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Book Review of, Paul Shankman. *The Trashing of Margaret Mead:
Anatomy of an Anthropological Controversy*

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The Trashing of Margaret Mead: Anatomy of an Anthropological Controversy. By Paul Shankman, foreword by Paul S. Boyer. (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2009. xvii + 299 pp. \$29.95 paper)

In 1983, a book by Derek Freeman publicly attacked anthropologist Margaret Mead's scholarly reputation. Paul Shankman vividly chronicles the anatomy of the resulting controversy. From the publication of *Coming of Age in Samoa* in 1928 until her death in 1978, Margaret Mead was a household name in America. Shankman argues that it was Mead's fame that gave Freeman's books their notoriety. The Mead-Freeman controversy was not about Mead's anthropological research; it was instead about her stature as a feminist, a liberal, and a public intellectual. The controversy played out in the media, where Freeman's mud, once slung, stuck. In the halls of academia, Freeman's arguments have been thoroughly examined and largely dismissed, but Freeman's attack has marred Mead's image in the court of public opinion.

This engaging book plunges into the media coverage of Freeman's initial accusations. Shankman then introduces Mead and Freeman with respectful but colorful depictions. He notes their intellectual curiosities, their scholarly training, their networks and relationships, and, in Freeman's case, his emotional instability.

Shankman chronicles Mead's fieldwork on adolescence in the South Pacific and the process of writing her most famous book, *Coming of Age in Samoa*. He also examines how the public conceived of adolescence in the 1920s, providing context for the book's reception in the United States. Shankman then considers what the book meant and means to Samoans.

Next Shankman explores the ethnographic and historical materials available on Samoan sexual practices, particularly those

related to virginity. Shankman notes that what people do (their behaviors) and what people say they do (their ideals) can differ; Freeman focused on beliefs, while Mead focused on practices. In addition, Shankman makes clear the complex nature of Samoan society, considering the social hierarchies and the shifts in cultural patterns that occurred during the eras that Mead (1920s) and Freeman (1940s) did their fieldwork.

Having set the context, Shankman critically examines Freeman's accusations. Shankman's evidence conclusively demonstrates how Freeman distorted and misrepresented Mead's positions. Indeed, despite his insistence that his research was scientific and airtight, Freeman misquoted Mead, omitted material, and misled his readers alarmingly. Using data from Mead's field notes, letters, and published work, Shankman thoroughly refutes Freeman's suggestion that Mead was hoaxed or fooled by lying informants. Shankman also demolishes Freeman's claim that Mead overemphasized "culture" in the "nature-nurture" debate, showing instead that Mead firmly believed in evolution and the importance of human beings' biological nature in shaping behaviors. Shankman briefly speculates on what may have motivated Freeman's obsession with Mead's early work in Samoa and the personal nature of his attack.

Shankman's arguments will appeal to anthropologists who value careful scholarly inquiry, but this book will also engage and entertain students and the general public. The book offers lively characters, rigorous debate, historical investigation of sexual practices, and an inside view of a major intellectual controversy.

"Margaret Mead. Wasn't her work shown to be wrong?" Once one has read Shankman's book, one can dismiss this and other reverberations of the Mead-Freeman controversy with a firm answer: "Actually, those allegations have been thoroughly investigated, and Mead's name has been cleared." This lucid and readable book conclusively redeems anthropology's most famous public intellectual.

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