



Margaret Mead

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Author Profile

One of the pioneers of modern American anthropology, Mead was known as a tireless field investigator and a skillful writer with a popular appeal. Conducting most of her ethnographic work in Samoa and other islands of Oceania, she emphasized the determining influences of culture on the individual personality, and she focused on cultural differences in child rearing, gender roles, sexual rules, and sexual practices. In addition to descriptions of life in “primitive” societies, Mead’s writings included strong criticisms of gender roles and conventional sexual morality in the United States.

The most controversial of her twenty-three books included *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928), *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (1935), and *Male and Female* (1949). Although governmental agents rarely censored her books, conservative critics often tried, and sometimes were able, to keep these books out of local libraries, and from time to time high school teachers were criticized for including her works in reading lists. In 1961, for example, the Mothers United for Decency of Oklahoma City operated a “smutmobile” which prominently displayed a paperback edition of *Male and Female*.

Bibliography

Bateson, Mary Catherine. *With a Daughter’s Eye: A Memoir of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1994. Bateson looks back on her childhood and her anthropologist parents Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson. This portrait sheds light on Mead’s achievements and stands alone as an important contribution for scholars of her work.

Cassidy, Robert. *Margaret Mead: A Voice of the Century*. New York: Universe Books, 1992. Provides an understanding of the scope of Mead’s influence in the field of anthropology and elsewhere.

Cote, James E. *Adolescent Storm and Stress: An Evaluation of the Mead-Freeman Controversy*. New York: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1994. A detailed account of the Mead-Freeman controversy.

Foerstel, Lenora, and Angela Gilliam, eds. *Confronting the Margaret Mead Legacy: Scholarship, Empire, and the South Pacific*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992. This is a compilation of ten articles critiquing Mead’s anthropological achievements. Foerstel and Gilliam’s “Margaret Mead’s Contradictory Legacy” is particularly useful in its discussion of her entire career, including her long service in American intelligence agencies.

Freeman, Derek. *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983. An interesting aspect of Mead’s life is the controversies she generated. This work was written by her harshest critic.

Holmes, Lowell Don. *Quest for the Real Samoa: The Mead/Freeman Controversy and Beyond*. Smith Hadley, Mass.: Bergin Garvey, 1987. A general discussion and analysis of the Mead-Freeman controversy.

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Howard, Jane. *Margaret Mead: A Life*. New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1990. A clear and comprehensive picture of Mead's life.

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