Margaret Mead

This article is provided courtesy of History.com

history.com

Cultural anthropologist and writer Margaret Meade (1901-1978) was born in Philadelphia and graduated from Barnard College in 1923. Appointed assistant curator of ethnology at the American Museum of Natural History in 1926, she embarked on two dozen trips to the South Pacific to study primitive cultures. In her resulting books such as Coming of Age in Samoa (1928), Mead formulated her ideas about the powerful effects of social convention on behavior. Named a professor of anthropology at Columbia University in 1954, Mead continued to advocate for the relaxation of traditional gender and sexual conventions through her lecturing and writing.

Mead, who turned the study of primitive cultures into a vehicle for criticizing her own, was born in Philadelphia. Both her father, Edward Mead, an economist at the Wharton School, and her mother, Emily Mead, a sociologist of immigrant family life and a feminist, were devoted to intellectual achievement and democratic ideals.

Mead discovered her calling as an undergraduate at Barnard College in the early 1920s in classes with Franz Boas, the patriarch of American anthropology, and in discussions with his assistant, Ruth Benedict. The study of primitive cultures, she learned, offered a unique laboratory for exploring a central question in American life: how much of human behavior is universal, therefore presumably natural and unalterable, and how much is socially induced?

Among a people widely convinced of the inferiority of women and the immutability of gender roles, clear answers to this question could have important social consequences.

Selecting the peoples of the South Pacific as the focus of her research, Mead spent the rest of her life exploring the plasticity of human nature and the variability of social customs. In her first study, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928), she observed that Samoan children moved with relative ease into the adult world of sexuality and work, in contrast to children in the United States, where lingering Victorian restraints on sexual behavior and the increasing separation of children from the productive world made youth a needlessly difficult time. Westerners' deep- seated belief in innate femininity and

© 2016 A&E Television Networks, LLC. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission

masculinity served only to compound these troubles, Mead continued in *Sex and Temperament* (1935). Describing the widely varying temperaments exhibited by men and women in different cultures, from the nurturing men of the Arapesh tribe to the violent women of the Mundugumor, Mead maintained that social convention, not biology, determines how people behave. A decade later she qualified her environmental stance somewhat in *Male and Female* (1949), in which she analyzed the ways in which motherhood serves to reinforce male and female roles in all societies. She continued nevertheless to emphasize the possibility and wisdom of resisting traditional gender stereotypes.

By the 1950s Mead was widely regarded as a national oracle. She served as a curator at the Museum of Natural History from 1926 until her death and as an adjunct professor of anthropology at Columbia from 1954, but she devoted the greater part of her professional life to writing and lecturing. Married three times and the mother of only one child at a time when both divorce and only children were uncommon, Mead nevertheless achieved fame as an expert on family life and child rearing. In such books as *Culture and Commitment* (1970) and her autobiographical *Blackberry Winter* (1972), in magazine articles for Redbook, and in her lectures, Mead tried to persuade Americans that understanding the lives of other people could help them understand their own, that a greater ease with sexuality (homosexual as well as heterosexual) could enrich them, that motherhood and careers could and should go together, and that building support networks for the overburdened nuclear family would bring greater well-being for all.

© 2016 A&E Television Networks, LLC. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission

Lucretia Mott

This article is provided courtesy of History.com

history.com

Lucretia Mott (1793-1880) was one of the leading voices of the abolitionist and feminist movements of her time. Raised in a Quaker community, she became a member of the society's ministry and adopted its anti-slavery views. Mott helped form the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society in 1833, and later was among the founders of the American women's rights movement. Mott's feminist philosophy was outlined in her *Discourse on Women* (1850), in which she argued for equal economic opportunity and voting rights. After helping to establish Swarthmore College in 1864, she served as head of the American Equal Rights Association.

Born the daughter of a Nantucket sea captain, Mott was reared in a Quaker community that provided strong role models for the young girl. She attended a Quaker boarding academy in the Hudson Valley, New York, where she soon became a teacher. After her family moved to Philadelphia, a fellow instructor at the academy, James Mott, followed her there, and in 1811 the two were married. They had six children, five of whom survived infancy. The death of her first son deepened her spirituality, and in 1818, she became a member of the Quaker ministry.

Mott, like many Quakers, advocated antislavery and boycotted all products of slave labor. She helped found the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society in 1833 and served as its president. She also became prominent in the national organization after it admitted women. This sort of activity in reform groups was a radical departure for women of her era.

When denied a seat in 1840 at the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London on account of her sex, Mott preached her doctrine of female equality outside the conference hall. During her London visit, she befriended Elizabeth Cady Stanton, wife of abolitionist delegate Henry Stanton. During the summer of 1848 she and Stanton organized the meeting at Seneca Falls, New York, where the American women's rights movement was launched. Mott was elected president of the group in 1852.

. . . [Mott] believed women's roles within society reflected limited education rather than innate inferiority. She advocated equal economic opportunity and supported women's equal political status,

© 2016 A&E Television Networks, LLC. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission

including suffrage.

After the Civil War, Mott, unlike many abolitionists who believed their work was done, threw herself into the cause of black suffrage and aid for freed people. She also helped establish a coeducational Quaker institution, Swarthmore College, in 1864. Two years later, despite increasing ill health, she was elected head of the American Equal Rights Association. . . . [T]he group broke into factions[:] the National Woman Suffrage Association (headed by Stanton and Susan B. Anthony) and the American Woman Suffrage Association (led by Lucy Stone, Julia Ward Howe, and others).

Although viewed as a peacemaker by both abolitionists and feminists, Mott did not thrive [in] her role as referee, suffering increasingly from severe stomach disorders. Nevertheless she pursued her own path as a champion of the unempowered-the poor, blacks, and women. Using her gift for oratory, Mott delivered hundreds of speeches and sermons, reached thousands of listeners, and was a strong force in effecting the reforms of her day.

The Reader's Companion to American History. Eric Foner and John A. Garraty, Editors. Copyright © 1991 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

© 2016 A&E Television Networks, LLC. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Use the article "Lucretia Mott" to answer questions 1 to 2.

1. What organization did Lucretia Mott help found in 1833 and serve as president of?

2. The author claims that Lucretia Mott's "activity in reform groups was a radical departure for women of her era." What evidence in the text supports this claim?

Use the article "Margaret Mead" to answer questions 3 to 4.

3. What did Margaret Mead "emphasize the possibility and wisdom of resisting"?

4. What did Margaret Mead do to challenge traditional gender stereotypes? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

Use the articles "Lucretia Mott" and "Margaret Mead" to answer questions 5 to 6

5. What did Lucretia Mott and Margaret Mead both challenge?

6. Contrast Lucretia Mott's challenging of traditional gender stereotypes with Margaret Mead's challenging of traditional gender stereotypes.

ReadWorks.org · © 2020 ReadWorks®, Inc. All rights reserved.