

Economically, Samoa is a predominantly agricultural country. The village communities maintain a largely subsistence economy, based on agriculture and fishing. The principal exports are copra, cocoa, and bananas. The only secondary industry of significance in the export trade is the manufacture of desiccated coconut. The Territory has also useful forest resources. They are limited in extent and variety, but in recent years they have been more carefully examined. There are no known deposits of commercially valuable minerals.

For more than a century Samoa has been in continuous contact with the western world. Socially, and, to some extent, economically, Samoan society has been able to absorb the external influences to which it has been exposed. The Church has become an integral part of village life. For almost the lifetime of the oldest men and women now living the villagers have been cutting copra to support their Church and pay for their purchases at the trading-station. Politically the transition has been far less smooth. For a variety of reasons, Samoa failed to obtain internal political unity such as that established in Tonga and various other parts of the Pacific. Samoan society does not readily accept the dominance of a single leader, and the scale and intensity of commercial and political rivalries among the western intruders ensured that every tendency to division would be exploited to the full. A Samoa Kingship was established under western influence; but it quite failed to build up an effective Administration. Germany, Great Britain, and the United States obtained privileges for themselves and for their nationals. They were granted the right to establish coaling-stations and to bring Europeans under a form of extra-territorial jurisdiction.

Internal intrigue, and jealousy among the representatives of the interested Powers, reached its climax in 1889. In that year the Powers signed the treaty known as "The Final Act of the Berlin Conference on Samoan Affairs." Samoa was declared neutral and independent and Malietoa Laupepa was recognized as King. The Samoan Government was provided with a Supreme Court, with most extensive jurisdiction, presided over by a European Judge. And a separate municipality of Apia was constituted, with a multiplicity of officials, to take care of the area where most Europeans were settled. But these arrangements brought about no real solution. The death in August, 1898, of the King and a dispute over the succession gave the Powers another chance. In 1899 they sent a Commission to Samoa. It secured the acquiescence of some of the Samoan leaders to the abolition of the Kingship. The three Powers then agreed to partition the islands. In a series of conventions signed on 16th February, 1900, it was agreed that the United States should annex Eastern Samoa (including the fine harbour of Pago Pago), while Germany acquired Western Samoa (including the Town of Apia and the important plantation properties of the Deutsche Handels- und Plantagen-Gesellschaft). Great Britain withdrew from the group in return for the recognition by the other Powers of certain of her asserted rights in other parts of the Pacific.

Germany administered Western Samoa until 29th August, 1914, when the Territory was occupied by New Zealand Military Forces. After the end of the war, on 7th May, 1919, the Supreme Council of the Allied Powers conferred on the British Crown on behalf of the New Zealand Government a mandate for the administration of Western Samoa. By the Samoa Act, 1921, New Zealand made provision for a civil Administration to replace the wartime military regime.

The new constitution provided for a Legislative Council with unofficial members, and the Administration began to carry out a plan of building up a system of representative local government. Schemes for economic development were also undertaken. For some years considerable progress was made; but in 1926 and 1927 the Administrator found himself faced with a growing body of opposition among both Samoans and the European community. It found an organized outlet in the Mau. The faults of the Administration had been in the matter of tactics, rather than in the over-all objectives of policy. But, for the time being, the opportunity for further progress was slight. In 1927 the Mau embarked on a programme of civil disobedience which lingered on until 1936.