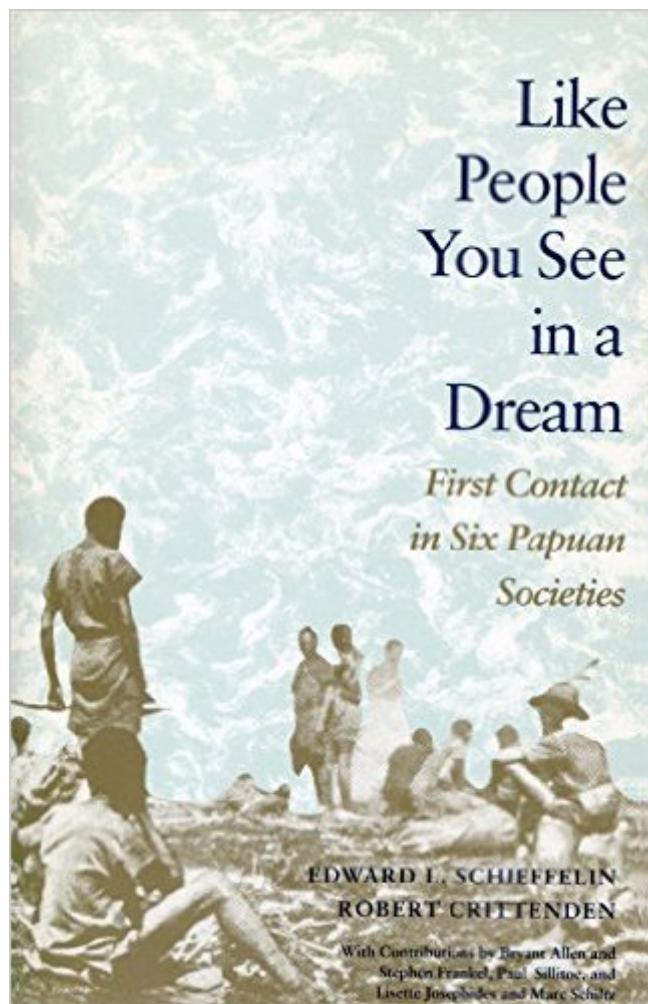


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Like People You See In A Dream: First Contact In Six Papuan Societies



Synopsis

This book is at once a detailed ethnographic and historical analysis of one of the final modern-day experiences of first-culture contact, a classic example of historical geography, and an extraordinary tale of exploration, imperialist arrogance, blood-shed, suffering, courage, and near disaster. By the 1930's, the interior of the island of New Guinea, protected from outside penetration over the centuries by its rugged mountains and unruly rivers, remained one of the few places outsiders had never seen. In early January of 1935, the Papuan colonial administration dispatched patrol officers including 40 Papuan carriers and police, to explore the vast unknown country between the Strickland and Purari rivers. The expedition moved inland along the river systems by steam launch and canoe until, in mid-February, they abandoned their boats and proceeded on foot through the tropical forest and into the mountains. Along the way, the party encountered hitherto unsuspected populations - peoples of six tribes, numbering in the tens of thousands - who had never before seen white men and who were still using Stone Age tools. As the patrol proceeded, the local people became increasingly unfriendly, the expedition members increasingly edgy. The patrol ran out of food, and the locals refused their offers of barter. Starving, racked by dysentery, and beleaguered by bands of warriors, the expedition did eventually find its way back to the coast, but left in its wake more than 50 Papuans dead. The day-by-day account of the patrol forms the central thread of this book, but the story is told in many voices. One of the expedition's two leaders speaks through his patrol report, his letters, and the book he wrote about the expedition. Patrol carriers and police speak through their depositions at the official inquiry that followed the patrol. Most important, the Papuan people who experienced the patrol at first hand speak through the ethnographers who in recent years sought them out. The ethnographers themselves provide detailed accounts of the cultural context and historical conditions of their informants. Finally, the voices of the principal authors emerge in the way the material is woven into chapters of a story rather than a series of academic papers, and in their discussions of context and implications, showing why the papuan tribes and the Western explorers perceived events and responded to each other in the way they did. The book is richly illustrated with 46 photographs and includes 14 maps that for the first time accurately trace the patrol's route.iv>

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