



# Sahlins, Obeyesekere, Cook: What anthropology's most famous debate can tell us about anthropology's past and future



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Marshall Sahlins is known as one of the most important anthropologists of the 20th century. In the early 1990s he found himself under attack when the anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere wrote an entire book dedicating to criticising Sahlins's work on the history of Hawai'i. The result was the "Sahlins-Obeyesekere Debate", a conflict which quickly transformed from a scholarly confrontation about the minutiae Hawaiian history and turned into a debate about postcolonialism, objectivity, and the politics of studying the other. This talk will look back at the Sahlins-Obeyesekere debate and assess its place in anthropological history. We will also examine how anthropology today could profit from some of the lessons learned during this famous debate.