

Pacific Brides: US Forces and Interracial Marriage during the Pacific War

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Between 1942 and 1945, over two million servicemen occupied the southern Pacific theatre, the majority of them Americans in service with the Marines, Army, Navy and Air Force. When the United States entered World War II in December 1941, they 'swept in a mighty deluge' doubling, sometimes tripling the populations of the Pacific Islands.¹ Their short but intense period of occupation in the South Pacific had far reaching consequences. Not only did they dramatically alter the economies and environments of the islands, they also brought with them a set of ideas about race and intimacy encapsulated in legal codes, as well as social practices, which were applied to the organization of their own forces, and to the local populations.² American racial ideology also informed military regulations governing overseas marriages involving US forces, most notably inhibiting African American men's marital opportunities in the European theatre.³ US forces were banned from interracial marriage in the China-Burma-India theatre, while racial discrimination encoded in federal immigration and naturalization laws shaped the fortunes of Japanese war brides of US military personnel.⁴ Military governance of marriage was also a feature of the Pacific War in the South Pacific Command where the contours of interracial intimacy, and the possibility of legal marriage between US servicemen and indigenous or mixed race women were shaped by American military regulations.

As one of the 'affective registers' of the expanding American empire in the Pacific, marriage regulations demonstrate the wide reach of US law and the power of the American military authorities to regulate the private lives of its personnel extra-territorially.⁵ While marriages between US servicemen and 'foreign' women in the Pacific were not prohibited, any prospect of interracial marriage was severely proscribed because the US War Department's marriage regulations mirrored race-based US federal immigration and naturalization laws, as well as anti-miscegenation laws at state level.⁶ Despite these restrictions 40 'racially ineligible' women from the South Pacific region married their American sweethearts, defying the policy of the US military. Because 'wartime marriages of soldiers were not only matters of the heart, but of military policy as well', this essay traces the material, as well as emotional, consequences of the legal interventions of the American military authorities and government officials into private lives during and after the Pacific war.⁷ Further, it sketches military governance of interracial marriage at a time when parental and community control of intimacy gave way to the bureaucratic processes of the military command, which held the power to legitimate relationships. We trace how couples negotiated the multi-layered jurisdictions of American military and legal processes, foregrounding how becoming a war bride was as much a legal act as it was an emotional bond.⁸

Race, war and marriage

Post-war the United States welcomed war brides from across Europe, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand onto its shores. Between 1945 and 1949 a total of 114,691 women, 333 men, and 4669 children had entered the United States under the provisions of the War Brides Act 1945 and the GI Fiancée's Act 1946.⁹ War brides were a special migrant category. They were not subject to the immigration

quotas set under US federal immigration law, and their entry into the country was expedited as part of a post-war family reunification policy. Numbers demonstrate just how significant this group was: in the immediate post-war years war-bride migration represented 22% of all legal admissions to the United States.¹⁰ Not all war brides were equal though, and not all American servicemen had equitable access to marriage during the Pacific war.

Recovering the histories of indigenous and mixed race war brides from the South Pacific is no easy task. For a start they are absent from the scholarly discussion about America's foreign war brides of World War II, with much of the attention directed at the more sizeable numbers of war brides from the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Germany and Japan. Sheer numbers, and the long history of race-based immigration policy targeted at Asian peoples helps explain the focus on Japanese war brides especially, for that group has been regarded as playing a significant part in the eradication of race-based federal immigration laws in the United States by 1952. When the South Pacific appears, many scholars have focused on the Hollywood image of Polynesia, looking at how representation and reality diverged for American servicemen during the Pacific war. Although there is abundant evidence of sexual encounters across the colour line in the Pacific, the actual working of policies around intimacy and race, and its effects, are largely ignored in favour of cultural representations of Polynesian sexuality.¹¹

Unfortunately traditional sources for war bride research, such as Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) statistics, do not reveal how many indigenous or mixed race women from the South Pacific region married American servicemen during the course of the war. The INS collated war bride migration data on the basis of national origins. It categorized New Zealand and Australian brides together, while Fiji, Western Samoa, the Cook Islands and Tonga do not appear in the countries list at all, rendering them statistically invisible. Research in marriage records, newspaper reports, divorce files, US consular correspondence and oral histories has proved a more productive approach, so far uncovering 36 indigenous and mixed race women who married American servicemen during the course of the Pacific war. A further four women entered the United States as fiancées, bringing the total number of Pacific war brides to 40. Four brides hailed from Tonga, one was from Rarotonga in the Cook Islands, five were of Fijian ancestry, three came from Western Samoa, but the vast majority were Māori or of Māori ancestry. New Zealand's predominance in the marriage statistics reflects the larger number of US servicemen stationed there during the war, with an estimated 100,000 troops passing through the country from mid-1942 until mid-1944. Tonga welcomed just over 8000 US forces in May 1942, but it is estimated around 30,000 passed through its main island, Tongatapu, over a three-year period. Around 8000 American servicemen were in Fiji, and an estimated 1600 servicemen, not all of who were American, were stationed in the Cook Islands during the war. By April 1942, close to 10,000 US servicemen were stationed in American and Western Samoa.

Of the 40 brides, the majority (26, or 65%) had one European parent. Managing interracial marriage in countries with long histories of cross-cultural contact and interracial mixing, caused some difficulties for military authorities. On the eve of the arrival of US forces in the South Pacific region the numbers of Europeans, Chinese and Indians residing in the islands were small, but they contributed to the creation of mixed race families and communities in Western Samoa, Fiji, Tonga and the Cook Islands.¹² A different situation existed in New Zealand where American servicemen

encountered a population that was largely European; Māori were a minority then largely residing in rural areas. At the 1936 national census, the last to be conducted until 1945, 82,000 Māori (5.23%) and 6976 'race aliens' (0.44%) were recorded in the population – of the latter, 'about six thousand were Asiatics and the rest Polynesians'.¹³ By 1942, as Māori women were manpowered into essential industries, and moving to Auckland and Wellington in greater numbers, so were Pacific Islanders. At 1945 the national census recorded increases 'in regard to Samoans, Cook and Niue Islanders, many of whom arrived in New Zealand during the recent war'.¹⁴ There were 988 'Polynesians' recorded in the 1936 census, which increased to 2159 by 1945, and of the latter 1602 were of 'mixed blood'.¹⁵ Included amongst them were over 100 Cook Island women sent to the country to work as domestic servants in private homes from 1942 to 1943 under a New Zealand government scheme.¹⁶

Local leaders also sought to manage social interactions. While it was those stationed on rear bases away from the front lines, most of which were located within the South Pacific Command (the Cook Islands, the Samoas, Tonga, Fiji and New Zealand), who had the greatest opportunity for meeting local women, local leaders and officials discouraged it, sometimes removing young people (especially women) from villages located near Americans bases, encouraging them to go inland, especially in Fiji and Tonga.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the sheer demographic dominance of the Americans, their lengthy stays in one place, and their economic influence (local people worked for them or traded with them), encouraged social interaction. At rear bases the men had time to socialize, something which military commanders encouraged to keep up morale, and stave off boredom.¹⁸ Sex with local women was an acceptable part of governing men stationed in each region, but this had implications for local women, who were regularly inspected for venereal disease by military doctors.

Historically in the United States interracial sex was less problematic than interracial marriage, for the first did not come with the rights and respectability accorded married couples.¹⁹ US state authorities sought to control the institution of marriage, because marriage laws were bound up with white men's sexual freedom and civil rights, including the control over marital property.²⁰ Attitudes to interracial marriage in the United States, with its associated legal codes, were foreign to people in the Pacific Islands and New Zealand, where the practice was not outlawed. In his 1946 memoir, John Zimmerman details how American customs, practices and attitudes about interracial sex were brought to the Pacific. While stationed at Wellington with the USMC in 1943, he

noticed that among the innumerable Marines who were fraternizing with the native population and visiting and sleeping with them with every sign of enthusiastic enjoyment was a large number of Southerners of that class which is admittedly the most hidebound in the country in the matter of the color line. These lads, whose hackles would have risen like the quills of a porcupine at the mention of any kind of social intercourse with a person darker than a sunburned Italian, and who would have screamed and beat their breasts at the merest hint of miscegenation, were now wholeheartedly engaging in the one and at least thinking seriously of the other.²¹

Sex across the colour line was taking place, but not all were casual encounters. Zimmerman 'knew several of our men who had taken one or another of the girls to live with him, and in all cases it worked out well. There was no attempt at

concealment, and the situation was accepted as quite the natural thing. The girls seemed to be as faithful as though there had been a marriage ceremony, and as far as I could determine, they lost no reputation in the eyes of their own people.'²² There is evidence that some servicemen formed sincere attachments with young women in the South Pacific. While they may not have been able to marry legally, they took up alternative arrangements, normally making a customary marriage or co-habiting for a lengthy period of time, challenging, at times, local customs and practices of morality.²³ Legalizing a relationship was a different matter.

Military authorities did not encourage marriages with foreign women, and this was given official support under military regulations. The US War Department issued Circular No. 179 in June 1942 requiring any serviceman who wished to marry to obtain permission from his commanding officer two months in advance of the wedding; but before consent could be given the commanding officer was required to conduct an investigation into the young woman and her family.²⁴ One New Zealand war bride recalls:

you had to be so vetted. I mean even if you were pregnant you had to prove it was theirs. Oh, the stuff you had go through, it was incredible. Him too. I mean they had to have letters from home, from responsible people. You hear stories of ones getting married who were already married back home, and I can't understand how, given the amount of information that had to come back and forth before they would sign your papers. They were very strict.²⁵

The circular, in its stated reasons for refusing permission to marry, mirrored US immigration laws which restricted entry to those who could potentially become a burden on the state (including ill-health, physical or mental disability, poor moral character, or criminal activity) or did not fit racial criteria. A Commanding Officer also had recourse to state law when it came to marriage, and could 'refuse on account of anti-miscegenation laws of the soldier's home state'.²⁶ In a report on marriages between American servicemen and Australian women the American Red Cross, who assisted military authorities in their investigations, 'had to make sure that the girl had no coloured blood in her veins, because that would create grave difficulties under the United States immigration laws.'²⁷ The American Red Cross undertook the same process of investigation in New Zealand and across the South Pacific Command. Because of this one New Zealand war bride believes interracial marriage 'would have been a no-no. I think there were plenty of children left behind. [There would have been] very few marriages between Maori and American servicemen, and if there were they would not have been allowed to go the States.'²⁸

Servicemen were also punished for contravening military regulations, and this extended to marriage. No matter where they were stationed during the course of the Pacific war, American soldiers were in the unique and highly irregular position of remaining under the jurisdiction of American law.²⁹ Hence when the American military released marriage regulations for its forces, they were as binding and as official as any law.³⁰ Officially, these stringent regulations were not intended to prohibit 'overseas marriage, nor [was] it designed to lend encouragement to them', explained Lieutenant Charles Stephenson, an Auckland-based chaplain for the United States Naval Reserve, in 1945.³¹ However, the idea that the US military authorities remained neutral regarding the marriage of its servicemen to civilians is a position hard to defend in light of the requirements for its approval.

With the goal of developing some consistency in policy and practice, representatives of the US Army, US Navy, US Marines and the American Red Cross met at the US Consulate office in Auckland in mid-November 1943. They 'agreed permission to marry would not as a rule be granted to American servicemen desiring to marry Maoris predominantly of Maori blood. In this connection it was agreed that every application for marriage would be carefully investigated before approval by a competent Officer of the service concerned'.³² This policy was applied unevenly by the different services stationed in New Zealand and in the Pacific, with sympathetic commanding officers and chaplains sometimes giving their official endorsement to couples. Prior to November 1943 there had been instances of interracial marriage involving US personnel in New Zealand and Tonga, and the practice continued into 1944. Nevertheless, the policy was effective, with few interracial relationships ending in legal marriage. By 31 December 1945, 1588 New Zealand women had married US servicemen; of these, US consular officials found only fourteen who were 'believed to be racially excluded'.³³

Going Stateside

Circular No. 179 instituted a formal system of marriage regulation and administration under military control, but it was only the beginning of a couple's engagement with the US bureaucracy. If a couple were able to marry, then legal preparations would be initiated for a bride's entry to the United States. Forms had to be filled out for a passport, along with two sealed and certified doctor's certificates procured from American-approved doctors. Four passport photographs, two sealed and certified marriage certificates, a marriage licence, a groom's bank statements and statement of financial support from his American family rounded off the paperwork.³⁴ Women were also required to provide proof of their ethnicity, for in order to gain entry to the United States they had to meet the racial criteria set out under the Immigration Act 1924, and fulfil the requirements for naturalization under the Nationality Act 1940. A documentation system to track entry, which required all prospective migrants to apply for a visa, supported this policing of national borders.³⁵

Until the introduction of Public Law 271 (War Brides' Act) in 1945, brides from the Pacific Islands and New Zealand were subject to immigration restrictions that saw them vying for 100 places allocated to each country on an annual basis under a national quota system.³⁶ Designed 'to expedite the admission to the United States of the alien spouse and the alien minor children of citizen members of the United States armed forces', the 1945 Act effectively exempted war brides from the quota system, allowing them unrestricted entry.³⁷ In the following year Congress passed the GI Fiancés Act into law, allowing women engaged to US servicemen admission to the US for three months, and as long as they married within that time period, they were granted a permanent visa, otherwise they faced deportation.³⁸ Tracing the fate of the Pacific war brides offers insight into how these processes of entry and restriction, especially deportation, worked in practice.³⁹

Marriage of US forces overseas tested the ability of US immigration and naturalization officials to monitor national borders. Those men who succeeded in getting married sought to bring their wives to the United States, but this was met with widespread uncertainty over whether 'Polynesians' were racially admissible under US immigration and naturalization laws, a situation first brought to the attention of US officials and lawmakers by the case of Patricia and Henry. Patricia was Māori, and in December 1943 she and Henry, of the US Coast Guard, married at Auckland. In 1944

he applied for a visa to enable his wife and their daughter to permanently enter the United States. Initially the application was approved, but the US consul was not certain about the eligibility of Māori to become naturalized Americans under the law. He sought the advice of the State Department, who in turn sought the advice of legal experts in the Justice Department. In November 1944 the expertise of museum ethnologists was sought by both departments in an effort to gain a definitive answer concerning the racial ancestry of Māori. It took some time for them to come to a decision, but with expert advice in hand by January 1945 they advised consular officials in New Zealand that ‘Maoris are Polynesians and that they are not considered to be descendants of races indigenous to the Western Hemisphere within the meaning of Section 303 of the Nationality Act of 1940’.⁴⁰ US naturalization and citizenship laws divided the world into the western and eastern hemispheres, and rendered only those individuals descended from ‘races’ of the western hemisphere eligible for citizenship. Anyone unable to be considered for citizenship was also denied entry under the Immigration Act 1924. With two Māori parents, Patricia did not belong to an approved ‘race’ under the Nationality Act, resulting in the retraction of her visa in January 1945.⁴¹

Patricia’s case preceded the 1945 Act, and stands as the first instance where the US immigration and nationality laws were tested by interracial marriage during war in the Pacific. Described as ‘the first definite opinion on the applicability’ of the Nationality Act to those of Polynesian ancestry, the case set an important precedent, which the US consulates in Noumea, Sydney, and Suva were obliged to apply to future applicants.⁴² Nevertheless, the issue of racial eligibility of Māori and Pacific Island women was debated into 1945 as new cases arose, and couples contested consular decisions. As Prescott Childs, the American consul noted in June 1945, this was an important issue that demanded resolution because ‘it is known that some of our servicemen have married or are engaged to girls with fifty per cent or more Maori blood’.⁴³ Visa complications of this nature would not be resolved for Pacific Islanders until 1949, when they were made eligible for US naturalization and immigration. By then some couples had given up hope, legally ending the relationship by divorce. Others never divorced, keeping their married name and raising any children of the relationship as single mothers, for a married name and a wedding band moderated the stigma associated with ‘abandonment’ by an American husband. Patricia and Henry were not one of those couples. She was ‘the love of his life’, and they remained together, living in Canada, until Henry’s death in 2006.⁴⁴

Women were aware of US immigration restrictions. They were advised of them when they made an application for marriage, and again when applying for a visa. Viv’s family believed she did not go to the United States, despite encouragement from her American husband, because she feared racial discrimination.⁴⁵ He had served with the Navy and demobilized in the US, but never returned to New Zealand. They divorced in 1959, many years after she had entered a de facto relationship and started another family. When her American ex-husband died in 1961, he left his modest estate to his New Zealand-born son, who was his only child.⁴⁶ Twelve of the 40 Pacific war brides ended up in the same situation, unable or unwilling to go to the United States. One young woman sought help from Lou Lockheart, the advice columnist for the popular women’s magazine the *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly*, in June 1944. ‘I love an American who wants to marry me’, she wrote, but ‘I am a quarter-caste Maori. Will that make it difficult for me to get in to the USA?’⁴⁷ Another woman, who described herself as ‘a quarter Polynesian’, also wrote in for

advice as she was making arrangements to travel to the United States, but feared she would be denied entry because of her ethnicity.⁴⁸ This was a very real fear, because the fate of an illegal alien was the very public humiliation of deportation.

Consular officials stationed in the Pacific and New Zealand, rather than military authorities, decided the eligibility of individuals for an entry visa to the United States. When Staff Sergeant Joseph L. Bergeret sought the admission of his Tongan wife to the United States he provided proof of his family's support, and reputable citizens from his home town also wrote to consular representatives on his behalf. In order to process the application Bergeret's wife needed to provide proof to the American consulate in Suva that she has 'a preponderance of either white or African blood, or both' to meet the criteria of the Nationality Act.⁴⁹ There is no evidence that Vaisinia ever gained entry to the United States. It was standard practice to seek documentary support because in countries with histories of racial mixing, consular officials could not rely on visual appearance as a guide to racial ancestry and eligibility. As one official of the State Department's Visa Division stated before the US House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization in 1945, there were 'sad cases' of American servicemen stationed in the Pacific who married women who 'looked white', but were not 'white by law'.⁵⁰ Just as colonial rulers found the 'half-caste' defied categorization, and challenged racial hierarchies, so too did US consuls, who faced the difficulty of 'reading' visual appearance, but without the requisite local knowledge of family ancestry and connections to make recommendations.⁵¹

For the American visa application system to work as it was designed to, it relied on the availability of accurate documentation. Consular officials discovered systems of birth registration in the Pacific were often non-existent, cases where births had not been registered, and in other instances, registration systems that utilized racial categories that did not match American understandings and classifications of race. In early October 1944 the Auckland consul John C. Fuess telephoned the registrar of births to discuss the question of visa applications from 'persons having Maori blood'. Fuess needed reliable documentation to make recommendations, but now learnt that a separate system of birth registration existed for anyone possessing more than half Maori 'blood'. Complicating matters, parents could register their child on the general birth register and get 'a white birth certificate' as long they provided a written statement attesting to ancestry. As New Zealand birth certificates could not help 'to determine the blood composition of the child', Fuess dismissed them 'as a guide in determining the admissibility of aliens to the United States from the point of view of blood compositions'.⁵²

Documentary proof was sometimes not enough to eradicate suspicion. One young woman presented herself at the American consulate in Suva, Fiji, with all the required documents to make initial preparations for a visa application, including letters of support from her serviceman fiancée and his parents. While she had provided correct documentation, the consular official found her appearance unsatisfactory. Her dark complexion was of concern, while 'her hair reveals that she might have Fijian blood'.⁵³ In March 1944 the fiancée of Lieutenant Roger Herrick experienced 'difficulty in obtaining an immigration visa to enable her to journey to the United States'.⁵⁴ Although a 'British subject by birth' she had conceded to 'having an admixture of Polynesian or Melanesian blood, the percentage of which' needed elaboration in order to obtain a visa to the United States.⁵⁵

Those without access to a birth certificate were forced to get affidavits from relatives who could offer evidence of their racial ancestry. 'I have a request from my

niece who is a New Zealander' wrote one woman, 'to have sworn affidavit as to how much dark & white blood her father has. He was born in Fiji'.⁵⁶ Uncertain how to proceed in the matter, she requested consular advice on how to provide official evidence that 'my niece has much more white blood than dark blood, about 75% I think, so there is no difficulty & I will be able to fix it up as soon as possible'. Where documentation was impossible, couples sidestepped the process, or massaged genealogies to enhance one's European ancestry. Visual appearance helped and hindered this process of finding white ancestors. Rosie, engaged to a US serviceman, called at the US consulate in Suva, to find out the requirements to enter the US so she could marry him. 'It was obvious as the conversation proceeded' that the young woman 'was acquainted with the necessity of producing evidence of her blood percentages. She said that she was regarded as a half-caste. She left the office fully understanding that her application for a visa to enter the United States could not be entertained unless she could produce proof that she was more than 50 per cent white.' As she was unable to provide the required proof, she 'said that she would probably arrange for her fiancé to come to Fiji and settle'.⁵⁷ Very few servicemen are known to have returned to the Pacific to reside after the war.

Women of mixed ancestry from New Zealand and the Pacific entered the US without much trouble after 1945. Such women also married with little difficulty for their mixed ancestry did not contravene the racial criteria of US immigration and naturalization laws, nor state laws prohibiting miscegenation. They looked European, and they could claim, and prove, to be 'white by law'. Nola and Zack married at Wellington in 1944.⁵⁸ She arrived in California on 14 January 1946 on the *Permanente*, and on the passenger list she is identified as Swedish-English. Nola's mixed ancestry worked in her favour, for she was able to play down her Asian heritage to fit the requirements of US immigration policy. A number of Pacific war brides did this, including Doris, who was identified as Scots-English on the passenger list. She was in fact of mixed Māori-European ancestry. Legally British subjects, mixed race Fijian and Māori women could deploy nationality to mask racial ancestry. Immigration and Naturalization officials were aware of this practice, and in December 1944 reminded consular officials that the regulations of the Immigration Act 1924 required applicants to state their race when requesting a visa. Recently though, they had found 'in many cases the nationality of the applicant or the country of residence of the applicant apparently has been an influencing factor in determining racial classification'.⁵⁹

The majority of war brides who entered the US under the 1945 Act were white, or looked white; it was only the racially inadmissible who took the risk of deportation. In May 1946 Helene Bouiss, a Japanese-German war bride, was taken into custody at Oregon. Her serviceman husband immediately instituted legal proceedings to halt the deportation process and to have her status reassessed. Bouiss has been identified by legal historians as 'the only reported case [of deportation] involving a racially inadmissible war bride after World War II'.⁶⁰ But there were also two 'Polynesian' brides who came to public attention in May 1947.⁶¹ Monica, of Fijian parentage, and Lena, from Western Samoa, had entered Honolulu in January 1947. Upon arrival immigration authorities assessed them as racially inadmissible and immediately detained both women. On 27 February 1947 the Suva Consulate received a telegram from Immigration and Naturalization, requesting verification of Monica's racial ancestry.⁶² On investigation the consulate found her to be 62.5% 'other than European'.⁶³ Facing deportation, Monica was only able to remain in the United States

because the local congressional representative Senator Joseph Farrington (Hawaii-R) took up her cause, as well as Lena's case.⁶⁴ Public denouncement of the treatment of Helene, Lena and Monica led to the passage of Public Law 213 in 1947 by Congress, which temporarily eradicated racial criteria as grounds for excluding war brides and fiancés from admission to the United States.⁶⁵ At the time it was believed between 1500 and 2500 couples would apply for entry under its provisions, the majority from Japan.⁶⁶

Prior to the enactment of Public Law 213, servicemen could privately petition Congress to exempt their wife from immigration restrictions based on race.⁶⁷ Private petitions were a 'last resort to avoiding consequences required by the law, such as exclusion or deportation from the United States or denial of US citizenship'.⁶⁸ A total of 429 private bills were introduced in the 79th Congress (1945-1946), but only 15 were enacted, with 117 enacted during the 80th Congress (1946-1947) out of 1141 private bills introduced that year.⁶⁹ One of these petitioners was Lewis Hall. He met Nancy in 1942 'during a brief rest in New Zealand' before his division was sent to the Solomon Islands. Hall returned to New Zealand in 1943, and the couple married on 29 October that year, with the permission of the US Navy authorities. At the end of the war Lewis demobilized in the United States, but it took a further two years before his wife could enter the country, and only after he 'battled his way through person interviews with the late Rep. Eugene Cox, Sen. Richard Russell, FBI Chief Edgar Hoover – and ex-President Harry S. Truman himself.'⁷⁰ His private petition was successful and Nancy entered the country in August 1947, settling into married life in Georgia. A local newspaper caught up with the couple in March 1953: a photograph of Hall's 'lovely South Sea Island wife' standing in the kitchen of their home, holding a mixing bowl and wearing an apron – the typical American housewife – depicts her comfortably settled into married life.

Somewhat ironically, the requirements placed upon consular and immigration officials to document every aspect of the lives of visa applicants means that a wealth of information exists about the racially inadmissible. Legal documents, application forms, and official correspondence helps the historian to trace the fate of these couples, while also providing insight into the ways in which couples negotiated the challenge of racial restrictions and exclusions. Practices of recordkeeping designed to track the racially problematic leaves us with an uneven historical record that emphasizes those who failed, with the fate of couples who succeeded in entering the United States harder to establish. Women like Patricia (ie. women with no or minimal mixed ancestry) had to hope that their husbands were willing to move to the Pacific where their marriage did not contravene any laws. Most gave up waiting for that to happen, and petitioned for divorce instead.

For New Zealand women married to US servicemen obtaining a divorce was difficult until 1947 when the Matrimonial Causes (War Marriages) Act was passed, 'correcting the anomaly' which stated that divorce proceedings could only be undertaken in the courts of the husband's domicile.⁷¹ That Act was conceived specifically as a wartime measure, with marriages to American servicemen in mind. It granted New Zealand courts the jurisdiction to nullify marriages regardless of a husband's domicile, notwithstanding the fact that its decrees may not be recognized by the husband's courts.⁷² It made divorce easier too, reducing the grounds of desertion from three years to 12 months. Described at the time by Josiah Hanan, the Member of Parliament for Invercargill, as a 'wise and humanitarian piece of legislation', it granted retrospective rights to women in difficult situations.⁷³ The

question of domicile and divorce in Fiji was resolved under the Matrimonial Causes (War Marriages) Ordinance 1945, which established Fiji as the domicile of parties to a marriage after September 1939, allowing the Supreme Court to hear cases of divorce involving such individuals.⁷⁴

A Māori woman, Kitty, chose to divorce her American serviceman husband in 1949. She had married Edward in 1944, at St Matthew's Church, Auckland when she was 20, and he was 23. Three weeks later his unit shipped out, but the couple maintained contact by regular exchange of letters. Edward was discharged from the Army in July 1945, but never returned to New Zealand. Four years later the New Zealand Supreme Court granted Kitty a divorce; the documentation reveals that the military authorities warned the couple of the legal barriers to making a life together in the United States. 'Prior to my marriage I called at the American Consulate to get permission to marry. They told me before I got married I could not go to the USA', however, Edward 'agreed to return to NZ after his discharge. I believed him.'⁷⁵ Edward is representative of many young soldiers in the Pacific: on return to the United States they either did not want to go back to the Pacific, or could not return for financial reasons. He wrote to his 'Dearest Wife' on 26 July 1946 encouraging her to petition for a divorce, which he would not contest.

I will take the blame for it as since I am home I have not been much good. For awhile [sic] I was working to get money to come back to you and it seemed the more I worked the less I had so I could not make anything and it would cost me over \$1000 to get back and I could not get it. So that is the reason I could not get back and I would have liked to be back with you and the rest of our friends.⁷⁶

While he noted 'it is to [sic] bad that money is keeping us apart' race-based immigration policy in the US also played a role in imposing serious delays in the reunification of couples and families, ultimately contributing to marital failure.

Conclusion

Marriages made in the midst of war, warned experts, were fragile and more likely to fail. International marriages were thought to be particularly vulnerable, for they were too often made in haste with little thought for the future, nor the legal or emotional consequences.⁷⁷ These consequences can be traced through the many practices of governance used by the US military and officials to constrain and control desire, sentiment, and affection. At least 40 Pacific brides unravelled military regulations though, and we know 12 were excluded from entry to the United States on the basis of race, but it is likely that many more couples were denied the opportunity to marry by military authorities. The remainder were able to negotiate complicated military and legal processes by massaging genealogies, or staking a claim to European ancestry. Not all were successful at this, for at least two brides were targeted for deportation. Of the 28 brides who successfully entered the United States their faint imprint on the archival records offers evidence of how regulations, policies and laws could not always manage and contain affection. For this group the post-war ideal of family reunification as expressed by US lawmakers and encouraged through war bride legislation became a reality, but the experience for those deemed racially inadmissible was radically different, resulting in marital failure and family breakdown, or lengthy delays to reunification.

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¹ Judith A. Bennett, *Natives and Exotics: World War II and Environment in the Southern Pacific*, Honolulu, 2009, p.6.

² Allison J. Gough, “‘Messing Up Another Country’s Customs’: The Exportation of American Racism During World War II”, *World History Connected* 5, no. 1 (2007), para.3. Also see, Bennett, pp.28-29.

³ See Sabine Lee, ‘A Forgotten Legacy of the Second World War: GI Children in Post-War Britain and Germany’, *Contemporary European History*, 2, 2 (2011), pp.157-81. David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1942-1945*, New York, 1995. Sonya O. Rose, ‘Girls and GIs: Race, Sex, and Diplomacy in Second World War Britain’, *International History Review*, 19, 1 (1997), pp.146-60.

⁴ Yasmin Khan, ‘Sex in an Imperial War Zone: Transnational Encounters in Second World War India’, *History Workshop Journal*, 73, 1 (2012), p.12. Susan Zeiger, *Entangling Alliances: Foreign War Brides and American Soldiers in the Twentieth Century*, New York, 2010. Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, Oxford, 2009.

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Polynesian mixture), 330 Chinese and 75 Melanesians (p.89), but Fiji's population was far more diverse at 1940. In that year the country had a total population of 220,800, with 4300 Europeans, 98,100 Indians, 5100 mixed race, 2100 Chinese, 3100 Pacific Islanders, and another 1400 classified as 'other'. Most of the population were Indigenous Fijians (pp.95-6).

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¹⁶ *Dominion*, 21 April 1943, p.6. *New Zealand Herald* (NZH), 20 April 1943, p.2.

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¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.34.

¹⁹ Pascoe, p.12.

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- ⁴³ Prescott Childs to John Fuess, 15 June 1945, Suva Consulate Records, 1945, Vol. 3, RG 84, NARA.
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