Pathways to the Present

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Conclusions

It is worth repeating in closing that the Pacific—one-third of the globe, encompassing millions of square miles and millions of people—has always been, and remains, a large, complex region composed of subregions. Even Oceania, one of the subregions, is itself conventionally divided into Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. The complexity of the Pacific makes generalizations difficult and fraught with possibility for error. Restricting the scope of investigations to some of the regions owned or controlled by the United States helps a bit, but even within these areas considerable diversity remains. Nonetheless, my work supports several important conclusions.

America’s Pacific possessions, from the Aleutian Islands in the north to American Samoa in the south, and from Seattle and Silicon Valley in the east to Guam and the Philippines in the west, may be considered as one region, especially in modern times. Distinctly Pacific issues have been played out in these territories in decision making about economic development and environmental protection matters. World War II was certainly a watershed for all of these territories, but the issues that have arisen since then have also been closely related to the long history of the region. While current events have affected the choices people have made, the historical roots of those choices have been of equal import. History matters. Of course, each of the areas covered has had its own long history, and those local histories have shaped events in discrete ways. Still, several matters have transcended local developments as Pacific phenomena.

The political and economic colonialism of the region has been of particular significance in shaping the parameters within which decisions have been made. Control by westerners was preeminent in the recent history of much of the Pacific, and that history greatly affected developments. Among America’s Pacific possessions the legacy of colonialism was perhaps most obvious in the cases of Hawai‘i and Guam, but colonialism was also influ-
ential elsewhere. Residents in all of these regions harbored the feeling that they were being treated as second-class citizens—or worse—in America’s Pacific empire. Their rebellions against that position fueled some of the environmental efforts to control economic growth on their own terms. Pacific peoples particularly had misgivings about America’s military presence. From the opposition to the use of Kaho’olawe as a bombing range, to disdain for federal regulation of fishing in Alaska, to efforts to revise plans for the ammunition dock in Guam, a desire to cast off perceived colonial standing motivated local residents. These feelings persisted as the twenty-first century opened.

World War II served as a catalyst for the development of many economic and environmental improvements in America’s Pacific possessions. Pacific peoples were generally glad to have the American military rid their region, especially Micronesia, of Japanese influence and control. They also welcomed the economic growth that accompanied America’s increased presence in the Pacific, as military spending for World War II and the Cold War boosted local economies. The conflict and its aftermath opened the Aleutian Islands to new types of fishing, brought economic growth to Hawai‘i as servicemen later returned as tourists, helped spur the development of Guam, and brought major changes to America’s Pacific Coast cities and to southern Japan’s urban centers. However, people had short memories. Remembrances of World War II faded, and with that dimming went many favorable opinions of the U.S. military. Moreover, with economic growth came new environmental challenges. Pacific peoples soon found themselves at loggerheads with the American military, especially the U.S. Navy, and with some of the courses developments were taking. Even as some benefited from development, they questioned the various costs it entailed. Developments increased fishing pressures along the Aleutians, created the military ground that became pivotal to Hawaiian protests, altered Guam’s ecosystem, and intensified urban growth in the Seattle and Silicon Valley regions.

However, conflict was not a simple matter of locals against outsiders. Divisions existed within the ranks of those living in the various regions. Nowhere were these divisions clearer than in the splits separating indigenous peoples from Euro-Americans moving into their areas. Environmental contests regularly came to involve the rights of indigenous peoples, most obviously in the efforts of native Hawaiians to halt the bombing of Kaho‘olawe, but also in the work of Chamorros to modify park plans on Guam and the desire of Alaskan Natives for input into schemes for an international park for Beringia. Similarly, efforts by Native Americans, especially the Duwamish
Indians, to affect land-use and waterway issues in Seattle became important in the 1990s and later. One exception to this generalization may be Japan, where the native Ainu of northern Japan had little say after the early 1800s. Even in Hiroshima, however, minorities mattered, at least for a short time, as Koreans and *burakumin* influenced the reconstruction of the city for a few years. Nor were outsiders united. In Guam, for example, navy officers sometimes found themselves at odds with other federal government officials on park and dock issues.

What comes through in these controversies is the importance of the state as the arena in which the disputes were resolved. More than that, the state itself was often one of the most important actors on the scene and helped to structure the developmental activities. The U.S. Navy greatly affected developments over much of America’s Pacific, especially Guam and Hawai‘i. As scholars studying modern American history for twenty years or so have been reemphasizing, state actions matter. My study reaffirms the need to bring the state back into the big picture of economic and cultural development. People as agents of change also deserve attention, however. Individuals were influential in shaping events across the Pacific: Noa Emmett Aluli in Hawai‘i, Frederick Terman in Silicon Valley, Lowell Wakefield in Alaska, Shinzō Hamai in Hiroshima, and Paul Bordallo on Guam. People work in modern societies within the frameworks of state organizations, and they often do so through the formation of voluntary bodies, a mark of the development of civil societies. They frequently then use state agencies to achieve their goals. Aluli helped start the voluntary private organization of the PKO but later employed the state agency of the KIRC to restore Kaho‘olawe. My study shows how the state interacted with the emergence of numerous cultural and social groups on a wide variety of developmental and environmental issues.

In looking at the Pacific, this study has revealed relationships between urban and rural issues, emphasizing similarities rather than differences between the two types. In all of the areas, with again perhaps the exception of Hiroshima, environmental justice issues were important. The rights of minority peoples often intersected with environmental and developmental issues. From Filipino women dealing with chemical solvents and polluted water supplies in Silicon Valley, to native Hawaiians grappling with land-use matters on Kaho‘olawe, to Chamorros reasserting claims to their lands, environmental justice issues cut through the lives of city dwellers and rural peoples alike. Even in Hiroshima, the rights of minorities called for, but did not receive, justice in the reconstruction of the city. Throughout America’s
Pacific possessions, economic growth was uneven. Parts of regions benefited more than others, and different groups had varying experiences.

What transpired in the Pacific, and especially on Pacific islands, resonates with developments in other regions. Large as it is, the Pacific is, of course, only part of the globe. In his *Something New under the Sun*, historian John McNeill has emphasized that the rapidity of global population and economic growth in the twentieth century created environmental challenges not known in earlier times, a discontinuity with the past. As he has explained, “There is something new under the sun... the place of humankind within the natural world is not what it was.” In terms of the scale and scope of environmental changes caused by people, he has written, “there has never been anything like the twentieth century.”¹ That was certainly true of the Pacific, especially after the Second World War, when the pace of economic and environmental changes accelerated. Economic growth and the integration of the Pacific with other parts of the world altered lifestyles and forced Pacific peoples into making increasingly difficult environmental choices—choices similar to those people were having to make elsewhere in the world; and the types of decisions arrived at by Pacific peoples resembled those made by peoples in some specific parts of the globe.

Many of the same economic development and environmental protection matters Pacific peoples faced were played out in the American West. Here, too, perceived colonialism—often exemplified by the federal government and especially the U.S. military—irked, to put it mildly, Americans moving westward. Moreover, in the American West, as in the American Pacific, outside business enterprises, which provided much of the capital and expertise needed for development, were viewed by many residents as evil predatory interests. It was to counter such perceptions that Wakefield Seafood moved its headquarters from Seattle to an island near Kodiak after Alaska became a state.

The efforts of indigenous peoples in America’s Pacific possessions have also resembled in important ways the work of some Native Americans to protect their environments, often by ending or limiting military use of their lands, especially in the West. In the American West, some tribes found themselves opposed to the military over land-use issues. The Western Shoshone, for example, successfully worked with non-Indian groups to deraill plans to base a proposed mobile MX missile system in the Great Basin region in the 1980s. Yet, one must be careful not to push this analogy too far. While well aware of these matters, and while sympathizing with the Native Americans, native Hawaiians took little part in these protests against the military, view-
ing themselves as a Pacific people and most concerned with developments in the Hawaiian and other Pacific islands. Protests on Kaho‘olawe connected more directly with changes taking place in other parts of the Pacific, especially with attempts to stop the use of Pacific islands as nuclear-testing sites and military bases.

Beyond the American West, other regions call for direct comparison to the Pacific. The circumpolar Arctic has in recent decades shared major similarities with parts of the Pacific in its development. Both regions have had very fragile environments; both have suffered from extractive industrial development at the hands of colonial powers, including the Soviet Union and Russia; and in both regions indigenous peoples have been harmed and are now reasserting their rights, especially to aboriginal lands.³ Certainly, one important issue running through Pacific and Arctic environmentalism has been the fate of native flora and fauna under pressure from alien species. This problem is, of course, global in scope, but it is probably most pronounced in the Pacific, especially on Pacific islands, and in the Arctic.

Possessing especially fragile environments, these regions face situations in which one environmental change can very quickly “cascade” into many others. Thus, brown tree snakes devastated Guam. Nor was this circumstance unusual. In 2005, the Pacific harbored 24 percent of the world’s threatened birds, many at risk because of the introduction of invasive species. A Regional Invasive Species Programme devised for the Pacific in 1998 belatedly recognized the problem.⁴ Similarly, the introduction of fox farming to the Aleutian Islands in a misguided attempt to create a vehicle for economic development there led to the decimation of native bird populations when hungry foxes escaped into the countryside. Exactly how to revegetate Kaho‘olawe became an important issue in the 1990s and early 2000s. It was decided, at first, to remove all tamarisk trees, an alien species. However, when it was discovered that they provided shade in which many native species thrived, tamarisk trees were retained. Ideology played a role in this and similar decisions made throughout the Pacific, as culture and economics went hand in hand. Writing about native species in his poem “Native Plants” in 1985, activist botanist Rene Sylva observed:

The Hawaiian plants are social plants.
If you go look underneath the Hawaiian tree
There’s all kinds of plants that grow under them. . . .
But the non-native plants are antisocial trees. . . .
Nothing grows under there. . . .