Response: K. R. HOWE
MASSEY UNIVERSITY
NEW ZEALAND

I am grateful to *Pacific Studies* for arranging this review forum. It is a fitting conclusion to my "Pacific Islands History in the 1980s" (*Pacific Studies* 3, no. 1, 1979), which argued that *one* of the things badly needed for Pacific islands studies was a general history putting together all the detailed but fragmented research of thirty years of "modern Pacific history."

Naturally I am pleased that the reviewers here agree that my efforts have been worthwhile and that they concur in the view that my book is a "worthy successor" to Oliver's *The Pacific Islands,* which was first published in 1951. I am particularly pleased that the reviewers confirm our experience in New Zealand that the book is most suitable for the teaching of Pacific history.

Of course I unreservedly accept all the nice things that the three reviewers say and, lest the following comments seem too defensive, let me make clear at the outset that I thank them for all their opinions whether I agree with them or not. Let me also emphasize that I am perhaps in a better position than anyone else to be aware of the book's limitations. Some of these limitations have been mentioned by the reviewers, others that I believe exist in the book have not (but I'm not going to list them here!).

I shall deal first with certain points raised by the reviews of Spate and Meleisea, and then at more length with that of Ralston.

Spate's introductory statements and overall assessment are indeed generous and I am very grateful for them. On some points of detail: his critique of my brief introductory discussion of political structures in Melanesia and Polynesia is rather abrupt and his compression of selected sentences, especially from page 60 of my book, puts the least favorable interpretation on my views. But I accept his warning that I risk the "error" of "negating . . . [my] desire . . . of transcending an over-particularising empiricism." Both Meleisea and Ralston however suggest that with regard to some Polynesian political systems my error is precisely the opposite!

Spate's warnings about the dangers of too much emphasis on the "uniqueness" of each island and of the historian being conceptually "marooned on some particular atoll or group, regardless of the sweep of the currents which bring life to the isles" is well worth stressing. One of Spate's significant contributions to Pacific history in his multivolume work *The Pacific Since Magellan* is his oceanic as opposed to insular

perspective. I am pleased that he feels I have taken a balanced approach in this context of assessing the relative importance of indigenous as opposed to exotic influences. I shall return later to Spate's point about my decision to write a history to colonial rule.

Meleisea is also generous in his overall assessment. He nicely, but all too briefly, captures the sense of excitement that modern Pacific history has had for him as it unfolded from the late 1960s; and his distillation of my book into "four themes" is more succinct than my efforts at a similar exercise.

I agree with his contention that in discussions of Polynesian political systems there has been far too much arbitrary categorizing and stereotyping, which seems to stem largely from the works of Sahlins and Goldman. But contrary to what Meleisea says, I have certainly not accepted the proposition (and nor, I think, has Goldman) that Polynesian political systems represent the "culminations of hundreds, even thousands of years of unidirectional evolution."

Meleisea's comments on Samoa are also most pertinent and again I find myself in complete agreement with his interpretations. I hope I have not, as he claims, tried "to diminish the tragic consequences of land grabbing, king-making, and gunboat diplomacy by Europeans in destroying the political capacities of islanders to respond on equal terms." I believe that there is plenty of material illustrating precisely these features on pages 247-254. And I must take issue with his comment that I conclude that "the Samoans simply lacked the capacity to unite and that the three powers, in the face of this intransigence" carved up Samoa among them. The word "intransigence" is most certainly not mine. What I do argue (which is presumably in accord with Meleisea's views) is that at those times, especially from the 1870s onward, when Samoans did agree upon a form of government to represent them

> their hopes of creating a centralized administration were to be dashed by the economic and political interests of rival European concerns. . . . The overall economic needs of the white population were much more demanding and more complex. Samoa was needed for its land; Samoans were needed as plantation labourers. The Europeans wanted a strong government which could recognize their land claims, guarantee them rights to buy more, and generally sanction and protect their interests and property. But since the English, American, German, and French communities were riven by religious, national, and commercial conflicts they could never agree on how such a gov-

> ernment should operate. Various European interest groups could divide and rule the Samoans, which was easy enough given Samoan factionalism, yet in doing so they quarrelled bitterly amongst themselves. The Europeans were less united than the Samoans. (249-250)

This theme then becomes the dominant one and is illustrated by many examples for the remainder of the chapter on Samoa.

Ralston's lengthy review, again with a most gracious introduction, could well be used as a basis for a course on Pacific islands historiography! Unfortunately space does not permit me to reply in kind. I will deal with what I feel are the most substantive points, some of which will refer back to Spate and Meleisea.

I accept that my history (and Pacific islands history in general since J. W. Davidson days) has what Ralston calls a "eurocentricity" of structure, that is, that the basic "organizing principles" have to do with the arrival of the West and the Islanders' responses, Martin Silverman, in reviewing another book (*Pacific History Bibliography and Comment 1983,* p. 80) has aptly called this approach the Oceanic Epic: "The population. adapts to its environment; it has its own history for a while; it responds to a succession of alien forces which are either ripples or waves; it looks forward toward an uncertain future." I'm not quite sure why Ralston (who admits to her own contribution to this Epic) feels so uneasy about it. One can acknowledge and accept its obvious limitations yet still find it a perfectly valid and useful perspective. Ralston certainly offers no alternatives, and in any case alternatives will have their own particular limitations--the universally valid perspective on the past does not exist. The problem is that Ralston slips too readily from saying that the "genesis and organizing principles" of my book "are imposed from the outside" to saying several times in her review that the events I examine are determined by outside or exotic influences. This contradicts a main theme of the book which suggests that for much of the period under discussion "the course of events was very much influenced by the nature of the Islanders' own social and political arrangements" (352). And I must say that there seems to be a contradiction in her dissatisfaction with the view (which she erroneously attributes to me), that foreigners were always the "motivating agents," "the preponderant generators of change," and her insistence that I have not given enough weight to European interference causing the Islanders' "loss of land and political initiative, and their increasing dependency and economic vulnerability." There is a flaw in her logic somewhere.

Ralston proceeds to survey the various sections of my book and for the most part our views coincide, though I am a little surprised at her comment that my account of precontact Pacific societies is "static." I do devote an entire chapter to change in island communities from initial settlement to the advent of Europeans. Also I would like to state emphatically that I have not assumed (as Ralston says I have) that those islands which saw the emergence of monarchies are in any sense superior to those which did not. Nor do I ever claim that these centralized states were better placed to cope with Western contact.

> Whatever the island contexts in which these kingdoms emerged and operated, outside influences far beyond the control of kings and their subjects ultimately determined the fate of the royal regimes. The French took over Tahiti in 1843. . . . the United States annexed Hawaii in 1898. The Tongan monarchy survived, not just because of certain attributes and strengths it possessed, but because the Great Powers agreed to allow it to survive, under British protection. . . . Had any of the powers wanted to annex Tonga there would have been little the Tongan monarchy could have done to prevent it. (197)

I chose to examine the issue of political centralization, or lack of it, since this provided a narrative structure and a convenient theme around which many aspects of culture contact could be investigated. And I wished to do so in a comparative context since, to my knowledge, no one has ever done so.

I would now like to turn to Spate's and especially Ralston's view that I should have said more about the fate of Pacific Islanders in colonial and postcolonial times and contrasted this with my more optimistic analysis of their precolonial experience. I have every sympathy with the thrust of their opinions. Clearly this is an issue that so much of the "new Pacific historiography" must come to terms with. To what extent should Pacific historians, in choosing to write about events of a hundred years ago, constantly look ahead? I believe that I *have* adequately foreshadowed less happy colonial times in terms of loss of land and economic and political initiatives. Ralston even quotes several of my comments to this effect (though to suit her argument she then dismisses them!). But though I refer to these issues far more than the reviewers indicate, my emphasis on them has, in their view, been insufficient. I can only say that my views about the colonial and postcolonial experience for Pacific Islanders do not differ from theirs.

The root cause of the reviewers' unease in this context is my decision to stop at the point when colonial rule was established. I am acutely conscious of the structural difficulties this has caused. Ralston seems unconvinced with the reasons that I offer in my preface for not coming into the twentieth century. I still can't think of more compelling ones. All I can say is that I would very much like to have brought the story through to the present day but given the sparse nature of twentieth-century studies on the Pacific I felt unable to do so--and so has everybody else over the last thirty years! Ralston says it can now be done and if she is so confidently informed as she claims I hope she (or somebody else) makes the attempt, but I'm not aware of any moves in this direction (and I have no immediate plans for a *Waves Two*). I think it should be stressed for the benefit of those readers not familiar with Pacific historiography that Pacific historical studies are overwhelmingly precolonial in setting. Ralston's own work is, and so is the work of other leading contributors whom she quotes--for example, Greg Dening whose recent book on the Marquesas covers the period from 1774-1880. And perhaps it is no coincidence that Francis Hezel's just published book on Micronesia (*The First Taint of Civilization*, 1984)--which nicely fills a gap in the coverage--is subtitled "A history of the Caroline and Marshall islands in pre-colonial days, 1521-1885."

I am certainly not trying to defend or justify this chronological bias; indeed I wish it did not exist, but it *does*, and thus it is necessarily reflected in the structure of my book.

Ralston's concluding outline of the "development of Pacific history over the past thirty years" is a useful and at times provocative summary of directions, strengths, weaknesses. But not much is new. There is little I wish to take issue with, indeed much of it is in complete accord with my own published views. What does disturb me somewhat though is the fact that whenever and wherever Pacific historians meet, we seem to chew over these issues ad nauseam. People are always pointing out what should be done, but very few actually do anything about it. We are our own best critics, yet also, I fear, our worst since the atmosphere engendered by the often negative (dare I say cynical) self-examination our discipline is prone to indulge in has not encouraged people to break out and, to use Spate's words, "play the generalist game." After all, as Ralston says, there is a "third of a century" between Oliver's and Howe's histories of the islands. I can only endorse wholeheartedly her hope that another general history will not take a similar length of time to appear.