

**TALES FROM THE INTERNET:  
MARGARET MEAD'S LEGACY IN AMERICAN CULTURE**

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This essay explores the importance of Margaret Mead for American society as revealed through the cultural domain of the Internet. By examining sites accessible through popular search engines, the essay analyzes Mead's life using Joseph Campbell's myth of the hero's journey. Mead's legend emphasizes her journey to far places and her return with important gifts of knowledge for society. Mead is also a distinctly American hero by representing values of pioneering, defense of personal freedom, and commitment to bettering society. The recognition of the importance of culture on human behavior, Mead's own life as a role model for people, the wisdom of her quotations, and anthropology itself—which has become synonymous with Mead in the popular mind—are all restorative gifts from Mead, the hero.

NOT LONG AGO, I encountered Margaret Mead's name in the course of non-anthropology events twice in one week. The first was at a meeting where the speaker quoted Mead on the challenges of educating children in a changing culture. The second was an article on corporate behavior where the scientist was compared to Margaret Mead. I wondered how Mead, dead more than twenty years, is so important that the American public still responds to her name. I decided to investigate the extent of Mead's presence in the new cultural domain of the Internet.

The Internet was still in its infancy at the time of Mead's death in 1978, as was the personal computer. Mead would not have participated in Internet communication, which came into its own in the 1990s. Nevertheless, I had no difficulty in finding Mead's name using the popular search engines. In fact, I found a veritable celebration of Mead on the Internet. Her name is on more than a hundred Web sites, including over thirty biographies—

some composed by respected encyclopedias, others by unknown writers. I found her quotations on sites of dozens of organizations. Three schools are named after her, as are two awards and a film festival. Her image is on a U.S. postage stamp. Her books can be easily ordered through the Internet. You may order an audiobook of an actress reading from Mead's work, and buy a poster of her portrait and words. An entrepreneur selling rune cards uses her name as endorsement. A grade school curriculum is designed about her life and contributions. She is presented as a role model for young people and her words are incorporated into dozens of grassroots sites, speaking to community action, the environment, and love for other human beings.

All of this leads me to say that Mead has come to symbolize more than Mead the person. As revealed through the Internet, Mead is a legend that can be interpreted as that of a mythic hero or heroine. She represents values of importance to Americans. In this essay, I explore Internet Web sites to determine what these values are and what Mead means to the public.

The Internet itself provides a public forum for individual statements and group discussions. Entries are not necessarily reviewed nor validated. The Internet as a medium, while vibrant and constantly changing, also has the capacity to be static. Web site addresses may change overnight and links from one site to another may be broken without notice. At the same time, Web pages may be left unchanged for years; information may be old or inaccurate. Chat-rooms and listserves may be archived, and conversations once lively and cutting-edge, are now outdated. The Internet is creative as well as pedantic. Some sites are filled with graphics, others with uninterrupted text. Sites may have grammatical and spelling errors, and factual inaccuracies. Some sites are original; other blatantly plagiarized. Most sites do not identify the author of the words nor the date of writing.

This essay gains its inspiration from the dozens of personal Web pages that in some way refer to Margaret Mead. I have not used academic databases nor Internet library sources. In fact, I have tried to avoid the peer-review, scholarly side of the Internet. I am looking for the image of Mead as revealed through Web sites accessible through popular search engines. My interest is not in the accuracy of the Internet accounts but in the message conveyed.

### **The Hero's Journey**

The journey of the hero is described by Joseph Campbell (1968) as a monomyth crossing all cultures. In this myth, the hero follows the path of adventure through the passages of separation, initiation, and return. From a childhood

showing manifestations of future destiny, the hero hears the call of adventure and sets out from home (Campbell (1968:320). The hero passes over the “threshold of adventure,” and with the aid of helpers, journeys into unfamiliar worlds where the hero is tested and triumphs (Campbell 1968:245–246). In the process, the hero is transformed, gaining expanded consciousness and freedom. In the final stage, the hero returns to the homeland, bringing the boon, the gift that will restore the society (Campbell 1968:196–197). The hero’s final challenge is reintegration into society, to move from the land of the exotic to the land of the common place, and to present society with “life-redeeming elixir” (Campbell 1968:216). Although the hero is honored and recognized by society, the purpose in the hero’s journey is not to benefit the hero. Campbell (1988:xv) sees this as the distinction between a celebrity and hero; the hero gains wisdom to serve others.

### *Early Life*

Like mythological figures, facts of Mead’s origins are shrouded in mist—or at least inconsistencies in Internet accounts. While many sites agree she was born in Philadelphia in 1901, some maintain that she was born on 16 December, some on 17 December, others on 18 December. Some note that she was one of a family of five children; others that she was the oldest of four (*Birthdays, December 17* [n.d.; hereafter *Birthdays*]; Del Monte et al., 1999; Emuseum 2004; Flaherty 2004; Gale Group n.d.; Ogieva n.d.; Raven n.d.; Sable 1996). Stories of her childhood foreshadow both her life as an anthropologist, and her boon, her gift, to society. Born to highly educated parents, Mead was distinctive from other children. From an early age she was an independent thinker and was taught to observe the behavior of other children. Her family encouraged her to play with children of all economic and racial backgrounds. She was schooled in feminist ideas by her mother and grandmother who taught her that women could have professions. Mead, herself, felt her distinctiveness and determined to make a difference in society (Gale Group n.d.; GirlSite 2000; Keeler 1997; Kristi 1997; Ogieva n.d.; Raven n.d.).

### *Preparation for the Hero’s Journey*

Higher education was primary for the young Mead. Her father resisted her attending college: she had to struggle to persuade him to let her go. She attended DePauw University in Indiana, but then transferred to Barnard College in New York before entering graduate school at Columbia University. Two important people emerge as helpers from this time: Franz Boas, a

mentor, and Ruth Benedict, a friend and collaborator (Fact Monster 2000; Gale Group n.d.; National Women's Hall of Fame 1998).

### *The Calling*

In college Mead was introduced to the field of anthropology and became aware of rapidly disappearing cultures around the world: "That settled it for me. Anthropology had to be done now. Other things could wait" (quoted in Gale Group n.d.).

### *The Journey*

Under Boas' guidance, but, according to some, against his will, (e.g., National Women's Hall of Fame 1998; Snider 2000), Mead set out alone for Samoa. She was either twenty-three or twenty-four years old, depending on the account. Anthropological research fascinated her. Although Samoa was her most famous destination, she subsequently lived and studied throughout Oceania, including New Guinea and Bali. Throughout her journeys, Mead studied and lived with the local people, learning their languages and cultures (*American Museum of Natural History* 2004; Blackbirch Press 1999; Encarta Online Encyclopedia 2000 [hereafter Encarta]; Gale Group n.d.; Oxford University Press 1999 [hereafter Oxford]).

### *The Road of Trials*

Living conditions were sometimes challenging. She wrote home:

'The natives are superficially agreeable, but they go in for cannibalism, headhunting, infanticide, incest, avoidance and joking relationships, and biting lice in half with their teeth' (quoted in National Women's Hall of Fame [1998]).

Mead's personal life was challenged as well. While studying in New Guinea she met Gregory Bateson, who became her third husband and the father of her daughter, and with whom she was to do much research. Mead had also collaborated in research with her second husband, (an anthropologist, or perhaps a psychologist), Reo Fortune, whom she met on her original return from Samoa, or en route to Europe, depending on accounts. Mead's first husband was a young theology student whom she married after graduation from college (*Emuseum* 2004; Flaherty 2004; Gale Group n.d.).

*Reintegration into Society*

When she returned from her adventures abroad, Mead published *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928). Mead became famous for this book, which has never gone out of print, and later published other works based on her South Seas voyages, including *Growing Up in New Guinea* (1930), *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (1935), and *Male and Female* (1949), among others (Comptons 1998; Flaherty 2004; Keeler 1997; Women's International Center 2001). She worked at the American Museum of Natural History in New York for her entire adult life. She also taught at Columbia University and was professor, chair, and perhaps, founder of the anthropology department at Fordham University (Encarta 2000; Fact Monster 2000; Flaherty 2004; Keeler 1997).

Mead brought ideas from her anthropological experience into the public forum (see also McDowell and Bateson [this volume, 4–18 and 162–175]). She was an interpreter, and an intermediary, of other cultures for American society. Through a regular column in *Redbook* magazine, she gave advice and counseling on many issues, including women's rights, child rearing, adolescence, sexual morality, sex roles, race relations, population control, drug abuse, human rights, world-hunger, environmental pollution, and mental health. She also appeared on popular television, including *The Tonight Show*, with Johnny Carson. In 1969, she was named by *Time Magazine* as "Mother of the World" or as "Mother of the Year," depending upon accounts (Comptons 1998; Encarta 2000; Gale Group n.d.; Henne-Wu 1997; Kristi 1997; Lynden n.d.; National Women's Hall of Fame 1998; Raven n.d.; Snider 2000). She hoped that her work would help make society more humane and socially responsible (*American Museum of Natural History* 2004).

A world-recognized scholar and leader, Mead was influential in the United Nations and active in the World Federation for Mental Health. She wrote forty-four books and more than a thousand articles that have been translated into many languages. She received twenty-eight honorary doctorates and was the first anthropologist to be President of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (Delmonte et al., 1999; Fact Monster 2000; Keeler 1997; Margaret Mead Centennial 2001 [2000; hereafter Mead Centennial]; Oxford 1999; Raven n.d.). When she died in New York City on 15 November in 1978 or 1979, a Pacific tribe honored her with a five-day ceremony normally reserved for the highest chiefs. She was posthumously awarded the United States' highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, for her life of service to the public good (Comptons 1998; Del Monte et al., 1999; Mead Centennial 2000; Oxford 1999).

*The Boon*

What was the boon that Margaret Mead brought back? How did her heroic journey help restore society? Four gifts from Mead are identified from the Internet tales: the recognition of the importance of culture on human behavior; elevation of the field of anthropology; Mead herself as a role model; and a particularly significant quotation that has guided individuals and groups for several decades.

The awareness of importance of culture on human behavior is her first gift (Encyclopedia Britannica 2004; World Book 2000). The essence of this gift is articulated in a quote attributed to Mead: "I have spent most of my life studying the lives other peoples—faraway peoples—so that Americans might better understand themselves" (quoted in *American Museum of National History* 2004; Lynden n.d.). This quotation points, as a needle on a compass, to the boon which Mead gave to the general public. This was that the way we as human beings are raised, our family structures, our community, the things we are taught—all of these things go through the lens of culture and that variation in behavior is primarily a result of culture rather than biology. Because of this, we can change behavior and change society. Mead's gift showed Americans that because people can learn from each other, human diversity is a wonderful and vital resource. This gift of the awareness of the importance of culture on human behavior helped break stereotyped sex roles, and encouraged people to live to their fullest potential (GirlSite 2000; Henne-Wu 1997; Mead Centennial 2000):

Margaret went to Samoa, a set of islands in the Pacific Ocean, to study the people there. She watched how people acted around each other, how they spoke, and their body language. On some islands, she noticed that women were in charge of business and men were the artists. Margaret took trips 14 times to study different people and their cultures. She found that men and women are often raised or expected to act a certain way, and these ways can be very different in different societies. By looking at these other cultures, she learned how our society also expects people to act certain ways. . . . Dr. Margaret Mead taught people that they can do anything they are talented at, no matter what society expects them to do (Historia-Mead 2002).

Accompanying the gift of cultural awareness is the gift of anthropology. Mead strove to bring the benefits of anthropology to the public consciousness. She also pioneered the field of psychological anthropology. She was one of the first anthropologists to study child-rearing practices and to promote

the point of view of women and children (*American Museum of Natural History* 2004; Fact Monster 2000; Kristi 1997; Snider 2000; Society for Applied Anthropology 2004; Women's International Center 2001). Mead's gift of anthropology to the public is remembered in the Margaret Mead Award given by the Society for Applied Anthropology:

Margaret Mead, for years among the best known women in the world, was also the best known anthropologist, with a particular talent for bringing anthropology fully into the light of public attention. The Margaret Mead Award . . . celebrate[s] the tradition of bringing anthropology to bear on wider social and cultural issues. The awardee's activity will exemplify skills in broadening the impact of anthropology—skills for which Margaret Mead was admired widely (Society for Applied Anthropology 2004).

The third gift is that of Mead herself. Mead was a superwoman of the 20th century and continues to be a role model for adults and children; men and women, boys and girls alike.

Margaret Mead left a lasting impression on people from her generation as well as those who live today. . . . To women, she served as a source of inspiration for her achievements in a professional field. Through her work as an anthropologist, Mead helped bridge gaps between cultures to resolve misconceptions and existing prejudices. It is easy to see the great contribution that Margaret made to the world and why she is viewed to be an individual that made a difference (Keeler 1997).

Mead was a visionary, speaking out for world peace, and love of the planet earth. She was *avant garde*, applying technologies of film in new ways and exploring new philosophies. She was practical and outspoken. She perceived human life in holistic terms, seeing how changes in one area affected others. She thus brought new perspectives to issues and worked to find creative solutions (Mead Centennial 2000; Mermin 2000). Mead was comfortable with herself and with her life. "Though married and divorced three times, Mead firmly stated, 'I don't consider my marriages as failures. It's idiotic to assume that because a marriage ends, it's failed'" (quoted in Gale Group n.d.). Mead enjoyed motherhood and being a grandmother as well. She lived a long full life and was active until the end. She is quoted as saying, "Sooner or later I'm going to die, but I'm not going to retire" (quoted in Cybernation n.d.).

The final restorative boon that Mead brought back for society was the conveyance of a deep respect for the power and importance of the individual. This respect is revealed in a quotation attributed to Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever has." On the Internet, this is perhaps the most visible of Mead's gifts. These words are watchwords for dozens of groups and concerned individuals.

No one knows exactly where or when Mead actually spoke or wrote these words. On the Institute for Intercultural Studies sponsored Web page, authorities on Mead's life admit that although they receive many inquiries about Mead's "admonition," they are unable to locate when and where it was first used (Mead Centennial 2000). The words may have been spoken spontaneously and then reported in a newspaper. The origin of the quote is a topic of discussion on at least two listserves, but neither sheds light on the origin of the quote (see *Deep Ecology* 1996).

The quote gives hope to people trying to make a difference in their community. As the author of Margaret Mead Centennial site writes:

Margaret Mead's remark about the power of cooperative action for change has inspired original thinking and activity by hundreds of individuals and organizations. When discussing problems and conflicts, she used to say, in the most matter-of-fact tone of voice, 'We need a new social invention' (quoted in Mead Centennial 2000).

Many groups seem to be doing just that, and use her quote to support them. For example, the November Coalition, an action group concerned about American citizens imprisoned on drug charges, prominently uses the quotation in their Web pages and acknowledges its importance to their work: "The famous Margaret Mead quote became our mantra: 'Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world—indeed it is the only thing that ever has'" (quoted in Callahan 1999). In this same site, the editor notes:

It was this small vigil in New York City that drew the writer from *Newsweek Magazine* . . . ! Reminds me of some dear words from Margaret Mead, 'Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world, indeed, it is the only thing that ever has' (quoted in Callahan 1999).

The importance of Mead's quote is seen beyond its sheer number of occurrences. On *quotegeek.com* (Kate 2003), readers rated this quote 10—the



highest score possible. On *honorandcourage.com* (n.d.), the quotation is the only entry on the Web site. There are no other links, and the site is not part of any other series. Mead's statement appears to be the only reason for the site's existence. The quote's importance is also supported by the suggestion that it has entered American folklore. The words have apparently been passed from person to person, from organization to organization. The essence is preserved, even if the actual words may vary. Thus we find: "Never doubt that a small group of dedicated individuals can change the world . . . indeed, it's the only thing that ever has" (Food for Thought 2004); or "Never believe that a few caring people can't change the world. For, indeed, that's all who ever have" (Quoteland 2001); or "A small group of thoughtful and concerned citizens can change the world" (Forgach and Wilkes 1999).

Campbell (1968:238) maintains that the ultimate boon which the hero brings back from the journey is the "freedom to live." The subtitle of one of Mead's Internet biographies is "An Anthropology of Human Freedom" (Mead Centennial 2000). The restorative boon is an expressed part of her legacy.

Mead's position in American Society as someone beyond the ordinary was articulated by New York's Senator Jacob K. Javits in his statement for *The Congressional Record* on 15 January 1979:

'Margaret Mead lives on. She is with us in the brilliant studies she conducted on human behavior; she lives on in the many books she has authored; her ideas thrive in the minds of her students whom she stimulated with her zeal and zest for the search for knowledge and truth' (quoted in Mead Centennial 2000).

Mead's importance is also suggested by the dignitaries who comprised the Margaret Mead Centennial 2001 Honorary Committee. Former President Jimmy Carter and Mrs. Rosalynn Carter were the honorary co-chairs, while the committee itself included luminaries known for their care of others and of the world. The International Honorary Committee, chaired by Claude Lévi-Straus, brought together representatives of the anthropological community from thirty countries (Mead Centennial 2000).

Mead's name is enshrined in institutions and events, including an international video and film festival, a journalism award, an applied anthropology award, and a U.S. postage stamp. Three schools are named in her honor: Margaret Mead Elementary, (Sammamish, Washington); Margaret Mead Junior High School (Elk Grove Village, Illinois); and Margaret Mead School PS #209 (Brooklyn, New York). At Margaret Mead Elementary, Jim Anderson's 1998-99 3rd/4th grade class created a 10 by 12 foot mural of Margaret Mead, inspired by a public mural of Martin Luther King. Although not totally ac-

curate, "The design included a border to symbolize the time Margaret Mead spent in Africa and Samoa doing research" (Anderson and Briggs 1999).

Mead's importance is also signified by the fact that she needs no introduction to the American public. Her name is synonymous with anthropology and anthropologists. When the subject of an article concerns anthropology, frequently Mead's name is included to alert the public to this fact. For example, on a financial information Web site, the headline for an article about organizational analysis reads: "Anthropologists Go Native in the Corporate Village. Get me Margaret Mead! The biggest names in business—GM, Intel, Nynex—enlist anthropologists to decode the rituals of corporate life" (Kane 1996).

Intel's Web site, discussing "Designing the Perfect Product," states:

If the word 'anthropology' makes you think of Margaret Mead wandering around the jungles of Samoa, you haven't heard of ethnography. Like traditional anthropology, it involves long-term observation of people in their natural habitats (Intel 2000; see also Mendels [2000] for *Business Week*).

In addition, Mead's name adds credibility to topics concerning anthropology. For example, when interviewing a new anthropologist, the online journalist uses Mead to set the stage before drawing in pop culture:

Margaret Mead to Tomb Raider. . . . Back in the good old days, women anthropologists were figures of respect and scholarly integrity. Right? I mean even though Margaret Mead looks freaky with those masks, and her first book. . . with its "free love in the South Pacific" theme was a little risqué, she was still quite respectable. But today there is a whole new anthropologist icon on the scene. She's Laura Croft, a gun-wielding, short-shorts wearing, tomb-raiding video game heroine (Womenshands n.d.).

### Myths and Heroes

Why should we be concerned about stories from the Internet that may or not be true? For anthropologists, myths may indeed be tall tales that are factually incomplete or inaccurate. Myths are "sacred narratives" (Howard and Dunaif-Hattis 1992:552) that take events and people beyond the realm of the mundane. Such narratives tell about culture heroes and their exploits. These stories help people to understand themselves and their society, and uphold confidence in the social order. Myths as sacred narratives also provide practical guidance and moral wisdom (Eliade 1963:2, 8; Mair 1963:27; Malinowski [1948]1992:101).

Although myths may contain truth, they are not necessarily true in themselves. Myths are accepted on faith rather than logic, since they cannot necessarily be proven. Furthermore, stories and quotations from heroes are taken out of context and lose scientific validity. They become a “metalanguage” with symbolism and meanings of their own (Barthes 1972:109, 114–115). In the legend of Mead, as repeated throughout the Internet, details shift: the dates of her birth and death; where she met Franz Boas; where she met her husbands; where she did field research; what was her actual award from *Time Magazine*. In the myth, precise history is not important. What *is* important are the messages communicated and the values they represent.

Myths of heroes are particularly important because the hero represents the highest values of the culture, the “soul of the community” (May 1991). Heroes help a society to clarify important qualities and serve the important function of role models. Bettelheim (1977) notes the particular need for heroes for today’s children raised outside the traditional security of the extended family and community.

[I]t is important to provide the modern child with images of heroes who have to go out into the world all by themselves and who, although originally ignorant of the ultimate things, find secure places in the world by following their right way with deep inner confidence (Bettelheim 1977:11).

Children learn that though they may feel abandoned in the world, they will ultimately be guided, like their heroes, and given help when needed. The story of the lone hero, successfully establishing rich and meaningful and relations with the world, continues to reassure and give confidence to people (Bettelheim 1977:11).

### **The American Hero**

The United States has its own set of heroes. Typically they are a no-nonsense, straight-talking, lot. They are brave pioneers who are not afraid of authority. Legendary American heroes such as Daniel Boone, Annie Oakley, Charles Lindbergh, and Martin Luther King, Jr., are defenders of personal freedom and committed to bettering society. These heroes speak to and for common folk (Geist and Nachbar 1983:206; House 1993:65–71).

Mead is also a distinctively American hero who represents American values. She was a pioneer, “an intrepid explorer” (Lynden n.d.), “a true ground-breaker” (Raven n.d.). Mead “pushed back the boundaries of her science” (National Women’s Hall of Fame 1998), and “pioneered research methods

that helped shape American public policy” (Gale Group n.d.). On the postage stamp issued with her picture, the U.S. Postal Service (2003) notes, “Mead explored the effect of culture on the behavior and personalities of children and adults, as well as the differences between men and women.” The background of the stamp shows a palm tree and a piece of tapa cloth, representing the South Pacific, associated with her studies (United States Postal Service 2003). Her journeys required courage and pioneer spirit as she forayed into the areas of controversy and “Unmapped Country” (Women’s International Center, 2001). Mead was a pioneer in the field of anthropology (Del Monte et al., 1999; Snider 2000). Her pioneer use of film is honored in the annual Mead Film and Video Festival at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City and other locations. This unique festival continues to be an important way of disseminating anthropological ideas to the public (Mermin 2000; University of Southern California 1997).

The focus of Mead’s pioneer work, the reason for her boon, is the betterment of society. In her lifetime, she spoke out on a wide range of social issues, including testifying in the U.S. Congress (*American Museum of Natural History* 2004). The many community organizations using Mead’s famous quote on their Web sites reflect her concern for society. Such organizations include those for volunteer service, tax reform, patient care advocacy, peace in the Middle East, citizens against drugs, citizens in favor of drugs, citizens against hate crimes, and parent-teacher associations, among others. Her concern for the quality of life of women is reflected in an award in her name given by the American Medical Writers Association. The Margaret Mead Award for Reporting on Postmenopausal Health is given for writing on health issues for older women (American Medical Writers Association 1998).

Mead was a defender of the individual, regardless of age or sex (Historia-Mead 2002). She sought equality and a future where “each boy and girl feels a whole human being” (StoryTapes n.d.). This follows the “wise saint” American archetype identified by House (1993:68–69), whereby through experience a hero achieves wisdom to help others. Guiding words attributed to her, “There is no greater insight into the future than recognizing when we save our children, we save ourselves,” reflect this wisdom (Texas Juvenile Probation Commission 2004). Di Leonardo (2001:29; 36) notes that Mead is viewed as a “holy woman” who continues to inspire equality, understanding, and liberation.

Mead’s detractors are revealed occasionally in the Internet sites. When controversy is mentioned, it is generally in passing, as in this entry:

In recent years, some of Mead’s early research on Samoa has been questioned, most notably by the Australian anthropologist Derek

Freeman, who argues that she was wrong about Samoan norms on sexuality. Nevertheless, her life-time achievements eclipse the controversy surrounding her earliest fieldwork. We celebrate Margaret Mead, a woman anthropologist who was a strong proponent of women's rights, who shone a light of understanding on human nature, and a clear and forceful entity who provided much knowledge to the field of anthropology and psychology. "*To cherish the life of the world . . .*" *Margaret Mead* (Del Monte et al., 1999).

Campbell (1968:196–197) notes that the hero's return to the world may be complicated if the boon has been gained in opposition of gods, demons, or a guardian. But there is little in the Internet tales to indicate that this is the case. In fact, Mead's story on the Internet more closely follows the path of victory:

If the hero in his triumph wins the blessing of the goddess or the god and is then explicitly commissioned to return to the world with some elixir for the restoration of society, the final stage of his adventure is supported by all the powers of his supernatural patron (Campbell 1968:196–197).

Essentially, Derek Freeman's (1983) critique of Mead's ethnography is ignored. His critique of Mead falls short because his concerns about "scientific objectivity" in her early research do not make a difference in the areas in which Mead is important to the public (see also Bateson, this volume). Lifestyle issues of childrearing, family structure, and community activism, as well as personal qualities of courage, pioneering, and serving as a role model are important, not because they are "objective" or "scientific," but because they represent cultural values of the highest order. The veracity of a story may not be proven, but we have faith in the essence behind the story, i. e., in the person and in the cultural values.

While Freeman (1983), through his choice of sub-title for his book (*The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth*) knew that he was challenging more than just Mead's writing, he may not have been aware how deeply imbedded she is in American society. Indeed, in critiquing Mead and *Coming of Age in Samoa*, he challenged a young woman (she was twenty-seven when the book was published), and specifically a young American woman. In the model of the hero and the hero's journey, Freeman challenged a young woman who represented the spirit of the pioneer, who traveled to faraway places to learn important lessons to bring back to her own society. Mead is embedded as America's anthropologist who loved her society and worked to strengthen it.

While the focus of the myth and of this essay has been on American society, it is clear that the values Mead represents transcend borders. Mead's quote appears on Web sites in Canada and Latin America, as well as in Australia and Europe. As a contemporary hero, Mead represents the multicultural promise of modern day life and the reality of the global village. Through her gifts she teaches us to embrace differences and not to fear them. Her boon, delivered in the 20th century, continues to guide our society in the new millennium.

### **Margaret Mead: The People's Anthropologist**

When I was a first-year anthropology student in the 1960s at the University of Auckland in New Zealand, our professor reviewed anthropological work in North America. He raised Margaret Mead as a prominent name in American Anthropology, and with just the slightest hint of gentlemanly disdain, noted that she was best known for popularizing the discipline.

After spending hours on the Internet and finding her name on more than one hundred Web sites, I would suggest that Margaret Mead has indeed not only popularized anthropology but has, herself, become popularized. Margaret Mead's name is itself synonymous with anthropology in the American eye. She is the people's anthropologist. Much like the painter, Norman Rockwell, she is beloved by the American people, in spite of critics' opinions.

Margaret Mead is alive and well in American popular culture. She is accorded a permanent place in American history as a great American woman; she is the spokesperson for the common person. Her words celebrate the committed person and continue to inspire citizens. She is presented as a role model and an inspiration for young people. She has come to fill that rare role of an American woman hero who continues to inspire and sustain society.

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