

Margaret Mead wasn't your grandma

by Carol White

Margaret Mead, A Life

Jane Howard

Simon & Schuster, New York 1984

\$19.95 hardbound, 527 pp.

With a Daughter's Eye

A Memoir of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson

Mary Catherine Bateson

William Morrow & Co., New York 1984

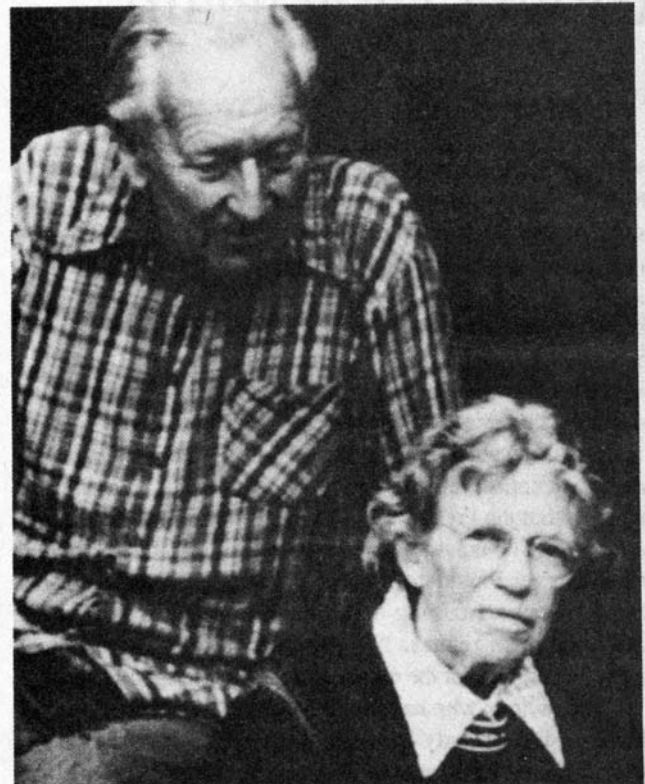
\$15.95 hardbound, 142 pp.

Every time you see a young person with puffy, red-rimmed eyes and a vacant stare, shuffling down the street, in sync with a transistor radio which is wired into his or her ears—you should know that you have Margaret Mead and her three husbands to thank. That being the case, I would not recommend that you rush out to buy either of the two biographies which were released last year.

Each in its own way is meant to convince you that Margaret was a real dear. In fact, Ms. Howard tries to turn her into a grandmother from the get go because of her close relationship to her own grandchildren. However, it does not take too much reading between the lines to determine that dear Margaret was a domineering, ambitious schemer, who would stop at nothing in order to push forward her own professional career.

But who really cares! The important thing about Margaret was expressed in her collaboration with a group of anthropologists whose purpose was to engineer the counterculture. She was first deployed to Samoa by anthropologists Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict to defend the thesis that sexual libertinism during adolescence correlates positively with the mental health of a culture. Right before the start of the Second World War, she and her third husband, Gregory Bateson, studied Balinese culture.

Bali was already a haven for homosexuals, opium smokers, and modern artists from the United States and Europe. The focal point of the culture was the Balinese dancers who performed in a state of trance, and in other aspects of their life maintained a schizophrenic state of dissociation. How effectively they were able to translate this experience is clear in those aspects of Gregory Bateson's career which his daughter does not think important to mention—such as his promotion of LSD among youth.



Margaret Mead with third husband Gregory Bateson

Bateson was the coordinator of those various programs which, in the 1950s, spread this mind-destroying psychedelic drug among unsuspecting layers of the population, such as veterans and young people who were attracted to rock concerts. Bateson established the LSD research Center at Palo Alto Veterans Administration Center in California and sponsored Ken Kesey (of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*) and the Merry Pranksters.

According to her daughter, one of the few things which Margaret reproached herself for was her stupidity in advocating the "legalization" of marijuana instead of calling for decriminalization. Using the honest term had aroused too great an opposition in the population.

On the other hand, Margaret prided herself on her collaboration with Dr. Spock. Together they created the preconditions for the counterculture by convincing mothers to manipulate rather than discipline their children. The general ban-

ality of postwar suburban life in the United States weakened the moral fiber of the nation—but every aspect of the Mead-Spock program was carefully planned to induce hedonistic values in children, and an unwillingness to accept the necessary restraints of a worth ethic.

Mead under attack

The two books were probably written as an answer to an attack on Margaret Mead which has made the headlines. In February 1983, Derek Freeman, an Australian anthropologist, documented that Margaret's account of life on Samoa was a complete hoax. It appears that the culture was paranoid and embittered rather than as she pictured it, relaxed and easy-going. Both Jane Howard and Catherine Bateson go to some length to defend Margaret Mead from the charge of deliberate dishonesty by pointing out that anthropological studies are necessarily biased and incomplete.


This is contradicted, however, by the internal evidence provided by Ms. Howard herself. The same issue was a matter of bitter dispute between Margaret and another of her husbands, the anthropologist Reo Fortune. They did field research together in New Guinea. Mead, of course, was given the opportunity of widely publishing her views, while her quickly divorced husband's career was ruined. Anyone reading these two books will come away absolutely, and correctly, convinced that anthropology is a fraud.

As I said, though, neither of these books is worth reading. They do not explain that the purpose of anthropology is brainwashing whole cultures. Mead, and her teachers and husbands, studied primitive, paranoid, small cultures in order to test their theories as to how to turn the United States into such a collection of paranoid communities.

Who really cares that Margaret had a lesbian relationship with Ruth Benedict among others—or that Gregory suggested to his daughter that they have a sexual relationship? (These were not the kind of mass murderers of whom it can be said: "Oh, but they were so good to their family.") The important thing is that they tried to "turn on" the youth of the United States and Western Europe to perversion. And this neither author finds exceptionable, or worth reporting in detail.

An interesting sidelight on the books is provided by the Freeman controversy. Margaret Mead was sponsored by Franz Boas as part of his promotion of cultural relativism in place of the more overt racism of the Harriman-sponsored eugenicists of the Museum of Natural History. This was the liberal wing of anthropology; the soft fascists who would deny the backwardness of these primitive cultures as a way of forever condemning people to the backwardness imposed upon them by the domination of their various imperial masters.

The more open racists—the same people who exhibited a stuffed Eskimo in the Museum of Natural History—defend the view that "backwardness" is biologically determined. Freeman is of this latter school, which—sadly, but not surprisingly—is having a resurgence today.



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