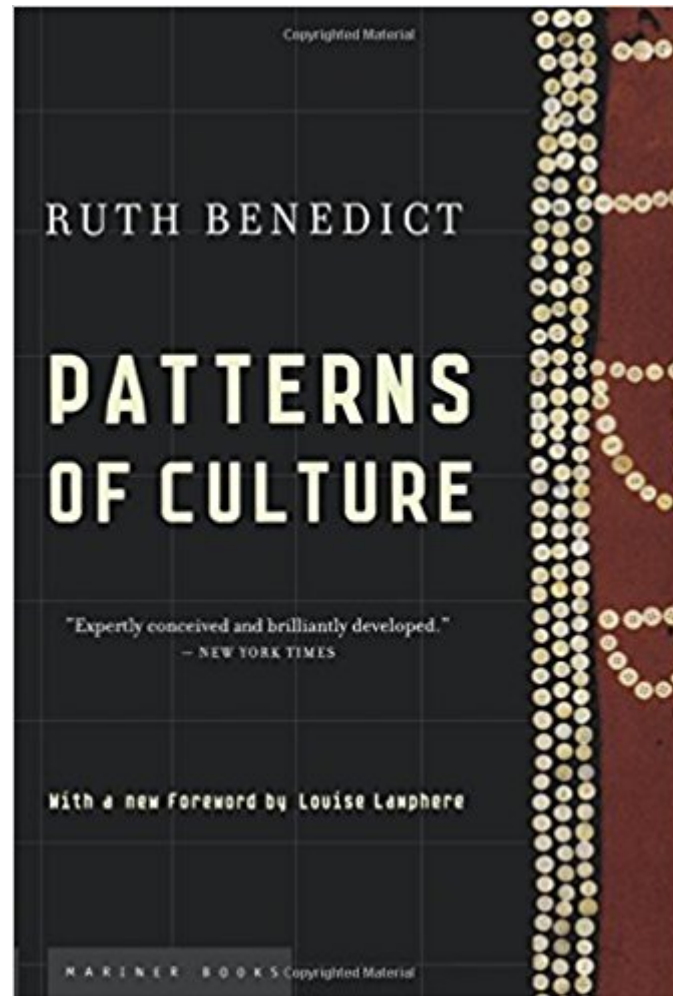




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Patterns Of Culture



Synopsis

"Unique and important . . . Patterns of Culture is a signpost on the road to a freer and more tolerant life." -- New York Times
A remarkable introduction to cultural studies, Patterns of Culture is an eloquent declaration of the role of culture in shaping human life. In this fascinating work, the renowned anthropologist Ruth Benedict compares three societies -- the Zuni of the southwestern United States, the Kwakiutl of western Canada, and the Dobuans of Melanesia -- and demonstrates the diversity of behaviors in them. Benedict's groundbreaking study shows that a unique configuration of traits defines each human culture and she examines the relationship between culture and the individual. Featuring prefatory remarks by Franz Boas, Margaret Mead, and Louise Lamphere, this provocative work ultimately explores what it means to be human. "That today the modern world is on such easy terms with the concept of culture . . . is in very great part due to this book." -- Margaret Mead
Benedict's Patterns of Culture is a foundational text in teaching us the value of diversity. Her hope for the future still has resonance in the twenty-first century: that recognition of cultural relativity will create an appreciation for 'the coexisting and equally valid patterns of life which mankind has created for itself from the raw materials of existence.'" -- from the new foreword by Louise Lamphere, past president of the American Anthropological Association
Ruth Benedict (1887-1948) was one of the most eminent anthropologists of the twentieth century. Her profoundly influential books Patterns of Culture and The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture were bestsellers when they were first published, and they have remained indispensable works for the study of culture in the many decades since.

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Customer Reviews

RUTH BENEDICT (1887â “1948) was one of the twentieth centuryâ™s foremost anthropologists and helped to shape the discipline in the United States and around the world. Benedict was a student and later a colleague of Franz Boas at Columbia, where she taught from 1924. Margaret Mead was one of her students. Benedictâ™s contributions to the field of cultural anthropology are often cited today.

enjoying the book

The cover and quality of the physical book is great. Also, this is a classic text which is a good read for any Anthropology student!

very nice, I like it, It is what I expect. The quality is very good. ^_^ I like it .

thank you

Service very good. 4 star rating for a book in good condition as described.A lot of hi-liting not mentionedWould recommend this book to social scientists especially anthropologists

For generations of students and readers, Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* has served as a general introduction, not only to anthropology as an academic field of enquiry, but to our variegated diversity of cultures. The structure of the book is at once so simple, so compact, and so sharply outlined, that it never fails to impress the reader by its analytical rigor and logical coherence. The study of three sharply contrasting cultures--the Zuni Pueblos of New Mexico, the natives of Dobu in Melanesia, and the Indian tribes (mostly the Kwakiutl) of the American Northwest coast--form the core chapters of the book. They are bracketed by three introductory chapters and two concluding essays. The opening part insists on the role of custom in shaping human behavior, the diversity of cultural traits, and the coherence of a culture brought about by a dominating principle. The last two chapters make a plea for cultural relativism and for tolerance towards individuals who do not fit into the dominant social pattern.The diversity of cultures and the coherent pattern that they form are presented as the core message of anthropology. The argument is made stronger by references to

other social sciences and by powerful metaphors. According to Benedict, all the possible human behaviors are distributed along a great "arc" which covers the whole range of possible cultural traits. Each culture then select along this arc a configuration of human possibilities that fits its environment and forms a coherent whole. The analogy here is with language and linguistics: "In cultural life as it is in speech, selection [from the inventory of physically available possibilities] is the prime necessity"--and capsulated in the famous Digger Indian proverb that serves as epigraph to the book: "In the beginning God gave to every people a cup of clay and from this cup they drank their life." Another analogy is with psychology and medical science. The dominant pattern of each culture is compared to the categories used in psychiatry to classify human behavior. Schizophrenia, hysteria, and manic depression are not a bundle of disconnected traits, they form a coherent whole and allows the physician to make an informed diagnosis. Similarly, "self-torture here, head-hunting there, prenuptial chastity in one tribe and adolescent licence in another, are not a list of unrelated facts, each of them to be greeted with surprise wherever it is found or wherever it is absent." A culture, like an individual, is a more or less consistent pattern of thought and action. Each tribal society or primitive culture can thus be understood by its constitutive formula. As the author succinctly states at the beginning of each case presentation, the Zuni are "a ceremonious people"; the Dobuans are "lawless and treacherous"; and the Kwakiutl are "a people of great possessions". Each central chapter develops this fundamental principle stated at the outset, based on observations collected by prominent ethnographers--Franz Boas for the Kwakiutl, Reo Fortune for The Sorcerers of Dobu (and Bronislaw Malinowski for their neighbors of the Trobriand islands), and Ruth Benedict herself, as well as various sources, for the Pueblo Indians. The generalization about a culture's organizing principle emerges from careful observation, which should not be biased by hypothesis, thesis, or theory. There is a fine division of labor between the field worker and the armchair anthropologist. Benedict wants the fieldworker to be "faithfully objective": "He must chronicle all the relevant behavior, taking care not to select according to any challenging hypothesis the facts that will fit a thesis." The anthropologist then rearranges this empirical material along theoretical lines. In a process of inference, he detects patterns and regularities in the observed behaviors and customs. In order to grasp the meaning of a culture as a whole, he first has to immerse himself into a sea of rites and practices, of myths and beliefs. But he also dwells in the realm of high theory, and he draws general lessons from his observations. Another way to express the dominant pattern of a culture is provided by the book's author through the categories of Dionysian, Apollinian, and paranoid cultures. The Dionysian/Apollonian dichotomy is taken from Friedrich Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy--and from Oswald Spengler, who substituted Dionysian

with Faustian-- , while the reference to the paranoid pattern of behavior is borrowed from Freud. The "will to superiority" which characterizes Kwakiutl culture could be linked back to the same authors. These categories were in the zeitgeist when *Patterns of Culture* was written, and the reference to literary works or to critical theory gives a cachet of intellectual sophistication to the description of primitive rites and customs. Like the social character of the Pueblos, *Patterns of Culture* is an Apollonian work, built around symmetries and written in a dispassionate tone. Upon closer examination however, this well-ordered structure shatters, and cracks appear in the edifice. There are contradictions between the bracketing chapters and the substantive part. In fact, Benedict doesn't fulfill the program she sets forth in the opening chapters, and she spends the last chapters dismantling it. The three monographs are self-standing and could well be read in isolation from the other chapters. But when replaced in the book context, they are at variance with the general messages formulated by Benedict. The appeal to tolerance and the celebration of cultural diversity ("the equally valid patterns of life" mentioned in the closing sentence of the book) are contradicted by the cruel and wicked ways of the Dobuans, or by the belief, shared by all tribal societies, that only their members are fully human while non-members are rejected outside the purview of humanity. There is a sense of jubilation, of perverse sadism even, by which Benedict describes the self-tortures that the Plain Indians inflicted upon themselves in their Dionysian quest for delirious visions. "They cut strips from the skin of their arms, they struck off fingers, they swung themselves from tall poles by straps inserted under the muscle of their shoulders. They went without food and water for extreme periods." Similarly, she insists on the wickedness of the Dobuans that manifests itself in all their social institutions: in marriage and conjugal life, in agriculture techniques, in religious ceremonies and magic rites, in economic exchange, in death and burial rituals. "All existence is cut-throat competition, and every advantage is gained at the expense of a defeated rival." People are all the more treacherous that "in ordinary converse the Dobuan is suave and unctuously polite". Apart from the question whether what Benedict describes really was true--and some descriptions seem to be marked by the seal of fiction--, we may note that the three cultures presented in the book were by no means stable and self-sufficient. As the last of the Digger Indians remarks, "our cup is broken now". The Pueblo Indians of New Mexico were just a shadow of their former selves. They had abandoned their walled cities and troglodyte housings long before the arrival of the white man, and were surviving on strips of desert. One may suspect that their formalistic insistence on rituals and ceremony, counting the number of feathers in their masks, was somehow directed towards the ethnographer, and for the tourists that were to follow in his path. Their culture was on the way to commodification, and would soon transform into empty forms

destined for outside consumption. The Pacific Northwest Indians didn't even have this chance: by the time of Benedict's writing, their culture had already disappeared, and was only known through past observations. There was certainly a bent towards self-destruction in the gigantic potlatch and bonfires of the vanities that served as a substitute for war and exchange. Where intellectuals like Marcel Mauss or Georges Bataille, impressed by the descriptions of Franz Boas, saw the logic of a gift economy or the accursed share of culture, we may detect the last sparkles of a civilization consuming itself. As for the wicked sorcerers of Dobu, we know less about their highly dysfunctional culture, but one may detect they learned part of their treacherous ways from the white man, who tried to allure them into indentured labor. The claim that primitive cultures are "laboratories" in which the problems are set in simpler terms than in complex societies raises the question of what is really being tested in these labs: if even simple experiences on a small scale such as Dobu Island leads to such grotesque failure, then one can be pessimistic about the fate of our complex societies, where problems are compounded by size and scope. But Benedict's point in describing the bizarre developments of behaviors in alien cultures is to emphasize the queerness of our own. She practices the art of extravagant otherness as self-critique. If the Pueblos are formalistic, the Dobuans mean and treacherous, and the Kwakiutl ostentatious to the extreme, don't we all share these proclivities? The whole enterprise of describing these cultures, in three chapters absolutely crammed with detailed material of the most curious sort--Zuni passage rites, Kwakiutl chants, Dobuan residence arrangements--is informed with concerns rather close to home. The author focuses on topics that were of particular salience to contemporary Americans: marriage and divorce (the later being seen as a normal development), adolescence and entry into adulthood (reference is made to the "prevalence of the petting party" among young Americans), conformism and conspicuous consumption ("keeping up with the Joneses"). In the end, anthropology is seen as a moral science, and the detour through other cultures as a way to adjust our moral compass to new coordinates. Looking forward, Benedict writes, with a touch of optimism: "It is probable that social orders of the future will carry their tolerance and encouragement of individual difference much further than any culture of which we have experience."

Read this in a philosophy class 32 years ago and I'm enjoying reading it again. Gave a copy to a mentee.

I read this book many years ago and I haven't looked at it lately. So, this is strictly from memory. What I remember about the book is that from the book I acquired this "insightful idea" : that as we

learn our own culture we become a "prisoner" of our ONE culture. We become a prisoner because we only know ONE culture. If we only know ONE culture we have "no choice" but to "live and think" WITHIN that ONE culture. But, if we know two or three or twenty cultures we can then "free" ourselves from living and thinking and perceiving in ONE way. We will then have choices BETWEEN more than one way of life, we will have choices between more than one way of thinking and we will have choices between more than one way of perceiving the world. The knowledge of more than one culture gives us "more freedom" of choice. Thus we cease to be "a prisoner of culture". We become somewhat of an "overman" because we are "free to choose" among many cultural possibilities that people with only ONE culture cannot. And, we can become a "participant observer" among many cultures. We can choose how to live, perceive, and think among many more possibilities which gives us "more freedom" of action. This "insight" has freed me to choose "the best" aspects among many cultures thus enriching my life and giving me more choices about how to live my life. If this book does the same for you, then it has served its purpose. I recommend the book because of the "cultural freedom" you may acquire from reading it. Email:

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