**Mead, Margaret (1901-1978)**

Renowned American cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead studied under Franz Boas (1858-1942) and Ruth Benedict (1887-1948)at Columbia University, where she completed her PhD. in 1929 and continued as an adjunct professor from 1954 to 1978. In Mead’s seminal *Coming Of Age In Samoa* (1928) she identifies universal ethical standards, but argues that the practices of maintaining these standards are culturally conditioned. Mead concluded that turbulence in adolescence is a specifically Western cultural feature, not a biologically imperative rite of passage. The book’s publication coincided with an American fascination with adolescence as a formational period and became a pivotal reference in the nature vs. nurture debate. Her claims were famously criticized by Australian anthropologist Derek Freeman (1916-2001), though his counter-argument was dismissed in 1983 by the American Anthropological Association as misleading. Mead’s status as a household name derived partly from her book *Sex And Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (1935). Mead’s thesis that gender roles are socially constructed was instrumental for second-wave feminists. Lauded for her use of cross-cultural comparison to highlight issues in Western society, Mead became one of the first anthropologists to utilize her research to study the future of human civilization. She was curator of ethnology at the American Museum of Natural History from 1946-69, and was named Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1948 and president of the American Anthropological Association in 1960.

*Emma Doran, Ryerson University*

**List of works**

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**References and further reading**

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Mark, J. (1999) *Margaret Mead: Coming of Age in America*, New York: Oxford University Press.

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