Writing on behalf of the Guam Legislature in 1971, that body’s secretary and speaker jointly observed, “The dominance of America’s presence in the Pacific explains so much of Guam’s economic growth and current land problems.” Continuing, they noted, “Although the U.S. interest in the Pacific dates back to the mid-19th century, it was really World War II that precipitated the major involvement by the Americans in the Far East and Pacific realms.” Finally, they observed that “for the central Pacific much of the U.S. military administration and strike forces centered in Guam.”¹ They were correct. As in so many Pacific places, World War II was a watershed in Guam’s history. After the conflict, with the onset of the Cold War, the military presence of the United States became even more pronounced in Guam than it was in the Hawaiian Islands or Alaska.

After looking at Guam’s history as the framework within which later developments played out, this chapter explores how the increased American military presence on Guam affected the lives of Guamanians and how they responded to the changes caused by it. The chapter focuses on controversies on three interrelated issues: where to build a new ammunition wharf for the U.S. Navy, how to establish a national park to commemorate America’s World War II campaigns in the Pacific, and where to place a national seashore in Guam’s waters. Divisions on these topics well illustrate how intertwined economic, environmental, and cultural matters had become. So, too, did efforts to understand and control the brown tree snake on Guam, the fourth major topic of this chapter. An alien species inadvertently introduced by the American military at the close of World War II, the brown tree snake proliferated to such an extent that it disrupted the social and economic well-
being of Guamanians. The chapter also compares developments on Guam to those on the Philippine Islands and American Samoa.

As in the Hawaiian Islands, conflicts with the navy on Guam and in the Philippines, and to a lesser extent American Samoa, reached a series of climaxes in the 1970s and 1980s. Guamanians and Filipinos especially wanted to win economic independence from the American military. Guamanians, in particular, sought at the same time to protect the physical environment of their island and to preserve what remained of its native culture. In this complex situation, American military authorities were far from simply acting as “heavies.” Navy officials, perhaps influenced by events in Hawai‘i, learned to be sensitive to the wishes of others while also pursuing their own agendas, making compromises the order of the day.²

### Development in Micronesia and Guam

Micronesia means “tiny islands” in Greek, an apt description. Some 2,373 islands in the Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Mariana, and Southwest island groups compose Micronesia. Scattered over an area in the western Pacific larger than the continental United States, Micronesia is mostly ocean. It encompasses 7 million square kilometers of ocean but only 2,700 square kilometers of land, an area smaller than the state of Rhode Island. More than any other segment of Oceania, Micronesia fits scholar and activist Epeli Hau‘ofa’s description of Oceania as a “sea of islands.”

Guam is the largest and most populous island in Micronesia. It is one of the fifteen islands composing the Marianas, a north–south archipelago nearly 500 miles long located about 1,500 miles east of the Philippines. Other major islands in the Marianas include Rota, Tinian, and Saipan. Covering 214 square miles, about 137,000 acres, Guam is roughly thirty miles long and nine miles wide. By itself, Guam constitutes one-fifth of the dry land of Micronesia and over one-half of that of the Marianas. It narrows to about four miles in width at its center, giving it something of the shape of a bowtie. While northern Guam consists of a raised limestone plateau, parts of which have steep cliffs, southern Guam is a mixture of volcanic hills and valleys containing rivers and waterfalls. Swept by Southeast Asian monsoon rains, the island endures a typhoon once about every three years and a super typhoon roughly once a decade. Some 166,000 people were residing on Guam in 2004, and about 412,000 in all of Micronesia.³

Micronesia was probably colonized by people from southeastern China
Pathways to the Present

and Taiwan. Migrating to the Philippines, Indonesia, and the Malay Peninsula, they populated the Marianas perhaps five to ten thousand years ago. Archaeological sites discovered in the Marianas so far date firmly, however, to only about thirty-five hundred years ago. Making pottery and using looms to weave cloth, the inhabitants had a rich subsistence lifestyle based on cultivated agriculture—especially breadfruit, taro, sugarcane, yams, bananas, and a limited amount of rice—and near-shore and pelagic fishing using outrigger canoes called proa. As they moved into the Marianas, people altered their physical environments, though less so than in some other Pacific regions such as the Hawaiian Islands. They brought with them rats, but not the more destructive dogs and pigs (or chickens) that commonly made up the portable biota of later Pacific voyagers. Some Micronesians organized extensive trading and tribute empires that lasted for centuries. On Guam, they lived in settlements, usually near freshwater sources and wetlands for growing taro and other root crops. Known as the Chamorros, they used stone pillars called latte as foundations for their most prominent buildings beginning around 1,000 A.D. Organized in matrilineal clans, they were not a unified people, a fact that left them vulnerable to conquest by Europeans.

That conquest came in the 1600s, ushering in three centuries of colonial rule. “Discovered” by Ferdinand Magellan in 1521, Guam was claimed by Spain in 1565, but was not colonized until after the Chamorros were defeated in a series of battles in the late 1600s. Organized resistance to the Spanish ended in 1685, by which time the Chamorro population on Guam had been reduced to about two thousand from roughly twelve thousand in 1668. Diseases unintentionally introduced by the Spanish, as well as warfare, caused this precipitous decline, just as diseases introduced by westerners decimated the ranks of native Hawaiians and Alaskan Natives at later dates. Tinian, Saipan, and Rota were also conquered by the Spanish. The Spanish transported all of the Chamorros to Guam and organized them into villages laid out in the Spanish fashion, with plazas, churches, government buildings, and schools. Only about a century later were some Chamorros allowed to return to their home islands. Beginning in the late 1600s, Guam and the other Marianas entered what has been described by Robert F. Rogers, the foremost historian of Guam, as “a twilight period of 200 years of solitude until the next invasion.” The Spanish converted the Chamorros to Catholicism, but did little to develop Guam or the other Marianas economically. The Spanish empire was stretched thin, and Guam was useful to the Spanish mainly as a way station to the Philippines.

The United States purchased Guam, along with the Philippines and Puerto Rico, from Spain after its victory in the Spanish-American War in
1898. Germany established a protectorate over the Marshalls in 1885 and bought the Carolines and Marianas (except Guam) in 1899. The United States put its navy in charge of governing Guam, a situation that endured for decades. “The island would be administered as if it were a ship,” Rogers has written, “the 'USS Guam,' with the governor as captain, U.S. military personnel as crew, and the Chamorros as mess attendants.” Military not economic development considerations dominated American thinking about Guam. Nonetheless, some favorable changes occurred, especially as sanitation and medical services improved, leading to a resurgence in the Chamorro population from 9,630 in 1901 to 21,000 in 1940. Even so, as Rogers has observed, Guam “still had a subsistence ‘bull cart’ economy” with the navy’s efforts to foster agricultural production “only marginally successful.” Moreover, the navy treated the Chamorros as a distinctly inferior people. Denied citizenship in the United States, they were for a time forbidden to marry whites.

Meanwhile, as a result of defeat in World War I, Germany lost its islands in Micronesia to Japan. Under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, Japan was awarded all German lands in the Pacific north of the equator—including Tinian, Saipan, and Rota—as a Class C mandate of the League of Nations. Japan promptly integrated them into its growing Asian empire and developed them economically through commercial fishing, sugarcane plantations, and copra production.

World War II brought major changes to Guam. Japanese forces bombed it on December 8, 1941, and landed troops on the island two days later. The capture of Guam took less than six hours. The Japanese then tried to incorporate Guam into their empire. Japanese replaced English in the schools, and Chamorro men were mobilized to build airstrips. In general, people on Guam, Rogers has concluded, assumed an “attitude of guarded, submissive neutrality toward the Japanese, while hoping for the return of the Americans.” A few helped American servicemen try to avoid capture, at great personal cost, even death. As the war wound down, living conditions worsened. Forced labor became brutal, food supplies dwindled, and a breakdown of Japanese military discipline led to the massacre of a number of Chamorros. In July 1944, American forces invaded Guam, storming ashore at Asan just north of Apra harbor and at Agat a few miles south of the port. After fierce fighting, the island was secured in mid-August. The cost was high; 1,769 Americans and about 11,000 Japanese died. Some 578 Chamorros also lost their lives and another 258 were injured between 1941 and 1944, according to official claims later submitted to the United States Congress. In addition, many Chamorros lost their lands.
The coming of peace led to major alterations to Micronesia. At the urging of the American delegation, the United Nations Security Council made most of Micronesia (but not Guam) a trust territory of the United States in 1947, with the new dependency assuming the title of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI). President Harry S. Truman vested control over the TTPI in the navy and appointed the Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC) as the first high commissioner for it. CINCPAC administered the vast reaches of the TTPI from headquarters in Honolulu. Guam was not part of the TTPI. Instead, as a United States flag territory, it continued to be administered separately by the navy.¹⁰

Micronesia and Guam did not return to their sleepy prewar existence, for the coming of the Cold War heightened their strategic significance. America hoped to build a network of bases in Micronesia to support a forward deployment of military forces around the western Pacific. Then, too, the United States sought nuclear test sites in Micronesia, conducting atomic tests at the Bikini Atoll in 1946 even before the TTPI was created. All-in-all, the United States had grand ambitions for Micronesia. As a leading historian of America in Micronesia, Hal H. Friedman, has observed, “Between 1945 and 1947, the United States sought to, and largely succeeded in, developing an exclusive, strategic sphere of influence in the Pacific Basin,” which turned much of the Pacific into an “American lake.”¹¹

American actions, Friedman has noted, meant that the “military and economic development of Micronesia” during these years “demanded quite a bit of political and cultural change to be bequeathed or imposed on the inhabitants of the islands.” Saipan, Tinian, and especially Guam were to support major American military bases, and some of the military plans envisioned removing indigenous peoples, or as the military described them, “natives,” from their lands. This action was never taken in full. It was anticipated that 71,000 acres, half of the land on Guam, would be needed for bases. Ideas were floated to turn Kwajalein Atoll into a hub for air transportation and to use Enewetok as a fleet anchorage. Most of the proposed changes took decades to complete, with military installations concentrated on Guam and Kwajalein. The latter island group continued to be used as a nuclear test site by the United States into the late 1950s and as a missile range into the 1980s.¹²

World War II, then, was of great importance for Micronesia and Guam, as it was for most of the Pacific. Above all, the war greatly heightened America’s long-standing involvement in the Pacific and, more specifically, in Guam. The development of the Cold War, along with trade possibilities, meant that that increased interest would not fade away. Rogers summarized the situation
“The geopolitics of the Pacific,” he observed, “were thus transformed from the prewar situation, in which Guam was a lonely American outpost surrounded by hostile Japanese islands, to one in which Guam was the center of an American-dominated lake that encompassed the entire western Pacific.”¹³ Not surprisingly, the American military, especially the navy, long remained the major force in Guam’s political and economic development.

The wartime government of Guam was replaced in 1946 by a peacetime administration, with Rear Admiral Charles A. Pownall, formerly the commander of America’s naval air forces in the Pacific, as the appointed governor. Shortly thereafter the Eighth Guam Congress, a locally elected body with limited powers, convened in a Quonset hut in Hagatna (Agana). Most Guamanians, as residents of Guam started calling themselves right after World War II, could not become American citizens at this time unless they entered America’s armed services. Guamanians could not qualify for citizenship by being born in the United States, since Guam was an unincorporated territory; nor could they be naturalized as citizens of a foreign nation—a real Catch-22 situation. Disenfranchised except in local elections—and the appointed governor could veto any measures passed by the Guam Congress (later the Guam Legislature)—Guamanians had little say over their political lives.¹⁴

Political impotence carried over into economic matters, especially landownership. Despite the passage of legislation by the United States Congress in 1945 and 1946 designed to help them, Guamanians found it difficult to win reimbursement for losses incurred during World War II. The navy placed low ceilings on claims adjudicated by a Land and Claims Commission, and by the time the last claim was settled in 1957 the federal government had paid out only $8.3 million to 4,429 Guamanians. More galling was the loss of additional land. In 1946, the same Congress that authorized Guamanians to press claims for World War II losses approved legislation allowing the American military to acquire private land on Guam for the creation of bases.¹⁵ The armed forces soon did so. When the United States had acquired Guam from Spain in 1898, it took over Spanish crown lands on the island, about 25 percent of the island’s land area. As the federal government purchased more land, its holdings rose to 48,144 acres in 1937, roughly 35 percent of Guam’s total land area. Further acquisitions brought federal government landholdings on Guam to about 56,500 acres, about 42 percent of Guam’s land, by 1948. By 1950, the federal government owned or leased 58 percent of the land area of Guam. As two Guamanian historians accurately noted about a decade later, “this was a cause of bitter resentment among Guamanians.”¹⁶
The loss of land troubled Guamanians for more than economic reasons. Family, not individual, landownership was central to Micronesian culture, and attacking that ownership was perceived as an assault on culture and family. As a leading scholar of Micronesian society has explained, “land was once . . . a cherished part of a group’s and an individual’s identity.” In fact, “to have rights to land—understood as including the offshore flats and reef or fishing areas—was to be able to meet all one’s basic needs: food, housing, transportation, and medicine. . . . People spoke of eating from their piece of land.”¹⁷ More was contested than simply the land itself, just as was the case with Kaho'olawe in the Hawaiian Islands.

Moreover, in its desire to maintain tight security, the navy restricted commercial development on Guam. Guam’s economy did well in the late 1940s, due mainly to war-surplus sales and military construction. However, restrictions soon limited growth and diversification. Local firms could not employ alien workers, such as Filipinos (unlike the military, which did), and local businesses had to be at least 51 percent owned by Guamanians. Moreover, only Guamanians could purchase land on Guam or lease it for more than five years. Well-meaning efforts to protect local residents from outside exploitation, these ordinances nonetheless limited development. Perhaps most harmful, the navy required security clearances—in effect, visas—for anyone traveling to Guam, a circumstance that made the development of tourism unlikely.¹⁸

Under mounting pressure from Guamanians, the federal government agreed to a major alteration in the island’s political status in 1950. Through an Organic Act passed by Congress that year, a civilian government replaced the naval government and Guamanians were recognized as American citizens. The new governor, who was appointed by the president until 1969 and elected by Guamanians thereafter, still had veto power over measures passed by the Guam Legislature but usually tried to cooperate with members of that body. Because of security concerns, however, the navy controlled travel clearances until 1962, a circumstance that continued to retard tourism and also made it difficult for Guamanians to leave their island. It is worth remembering that tourism is partly structured by state actions. Once travel restrictions were lifted, tourism began expanding, and many Guamanians, often the best educated, left Guam for mainland America as part of the Pacific diaspora, the movement of Pacific Islanders to America, New Zealand, and Australia.¹⁹

Efforts to diversify Guam’s economy accompanied political liberalization. One section of the Organic Act provided that products made on Guam could enter mainland America duty-free. Business leaders on Guam had visions
of their island becoming a center of manufacturing, trade, and finance like Hong Kong. That never occurred. Guam lacked the resources and was too far from major consumption centers to develop much of an industrial base. Then, too, disputes with Congress over how much of a product needed to be made on Guam for that product to be classified as Guamanian and thus eligible for duty-free shipment limited exports.²⁰ Navy restrictions on the use of Guam's only commercial harbor at Apra, about two-thirds of the way down the island's west shore, also hurt. The placement of the navy’s munitions wharf near the port's commercial facilities meant that trade was restricted, for a clear blast zone needed to be maintained in case an accidental explosion occurred. Relocating the ammunition wharf became a contentious issue in the 1970s and 1980s.

Nor did agriculture thrive. With much of the productive farmland in military hands, little was left for cultivation. “Lack of good farming land is the most serious problem Guam’s farmers must contend with,” observed a publication of the Guam government in 1953. “Condemnation of farm lands and the exodus of potential farm labor to occupations with the government or private firms have,” it noted, “handicapped the re-building of the agricultural industry.” In 1950, Guam had just 1,250 people employed in farming, and two years later only 3,759 acres were planted.²¹ Nor did agriculture prosper much in later decades. Another report sponsored by the Guam government observed in 1971 that “agriculture has not been a growth industry during the sixties.” In fact, the amount of land under cultivation fell, and fish production declined.²²

Thwarted on most other fronts, Guamanians pinned their hopes on tourism, and in this endeavor they were partially successful. That Guam would emerge as a major tourist center in the Pacific was, however, not apparent in the 1950s. The Guam Legislature established the Guam Travel Bureau in 1952, but a year later even a booster publication admitted that “Guam today is definitely not the place for visitors.” The pamphlet observed that there were “no hotel facilities and little likelihood for any in the near future.” Guamanians liked to think of their island as “the Crossroads of the Pacific,” but air transportation to Guam from mainland America was limited to two flights per week by Pan American Airlines and another two flights weekly by Philippine Airlines.²³ No flights yet connected Guam to Japan, which would later become the major source of tourists. Then, too, even Americans needed to have permission from the military in the form of security clearances to visit Guam.

When the requirement for permission to visit Guam was dropped in
1962, the number of tourists traveling to the island from mainland America rose. Federal government actions were important in another way as well. After doing little for about twenty years after World War II, the government spent considerable sums cleaning up war debris throughout American possessions in Micronesia. In 1963, about two thousand visitors called on Guam. Facilities were limited, mainly to seventy rooms in the Cliff Hotel above Hagatna. Only later in the decade, with Japan's economy doing well and Japanese tourists coming to make up the bulk of those visiting Guam, did tourism begin to take off. The number of people visiting Guam mushroomed to seventy-five thousand in 1970. About 83 percent of the tourists were Japanese, leading one writer to label the tourist boom “Japan’s new invasion of Guam.” Continental Airlines and TWA featured flights with jets between Honolulu, Guam, and Hong Kong, and Japan Airlines instituted service to Guam from Tokyo and Osaka. A growing number of hotels housed the tourists. Guam boasted eighteen, a number of them Japanese-owned, with a total of 1,034 rooms, by 1970. Many were along Tumon Beach, just north of Apra Harbor, an area destined to become overcrowded, much like O'ahu’s Waikiki.²⁴

Guam's tourist boom continued into the 1990s. High-rise hotels lined Tumon Beach, stressing the island's electric-power, freshwater, and highway infrastructure. Increased air service, a runaway boom in Japan’s economy, and legal changes (in 1988 a requirement that Japanese have visas to visit Guam for short trips was discontinued, once again underlining the importance of state actions to economic development) spurred development. In 1986, Guam possessed over three thousand hotel rooms and 585,000 visitors came to the island.²⁵ As restrictions on foreign investment were lifted, Japanese firms invested in the tourism of Guam and other parts of Micronesia, playing a leading role in the construction of new hotels in the 1980s, just as they did in the Hawaiian Islands. By 1994, Guam was hosting 1.1 million tourists annually, of whom 71 percent were Japanese, in four thousand hotel rooms. Some 275 commercial air flights entered or left Guam every week. A publication of the Guam government correctly observed in 2002 that “Guam’s economy relies heavily on tourism revenue,” although the number of tourists visiting the island remained about the same as it had been eight years earlier. The 1990s slump in the Japanese economy hurt tourism on Guam. However, in the early 2000s, as Japan’s economy recovered, so did Guam’s. In 2004, tourist arrivals topped one million for the first time in four years.²⁶

The only partial success in economic diversification was not unique to Guam. The TTPI was dissolved in 1978, and American trusteeship of Micronesia began to end. In its place politically independent entities arose:
the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Republic of Belau (Palau), and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). The northern Marianas became the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, an American commonwealth. The Republic of Nauru and the Republic of Kiribati became members of the British Commonwealth. The Republic of the Marshall Islands and the FSM entered into a Compact of Free Association with the United States in 1985, and in 2002–2003 the United States Congress renewed that compact. By contrast, Guam remained an organized but unincorporated territory of the United States into 2005, despite a long-standing desire of many Guamanians that their island become a commonwealth. Even with their new political arrangements, the islands of Micronesia have encountered great difficulty in achieving balanced economic growth. As in so many of America’s Pacific possessions, uneven growth has been the norm. A lack of varied resources, great distances to markets, and colonial legacies have dogged their efforts.²⁷

Economic diversification and economic freedom from the United States have proven to be elusive. Throughout most of Micronesia, governments, subsidized by the United States government, were the largest employers, often providing work to as much as 60 percent of those employed in wage-earning jobs. Nor has full political freedom been achieved. In return for their political independence, the states formed from the TTPI have generally had to accede to American conditions: that no other country could use their islands for military purposes; that American military forces, including nuclear ones, would have free transit through the islands; and that the United States could establish military bases on the islands, including the continued use of the Kwajalein Atoll as a missile range. The United States paid for these rights, which made the new nations all that more dependent on America. Those payments, which were adjusted upward in the 1980s and 1990s, galled many Guamanians, who thought that they were not receiving their fair share of largesse from Uncle Sam.²⁸

Continuing a long tradition, Guam’s largest single employer in 1970 was government. The federal government employed 6,676 Guamanians, and the local government, known as GovGuam, gave work to an additional 5,486. This situation was not new. In 1948, nearly 40 percent of Guam’s workers had found employment with the navy or other federal agencies on the island. Nor did this situation change much in later decades. Government—although now the local not the federal government—remained the largest employer in the late 1990s. Not until 2004, for example, was Guam’s telephone exchange privatized. GovGuam provided jobs to about 14,000 people.²⁹ They were not
low-paying ones, especially by Pacific Island standards. In fact, in 1990 Guam moved ahead of a state in per capita income for the first time, as the per capita income in Guam of $9,928 slightly exceeded that in Mississippi of $9,648. The per capita income for all of the United States was $14,420. This contrasted to a per capita income of $535 in the Republic of Kiribati, the lowest in Micronesia.³⁰

These jobs supported a growing number of residents on Guam. About 22,000 people lived on the island in 1940, of whom 91 percent were Chamorros. By 1980, Guam's population had risen to roughly 105,000, of whom just 55 percent were Chamorros. Chamorros lived throughout Guam, but several old-time Chamorro settlements, Merizo and Umatac, were located in southwest Guam and became centers for debates about where to locate a national park and seashore on the island in the 1970s and 1980s. In 2000, the island's population stood at 155,000, including at least 50,000 residents who were foreign-born. Many of the immigrants had come from other parts of Micronesia, which under the terms of the Compact of Free Association had unrestricted immigration access to Guam. Yet, even as opportunities on Guam attracted other Micronesians, a perceived lack of opportunities propelled Guamanians from their territory. By 1990, 49,000 Guamanians were living in mainland America, over one-half of them in California.³¹

The unbalanced economy that Guam developed, one based mainly on the military, government, and tourism, influenced the interaction of environmental and developmental issues on the island. Guamanians, like others throughout the Pacific, sought to find a workable balance between economic development and environmental preservation. They did so, however, in the shadow of the United States military. The past history of the American military's actions on Guam, especially its taking of land, greatly affected Guamanians' perceptions of the issues.

Controversies about Military Facilities on Guam and the Philippines

Issues of military influence, economic development, environmental change, and indigenous people's rights merged in the question of where to build a new ammunition wharf on Guam. From the 1940s, the navy had maintained a pier known as Hotel Wharf well inside Apra harbor, at which ships unloaded ammunition for use by the navy and the air force. The ammunition was either trucked inland several miles to a storage magazine, which the
Guam, the Philippines, and American Samoa

[54x597]Guam, the Philippines, and American Samoa

navy called NAVMAG Guam and which supported the Seventh Fleet, or was
taken directly to air-force bases on the island. The air-force bases included
Strategic Air Command bases for B-52s armed with nuclear weapons. Sur-
rrounded by an extensive breakwater known as the Glass Breakwater, Apra
harbor was protected from the open sea.

Problems arose in using Hotel Wharf as a munitions transfer point,
especially as its usage intensified with the escalation of the Vietnam conflict
in the 1960s. B-52 bombers flew from Guam airfields, armed with bombs
brought in through Apra harbor. Simply put, Hotel Wharf was too close to
commercial installations. To guard against damage should an accidental ex-
losion of conventional weapons occur, the navy needed to locate its am-
munition wharf about two miles from any such installations. Hotel Wharf’s
proximity to commercial facilities dampened development in Apra harbor
just as tourism and other forms of economic activities were taking off, thus
throttling efforts to make Guam’s economy less reliant on the military. More
than development issues were involved in building a new ammunition wharf.
Wherever the wharf was placed, whether somewhere within Apra harbor far
from commercial installations or at a location elsewhere on the island, it
would likely hurt Guam’s flora and fauna. It might also affect the activities of
Guamanians, for any commercial building or home within a two-mile radius
of the wharf would have to be relocated to clear the possible blast zone of
people.

Still more was involved in relocating the ammunition wharf, for that
issue was closely related to two others: where to establish a national park on
Guam and where to locate a national seashore. The issues impinged upon
one another, as decisions made about any one affected each of the others.
As was so often the case in the Pacific, a seemingly simple matter quickly
became complex. At first, navy officials viewed the relocation of their am-
munition wharf mainly in technical terms. However, as Guamanians became
involved in efforts both to develop their island economically and to preserve
parts of its physical and cultural environments, navy officers had to broaden
their outlooks, and over several decades viable compromises were worked
out about where and how to construct a new ammunition wharf.³²

The desires of military, especially navy, officials and the hopes of busi-
esspeople on Guam coincided in pushing the federal government to end the
use of Hotel Wharf as a munitions pier. The navy wanted the construction
of a wharf capable of handling several ships simultaneously unloading up to
9 million pounds of ammunition, surrounded by a blast zone of 10,400 feet
(this zone was called “an explosive safety quantity distance” or ESQD). Small,
obsolete, and too close to commercial piers, Hotel Wharf no longer sufficed. A 10,400-foot blast zone around the wharf included virtually all of the outer Apra harbor and part of the inner Apra harbor, including many areas where new commercial development was desired. In fact, Hotel Wharf could operate as an ammunition wharf only with a special safety waiver granted by the federal government. With new, fast large ammunition ships coming into use, the need to relocate the wharf was seen as especially urgent by the navy.³³

Business leaders feared that blast-zone restrictions were hampering economic development and strongly supported the navy’s desire to construct a new wharf. The Guam Chamber of Commerce gave “its wholehearted support and approval” to the navy’s proposal to move its wharf. Typical of the many Guamanian business leaders who testified favorably at public hearings was the general manager and vice president of Guam Oil & Refining, “The present location and the requisite restriction of operations in the harbor area,” he complained, “severely restricts the necessary and orderly development and usage of the commercial port area” and thus acted as “a restrictive force on the economy of Guam.”³⁴

Navy officials agreed. They observed that “the potential for economic growth is excellent” on Guam. Containerized cargo handling began in 1969, strengthening Guam as a transportation hub, and “tourist steamers” were calling on the island in growing numbers. However, they also noted that “the lack of clear zones from explosives loading and unloading performed by the military is a considerable deterrent to commercial development of Apra Harbor.” This unfortunate circumstance, they further recognized, “prevents the government of Guam from realizing the full tax base and revenue potential of the harbor.” The relocation of the munitions wharf could open the way to economic growth.³⁵

With business and military leaders in agreement, the only question remaining was where to construct a new wharf. Therein lay the rub. The selection of a new site proved difficult and time-consuming, and required compromises on the part of the many parties engaged in it. Specific site selection actions pitted the navy against Guamanians, but more was involved. As historian Michael Clement has written, the “controversy was just as much an internal conflict in the Government of Guam as it was a clash of military and Guamanian desires.”³⁶ Technical considerations such as wind and wave directions, economic matters, especially the costs involved in building and maintaining a suitable wharf, and environmental and cultural issues all played important roles in the decisions of where to build the new wharf. Between 1964 and 1977, the navy investigated twenty-six potential sites, from
Ritidian Point in the north to Cetti Bay and Sella Bay in the southwest, in eight separate engineering and environmental studies. Most possibilities were quickly discarded, but several received careful consideration.

Sella Bay attracted considerable favorable attention in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Without consulting Guamanians, navy officials announced in 1969 that they would build the pier at Sella Bay. Compared to several other sites then also under review, it offered technical and cost advantages. Navy officials estimated that it would be less expensive to build a wharf, purchase land, and build roads at Sella Bay than at other places. Then, too, a wharf there could, they thought, be used 360 days per year, more days than at most other sites. Moreover, such a wharf would be close to the inland naval storage magazine, just seven miles away by truck. Finally, only twenty homes fell within the projected blast zone, compared to as many as a thousand at some possible locations.

Initially there was a fair amount of local support for the Sella Bay option. The executive vice president of the Guam Chamber of Commerce argued forcefully for construction there. As Clement has observed, “A key concern of businessmen at the time was to establish a private sector not dependent on the U.S. military.” Above all, the chamber official stressed the need to move the munitions wharf out of Apra harbor to open that port to commercial development. The chamber’s executive vice president thought that technical considerations made Sella Bay a logical choice. Few people, he observed, would have to be relocated. Moreover, building the wharf at Sella Bay would protect the area’s physical and cultural environments. The blast zone surrounding the pier would preclude any hotel or resort developments nearby, thus enhancing “the area for such use as recreation, conservation, ecological and marine research.” Sella Bay was at the time being considered for inclusion in a new national seashore, and building the ammunition wharf there would, he further asserted, save “the area for the eventual development of the proposed National Seashore Park.” Moreover, he claimed that “artifacts in the area,” including Chamorro latte stone sites, then subject to vandalism, would be better preserved. Composed of Chamorros and non-Chamorros, the chamber backed the navy’s plan, more generally, as helping Guamanians build a modern, capitalistic economy.

Far from all Guamanians agreed with these arguments. A growing number argued that the navy had already claimed too much land on Guam and that the beauty of the island needed to be preserved to help tourism develop. One Guamanian explained, “Sella Bay is one of the most scenic spots on the island, and we greatly need it to promote tourism.” He observed, moreover,
that “Our economic situation on Guam is primarily derived from military expenditures,” and concluded, “with the aid of tourism, our economic situation can be greatly enhanced.”

Responding to such complaints, the Guam legislature acted. The body held two public hearings on the matter in 1970 and passed a resolution “expressing deep concern over [the] ammo wharf” in July of that year. Additional protests led the legislature to pass a stronger resolution in early 1971 calling for the navy to abandon its plans for Sella Bay. Legislators pointed out that the American military already controlled much of Guam’s land and that the navy was proposing to acquire at least an additional 4,400 acres to support the construction of the wharf. The military, they complained, had already placed many of the best fishing and swimming beaches off-limits to the Chamorros who had once lived on them. The members went on to protest against any additional land acquisitions by the military, stating, “One of the most prevalent threats to the cause of preservation and conservation of the lands of the territory is the proposed acquisition by the Federal Government of Sella Bay and the surrounding area, one of the most scenic on the island, being ideal for open beaches and the recreation for the people of Guam.” Sovereignty was at issue. Far from protecting the ocean for inclusion in a national seashore or helping to preserve Chamorro culture, the wharf would cause serious environmental degradation. For several years the environmental organization Friends of the Earth had opposed the location of the munitions wharf at Sella Bay, and the Guam legislature closed its resolution by calling upon that group “to use its best efforts, including the taking of any legal action which it might feel appropriate to help the people of Guam in opposing the acquisition of Sella Bay by the Federal Government for the development of an ammunition wharf.”

That legal opposition was forthcoming. Members of the Guam legislature, together with representatives of several environmental bodies, sued the governor of Guam to prevent building the wharf at Sella Bay. In agreement with the navy and the Chamber of Commerce, the governor was trying to work out a land exchange—the navy would acquire extensive land holdings owned by the government of Guam around Sella Bay in return for ceding land elsewhere, especially in Apra harbor, to the government of Guam—which would allow construction at Sella Bay to begin. Backed by a petition signed by fifteen thousand Guamanians to “Save Sella Bay,” those mounting the lawsuit were successful on appeal in 1973 to the Ninth Circuit Court in San Francisco—the same court that later ruled in favor of native Hawaiians occupying Kaho‘olawe. Unable to acquire the shore land it needed, the navy reluctantly abandoned its efforts to establish a munitions pier at Sella Bay.
Individuals as well as organizations played important roles in decisions involving developmental and environmental matters throughout America’s Pacific possessions, a situation certainly true on Guam, as they acted through politics. Paul Bordallo emerged as the Chamorro champion for those opposing the navy’s plans for Sella Bay. A senator in the Guam legislature, Bordallo had been educated at Stanford and Harvard Universities, from which institutions he had earned degrees in business administration. He was, in fact, a business leader on Guam. However, unlike most members of Guam’s Chamber of Commerce, he opposed the navy out of a sense of outrage about how Guamanians, especially Chamorros, had been treated by it. At Stanford, he had earned a minor in anthropology and as part of his work on that degree had studied indigenous peoples of the Pacific. His father had been a member of the Guam Congress in the 1930s. Bordallo explained in a 2002 interview that “the central issue” in the Sella Bay controversy was “identity” and “sovereignty.” “I conceived this Sella Bay,” he said, “as a point that could lead to not just verbal confrontation between the Chamorro people of Guam and the United States military,” but as one that contained “seeds to very serious consequences in Guam.”

The Guam legislature, supported by a public outcry, forced the navy to look elsewhere, in a major power reversal from earlier times. “Perhaps the most significant factor which weighs against the Sella Bay site,” navy officers noted ruefully a few years later, “is the growing opposition of the local populace.” More than technical and economic matters needed to be addressed. “A major issue,” they continued, “is the proposal to use the Sella Bay area as an underwater conservation area.” Environmental and cultural matters had trumped technical and economic considerations.

With Sella Bay no longer a possibility, the navy turned its attention to Orote Island, a large rock formation that forms the western tip of the Orote Peninsula, which in turn comprised the southern shore of Apra harbor. Some Guamanians had suggested this location as early as 1972. Orote Peninsula terminated in high cliffs, which could, they thought, contain blasts from accidental explosions. Deep water for moorage was available, as was nearby land for the temporary storage of explosives. All of the peninsula and island was uninhabited federal land, making it unnecessary for the federal government to acquire more land or to relocate people. A commission established by the Guam legislature and the governor of Guam favored the site in no uncertain terms. Members of the commission pointed out that Orote Island was far enough from the commercial sections of Apra harbor, well beyond the blast zone, to allow port development to proceed with few restrictions. They noted that some 40 million dollars’-worth of projects were ready for
construction inside the Apra harbor on Cabras Island, owned by the Guam government, if that island could be shown to be outside of any blast zone.⁴⁹

Navy officials agreed that Orote Island was a possible location. Two wharves capable of handling 9 million pounds of ammunition could be built for what they considered a low cost in a technically suitable area. Environmental disturbances could be kept to a minimum, navy officials believed, although twenty-one acres of a coral reef would have to be dredged to a depth of forty-five feet. Most important, navy officials observed, “Placing the pier at the isolated Orote Point site will insure that the expanding commercial port facilities in Apra harbor, coexisting with Navy requirements, can be accommodated without endangering the lives of employees in this ‘industrial area.’”⁵⁰

Even so, no munitions wharf was constructed at Orote Island. Plans for such a wharf were prepared in 1974, only to be deleted from the federal government’s construction budget in 1978, a victim of the general post-Vietnam conflict scaling back of the American military. More was involved than economics. Some Guamanians and some federal government officials believed that the environmental impact statement about Orote Island grossly underestimated the damage to flora and fauna likely to occur and opposed building wharves there.⁵¹

Opposition on environmental grounds, combined with economic considerations, killed construction possibilities. As the navy later admitted, “When the Draft EIS was circulated in 1977, the proposal drew heavy criticism on the basis of its environmental impact,” and that criticism “plus a high construction cost led to the project being dropped in 1978.”⁵² Historian Rogers later wrote of Orote Island, “It is a lovely place where I have hiked, fished and scuba dived many times. It would have been obliterated by the wharf complex, hence the objections to building the wharf there.”⁵³ The navy learned once again that it could not ignore environmental issues.

Attention shifted to new areas in the 1980s, as the presidential administration of Ronald Reagan greatly increased federal government expenditures on the military. Two sites within Apra harbor, both having blast zones that would exclude most of the commercial sections of the port and both to be located on land already owned by the federal government, received careful scrutiny. One was a site on Adotgan Point on the Orote Peninsula just a short distance inside the harbor from Orote Island on the tip of the peninsula. The other possibility was a site on the Glass Breakwater, which formed the northern boundary of Apra harbor. Navy officials preferred the Adotgan site for economic and technical reasons. Learning from their past experiences,
they were quick to admit that there were environmental drawbacks to building wharves at the Adotgan site. However, the navy believed that mitigation measures could limit most of the problems.⁵⁴

Testimony about the navy’s proposal to build its munitions wharf at Adotgan Point in the early 1980s revealed divisions of opinion among both Guamanians and federal government officials. The testimony also showed that the navy had become more responsive to the desires of others. Everyone agreed that it was necessary to relocate munitions handling from Hotel Wharf. The governor of Guam, the Guam legislature, and Guam’s representative to the United States Congress endorsed relocation wholeheartedly. All were glad that no more land would need to be acquired by the federal government to construct a pier at either Adotgan Point or the Glass Breakwater.⁵⁵ While all could agree that relocating the munitions wharf was necessary, there was initially no consensus about which of the two sites was preferable. Not all favored the choice of Adotgan Point, as environmental and cultural issues again intruded.

Questions quickly arose about the impact a wharf at Adotgan Point would have on Guam’s physical and cultural environments, despite the navy’s assurances about mitigation measures. Leaders of federal and territorial agencies voiced objections. Officials of the Fish and Wildlife Service in the Department of the Interior had “serious concerns” about the effects of construction on coral reefs and saltwater fish, as did members of the National Marine Fisheries Service in the Department of Commerce. The head of the Environmental Protection Agency also wondered if Adotgan Point was the best location from an environmental point of view. Members of the Guam Planning Agency favored the Glass Breakwater, because placing a wharf there “would do far less environmental damage” and would help preserve “scenic vistas.” The chairman of Guam’s Division of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources agreed that the site at the Glass Breakwater was “the least environmentally damaging alternative” and concluded that there “was no justification in selecting the Adotgan Point alternative.” Likewise, the head of the Guam Environmental Protection Agency stated that he “[could not] agree with the choice of Adotgan Point,” for too much coral reef would be lost.⁵⁶ Guam’s Department of Parks and Recreation officials observed that important historic and prehistoric sites might be damaged in the construction of roads and other shore-based facilities to serve a munition wharf there. Members of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation in Washington, DC seconded those concerns and added that the pier would be “a visual intrusion” on historic sites.⁵⁷
Demonstrating sensitivity that they had not previously displayed, navy officials responded carefully to all of the objections, leading to acceptance for their plans. They went further. In the fall of 1982, they agreed in a formal memorandum with the government of Guam to design any facilities on Adotgan Point in ways to minimize their impacts, including their visual impact, on historic sites. A year later, they entered into a still more far-reaching memorandum of understanding in which they agreed to establish two substantial ecological reserves on federal land as compensation for any harm the construction at Adotgan Point might do to flora and fauna. One would be a cliff area on the Orote Peninsula, a special habitat for birds; the other would encompass shore lands, the home of several endemic Guamanian birds and the rare fruit bat, and a substantial reef area.\(^5^8\) Embracing these concessions, nearly all of those who had initially questioned the Adotgan site now supported it. The new ammunitions wharf was completed with federal funding in the late 1980s. Hotel Wharf was turned over to the government of Guam and in the 1990s was used by cruise ships.\(^5^9\)

Controversies about the location of the munitions wharf on Guam, together with the general matter of land occupied by military bases on that island, resonated with disputes about American military bases in the nearby Philippine Islands. When the Philippines achieved independence from the United States in 1946, the American military retained military bases there. With the coming of the Cold War, and especially with America’s involvement in the Vietnam conflict, political leaders in the United States viewed the bases, like those on Okinawa and Guam, as essential bastions against the spread of communism in the Far East. Filipinos were more circumspect about the presence of American bases on their soil. They saw it as a challenge to their national sovereignty. The issue of the bases was complicated, however; for it became tied up in two other disputed matters: American aid to the Philippines and trade tariffs. Filipinos generally pressed Americans for more economic aid and for trade legislation aimed at keeping the American market open to goods from the Philippines, while allowing Filipinos to levy tariffs on goods imported from the United States. In the minds of many Filipinos, economic aid and trade concessions were necessary to reduce their nation’s dependence on the United States, a dependency, they argued, that had begun well before 1946.\(^6^0\)

The story of disputes over the bases was one of declining American, and growing Filipino, power. In 1947, the newly independent Philippines granted the United States ninety-nine-year-long leases over a number of bases, most notably a large air base at Clark Field and a major naval installation at nearby
Subic Bay. In return, United States officials pulled American troops out of Manila, the capital of the Philippines, gave economic aid to the new nation, and met their Filipino counterparts partway on trade issues. During the 1940s and 1950s, the presidential administrations of Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower resisted Filipino efforts to assert any control over the bases, though Eisenhower acknowledged that ownership of the land the bases occupied resided with the Philippines. The U.S. Justice Department had claimed that the United States retained sovereignty to the bases’ lands when it transferred title to the rest of the islands to the Philippine government in 1946. A bit later, the United States accepted new boundaries for the Subic Bay base to give jurisdiction over eighty thousand Filipinos in Olongapo to the Philippine government. As part of the base, those in Olongapo had had their lives governed by American law, for American, not Filipino, laws governed the bases—a major bone of contention. In the early 1960s, Filipino leaders successfully renegotiated the length of the bases’ leases from ninety-nine to just twenty-five years. Further negotiations concluded in 1979 reduced the size of the bases at Clark Field and Subic Bay, labeled the bases “Philippine,” and called for a review the bases’ situation every five years.⁶¹ By the late 1980s, the bases employed seventy thousand Filipinos and contributed $1 billion annually to the economy of the Philippines. Even so, mounting Filipino pressures and a reassessment by Americans of the value of the bases led to America’s exit from the bases in the early 1990s, ending the United States’ century-long direct presence on Filipino soil.⁶²

While the controversies involving American bases in the Philippines rarely touched on environmental issues, those concerning where to locate the munitions wharf in Guam did. Moreover, the debates about the wharf had ramifications far beyond that single issue. The heated arguments spilled over into contemporary discussions about the creation of a national park and a national seashore on Guam.

The Creation of the Guam National Seashore

In 1971, Representative Harold Johnson of California, the acting chairman of the Subcommittee on National Parks and Recreation of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, introduced a joint resolution to the Senate and House to create a national seashore on Guam. Intended to “preserve for public use and enjoyment certain areas possessing outstanding natural, historic, and recreational values,” the proposed seashore would encompass a
region mapped out for inclusion in a park in 1967. That area was large, a total of 18,470 acres, of which 5,400 would be reef and water. The remaining nearly 13,000 acres would consist of land on Guam either already owned by the federal government or to be purchased by the federal government. Proposed for southwest Guam, the park would include the seashore from Nimitz Beach in the north down through Cetti Bay, Sella Bay, and Umatac Bay, all the way to Cocos Lagoon and Cocos Island in the south. The seashore would also include inland areas adjacent to the beaches, even embracing Mount Lamlam, the highest peak on Guam.⁶³

Well aware of local antipathy toward the federal government, those preparing the resolution included safeguards for Guamanians. Property owned by the territory of Guam could be acquired only with the consent of the Guamanian government. There were also limitations on how the federal government could use its powers to purchase privately owned land for the seashore. For one year after the passage of an act establishing the seashore, the federal government was explicitly forbidden from using condemnation powers to buy lands in the villages of Umatac and Merizo, which were populated mainly by Chamorro people pursuing traditional lifestyles. Even after that time period had passed, condemnation would be difficult, hemmed in by many restrictions. It was assumed that considerable stretches of private land would always exist within the boundaries of the seashore, and that hunting and fishing would be allowed to continue within the seashore as long as the activities conformed to Guam’s laws.⁶⁴

In early 1972, Johnson and other members of his subcommittee traveled to Guam to hold a series of public hearings on the proposed seashore, and they revealed that, while support did exist for the seashore, Guamanians also harbored reservations about it. Paul Bordallo, chairman of the Committee on Agriculture, Resources, and Development for the Guam legislature and the same legislator who was most adamantly opposed to the relocation of the navy’s ammunition wharf to Sella Bay, summed up the feelings of many residents. Bordallo praised the congressmen for holding hearings on Guam and listening to local opinions, something, he pointedly said, navy officials never did. He then opened his testimony by observing that the Guam legislature “sincerely and enthusiastically” supported the creation of the seashore.⁶⁵

However, Bordallo spent most of his time expressing doubts. “First,” he noted, “we think the proposed size of the park is too large.” It would be a mistake, he continued, “to deduct a substantial part of our limited area from the tax rolls and from the jurisdiction of our government,” for to do so would “seriously inhibit the development of Guam.” After denouncing the navy’s
effort to appropriate land in Sella Bay, he stressed “how much the people of Guam resent involuntary condemnation and how important it is that the Park Service negotiate with private landowners within the taking and permit them to remain within the seashore so long as they conform to the master plan.” He went further in his defense of the rights of Guamanians, saying that the National Park Service should share responsibility for the administration of the seashore with the government of Guam. Administrators should also, Bordallo asserted, give preference to Guamanians for jobs, especially in running concessions for the park. “We don’t want to see a system develop,” he concluded, “where the chiefs are all from the mainland United States and the Indians are all from the local reservation.”

In his recommendations for the treatment of the Chamorro villages of Merizo and Umatac, Bordallo demonstrated ambivalence, as did many Guamanians. On the one hand, he urged that the seashore be established in ways that would not disrupt the lives of people in those areas. On the other hand, Bordallo said that park planners needed “to recognize the needs of the villages of Merizo and Umatac for normal growth.” It would not, he continued, be “appropriate to freeze these communities and preserve them like a fly in amber for all eternity.” Perhaps, he thought, controlled tourism, “not a Coney Island type of development,” in which the seashore could play a major part, offered a way out of this dilemma. The southern part of Guam, Bordallo finished his testimony, should remain “peaceful and serene.”

The Guam legislature had in 1971 passed a resolution introduced by Bordallo calling on all governmental bodies “to preserve and enhance the ancient features and traditions of the southern districts of Guam . . . most akin to the ancient Chamorro way of life.” However, the resolution went on to incorporate some of the same contradictions as Bordallo’s later testimony. It noted that “tourists find the atmosphere of the southern districts particularly appealing and picturesque, which gives another reason to take whatever steps necessary to preserve this atmosphere and thereby maintain a great natural tourist attraction.” The resolution urged the construction “at an appropriate site within the locale of an old Chamorro village, complete with thatched roof buildings, latte stone sites, and all else required to recreate in the southern part of Guam an authentic habitat of the autochthonous inhabitants of the Marianas.” It further called for the building of “a by-pass highway system so as to preserve the slow pace of the three southern villages and yet permit motor vehicles a rapid transit to the area.”

Most Guamanians who testified agreed with Bordallo. Nearly all said that the creation of seashore could help preserve Guam’s environment. Many
noted with satisfaction that it would preclude the navy’s building an ammunition wharf in Sella Bay while encouraging desired forms of economic development. They believed, that, if done carefully, the creation of a national seashore could help free Guam’s economy from dependence on the military. George Bamba, chairman of the Committee on Ecology and Environment for the Guam legislature, further explained that such a creation would keep the area out of the grips of outside entrepreneurs as well. He complained that “Japanese-run hotel” facilities were taking over his island, making Guam “an economic colony of Japan,” and said that he favored the seashore, with locally owned and operated concessions, as a move in the direction of economic diversification and freedom. By this time, some were calling this part of Guam “the Japanese Riviera.”

More than economics was involved. The president of the Guam Environmental Council, who described his group as being composed of “local residents who are dedicated to the maintenance of quality environment for the people and community of Guam,” asserted that his organization desired a national seashore because it would “enhance the social, economic, cultural, and natural environment of the island.” He noted in particular that it could protect “the people’s heritage” and Chamorro lifestyle. Much was seen as being involved in the creation of a national seashore. Indeed, a petition sponsored by the Guam Environmental Council, signed by sixty-five hundred Guamanians, captured well the sometimes conflicting thoughts. A National Seashore was needed, the petition to the secretary of the interior read, “for its potential contribution to knowledge of tropical Pacific ecology, and for its recreational benefits to local residents and to the large and growing number of tourists on the island.”

Like Bordallo, most of the same Guamanians testifying in favor of the creation of a national seashore had reservations. Above all, they feared that its establishment might become an excuse for the federal government to seize more land. The example of the navy’s designs on Sella Bay was never far from their minds. A lawyer, who was at the time representing several Guamanians claiming that they had lost land unfairly to the navy, expressed such thoughts when he said that, if not done justly, setting aside land for the seashore would “force still more Guamanians off of their land and into the urban mold.” He called upon members of the subcommittee to “at least require that the individual landowners of this island be given the opportunity of acquiring land of like character and dimension in exchange for that which they must surrender” and pleaded, “Don’t give a man a handful of dollars.” A resident of Umatac was even more blunt. In a letter published in Guam’s
leading newspaper in 1971 and then entered into the 1972 hearings, he addressed the “Uprooted People of Guam.” He urged that they “let themselves be heard before they all wither and die from so many transplantings,” a reference to land losses attributable to the federal government.⁷¹

The impassioned testimony of the Guamanians made its impression on the visiting congressmen. Representative Philip Ruppe of Michigan noted at the conclusion of the hearings that he was glad to learn that Guamanians supported the idea of a national seashore and believed that they were “correct in expressing your concern over the land use that would be part of such a development.”⁷² Over the next few years, the measure creating a national seashore on Guam was reworked to embody many of the desires of the Guamanians. In 1978, the U.S. Congress established a Territorial Seashore Park, encompassing 12,500 acres of Sella Bay and surrounding land from Agat in the north to Merizo in the south, thus setting up an area considerably smaller than the one that had been surveyed a decade earlier. Development was restricted and, according to the leading historian of Guam in 1995, “Sella Bay remains uninhabited and pristine.”⁷³ A publication of the Guam Visitors Bureau noted in 2004 that Sella Bay, the center of the seashore, “is accessible only on foot, by way of a 1.5-mile hike beginning south of the town of Agat.” The guide continued, “The bay has good corals and underwater caves, making it excellent for swimming and snorkeling.” Culture, as well as flora and fauna, might be enjoyed: “Hikers will discover ancient latte stones and pottery shards, which are all that remain of Sidya, a Chamorro village that was deserted nearly 200 years ago.”⁷⁴

The Establishment of the War-in-the-Pacific National Historical Park on Guam

Even as the Congressional Subcommittee on National Parks and Recreation was conducting hearings on Guam about the creation of a national seashore there in 1972, its members listened to testimony about a proposed national park for the island. To be called the War-in-the-Pacific National Historical Park, it would commemorate American military campaigns during World War II, especially the one to retake Guam from the Japanese in 1944. Introduced into Congress by Representative Richard C. White of Texas, who as a marine had landed on Guam to recapture the island, the park bill raised many of the same issues that the act to create a national seashore had stirred up, but contained some interesting twists. White’s measure envisioned the
establishment of a park encompassing beaches on which the marines had landed and a substantial inland region composed of places at which battles had been fought, for a total of about 2,800 acres in areas including Asan, Agat, and Mount Tenjo. It was proposed that a museum and commemorative markers would grace these lands.⁷⁵

Nearly all Guamanians who testified said they favored the park’s creation. A member of the Guam legislature observed that the park “has met with favorable consideration from the people of Guam and the members of the Guam legislature.” It would be, he thought, “a fine tribute to the battles on Guam” and “a living memorial to the entire Pacific campaign.” He noted further that “Guam has developed into a key position of U.S. military activity in the Pacific” and that “the military personnel stationed on Guam would receive a sense of pride and historical perspective from a national park such as that proposed.” More was involved than patriotism. After discussing the increase in tourism on Guam, he supported constructing the park, because doing so “would be of substantial assistance to Guam’s developing tourism.” The director of Guam’s Department of Commerce made the same point, testifying that he thought a national park would aid “our budding tourist industry and our economy.” Others favored the establishment of the park more as a way to preserve increasingly scarce open space. A representative of the Guam Environmental Council praised the proposal for saving “open space needed to maintain the charm and dignity of Guam.” Quality-of-life matters concerned him the most. “For all of our construction, new highways and all of the growth that we see on your island of Guam,” he explained, “I hope we and certainly you never lose sight of the fact that the environment of the island should be one where it is very fine and very good for the people of Guam to live and enjoy.”⁷⁶

Nonetheless, even proponents had questions. Many thought that the proposed park was too large and gave too much power to the federal government. The same Guam legislator who testified in favor of the park noted that “land on Guam is exceedingly dear” and called for a park of more limited size. He thought that the federal government should be allowed to acquire land only with the concurrence of the governor of Guam and the Guam legislature, and wanted provisions added to the legislation to provide the people of Guam with a say in the administration of the park. The director of Guam’s Department of Commerce noted that “our recent past has demonstrated that we cannot allow a Federal agency to have carte blanche in Guam.” He, too, said that the government of Guam must have veto power over any land acquisitions and that Guamanians needed to be involved in
running the park. Even the member of the Guam Environmental Council who favored the park as a means of preserving open space cautioned, “We would like to see some publicity here on the island so that we will know that they are not going to include three-fourths of the area of Guam.” All made reference in their park testimony to the controversy over the plan to build a munitions wharf in Sella Bay, which was made with almost no local consultation, as a poor way to conduct matters.

Congress authorized the expenditure of $16.5 million to create the War-in-the-Pacific National Historical Park in 1978, with all except $500,000 to be spent on the acquisition of land. It included seven different units of land. A second park called the American Memorial Park was created on Saipan. However, for over a decade little was done. In the fifteen years after 1978, the U.S. Congress actually appropriated only $3 million to purchase land for the park on Guam. Of this amount just $2.5 million were spent, enough to acquire less than 40 percent of the private land within the park’s boundaries. Congressman Morris Udall, chair of the House Committee on Natural Resources, visited Saipan and Guam in 1989 with other committee members to try to drum up support for the parks, to little avail. Acres of privately owned land remained inside the park on Guam. Meanwhile, it was only in 1983 that the National Park Service submitted a general management plan to congressional committees. Federal government budgetary restrictions retarded park development. Even in beginning to construct the park, the National Park Service, despite all of the voices of Guamanians heard at public hearings, rode roughshod over some local desires. The government of Guam had planned to build a new small boat harbor at Agat. However, this location was one of the places where the marines had landed, and the federal government took it over, despite protests from outraged Guamanians, for the park. The Park Service seized the land by declaring a rusty World War II sewer pipe on the land to be a historic landmark.

The park remained unfinished in the early 1990s, a situation that dismayed many as the fiftieth anniversary of World War II approached. To determine how best to proceed, Congress held a new round of hearings on a measure to fund the park adequately in 1993. The bill would appropriate $8 million for the park on Saipan and $11 million for the one on Guam. Held in Washington, DC, the hearings were a love feast, with no one dissenting from the park plans. The governor of Guam, representatives of the Guam legislature, members of Guam’s American Legion post, and many marine veterans, including a former commandant of the Marine Corps, testified either in person or by correspondence in favor of the park. Gone were any doubts about
the acquisition of land by the federal government or any misgivings about how the park might be administered. Instead, a new element not present in the hearings two decades before rose to prominence—Chamorro culture. Many Chamorros had lost their lives during the Japanese occupation of Guam and in the fighting by Americans to retake the island.⁸⁰

In 1993, a proposal to include in the park on Guam a memorial to those Chamorros won overwhelming support. Typical was the handwritten letter of one Guamanian to the Congress, which argued that with a memorial “our unique Chamorro culture will be appreciated and will touch other people across the globe so this world can be peaceful that was meant to be [sic].” The chair of the Guam legislature’s Committee on Youth, Senior Citizens and Cultural Affairs went further in linking Chamorro lifestyles, economic development, and the need for the park. She began her testimony by observing that “the comfortable lifestyle we maintain today is tied to that period of turbulence in Guam's history,” a reference to World War II. She then stated that in recent years Guam had “undergone an unprecedented frenetic rate of development . . . which has diluted the dynamics of our island culture.” She concluded that “the same economics that has upgraded our lifestyle has strained the cultural fabric that provides strength and blurs the identity of our people” and supported the measure to build the park “as a means of providing a tangible approach in the preservation of our culture.” Another Guamanian urged the construction of the park as a way of saving “our ancient artifacts like the latte stones,” which “the native Chamorros once used.”⁸¹

In the end, Congress appropriated the necessary funds, and the War-in-the-Pacific National Historical Park was completed, including a memorial to the Chamorros who had lost their lives during World War II. Covering 1,960 acres in seven units, the park has a visitor center at Asan, where there are interpretive exhibits and audiovisual programs. Designed to “honor all people from all nations who participated in the Pacific War,” the park includes in its visitor center exhibits on Chamorro culture and history, as well as exhibits about the war. It also features environmental exhibits, including one on the brown tree snake.⁸²

The Invasion of the Brown Tree Snake

A government publication noted with pride in 1953 that Guam was “completely free of poisonous snakes,” making the island “a virtual utopia from poisonous bites of any kind.”⁸³ A scant forty-three years later, a scientific
report prepared for the U.S. Congress observed the very damaging impacts the brown tree snake was having on Guam. “The brown tree snake (Boiga irregularis),” the document noted, “has been a major factor in a modern extinction episode beyond its native range that is unprecedented in its scope: the extirpation of most of Guam’s native terrestrial vertebrates, lizards, and virtually all of the island’s forest birds.” In addition, the report continued, brown tree snakes on Guam had caused “more than a thousand power outages, damaged agricultural interests by preying on poultry, killed many pets, and envenomated numerous children.” Journalists reporting on the damage done by the brown tree snake were blunt. One titled his account “The Snake That Ate Guam.”

Inadvertently introduced by the American military, the brown tree snake overran the island. Native to Indonesia, New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and northern Australia, the snake probably entered Guam as a stowaway in a navy ship’s cargo shortly after World War II. Having no natural predators on the island and proving to be very adaptable in its exploitation of habitat and food sources, the reptile reached a population density of thirty-five to fifty per acre in the mid-1980s. This meant that there were perhaps 2 million brown tree snakes on Guam, about 20,000 per square mile. The snake was more than simply another pest; it was the cause of a major ecological disaster on Guam and a significant hindrance to the development of the island’s economy. Moreover, the brown tree snake threatened to spread to other Pacific Islands, including the Hawaiian Islands, where it could be expected to wreak similar damage.

Julie Savidge, a doctoral candidate in ecology at the University of Illinois, who worked in Guam’s Division of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources (DAWR), was the first scientist to fully understand and publicize the harm the brown tree snake was causing. By the 1970s, Guamanians noticed that birdlife on many parts of their island was becoming increasingly rare. Guam’s avifauna consisted of eighteen native birds, mainly forest dwellers such as the bridled white-eye, the Guam flycatcher, and the Rufous fantail. Many of these were unique to Guam, not even living on nearby islands like Rota. In 1978, those with the DAWR proposed that ten of Guam’s native birds and two species of fruit bats be placed on the federal government’s list of endangered species. Two of these birds, the Guam rail and the Micronesian broadbill, lived nowhere else in the world. The agency also advanced a plan to try to discover the causes for the decline in the populations of the birds. Savidge was tapped for that investigation.

Her work showed conclusively that the brown tree snake was respon-
sible for the plummeting numbers of birds. Scientists and nonscientists alike had suspected other causes, for up to that time no snake had been implicated in the wholesale destruction of birdlife anywhere in the world; thus the situation on Guam was a new one. Through extensive fieldwork, Savidge and others at the DAWR had ruled out other possibilities: pesticide contamination, loss of habitat, competition from introduced birds, exotic diseases (avian malaria was at the time decimating bird species endemic to the Hawaiian Islands), and the depredations of rats. Then, through careful research in old newspapers and written reports and through the use of interviews and questionnaires with people throughout Guam, Savidge determined both when brown tree snakes were first noticed in different regions and when birdlife began disappearing from those areas. When it became clear that the arrival of snakes corresponded to the decline in birdlife, Savidge thought she had uncovered why the birds were disappearing. When additional fieldwork revealed that brown tree snakes ate all kinds of birds—and lizards and fruit bats, which were also becoming scarce—she was sure of it.⁸⁹

Savidge was able to determine how the brown tree snake had spread on Guam. Introduced through Apra harbor sometime in the late 1940s or early 1950s, the snakes spread to southern Guam in the 1950s, to central Guam in the mid-1960s, and to Guam’s northern extremities in the late 1970s and early 1980s. By early 1983, ten forest bird species managed to survive only in a small forest below the cliff line at the northern tip of Guam, a place the snakes could not reach. Birds also flourished on Cocos Island, a small islet just south of Guam—again, a place snakes had not reached. By this time, several of Guam’s bird species were presumed to be extinct in the wild. Some survived in captivity through the heroic efforts of zoo curators, and some of these birds were later reintroduced to the wild. Others were completely lost.⁹⁰

The impacts of the brown tree snake were multiple. By 1986, nine species of birds had been extirpated and others were endangered. At a time when the protection of their flora and fauna, including birdlife, featured prominently in debates about where to build the navy’s ammunition wharf and where to locate parks, the depredations of the snakes alarmed Guamanians, especially as they came to see birds endemic to Guam as part of their natural and cultural heritage. There were also unexpected consequences. With most birds gone, growing swarms of mosquitoes might spread diseases such as the deadly dengue fever. Then, too, as they invaded buildings, the nocturnal snakes, which are mildly venomous, bit babies and children as they slept. By 1994, some 206 snakebites had been recorded, including eleven serious
cases involving babies less than one year old. In addition, snakes climbed guy wires leading to poles supporting electrical power lines, often creating short circuits. Power outages became common just as uninterrupted electric flows were most needed for touristic developments. Between 1978 and 1994, there were twelve hundred such outages, and it was “conservatively estimated that power outages on Guam caused by brown tree snakes have cost millions of dollars a year.” These power disruptions had many ramifications. As a government report observed, “Snakes startle people, and power outages frequently cut short their enjoyment of Guam’s nightlife and shopping centers.” Power outages also shut down refrigeration units and computers. Not only were the snakes dangerous and spreading diseases, they were also bad for business.⁹¹

Brown tree snakes threatened to become a problem throughout the Pacific. Very hardy, they could hitchhike to other islands in the wheel wells and cargo holds of airplanes and in cargo containers leaving Guam by ship. Biologists warned that “exotic snakes pose an enormous threat to other islands” and observed that it was “imperative that they be eliminated from interisland transport.” Brown tree snakes were repeatedly found on O‘ahu in the 1980s and 1990s, brought in accidentally by military airplanes. Closer to Guam, numerous sightings of brown tree snakes occurred on Saipan, Tinian, and Rota. It was deemed likely that a colony of the snakes was established on Saipan by the 1990s. Kwajalein, Pohnpei, Wake Island, Okinawajima, and the Diego Garcia Atoll (in the Indian Ocean) reported less frequent sightings.⁹²

Conceding that the snakes would never be completely eliminated from Guam, scientists and governmental officials hoped in the early 2000s to reduce their numbers through an integrated management plan that would alter their habitat and use both chemical and biological controls.⁹³ Recognizing the danger that the snakes might spread beyond Guam, in 1991 Congress added a section to the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990 to authorize a cooperative program to control the snake. Representatives of the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, and the Interior, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (in which Tinian and Saipan lay), the territory of Guam, and the state of Hawai‘i formed a Brown Tree Snake Control Committee in 1993 to develop an integrated pest control approach.⁹⁴

By the close of the 1990s, the most stringent controls applied to the Hawaiian Islands. Working with the Brown Tree Snake Control Committee, the Hawaiian legislature established an Alien Species Action Plan in 1994. As it was applied to brown tree snakes over the next few years, this plan meant
that all airplanes leaving Guam for Hawai‘i were inspected for snakes on the ground in Guam and were checked again once they landed at a Hawaiian airport. Finally, the state established Snake Watch Alert Teams (SWAT) to seek out and destroy any snakes that might somehow have gotten loose in the Hawaiian Islands. Fears that brown tree snakes might run wild on Maui contributed substantially to a decision not to extend the length of the major runway of that island’s main airport. A longer runway might allow airplanes to fly in directly from Guam, and those airplanes, many Mauians feared, might bring in brown tree snakes. Even so, in the summer of 2004 some residents suspected that brown tree snakes had gotten loose in the Hana region of Maui. In the winter of 2005, residents expressed similar fears about O‘ahu.⁹⁵

**Developments in American Samoa**

Developments in American Samoa, the only possession of the United States south of the equator, offer a valuable contrast to those on Guam.⁹⁶ Along with other European nations, the United States developed an interest in the Samoan Islands in the late nineteenth century for strategic purposes. The United States annexed the islands of Tutuila and Aunu‘u in 1900 and the nearby island group of Manu‘a four years later, despite the desire of chiefs in the last group to remain independent. These annexations were confirmed by Congress in 1929. The main goal was to create a naval coaling station and communications center at Pago Pago on Tutuila. To this end, American Samoa, like Guam, was placed under the administration of the navy, which gave tremendous leeway to local commanders. The naval administration lasted until 1951, when administration was shifted to the Department of the Interior, just as took place on Guam.⁹⁷

The land area of American Samoa comes to about seventy-three square miles and is mainly mountainous. The climate is tropical. Comprising about three-quarters of American Samoa’s land and 95 percent of its population, Tutuila is the most important island, home to the port of Pago Pago, which serves as the commercial center. Possessing several tuna-fish canneries, its harbor is, according to recent descriptions, “polluted and muddy.” On “bad tuna days” the stench “will take your breath away.” The three small islands of the Manu‘a group, about sixty-two miles east of Tutuila, are much less developed, “100 years away” from the commercialization on Tutuila.⁹⁸

As on Guam and Hawai‘i, indigenous inhabitants in the Samoan Islands
altered the landscape through their cultivation practices well before the coming of westerners, as a detailed study of Ofu Island in the Manu’a group has shown. Bringing rats, pigs, dogs, and chickens with them, settlers reached Ofu about three thousand years ago. They exterminated five of ten native seabirds and one of three native land birds. Moreover, their cultivation largely modified Ofu’s coastal terrace, with their slash-and-burn agriculture contributing to the loss of native birdlife through habitat destruction.⁹⁹

By contrast, the naval administration, in the words of historian Steven Fischer, “transformed little in this part of Samoa.”¹⁰⁰ For the most part, U.S. Navy administrators ruled in consultation with established local leaders and tried not to upset established ways of doing things. When a consultative legislature was established, members were chosen from established village districts, and, not surprisingly, well-known local leaders won election. Nor did many changes come to the economies of the islands. Subsistence agriculture and fishing continued as before, with copra about the only export. A 1952 naval report observed, “It is difficult to conceive of any nation gaining economic or financial benefit from American Samoa,” for “the island resources have no potential.” In a major difference from the situation on Guam, the navy appropriated little land for military usage, just 121 acres, and enforced ordinances preventing the loss of land by Samoans to outsiders. Nor were many nonresidents allowed to set up businesses in American Samoa, for fear that they might exploit residents. Some 99 percent of the land remained in Samoan hands in 1951. Even so, all was not harmony. In the 1920s, a strong movement for autonomy developed among Samoans, including those in American Samoa. Called “Mau,” which means opinion, the movement called for the establishment of a civilian government. Those in the campaign accomplished little in the eyes of naval officers except to disrupt economic development by their interminable meetings. Naval officers improved health in American Samoa, leading to a doubling of the population every twenty-five years after 1900, until it reached about 24,000 in 1950. They also established an elementary and secondary public school system enrolling about 3,500 pupils. Another 1,175 students were in private missionary schools. Technological advancements made Pago Pago obsolete as a naval station, and the navy pulled out in 1951–1952. Here was a basic difference from Guam where, of course, the U.S. military increased its presence and its land acquisitions during the Cold War.¹⁰¹

Only in the 1960s did economic circumstances begin to change in American Samoa, but even then not nearly as much as on Guam. Under the administration of President John F. Kennedy, infrastructure improvements
were made: new roads, an international airport, sewage-treatment facilities, and so on. The number of tuna canneries increased. The first tourist hotel was constructed. Even so, tourism failed to develop into a mainstay of the economy. In 2003, a leading guidebook still described accommodation options as “very limited” and labeled the largest hotel, which was government-run, as “infamous.” There was one national park in American Samoa, with three units totaling nine thousand acres on the islands of Tutuila, Ta’u, and Ofu. One of the park’s goals was to help preserve native society, and villagers were allowed to continue gathering plants from park areas for cultural and medicinal purposes. Nonetheless, traditional society eroded, and alcohol, juvenile delinquency, and crime problems surfaced. Moreover, civilian administrators created “a small welfare state.” Appropriations to American Samoa from the U.S. government came to about $34 million annually in the early 2000s. Per capita income reached $8,000 annually.¹⁰²

Even as Samoan society began to become commercialized, traditional titles and land tenures remained largely unchanged, and outside entrepreneurs were restricted in their access to American Samoa. The establishment of the tuna canneries was the exception, not the rule. Unlike native Hawaiians, American Samoans benefited handsomely from American subsidies and spoke little of seeking independence from the United States. In 2005, American Samoa remained an unincorporated, unorganized territory of the United States—by choice, not coercion. Unlike what occurred on Guam, American Samoan leaders opted not to try to win an organic act from Congress. To do so, they realized, would force them to give up racial preferences in landownership, which are unconstitutional under American law. An organic act might also force them to adhere to minimum-wage laws, thus undercutting advantages enjoyed by the tuna canneries.¹⁰³

In fact, American Samoa became (and is) a prime example of a MIRAB economy, dependent on the migration of its people abroad and their remittances home, as well as on congressional appropriations. One-third of the workforce is employed by the territorial government. About sixty-two thousand American Samoans lived beyond their islands in the 1990s, mainly in California and Hawai‘i, considerably more than the forty thousand residing in American Samoa.¹⁰⁴ Author Tom Conger captured well the “push” and “pull” forces that led many to leave American Samoa. Writing in 1996, he observed that the only major business in Pago Pago, the tuna-packing plant, imported its seasonal workers from Japan, and that most of the fishing boats were crewed by non-Samoans. “There’s a bit of government work . . . and a few work in the hotel,” he noted. However, in general, there was “Nothing for
the Samoan kids to look forward to. That’s why so many head to the U.S. as soon as their families can arrange.”¹⁰⁵

World traveler Paul Theroux, perhaps a bit jaded, has left an equally vivid and dispiriting picture of life in American Samoa. Commenting on the congressional subsidies, he concluded, “Life in American Samoa is one long Yankee boondoggle, and the people are so hoggishly contented that they cannot stand the idea of ever forming an independent political entity.” He called residents “corrupted” and “fat jolly people, with free money, having a wonderful time.” Samoa, Theroux believed, “had become part of the American family and was content.” “Samoans,” he thought, “were generally unenthusiastic, but similarly they were uncomplaining.”¹⁰⁶ What Theroux missed, of course, was the lack of opportunities available in American Samoa, which led to the massive involvement of American Samoans in the Pacific diaspora.

Conclusions

Events on Guam in the years after World War II amply illustrate some of the difficulties involved in trying to reconcile economic development matters, environmental protection issues, the rights of indigenous peoples, and the desires of the American military in the Pacific. Developments on Guam also showed, however, that compromises could be reached. Navy officers initially approached matters such as the location of its new ammunition wharf from a technical and economic viewpoint but, pushed by other groups, widened their outlook to include environmental considerations. The growing sensitivity of navy officials coincided with the problems they faced in the Hawaiian Islands with regard to Kaho‘olawe, and to similar problems elsewhere in the Pacific. Because CINCPAC was ultimately responsible for the navy’s stances on local issues in Guam and the Hawaiian Islands, it is likely that the thinking of navy officers about issues in both regions was related, although no “smoking gun” in the way of documentation exists.

As in most other areas dealt with in this study, compromises were arranged in the political arena, and the political process on Guam grew more pluralistic as time went on. More and more people and their organizations had effective access to political decision making. That process, as in other Pacific areas in which the United States had influence, was tinged with a dislike of federal government authority, leading to increased questioning about the roles of the American military on Guam.

Decisions to establish a national park and seashore on Guam were, like
that involved in siting the ammunition pier, made through political debate. Guamanians, including those favoring the preservation of the Chamorro culture, were active in shaping the contours of the enabling legislation. The situation on Guam provides a contrast to the much more inhumane treatment meted out to Native Americans in the earlier creation of many national parks on the American mainland. Largely because of the input of Guamanians, Chamorro rights received attention in establishing the parks and in deciding on a location for the ammunition wharf on Guam. Circumstances on the island resembled the growing attention Alaskan Natives received in planning for the Beringian Heritage International Park. Times changed as new groups demanded and received places at the political table.

The park, seashore, and wharf issues contributed to the development of a Chamorro rights movement on Guam. Like indigenous peoples’ movements throughout the Pacific, such as the native Hawaiian renaissance, that movement sought to restore native culture (including language), political influence, and economic power.¹⁰⁷ The Chamorro rights movement also aimed at the restoration of lost lands. Underlying specific concerns was again the issue of sovereignty. In the 1980s and 1990s, Guamanians, especially Chamorros, renewed their quest to regain lands lost to the navy right after World War II. In 1983, the United States Justice Department offered to settle the claims with a total payment of $39.5 million. Most claimants accepted the settlement, and the money was distributed to fifty-two hundred former landowners or their heirs. About two hundred disgruntled claimants held out for larger settlements, and the issue has not yet been resolved.¹⁰⁸ In a related move, in 2000 Congress agreed to take another look at claims for compensation for property, personal injury, and deaths. By 2003, a commission set up by the House of Representatives had collected more than five thousand questionnaires from Guamanians and was considering what actions to take.¹⁰⁹

While the issues swirling around decisions about where to place the parks and the munitions wharf could be divisive, there was unanimity of opinion about the need to control the brown tree snake. The damages caused by the snake hurt Guam’s environment and its business climate. The snake even threatened to bite into tourism, upon which many Guamanians banked to free themselves from the economic grip of the American military. In this case, the problem was not lack of consensus, but lack of knowledge. Until Julie Savidge conducted her research in the 1980s, no one really understood what the snakes were doing to their island, and even in the early 2000s no fully effective control mechanisms had been devised. Like other Pacific Islands,
such as Kaho‘olawe, Guam possessed a fragile environment, in which one change could quickly “cascade” to create other alterations: it took less than a generation for most of Guam’s birds to disappear. Invasive alien species, while certainly a global issue, had perhaps their greatest immediate impacts on small Pacific islands such as Guam.