

D. C. Lewis, *The Plantation Dream: Developing British New Guinea and Papua, 1884–1942*. Canberra: Journal of Pacific History, 1996. Pp. xvi, 347, illus., bib., index.

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In the wake of a new millennium reflection on historical achievements and mistakes are inevitable. When one muses on the scope and impact of change in Papua New Guinea over the last hundred years it is little wonder that the country, which only became independent from Australian rule in 1975, finds itself confronted with difficult decisions about which path to take in the hopes of finding a more stable existence for itself in the twenty-first century.

D. C. Lewis provides a look into the period of Papua New Guinea history between 1884 and 1942 when British New Guinea and Papua were a labora-

tory for expatriate plantation agricultural experimentation. His account brings into focus various processes and procedures that allow the reader to put into context some of the historical pieces that were pivotal in building the picture of Papua New Guinea that we see today. He focuses on the experiences of the early settlers who came to set up the plantation industry, pulling together published and unpublished source materials that he supplements with oral history narratives he collected firsthand. His text moves from a discussion of the attempts to bring white settlers in to establish plantations prior to 1907, the subsequent influx of approximately one hundred settlers, the conflicts and crises that followed and forced settlers to reevaluate their positions in relation to the Papuan government, a discussion of the plantation industry itself, and the relations between Papuan workers and white management.

Lewis's historical presentation provides thought-provoking materials such as the details of the Native Labour Ordinance of 1906, which permitted indentureship of native laborers for up to three years with twelve-month interludes before reengagement could take place (p. 49). This same ordinance allowed for ninety-nine-year leases that could be obtained for as little as £10 per thousand acres, a set of terms that "were bound to encourage many an incautious application for land once a boom had begun" (p. 74).

The juxtapositioning of global events with those taking place on the plantations of New Guinea and Papua facilitates the reader's understanding of how external pressures molded the development of the plantation industries. For example, when Henry Ford in 1907 introduced assembly-line production into his factories, the global demand for rubber increased dramatically. But by the 1920s rubber tapping in Papua became uneconomical due to the impact of the international recession at that time (pp. 72–73, 205). In addition to the copra and rubber plantations, brief sketches of the ups and downs of other colonial plantations such as those for tobacco, sisal hemp, cotton, tea, sugar, coffee, and cocoa are given (chapter 17).

*The Plantation Dream* presents the experiences of the white pioneers in New Guinea and Papua. Although it does not discuss the experiences of the indigenous pioneers who followed in the footsteps of the white pioneers, the book provides materials that could be used to make such a comparison, such as with the well-documented case of the trials and tribulations of Joe Leahy's coffee plantations (see the film *Black Harvest*). It would also be of interest to use Lewis's presentation of the white experience in New Guinea and Papua to make a direct comparison with the narratives of the indigenous workers who could explain how they experienced the "plantation dream." In this regard, perusal of the historian Clive Moore's work *Kanaka: A History of Melanesian Mackay* (Port Moresby, 1985) on Melanesian indentured

laborers in Queensland from 1871 to 1904 could provide some interesting comparisons with Lewis's work.

Lewis also provides a thoughtful introduction to his theme, noting that today's Melanesian nationalists are unlikely to find a meeting of minds with the white planters of the early twentieth century. Yet, in an ironic way there is a situational convergence between these planters and the forerunners of the nationalists of today, the Melanesians who dreamed of riches and status to be obtained through "cargo cult" activity (a label for a multifarious set of movements of liberation, emulation, and protest). Lewis notes that "it can be said of the Europeans who made their home in Papua as planters in the period under review that they at least profited little from the opportunity, being themselves dupes of excessive expectations and delusions they shared with those who had encouraged them to settle there" (p. 3)—thus the "plantation dream."