

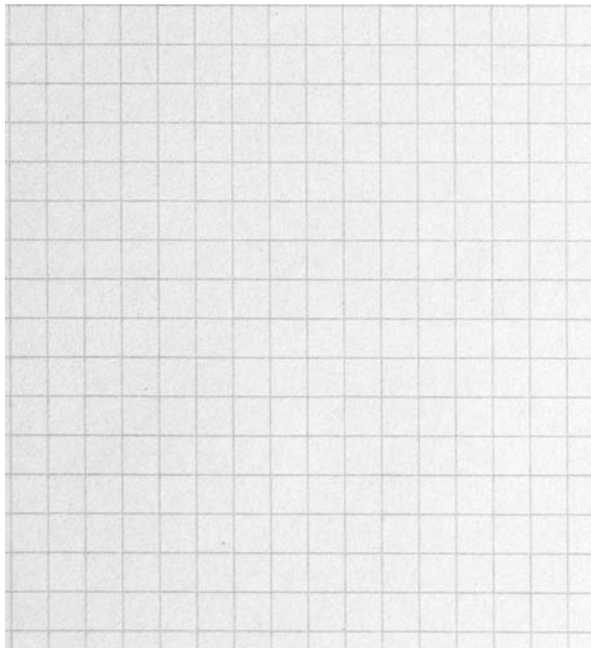
# POSSESSING POLYNESIANS

THE SCIENCE OF SETTLER COLONIAL WHITENESS  
IN HAWAI'I AND OCEANIA

MAILE ARVIN



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POLYNESIANS





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*The Science of Settler Colonial Whiteness  
in Hawai'i and Oceania*

MAILE ARVIN

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FOR NATIVE HAWAIIANS AND  
OUR KIN ACROSS POLYNESIA,  
MELANESIA, AND MICRONESIA.  
MAY WE CONTINUE TO FIND  
WAYS TO BE IN GOOD RELATION  
TO EACH OTHER, OUR MOANA,  
AND ALL THE LANDS WE LIVE ON.

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## INTRODUCTION

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### *Polynesia Is a Project, Not a Place*

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### POLYNESIA AS A SETTLER, SCIENTIFIC PROJECT

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

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

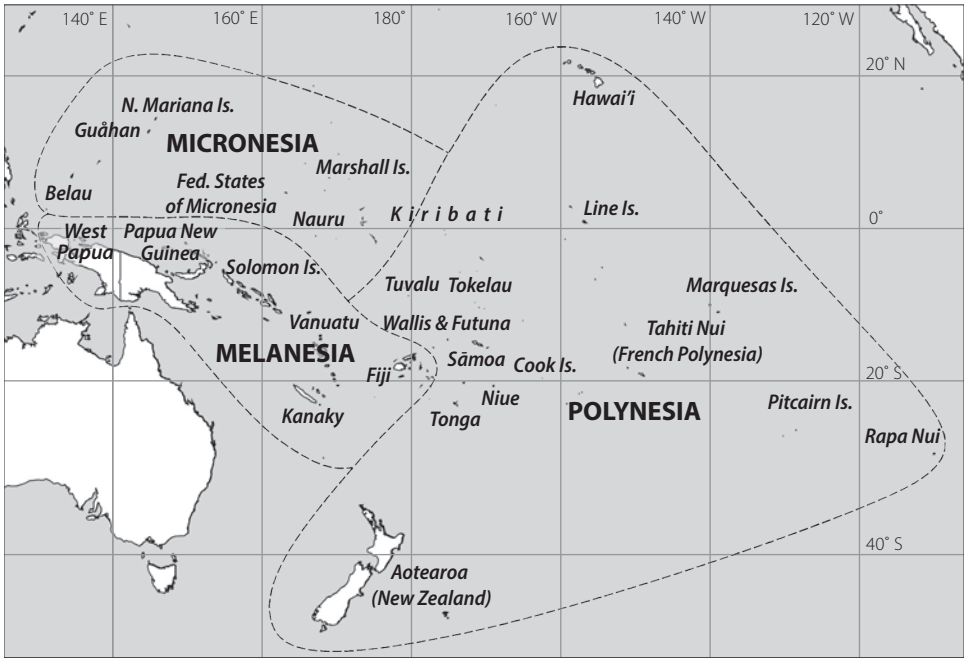


FIGURE 1.1. "Polynesians A-OK!" *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* cartoon, 1962.

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

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





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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

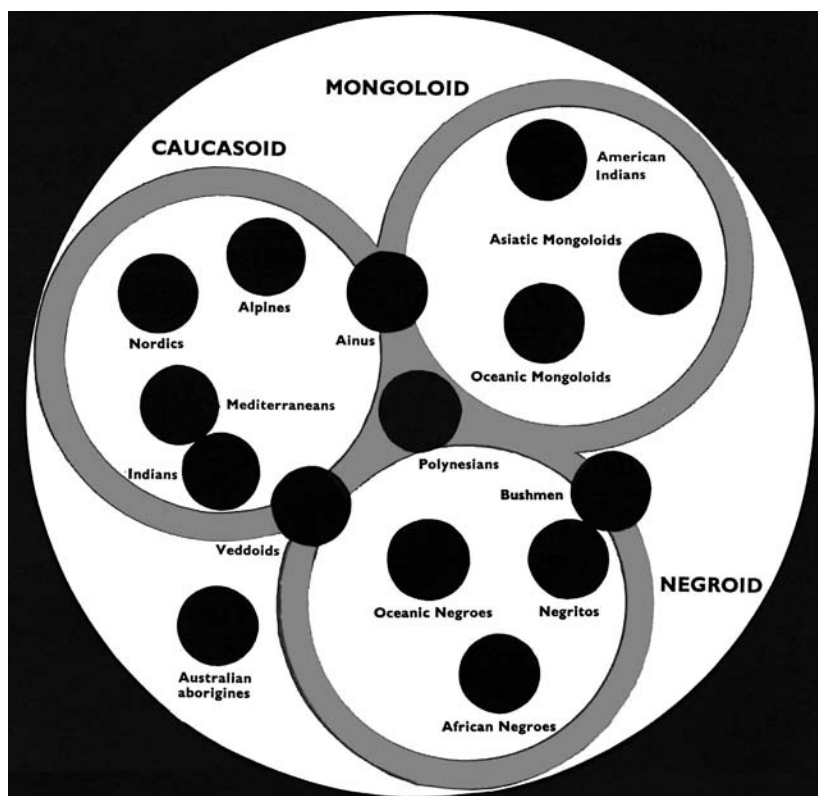


FIGURE 1.2. “Classification of Races according to A. L. Kroeber,” from *What Is Race? Evidence from Scientists* (Paris: UNESCO, 1952). Illustration by Jane Eakin Kleiman, based on A. L. Kroeber’s *Anthropology* (London: Harrap, 1949).

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

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

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

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

#### SETTLER COLONIALISM AS POSSESSION THROUGH WHITENESS

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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