Chapter 1

LEAVING PARADISE

Captain James Cook dropped anchor at Waimea Harbor in the Hawaiian island of Kaua'i on January 20, 1778. Two months later he reached Nootka Sound on the Northwest Coast of North America and thereby became the first European to visit both the Islands, which he named the Sandwich Islands, and the Pacific Northwest. Less than a decade later Hawaiians began traveling from the Islands to the Northwest Coast. Among the first non-Europeans to do so, they tell a different story about the post-contact years in the Hawaiian Islands than do the usual histories. These men and women repeatedly acted to the benefit of themselves and others in ways that testify, time and again, to their resourcefulness and resilience.

The long prevailing line of reasoning depicts the Hawaiian people as unable to cope with the changes emanating from contact. Their decline in numbers from about 300,000, by a conservative estimate, at the time of Captain Cook’s arrival to 80,000 by the mid-nineteenth century and to just 30,000 by century’s end gives the plot line for a morality tale in which indigenous ways of life are found wanting. In this view, Hawaiians must have done something wrong to merit their virtual demise. As a newcomer opined in the mid-1830s, “this people is in a deplorable condition—so much of sin, oppression and degradation that they are evidently decreasing very fast.” Hawaiians are, in effect, held responsible for the actions of others. In this version of events, the ruling groups did what they could to maintain control, but eventually the United States was compelled to rescue the Islands by taking them into its fold.

The Hawaiian Islands and the Pacific Northwest were intertwined from
the moment of contact. The impetus for Hawaiians’ departure lay with Cook’s voyage. Sea otter pelts acquired on the Northwest Coast fetched such a high price in Asia, where the Chinese used them to trim garments, as to unleash a mad dash for furs. The Islands became a stopover point for merchant vessels in search of pelts. While there, they picked up local men as crew. Sought out for their facility with water, Hawaiians were also distinguished by their physical appearance. According to Cook, “these people were of a brown colour, and though of the common size, were stoutly made.”

By the time the fur trade became land based in the Pacific Northwest in the early nineteenth century, Hawaiians had established their reputation as dependable workers and were hired almost as a matter of course. Fort Astoria, the principal American initiative west of the Rocky Mountains, relied on Hawaiians. So did its successors out of Montreal and London, the North West Company and the Hudson’s Bay Company. Hawaiians also sustained the early missionaries, worked in the sawmills that sprang up on both sides of the boundary fixed in 1846 between Britain and the United States, and participated in the gold rushes of mid-century. A few came for diversion, as with future kings Lot Kamehameha and David Kalākaua, who visited in 1860. Over a thousand Hawaiians made the crossing to the Pacific Northwest up to the American annexation of the Islands in 1898, some more than once.

By following these Hawaiians to and from the Pacific Northwest, we gain another perspective on the Islands during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At the time of Captain Cook’s arrival in 1787, the eight inhabited islands—from northwest to southeast, Ni’ihau, Kaua‘i, O‘ahu, Moloka‘i, Lana‘i, Maui, Kahoolawe, and Hawaiʻi—shared a hierarchical way of life based in subsistence agriculture and fishing. Authority over the land and its resources rested with chiefs, or ali‘i, who gave permission for its occupancy and use, as well as protection, to extended family units. These kindred networks, known as ʻohana, were comprised of commoners or makaʻāinana, a word that means, literally, “people living on the land.” Writing in 1868, indigenous Hawaiian historian Samuel Kamakau explained how the Hawaiians were in old days a strong and hard-working people. . . . Cultivation of the land was their main industry. With their hands alone, assisted by tools made of hard wood from the mountains and by stone adzes, they tilled large fields and raised taro, sweet potatoes, yams, bananas, sugar cane, and ʻawa [kava, a medicinal plant]; and bartered their product or used it at home. . . . The land was fertile, and the principal crop on Kaua‘i, Oahu, and Molokai was
wet-land taro. . . . On Maui and Hawaii where there was less wet land, dry-land taro was cultivated.4

The maka‘āinana repaid the ali‘i with their labor and part of their crop to be used, as explained by political scientist Elizabeth Buck, “for ritual obligations, for maintaining their chiefly apparatus, for redistribution to their supporting ali‘i, for status (evidence of kapu and mana) and for warfare.” Chiefs had the power to appropriate, channel, or transform mana, which was power emanating from the akua, or gods. Chiefs organized social relations, eating and dressing habits, the use of material resources, and social and personal order through the kapu, or taboo system. The prescriptions and prohibitions of kapu not only determined what was sacred and forbidden but helped sustain Islanders in a very effective system of cleanliness and health. Kamakau described his countrymen “prior to the coming of foreigners” as “hospitable, kindly, giving a welcome to strangers, affectionate, generous, givers.”5

The first outsiders in the Islands were more curious than censorious. Mostly seamen briefly on shore, they were captivated by the salubrious climate and physical beauty of what appeared to many of them a veritable paradise. They were aware of differences, but not interested in effecting change. Much as was happening elsewhere around the world, they differentiated the indigenous population by gender. Women they found pleasurable for sexual purposes, men useful for their labor.

Hawaiian Islanders developed their own strategies for dealing with newcomers so that, as historian I. C. Campbell points out, “for the first few decades after contact, Polynesians went about their affairs as if the coming of Europeans did not represent a turning point in their history.” New diseases caused deaths that would otherwise not have occurred, but overall Hawaiians coped. By the early nineteenth century power in the Islands had coalesced around a single ruling chief or king, Kamehameha I, and in 1819 the kapu system was abandoned. A Frenchman who visited that year described new tools, familiarity with firearms, and a penchant for European dress, “but that is the extent of the influence that the civilized world has had on the activities and customs of the Sandwich Islanders: the natives have made no changes in the way they build their houses nor in the way they live their lives.” Ethnographer Juri Mykkänen concludes that “the society was still largely intact as far as the trajectories of commoner life.”6

Hawaiian Islanders’ resourcefulness during the first decades of contact comes through vividly in the stories told about the first men and women leaving paradise for the Pacific Northwest. Both the handful who were of
chiefly status and the far greater number of modest background demonstrated a spirit of inquiry and a facility for dealing with new experiences that cut across the hierarchical way of life they shared at home. Be it the maritime fur trade on the Northwest Coast of North America from 1787 into the 1820s or its land-based counterpart at Fort Astoria in today's Oregon between 1810 and 1814, described in chapters 2 and 3, Hawaiians proved themselves to be hardworking, capable, and dependable. Their tenacity argues that the unification of the Islands around Kamehameha in 1810, with its capital at Honolulu on the island of O‘ahu, might well have initiated a time of well-being and prosperity.

Fundamental change was, however, on the way. It arrived in 1820 in the form of Protestant missionaries dispatched from Boston by the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions. The newcomers were entirely different from their predecessors in the Islands. Formed in the Puritan tradition associated with New England, they believed utterly in the superiority of their way of life. Their duty, as they saw it, was to convert Hawaiians to their outlook, but there was a hitch. The missionaries could not abide the maka‘āinana, or common people, and very soon concentrated their efforts on the small group at the top. Missionaries’ actions served to turn chiefs'
attention away from their charges. Ordinary Hawaiians’ way of life was disrupted without another to replace it.

From the moment the first missionaries landed in 1820, they made clear their disdain for the maka‘āinana. Their leader Hiram Bingham described his group’s feelings in language devoid of romanticism and fired with the zeal of moral certitude. “The appearance of destitution, degradation, and barbarism, among the chattering, and almost naked savages, whose heads and feet, and much of their sunburnt swarthy skins, were bare, was appalling.” According to another arrival, “those wretched creatures” gave “the appearance of being half man and half beast.” The first history of the Hawaiian Islands, published in 1843 and reprinted into the twentieth century, asserted that, up to the missionaries’ arrival, “the Hawaiians were . . . low, naked, filthy, vile and sensual; covered with every abomination, stained with blood and black with crime.” In her perceptive study of missionary wives, historian Patricia Grimshaw characterizes the “response to ordinary, nonchiefly Hawaiians” as “frankly condemnatory.”

To the extent missionaries found any Hawaiians up to their standards, it was the ruling groups. As put by Grimshaw and attested by Mykkänen, “the missionaries ardently wished to view the chiefs as players in the mission drama.” Ideologically, this attitude was contradictory. As one missionary wife acknowledged about the Islands’ system of rule, “I should scarcely have thought I could have become so desirous of any government so different from that in my own land.” A visitor about this time pointed up the great status differential that divided the tiny minority from what he termed “the common people,” comprising 149,000 of a population he estimated at 150,000. “The greatest wealth they can boast consists of a mat on which to sleep;—a few folds of tapa [bark cloth] to cover them;—one calabash of water, and another for poe [basic foodstuff made from taro];—a rude implement or two for the cultivation of the ground; and the instruments used in their simple manufactures.”

Other factors took precedence over Americans’ commitment at home to the well-being of all the people in common and to a republican form of government. The Calvinist theology to which missionaries subscribed interpreted worldly success as an indication of God’s approval. It was laudable, indeed, the duty, of God’s elect to have charge of political and economic as well as spiritual life. So assured, missionaries concentrated their efforts on the favored few. As early as 1823 one of the missionaries took pride “that our warmest friends are among the highest chiefs,” adding, “this, I think, makes our future prospects very flattering.”

Missionaries needed ordinary Hawaiians for two purposes: as objects for
conversion and as a source of labor. In order for the “wretched creatures” of the missionaries’ imagination to become docile Christians, which alone justified the newcomers’ presence in the Islands, they had to be reformed. Not surprisingly, according to legal ethnographer Sally Engle Merry, “it was Massachusetts prototypes that formed the basis of Hawaiian criminal law.” Proclamations from the mid-1820s onward banned sexuality outside of monogamous missionary-ritualized marriage and forbade such key Hawaiian cultural expressions as hula dancing and surfing.

The missionaries’ boldest initiative was to make everyone literate so as to be able to read the Bible. The creation of a written alphabet of the Hawaiian language was one of the most positive consequences of missionaries’ presence. At its height in the early 1830s, about 50,000 Hawaiians, mostly adults, were enrolled in some 1,100 schools under missionary aegis. Missionaries were unable to follow through, due to their inability to accept ordinary Hawaiians as capable of sanctity. The total admitted into church membership reached a thousand only in 1837, over a decade and a half after the first missionaries arrived. By then almost ninety American Board missionaries and support workers were scattered across seventeen locations.

The maka‘āinana were primarily useful for their bodies, as when Bingham, in the words of his great-grandson, “cajoled the chiefs into providing a thousand laborers” to build a majestic church of 14,000 coral blocks that still survives in the center of Honolulu. A visitor in the summer of 1837 described how the maka‘āinana “cannot cultivate their land, because their labour is demanded for the church, the missionaries having obtained the necessary edict which compels the natives to labour on the reefs, to procure blocks of stone for the purpose of building a new church.” It is an indication of missionaries’ priorities that Hawaiians were excused from church attendance were they “to cut a block of compact coral limestone from the reef, about three feet long, two wide, and one deep, at low water, and transport it to the shore—say half a mile.” Churches were constructed through similar means across the Islands.

Contemporary observers with no love for the Americans were convinced that everyday conditions of life were worsening. For all of the bias that underlay their critiques, they are instructive for, unlike the missionaries, these newcomers took plain people’s circumstances seriously. A French ship’s captain described in 1828 how “ever since the Protestants have gained a measure of influence on these islands, the old agricultural life of the people has deteriorated and rapidly declined.” The missionaries’ insistence that everyone immediately become literate and labor on their behalf was “leaving their fields untilled” and “their traditional plantations . . . devoured by
noxious weeds.” He described how “the small ponds where taro was grown are totally dried and barren.” 13

Englishman Richard Charlton, writing four years later, was far harsher. He attributed depopulation of what he termed “an earthly paradise” to missionary excess. Charlton made four points, the first of which echoed his French counterpart. “The bulk of the people are in a state bordering on starvation because the adults are taken away from their enclosures of taro and potatoes to learn to read and spell.” Second, persons who wanted to procreate were compelled first to marry in the church, which required money they did not have, and so there were fewer children. Third, “the missionaries have prohibited Fishing, Bathing, Jew’s Harps, and the Surf Board, and every other description of amusement among the native population” so that “their spirit is broken.” Charlton’s fourth point had to do with disease, the most general explanation for population decline. Its calamitous effects he linked to the missionaries “prohibiting bathing, which in that climate is almost as essential to existence as fresh air.” Water’s importance to good health is confirmed by a traveler who, a decade and a half earlier, had termed Hawaiians “the cleanest people I ever saw, both in their person and habitation.” An English visitor in 1839 asserted that “if the missionaries had not caused the discontinuance of cleanliness, of ablution, constant sea-bathing, and proper exercise, in men and women, as their natural habits pointed out,” they would have been less adversely affected by disease. The consequence was, as a Frenchman lamented, “this people, which early navigators represented as so happy in their nakedness, seemed to us to be miserable, under the rags which civilization has covered them.” 14

As possibilities diminished at home for Hawaiians to pursue their ways of life, opportunities expanded elsewhere. In 1821 the fur trade west of the Rocky Mountains was consolidated under the Hudson’s Bay Company, which shortly thereafter opened up an office in Honolulu which, as detailed in chapters 4 and 5, actively recruited workers from the Islands. Other indigenous Hawaiians were employed by missionaries who from the mid-1830s, as chapter 6 explains, echoed their Islands counterparts in pursuing indigenous souls in the Pacific Northwest.

Back home, Hawaiians’ ties steadily weakened to their chiefs and rulers, who increasingly identified themselves in terms of missionaries’ aspirations for them. Hawaiian Studies scholar Lilikalā Kameʻeleihiwa attributes the shift to Christian gods being perceived as more promising than the akua in keeping Hawaiians from dying. A well-educated indigenous Hawaiian was less generous. According to David Malo writing in 1839, “in former times, before Kamehameha, the chiefs took great care of their people,” but now
“their attention has been turned more to themselves and their own aggran-
dizement.”15 Two of the principal means of alienation were the Chiefs’ Children’s School and the Ka Mähele.

The Chiefs’ Children’s School, which operated in Honolulu from 1839 to 1850, was, according to missionary leader Hiram Bingham, “the teacher . . . of the kings and queens of the Sandwich Islands.” Students were the Island’s last five monarchs, 1854–1893, and eleven offspring of chiefs. Much as occurred in similar boarding schools for chiefly children on Maui and elsewhere, they were educated into others’ aspirations for them. However understanding the missionary couple in charge may have been, Amos and Juliette Cooke inculcated in the top layer of the ruling groups a way of life totally at odds with what had gone on before. As diplomatically stated about the student who became Hawai’i’s last queen, Liliuokalani, in American National Biography, “her moral values were shaped by the influence of the missionaries.”16 Taught in English rather than Hawaiian, which was used in the early missionary schools, this select handful was instructed to prefer outsiders’ ways, including acquisition of their material goods. Ruling groups’ schooling separated them more than ever from the common people and their obligations toward them.

The other, very important means of dissociating ruling groups from their charges was the Ka Mähele of the 1840s, a legal division of the Islands’ land that established private property in line with the priorities of missionaries and their newcomer allies. The significance of the shift cannot be overestimated. According to linguist and political scientist Noenoe Silva, “land tenure was the central feature” of a reciprocal system of “political and social relationships based on obligations as well as bonds of affection.” Previously, as explained by cultural anthropologist Marion Kelly, “Hawaiians lived in a subsistence economy based on a communal land tenure system. Although the land was controlled by the chiefs (ali’i), who expropriated food and labor from the cultivators of the soil, the commoners (maka’aina), everyone had rights of access and use to the resources of the land and the sea.” Kama-kau emphasized Hawaiians’ “inherent love of the land of one’s birth inherited from one’s ancestor” so that, while not owned, “the land belonged to the common people” by virtue of their having mostly “lived on the same land from very ancient times.” Beginning in 1845, all Islands land was divided into individually owned parcels consistent with outsiders’ preference for private property in accord with American practice. As summed up by Kelly: “Traditional Hawaiian culture and society was destroyed as the capitalist concept of private property replaced communal use of the land with individual ownership.”17
The *makaʻāinana* lost out twice over. The Ka Māhele removed commoners’ obligation to labor on behalf of their chiefs and hence the mutual benefits that ensued. Ordinary Hawaiians were meant to acquire their own land, as were ruling groups and the government, but, as historian Robert Stauffer explains in his detailed examination of “how the land was lost” at Kahana on the island of O‘ahu, the six-stage process was so complex and so costly as to deter almost any ordinary Hawaiian who did not receive missionary assistance from making a claim. Not only that, Lilikalā Kameʻeleihiwa observes, “some *makaʻāinana* may have been reluctant to claim ʻĀina [land] that heretofore had been controlled by the Aliʻi Nui [highest chiefs], as traditionally that would have been very rude and inappropriate behavior.” Despite all of the changes that beset the *makaʻāinana*, in the words of Kamakau writing in 1869, “the Hawaiian nation loves its king and chiefs.”

According to Marion Kelly, less than one-third of adult male commoners got any land at all, even the smallest plot, whereas the principal chiefs acquired thousands of acres each and the king and government large hunks. Overall, “the *makaʻāinana* received less than 1 percent of the land although they comprised 99 percent of the Hawaiian population.” An observer lamented in 1849 “the thousands of acres of taro land now laying waste, on all the islands.” A decade later a Russian ship’s officer described the native *kanakas* as being “free but landless.” The clusters of affluent subsistence farmers who were self-sufficient in terms of nearly all the essentials of life at the time of Captain Cook’s arrival were transformed by the mid-nineteenth century, historian Carolyn Ralston explains, into “a class of unskilled and predominantly landless peasants.”

Ordinary Hawaiians also lost out as the ruling groups, deprived of their traditional labor pool, very soon sold off virtually all their newly got gains to get the cash needed to mimic newcomers. Kamakau explained how “the chiefs were selling their land to foreigners and to those who had no grants.” The “bond of mutual dependence” and “spirit of mutual goodwill” that had characterized the Islands’ social structure gave way, in Ralston’s words, to ruling groups’ “buying sprees with little concern for the people’s well being.” Anthropologists Patrick Kirch and Marshall Sahlins term the result “a subtropical caricature of European royalty.” As summed up by Kamakau, writing in 1869, “the greater benefits of the law went to the foreigners who thus secured the right to live on the land even though they were not of the land.”

The *makaʻāinana* had every reason to feel abandoned. Ralston contends that “in no other Polynesian societies were the ordinary people forced to confront their chiefs and recognize that they were not protecting the peo-
people's own interests." Even Sally Engle Merry, for all of her determination to view the ruling groups’ actions sympathetically “as part of a struggle for sovereignty: an attempt to purchase independence with the coin of civilization,” is forced to acknowledge, based on her close examination of court cases from the town of Hilo on the island of Hawai‘i, that their actions “appeared to Hawaiian commoners to be a betrayal.” Noenoe Silva has documented the maka‘āinana’s resistance to the ali‘i’s sale of land to outsiders.21

Missionaries, together with their children and outsiders mostly allied to them, took charge. It was “under the patronage of American missionaries,” according to eminent Islands historian Ralph Kuykendall, that the first sugarcane plantations began operation in the mid-1830s, initiating the rush for economic gain. Missionary teacher turned entrepreneur Amos Cooke observed in 1850 that “while the natives stand confounded and amazed . . . the foreigners are creeping in among them, getting their largest and best lands, water privileges, building lots, etc. etc.” He and the others considered they were forwarding the Islands’, but very conveniently also their own, best interests by becoming the ruling group’s political advisors, as well as entrepreneurs in their own right. As Gavan Daws puts it in his general history of the Islands, “for the foreigners, certainly, it was the beginning of a new era; but for the Hawaiian commoners it was the beginning of the end.”22

Missionaries viewed their actions as confirming their status and also that of their children as among God’s elect. Much as in Puritan New England, whence their outlook originated, economic gain was deemed admirable. Missionaries were encouraged to act as they did by the American Board that had dispatched them to the Islands. Cooke described how the Board advised that “all of their Missionaries at these Islands get free from them as soon as convenient, settle here, with their children, adopt the country as their own, and thus do all that is possible to sustain the country, and Government, whatever the latter may be,” very possibly “Republican” within “a few years.” This perspective fit conveniently into the conviction among persons whom Daws terms “Manifest Destiny men” that the Islands were American turf.23

Missionaries and other newcomers rationalized their actions by continuing to portray indigenous Hawaiians as doomed to disappear and, in the interim, too indolent to act for themselves. “It is a matter of no great surprise that the natives should be, as they really are, a lazy people,” Cooke opined in 1850. “Like other savage nations, they are averse to any more labor than is absolutely necessary,” a leading official of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions asserted a few years later. In the view of a missionary wife, the Hawaiian “lacks stamina, that reliability of char-
acter which distinguishes the people of England, old and new.” Labor historian Edward Beechert explains outsiders’ self-serving logic: “New Englan-
ders, although vigorously opposed to racial slavery, nonetheless held firmly
to the notion of racial superiority. Since ‘idleness’ was a defect of character
found in the ‘heathen,’ it became necessary as part of the conversion process
to ‘save the Hawaiians’ by introducing them to the discipline of work—the
opposite of sin as evidenced in idleness.”

Newcomers hoped indigenous Hawaiians would work for minimal
wages on the sugar plantations being established on newly got land. Their
disinclination to do so seemingly demonstrated the rightness of outsiders’
intrusions. “They lack the elements necessary to perpetuate their existence,”
pontificated the American in charge of the legal system who was also a
major planter. “Living without exertion, & contented with enough to eat
and drink, they give themselves no care for the future, and mope away life,
without spirit, ambition, or hope. . . . I consider the doom of this nation as
sealed.” This attitude explains Cooke’s willingness to go into business and,
more generally, his “contemplation of doing something for a future Anglo-
Saxon race [in the Islands], provided God, in His wise purposes, should
allow this people [Hawaiians] as He has done the aborigines [in other col-
onized areas of the world to give way to] foreigners.” Sugar took off as an
export crop after the United States removed import duties in 1876. Until
then Hawaiians provided the bulk of the labor, being supplanted by con-
tract workers brought from China beginning in 1852 and Japan in 1868.

A way of life that had sustained Islanders for generations was destroyed.
Noenoe Silva reminds us how not just the Chief’s Children’s School and the
Ka Māhele but each and every change fit into a larger agenda working
against the interests of the Hawaiian people. “The banning of hula had as
much or more to do with establishing colonial capitalism, and thus with
establishing control over the labor of the Kanaka Maoli [indigenous Hawai-
ians], as with religion and the repression of sexuality.” In analyzing what he
terms “the twisted nature of nineteenth-century colonialism in the Pacific,”
Hawaiian Studies scholar Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo’ole Osorio describes
“a slow, insinuating invasion of people, ideas, and institutions” that “were
not physical only, but also psychological and spiritual.” As Osorio percep-
tively observes, “death came not only through infection and disease, but
through racial and legal discourse that crippled the will, confidence, and
trust of the Kānaka Maoli as surely as leprosy and smallpox claimed their
limbs and lives.” As summed up by Hawaiian Studies scholar Haunani-Kay
Trask, the missionaries “introduced a religious imperialism that was as dev-
astating a scourge as any venereal pox.”

The United States annexed the Hawaiian Islands in 1898. By then newcomers far outstripped the indigenous population. About 30,000 Islanders were wholly indigenous, another 9,000 partially so, compared to 100,000 newcomers, many of them recently arrived contract workers. Thereafter, as communications scholar Rona Tamiko Halualani puts it, indigenous Hawaiians “were surveilled by blood quantum technology and policies and articulated as ‘strange,’ nonadaptive, unproductive, unfit, and in need of rehabilitation, thereby maintaining the whiteness of the territory.” Apart from greater racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity in the nonindigenous population, little has changed to the present day.

Ordinary Hawaiians had to make their own way. While it is impossible to know with certainty the extent to which deteriorating circumstances at home were responsible for individuals leaving paradise, as early as 1839 David Malo tied the two together with considerable specificity.

On account of this want on the part of the chiefs for the people, some of the people are losing their attachment to the land of their birth; they forsake their places of residence, their kindred, and live here and there where they can find a place. Some, however, follow after the chiefs, . . . but many stand aloof; . . . and living without land, they are without food, and of these, some are induced to go to foreign countries to obtain a subsistence. This, therefore, becomes a means of decrease in the population; of the many that sail to foreign countries, some become sailors by profession and do not return as inhabitants of the islands, being satisfied with the wages for their labor and the food they receive. Some dwell permanently in the countries to which they go, and some upon other islands in the Pacific; because they find themselves comfortable in the places to which they have gone, they return no more.

Some Hawaiians first migrated from their homes to port towns, congregating in what Ralston terms “beach communities.” There men were more easily recruited for the fur trade and, in even greater numbers, into whaling. At its height in the 1840s and 1850s about three hundred to five hundred vessels a year stopped at Honolulu or at Lahaina on the island of Maui to pick up supplies and crew before heading off to hunt animals for their oil. During these years, as many as one in five Hawaiians between the ages of fifteen and thirty may have been so employed. Part of the reason lay in men’s willingness to work hard, another part in their capacity to do the job. A Hawaiian missionary account of 1844 makes the case. “I have never heard the captain of a vessel who did not speak highly of the native seamen whom he had employed. They are eminently subordinate, docile, good natured and trustworthy; and with proper training they become good efficient seamen.”
From about 1860 another option was to harvest guano, the waste material of seabirds, for fertilizer on small isolated islands under American control in the South Pacific. Again, it was missionaries who sought to profit from Hawaiians’ labor. In 1859 missionary leader turned Islands politician Gerritt Parmele Judd became the Hawaiian agent for an American guano company. Shortly thereafter he arranged for his son, who a couple of years earlier had participated in raising the American flag on one of the guano islands, to transport the first crew of Hawaiian laborers there to begin harvesting. Thirty Thousand more followed in their wake.

In comparison with the fur trade, whaling and guano harvesting were characterized by harsher and sometimes dangerous conditions of work, by greater isolation from outside influences, and by more certainty men would be returned home. In reality, the jobs may not have been that different from those then available at home, as described by Kamakau in 1869:

Today the working man labors like a cart-hauling ox that gets a kick in the buttocks. He shivers in the cold and the dew-laden wind, or broils in the sun with no rest from his toil. Whether he lives or dies it is all alike. He gets a bit of money for his toil; in the house where he labors there are no blood kin, no parents, no relatives-in-law, just a little corner for himself.

In the view of Kamakau, far too many of his contemporaries, however “learned they may be, are mere stone-carriers and lime-mixers.” 31

Hawaiians who headed to the Pacific Northwest were to a greater extent left to their own resources than had they stayed home. The missionary rhetoric seeking to contain indigenous people around the world took longer to make its way there than to the Islands. Their labor was wanted, be it for the fur trade or some other enterprise, but employers felt no need to control their souls. The men were valued for who they were, not disparaged for what they were not. Generally illiterate in English, the Hawaiians left no records of their own, but contemporary accounts testify to their tenacity. These references were almost always made in passing, which gives them a particular honesty. Even when condescending in tone, comments were in general approving. Indigenous Hawaiians in the Pacific Northwest were described very differently from the stereotypes used in the Islands to justify newcomers’ intrusion and usurpation.

Very importantly, Hawaiians who left for the Pacific Northwest did not depart in order to escape traditional ways of life. Rather, they integrated key elements from their upbringing that ensured success in their new venture. When housing was needed urgently, they constructed the thatched huts of their childhoods. Familiar social practices continued both privately and in
larger settings. The men took pride in their dances, chanting, and other pleasures. Patterns of obedience to their chiefs that they had internalized when young served them well in their work lives.

At the same time, men adapted. Some may have been persuaded to leave by chiefs and rulers avid for the cash advances their departing subjects turned over to them, but no one could compel men to stay once their initial contract came to an end. Men turned the duty they had shown their chiefs into a similar sense of obligation to their employers. Indigenous Hawaiians were hard workers who repeatedly demonstrated their loyalty in tense conditions, as well as in the tedium of everyday tasks.

It is impossible to know why some Hawaiians soon returned home while others remained in the Pacific Northwest through several terms of employment or for a lifetime. Some men did not measure up to expectations for them, or the jobs into which they were hired disappeared. Family likely drew many men back. A gentler climate in the Islands may also have done so. Others simply wanted to go home. A common pattern was to return at the end of a term of employment, but then go back to the Northwest Coast, perhaps because anticipated opportunities in the Islands were no longer to be had.

However long Hawaiians remained in the Pacific Northwest, common indigenous origins did not bind them to their counterparts there. Only rarely did men and women indigenous to the Northwest Coast travel to the Islands, so there was no common body of lore to share. While many Hawaiians cohabited with Indian women, they did not become Indians. Just as with their fellow fur trade workers, and perhaps because of their influence, they distinguished sharply between local women and their men folk. The first they accepted as sexual partners, much as newcomers did in the Islands. Indian men they held at a distance as alien and potentially dangerous.

The denigration Hawaiians experienced at home eventually caught up with them in the Pacific Northwest. As explained in chapter 7, the international boundary settlement of 1846 was a watershed. Arrivals into the Oregon Territory from the United States found Hawaiians an alien presence they lumped together with blacks, not wanted in any shape or form. The men in charge quickly enacted legislation depriving Hawaiians, and also blacks and Indians, of the rights they accorded themselves. Over time almost all of the Hawaiians who remained south of the border merged into the indigenous people of North America, making their lives on reservations. In sharp contrast, Hawaiians north of the 49th parallel in British territory, the future Canadian province of British Columbia, were accorded the same civil rights enjoyed by members of the dominant society. Chapter 8 describes how they

could take up land, vote, and live with dignity. Across the generations descendants on both sides of the border have been subject to discrimination based on physical appearance, but they have all the same, as summed up in chapter 9, continued to make a place for themselves across the Pacific Northwest.

Indigenous Hawaiians in the Pacific Northwest have been largely written out of the history of the Islands. One of the few contemporaries recording their absence was Samuel Kamakau, who from the 1860s had a regular column in the independent Hawaiian-language newspaper Ka Nupepa Ka‘o‘ko‘a. In January 1868 he claimed “thousands of Hawaiians have gone away to foreign lands and remained there.” A year and a half later Kamakau described how “the Hawaiian race live like wanderers on the earth and dwell in all lands surrounded by the sea.” He estimated there were “in Oregon, 500,” as well as smaller numbers living in Tahiti and other Pacific Islands, Peru (digging guano), East Coast American ports (after whaling), and “the bush ranges of California [where they went in search of gold].” Apart from Kamakau, reflections such as that in old age by John Papa Ii, an indigenous Hawaiian born in 1800, that “Hawaiians still live on those shores,” by which he meant the Pacific Northwest, are rare. As put astutely by Lilikalā Kame‘eleihiwa, “we have not yet begun to count all of the Hawaiians elsewhere in the world.”

The initiative shown by men and women leaving paradise for the Pacific Northwest in no way accords with the commonplace assertions about indigenous Hawaiians as characterized, so a Swedish visitor described in the mid-nineteenth century, by “born indifference and aversion to all kinds of labor.” Such claims, repeated over and over again, came to be believed, even by the individuals themselves. Hawaiian writer George Hu‘eu Sanford Kanahele has reflected how “one of the great tragedies in our history lies in the fact that many postcontact Hawaiians believed in their racial and personal inferiority and therefore were ashamed of their ancestors’ practices and ideas.” Hawaiians in the Pacific Northwest did not write about their experiences, with one or two exceptions, but the testimonies of others indicate the strength of Hawaiian values, retained across time and space. They stood tall, as would have their contemporaries at home, had they been given the opportunity to do so.