Ronald Takaki, *Pau Hana: Plantation Life and Labor in Hawaii, 1835-1920.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983. Pp. 224, illustrations. $14.95.

"I say that life on a plantation is much like life in a prison," says a worker in Ron Takaki's *Pau Hana: Plantation Life and Labor in Hawaii,* a long-overdue general survey of the plantation worker's experience circa 1835-1920. Although often too superficial and sentimental to be considered really critical scholarship, Takaki's is a warm, empathetic account written with feeling and a sense of allegiance to the nameless thousands who labored in the fields and mills. It is of significance precisely because it does not shrink from exploring the brutality and suffocation of the human spirit that were at the core of the plantation system. Indeed, this book provides reinforcement for the view developed by John Reinecke and other plantation scholars that the worker's lot on the prewar Hawaii plantations lay somewhere between a Mexican peon on an early twentieth-century *finca* and an indentured servant in colonial America,

Back in the late 1930s, the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association, alarmed by reviving unionism and some New Deal criticism of Hawaii's "peculiar institution" (plantation authoritarianism), sponsored a series of books and public relations campaigns to convince people both inside and outside the islands that the plantations were rustic communities of happily toiling folk content with their quaint cottages and "the most favorable living and working conditions" of anybody living in the tropics. This romance of plantation life has, however, been in disfavor for a while now. Certainly, two of the major studies of Hawaii's history, Lawrence Fuchs' *Hawaii Pono* and Gavan Daws' *Shoal of Time,* both portray the plantation environment as harshly repressive, semi-feudal domains populated by lords and serfs. Takaki's work, however, is the first to focus our attention completely on the plantation worker. It is a cane level view of Hawaii, and that is both its strength and its limitation.

The plantations are for Takaki, in one word, *betrayers.* What they betray is nothing less than the American Dream carried by the Chinese and Portuguese and Japanese and Korean immigrants to the islands they hailed as the Land of Glory, the Sandalwood Mountains, Terra Nova. These were men and women, come to escape the miseries of landlessness, peonage, century-old abuses, and iron-bound class hierarchies, Locked in by history, they would use Hawaii to recreate their own liberating history. Some came as sojourners wanting only to accumulate enough to return to Kwangtung and the Illocos and rural Hiroshima as well-to-do men; but others, many others, hungered "to be something, to own land," to express their lives in ways denied to them at home. To find some dignity and autonomy.

What they found instead (almost from the moment they walked off the boat in Honolulu harbor) was a harshly regimented, racist order controlled by the *luna's* snakewhip, the camp policeman, the plantation manager ruling as local potentate. In retrospect, the plantations in Hawaii abused the aspirations of immigrant and second generation workers, much as the Appalachian mines did the Welsh and Irish and Poles; the railroads, the Irish and Chinese; the garment factories, the Jews and Hispanics. Stranded thousands of miles from their cultural base, the immigrants could choose to endure the hardships of the plantation passively, struggle to change the shape of their Hawaii, or flee. Indeed, they did all three.

The twin themes of Takaki's book are oppression and resistance. For him, the plantation was always "contested terrain" where the masters (quite literally) held the whip hand while the workers were continually refining their methods of resistance; resistance varied from sabotage, feigned illness, desertion and slowdowns on an individual or small group level, to massive strikes that paralyzed the entire plantation system and challenged the reigning authority. The struggle begins with the first sugar plantation at Koloa, Kauai, in the 1830s--where Hawaiian workers, confronted with a hard-driving boss, quickly learned the art of malingering on the job and forging coupons to purchase things at the company store--and continues through the great broken strikes of 1909 and 1920.

The relationship of power in the plantation situation was always heavily weighted toward the plantation establishment. The workers, Takaki explains, "reduced to commodities . . . were placed in a labor market where planters inspected them and chose the ones they wanted, and the sugar agencies made selections and filled orders for the plantations." From the shrieking of the 5 A.M. "get up, get up" whistle, workers were deprived of any semblance of autonomy over their lives, dehumanized into factors of production. Herded from one work site to the next, working bent over for hours under a fierce subtropical sun, they waded across what must have seemed like endless yellow-green fields under the close scrutiny of men on horseback. Takaki is quite masterful at weaving the illuminating quote into his narrative. There is the Norwegian, for example, who expresses the disillusionment prevailing among all ethnic groups: "Our situation is daily becoming less endurable and we would advise our countrymen not to listen to talk of eternal summer and tropical fruits."

As a counterpoint to the plight of the plantation worker, Takaki takes us into the mindset of those who owned and managed the plantations. Through internal company documents, we catch glimpses of how they schemed to divide and rule the many different nationalities they brought to Hawaii, how they used every possible maneuver to maintain a cheap and docile labor force, In time, they developed plantation paternalism to quite the fine art; a judicious mix of strikebreaking, blacklists, violence, informers, *and* swimming tanks, medical services, baseball teams, churches. Time and again the planters showed how remarkably flexible they were in meeting new challenges to their absolute control over labor. When Hawaii was annexed at the turn of the century, the planters were forced to sacrifice their much beloved contract labor system. Naturally, thousands of "their" workers immediately fled to the higher wage West Coast. The planters reacted with vigor, placing restrictive taxes on mainland labor recruiters, politicking to have Asian emigrants to Hawaii barred from entering the continental U.S., and formulating a new bonus system calculated to tie their workers to the plantation. It worked wonders. When the Japanese proved strike-prone, there were the Filipinos to be brought in to restore a measure of discipline. Both in 1909 and 1920, Takaki describes how they brutally crushed large-scale plantation strikes, then granted some of the strikers' demands at their own discretion.

Hawaii's sugar planters, it seems, in a world full of poor people with their own individual dreams, were never short of new labor resources to exploit, never lacking some angle, always one step ahead of the workers who, divided by ethnicity and enforced segregation, united only very slowly.

Sometimes *Pau Hana* falls into the trap of romanticizing the "working class culture" that grew up in the plantations and (it is said) transcended the various ethnic components of the camps. But Takaki wisely refrains from making too many claims here, from arguing for a solidarity that did not exist, or seeing the creation of a unity that could mitigate the harshness of individual lives. He recognizes that the widespread escape into drinking and gambling and dancehalls derived from "the emptiness plantation laborers felt on weekends as well as the painfulness of their meaningless work during the week." He understands the terrible pain of men who having "failed to realize their dreams of wealth . . . had allowed the years to pass and had awakened one morning to see the wrinkled faces of old grey-haired bachelors greeting them on bathroom mirrors."

Pau Hana's strength lies in its clarity, its able use of English language sources, its determination to extract the essense of experience from the thoughts of those who lived it. Above all, Takaki has chosen to view his plantation from the camp itself, the hot, dusty, red-earth fields of caneland, the wooden porches of the plantation cottages where workers sat and smoked and mused after a long day in the fields. This gives the book its power and relevance. At its best, it is a testimony to the enduring human struggle for dignity, to the powers of human resilience.

There are flaws. Takaki's is the small, personalized picture of plantation life, yet we often lack the larger picture to make some sense of what is happening in the camps. For instance, in discussing William Hooper's Koloa enterprise, the author tells us, "Hooper opened the way for the development of a corporate dominated sugar economy and a paternalistic racial and class hierarchy in the islands." Hooper, convenient symbol that he may be, did no such thing. It was the global expansion of the

American economy to the Pacific coast, the settlement of California, and the creation of profitable markets for sugar at the time of the American Civil War that set up Hawaii as a large-scale exporter of the "white gold." The real establishment of the islands as "the sugar raising slope of the Pacific" was effected in 1875 when the United States passed the Reciprocity Treaty. In one stroke, Hawaii became economically dependent on the U.S. market, sugar was enthroned as king, and the need for plantation labor made urgent.

Takaki neglects to provide a useful framework for the growth and development of a plantation society. He also neglects to deal with sugar production as a *system in itself.* That is, how the cyclical growing period of the crop and worldwide competition resulted in sugar societies in the Pacific, the Caribbean, and Indian Ocean that had some remarkable similarities. Some discussion of the dynamics of sugar production and what this meant for Hawaii would have been invaluable to understanding the manner in which plantation life was structured.

The "small world" of the plantation is the book's subject, but even here the coverage is too superficial, too thin. The author makes a strong statement about the importance of some aspects of camp life, then glosses over them and passes on. We are left awaiting some deeper explanation. Pidgin receives two pages; likewise the role of religion is reduced to a handful of paragraphs. The introduction of family life into the plantation environment, the occupational structure, the working class culture of the camps are mentioned as significant, but much too briefly, almost in passing. The Big Five remain mysterious molochs lurking in the background offstage.

And some of Takaki's assertions are highly questionable. For instance, did the 1920 strike lay the basis for multiethnic unionism, which came only two decades later? *Pau Hana* concentrates almost exclusively on the plantation "laborer," thereby implying that this was the only position non-white workers held. However, even during the early twentieth century there was a substantial group of skilled Asian workers employed in the plantation shops and mills. It seems to this reviewer that Takaki, in trying to create a common denominator for the different ethnic groups in the camps, in trying to emphasize the oneness of experience, ignores the evidence that different groups had different experiences. Sometimes, very different. All of this bears the mark of a rush to publication on the part of author and publisher.

Ron Takaki's *Pau Hana* fills a void in plantation scholarship. It should be read and appreciated. And we still await a more profound interpretation of the plantation experience, one that probes deeply into the entire socioeconomic culture that grew up around the plantation, one that uses a more varied array of sources, one that asks the question: How does the plantation experience continue to shape today's Hawaii?

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In the Spring 1982 issue of *Pacific Studies,* an article, "Vanuatu Values: A Changing Symbiosis," by Robert Tonkinson appeared without his consent. The editor regrets this unfortunate error,