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## BOOK REVIEW FORUM

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Derek Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983. Pp. xvii, 379, illustrations, notes, orthography, glossary, index. \$20.00.

Review: Fay Ala'ilima  
Leeward Community College

In this 1983 book Derek Freeman attacks the validity of Margaret Mead's 1928 thesis that Samoan adolescents are relieved of storm and stress because of the easy and permissive nature of their society. But that is not all. By "unmaking her myth" he also hopes to shake the very foundations of American anthropology, which he claims has been misled by her Samoan research into an era of blind cultural determinism.

It is a crusade for which he shows considerable enthusiasm. He marshals an impressive array of historical, statistical, and psychological evidence to show that far from being pleasant, easygoing people, Samoans are involved in more murder, rape, child-abuse, and general mayhem than almost any society in the world. He attributes this tendency toward violence to their authoritarian ranking system, puritanically enforced by chiefs and now Jehovah as well.

This sounds for a moment as if he too is about to reach a culturally-determined conclusion. But no. He summarizes his efforts as follows: "The time is now conspicuously due" for us to recognize "the radical importance of both the genetic and the exogenetic and their interaction."

Most people I know came to that conclusion long ago. The book does not seem to add much to our actual knowledge of this topic. What it does seem to document thoroughly is the darker side of the Samoan character, and for that, he claims, they are tremendously grateful.

I am not an anthropologist, only an American wife who has been living in a Samoan family for thirty years. I have seen days (and nights) like Margaret Mead's and moments of mayhem like Freeman's. No one who has lived in Samoa long could doubt the existence of both. My only problem is with people who, like the blind men and the elephant, feel for one aspect or another and draw conclusions about what Samoans really "are."

Freeman says Margaret Mead buried the deviations from her mild, permissive norm into one chapter and forgot about them. He himself seems to have put the deviations from his repressed-aggressive norm into one paragraph at the bottom of page 278. Why doesn't he include a chapter on Samoan hospitality, based on his own experience with Lauvi who has welcomed him into his household for many years? And on the chiefs of Sa'anapu who not only honored him with a title but trusted him with access to their deliberations? He might even have included a chapter on Samoan forbearance. Despite their "violent tendencies" the chiefs of Sa'anapu have not banished him for revealing to the world only their darker tendencies. Would a town in Australia have shown such tolerance?

Freeman may feel that a one-sided study is warranted in order to unmake Margaret Mead's myth and save anthropology from cultural determinism. Others may claim it is more related to the making of Freeman. But in the relentless pursuit of knowledge and each other, don't anthropologists consider what their pronouncements do to the people they study?

*Coming of Age in Samoa* lured many starry-eyed young Americans (like myself) to Samoan shores. The "unmaking" of the myth makes me wonder how I escaped alive! Derek Freeman's book may bring him fame and fortune but it will hardly make life easier for thousands of Samoans struggling to gain acceptance in Honolulu, Auckland, and Carson City. For them it may operate more like a stereotype than a great intellectual discovery. I am not sure they will continue to thank him.