

IMAGINING THE SOUTH SEAS: THOUGHTS ON THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF PARADISE IN SAMOA

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Controversy generated by criticism of research Margaret Mead conducted nearly three-quarters of a century ago reminds us that modern ethnography came of age with fieldwork conducted on the sexual lives of Pacific Islanders. The Samoa debate suggests that an exotic eroticism continues to inform representations of women in anthropological writings and popular culture, and that Samoa is a candidate for sexual paradise on earth. This article explores the image-making of paradise by examining book covers and photographs associated with Margaret Mead's and Derek Freeman's narratives of Samoa. As cultural artifacts, book covers and photographs offer an intriguing way of investigating issues of ethnographic representation and the problem of who "owns" the bodies of Pacific Islander women.

Are we Samoans now to be known as a nation of sex-starved, suicidal rapists? I much prefer my previous reputation as a free-loving orgiast.

—Lelei Lelaulu (1983)

Introduction: Whose Samoa?

WHILE WRITING EARLIER DRAFTS of this article, I sipped Snapple's latest addition to "natural" fruit-flavored drinks. The "Samoan Splash Island Cocktail" contains—besides banana, orange, and strawberry juices—purée of *cupuacu*, a Brazilian melon that "looks like a coconut." Writing this article also inspired me to look for an old LP recording of Martin Denny from my undergraduate days. I listened to Denny's Exotica combo perform "Quiet

Village” and “Love Dance,” a mélange of “imitated ornate birdcalls amid vibes, gongs, drums, [and] conch shells” (Lanza 1995:70) with “unintelligible ‘tribal’ chants” (Swezey and King 1990:1). This was musical paradise on Waikiki at Henry Kaiser’s Hawaiian Village Shell Bar and Don the Beachcomber’s Bora Bora Lounge in the 1950s.¹

While listening, I examined the label of my drink. Above the Snapple logo rises a moonlit sea. A dolphin jumps, leaving a glittering, petal-like fan in its wake. In the background rises a volcanic mountain misted in dark silver—elusive, mysterious, foreboding. Beneath the logo, a single-masted rowboat is drawn up on a deserted beach next to a crackling fire. A creature hidden high in the fronds of a palm tree peers down at the scene. What do these strange yellow eyes see?

Pleasure and danger in paradise are juxtaposed in the label’s images, not unlike the hardback cover of Derek Freeman’s book on the “fateful hoaxing of Margaret Mead” (1999). Freeman’s photo on the dust jacket views the Manuan islands of Ofu and Olosenga through the foreground perspective of three palm trees and waves breaking over a coral reef on Ta’ū, the island of Mead’s fieldwork. Both the juice label and the book cover convey a generic brand of paradise. These two images represent an essentialized geography of escape that suggests a human presence, yet remains strangely uninhabited. Moreover, this exotic landscape promises adventure with a suggestion of danger. We can only speculate about why the boat and the fire appear abandoned in the Snapple label image. And we can only speculate about the dark secrets to be revealed in a book about a “fateful” trajectory of sex and deception concerning a famous woman anthropologist and her research in the South Seas idylls of Samoa.

I have been thinking about Samoa and its contested ethnographic representations for several years. Like many of my colleagues, I too was asked my opinion about the much-publicized appearance of Freeman’s first book (1983) that criticized Mead’s depiction of female adolescent sexuality immortalized in *Coming of Age in Samoa*, originally published in 1928 (hereafter referred to as *Coming of Age*). Like many of my colleagues, I too had to return to a text that I hadn’t read in years. Had Mead, according to Freeman (1999:161), “constructed her misinformed account of ‘free love-making’” from “fundamentally flawed fieldwork”? Was Mead “duped” or “lied to” by her informants? Were Mead’s research findings “preposterously false” and a “confused travesty” (Freeman 1983:228, 288)? Did Samoan girls and unmarried women assert their sexuality? Or were they puritanical maidens thoroughly converted to Christian values of chastity and domesticity? Were Samoan women victimized by men’s sexual aggression? Was Margaret Mead’s “chatty and feminine” narrative of the “rustling-of-the-wind-in-the-palm-trees”

(Evans-Pritchard 1962:96) image of Samoa “science or science fiction” (Worsley 1957)? Whose ethnographic version of Samoa is “correct”? Do these contrary views represent “paradigms in collision” as Freeman asserts (1992)?

Such questions are linked with a host of interesting issues concerning ethnographic representation, the production of anthropological knowledge, and the gender politics of ethnographic authority. Indeed, having spent several years examining these issues with regard to the Yanomami—an Amazonian people framed by the ethnographic paradigm of violence (Tiffany and Adams 1994, 1995)—I knew that, as a longtime student of Samoa, I would eventually return to what is commonly called the “Mead-Freeman controversy.”

Like my colleagues, I followed the reviews, rejoinders, newspaper articles, and editorials that appeared in popular and academic publications about *Margaret Mead and Samoa* (Freeman 1983), first announced on the front page of the *New York Times* (E. McDowell 1983). Not surprisingly, the media were quick to seize upon the Western imagination of the South Seas. Articles with evocative titles like “Bursting the South Sea Bubble” (Leo 1983), “Samoa: A Paradise Lost?” (Bernstein 1983), “In Search of the Real Samoa” (Begley, Carey, and Robinson 1983), and “Tropical Storm” (Sterba 1983) suggested that the golden beaches of paradise constituted a partial truth. By contrast, articles and reviews of Freeman’s book written by women journalists and anthropologists (including myself) argued that the “Angry Storm over the South Seas of Margaret Mead” (Howard 1983) was more than Western myth-making of paradise and that *Coming of Age* had significant implications for understanding issues of gender and women’s sexual lives (see, for example, N. McDowell 1984; Nardi 1984; Scheper-Hughes 1984; Tiffany 1984, 1985).

The ongoing debate, sustained by Freeman’s subsequent articles and paperback reissues of his first book in 1984 and 1996, suggested that I reconsider the constructed images of pleasure and danger in paradise. This reconsideration became more pressing when I began my second research visit to the Margaret Mead Archives at the Library of Congress, just as Freeman’s latest work on Mead’s “fateful hoaxing” began to appear in bookstores.

More than seven decades after the publication of *Coming of Age*, and nearly two decades since the publication of Freeman’s initial challenge, the academic literature concerning the erotic zones of Samoan Islanders continues to grow. This literature, which resumed in the late 1980s after a brief hiatus following an avalanche of commentaries and reviews of *Margaret Mead and Samoa*, had increased substantially during the 1990s.

Much of this recent work sought to reassess the Samoa controversy by returning to Mead’s ethnography. Some scholars addressed issues of sexuality and aggression, variously based on ethnographic fieldwork in the islands,

or by research on Mead's published and unpublished materials (Côté 1994; Feinberg 1988; Grant 1995; Holmes 1987; Mageo 1988; Orans 1996; Shankman 1994, 1996). Others addressed the controversy in terms of language and writing style (Lutkehaus 1995; Marshall 1993), challenged Freeman's assertions regarding the historical or methodological importance of Mead's book in the anthropological literature (Hays 1997), or responded with detailed commentaries and criticisms of Freeman's assertions (Côté 1998a, 1998b, 2000; Shankman 1998). Still others have been concerned with issues of colonialism and the changing contexts of anthropological constructions of Samoan sexual behavior (Leacock 1987, 1992; Mageo 1994, 1998). This resurgence of interest in the Mead-Freeman controversy has also coincided with feminist reassessments of the lives and ethnographic writings of other women anthropologists, notably Ruth Benedict (Babcock 1995; Caffrey 1989), Elsie Clews Parsons (Deacon 1997), Camilla Wedgwood (Lutkehaus 1986), and Zora Neale Hurston (Hernandez 1995), among others (see also Nichols 1996).²

This article is an exploratory discussion, necessarily incomplete, in which I examine images associated with Mead's and Freeman's ethnographic representations of Samoa. I suggest that both narratives may be interpreted as artifacts of the same paradise, an earthly utopia that is both a site of pleasure and danger.

Producing the Text

The West has a long history of imposing its constructions of eroticism on the South Seas. Geographically located in Polynesia, the Western imagination of the South Seas encompasses a social, geographic, and ideological space in which males undertake the quest of erotic mastery and self-discovery—recurrent themes in Western romantic literature and incorporated into the colonial experience of possessing distant worlds.

Romance awaits the explorer of this far-flung island domain, which promises escape from the troubled realities of more-familiar realms. Fantasies may be fearlessly enacted under the full moon and whispering palm trees as bare-breasted nymphs await their lovers or adventurous heroes cast upon golden shores. The South Seas child-woman of an eroticized landscape provides for Western men exciting escape from the routine of civilized existence and the predictability of their domestic and routinized lives. One need only mention the famous novelists—Jack London, Herman Melville, Joseph Conrad, Robert Louis Stevenson, and James Michener—and footnote lesser-known authors, such as Charles Nordhoff and James Hall, Louis Becke,

Beatrice Grimshaw, and Pierre Loti—to evoke the imagery of tropical abundance, seductive Pacific Islander women, and the thrill of male adventure.

The South Seas romance also informs the anthropological enterprise. Indeed, *Coming of Age* was not the first ethnographic text to challenge Western notions of sexuality and to be marketed with racy titles and endorsements from well-known experts of the day. Malinowski's provocatively titled *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* (1927) was published a year before Mead's book, and *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia* (Malinowski 1929) was published a year later. Malinowski's latter book included a preface by Havelock Ellis, the internationally recognized authority on the psychology of human sexuality (see also Weiner 1987).

Havelock Ellis's enthusiastic comments about *Coming of Age* were printed on a "bright red band" that adorned its cover: "That stunt helped the sales materially," publisher William Morrow wrote to Mead on 11 January 1929 (LOC: MMP, Box I2). Mead's original typed manuscript, "The Adolescent Girl in Samoa," was subsequently retitled (LOC: MMP, Box N1), while the introduction and concluding chapters were rewritten at the urging of her publisher (LOC: MMP, Box I2: Mead to Morrow, letters dated 25 January and 21 February 1928).

Mead's abstract of her proposed concluding chapter for *Coming of Age*, based on Morrow's "criticism and encouragement" of an earlier draft, was sent to her publisher with a cover letter dated 25 January 1928 (LOC: MMP, Box I2). The abstract makes it clear that her Samoan research had to be placed in a context of what Pacific Islander adolescents could tell Americans about themselves. Accordingly, the research problem was:

an experiment to find out whether the difficulties of our adolescent girls are due to the physiological changes which take place at puberty or to the civilization in which they grow up.

When this is answered in the negative, two questions still interest us: What are the differences between the Samoan civilization and the American civilization which produce these differences in behaviour? What significance have these results for us? (LOC: MMP, Box I2)

In short, the bodies and behavior of Samoan girls are of interest in helping us understand ourselves. Morrow's suggestions of making the book accessible to a popular audience encouraged Mead to consider the social and sexual agency of American women in the 1920s through the lens of "the other" (see also Mead 1965:122–126). Mead's hometown newspaper, the *Doyles-*

town Daily Intelligencer, promoted this theme in a front-page article that described Mead's proposed work in Samoa on the "Primitive Flapper" (LOC: MMP, Box I2). This was an oxymoron, as Samoan girls—while missionized and constrained by status considerations to varying degrees—were neither white, middle-class, nor "civilized."³

Prior to her fieldwork, Mead had recognized the importance of relating her Samoan research to the current media focus on issues of female "delinquency" and "rebelliousness."⁴ She was also aware of the necessity to present the results of her research to a "commercial publisher." Innovative marketing techniques, directed towards a growing urban population eager for consumer goods, were well established in American society by the 1920s. Mead's publisher merchandised *Coming of Age* to an audience receptive to eroticized images of paradise in the South Seas. The book also appealed to the important market segment of flappers, assertive "New Women" who sought to create independent lives that were not centered on men (see Cott 1994; Rapp and Ross 1986; Woloch 2000:275–306).

Before sailing to Hawai'i for research in the Admiralty Islands, Mead rewrote the last two chapters of *Coming of Age* in 1928 and asked Franz Boas to write a preface (Mead 1965:125). Convinced that the book could be effectively marketed to a popular audience, William Morrow later wrote to Mead that he had committed a "substantial" publicity budget of "nearly \$1,500.00 in various forms of advertising and promotion" and that the book had sold 3,144 copies in the United States as of 31 December 1928 (LOC: MMP, Box I2: Morrow to Mead, letter dated 11 January 1929). Noting the book's "splendid review" in the *New York Times* (dated 4 November 1928), Morrow outlined his publicity strategy in a postscript: "We are starting a new campaign for the book partly by circulars, and partly by special work with the book stores. We have gone into the matter very carefully, and we think that we are likely to get better returns from the plans we have made than we should get by general advertising in newspapers and periodicals." He went on to praise Mead and her work: "The basis of our success is the book itself. You wrote something that people could understand and enjoy, and you did it superbly" (LOC: MMP, Box I2: Morrow to Mead, letter dated 11 January 1929). In Mead's view, rewriting the last two chapters of *Coming of Age* had taught her an important lesson. Such writing had to "make the life of a remote island people meaningful to an American audience" (Mead 1965:125–126).

Discovering Paradise

Marketing paradise and the sexual lives of Polynesian girls was a success. Producing a book cover to convey the theme of an exotic eroticism was im-

portant for selling an image of a South Seas paradise that also challenged Western notions about female nature and the sexual lives of American women. Consider, for example, Freeman's description of paradise on the dust jacket of the 1928 edition of *Coming of Age* (Figure 1): "It shows, by the alluring light of a fuller than full moon, a bare-breasted Samoan girl, inflamed with sexual desire, hurrying with her lover, to what Mead, in her pseudo-poetic language (1928c:14) calls a 'tryst' beneath the palm trees. It is exquisitely true to the preposterous fantasies by which she had been hoaxed, and romantic bilge of the first water" (Freeman 1991:118). Freeman's rhetoric attempts to demolish the notion of a South Seas utopia by questioning the legitimacy of Mead as an ethnographer and as a writer. However, he does so within the ideological context of a paradise familiar to a Western audience. Thus, the idea of paradise remains a possibility, even if, as Freeman asserts, the social reality of paradise in Samoa is "romantic bilge."

Moreover, significant details of the scene on the dust jacket are missing from Freeman's account. This Polynesian girl, with hair that flows over her back, is faceless. She has neither eyes, nose, nor mouth. Wearing a pandanus skirt and a hibiscus behind her left ear, she runs hand-in-hand with her faceless lover. It is important to note that it is *she* who leads him towards the palm trees on the moonlit beach.⁵

The generic figures on the 1928 cover highlight the evocative image of Polynesia as sexual playground. Specific facial features and details of dress are irrelevant for shaping the image of a South Seas Eden for Western tastes. The book jacket, combined with Mead's narrative, derives from a view that paradise is, in fact, a geographical space inhabited by women in grass skirts who assert their sexuality and independence, not unlike American "New Women" of the 1920s (Tiffany 1998, 2001).⁶

Freeman's polemical assertions of informants' hoodwinking, combined with his denigration of Mead's mental state as a "chronic state of cognitive delusion" (Freeman 1991:117), deny a pleasurable version of paradise in Samoa. Rather, Freeman posits with a kind of missionary zeal a misogynist view of Samoan women as Christian prudes who are all too often the victims of men's brutal sexual aggression. This menacing narrative of paradise is rhetorically linked by repeated references to Mead's body and brain (Freeman 1983:70, 287; 1991:117-118). This dangerous and dark view of paradise not only denies Pacific Islander women the right to claim their bodies and their minds, but it also provides a forum for derogating the woman ethnographer's physical appearance and mental capacity. In other words, women's words and minds are suspect.

By contrast, Mead's narrative legitimizes voice and agency on behalf of her female informants while asserting her own rightful claim to conduct

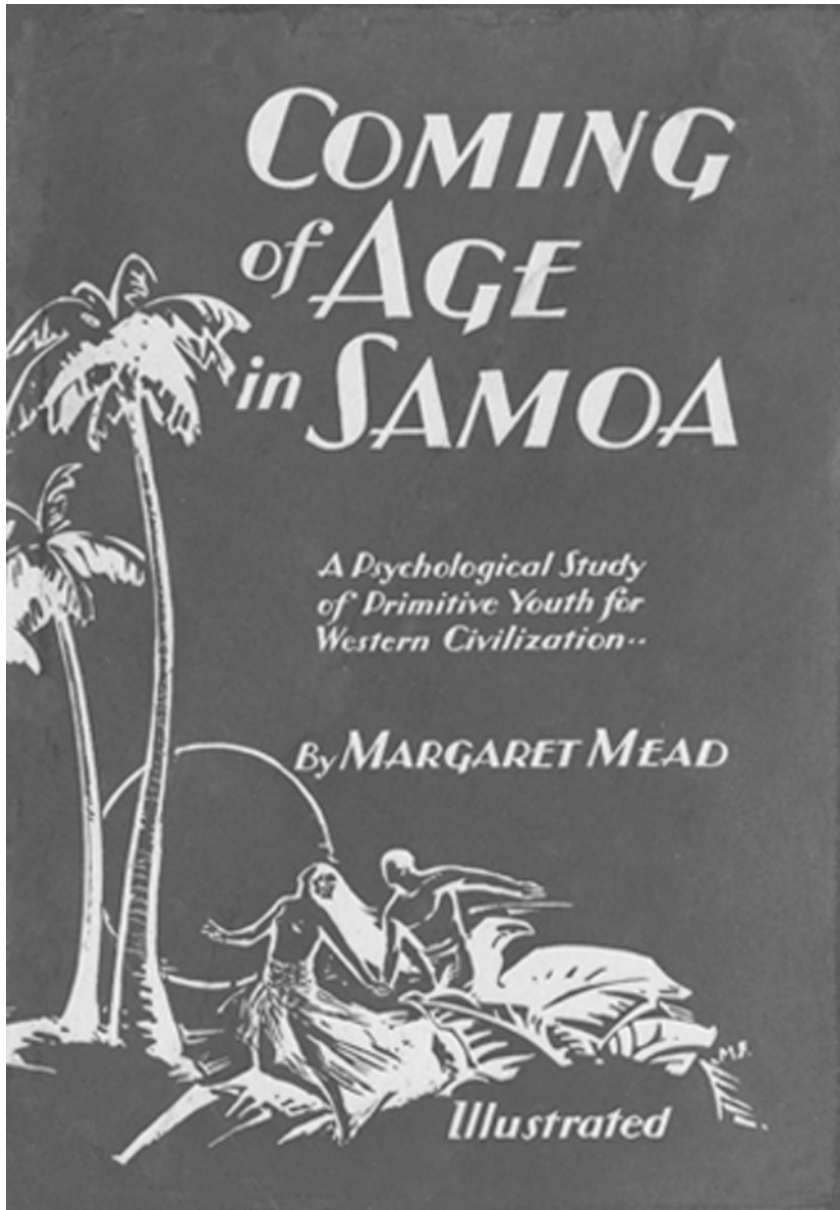


FIGURE 1. Cover of the first edition of *Coming of Age in Samoa*, by Margaret Mead, published in 1928 by William Morrow and Company. (Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc. Jacket cover reproduced from the Margaret Mead Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Courtesy of the Institute for Intercultural Studies, Inc., New York)

anthropological research. Mead, of course, was aware of the “current day-dreams in the Western world” of paradise and the positioning of this dream world in the Pacific of her time:

In the Twenties there were people who wanted to go to the South Seas Islands as a personal escape from their post-war world, from a dull and empty routine, from the denial of spontaneity, and the trampling of individual passions. . . . They wanted to go to the South Sea Islands and never come back, and the fiction of the period emphasized that one did not come back; the divine, sensuous inactivity was too alluring. (Mead 1940:336–337)

Mead’s narrative and its evocative dust jacket clearly located paradise in Samoa. Islander youth in the South Seas—in opposition to their American counterparts—enjoyed “freedom in sex, lack of economic responsibility, and lack of any pressure to make choices” (Mead 1939:x).

This essentialist portrayal of Samoan adolescents does not countenance danger; whereas, Freeman’s forbidding view of paradise cannot allow pleasure. Both narratives are cast in a static, one-dimensional social geography that resists an understanding of the complexities and paradoxes that comprise a human reality. Essentialist portrayals of Pacific Islander women’s bodies and lives disallow examination of the dynamics of gender, rank, and ethnicity, and also ignore the ways in which women’s bodies are appropriated for Western consumption as the exoticized and eroticized other (see, for example, Alexander and Mohanty 1997; di Leonardo 1998; Manderson and Jolly 1997; Stoler 1991).

The paperbound cover of the 1949 Mentor edition of *Coming of Age* reinforces the promise of Polynesian sexuality with its color drawing of a dancing couple (Figure 2). An artistic rendering of green, homogenized vegetation—the stock-in-trade marker of paradise South Seas-style—provides a background that highlights their bodies. This cover captures the erotic flavor that frequently accompanies a *siva* (dance). A *siva* may be danced and interpreted on many levels of eroticism, depending on the dancers’ age and social status, as well as the social context in which the *siva* is performed. The dance of a *taupou* (ceremonial maiden) with two or more men can be especially provocative. The male dancers’ assertive, almost aggressive and charging style contrasts with the languid and modestly sedate steps and arm movements of the *taupou*.

The woman portrayed on the Mentor cover, however, is not a *taupou*. She lacks the elaborately decorated headdress of human hair, the pandanus skirt, barkcloth, and other ornamentation associated with this elite status.⁷ The

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A Study of Adolescence and Sex in Primitive Society

COMING OF AGE IN SAMOA

MARGARET MEAD



A Mentor Book

FIGURE 2. Cover of the Mentor paperback edition of *Coming of Age in Samoa*, by Margaret Mead, published in 1949 by arrangement with William Morrow and Company. (Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.)

woman's facial features appear more Asian than Polynesian. By contrast, the male dancer's features suggest a generic, Caucasian-like look that is impossible to situate in a specific island group or culture. His face, framed by a leafy crown worn along the hairline, is reminiscent of Robert Flaherty's principal Samoan actor in his documentary film, *Moana of the South Seas*.⁸ "As he weaves his arms in intricate pattern, he keeps his eyes fastened on the girl, whose slight, rhythmic motion is so alluring" (Froelick 1925:392).

His partner, her hair pulled back in a chignon hair style like that of Moana's love interest, the beautiful *taupou* Fa'angase, and with eyes nearly closed, appears fully engaged with the movements of her dance. The woman's right arm conveniently covers the nipples of her bare breasts. Like the maiden on the 1928 cover of Mead's book, this dancer also seems to take the initiative by engaging in an erotically charged gesture as her right buttock and hip nearly touch her partner's left hip.

The dancers who decorate the Mentor book cover wear simple, sarong-like garments that tie at the waist and hang to the knees (*lavalava*). The lack of complex dress suggests that female sexuality in Samoa is not associated with elite status and the social decorum demanded of ceremonial maidens, but rather with the common woman, an image consistent with Mead's narrative.

Relocating Paradise

Images of women's overt sexuality, depicted on covers for the 1928 hardbound edition and the 1949 Mentor paperbound reprint edition, dramatically shifted with publication of the Morrow Quill paperback cover of the 1961 reprint edition of *Coming of Age*. A charcoal drawing of the head and bare shoulders of an exotic-looking young woman commands the viewer's attention (Figure 3). A small tropical flower nestles in her long, dark hair. Her downcast eyes suggest modesty; her full lips, slightly parted, convey sensuality. The woman is alone and refuses to look directly at her audience. She is enticing but problematic, her thoughts a secret to the viewer. This is not a woman of full-bodied Polynesian grace with the insouciant demeanor of a Gauguin painting. Rather, this small-boned, light-skinned woman appears as a generic combination of Asian and Polynesian features, leavened with a Hollywood hint of Bali and *South Pacific*. Indeed, the *South Pacific*-Balinese connection with paradise in Samoa becomes more explicit in the cover of the Laurel paperbound edition of *Coming of Age* published by Dell in 1968 (Figure 4).

The Dell Laurel edition cover depicts an updated version of the South Seas "wood nymph"—in this case a small-boned, light-skinned, and slightly Asian-looking woman with pouting red lips and a silky mane of dark hair carefully draped over one bare shoulder. A large white tropical flower nestles

Coming of Age in Samoa Margaret Mead

with a new preface by the author



FIGURE 3. Cover of the Morrow Quill paperback reprint edition of *Coming of Age in Samoa*, by Margaret Mead, published in 1961 by William Morrow and Company. (Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.)

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The classic study of primitive youth

COMING OF AGE IN SAMOA

MARGARET MEAD

with a new preface by the author



FIGURE 4. Cover of the Dell Laurel Paperback reprint edition of *Coming of Age in Samoa*, by Margaret Mead, published in 1968 by arrangement with William Morrow and Company. (Reprinted by permission of Dell Publishing, a division of Random House)

in her hair; a red sarong covers her breasts. Surrounded by tropical-looking vegetation, complete with the jarring presence of temperate-climate daisies in the background, she coyly looks up at the viewer. This is the classic *National Geographic Magazine* pose of the South Seas siren who inhabits a timeless, remote world (see also Lutz and Collins 1993:197–200; Nordström 1991: 273–274, 1992).

The visual message of the Dell Laurel cover is clear: This wood nymph suggests the possibility of intimacy and the appeal of a sexually compliant child-woman living in a primitive Eden (Nordström 1992; Tiffany 2001). Whereas the tropical world depicted on the Dell Laurel cover may be interpreted as Eden in Samoa, the woman situated in this paradisaical landscape is not Samoan. Indeed, what is remarkable about the covers of the 1961 Morrow Quill edition and the 1968 Dell Laurel edition of *Coming of Age* is the absence of the Samoan woman from paradise.

Interestingly, an earlier version of the Dell Laurel cover raised controversy. Barbara E. Adams, director of subsidiary rights for William Morrow and Company, requested Mead's approval of a proposed Dell cover described as "quite restrained in Gauguin style and colors" (LOC: MMP, Box I2: Adams to Mead, letter dated 3 April 1967). In a letter to Ross Claiborne, editor of Dell Publishing Company, Karen Graff (Mead's administrative assistant) wrote on behalf of Mead who had criticized the cover: "The girl does not look like a Polynesian; her arms are too thin. She is wearing a *Tahitian* style garment. Samoans do not wear this large red colored design. There is no flower like the one in her hair in Polynesia. The cover must be based on a real Samoan photograph, or they must not use a drawing at all. This is really incredibly bad, and cheap" (emphasis in original). Mead continued: "The girl is far too old. This book is about very young girls. If the artist would look up the first edition of *Coming of Age in Samoa*, published by Morrow in 1928, he would find models of both male and female types. And the posture must be right." Graff goes on to write that Mead "suggests that if Laurel would stick to printing and pretty colors, or palm trees and NO people, they would keep out of these difficulties" (emphasis in original). Mead was also concerned about how the proposed design could affect sales, noting that "[t]his cover would make it impossible to use the book in college courses, and this represents an enormous part of the paperback sale" (LOC: MMP, Box I2: Mead to Claiborne, letter dated 12 June 1967). It is not clear from the correspondence if Mead subsequently approved the cover published on the 1968 Dell Laurel edition.

From Samoa to Bali-Ha'i

Motifs of sensuality, culture, and race are interconnected in the 1961 and 1968 covers of *Coming of Age*, reflecting a recentering of the South Seas

idylls to Bali. Mead herself was aware of this geographic shifting and the growing industries of media and tourism when she wrote: "It has twice been my accidental fortune to make ethnological expeditions to islands which . . . have also been current daydreams in the Western world—the South Sea Islands [i.e., Samoa] in 1925, and Bali in 1935" (Mead 1940:336). Noting the efforts of steamship companies to promote Bali as a tourist destination in the 1930s, Mead wrote of their efforts "to make Bali the lineal descendant of the Tahiti of the romantic Twenties, with the slim figure of a high-breasted, scantily clothed girl as the symbol" (ibid.: 337).

In the postwar Pacific, the paradise of *South Pacific* fame was located in Bali-Ha'i, the forbidden island immortalized by James Michener and Rodgers and Hammerstein.⁹ Transformed in the Western imagination as the quintessential paradise, the dream world of Bali-Ha'i is the island of Bali (Vickers 1989).

Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical *South Pacific* was based on two short stories, "Our Heroine" and "Fo' Dolla," from James Michener's (1947) Pulitzer Prize-winning collection, *Tales of the South Pacific* (Green 1963: 129–136; 1980:217–218). "Fo' Dolla" features the memorable Bloody Mary, as well as the love affair between Lieutenant Joe Cable and Liat—Bloody Mary's nubile, teen-aged daughter. "Our Heroine" is the story of Nurse Ensign Nellie Forbush and the French planter Emile De Becque, who sired eight daughters by Javanese, Tonkinese, and Polynesian women. Michener, describing himself as "only a paper-work sailor, traveling from island to island" in the war years (1947:2), set both stories in the Melanesian islands of the New Hebrides (Vanuatu). At the time of the American military occupation, there were approximately 1,250 Europeans, 1,200 Vietnamese plantation laborers, and some 40,000 indigenous Melanesians in the archipelago (Lindstrom 1996:1).

The dust jacket of the first edition of Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific* depicts a large, volcanic island misted in deep shadow. There is no sign of human habitation on this forbidding landscape, possibly the pestilential and superstition-ridden island of "Vanicoro" that sheltered Bali-Ha'i from view (Michener 1947:147–148). The only confirmation of human presence in this scene is located off-island; it is a large military vessel that plies through a dark and menacing sea. The cover does not provide a glimpse of Bali-Ha'i to the casual viewer. "Like most lovely things," Michener writes in "Fo' Dolla," "one had to seek it out and even to know what one was seeking before it could be found" (ibid.:148).

Disappointed by the cheap paper, dark colors, and shabby binding of the first edition, Michener described it as "an ugly, monstrous book, a disgrace to a self-respecting company and a humiliation to its author" (1992:279; see also Hayes 1984:74–77). By contrast, the Pocket Books edition of *Tales of the*

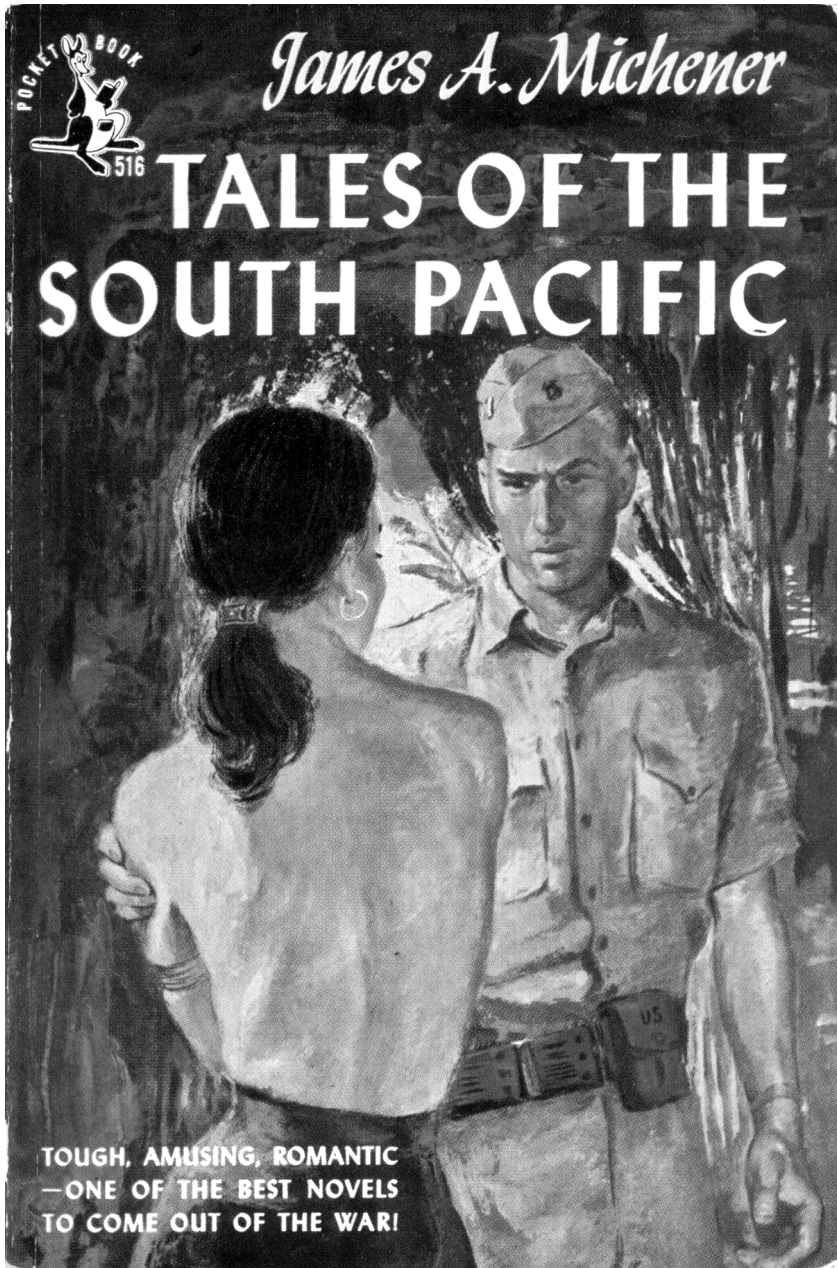


FIGURE 5. Cover of 1947 Pocket Books edition of *Tales of the South Pacific*, by James Michener. (Reprinted by permission of Pocket Books, a division of Simon & Schuster)

South Pacific, published in April 1947, captures the image of war and sex on its cover (Figure 5).¹⁰ The American in uniform, perhaps Lieutenant Cable, assesses the light-skinned, partially nude woman (Liat?) who stands before him. Her side profile suggests that her eyes are averted, arms crossed across her naked breasts in a suggestion of modesty or protection against the man's frank gaze. The woman's dark hair is pulled back with a pin at the nape of her neck; she wears gold hoop earrings. The viewer is encouraged to observe the woman's bare back and to consider the possibilities of what the man who looks at the woman is privileged to see.

Bali-Ha'i is described as "an island of the sea, a jewel of the vast ocean. It was small. Like a jewel, it could be perceived in one loving glance" (Michener 1947:147).¹¹ This description could also be applied to the woman on the cover of the Pocket Books edition. In "Fo' Dolla'," "Liat was the very spirit of Bali-ha'i."¹² For Lieutenant Cable, "Liat and the tall peaks of Vanicoro would become great, indefatigable beacons in the jungle night and cool mirrors in the jungle heat" (ibid.:155). The feminized landscape of Bali-Ha'i is a jewel, just as the woman's seductive body is a jewel, symbolized on the cover by her hairpin.

Bali-Ha'i is also a recentered place noteworthy for the absence of Pacific Islander women—like the covers of Freeman's books and Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific*. As Jolly notes in her discussion of *South Pacific*, "the erotics of the exotic here work through a series of displacements and fugitive transformations" (1997:112). Lieutenant Cable does not find paradise with an indigenous Pacific Islander woman, but rather with the daughter of a Southeast Asian (Tonkinese) migrant woman who is a black-market entrepreneur and procurer, occupations usually associated with men. The shifting of paradise from Polynesia to Bali-Ha'i displaces Polynesian women and ignores Melanesian women, the latter rarely equated with an imagined landscape of idyllic worlds (Mesenhöller 1989). Eventually, the relocation of paradise to Bali is reflected in the Asian features of the young woman from Bali-Ha'i who also adorns the 1961 Morrow Quill cover of *Coming of Age*. Polynesian women no longer inhabit paradise in this postwar image of Samoa.

The Other Side of Paradise

The dust jacket of the hardback copy of Freeman's *Margaret Mead and Samoa* contains no photograph or drawing of a human figure, thereby avoiding contentious issues of representing the bodies of Pacific Islander women.¹³ Thus, the cover of Freeman's book gives the appearance of solidity and neutrality, academic qualities associated with masculinity and a prestigious university press.¹⁴ The front and back covers are consistent with the author's

purpose of questioning ethnographic research, based on the experiences and words of Samoan girls and conducted by a woman, as suspect. The author's assertions of Mead's naïveté and her deception by female informants are highlighted on the back cover. It contains five lengthy testimonials, all from men, representing the fields of physical anthropology, zoology, ethology, and evolutionary biology. There is no Pacific specialist among them.¹⁵ Their words are testimonies to the "hard," masculine work of science, in contrast to Mead's purported gullibility and her narrative spun from girlish deceptions—the stuff of pseudoscience. This testimonial message of (masculine) rationality overcoming (feminine) emotion is reinforced on the back cover of Freeman's latest book as well (1999).

By comparison, the cover of the 1984 Penguin paperback edition of *Margaret Mead and Samoa* shifts from the disembodied neutrality of the 1983 hardcover dust jacket by highlighting Mead and dismissing Pacific Islander women. The cover shows a cropped head-and-shoulder photograph of a young Margaret Mead set against a Polynesian barkcloth design. Mead's face is solemn and serious, while her eyes look unflinchingly at the viewer. An unattributed reproduction of the original, full-length photograph (Figure 6) used in the 1984 cover of Freeman's book appeared in a favorable review by Edmund Leach titled "The Shangri-La That Never Was" (Leach 1983). The photo was also prominently reproduced in George Marcus's less-favorable review (1983), titled "One Man's Mead," published in the *New York Times Book Review*.

The photograph in Figure 6 suggests that the "Shangri-La" dream world of Samoa has been transformed into a domesticated enclave of colonial control. Mead's feminine clothes—a long-sleeved dress, neck scarf, anklets and dainty, strapped shoes—are sharply juxtaposed with an ornately-tied barkcloth belt worn by Pacific Islanders of rank. The belt, symbolizing the elaborate complex of chiefly ceremonialism and status, appears to dwarf the petite female body that holds the barkcloth. This effect is accentuated as the front part of the belt cascades several inches below Mead's dress and nearly reaches her ankles.

At first glance, the photograph suggests a simplistic portrait of Mead as a woman and as an ethnographer. This image fits Freeman's representation of Mead as too young, too naïve, too small, and too fragile to engage in a man's heavy-duty work of studying the physically and culturally robust Samoans. Alternately, the picture can be interpreted as a woman asserting her authority to engage in a masculine enterprise by traveling to a remote island world, by conducting ethnographic fieldwork on her own, and by publishing her research. The barkcloth belt authenticates the wearer's presence in Polynesia and her legitimacy as an observer of Samoan social life.



FIGURE 6. Unattributed photograph of Margaret Mead wearing a barkcloth belt. (Reprinted by permission of *New York Times Pictures*)

Freeman's *Margaret Mead and the Heretic* (1996), a retitled paperback reprint of his 1983 book, continues the displacement of indigenous Pacific Islander women from paradise. This Viking Penguin reprint contains a new foreword and was published at the same time that *Heretic*, David Williamson's play about Mead and Freeman, was staged in Sydney, Australia (Freeman 1996:vi; see also Monaghan 1996 and Thomson 1996). The 1996 book title, like the play, portrays a contest between Mead and the heretical Freeman. The cover appears to highlight the connection between Mead and her "fantastic" tale of paradise in Samoa. Mead's face is superimposed on Freeman's personal photograph of the islands of Ofu and Olosega, as seen across the beach from the island of Ta'ū, the site of Mead's fieldwork. The photographic artifice of blending Mead's body into the geography of paradise constitutes a dangerous co-opting of anthropological narrative. Mead has now merged into the landscape, her ethnographic authority erased and her voice silenced.

The appropriation of Mead's body and voice continues on the back cover of *Margaret Mead and the Heretic*. The back cover text contains a quotation from Fa'apua'a Fa'amū, Mead's cherished friend and informant, who is derogated as a prankster and liar. The text on the back cover is highlighted against a shroud-like background of deep black—like a death notice—suggesting the demise of Mead and her Samoan research. Three years later, the dust jacket of Freeman's 1999 "fateful hoaxing" narrative depicts a beach scene similar to the 1996 retitled reprint. Once again, Pacific Islanders are notable for their absence in this cover image. Mead has also disappeared from the cover, suggesting an erasure of the ethnographer's presence and her fieldwork in Samoa. Only the physical landscape of paradise remains: palm trees on a sandy beach, the coral reef, and islands in the distance. The cover confirms the book's premise of an unoccupied and derelict paradise. Mead, like the girls and women of Samoa, has been rendered invisible.

Concluding Thoughts on Paradise and Mead's Subversive Narrative

The success of *Coming of Age* and Mead's subsequent efforts to popularize and promote her work secured her public status and, at the same time, made problematic her academic stature in the eyes of her male colleagues. Unlike many other women ethnographers of her day, Margaret Mead is an exception to the erasure of women's ethnographic writing from the canon of ethnographic literature (Behar 1995). Freeman, a self-described "heretic," has undertaken a self-imposed quest to remove Mead and her "spellbinding text" from the canon (Freeman 1991:118).

Freeman's narrative of sexual violence in Samoa, accompanied by its subtext of biological determinism, suggests the legitimacy of male sexual aggres-

sion and female oppression. In his story, women's sexual agency cannot exist in a "paradise" that acknowledges a social structure politically controlled by men. By contrast, Mead's story of "love under the palm trees" (Kuper 1983), with its subtext of female assertion and nascent feminism, legitimizes women's control over their bodies and their ability to subvert or challenge the structures of male power.

In the course of this article, I have considered Mead's and Freeman's texts as enterprises to construct alternate versions of paradise. Freeman's tales of sex and lies bespeak the menacing, alter-representation of Samoa. Images on book covers reinforce Freeman's appropriation of the pleasure of paradise for men by derogating Mead's authority to write about the lives and experiences of Samoan girls and women.

Islander women are dismissed in the course of Freeman's narrative of sex and deception. This dismissal is also reproduced on the covers of his books. Paradise, as a site of pleasure, is now derelict: There are no Polynesian lovers on moonlit beaches. In Freeman's construction of the other side of paradise, Samoan women are useful, like the "sleeping beauties" and "wood nymphs" of Western image-making, but only when they serve the interests of men.

Problematic issues about who "owns" indigenous women's bodies, and who is privileged to interpret them, inform constructions of paradise. While dust jacket images of *Coming of Age* market eroticized bodies, Mead's book has a different story to tell. Mead highlighted the social and sexual agency of Samoan girls and women rather than male-entitling images of compliant South Seas sirens. *Coming of Age*—whether graced with a generic Polynesian or Asian woman on its cover—both supported and subverted its book cover images of pleasure in paradise. Mead's text spoke to Samoa as a Polynesian Eden; and she also suggested that both Pacific Islander and Western women claim the right to think and talk about their own bodies, their erotic feelings, and their emotions.

The politics of sexual paradise in Samoa returns us to the issue of ethnographic authority. The deserted island beach on the Snapple "Samoan Splash" label fits the book-cover images of Freeman's narratives. These images deny the presence of Pacific Islander women. They are displaced, just as Freeman has attempted to reduce their ethnographer by imposing Mead's face on an empty, palm tree-studded beach of the island where she lived and worked. Mead's body, like the bodies of her Samoan informants, are history: They have been conflated with the unoccupied landscape of paradise. Such a geography of the South Seas has no place for either Polynesian women or the ethnographer who wrote about them and attempted to speak for them in her book. Yet, *Coming of Age in Samoa* will, I believe, survive Freeman's efforts to edit women out of their own lives. Mead's and Freeman's narratives,

however, cannot exist on their own in this dialectic of pleasure and danger; both have been cast upon the golden shores of a South Seas island in the Western imagination.

NOTES

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Professor Derek Freeman died in 2001 as this article went to press.

1. "Quiet Village" and "Love Dance" were released in 1957 on a Liberty LP album titled *Exotica*, available on compact disk (Denny 1990). James Michener was a fan of Denny's music and contributed liner notes to Denny's 1958 album, *Hypnotique*, also available on compact disk (Smith 1996:3–4).

2. Historian Lois Banner is completing a biography of Margaret Mead, to be published in 2002.

3. The "Primitive Flapper" article, based on an interview Mead gave to the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, was published in 22 October 1925 [?] by the local newspaper in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, where both Margaret Mead and James Michener graduated from high school (LOC: MMP, Box I2; Hayes 1984:24–30; Howard 1984:33–36). The full name of the newspaper and the year of publication is missing from the copy of the article in the Mead Papers at the Library of Congress. I have assumed that the year was 1925, since the article suggests that Mead's interview in Honolulu was conducted shortly before her departure for Samoa.

4. Mead's interview with the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* noted that female "delinquency" was a "popular subject": "If I can determine whether qualities which sometimes work for her delinquency are common to all young girls of certain ages—even in the so-called primitive communities—and can learn the reasons for conditions as they are found, I shall have gone a long way in making clear the proper method of handling them in juvenile courts, schools, churches, Y.W.C.A.s and similar organizations" (LOC: MMP, Box I2: "Dr. Mead Explained South Sea Research in Honolulu Interview Recently Published There: The Primitive Flapper," *Doylestown Daily Intelligence*, 22 October [1925]).

5. This cover is reproduced in one of Freeman's articles (1991:113) and his recent book (1999: facing p. 149). Evidence that this particular cover was used for the first edition, and

continued to be used for some time, comes from two sources. First, the dust jacket was reproduced for an abridged and undated version of the Armed Forces Overseas Edition of *Coming of Age* (LOC: MMP, Box I316). Second, Mead refers to the first edition's cover in her 1967 letter to Ross Claiborne, editor at Dell, in which she criticized a proposed cover drawing for a reprint edition of *Coming of Age* (LOC: MMP, Box I2: Mead to Claiborne, letter dated 12 June 1967), discussed below.

6. Mead's role in selecting or approving the cover for the first edition of *Coming of Age* is unclear. Her published comments on the first edition are sparse: "It went to press, I read proof, and saw a small printer's dummy of the table of contents, chapter one, and the jacket. This done, I sailed for Hawaii, glad to be on my way to the field in the Admiralty Islands" (Mead 1965:125).

The printer's prepublication copy of the first edition with its dust jacket depicting lovers on the beach under a full moon is stored in the Mead Papers at the Library of Congress (LOC: MMP, Box I316). Besides its cover, this copy contains only the title and copyright pages, the table of contents, the first four pages of the introduction, and copies of twelve captioned photographs taken during her fieldwork.

There is scattered evidence in Mead's later correspondence with her editors and publishers that her approval of covers for reprint editions was important (LOC: MMP, Box I2). A book's cover can be a contentious issue between authors and publishers, as it was for Mead in one documented instance in which she vetoed the proposed cover of a Dell Laurel 1967 reprint edition (discussed below).

7. When I worked in Western and American Samoa in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, the formal dress of a *taupou* often consisted of a short velveteen skirt and modest top of velvet or cotton worked with sequins, rather than barkcloth and finely woven pandanus mats. Some ceremonial maidens did not bother to wear the elaborate hair headdress (*tuiga*) when they prepared *kava* or danced in public events. Occasionally, I have known women without *taupou* titles who were commissioned to prepare *kava* or dance at public events when a suitable ceremonial maiden was unavailable.

8. Robert and Frances Flaherty and their three small children arrived in Safune village on Savai'i in 1923. They lived there for nearly two years, and filmed most of what was to become *Moana of the South Seas* during the last four months of their stay. *Asia Magazine* editor Louis Froelick depicts the youthful Ta'avale, who plays Moana, the Samoan romantic lead, in fulsome terms: "He is eighteen, wonderful in his full-grown youth. His powerful shoulders and legs are as smooth and graceful as a girl's. He has the torso of a Greek" (Froelick 1925:320). The Mentor cover of the male dancer captures the essence of the handsome Moana, effusively described by Froelick in the article's subtitle as "One of Seven Immortals in a Radiant Land of Morning Light." Eight full-page photos of Samoans filmed in *Moana*, taken by Frances Hubbard Flaherty (1925), follow Froelick's article. For further discussion of the photography of the Flahertys and Margaret Mead, see Nordström (1995:31–35).

9. *South Pacific* opened on Broadway in April 1949 and closed in January 1954 after 1,925 performances (Green 1963:174). The 1958 film version of *South Pacific* was filmed in Hawai'i (see also Beidler 1993).

10. By early 1948, the hardcover edition had sold about 25,000 copies and Pocket Books planned to print 150,000 copies of a twenty-five-cent paperback edition (Hayes 1984:77).

Macmillan published an Armed Services edition in April 1947. The Pocket Books edition, first published in April 1947, omitted five stories, including “Our Heroine,” from the original hardcover edition published by Macmillan.

11. Rodman suggests that Bali-Ha'i is a “composite” of the forty-nine Pacific islands Michener visited during his wartime assignments (Rodman 1996:158 n. 1; see also Hayes 1984:61–62). The volcanic island of Ambae—like Bali-Ha'i—was a “‘forbidden island’ to U.S. Navy personnel during World War II, a prohibition that may have originated in Ambae’s designation as ‘Leper’s Island’ on Navy charts” (Rodman 1996:159 n. 1). On a clear day, the clouds that crown the volcano of Ambae are visible from the island of Espiritu Santo, where Michener wrote *Tales of the South Pacific* (William Rodman, pers. com., 1998).

The island of Vanicoro, “a large and brooding island, miasmic with malaria” and cannibalism, sheltered Bali-Ha'i. In Michener’s story “Fo’ Dolla,” the attraction of Bali-Ha'i was its large population of women, whom the French authorities had relocated to the island prior to occupation by American military forces (1947:147). “The French, with Gallic foresight and knowledge in these things, had housed on this haven of the seas all young women from the islands. Every girl, no matter how ugly or what her color, who might normally be raped by Americans was hidden on Bali-ha'i” (ibid.:148). Consider too that the song “Bali Ha'i” was pivotal in establishing the symbolic linkage of woman-as-island-in-paradise. According to music critic Stanley Green, the song “supplies a theme for the islands and reveals their hypnotic power. . . . The haunting sound of the first three notes is almost all that is needed to establish the spellbinding appeal of the South Seas paradise, and the words perfectly match its mystical quality” (1963:136). Rodgers was said to have composed the complete music for the song’s lyrics in five minutes while attending a dinner party (ibid.).

12. In “Fo’ Dolla,” Michener describes Bali-Ha'i as “green like something ever youthful, and it seemed to curve itself like a woman into the rough shadows formed by the volcanoes on the greater island of Vanicoro” (1947:147–148).

13. The Modern Library edition of *Coming of Age*, published in 1953 by Random House, also avoided the problem of representing female bodies by using the stylized drawing of a Polynesian-looking design on the dust jacket.

14. See Minton 1983 for further discussion of this book’s publication history.

15. Indeed, the back cover of the 1984 paperback edition of *Margaret Mead and Samoa* attempts to broaden the book’s appeal with an excerpt from a review published in *Fortune* magazine, noting that “Freeman’s *debunking* of Margaret Mead is of interest to us all” (emphasis added).

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