Chapter Two

Strangers On Our Oceans:
Pacific Islander Histories Since Contact

"Strangers on our Oceans"
(They came on great floating islands with sails like white clouds and as we welcomed them among us, little did we know that our lives would change forever.)
Colonizers of the Pacific

Fornander (1969) says voyages backwards and forwards across the Pacific were common exploration and colonization. Many islands remained in fairly constant contact and cultures and languages remained somewhat homogenous until the 15th century. It was then, according to Fornander, that the world underwent a mini Ice Age causing the ocean currents and winds to become unreliable. Tonga, Samoa, and Fiji remained in contact because of their proximities but long ocean voyages between the other islands ceased. By the time European explorers came in contact with the people of the Pacific, cultures and languages were similar but had diversified.

For almost two thousand years Pacific islanders had been exploring the Pacific Ocean, even before it was sighted in 1513 by the first European, a Spaniard named Vasco Nunez de Balboa while he was exploring the Isthmus of Panama. Soon after, Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese explorer in the service of Spain, commanded the first expedition into the Pacific entering via the bottom of South America. He explored the Marianas and Guam before reaching the Philippines in 1521. Other Spanish explorers based in the Americas explored the Marquesas Islands, Santa Cruz Islands, Vanuatu, and several other island groups in the second half of the 16th century and the Spanish began to establish a presence in the Pacific.

Spanish and Portuguese successes in colonization and in the lucrative spice trade brought the French into the Pacific in 1529 but domestic and continental concerns kept them from establishing a presence in the Pacific until the 1700's when Frenchmen Bougainville and La Perouse explored Tahiti, New Caledonia, and Australia, and other islands in the South Pacific. Frenchmen were fascinated by the tropical beauty of Tahiti and the exotic beauty of Tahitian women.

Dutch navigators and traders moved into the Pacific in the 1500's exploring New Zealand, Fiji, New Guinea, and Australia but Dutch trade tended to focus in the East Indies. In the 1500's, the British were in the East Pacific raiding Spanish settlements on the American coast and in the West Pacific establishing trade in Asia.

Between the 1500's and the mid 1700's, trade in Asia and the East Indies became more attractive and as the Americas were colonized by the French, English, Spanish and Portuguese, trade between the Americas and Asia became more attractive. The French, the English and the Spanish recognized the importance of securing strategic positions in the central Pacific as stopover points for trading ships.

Captain James Cook's eighteenth century explorations in the Pacific claimed New
Zealand and Australia for the British Empire. Captain Cook was the first British explorer to reach the Hawaiian Islands. The British began establishing colonies in Australia and New Zealand and also assisted King Kamehameha in the unifying of the Hawaiian Islands into one kingdom. The British developed strong relations with this island kingdom.

By 1840, the British controlled Australia and New Zealand, the Spanish controlled the Marianas and the Philippines, and the French controlled New Caledonia and Tahiti. The Germans had established trade in the Americas and began casting their gaze into the Pacific. They arrived in Apia, Samoa in 1857, and by 1860, were trading European goods for island goods in Savai'i, Tutuila and Manu'a in the Samoan Islands; and in Uvea and Futuna and the Lau Chain in the Fijian Islands. These goods were traded through Apia to Sydney from Valparaiso, Chile and Europe. By the 1880's Germans were also trading in Tonga, Samoa, Fiji, Tahiti, the Ellice Islands, the Gilberts, the Marshalls, the Solomons, New Guinea, the New Hebrides, and New Britain.

Three commodities brought Americans into the Pacific in the 16th and 17th centuries. These were sandalwood, whales and sugarcane. Americans began trading in sandalwood in Hawaii in 1790 and in Fiji in 1810. In 1811, King Kamehameha the Great entered into a written agreement with Boston traders for the milling of sandalwood. Sandalwood is identified as partly responsible for the beginnings of the United States commercial interests in Hawaii. A developing whaling trade was another. The United States saw the Hawaiian Islands as an ideal whaling port for its whaling fleets. It was the sugar industry, however, that had the greatest effect on Hawaii's story.
Hawaii's Story

Maika'i Hawaii, na kuahiwa, na awaawa, na kai, na kamakani, na pua, na kanaka
Maika'i Hawaii, ku'u aina aloha.

Beautiful beyond compare is Hawaii
Its majestic mountains, its deep green valleys, its golden beaches, gentle trade winds, fragrant flowers and golden people.
Beautiful beyond compare is Hawaii
my home.

"Ho'opa'a i ka makani - Chanting to the wind"
(Hawaiian Chanter)

Mark Twain described the Hawaiian Islands as the "loveliest fleet of islands that lies anchored in any ocean." (Dudden, 1992). Certainly Hawaii is perceived by many to be an unparalleled tropical paradise yet its history is not without sadness. Captain Cook, after landing on the shores of Kauai in 1778, ushered in contact between the Hawaiian Archipelago and the rest of the world. Because of its location, The Hawaiian Islands were the last of the major Polynesian societies to come in contact with westerners. Located approximately two thousands miles from continental America and any other major island group, it is the most isolated island group in the world. Such isolation did not spare it from the political maneuvering of European colonizing nations, Japanese Imperialism, and U.S. expansionism.

It is estimated that at the time of Captain Cook's arrival, the population of the Hawaiian Islands was about 300,000 and was dispersed in small settlements. Valleys usually created natural boundaries for villages that spread from the mountains to the sea, with access to all types
of resources necessary to sustain life. Each village was governed by a chief or ali'i who would be responsible for the distribution of resources. Fish and poi were dietary staples with fruit such as bananas and coconuts, pigs, chickens and dogs as part of the diet. Hawaiian life was organized by kapu, a system of taboos that determined relationships with living people, ancestors, and environment.

These independent villages were brought under one political umbrella by King Kamehameha the Great, who, by 1810, with the assistance of western technology, completed his conquest of the islands. During the early 1800's, foreigners poured into the Hawaiian Islands bringing with them new technologies, different customs and ways of life, alcohol, and disease. Lahaina, Maui became an important seaport of trading ships and whalers. Kamehameha desired to maintain the traditional form of kapu, but after his death in 1824, Ka'ahumanu, his favorite wife, abolished the Kapu system. It was about this time that the first missionaries, Congregationalists from New England, arrived. The Hawaiian population, plagued as it was by a variety of common western diseases, was in jeopardy. Hawaiians had no natural immunities to such diseases and many died. Within seventy years of contact with Europeans, the population of Native Hawaiians had dropped to about forty thousand. The missionaries not only taught the Hawaiians about the Christian God, but they also educated them in the ways of the western world, including western forms of government, so that Hawaii could remain an independent kingdom. However, whether the missionaries unintentionally or intentionally demeaned the Hawaiian spirit, teaching the Hawaiians to believe that their traditional ways were evil and degenerate was wrong. How could they expect the monarchy to survive with such a wounded spirit?

Several European nations were interested in Hawaii, the main ones being Britain, France and the United States. Certainly, Hawaii, located about halfway between China and the Americas, was strategically important for trade and military stability but it was sugar production that sparked U.S. interests. When the U.S. Civil War cut sugar supplies to the northern states, the Union looked to Hawaii for sugar and this boosted the sugar industry there. Although it stated that it had no intentions of annexing Hawaii, U.S. Congress clearly communicated to other western nations that it would not allow any other nation to invade and control Hawaii. The United States had secured through treaty, exclusive rights to Pago Pago Harbor in Samoa in 1872 but they soon realized that the key to Pacific Trade was Hawaii. This, along with pressure from American sugar growers and merchants, ushered in the conquest and annexation of Hawaii. In January 1893, the Kingdom of Hawaii was overthrown by U.S. interests, and Queen Liliuokalani,
the last queen of the Kingdom of Hawaii, was dethroned. Hawaii was annexed by the United States on August 12, 1898, and the Hawaiian flag that had flown over Iolani Palace was lowered and replaced by the American flag.

Hawaii's booming sugar industry and pineapple industry required the importation of foreign laborers. Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Portuguese, Puerto Ricans and Filipinos were brought into the islands and the face of Hawaii's population changed forever. Hawaii remained a territory and Honolulu, the largest city on the leeward side of Oahu, became an important port for trade. World War I saw a large influx of military personnel and Pearl Harbor became an important naval base so that by 1940, it was the home of the U.S. Pacific Fleet and nearby Schofield Barracks was the largest army post in the United States.

Hawaii later became one of the most popular spots for mainland U.S.A. tourists. Waikiki, once an important area of taro plantations, became the home of wealthy European-American families and the location of large American-owned hotels. Local native Hawaiians were banned from certain Waikiki beaches meant only for white local citizens and tourists.

Hawaii also became a focal point for anti-Asian sentiment. Japan's imperialist expansions into Korea, Mainland China and the Philippines fueled efforts to openly Americanize Hawaii's large Asian immigrant populations. Hawaii's Japanese population was particularly targeted because it was perceived as being connected to Japanese expansion in the Pacific. Pearl Harbor became that place where east and west finally clashed. Pearl Harbor was bombed by Japan on December 7th, 1941. Japanese planes hit all Hawaii's military establishments and left the US Pacific Fleet devastated destroying four battleships, three destroyers, and a minelayer and damaged three battleships and several other vessels. They attacked other naval, army, marine and air force installations destroying most of Hawaii's military air power. By sunset on December 7th, over 2,200 military men and women had lost their lives.

As the United States of America entered World War II, hundreds of thousands of military personnel flooded into the islands and from this point on, native Hawaiians became a minority. Hawaii's importance to the United States could never be slighted. On August 21, 1959, the very last remnants of the Hawaiian Kingdom was gone forever, Hawaii became the fiftieth U.S. state.

At first glance, Hawaii appears prosperous but very little of this prosperity has found its way into the homes of lives of those of Native Hawaiian Ancestry. Indeed, the last decade has seen the rise of several sovereignty groups of Hawaiians wanting the return of that which was illegally taken from them: their land. *Note to teacher: Research current sovereignty issues.*