

BACKGROUND NOTESAmerican Samoa

Status - A non-self-governing territory of the United States, administered by the Department of the Interior

Capital - Pago Pago

The unincorporated territory of American Samoa is the most southerly of all lands under United States sovereignty. There are seven islands in the American Samoan group with a total area of 76.2 square miles. Pago Pago (pronounced Pango-Pango), the principal and capital city, located on the island of Tutuila, is one of the finest and most beautiful harbors of the South Pacific.

The people of American Samoa are American nationals; are of almost pure Polynesian stock and number 20,051 according to the 1960 census. The climate of the islands is tropical and pleasant; the main islands are of volcanic origin with a yearly temperature range from 70 to 90 degrees and a humidity of about 80 percent.

American interest in the Samoan islands began with the report made by the United States Exploring Expedition which visited the islands under the leadership of Lt. John Wilkes in 1839. By a Treaty of 1899, the United Kingdom and Germany renounced their claims in the Samoan group in favor of the United States, and the main islands were ceded to the United States in 1900 by local chiefs.

Congress formally accepted the islands in 1929 by means of a Joint Resolution. They were under naval administration until 1951 when their administration was transferred to the Department of the Interior. Under the terms of the deeds of cession, the United States Government agreed that the chiefs of the villages would be permitted to retain their individual control over their separate villages and agreed to respect and protect the individual rights of the people, especially in respect to their lands and other property. As a result of this commitment, most of American Samoan land is communally-owned.

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