

Primates of Park Avenue: A Memoir

By Wednesday Martin Ph.D.

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Instant #1 *New York Times* Bestseller!

The book that has outraged the social elite!

“Eye-popping.” —*People*

“Amusing, perceptive and...deliciously evil.” —*The New York Times Book Review*

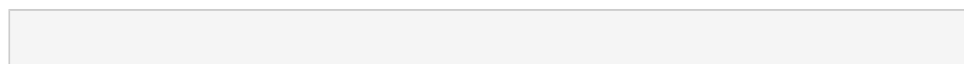
“Juicy, sexy, bawdy stuff.” —*New York Daily News*

**“Think *Gossip Girl*, but with a sociological study of the parents.”
—*InStyle.com***

An instant #1 *New York Times* bestseller, *Primates of Park Avenue* is an “amusing, perceptive and...deliciously evil” (*The New York Times Book Review*) memoir of the most secretive and elite tribe—Manhattan’s Upper East Side mothers.

When Wednesday Martin first arrives on New York City’s Upper East Side, she’s clueless about the right addresses, the right wardrobe, and the right schools, and she’s taken aback by the glamorous, sharp-elbowed mommies around her. She feels hazed and unwelcome until she begins to look at her new niche through the lens of her academic background in anthropology. As she analyzes the tribe’s mating and migration patterns, childrearing practices, fetish objects, physical adornment practices, magical purifying rituals, bonding rites, and odd realities like sex segregation, she finds it easier to fit in and even enjoy her new life. Then one day, Wednesday’s world is turned upside down, and she finds out there’s much more to the women who she’s secretly been calling Manhattan Geishas.

“Think *Gossip Girl*, but with a sociological study of the parents” (*InStyle.com*), Wednesday’s memoir is absolutely “eye-popping” (*People*). *Primates of Park Avenue* lifts a veil on a secret, elite world within a world—the strange, exotic, and utterly foreign and fascinating life of privileged Manhattan motherhood.



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Editorial Review

Review

"An eye-popping insider's guide." (*People*)

"An amusing, perceptive and, at times thrillingly evil takedown of upper-class culture by an outsider with a front-row seat...Martin's writing is confident and evocative...Her reading of the fashion attire of real estate brokers for 'triple mint' apartments is brilliant...at a time when a social comedy of the rich a la Tom Wolfe has been lost in national discourse...it's fun to dip into a sophisticated, if silly, look at the Upper East Side's Twilight Zone. Primates of Park Avenue is also a good reminder that as much as we may envy the wealthy, they fight every day for a place in their own social hierarchy, too." (*New York Times Book Review*)

"Juicy, sexy, bawdy stuff...the perfect summer beach book...the tasty tome we'll all be devouring when the weather warms." (*New York Daily News*)

"Applying the chimpanzee research of Jane Goodall or the observations of bonobos by Frans de Waal to one's neighbors and co-workers is great fun...Martin rewards those of us in humbler circumstances the undeniably pleasant frisson of superiority that comes with finding fault with those better endowed financially, socially, sartorially." (*Chicago Tribune*)

"Think privileged NYC wives are another species? Martin goes undercover in this dishy memoir and reminds us that we all have something in common." (*Glamour*)

"Hysterical and cutting." (*Harper's Bazaar*)

"Think: Gossip Girl, but with a sociological study of the parents." (*InStyle.com*)

"Put this book at the top of your summer reading list!...astute and entertaining." (*Miami Living*)

"Amusing...incisive...a wryly entertaining guide to this rarefied subculture." (*The Economist*)

"Recalls Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*...Primates is pacy and skillfully weaves cultural insight with personal anecdote...This is an intriguing insight into a closed world. It is easy to dismiss the subjects as frivolous and mean, which many seem to be. But our envy and schadenfreude makes the rich a compelling curiosity." (*Financial Times*)

"Fascinating...The author has a Ph.D. and a background in anthropology and primatology, so it's not long before she's analyzing her fellow mommies in terms of what she knows about olive baboons. The book is at its best when Martin analyzes her population this way. Comparing a group of women to primates, their family planning to those of birds, their interactions with men to groups of mice—these make for compelling insights...Engrossing." (*The AV Club*)

"Picture 'Real Housewives,' add in pop-science, and you have Wednesday Martin's new book." (*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*)

"A very funny, and slightly scary, look at the denizens of Manhattan's Upper East Side." (*Connecticut Post*)

"Any population is fair game for anthropological research, so why not the super-rich, super-thin, and oh-so-well-dressed mothers of New York's Upper East Side?... Illuminating and fun." (*BookPage*)

"Martin puts her academic background (anthropology classes and a doctorate in cultural studies) to witty good use in describing this wealthy tribe's extremes...it became clear to me, reading Martin's book, that our Bay Area tribes aren't so different from those of New York." (*San Francisco Chronicle*)

A Jane Goodall wielding an American Express Black Card, the author leads readers through the hierarchical benchmarks of Upper East Side mothers. This anthropological journey into the wilds of New York City's most exclusive zip code could have easily devolved into condescension, but instead it proves that mothers everywhere want the same thing: health and happiness for their progeny. (*Library Journal, starred review*)

"I absolutely loved this memoir and could not put it down! It's incredibly clever; Martin uses anthropology to analyze Upper East mothers, and it's astonishingly illuminating. Somehow, Martin manages to be caustically perceptive but also generous, funny, moving, and erudite all at the same time. This is one of the most fascinating books I've read in a long time." (Amy Chua, Yale Law Professor and author of *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* and *The Triple Package*)

If anthropologist Jane Goodall had landed on Park Avenue with a Birkin bag instead of the wilds of Tanzania with a notebook, this is the book she would have written. *Primates of Park Avenue* is a smart, funny, and original dissection of the tribal rites of rich and striving New Yorkers as they migrate between Manhattan's Upper East Side and the Hamptons. (Steven Gaines, author of *Philistines at the Hedgerow*)

"I am a huge fan of everything Wednesday Martin writes - her astute observations are filled with wisdom and humor, and more than once have helped me see the world through different eyes." (Jane Green, New York Times bestselling author of *Saving Grace*)

"People aiming to study primates in the wild are carefully taught to avoid anthropomorphism. Reading human motivation into the behavior of free-living primates is a no-no. But what about using information from primate field studies to interpret human behavior "chimpomorphically"? Confronted with the need to cope with sociopathological conditions on New York's ultra-wealthy Upper East Side, Wednesday Martin delved deeply into her knowledge of primate behavior. The result is this book in which primatology leads to a deeper understanding of the human hearts that beat beneath their designer-clad exteriors. A tour de force" (Robert Martin, Ph.D., Professor of Biological Anthropology and Curator Emeritus, Field Museum of Chicago and author of *How We Do It: the Evolution and Future of Human Reproduction*)

"When mean girls and wannabes grow up, they become the women so perfectly depicted in Wednesday Martin's funny and intelligent memoir. How wonderful that she survived the jungle of Park Avenue with strong female friendships intact." (Rosalind Wiseman, author of *Queen Bees and Wannabes*)

"Dr. Wednesday Martin is a genius. This book is a must for anyone fascinated by people, trends, and tribes." (Lucy Sykes, author of *The Knockoff*)

"Upon relocating to New York City's Upper East Side, a wannabe socialite assimilates by anthropologically decoding the behaviors of mom natives in this memoir about fitting in while standing out." (*O Magazine*)

About the Author

Wednesday Martin, PhD, has worked as writer and social researcher in New York City for more than two decades. The author of *Stepmonster* and *Primates of Park Avenue*, she has appeared on *Today*, CNN, NPR,

NBC News, the *BBC Newshour*, and *Fox News* as an expert on step-parenting and parenting issues. She writes for the online edition of *Psychology Today* and her work has appeared in *The New York Times*. She was a regular contributor to *New York Post*'s parenting and lifestyle pages for several years and has written for *The Daily Telegraph*. Wednesday received her PhD from Yale University and lives in New York City with her husband and their two sons.

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Primates of Park Avenue

CHAPTER ONE

Comme Il Faut

Fieldnotes

Environment and ecology

The island is a geographically, culturally, and politically isolated landmass roughly seven times longer than it is wide. The climate is temperate, with relatively harsh winters and extremely hot and humid summers that, in recent years, approximate tropical conditions due in part to two centuries of intensive land clearing and industrial practices. The island's longitude is 40°43'42" N, and its latitude is 73°59'39" W.

Island dwellers live in a state of ecological release—resources such as food and water are abundant and easily procured; disease is minimal; there is no predation. Living in a niche characterized by literally unprecedented abundance, untethered from hardship, the wealthiest islanders are able to invest heavily in each and every offspring and to invent elaborate and complex social codes and rites, the observance of which are time-, labor-, and resource-intensive.

In spite of the extraordinary abundance of food, water, and other resources island-wide, there is persistent and marked poverty in some areas. The isolation, extreme population density, and vast discrepancies in wealth, as well as traditionally gender-scripted roles and behaviors around child rearing and work, may inform and in part account for many of the strange-seeming behaviors of the wealthiest island dwellers, discussed in the following pages.

Island dwellings

The island's inhabitants are primarily vertical dwellers, making their homes directly on top of one another in structures of finely ground stone. Living in these "vertical villages" allows inhabitants to maximize physical space, a precious commodity in short supply on their tiny and remarkably densely populated island. In some locations, particularly where the wealthiest islanders reside, these vertical villages are notably restrictive, with a secretive "council of elders" presiding over who will and will not be allowed to live there. Scouting out a dwelling is one of the most labor-intensive practices of the female members of the tribe I studied—most often the task is undertaken by primiparas. Almost without exception, "dwelling shamans" guide these women in their quests for homes—which are also quests for identity. The shamans offer specialized knowledge, counsel, and emotional support throughout this costly, protracted, and painstaking initiation process.

Geographical origins of islanders

Island dwellers have heterogeneous geographical origins. Many dispersed at sexual maturity from their natal groups in distant, smaller, and even rural villages, immigrating to the island for enhanced professional, sexual, and marital prospects. Other island dwellers are indigenous; their status is higher than that of the nonautochthonous residents, particularly if they were raised in certain corners of the island or attended particular “learning huts” while growing up there.

Beliefs of and about islanders

Whether they are autochthonous or émigrés, island dwellers are believed by outsiders, many visitors, and their countrymen to harbor haughty attitudes about themselves and their island. They are known throughout the land for their brusqueness; intellectual gifts; dazzling adornment practices; and acumen in barter, trade, and negotiation. Increasingly, their trade is in invisible ideas and abstractions, enhancing the sense that they have privileged knowledge and even “magical” powers. The journeys and tribulations of those who move to the island and struggle to succeed there are the stuff of legend, literally—there exists a long oral and written tradition about the supposedly indomitable and unique spirit of people who are able to “make it there.” Once they have established themselves on the island, it is said, they can “make it anywhere.”

Resource acquisition and distribution

On the whole, the island dwellers are the richest in the entire nation, living untethered from the environmental constraints that have such a profound impact on life-history courses in other habitats worldwide. Obtaining adequate calories for themselves and their children, the main ecological challenge to parents worldwide and throughout our evolutionary prehistory, is a simple given for wealthy island dwellers. However, as in many industrial and postindustrial societies, fathers of the very traditionally gender-scripted tribe I studied tend to focus on the job of provisioning their wives and families with less-tangible resources, including financial, social, and cultural capital. While many island-dwelling females work outside the home, during the childbearing and child-rearing years, many wealthy female islanders believe it is their “role” to remain home with their children, where they are often assisted by alloparents—individuals other than parents who take on parental roles. They call these alloparents “housekeepers,” “nannies,” and “caregivers.”

Island organization

The island is organized, in the minds of island dwellers, into four quadrants: Up, Down, Right, and Left. The “Up” and “Down” areas are believed to be markedly distinct—with Up being preferable for raising children and Down being considered primarily a place for pre-reproductives, cultural “outsiders,” feasting, and ecstatic nighttime rites. Islanders further divide their island into left and right hemispheres. “Left” and “Right,” like “Up” and “Down,” are believed to have different—even polar opposite—characteristics. Left is believed to be more casual and progressive, in contrast to Right’s perceived formality and conservatism.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Thersa Davenport:

The ability that you get from Primates of Park Avenue: A Memoir is the more deep you excavating the information that hide into the words the more you get considering reading it. It doesn't mean that this book is hard to recognise but Primates of Park Avenue: A Memoir giving you thrill feeling of reading. The article writer conveys their point in certain way that can be understood simply by anyone who read the idea because the author of this reserve is well-known enough. That book also makes your current vocabulary increase well. That makes it easy to understand then can go with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We advise you for having this Primates of Park Avenue: A Memoir instantly.

Trevor Cianciolo:

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Darrin Russell:

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