America According to Margaret Mead

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> Those social behaviors which automatically preclude the building of a democratic world must go—every social limitation of human beings in terms of heredity, whether it be of race, or sex, or class. Every social institution which teaches human beings to cringe to those above and step on those below must be replaced by institutions which teach people to look each other straight in the face—and that whether the institution in question is the German family or the New York public school system. But no institution is to be rejected in hate; each is to be examined to see what values there are in it and what other valuable institutions it supports. Each is to be considered not as a mere law or formal practice, but as something which is deeply imbedded in the habits of living human beings. To kill these human beings would make us, as we have seen, unfit to inaugurate a new world. Gradually to eliminate the institutions which crippled them will be more arduous, but it will grant us immunity from the corruption which comes from playing God in a human world.
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> (*AKYPD* p. 255)

Introduction—2000

I bought my copy of *And Keep Your Powder Dry* in February 1970. I was planning a proposal that would take me to a small town in Michigan where, altogether naively I now realize, I was sure I would find "America." Margaret Mead might have given me heart in my search: who else was surer that anthropologists, and particularly "foreign" anthropologists, would find America anywhere in the United States? I quoted the book but I dismissed it: things couldn't be so easy. I don't remember my advisers at the University of Chicago chiding me for this dismissal. Margaret Mead, it

seems, had already been relegated to history, and I was surprised to find out, on moving to Columbia, that she was not only alive but also involved in matters I had not been pointed to. There were those who did not read her as a simple-minded psychological anthropologist: There was also an esoteric reading. But the only reading that can disturb us is the one Mead modeled for us, that is a reading that confronts our political responsibilities to our audiences as we speak with the full though circumscribed authority of the scientist.

This is not a literal reading of Mead—though I play close attention to her text. Rather, it is an exercise in locating the various challenges she gives to contemporary social scientists, in taking them seriously, and in wondering what we are to say next. These challenges can be summarized in one word, "America." Mead affirms that America is real, that America arises in interaction, that America is to be built, and that intellectuals must participate fully in this construction by telling those responsible for it what they might not know or, in more contemporary terms, what they cannot quite say easily so that it can be used for action. If I am right, this affirmation is indeed paradoxical, for America is both fully made now, with serious consequences for all, and also still in the future, requiring dedicated political action for the present not to produce what it is always at risk of producing.

This introduction is an exercise in reconstruction starting with the historical context Mead made for *AKYPD*. I start with her as an author placing herself in time and cultural framework. I follow her acknowledgment of the framework and her manipulation of the framework to make her voice heard. In the process, she fell into various traps, particular descriptive ones that may be most serious given her claim to scientific authority. In fact, she never did fieldwork in United States and, in the book, she dismisses or ignores most of the work that had already been done by 1942. If we are to walk further on the trail she cut, we must acknowledge the full range of this work. But the questions she addressed were fundamental and she cut through them like a young conqueror. These are questions about the justification of our work and the justification of political action in a system that sustains this work. They are questions about the future shape of America and what anthropologists, as a peculiar type of social scientist, might contribute not as citizens but as *scientists*. We cannot but address these as we steel ourselves to make our voice heard in a public sphere that is at least

as hostile, if not more, to the disciplinary claims that cultural construction and individual agency are the basis of human action.

Mead has been deconstructed many times and from many different angles. Derek Freeman (1983) has done so in a manner designed to destabilize the whole field of cultural anthropology: he challenged the research basis of her generalizations about cultural variation that made Mead, and anthropology, famous and authoritative in the United States. Recently, di Leonardo has broadly expanded a more traditional critique *within* anthropology: she shows at length how Mead used all the cliches of anthropology to establish an authority on a telling of the contribution of the discipline that aligned it with the more conservative forces in America—however ironically, given Mead's identification with liberal politics (Marcus and Fisher 1986; di Leonardo 1998). They have a point. Mead, taken literally, can be dangerous both as an ethnographer of the United States, and as a voice for cultural anthropology. As Florence and Clyde Kluckhohn chide in the first review of the book by anthropologists (1943), the book "was written a trifle too hurriedly" (in six weeks in fact!). They begin what remains a devastating critique of its ethnographic grounding; and they worry that Mead took too many risk. The situation was dire in 1942, but a few more weeks might have strengthened her hand. Still, the risks she took are interesting, and it may be that, in any event, we have no choice but to continue taking them. Like her, we cannot wait "till all the facts are in" because they never will be.

The reprinting of this book must not simply be an act of homage but another reminder of our positions as (American?) intellectuals in the United States. We remain where she saw herself: given a certain authority to say certain things. From this position she spoke. We may think she spoke too much and be tempted by silence, mumbling obscurely from the sidelines. *And Keep Your Power Dry* is not obscure. It is garish in its clarity. But we should not miss the complexity of its construction of an object, "they Americans," that is also a subject, "we Americans," though only in the service of a project, a *future* America that is the one worth fighting for. Mead, I argue here, is not describing America in the book: she is educating and prophesying. Sixty years later, when we are called to educate if not prophesy, can we say that America is now less real? less subjective? less in progress? For better and for worse, in 2002 as in 1942, in the United States and all around the world, America is here, there, everywhere, for me, you, and all of

us to take into account as we struggle to construct our personal lives. And it is all the more real that we feel called to criticize what it is in the name of what it should be.

This is a deliberately anachronistic reading "for America 2000." It is written in three voices: "I," "we," and the passive that distances both author and implied reader. I borrow two of these from Mead. She starts her introduction with the bold affirmation that "Six times in the last seventeen years *I* have entered another culture ..." (p. 3) and concludes "these things *we* can do" (my emphasis. title of Chapter 14). I, Hervé Varenne, was born in France, and I am still a card carrying "alien" in the United States. I am writing here about something, America, that is not mine. Or is it? I have the sneaky feeling that Margaret Mead, looking at my life history, noting that I have now been in the country for more than 30 years, have completed my schooling here, married, raised three children, and built a career in a university in New York, would place me squarely within the first generation and include me in the "we" she was addressing. I could attempt to resist her move and claim instead another position she offers me, that of the "European in our midst" (title of Chapter V). But any simple refusal to accept her "we" for me would be disingenuous. The power of America to claim its own transcends personal choice and enculturation: I cannot control Mead's spirit and the forces she represents. And so, I must recognize the gestures that appropriate me and acknowledge that I have been caught in the proposed collective whether as alien or immigrant. Culture, and on this matter at least I will keep my distance from Mead, is not a matter of personal acquiescence. It is a matter of the objective conditions of every day life. I do not write here as a psychological anthropologist concerned with capturing in what ways "I" may (not) be American, or "what America means to Me." I write as a cultural anthropologist concerned with the America that captured me. There is something both wonderful and awful, that is inspiring of both wonder and awe, in what Mead calls America—and this includes her certainty about who will join up with her "we" and about their responsibilities to each other.

Powder?!

I must retell my initial misreading of *And Keep Your Powder Dry*. Having arrived recently from France, I barely knew of Margaret Mead. I can't remember when and from whom I discovered her

for myself, but every time I think of the book, I remember my confusion over its title: she was talking about "powder," she was a woman, she was writing about America, the book had to be in some ways about makeup. I was also sure it couldn't be about makeup, but I couldn't, and still can't quite, chase from my mind the image of a woman "powdering her nose." I do not know whether Margaret Mead ever powdered her nose. I do know that she carefully constructed an image of herself as a fighter who kept her gun powder very dry for the coming battle even as she trusted in God (America). The whole book, of course, is an extended version of the speech generals give to soldiers as they are sent into war and the coda about one's guns is not the least important moment of the speech.

I remain embarrassed by my error. It reveals my ignorance of Anglo-American history, possibly excusable because I was not schooled in the United States. It is also gendered. A person named 'Margaret' does not write about guns, does she? I might invoke as an excuse an early education when feminism was still mostly in the future. I would rather focus on the processes that would gender a book, partially based on the sex of the author, and partially on a word in the title. After all these are the processes that interested Margaret Mead, and she is one of the first to have shown that the assignments of properties to the sexes, as well as the gendering of objects, is an aspect of a general property of humanity: the transformation of nature (sex) into culture (gender) through symbols. This produces both a wonderful array of multiple ways of dealing with life and the 'cruelest' identifications that 'disallow capacities' of particular 'human spirits' at particular times and spaces (paraphrased from *AKYD*: 4). I don't know that Margaret Mead ever regretted not becoming an army general. But she clearly understood the power of the processes that prevented her from considering the possibility as she grew up in the first half of the twentieth century "in America." Gendering may be cruel, but it is a very real fact of human life. Particular patterns of gendering, like the one that would associate gun powder with men and makeup powder with women, are also facts of life in particular "cultures" as Mead would have said. They are eminently changeable: For many years, generals powdered their wigs! But there is a moment when these associations are "alive," in the sense that one talks of an electrical wire as being "live" because it can kill you as well as save you. At these moments cultural constructions are fully real as

objects to be confronted—even if the goal is to demolish them. The wonder and problem is that, often, these walls are made invisible while obvious doors beckon. This is wonderful when the organization of walls and doors reveal possibilities not used elsewhere. It is a cruel problem when it blocks these very possibilities in another time and space.

Making walls visible so that one might open doors in some while shoring up others is, as I rewrite it, Mead's primary anthropological goal. This is a worthy goal indeed—if there is merit in the metaphor of culture I prefer—one where culture is likened to doors and walls opened and closed at various arbitrary places within houses of various shapes (Varenne and McDermott 1998). Mead was convinced that America was real but she also knew that this reality was historical, arbitrary, and in need of change. Most, these days, would easily agree with the later part of her statement. The difficulty is with the first part about the reality of America. From my personal experience trying to teach "America" to students and colleagues, I know that all claims to the facticity of "America" will raise passionate rebuttals. And yet, if there is anything of interest in *AKYPD*, it is the bold affirmations Mead makes in the first pages of the introduction: "I came home ... convinced that the next task was to apply what we knew ... to the problems of our own society.... My own culture, the language and gestures, the rituals and beliefs of Americans ... in America" (pp. 3–4). Mead does not worry about the words "home," "own," "society." America is home. It is ours. It is obvious. *Who* is "we" is not her concern as she explores *what* is "we" for one particular purpose: fighting a war for a particular future. How this might be read by recent immigrants, or by the many others for whom America is not quite home for any of a long list of reasons is not a concern of hers in the book. This is either a reason to dismiss the book or it is a challenge to the current common sense: how can a sane person assume America? How can she forget the multiplicity of experiences in the country? How can she assume that it is "home"?

America for Whom?

Mead anchors *AKYPD* strongly in time and cultured space. The first section says it all: "Introduction—1942." The English version specifies further in a "Preface from England—1943" that "this particular book was written for Americans" (p. xxiii) and not "'in English.'" Mead is not distancing herself but specifically placing

herself in a particular field. This is "the summer of 1942." The United States have only recently and reluctantly entered the war. She will "do what [she] can, as an anthropologist,... to win the war" (p. 14). Having so placed herself, she "clears the air" (title of Chapter 2) to set the overall argument that the war can only be won, and should only be won, by America if America is true to itself. To help win the war, an anthropologist does not display the horrors perpetrated by the enemy, or of the dangers they might pose. She displays what a victorious America will look like: "A world that is not American or English or Russian or Chinese, that is not German or Italian or Japanese, that dos not represent the triumph of the white race over the black race, or the triumph of the yellow over either" (p. 251). This echoes the famous last lines from Zangwill's play *The Melting Pot* where, as the sun rises over New York City, the hero dreams of a time when "Celt and Latin, Slav and Teuton, Greek and Syrian, black and yellow, Jew and Gentile, East and West, and North and South, the palm and the pine, the pole and the equator, the crescent and the cross," would live together in peace (1975 [1909]: 200)

Like Zangwill in his time, Mead is building up a particular audience for a particular political purpose. She is constructing those who were to fight this war, who must be convinced to fight it, must understand how to fight it most effectively by understanding their human resources and, above all, who must be reminded of the dangers inherent in their own success. She is addressing Roosevelt, Eisenhower, McArthur and, more ambiguously, G.I. Joe. After all "we run a terrible risk of winning [the war] in the wrong way, of winning with hate and fascism entrenched in our own society as well as in that of the enemy" (p. 251). "America" is not about what was or even what is but about what should be, in the future, when all that still needs to be done has in fact been done. The book is more of an education into what America is to be than an exhortation to fight. It is only in passing about the "America" that social scientists or historians might study. And it is certainly not "an attempt to take off American clothes, I prefer Americans with clothes" (p. 8)!

If this is a book "for Americans" in the guise of a book "about" Americans, who, then, is it for? Pragmatically, Mead may have operated under the rule of thumb that whoever accepted to be "we" with her was "American," even if they disagreed with specifics of her analysis. Readers who would not join her in this "we"

remained outside her particular Pale—for example, readers in England (p. xx). This is a challenge to the current understandings of who is to be included under "American" because Mead is working with a principle of inclusion that is much less demographic than it is moral.

More and more explicitly as the book progresses Mead distinguishes between "what many in America believe or do" and "what Americans are like." Regularly, in fact, Americans become "they" and Mead places herself and her readers at some distance though not at an anthropological distance of attempted neutrality, but rather at the prophetic distance towards which to lead the possibly recalcitrant. By implication at least, she constructs many in her audience as being still in the process of becoming American, and many as failing to understand what America is really like. But her method is to fix on the future, not dwell on the present and this may explain some of the most puzzling silences in the book. The Kluckhohns, in their 1943 review, already noted how she downplays class. Even at a time when one could not be sure that the Great Depression had ended, she does not dwell on economic inequalities. Even more puzzling is her total silence around all issues of race in the United States. I do not think the word slavery appears anywhere in the book. There is no mention of the Jim Crow laws in the South and no mention of the person she might have called "the African in our midst." In 1965, she does add to the new edition of the book a reference to Myrdal's book about the "American dilemma." But neither in the new introduction, nor in the "bibliographic note" where she discusses some theoretical issues, does she confront an absence that should by then have seemed glaring. She does talk about racism, but only in the context of Germany: racism there justifies total war. Racism is not American. Racists are not Americans. Perhaps she thought it would be obvious to her readers that she took the fight against Germany and Japan to be a continuation of the fight against the Confederacy. Racism may be in the United States, it is not in America. Be that as it may, her silences are loud indeed and one wish for an acknowledgement that there is a serious problem here.

By her definition many in the United States are not Americans but her criteria is not length of residency, claims to sacred symbols based on descent, or mechanical enculturation. The American is not the 10th generation WASP. The American is as likely to be the

recent immigrant woman, marginalized because of class and race and struggling to assert herself. Above all, it is the person who rejects all "old countries"—including the old United States that was not the America to be. Most preeminent among unAmericans would be those citizens with deep roots in the country who fail to take the stance she presents as American. America is not an ethnic group. It is neither "motherland" nor "fatherland." America is a community, a religion. When "we" claim that "God is on our side," she writes, it is because "our cause is just": "the Germans followed a tribal God whose preferences were determined by race," Americans understand that "the only way to get God on one's side is to be on the right side." And, she concludes, "that has been the whole teaching of Puritanism" (p. 162). America is not a matter of blood or descent; it is a matter of faith.

Mead is not a scholar of Puritanism, and her title's embrace of Cromwell would probably not have extended to his actual conduct during his invasion of Ireland. Rather, Puritanism as self-examining righteousness on a journey towards perfection, is made to stand briefly for an America that may be closer here than there but remains a work in progress, an ideal, something to strain for, and to fight for with all one's might and for total victory. Thus Mead's interest with immigration, invasions, or "the European in our midst" that is her focus in Chapter V of the book. "We are all third generation" she also writes (Chapter III), for, after all, "this is not quite our country ... It is, for every one of us, somebody else's country" (p. 74). It is a country that is continually being invaded (p. 201) and the American is both the person who invades and the person who accepts the invader. It is a country made by people running away from all sorts of things that they might still at times yearn for but that they cannot, must not, attempt to reconstruct. Mead would not pick up the complaint James Joyce has Stephen Daedalus voice about English not being "his" language. It would be in Mead's spirit to say that the American is the person who steals the language against all kinship claims. These Americans, and their children, will fail at times, just as Jefferson did when he postponed freeing his slaves. Americans will always be tempted to revert to being the people they were. This may be understandable, but it must not be condoned. Preservation of what is must not be used as justification for action, not war certainly, and not any other form of political construction.

Mead's "What" for America

AKYPD can only be read profitably as a statement in what Bellah once called the "civil religion" of America. It is an insider's document for a certain kind of non-academic, and non-anthropological, "insider": people who accept inclusion in her "we, Americans" (including many who would disagree with the details of her analyses) and who have some moral and political influence on what is to happen in the United States. The book soon becomes quite odd when one moves outside the circle of this particular audience. It is not quite an anthropological work but it is one that fully implicates anthropology. She affirms that anthropology has something specific to say about that social and geographic space where "America" is particularly problematic. She thus presents a double challenge to anthropologists working in the United States: First, what stance should be taken when facing non-anthropologists? And second, when we join her in affirming our descriptive and interpretive voice, what is the picture to be drawn? What is the text to be written about America?

AKYPD starts with two chapters building Mead's authority as a scientist, an anthropologist, and as someone needed for the struggle to come. She starts with a rhetorical question: "What then is this American character, this expression of American institutions and of American attitudes which is embodied in every American, in everyone born in this country and sometimes even in those who have come later to these shores?" (p. 27). This is the Margaret Mead that will lead generations of professional anthropologists to dismiss her work: how could anyone dare pose let alone answer such questions? What kind of research is called for here? What theory of culture and indeed humanity is being invoked? Mead is not addressing the profession but this is not an excuse. In the very name of the authority she claimed she should at least have written "in many of those born in this country." But she didn't. By 1965, she is aware of the critiques of purely psychological theories of culture, particularly the most radical critiques that "any theory of personality which involves the recognition of characteristics (whether they are innate or acquired through early learning) that may be constant through life is necessarily racist in tendency" (p. 328). Recently, Ray McDermott and I have raised a version of this critique in reviews of much current understandings of educational processes in the United States (McDermott and Varenne, 1995; Varenne and McDermott, 1998). She of course

defends herself in a way that few would now choose: "on the basis of my own work and that of others, I believe there is convincing evidence for the existence of differences in temperament as well as in intelligence.... They are shaped profoundly by culture and are subject to individual differences in intensity, but they are discernible in all human groups, whatever their social and cultural patterning may be" (pp. 329–30). At this point, one may now choose to avert one's eyes, or else to cast out all of her work as ideologically suspect.

I have chosen the former route because an alternate reading is possible. It is one that Mead encouraged in some of her latter students but never advertised. Let's take one of her most challenging statement: How could she write "we are all third generation"? Given her interest in individual character, and an initial understanding that this would lead to research and generalization based on detailed studies of individuals, one might expect her to have written "many of us are third generation and a significant number of those have a character structure that may be unique among the people of the earth." This would be followed by various reports of research into personality structure (or "identity" as it might be labeled these days). And so on and forth in sober scholarly tones perhaps on the model of what Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck did (1961). This, of course, is not Mead's way. Rather, under a bold title about "us all," she tells a bunch of altogether wild stories that have the qualities of origin myths. We are told of adult migrants leaving "his land, his parents, his fruit trees, and the little village street behind him.... The father whom he left behind was strong, part of something terribly strong, something to be feared and respected and fled from" (p. 47). We are told of this migrant's son (there is not much room for women here!) "passionately rejecting the halting English, the half-measures of the immigrant" and adopting violent isolationism and "intolerance of foreign language and ways" (p. 48). And then we are told of the migrant's grandson who rejects both father and grandfather in favor of new totemic ancestors like Washington and Lincoln symbolizing a world "*towards*" (Mead's emphasis) which to orient "a world in which we don't fully belong, but which we feel ... we some time may achieve" (p. 53).

This picture cannot possibly be taken literally! It is, of course, literally self-contradictory: "we" cannot all be third-generation since, in 1942 as in 2002, many of us were not born in the United States, were born from parents who were not born here, or, on the other hand, can trace a large part of our ancestry to people who arrived in the Americas several centuries ago. Once again she is either excluding large portions of the population of the United States from America, or else she is doing something else. The trick, perhaps is not to get caught by the logic of her voice and listen rather to the other possibilities she did not develop.

America was absolutely real for Mead, even though she placed it in the future. America was to be made in a continual process of reconstruction. It was not an object of the past but a project towards which to aim. In that sense, she is not suggesting that America is a "system" in the structural-functionalist sense. There is no whiff in the book of either Radcliffe-Brown or Parsons. Rather she lines up, implicitly of course, with another kind of system theory, one that she must have been talking about with Gregory Bateson. Here, America is approached as "teleological" process, that is as a set of interactions through which miscellaneous participants react to each other as they struggle for a particular goal. "We" are not all "third generation" but we may all be caught within a process that pulls all in the United States into the third generation and keeps replacing "us all" there. "All" refers not to uncultured Americans but to the human beings caught by this process, particularly in the United States, whether born here or not, whether historically marginalized or not. The third generation is the logic of a system continually reproduced through the myths, rituals, and everyday practices of the people that have been grabbed by this particular kind of gravitational center. This is America as Naven (Bateson [1935] 1958).

There is one moment at least when Mead writes something that might allow for this alternate reading: "When I say that we are most of us—whatever our origins—third-generation in character structure, I mean that we have been reared in an atmosphere which is most like that which I have described for the third generation" (p. 52). She does not elaborate what she means by "atmosphere" and she immediate reconstitutes herself as a psychological anthropologist by insisting that the essential cog in this machinery is child-rearing and the ensuing character structure. But we do not have to follow her into this dead-end. We can focus instead on the "atmosphere," that is the settings, contexts, social scenes and practical performances whether or not they produce a character. By focusing on these as possibilities opened and closed we

might be able to set an account of America on sounder theoretical grounds. America is not carried by Americans as some kind of virus. Rather it is constituted by the interpersonal processes within historically constructed fields that provide particular tools to particular kinds of people in particular kinds of positions. It is in this sense perhaps that it might be said that both Bill Clinton, Jesse Jackson and myself are "third generation" at those powerful moments when we have to align ourselves with our consociates towards the major rites, symbols and practical productions of America, and this must include war as well as all kinds of social policy.

This is not the place to develop the theoretical grounds that might build a better foundation for an understanding of the processes that constitute America. It is the place to call attention to the depth of the material anthropologists have produced over the past 75 years and the ways it might be used to establish the anthropology of America on firmer ground. It can be discouraging to read "It's time for anthropology to bring the ethnography of everyday life to the US" (Fricke 1998) as if it had not done so from the first years of the institutionalization of the discipline onwards. The recent flurry of articles about the importance of work in the United States published in the *Anthropology Newsletter* (Darrah et al. 1998; Dudley 1999; English-Lueck and Freeman 1998; Fricke 1998; Harness 1998; Holland et al. 1999; Townsend 1999; Wilk 1999) gives short shrift to this history and could reproduce the relative marginalization of this work within the discipline. But this need not be our fate.

What Other Anthropologists Have Said

A full review of what anthropologists have said about America is impossible. I want only to suggest its breadth and depth. Boas wrote about "The Modern Populations of America" as early as 1915 ([1915] 1966). The ethnographic work of the Chicago sociologists in the 1930s and 1940s (Wirth 1928; Drake and Cayton 1945), culminating in the massive work of W.L. Warner and his collaborators in the 1940s and 1950s, continue to stand as an example to emulate (Warner et al. 1941–59). In the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, every branch of anthropology contributed in one way or another to this growing literature. There is the culture and personality work of Hsu (1963), or, from a different perspective, Henry (1963). There is the quasi-anthropological work of Gans (1962, 1967) or Suttles (1968), as well the symbolic work of Schneider ([1968] 1980) or

myself (Varenne 1977, 1986). And then there is all the work by anthropologists addressing major policy issues in America, from the work of Oscar Lewis (1965) to all the work criticizing his summary (Valentine 1978; Stack 1975; Shimkin 1978), not to mention work in anthropology and education (Erikson and Schultz 1982; McDermott et al. 1979, 1982, 1993; Ogbu1978) and general policy (Newman 1988). In the past 20 years this work has blossomed to such an extent that the first summary of anthropological work on America to be published by the *Annual Reviews in Anthropology* (Spindler and Spindler 1983) was followed only nine years later by another one (Moffatt 1992) that did not include most of the works mentioned in the first one. Since then there has been an explosion of work in all settings and institutions, in hospitals and research ships as well as in schools, using all methodologies from participant-observation in neighborhoods and suburbs to conversational analysis in families and the courts.

This listing barely scratches the surface. I would not risk imagining how Margaret Mead might integrate all this work if she were to re-write *AKYPD* in a time of major threat to the United States. She might note the extent to which much of this work does not address the problem of "America" whether specifically dismissing it as fantasy or, worse perhaps, assuming that it has been solved. Sanjek, for example, writes about *The Future of Us All* (1998) to tell "us" (Americans?) that the future belongs to ethnic minorities but does not quite address the framework within which these minorities will coexist. I am tempted to say of Sanjek, like of all the others who, since Glazer and Moynihan affirmed that America had moved *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1963), that they were missing the logic of her argument about the Third Generation as the American way for ethnicity (Varenne 1998). This is something that Sollors, in his own analysis of the melting pot discourse among American intellectuals (1986), says with great academic care: the discourse of multi-culturalism within the United States, discourses that emphasize ethnic descent as the main source of division can be shown to do two dangerous things. First it can disguise the reconstitution of "America as future land of newcomers who are organizing each other to live together in peace," that is the reconstitution of the Melting Pot Myth as told from the earliest times of the colonization of North America by Protestant and Rationalist Europeans. Second, it can also hide a set of other problems generated by "America" itself, particularly problems of racism as Dumont once argued (1980 [1966]),

problems of class or problems with the technologizing of the body (Rapp 1999), and perhaps even of basic social relationships that are related to the broad issues that the dominant institutional and *American* discourses about individualism and community specifically pose for all who live in the United States.

The Reconstitution of America

This brings us back to the heart of Margaret Mead's challenge to those responsible for America. Mead was more interested in America as project than she was in America as object. But her fundamental conviction of the need to face both cannot be simply dismissed. Certainly, we must recast her discourse to take into account six decades of theoretical development. I do so by presenting America as a matter of social factuality with consequences rather than as a matter of psychological prevalence. The point however is to face an object that cannot be ignored, particularly if one is ultimately concerned with the future. This object, America, is far outside any particular person's commonsense control, and yet may constitute the most serious threat to the people whom it encompasses. It cannot be ignored because it may be our common disability. As Mead says (p. 4), the recognition of our practical conditions must produce a passionate response among those most implicated in America, that is those who will accept the tools it has produced. For America is also our common ability.

I first encountered opposition to treating America as object during my graduate student days at the University of Chicago when my not-for-long naive claims that I was going to study "American culture" in Downstate Illinois was greeted with general laughter. I interpreted the laughter as a kind of ethnocentric embarrassment: only "they" have culture in the anthropological sense, "we" are different. It is only much later that I realized the depth of the ideological revulsion towards an affirmation of America as a fact in the here and now. This revulsion has reached a kind of peak over the past ten years and it is now polite common sense that there is no America, and that there can't be any.

The distributional argument is assumed in this discourse as the most devastating against any affirmation of America as real; if "I" have characteristics generally not associated with the American, then there is no ground on which to build a picture of the American, particularly if "I" has a claim on the United States. A claim to descent from Africa, Mexico, etc., as well as from those who

lived on the continent before the Europeans arrived, can thus be transformed into a claim to be included in any account of America and, most importantly, to invalidate it. There are fascists in the United States, and there are Communists, there are Catholics, Muslim, Buddhist, etc., and each of them must be accounted fully in their own term, thereby making America impossible to characterize, except perhaps as the empty field on which all these people have been placed. In the long run, as I had in fact learned during my first sustained experience "in America," there cannot be an objective America because there are only individuals in America and individuals are all different.

But behind the distributional argument lies another one that touches deeper stresses in American ideology: America is not real because it has not been completed. America is not real because those who claim it most insistently can easily be shown to be hypocritical: when di Leonardo, for example, shows how Mead, this most powerful among women, was never a feminist and was in fact often a counter-feminist (1998: 190–1, 238–39), she is performing one of the most significant act of American ideology as she uses a moral standard to judge a person and dismiss her work. On a broader scale this is the rhetorical process that focuses attention on segregation, discrimination and racism, whether based on gender, sexual orientation, language, religion. This revulsion against the actual in the name of "self-evident truths" eventually replicates an ideological movement echoes of which can be found in the early versions of the melting pot myth, in John Dewey's call for democratic schools, and certainly in Mead's argument in favor of total war: state action is only defensible if it is not its own goals. As Dewey put it:

> Is it possible for an educational system to be conducted by a national state and yet the full social ends of the educative process not be restricted, constrained, and corrupted? Internally, the question has to face the tendencies, due to present economic conditions, which split society into classes some of which are made merely tools for the higher culture of others. Externally, the question is concerned with the reconciliation of national loyalty, of patriotism, *with superior devotion to the things which unite men in common ends, irrespective of national political boundaries.* (My emphasis. [1916] 1966 Chapter 7)

America ("democracy" in Dewey's work) is not the United States as nation-state. It is not "for-itself" but rather for (all) human beings.

This devaluation of America, democracy, "that which we are fighting for" (as it is now sometimes not named), is all the more problematic when addressing the most intractable of social tensions in the United States, most profoundly perhaps on issues of race as they touch the very definition of humanity and the limits of political action. Gunnar Myrdal (1944) did not hesitate to label "American" a dilemma that is still quite not resolved two centuries after the solemn proclamation that "all men are created equal" at the very moment when some men were to be counted as two-thirds of men. For after all, what is a man? a woman? when is a person? how is a person? America has repeatedly asked and answered these questions, but the problems are not quite resolved. Louis Dumont went even further than Myrdal by suggesting that racism is integral to the democratic emphasis on the individual as responsible agent. Racism, then, would not be undemocratic (unAmerican).

Dumont's argument, summarized, is that discrimination on the basis of traits constructed to be significant is widespread, if not universal, in human societies. By contrast, the ideological revulsion against such discrimination is anything but widespread. It is not that people anywhere willingly accept their subordination. Everywhere people resist the fate made for them by their consociates, but there are few places where the resistance is inscribed in the founding documents. This inscription, however, cannot erase discrimination. It can only sublimate it. America is real through its sacred texts, myths, and rituals, and of course, through all the institutions, discourses, and everyday difficulties produced by the attempt to inscribe, embody and enact these texts. From this perspective, Dewey's (and Mead's) optimism is self-contradictory: The more the political forces constituting schools (and all the other major institutions of the *American* State) focus on the development of individual potentialities, the more they reconstitute invidious distinctions among potential human beings on any number of scales.

America cannot be made to disappear even if many, I would say all, who live in the United States are not "American" in any simple way. It cannot be made to disappear even if it is not completed unless the most profound American values, and the most established American institutions are taken out of the realm of culture. The "Declaration of Independence" is an "American" document not because Jefferson was a hypocritical product of his time, but because it constitutes the very ground on which his hypocrisy can be made to count and it points at how it should be made to

count. In its adoption, and in its survival, along with the constitution and its amendments, it has so radically escaped his authorship that it can now be used to judge him and most of his peers to the present day as somehow unworthy of uncritical respect. It may even be that some of Margaret Mead's wildest metaphors about American fathers and grandfathers might be evocative here: as members of the third generation, "we" reject both Jefferson and Mead for their various failures. But, as we do, we cannot forget the powerful if not hegemonic and certainly cultural constitution of the principles of the rejection. Eventually, we must stand with Jefferson and Mead affirming why "in the course of human events" we might choose to move in particular directions.

Mead's Challenge

There is an odd moment in *AKYPD* when Mead is establishing the grounds of her authority as a scientist on the way to justifying her determined entry into the political fray. For several pages (pp. 8–13), she struggles to establish that she is detached from America. She knows what she writes will "sound exactly like a Sunday-school lesson" even though "these will be highly technical statements." "Any discussion of Americans must simply bristle with words like *good* and *bad*" because that is the way America speaks. If she were writing about Bali, other words would appear. None of these words are to be taken literally. They are all quotes from the natives within a broader relativized anthropological field. On this field there is no Good, no Truth, there are only reports of the use of words like "good," "true," along with reports of words like "taboo," "manna," and other exotic terms to be explained in their own cultural context.

But Mead only maintains this detached stance for a brief while. The last sentences of the book confirm where she has stood throughout, and this is within a broader field that encompasses the anthropological field. She is not describing, she is prophesizing:

> If we are to fight, if we are to win, if we are to hold before us as we fight a goal we will count worth fighting for, that must goal must be phrased in American terms, in that mixture of faith in the right and faith in the power of science: Trust God—and keep your powder dry. (p. 262)

There is wide agreement that Mead was already prophesying when she wrote *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928). *AKYPD* is a further milestone in Mead's career as she directly enters the American

fray. This would culminate with her many pronouncements about the future during the 1960s (1970) and her decision to answer questions in *Redbook Magazine* (Mead 1979). Her goal is not cultural critique, it is cultural construction. This is the challenge she presents to post-modern anthropologists "if we are to fight" ... in Europe, in Africa, or ... in America. This fight is likely to be violent and must be justified by moving beyond culture as technical term and into the realm of the Truths Jefferson, Lincoln, Martin Luther King invoked. This is the realm within which many intellectuals quiver, and some say they snigger as they express their irony. But even irony is a stance, and probably not a very productive one.

Mead's challenge is all the more radical that, having decided that a war had to be fought because it was just on American, that is universal, terms, she also volunteered to act within the institutions of the United States, both governmental and private. She offered her help to the war administration, and she redoubled her efforts in the mass media. She trusted America, and she honed her rhetorical skills as an anthropologist. She probably would have scoffed at those who write that "culture is text," unless they started writing ... Almost anything can be said, written, fought for, in culture, so affirms the anthropologist. But only some things should be said, written, fought for by any means including total war, for our future in culture, so affirms Mead. As a new millennium starts, as Americans, again, are challenged by the resistance of so many to American ideals of individual self-determination, when women are mutilated, populations are evacuated, and others sold into slavery, when poverty continues to grip some in this land, when so many are mis-educated, when decision have to be made about the physical environment, irony ceases to be a plausible choice. "We" must be aware of our sins, and yet move boldly forward into the public sphere.

I can hear a flag wave as I write these lines. As I do this in New York City, wondering about war in the Balkans and accusations of racially targeted police brutality, the flag I hear is not the same tricolor I would hear if I was writing in Paris. There are stars and stripes on this flag, symbols of individuals coming together for a "most perfect union." To this flag I should probably "pledge allegiance" in the ceremony that would formally transform me into the most mythical of all Americans, he who chooses America over Europe. I will not do it but I cannot ignore the pressure, nor its source. America (Mead ...) beckons!

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Preface—1965

★

THIS BOOK was written in 1942 as a social scientist's contribution to winning the war and establishing a just and lasting peace. It was frankly and completely partisan. In writing it, I attempted to use all my experience gained through the study of primitive societies, where distance provided objectivity, to present the culture and character of my own people in a way they would find meaningful and useful in meeting the harsh realities of war. The highest compliment I ever received on this book was implicit in a question asked by a slightly aggrieved adolescent: "How did Margaret Mead know how my mother brought me up?"

Unlike many anthropologists whose energetic learning of the cultures and the languages of other peoples has had its source in extreme dissatisfaction with or disappointment in their own culture, I have always enjoyed my own culture—just as I like my own name and enjoy being a woman. My reason for spending so many years away from the United States on Pacific islands is that field work has given me access to materials out of which we might gain a different understanding and the hope of achieving a valuable new consciousness in the modern world.

In the summer of 1945 I began to write a sequel to *And Keep Your Powder Dry*. My intention was to discuss the postwar roles of the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union (at that time, anthropologically speaking, quite unknown). But when the atomic bombs exploded over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I tore up the manuscript. Once we knew that it was possible for a people to destroy the enemy, themselves, and all bystanders, the world itself was changed. And no sentence written with that knowledge of man's new capacity could be meshed into any sentence written the week before.

But this book, written three years earlier, was directed to a consideration of qualities in the American character that have not been altered by the fact of the bomb. Furthermore, we are today