Introduction

Where is American Sāmoa? And why does this region have the word “American” in it? This set of five islands and two atolls in the South Pacific is the most southern territory of the United States in the last time zone of the globe. American Sāmoa is 2,566 miles southwest of Hawai‘i and 4,719 miles southwest of the continental U.S. West Coast. The total landmass of this region is almost seventy-seven square miles, with a population of 55,519 according to the 2010 census. Through a set of treaties between the U.S. Navy and local chiefs in 1900 and 1904, this area became an unincorporated territory of the United States and has maintained that status through today. Over the years, this location has served as a U.S. Navy port, particularly important during World War II, a major site for tuna canning, and the location of the largest National Marine Sanctuary in the United States.

This book examines the unique experiences of American Sāmoans in contrast to other U.S. colonials, or people under direct U.S. authority, who became part of the U.S. empire at the turn of the twentieth century. The United States engaged in colonialism (or direct government control over another region), as opposed to imperialism (which involves extended efforts to influence another region’s governance, but usually does not entail direct control), in places like Hawai‘i, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam.

Despite active protests by the majority of Native Hawaiians, their islands became a U.S. territory in 1900, instantly converting the indigenous population into U.S. citizens against their will. After the U.S.-Philippine War in 1902, the U.S. federal government dictated the Philippines’ government and economy until independence was granted in 1946. Puerto Rico was an unincorporated territory under U.S. leadership from 1898 until becoming a Commonwealth in 1950. Chamorros have lived in an unincorporated territory of the United States since 1898 (except for Japanese occupation during World War II). In these U.S. colonies, federal leadership controlled all decision making in the beginning,
gradually providing local representation in government positions after a significant period of assimilation to American values, ideals, structures, and processes. While stories of U.S. colonialism in Hawai‘i, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico are familiar to many, the history and contemporary effects of U.S. rule in American Sāmoa, as well as Guam, are quite invisible.

The common story of the U.S. government’s takeover and control of island colonies was not the case in American Sāmoa. Instead of native customs being erased by missionaries, as in Hawai‘i, and intense Americanization initiatives such as those in the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam, American Sāmoa differed from other colonized regions because the U.S. government has historically accommodated indigenous practices in this area. From the beginning of their official relationship with the United States in 1900, American Sāmoans maintained indigenous control over their local governance. While the United States held authority over larger structural affairs, such as international trade, global diplomacy, and the military, the traditional Sāmoan fa‘amātai (chiefly system of leadership and decision making) managed daily life.

The U.S. federal government consistently used island colonies for monocrop export industries (that profited U.S. corporations) and strategic military sites. In Hawai‘i, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, sugar became those regions’ major agricultural export. American Sāmoa became a site for the monocrop of tuna canning, which will be discussed in chapter 2. These island regions, as well as Guam, also became sites for major military bases. However, unlike the experience of other U.S. colonials who have generally come under full federal control, American Sāmoans have always had a degree of independent action. According to a 2012 U.S. Department of Commerce report,

Although the Department of the Interior has administrative oversight of the Territory of American Samoa, there is only a limited amount of direct Federal involvement there. The Federal government owns no land on American Samoa except for an uninhabited atoll 150 miles from Tutuila. . . . There are no military installations in the Territory, nor any energy facilities serving an area outside the Territory. The primary Federal agencies with interests in American Samoa are resource protection oriented. With the exception of the U.S. Coast Guard, all relevant Federal authorities concerned with Federal resource protection laws have their offices located over 2,000 miles away in Honolulu, or over 4,000 miles away in Seattle or San Francisco. Due to this lack of a continual presence, enforcement of Federal resource protection laws is irregular at the Federal level. 6
Introduction

The federal government openly acknowledges its minimal economic, bureaucratic, military, and legislative involvement in this unincorporated territory. Consequently, the maintenance of local indigenous rule since 1900 significantly differentiated colonization in American Sāmoa from other island territories of the U.S. empire.

This work examines U.S. federal marine policies and programs in American Sāmoa to highlight historic U.S. colonialism in the region. According to post-colonial ecology scholars Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley, “European Enlightenment knowledge, natural history, conservation policy, and the language of nature—the very systems of logic that we draw from today to speak of conservation and sustainability—are derived from a long history of the colonial exploitation of nature.” Imperialism, colonialism, and empire building are at the root of land occupation, as well as resource categorization and use. Subsequently created, as well as supposedly scientific, hierarchies and priorities place indigenous groups like Pacific Islanders at the bottom of social, economic, political, and cultural structures throughout environmental and empire history. Such Western-based ideals about the appropriate use of the environment and proper modern lifestyle patterns have drastically altered the lives of indigenous groups. The following chapters highlight the shifts in marine practices in American Sāmoa away from self-sufficient subsistence living to a cash-based, export economy and the precedence of Western-based scientific and ecology ideals in environmental practices since World War II.

The following case studies also show how U.S. federal ocean-use policies connect contemporary scientific and ecological prerogatives to continued U.S. control and authority over the region and its people. As Sasha Davis discussed, the desire to possess and control Pacific Island regions stems from the U.S. empire’s ultimate goals to protect globalization and free market trade in the Asia-Pacific region. The ability of U.S. vessels to move and exchange easily with markets throughout the Pacific Rim remains a key motivation to retain island colonies and continue to regulate ocean use in the region. Mansel Blackford also argued for “the tremendous importance of government policy in shaping the fishery and the fishery’s global scope. . . . Regulation and development went hand in hand.” The expansion of U.S. federal marine regulations during the twenty-first century results in continued U.S. authority over American Sāmoans, as well as a strong influence on the global fishing industry.

However, like work by sociologists Cluny Macpherson and La’āvasa Macpherson, this study views island colonies as “a site where global forces confront local ones, and Sāmoans are assumed to be active agents in the transformation of their
The following case studies also demonstrate the human priorities of economics, local control, and indigenous rights by American Sāmoans. While Westerners have prioritized wilderness and conservation, indigenous groups are more concerned about “arable land and potable water, public health, the threats of militarism and national debt, and reflect social planning for cultural, economic, and national sovereignty.” Often times, native issues are distinct and separate from colonizers’ interests.

In fact, ideals, goals, and standards in a colonized territory and for its local population do not always coincide with, support the needs of, or have the same impact or resonance in the continental United States. Stateside environmental efforts and economic regulations, such as national marine sanctuaries and minimum wage standards, seem positive and moral from a lower-48 perspective. However, these same rules have adversely influenced ground-level employment, local industries, and native access to ancient fishing grounds in American Sāmoa. As historian Karl Jacoby has stated about Native Americans, U.S. “conservation was but one piece of a larger process of colonization and state building in which Indian peoples were transformed (in theory, at least) from independent actors to dependent wards bound by governmental controls.” Western-based initiatives have also imposed nonnative standards, practices, and ways of knowing on this indigenous group.

Native issues versus federal issues in colonized American Sāmoa are complex and layered, sometimes tense and fraught. Examining the intersections of environment and empire widen understandings of fundamental questions of difference, power, and privilege that postcolonial ecology studies emphasize. This work discusses the complications involved in the unique shared governance in American Sāmoa, the impact of government policies on this indigenous group and the United States, as well as the ways in which native American Sāmoans have expressed their views about government regulations of marine practices and ocean-related management policies in the post–World War II era.

**Brief Historical Background**

Researchers believe the first Sāmoans, known as the Lapita people, originated from Melanesia. This group migrated from New Caledonia to Fiji, then Tonga and Sāmoa more than 3,500 years ago. Over two thousand years ago, Sāmoan political and social systems “were fully developed and operating” at independent village, clan, and regional levels. These people then started to explore regions in more eastern areas of the Pacific, influencing cultures as far as the Hawaiian
Islands. According to *A History of American Samoa*, during this period “there was much exchange and intermarriage between Samoa, Fiji, and Tonga.”

More than 1,300 years ago, Tonga occupied the Sāmoan islands for over 300 years until Sāmoans from places like Manu'a in the east and Upolu in the west revolted against this empire. After that overthrow, a series of Sāmoan chiefs competed for control over various islands in the archipelago. More than four hundred years ago, struggles over royal titles heightened and divided communities across the islands into the nineteenth century. During this period, strong rivalries among 'āiga (descent groups) throughout this region resulted in violent clashes among Sāmoans.

In 1722, the first Westerners made contact with the Sāmoan islands, led by Jacob Roggeveen, a Dutch expedition leader for the West India Company. However, Western settlement did not occur until Congregationalist members of the London Missionary Society arrived in 1830. Just ten years prior, some of the
first informal missionaries came from Tahiti and Tonga.17 Methodists in 1835, Roman Catholics in 1845, and Mormons in 1865 followed these two groups of initial proselytizers.18 From the 1850s on, France, the Netherlands, Great Britain, and the United States were also interested in acquiring the last available regions of the world for Westerners to expand their empires at this time: the islands of the South Pacific.19 Germans started to develop strong interests in the harvesting, processing, and exporting of copra from Upolu in the 1870s. The Kingdom of Hawai‘i also tried to form a confederation with Sāmoa in 1887, but those efforts ended after the Bayonet Constitution was forced on King Kalākaua later that same year.20

In 1899, three Western countries agreed to partition the area through the Berlin Treaty without consulting Sāmoans or any other native groups. Germany took control of the western Sāmoan islands, Great Britain gained authority over Tonga, the Solomons, and areas of West Africa, and the United States obtained authority over the eastern Sāmoan islands.21 One year later, the U.S. Navy negotiated a Deed of Cession with Tutuila chiefs. On April 17, 1900, the U.S. Navy and twenty mātai (chiefs) of the island signed a document granting the U.S. government sovereign rights over the lands and waters of Tutuila, Aunu‘u Island, and the surrounding area, specifically “all other Islands, rocks, reefs, foreshores, and waters lying between the thirteenth degree and the fifteenth degree of south latitude and between the one hundred and seventy first degree and the one hundred sixty seventh degree of west longitude from the Meridian of Greenwich.”22 This agreement also stated that “the Government of the United States of America shall respect and protect the individual rights of all people dwelling in Tutuila to their lands and other property. . . . The Chiefs of the towns will be entitled to retain their individual control of the separate towns, if that control is in accordance with the laws of the United States of America. . . . But the enactment of legislation and the General Control shall remain firm with the United States of America.”23 This verbiage maintained the right of the indigenous population to govern local society and manage land according to their traditional practices, as long as these conventions did not conflict with U.S. regulations.24 However, the United States held ultimate political and legal rule over the area.

On July 16, 1904, Tuimanua, the king of the Manu‘a Islands, and his five chiefs signed a similar agreement for the northeastern portion of this archipelago, including “the whole of eastern portion of the Samoan Islands lying east of longitude 171 west of Greenwich and known as Tau, Olosega, Ofu, and Rose Island, and all other, the waters and property adjacent thereto.”25 This treaty stated that “the rights of the chiefs in each village and of all people concerning
Introduction

their property according to their customs shall be recognized. Once again, the United States gained overall control with the stipulation that customary Sāmoan systems remained protected.

Together, these Deeds of Cession created tiered governance in the region that allowed the continuation of local indigenous practices and accepted general native subordination to U.S. governance. This shared political-legal authority, heavily steeped in Western methods of geographic calculation and nonnative notions of individual property rights, remains in effect today in this unincorporated territory of the United States.

Why was the United States interested in shared authority in these islands and why did Sāmoans agree to hand over the sovereignty of their islands? In addition to participating in global empire building at the time, the U.S. government viewed Pago Pago Harbor as a key location for a coaling station between Asia and the Americas. Some, like researcher Joseph Kennedy, believed that the
U.S. Navy did not want to take on responsibility for full control of the islands, therefore willingly agreed to joint authority over the region. The United States was already fighting a bloody war for control in the Philippines. With strong resistance to U.S. rule in that archipelago, as well as other Western powers in the region willing and ready to take their place, the U.S. Navy was open to a degree of shared governance with indigenous leaders in Sāmoa to gain their loyalty and cooperation. Joint authority also meant the U.S. Navy could keep other foreign investors out of the region while maintaining a South Pacific pathway to Asian markets. This arrangement allowed the United States to have overall authority that could remain limited indefinitely, but could also be expanded when needed at a moment’s notice.

In fact, scholar Christina Duffy Burnett has claimed that “American imperialism has also consisted of efforts to impose limits on expansion: to draw lines around what counts as properly “national” territory,” providing ways to reduce “the number of contexts in which the government must take up the responsibilities that come with such power.” Shared authority in American Sāmoa, unincorporated territorial status for Guam, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, informal protectorate status for Cuba, and purely extractive rights in the Guano Islands all demonstrate such an approach to U.S. expansionism. By avoiding full-fledged responsibility towards these locations, the U.S. government can reap all the benefits of exploiting these regions without the cost or burdens of providing citizen-level support and rights to the people living in these places.

Since Western powers had been vying for power in the region since the mid-1800s, and were likely to persist in the area, Sāmoan chiefs might have seen the United States as the best option among the determined empire builders from the west. Chiefs on Tutuila and Aunu’u were traditionally treated as vassals by the high chiefs of Upolu and Savai’i. ‘Āiga from the eastern islands might have viewed the United States as a good protector from the tensions and conflicts with the western islands in the nineteenth century. In 1872, High Chief Mauga gave the U.S. exclusive rights to use Pago Pago Harbor, and in 1873, Tutuila chiefs petitioned for the annexation of American Sāmoa by America. While the U.S. Congress never passed annexation, the U.S. Senate did ratify a treaty in 1878 giving the United States the right to establish a naval station at Pago Pago. These negotiations set the foundation for future U.S. presence and control on Tutuila.

Kennedy also discussed how Sāmoans wanted to keep local governance but have U.S. protection without much sacrifice of their independent action in the
years following the Deeds of Cession. Regardless of the ultimate reasons for this political arrangement, the shared custody of power over American Sāmoa has led to some conflicts, disagreements, and disconnects between U.S. federal policies, guidelines, expectations, and regulations and indigenous Sāmoan interests, desires, culture, and values. This work will explore the intricacies of combined governance through the lens of marine practices, labor issues, and ocean resources in the region since the mid-twentieth century.

Allowing traditional Sāmoan leadership and local control was acceptable to the U.S. federal government during the first half of the twentieth century because until World War II, this region was not considered an important area of U.S. jurisdiction. This territory lost its turn-of-the-century strategic military value due to a shift from coal to steam-powered naval vessels, as well as other American bases established in Hawai‘i and the Philippines. After serving as a significant supply and mustering station for the Pacific theater of World War II, this Pacific archipelago once again fell to the back burner of federal government concern.

With the closing of the U.S. naval base at Pago Pago in 1951, American Sāmoans started migrating in large numbers to Hawai‘i, the continental United States, and Guam to pursue cash-based wage labor jobs to support their families. As Fa‘anofo Lisaclaire Uperesa and others have shown, a strong historic and current belief exists that material success “is possible only through migration abroad and taking advantage of opportunities provided by the United States.” Outmigration continues today, with an average of 7,804 people leaving the region for work each year from 2006 to 2016, about 14 percent of the total population. Such movement is used as opportunities to improve both the economic circumstances of migrants and their families at home who often receive financial support from those abroad. These remittances have provided an uncalculated but significant contribution to supporting ‘āiga and village economies in American Sāmoa.

In 1963, a Reader’s Digest article highlighted the poverty level conditions in this periphery of U.S. empire. Author Clarence Hall admonished the U.S. government for leaving this area to languish in deprived circumstances, describing how “government buildings were peeling and rotting on their foundations, beautiful Pago Pago Bay was marred and befouled by hideous over-water outhouses, rutty and teeth-jarring roads unrepaired for years . . . Public schools are unequipped shacks.” In response, President John F. Kennedy authorized infrastructure improvement projects and social services that lasted through 1967. These projects included the development of radiotelephone services, extensive
road repairs, educational television, the construction of a new conference building, hospital, and hotel, as well as the opening of a second tuna cannery. This temporary push to improve conditions in American Sāmoa ushered in the next major set of Western-based structural changes in the region.

From that point forward, the U.S. government encouraged the tuna canning industry in the region, discussed in chapter 2, and later started to pour federal grants and monies into the local economy. High tax and tariff breaks, as well as variable minimum wage and lax labor standards, encouraged the development of this commerce as a major source for the Gross Domestic Product, besides federal grants, in the territory. Since 2007, about 57 percent of territorial income has come from the tuna canning business, with an average of 30 percent coming from government funding.41

Despite such federal government influences in the region, as scholar Kirisitina Sailiata has written, the long-term continuation of indigenous practices can be seen as a unique form of American Sāmoan resistance to colonization.42 Indigenous demands for more representation under federal rule have occurred in American Sāmoa since the Mau in 1920, which involved native protests against their poor treatment by the U.S. Navy.43 Since that movement, Sāmoans have pushed for increased indigenous self-governance at various times, but have not sought complete separation from the United States. This native group established a territorial constitution in 1960, a full-time legislature in 1971, and the first elected governor in 1977. Until the 1980s, American Sāmoans exercised control over local environmental management. Local leaders also determined wage policies until 2007.

The full-time Sāmoan legislature (Fono), emulates both Western and indigenous political structures. One component of the Fono involves eighteen popularly elected officials in the House of Representatives. The second section of the Fono is the Senate, which consists of fifteen members appointed by the “council of chiefs, in accordance with Samoan custom.”44 The allocations for both branches are based on traditional Sāmoan counties. While the names of each component of the legislature and the election of House representatives reflect U.S.-based governance models, the members of the Senate and district lines follow customary native Sāmoan pule (political authority).

The American Sāmoa Government (ASG) has struggled to keep the region’s economy afloat since the establishment of the Fono in 1971. Every elected governor has faced administrative deficits. Several corporate efforts to establish businesses in the region were initiated but failed to stay operational long-term. These short-lived industries included a small assembly plant for Bulova watches,
a Meadow Gold dairy manufacturing plant, a First National City Bank branch, and the Dory commercial fishing boat program that will be discussed in chapter 1. Proposals to start a third tuna cannery and an oil refinery were also brought forth but rejected by the ASG. By 1975, manufacturing and production plants shut down due to the general worldwide recession. Other impediments to the establishment of alternative industries in the 1970s included U.S. tariff agreements with developing countries and changes in territorial customs inspections. By 1979, the five-year territorial economic development plan decided to focus ASG Department of Commerce efforts on the fishing industry and agriculture.

While American Sāmoa has always received some amount of federal funding since the Deeds of Cession, from 1999 through today the U.S. government has provided over $200 million annually in grants and subsidies to bolster this region’s economy. In exchange, this funding requires American Sāmoan grantees to create economic, social, and environmental programs based on Western standards and nonnative forms of knowledge and decision making, as will be discussed in chapter 4.

Once the U.S. government started to invest large amounts of money into the region, the contours of the American Sāmoan–U.S. colonial relationship shifted. This native group became more dependent on U.S.-imported cash, food, and goods instead of subsistence fishing and farming. The United States also started to impose more regulations and management over the ecology and economy of the region. A disconnect between American ideals and indigenous ways of life developed. Sometimes the needs of a communal society with strong indigenous social and political hierarchies, as well as major economic dependence on the commercial fishing industry, conflict with federal initiatives for environmental and labor protection. Into the twenty-first century, the U.S. federal government has increased its role in developing policies that have not coincided with indigenous desires or needs, leading some American Sāmoans to become more anxious about their precarious position in relation to U.S. policies, a direct result of being U.S. colonials.

**Shift in Marine Practices in American Sāmoa**

Massive U.S. military presence in the Pacific during World War II quickly introduced and integrated American products and ways of living in American Sāmoa and other Pacific Islands. After the war ended, U.S. troops and materials were quickly removed from these areas. However, American Sāmoans
continued to “demand modern conveniences introduced by the military. . . . Everyone wanted a telephone line. Corned beef, bread, and butter became staples. *Palagi* [foreigner]-styled houses were replacing Sāmoan houses at an increasing rate.”49 In addition to newly developed desires for Western commodities, American Sāmoans wanted more wage-based jobs to pay for imported goods, better education, and improved health care. The colonial influence of a U.S.-style economy, culture, and lifestyle increased rapidly during this period.

Prior to U.S. rule in the region, American Sāmoans typically ate a self-sufficient diet based on seafood gathered from the ocean such as octopus, fish, shrimp, and lobster. Native groups also cultivated produce like bananas, mangos, taro, papayas, and breadfruit on local plantations. According to Va’amua Henry Sesepasara, the Governor’s Advisor on Fisheries and the ASG Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR) director in 2018, “we eat what we catch. We don’t play with our food. We eat almost anything we catch in the water. If it crawls, moves, swims in water, we eat it.”50 American Sāmoans interviewed for this project often identified the 1980s as the period when a shift occurred away from nutritional self-sufficiency to local commercial fishing and export-based eating.

According to Nate Ilaoa, the American Sāmoa coordinator for the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Wespac), these days “if a family talks about buying fish, usually they pick up a can of mackerel or tuna.”51 However, as far back as 1926, researcher Alfred Judd noted that “today the natives are not fishing as they could.”52 Observer Frank Drees also described many cases of canned salmon and sardines at a funeral in Vaitogi in the mid-1930s.53 From a more contemporary perspective, the 2010 U.S. Census showed that only 6.7 percent of the American Sāmoa population engaged in subsistence activities and 3.2 percent of the population worked in farming, fishing, and forestry occupations.54 A 2016 report also found that 47 percent of American Sāmoans did not fish, 20 percent never swam, and 65 percent purchased seafood from stores or restaurants.55

Greater access to and reliance on cheaper and convenient canned or processed foods in grocery stores, as well as the influx of cash-based government jobs since 1999, enticed many American Sāmoans away from the more laborious and less glamorous tasks involved in manual fishing and crop cultivation. The increased use of Western technologies, like cable television, the internet, and related social media, as well as cell phones have also come to dominate the interest and attention of American Sāmoan youth.56 These changes in consumption practices, away from frequent and regular marine practices and land cultivation towards
a strong focus on and value for imported, off-island goods, directly reflects another impact of being U.S. colonials—incorporation into the culture of American consumer society. According to Wespac Fishery analyst Marlowe Sabater, the Sāmoan islands has a great seafaring tradition, a reputation as navigator islands. American Sāmoans have lost that connection since becoming a territory.

As a cash-based economy today, fishing is no longer a widespread tradition. While both the local American Sāmoa Government and U.S. federal groups have developed educational programs to encourage youth, as well as adults, to take up fishing and other ocean uses, some of which are discussed in chapter 4, most people in American Sāmoa do not believe angling will become a popular or dominant mode of living again. Fishers interviewed in 2016 stated that they have taught their children how to fish. Many of these children enjoy the practice and some are even better fishers than their parents. But families without an active angler often do not pick up this practice.

Despite this decline in regular marine use by large portions of the population, as a set of islands in the middle of the Pacific, the ocean has always been an important and valuable commodity in American Sāmoa. Pacific Islanders scholars such as Epeli Hau‘ofa and Alice Te Punga Somerville have written about the orientation of islander life to the water more than land. The ocean is the source and center of physical and spiritual sustenance, as well as social, political, economic, and cultural exchanges. Water connects Pacific Islander people and places.

Consequently, control of ocean resources is fraught with multiple opinions and agendas. From fishing rights to conservation policies, different levels of U.S. and American Sāmoa leadership, as well as general society, have varied ideas about appropriate allocation and use of this supply. According to the National Marine Sanctuary of American Sāmoa website, “the American Samoa sanctuary is the most remote, is the only true tropical reef, and is thought to support the greatest diversity of marine life” in the entire national sanctuary system. Consequently, some groups appreciate these regional waters for their scientific value. Others use the ocean as a source of income and profit. Some treat the ocean as sacred and deeply connected to cultural practices and customs, while others see the water as something to fear or something that does not factor into their daily lives. All impacted groups in American Sāmoa understand the importance of access to and the continued health of marine resources surrounding the territory. However, as the following chapters show, not everyone agrees on the type of regulations, policies, and projects needed for ocean stewardship.

Another major set of events that contributed to changes in commercial and
recreational fishing practices, marine administration, and ocean knowledge gathering in American Sāmoa involved the creation of Wespac in 1976, the transition of the ASG Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources from a division of the American Sāmoa Governor’s Office to a separate entity in 1985, and the formation of the National Marine Sanctuary of American Sāmoa in 1986. The following chapters examine how the establishment of these umbrella management organizations, as well as actions or inaction by the U.S. Congress, have created a modern administrative colonial state in American Sāmoa that has formalized, standardized, and bureaucratized ocean-related policies in the region according to Western ideas of conservation, environmentalism, science, protection, and ethics. In general, marine resource supervision works to protect the long-term health of the Pacific Ocean. However, different definitions of healthy ocean use exist, especially in American Sāmoa. These ideas range from wide swaths of no-take zones and complete preservation to temporary fishing policies that regularly evaluate the most effective and profitable methods to engage with local ocean resources. Issues of native rights to access ancestral waters also come into play.

Other Sāmoan Contexts

While much has been written about independent Sāmoa, a limited number of books, dissertations, and articles have been written about the history of U.S. involvement in American Sāmoa and the impact of U.S. colonialism on this indigenous group. While there was a naval history written on American Sāmoa in 1960, a coffee-table book published on the history of American Sāmoa in 2000, a general history of U.S.–American Sāmoan relations from 1900 to 1950 printed in 2009, and a high school level general history textbook printed in 2009, Sailiata’s PhD dissertation is the only in-depth study of U.S.–American Sāmoa relations throughout the twentieth century. To date, most academic studies of American Sāmoa have focused on the impact of Sāmoan culture on economic and social development, such as migration, language, education, and fisheries. Robert Franco wrote about Sāmoan perceptions of work in 1991 from an anthropological perspective. Sa’iliemanu Lilomaiava-Doktor has written a dissertation and articles about Sāmoan population movement. Fa’anofo Lisa-claire Uperesa has examined identity, migration, economics, and colonialism among American Sāmoan football players. Holger Droessler wrote a dissertation in 2015 on U.S.–American Sāmoan relations from 1889 to 1919. Others have written dissertations on disaster recovery after the 2009 tsunami, as well as books and articles about marine ecology in American Sāmoa.
Building on these works, this study supports the idea that indigenous knowledge, concepts, and ideologies should be integrated into analyses to better understand the perspectives and approaches of Pacific Island communities. The concept of ʻvā (social space relations) can provide greater insight to American Sāmoan motivations, actions, and positionalities to the variety of marine policy situations discussed in this work. According to American Sāmoan historian Fofō Sunia, ʻvā is “one of the most important components of the makeup of the Sāmoan culture, so important that it is considered ‘sacred’ in most situations. ‘ʻVā’ is the distance between two bodies. The ‘ʻvā’ must always remain orderly, respectful and well kept. The ‘ʻvā’ must always be peaceful and harmonious.”

All relations in Sāmoan culture are governed by this concept.

Scholar Albert Wendt described ʻvā as “the space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates, but space that relates.” Lilomaiava-Doktor also explained how ʻvā “connotes mutual respect in sociopolitical arrangements that nurture the relationships between people, places, and social environments.” The nurturing of ʻvā (tausi le ʻvā) involves alofa (love), faʻaaloalo (respect), and tautua (service). Such moral guidelines outline culturally appropriate behaviors for both individuals and the extended family (ʻāiga) in all aspects of life ranging from social, economic, spiritual, cultural, and political components. Overall, such practices emphasize “cultural tools of conflict resolution in Island societies, where collective well-being is paramount.” Scholars have agreed that ʻvā is a central concept to understanding social relationships in Sāmoan culture.

However, ʻvā requires time and effort. According to ʻAumua Mataʻitusi Simanu in an interview by Lilomaiava-Doktor:

The whole Samoan way of life is premised on relationships and how we maintain this ʻvā with others, including our superiors and workmates at work or any situation. It is always a good practice to consult and discuss your plans. . . . When people who have been caring for the land are notified, everyone is happy and will make sure the plan is executed and implemented to successful completion. . . . your cultural knowledge of what is appropriate in faʻaaloalo [respect] knowing the ʻvā fealoaʻi [social respect], following protocols of communications will earn you respect.

As will be shown in the following chapters, when proper protocols are followed and ʻvā fealoaʻi is created, programs and initiatives are supported.

When such cultural expectations of “participation, obligation, and reciprocity” are not followed, policies and guidelines are resisted or outright protested.
against. Sunia also commented how “if some disturbance arises between two families, you will hear the advice or admonition from others—‘teu le vá,’ meaning improve or be mindful of the harmony that should exist between you two.”

Sincere responses must be provided to repair damaged relationships or reestablish harmony. Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta’isi also explained how “conflict assumes when the tau’oi or boundaries within are transgressed or misunderstood. . . . disharmonies are resolved through the co-existence of remorse and forgiveness on the one hand, and the privileging of alofá (meaning love and compassion) and ‘āiga (or family) on the other.”

Conscientious acknowledgement and deliberate monitoring of proper actions and understandings within Sāmoan culture become central to social relations in the region. To correct an offense, a combination of regret, sympathy, care, and kinship should be involved.

On a daily basis, American Sāmoans navigate indigenous concepts of moral, ethical, and respectful behaviors, as well as territorial and U.S. federal government regulations, policies, and expectations at the same time. Sometimes, decisions are made according to vá, and other times, Western ideals. American Sāmoans have not hesitated to express dissatisfaction when colonial policies do not mesh with their expectations or desires on appropriate conduct. This group has also embraced certain Western policies when useful or beneficial.

The priority of the family over any individual is key to vá. Historian Damon Salesa explained how “the central role of family in Pacific lives means that individuals are not the sole or even primary economic unit.” Consequently, “many Pacific people, when forced to choose between economic business success and family reputation or status, seem to put family first in order to enhance their ‘social and cultural capital.’” Understanding this fundamental approach to life, the incorporation of Sāmoan culture can lead to more appropriate and effective government policies and interactions with the local population. Researcher Miranda Cahn explained how rules not “congruent with indigenous ways... may jeopardize the success and sustainability” of programs. According to scholar Susan Maiava, Sāmoan “self-esteem is related to family position and status, and to be a member of a well-respected family, socially well located, is a universal goal.” Ultimately, “improving and enhancing the ‘āiga culturally, socially and economically is the aim of fāa Sāmoa (the Sāmoan way of life).” Positive feelings and continued support stem from actions, policies, and programs that sustain and value ‘āiga.

Lilomaiava-Doktor defines fāa Sāmoa, or the Sāmoan way of knowing, as “an intellectual tool for apprehending the world, how Sāmoans interact with each other, the church, outsiders, and the environment.” While a whole range
of relations, actions, activities, and attitudes are involved in this practice, that also includes communal sharing, generosity, reciprocity, as well as maintaining harmony and balance, a general understanding exists among American Sāmoans over the essence and importance of such an approach to living.

The concept of bioregionalism is one way to meld concepts of *vā*, including *fāa Sāmoa*, and postcolonial ecology. Byron Caminero-Santangelo analyzed Mitchell Thomashow’s idea of bioregionalism, which entails a commitment to understand local ecology and human relationships” (“Toward” 125), as well as a sense of belonging based on such understanding. The bioregion itself is an ecopolitical unit integrating ecological and cultural relationships and determined by such factors as geography, ecosystem, indigenous culture, local knowledge, and environmental history. If capitalism in its various phases has made space out of place, stripping away prior signification (deterritorializing) and reshaping in order to facilitate control and exploitation, then the process of imagining or reimagining a “place” entailed by bioregionalism can be one means of countering threats of exploitation, environmental degradation, and disempowerment.83

Bioregionalism takes both human and ecological issues into account while also acknowledging the legacies of colonialism and indigenous knowledge in these regions. Thinking about the multiplicity of actors, motivations, goals, and perspectives in tandem can lead to new ways of understanding the history of marine practices in American Sāmoa and reimagining this space as central to U.S. economic, political, and environmental policies, as well as control over indigenous groups.

As Caminero-Santangelo has also stated, “This form of imaginative engagement encourages understanding of and commitment to one’s place and community, as well as the places and communities of others, and it challenges the meanings imposed in the process of deterritorialization. . . . it encourages careful attention both to ecology and to human relationships as a means for care and stewardship.”84 A focus on bioregionalism involves a deep analysis of both local and global relations, various sides of any issue, as well as diverse ways to think about ecology policy from a community and an environmental perspective.

This work studies the bioregion of American Sāmoa marine spaces to provide clear information on the development of specific post–World War II fishery related policies and their impacts on American Sāmoans, U.S. citizens, American Sāmoa, and the United States. U.S. colonial status results in multiple agency jurisdictions over local waters. This variety of entities has diverse opinions
and approaches for each issue, as well as particular, complicated, and extensive Western-based bureaucratic administration and enforcement procedures.

Both va'a and bioregionalism can help in the analysis of marine practices in American Sāmoa and point to future ways to develop and maintain appropriate and effective policies and guidelines moving forward for “resource use, stewardship, and sovereignty.”

Balance is a concept and goal expressed when discussing both ideas. And as Jacoby has urged, such attempts are “first steps toward an environmental policy that protects not only nature but also the human communities with which it is intimately entangled.” An ecology and indigenous rights-based approach can lead to alternative possibilities and relationships.

Wendt, Hau’ofa, and Sailiata have each argued that strategic negotiations within U.S. federal formations are needed for the future. This analysis of federal ocean-use policies (and related issues like wage rates) assesses past policymaking so American Sāmoans, U.S. citizens, and the U.S. federal government can have solid historical knowledge to help decide on how to move forward with future marine practices and other areas of shared authority in well-informed and creative new ways.

Chapter Breakdown

Information for this book stems from over one hundred interviews with individuals connected to marine programs or policies in American Sāmoa at all levels, including U.S. federal government agencies, territorial government officials and staff, local businesspeople and workers, as well as community leaders, students, teachers, fishers, and other members of the general public with an interest in these issues. The selected bibliography provides a sampling of those interviewed. Other sources integrated into this work include historic and contemporary documents such as government reports and local newspapers. In particular, online portals such as Talanei.com (discussed in chapter 1), Sāmoa News (discussed in chapter 2), and regulations.gov (discussed in chapter 3) provide windows into voices of those vested in American Sāmoan issues on the internet. As will be discussed in the conclusion, contemporary Sāmoan communities across the globe are highly connected through the web and social media. Even if it is impossible to verify the location or residence of online commentators, as Macpherson and Macpherson have explained, relatives abroad are still important parts of the local village. The opinions of all `āiga members count, regardless of where a person is living throughout the diaspora. The hope is that this variety of sources will
provide a diverse picture of the marine bioregion of the unincorporated territory of American Sāmoa.

Each chapter of this book highlights a type of ocean-use policy or marine-related practice in American Sāmoa regulated by either the territorial or federal government. Historic and current U.S. colonial control—as well as the importance of vā and fā’a Sāmoa—are highlighted in each case study to better understand this bioregion. Chapter 1 examines the development and experiences of two major local commercial fishing groups (small-scale indigenous alia fishers and large-vessel local longliners), as well as the impact of federal regulations on fishing access in nearby waters. The contours of commercial fishing in American Sāmoa are consequences of past and contemporary U.S. authority and initiatives in the region. Some local fishers find U.S. programs and regulations useful and beneficial for their businesses while others believe recent changes in policies violated vā fealoa’i. Varied Sāmoan perspectives demonstrate the diversification of native society in the face of globalization, the complications involved in shared indigenous and federal governance over the waters surrounding this area, as well as the reliance of fishers on colonial structures to protect their indigenous rights to engage in a cash-based economy.

Chapter 2 considers the American Sāmoa tuna canneries that, until 2009, provided one-third of all canned tuna to the United States. The imposition of U.S. labor standards in this unincorporated territory by the U.S. Congress in 2006 ignored the historic ground-level reality of the canning industry in this Pacific region that has benefited from the variable application of federal employment and trade regulations. Tuna businesses set up shop in American Sāmoa due to the cheap labor and tax exemptions provided by the U.S. federal government. A pool of wageworkers for canneries developed during the shift from self-sufficient subsistence fishing and agriculture systems to a cash economy focused on import purchasing. Manual laborers have accepted menial pay and resisted unionization throughout the history of the canning industry in the region, partially because their employers have followed vā fealoa’i. By providing free foodstuffs during holidays and accommodating absences for major family events like funerals, such attention to proper and respectful social relations has appeased workers enough to keep them working in these difficult and low-wage jobs.

Chapter 3 analyzes the creation and expansion of the National Marine Sanctuary of American Sāmoa. While local indigenous leaders took advantage of their U.S. colonial status and initiated the establishment of this nationally protected area in 1986, the process to extend federal jurisdiction to five additional areas over 13,580.75 more square miles of water in 2012 did not involve enough vā
fealoa’i. Consequent vocal resistance to the augmentation of the sanctuary led to much negativity and long-term skepticism for government ecology initiatives. Per the Deeds of Cession, areas of American Sāmoa that Americans currently deem as unspoiled or environmentally important to preserve have been or continue to be owned by indigenous groups. However, native presence and rights have started to take a back seat in contemporary ecological and scientific rhetoric for preserving a pristine nature environment. Such erasures can hide the longer colonial history and continued occupation, control, and alteration of the Pacific region by outsiders.

Chapter 4 highlights two local marine-based projects created by the American Sāmoa Government Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources: Village Marine Protected Areas and the on-the-ground data collection of shore-based and offshore fishing activities in local waters. Successful programs have acknowledged and integrated Sāmoan cultural practices and expectations like vā into the development, implementation, and maintenance of ocean-related initiatives. However, the federal monies that fund these projects also impose nonnative forms of knowledge making and ocean supervision on the community, demonstrating historic and contemporary colonial influences on local marine policies, programs, and procedures in American Sāmoa.

While scientists and environmentalist venerate parts of the Pacific as some of the last virgin environments in the world that need protection and regulation by the U.S. government, places like American Sāmoa and Hawai’i have long been populated by native groups that have successfully and productively tended to the ecology of their homelands through their own indigenous practices and knowledges for centuries before Western control. Experiences that highlight the historic insights and current roles that native groups can actively play in useful and effective marine policy development are often ignored in discussions of ecological conservation and preservation.

These Western-based scientific and green conversations also mask America’s “excessive consumption, pollution, and waste as well neocolonial forms of globalization, militarism, and development.” Discussions of overfishing to protect the profitable tuna industry discussed in chapter 1, minimum wage addressed in chapter 2, and marine sanctuaries and marine monuments analyzed in chapter 3 position the U.S. federal government as the best guardian for the future and long-term health and security of the Pacific region. However, the needs and actions of the United States and other Western nation-states have caused most global environmental destruction and economic disparities. Environmental consequences from industrialized nations’ overconsumption and pollution, such
as rising sea levels and changing weather patterns from greenhouse gases, burden Pacific Islanders with the need to create environmental and ocean policies for the long-term survival of their marine regions. Neoliberal capitalism that pushes for free market trade, tax and manufacturing advantages, and the highest possible profits also positions Pacific Islander laborers at the bottom of the economic and social hierarchies of production. Such ecological and economic structures continue to subjugate Pacific Islander U.S. colonials, as well as Caribbean U.S. colonials, to Western needs and priorities.

Additionally, Mansel Blackford highlighted “the growing importance since World War II, and especially since the 1960s, of consumerism in environmentalism. Many Americans have come to view clean air, clean water, and so on almost as birthrights like consumer goods. More than that, Americans have come to see nature itself as a consumer product to be put to good use, as in national parks for sightseeing.” U.S. environmental principles and practices are grounded in neoliberal capitalist desires for positive experiences for one’s own entertainment and fulfillment. Ideal activities from this perspective often involve adventure, recreation, pleasure, and awe-inspiring experiences. This seemingly universal desire to enjoy the environment fundamentally differs from the reliance of many Pacific Islanders on ecology for everyday living and functions. Sometimes American Sāmoans are even scared of the environment, which can pose dangers such as drowning and devastation from tsunamis. For some, the ocean needs to be feared and respected, better kept at a distance for safety.

Despite the diversity of interests included in each of these chapters, all of these issues center on the fact that as U.S. colonials, American Sāmoans are ultimately subjected to U.S. federal regulations. American Sāmoans are born as U.S. nationals, or wards of the United States. They have the right to freely travel within U.S. jurisdiction, as well as become U.S. citizens within two years of declaration. American Sāmoans are raised with both American and Sāmoan cultural and social customs, as well as regulated by U.S. and American Sāmoa economic and political structures. Native and nonnative standards and expectations interweave in policymaking as well as ground-level decisions and practices.

This combination of both indigenous and U.S. colonial status complicates authority over topics like marine practices. Both the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the American Sāmoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources have jurisdiction in local waters. Sometimes their policies coincide and other times their priorities conflict. Chapters 1 and 4 demonstrate the pros and cons of shared authority over ocean-use policies while chapters 2 and 3 detail key moments when federal goals dominated policy
development in American Sāmoa. In all of these cases, native groups have not hesitated to voice their discontent and frustration with government policies that appear to encroach upon their indigenous rights to or expectations for properly enacted local management, relations, and control.

American Sāmoa-specific policies also have an invisible but major impact on national and global policies. Decisions to expand fishing vessel permits in U.S. Pacific waters in 2016 and backlash from the expansion of the National Marine Sanctuary of American Sāmoa in 2012 have significantly altered the contours of both the international tuna fishing industry and NOAA community engagement. American daily consumption of canned tuna, campaigns for minimum wage, and efforts to increase environmental protections are enabled or hindered by ecological and economic regulations imposed on this unincorporated territory of the United States. Like postcolonial ecology studies’ encouragement to “uphold a sense of alterity while still engaging a global imaginary,” this work presents multiple indigenous and governmental perspectives to gain a fuller picture of life and living in the unincorporated U.S. territory of American Sāmoa as U.S. colonials, as well as the many reverberations of such status beyond its waters throughout the Pacific, the United States, and global marine and indigenous environments—in essence, the bioregion of American Sāmoa fisheries.93