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. In fact,
he ordered the navy to obtain the secretary of the interior’s opinion for the possible inclusion of the entire island in the National Register. The navy was also instructed to draft a more complete environmental impact statement detailing the results of its activities on Kaho'olawe.⁶¹

In late 1977, navy lawyers responded with a supplement to the 1972 environmental impact statement in which they grudgingly gave ground. “It is concluded,” noted the report, that the “U.S. Navy, in conjunction with other users, has no suitable alternative to the use of Kahoolawe as a target site.” Pointing out that they had planted additional trees and had eradicated sixteen thousand feral sheep and goats in the 1970s, navy officials praised their environmental restoration efforts. They also claimed that they had followed the order directing them to sponsor archaeological work on the island.⁶² Public hearings on the supplemental environmental impact statement in 1978 showed, however, just how dissatisfied many Hawaiian residents were with the navy.

Members of the PKO led the opposition in the hearings. Walter Ritte offered a detailed critique of the navy’s findings, concluding that “inside I’m pissed off” and that “the credibility of the United States Navy stinks!” Like Ritte, Aluli denounced the navy for violating federal laws and orders. At the close of his testimony Aluli stated: “Listen. Stop the bombing, cross the cultural gap. You’re big enough and powerful enough. We are a rising nation, and we are going to be recognized.” Isaac Hall, who was just beginning a distinguished career as an environmental lawyer on Maui, testified on behalf of the PKO, noting that “basically, we have pitted the national military needs of the navy against the cultural needs of the people of Hawaii.”⁶³ Members of other native Hawaiian groups and representatives of environmental bodies echoed the sentiments of those in the PKO. After asking for “a few seconds of silence for Brother George Helm and Brother Kimo Mitchell,” a member of Hui Alaloa observed, “it is my firm belief that we Hawaiians today have every right to walk and hunt our mountains, to fish and surf and camp on our beaches.” Similar testimony came from members of the Hawaii Coalition of Native Claims and the Mama Loa Foundation. Representatives of Life of the Land condemned the navy for what they viewed as its callous treatment of animal and plant life. A representative of the Sierra Club called the bombing a “sad display of natural and archaeological destruction” and drew an analogy that an increasing number of Hawaiian residents accepted. “Kahoolawe,” he said, “is in a very real sense the Plymouth Rock of the Polynesian pilgrims who came to Hawaii.”⁶⁴

Faced with hostile testimony, in 1979 the navy accepted a consent decree
setting new rules for the use of Kaho'olawe. Endorsed by the PKO, the federal court decree began a period of joint use of Kaho'olawe by the navy and native Hawaiians in 1980. The decree stipulated that the navy clear about one-third of the island’s surface of all ordnance. The PKO was to select the areas to be cleaned up according to their significance for “restoring the religious, cultural, historic and environmental values of Kaho'olawe.” Moreover, the navy was to give the PKO access to Kaho'olawe for at least four days each month for ten months of the year for religious, cultural, scientific, and educational purposes. Furthermore, the navy was to submit to the secretary of the interior an application for the inclusion of all of Kaho'olawe in the National Register, and a few months after the navy signed the consent decree the island was indeed so listed. The navy was ordered to eradicate all goats still on the island, implement a soil conservation program, begin revegetation, and draw up an ocean management plan for surrounding waters. Finally, the navy was told to recognize members of the PKO as stewards of Kaho'olawe.

A jubilant PKO won a major victory with the consent decree. In 1982, native Hawaiians reinstituted Makahiki celebrations, end-of-the-year festivities of peace, relaxation, and religion. By 1992, some four thousand people had visited Kaho'olawe, mainly for spiritual and educational purposes. That fall, cultural ceremonies rededicated Kaho'olawe as a center for the spiritual well-being of the Hawaiian people. Still, there was nothing in the consent decree to prevent the navy from using some of Kaho'olawe as a gunnery and bombing range, and it reserved about one-third of the island as a live-fire range.

Rim of the Pacific (RimPac) exercises, which involved the bombardment of Kaho'olawe by the U.S. Navy and the navies of America’s allies in the Pacific every two years, particularly irked those trying to put an end to military use of the island. The 1982 exercises led to a protest landing on Kaho'olawe by PKO and Greenpeace members in kayaks, causing political leaders of Australia and New Zealand to halt their navies’ ships from firing on the island. In the wake of the 1982 exercise, the PKO broadened its protests by seeking international help. In 1983, PKO members met with members of the South Pacific Peoples Foundation, who at the time were deeply involved in efforts to stop nuclear testing in the Pacific. Aluli denounced RimPac exercises in 1984 for failing to protect Hawaiian sites on Kaho'olawe, leading Japanese leaders to bar their ships from firing on the island. However, it was the 1988 RimPac exercises that attracted the most protests. Together with PKO members, Hannibal Tavares, the mayor of Maui County, landed on Kaho'olawe during a lull in the military maneuvers, planted a county flag on the island,
and called upon the navy to return the island to the people of Hawai`i. Accompanied by Harry Mitchell, Tavares then toured parts of the island, attentive to Mitchell’s admonition, “from the land alone can come life, not out of cement,” a derogatory reference to resort development taking place on Maui.⁶⁸

The 1988 protests strengthened ties between the PKO and other Pacific groups. As Aluli explained at the time, the PKO’s work was “all part of a network of groups involved in issues such as the rights of indigenous people, peace, and the environment.” Specifically, Aluli named three Japanese groups with which he was in contact: Jinshukoza, Jensuikin, and Jensuiky. The first body was involved in supporting the rights of indigenous peoples; the other two took part in antiwar protests. As a Honolulu newspaper observed, “While the Navy prepares for biennial Rimpac exercise in May, the Protect Kahoolawe Ohana can turn to a network of international contacts to protest in their countries the bombing of the target island in Hawaii.”⁶⁹

Political action followed the protests. Pushed by Senator Daniel Akaka of Hawai`i and supported by Senator Inouye, the chair of the Senate Defense Appropriation Committee, the Senate passed and the House concurred in a 1990 measure creating the Kaho‘olawe Island Conveyance Commission (KICC) to set terms for the return of Kaho‘olawe to the state of Hawai`i. At the same time, President George H. W. Bush instructed his secretary of defense to end use of Kaho‘olawe as a firing range. This temporary halt was later made permanent, and after 1990 no bombs fell on Kaho‘olawe. With Tavares as its chair and Aluli its vice-chair, the KICC held public hearings throughout the Hawaiian Islands in 1991 to encourage further discussion of the island’s future. Those who had once been in opposition now ran the show, and their leadership created a new mood at the hearings. Tavares urged those testifying to “speak from the mind and the heart” in “any language you want, Hawaiian, Portuguese, Japanese, Filipino, whatever.” He called upon native Hawaiian elders to begin the meetings with prayers and chants.⁷₀

Testimony strongly favored ending military use. A representative of the PKO articulated what was in the minds of many native Hawaiians, stating that “the aina is alive with mana [power], and we all know that it is wounded, and we need to heal it.” Dana Naone Hall, a native Hawaiian activist on Maui and wife of the environmental lawyer Isaac Hall, called for “a complete cessation of military use” and the immediate return of the island to the state of Hawai`i “prior to its ultimate conveyance to a sovereign Native Hawaiian entity.” Charles Maxwell voiced similar sentiments. Politicians of every stripe, representatives of the Sierra Club, members of the International
Longshoremen and Warehousemen’s Union, and officers of Maui Historical Society supported the testimony of native Hawaiians. Most poignant was the testimony of Inez Ashdown, the last living descendant of those who had once been ranchers on Kaho‘olawe. Ill and unable to attend the hearings, the ninety-two-year-old Ashdown had a priest present her testimony. The priest began by noting that Ashdown was one of the few people alive who had known the Kingdom of Hawai‘i’s last queen, Lili‘uokalani. “Though her body is very weak and old,” the priest said, Ashdown “speaks vehemently against those who have hurt it [Kaho‘olawe], those who have destroyed it.”

In the testimony given at the hearings and the results of a 1992 statewide public opinion poll, the KICC found overwhelming support for an end to military use of Kaho‘olawe. Some 77 percent of the 252 people testifying at the public hearings, as well as 71 percent of 1,200 Hawaiian residents chosen at random for polling by the governor of Hawai‘i’s Office of State Planning, wanted to halt all military activity immediately. Of those testifying, 79 percent thought Kaho‘olawe should be given into the stewardship of the PKO and held by the state of Hawai‘i until some form of sovereignty for native Hawaiians was recognized. Of those polled, 77 percent believed that Kaho‘olawe should be relinquished by the federal government to their state government, but only 45 percent wanted the PKO to manage the island (40 percent wanted the state government to do so). A poll of 2,000 Hawaiian residents in the February 1992 edition of Honolulu Magazine revealed similar findings. It revealed that there was “nearly universal agreement” that the “best thing about Kaho‘olawe” was “the efforts to save the island/stop the bombing.”

The polling and the hearings revealed a remarkable degree of support for the PKO and native Hawaiians, backing that had been much less widespread just ten or fifteen years earlier. Much had changed to explain the growing support. First and foremost was the work of native Hawaiians themselves. Their landings, along with the deaths of George Helm and Kimo Mitchell, had dramatized and simplified issues for many residents of the Hawaiian Islands, as Helm and Mitchell became almost unquestioned icons for those in the movement. Moreover, the maturing of the native Hawaiian renaissance, especially the PKO’s increasing reliance on lawsuits, made native Hawaiian demands seem less radical.

The PKO’s changing approach also won acceptance from other Hawaiian residents. Even though they benefited from the spending of the federal government in their islands, such as its support of military establishments, Hawaiian residents resented what they saw as their colonial, second-rank
status. Such a reaction should not be surprising. Many western American residents harbored deep dislikes and suspicions of the federal government, even though their region had benefited inordinately from federal spending. The Sagebrush Rebellion of the 1970s and 1980s is perhaps the best-known manifestation of this feeling. Rebels in western states like Nevada called upon the federal government to give vast tracts of the public domain to the states, presumably so that the land might then be sold to private purchasers. Permeating the opposition of Hawaiian politicians to the navy’s bombing of Kaho‘olawe was a desire to take control of affairs away from the federal government. Much the same thinking, we shall see, affected developments in many of the other regions dealt with in this study, most notably in Alaska and Guam.⁷³ Then, too, Hawaiian residents found that they could back the PKO for their own reasons. Environmentalists, whose numbers greatly increased during the 1980s and 1990s, saw the movement to end the bombing as a major issue. While they might not agree with native Hawaiians about every detail of Kaho‘olawe’s future, they could easily agree that bombing should stop.

Finally, navy officials were, at times, their own worst enemy. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, they fought all efforts to limit their usage of Kaho‘olawe, giving ground only when forced to do so; they failed to move with the times. Consistently arguing that no other spot in the Pacific had the advantages offered by Kaho‘olawe for live-fire exercises, navy officials persisted in their stance even as the world around them changed. As America’s role in the conflict in Vietnam ended in the 1970s, and as the Soviet Union disintegrated and the Cold War wound down in the 1980s and 1990s, the unwavering stance of the navy came to seem anachronistic to many Hawaiian residents: the navy simply became less relevant to their lives. Fewer and fewer Hawaiian residents were willing to accept the argument that bombing Kaho‘olawe was essential to America’s national security. In addition, the relative importance of military spending to the economy of the Hawaiian Islands decreased, making it easier for Hawaiian residents to forsake the navy. To some, the bombing even seemed to threaten desired touristic developments on nearby Maui.

As the “major finding” of its final report to the federal government, the KICC declared that Kaho‘olawe was “a special place with unique and important cultural, archaeological, historical, and environmental resources” and recommended that all “commercial activity and exploitation of resources” be prohibited. It concluded, moreover, “that all military use of Kaho‘olawe must cease, and that the State of Hawai‘i must guarantee in perpetuity that
the island and its surrounding water be used exclusively for the practice of traditional and contemporary Hawaiian culture, including religion—and for educational and scientific purposes.” The KICC asked that Kaho'olawe be returned to the state “without conditions” and that the federal government “be responsible for the removal of unexploded ordnance . . . and that the island be restored to a condition reasonably safe for human habitation and human use.” The recommendations hearkened back to President Eisenhower’s 1953 order, which had stated that Kaho'olawe would someday be returned to Hawai‘i in an appropriate condition for civilian use.⁷⁴

The Return of Kaho'olawe

At sunrise on May 8, 1994, native Hawaiians and their supporters on Kaho'olawe walked down to the beach at Hakioawa—a major settlement in precontact days, and in the 1990s the base camp for the PKO—to celebrate the island’s return to the state of Hawai‘i. In the early morning, the celebrants cleansed themselves by bathing in the ocean, changed into traditional dress, and gathered in front of a stone platform where a ceremony giving thanks for the return of Kaho'olawe took place. “Linked in prayer” and with “feet rooted in the 'aina,” the celebrants chanted and sang in the sunrise. As the sky turned blue, an ‘awa ceremony began, honoring those who had helped bring about the transfer. Offerings were made by PKO leaders to Kanaloa, god of the ocean, and to Lono, god of agriculture. Later in the day, the celebrants visited a rock where plaques honoring George Helm and Kimo Mitchell had been placed. Here Aluli spoke: “George Helm dreamed of the re-greening of the island. Now the island is home. It's up to us to come back, to learn from the ‘aina and make it grow.” Finally, those on Kaho'olawe formed a circle, joined hands around the Hawaiian flag, and exclaimed, “I ku wai! [stand together].”⁷⁵

The official documents transferring Kaho'olawe from the federal government to the state of Hawai‘i had been signed the day before at a meeting on Maui. By their terms, the federal government gave up all claims of ownership to Kaho'olawe to the state of Hawai‘i and agreed to clear unexploded ordnance from the island and complete its restoration within ten years. While the cleanup was under way, the navy would control access to the island, doing so, however, in close consultation with state officials. A congressional appropriation of $400 million was to pay for the cleanup. After a decade, the navy would transfer all control to the state. State actions reinforced those of the
federal government. Hawai‘i established the Kaho‘olawe Island Reserve, consisting of the island and its surrounding ocean waters, for the preservation of native Hawaiian cultural, spiritual, and subsistence practices. No commercial uses were allowed. State legislation also set up the Kaho‘olawe Island Reserve Commission (KIRC) to lead the cleanup in cooperation with the navy. Aluli, the former PKO activist, became the chair of the KIRC and was joined on the body by other PKO members. The KIRC recognized the PKO as “the landowner of the island, holding it in trust for the sovereign native Hawaiian entity when it is re-established and recognized by the state and federal governments.”

Meanwhile, the KIRC set policies in a use plan promulgated in late 1995. The commission was empowered to decide how thoroughly the many sections of the island were to be cleaned up. Under various agreements between the federal and state governments, about one-quarter of the surface of Kaho‘olawe was to be cleared of ordnance to the extent that it would be completely suitable for human use. Roughly three-quarters of the island were to be made reasonably safe. Working closely with the PKO, the KIRC listed thirteen areas for complete cleanup. As the land was cleared of ordnance, it was to be restored through the control of erosion, revegetation with native plant species, and the recharging of water tables. The KIRC’s plan also designated areas for the establishment of educational centers/work camps, overnight campsites, cultural/historical preserves, and botanical/wildlife preserves.

Both the navy and the KIRC felt increasingly pressed for time to meet the cleanup deadline of 2003, resulting in a change in priorities. While the KIRC initially insisted that the surface of the entire island be cleaned, it later agreed to the cleaning of 70 percent. The KIRC also agreed to less subsurface cleaning, selecting only those places that would be in high use. Federal efforts ended in November 2003, with about 60 percent of the surface and 7 percent of the subsurface of Kaho‘olawe cleaned up. The management of access to the island was at that time turned over to the state of Hawai‘i. Kaho‘olawe was well on its way to becoming a religious, cultural, and educational center for Hawaiians.

Naval Live-Fire Operations Elsewhere in the Pacific and Caribbean

Despite the resolution of matters on Kaho‘olawe, the navy remained embroiled in controversies elsewhere in the Pacific. In 2002, a federal court ordered the navy to cease using the tiny island of Farallon de Medinilla in
The Hawaiian Islands

the U.S. Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, about fifty miles from Saipan, as a live-fire range. With Kaho'olawe closed to shelling and bombing, this islet, which was about 0.3 miles wide, 1.7 miles long, and 260 acres in area, was one of the few live-fire ranges the navy had in the Pacific. Although uninhabited by humans, it was the home of extensive birdlife, including masked, brown, and red-footed boobies and great frigates. The international environmental group Earthjustice Legal Defense for the Center for Biological Diversity argued that the navy’s bombing was destroying the birds and their habitat. Navy officials opposed closing the island to live-fire exercises. Showing just how complex matters could be, the congressional delegate from Guam and Saipan’s business leaders, who were often at odds with the federal government on other issues, supported the navy on this occasion. They feared that any move by the navy to lessen its operations in the Northern Marianas would harm the region’s economy. On appeal, navy lawyers succeeded in having the stay on its bombing lifted.⁷⁹

Naval officers were less successful in getting their way in the Caribbean, as demonstrated by events involving the small American island of Vieques,
located a few miles east of Puerto Rico. In 1999, 2000, and 2001, protestors decried the navy’s use of large parts of Vieques as a bombing and gunnery range in terms and with methods very similar to those employed by native Hawaiians a generation earlier. A local referendum of the island’s residents revealed that two-thirds of them wanted the navy to stop all military use of their island. In statements reminiscent of the early opposition to the bombing of Kaho’olawe, residents said that they feared that the bombs might go awry (an errant bomb killed a civilian in 1999) and that they thought that the bombing was bad for tourism and fishing. When the navy refused to stop the bombing, activists led by the vice president of Puerto Rico’s Independence Party moved onto the bombing range to dramatize their protests, and fishermen piloted their boats into forbidden waters around the island. Supported by the governor of Puerto Rico, the activists forced navy officials to the bargaining table in 2001, and a year later a compromise had been worked out. The navy greatly limited its military use of the island and restored parts of the bombing range to civilian use.⁸⁰

The navy clearly needed ranges for live-fire bombing and shelling as the twenty-first century opened. The world remained an unsafe place, and America’s armed forces required places to practice their operations. But where would they be? The growing opposition to live-fire operations in both the Pacific and the Caribbean from the 1970s onward left the navy with fewer options than had been the case in earlier times. Moreover, that opposition became more than a NIMBY (not in my backyard) affair. As opposition increasingly equated environmental with cultural matters, the navy found itself beset in ways that had not occurred in previous decades.

Conclusions

The campaign to end military use of Kaho’olawe is revealing for what it illuminates about the development of environmentalism, particularly within the United States. As distinct from conservation movements, environmentalism developed as part of consumerism in the United States, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s. Americans came to regard a clean environment as almost an entitlement, similar to their right to possess advanced consumer goods, such as color televisions. As historian Samuel P. Hays has observed, “Environmentalism was a part of the history of consumption that stressed new aspects of the American standard of living.”⁸¹ As might be expected, local environmental groups composed mainly of middle-class Caucasians,
joined by local politicians, mounted the first major opposition to the navy’s bombing of Kaho’olawe. The degradation of the island did not fit in with the advanced consumer society they thought they should have. It was not that they wanted to build shopping malls on the island but that many of them, such as Cravalho, hoped that the island could be used (consumed) as a park or a place for leisure-time activities such as fishing or hunting. They also saw a halt to bombing as a boon to the development of tourism on Maui. For them, nature had become something of a commodity.

Many native Hawaiians viewed matters differently, and their entrance onto the environmental stage during the mid-1970s changed the nature of the campaign against the navy. Many thought of the island as a spiritual and cultural home and only secondarily, if at all, as a place for leisure-time hunting, fishing, and picnicking. They sought cultural renewal as well as environmental restoration. No hotels, resorts, or appurtenances of consumerism, they insisted, should be allowed. For example, there would be no organized bicycle riding down Kaho’olawe’s hills, nothing like the very popular ecotourism bicycling on Maui. A KIRC commissioner spoke for many native Hawaiians when she contrasted the restoration of Kaho’olawe as an undeveloped, spiritual place to what she viewed with dismay as the touristic development of Maui. Kaho’olawe, she observed, “has a basis of culture that does not require condominiums, does not require cement walkways.” The landings of native Hawaiians in the 1970s, along with their work through the courts in later decades, convinced other Hawaiian residents to accept the idea that Kaho’olawe had special meaning for them and that they should become stewards for the island.

The environmental activism of native Hawaiians resembled the drifting of some Americans into an environmental justice movement in the 1970s and later. Garbage dumps, electric power plants, sewer facilities, and hazardous waste sites seemed to be located near Indian reservations and in lower-income, often black and Hispanic, urban areas. For instance, in his recent examination of Chicago, historian David Pellow has examined “conflicts over solid wastes and pollution in urban areas, particularly in communities of color” and “workplaces where immigrants and low-income populations live and labor.” By 1988, about 4,700 local groups had been formed across the United States to oppose toxic-site placements. The environmental justice movement was interested as well in changing workplace conditions. In doing so, the movement, scholar Robert Gottlieb has written, began “to shift the definition of environmentalism away from the exclusive focus on consumption to the sphere of work and production.” Native Hawaiians faced some
of the same challenges as other minorities in the United States in environmental justice matters, and for native Hawaiians the continuing destruction of what they viewed as their land, the island of Kaho’olawe, by an outside force, the U.S. Navy, came to symbolize all that was wrong with how they had been treated by Americans for over a century.

With its emphasis on the spiritual and cultural value of the land, however, the native Hawaiian version of environmentalism also differed from the ideas espoused in the environmental justice movement. The efforts of native Hawaiians to reassert control over Kaho’olawe resembled closely the work of other indigenous peoples—ranging from Native Americans to the Maori of New Zealand to the Chamorros on Guam—to regain lands lost to western powers. Many native Hawaiians came to see their work as part of a larger transnational, anticolonial movement, part of a reintegration of the Pacific, and continue to do so to the present day. The native Hawaiian effort to “heal” Kaho’olawe came to stress a perceived sacredness of the earth and was incompatible with any efforts to put the island to economically productive use, even environmentally friendly use. As Helm had written in introspective notes not intended for publication: “My veins are carrying the blood of a people who understand the sacredness of the land and water. This is my culture & no matter how remote the past is, it does not make my culture extinct.” He concluded, “We are Hawaiians first, activists second.” While partially romanticizing the lives and thoughts of the Hawaiians who had once lived on Kaho’olawe (for Hawaiian actions, especially their agricultural plantings, had begun altering the island well before the first westerners arrived), Helm voiced sentiments shared by some other leaders of Pacific peoples. Like Helm, they partially mythologized the pasts of their groups as a way of understanding and achieving goals in the present.⁸⁴

Kaho’olawe’s story is mainly a rural one, though many of the native Hawaiian and environmental leaders involved in it were urbanites. The next chapter turns to two major urban areas of the Pacific: Silicon Valley in the San Francisco Bay area and Seattle in Puget Sound. In these regions seemingly different economic development and environmental issues were played out; but beneath the surface, and not very far underneath it at that, many of the same Pacific and global issues raised in restoring Kaho’olawe surfaced again.