

# Chapter One

## Introduction to the Territory of American Samoa

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### 1.1 The Territory of America Samoa

For readers that lack an intimate knowledge of American Samoa, this brief introduction has been provided to kindle your interest in discovering the Territory of American Samoa.

This chapter, which highlights American Samoa's features, and Chapter Two, State-of-the-Territory, are provided as the foundation for your understanding of the Territory's ambience, what its development issues are, and what policies the government will focus upon for the future.

American Samoa is an unincorporated, unorganized territory of the United States of America. American Samoans enjoy most of the benefits of being a United States citizen, including the freedom to choose their own elected representatives and to move freely within the United States. An explanation of American Samoa's political status is provided in section 1.5 at the end of this chapter.

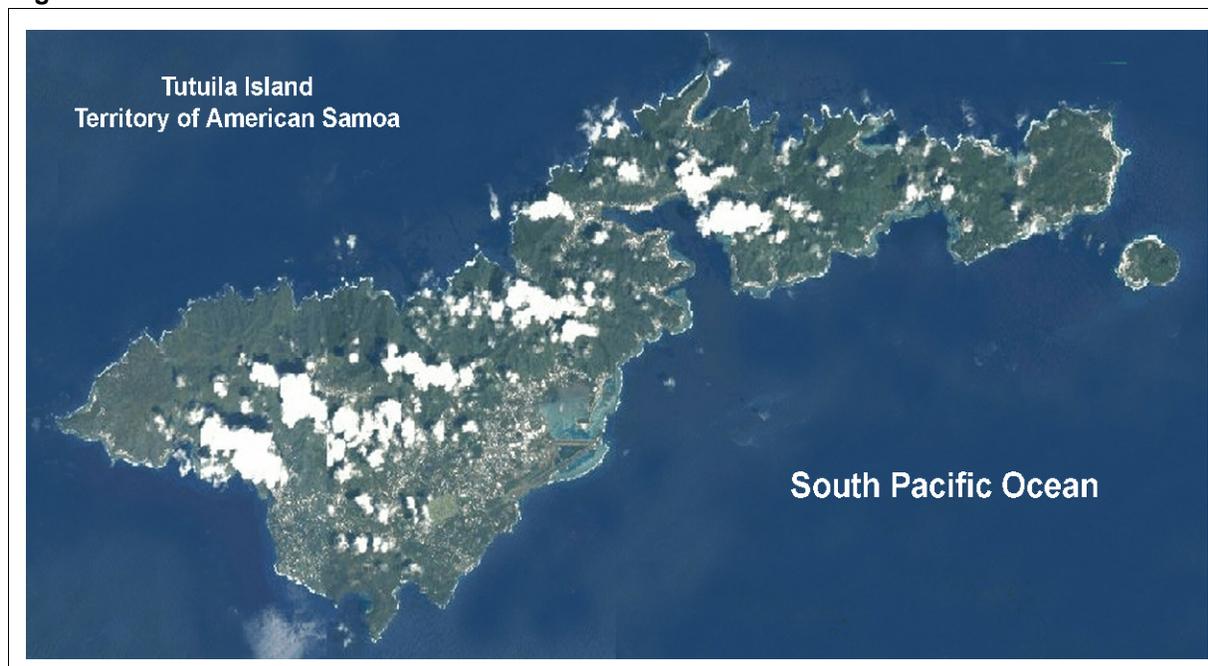
American Samoa is not a single island; rather it consists of five volcanic, high islands and two coral atolls. Tutuila Island is the largest volcanic island, the most populated island, and the Territory's administrative center. Aunu'u, a populated remnant of a volcanic cone, lies just off Tutuila's southeastern coast. The small volcanic islands of Ofu, Olosega and Ta'u form the Manu'a Islands group that is located seventy miles east of Tutuila. Two coral atolls, Swains Island, a privately owned island, and Rose Island, a wildlife refuge, lie several hundred miles north and east of Tutuila. These islands are seen on the back of the front cover of this plan as a reduction of a commercially available map prepared by the University of Hawaii Press.

### 1.2 The Territory's Land and Location

#### 1.2.1 Tutuila, the Main Island

American Samoa is the only U.S. possession situated south of the equator. It is quite a long

**Figure 1.1 Tutuila Island**



distance from the continental United States. Tutuila's Pago Pago International Airport is situated 172° 42' west longitude and 14° 20' south latitude. It is about 2,300 miles south-southwest and five hours flying time from Honolulu, Hawaii or 4,500 miles and a ten hour flight from Los Angeles, California.<sup>1</sup>

Tutuila's nearest neighboring island is Upolu, the second largest island of the Samoan archipelago. Its largest town is Apia, the seat of the Independent State of Samoa. A flight to Apia takes forty minutes flying time from Pago Pago International Airport.

Tutuila's land area is estimated at 56.0 square miles, that is seventy-two percent of the total Territorial land area of 76.1 square miles.<sup>2</sup> Tutuila supports ninety-seven percent of the Territory's population of 57,291<sup>3</sup> people on a relatively flat but narrow coastal bench that lies between the shoreline and the foot of the steep mountainsides, which reach to 2,142 feet for the island's highest peak, Mt. Matafao.<sup>4</sup>

Tutuila's rugged and picturesque mountains are an outstanding feature of the island. Other scenic features are the deep water port of Pago Pago Bay, the rugged and forested National Park, and Fagatele Bay, a national marine sanctuary.

Tutuila Island formally became a possession of the United States with a Deed of Cession signed by its ranking chiefs on April 17, 1900. In 1904 the chiefs of the Manu'a islands formally joined the union and the Territory of American Samoa.

### 1.2.2 Manu'a Islands

The Manu'a Island group, consisting of Ofu, Olosega and Ta'u islands, are high volcanic islands. They are the tips of ancient volcanoes that rise sharply from the sea. Ta'u, the largest of the three small islands, appears as the northern half of an eroded volcano crest and

reaches 3,170 feet in elevation. Ofu and Olosega, together, stretch three miles east to west and equal the length of Ta'u island.

**Figure 1.2 The Islands of Ofu and Olosega**



Together, they are about a third the size of Tutuila, which spans a distance of approximately twenty miles.<sup>5</sup>

The population of 1,379 people live on the narrow coastal fringes between the steep slope of the mountains and the sea. The population of the Manu'a Island group has been declining over the last century due to its remoteness.<sup>6</sup>

Manu'a is known for its natural beauty and remote location away from bustling Tutuila. It is an ideal location to find serenity in the South Pacific and a most desirable vacation destination because of its pristine isles and lack of urban infrastructure.

### 1.3 Climate and Environment

American Samoa's climate is warm and humid with abundant rainfall. On average, the Pago Pago International Airport receives 135 inches per year, but rainfalls average between 120 and 240 inches per year at different locations. The amount varies due the location of mountain peaks and the resulting orographic rainfall. The Summer months, December through February, are significantly wetter than

other times of the year, but American Samoa does not have a rainy season and at least a trace of rain falls on approximately 300 days each year.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the heavy rainfall, there are no lakes and only a few perennial streams in the Territory, due to the steep topography, limited land mass and porous volcanic soils.

The Samoa archipelago, which includes the Independent State of Samoa, lies within a region that is annually threatened by hurricanes. Although American Samoa is not regularly affected by hurricanes, five powerful hurricanes have struck the Territory's islands in the last forty years (1966, 1979, 1987, 1990 and 1991). Each have passed over at least one of American Samoa's islands. Hurricane Val (1991) resulted in tens of millions of dollars damage to Tutuila's public and private infrastructure and similar damage to the islands of Ofu, Olosega and Ta'u. Thus, the government stands on alert and maintains an emergency preparedness program.

#### 1.4 Population and Human Settlement

When the islands of the Samoa archipelago were partitioned one hundred years ago and the easternmost islands were ceded to the United States, approximately 4,000 people, including Americans and Europeans were resident on the main island of Tutuila. About 1,750 Samoans lived in the outlying Manu'a group.<sup>8</sup>

In the 2000 Decennial Census the ethnic composition of the population was little changed.

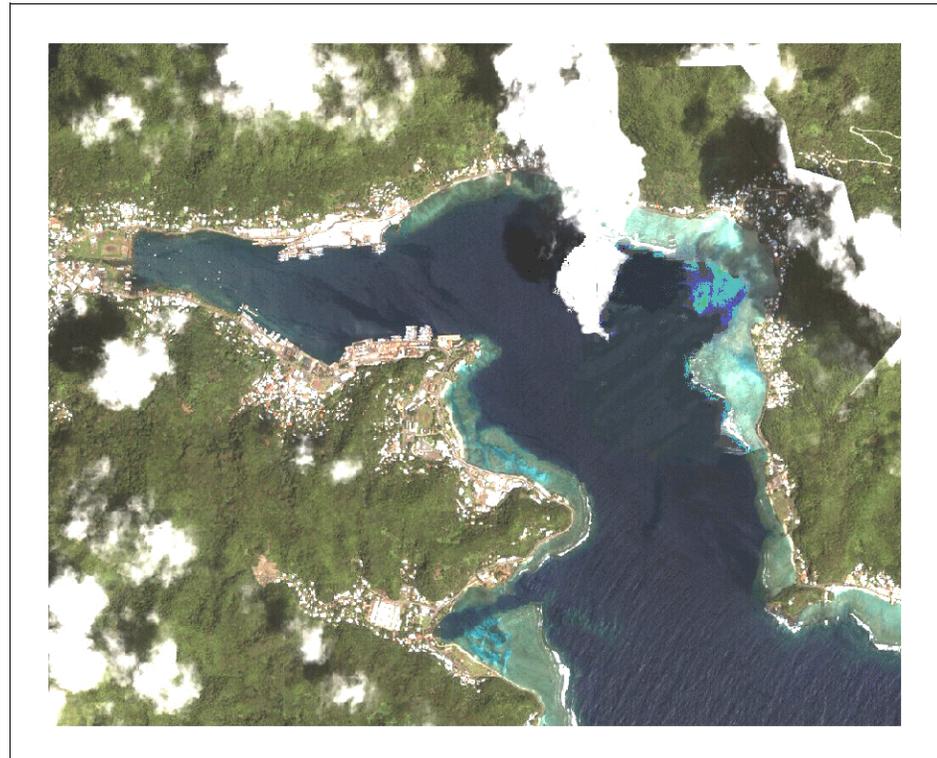
Almost ninety percent of the residents of American Samoa are still Samoans, but there are many more people living on Tutuila. The Census counted 55,912 Tutuila residents, along with 1,379 Manu'a Islanders. Thus the population of Tutuila increased fourteen-fold during the Twentieth Century, while Manu'a lost a portion of its already-small population. The Manu'a Islands now comprise only two and four tenths of the total population of the Territory.

The majority of the Territory's population resides at two areas of Tutuila, the Pago Pago Bay area and the Tafuna Plain.

##### 1.4.1 Pago Pago Bay

The Pago Pago Bay area was not the first place to be settled by missionaries in the mid-1800s, but it very quickly became the center of

Figure 1.3 Pago Pago Bay



commercial activities as a result of its sheltered deep water port. After the partition of the Samoa islands and cession to the United States in 1900, the Territory was administered by the U.S.

Navy Department and the bay area became the seat of the new Territorial government.

The small villages lining the bay's shoreline grew slowly during the first half of the Twentieth Century. The village of Fagatogo became the Territory's commercial center as well as the Navy's administrative post.

A large military mobilization during World War II thrust American Samoa into the modern age. Business picked up after World War II, but Fagatogo and the Territory did not make great strides forward until the mid-1960s when the U.S. Government put a serious effort into expanding and improving the Territory's infrastructure. Fagatogo village maintained its colonial and South Pacific ambience well into the 1960s. However, in recent years the village has fallen into disrepair. Vestiges of the colonial era still remain and are being revived with urban renewal

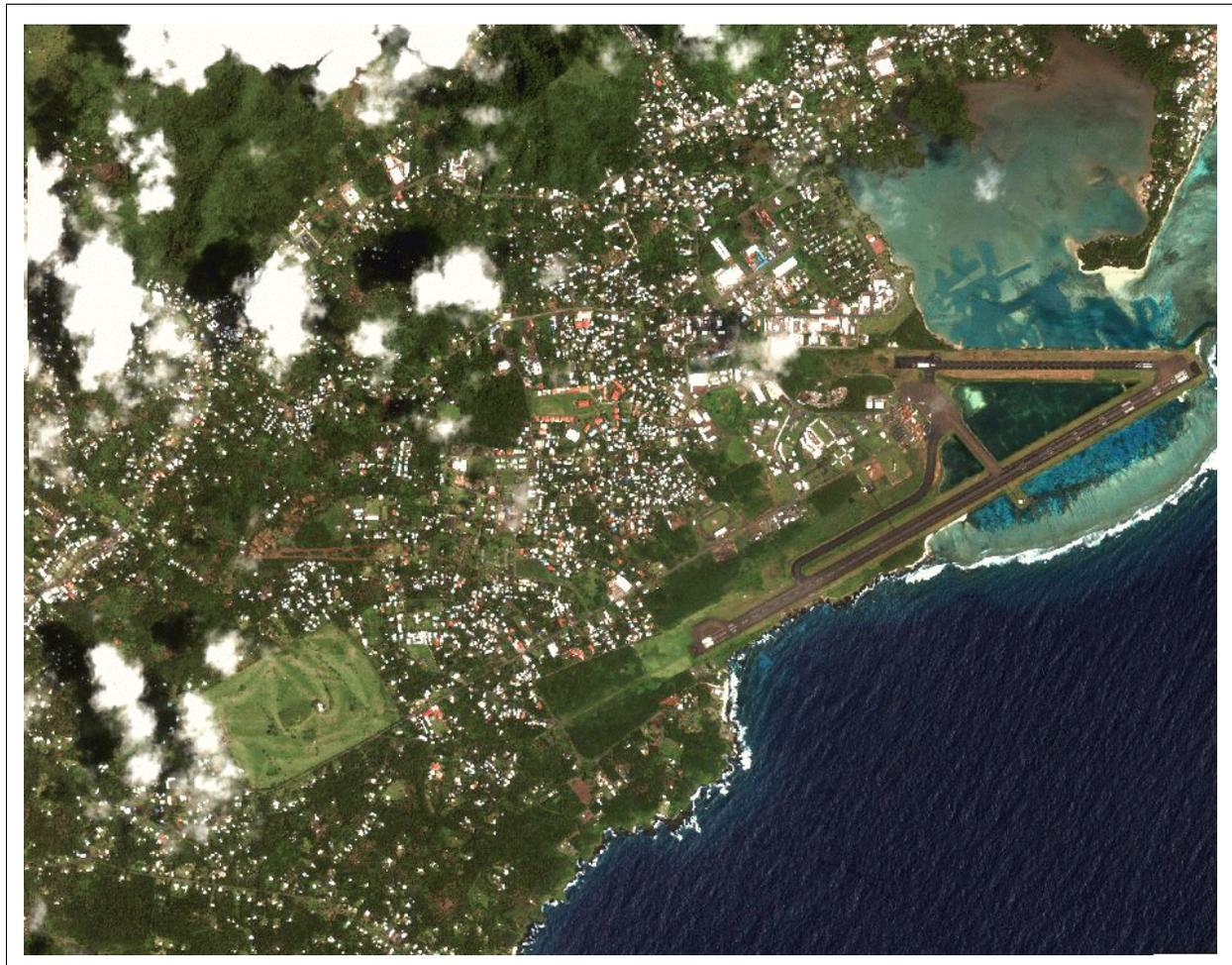
programs that will revitalize of the colonial architectural theme.

The Pago Pago Bay still remains the seat of government and the dominant center for commerce and employment, although the Tafuna Plain area is the site of most new development in recent years. Two of America's best known tuna processing canneries, StarKist and Chicken of the Sea, are located within the inner harbor of the bay and employ close to one-third of the Territory's 14,000 paid employees.<sup>9</sup> The Territory's government is now seated at Utulei village at the center of and on the western shoreline of Pago Pago Bay.

#### 1.4.2 Tafuna Plain

The Tafuna Plain is the only large area of relatively flat land in the Territory. It is located in the southwest center of Tutuila. Because most

Figure 1.4 The Tafuna Plain



of the Territory's terrain has slopes greater than thirty degrees, it has become the site of intensive residential and commercial development over the last half of the Twentieth Century.

The Tafuna Plain presently holds about forty percent of the population of Tutuila, in an area of approximately five square miles.<sup>10</sup> The Tafuna Plain is also an area where most non-Samoan and recent immigrants reside.

Since the Tafuna Plain is the only area capable of handling air traffic, the Pago Pago International Airport is located at its southeastern periphery. This area within the Tafuna Plain is also the site of the largest amount of government owned property, acquired because of and after World War II. It houses an Industrial Park, a residential development for government contract workers, and is the site of recent light-industrial and commercial development.

The Tafuna Plain laid dormant and under-used until after World War II, because of its relatively late volcanic history and difficult-to-cultivate, rugged ground. In 1940 there were less than 1000 residents in all of Tualata County, which also includes villages outside the Tafuna Plain.<sup>11</sup> Sixty years later, in the year 2000, there were 22,025 residents, reflecting an average growth of five percent per year over a 60-year period and a twenty-two fold increase in the population.<sup>12</sup> The central portion of the Tafuna Plain is the site of intensive residential development, in-fill, the construction of the Territory's first multi-family facilities and the emergence of large religious institutions. The eastern core of the plain is reaching single family housing saturation and development is now occurring throughout the southwest and western portions of the plain.

Notwithstanding the recent commercial and physical development on the Tafuna Plains growth, the Pago Pago Bay area still remains central to the economic well-being of the Territory and central to the cultural and social life of American Samoans because of its historical significance.

### 1.4.3 Outlying Residential Villages

The remainder of Tutuila Island's population, with the exception of several upland villages, resides in forty-six small villages located along the narrow, coastal flats that fringe the island. Residential areas and population are restricted in growth because of the steep mountain slopes and the ocean shoreline bounding the villages. Masefau village, pictured in Figure 1.5

**Figure 1.5 Masefau Village on the North Shore of Tutuila**



and situated on the north shore of Tutuila Island, exemplifies the type of topography and terrain found throughout a majority of the villages of the Territory's islands.

The majority of residents of the Manu'a Island group live in six villages that are also located on the coastal fringes of the three islands of Ofu, Olosega and Ta'u.

## 1.5 Political and Personal Status

American Samoa is an "unincorporated, unorganized U.S. territory", which means that the U.S. Constitution does not apply in all matters, and that the Territorial government is able to create and administer its own immigration and taxation laws, as opposed to those matters being controlled by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service or the U.S. Internal Revenue Service.

Because of its unincorporated status, the Territory is able to treat alien residents differently than American Samoa born residents. The Territory is also able to limit the sale of land to American Samoans and to limit or restrict the licensing of foreign businesses.

**Figure 1.6 The Fono, The Legislature of American Samoa**



American Samoans and American citizens can vote in local elections, however voting is not a privilege or right for those not born in American Samoa. American Samoans are eligible for U.S. national passports, but American Samoans, as one of the limitations of an unincorporated, unorganized U.S. territory status, do not have the right to vote for the President of the United States.

## 1.6 Samoan Society and Leadership

American Samoa is simultaneously a Samoan community and an American community. Most Samoans are bilingual in English and Samoan. Although modernization and political alignment

with the United States are steadfastly supported, the Samoan culture remains intact and robust, with residents actively participating in cultural activities, that pervade such life-cycle occasions as weddings and funerals, but also Flag Day ceremonies of April 17<sup>th</sup>, title investitures, church functions and village exchange visits.

The basic unit of Samoan society is the 'aiga' (the family or extended family) but the culture also recognizes the village, and the church as predominant organizations that influence personal and communal activities. It is important to note that each extended family holds lands on a communal basis for use by family members, and that there is a senior matai (chief) for each family, along with subordinate chiefs, that manage family lands and activities.

The village represents the aiga, which can number from a few to hundreds of people. Each village has a 'fono' (council of matais) that is responsible for governing the village community. Matters of general concern and the conduct of village affairs, including conflicts and punishment of offenders of village customs, are the responsibilities of the village fono. At the county or district level matais also deliberate and choose the highest ranking chiefs to serve in the Senate, where eighteen seats are reserved for only traditional leaders.

Members of the Senate serve in the American Samoa legislature, also called the 'Fono.'. The Fono is a bicameral body consisting of the eighteen member Senate and a twenty-one member House, that is elected through universal suffrage. The Fono is responsible for the passage of local legislation and local taxation measures.

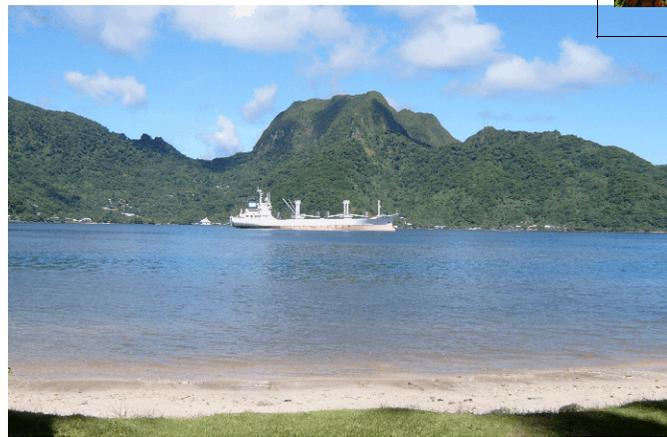
## 1.7 Features of American Samoa

The Samoa archipelago has many features which stand out and warrant special attention. In part, they define the ambience and majesty of the South Pacific. A few of American Samoa's features deserve to attract the attention of the world, they are: the Pago Pago Bay and Rainmaker Mountain, the National Park and rugged northern shore of Tutuila Island, the picturesque and timeless Manu'a Islands and the Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary.

### 1.7.1 Pago Pago Bay and the Rainmaker Mountain

Although Pago Pago Bay is prized for its protected deep water port, it is also prized for its magnificent scenery. As the bay is a remnant of an ancient caldera, its northern ridges rise vertically and dramatically to an elevation of nearly 1700 feet. On the eastern periphery of the bay stands the renowned and picturesque Rainmaker Mountain, American Samoa's icon.

**Figure 1.7.1 The Rainmaker Mountain**



### Figure 1.7.2 The Cocks Comb on Tutuila's North Shore



the beautiful blue Pacific Ocean. On Ofu, there are long, white coral sand beaches with overhanging palm trees.

### 1.7.3 Ofu and Olosega: Paradise Found

As seen on page 2, the islands of Ofu and Olosega are simply breathtaking to observe. They represent all that is the South Pacific, i.e. tropical, green, mountainous islands, white sands and azur blue water.

### 1.7.2 The National Park and North Shore

The National Park of American Samoa is a wild, scenic rainforest and coral reef area that is spread across the three islands of Tutuila, Ofu and Ta'u. These portions of the park total nearly 9,000 acres with 1,000 acres as offshore water extending to the edge of the coral reefs. Unlike traditional national parks where the Federal government owns and manages the land, all lands in the National Park are leased from nine villages and the American Samoa Government.

The park consists of superb native paleo-tropical rainforest extending from the ocean's edge to the mountain tops in misty cloud forests. On Tutuila, there are miles of some the most spectacular shoreline views in the world, including cliffs and coves overlooking

### 1.7.4 Tutuila's South Shore and Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary

The Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary is a marine protected area located at the tip of the rugged southern central shoreline of Tutuila Island. The Sanctuary is one of many marine protected areas set up under Federal law. Fagatele crater forms its semi-circular terrestrial boundary. The bay is approximately seven-tenths



of a mile in diameter and upwards of four hundred feet deep at the mouth of the crater.

### Endnotes

1. Bier, James A., The University Press of Hawaii, *Islands of Samoa* (map), Honolulu, Hawaii.
2. Department of Commerce, American Samoa Government, *American Samoa Statistical Yearbook*, Pago Pago, American Samoa, p. viii, 1996.
3. United States Bureau of the Census, *2000 Census of Population and Housing, American Samoa*, Press Release, Washington, D.C., July 2001.
4. Bier, James A., The University Press of Hawaii, *Islands of Samoa* (map), Honolulu, Hawaii.
5. *ibid.*
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7. Department of Commerce, American Samoa Government, *American Samoa Statistical Yearbook*, Pago Pago, American Samoa, p. 53, 1996.
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9. Department of Commerce, American Samoa Government, *American Samoa Statistical Yearbook*, Pago Pago, American Samoa, p. 105, 1996.
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11. Department of Commerce, American Samoa Government, *American Samoa Statistical Yearbook*, Pago Pago, American Samoa, p. 10, 1996.
12. United States Bureau of the Census, *2000 Census of Population and Housing, American Samoa*, Press Release, Washington, D.C., July 2001.