

INTRODUCTION

Polynesia Is a Project, Not a Place

What is a Polynesian? I've encountered this question many times in my life, from strangers and friends alike. For most, it's an honest question. Schools in the United States rarely teach much, if anything, about the Pacific Islands. From elementary school through college, even the history of how Hawai'i became the fiftieth state of the union usually remains unexplored. Unsurprisingly, then, the transnational histories of Polynesia, itself only one region of the broader world of Oceania, are even more rarely addressed. Yet Polynesia and Polynesians are everywhere in popular culture. To many Americans, Japanese, Chinese, and others, Polynesia (especially Hawai'i) is a magical vacation spot, destination wedding venue, and tropical honeymoon getaway. So-called tiki culture is popular again in the United States, that postwar invention expressing nostalgia for U.S. military service and R&R in the Pacific, now revived in everything from hipster tiki bars to a bewildering proliferation of tiki-themed lawn ornaments to supplement the familiar tiki torch. Perhaps most pervasively, *Lilo and Stitch* (2002) and *Moana* (2016) are two well-loved Disney franchises set in Polynesia and featuring Polynesian characters. Disney further capitalizes on these films at their resorts, including the Polynesian Village Resort at Disney World in

Orlando, Florida, opened in 1971, and their newer Aulani Resort and Spa in Kapolei, Hawai'i, opened in 2011.

So, when people ask me “What is a Polynesian,” the question is tinged with an uneasy mix of familiarity and confusion. Polynesia is sometimes misunderstood as referring solely to French Polynesia, the French territory that includes Tahiti, rather than the broader region that encompasses over a thousand islands and more than a dozen independent countries or territories. Some questioners want me to authenticate exotic images or recommend the best hotels to stay at in Hawai'i. To them, Polynesians are natural travel agents. Others are unsure, after learning that I am Native Hawaiian, what that means exactly. Some insist: That means part Asian, right? What percent Hawaiian are you? But aren't all the Natives extinct? That I, like many Native Hawaiians, am multiracial with Chinese and haole (white) ancestry in addition to my Native Hawaiian ancestry, often seems proof to them that their suspicions about Hawaiian extinction are correct—however long I might spend explaining why such notions are both false and harmful.

There is a long history to such questions, and the attendant proprietary sense that many white Americans, in particular, display when they decide my answers are not sufficient and that they actually already know what a Polynesian or Native Hawaiian is. This book is a critical history of such Western knowledge production about Polynesians as a race, demonstrating how important such pursuits have been to the ideological work of settler colonialism in Hawai'i and other parts of Oceania. My goal in exploring this history, and its enduring legacies, is to challenge how Polynesians are made invisible as a people, despite their literal and imagined presence in many of the centers of American culture, from Disney cartoons to the many Polynesian men on the field during *Sunday Night Football*. While my analysis is relevant to the popular images of Polynesia noted above, this book takes a closer look at the history of Western scientific studies that similarly and repeatedly questioned: “What is a Polynesian?”

Indeed, since the earliest encounters between Europeans and Indigenous Pacific Islanders, white Europeans (and later, white Americans) expressed a fascination and partial identification with the racial origins of Polynesians. To British Captain James Cook and others, Polynesians seemed to represent “natural man” in his purest state. European painters such as William Hodges, for example, depicted Tahitian women in the style of classical Grecian bathers in his 1776 painting *Tahiti Revisited*. In later social scientific studies from the mid-nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century, such ideas about the racial origins and classification of Polynesians became the

subject of intense scrutiny and debate. While these theories shifted over time, the enduring logic that Polynesians could be understood as more “natural,” “classical,” or otherwise primitive versions of white civilizations remained throughout changes in social scientific trends.

This logic persists to this day, from the daily exotification of light-skinned Hawaiian “hula girls” as naturally available sexual conquests for visiting white tourists, to complicated matters of legal recognition for Native Hawaiian people.¹ The central argument of this book is that settler colonialism in Hawai‘i and Polynesia more broadly is fueled by a logic of possession through whiteness. In the logic of possession through whiteness, both Polynesia (the place) and Polynesians (the people) become exotic, feminized possessions of whiteness—possessions that never have the power to claim the property of whiteness for themselves. Instead, the Polynesian race is repeatedly positioned as almost white (even literally as descendants of the Aryan race), in a way that allows white settlers to claim indigeneity in Polynesia, since, according to this logic, whiteness itself is indigenous to Polynesia. This logic naturalizes white settler presence in Polynesia and allows white settlers to claim, in various ways, rightful and natural ownership of various parts of Polynesia. Notably, this idea of whiteness making itself Indigenous in order to control and own a place violently attempts to replace the quite different definition of indigeneity held by many Polynesians and other Indigenous peoples, which emphasizes relationships and responsibilities to land as ancestor.

Today, white social scientists no longer claim that Polynesians are Aryan. Whiteness, like all forms of racial ideologies, has never been a completely stable or unchanging concept. Yet the historical production of Polynesians as very close to whiteness in science continues to authorize white claims to ownership over Indigenous Polynesian lands and identities. This is true despite the fact that whiteness is often unmarked as such in scientific discourse, more often operating through the language of the “universal” or “good of mankind.” Nonetheless, as Toni Morrison has written about tropes of blackness in the writing of white American writers, “the subject of the dream is the dreamer.”² So too, the Western racial construction of Polynesians from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reflects the self-referential concerns of the West and white anxieties over their own shifting definitions of whiteness and humanity.

While whiteness is commonly the named referent, antiblackness is also always a significant part of the Western construction of the Polynesian race as almost white. Like indigeneity, blackness is so often simultaneously

invisible and hyper-visible. Ideas about Polynesians being almost white were formed in distinction to ideas about Melanesians being black.³ Melanesia, a distinct Oceanic region west of Polynesia and south of Micronesia, includes the present-day countries of Papua New Guinea, West Papua, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia (Kanaky), and Fiji. Imperial and settler images of Melanesians projected fears about savage, dark-skinned cannibals, and were used to justify practices of kidnapping and forced labor. Blackness as understood in the continental United States in reference to African Americans also, at times, played a significant role in racial discourses in Oceania, especially in Hawai'i. For example, in the period surrounding the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom in 1893, U.S. media repeatedly portrayed King Kalākaua and Queen Lili'uokalani as pickaninnies and spread rumors about their having African American ancestry in order to discredit them as legitimate rulers.⁴

Such racist images were enabled by discourses about Polynesians' proximity to whiteness, rather than being a break from them. For whiteness in relation to Polynesians always remained a question and a problem, despite accumulating social scientific knowledge over decades declaring various definitive answers. The question "What is a Polynesian?" was always implicitly or explicitly a question about whether Polynesians were white or black. White settlers wanted Polynesians to be whiter because it suited their own claims of belonging to Polynesia while it also soothed colonizers' racial anxieties about those they dispossessed. This book therefore analyzes how Western fears about Polynesian blackness, through ancestral or more recent relationships with Melanesians and African Americans, haunts the logic of possession through whiteness in deep and complex ways. These fears about Polynesians' potential proximity to blackness are also always wrapped up in fears about Polynesian indigeneity threatening and undercutting the claims to indigeneity, power, and resources made by white settlers in Polynesia.

Overall, *Possessing Polynesians* investigates narratives about Polynesian whiteness not to reveal truths about Polynesians per se, but to expose the foundations of settler colonial power in a possessive form of whiteness that must be divorced from its claims to indigeneity on the path to decolonization. My goal is not to provide a more appropriate racial classification for Polynesians, but to show how racial knowledge—never stable, but often shifting—has been and continues to be central to settler colonialism in Polynesia. In this sense, this book is a critical genealogy of whiteness in Polynesia, more than it is a history of Polynesianness, as self-determined

by Polynesian peoples. Yet what I show here is the history of how, and with what consequences, constructions of Polynesianness, whiteness, and blackness have intertwined through enduring settler colonial ideologies, and how Polynesians have alternately accepted and refused them.

POLYNESIA AS A SETTLER, SCIENTIFIC PROJECT

To Thor Heyerdahl in 1947, the answer to “What is a Polynesian?” was: an ancient white race from Peru. A Norwegian self-styled “explorer,” Heyerdahl sought to prove a theory, already discredited by other social scientists of the time, that Polynesia was settled by a mythical white race that left Peru centuries ago. His method of proving this theory was dramatic: he would himself attempt to drift on a simple balsa wood raft from Peru to Polynesia.⁵ The raft, which he named *Kon-Tiki*, was ill-equipped for such a long sea voyage, and Heyerdahl could not swim. Ultimately, the raft reached the Tuamotu Islands of French Polynesia, where he and his crew were saved from starvation and dehydration by the local Indigenous people. This ill-fated voyage did not dissuade Heyerdahl from his theory or this style of “exploration.”⁶ In 1962, the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* critically commented on a new Heyerdahl book in which he claimed that Peruvians first settled Hawai‘i and then “mixed” with American Indians who arrived later. The article cited Bishop Museum ethnologist Kenneth Emory, who strongly dismissed Heyerdahl’s claims, emphasizing instead the strong relationships between Polynesian languages and cultures.⁷

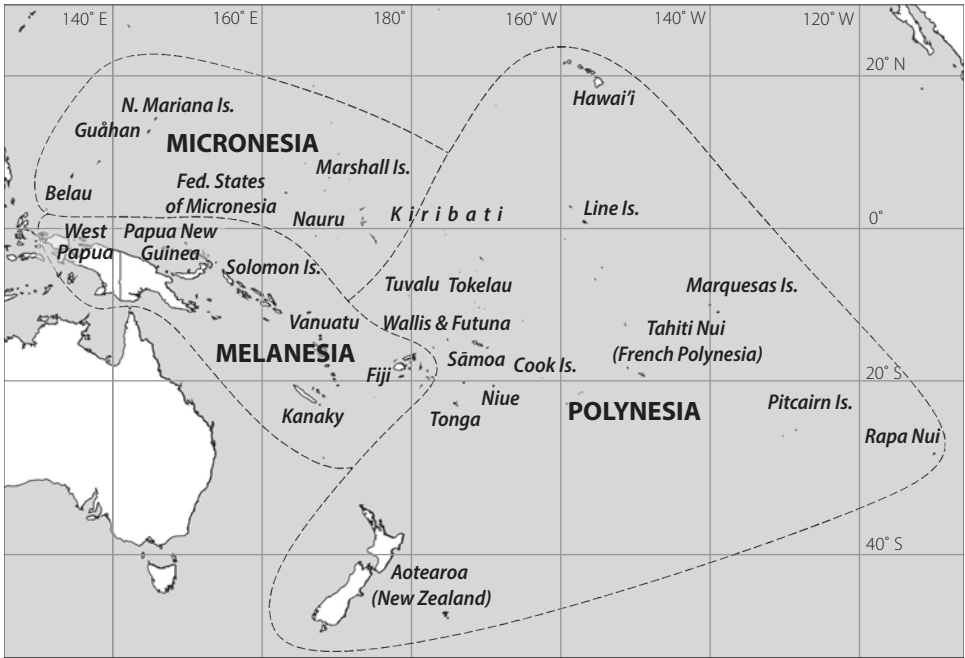
Yet the newspaper also disparaged Polynesians. In a political cartoon accompanying the article (figure 1.1), a Polynesian figure, depicted as a hulking, obese man, charges at a Peruvian, yielding a sign saying “Polynesians A-OK.” The Peruvian man is drawn as much smaller in size, but unwavering, holding his own sign: “Peruvians SI, Polynesians NO.” In this cartoon, the white social scientist or self-styled explorer disappears from view, while the two figures come across as holding tribal, “primitive” attachments to exclusive origin stories and racial divisions. In this way, the cartoon neatly illustrates how the social scientific knowledge that produces theories about Polynesians as a race so often disavows its own role in that production, instead blaming Polynesians (and Peruvians, in this case) for believing in race and racism. Meanwhile, white social scientists maintain their authority as experts on Pacific and South American cultures because of their seemingly distanced position, when in fact their work shores up white, colonial claims to lands and resources.



FIGURE 1.1. "Polynesians A-OK!" *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* cartoon, 1962.

Despite the apparent absurdity of Heyerdahl's research, his "exploration" was an outgrowth of what social scientists from the early nineteenth century had dubbed the "Polynesian Problem," that is, the problem of determining the geographic and racial origins of Polynesians. Until the revitalization of long-distance Indigenous oceanic voyaging, notably beginning with the Native Hawaiian double-hulled canoe *Hōkūle'a's* successful navigation from Hawai'i to Tahiti in 1976, Western science maintained that Indigenous Pacific Islanders could not have purposefully traversed the Pacific Ocean, but instead likely settled the Pacific Islands randomly through "accidental drift." By navigating the *Hōkūle'a* with traditions based on reading the stars, taught to them by Mau Piailug, a Satawal (Micronesian) navigator, the *Hōkūle'a* crew proved that Indigenous Pacific Islanders had the skills to intentionally travel the Pacific.⁸ The *Hōkūle'a* and many other revitalized canoes across the Pacific continue to demonstrate that Polynesia was not inhabited haphazardly by accidental rafts set adrift from Peru. Yet Heyerdahl's antics are still praised and promoted today. In 2011, his archives became officially part of UNESCO's "Memory of the World Register," which describes Heyerdahl as "one of the greatest communicators and renowned explorers of the 20th century."⁹ Similarly, a 2012 film about the *Kon-Tiki* expedition emphasized that Heyerdahl's journey inspired the world and reanimated interest in exploration after the devastation of World War II. Neither UNESCO nor the film mention Heyerdahl's racial theories, nor the well-established and revitalized traditions of skilled Indigenous oceanic voyaging.¹⁰ In this way, stories about white settlement of the Pacific and white racial origins continue to circulate today, erasing Polynesian, Micronesian, and Melanesian histories and present-day lives and imposing racial divisions both internally and externally, while acclaiming white "exploration" of the Pacific as valuable to all mankind.¹¹

Martinican postcolonial theorist Édouard Glissant has reminded us that the "West is not in the West. It is a project, not a place."¹² In this vein, I see discourses, such as Heyerdahl's, about Polynesians as almost white as an attempt to make Polynesia into a Western, settler colonial project, not merely a place. In this project, Polynesia's origins can be traced to the imaginations of European imperialists, dividing the "almost white," friendly Polynesians from the decidedly more savage and hostile Melanesians. This Western project of Polynesia does not negate the fact that Indigenous peoples from across the areas of Polynesia maintained meaningful connections and identity, long predating Western contact and settlement and continuing through today, through shared or overlapping genealogies and cosmologies. Many



MAP 1.1. Map of Oceania showing the regions of Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia. Created by author and Justin Sorensen, GIS Services, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

Pacific Islands studies scholars have shown that Western ideals of Polynesia, Micronesia, Melanesia, and Oceania (map 1.1) are not totalizing and are irreconcilable with Indigenous epistemologies of the Moana, or Pacific Ocean, that emphasize the ocean as connection rather than barrier.¹³

It is important to know the origins and terms of Polynesia as a Western project not because it reflects the “truth” about Polynesia or Polynesians, but because it is a form of knowledge production that structures settler colonialism in many parts of Polynesia. Additionally, attention to the history of race in regard to the Polynesian/Melanesian divide analytically shifts understandings of race in relation to Pacific Islanders beyond the common U.S.-based racial categories, in which Pacific Islanders (including Native Hawaiians, Māori, Tongans, Sāmoans, Marshall Islanders, Chamoru, and many others) are usually understood only in reference to the incredibly broad U.S. designation “Asian/Pacific Islander.”¹⁴ Many scholars and activists have argued that Pacific Islanders are ill-served by the Asian/Pacific

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Islander, or its abbreviation API, label, given stark, documented inequalities between Asian American and Pacific Islander groups as well as the distinction that Pacific Islanders are Indigenous peoples (whereas some, but not all, of Asian Americans identify as Indigenous).¹⁵ Polynesian, Micronesian, and Melanesian can at times be labels preferred by Pacific Islander communities, since (despite their Western origins) these labels have been adopted in Oceania as identities of regional solidarity. These regional identities are often more relevant and grounded in local contexts than the Asian/Pacific Islander classification. Polynesian, for example, is a broadly used, coalitional identity used in many diasporic contexts to signal political and cultural affiliation, as in the Salt Lake City, Utah, area, where a large population of Tongans, Sāmoans, Native Hawaiians, Māori, and others live.

While I approach Polynesia and Polynesian identity as a transnational, regional formation, this book focuses most specifically on how the ideal of Polynesians as almost white has shaped settler colonialism in Hawai‘i. This focus stems from my position as a Native Hawaiian feminist scholar. Yet, with my focus on Hawai‘i, I also seek to connect the issues most relevant to the Kanaka Maoli context to other Polynesian and Indigenous contexts, because neither the structures of settler colonialism nor the Indigenous alliances formed against it are limited to Hawai‘i. In the United States, there is often a problematic assumption that Native Hawaiians can stand in for all Indigenous Pacific Islanders, especially Polynesians, or that they easily fit into the category of Native American. This assumption reduces the complexity of Native Hawaiians, other Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans. Though there are long-standing, crucial alliances among all of these groups, sometimes under the broadly applicable identity of “Indigenous,” Native Hawaiians, like all Indigenous peoples, are a distinct people with specific histories and cultures developed in relationship to the lands and waters of Hawai‘i. This book uses Native Hawaiian and Kanaka Maoli (a Hawaiian language term literally meaning original people, and a preferred identity to some) interchangeably to refer to the Indigenous peoples of Hawai‘i.

When I do analyze other Polynesian or Indigenous contexts, I do so not because these contexts are all exactly the same, but to attempt to regenerate meaningful connections, especially among Polynesians and other Pacific Islander peoples, and because of the political resonances that exist in our histories and contemporary moments. Tonga, for example, was never formally colonized or settled by white people; thus, settler colonialism as an analytic frame is arguably less relevant to the Tongan context.¹⁶ Nonethe-

less, Tongans, as Polynesians, have undeniably been subject, at times, to the same ideologies about Polynesian almost-whiteness, especially through the influence of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.¹⁷ In another example, in Tahiti and the other island groups of what is now French Polynesia, a territory of France, the Mā'ohi have maintained a demographic majority throughout white French settlement. This differs from the New Zealand and Hawai'i contexts, where Māori and Kānaka Maoli have long been minority populations in their own lands.¹⁸ Still, French imperialism and settlement impacted Mā'ohi in many similar ways, including the use of French Polynesia as a site for nucleolar testing. So too, the idyll of Polynesian women as the exotic, “dusky,” almost white objects of European heterosexual male fantasies remains rooted in particular ways to Tahiti, especially through the works of the painter Paul Gauguin. This book is a starting point for further scholarship on these Oceanic connections.

A critical analysis of the Polynesian context also offers a valuable approach to scrutinizing broader, seemingly “inclusive” contemporary discourses on racial mixture, multiculturalism, and universalist notions of humanity. Too often, uncritical liberal discourses identify greater inclusion of women, queer folks, and people of color into white spaces, or the very existence of multi-racial people, as the solution to the structural violences of white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, settler colonialism, and racial capitalism. Diversifying the faces of those in power is not nothing, but it is never adequate in and of itself in achieving structural change. Indeed, as Sara Ahmed has pointed out, too often “diversity” is deployed as a powerful rhetoric to preserve the status quo.¹⁹ While many in the United States may tend to think of such superficially multicultural forms of maintaining white institutionalized power as a post-Obama era phenomenon associated with the nonsensical term *post-racial*, the history of discourses that conditionally include Polynesians within whiteness provides a deeper genealogy to both the strategy of dispossession-through-inclusion and the resistance that always accompanied it.

One telling example of both the enduring logics and the global import of Western studies of the Polynesian race comes from shortly after World War II. Here again, that question of what a Polynesian is arose, namely in a booklet produced by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1952, titled *What Is Race?* The booklet was created in the context of UNESCO's directive to clarify for the world the scientific basis of race after World War II and the United Nations' passage of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Using diagrams and tables outlining Mendelian genetics, the booklet illustrated that “a race, in short, is a

group of related intermarrying individuals, a population” that differs merely in the relative frequency of certain hereditary traits. Though UNESCO’s first Statement on Race in 1950 had boldly stated, “For all practical purposes, ‘race’ is not so much a biological phenomenon as a social myth,” physical anthropologists maintained the continued existence of biological, racial categories.²⁰ For such physical anthropologists, whose careers depended on the continuation of race as a matter of measureable, physical features, “it was not ‘race’ but racism that was the problem.”²¹ Thus, the 1952 *What Is Race?* booklet emphasized that there was no “single objective list of races,” but nonetheless sought to further teach and test readers’ understandings of scientific racial classifications.²² The Polynesian race was utilized as an instructive example.

“What is the Polynesian race?” the UNESCO booklet asked readers, presenting them with a diagram of three circles (figure 1.2), labeled with racial classifications as determined by anthropologist A. L. Kroeber. There is one red circle each for the “Caucasoid,” “Mongoloid,” and “Negroid” races, filled with specific groups, such as “Nordics” in the Caucasoid circle.²³ In the dead center of the three circles is a dot labeled “Polynesians.” While a cursory glance at the diagram might suggest that it is indicating Polynesians are an equal mix of the three racial groups, the Polynesian dot actually represents an assignment. The book instructs readers to investigate and classify the Polynesian race into one of the three circles.²⁴

Readers were encouraged to seek answers to the proper classification for Polynesians in the book *Up from the Ape*, by E. A. Hooton.²⁵ Hooton described Polynesians as a “COMPOSITE RACE (Predominately White).” As “one of the tallest and finest-looking races of the world,” Hooton explains Polynesians’ “composite” racial nature as blending “Mongoloid, Negroid and European” characteristics “into a harmonious and pleasing whole.” Yet this mixture is not equal, as he notes: “However, a careful consideration of Polynesian features in the light of what is known of the behavior of Negroid and Mongoloid characters in racial crosses suggests that the White strain in this composite race must be much stronger than either of the other two elements.”²⁶

Hooton’s account here, emphasizing that Polynesians were fundamentally a broad racial mixture but also more white than Negroid or Mongoloid, concurred with other anthropological accounts at the time. Kroeber’s 1948 textbook *Anthropology* (from which the *What Is Race?* booklet copied their three-circle diagram) similarly highlighted Polynesians’ whiteness: “There is almost certainly a definite Caucasoid strain in them.”²⁷ In this way, physical

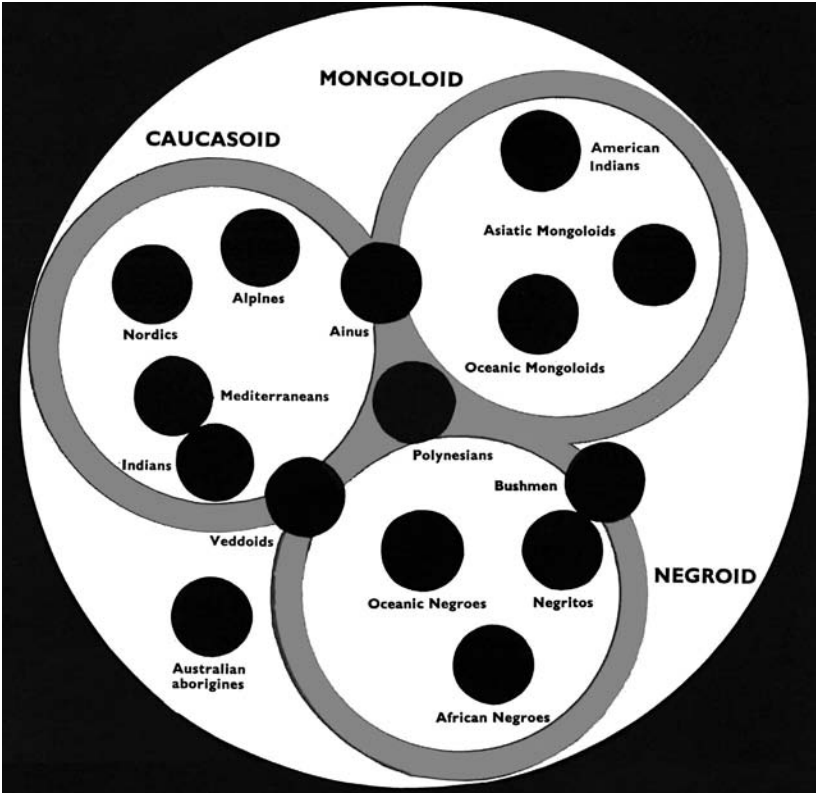


FIGURE 1.2. “Classification of Races according to A. L. Kroeber,” from *What Is Race? Evidence from Scientists* (Paris: UNESCO, 1952). Illustration by Jane Eakin Kleiman, based on A. L. Kroeber’s *Anthropology* (London: Harrap, 1949).

anthropologists combined “racial mixture” and whiteness as the Polynesian race’s defining features.

Rather than being squarely in the center of the Caucasoid, Mongoloid, and Negroid racial classifications, the booklet therefore taught readers that the Polynesians should be included within the Caucasoid circle.²⁸ This lesson and its use of the Polynesian race raise a number of important questions. Why was the Polynesian race the ideal test case for a scientific and lay audience to contemplate the biological aspects of race? Why, despite the effort of UNESCO to show that race was significantly socially constructed, did Caucasoid, Mongoloid, and Negroid remain valid scientific categories in 1952? Why and how could Polynesians classify as both “composite” (a mixture) and as “predominately” Caucasoid?

Today, it may be easy for many to dismiss such arguments as those displayed in the UNESCO booklet as racist pseudoscience. Yet such a dismissal is premature and at times even naïve, as it risks overestimating how much contemporary ideas about race continue to be formed by that science. Today, most college classrooms across the humanities and sciences teach students that race is not a scientific truth, but a social construction. Social scientists and geneticists in fact largely agree on this point, often citing biologist Richard Lewontin's conclusion in 1972 "that of all human genetic variation (which we now know to be just 0.1 percent of all genetic material), 85 percent occurs *within* geographically distinct groups, while 15 percent or less occurs *between* them."²⁹ In other words, there is much greater genetic diversity within distinct racial groups than between them. Yet, in looking to genetics to confirm the social construction of race, have we forgotten to remain critical of how science itself is socially constructed and retains an enormous power for legitimizing truth?

This is why the UNESCO efforts to educate about race and science after the racial horrors of World War II are so instructive. Indeed, many of the physical anthropologists, such as Harry Shapiro, who contributed to knowledge production about Polynesians' almost-whiteness, were directly involved with the UNESCO initiatives on race and education in the 1950s. Their involvement partially explains the use of Polynesians in a UNESCO lesson about race. More generally, the Polynesian race was appropriate for UNESCO's purposes because Polynesians and their supposedly racially mixed but also white nature could easily represent a fundamental human unity and universality that UNESCO was eager to impress on their readers. From some of the most isolated islands in the world, Polynesians symbolized the post-racial decades before that term would come into vogue. To social scientists, Polynesians showed that the geographic isolation that caused biological racial difference could be overcome—that racial mixture could thrive and not only be socially accepted but herald the end of race and racism.

SETTLER COLONIALISM AS POSSESSION THROUGH WHITENESS

The use of Polynesians by UNESCO as an object lesson about race in 1952 illustrates how the questions raised in the Polynesian Problem literature from the early 1800s continued to circulate long after. This book analyzes that deep history of attributing (always approximate or partial) whiteness to the Polynesian race in Western scientific literature, popular culture, and law. Through bestowing partial, ancestral whiteness upon Polynesians in

scientific knowledge, white settlers (and white settler nation-states) were able to claim that whiteness itself was indigenous to Polynesia. With these scientific declarations, white settlers established their own kind of ancestral claims to Polynesian lands, resources, and identities, while also projecting that the future of Polynesia was destined to be white again through “racial intermarriage” between white settlers and Polynesian women. Yet this Polynesian whiteness was constructed as a one-way conduit, transferring what was valuable about Polynesia in colonial, capitalist economics to white settlers. In turn, the value of whiteness was not accrued by or extended to Polynesians; rather, Polynesians became the feminized, exotic, possessions *of* whiteness, gaining no secure power to possess whiteness or identify as white themselves. This process of uneven racial alchemy was fueled by a logic of possession through whiteness. The agent(s) of possession in this process are not merely individual white settlers, but the discourse of Polynesians as almost white produced in Western scientific knowledge.³⁰

To be clear, the discourse about Polynesian whiteness examined in this book is a serviceable construct for the interlaid structures of white supremacy and settler colonialism, not for Polynesians themselves. It has little to do with what Polynesians look like or are recognized as on the street. Polynesians do not uniformly “pass” as white individuals socially, legally, or economically. In most contexts, in fact, Polynesians decidedly do not pass. They face higher rates of incarceration, shorter life spans, less wealth, and more discrimination in workplaces and education.³¹ The construction of Polynesian whiteness has even less to do with how Polynesians identify themselves and their own genealogies outside of such imposed Western frames. Perhaps this disjuncture between the Western construction of Polynesian whiteness and the lived experiences of Polynesian people explains, in part, why histories of the Pacific often fail to seriously engage the well-documented history of the construction of Polynesians as almost white. Or, perhaps, the lack of engagement is more simply due to a reluctance to examine the thoroughly discredited field of Aryanism. Contemporary studies of ethnologists and scientists working in Polynesia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries often fail to mention, or note only in passing, that figures such as folklorist Abraham Fornander or physical anthropologist Louis Sullivan were fully committed to, and saw the bulk of their work as, proving that Polynesians were members of the Aryan family.³²

Unfortunately, discourses about Aryanism and white supremacy are no longer quite as distant and disproven as many hoped. White supremacist rallies such as the “Unite the Right” event that took place in Charlottesville,

Virginia, in August 2017, highlight the fact that white supremacy has never been eradicated as either an openly racist ideology or a structuring foundation of the United States. While Charlottesville foregrounded violence against black people and nonwhite immigrants, that the white supremacists carried tiki torches as they marched demonstrated yet another way that the legacies of the Polynesian Problem continue to uphold latent associations between whiteness and Polynesianness. Polynesians were not foremost in these white supremacists' minds as they rallied. No doubt, the tiki torches were simply the most convenient consumer product for the angry mob to buy. Yet the fact that the ubiquitous tiki torch was so readily available to them is undeniably tied to the history of colonial images of Hawai'i as an idyllic vacation destination for white Americans—that is, of Hawai'i as a white possession. This example also calls attention to how the settler colonial logic of possession through whiteness is at once anti-Indigenous, anti-immigrant, and antiblack. The relation between the logics of possession through whiteness and antiblackness, and between anti-indigeneity and anti-immigration, is not merely one of analogy or comparison, even as they are distinct logics; rather, they are inextricable. This means they also must be challenged and undone together.

Given the increased but varied usage of *settler colonialism* as an academic term in recent years, it is worth explaining in detail here how this book defines and theorizes the concept. Settler colonialism, as a structure of dominance, is particularly set on the domination and exploitation of land.³³ Settler colonialism is not a structure limited to any discrete historical period, nation, or colonizer. Though never monolithic or unchanging, settler colonialism is a historical and a contemporary phenomenon. Its power usually operates simultaneously through economy (the turning of land and natural resources into profit), law (the imposition of the legal-political apparatus of a settler nation-state, rather than an indigenous form of governance), and ideology (culturally and morally defined ways of being and knowing resulting from European post-Enlightenment thought).

Possession through whiteness is one strategy deployed within the ideological power of settler colonialism, which is often in articulation with, but irreducible to, the economic and juridical forms of governance that also constitute settler colonialism. For example, in the Hawaiian context, economic and ideological components of settler colonialism preceded its legal-political expression, as Christian missionaries and plantation owners (often descendants of missionaries) worked within the existing legal-political structures of the Hawaiian Kingdom until it no longer adequately suited

their needs. White plantation owners overthrew the Hawaiian Kingdom in 1893 because Queen Lili'uokalani began seeking stronger protections for Native Hawaiians against the power of the plantations.³⁴ Further, Hawai'i only officially became one of the United States' "new possessions" (along with the Philippines, Cuba, and Puerto Rico) in 1898, when annexed by a U.S. Congress that sought to secure a coaling station for the U.S. Navy on their way to fight the Spanish-American War in the Philippines.³⁵ This history of how Hawai'i became part of the United States shows that the economic, juridical, and political forms of settler colonialism may not always be automatically aligned. Nonetheless, the ideological components of settler colonialism often work to coordinate these different spheres of power, though creating an enduring racial and gendered "settler common sense" about Indigenous peoples.³⁶

I emphasize the logic of possession in friendly contrast to other articulations of influential ideologies under settler colonialism. For instance, Patrick Wolfe's "logic of elimination" encompasses Indigenous genocide and amalgamation, through which the settler is the one who replaces the eliminated. Yet possession, rather than elimination, articulates more fully the ways in which settler colonial practices of elimination and replacement are continuously deferred. Though these processes are often taken on their own terms to be over and "settled"—the Natives long dead and vanished—they are not, and cannot ever be, complete.³⁷ Though Wolfe also acknowledges this incompleteness, famously noting that settler invasion is "a structure not an event," I see possession as expressing more precisely the permanent partial state of the Indigenous subject being inhabited (being known and produced) by a settler society. There is, as Scott Morgensen notes, a promised consanguinity (literally, "of the same blood") between settler and native that is often eclipsed in formulations that focus only on settler colonial "vanishing" and "extinction."³⁸ This imagined familial and racial affinity enables constant (sexual, economic, juridical) exploitation, by producing the image of a future universal "raceless" race just over the settler colonial horizon.

I also highlight processes of possession, rather than elimination, in order to foreground the gendered aspects of settler colonialism. The supposed consanguinity between the settler and the Native is necessarily produced through heteropatriarchy. Heteropatriarchy can be defined as "the social systems in which heterosexuality and patriarchy are perceived as normal and natural, and in which other configurations are perceived as abnormal, aberrant, and abhorrent."³⁹ As in the English legal principle of coverture, whereby a woman's property and rights are passed on to her husband upon marriage,

through the logic of possession, an intimate relationship is forged that binds settler and Native, aiming to nullify Indigenous peoples' distinct "sense of being a people."⁴⁰ Settlers thus also come to possess indigeneity (making their presence and exploitation of land natural and nonviolent) through "racial mixture," enabled by sexual relationships with Indigenous women.

Too few scholars have recognized that policies encouraging "racial mixture" in and of themselves have never seriously threatened existing racial and colonial hierarchies, but can in fact be strategies of racial/colonial subjection.⁴¹ As Jared Sexton argues, miscegenation provided structure to "the fiction of race purity."⁴² Further, as Tavia Nyong'o has shown, racial hybridity, as a promised but continually deferred panacea for the historical ills of slavery and racism in the United States, is a venerable "American national fantasy" visible in antebellum history, not just contemporary millennial trends.⁴³ Nyong'o traces the ways that blackness is constructed through hypodescent, "in which each successive generation of mixed peoples are determined to be legally and socially black and held to the same discriminatory standard as everyone else of African descent."⁴⁴ Nyong'o persuasively argues that hypodescent thus "manages the racial future by promising a fusion that never comes."⁴⁵

Complementary to the hypodescent of blackness is the hyperdescent of indigeneity, wherein successive generations of mixed-race Indigenous peoples are determined to be legally "white," through systems like blood quantum, though they are generally not socially or economically treated as white. This hyperdescent manages the racial future by promising a "fusion" that never was intended to be one. The end product of racial mixture determined by hyperdescent is whiteness, but a whiteness that remains accessible only to non-Indigenous, nonblack people. Hyperdescent accordingly maintains the line between black and white, managing white racial fears of the potential savage blackness of Indigenous peoples by constructing them as almost white, rather than black. This black/white split is replicated and gendered within Indigenous populations too, as evident in tropes about the light-skinned, sexualized Polynesian girl available to white settler men that ensure Polynesian women are subject to sexual violence while Polynesian men are viewed as dark, dangerous threats to white masculinity, as discussed further, particularly in chapter 3.

Racial mixture therefore provides a method for settlers to become native, thus possessing the "native" category in terms of both land and identity, while Indigenous peoples and Black peoples are continually dispossessed from claims of belonging to the settler colonial state. The logic of possession

through whiteness is not only a logic of hyperdescent that specifically dispossesses racially mixed people; more broadly, it projects an imagined past and future of racial mixture in order to bolster white settler claims to belonging in settler colonies. Blood quantum laws in Hawai'i, for example, dictate that Native Hawaiians must prove that they are "more than one-half part" Hawaiian to be eligible for access to certain lands. This requirement places a burden of "race-saving" on Native Hawaiian women, who face pressure to have children with Native Hawaiian men of high blood quantum. Such projections are inherently heteropatriarchal, taking for granted that Indigenous women will "marry" white settler men and reproduce mixed-race children who will usher in this whiter future. Yet this discourse does not actually depend on large numbers of racial intermarriages but simply projects as inevitable a future horizon in which the Indigenous populace has been "whitened," and thus made "extinct."

The repeated use of discourses of racial mixture in settler colonial ideologies demonstrates that the places where settler colonialism appears to be "tender" and feminized are just as deserving of critical analysis as the forms of violence perceived to be more "masculine," such as war. Misogyny and homophobia are structural forms that continue to subtly shape many Western societies. Though academia often pretends that because it is "critical," it is more evolved and more immune from such oppression, institutionalized patriarchy, misogyny, and homophobia undoubtedly shape the lack of theoretical attention to gender and sexuality in academic accounts of settler colonialism. Heteropatriarchy's relationship to settler colonialism is far too under-theorized in conventional formulations of ethnic studies, gender studies, and even in the recent growth of interdisciplinary literature focused on critical theories of global settler colonialism.⁴⁶ For example, scholar Lorenzo Veracini, a founding editor of the *Settler Colonial Studies* journal in 2011, offers productive analyses about the differences between colonialism and settler colonialism.⁴⁷ However, Veracini has little to say about the place of gender or heteropatriarchy in either of these structures, and his theoretical framings of settler colonialism are less robust because of it.

Veracini characterizes colonialism as "a demand for labour," whereas settler colonialism is "a demand to go away."⁴⁸ But settler colonialism is more complicated than a demand for Indigenous peoples to "go away," and not only because Indigenous peoples were forced to labor for settler colonies in many contexts (e.g., California Indians forced to build Spanish missions, or blackbirded Melanesians forced to work on settler plantations in Australia and Fiji).⁴⁹ The so-called tender side of settler colonialism does not

demand that Indigenous peoples “go away,” but rather assumes the natural demise of the Indigenous “race,” and the ultimate unification of settlers and Indigenous peoples in one nation. Through the logic of possession through whiteness, the “demand” is more a liberal statement of commensurability: “We are you. We are (almost) the same.”⁵⁰ This requires additional labor of a different kind—primarily the sexual and reproductive labor of Indigenous women, who are expected to birth the new, successively less “raced” generations, through coupling with white settler men.

How whiteness and racial mixture relate to structures of settler colonialism is therefore under-theorized but holds the potential to clarify our theories of settler colonialism globally. The United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia are commonly taken for granted as the exemplars of settler colonialism. In each context, the settlers’ national investment in whiteness is clear, suggesting that possessive forms of whiteness (the selective incorporation of Indigenous peoples into white settler societies) may be one of the most important features distinguishing settler colonialism from other forms of colonialism. Though I focus on possession through whiteness as applicable in Polynesia, possession through whiteness has wider potential applicability, though the specific contours of the racial category of possession may differ in Asian, African, Latin American, or Middle Eastern contexts such as Taiwan, Tibet, South Africa, Mexico, or Israel. While whiteness in Latin America, for example, is often understood through discourses of *mestizaje*, there are rich similarities in how racial mixture is understood, in both Latin America and Polynesia, as a mode of not simply “whitening” a native population but engulfing the human and natural resources of a place for the purposes of white settlers. This is not to say that whiteness across various settler colonial contexts is exactly the same, or even impacts the various Indigenous peoples under these countries’ rule in the same way. Rather, I am calling on scholars to better interrogate whiteness in concert with how Indigenous peoples have been racially constructed (something whiteness studies usually fail to do) in each of these places, precisely because they are different. This book makes a modest contribution toward this goal by focusing on whiteness and indigeneity in Polynesia, and Hawai’i in particular. Yet in doing so, this study also hopes to contribute to the larger theorization of settler colonialism in fields including Native American and Indigenous studies, Pacific Islands studies, critical ethnic studies, gender and sexuality studies, and settler colonial studies, through attending to the structural importance of Western scientific discourses of whiteness and racial mixture.

Though this book is attentive to the construction of Polynesia as a Western, settler project, it is also concerned with how Polynesians have made it their own project as well, far predating Western settlement. Not surprisingly, then, the meaning invested in Polynesia by Polynesians often has little or nothing to do with Western ideas about race and whiteness. Instead, Polynesianness is often grounded in shared political and cultural histories, living and organizing together in diasporic locations such as Auckland, Honolulu, Salt Lake City, Southern California, or the San Francisco Bay Area, and/or common genealogies especially in relation to our akua and kūpuna, gods and ancestors, who traveled across Polynesia, such as Maui and Pele.⁵¹ This book cannot do justice to the variety of meanings Polynesia as a Polynesian project holds. Yet it does analyze what happens when Polynesian pasts and futures are interrupted by settler horizons. To better contextualize such interruptions, we must reorient ourselves to what Damon Salesa has called “Indigenous time,” which is oriented by ancestors and descendants, not to a “disembodied calibration of time.”⁵² In Polynesian epistemologies, Salesa further notes that we might recognize a long-standing concept of *wa, va, or vaha’a*, meaning something like “space-time,” in which “places and time were not secular, but filled with the resonance of the spiritual and divine.”⁵³

Salesa’s work reminds us that despite historical and contemporary colonial projects in Oceania, we can still meaningfully locate Polynesia within Indigenous frameworks as well. This book analyzes how Polynesians respond to, critique, and co-opt the settler colonial logic of possession through whiteness, through a framework of regeneration. Regeneration is an Indigenous feminist analytic, shaped by my engagements with other Indigenous studies’ formulations of regeneration.⁵⁴ As Anishinaabe writer Leanne Simpson puts it, regeneration is a “process of bringing forth more life—getting the seed and planting and nurturing it. It can be a physical seed, it can be a child, or it can be an idea. But if you’re not continually engaged in that process then it doesn’t happen.”⁵⁵ As Simpson’s theory points out, regeneration is therefore a different conceptualization of time, reminiscent of Salesa’s reorientation to Indigenous time, focused on embodied daily practices, incremental steps, and the nurturing of life. Regeneration within an Indigenous feminist frame is not a vanguard or prescribed political program. Regeneration signals new growth and life cultivated after destruction, as in the plants that gradually return to a charred landscape after

a volcanic flow. Regenerative actions seek the return of function, balance, or power, as in the regrowth of a starfish's limb or mo'os (lizard, gecko) tail.

In other words, regeneration is acting on the recognition of a responsibility to a people and a place to refuse the settler colonial order of things. This is relevant to this book's working definition of indigeneity itself. As particularly informed by the Kanaka Maoli context, indigeneity refers to the condition of being genealogically related to specific lands/oceans, which determines particular kinds of relationships between a people and a place, where the place is often understood as an ancestor that the people must care for.⁵⁶ Settler colonialism often disrupts the abilities of an Indigenous people to fulfill such responsibilities or kuleana. This happens in part through the production of Indigenous peoples as a race, rather than as a sovereign people, and the production of settlers as the native, natural owners/residents of a place (though without the same genealogical relationships and responsibilities to that place that Indigenous peoples do).⁵⁷ This process is deeply connected too, in the U.S. context, to the dispossession of kidnapped Africans who are transformed from Indigenous peoples of their own African nations into black slaves through the transatlantic slave trade. For Indigenous peoples of both the Americas and Africa, settler colonial law, society, and science turn a people's political claims (sovereignty) into a supposedly biological one (race).

Framing indigeneity through a lens of regeneration consciously centers the raced and gendered body in analyses of both settler colonialism and decolonization. Regeneration in this Indigenous feminist sense invokes the body, but does not center genetic, biological reproduction as the mode of building the future (though it also does not dismiss the gendered labor of birthing and raising children). Rather, regeneration takes a broader view of kinship and community that is rooted in good relationships with one's self, one's community, other communities, and the lands we live on. As Indigenous feminist Geraldine King writes, "dispossession is about breaking the relationship between bodies and land."⁵⁸ Accordingly, Indigenous decolonization efforts inside and outside the academy must center the body, not only land or issues such as Native governance that are often perceived as more central (and implicitly, more masculine).

Attempts at regeneration are also sometimes ugly, uncomfortable, conflicted, and co-opted. Because regeneration is not a political program or vanguard, regeneration in my framing also allows for analysis of actions that are not always straightforwardly "good," though they are always complex. *Regeneration* was in fact a keyword of the American eugenics movement, as

in “race regeneration,” signaling efforts to purify the genetics of the white race. While Polynesians in general do not adhere to imposed Western designations of race, gender, and sexuality, at times they do seek to use imposed categories to their own advantage, as in the *Day v. Apoliona* case examined in chapter 4. The *Day* plaintiffs went to court to further entrench and even extend the reach of blood quantum laws defining Native Hawaiians as those with 50 percent or more Native Hawaiian blood. While I find the politics of the plaintiffs deeply troubling, reinforcing the very racial and heteropatriarchal hierarchies that comprise their own colonization, their actions nonetheless betray a strong anticolonial critique and an interest in repossessing a Native Hawaiian future of their own making. In this way, it is oriented by a politics of regeneration that cannot be wholly separated from the other Native Hawaiian activist projects this book examines. I therefore find it useful to contrast the *Day* plaintiffs’ actions with other, more expansive visions of regeneration in part II.

The attention to regenerative actions alongside the historical and contemporary presence of possession through whiteness allows this text not simply to document the colonial “damage” of attributing almost whiteness to Polynesians in Western scientific knowledge, but to further better understand what strategies have been and might be effective in unsettling settler logics.⁵⁹ Focusing on desire and not just damage is an Indigenous feminist approach, most eloquently described by Eve Tuck.⁶⁰ As this book attempts to highlight throughout, the racial designations imposed on Native Hawaiians and other Polynesian peoples have never been wholly or blindly accepted. In many Native Hawaiian contexts, historically and in the present, being “Part” or “x percent” Native Hawaiian is entirely nonsensical. Native Hawaiians have long been inclusive about their genealogical definitions of community and nation in a desire to grow their relations.⁶¹ This inclusion rarely made sense to social scientists like Louis Sullivan, as I discuss in chapter 2, who often doubted and disregarded the self-identifications his Native Hawaiian subjects made, marking many of those who claimed to be “Pure Hawaiian” as likely “Part Hawaiian” instead.

That Native Hawaiians would want to hold onto their Hawaiianness, that they seemed to refuse the offer of nominal entry into whiteness, was often baffling to scientists and the larger American public. Salesa similarly writes of the continual self-identification of “half-castes” as Māori, as a development that was “fascinating to scholars, who wondered why, if given access not just to the colonial polity but the white race, literally thousands of people apparently refused, and not just day after day but (by the 1930s and

1940s) generation after generation.”⁶² This kind of refusal is what I term a *regenerative refusal*. Part II of this book examines how such regenerative refusals operate against the logic of possession through whiteness in law, art, and science today. I seek not to make such refusals legible to Western science, but to spend more time with refusal as a mode of promoting more life and joy to Indigenous communities, even or especially in the face of seemingly insurmountable settler colonial power.

Regenerative refusals attempt to capture how Polynesians negotiate entanglements with the logic of possession through whiteness, with an eye toward effecting meaningful change. Overall, this book’s theory of change is in line with the sentiment expressed by Avery Gordon: “We need to know where we live in order to imagine living elsewhere. We need to imagine living elsewhere before we can live there.”⁶³ My purpose in excavating the racial and colonial knowledge of “where we live” is oriented by the need “to imagine living elsewhere,” in an Indigenous space-time where we have divested from such knowledge. My framework of regeneration attempts to reveal glimpses of a possible “elsewhere” through a thorough investigation of how Native Hawaiians respond to “where we live” now. As a Native Hawaiian feminist, I find these tasks urgent. Yet, while I am of the Native Hawaiian people, and Polynesian people more broadly, I do not seek to speak for all of them, or even part of them. Rather, under the rubric of regenerative refusals, I analyze several different actions that I see as connected through similar goals of decolonization, even when their strategies may be at odds. In other words, this book is about both understanding the colonial histories that shape the lives of Native Hawaiians and Polynesians today and, through listening to and learning from abundant regenerative refusals, planning for a different future for Oceania and its diasporas.

THE POSSESSIVE SPIRIT OF WHITENESS AND ANTIBLACKNESS

How do Indigenous Oceanic pasts and futures figure in contemporary scientific research about Polynesians? I take up that question further in chapter 5, but it is worth noting from the outset that researchers continue to ask “What is a Polynesian?” especially through tracing Polynesian origins in genomics and linguistics to Austronesia. *Austronesian* (literally meaning “southern islands”) is a designation given to an extensive language family spanning from Southeast Asia to Madagascar in the west and Polynesia in the east. A significant amount of research about Austronesian origins is centered in Taiwan as a possible “homeland” or “birthplace” of Austronesian

languages, which supporters of Taiwanese independence have at times used to further their political cause by pointing to Taiwan's ancestral racial distinction from mainland China. While contemporary Austronesian discourse does not center whiteness, its roots are in early twentieth-century discourses of Aryanism.⁶⁴ So too, the Austronesian discourse, as emanating from scientific and popular culture sources, has occasionally flattened rather than expanded notions of Indigenous identity. Narratives about Taiwan as a Polynesian homeland can be problematic for both Polynesians, who can be represented as immigrants to their native lands and therefore equivalent to other citizens of settler states like New Zealand and the United States, and for Indigenous Taiwanese, who are sometimes represented, as Mark Munsterhjelm has noted, as “ancestral living dead because their main significance is primarily as living conduits to dead Māori ancestors.”⁶⁵ Ironically, as I show in chapter 1, this problematic construction of Indigenous Taiwanese people echoes nineteenth-century Polynesian Problem literature that constructed Māori and other Polynesians as the “ancestral living dead” to white settlers.

No one deserves to be framed by science as “living conduits” to another people's past. This gloss of Indigenous Taiwanese as repositories of Polynesian pasts is a more recent example of the kind of colonial possession that this book traces and critiques. Possession, in this respect, is the claiming of other peoples' bodies, identities, and other resources as one's own, without regard to those peoples' own histories and desires for the future. As I describe further throughout this book, the logic of possession through whiteness clearly continues to impact not only how white people see Polynesians and other Indigenous peoples, but also, and more devastatingly, how we see each other, as in the above examples between Polynesians and Peruvians or Indigenous Taiwanese peoples. What is at stake in my project, then, is ensuring that our relationships between Indigenous peoples in and beyond Oceania are not haunted at their foundations by settler colonial frameworks. By understanding the history of Western constructions of race in the Pacific, we build the groundwork for finding new ways to reject the imposed white/black racial and settler colonial binary that endures within and between Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia.

In colonial conditions, knowledge is the important agent of possession—a word with which I purposefully invoke its bodily, haunting, supernatural connotation. Demons and spirits, rather than (and anathema to) the logic of science, are commonly identified as the agents of bodily possession. But many have noted that modernity and science are in fact haunted, obsessed with the eradication of the premodern and the exorcism of ghosts.⁶⁶

Similarly, this book is a history of social science, what haunts it, and how this form of knowledge continues to haunt us, with a particular interest in how and why social science produced the idea of the almost white Polynesian.

In its approach to race and the history of social science, this book follows the critical interventions of Denise Ferreira da Silva, who has intervened into conventional conceptions of race by returning to accounts of the human in foundational post-Enlightenment European philosophy, which structured early social scientific texts. Silva particularly focuses on the importance of the transcendent human Spirit theorized by G. W. F. Hegel, which provided the conditions of possibility for the development of racial power.⁶⁷ By following how Hegel's Spirit haunts past and present concepts of race, Silva intervenes into conventional understandings of race as used in the United States as descriptive of particular forms of oppression by recuperating "scientific signification to introduce a conception of political subjects as an effect of symbolic, productive violence."⁶⁸ What Silva finds in the field of science is not simply the production of race as part of the "symbolics of blood," or physical characteristics, but "raciality" that operates via the production of minds.⁶⁹ For Silva, raciality is enabled by the scientific production of self-consciousness as Man's distinguishing attribute (which, after Hegel, is able to be understood as an interior quality that allowed Man productive power over exterior things).⁷⁰ Europe's Others would not be able to achieve transcendence in the same way, remaining "doubly affectable," because they would be subject to both exteriority (bodies and nature) and the European Man who had more successfully realized his own self-perfection (Hegel's Spirit).

Silva's approach illuminates the history of the social scientific construction of the almost white Polynesian well precisely because it attends to race as not merely a matter of skin color. While physical markers are certainly of consequence to the racialization of Polynesians, the creation of the almost white Polynesian had very little to do with the objective physical traits of Polynesian peoples, and much more to do with white settler claims to self-realization, over and against what white settlers saw as Polynesians' "exteriority" and "affectability," in Silva's terms. In other words, Silva's take on raciality helps explain the complex workings of possession through whiteness as a form of settler colonial power that did not simply discriminate based on color but created elaborate fictions about past and future relationships between white settlers and Polynesians. While on the surface such claims promoted a sense of equality between white settlers and Polynesian people, in actuality, they allowed a subtler form of raciality, as a "production

of minds,” where white settlers would be understood as self-determining and productive, and Polynesians would be understood as never having the ability to be self-determining. This kind of reasoning instituted a hierarchy wherein white settlers were understood to be necessary to making Polynesian lands and people productive, because Polynesians were supposedly incapable of this productivity themselves. Of course, this idea was demonstrably false, contravening the deep history of Polynesians creating self-sustaining ways of life for centuries before European contact.

By following Silva’s formulations of raciality and spirit, this study differs in significant ways from other studies of race and whiteness, especially those structured by positivism or empiricism. For example, possession through whiteness, like Foucault’s theory of biopolitics, is an extralegal, liberal, social form of governance. For Foucault, the biopolitical was a type of power/knowledge that focused on society and the management of society through technologies that produced and capitalized human life.⁷¹ Foucault’s account of biopolitics is largely an account of the management of life as positive knowledge, made most plain in statistics. Unlike biopolitics, however, possession through whiteness forces a spiritual and racial investment of human capital within the colonized, which cannot be fully produced through statistics alone. My theory of the logic of possession through whiteness relies on a different account of life from biopolitics—namely, Hegel’s, which produced the human as Spirit.⁷² Through the production of the colonized as almost (but not quite) white, the possibility of attaining transcendence is held out but deferred as impossible—indeed, attaining transcendence and whiteness would “obliterate” the colonized as such. This account of raciality helps explain why racial violence can continue haunting the present despite laws against racial discrimination or the lack of overt racism in some places. The extension of rights or social niceties to nonwhite people can be the very mechanism through which racial violence is perpetuated, as the achievement of full personhood for Europe’s Others in Hegel’s understanding of the human will always be indefinitely deferred.

Formative studies of whiteness in the United States and beyond have emphasized whiteness as a powerful legal, economic, psychological, and/or literary category. Emphasizing whiteness as a matter of scientific knowledge/power, this book alternately draws from, extends, or departs from these studies, with attention to their varying engagements with theorizing indigeneity and settler colonialism.⁷³ The structural forms of whiteness and white supremacy in my analysis are not reducible to a set of phenotypes or group identity labels such as *haole*.⁷⁴ *Haole* is a word commonly used to

describe white people in Hawai'i, which can be merely descriptive or hold a pejorative implication, though its original meaning is simply "foreigner." This book is not about the history of the development of haole identity, but about the racial discourses haole settlers used to dispossess Native Hawaiians and other Polynesian peoples. I approach whiteness, after Rey Chow's description, as a historically and geographically changing, "ascendant" ideology, folding peoples into it, encouraging peoples to identify with the power/knowledge of whiteness even when they are individually excluded from identifying as white.⁷⁵

Settler possession of indigeneity through whiteness is an oft-overlooked foundation of the legal protection of "whiteness as property," in the well-known formulation by Cheryl Harris.⁷⁶ Harris argues that the privileges of whiteness have historically been constructed as a kind of privilege-laden property that white people own and that the law acts to defend. Harris points out that white people are able to control whiteness as property, but Indigenous peoples or Black people who can at times "pass" as white have no equivalent control over their own identity.⁷⁷ As Harris puts it, this is "trespassing," because performing whiteness is not the same as owning it permanently. Performing whiteness requires sacrifice and, indeed, accepting the daily "risk of self-annihilation."⁷⁸ There is no guaranteed future in performing whiteness this way because those who pass do not have "continued control" over whiteness as ownable, permanent property. Indigenous peoples also at times "trespass" on the property of whiteness in similarly damaging ways. But because indigeneity, as a natural claim to a place, is desirable within a settler colonial context (in contrast to blackness, which is defined as a negative opposite to whiteness), white people also routinely attempt to "pass" as Indigenous. I mean this not only in the sense of "playing Indian," but in a deeper identificatory process in which white settlers feel a natural ownership of a place. Within the structure of settler colonialism, this type of passing is far from risky—rather than "self-annihilation," possessing indigeneity is in fact a form of self-actualization for white settlers. In short, white settlers in Polynesia use this form of passing to steal Indigenous land and power.

My approach to whiteness and settler colonialism builds on other accounts in Indigenous studies, notably including Indigenous Australian scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson's work. Moreton-Robinson argues that patriarchal whiteness operates through "possessive logics" that are "underpinned by an excessive desire to invest in reproducing and reaffirming the nation-state's ownership, control and domination."⁷⁹ Her attention to these possessive

logics in law, such as Native title law in Australia, provides invaluable analysis for understanding deeply rooted ideologies about settler colonial nation-states as naturally white. Where Moreton-Robinson's scholarship locates the foundations of whiteness largely in early settler accounts such as Captain Cook's declaration of Australia as *terra nullius* (empty land) and in settler state law, this book turns to the construction of race and whiteness in the history of Western social and genetic sciences, as well as law and art. Whereas in the context of Australia, Indigenous people have been constructed as black in stark distinction to white settlers, in Polynesia, the racial construction of Indigenous peoples is in closer proximity to whiteness. While these racial constructions are superficially distinct and opposing (Aboriginal Australians as black and Polynesians as almost white), both are simultaneously structured by antiblack and anti-Indigenous settler colonial ideologies.

Antiblackness is generally under-theorized in critiques of settler colonialism, but it is central to my theory of settler colonialism as buoyed by a logic of possession through whiteness.⁸⁰ By antiblackness, I mean antiblack racism as it is globally, structurally embedded in societies, economies, laws, and ideologies, exposing people who are Black or read as black to what Ruthie Gilmore has succinctly described as "vulnerability to premature death."⁸¹ In the context of the history of Oceania, "black" as an identity either imposed or self-attributed most often refers to Melanesians and/or Aboriginal Australians, both of whom, in the Western imagination, formed the contrasting image to the ideal of Polynesians as white. Tracey Banivanua-Mar describes Melanesianism as "the historical notion that Melanesians, or Kanakas, were essentially driven and motivated by the base instincts of tribalism, primitivism, and savage violence . . . an idea that dehistoricized people's physical actions and essentialized Islanders' violence in a way that displaced it from its social context."⁸²

Deeming Melanesians black and irrationally violent served Western purposes in many ways, perhaps most obviously in the forced labor practice of so-called blackbirding. About sixty thousand Melanesians were kidnapped, coerced, or otherwise forced into laboring on plantations in Queensland, Australia, from 1863 to 1906, and at least twenty-two thousand Melanesians were similarly forced into labor on plantations in Fiji in this period. While seemingly distant and largely taking place after the legal end of slavery in the United States, the United States played a role in these forced labors. Gerald Horne, for example, analyzes post-Civil War U.S. complicity with British and other European blackbirders in Fiji, showing how white U.S.

settlers in Fiji and Australia brought antiblack and white supremacist ideologies with them to the Pacific.⁸³

While this book does not focus on the history of Melanesia directly, these racial discourses that Banivanua-Mar and Horne trace in relation to Melanesians as black, primitive, and violent are a constant counterpart to the logic of possession through whiteness that I analyze in the history of racial constructions of Polynesians. Against the lofty ideal of Polynesians having an ancestral Aryan genealogy and therefore holding kinship with white settlers, in practice Polynesians were always subject to binary classification as either a “true” Polynesian who was conditionally Caucasian, or a false Polynesian whose primitive habits and dark skin placed them more solidly with the Melanesian “type.” In fact, Polynesians were, on occasion, also blackbirded. Matt Matsuda describes, for example, how the Rapa Nui people were forced to work in guano mines in Peru from 1862 to 1864, doing work that was so deadly that 90 percent of them perished.⁸⁴

Given such histories, this book demonstrates that the relations between indigeneity and blackness are deeply bound, not just comparable as similar but distinct categories. They are, as scholars like to say, “mutually constitutive,” but I attempt to show in this book how that does not simply mean that Melanesians and Polynesians are represented as eternal, static opposites. Rather, periodically or even regularly, Polynesians can fail to live up to their supposed conditional whiteness and then be treated as degenerate, black, primitive—all characteristics that in the Oceanic context of imperialism and colonialism are coded as Melanesian, and in Hawai‘i and other U.S.-dominated islands can additionally be coded as African American. Within both Polynesian and Melanesian groupings, white settlers could create hierarchies that elevated some Polynesians or Melanesians over the rest, labeling certain Polynesians “black,” or those deemed relatively advanced among Melanesians as “relatively civilized.”

These contingent valuations could be internalized by Polynesian peoples, giving rise to a kind of Polynesian exceptionalism, wherein Polynesian peoples invest in the idea that Polynesians (or their specific ethnic group such as Kānaka Maoli, Sāmoan, Tongan, or Māori) are better than Melanesians and Micronesians. I discuss the complications of such internalized Polynesian exceptionalism throughout the book. On the other hand, there are also many notable cases in which Polynesians have identified explicitly as Black in order to signal both an anticolonial stance distinguishing Polynesians from white settlers and a meaningful solidarity with Black people from other colonial contexts, including Melanesians but also Africans and

the African diaspora in the Americas. Robbie Shilliam, for example, examines how Māori in Aotearoa “grounded” with Rastafari and the Black Panthers in the 1960s and 1970s, forming a powerful activist movement under the banner of the Polynesian Panthers.⁸⁵ Nitasha Sharma further analyzes the solidarities between African Americans and Native Hawaiians in Hawai‘i.⁸⁶ In some contexts, then, Polynesians have explicitly responded to the logic of possession through whiteness by investing in identities that emphasize both blackness and indigeneity as global forms of solidarity among colonized peoples. Such examples are hopeful demonstrations that these community divisions are not inevitable, and that actions challenging imposed colonial ideologies about race can work.

Further, we can see elements of a racial triangulation when we consider other immigrant populations in Oceania—primarily Asian immigrants. Yet this triangulation is also more complicated than simply assigning Asian immigrants an intermediate place in the preexisting black/white, Indigenous/settler binary. I argue in this book that white settlers used the presence of Asian immigrants in Hawai‘i, particularly Chinese immigrants, many of whom found success as small business owners in the Hawaiian Kingdom and Territory of Hawai‘i, as evidence that Hawai‘i was whitening. While Chinese were not viewed as white, they were also, in the minds of haole settlers, not Native Hawaiian and not black. As I discuss in chapter 3, white social scientists would take the presence of Chinese and other Asian immigrants, and especially their intermarrying with Native Hawaiians, as proof of a uniquely American melting pot transforming Hawai‘i into a multicultural society that nonetheless adhered to white norms.

In the Hawaiian context, important coalitions have formed between Native Hawaiians and Asian Americans. A recent formation of self-identified “Asian settler scholars” including Candace Fujikane, Jonathan Okamura, and Dean Saranillio, have theorized Asian settler colonialism as a framework to grapple with the ways that Asian Americans have participated in settling Hawai‘i and naturalizing American occupation.⁸⁷ I say “Asian American” here to make clear that these scholars are largely ones who in other contexts may identify as Asian American (that is, people who have Asian ancestry but were largely born and raised in the United States) and/or consider themselves part of Asian American studies as a field, but it is notable and instructive that these scholars emphasize “Asian settler” as their connecting force, not Asian American. There is much to unpack in that choice of term, but I read it as a critique of the way the identity Asian American can erase both differences within the label and complicity with

settler colonialism more broadly. It is also consistent with the ways that Asian American holds less salience in the Hawaiian context, where people have often identified with specific ethnic identities rather than with Asian American as an umbrella term. Perhaps most notably, the choice to not identify with the “American” in Asian American appears to be a purposeful reorientation of those with Asian heritage to see themselves in relationship to Native Hawaiians and the Hawaiian Kingdom, rather than only in relation to the U.S. nation-state. For indeed, in contrast to histories that laud the first generations of Japanese and Chinese plantation workers as the foundation for the contemporary Asian American middle class in Hawai‘i, these scholars seek to reposition themselves and their communities outside of U.S. national frames and within a squarely settler colonial one.⁸⁸ While criticism of the term *Asian settler* has denounced the potential for lumping Asians and Asian Americans along with white settlers into a category starkly opposed to Native Hawaiians, the Asian settler scholars repeatedly position their critiques as ones that do not seek to reproach Asian Americans in Hawai‘i for their presence there but rather to challenge Asian American affiliations with the U.S. nation-state.

The usage of “Asian settler” is therefore not a determination that Asian immigrants are exactly the same as white settlers in Hawai‘i, but rather that ideologically Asian Americans have also been placed in proximity to whiteness in the United States, and are working to undo the ways that this positioning invites violence against Asians and Asian Americans. The model minority myth, Victor Bascara writes, trots Asian Americans out as “miracle synthetic white people.”⁸⁹ Of course, there are nuances within the incredibly broad label of Asian American. Historically, Filipinos in Hawai‘i, for example, have always had much less capital and been much more distanced from whiteness than Japanese and Chinese Americans. Not being able to assume that synthetic whiteness in any secure, consistent way, however, puts Asian Americans in a similar if incommensurable position to Native Hawaiians in respect to whiteness. Each group is engaged in the project of America by being possessed through whiteness, while they themselves are not fully extended the possession of whiteness. Nonetheless, many Chinese and Japanese Americans in Hawai‘i have secured middle-class or higher status. So too, international Chinese and Japanese investors continue to buy a large proportion of Hawaiian real estate, while Native Hawaiians continue to fall to the bottom of most socioeconomic scales and increasingly make up a majority of Hawai‘i’s growing homeless population. This incommensurability is what Asian settler colonialism attempts

to acknowledge and work to change. I further engage with the theoretical and political possibilities of Asian settler colonialism in chapters 3 and 6, in relation to the history of the ideal of Hawai'i as a melting pot and the problematic Asian American use of *Hapa*, a Hawaiian word meaning "part," and commonly used as a self-identification of mixed-race Native Hawaiians to foreground their Native Hawaiian ancestry.

TRACING POSSESSION THROUGH WHITENESS:
METHODS AND STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Words and discourses do not exist separate from us, but infiltrate and shape the intimate and public spaces we live in. This wisdom is encompassed in the 'ōlelo no'eau (proverb), "i ka 'ōlelo ke ola, i ka 'ōlelo ka make" (in words is the power of life and death).⁹⁰ This book applies discourse analysis to Western social scientific literature about Polynesians from the mid-nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century, as well as to more contemporary constructions of race in law, genetics, and visual representation. Discourse analysis of social scientific studies may sound rather dry and irrelevant to the daily lives of Polynesian peoples, and indeed, such texts are, by design, often abstract and removed from community concerns. My attention to the power of social scientific studies, in concert with law and popular culture, throughout this book follows the principle in Hawaiian epistemology that words and language (and by extension, discourses, which encompass words, representations, practices—specific modes of knowing) are powerful, with the ability to give and take life.

Indeed, this book is attentive to the power of discourse to bring about material, corporeal changes. I often employ the analytic of possession through whiteness through the metaphor of haunting, particularly the haunting of Polynesian bodies by the deep legacies of Western knowledge production about Polynesian whiteness. This colonial, racial knowledge as a discourse was always forcibly enacted on Polynesians. Rather than a distanced, historical, literary, or visual studies approach, conceiving of possession through whiteness with attention to the body and the corporeal reminds me of the many ways this knowledge is violently embodied, attached to people with devastating consequences, as in blood quantum designations and legislation, as I examine in chapter 4, or inevitably overlaying the erotic image of the hula girl onto an actual Native Hawaiian woman, as I examine in chapters 3 and 6.

These issues are constantly present, and deeply felt, in my own life as a Native Hawaiian woman. Yet the force of Western scientific constructions

of Polynesian race and gender are not and never have been totalizing. Possession, in whatever its supernatural, scientific, legal, and/or other imperial forms, is unstable and never quite complete. Possession is nine-tenths of the law, as the popular maxim goes, but the one-tenth matters in sometimes surprisingly substantial ways. Science fiction portrayals of demonic or other kinds of possession, for example, enjoy showing the always-shifting battles between an occupying spirit and its unwilling host. Following these ideas about possession, this book is attentive to the instability and specificities of the discourse of Polynesians as almost white across time and place, especially through the many ways that Native Hawaiians and other Polynesians have refused to be wholly possessed by settler colonialism. In the acknowledgment that words can hold life and death, there is also an acknowledgment in Hawaiian epistemology that you always have a regenerative power to write, sing, or chant back.⁹¹ The discourse of the almost white Polynesian race must be exposed, overturned, and thoroughly exorcised. Accordingly, I understand the words I offer here and the words and actions of other Polynesian peoples I highlight to be part of what ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui has identified as a “hulihia discourse of ‘Ōiwi agency” that counters and overturns settler rhetoric, while developing its own.⁹²

In a similar vein, Nyong’o argues: “Race is a theory of history, so exposing its historicity will trouble its foundations and foreground its assumptions regarding time and temporality.”⁹³ Exposing the historicity of the Western construction of the Polynesian race is the task I take up in part I of *Possessing Polynesians*, “The Polynesian Problem: Scientific Production of the ‘Almost White’ Polynesian Race.” These chapters examine Western scientific studies of the Polynesian race from the nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries, where the logics of seeing Polynesians as simultaneously “Caucasoid” and as racially mixed developed, especially in studies based in Hawai‘i. The use of Hawai‘i as a social scientific model for supposed racial harmony before and after World War II is a central concern, especially in chapter 3, where I consider the ways that the sociological theory of Hawai‘i as a racial melting pot was premised on the assimilation of Asians and Native Hawaiians into whiteness. Though the chapters of part I are roughly chronological, their goal is less to provide a comprehensive narrative history of all ideas about race in the Pacific than to show how settler colonial ideologies about Polynesian almost whiteness developed thematically, from the representation of Polynesians as Aryan “heirlooms of the past,” to the physical anthropological theories of Polynesians as “conditionally Caucasian,” and, finally, to the sociological construction of Polynesians

blending into a whitening melting pot. All of these ideologies are underpinned by enduring logics that allowed white settlers to write themselves into Polynesian pasts and futures.

Part II of *Possessing Polynesians*, “Regenerative Refusals: Confronting Contemporary Legacies of the Polynesian Problem in Hawai‘i and Oceania,” considers how the histories of part I continue to haunt the present by examining ongoing challenges Native Hawaiians and other Polynesians face in law, popular representation, and science. Mirroring many of the concerns of part I, part II demonstrates that the logic of possession through whiteness, though generated in sciences that are now often spoken of as debunked pseudosciences, is still very much alive in the structure of settler colonialism in Polynesia. Chapter 4, for instance, examines echoes of the eugenic construction of the “Pure” and “Part” Hawaiian in internal and external battles over legal recognition for Native Hawaiians. In the interplay between parts I and II, *Possessing Polynesians* impresses upon its readers that the role of science in constructions of race cannot be too easily dismissed or limited to the “bad” science of the past, but that both past and ongoing scientific projects naturalize white settlement of the Pacific, constructing Indigenous Pacific Islanders as almost-white relics rather than complex and contemporary Indigenous peoples.

The inclusion of historical and contemporary analysis is essential to this book because to many Polynesians, these histories are not over. This interdisciplinary approach enriches existing scholarship on the history of science in the Pacific. While largely overlooked in the U.S. academy, the history of the Polynesian Problem and the imposed white/black divide between Polynesia and Melanesia is well documented and described by European and Australian historians.⁹⁴ However, these studies focus on the history of European colonialism largely without engaging the scholarship of Indigenous Pacific Islanders or Indigenous studies, which has grown enormously in the past few decades.⁹⁵ This book covers some of the same ground as historians such as Bronwen Douglas, K. R. Howe, and Nicholas Thomas, but with a different purpose. I focus on unraveling the logic of possession through whiteness for the benefit of contemporary Indigenous peoples. This research is oriented by Polynesian epistemologies that value learning from both distant and more immediate ancestors, often metaphorically described as envisioning the future by walking forward into the past. Accordingly, part I’s focus on the past is not intended to be an immersion in historical trauma and damage, but rather a caring, critical assessment of what needs to be done today to regenerate vibrant Polynesian futures.