Introduction

The seeds for this work were sown many years ago in 1947 when I was stationed in Honolulu. On a visit to the base library, I requested a book or anything in writing about Blacks in Hawai‘i, and after a search, was told by the base librarian that no such published information could be found. Fifteen years later while working for the Government of American Samoa, I stopped in Hawai‘i and visited the State Library and University of Hawai‘i Library, again seeking information on Blacks in Hawai‘i; once again, my search was frustrating and very little information was found. While in Samoa, I had heard stories of men of African ancestry who had lived in Suva, Fiji and Apia, Samoa as well as in Pago Pago, American Samoa and on other remote Islands of the South Pacific. Where did these Blacks come from? Did they have families? What circumstances had brought these men of African ancestry to the far away South Pacific?

The Islands of Hawai‘i and the South Pacific have always fascinated adventurers, merchants, sailors, missionaries, and those with their own soaring dreams of paradise. When these foreigners stepped onto the beaches of Hawai‘i, the Kanaka Maoli received them with the open arms of warmth and hospitality just as the land itself had once welcomed them. The Hawaiian people are Polynesians, descendents of courageous navigators who had earlier settled in the many Islands known now as the “Polynesian Triangle” bounded by New Zealand to the Southwest, Easter Island to the Southeast, and Hawai‘i to the North. Sailing freely from the South Pacific to the North, navigating by the stars, the movement of the ocean currents, and by following the flight of migrating birds, Polynesian peoples eventually landed ocean-going canoes on Hawaiian shores sometime during the sixth century and, finding the Islands pleasant and inviting, decided to settle. It was not until the eleventh century that others, sailing regularly from the Marquesas, joined these initial settlers. These early voyagers had planned well both for survival of the hardships of such long trips and for the rigors of settling anew in unknown lands. Travelers carried with them their religion, food supplies, which included chickens, pigs, plants and cooking and storage containers, and plants that might allow them to create the tools needed for settlement, including rope, bark cloth, utensils, etc.
Travel between Tahiti, the Society Islands and Hawai‘i stopped around 1275 A.D. When the Englishman, James Cook, arrived in 1778, he met Polynesians who had been living in Hawai‘i for over a thousand years and who had, for much of that time, been living a life isolated from other Polynesians of the Pacific. Cook’s lieutenant, James King, estimated that there were 400,000 Hawaiians at the time of Cook’s arrival, but contemporary historian David Stannard suggests in *Before the Horror* that his study of Hawai‘i’s population revises that earlier estimate to 800,000 inhabitants living in Hawai‘i in 1778.\(^1\) Cook believed that those whom he encountered on the shores of Hawai‘i resembled the Polynesians he had met earlier during his visits to the Islands South of Hawai‘i. They had similar physical features, cultures and life styles. During his visit to the Islands, Cook encountered highly developed societies that were both politically and socially organized,\(^2\) but, unfamiliar with either the history of the Polynesians or with their complex philosophic systems, Cook reported his initial encounters with the people of Hawai‘i using the language, the vision, and the tools of a very different culture. Although a scientist trained to acutely observe, Cook observed with a lens that was ground by a European community that as yet had little or no understanding that equally valid societies might exist in the world that did not share European goals or values. Whatever Cook thought of the peoples he encountered, there can be no question that life was never the same after Cook arrived in Hawai‘i.

Cook commented in his journal that he and his men entered

their ports without daring to make opposition, we attempt to land in a peaceable manner, if this succeeds, it’s well, if not we land nevertheless and maintain the footing we thus got by superiority of our firearms… .\(^3\)

Cook may have felt that he could rely for protection on the power of guns, but his last visit to the Islands in 1779 was cut short by angry warriors at Kealakekua Bay on the Island of Hawai‘i. One of the larger, single-masted dinghies from the *H.M.S. Discovery* had been taken by several Hawaiians, and in retaliation Cook threatened to hold elderly chief, Kalaniopu‘u, as hostage. Enraged, warriors attacked and killed Cook along with four of his men.\(^4\)

Captain Cook’s final layover in Hawai‘i was brief, but that visit left a mark on Hawai‘i that it is noted even today. Cook’s marines did use firearms against the Hawaiians, and won few friends with that action, but perhaps more devastating to the Hawaiian people were the European diseases that these English sailors brought with them. Syphilis, tuberculosis, small pox, and
even the common cold were previously unknown in the Islands. Hawaiian immune systems were not prepared to overcome these new diseases, and no medicines were readily available to combat illness.

After sailors returned to the West with stories of the Pacific, word spread rapidly about the fortunes that could be made in Hawai‘i, and more adventurers began to arrive on Pacific shores. King Kamehameha I at first welcomed these foreigners, but history tells us that many of these whom he welcomed did not perhaps deserve such trust and hospitality; too many of these first visitors were not a credit to the human race. These early “entrepreneurs” have been referred to as “rascals of the Pacific,” or described as losers “who were miserable, human flotsam and jetsam.” Ships from other nations, especially from New England, sailed into Hawai‘i’s ports and brought with them the best and worst of the West. The whaling ships arrived seeking supplies and to leave goods for trading, and other American ships stopped en route to China to load their hulls with fragrant sandalwood, which was in demand in China. Sugar, foreign trade, whaling, and shipping offered the greatest opportunities for Pacific adventurers, but not all early sailors engaged in business enterprises that were ethical or even legitimate. Always, there were men willing to do anything to make money. When the Christian missionaries arrived in Honolulu in 1820, they discovered a raucous seaport overrun with drunken sailors and nightly brawls.

This work describes a few of the early settlers of African ancestry, decent men who stepped ashore and decided to stay in the Islands, despite the brawls, despite the drink, despite the unruly behavior of many, mainly because they had a vision that in these Islands there might be the chance for a better way of life. After enduring the harshness of slavery and the racism that lingered on after slavery was finally abolished or after spending equally hard years at sea, these early Black travelers saw Hawai‘i, a land populated by gracious and intelligent men and women, as a land of possibility. Many Blacks sailed from Cape Verde (Cabo Verde) or from other Portuguese colonies in Africa, and many more were runaway slaves from the American South. In a diary kept while aboard the Neptune, Ebenezer Townsend stated that he met five men, two of whom were Blacks on Kaua‘i in 1798.

Free Blacks and Blacks from Africa as well as the Islands of the Caribbean also found their way to Hawai‘i and remained. As Takara and Scruggs state in their chapters, many of the ships that stopped in Honolulu or Lahaina carried crews that were 50 percent Blacks. When these Black crewmen
joined their shipmates in enjoying the rest and recreation that Honolulu and Lahaina provided, some found it hard to return to the ship. They discovered instead a niche for themselves and remained ashore. During the early years of the nineteenth century, Honolulu provided a community that welcomed Blacks. Sailors who came ashore in Honolulu might have used some of the services of the several Black-owned businesses, including barbershops, a tailor shop, boarding houses, and Anthony Allen’s “grog shop,” and if they heard music serenading villagers and visitors, that music might have been played by Kamehameha III’s Royal Band under the direction of a succession of band directors who were Blacks.

Hawai‘i’s census, naturalization records, and newspaper accounts show Africans and West Indians living in the Kingdom and becoming naturalized as citizens. Louis Mitchell, a man of African ancestry, arrived in Honolulu in 1878 from Mauritius and was accepted by Hawaiians almost immediately. He learned the Hawaiian language and participated in the culture and village life of the Kānaka Maoli. Mitchell married into a prominent Hawaiian family and later became ordained as a pastor after studying at the North Pacific Missionary Institute. While on a mission to the Gilbert Islands from 1895 to 1898, he was tangled in theological and political disputes between the Protestant and Catholic missionaries, but only on rare occasions did any question arise concerning “his dark skin color.” When Mitchell returned to Hawai‘i, he pastored churches in Koloa, Kaua‘i, and in Hāna, Maui before inexplicably ending his own life. His suicide has never been explained fully, other than he had a serious “internal problem.”

Despite the aversion to proposals in the 1880s to recruit groups of Blacks as contract laborers for Hawai‘i’s sugar plantations, individual African Americans continued to find their way to Hawai‘i as the nineteenth century drew to a close. Albert S. Broussard discusses the amazing story of a Black woman, Carlotta Stewart Lai, who arrived in 1898 with her family and, then, spent more than fifty years in Hawai‘i as an educator. Edward Fletcher and Benny Rollins are two Black men representative of those who also came to Hawai‘i to find a place for themselves. Edward Fletcher met W. O. Smith who was recruiting workers for C. Brewer Company’s plantations on Maui, but when Fletcher arrived on the schooner, Mary Swan, in 1877, he went to work as a teamster. He later married a Puerto Rican widow and they had four children, two daughters and two sons. The Maui News featured Fletcher on its first page in 1936 when he was 80 years old and still working. Born in Charleston, South
Carolina in 1882, Benny Rollins found his path to Hawai‘i. As a youngster growing up in Charleston, he took a liking to horses and was told by a relative that if he wanted to learn about horses he should go to New York State to work as an apprentice at the thoroughbred stables located there. He did just that and never looked back. As a jockey in New York, he met Dr. J. C. Fitzgerald, a veterinarian from Hawai‘i who told Rollins that horse racing was becoming very big in the Islands and that opportunities for jockeys were great, indeed. In 1906, Rollins arrived in the Islands and went on to ride in winning races at the Kapi‘olani Park race track in Honolulu. Eventually, Rollins became one of Maui’s top breeders and worked for millionaire Harry A. Baldwin as manager and breeder of his stables. He met and married Margaret de Rego and raised six children on the Haleakalā Ranch.

I am certain that readers of this issue will find interesting such stories of early Black settlers seeking community in Hawai‘i, and I hope that they will also find valuable discussions of contemporary Black community in Hawai‘i nei. Although there is no specific residential community in Hawai‘i where Blacks live, there is an emerging socio-psychological Black community that is influential in the Islands. Although earlier Black settlers before World War II may have intentionally wanted to assimilate and were satisfied to be identified as “cosmopolitan,” a polite term used to identify “colored” people, later arrivals to Hawai‘i preferred not to be identified as the faceless “other” and wished instead to maintain racial and cultural identity. The struggles of these later settlers to maintain that sense of identity and pride are included here.

As we see the essays by Wermager, Barbee-Wooten, and Jackson, following World War II most Blacks who migrated to Hawai‘i entered the existing social structure, as their education, skills and experience allowed. Those who came to Hawai‘i through their own initiative and not as members of the military were apparently as successful in their fields as they might have been on the Mainland and entered the growing Black community in Hawai‘i, worshipping in Black churches and celebrating Black holidays, including Kwanza, which means “first fruits” in Swahili and is celebrated at the beginning of a new year as a secular holiday. Kimetta Hairston shares with the reader the cultural and racial insensitivity challenges faced by some dependents of military families stationed in Hawai‘i.

Despite the differences of opinion among social scientists, something dramatic has been happening in recent decades in Hawai‘i. We learn from Leon Richards in his discussion of the dynamics of interracial marriage that
individuals in Hawai‘i have been marrying outside of their own ethnic groups: Hawaiians, Cape Verdeans, Puerto Ricans, Chinese, Portuguese, Filipinos, African Americans, Europeans, and others have been mixing it up for over 200 years. There are those who see Hawai‘i’s multicultural and multiracial environment as a “melting pot” and those who argue that Hawai‘i’s people are more like a rainbow, where all colors are distinct, yet necessary to one another; their beauty arising both from singular vividness and from proximity and connection to one another. Indeed, for many, the racial issue by and large is not as sensitive in Hawai‘i as elsewhere because many people often don’t know with which race they want to identify. There are those who argue that the concept of “race” has no place in twenty-first century society, that it has been used in the past solely as a social and political construct, and that the time has come to abandon such divisive thinking. Marsha Joyner and Pōka Lāenui discuss the dynamics of interracial relations between Hawaiians and Blacks in Hawai‘i and the politics of race in their conversation. In general the message in these pages note that what is happening among Hawai‘i’s people might very well be a blueprint for future more enlightened communities in the United States.

**Blacks in the Pacific Islands**

Very few people are aware of the fact that people of African ancestry arrived in the South Pacific Islands during the nineteenth century, but with the expansion of the whaling industry into the Pacific, African Americans and others of African ancestry settled in Melanesia and to some extent in Polynesia. Idyllic climates, abundant fresh food, friendly people, and the relative peace of these Islands enticed many crewmen to abandon their ships while in port and to seek refuge from a demanding life at sea. Indeed, many were encouraged to remain ashore when the ships set sail. Many local Island chiefs attempted to adopt skilled members of a crew, especially those who understood munitions, who wished to remain in the Islands, and Black men were frequently amongst those skilled crewmen. R. A. Derrick, the noted Pacific scholar states in his *History of Fiji* that “Negroes who were sometimes landed from American ships, were even more prized than white men.”

While in Fiji on a Fulbright research and teaching project at the University of the South Pacific in the late 1970s, Hazel M. McFerson, a professor at George Mason University, interviewed descendents of these early African American settlers of South Sea Islands, discovering both contemporary attitudes towards Blacks in the Pacific and their long established history as
Island residents. Hailing from New Bedford, Massachusetts, John Brown, for example, arrived in the Lau group of Islands on the *Phantom* around 1860 and became a successful trader on the coast of Vatulele. In recognition of his having lived many years in Bua, Brown was awarded a Crown grant of a small piece of land for his home and gardens where he lived for many years with his Fijian wife from Vaturua and their several children. Another sailor, H. B. Williams, left his ship in Samoa to open a “grog shop” in Apia. In 1865 Williams moved to Suva and remained there until his death in 1909. Jacob Andrews also arrived on a whaling ship from New Bedford in the late 1800s and settled in Tavenui as a supplier to local area chiefs of guns and ammunition. Andrews’ wife was the daughter of a popular local chief who gave him land in Rewa, and one of the Andrews’ sons, Phil, moved to the United States and served in World War I. Families in Fiji whose ancestors are proud to identify with their African American ancestry include those of Williams, Brown, Burrows, Dunn, Andrews, Radigan, Rogers, and Butts. There are also descendants of persons of African ancestry scattered throughout French Polynesia, Cook Islands, Western Samoa, Tonga, Kiribati, Nauru, and Papua New Guinea. During World War II, thousands more Blacks arrived in the Pacific, and although most later returned to the United States, some remained and made their homes in the Islands.

The Blacks who came to the South Pacific and to Hawai‘i were both rascally men of adventure and sober men who wished to escape the restrictions placed on them in their own countries. Many African Americans settled on Pacific Islands only hoping to leave behind the harshness of racism, poisoning too many communities in the United States. This desire to seek a better and more secure life is the bittersweet story of the people who still live in the African diaspora.

**A Special Note**

Readers might note that several authors refer to Hawai‘i as a “colony” subject to “colonialism” by the United States before 1900. The use of these terms might be problematic for some readers since the Kingdom of Hawai‘i was an independent nation. Use of these terms in the broader sense have political implications involving the overthrow of one nation by another nation. Although the Kingdom and the Republic of Hawai‘i was not invaded by the U.S., the government was overthrown by a group of American businessmen residing in Hawai‘i who nonetheless enjoyed the unofficial support of the U.S. military. Also, cultural and intellectual domination occurred when the
two cultures collided in the nineteenth century and settler culture became pervasive. This type of domination of a people and their culture can have the same results as if they were invaded and colonized in the traditional sense of being usurped by a foreign nation.

Also, in this collection of papers the use of “Black” and “African American” are acceptable terms to describe a person of African ancestry. Readers will also find the terms “colored” and “Negro” in quotations from cited sources. Both of these terms were used historically in the United States, but are no longer used, to describe individuals of African ancestry. In several articles “haole,” the Hawaiian word meaning stranger is used, but in contemporary Hawai‘i it is used to describe a “White” person.

Notes

1. David E. Stannard, Before the Horror (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i, Social Science Research Institute, 1989), 30.


7. Ebenezer Townsend, Diary, 12 August to 31 August 1798, 21, Hawaiian Historical Society.


9. Hawai‘i State Archives, Index to Naturalization Record Books (Honolulu: Hawai‘i State Archives, n.d.). See also microfilm records.


11. Ibid.


16. One of my students from Papua New Guinea informed me that her name was Nigerian because her grandfather came to Papua as a Protestant missionary from Nigeria in the late 1890s and later married a local woman.