Margaret Mead: An American Phenomenon, 1901–1978

Margaret Mead strongly identified herself with America and American culture. She felt that she came from the heart of American society. Her grandmother, Martha Ramsay Mead, who gave her most of her early education, grew up in the little town of Winchester, Ohio, which had been founded by two of Margaret's great-great grandfathers. Margaret's father was a professor of economics at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania; her mother was a sociologist whose doctoral dissertation dealt with the adaptations of Italian immigrants to American life; and her grandmother was a schoolteacher who developed advanced ideas on the proper education of children. Thus Margaret was a third-generation woman social scientist.

With such a family background, Margaret never had an identity crisis. Nothing within herself distressed her. She knew who she was and where she came from. In her autobiography she wrote "I was always glad that I was a girl. I cannot remember ever wanting to be a boy. It seems to me this was because of the way I was treated by my parents. I was a wanted child, and when I was born I was the kind of child my parents wanted."

Her parents and grandparents were religious skeptics, but Margaret at the age of 11 had herself baptized in the Episcopal Church and all her life she retained a firm religious faith. She enjoyed going to church because it contributed to her sense of rootedness. Her faith was emotional rather than intellectual, and she felt no inconsistency between her dedication to science and her religious feeling.

When she was young, Margaret painted; wrote poetry, the beginnings of a novel, and short plays for school occasions; and she edited the *Barnard College Bulletin*. But she became convinced that she did not have the "superlative talent" needed to become a professional artist or writer. She chose science instead, in the belief that "science is an activity in which there is room for many degrees, as well as many kinds, of giftedness." Yet she could not forgo her love of words and imagery, or her artist's delight in creating a world out of impressionistic details. No one who has read the beautiful opening pages of *Coming of Age in Samoa* can fail to be caught by her poetic spell. Her artistic impulse made her one of the great interpreters of anthropology to the wider public.

Few scientists have demonstrated so clearly the uses of the seeing eye and of imagination in both science and art. After each of her field studies of the societies of the South Seas, she published a technical monograph which contributed to anthropological theory, as well as a book for more general readers. *Coming of Age in Samoa* was followed by *Social Organization of Manu'a,* and *Growing Up in New Guinea* by *Kinship in the Admiralty Islands*.

In much of her scientific work she was decades ahead of her time, for example, in her interest in comparative education and her concept of culture as a communication system. Her far-reaching contributions to anthropology are well illustrated in *Socialization as Cultural Communication*, edited by Theodore Schwartz*, in which each of the contributors based his article on her seminal ideas.

One of her colleagues has described her fieldwork as having a style that no one could emulate, compounded by talent, energy, and rapidity. In everything she did, she worked very fast, with self-confidence and an absence of self-doubt. She was not introspective, and she possessed an inner harmony.

Margaret began early to devote part of her time and energy to the American Association for the Advancement of Science. She became an officer of Section H–Anthropology, in 1950. She served on the Council of the Association, on the Board of Directors, and on several special committees before and after her election to the presidential succession in 1973. Her long relationship with the AAAS gave her an almost proprietary interest in the organization. This made for some interesting exchanges when she joined the Board of Directors as president-elect.

Perhaps because of the extreme difference in our bodily proportions (I am six four and she was about five one), which may have reminded her of her third husband, Gregory Bateson, who is even taller than I, she loved to argue with me on almost any subject. She would make some outrageous statement, which I would gullibly challenge, and we were off on what other Board members called

*Chairman of the Department of Anthropology, University of California, San Diego.

AAAS Socio-Psychological Prize

Submission of entries in the 1979 competition for the AAAS Socio-Psychological Prize of $1000 is invited. Established in 1952 with funds donated by Arthur F. Bentley, the prize is awarded annually for a meritorious paper that furthers understanding of human psychological-social-cultural behavior. The prize is intended to encourage in social inquiry the development and application of the kind of dependable methodology that has proved so fruitful in the natural sciences.

Entries should present a completed analysis of a problem, the relevant data, and interpretation of the data in terms of the postulates with which the study began. Purely empirical studies, no matter how important, and purely theoretical formulations, no matter how thoughtful, are not eligible.

The winning entry will be selected by a Committee of Judges selected by a management committee consisting of officers of the AAAS Sections on Anthropology (H), Psychology (J), and Social and Economic Sciences (K), and the Executive Officer of AAAS. The prize will be presented at the 1980 Annual Meeting in San Francisco, California, 3–8 January.

Unpublished manuscripts and manuscripts published after 1 January 1978 are eligible. The deadline for receipt of entries is 1 July 1979. For entry blank and instructions, write to the AAAS Executive Office at the AAAS address.