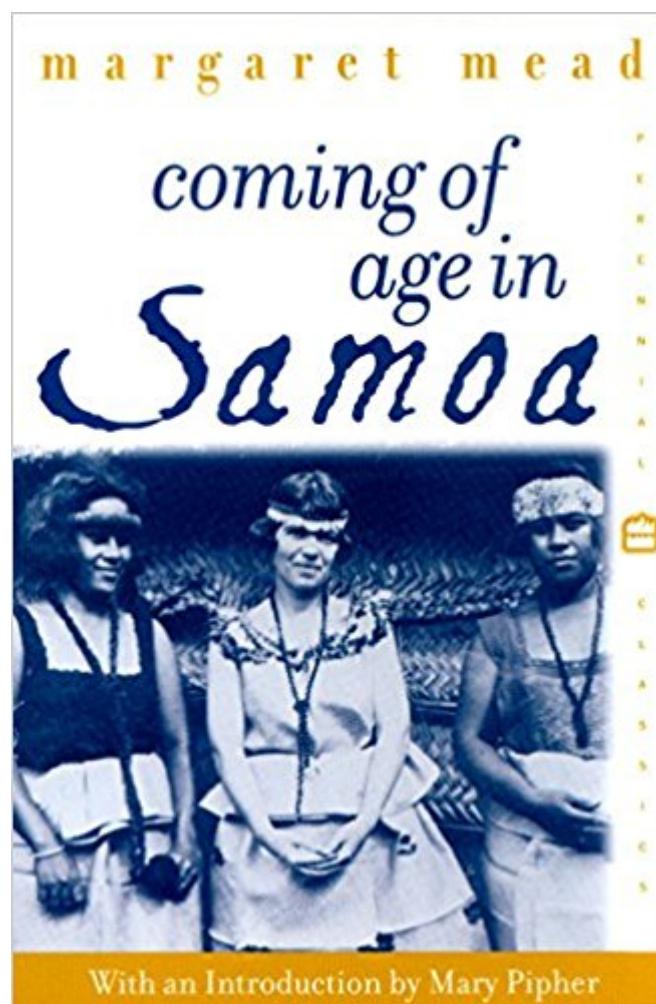


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Coming Of Age In Samoa: A Psychological Study Of Primitive Youth For Western Civilisation (Perennial Classics)



Synopsis

Rarely do science and literature come together in the same book. When they do -- as in Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, for example -- they become classics, quoted and studied by scholars and the general public alike. Margaret Mead accomplished this remarkable feat not once but several times, beginning with *Coming of Age in Samoa*. It details her historic journey to American Samoa, taken when she was just twenty-three, where she did her first fieldwork. Here, for the first time, she presented to the public the idea that the individual experience of developmental stages could be shaped by cultural demands and expectations. Adolescence, she wrote, might be more or less stormy, and sexual development more or less problematic in different cultures. The "civilized" world, she taught us had much to learn from the "primitive." Now this groundbreaking, beautifully written work has been reissued for the centennial of her birth, featuring introductions by Mary Pipher and by Mead's daughter, Mary Catherine Bateson.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Coming of Age in Samoa (1928) launched Mead's career as an anthropologist, which was reaffirmed with the 1930 publication of *New Guinea*. In both volumes she theorizes that culture is a leading influence on psychosexual development. She also surmises that the so-called civilized world could learn a lot from so-called primitives. Essential volumes for academics. Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Margaret Mead (1901-1978) began her remarkable career when she visited Samoa at the age of twenty-three, which led to her first book, Coming of Age in Samoa. She went on to become one of the most influential women of our time, publishing some forty works and serving as Curator of Ethnology at the American Museum of Natural History as well as president of major scientific associations. She was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom following her death in 1978.

The first 12 chapters of this book are timeless, in that they capture a people in a certain place and time. The detailed description of several girls and a specific community gives the reader a look into a very different culture with little bias. However, the final chapters take a darker turn attempting to compare apples to oranges, one cultures positives against another. "negatives." Mead wrote this book with American educators in mind several generations ago. Unfortunately, when pieces of this self-sufficient, simpler culture were cherry-picked and idealized for American society, it created a socially contentious atmosphere in the more complicated and global American culture. In Chapter 13, she notes that when European standards for sexual behavior intrude "the need for choice, the forerunner of conflict, will enter into Samoan Society." At the core of American culture is the human right to choose for one's self, therefore the two society's are fundamentally different and should be examined individually not compared as though one is better than the other. Mead also reveals her views against nuclear families and parents' key roles in their children's upbringing. In Chapter 14, she says "it is a question of the absence of a common standard far more than of the nature of the standards," referring to how children are parented differently in American households. On the next page she continues, "It is unfair that very young children should be the battleground for conflicting standards, that their development should be hampered by propagandist attempts to enlist and condition them too young." Finally, Mead contradicts herself in suggesting "the home must cease to please an ethical cause or a religious belief with smiles or frowns, caresses or threats." Then she says, "They must be taught that many ways are open to them." Mead falsely suggests that an American child raised in a home of strong opinions and vigorous causes then could not also be reared to have an open minded and be able to think for himself. In summary, I recommend this book to adults as an eye-opening look at the human condition through an unfamiliar culture. However, one should stop at the end of Chapter 12.

This book would have been much more understandable and readable if the author had followed one or two girls through the cycle of growing up. It seems to be random information that does not come together very well to reveal the true culture.

A real scientist she was and tells it as she finds it. She points out the differences between the boys and girls beautifully, with honesty.

Margaret Meade was fooled by the girls she spent time with. Imho

I give it one star as science and five stars as a meta-commentary on society. Combined, three. How anyone can read this and not see it as a fantasy is beyond me. Think back to how naive you were in your early twenties. Now imagine that you are a young woman seeking to make a name for yourself in a field, and you are under the wing of strong minded research advisor. You're going to head off to Samoa and you will find facts that fit your narrative. Anthropology is a field well suited to storytelling. Researchers go off to distant lands, write down a bunch of stuff, and come back to civilization. Of course there is no small amount of distortion along the way. Consider Castaneda. The anthropology department at UCLA stood fast behind him for a very long time, because to admit otherwise would be to admit their lack of skepticism - and his work was riddled with absurd fallacies! I am not at all surprised that Derek Freeman's work was slammed by the anthropology field; to consider it credible would be to admit failure of their own. Circle the wagons. The criticism leveled at Freeman's work consisted of fallacious attacks, such as his only publishing after Mead was dead. Just because someone is no longer living does not make their work immune to criticism. Or insinuating that her work is attacked because she is a woman: So as a woman, her work is assumed beyond reproach? Castaneda's work was dissected mercilessly; I guess having a Y chromosome is not a universal shield. Here's the basic litmus test: Extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof. The claim that societies exist that indulge in free love and unrestrained sexuality is an extraordinary claim, for it runs contrary to the entire rest of civilization. A related challenge: If free love worked for primitive societies, why are the Samoans the only ones that figured it out? Why haven't more been discovered? The default response to Mead's claims needs to not be "What interesting truth!" but "Interesting claims. Now let's go check them." In other words, don't believe everything you read. People do make stuff up, you know.

Coming of Age in Samoa is well written and engaging, an enjoyable read. Mead has an ability to present a scientific study in poetic form drawing the reader in while communicating social observations. From a psychological perspectives there are several shortcomings. Mead did a revolutionary work; it was however somewhat incomplete and romanticized to fit Mead's personal predispositions. While stomach or back pain were indicated, No reasons for the high percentage of possible psychosomatic pain were not addressed. In addition, after only 5 months in Samoa, the level of intimacy required for disclosure of familial sexual encounters, both heterosexual and homosexual, is not often attained in such a short amount of time inside the familial clan setting.

a classic!

I love this book and will read it over and over. Although there have been a lot of criticisms to this book, I think it's a great read and sheds a lot of light into different cultures.

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