

MARGARET MEAD

b. December 16, 1901

d. November 15, 1978

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.”

A recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, Margaret Mead brought public attention to anthropology and influenced the sexual revolution of the 1960's.

Margaret Mead was an innovative cultural anthropologist who brought public attention to the field by making her work understandable and relevant. Famous for her trademark cape and walking stick, Mead shaped anthropology with her nontraditional research methods.

Raised in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, Mead was the first child of two social scientists. She began building her observational skills when her grandmother asked her to take notes on the behavior of her two younger sisters. She encouraged Mead to notice “emerging differences in temperament between the two girls.”

Mead received a degree in psychology from Barnard College in 1923. She received an M.A. in 1924 and a Ph.D. in 1929 from Columbia University.

Mead rocked the American public and the anthropology world with her first book, “Coming of Age In Samoa” (1928), about the sexual behavior of young Samoan women. This book and her subsequent reports on the sexual attitudes of other cultures influenced the sexual revolution of the 1960's.

She married three times, all to men who were anthropologists. From 1955 until her death, she lived and worked with female anthropologist Rhoda Metraux. Evidence of their romantic relationship can be found in “To Cherish the Life of the World: Selected Letters of Margaret Mead” (2006).

Mead wrote or contributed to more than 30 books, gave hundreds of speeches, and taught at Columbia University and Fordham University. She worked at the American Museum of Natural History, where she was named curator emeritus.

At the age of 72, Mead was elected president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. In 1979, she was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor.



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