

Margaret Mead

American anthropologist, author, lecturer, one of the most influential female thinkers in the social sciences. Margaret Mead was a celebrity as well as an intellectual, who wrote academic and popular books. However, some doubts have arisen about her famous *COMING IN AGE IN SAMOA* (1928), but otherwise Mead is respected as a major scientist in anthropology. Her other works include *MALE AND FEMALE* (1949), *AN ANTHROPOLOGIST AT WORK* (1959), a study of her colleague Ruth Benedict, *A RAP ON A RACE* (1971) with James Baldwin, and memoirs *BLACKBERRY WINTER* (1972).



"As the traveler who has once been from home is wiser than he who has never left his own doorstep, so a knowledge of one other culture should sharpen our ability to scrutinize more steadily, to appreciate more lovingly, our own." (from *Coming of Age in Samoa*, 1928)

Margaret Mead was born in Philadelphia into a Quaker family. The family tradition was strong in the social sciences. Her father, Edward Sherwood Mead, was a professor of economics at the University of Pennsylvania, and mother, Emily (Fogg) Mead, a sociologist. In her early childhood, before she knew what the words meant, Mead learned to say, "My father majored in economics and minored in sociology and my mother majored in sociology and minored in economics." In 1919 she entered DePauw University but transferred after a year to Barnard College, where she took a course in anthropology with Professor Franz Boas (1858-1942) and his assistant, Dr. Ruth Benedict.

According to Margaret Caffey's biography about Ruth Benedict, Mead became eventually Benedict's intimate friend. Her first marriage with Luther S. Cressman, a minister and archaeologist, ended in 1928. In the same year she married Dr. Reo F. Fortune, a New Zealand anthropologist, with whom she published *GROWING UP IN NEW GUINEA* (1930). It compared observations of Pacific Island life with contemporary American educational system. Without accepting promiscuity Mead suggested that in modern society sex attitudes might be more relaxed.

Mead received her Ph.D. in 1929 from Columbia University. She carried out a number of field studies in the Pacific. Edward Mead once had said her, "It's a pity you aren't a boy; you'd have gone far." Her first field trip Mead made in 1925-26 to the island of Tau, in Samoa. There she studied the development of girls in that society, and published the results in *Coming of Age in Samoa*. In the st

udy she investigated adolescence lovemaking, and demonstrated that the transition of Samoan young girls into adult women went apparently without emotional crises. The result was contrasted with that of American girls. Mead suggested, that Americans could learn things from the Samoans about raising children. In 1983 an Australian researcher, Derek Freeman, claimed in his book *Margaret Mead and Samoa* (1983), that she had ignored biological factors in favor of a theory of cultural determination of sex roles. Jane Howard in her biography of Margaret Mead (1984) tells that she characterized the men of the Arapesh people of New Guinea as gentle and unaggressive while her co-worker Reo F. Fortune recorded that many old men "claimed one or more war homicides to his credit."

On her other expeditions Mead made field studies in the Admiralty Islands, New Guinea, and Bali. From 1926 Mead held a position at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. She remained a member of the staff for the rest of her career, retiring as a curator emeritus of ethnology in 1969. Mead was a visiting lecturer at Vassar College (1939-41), a lecturer at Columbia University (1947-51), and from 1954 to 1978 she was an adjunct professor of anthropology at Columbia. From 1969 to 1971 Mead was a professor of anthropology and a chairman of the Division of Social Sciences at Fordham University. She also held a number of visiting professorships. At the age of 72, she was elected to the presidency of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

In 1936 Mead went with her third husband, the English anthropologist Gregory Bateson, to Bali to do field work. After about fifteen years, they divorced, but the period was probably the richest in her life. "American women are good mothers," she once said, "but they make poor wives; Americans are very poor at being attentive to anybody else." In their Bali years they took and annotated 25,000 photographs. Catherine Bateson, their daughter and only child, born in 1939, became the target of her parent's enthusiastic observations - her birth was filmed and her childhood was scrupulously recorded. *BALINESE CHARACTER* appeared in 1942 and *GROWTH AND CULTURE*, written with the collaboration of Frances Cooke Macgregor, in 1951.

During World War II Mead served as an executive secretary of the committee on food habits of the National Research Council. She wrote pamphlets for the Office of War Information. After the war Mead published *Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in a Changing World*, which made use of her observations of people in the South Pacific and the East Indies. "We know of no culture that has said, articulately, that there is no difference between men and women except in the way they contribute to the creation of the next generation." (from *Male and Female*, 1948) Partly Mead wanted to prove that although there are certain differences between sexes - connected with impregnation, giving birth and nursing - they shouldn't be considered restrictions. In the last chapter Mead defended women's right to develop their talents. She also tentatively presented the supposition that men have a subtle superiority in natural sciences, mathematics, and instrumental music compared to women, who are more skillful in humanities in which they can use intuition. *THEMES IN FRENCH CULTURE* (1954) was an attempt to apply anthropological mythology to the study of Western society. It was written with Rhoda Budendey Métraux, a younger colleague with whom Mead shared a house in Greenwich Village for many years.

"Mead's anthropology had many other red, white and blue-blooded virtues. One was the common anthropological conceit, out of which she made a career, to the effect that the ultimate value of studying other cultures was the use we could make of them to reconstruct our own - a heady kind of intellectual imperialism, as if the final meaning of others' lives was their significance for us." (Marshall Sahlins in *The New York Times*, August 26, 1984)

With her publications, lectures on women's rights, child rearing and education and other social issues Mead became something of a guru, a larger than life character, who, in spite of her 5-foot-2-inch figure, was always the center of attention wherever she went. Among Mead's several awards is Unesco's Kalinga Prize. Its other receivers include Björn Kurtén, George Gamow, Fred Hoyle, Julian Huxley, Konrad Lorenz, and Bertrand Russell. One of her central themes in speeches and writings was that while cultural factors are fundamental determinants of behavior, they are themselves open to influences and capable of improvement. Mead's memoirs, *BLACKBERRY WINTER*, appeared in 1972. She died of cancer in New York on November 15, 1978. From her 39 books, she wrote 15 in collaboration. Mead also was Ruth Benedict's (1887-1948) literary executor and published in 1959 an anthology, *An Anthropologist at Work*, based on her colleague's letters, diaries, and other writings. Mead's daughter, Mary Catherine Bateson Kassarian, became an anthropologist and dean of social sciences at Raza Shah Civar University in Iran. Valuable first-hand information of Margaret Mead is to be found in her work *With a Daughter's Eye: Letters From the Field, 1925-1975* (1984). For further reading: *Intertwined Lives: Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Their Circle* by Lois W. Banner (2003); *Adolescent Storm and Stress* by J.E. Cote (1994); *Margaret Mead* by Edra Ziesk (1990); *Margaret Mead* by Phyllis Grosskurth (1989); *Ruth Benedict: Stranger in This Land* by M.M. Caffey (1989); *Margaret Mead: A Life* by Jane Howard (1985); *Margaret Mead, a Life* by J. Howard (1984); *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth* by D. Freeman (1983)

Selected works:

COMING OF AGE IN SAMOA, 1928

AN INQUIRY INTO THE QUESTION OF CULTURAL STABILITY IN POLYNESIA, 1928

THE MAORIS AND THEIR ART, 1928

COMING UP IN NEW GUINEA, 1930

SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS OF MANU'S, 1930

THE CHANGING CULTURE OF AN INDIAN TRIBE, 1932

SEX AND TEMPERAMENT IN THREE PRIMITIVE SOCIETIES, 1935 - Sukupuoli ja luonne kolmessa primitiivisessä yhteiskunnassa

THE MOUNTAIN ARAPESH, 1938-49 (5 vols. in 4)

FROM THE SOUTH SEAS, 1939

BALINESE CHARACTER, 1942 (with Gregory Bateson)

AND KEEP YOUR POWDER DRY, 1942

BALINESE CHARACTER, A PHOTOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS, 1942

MALE AND FEMALE, 1949 - Mies ja nainen

SOVIET ATTITUDES TOWARD AUTHORITY, 1951

GROWTH AND CULTURE, 1951 (with Frances Cooke Macgregor, photos by Gregory Bateson)

THE STUDY OF CULTURE AT A DISTANCE, 1953 (ed. with Rhoda Métraux)

PRIMITIVE HERITAGE, 1953 (ed. with Nicholas Calas)

THEMES IN FRENCH CULTURE, 1955 (ed. with Rhoda Métraux)

CHILDHOOD IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURES, 1955 (ed. with Martha Wolfenstein)

NEW LIVES FOR OLD, 1956

AN ANTHROPOLOGIST AT WORK, 1959

PEOPLE AND PLACES, 1959

A CREATIVE LIFE FOR YOUR CHILDREN, 1962

CONTINUITIES IN CULTURAL EVOLUTION, 1964

FAMILY, 1965 (with Ken Heyman)

ANTHROPOLOGIST AND WHAT THEY DO, 1965

AMERICAN WOMEN, 1965 (ed. with Frances B. Kaplan)

THE WAGON AND THE STAR, 1966 (with M. Brown)

THE CHANGING CULTURAL PATTERNS OF WORK AND LEISURE, 1967

CULTURE AND COMMITMENT, 1970

A WAY OF SEEING, 1970 (with Rhoda Métraux)

A RAP ON RACE, 1971 (with James Baldwin)

BLACKBERRY WINTER: MY EARLIER YEARS, 1972

TWENTIETH CENTURY FAITH, 1972

WORLD ENOUGH, 1975

LETTERS FROM THE FIELD, 1925-74, 1977 (with R.B. Métraux)

MARGARET MEAD, SOME PERSONAL VIEWS, 1979 (with R.B. Métraux)

ASPECTS OF THE PRESENT, 1980 (with W.W. Kellogg)

THE ATMOSPHERE, 1980

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