

Ruth Benedict

(1887-1948)

Fonte: <http://gaygate.com/media/pages/ruthben.shtml>
Kardner, *Eles estudaram o homem*

Ruth Fulton Benedict was born on June 5, 1887, on a farm in the Shenango Valley in upstate New York. Her father, a brilliant and promising young surgeon, died when she was an infant, and she was raised by her mother and grandparents. Following in her mother's footsteps, she enrolled at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York, in the fall of 1905. After receiving her B.A. in English in 1909, she travelled for a year in Europe, and then taught for three years at girls' schools in California. In 1913 she met Stanley Benedict, a medical student, and they were married in 1914.

Benedict settled into the life of a housewife in the Long Island suburb of Douglas Manor, but found suburban life stultifying and soul-destroying. To occupy herself—to salvage herself—she wrote poems (a number of which she published under the pseudonym “Anne Singleton”) and a biography of Mary WOLLSTONECRAFT, the first in a series of projected biographies of what she called “restless and highly enslaved women of past generations.” The work was rejected by Houghton Mifflin in 1917, and remained unpublished in Benedict's lifetime.

In 1919 she took the important step of enrolling in some courses at the New School for Social Research in New York City. Encouraged by her teachers, she went on to study with the great

anthropologist Franz Boas at Columbia University, where she received her Ph.D. in 1923 with a dissertation titled “The Concept of the Guardian Spirit in North America.” As Boas' assistant and chosen successor, she remained at Columbia and eventually was made Professor of Anthropology there. In 1922, while working as Boas' teaching assistant at Barnard College, Benedict met a senior named Margaret Mead.

The two became intimate friends, and by 1925 were lovers (even though Mead had married in 1923). It was both a physical/ emotional relationship and an intellectual collaboration so profound that the two eventually claimed that they were unable to distinguish which was responsible for what particular idea. Their relationship also affected the nature of their work. Biographer Margaret Caffrey writes: “Benedict found the study of misfits congenial to her personally, having felt herself a misfit in American society since early childhood. Now she and Mead were faced with questions the new psychology raised about their love—were they sick, were they neurotic, were they abnormal, did they deserve to be social outcasts?”

Within this general context, and within the specific context of their feelings toward each other, during 1926, when Mead and Benedict worked together at Barnard and Mead wrote *Coming of Age in Samoa*, they began to explore the idea of deviance and ultimately subtly attempted to change the idea of the deviant from a totally negative one to one possessing positive value.” To facilitate this, they came up with the notion of positive and negative deviancy: women who loved women were positive when they accepted their love as a healthy alternative to society's conventions; they were negative only when they internalized the homophobia of their society and hated themselves as a consequence. The deviant, Benedict argued, is “not some type to be specified and described on the basis of a universally valid abnormal psychology.”

Instead, the deviant is simply “the type not capitalized in the society to which he was born. “Although Benedict’s and Mead’s physical relationship cooled with time, their intellectual rapport remained constant for the rest of Benedict’s life. Mead moved on to other lovers, both male and female, and to two more husbands over the course of time. Benedict fell in love, in 1931, with Natalie Raymond, and the two stayed together for the next eight years. Caffrey explains: “For Ruth Benedict her relationship to Margaret Mead acted as a revelation. It apparently affected her so deeply that from that time forward she became a woman-loving woman.” She and her husband formally separated in 1931.

One of Benedict’s goals as a woman-loving woman was to change the social attitude concerning homosexuality. In particular, she took on the psychology /psychiatry establishment that defined homosexuality as a disease. To that end she published, in 1934, an article called “Anthropology and the Abnormal” in the *Journal of General Psychology*. She began by questioning the idea of “normal” and “abnormal” as absolute categories, and demonstrated that “Whenever homosexuality has been given an honorable place in any society, those to whom it is congenial have filled adequately the honorable roles society assigns to them.” In particular she pointed to the culture of ancient Greece, and to those Native American societies with a tradition of the berdache.

Furthermore, she argued, just as certain values that are considered abnormal in our society are normal in other societies, so other societies value as ideal certain behaviors that are considered reprehensible in our own. As examples she offered the Dobu people of New Guinea, for whom individuals “of sunny, kindly disposition who liked work and liked to be helpful” were considered “silly and simple and definitely crazy;” and the Kwakiutl of British Columbia, for whom what we would diagnose as megalomaniac paranoia is “na essential attribute of ideal

man.” The result, she argued, is to “force upon us the fact that normality is culturally defined.” Benedict expanded her concept of cultural relativity in *Patterns of Culture* (1934), a landmark book that was translated into 14 languages and sold over 1.5 million copies. Caffrey writes: “*Patterns of Culture* had a multiple impact on American thought. It acted as a signal of and a catalyst for the final acceptance of a profound paradigm change in the social sciences and in American society and set in place the new twentieth-century paradigm or world view which had been taking shape up to that time.... At the beginning of the decade biology was firmly entrenched as the primary motivator of humanity. Biological determinism allowed no leeway for change....

Benedict’s demonstration of the overwhelming role of culture in creating three different lifestyles, those of the Zu-i, the Dobu, and the Kwakiutl, provided the final important evidence for replacing biology with culture as the major causal factor in human life.” Benedict’s fieldwork among the Zu-i peoples in New Mexico led to the two volume *Zu-i Mythology* in 1935. Other works included *Race, Science and Politics* (1940) and *The Chrysanthemum an the Sword* (1946), an analysis of the intertwined cultural patterns of aestheticism and militarism in the Japanese national character. During the 1930’s she worked against censorship and for individual rights, and organized a gathering of signatures for a published condemnation of Nazi science. After her relationship with Natalie Raymond ended in 1939, Benedict fell in love with Ruth Valentine, and the two lived together in New York City until Benedict’s death on September 17, 1948.

Ruth Benedict was a major figure in the evolution of the social sciences. Her work provided much of the basis for modern cultural anthropology. Moreover, her notions of cultural relativity, and the importance of culture as opposed to biology in deter-

mining identity and values, anticipate in important ways the work of Michel FOUCAULT and the arguments about social constructionism versus essentialism that have animated recent gay discourse. By providing a model of culture's role in determining values, Benedict also made possible the hope that our society's firmly entrenched homophobic attitudes are not necessarily immutable givens, but might in fact be susceptible to change.

RUTH BENEDICT

(do livro: Eles Estudaram o Homem)

(New York 1887 - 1948)

Um dos seus primeiros interesses - antes de estudar antropologia - foi a personalidade marginal, a pessoa que se achasse deslocada com relação ao meio cultural. Interessou-se por poetas, muitos dos quais fora de compasso com a sociedade; ela mesma escreveu poesias. Tema persistente de sua antropologia foi a reconciliação da liberdade individual com a integração cultural.

Em 1922 - aos 35 anos - realizou o primeiro estudo de campo entre os índios serranos da Califórnia, sob supervisão de A. L. Kroeber. Doutorou-se em 1923 e foi nomeada professora de Antropologia na mesma universidade - Colúmbia- no mesmo ano. Realizou trabalhos com os zunis (1924,25), cochitis (1925) e com os pimas (1926). Essa última experiência de campo foi crucial, pois nessa ocasião colocou em prática a idéia de estudar e compreender um povo através da análise de seus padrões de cultura característicos. Esse ponto de vista foi formulado na monografia "Tipos Psicológicos das Culturas do Sudoeste"

(1928), que mais tarde se transformou no livro Padrões de Cultura (1934). Boa parte de sua obra antropológica foi um desenvolvimento da idéia e da metodologia básicas contidas na monografia.

Na década de 40 estudou padrões de cultura asiáticos e europeus, utilizando informantes aculturados nas áreas urbanas dos EUA. O livro sobre a cultura japonesa O Crisântemo e a Espada (1946) é o mais conhecido. Durante a guerra fez valiosas contribuições ao governo como analista de Ciências Sociais junto ao Departamento de Informações de Guerra.

A sua tendência para a integração e a generalização colocou-a em uma visão compreensiva da cultura. A simples enumeração e análise dos traços distintivos de cultura não lhe pareciam suficientes para explicar a cultura. Como os funcionalistas, Benedict estudava as culturas como conjuntos mais ou menos integrados. Mas enquanto Malinowski partia do indivíduo e via os fenômenos culturais como derivados das necessidades individuais, Benedict partia das "configurações culturais" e via o comportamento individual como conformidade, em grande escala, com determinados imperativos culturais.

Para ela a maior parte das sociedades tem um "impulso dominante", que tende a desenvolver situações humanas periódicas - nascimento, morte, procura de alimentos e abrigo - de acordo com a própria inclinação. A morte, por exemplo, entre os índios das Planícies Ocidentais é ocasião de demonstrações violentas, prolongadas de pesar; já para o pueblo do Sudoeste o falecido deve ser esquecido o mais rápido possível.

Os impulsos opostos observados em diferentes culturas Benedict chamou de dionisíaco (caracterizado pela exaltação e o excesso) e apolônico (caracterizado pela medida e pela ordem), termos emprestados de Nietzsche. O exercício da religião, da guerra e do sexo em ambas as culturas é modelado de modo que

serve de ocasião à gratificação dos respectivos impulsos culturais - o significado e a função das instituições culturais serão diferentes nas duas culturas.

Para Benedict, portanto, é possível uma interpretação funcional de culturas, mas nunca da cultura. Para ela há uma variação “quase infinita” dos traços culturais, o que implica na impossibilidade de uma explicação científica, de uma ciência da cultura, embora ela não chegue a reconhecer isso. Essa é a importante implicação da relatividade cultural de Benedict, que se origina no seu mestre, Boas.

Benedict trabalha com a idéia da relatividade cultural: para ela há pouca liberdade individual, embora haja uma liberdade cultural ilimitada. Define a normalidade como relativa: uma situação cultural pode ser marginal em uma cultura, mas não em outra. Em *Padrões de Cultura* a idéia central é a variação quase ilimitada dos padrões culturais. Reuniu, para sua argumentação, vários estudos de campos realizados por diferentes autores. Os Dobu da Nova Guiné são o exemplo histórico que apóiam sua tese de que uma cultura pode funcionar perfeitamente ainda que possua o que constitui, para a civilização ocidental, os mais perversos traços humanos. A má índole e a deslealdade são virtudes institucionalizadas nessa sociedade e praticadas dentro de formas culturais prescritas.

A idéia de Benedict é que a cultura é consistente através de configurações culturais integradas sob a ascendência de um padrão geral, dominante. Uma cultura é análoga a um indivíduo, no sentido de que é “um padrão mais ou menos consistente de pensamento e ação”. As culturas “são a psicologia individual largamente arremessada à tela, revestida de proporções gigantescas e assinalada por um longo período de tempo.” Esse uso da Psicologia coloca Benedict entre os modernos antropólogos que tentaram uma abordagem interdisciplinar do estudo do homem e da sociedade. Mas os aspectos funcionais e adaptativos

da teoria psicológica não são utilizados para explicar por que uma cultura difere da outra. O etos grupal característico de um povo é um “dado”.

A crítica mais constante à obra de Benedict diz respeito à concepção de “gênio”: ela escolheu e exagerou os traços culturais de uma sociedade que lhe corroboravam a concepção de gênio particular e pôs de lado os que pareciam refletir um impulso contrário. Rotular uma cultura de apolônica ou dionisíaca pode ser útil para indicar uma propensão geral, mas pode induzir em erro quando isso se faz como premissa científica no intuito de ordenar e interpretar toda a extensão do comportamento cultural e individual em uma sociedade.

Benedict não se satisfazia, como Boas, com o simples registro de informações adiando a compreensão para o futuro, quando a Antropologia revelasse sólidas generalizações indutivas sobre o homem e a sociedade. Benedict utilizava o conceito da integração cultural como instrumento para compreender e explicar os estudos culturais.

RUTH BENEDICT (INGLÊS)

Ruth Benedict, a world renown American anthropologist, was an early supporter of the theory of cultural relativism. Cultural relativism states that no single culture can be viewed as being any better than any other culture. Each culture is distinct and different in its own right and each attempts to solve the problems of its people the best way it knows how. However, when World War II broke out, Benedict was forced to reconsider this stance as she could not bring herself to believe that the Nazi culture was just as valid and adaptive as any other. This internal conflict led Benedict to her concept of synergy which states that “any society that is compatible with human advancements is a good one, but a society that works against basic human goals is antihuman and evil, and can be judged as such.”

Re: Ruth Benedict: Greatest Japanologist
 From: Michael Mosher
 Subject: Re: Ruth Benedict: Greatest Japanologist
 Date: Thu, 5 Nov 1998

Once I discussed Ruth Benedict with a colleague at Tohoku University Law School, political scientist Hideo Otake, now at Kyoto-Dai. It ended when he turned to me and asked, “Do you really think, Mosher-san, that I am incapable of feeling guilt?” This refers, of course, to Benedict’s notorious dichotomy: Americans feel guilty, Japanese, predominantly shame, a dichotomy which Otake wanted to dismiss out of personal experience. Otake is among those who think Benedict missed the boat—literally I suppose since she had never been to Japan when she wrote the book. Doug Lummis’, “A New Look...” is another sceptical appraisal. I have come to suspect, however, from overt (ob-

servável, público, claro) as well as less direct praise (mérito) of “Chrysanthemum” that many Japanese are proud enough to be identified with this description of them. It may be one more piece of confirming evidence that your university journal published this opinion:

“Ruth Benedict is one of the greatest Japanologists of our times, whose *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, written during the Second World War, is the best textbook of Japanese culture in the fin de siècle of the twentieth century.” I think I can see why so many Japanese like the book. Largely a contrast between the U.S. and Japan, it is not at all obvious that Americans come out winners. Or if they do—and literally, of course, they did—one senses in her writing an admiration for the Japanese as carriers of subversive values. Here’s what I had to say about the book in an annotated bibliography I did for a 1994 course:

A classic portrait of Japan by an esteemed anthropologist. There are three things to say about this remarkable book. Despite vigorous dissent (*discórdia*) by some, it is accepted by many Japanese as a valid portrait of their people. It was written in the heat of war. It was written by someone who had never set foot in Japan, and did not speak its language. For my money there is a fourth remarkable feature to the book. It reads like a rewrite of the philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche’s dialogue of the aristocrat and the Christian (cum rationalist) in “*The Genealogy of Morals*,” 1887, with the Japanese exemplifying the aristocratic sensibility. Tocqueville’s contrast of democrat and aristocrat also seems much on the author’s mind with Roosevelt’s democratic U.S. confronting an ancien régime aristocracy.

Let me unpack a bit of this. Nietzsche celebrated the “strong, fullnatures” of the “knightly-aristocratic” or “barbarian” peoples, —he cited the Japanese nobility explicitly, to wit (*isto é*), “the Roman, Arabian, Germanic, Japanese nobility, the

Homeric heroes, the Scandinavian Vikings,” First Essay, Section 11. He contrasted the “nobility” he found among these healthy barbarians with (what he claimed was) the sickly style of equality loving Europeans corrupted by Judaeo-Christian “slave” values and then by science and rationalism. For Nietzsche the capacity to do science, to be a rationalist, was simply the transformation of “slavish” Christian humility and self-repression into a new mode, one which was, however, no longer humble because it gave its carriers a novel form of mastery. But this was no simplistic dichotomy; as a representative figure within European science and religion, Nietzsche understood the strengths of its universalist outlook and also the narrowness of the horizon of its “great souled” aristocratic opponents.

Now what causes grief to many Japanese critics of this book is the suggestion of a “we Americans are good democrats, you Japanese are not” outlook that one might argue is its message. But this is a misreading. Benedict gives the reader all sorts of clues that she admires the disposition she reads into the (allegedly) Japanese temperament. For instance, Benedict gets from Nietzsche the idea that aristocrats are only concerned with shame, democrats with guilt. Living also in the grip of fascination with Freud, Benedict inherited the common belief of her (1930’s, 1940’s) circle that Americans were stricken with too much guilt!

Thus, two cheers for shame as a replacement. (Somehow I think this must bear on contrasting attitudes on this list toward Roppongi...) It is not clear she got more out of reading Nietzsche than that it might pay to reflect on the “noble ideals” in Japanese mores (costumes), (e.g. respect for suicide) and using them as a foil (contrast) for discussing the democratic ideals (habits?) of the Americans. Benedict could have gotten the same sensibility from Tocqueville whom she explicitly cites. He had a similar manner of balancing ambivalently between contrasting aristocratic and democratic notions of value. A

French aristocrat himself, Tocqueville recognized that democratic values were the wave of the future and that they ought to be. This, however, did not rescue him from nostalgic admiration for a declining aristocratic order. It seems also to have aided him to be more precise in “Democracy in America” about the failings and pitfalls of the democratic mindset. I think you can see why reflective Japanese who had just lost the war might appreciate this book by an American capable of understanding the virtues of the values that lost. Respect for the values of the defeated is, in fact, a martial and aristocratic habit: recall the Morris volume, “The Nobility of Defeat.” Today, it is not clear whether one can really find in Japan traces of this aristocratic heritage, (if one ever could— but see my friend Eiko Ikegami’s “The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism in the Making of Modern Japan.”) For Benedict’s Japanese fans the book may be a semi-articulated “fond goodbye” to a way of life that never quite managed to find its way in the 20th century.

Is Ruth Benedict the greatest ever? Let me recommend a book by someone who may be qualified to make a guess, my anthropology colleague here, Clifford Geertz. He compares the famed anthropologists in “Works and Lives: The Anthropologist As Author” (Stanford University Press, 1988). There she is, in the penultimate chapter, mixing it up with Levy-Strauss, Malinowski, and Evans-Pritchard. Geertz also mentions Nietzsche as a source, though for “Patterns of Culture,” not “Chrysanthenum and the Sword.” In general, Geertz thinks Benedict was too much under the influence of her immediate colleagues, including her friend, Margaret Mead, whose agenda was wholly different from that of her friend. Geertz recommends skipping both the first and last parts of “Chrysanthenum”. The first part is patriotic gore. I think he calls it “ethnography for admirals” (it was written for the U.S. military). The last part is too 1930’s social science-y, and too filled with Mead’s reformist so-

cialscience agenda. (As I recall, in the last part there is a perfectly horrid Freudian chapter on toilet training.) But the middle-chapters deserve acclaim. Here is Geertz on Benedict: “the great originality of Benedict’s book... lies in the fact that she does not seek to unriddle Japan and the Japanese by moderating this sense of an oddly made world populated by oddly wired people, but by accentuating it.... [Nevertheless] moving from examples [she offers] in which ‘they’ sound the odd case to one in which ‘we’ do, a disconcerting twist appears in the course of this forced march through cultural difference.... Japan comes to look, somehow, less and less erratic and arbitrary while the United States comes to look, somehow, more and more so... The enemy who at the beginning of the book is the most alien we have ever fought is, by the end of it, the most reasonable we have ever conquered,” p.117, p. 121.

Michael Mosher Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton

Ruth Benedict (1887-1948) Biographer Margaret Caffrey writes: “Benedict found the study of misfits congenial to her personally, having felt herself a misfit in American society since early childhood. Now she and Mead were faced with questions the new psychology raised about their love—were they sick, were they neurotic, were they abnormal, did they deserve to be social outcasts? Within this general context, and within the specific context of their feelings toward each other, during 1926, when Mead and Benedict worked together at Barnard and Mead wrote *Coming of Age in Samoa*, they began to explore the idea of deviance and ultimately subtly attempted to change the idea of the deviant from a totally negative one to one possessing positive value.” To facilitate this, they came up with the notion of positive and negative deviancy: women who loved women were posi-

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Caffrey explains: “For Ruth Benedict her relationship to Margaret Mead acted as a revelation. It apparently affected her so deeply that from that time forward she became a woman-loving woman.” She and her husband formally separated in 1931. One of Benedict’s goals as a woman-loving woman was to change the social attitude concerning homosexuality. In particular, she took on the psychology/psychiatry establishment that defined homosexuality as a disease. To that end she published, in 1934, an article called “Anthropology and the Abnormal” in the *Journal of General Psychology*. She began by questioning the idea of “normal” and “abnormal” as absolute categories, and demonstrated that “Whenever homosexuality has been given an honorable place in any society, those to whom it is congenial have filled adequately the honorable roles society assigns to them.” In particular she pointed to the culture of ancient Greece, and to those Native American societies with a tradition of the berdache.

Furthermore, she argued, just as certain values that are considered abnormal in our society are normal in other societies, so other societies value as ideal certain behaviors that are considered reprehensible in our own. As examples she offered the Dobu people of New Guinea, for whom individuals “of sunny, kindly disposition who liked work and liked to be helpful” were considered “silly and simple and definitely crazy;” and the Kwakiutl of British Columbia, for whom what we would diagnose as megalomaniac paranoia is “an essential attribute of ideal

man.” The result, she argued, is to “force upon us the fact that normality is culturally defined.” Benedict expanded her concept of cultural relativity in *Patterns of Culture* (1934), a landmark book that was translated into 14 languages and sold over 1.5 million copies. Caffrey writes: “*Patterns of Culture* had a multiple impact on American thought. It acted as a signal of and a catalyst for the final acceptance of a profound paradigm change in the social sciences and in American society and set in place the new twentieth-century paradigm or world view which had been taking shape up to that time.... At the beginning of the decade biology was firmly entrenched as the primary motivator of humanity. Biological determinism allowed no leeway for change.... Benedict’s demonstration of the overwhelming role of culture in creating three different lifestyles, those of the Zu-i, the Dobu, and the Kwakiutl, provided the final important evidence for replacing biology with culture as the major causal factor in human life.” Benedict’s fieldwork among the Zu-i peoples in New Mexico led to the two volume *Zu-i Mythology* in 1935.

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<http://www.encyclopedia.com/articles/01322.html>

Her works emphasize the concepts of cultural configuration, national character, and the role of culture in individual personality formation. Her widely read books helped popularize the concept of culture and attacked racism and ethnocentrism.