

INTRODUCTION

HAWAI‘I IS MY HAVEN

Field Notes, August 2009

I met E, a Black nurse from Mississippi, for our interview during her lunch break in the courtyard of Queen’s Hospital in Honolulu. She said, “Hawai‘i is my haven. It’s beautiful: the ocean, the beach, the mountains, and mostly the people feel aloha, the spirits. . . . It feels like in Hawai‘i you can escape your Blackness.”

“Haven.” “Sanctuary.” “Reprieve.” These are the words Black residents use to describe Hawai‘i. They also experience racism, ostracism, and erasure. I illustrate this duality of Black life in Hawai‘i through the life stories and experiences of hundreds of people of African descent. They include locals who were born and raised in the Hawaiian Islands as well as transplants, like the nurse Ellen, identified as “E” in my field notes, who moved here as adults. The title of this book came from my conversation with Ellen, whom I interviewed in 2009 (just my second interview of the project). While I have stayed in touch with her over the past decade (she read my work and let me identify her), it was only years later that I learned that Ellen had won one of the largest damage awards in an employment discrimination case in the Islands (figure INT.1).¹ When she mentioned her troubling encounters with fellow nurses at our initial interview, she had confided in me, saying, “It’s good to speak to another minority that understands.” Ellen personifies the irony of attempting to “escape” one’s Blackness—or, rather, escape denigrating ideas about Blackness—while facing antiBlack racism in a place of sanctuary.

Jury awards former Queen's nurse \$3.8 million in lawsuit

Ellen Harris filed a lawsuit in 2013 against Queen's Medical Center, claiming racial discrimination and retaliation after she reported multiple patient safety issues..



Former Queen's Medical Center nurse, Ellen Harris was awarded more than \$3.8 million in damages by a circuit court jury, on Wednesday.

Figure INT.1 Ellen Harris, a Black nurse, in 2018 won one of the largest damages awards for employment discrimination in Hawai'i. Source: KITV Island News.

Hawai'i Is My Haven is the first ethnography of Hawai'i's Black civilian residents—a population virtually absent in the popular and scholarly imagination of the Pacific, with the exception of former President Barack Obama. “You can’t really understand Barack until you understand Hawai’i,” says Michelle Obama.² The former president concurred that the Islands shaped him when he explained, “No place else . . . could have provided me with the environment, the climate, in which I could not only grow but also get a sense of being loved. There is no doubt that the residue of Hawai’i will always stay with me, and that it is part of my core, and that what’s best in me, and what’s best in my message, is consistent with the tradition of Hawai’i.”³

Yet in his memoir, Obama also describes the racism he faced growing up in Honolulu.⁴ Like almost one-fourth of the population of Hawai’i, Obama is multiracial, representing the almost 50 percent of Hawai’i’s Black residents

who identified as more than one race on the 2010 census.⁵ Black locals, or African-descended people who are born and raised in the Islands like Obama, often do not have access to Black communities in contrast to Black transplants who move to the Islands as adults from elsewhere, including members of the US armed forces. Raised within nonBlack families, it is their local Hawaiian and Asian community members who inform their feelings of belonging.

Black residents, both local and transplant, are a present absence: although more Black people live in Hawai‘i than Sāmoans, who have a significant local imprint, few people recognize them. Hawai‘i is at once a site of proliferating Blackness, through the popular local adoption of Black culture, and of Black absence, which includes the denial of the Black civilians who live among us. This absence is due both to the reduced *salience* of Blackness in the Islands, referred to in Ellen’s discussion of “escape,” and to the displacement of Black people onto the continental United States.

Contesting their erasure, Hawai‘i’s Black residents were impossible to ignore during the marches, rallies, and vigils held across the Islands in honor of George Floyd, an African American man who was murdered by a Minneapolis police officer, Derek Chauvin, on May 25, 2020. Among the attendees at local events were Black transplants who remarked on this unique moment of potential social transformation. In response to a youth-organized “Hawai‘i for Black Lives” march on June 6, 2020, which drew nearly ten thousand people to the state capitol building, retired professor and Morehouse College graduate Robert Steele reflected, “One of the unique things not only here but nationally or internationally is how [rally organizers] hold a demonstration. The whole movement is so ethnically diverse. In fact, the majority of participants are people of color, which is so gratifying.”⁶ A Black man from Georgia who attended an event a week earlier at Magic Island in Honolulu that drew around two hundred people to memorialize Floyd highlighted Hawai‘i’s uniqueness: “This is a fantasy to me, people of different hues, different backgrounds all together,” he said. “This is how it should be.”⁷

The realities of racism, however, cloud sunny depictions of Hawai‘i as a multicultural and harmonious society. A Black Hawaiian community organizer, Shayna Lonoaea-Alexander, told a reporter that “a lot of folks believe that because Hawai‘i is a melting pot that anti-blackness doesn’t exist here. . . . Anti-blackness and racism exists in Hawai‘i and it’s unacceptable and it’s on all of us to fight for Hawai‘i, to fight for a country where being black isn’t a death sentence.”⁸ Dr. Akiemi Glenn, a Black transplant to Hawai‘i, explains in a June 2020 interview at the height of protests,



Figure INT.2 *All Colors Are in This Together. #blacklivesmatter.* The Maui surfer, Roderick Nathan, holds a surfboard commemorating George Floyd during a paddle out in honor of Black men and women murdered by the police. Photo by Conan Gentil, May 31, 2020.

In addition to watching the stuff that's happening in North America over the last week, we're . . . grappling with the blatant and often unrecognized antiBlackness that's a part of Hawai'i culture. I'd be remiss to talk about what's happening in North America without also contextualizing threats that have been made against Black people even . . . here in Hawai'i. . . . As people here have been organizing vigils and demonstrations and socially distanced gatherings, there have also been calls for nonBlack locals to come and keep an eye on us to make sure that we don't become violent.⁹

Glenn, the cofounder and executive director of the Pōpolo Project, an organization documenting Black life in the Pacific, deciphers these responses as local adoptions of antiBlack racism: "So even though we live here and we are part of this community, there's still this suspicion of criminality that's associated with any kind of Black people and Black gatherings."¹⁰

Hawai'i's Black population faces global antiBlack racism and local erasure simultaneously. On the one hand, locals presume that the Black people they encounter in Hawai'i are temporarily stationed in the Islands as part of the US military, and thus as agents of state power. On the other hand, local and tourist framings of the Islands as devoid of Black civilians allow this place to imagine itself as free from the racial problems that beleaguer the United States.¹¹ As a result, Black locals appear an oxymoron, an impossibility. Speaking of sentiments expressed by Black community members in Hawai'i surrounding weeks of activism in response to George Floyd's murder, Glenn explains, "Many folks are feeling very tired. . . . But what I think that tiredness is about is that exhaustion comes with constantly having to explain yourself and your humanity. And for many Black locals, having to explain that we live here, and that we are part of this community" and "part of the local people."¹² Black people are not considered to be from the Islands but rather are an ignored minority in a mostly nonWhite place. It is more the case that Blackness has been adopted by Pacific Islanders who embrace Black cultural forms, such as reggae and Rastafarianism, and Black politics, including the ideologies of the Black Panthers expressed by the Polynesian Panthers in Aotearoa/New Zealand, without concrete reference to or knowledge about the African diaspora. This reduction of Blackness to culture and ideology results in the excision of actual African-descended people from our local and scholarly understanding of Hawai'i.

The prioritization of frameworks of culture and ethnicity in tourism, local discourse, and research on Hawai'i contributes to the erasure of Hawai'i's Black civilians. Without an analysis of *race*, we cannot understand, or even see, Black life in the Pacific. In a June 2018 interview during one of her visits to

Hawai‘i, the cofounder of the Black Lives Matter movement Patrisse Khan-Cullors stated:

Black struggles and freedom struggles, in particular, have had such an important impact on the globe. Everywhere I go, Black Lives Matter is understood as part of a long legacy, a movement, of Black people trying to fight for our freedom. It doesn’t always mean that it’s going to translate into a particular place. . . . *Maybe Black Lives Matter doesn’t make sense here, but maybe the conversation about Blackness makes sense here.* And how do we translate that. . . . Let’s talk about Blackness and its relationship to our context [in Hawai‘i], not Black Lives Matter in the US. (italics added)¹³

Khan-Cullors’s sentiment that Black Lives Matter may not “translate” or “make sense” in Hawai‘i is uncanny in light of the protests during the summer of 2020. Her comments illustrate the widespread erasure of Black residents described by Glenn. Discussions of Blackness in Hawai‘i before 2020 and even during these international uprisings pivoted to Melanesians, anti-Micronesian racism in Hawai‘i, and reflections on the widespread adoption of reggae and hip hop. Few acknowledge the presence of Black people living within these communities, except for Black community leaders like Joy Enomoto, an artist and activist who is Black, Asian, and Hawaiian, and Akiemi Glenn, a Black, Asian, and Native American linguist with genealogical ties to the areas now known as North Carolina and Virginia. They have both been called on to “translate” the importance of the recent Black protests taking place across the nation to the Hawai‘i context.

I join these efforts to address Khan-Cullors’s call for a conversation about the value of Black life in the Pacific by providing the necessary context: mapping the histories, lives, and politics of Black people in Hawai‘i. To realize the potential of solidarity that Khan-Cullors, a queer Black woman artist, organizer, and freedom fighter, hopes for requires us to address locally specific tensions that stall Black and Hawaiian comradeship.¹⁴ Khan-Cullors’s travels across the Pacific led her to recognize the intersection of race and indigeneity. She observes, “Hawai‘i has always been an interesting place for me when I think about indigeneity and Black Indigeneity in particular. . . . I’ve learned much more about colonialism in Hawai‘i and the US military’s impact here in Hawai‘i and the kind of role Black Lives Matter has the opportunity of playing when it comes to having a broader conversation about globalization and a broader conversation about solidarity work.”¹⁵ In the Islands, the local context necessary for understanding the particular contours of Black life includes its colonial history, military occupation, and Asian settler colonialism. This



Figure INT.3 Dr. Akiemi Glenn, executive director of the Pōpolo Project. Photo by Michael McDermott.

setting informs clashing ideas about what issues matter locally and how best to go about addressing them—dynamics that shape Black and Hawaiian relations.

Some of the tensions framing relationships between Black and Hawaiian people convened around two movements that reached a crescendo in 2020, both of which I consider to be struggles for liberation: the Movement for Black Lives against police brutality and Kānaka (Native Hawaiians, or Hawaiians) self-determination represented by the *kiaʻi*, or Native Hawaiian protectors. The *kiaʻi* stationed on Maunakea, a mountain of ancestral significance that has also been claimed as a site for astronomy, have mobilized to stop the desecration of their land proposed by the construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope.¹⁶ Earning global support, the protectors went to the mountain on the Big Island of Hawaiʻi to disrupt a planned groundbreaking ceremony on October 14, 2014. Hawaiian activists, including the *kūpuna* (elders), have since camped out in the cold and faced arrest while successfully blocking the ongoing march of the settler state’s attempt to bulldoze Hawaiians’ rights to make decisions about their land.¹⁷

Native Hawaiian activists have been guided by their *kuleana* (rights and responsibilities) and the practice of *kapu aloha*, or “the commitment to non-violent direct action” that fosters “compassion and respect while engaged in politicized expressions of outrage and disobedience.”¹⁸ The same principles of *kuleana* and *kapu aloha* guide the protests against antiBlack racism in Hawaiʻi. More often, however, locals frame the struggle for Kānaka self-determination on the one hand and the desire for the recognition of Black humanity on the other hand to be discrete and contestatory aims. More concerning, when African-descended people in Hawaiʻi do voice their concerns in ways informed by a legacy of Black struggle, other locals dismiss their problems and disparage their strategies as not representative of “*aloha*.” The Hawaiʻi reporter Anita Hofschneider reflected on this contradictory response to Black and Hawaiian activism: “Social media posts also compared violent protests [against police violence] on the continent with peaceful Native Hawaiian protests in Hawaii against the Thirty Meter Telescope on Mauna Kea.”¹⁹ She interviewed the Black Hawaiian organizer Shayna Lonoaea-Alexander, who explained, “There’s a lot of online discourse right now around Kanaka (Native Hawaiians) trying to police the way black folks are grieving and protesting and I think it’s so unacceptable,” she says, speaking of the depiction of Black protest as “violent.”²⁰ Lonoaea-Alexander calls out the lack of reciprocity between Hawaiian and Black activists, saying, “We asked the world to stand with us [Hawaiians] (on Mauna Kea) and I think that the world really responded but when black folks

are asking it's a different story. . . . I'm tired of people who look like my dad or my brother or my sister being killed."²¹

Despite these divisions, the Movement for Black Lives and *kia'i* protecting the Mauna against desecration are fighting against the same sources of oppression: state-sanctioned violence, racism, and colonialism. The police enforce the White supremacist settler state even when the officers are nonWhite and are even one's family members, as they often are in Hawai'i. By extending themselves to learn about Black struggles, two Hawaiian collectives cultivating Hawaiian knowledge and fighting for Indigenous self-determination, Pu'u honua o Pu'u huluhulu and the Hawai'i Unity & Liberation Institute (HULI), issued a "Joint Statement of Solidarity for the Protection of Black Lives" on June 5, 2020. The statement proclaimed their solidarity with Black communities fighting against police violence:

While we share in histories of oppression and colonialism, we recognize and understand that our lived experience is not the same as the Black experience in America and we refuse to use Kapu Aloha to judge their response to struggle for survival. We acknowledge with great pride and humility the influence that black struggle has had on the Hawaiian movement and political consciousness and call upon the lāhui (Hawaiian Nation) to learn about the relationship between black and Hawaiian struggle.²²

The statement frames Black and Hawaiian people, experiences, and politics as distinct and calls for Kānaka to learn about their political cross-fertilization. They also recognize "our Black Hawaiian relatives," people whose voices I center in this ethnography: "Anti-blackness is a problem in our communities, and we must work to understand the many forms that it takes in Hawai'i. We must address this issue together and commit to stand as *kia'i* (protectors) against anti-blackness and racism," the statement urges.

This book offers a framework for understanding these discussions that acknowledge agency and oppression. *Hawai'i Is My Haven* maps the context and contours of Black life in Hawai'i that frame relationships among people in the Islands. It centers both Black locals and Black transplants to Hawai'i who encounter a life of integration and invisibility. My focus on Black residents includes Black Hawaiians, or the children of Black and Native Hawaiian parents, who do not abide by either the local Hawai'i or North American academic framing of Black and Indigenous people as disparate groups living in distinct geographies and advocating divergent politics. The kuleana of Hawai'i residents to urgently address antiBlack racism and Indigenous self-determination

in a settler state is clear in the current predicament of Black residents. Akiemi Glenn expresses the specific needs of Hawai‘i’s Black residents during a period of mourning in the summer of 2020: “Of course, we are feeling the ‘eha (hurt, pain) and the heaviness of what’s happening in North America very much, but we also love Hawai‘i and will behave accordingly as we are grieving.”²³

Black people grieve in a place they may consider their haven and sanctuary, far from the Middle Passage and the Black Atlantic.²⁴ Black transplants grew up in Black communities, and their perspectives are informed by the history of slavery and antiBlack racism. Their worldviews are challenged in the Black Pacific, where Indigenous epistemologies and local cultural practices take precedence. They are part of a two-centuries-long lineage of Black arrivals who have experienced historical acceptance and integration into Hawaiian society. This is what shapes a sense of optimism and possibility for African-descended people, notably personified by Obama. However, Black residents, both locals and transplants, also trouble this positive depiction through their accounts of invisibility and experiences with antiBlack racism in contemporary Hawai‘i. Shifting the focus from what is exceptional about Obama, I ask, What alternative to elsewhere, and particularly the continental United States, does Hawai‘i provide to members of the African diaspora? How is it that Black civilians experience antiBlack racism yet nonetheless declare Hawai‘i to be their haven?

The Difference of Hawai‘i

[The Kingdom of Hawai‘i was] a neutral country, that sought to have friendly relations with countries throughout the world, that gave a home to people of multiple ethnicities that wanted to be here at a time when in other countries, they were enslaved.

NOELANI GOODYEAR-KA‘ŌPUA, 2018

I can remember when Hawai‘i became a state; I was just a little girl [in Alabama], and all the Black people were so excited. Because it was basically a nonWhite state. And we knew that. And so it was exciting that this kind of a thing could happen. [Us] not understanding all of the history, of course, and the dispossession and the overthrow—any of that. But it was just this model of equality, if you will, that was so incredible.

BLACK LONG-TERM RESIDENT

Hawai‘i, a place with no clear demographic majority, has been heralded as an ideal multicultural society because of its racial and ethnic diversity.²⁵ In his visit to the Islands in 1959, the year of statehood, Martin Luther King Jr. commended the Hawai‘i State Legislature: “I come to you with a great deal of appreciation, I should say, for what has been accomplished in this beautiful setting and in this beautiful state of our Union,” particularly, he noted, “in the area of racial harmony and racial justice.”²⁶ Today, nearly one in every two marriages is interracial or interethnic, resulting in a large number of multiracial people, at almost a quarter of the overall population. Of Hawai‘i’s 1.25 million residents, Asians make up 41 percent, Whites 24 percent, and Native Hawaiians approximately 20 percent.²⁷ Yet all this attention to Hawai‘i’s diversity curiously neglects a group so central to America’s understanding of itself: Black people.

Residents and representations of Hawai‘i remain silent on the question of its Black population, except for individuals in entertainment and politics.²⁸ They include Barack Obama, Janet Mock, and Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson—figures who are often read nationally as Black, but locally as multiracial. The invisibility of the Islands’ Black population in today’s scholarship on Hawai‘i and on the African diaspora, tourism literature, and local discourse could be due to Black people’s small demographics, at 3.5 percent in 2018. However, their population has increased every decade for the past eighty years.²⁹ The historical and current erasure of Black people is belied by their growth (a 16 percent increase in the last decade) and the prevalence of Black popular culture. Blindness to the contemporary presence of Black men and women mirrors a historical omission of what has been an almost 250-year-old story.³⁰

Subject to hyperbole, Hawai‘i is described by the popular press as “the most isolated population center on the face of the earth.”³¹ Indeed, it takes a five-hour flight to get to Hawai‘i from California, and almost nine hours from Japan. The Hawaiian Islands, in the center of the largest ocean on earth, consist of eight main islands: the Big Island of Hawai‘i, Kaua‘i, Maui, Lāna‘i, Kaho‘olawe, Moloka‘i, Ni‘ihau, and O‘ahu. O‘ahu, the site of this ethnography, houses the state capital of Honolulu, the Islands’ largest and most populated city, within which lies the tourist mecca of Waikiki. These islands, together with numerous other isles and atolls, appear discrete, reachable by airplane, boat, and canoe. Yet they form an archipelago united undersea by a volcano chain, and united politically between 1795 and 1810 by King Kamehameha I.

The Hawaiian scholar Ty Tengan summarizes, “Despite the establishment of a monarchy (1810) and international recognition of the Hawaiian Kingdom’s

independence (1843), the nation suffered an overthrow (1893) backed by the U.S. military and annexation (1898)—both done illegally.”³² After the 1893 coup against the reigning queen, President Cleveland admonished, “It appears that Hawaii was taken possession of by the United States forces without the consent or wish of the government of the islands. . . . Therefore the military occupation of Honolulu by the United States . . . was wholly without justification, either as an occupation by consent or as an occupation necessitated by dangers threatening American life and property.”³³ Congress refused the President’s orders to reinstate the Queen.

In light of this history and with respect for Hawaiian self-determination, I do not typify Hawai‘i as a state or conflate it with the rest of the United States. Rather, I refer to the continental United States or the contiguous forty-eight states (rather than “the mainland,” a term that decenters the Islands) in distinction to this unique site. Hawai‘i is a state that is not a state. It houses the US Indo-Pacific Command. It is a place illegally occupied by the United States. It is a site of active Indigenous resistance for an independent nation.

Whereas residents are profoundly aware of Hawai‘i’s colonial history of usurpation, scholars and the tourist industry advance representations of Hawai‘i as a site of exception, the epitome of a harmonious multicultural and multiracial society that forecasts national demographic changes. Social scientists affiliated with the Chicago school of sociology focused on its diversity, group relations, and mixed race marriages and their children to depict Hawai‘i as a “racial frontier.” The demographer and University of Chicago graduate Romanzo Adams came to O‘ahu in 1920 when the college became the University of Hawai‘i, and he founded the departments of sociology, economics, anthropology, and social work. Adams was followed by fellow Chicago graduates Andrew Lind (arriving in 1927 and retiring in 1967) and Robert Park (1931–1932), both of whom studied race and Island demographics.³⁴ Shelley Lee and Rick Baldoz review how these early social scientists conceived of Hawai‘i as “racial laboratory,” a “fascinating interracial experiment station,” whose study could “yield insights about racial dynamics and social change that might be brought to bear on understanding and solving race problems in other parts of the United States.”³⁵ Today, Hawai‘i’s demographics and multiculturalism continue to interest not only scholars but also mainstream Americans, whose perceptions of the isles are shaped by a tourism industry invested in obscuring its direct links to militarism, plantation histories, and the illegal overthrow of the monarchy. It is this history, however, that shapes the contours of Black life in Hawai‘i.

This history—including the absence of a slave past—plays out in contemporary group demographics and dynamics. The Black and White binary

is not primary; immigrants do not refer to Latinos (who constitute a full 10 percent of the population); disenfranchised groups include Hawaiians, Sāmoans, and Filipinos, as well as recent Micronesian immigrants; and local Chinese and Japanese, along with haole, or White people, have political and economic clout.³⁶ Rather than viewing the Black population as the primary native-born minority, locals consider them (along with Whites) to be sojourners, cultural outsiders, and part of an unwelcome military presence, or else athletes or reggae artists. The conception of Black people as arrivals from elsewhere and unfamiliar with local culture informs the subjectivities of Black transplants. They come mostly from the United States, but also from Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Caribbean, and find themselves to be just one among many nonWhite groups. In a similar reversal of their racialization in the continental United States, Asians are often presumed to be island-born residents who have created local culture through their linguistic, culinary, and other practices from the mid-nineteenth-century plantation times to the present. Much of this, along with the large mixed race population, marks Hawai‘i as exceptional.

Black life in Hawai‘i is exceptional as well, distinct from elsewhere. Black people made up 3.5 percent of Hawai‘i’s population in 2018, or 48,863 residents, making them the sixth-largest group, just after Chinese.³⁷ One-quarter of the Black population is Island born, with the rest coming mostly from the continental United States (5 percent are born abroad).³⁸ In a 2014 article in *Black Enterprise* crowning Hawai‘i the state with the highest Black household wealth, Kenneth Clark extols: “Topping our list is one of the most beautiful places created by God’s design. Better known as ‘Paradise,’ black residents who live in Hawaii make the most . . . at a whopping \$66,629.”³⁹ People of African descent also have the Islands’ highest rate of high school graduation and employment while being the “race least likely to be in poverty in Honolulu.”⁴⁰ What accounts for these economic opportunities and racial trends for Black residents? The answer partially rests in the institutions that bring them here.

The armed forces employ one-fifth of the entire Black population in Hawai‘i, who, along with their dependents, make the military the second biggest employer of Black residents. More than 30 percent of Black civilians are veterans.⁴¹ Thirty-three percent of Black residents work for the federal and state government.⁴² These statistics may account for why the Black online source TheRoot.com named Hawai‘i the “number one best state for Black people” in 2014.⁴³ Certainly, these figures reflect a version of Black success that some people may contrast with the rest of the nation. The conflation of “Black” with “military” is hegemonic in Hawai‘i; it is difficult to overstate its effect on all Black residents. At the same time, this conflation is historically

inaccurate and denies the realities of Black nonmilitary civilians. This ethnography expands the focus on Black soldiers in the Pacific to include Black locals, or Hawai‘i-born-and-raised people of African descent, who are mostly multiracial, primarily raised in nonBlack families, and occupy a range of class statuses.

Hawai‘i Is My Haven breathes life into these facts and figures, illustrating the contradictions of Hawai‘i as both a sanctuary and site of antiBlack racism. After all, Black residents pay the most for rent, work more hours than all other groups, and are the tenth-highest-paid group.⁴⁴ These figures do not relate what emerges as the central theme from my interviews with sixty African-descended locals and transplants: this predominantly nonWhite society with a significant Indigenous population moderates White racism and thus expands the opportunities for Black people.

An Ethnographic Account

This inaugural ethnography of Hawai‘i’s Black population—also the only ethnography of African American civilians in Oceania—draws from a decade of fieldwork to address two questions: What does the Pacific offer people of African descent? And what do Black transplants bring to Hawai‘i that leads to a deeper understanding of the Islands? Black locals recount how Blackness resonates differently—as both more expansive and less salient—than elsewhere, specifically the contiguous forty-eight states. Black transplants, on the other hand, bring with them a *racial lens*, or an analytical view that, in contrast to dominant representations of the Islands, both sees and dissects racism as a central component of local power dynamics. Transplants insist that a racial hierarchy prevails in this “Pacific paradise”—albeit, they find, not a Black and White one.

Hawai‘i offers an alternative to life otherwise: a society that prohibited slavery in the nineteenth century and a site of “less pressure” today.⁴⁵ Participants describe their relief from relentless structural, police, and class oppression and from what they describe as the expectations of “being Black” in their daily lives. Nonetheless, Black men and women living in Hawai‘i experience racism, within the intimacies of their homes and as they navigate the institutions that hire them. Whereas the general Island ethos amplifies cultural and ethnic differences to celebrate multiculturalism, Black people who move here highlight the vectors of racism that they confront. At the same time, the large Asian population, significant Indigenous presence, and notable Black absence confound them. Upon arrival, they see that in these Pacific islands, the targets of racism are not always Black, and the perpetrators are not always White.

A living contestation of White supremacy, Hawai‘i offers a contrast to US racial formations. For over two centuries, Black people have experienced integration and acceptance in Hawai‘i rather than segregation and systemic oppression. Black locals, who are raised in a place that lacks a large Black presence (or Black Metropolis)⁴⁶ and where nearly a quarter of people are multiracial, offer a different orientation to debates about Blackness and multiracialism within African American studies and mixed race studies. This place has been home to generations of island-born people of African descent, from the children of Cape Verdean mariners’ unions with Hawaiian women in the early nineteenth century to the people I interviewed who have Black fathers and Hawaiian, Korean, and other nonWhite mothers. Rather than signaling the end of racism or upholding the sociological fantasy of Hawai‘i as a “fascinating interracial experiment,” Black multiracial people in Hawai‘i emerge from the entangled tentacles of oppression.⁴⁷ These processes, including colonization, dispossession, exploitation, disenfranchisement, racism, and militarism, shape the lives and perspectives of Hawai‘i’s Black civilians.

The historical scholarship on this population is scant, based largely on nineteenth-century missionary and shipping archives. In other words, much of it comes from European and American perspectives. Other work details the military history in the Pacific with a focus on World War II, which created a diaspora of African American soldiers—and their children—across Oceania, from Hawai‘i to Sāmoa, from New Hebrides to New Caledonia. Important exceptions include the narratives of women scholars and artists of African and Pacific Islander descent, including Teresia Teaiwa, Courtney-Savali Andrews, and Joy Enomoto.⁴⁸ Important recent scholarship on Hawai‘i draws from Hawaiian language sources;⁴⁹ however, in centering Hawaiian-haole relations and Asian plantation histories, they have not looked for Black figures before the twentieth century. Twentieth-century sociologists, demographers, historians, and Black scholars living in Hawai‘i provide the most relevant studies, but none charts the *lives* of Hawai‘i’s Black population.

Linking the current civilian presence to Hawai‘i’s history expands our understanding of the Islands beyond multiculturalism and the armed forces. Encounters between Black people from elsewhere and those from the Islands highlight locals’ (including Black locals’) unawareness about the history and concerns of the African diaspora. As a result, this expanded knowledge provides people of African descent with a location and sense of belonging. At the same time, Hawai‘i and its residents offer African Americans and other members of the African diaspora ways of thinking about the self that decenter “Middle Passage epistemologies,” which, according to Michelle Wright, follow a

“linear progress narrative” that fixes the Middle Passage as definitive of Blackness.⁵⁰ I heed Wright’s call to look to examples that fall outside the “Africa to America” narrative. What happens over time—and sometimes quickly—is that people begin to foreground connective relationships to land, people, and ancestries in ways not determined by the boundaries and histories of White-ordained racial formation.

My articulation of the Black Pacific does not erase Native Hawaiians but rather engages them in their home, where African-descended people find themselves read through Native Hawaiians’ historical engagements with Blackness.⁵¹ This includes Hawaiians’ reverence for Pō (the generative darkness); haole missionaries’ historical transference of their ideas of Black inferiority onto Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiians); the European construct and ensuing Pacific Islander adoption of the colonial divisions of the Pacific, including Melanesians; and the global influence of Black expressive forms.⁵² (I use “Kanaka,” “Kanaka Maoli” (Kānaka, plural), and “Kanaka ‘Ōiwi” interchangeably with “Hawaiian” and “Native Hawaiian.” “Hawaiian” does not refer to everyone from the Islands (e.g., I say that I am from Hawai‘i, but I am not Hawaiian); it is not like calling someone a “New Yorker.” These terms refer only to the Indigenous people of Hawai‘i—to those with Hawaiian ancestry who are the descendants of the first inhabitants of the Hawaiian Islands.)⁵³ I add to these various layers and valences of Hawai‘i’s engagement with Blackness a missing component: the actual experiences of members of the African diaspora in the Pacific, Black people in the Hawaiian Islands.

This project speaks across the “studies”: it addresses debates between Black studies and critical mixed race studies (see my analysis of multiracialism in chapter 2); it brings Pacific Islands studies into conversation with Black studies (chapter 3); and most centrally, it addresses tense debates between Black and Native studies that center historical and political disputes (discussed at length in chapter 5). My ethnographic illustration of Black and Hawaiian encounters expands theories of (Asian) settler colonialism, Black agency and abjection, and the Black/White, local/nonlocal, and native/settler binaries—all more fully discussed across the chapters. Documenting daily life fleshes out, and in some cases directly contests, totalizing abstract theories of Black life and death, Native erasure, and frameworks that prioritize some forms of oppression over others. It also animates the Islands as more than a primarily Asian locale. This is not a binary analysis. Unlike many scholars of transpacific studies, I expand beyond the “cultures of the Asian diaspora” by stopping *in the Pacific*.⁵⁴ Additionally, whereas North American studies analyze triangulated Native-Black-settler (White) relations, Hawai‘i-based scholars analyze

the relationship of Native Hawaiian-Asian-haole triangulation. How do Black people emerge within this paradigm? How do they disrupt it? I theorize the relations between Hawaiians, Asians, and Black people while decentering haole.

Less studied—and the focus of my project—is the role of race and racism in Hawai‘i.⁵⁵ Members of the African diaspora illustrate how central these systems are to understanding life *for all people* in the Islands. Black transplants bring an explicitly racialized framework—a racial lens—to the Islands. Black Americans often grow up within a particular set of relations informed by the history of slavery, segregation, and antiBlack racism. This framework allows them to understand group dynamics through a continental US perspective that includes an awareness of the differential access to resources based on race. Along with a Black/White understanding of difference, they may advance the one-drop rule, or the rule of hypodescent, which states that if you have a “drop” of Black blood, you are (just) Black. At the same time, they also bring knowledge of counterhegemonic ideologies of Black resistance, cultural expressionism, and a deep sense of connectivity among members of the African diaspora. A racial lens includes an analysis of White supremacy and a deep awareness of the workings of racism that they see as crossing oceans to settle in a place where haole are not a majority. This perspective contests depictions of Hawai‘i as a “multiracial paradise,” challenging locals’ tendency to view racism as a problem that happens “over there,” as a problem only plaguing the continental United States. At the same time, Black transplants encounter a site of persistent Indigenous resistance against haole oppression—resistance they relate to and consider as a model for liberation. Local dynamics and Native politics reorient people who are used to understanding their position as oppressed within a Black and White binary.

The Black Pacific

“The Black Pacific,” a term used to describe the movements of African-descended people, aesthetics, and politics across Oceania, is a growing area of study generally attended to by historians.⁵⁶ Whereas the majority of the literature on the Black Pacific centers the military and reads Blackness as embodied by either Black American soldiers or else in reference to cultural and political formations (reggae, Black Power ideologies, and aesthetics), I center the lives of civilians who identify as Black and as members of the African diaspora. I use the Black Pacific as an ethnographic, conceptual, and geographic concept. The Black Pacific is descriptive—it includes my ethnographic charting of the daily lives of African-descended people in a Pacific site. It is geographical, focusing

on a place deemed “the most isolated place on earth” that is intimately tied to global imperial powers (the United States and Japan). It is contemporary, in contrast to studies fixated on World War II. And it is conceptual, offering a counterpoint to the Black Atlantic, bringing Pacific Islands studies into conversation with Black studies.

Scholars who use the term “the Black Pacific” include those who skip *over* the Pacific to speak about the Americas and Asia, including the study of African American men in East and Southeast Asia and other Afro-Asian projects.⁵⁷ In these works, as in much of transpacific studies, peoples and societies are evacuated from Oceania, which emerges as a vast, watery “flyover” expanse, a place not productive on its own. The Hawai‘i-based scholars Paul Lyons and Ty Tengan explain, “‘Asia-Pacific’ and the ‘Transpacific’ often sublate Pacific Island and Islander priorities within models that originate outside of the Islands.”⁵⁸ Engaging a Pacific society on its own terms involves grappling with a deeply local context.

An ethnography of the Black Pacific that centers people associated with transatlantic slavery brings the Black Atlantic theorized by Paul Gilroy into conversation with Pacific indigenities.⁵⁹ It thus contributes to research on the appeal of Black politics and aesthetics across Oceania, which includes Robbie Shilliam’s analysis of Rastafarianism in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Bernida Webb-Binder’s study of Black Pacific art in the United States and Aotearoa, and Gabriel Solis’s examination of music in Australia and Papua New Guinea, islands whose people have been considered Black.⁶⁰ Power is at play not only among Polynesians, Micronesians, and Melanesians but also within these categories of people as they consider notions of Whiteness and Blackness.

White colonizers parsed Pacific Islanders into a tripartite racial taxonomy of Melanesians, Polynesians, and Micronesians, informed by their encounter with Africa. Melanesians, so named owing to their melanin, emerge in discussions of Blackness in the Pacific as the result of cartographies of European colonial racial taxonomies. Pacific Islanders have generated their own conceptions of Blackness and darkness. This includes Hawaiians’ reverence for Pō, or darkness, and the identification of some Indigenous Australians and Papua New Guineans with Blackness and as Black. Together, these colonial and Indigenous conceptions shape the experiences of Black people in Hawai‘i—experiences that, for African Americans, are distinct from those of both Africans and Melanesians.

The racial dynamics that exist in the Pacific contextualize but do not explain the experiences of the people in my study. This project focuses primarily on African Americans and people who identify as part of the African diaspora rather

than on Melanesians, whom the Fijian scholar Ponipate Rokolekutu describes “as the black people of the Pacific.”⁶¹ “In mapping Oceania,” writes the political scientist Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, “Melanesia was the only subregion named after the skin color of its inhabitants: the ‘black-skinned people’ or ‘black islands.’”⁶² Linked to colonial constructs of Africans, this informs Melanesians’ placement at the “bottom” of the racialized hierarchy of Pacific Islanders. Rokolekutu explains, “Oceanian epistemologies are deeply racialized.” He continues: “The European discourse on race has subsequently informed racialized epistemologies and racial categorization in Oceania. Melanesia[ns] are represented as inferior while a degree of deference is accorded to Polynesians. Both Melanesians and Polynesians have internalized such perceptions which subsequently dictates race dynamics in Oceania.”⁶³

Blackness is a concept rather than an essence, an ideology rather than biology. As such, the people of Oceania have adopted these constructs that inform their relations. Hawaiians were conceived of by Europeans as “almost White” Polynesians and thus granted higher status than Micronesians or Melanesians—the latter considered “Oceanic Negroes” or “ignoble savages”—who lacked the former’s societal development, physical beauty, and potential.⁶⁴ Yet in the nineteenth century, Hawaiians too were called “niggers” (a term that I never say aloud in any iteration), as well as “Indians,” while today Micronesians are targets of antiBlack racism in Hawai‘i.

Africans and African diasporic people from North America, Europe, Asia, and the Caribbean are read *through* and also *separately from* these legacies and meanings of Pacific Blackness. Melanesians and some Indigenous Australians share with African-descended people the denigration of their darkness, connecting them to colonial constructs of African inferiority, an antiBlack ideology fueled by White supremacy that belts the globe.⁶⁵ They are also bonded through their resistant and powerful identifications as Black.⁶⁶ Yet African Americans, rather than Melanesians, find that they are the ones viewed as the repositories of “the Black experience” that people in Hawai‘i imagine when referring to Blackness. When African Americans move to the Pacific, therefore, they are interpolated through these existing ideological layers. At the same time, they serve as representatives of hegemonic Blackness (including Black politics, popular culture, and notions of racialized violence and sexuality) that circulate the globe, and are intercepted in specifically Black American ways.

Colonists may have tried to fix people of Oceania into Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia, yet in practice, people fuck with conceptions of who is what, including who and what “Black” is in the Pacific. Hawai‘i does not

conform to the Black/White binary of the continental United States in part because of its large Asian demographic, strong Native Hawaiian presence, and mixed race population. Yet perhaps the most evident example of resistance to the White racial hierarchy is simply the nonsalience of Blackness in Hawai‘i and Hawaiians’ historical acceptance of African diasporic people. Blackness is expansive—it refers to politics, to aesthetics, and to populations that circulate the oceans. Blackness does not conform to taxonomic categories and does not stick fixedly to bodies. The Canadian Black diaspora studies scholar Rinaldo Walcott says that “the wonderful thing about blackness is that it is a sign in which we are not exactly sure what might sit underneath it or what might sit within it, but yet there is a history that shapes what we mean by it when we invoke it.”⁶⁷

(Mixed) Race and Indigeneity

I place race at the center of this study without forcing US-centric models on the Hawai‘i context. Race, along with indigeneity and settler colonialism, explains the relationship between Black, Hawaiian, and Asian people; highlights the dynamics of belonging; and challenges the dominant theories of ethnicity and culture as the operative dynamic among groups in the Islands. Ethnicity is an individual’s chosen identity, including cultural practices and ancestry. On the other hand, race is not always a selected identity and is often imputed on people. A racial analysis centers historical processes of racialization and racism, which highlight power and inequality among groups. People can thus have racial and ethnic identities (e.g., being identified as Black and identifying as Nigerian, or identifying as Black and Nigerian). People across the United States are also identifying in growing numbers with more than one racial category, or as multiracial—the fastest-growing population in the United States. If the scholarship on Hawai‘i has focused on ethnicity—despite earlier Chicago school scholars’ research on “race”—less studied and the center of my argument is how groups in Hawai‘i are differentially racialized for the economic and political gain of powerful interests and institutions.

People also identify along the lines of race *and* indigeneity, such as the Black Hawaiians in this project, or people with a Black parent and a Native Hawaiian parent. I maintain the specificity of Kānaka indigeneity rather than viewing Hawaiians as just another ethnic group or racial category. At the same time, Hawaiians and other Indigenous people have been racialized through colonization and disempowerment. Although race and indigeneity are distinct processes and categories of identity, law, and materiality, they overlap in

important ways for Black residents of Hawai‘i, and particularly Black Hawaiians. The Islands’ history, Kanaka Maoli practices, and local culture inform how people understand and express themselves here, expressions that arrivals from elsewhere may find puzzling.

Exchanges among groups in Hawai‘i unsettle both hypodescent and the expectation that people identify monoracially, or with just one race. Black locals disagree with scholars who argue that the category of Black is expansive enough to acknowledge multiracialism.⁶⁸ People I interviewed forgo a “Black-only” identity and instead adopt the Hawaiian practice of hyperdescent, whereby they acknowledge all their ancestries. Rather than interpreting this as antiBlack, a flight from Blackness, or internalized racism, I read such choices through Kanaka epistemologies that reveal practices of expansive inclusion.

Critics of multiracialism argue that discussions of “mixed race” lead to the quantification of what is a socially constructed process of racialization. In Hawai‘i, the quantification of race coexists with an elastic handling of ancestry. Federally imposed policies still require evidence of blood quantum to be eligible for certain material resources. However, people debate who is and is not Hawaiian “enough” by calling on ancestry as well as cultural capital and knowledge. Both Hawaiian and Black people, despite their multiple ancestries, often highlight their Hawaiianness or Blackness, respectively. As Brandon Ledward writes in his study of Hawaiian hapas (multiracial people), “rather than playing up our many ethnicities often times most of us choose to posture ourselves as simply Hawaiian.”⁶⁹ Yet, after living in the Islands for some time, Black transplants, who formerly identified as Black only, tended to recount all their ancestries when asked, “What are you?” The Black Pacific provides opportunities for expansive identifications because of both the relative invisibility of Blackness and the prominence of Indigenous epistemologies. At the same time, Black locals are integrated into local nonBlack networks of kin and community and may not learn about the African diaspora. They come up against racial authenticators from elsewhere who apply stringent conceptions of hypodescent and monoracialism that shape Black locals’ ambivalence to Blackness.

Analyzing how Black Hawaiians navigate ideas of Blackness alongside Kanaka ideas of genealogy and belonging brings Black studies into conversation with Pacific Islands studies. Brandon Ledward explores group dynamics among Hawaiians whose communities are filled with people of multiple ancestries. Ledward wants to “examine the implications of multidentivity among Hawaiians who feel strong connections to diverse ethnic groups.”⁷⁰ His ethnography illustrates “social factors contributing to the notion of ‘Hawaiian enough’

and discuss[es] the implications processes of racialization have within the contemporary lāhui Hawai‘i (Hawaiian community).⁷¹ The vast majority of Hawaiians—like African Americans—are of mixed ancestry (Ledward says up to 98 percent of Kānaka Maoli).⁷² His study of “hapahaole” (people with Native Hawaiian and European ancestries) attempts to bridge the divide of hapa and Hawaiian as separate categories, which emerges as one impact of US racialist thought on Hawaiian epistemologies that my research also emphasizes.⁷³

If the experiences of Black people in Hawai‘i seem primarily to highlight how race operates, the lives of Black Hawaiians reveal how race and indigeneity intersect. While Ledward looks at White and Brown Hawaiians, or Hawaiians who cross the categories of Hawaiian, local, and haole, Black Hawaiians reflect the unique ways that Blackness (rather than haoleness) functions and is de/valued within Native communities. The historical racialization of Black people and the local emphasis on being Native Hawaiian explains why participants in this project who have Hawaiian mothers and Black fathers identify as both Black and Hawaiian. Hawai‘i’s unique context reveals the problem in critiquing this mode of multiracial identification—a critique (often accompanied with suspicion) that emerges from mapping a continental Black/White, monoracial, and hypodescent framework onto both the Pacific and multiracialism.

Black Residents and Asian Settler Colonialism

The work on settler colonialism in Hawai‘i has not yet taken Black people into account. Even in the most recent books on Hawai‘i, one cannot find the terms “Black” or “African American” (or even “race”) in their indexes. If in the continental United States, settler colonialism is viewed as a White/Native structure of Native erasure that relegates Indigenous peoples to the past, Native Hawaiians, at 20 percent of the population, are undeniably contemporary, present, and agentic. This reorients the meanings of race and indigeneity—as well as belonging in a settler state—for people of African descent.

This book bridges continental discussions of settler colonialism that theorize the role of Black people within the native/settler binary with those in Hawai‘i that analyze Asians and other immigrants as settlers. Evelyn Nakano Glenn calls out comparative race studies for its erasure of Indigenous people and complicity with Native dispossession. Glenn, drawing on Patrick Wolfe’s definition of settler colonialism as a structure and not an event, applies an intersectional approach to the conditions faced by communities of color.⁷⁴ She encourages fellow ethnic studies scholars to see how a “settler colonialism

framework can encompass the specificities of racisms and sexism affecting different racialized groups while also highlighting structural and cultural factors that undergird and link these racisms and sexism.”⁷⁵

Bridging ethnic studies and Native studies, *Hawai‘i Is My Haven* contributes a Pacific perspective to new work analyzing Native and Asian immigrant relations in North American settler state contexts while I decenter the hegemony of the study of Asians in Hawai‘i.⁷⁶ I do so by foregrounding the voices of Native Hawaiians. This project engages the robust theorization of (Asian) settler colonialism in Hawai‘i and the scholarship on Hawaiian politics, grounded in the ideas of Haunani-Kay Trask. These contributions, as seen by any number of panels at the annual Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) conference, have primarily been about the *conceptual* contribution of Hawai‘i and Pacific Islands studies scholarship to (North American) Black and Native relations. Zeroing in on Black and Native interaction *within* Hawai‘i reorients debates in Black and Native studies about group connections, tensions, and liberation. It illustrates, as Tiya Miles and Sharon Holland do in their volume centering North America, how “people of African descent transported and transformed cultures, created intersectional communities, and built metaphorical as well as physical homes on Native lands and within Native cultural landscapes.”⁷⁷ Like scholarship on the Caribbean, however, it expands debates between Black and Native studies that privilege the Americas.⁷⁸

If Black people are relatively invisible, Asians form a substantial presence in the Islands, where settler colonialism and localness are primary formations. Asians, including Asian multiracial people, made up over 56 percent of the population in 2015.⁷⁹ Okinawans and Japanese are the highest per capita income earners and have the highest rates of homeownership.⁸⁰ As the Hawai‘i expert Jonathan Okamura explains, “Since the 1970s, ethnic relations in Hawai‘i have become increasingly structured by the economic and political power and status wielded by Chinese Americans, Whites, and Japanese Americans over other ethnic groups.”⁸¹ It is Asian—not White—settler colonialism that emerges as a living, obvious, and maintained structure.

Asians in Hawai‘i are defined not only by their settler status but also by their various racialized positions. They contribute to the perpetuation of local culture and differentially face the effects of unequal resource distribution. The plantation economy of prestatehood Hawai‘i brought waves of plantation workers from China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and elsewhere. This history of exploitation has become the dominant narrative drawn on by Asians not indigenous to the Islands to justify their belonging. However, the framework of Asian settler colonialism reveals how claims to a local identity

provide cover for the ways various Asian groups advance the settler state and dispossess Hawaiians of their land and rights to self-determination.⁸² After statehood, these various ethnic groups have come to occupy highly uneven positions of political and economic power. The Islands are home to a diversity of Asian communities, from those running political and economic life to the precariously housed hotel workers. As a result, Okamura has articulated why “there are no Asian Americans in Hawai‘i,” whereby “ethnic,” or what I consider racialized, distinctions (Japanese, Filipino, etc.) within this lumping category are primary.⁸³ This explains why, for instance, someone may describe a neighbor as a “local Japanese” or may self-describe as being a “Filipino from Wahiawā,” rather than identifying as “Asian American,” as is more common in the continental United States.

In their study of Asian and Native relations in North America, Karen Leong and Myla Carpio explain, “Because the settler state works to eliminate Indigenous claims to the land, immigrant groups’ conditional inclusion requires complicity in ignoring these Indigenous claims as well.”⁸⁴ This is relevant to Hawai‘i, where Harry Kim, mayor of Hawai‘i County on the Big Island, explains how to “trample the souls” of Native Hawaiians in his advancement of the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) on the sacred land of Maunakea—a move contested by Kānaka Maoli and other residents.⁸⁵ Asian complicity in Native dispossession through their participation in settler colonialism takes place *alongside* Asian antiBlack racism: this is the same mayor who jokingly referred to a Black professional as “that colored guy.” If, as J. Kēhaulani Kauanui shows, “Asian groups were racialized in contrast to Native Hawaiians vis-à-vis the haole,” Black people have been both compared *and* contrasted with Kānaka to differing ends.⁸⁶

Black locals, including Black Hawaiians and Black Asians, develop our understanding of settler colonialism, the development of racialized indigeneity, and the resonance of local identity. They include Hawai‘i-born Black children who are raised in nonBlack communities and identify strongly as local. As a result, Hawai‘i’s Black residents do not fit neatly into the important critique waged by Hawaiian and Asian settler ally scholars who reveal how Asians in Hawai‘i (especially the political elite) deploy “local” to deny their role in settler colonialism and advocate anti-Kanaka policies.⁸⁷ A local or nonlocal identity emerges as central categories of non/belonging in this study. Are Black people local? Black locals highlight the salience of this identity, disrupting efforts to consider “local” as only a problematic identity in debates over settler colonialism. Scholars who only analyze ethnicity cannot respond to these questions

when they neglect a racial analysis, deny indigenous specificity, and downplay both racism and material inequalities.

Haunani-Kay Trask's specification of "settlers of color" frames the field of Asian settler colonialism, raising the question of other nonWhite people in settler states. Are Black people settlers? This question of the structural relation of Black people to Native dispossession has arisen in some work focusing on Black and Native studies. "Black dislocation within the settler state is always an unfinished and incomplete project," write Eve Tuck, Allison Guess, and Hannah Sultan.⁸⁸ "Policing tactics, gentrification, vigilantism, and political isolation find justification in the settler colonial truism that Black people should not be where white settlers want to be."⁸⁹ They echo critiques of Asian settler colonialism: "Yet the struggle to resolve Black dislocation can obscure the face of Indigenous erasure and resilient, radical relationships to the land. There isn't something easy to say about this."⁹⁰ Indeed, my interlocutors reflect on these politics, as I do by raising the question of Black agency in aligning with the US military occupation of Hawai'i. I also turn to the historical, political, and cultural cross-pollination that characterizes Black and Hawaiian relations. This book does not conflate Black and Hawaiian struggles for self-determination but rather looks to what emerges once we bring together Black and Hawaiian people, race and indigeneity, a racial lens and Kanaka epistemologies, in our analysis of the descendants of enslaved people living in a nonWhite settler state.

On Relations and Relationality

Hawai'i presents an alternative to elsewhere because of its nonWhite demographics and strong activist movements that critique US hegemony and imperialism. Not just a confrontation to White supremacy, it is a place where even aspirations to Whiteness are disparaged. Black people experience the pleasure of being part of a multitude of communities of color while reflecting on accountability for settler colonialism and military occupation, which are ever-present structures of life in many parts of the Pacific. Race, too, is an organizing force in the Hawaiian Islands.

Race both offers a top-down analysis and requires our attention to the adjacent everyday dynamics of a person's life. Race, combined with indigeneity that highlights connectivity, genealogy, and place-based identities, strengthens our understanding of Black life in the Pacific. At the individual level, we see how Black residents negotiate historical tropes of Blackness, antiBlack racism,

and the perception that they are not local. These racialized processes intersect with the experiences of other groups, including Native Hawaiians' histories of colonization, kuleana (responsibility, privilege), and ideas of belonging, along with Asian groups' uneven rise to power and their contributions to local culture.

I detail the agency *and* oppression of Black, Hawaiian, and Asian people vis-à-vis global systems of racial power and capitalism (e.g., White supremacy, slavery, plantation economies, settler colonialism). While this context frames this ethnography, I highlight on-the-ground relations. These not only humanize global processes but trouble facile theoretical claims, including binaries, "Oppression Olympics," identity-based generalizations and cancellations, and uncritical celebrations of an alliance. I reveal, for instance, how Native Hawaiians are oppressed *and* are antiBlack, both within the context of colonization. Conversely, I show how Black people in Hawai'i face racism *and* are part of a tourist economy and occupying military force. NonWhite groups internalize and exert colonial and racist ideologies in the painful recollections of Black locals. Beyond ideology, the *practices* that inform(ed) slavery, genocide, labor exploitation, war, and diaspora also converge in contemporary life, including for those who emerge from these histories and are Black and Native, Black and Asian, and Black and Latina/o. Black Koreans and Black Okinawans recount their experiences with invisibility and the antiBlack racism they face within their Asian communities. They cannot escape racism, even on these promising shores. Black Hawaiians as well as Black Sāmoans, central to this ethnography, illustrate how people living within, among, and *beyond* these categories conceive of their relations to others in ways that privilege connections.

Native dispossession and the denigration of Blackness do not go uncontested. The combination of Indigenous epistemologies, illustrated in contemporary movements for self-determination and cultural revitalization, and the racial lens employed by Black transplants work hand in hand toward decolonization and antiracism. Black people navigate the imbrications of White supremacy and Hawai'i's occupation, but their relationships and sense of self are never fully determined by them. Because I root my analysis in the history of Hawai'i, we see how the norms in the Hawaiian Kingdom still inform contemporary life through the persistence of Kanaka epistemologies and practices. I share the desire articulated by Tuck, Guess, and Sultan, who discuss Black and Indigenous people on the "selfsame land" "to supersede the conventions of settler colonialism and antiblackness toward another kind of futurity."⁹¹ In light of the antagonisms reflected in a range of scholarship, I join their turn toward

“the need for more thought and attention given to the relationships between Indigenous peoples and Black peoples.”⁹²

The lives of the participants in this project emerge from the intersection of racism and colonialism; their actions reveal the link between antiracism and decolonization. While we may know this politically and intellectually, we have few examples of how this is *lived*, contributing to the literary and historical analysis of Black, Asian, and Native relations. What this ethnography shows is that no one exists outside of antiBlack racism, settler colonialism, and occupation; nor do one’s given identities (“Kanaka,” “settler,” “African American”) *determine* our relation to these systems. It is our standing vis-à-vis institutions of oppression—within and outside of them—that gauges our contribution to maintaining or decimating them.

One’s positionality crafts conceptions of one’s kuleana, or responsibility. The Kanaka scholar Hōkūlani Aikau describes kuleana as a central component of living responsibly with “critical positionality and reflexivity. Kuleana is not static, is not fixed; it is about understanding yourself in relationship to the place where you are.”⁹³ It is a constellation of “responsibility, authority, and obligation” and thus shifts accordingly.⁹⁴ But it is the *actions* of people—not just their identities—that determine whether we uphold or undermine racism and colonialism. Hawai‘i, and especially contemporary movements in the Islands, requires residents to reflect on their accountability and responsibility to this place and to one another. Analyzing the intersection of race and indigeneity includes how members of the African diaspora contend with living as people not indigenous to Hawai‘i.

Critical self-reflection, together with action based on one’s kuleana, creates a sense of we-ness among those working with expansive notions of community.⁹⁵ “What linked land taking from indigenes and black chattel slavery,” explains Glenn, “was a private property regime that converted people, ideas, and things into property that could be bought, owned, and sold.”⁹⁶ Yet current practices of self-determination and visions of the future in the Islands challenge imported colonial practices that were not only statist and proprietary but also based on the denigration of Native Hawaiians and Black people.⁹⁷ The lives and ideas of those living in and creating the Black Pacific expand academic debates, model both limited and expansive politics, and paint a fuller picture of daily life that moves us from a race-only, ethnicity-only, or native/settler-only lens to one that accounts for these, as they articulate.

Methods, Participants, and My Story

Born and raised in Hawai‘i, I am the daughter of an immigrant father from rural North India and a Brooklyn-born Jewish mother who is the daughter of immigrants from Russia. I am Indian and White, neither Hawaiian nor Black. My parents, professors at the University of Hawai‘i (history and Asian studies) for forty years, raised my brother and me in a middle-class home in Mānoa Valley in Honolulu on the island of O‘ahu. I considered myself and was considered by others to be a local girl. People knew that I was Brown but not Hawaiian, given the close-knit nature of Hawaiian communities. Other youths teased me for my Indianness and demanded clarification: as Jay-Z once rapped, “Are you red dot or feather?”⁹⁸ I attended local public schools: Noelani Elementary School in Mānoa Valley, followed by Stevenson Intermediate and Roosevelt High School in Pauoa, attended also by several participants in this project. On alternating yearlong sabbaticals, my parents relocated us to live in my father’s North Indian village of Kota, the Indian city of Jaipur in Rajasthan, and Queens, New York. Otherwise, at home in the Islands, I played soccer, learned ballet, and played violin in the Hawai‘i Youth Symphony. But it was hula that most formed me, that most informed me about my birthplace—its stories, histories, people, plants, and practices. I danced first with Auntie Maiki Aiu Lake above Puck’s Alley at the mouth of Mānoa Valley. After she passed away, I joined Hula Hālau Na Hanona under Kumu (teacher) John Keola Lake at St. Louis High School for almost a decade, until I left for college in California. This book—like all my scholarship and teaching—is shaped by this marriage of factors.

I offer this ethnography as someone trained in anthropology and housed in ethnic studies (aka race studies). While too many people have heard me joke about being “divorced from anthropology,” it is true that I had a vexed relationship with the discipline. Its scholarship (and scholars!) did not encourage my interests, which have always focused on the United States (not “there”), on communities and concerns (too) close to me, and on race and racism (instead of cultural difference). That said, anthropology equipped me with the ethnographic method that I remain committed to, while my political and intellectual motivations align comfortably with comparative race studies as a professor of African American studies and Asian American studies.

Hawai‘i Is My Haven expands my previous ethnographic analysis of Black and Asian relations. The goal of my work is to detail interminority racisms shaped by White supremacy to illustrate the formation of on-the-ground solidarities. I illustrate existing models of antiracism that consider the liberation

of all people. My work past and present decenters Whiteness and looks to understudied collectives through a focus on race and culture and, in this book, indigeneity—whether South Asian American hip hop artists, rappers in the Middle East, or Black people in Hawai‘i. Working to eradicate racism that differentially affects all nonWhite people (and, yes, affects White people too—but that’s not my concern), I chart the everyday lives of people who cross theoretical and commonly accepted boundaries of race, place, and politics. Their understandings of the world provide theories of difference and solidarity. Understudied, unique, and small populations, owing to their “difference” from normative expectations, *show us* (and thus disrupt) naturalized categories as they navigate divisions, including those among presumably incommensurable groups. This explains why so much of this ethnography centers Black people in the Pacific and multiracial people within Black studies.

After my father, Kumu John Lake (a voracious storyteller and cigarette smoker, just like my father) was the most influential man in my life. More than a hula teacher, this esteemed elder took our hālau (hula school) across islands to Maui, and across the Pacific to Aotearoa/New Zealand for exchanges with Maori, whom we later hosted. Our hālau comprised younger and older dancers, men and women, straight, gay, and mähū (third gender, for those who do not identify as only male or only female). Sāmoan and Tongan football players, Japanese, Indian, Hawaiian, and hapa haole Catholic and public school girls—we all together practiced complicated ka‘i (entrances), dances, and ho‘i (exits), with the better dancers in synchrony up front, me and the others in the back.

Kumu Lake drove us in his van up to the mountains on the other side of the Pali, where we climbed the deep crevasses etched by rain. He narrated the Hawaiian names of the plants and flowers we picked to make haku lei for our heads, wrists, and ankles for our performances at the Prince Lot Hula Festival. We pretended to listen but were more interested in sliding down the muddy mountains on the wet ti leaves we gathered. He had us memorize oli (chants) in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i (I always lip-synched, never really dedicated the time to learn them); he gave us Hawaiian names, equipped us with the skills, and guided us through ‘ūniki (a rigorous graduation process, which I failed to complete). He told us about Hawaiian history, the meaning of every step in each song, and gave us printed sheets with the words and movements to scores of ‘auana (modern) songs and hula kahiko (ancient) chants. I still have these materials stored in an aged yellow three-ring binder in my old woven hula bag, stuffed with my instruments—the ‘uli ‘uli, pu‘ili, ipu, along with the ipu mat; my green hula skirt that we printed with tapa now fits my daughter. The dark

golden yellow ‘ilima lei I painstakingly made, feather by feather, for weeks under his guidance is stored safely in a plastic cookie dough container.

Writing this book has been an interrupted yet long-term return home that rewarded me with memories informing my fieldwork and analysis. While my home is still there (my mother retired and still lives in my childhood house, where I edited the final version of this book during COVID-19), my father and Kumu Lake have passed on. As they and others left, my own family has grown during fieldwork, first with one child and then another. Each research trip involved at best, with no delays from a Chicago airport, a nine-hour flight (for a family of four, recent trips cost at least \$3,000). My children got to play in the same backyard that I did at their age, helping my mother collect coconuts and rotting mangoes from her yard, and swimming in the same outdoor Mānoa public pool that I did. I have been able to watch the Wednesday night fireworks from the Ilikai Hotel with my mother after witnessing in awe how this almost eighty-year-old still paddles with the Anuenue canoe club, near the Hilton Hawaiian Village in Waikiki. It allowed me to reconnect with my home after years of the growing sense that I was read as being from “the mainland,” despite my Hawaiian jewelry and familiarity with Sāmoan doormen, as a result of too much time away from home.

This project reflects my love of Hawai‘i and gratitude to the people of O‘ahu who raised me and shaped who I am. Hawai‘i has always been home and a gift to me. My father’s generous outlook, my mother’s political radicalism, and Kumu John Lake’s wisdom inform my kuleana. This ethnography is my attempt to tell these stories and to engage with their theoretical and political implications.

I began fieldwork in 2009 and over ten years have spoken to hundreds of island residents in addition to the sixty people I formally interviewed, many of them several times. My work centers the voices of those who self-identify as Black—people of African descent who are members of the African diaspora. After arranging childcare, I rode my father’s scooter or drove my mother’s car to meet generous participants at coffee shops in Mānoa and across O‘ahu, the university’s Campus Center, and in people’s homes. Interviewing was always a pleasant and often exhilarating experience, despite my constant low-grade anxiety that preceded each meeting (“Why am I an ethnographer? Do I have to do this interview?”) as a result of feeling that I was taking and not returning something from participants when I asked them to share their stories. Part of this stemmed from the ethics of ethnography, as well as my fatigue from the heat and my persistent allergies. It was, however, always worth it, as I experienced the postinterview rush of inspiration that amplified my interest in these

questions. Conducting this project in my hometown was deeply satisfying, as I was familiar with the topography, could easily suggest and find places to meet people, and understood historical dynamics and local references.

No less important, the dress code demanded a casual approach—thus my uniform of tank top, flowing and comfortable cotton culottes, and plastic slippers (slippas) worked well for me as I conducted my first stint of fieldwork throughout my first pregnancy. I began this project in the year I was on leave from my university in Evanston and lived in Hawai‘i. During that year, I got married and became pregnant with my daughter, and my father died. He was crucial to the initial drive of my project, urging me to contact potential interviewees, including people like Ellen, the Black nurse who befriended him during his frequent hospitalizations. My mother, also a professor, doubled his effort over the past decade, introducing me to her students who were multiracial Black Asian transplants taking her courses in Asian studies. As my father’s health deteriorated, he was bedridden at the Queen’s Medical Center. He couldn’t speak well, and then not at all. Indian family and community members brought his favorite parathas and sweets, even after he couldn’t or wouldn’t eat. And yet he always listened to my chatter about the progress of my pregnancy, my husband’s career, and updates about my research. His hands float across this project, revealed through participants that he enlisted for me as we sat at a coffee shop in Mānoa Marketplace earlier in the year before he was sick. While my mother is the anthropologist who inspired my career, I learned how to be in the world as a social and empathetic person from my father.

Fieldwork consisted of the staples of ethnography: heavy hanging out, formal and informal interviews, and participant observation. I took notes wherever I found myself—at nightclubs, the beach, and house parties. I recorded interviews that were between one and two hours long and had them transcribed by hired students and rev.com. I coded and analyzed them both by hand and with Atlas.ti, a qualitative software analysis program I know I am supremely underusing. I wrote the book using the software program Scrivener, a writer’s dream. Informing my analysis was my engagement with Black studies; the scholarship on race, ethnicity, and the history of Hawai‘i; Native studies; critical mixed-race studies; and the work on the nineteenth-century Pacific.

The historical context for this contemporary ethnography emerged from my archival research of shipping logs, missionary journals written in English, and official correspondence and newspapers in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i (Hawaiian language). Except for the basics I learned from Kumu Lake long ago, I do not speak ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, and thus my research on nineteenth-century Hawai‘i is

limited. What I found suggests provocative traces of Black life in the 1800s, recorded not just in missionary journals and other English-language texts. I also searched hundreds of Hawaiian-language sources in the rich digital collection of the Hawaiian Mission Houses for particular terms to get a picture of how words for blackness and darkness developed as descriptors for things and then later for people. I scoured the correspondence of the monarchs and chiefs in the Ali‘i Letters Collection and the newspaper *Ka Lama Hawaii*; upon finding the terms, I solicited the assistance of colleagues who spoke ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, including Drs. Hi‘ilei Hobart and Charles Langlas, to help me correctly interpret their context. For other chapters, I also analyze contemporary media and social media accounts, including local and national newspapers. Census and demographic information from a range of sources, including Hawai‘i economic and population reports, has been key to illuminating the Black presence in the Islands that has so curiously and almost completely fallen under the radar.

I spoke to hundreds of people—any Black person I could meet on O‘ahu (and I Skyped with those on outer islands) and many nonBlack residents. University of Hawai‘i professors led me to students and Black faculty; high school friends pointed me to former classmates; new friends and family introduced me to others. I interviewed nurses, bartenders, DJs, lawyers, and security guards. However, it was only after coding, reading each interview and other source materials scores of times, and analysis that I created the primary groupings of people that structure this ethnography. These primary categories include Black locals and Black transplants; long-term residents (I also call them “old-timers”) and newcomers; locals (those born or at least raised in the Islands); and nonlocals (those who moved to Hawai‘i after high school). This book also highlights the experiences and perspectives of nonWhite dual minority biracial people, whom I call Black hapas or multiracials (more on the term “hapa” in chapter 2).

The first group consists of nineteen Hawai‘i-born or Hawai‘i-raised Black *locals*, who grew up mostly in their nonBlack mothers’ communities in the Islands. Forty-one people make up the second group, *transplants*. Transplants are roughly divided into *long-term residents* (who had generally lived in Hawai‘i for over ten years) and *newcomers* (more recent arrivals at the time of our interview). Overall, almost half, or twenty-eight of the sixty participants, were multiracial, including fourteen locals and fourteen transplants. There are thirty-eight men and twenty-two women; one man identifies as gay, and two women are queer identified, including one who is gender nonconforming. Black transplants and locals offer distinct life stories, with different orientations to

Black history and politics and uneven access to Black communities, families, and cultures. Together, along with the epistemological topography of their childhoods, these shape residents' identifications with Blackness, localness, and belonging in Hawai'i.

Many of these people stay in touch with me, sending me emails and Facebook messages updating me about their battles with cancer, the development of Black social life in Hawai'i, and their lawsuits against workplace discrimination. Right now our conversations are consumed by the protests against anti-Black violence emerging from the murders of Black people including George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Nina Pop, and Ahmaud Arbery. They keep me abreast of new events centered on vigils and BLM protests in Hawai'i, the growing Black community, and happenings at the university, where Black students and faculty come together to create spaces of belonging. I have stayed in touch with many of these people, as well, by sharing my writings, sending them my publications, and, of course, explaining why it has taken so long for the book to come out. Facebook has been a particularly critical technology for maintaining contact, allowing me to keep abreast of their lives, including changes in their work, the growth and contractions of our families, and evidence of our aging. It has also led to real and long-term relationships with them, as we could communicate about when we were next going to be in the same place and arrange to meet up—at least we did before COVID-19 upended our lives.

This is a ground-up ethnography. It is not determined by the most current debates and categories but rather hopes to ground some of the tendencies toward abstraction on the question of Blackness and characterizations of interminority relations, as well as some Black and Native studies scholarship. I highlight the influence of Native Hawaiians, Kanaka epistemologies, and local culture. I focus first and foremost on the islands of Hawai'i (with a bias toward its largest city, Honolulu, on the island of O'ahu) and the words, perspectives, and experiences of Black people who live in the Islands as non-military-affiliated civilians. Their generosity and stories filled the hundreds of hours, thousands of pages, and years of fieldwork this book emerges from.

I do not recall growing up with any kind of Black community in Honolulu—most of the people I knew and saw around me were hapa haole (mixed race), Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, haole, Samoan, and Hawaiian. When I return home now, my family hangs out at Kaimana Beach with members of these groups along with Black residents of Hawai'i. We are invited to attend events hosted by Black collectives, usually by women who have come to the Islands alone or with their children. I interact with a significant number of Black scholars,

from new hires at the university to emerita faculty who still live on O‘ahu. Social, arts, and political events advocate food sustainability, Black performance, and conversations with Hawaiians about coalitions. My family, including my Black and Hungarian Jewish husband (who in Hawai‘i is sometimes read as Sāmoan), and our two children are integrated into Black communities in Chicago. Unlike the Honolulu of my childhood, in which Blackness was invisible outside the military context, my family now experiences O‘ahu as a Brown place of fellow multiracial people with a growing Black population whose cultural presence is strong, respectful, and respected, and not necessarily affiliated with the military. Things have changed over time. Given the rising demographics of Black people in Hawai‘i over the past century, I chart this change and what it means for all of Hawai‘i’s people.

Conclusion

Hawai‘i Is My Haven animates the liminal as a center for theorizing: the Black Pacific, the nonWhite multiracial (a mixed race person who does not have a White parent), and the porous boundaries and critical nexus between race and indigeneity. Hawai‘i has long offered people of African descent an alternative to the places from which they came, yet US notions of race and White supremacy travel across the ocean through colonialism, militarism, and the tourist economy. Life stories of Hawai‘i’s Black civilians foreground experiences with racism that trouble images of its welcoming multiculturalism. At the same time, this society provides an alternative for members of the African diaspora, who describe Hawai‘i as their haven. They also express feeling a respite—a space to breathe—away from the “pressures” that come with being Black in the continental United States. Racism reinforces their racial lens, while Native Hawaiian practices allow them to be “Black and _____” rather than “Black only,” represented by the significant number of Black people who identify with more than one race on the census.

The Pacific expands conceptions of Blackness. In Hawai‘i, Black people adopt Kanaka practices to develop what the activist and Black feminist scholar Angela Davis describes as the necessary expansive and inclusive community formations for revolutionary transformation, in contrast to identity-based communities, which can be exclusive and narrow.⁹⁹ The perspectives of African-descended people living in Hawai‘i, informed by the history of both the African diaspora and the Pacific, illuminate a Black Pacific worldview that weaves together a racialized understanding of power with an indigenous understanding of place and people—and the connections among them. These

illustrations contest the scholarship that, while understandably focused on Black death, also portrays Black life as only abject.¹⁰⁰ Hawai‘i enables a sense of optimism and possibility embraced by many participants.

Between the introduction and the conclusion, this book offers five chapters that articulate Black life in one part of the Pacific. Chapter 1, “Over Two Centuries,” charts the history of Black people in Hawai‘i from the beginning of the nineteenth century who went on to play critical roles in Hawaiian society. Often citizens of the Kingdom, they also were central to the racialization of Hawaiians by haoles. These ideas shifted considerably with the twentieth-century association of Black people with the US military. The persistence of Kanaka epistemologies and the tendency to integrate Black people within their communities and families intersected with the increasingly negative twenty-first-century reception of Black transplants.

The next two chapters focus on the experiences and perspectives of Black locals (chapter 2), which contrast with Black transplants (chapter 3). Black locals’ life stories may be the most understudied of the Islands’ populations. However, they answer the question of what the Pacific offers people of African descent. With an analysis of their demographics, identifications, and conceptions of Blackness, they chart the effects of racial invisibility as well as the opportunities of expansive belonging offered by local practices and Kanaka approaches to genealogy. Chapter 2, “‘Saltwater Negroes’” (a term used by one local Black Sāmoan), takes on the charge that multiracialism is a form of antiBlackness while engaging questions of race and localness, making a case for the meaningfulness of local identity. Black locals, including Black Hawaiians, Black Sāmoans, and others, reveal how and why the Pacific is a place of expansive Black belonging. (Mixed) race, indigeneity, and local culture together forge the dynamics through which non/belonging and affiliation are assessed and asserted.

Chapter 3, “Less Pressure,” focuses on transplants, or African-descended people who moved from North America, Asia, Europe, the Caribbean, and Africa to the Islands as adults. It charts their reasons for doing so and identifies how their preconceptions of Hawai‘i aligned with their actual experiences. Illustrating a racial lens, their perspectives, formed in parts of the world with a greater Black presence, illuminate how power operates here. This chapter enters debates on (Asian) settler colonialism, addressing whether or not Black people can be settlers while also explaining why some consider Black absence to be a source of liberation. It also documents the strong imprint of the Islands on its residents, including these transplants whose views about race and Blackness are challenged in this “haven.”

Chapter 4, “Racism in Paradise,” the first substantive documentation of antiBlack racism in Hawai‘i, brings the experiences of Black locals and transplants together. Through an analysis of antiBlack racism at home, school, and work, and in encounters with the police, we see the limits to depictions of Hawai‘i’s celebrated diversity. At the same time, locals and transplants diverge in their *analysis* of racism, including their perspectives on local humor as a way to contend with difference. Transplants call out and contest racism (often through the courts) because of their identification and racial analysis of local dynamics (racial lens). How does this explicit reckoning with antiBlack racism come up against local dismissals that Black people have a “chip on their shoulder” or don’t understand local culture? Tensions between these interpretations have come to a head in local reactions to Black Lives Matter protests against police violence and the ongoing erasure of Black people in Hawai‘i. Transplants’ racial lens gives voice and structure to racism in the Islands and, along with the painful childhood memories of Black locals and accounts of their interactions with police, makes a resounding call for critical reflection of all island residents for our role in antiBlack racism—and our kuleana to challenge it.

Chapter 5, “Embodying Kuleana,” centers Black and Kanaka positionalities and relations, framed by a discussion of Black and Native studies. It foregrounds the voices of Black Hawaiians but expands out to Black residents’ reflections on land, sovereignty, and belonging. This final substantive chapter shows how US histories of slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and police violence, as well as class status, inform Black transplants’ views on Hawaiian movements for self-determination. They revert not so much to native/settler or local/nonlocal divisions as they draw links across African American, Native American, and Hawaiian histories. Together, they map overlapping pasts and a shared present and chart routes that Black and Hawaiian people together can navigate toward liberated futures.

I end with a conclusion that reveals how people are neither just trapped by colonial categories and racist ideologies nor simply reactive to them. Rather, through everyday strategies, political exchange, and knowledge production, people in Hawai‘i exceed these constructs as they consider their kuleana and act with accountability. I offer suggestions for how to bring settler colonialism and racism into account through the greater incorporation of Black people into our learning in the Islands. If knowledge is power, then in looking to the knowledge that circulates between Black and Native people, we can find existing models for antiracism and decolonization.

OVER TWO CENTURIES

THE HISTORY OF BLACK PEOPLE IN HAWAI'I

Hawai'i was different for Blacks coming here initially because they didn't have to deal with the stigma of being slaves in Hawai'i. If you step off in Hawai'i, nobody was going to hunt you down, shackle you up, and bring you back. You stepped off and stayed and dealt with Hawai'i as it was.

LOCAL BLACK SĀMOAN

Only by understanding colonization and its accompanying logics can one make sense of how social, political, and economic relations have been structured, restructured, and reconfigured throughout history. This historical approach does not dismiss the violence and inhumanity of slavery as an institution, but neither does it ignore the violence and inhumanity of colonization; instead, it links together forced removals and relocations, and dispossessions of land and personhood.

KAREN LEONG AND MYLA CARPIO, "CARCERAL STATES," 2016

Not so much erased as unknown, the history of Black people in Hawai'i is a story of integration and invisibility over two centuries long. Black whalers, king's advisers, and educators arrived long before the large waves of both Asian plantation workers in the nineteenth century and Black US military personnel the following century. Predominant narratives (only) link Black men and women to the Atlantic slave trade or else to their military history in the Pacific. Reading

Hawai‘i’s history through the lives of African diasporic people who arrived since the late 1700s expands these narratives. This story has been overlooked in our attention to the Middle Passage in studies of the African diaspora and by foregrounding Pacific Islanders’ encounters with American and European Whites as well as Asian settlers in Pacific Islands studies. Additionally, scholarship on Hawai‘i fixates on White-Asian-Hawaiian relations while ignoring both ideologies of Blackness in these colonial encounters and the presence of African diasporic people.

Colonial constructs of Blackness—not just Whiteness and indigeneity—shaped the Pacific as Europeans attempted to fix Oceania’s heterogeneity. White people carved this vast oceanic world into categories of race, appointing Melanesians as the Black people of the Pacific because of their dark skin and curly hair, in contrast to Polynesians, whom Europeans considered closer to Whiteness.¹ African-descended people dialogically informed these ideologies in Hawai‘i, where attitudes toward Blackness and Black people shifted over the last two centuries. In the nineteenth century, Hawaiians increasingly adopted US ideas of race, while they themselves were triangulated by Whiteness *and* Blackness.

Presenting the early Black presence in Hawai‘i is not just a matter of demographic significance. The context to these numbers uncovers competing discourses about difference imprinting a major portion of the globe. In part, the lack of attention to Oceania by African American studies scholars reflects intellectual (and perhaps political) blind spots, including an unwillingness to approach African diasporic history outside the Black Atlantic and beyond the contiguous forty-eight states. In their attention to colonization, which prioritizes relations with White people, Pacific Islands studies scholars also have not attended to this history. Yet this is the story of Kanaka (Native Hawaiian) racialization. Haole (Whites) distinguished themselves from Hawaiians, whom they aligned with “Indians” in the Americas, but they were all also interpolated by Blackness. Centering the Black Pacific unsettles Black/White and Black/Native/White frameworks in continental and Atlantic studies of racial formations and the Native/settler framing of Pacific Islands studies.

The early history of Black people in the Hawaiian Islands marks the origins of the centuries-long presence of Black island residents whose voices inform these pages. Unlocking our gaze on the Black Atlantic, we see how Black people have not only crossed but also at times stopped to settle within and shape the Pacific.² Arriving a century before Hawai‘i’s annexation (1898), Black newcomers entered a society not structured by race. It was mostly men who came, owing to the institutions that brought them—whaling and later

the military—creating a persistent gender imbalance that still favors them. What has changed significantly over time is the shift from the social organization of the Hawaiian Kingdom to one of a US racial and political state—a shift Black people engaged. Despite the increasing significance of race along with racist concepts and structures, Hawai‘i continues to be a sanctuary for African-descended people, far from the history of slavery and the bonds of oppression. Such a sanctuary is partly created by ongoing Kanaka (Native Hawaiian) resistance to the imposition of US paradigms and thriving Hawaiian ideas of being and belonging.

The nineteenth century proved tumultuous for Hawai‘i. Through the first half of the 1800s, distinctions in the Hawaiian Kingdom were between high and low chiefs, between gods, the ali‘i (the ruling chiefly class), and maka‘āinana (commoners), as well as between men and women.³ One’s station in life, or status as maka‘āinana or ali‘i, was determined by genealogical ties and recounted through oli (chants). Ali‘i were primary shapers and enforcers of societal norms. However, ships brought foreigners and their diseases that eradicated over 90 percent of the Hawaiian population.⁴ Within this context of “the great dying,” the historian Jonathan Osorio charts the effect of arrivals, including missionaries and other haole elite, who coordinated the “dismemberment” of Kānaka Maoli from their cultural and spiritual practices that had maintained harmony and pono (balance, righteousness).⁵ Growing external influence shifted the significance of genealogy and changed who could hold power, presenting the chance for members of the nonchiefly class to exercise greater clout.⁶ Early Black arrivals entered this turbulent society where they, too, found new opportunities.

Race generally and Blackness specifically were less fixed in the Pacific. Accepted as free in a place not yet wed to notions of Black inferiority at the height of US slavery, Black immigrants to Hawai‘i held important political and economic positions. With no slave codes, the Islands offered a place of refuge and possibility, including the freedom to be oneself.⁷ Hawaiians accepted Black whalers, noticing that they were also dark skinned.⁸ Categories connoting difference were not the same in Hawai‘i, and the categorization of African diasporic people—sometimes as Black, sometimes as White, and other times as Hawaiian—depended on the census, whom one asked, and self-identification: a reprieve from the US obsession with quantifying “ratios” of Blackness.⁹

In 1843, as a sovereign nation-state with citizenship granted to its people regardless of race, Hawai‘i became the first internationally recognized non-European territory.¹⁰ The nineteenth century saw changes to who could hold

power through laws including elections, new constitutions, and a changing land tenure system, as well as later changes to nationality. At the same time, in addition to confronting widespread death from disease, Hawaiians faced the arrival of Christian missionaries and foreign business interests. Kanaka rulers selectively adopted and merged foreign ideas with Indigenous practices; Hawaiians also outright resisted haole imposition.¹¹ Navigating ideas of race accompanied these drastic changes, which included the shifting political statuses of the island chain.

In a January 1893 coup backed by the US Navy, an oligarchy of primarily wealthy American businessmen, representing what became known as the “Missionary Party,” forcibly sought the abdication of Queen Lili‘uokalani. Through the 1893 overthrow, a group of haole men placed themselves as the new provisional government of the republic, headed by Sanford Dole, a lawyer from a missionary family in the Islands. Later the Queen was imprisoned in ‘Iolani Palace under the charge of “treason” for knowledge of a (failed) 1895 counterrevolution by her supporters and for attempting to create a new constitution as demanded by the majority of her people.

Kānaka fought foreigners’ rising power against their nation and monarch that disenfranchised Hawaiian and Asian residents.¹² In her deeply moving book *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*, Lili‘uokalani recounts her resistance, wherein she refuses to abdicate her title and her duty to her people.¹³ President Cleveland had issued a directive to return the rights of the Queen, who was, according to the president of the United States, illegally overthrown. Campaigning in Washington, DC, over many months, Queen Lili‘uokalani attempted to sway Congress to follow this directive. She protested, and Hawaiian organizations and royalists fought usurpation of Hawaiian sovereignty. Nonetheless, in 1898 President McKinley annexed Hawai‘i by signing the Newlands Resolution.¹⁴ Two years later, Hawai‘i became an organized incorporated US territory through the Organic Act. In 1959, with the support of US political interests and its military, Hawai‘i became America’s fiftieth state, despite Kanaka resistance. The US military’s role in Hawaiian dispossession and the illegal occupation of the Islands frames shifting attitudes toward Black people in Hawai‘i. While they were initially accepted as sailors, laborers, businessmen, and professionals in the nineteenth century, in the next century Black men arrived in greater number as soldiers participating in the militarization of the Pacific.

As Hawaiians debated political incorporation, they simultaneously wrestled with the growing hegemony of US notions of race. The 1887 “Bayonet Constitution,” led by an armed group of American and British men, hastened

the erosion of sovereign power and undermined the capability of the reigning King Kalākaua (the Queen's brother and predecessor). Under duress, the King created a new cabinet of powerful haole men, with a constitution that for the first time made "democratic rights . . . determined by race."¹⁵ Certainly by 1898, upon annexation, haole settlers had institutionalized US racial categories and other ideologies of race.¹⁶ The ruling elite placed Hawaiians along a shifting spectrum from Black (calling them "niggers") to White (determining them to be "almost White" Polynesians),¹⁷ influencing Islanders' ideas of racial difference. Those shifts also affected Black peoples' status and opportunities in Hawai'i.

Why have Black men and women consistently described Hawai'i as their sanctuary? Certainly, part of it is precisely that the Pacific, meaning a place "calm and peaceful," is not the Atlantic.¹⁸ Early Black immigrants saw Hawai'i as W. E. B. Du Bois did: "as a land of opportunity," far from the inhumanities of slavery, and a "paradise" not structured by Black dehumanization.¹⁹ As the prolific historian Gerald Horne writes, "Those of African descent in particular looked longingly to the Pacific as a sanctuary from their living hell in the Americas."²⁰ Yet positive sentiments arise also as a result of what the Islands *were*, not just what they *were not*: a place where people did not have to be defined by their Blackness.²¹ Over centuries, Black arrivals have been able to take advantage of economic and other opportunities, significantly shaping a place lacking geographic concentrations of segregated Black communities that were elsewhere responding to racism. By contrast, their Hawai'i story reveals the lives of notable and educated Black individuals since the early 1800s, including formerly enslaved men and women, civil rights attorneys, barbers, unnamed sailors, and hundreds of thousands of military members. They found in Hawai'i a respite from the constraints of the places they had left; some married and settled into island life. The children of these Black and Hawaiian and Black and Asian unions are a significant portion of the people who anchor this book.

This project is partly recuperative: it places Black people into Hawai'i's history. Lauded histories of the Islands tell us a fascinating and complex unfolding of haole influence on Hawai'i's elite; newer ones reveal organized Kanaka resistance. Yet they have not looked in the records for nonWhite, nonAsian foreigners who populated the Islands. Remarkable notations of Black sailors, musicians, and others dot the pages of missionary journals and Hawaiian-language newspapers to provide a fuller account of a society thus far depicted as an indigenous place increasingly peopled with haole and a growing Asian population.

This project is also conceptual: it reveals race as an imperative analytic that becomes unwaveringly obvious when we center people of African descent in Hawai‘i’s history. The earliest arrivals experienced the possibilities of a non-race-based society available to African people during a time of slavery. At the same time, Black people—both as individuals and as the perceived embodiment of White imaginings of Blackness—were central to the adoption of race by the late 1800s. Their experiences illustrate both the Kingdom’s uniqueness compared with the United States and its growing accommodation to US racialist (and racist) thought and structures, as it changed from a kingdom to a US territory and then to a state.

This chapter provides this historical context to correct the current notion that all Black people in Hawai‘i are visitors here as a result of the US military. Hawai‘i residents’ association of Black people with the US military has become hegemonic since the twentieth century, developing antiBlack sentiment in the Islands. World War II brought the largest number of African Americans—again, mostly men—through all branches of the US military, which, along with media outlets, continues to inform locals’ understandings of who Black people “are.” However, from the nineteenth century to the present, Hawai‘i is also peppered with distinguished Black civilians who made the Islands their home. I highlight several of these notables, whose accomplishments reflect the possibilities afforded by the Pacific. They are joined today by college students and professionals, newcomers and long-term residents, who have migrated from North America, along with a smaller number from Asia, Europe, the Caribbean, and Africa. While the US military has been the primary generator for the arrival of Black people in the Hawaiian Islands, it neither begins nor ends their local story. Black locals are the most invisible of Hawai‘i’s Black population, their narratives overshadowed by the military.²² This neglected history reveals why Black people have considered these islands to be their haven, an alternative to life otherwise.

A Note on Terminology

The term “Black” is more accurate than “African American” in identifying African diasporic people who have migrated to the Islands. The sociologist Romanzo Adams wrote in 1945 that “the number of Negroes in Hawaii has never been large and commonly most of them are not called Negroes.”²³ Yet there were enough people of African descent in the nineteenth century for Hawaiians to describe them with the term “haole ‘ele‘ele.” Eleanor Nordyke, a demographer, translates this to “foreign black.”²⁴ Haole referred initially to any

foreigner and later specifically to White people; ‘ele‘ele means “Black, dark, the black color of Hawaiian eyes.”²⁵ Hawaiian-language references translated to “black” in newspapers across the nineteenth century described color, as in “black paints” or “black hair dye,” or else something dark or darkness. ‘Ele‘ele referred to dark or darkened things (“black bear,” etc.).²⁶ “Pā‘ele” was another term for “Negroid . . . Negro, Black” as a noun; used as a verb, it means “to be covered with dirt; to besmear; to blacken.”²⁷

In the nineteenth century, some Hawaiians also used the terms “negero” and less frequently “nika” to mean “negro” or “nigger.”²⁸ Clarissa Armstrong, the haole wife of Reverend Richard Armstrong, writes in her journal: “The natives often ask if he [referring to an image on her wall] is a negro (‘nika’)” (parentheses in original).²⁹ This term is not commonly used today, although now many island residents call themselves and one another “nigga,” despite not identifying as Black.³⁰

“Pōpolo” is a more common term to refer to African-descended people in contemporary Hawai‘i (which, like the term “haole,” is used both descriptively and derogatorily), referring to the dark berry of the nightshade plant. In the Kumulipo, a Hawaiian creation chant, “Pō” refers to darkness, which is there from the beginning and gives birth to the first woman.³¹ “Pō” refers here to darkness or “deep darkness” (pō-uli). The scholar Joyce Pualani Warren explains, “A pan-Polynesian concept, Pō is the darkness, a chaotic yet generative space from which life emerges.”³² Pō thus refers to “night, darkness, obscurity; the realm of the gods; pertaining to or of the gods, chaos, or hell.”³³ Under the entry “pōpolo,” the Hawaiian dictionary states: “Because of its color, pōpolo has long been an uncomplimentary term. . . . In modern slang, Blacks are sometimes referred to as pōpolo.”³⁴ Yet, like the term “nigga,” “pōpolo” has been reclaimed by some Black people in the Islands who use it to self-describe.

Most usually, the participants in this project and others use the common US terms “Black” and “African American” (along with their other racial identities for those who are multiracial) to refer to themselves and other African-descended people. These shifts in terminology are part of the uneven adoption of US racial distinctions in the Islands.

Possibilities in the Pacific: The Earliest Black Arrivals

Decades before plantations, Black men and women landed and often settled in the Hawaiian Kingdom. There were many important positions to occupy in the rapidly changing nineteenth century. Some acquired citizenship and land; they married Hawaiians and learned ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i (the Hawaiian language). While in the United States the slave system was still intact and citizenship was

denied to people of African descent, former and escaped enslaved men and women could participate fully in the Hawaiian Kingdom. For one, no person was a slave in Hawai‘i. Additionally, darkness was hailed as a sign of “strength and courage.”³⁵

On the heels of James Cook’s voyages to Hawai‘i (1778–1779), free Black men worked along maritime fur-trading routes between the Pacific Northwest and China. Among those aboard whaling and exploration ships leaving New England (Bedford) and Liverpool, England, were those seeking refuge from slavery. Based on shipping records and missionary accounts, we can say that “by the time Europe was ready to tackle the last unexplored ocean [the Pacific], free and unfree Blacks had been serving onboard these ships in a variety of capacities,” bringing them to Hawai‘i by 1800.³⁶ Following Hawai‘i’s sandalwood trade to China (the 1790s), the first whaling ship arrived in the Islands in 1819, the year before the first missionaries landed. This legacy of arrival—from Cook to the sandalwood trade, the waves of whalers and missionaries, and later the US military—points both to a genealogy of Western imperialism and to the vectors that brought African-descended people to these islands.

If by annexation people in Hawai‘i had begun adopting US racial categories and ideologies of difference, this was neither an inevitable nor a complete process. Hawaiians had their own practices. Scholars describe the “assimilation” of the several thousand Cape Verdean sailors arriving on whaling ships between 1820 and 1880, who went on to learn Hawaiian and practiced local customs.³⁷ Former University of Hawai‘i professor Edgar Knowlton Jr. compiled the names and migration stories of Cabo Verdeans of African descent, including those who married women with Hawaiian names.³⁸ Their children, also given Hawaiian names, tended to marry other Native Hawaiians, revealing a less rigid racial stance concerning Blackness. Hawaiians did not adopt the US one-drop rule, used the term “haole” to refer to any foreigner, and maintained an expansive definition of who was Hawaiian.³⁹

The Kanaka scholar J. Kēhaulani Kauanui writes, “Kanaka Maoli genealogical practices and kinship . . . differ from the U.S. colonial imposition of blood quantum”; whereas “the blood quantum rule operates through a reductive logic,” Hawaiians call on “expansive identity claims based on genealogy.”⁴⁰ There is an absence of Black people in the records because individuals had difficulty categorizing African-descended people, some of whom privileged their self-identification as Hawaiian. A disjuncture emerges, too, between the ideas of difference (or lack thereof) held by the Kanaka women who married these Black men and statisticians’ attempts to enforce US regimes of race as quantifiable. I am reminded of Stephanie Smallwood’s account of the Atlantic slave

trade, in which the historian highlights the limitations of written accounts and ledgers that commodify rather than humanize those enumerated.⁴¹

We have records of Black men and a few women of the nineteenth century who arrived as missionaries, educators, and entrepreneurs.⁴² Four Black men made up the King's Royal Band, and soon after that, the first two band leaders of the King's Band (now called the Royal Hawaiian Band), commissioned by King Kamehameha III in the 1830s, were Black men.⁴³ On July 11, 1848, Amos Starr Cooke of the Castle and Cooke company enjoyed a concert in which "the Band consisted of the leader & 9 negroes - - 4 . . . with claronets (!)." ⁴⁴ Others who also found a place as yet unsettled by race became advisers to the monarch and, in the early 1900s, owned small businesses like boardinghouses.⁴⁵

Elsewhere, other scholars and I have written about important Black figures in nineteenth-century Hawai'i.⁴⁶ The story most often begins with Anthony Allen, an escaped enslaved man from New York. He arrived in Honolulu around 1810, where he became an entrepreneur and steward to King Kamehameha.⁴⁷ It was on Anthony Allen's O'ahu estate that Allen made the acquaintance of Betsey Stockton, the first documented Black woman to live in the Islands. Anthony Allen "was very kind to me," Stockton writes, "and seemed happy to see one of his own country people. I think he told me he has resided on the island twenty years, and had never before seen a coloured female."⁴⁸ Betsey Stockton (b. ca. 1798) was "gifted" as a slave to the wife of the president of Princeton University (then a college) in New Jersey and became renowned for her missionary zeal. After being granted her freedom, Stockton accompanied the friend of her former owners across the Pacific, arriving in Maui in April 1823, where she stayed for two and a half years. There, this remarkable individual learned 'ōlelo Hawai'i and founded a school for Kānaka Maoli. The Hampton Institute in Virginia was modeled on Stockton's school.⁴⁹

Allen and Stockton are just two of the scores of Black residents in the Kingdom of Hawai'i at the time. They offer reputable stories of upward mobility to suggest why the existing narrations of "the African American experience in Hawai'i" (few as they are) usually begin with them, rather than with the nameless laboring sailors who arrived well before them. They and countless others held important positions and shaped the Islands' educational, economic, and cultural arenas. We miss these striking individuals—and those deemed "less impressive"—if we do not look for them in archives. These compelling figures existed not only outside of official documents but also outside of our contemporary and taken-for-granted categories.

Relying only on official documents like the census and English-language sources makes it appear as if annexation brought about a drastic shift in racial

classification. Yet turning to the daily writings of haole, maka‘āinana, and ali‘i—not to mention the *spoken words* of Hawaiians, as Noelani Arista urges⁵⁰—we see that Hawaiians were not yet regularly distinguishing Black people simply along racial lines in the first half of the nineteenth century. However, Europeans and Americans were steadily importing their racial science in the decades that preceded annexation as these islands became a cauldron of competing ideas of difference.

Nineteenth-Century Hawai‘i: A Place Unsettled by Race

Nineteenth-century Hawai‘i calls for a *racial* analysis of this island society, yet one that does not conflate its dynamics with those of the United States. Whereas “the continental triangulation of black, white, and Indian racialization provides a framework for conceptualizing the Hawaiian, Asian, and white triangle formed in the colonized islands,” so too did paradigms of Blackness—and Black *people*.⁵¹ Racialization affected this “most isolated landmass in the world” in several ways: Europeans and Americans divided Pacific peoples into a tripartite racial hierarchy of Polynesians, Micronesians, and Melanesians; they categorized Kānaka Maoli alternately as Indian, Black, and White; and African-descended people entered a society not structured along racial lines in the early 1800s but emerged at the turn of the century as “Blacks,” “Negroes,” and “niggers.” As the archaeologist Fred McGhee insists, “The cultural geography of European exploration and colonization—and ultimately of race—in the Pacific . . . needs to be rethought, in a manner similar to the way identity and geography have been rethought in the Atlantic maritime worlds to produce a deliberately cross-cultural and trans-national Black identity and culture picture.”⁵² The Pacific was an(other) racial frontier. Using the term “Black Pacific” well before the current crop of scholarship, McGhee argues that “it cannot be denied that by the mid to late eighteenth century the Black Atlantic world (Gilroy 1993) was already in contact with and influencing (and being influenced by) the Pacific world.”⁵³ New England missionaries brought some of the sharpest changes.

Christian missionaries who arrived starting in 1820 degraded Hawaiian culture and brought antiBlack racism and ideas of native savagery with their religion.⁵⁴ Part of haole attempts to control the populace included efforts at categorizing according to illegitimate racial science. Despite rampant taxonomizing, Western racial categories were in flux in the Pacific (including the relationship between Melanesians and more recent African diasporic arrivals) because people do not exist according to colonial constructs. American and

European “colonial travelers who voyaged through the Pacific sailed through a sea of islands inhabited by peoples they identified as Indians” and attempted to racialize Hawaiians as Native Americans.⁵⁵ The Spanish physician Don Francisco Marin, a confidant of King Kamehameha and “one of the most influential European residents in the Hawaiian Islands in the early 1800s,” called Hawaiians “Indians” (itself transposed from Columbus’s erroneous thinking that he had landed in India).⁵⁶ Haole also attempted to denigrate Hawaiian monarchs by calling them “niggers.” From early encounters, White people grafted their constructed categories onto Oceania.

Hawaiians have a counterhistory of explaining their distinction from others. Queen Lili‘uokalani contests her usurpation, arguing, “The people of the Islands have no voice in determining their future, but are visually relegated to the condition of the aborigines of the American continent.”⁵⁷ In the early twenty-first century, some advanced a similar argument against the unsuccessful Akaka Bill that had attempted to grant Hawaiians a status similar to that of Native American tribes.⁵⁸ In quite a different way, Hawaiians also found a likeness with Native Americans. Hawaiian-language texts show how “since the 1830s, American Indian people became a central site around which Kanaka reflected on colonialism and their own situation.”⁵⁹

As the anthropologist Virginia Dominguez reveals, the shifting terrain of the nineteenth century unsteadies the “inevitability” and hegemony of US racial terms in a place where Kānaka Maoli persistently engaged global ideas.⁶⁰ People of African descent had more play with their identifications within this society structured neither rigidly by race nor by a system of slavery. Black people were respected rather than reviled. The educator Betsey Stockton—formerly enslaved when she lived in New Jersey—describes a day in Hawai‘i in 1823 before she learned ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i: “After service the favourite queen called me, and requested that I should take a seat with her on the sofa, which I did, although I could say but few words which she could understand.”⁶¹ Would this scene have been imaginable in the continental United States? Haole may have referred to the earliest African-descended arrivals through references to Blackness; nonetheless, Black women and men experienced integration, mobility, and prominence over generations, further revealing the stronghold of Kanaka epistemologies.

Hawai‘i’s more flexible yet increasingly solidifying racial borders are evidenced through the unstable and unexpected categorization of people of African descent. Kanaka Maoli definitions of genealogy and ancestry commingled with US racial definitions. Such unsteadiness contrasts with the fixity of Blackness and obsession over racial boundaries in the United States that instituted

antimiscegenation laws regulating marriage as early as the 1660s.⁶² In contrast to the one-drop rule, Black Hawaiian children were often classified as part Hawaiian, reflecting “inclusion [that] is not premised on the exclusion of one’s other racial identities,” or what Kauanui calls “*hyperdescent*.”⁶³ The historian Gerald Horne remarks on the fact that one could intermarry with Hawaiians and have children who were identified as Hawaiian, whereas this kind of integration into nonBlack communities was less probable in the United States.⁶⁴ This marital incorporation, along with professional and friendly relationships of *maka‘āinana* and *ali‘i* with Black men and women, signifies the receptivity to, and general lack of concern over, Black residents before World War II.

Haole, Black, and Asian people were not the only migrants; Hawaiians had long crossed the ocean. Nineteenth-century *Kānaka* visited the Eastern Seaboard and other parts of the United States (and many other nations), where they interacted with Native American, Black, and White people.⁶⁵ The historian David Chang shows how *Kanaka* racialization as Native people led Hawaiians to identify with and marry Native Americans in the western United States. Chang joins Gary Okiihiro’s examination of the routes Hawaiians traveled for hundreds of years, including those who fought in the Civil War, and the ties between schools for Native children in Hawai‘i and the US East Coast.⁶⁶ These historians contribute to the work on overseas Hawaiians established in the careful research of Hōkūlani Aikau, Lisa Kahaleole Hall, and Adria Imada.⁶⁷ Their scholarship shows that not all *Kanaka* experiences abroad were positive.

Traveling Hawaiians were afflicted (and infected) by ideas of Blackness in the continental United States. They encountered the denigration of non-Whites abroad and aboard ships. Queen Kapi‘olani and Princess Lili‘uokalani visited San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Chicago, and Washington, DC, where they met with President Cleveland and confronted categories of race framed by both Native American genocide and the enslavement of Africans. During Prince Lot and Prince Liholiho’s travels in 1849–1850, the latter prince encountered a train conductor who attempted to remove him from the train car. As the sixteen-year-old Alexander Liholiho (who later became king of the Islands) wrote, the conductor “took me for somebody’s servant just because I had darker skin than he had. Confounded fool.”⁶⁸ John Quincy Adams described an earlier visitor to DC, the diplomat Timoteo Ha‘alilio, as being “nearly black as an Ethiopian, but with a European face and wool for hair”; Ha‘alilio was similarly mistaken for a servant or slave.⁶⁹ Such *Kanaka* experiences with racism abroad, where they were read through the prism of Blackness, both informed

ali'i of the negativity associated with Blackness and led Hawaiians to align with other people of color, as in the case of mid-nineteenth-century Hawaiians on the East Coast who lived in Black households.⁷⁰ Upon return, the future monarchs confronted the growing racial denigration of their people.

African-descended people, too, practiced expansive Kanaka epistemologies of belonging when they foregrounded their Hawaiian identities. Reverend Andrew Iaukea Bright (b. 1881), father of the singer Sol Bright, “would say with a hearty laugh, ‘Well I’m a Hawaiian, but my father was a black-assed popolo’”—referring to his father, who came from the port of Bravas in the Cape Verde Islands.⁷¹ Was the Reverend using “Hawaiian” to refer to ancestry and also to citizenship? Was he referring to his kinship and genealogical connection to place and people that would not preclude his own Blackness? Was he adopting racial categories and distancing himself from Blackness? Was his use of “black-assed popolo” a form of self-identification, an example of ethnic humor, or a term of derision? Paying attention to these fleeting references to Blackness and the kinship of Hawaiians to African-descended arrivals points us to the Pacific as a proper, if neglected, site of the African diaspora and illustrates nineteenth-century Black and Native relations.

The possibilities in this society illustrate Virginia Dominguez’s bold claim that the Kingdom of Hawai‘i (1840–1893) was a possible site for the “unthinkability of race.”⁷² This appealed to nineteenth-century arrivals who benefited from “Hawaii’s non-exclusionary citizenship laws which gave access to civil and political rights to such African Americans . . . nearly 20 years before the US civil war.”⁷³ Hawai‘i’s explicit antislavery stance, detailed in Willy Kauai’s careful research, was an added draw: “Article II. Involuntary servitude, except for crime, is forever prohibited in this Kingdom; whenever a slave shall enter Hawaiian Territory, he shall be free.”⁷⁴ Kauai finds that until 1887, the year of the Bayonet Constitution, “acquiring Hawaiian citizenship was based on allegiance, not skin color.”⁷⁵ The 1890 Census shows about 15 percent of its Hawaiian subjects were not Native Hawaiian or were “of foreign ancestry.”⁷⁶ Although the Kingdom was not an equal society, Dominguez writes that “no institutional practices promoted social, reproductive, or civic exclusivity on anything resembling racial terms before the American period,” despite the presence of non-Hawaiian subjects of the Kingdom.⁷⁷

As American oligarchs debated the Islands’ future with the United States, they imported racial science, transposing ideas applied to Black bodies onto Hawaiian ones. At the same time, Americans distinguished Hawaiians from both African-descended people and the Blackness of Melanesians. Polynesians

were not spared the ideologies of Black inferiority; haole placed Kānaka Maoli within their hierarchy of races as well as within colonial divisions of the Pacific. They applied supremacist conceptions of Black inferiority developed in the context of slavery to Hawaiians, calling them a heathen and “shiftless” people to justify colonization while noting their hierarchical valuation as “closer to White” than Micronesians (who now face antiBlack racism in Hawai‘i) and Melanesians.⁷⁸ Among these ideas was the conflation of darkness with inferiority, contrasting with Kanaka ideas of the mana of darkness, or Pō. The Maui chief Kahekili tattooed half of his body black, “just like his namesake the god of Thunder,” signaling Hawaiians’ “revering its [i.e., blackness/darkness] power, its sacredness, its importance to our origins and our strength.”⁷⁹ Yet darkness and inferiority began to cohere in the Islands.

Colonists attempted to discredit the monarchy by crafting rumors of King Kamehameha’s African ancestry—the “proof” was his dark complexion.⁸⁰ Queen Lili‘uokalani faced the same “Negro-ification” when a news writer claimed that she “had no ‘real hereditary royalty’” and that she and King Kalākaua “were instead the illegitimate children of a mulatto shoemaker.”⁸¹ According to Noe Silva, American cartoonists “borrowed stock images of Africans and African Americans” to racialize and denigrate Kānaka, depicting the queen as a “pickaninny” in the 1890s.⁸² The Queen resisted these images; however, they fit too neatly within the larger narrative of White supremacy worming its way into the Islands over the course of the nineteenth century.⁸³ Reverend Baldwin (of the famous Baldwin family of Maui) describes a meeting in 1831 with the ali‘i: “We were first introduced to Kauikeaouli, the king, a stout young black boy of 17,” who was “quite French in his manners, & reminded me very much of many of our spruce College bucks,” after which he made the acquaintance of “Kaahumanu, that monument of divine grace that I have long wished to set my eyes upon.”⁸⁴ Native Hawaiians were and were not “Black.”

Maka‘āinana, or commoners, were not spared these racialization efforts, as “empire has functioned by making its victims both Indian and black.”⁸⁵ Dwight Baldwin describes his reaction upon arrival, similar to that of fellow missionary Betsey Stockton: “The natives flocked around us. We needed nothing more than their appearance to tell us we were on heathen ground,” mentioning their lack of clothing other than the tapa on their waists. “Here for the first [time] we found things that reminded us of home. All seemed American around the mis. establishment, except the black faces that met us every where, & *alohas* instead of, *how do you do?*”⁸⁶ Other influential haole residents, like Dr. George Albert Lathrop, who “habitually” called Kānaka “niggers,” supported the haole takeover of the Islands.⁸⁷ Lathrop’s racism proved fatal through his ineffectual handling of

medicine. A Honolulu physician from New York, Lathrop opened his Queens Street drugstore in 1850 and was a founding member of the Hawaiian Medical Association (1856). The doctor was responsible for overseeing the compulsory smallpox vaccination program in a medical district that became plagued with “general mismanagement” and a “defective vaccine” during the great epidemic in 1853.⁸⁸ Introduced by a merchant ship that arrived that year in the Honolulu port from San Francisco, the outbreak killed an estimated ten thousand people.

Not only did haole bring diseases that physically devastated Hawai‘i’s people; they also imported ideologies that infected the minds of its residents for centuries to come. “To enact indigenous genocide and displacement, settler societies have drawn upon the same language of racial threat and criminality that has been invoked to justify anti-black violence,” the historian Justin Leroy writes.⁸⁹ This included sentiments of disgust toward “natives” and their “heathenism” (which conversion attempted to resolve) and attempts to fit them into racial categories codified by the law and census developed through White people’s encounters with Native Americans and Africans.

Hawaiians adopted ideologies of race in their ways, to distinguish Kānaka as a people. Queen Lili‘uokalani asked in 1898 if it is not so that “as a race we have some special mental and physical requirements not shared by other races which have come among us?”⁹⁰ Yet because of its demographic, historical, and geographic distinctiveness, Hawai‘i’s racial dynamics were unlike those of the United States, in large part because of Kanaka persistence. Despite epidemics and attempts to “disappear” them, Hawaiian epistemologies and practices continue to shape island norms and propel its future orientation as Kanaka demographics and culture rebound. Hawaiian resistance to “dismemberment” through expansive ideas of belonging is largely why these islands continue to provide Black people an appealing alternative to US society.

Settling Race/Racial Settlements:

The Turn of the Twentieth Century

Hawai‘i’s relationship to race—and Blackness—cemented with annexation. Rather than an overnight change theorized by Dominguez, haole imported racist ideologies (and racist practices) well before official codification and political incorporation, signified by collecting “racial” data through the US Census. But this was not a one-way imposition. As haole disembarked onto Hawaiian land, ali‘i and Kanaka laborers set sail on ships abuzz with humanity, to which they contributed their own ideas and practices. They traveled to

destinations where haole explained their divisions of humankind, and upon returning from Liverpool and London, and Macao and Mexico, those Kānaka brought back new notions of difference, modes of behavior, and items of desire.⁹¹ Various ideologies clashed in the Islands, especially over the burgeoning plantation economy that came to shape contemporary Hawai‘i. Twentieth-century Hawai‘i also witnessed the continued arrival of prominent and influential Black individuals and their families. According to the census, by June 1, 1900, Hawai‘i had 233 Black residents, and the number grew to 695 ten years later.⁹² These newcomers had to navigate their status vis-à-vis the Islands’ growing diversity, made all the more so by Asian plantation workers.

Haole in Hawai‘i indoctrinated (and often authored) racist Black/White understandings of difference partly based on their knowledge of US southern economies. They applied this racialist discourse to emerging disputes in Hawai‘i over a Black plantation labor force in the early 1900s. Some Hawai‘i plantation owners hoped to resolve their labor shortage by recruiting several hundred Black southerners starting in 1901.⁹³ The Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association brought thirty families from Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama to a Maui plantation in 1907. These newcomers followed the trend of earlier Black arrivals: they “did not establish a separate homogenous community”; rather, some “merged with the residents through intermarriage and association with local groups, but others returned to the Mainland.”⁹⁴ Debates over the use of Black southern labor explain these small numbers. The plantocracy may have resisted their recruitment for several reasons, including stereotypes of Black people as “unmanageable, lazy, untrustworthy and violent.”⁹⁵ Abolitionists included members of the Hawaiian government and those missionaries who felt that contract labor was too similar to slavery. On their end, southern plantation owners wanted to hold on to their labor supply. The geographic and social distance of these “foreign” islands, along with reports of terrible working conditions faced by Black workers, further discouraged their large-scale emigration.⁹⁶

A similar debate occurred in the US South over Chinese people as possible sources of labor after the abolition of slavery. Although White people viewed as unsuitable both Chinese workers in the US South and Black workers in Hawai‘i, they considered Asian and Black people differently. In Hawai‘i, Asians were considered desirable workers, unlike their Black counterparts; the US South preferred Black to Asian labor.⁹⁷ This represents the divergent forms of deviance that White people produced, through ideologies of difference and practices of exploitation, of Asian and Black people. This occurred both within the bounds of the United States and in their colonial considerations of Africa (to which White

people attached notions of savagery and Black inferiority) and Asia (Orientalist depictions of emasculated and backward heathens). While in the US imaginary, it is laboring Black bodies we think of when discussing plantations while forgetting the Chinese presence, Hawai‘i’s prestatehood narratives showcase poor conditions faced by Asian laborers (whose descendants became known as “local”) without recalling the island of Maui’s Black plantation workforce.

By the mid-1800s, haole elite turned land taken from Kānaka Maoli into sugar plantations, followed by pineapple production and tourism, all based on exploited labor that created profits to line the pockets of an oligarchy.⁹⁸ The ruling elite melded “moral” objections to Native indolence (Kānaka objected to laboring under haole) with economic aims that racialized Asians as desirable workers. Haole missionaries, businessmen, and politicians (often one and the same), along with traveling Hawaiians, further changed the landscape to develop their capitalist interests.⁹⁹ While largely narrated as a haole, Hawaiian, and Asian story, Black people and ideas of Blackness were part of this unfolding economy.

The sugar plantation economy, which began in 1835, shapes contemporary demographics and local culture in this nonWhite settler society.¹⁰⁰ It led to the arrival of workers from Asia and the Pacific (as well as Puerto Rico), who together shared a working-class experience and now collectively form the majority demographic. Haole plantation owners’ techniques of enforcing racial difference structured the economy.¹⁰¹ Unequal living and working conditions, including the geographic separation and differing pay and status granted to groups, both distinctly racialized each group *and* led to the development of local culture. Local culture, discussed at length in chapter 2, may now be a shared expression that privileges Hawai‘i-centered practices, but it exists within a society rife with racial and economic hierarchies.

As in the continental United States, indigenous people resisted their co-optation as plantation labor. The Kōloa Plantation on Kaua‘i was established in the 1830s, and by 1841, Hawaiian workers resisted their conditions and objected to the destruction of land, leading plantation owners to look elsewhere for labor.¹⁰² Beginning in 1852, about thirty thousand Chinese (mostly men) made up the first wave of contract workers, many of whom stayed on and married Hawaiian women. In the early 1880s, King Kalākaua visited Japan, China, and India in an attempt to garner laborers and assist his nation’s economy.¹⁰³ Japanese came in large numbers (around 159,000) between 1868 and 1907 and contributed significantly to the development of local practices. Families of Portuguese, many from the Canary Islands, followed in two waves between 1878 and 1913 (15,000), becoming lunas (supervisors) on plantations

partly because of their proximity to Whiteness. Six thousand Puerto Ricans followed, and then Spaniards and Mexicans (8,000—many of whom were also categorized as “White” on the census) at the turn of the twentieth century. Nearly eight thousand Koreans came, starting in 1903, followed by Filipinos (around 123,000 between 1906 and 1946), one of the largest groups in contemporary Hawai‘i.¹⁰⁴

Plantation owners, attempting to quell possible insurrection, segregated these groups through imposed distinctions (the workers overcame this with strikes in 1909 and 1920). These constructed differences, including varying levels of economic and political power, as well as particular stereotypes, continue to distinguish various Asian groups in Hawai‘i today.¹⁰⁵ This history also marks their distinction from the racial and community formation in the continental United States, where Asians are a minor demographic and are lumped together as a racialized group of newcomers and professionals. In Hawai‘i, Asians are not lumped together into a combined category. This process reflects the differential formation of racial ideas in Hawai‘i referred to as “ethnicity” and reminds us of the important intermediary and shifting role of Asians between Black and White, as well as between haole and Hawaiian. Filipinos and Sāmoans, along with more recently arrived Micronesians, tend to be racialized in negative ways used to “justify” their lower status, while haole, Chinese, and Japanese dominate local politics yet are also distinctly racialized.

The hegemony of the plantation narrative erases Black people, since they mostly did not come through this system. This dominant narrative also forms the basis for Asian settler colonialism, which obfuscates the role of Asian settlers in ongoing Native dispossession.¹⁰⁶ Histories of Hawai‘i focus significantly on the Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos, with exciting new research on early Hawaiian history; less is known about Black workers or, perhaps more surprisingly, the other major US racial minority: Latinos. Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, who make up nearly 10 percent of the Islands’ population today, have a long local history but face a similar erasure.¹⁰⁷ The Black presence in Hawai‘i precedes these waves of Asian and Latino laborers, and we know little about their intergroup relations, on and off the plantation. In part, this is because Black men arrived earlier as whalers and sailors, yet we have been wrong to erase them from plantation history. A few hundred Black workers came from the US South to encounter a new society. But it is the notable Black men and women who came at the turn of the twentieth century whose absence from island history seems so curious, given the greatness of their contributions.

A steady stream of highly educated Black Americans at the turn of the twentieth century, including several lawyers and Black professionals with ties

to Howard University, shaped residents' perceptions of their intellectual acuity and professional successes. The first practicing Black lawyer in the Islands was the South Carolina-born (1853) T. McCants Stewart. Whereas Betsey Stockton was enslaved by the president of Princeton, Stewart attended Princeton in the same class as Woodrow Wilson. The esteemed attorney, a graduate of Howard University and a friend of Frederick Douglass, was recognized for his letters comparing the situation of Black people in the South with those in the North (he was critical of the latter).¹⁰⁸

The *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* celebrated Stewart's arrival from Brooklyn on November 29, 1898 (the year of annexation): "T. McCants Stewart, a distinguished Afro-American, who is a thorough-going American, if there ever was one, has arrived in Honolulu and will remain to engage in the practice of his profession—that of the law. . . . He is a lawyer of character and ability, well fitted for any business connected with the ability of Justice."¹⁰⁹

Stewart "may have desired to start a new life in a land devoid of the racial limitations he faced in the United States"—his success in the Islands bears this notion out, as he was considered a possible candidate for governor.¹¹⁰ According to his acquaintance Marcus Garvey, Stewart intriguingly may also have come to the territory "at the instance of British capitalists to represent them in some valuable interests."¹¹¹ Staying for about seven years, Stewart developed his practice, helped draft a city charter for Honolulu, "and represented all varieties of people in diverse Honolulu."¹¹² According to the Black lawyer Daphne Barbee-Wooten, Stewart "represented Chinese clients who suffered from discrimination and expulsion in immigration cases," setting the precedent for Black lawyers fighting discrimination in the Islands.¹¹³

The race consciousness of Hawai'i's first Black attorney represents the orientation of those following in his steps.¹¹⁴ His impact was long-standing, as his daughter Carlotta (who married a Chinese businessman, Yon Lai, changing her last name from Stewart to Lai) helped develop Hawai'i's educational system.¹¹⁵ She was a graduate of O'ahu College (which became Punahou School, Obama's alma mater) and was the first Black principal in Honolulu. One source suggests that "conditions were neither difficult nor racially oppressive for a black professional woman, [as] in Hawai'i, there was no substantial black community before World War II, and Carlotta saw few black people either in classrooms or outside."¹¹⁶ As her father once stated, "Happy is the man, who . . . leaves such footprints on the sands of time that succeeding generations are safe in following them."¹¹⁷ Generations of Black men and women have indeed followed in the footsteps of Stewart, Lai, and the much earlier nineteenth-century arrivals.

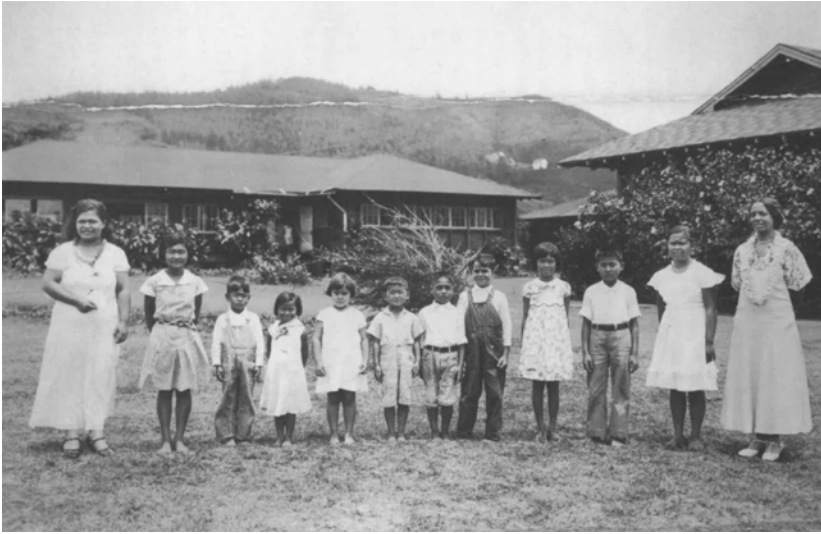


Figure 1.1 Principal Carlotta Stewart Lai (*right*) and students at the Hanamaulu School, Kaua'i, 1933. Source: Peter Young, *Carlotta*, Images of Old Hawaii, December 9, 2015, <http://imagesofoldhawaii.com/carlotta>.

While massive numbers of Black soldiers arrived in the twentieth century, there was still a steady stream of Black civilians and families who became influential. Alice Ball, the daughter of Black professionals from Seattle, was the first African American and the first woman to graduate with a master's of science in chemistry at what became the University of Hawai'i.¹¹⁸ She played a crucial role in developing an antileprosy treatment that was used for decades after her untimely death at twenty-four (1916). The Ball Method of treating Hansen's disease was erased from the record when a haole scientist who became the president of the University of Hawai'i created his method without citing his predecessor.

Other influential residents thrived in Hawai'i during the time of Jim Crow. They include Wyoming-born politician Nolle Smith (b. 1888, son of a Choctaw and Black mother and White father), whose family was featured in a 1959 issue of *Essence* magazine.¹¹⁹ Fellow politician Helen Hale broke a host of barriers for which she too was recognized locally as well as by a different prominent national Black American magazine. Hale was the Minnesota-born niece of Ralph Bunche and came with her African American husband to the Big Island in 1947, just before statehood (they divorced, and she married Richard Kiyota).¹²⁰ The words of "the poet laureate of Hawai'i" Don Blanding pulled her to the



Figure 1.2 Carlotta Stewart, ca. 1900. Source: Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC.

Islands, which she thought would provide a “racially receptive culture” that she indeed found.

During a visit to the Big Island, Blanding wrote a poem, “Tutu” (Grandma), published in 1939.¹²¹ Dedicated to “those grand old Hawaiians you see sitting on the doorsteps of the little houses along the road in Kona watching life go by, smiling,” the poem begins:

*I would grow old as you are old, Tutu,
Seasoned with loving, mellow with gracious giving
I would have hair like your grayed hair, Tutu,
Each silver thread a service stripe of living.*¹²²

The poem is oddly predictive of Hale’s future. She was featured on the cover of *Ebony* magazine in 1963 as “Hawaii’s top woman politician,” wearing a tapa print top and several lei. Encouraged by Blanding’s descriptions, Hale moved to the Big Island of Hawai‘i, where she lived for sixty years and died at the age of ninety-four. She served the county and Hawai‘i Island, earning her own badges of silver hair described in Blanding’s poem.

After working as an intermediate school teacher and being on the board of supervisors in the 1950s, Hale served three terms in the state legislature to become the oldest person elected in that capacity.¹²³ In 1962 she ran for chief executive officer (i.e., mayor) of Hawai‘i County. Her feature in *Ebony* the next year states, “For a person who was not a native of Hawaii, and not related to any of the leading island families and who in addition admitted being part Negro, part Indian ‘and a few other nationalities,’” it seemed that her campaign “could only lead to defeat.”¹²⁴ She beat the Republican incumbent to become the first woman and first African American mayor across the Islands. Indeed, Hale was the first woman to run the island in an executive capacity since Queen Lili‘uokalani in the previous century. Hale helped to develop astronomy on Maunakea (currently the site of struggle over Indigenous land rights) and fostered the creation of the unparalleled Merrie Monarch hula festival.¹²⁵ Perhaps because of her fair appearance, some sources do not mention her racial background. Others call her “multiracial,” saying that her mother and father were “both of mixed African-American and Caucasian heritage,” while Black long-term island residents proudly claim her as African American.¹²⁶

The experiences and contributions of these transplants, better documented than those of early Black sailors and their children, reveal exemplary accomplishments possible in a place structured neither by slavery nor by a Black/White binary. Black people were long accepted in this Pacific site, where they tended to arrive as individuals or in smaller groups than the waves of

Asian plantation workers of the nineteenth century. In Hawai‘i, in contrast to the places they left, members of the African diaspora pursued opportunities during the Jim Crow era and served critical roles in the governing, legal, educational, and social life of the Islands.

While noting these contributions, I want to caution against a dominant narrative of Black history in Hawai‘i that is emerging among some representatives of “the Black community” (generally African American long-term residents, a few with ties to the military). This narrative begins with Anthony Allen and ends with Barack Obama, developing a progress story of accomplishment and respectability that erases many Black island residents—including women—who do not fit this narrative or choose not to. Marginal to this account (but central to the story of Hawai‘i) are Cape Verdean whalers and other mariners who arrived before Allen, nonprofessional Black residents, and especially Black locals who do not identify with this story of Black Hawai‘i.¹²⁷ One accessible timeline, “The History of African Americans in Hawai‘i,” presents only the most “distinguished” and respected figures, filled with nonlocal educated lawyers, doctors, and politicians.¹²⁸ It does not mention Black people’s role in the domestication of Hawai‘i into the United States or their role today in the Islands’ occupation. Like the growing scholarship on Black Hawai‘i, this narrative also excludes non-American Black people. Black residents on the margins of this curated narrative of African American accomplishment have been concerned with other questions of belonging. They contrast with Black transplants through their kinship ties to local communities that formed when race was still unsettled. If anything, however, these emerging contestations mark the recognition of a growing Black presence.

Hawai‘i’s history, as told either in its schooling system or in any of the recently published major texts on Hawaiian history, gives the sense that there has been no significant Black settlement. This is incorrect. This overlooked story affects the lives of contemporary Black people and deepens our understanding of the development of race in Hawai‘i. Sketches of early arrivals reveal acceptance and integration in a place where Black people were not reduced to race but rather found avenues of identification that exceeded or outright challenged the one-drop rule.

Archival silences make it difficult to quantify Black people living in the Hawaiian Islands during the 1800s. But what accounts for monographs today that make no mention even of Hawai‘i’s contemporary Black population? Historical research conducted by African American scholars I spoke with contests Romanzo Adams’s thesis that there was “probably no significant immigration” of “American Negroes . . . until after annexation in 1898.”¹²⁹ Adams

was locally considered the expert on Hawai‘i’s demographics: “No scholar has analyzed the statistics of population of Hawaii with greater skill and insight than Romanzo Adams.”¹³⁰ However well regarded Adams was as a demographic pioneer, his methodology limited his findings.¹³¹ His dependence on census statistics, which folded those people we consider today to be “Black” into the category of “Others” from 1900 to 1950, misses the lively social and demographic life of preannexation Hawai‘i.¹³² Neither do demographics and numbers encapsulate the opportunities Hawaiians offered to these arrivals and the respect they paid them within the flux of the nineteenth century.

The census codifies race. However, such structures are not determined; they must engage with local ideas. This may be why Hawai‘i was not only a place where the child of a Black man and a Hawaiian woman could become Hawaiian, but also a place where some African-descended people became White.¹³³ The census categorized people of African descent variously, including as Portuguese and Puerto Rican—both of whom were later classified as White.¹³⁴ Some records listed the early “Black Portuguese” as Black, and others as Caucasian and, in at least one case, mulatto, thereby undercounting people whom today we may consider Black. The most prolific scholar on Black Hawai‘i, Kathryn Takara, offers another explanation for their decreasing numbers in the last century: “Because of the stigmas and negative stereotypes associated with descendants of slaves, some Blacks in the past chose to be identified with another race that was more acceptable and familiar to the local Hawaiian community. Blacks who called themselves part-Negro in the 1910 Census found it easier to become part-Hawaiian in 1920. Even today, a few fear the possible or imagined repercussions of being discovered to be of Negro origins.”¹³⁵ By the end of the nineteenth century, colonial conceptions of race had reorganized Hawai‘i.

The Black encounter with Hawai‘i illustrates the unfolding of racial formation and its alternatives. Enslaved and free Black men and women made their way to the Kingdom, where they became citizens and used their intelligence and compassion to learn from, care for, and cultivate Hawai‘i’s population through contributions in education and health, and in leisure and labor. It was specifically the lack of a slave system and the openness of Kānaka to people of African descent in this monarchical nation—one that did not systematically denigrate Black people or Blackness—that provided these opportunities. It was a world of difference from the Middle Passage. This is the foundation of what the Pacific offers people of African descent.

Black mariners encountered the Pacific as a vast site of Indigenous diversity, a heterogeneity unflattened despite Europeans’ attempts to encase people within constructs of Micronesians, Polynesians, and Melanesians. The Black

presence in Hawai‘i questions studies that restrict island dynamics to a triangulation of haole, Hawaiian, and Asian. Members of the African diaspora also crossed the Pacific, where Indigenous people were racialized in relation to Europeans *and* Africans. Multiple vectors of Blackness overlay this ocean that covers over a quarter of the earth—vectors including transposed ideas of Blackness as well as Black women and men peopling the ocean and its island communities, including Melanesia, Aotearoa, and Aboriginal Australia.

Haole racialized Blackness and Hawaiianness in overlapping yet distinct ways. The Black presence in Hawai‘i interrupted Europeans’ applications of Black inferiority and “sloth” on Kānaka Maoli, just as the haole presence qualified the application of “Whiteness” to Hawaiians. The intersection of racialization and indigeneity constructed Hawaiians as nonWhite natives. With the importation of White supremacy came the conditions for forging a collectivity of people defining themselves in opposition to their shared oppressors. Black, Hawaiian, and Asian residents shared a sense of we-ness, even if ephemeral and strategic, forming local culture. Yet divisions also took root.

Shifts after annexation enforced Kānaka Maoli adoption of racial ideas. These included the census, land policy, schooling, and the denigration of Blackness and African-descended people by the turn of the twentieth century.¹³⁶ Takara writes: “That the very possibility of being Black could threaten to depose a king in late nineteenth-century Hawai‘i, a land where prior to Western contact ‘Black’ had symbolized the greatest political and spiritual powers, should indicate just how much had changed in less than 100 years.”¹³⁷ This shifting attitude comes with residents’ adoption of US racial categories affecting twentieth-century Black men and women—soldiers and their families who arrived in large numbers amid US Jim Crow segregation and the push toward statehood. Leaders who favored Hawai‘i’s union with the United States, including some local Asian constituencies, aligned with America despite documented Kanaka Maoli opposition to these political *and* ideological commitments.

Imported ideologies and practices harmed Black and Hawaiian people in territorial Hawai‘i—moreover, they transformed relations between them. If the small numbers and flexible conceptions of Black people in nineteenth-century Hawai‘i shaped their acceptance and integration, this shifted to negative notions of Blackness in the next century, when the largest numbers of Black arrivals came as part of the US armed forces. The expansion of US militarism across the Pacific, including the Spanish-American War of 1898 and World War II, served to erase the Islands’ Black past and Black people’s histories of working with *and as* Hawaiians (referring both to citizenship and to people

with African and Hawaiian ancestry). It created a new paradoxical narrative of Black people. On the one hand, they were foreign agents working *alongside* haole against the rights of Kānaka, which solidified local adoptions of anti-Black racism. On the other hand, their presence increased island residents' exposure to Black culture and struggle as nonWhite people resisting global oppression.¹³⁸

Twentieth-Century Hawai'i, the "Black Equals Military" Conflation, and Contemporary Black Residents

Twentieth-century African American participation in the US military forms what has become the overwhelming narrative about Black people in Hawai'i. The first group of Black military men who came to Hawai'i arrived in 1913 as part of the segregated troops of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry Regiment, hailing mostly from the US South. Among these two thousand soldiers was Dr. William Waddell, an expert in veterinary medicine who joined the faculty of the Tuskegee Institute and worked with George Washington Carver.¹³⁹ Waddell retired in Hawai'i, where his daughter, the poet and scholar Kathryn Takara, has, over the past decade, invited me to her countryside home to talk story (her poem opens the pages of this book). This regiment, which had been tasked with "controlling" Plains Indians (by whom they were named "Buffalo Soldiers" during the Indian Wars of the 1870s because of their "woolly heads") and working in national parks, was now stationed in Schofield Barracks in north central O'ahu. They were later relocated to the Big Island, where, amid downpours, they arduously built a twenty-five-mile trail to the summit of Mauna Loa. Martha Hoverson's careful collection of newspapers and bulletins from the time reveals the soldiers' renown for baseball, with games drawing spectators in the thousands.¹⁴⁰ Like those arriving before them, these temporary transplants saw that "Hawai'i was more accepting of the African American soldiers than mainland communities had been. They did not entirely escape prejudice during their time in the islands, and they certainly remained segregated, but the soldiers did not encounter the racial hatred that had characterized their interactions with civilians in parts of the mainland."¹⁴¹

Many servicemen and servicewomen came from the southern United States and brought perspectives on difference informed by their experiences with racism and segregation—the same realities that made the military an attractive choice. In Hawai'i, young Black Americans experienced a new kind of society, finding themselves stationed in the United States (first as a territory and then as a state), but in a place that was predominantly nonWhite outside

of the barracks. Soldiers earned steady paychecks, which they could spend on leisure activities “in town” (Honolulu), where they found relief from the rigid racial structures of home and their bases. Black soldiers stationed in the Pacific wrote home to their loved ones, describing the Islands as a place where “one can be respected and live as a free man should.”¹⁴² Whereas Whites warned that Black men “are going to overstep their bounds a little too far one of these days and these boys from the South are going to have a little necktie party,” a Black shipyard worker was adamant that he would “never go back” “down there” to the Jim Crow South.¹⁴³

Hawai‘i has been viewed for centuries as a strategic military and trade location between the Americas and Asia, ideal for colonial interests and central to US imperial expansion. During our “decolonial tour” of O‘ahu, the local Japanese activist Kyle Kajihira and Hawaiian activist Terrilee “Auntie Terri” Keko‘olani took my undergraduate class from Northwestern University to Camp Smith overlooking Pu‘uloa (Pearl Harbor).¹⁴⁴ This is home to the US Indo-Pacific Command, the “oldest (January 1, 1947) and largest of the unified combatant commands,” responsible for operations covering half of the Earth’s surface.¹⁴⁵ The US consolidated military occupation during World War II, when Hawai‘i was under martial law and faced the arrival of over one million people working in and for the military. “Among these men and women were approximately 30,000 people of African descent—soldiers, sailors, war workers.”¹⁴⁶ They did not all leave at war’s end but rather solidified the US military presence in the Islands and reached into and across the Pacific to Asia.

In alliance with haole big business, the US military secured bases on the Islands totaling over 5 percent of the land today (the highest of any state), including nearly *one-quarter* of all land on O‘ahu (the island on which Honolulu is located).¹⁴⁷ This restricts Kānaka access to their sacred sites, and some beaches are closed to nonmilitary personnel. In 2010, about 13 percent of Hawai‘i’s population consisted of the military and their dependents, housed primarily on the island of O‘ahu.¹⁴⁸ In 2017, the most common job in Hawai‘i was working in the military (followed by cooks and retail salespeople).¹⁴⁹ The same source finds that “Hawaii has an unusually high number of residents working as Military,” at 16.3 times higher than the expected rate.¹⁵⁰ Black men and women make up a substantial proportion of these numbers, and of the island residents who are veterans.

The arrival of members of all four branches of the US military consolidates the hegemonic association that “Black equals military.” It is difficult to overstate the dominance of the presumption that all Black people in the Islands must be in the military. This aligns Black people—no matter their actual

affiliation—as participants in US imperialism across the Pacific and in Asia, and specifically in the occupation of the Hawaiian Islands. The tides of the Black experience shift here from acceptance and integration in the nineteenth century to ambivalence and hostility since World War II.

The US territory was a place of possibility and disappointment for Black soldiers. They were excited about life's adventures as they negotiated race relations in “a strange place” and site of “liminality.”¹⁵¹ Yet they also experienced familiar structures, including the racism of White soldiers who spread notions of Black inferiority and hypersexuality that influenced locals. In either case, they may not have considered themselves as agents of colonization. The Black studies scholar Sylvester Johnson historicizes the effect of Christianity on the formation of Black settler colonies like Sierra Leone and Liberia “spawned” by the American Revolution in the Atlantic world. At the turn of the nineteenth century, free Africans in the United States “conceived of their settlements as civilizing projects devoted to African redemption” with the goal of self-determination.¹⁵² Yet Black people did not arrive in the Hawaiian Islands attempting to “establish their own state,” as they wished to in Sierra Leone, where “they were, in essence, pursuing the same terms of racial freedom as had the White settlers of the Americas,” thereby defining it as a “colonial project,” according to Johnson.¹⁵³ In Hawai‘i, they came as individuals and in small groups to a monarchical nation, and later a territory and US state, where they integrated rather than made it a place of repatriation for large numbers of Black men and women.¹⁵⁴ However, their participation in the occupation of Hawai‘i across the twentieth century led to rising tensions.

The role of the US military in Kānaka dispossession through occupation and its environmental damage to the land, sky, and sea is key to the varied reception of Black people by residents. Hawai‘i’s political elite align with these US interests, further eroding Kānaka Maoli self-determination and their land base. The governor and the University of Hawai‘i president, for instance, stand by US national and colonial interests in their advocacy for the construction of the Maunakea Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) despite Hawaiian resistance. In response to their arrival, military personnel across racial backgrounds face ambivalence and at times outright hostility. Locals’ and visitors’ unfamiliarity with the long and diverse history of Black people removes potential alternatives to the “Black equals military” reference today. This conflation informs the daily lives of Black civilians.

Raised in this context, Barack Obama represents a relatively common Black local experience: he is multiracial, does not come from a military family,

and was raised not by his Black father but by his mother's family (more on this later). Ironically, however, as president—and thus commander in chief of the entire US military—Obama's more recent history consolidated the association of Black people with the military. This position shaped his subsequent visits home, when the president and his family, ensconced in a protective security detail, worked out at military gyms and thanked the troops for their service. Global knowledge about Obama lacks the overall context of Hawai'i's Black history and the current racial dynamics that I provide in this project. As a result of the romanticized narrative about this Black person from "paradise" who became the most powerful man in the world, the Islands have experienced what one Black resident called "the Obama Effect"—the rising numbers of Black civilians moving to Hawai'i.

The population of people who chose just Black or African American in Hawai'i on the 2010 Census was 21,424, which jumps to 38,820 when it includes those marking two or more races.¹⁵⁵ Obama has influenced this trend. But since the 1950s (when Hawai'i became a state), the Black population has nearly doubled each decade. In 1930 there were 322 Black men and 241 Black women, and the numbers grew to 11,804 and 5,560 respectively by 1980.¹⁵⁶ These numbers reflect both a significant rise and the historic gender imbalance owing to those arriving through the military.

While dependents who move with Black military personnel also tend to be Black (based on national marital patterns), Black residents marry nonBlack spouses in Hawai'i, as they have for centuries. This should not be surprising, as Hawai'i leads the nation in intermarriage rates. As in the continental United States, Black women in Hawai'i outmarry at much lower rates than Black men, but the rates are still quite significant: nationally in 1980, 3 percent of recently married Black women and 8 percent of Black men married nonBlack spouses; in Hawai'i over 19 percent of Black women and 51 percent of Black men outmarried.¹⁵⁷ These may be the parents of the 34 percent of Black people in Hawai'i who checked two or more races in 2000, growing to 44 percent ten years later, a significant departure from the national rate of 7 percent.¹⁵⁸

Gendered outmarriage patterns with Hawaiians are also notable. In one 1998 report, out of 433 Black grooms, 157 married Black women; 76 married Hawaiian women; and only one Hawaiian man married a Black woman, in large part due to Black women's smaller demographic, as well as the gendered racism that Black women face.¹⁵⁹ (This pattern is evident among the Black Hawaiian people I spoke with, all of whom had Black fathers and Hawaiian mothers.)¹⁶⁰ When one considers the long history of intermarriage in Hawai'i

among all groups, these high rates among Black residents are only partially a result of the gender imbalance (i.e., the smaller numbers of Black women). This, combined with the acceptance of African-descended people, results in a population of multiracial Black locals who are central to my project—a population that is overshadowed by Black soldiers.

In 2010, almost 41,000 people in the armed forces were living in Hawai‘i with 62,322 dependents, totaling over 100,000 people out of 1.36 million total residents. Indeed, the vast majority of Black people in Hawai‘i serve in the US military.¹⁶¹ By 1985, over 85 percent of Hawai‘i’s Black population had military-related jobs or were their dependents. In 1990, almost 2.5 percent of the state’s population was Black, yet Black people made up 16.5 percent of the armed forces and 13.3 percent of military dependents.¹⁶² Military veterans made up nearly 16 percent of the Islands’ population in 2000, but nearly a third of Black people in Hawai‘i are veterans—by far the highest rate among all groups. As for nonmilitary residents, the State of Hawai‘i Data Book lists 7,286 Black people, 0.5 percent of the total population, in 2011; another source offers a 2010 civilian labor force for those selecting “Black” at 7,300 people.¹⁶³ Even these recent censuses likely continue to miss hundreds of African-descended people who do not identify as “Black or African American” and select other parts of their identities, including Native Hawaiian. These striking demographics structure relations *among* Black people in the islands, including military, Black, and multiracial Black locals, and newer arrivals such as college athletes, professionals, and artists.

Not all Black people in Hawai‘i are tourists or work in the military. Hawai‘i is now home to the largest number of Black civilians in its history. Along with college students, a growing number of Black health, education, and law professionals make the Islands their home. Some of them are former military personnel who stayed on; others arrive as young adults seeking new opportunities. They come mostly from the continental United States but include migrants from the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, and Europe. The University of Hawai‘i’s first international student from Africa was Barack Obama Sr., who came from Kenya in 1959 when he met seventeen-year-old White Kansan classmate Ann Dunham, whom he married. More visible in the social landscape and particularly in Honolulu are the temporary visitors who include African American tourists—groups of young Black men or older married couples—and touring bands (mostly reggae) from Jamaica and the United States.

Most invisible are Black locals who are raised in their Hawaiian, Sāmoan, Asian, and other local communities across the Islands and tend not to be affiliated with the military. Yet they are the ones who exemplify the possibilities

of Black life in Hawai‘i, epitomized by Obama. Local news stories, with titles like “Hawaii’s Influence on Barack Obama,” cite his style and ease: “Obama has oozed island cool: the black shades and khaki shorts, the breezy sandaled saunter. . . . He strolled near the beach, enjoyed a shave ice and a . . . Spam musubi.”¹⁶⁴ Obama appreciates the Islands’ influence on him. He says, “I do think that the multicultural nature of Hawaii helped teach me how to appreciate different cultures and navigate different cultures out of necessity. . . . There just is a cultural bias toward courtesy and trying to work through problems in a way that makes everybody feel like they’re being listened to.”¹⁶⁵ Obama may be the most famous Black person from Hawai‘i, but he is by no means the only one.

The renowned trans activist Janet Mock offers her memoir *Redefining Realness* about growing up in her mother’s working-class Hawaiian home in Kalihi, where “it was the norm to have people who were not male or female” (referring to māhū) and “everybody was at least brown or tinted in some way.”¹⁶⁶ Mock later lived with her African American father in Oakland, California, where she was forced to reckon with her racial, gender, and sexual identities. Other Black residents include entrepreneurs like Wally Amos of Famous Amos cookies, who came with the air force but stayed because of the “peace” and beauty.¹⁶⁷ Educators include Dr. Miles Jackson, who came with the US Navy and later became a professor and dean of the School of Library and Information Sciences at the University of Hawai‘i. Kathryn Takara is another scholar, who founded Pacific Raven Press, which publishes most of the work on African Americans in the Islands. Kenneth Lawson (who codirects the Hawai‘i Innocence Project) and Charles Lawrence are faculty at the University of Hawai‘i Law School, whose new dean is Camille Nelson, a Black scholar from Canada.

Black and Sāmoan Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson spent his formative years in Hawai‘i until he was fourteen. He describes the difficulties of growing up in the sunny islands, saying, “I’m really lucky that I didn’t wind up in prison, and certain I was on that track if I had stayed there in Hawaii.”¹⁶⁸ Like Obama, the famous actor is hailed for being a “native son” (although he is Sāmoan and not Hawaiian) and criticized for his representational choices. Johnson voiced the part of the Hawaiian god Māui in the Disney blockbuster *Moana*. He agreed to play King Kamehameha in the film *The King*, a role some felt should be played by a Hawaiian: “Some Hawaiians in the community,” says one Kanaka teacher, “might take offense to a non Hawaiian, in this case a Polynesian to play this role.”¹⁶⁹ Each of these famous Black people from Hawai‘i—Obama, Mock, and Johnson—is a local multiracial Black person who faces questions about appropriation and their Blackness, whether in their activism, politics, or art.¹⁷⁰

Black locals and old-timers also advance Black music. Black and Hawaiian radio personality Big Teeze works for a local reggae station; Kailua-born R&B and reggae singer-songwriter Irie Love, who is “Jamaican and Native American . . . Caucasian and Hawaiian,” has toured globally;¹⁷¹ Black DJs and producers Sub Zero and DJ Jrama have hosted hip hop parties for decades, and Black Canadian Chuck James and his Black and Mexican sons are respected jazz drummers. The gender discrepancy that favors Black men is evident in this recitation of famous people, yet Black women have been an important presence from the days of the educator Betsey Stockton and scientist Alice Ball to the nurses, educators, lawyers, and musicians of today. The Black Hawaiian performer Ginai is a renowned singing celebrity who performs at the Blue Note in Waikiki, and other Black women like Daphne Barbee-Wooten and Sandra Simms work in law. The long-term resident and educator Kathryn Takara is joined by more recent arrivals, including engaged scholars and activists like Dr. Akiemi Glenn, a linguist from the southeastern United States who helped found the Pōpolo Project, an organization giving voice to Black people in the Islands.

Black locals also live across the islands, from the descendants of Black workers on the Spreckelsville plantation in Maui to Black Hawaiians living on Hawaiian Home Lands in Papakōlea and Nanakuli. They include the children of Japanese, Korean, Filipino, and Okinawan mothers and African American military and civilian fathers. Black people born in Hawai‘i work in retail and as bartenders, entertainers, social workers, athletes, and entrepreneurs. Whereas Black transplants may include the women who attend Links events and NAACP meetings, Black locals perform in hālau hula (hula schools). Hawai‘i’s Black residents in the twenty-first century make up a diverse group, less a collective than a smattering of individuals across the islands, with Honolulu and military bases serving as important hubs. Today’s civilian Black population is, like those who came over two hundred years ago, integrated and often invisible, living their lives as they face acceptance and ostracism.

Conclusion

The history of the Hawaiian Islands is not only the story of seafaring Polynesians, haole “discovery,” and laboring Asians; it is also the history of the African diaspora. From the first arrivals at the end of the eighteenth century, Black people—many of whom were fleeing slave societies—encountered a kingdom not organized along racial lines. Far from the epicenter of the slave trade, the Black Pacific was nonetheless informed by the development of race that

grounded that institution. Black sailors confronted these hierarchies aboard ships that then crossed the Pacific, sometimes arriving in societies that became their new homes.

This chapter has drawn on the essentially unknown story of Black people in the Hawaiian Islands—a story that calls forth a racial analysis of this shifting society. By looking beyond traditional archives and official census documents, we find a host of Black men and some Black women living in, among, with, and as Native Hawaiians, some rising to prominence and shaping the Kingdom of Hawai‘i. From early Cape Verdean whalers to Black American sailors, from educators to activists, both with spirits of independence and adventure, people of African descent found something new—a haven, they say, that encouraged some to stay and make it their home.

Kānaka Maoli disallowed slavery and welcomed Black women and men, venerating darkness as Pō in their creation story. As a result, early Black arrivals not only witnessed but also took part in changes in Hawai‘i’s status as kingdom, republic, territory, and fiftieth US state. Black men served as advisers to kings, and some made their fortunes; and a queen invited the first documented Black woman in the Islands, a formerly enslaved and pedagogical innovator, to sit next to her in the 1820s. Sometimes they aligned with Native Hawaiians, intermarrying and forming Hawaiian families. Although these early arrivals were both respected for their diverse skills and integrated, few today know this history, overshadowed as it is by the narrative of US imperialism since the twentieth century.

While the military may offer opportunities within a racist and exclusionary nation, being part of the military also means participating *on behalf of* that nation’s bombing and conquest of people across the globe. Black people in the armed forces exemplify what Ethan Caldwell calls “the colonized-colonizer paradox.” This refers to the dynamic by which African Americans, oppressed in the nation that enslaved them, find opportunities in the military, through which they can leave the boundaries of the nation but participate in the colonization of other nonWhite people.¹⁷² Black military men’s nonWhite yet agentic and class status since World War II significantly affected their increasingly tense reception in Hawai‘i. The resulting hegemonic association that “Black equals military” forged in the mid-twentieth century shapes contemporary ideas about Black people.

The history of Black Hawai‘i—and its unknownness—reveals how race, and not just ethnicity and culture, shapes the Islands. Black people have historically found Hawai‘i to be their haven, even as US racial ideas take root. They have, for over two hundred years, experienced both integration and invisibility in

this nation initially structured neither by race nor by slavery and still not by a Black/White binary. It is from this past that the current generation of Black Hawaiians and Black Asians emerges to narrate family histories, which I detail in the next chapter, that crisscross oceans and continents, following Pacific currents ridden for centuries by members of the African diaspora. Knowing the story of Black civilians in Hawai‘i expands our understanding of the Islands’ diversity and provides contemporary Black residents with a sense of place and belonging. Their histories reveal an expansive and detailed portrait of the Black Pacific as a site of indigeneity and a set of racial dynamics that Black people in Hawai‘i continue to negotiate.