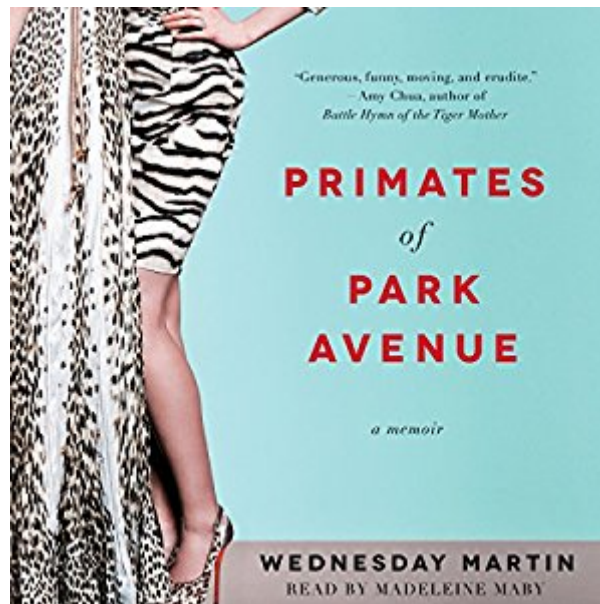


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Primates Of Park Avenue: Adventures Inside The Secret Sisterhood Of Manhattan Moms



Synopsis

Like an urban Dian Fossey, Wednesday Martin decodes the primate social behaviors of Upper East Side mothers in a brilliantly original and witty memoir about her adventures assimilating into that most secretive and elite tribe. After marrying a man from the Upper East Side and moving to the neighborhood, Wednesday Martin struggled to fit in. Drawing on her background in anthropology and primatology, she tried looking at her new world through that lens, and suddenly things fell into place. She understood the other mothers' snobbiness at school drop-off when she compared them to olive baboons. Her obsessional quest for a Hermes Birkin handbag made sense when she realized other females wielded them to establish dominance in their troop. And so she analyzed tribal migration patterns; display rituals; physical adornment, mutilation, and mating practices; extra-pair copulation; and more. Her conclusions are smart, thought provoking, and hilariously unexpected. Every city has its Upper East Side, and in Wednesday's memoir listeners everywhere will recognize the strange cultural codes of powerful social hierarchies and the compelling desire to climb them. They will also see that Upper East Side mothers want the same things for their children that all mothers want - safety, happiness, and success - and not even sky-high penthouses and chauffeured SUVs can protect this ecologically released tribe from the universal experiences of anxiety and loss. When Wednesday's life turns upside down, she learns how deep the bonds of female friendship really are. Intelligent, funny, and heartfelt, *Primates of Park Avenue* lifts a veil on a secret, elite world within a world - the exotic, fascinating, and strangely familiar culture of privileged Manhattan motherhood.

Book Information

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Motherhood #170 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Anthropology > Cultural #202

Customer Reviews

I read this book through the end waiting for some redemption of content and character - let me save you the trouble - there is none. The author spends a lot of time establishing, emphasising and reiterating that she was an outsider who achieved insider status. That's all fine and dandy if you use it to reveal a meaningful or at least an amusing portrait of a culture even if it is more realistically an NYC subculture. But the observations are largely superficial and it is far more important for Dr. Wednesday Martin to lay out her anthro-creds than tell a good story. For example Dr. Martin discusses Physique 57 in great depth but neglects the fact that it's wildly popular because it doesn't mess up a blowout! Even if a reasonable reader decided to ignore the author's latent hostility against women who have chosen to be "only" mothers and wives on an admittedly grander scale the big issue is that reading this book makes you feel like you're listening to a mean-spirited gossip rather than the anthropologist gone native. This is frankly an abuse of the memoir format and she has compassion for no-one outside herself. I felt sorry for her late-stage miscarriage and when I read how the other women rallied around to help her I felt that she totally betrayed all her friends. More than being unfunny or wearing too heavily the curse of anthropological knowledge what this book is centrally is unsisterly and unkind. Specifically given the base torment she went through to get her Birkin, sharing with us her condescension to a shopgirl who she believed would never get one make me dislike her even more. I wish that shop assistant identifies herself and Dr.

Judging by the cover, the publishers are clearly aiming for the beach-reading-chick-lit audience, and I was happy to oblige, picking up the book for a fun summer read. Unfortunately, even for a breezy story I was disappointed by the laziness of this book. If you have ever seen the movie Mean Girls, you know the predictable storyline. Fish out of water 'normal girl' attempts to integrate herself into a strange subculture of wealthy, spoiled and entitled girls. Secretly, she reports on their strange behaviors to her 'normal friends' while comparing them to jungle animals, eventually turning into the very thing she was initially repelled by. I was into the concept, however without the addition of Tina Fey's wry humor, the story is just...boring. With broad strokes, the author paints herself as an 'anthropologist' and frequently structures the beginning of chapters like a tongue in cheek scientific paper. Quoting Jane Goodall over and over and over and over again, the author seems to think that we won't understand the title unless she brings up the mating rituals of primates every 20 pages. At the start of the book, we are led to believe that this privileged culture is ridiculous to the author and

her family, laughable even. However this breaks down after the first few chapters, when she purchases an expensive handbag just because she 'wants it.' The next 75% of the book is a stream of brand names and nursery schools. There was no character development, or even characters! Everyone was described by an outfit, a handbag, a child. No one was a person. Which would be fine, if the author was a fully developed character. After all, the entire book is in her point of view. However, perhaps in an attempt at privacy, we learn nothing about the author other than her address.

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