Donald D. Johnson, with Gary Dean Best, *The United States in the Pacific: Private Interests and Public Policies, 1784-1899.* Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995. Pp. 225, bibliography, index. US$59.95.

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During a long and distinguished career teaching history at the University of Hawai'i, the late Donald D. Johnson (1917-1993) was indeed a pioneer in the study of the United States' activities in the Pacific. This volume represents the synthesis of his thoughts regarding American expansion into the Pacific Ocean area during the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, Professor Johnson passed away before he could finish his work on this book, having been delayed by the necessity of completing two other books: *Hawaii's Own: A History of the Hawaii Government Employees Association* (1986) and *The City and County of Honolulu: A Government Chronicle* (1991). In honor of his mentor, diplomatic historian Gary Dean Best has prepared Johnson's study for final publication.

In his preface, Professor Johnson explains that he intends to determine "what American interests [in the Pacific] really were, whose interests they were, and how government policies supposedly designed for their well-being were suited to that end" (p. xii). To answer these questions he begins his study in 1784, when the *Empress of China* became the first American ship to arrive in China, and ends in 1899, when the controversy surrounding American acquisition of the Philippines reached a climax. In the interim he traces the experiences of the numerous interest groups--whalers, sealers, explorers, missionaries, merchants, government officials, politicians, and naval officers--that were active in Pacific affairs during that era. Since the Pacific was the main area of American overseas expansion during the latter half of the nineteenth century, a period that many historians consider an "age of imperialism," Johnson scrutinizes the objectives of these interest groups as they ventured into the Pacific. Rejecting economic determinism, he concludes that the motives behind U.S. policy in Oceania were "varied, complex, and often contradictory." They included "personal ambition, humanitarianism, missionary zeal, bureaucratic interest, and patriotic concern" (p. xii). In reality, American businessmen were usually less assertive in calling for government intervention than were self-serving politicians and publicists.

Johnson effectively argues that the American public's lack of interest in or knowledge of the Pacific area enabled small groups and individuals, usu-

ally in Washington, to exert influence on government policy far out of proportion to their numbers. In many instances, domestic promoters and politicians were able to encourage American expansion despite the opposition or disinterest of those groups actually involved in the Pacific. For instance, in the 1830s one-man lobbyist Jeremiah Reynolds was able to generate enthusiasm within the Andrew Jackson administration for a naval exploring expedition to Oceania to promote the whaling industry. By and large, however, the whalers themselves exhibited a marked lack of interest for such an undertaking and were quite content to go about their business without government "help." Similarly, Theodore Roosevelt's belief that Hawai'i was vital to national security, Secretary of State John Hay's view that Pago Pago harbor was "indispensable," and Captain Alfred T. Mahan's arguments in favor of maintaining naval bases in the Philippines were all after the fact contrivances made after the Spanish-American War as rationalizations. They did not accurately reflect contemporary geopolitical reality before 1898. Johnson believes that the "pseudo-strategic" arguments of these three expansionists helped to create myths that functioned to prepare Americans to accept a role as empire builders in the Pacific. As a result, the United States made crucial historical choices and commitments far out of proportion to its real interests in the Pacific at the end of the nineteenth century. Thus, in the absence of public scrutiny, interest groups exerted a great influence on public policy on the basis of assumptions that were, at best, dubious.

Although Johnson's thesis is not revolutionary, he has done an excellent job of placing American diplomacy in the Pacific in a clear, coherent perspective. His book is more historical interpretation than detailed history and will therefore be of most interest to those with a background in Pacific studies and American history. It provides a perceptive and well-reasoned analysis of the period but contains few interesting anecdotes. Unlike most diplomatic historians, however, Johnson also scrutinizes events from the perspective of the islands, instead of concentrating almost exclusively on domestic American politics. His point that the appeals of promoters for expansion were "fanciful" and "involved fundamental ignorance or misunderstanding of the societies with which they proposed to deal" is especially well made (p. xvii). This book's greatest contribution is in preserving the synthesis of forty years of work and study by one of the most respected experts in the field. Its only shortcoming, perhaps unavoidable given the circumstance under which it was completed, is that some of the sources are a bit dated and most of the secondary works cited have pre-1980 publication dates.