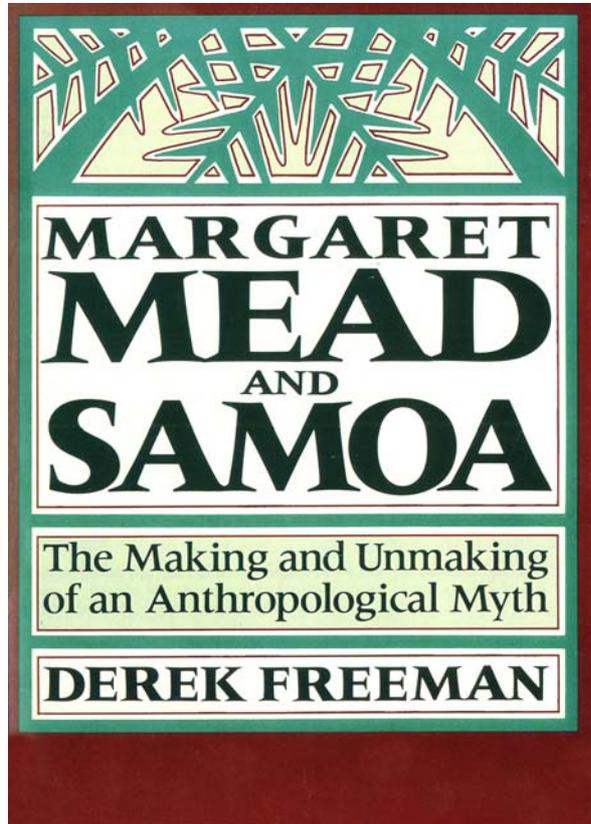


Book of The Century



Derek Freeman 1983).*Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge. MA.

The definitive work on the Samoan culture which refuted the claim of Margaret Mead that Samoa, "was easy and casual, and adolescence was the easiest and most pleasant time of life." .Professor Derek dispels the myth of the nature-nurture controversy that pits biology against culture when, in fact, biology and culture are always interactive where biology influences culture and culture influences biology.

Additional Commentary

Franz Boas, Margaret Mead's professor at Columbia University had sent the 23-year -old Mead to Samoa to study adolescence, and she returned with a startling conclusion. Adolescence was known in America and Europe as a time of emotional stresses and conflicts. If, Mead argued, these problems were

caused by the biological processes of maturation, then they would necessarily be found in all human societies. But in Samoa, she reported, life was easy and casual, and adolescence was the easiest and most pleasant time of life. Thus, in anthropological terms, according to Mead, Samoa was a "negative instance"--and the existence of this one counterexample demonstrated that the disturbances associated with adolescence in the United States and elsewhere had cultural and not biological causes. In the controversy between the adherents of biological determinism and those of cultural determinism, a controversy that was at its height in the 1920's, Mead's negative instance appeared to be a triumphant outcome for believers in the sovereignty of culture. From Preface.

"Freeman refutes Mead's characterization of Samoan society and adolescence point for point. Far from the relaxed transition to adult adulthood that Mead ascribed to permissive child rearing and tolerant sexual attitudes, Samoan adolescence, Freeman demonstrates, is a time of frequent stress in an authoritarian society with punitive methods of childrearing and restrictive regulations against premarital sex".

As a result, the Samoan culture was misclassified in Textor (1967) as a non-violent culture. This erroneous rating was based upon Mead's work, which Freeman brought to my attention when I gave a lecture in Australia on the origins of peace and violence.