This book is not without its faults. Said's commendable willingness to display his amazingly broad range of erudition sometimes betrays him, as, for example, in his mention of Akiri [sic] Iriye, his misstatement of Hayden White's topological categories (he mistakenly substitutes allegory for synecdoche), and his clumsy reference to the "Bretton Woods entente" (p. 328). Then too, for all its suggestiveness, ultimately the relationship between culture and imperialism remains unclear.

His suggestion that modernism, with its suspicion of cultural essences, owes a great deal to the resistance generated by imperialism may have some truth to it, but it also neglects the logical and historical dynamics within the Western intellectual tradition that conduced to the same end. And despite his modernist rejection of totalizing systems of thought, his dialectic of imperialism, resistance, and universal liberation is clearly very much in the Hegelian tradition. With imperialism playing the role of thesis, Said leaves no room for the possibility that all these processes are themselves part of a modernization whose dialectic is unfortunately not so clear, one in which both sides are swept up by forces that they can neither predict nor control.

While this original and intellectually invigorating work contains many ambiguities and offers ample invitations to argument, it also rewards the reader with far more insights than almost any other scholarly analysis that takes as its focal point the ideology of imperialism. It should be required reading for anyone with a serious interest in international relations.

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An experienced scholar and writer, Gary Y. Okihiro's focus in Cane Fires is the social phenomenon of the anti-Japanese movement in Hawaii. He has produced something more than a chronicle of a Hawaiian strain of xenophobia and racism. He offers us a richly nuanced case study of several major themes in American history, majority-minority relations, and even world history.

Initially, Okihiro provides a succinct account of the haole (white foreign) usurpation of power in Hawaii which coincided with the first of Okihiro's three phases of the anti-Japanese movement, the period of migrant labor, 1865–1909. The haole planter class gradually strangled the indigenous Hawaiian monarchy in a familiar story of "Manifest Destiny" and American imperialism and gobbled up the prime agricultural land in the process.
What the planters needed next to achieve their goal of making Hawai'i their own paradise was labor. The labor requirements of the plantations brought the Japanese workers and the haole owners together under conditions of manipulation and domination the tale of which becomes the tragedy—an affirming example of human grace throughout the rest of the book. Here, Cane Fires makes a major contribution to broader studies ranging from our understanding of the plantation as the channelling agent of specific forms of development world wide, to providing us with an excellent case study of many of Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theories.

Okihiro's second phase of the anti-Japanese movement ran from 1909 to 1940 and was a period of "economic, politic, and cultural dependency" designed to "produce profits for Hawaii's planters, muzzle dissent, and hinder the development of children of migrant workers" (p. xiii). Okihiro illustrates another historical trend: that the rise of American hegemony and its "Third World" were part of a symbiotic and antagonistic relationship. As Japanese roots in Hawaii went deeper, relations with the white elite became more antagonistic. Efforts to improve their lot through labor organization exacerbated their troubles. "The irony for Japanese workers was that in seeking to become Americans through a demand for equality, they were denied national membership and branded as foreigners, undesirables, and seditionists" (p. 55).

Okihiro explains that what was initially a labor-capital struggle became something more jagged in the aftermath of a major strike in 1920. The Hawaiian whites viewed the "Japanese problem" as a challenge to their hegemony and a national security issue. The prospects of racial solidarity among the Japanese, their seeming un-Americanisms, and concern over Imperial Japan's intentions "brokered the wedding of capitalism to the national security" (p. 86).

Cane Fires thus becomes a fascinating example of the complicated interrelationships between racism, capitalism, and nationalism (including national foreign policies). Okihiro aptly paints a picture of increasing paranoia on the part of the military creating a different sort of anti-Japanese movement. "The territory's security required an anti-Japanese movement that elicited Japanese labor but repressed Japanese culture and empowerment" (p. 271). Okihiro shows us that there were very serious fears of a Japanese "fifth column" should there be a conflict between the United States and Japan. One wonders what fueled the military planning against Japanese internal subversion—a sophisticated understanding of Japan's seizure of Korea or Manchuria? Or could it be that the Americans had a deep-seated understanding of how they themselves had absorbed Hawaii just thirty years earlier?