

Wilbur Schramm, Lyle M. Nelson and Mere Betham, *Bold Experiment: The Story of Educational Television in American Samoa*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981. Pp. ix, 244, bibliography; index. \$17.50.

Late in 1964, American Samoa found itself with a full-blown television system designed to be the main instructional element in the schools. Within two years “four of every five school age children were spending one-fourth to one-third of their class time watching a television picture.” This is all in a country that had not even had electricity two years earlier.

This ambitious, even audacious, undertaking was born in the mind of H. Rex Lee, who became Governor of American Samoa in May, 1961. It was supported by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior when the idea was presented to him three weeks later. It was then studied for three months by a team from the National Association for Educational Broadcasters who recommended a complete crash program. By mid-1962 Congress had

appropriated funds for the system itself and for the construction of thirty consolidated elementary schools with a total school age population of 6.5 thousand. Why the speed? "There was no time for waiting, no time for armchair patience, there had been too much of that for 60 years," Governor Lee said in 1965.

Nearly twenty years later, however, readers of this book are going to wish, with the authors, that someone had taken the time to at least collect baseline data so some relatively precise judgments could be made about the effectiveness of instant instructional television. Sadly, the authors were reduced to scraping and scratching for any little bit of data that might possibly be interpreted as being valid pre-TV assessment. Partial Stanford Achievement Test scores were available from 1932, 1935, and 1950, and scores apparently copied from records that had disappeared offered tantalizing hints about conditions in 1962, 1963 and 1964. That is about the extent of pre-TV educational data.

At the same time, it would appear that controversy and political changes began nibbling away at the system before it could develop and hit a stride that would give a useful view of its realistic potential. A change of governors in 1967 was the beginning of a dismantling process that ultimately turned American Samoan TV into today's primarily entertainment medium.

For a scientist, an experiment implies controls, measurements and assessments. In these terms, the "Bold Experiment" of the book's title was no experiment at all, but a bold, headlong, heedless rush into some form of modernity. The authors pay the price but make a game effort at "assessing" an "experiment" without controls or measurement. (Even during the TV years measurements were apparently so erratic, spotty and undisciplined that few substantive evaluations are possible.)

Nevertheless, the book is a valuable, excellent-under-the-circumstances evaluative effort to explore effects of instant television on a typical, even extreme, traditional culture. The single most valuable contribution is the comparison among samples of teenagers in American Samoa (in 1972 and 1977), Western Samoan teens who were within viewing range, and Western Samoan teenagers who were not TV viewers. These groups were tested for value differences, using home television viewing as the independent variable. Conclusion: Television contributes as an agent and reinforcer of broader cultural values. Translation: Significant changes were TV-traceable, but they were not dramatic.

A regrettable deletion which one hopes will be corrected in the future by one of the authors is the lack of extensive subjective assessment from Mere Betham. She was educated in the pre-TV system and later became

the director of education in American Samoa. With the exception of a couple of brief references, there is little direct evidence of her thoughts. Surely in a volume with such scanty empirical data her observations would have lent a rich dimension, coming as they would from deep within the affected culture. The book needed to be written. It is easily read and difficult to lay aside. Charitably, it leaves unscathed debators' favorite positions on the effectiveness of ETV, and there is ample room for the definitive analysis yet to come.

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