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University History Series

Burton Benedict

A SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGIST IN BRITAIN AND BERKELEY

With Introductions by  
William Simmons  
and  
Lesley A. Sharp

Interviews Conducted by  
Suzanne B. Riess  
in 2000-2001

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral history is a method of collecting historical information through tape-recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The tape recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is indexed, bound with photographs and illustrative materials, and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

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Family in Baltimore and New York City; early interests, film, Hollywood; Air Force Altitude Training Center, WWII; Harvard Dept. of Social Relations, faculty Gregory Bateson, Florence Kluckhohn; London School of Economics, thesis, Raymond Firth; marriage to Marion Steuber, London friends and activities; Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill, 1954, ethnographic work; research in Mauritius, 1955-1957, continuing interest in family planning programs; LSE faculty, colleagues, Cambridge Conference, Royal Anthropological Institute, interest in role analysis, ethnographic films; UC Berkeley Dept. of Anthropology since 1966: faculty Elizabeth Colson, William Shack, others, innovative teaching, department chairmanship; research in Seychelles, 1960, 1974, *Men, Women, and Money*; social aspects of the move to Berkeley; UC administrative roles: Divisional Dean, Letters & Sciences, Budget Committee, Study Abroad Program; Lowie Museum of Anthropology: PPIE Exhibition, directorship; discusses worlds fair scholarship, zoo education, Oakland Zoo, careers of daughters Barbara and Helen. Appended articles by Benedict.

Introductions by William Simmons, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley; and Lesley A. Sharp, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Barnard College, New York

Interviewed 2000-2001 by Suzanne B. Riess, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.



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## PREFACE

When President Robert Gordon Sproul proposed that the Regents of the University of California establish a Regional Oral History Office, he was eager to have the office document both the University's history and its impact on the state. The Regents established the office in 1954, "to tape record the memoirs of persons who have contributed significantly to the history of California and the West," thus embracing President Sproul's vision and expanding its scope.

Administratively, the new program at Berkeley was placed within the library, but the budget line was direct to the Office of the President. An Academic Senate committee served as executive. In the four decades that have followed, the program has grown in scope and personnel, and the office has taken its place as a division of The Bancroft Library, the University's manuscript and rare books library. The essential purpose of the Regional Oral History Office, however, remains the same: to document the movers and shakers of California and the West, and to give special attention to those who have strong and continuing links to the University of California.

The Regional Oral History Office at Berkeley is the oldest oral history program within the University system, and the University History Series is the Regional Oral History Office's longest established and most diverse series of memoirs. This series documents the institutional history of the University, through memoirs with leading professors and administrators. At the same time, by tracing the contributions of graduates, faculty members, officers, and staff to a broad array of economic, social, and political institutions, it provides a record of the impact of the University on the wider community of state and nation.

The oral history approach captures the flavor of incidents, events, and personalities and provides details that formal records cannot reach. For faculty, staff, and alumni, these memoirs serve as reminders of the work of predecessors and foster a sense of responsibility toward those who will join the University in years to come. Thus, they bind together University participants from many eras and specialties, reminding them of interests in common. For those who are interviewed, the memoirs present a chance to express perceptions about the University, its role and lasting influences, and to offer their own legacy of memories to the University itself.

The University History Series over the years has enjoyed financial support from a variety of sources. These include alumni groups and individuals, campus departments, administrative units, and special groups as well as grants and private gifts. For instance, the Women's Faculty Club supported a series on the club and its members in order to preserve insights into the role of women on campus. The Alumni Association supported a number of interviews, including those with Ida Sproul, wife of the President, and athletic coaches Clint Evans and Brutus Hamilton.

Their own academic units, often supplemented with contributions from colleagues, have contributed for memoirs with Dean Ewald T. Grether, Business Administration; Professor Garff Wilson, Public Ceremonies; Deans Morrrough P. O'Brien and John Whinnery, Engineering; and

Dean Milton Stern, UC Extension. The Office of the Berkeley Chancellor has supported oral history memoirs with Chancellors Edward W. Strong and Albert H. Bowker.

To illustrate the University/community connection, many memoirs of important University figures have in turn inspired, enriched, or grown out of broader series documenting a variety of significant California issues. For example, the Water Resources Center-sponsored interviews of Professors Percy H. McGaughey, Sidney T. Harding, and Wilfred Langelier have led to an ongoing series of oral histories on California water issues. The California Wine Industry Series originated with an interview of University enologist William V. Cruess and now has grown to a fifty-nine-interview series of California's premier winemakers. California Democratic Committeewoman Elinor Heller was interviewed in a series on California Women Political Leaders, with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities; her oral history was expanded to include an extensive discussion of her years as a Regent of the University through interviews funded by her family's gift to The Bancroft Library.

To further the documentation of the University's impact on state and nation, Berkeley's Class of 1931, as their class gift on the occasion of their fiftieth anniversary, endowed an oral history series titled "The University of California, Source of Community Leaders." The series reflects President Sproul's vision by recording the contributions of the University's alumni, faculty members and administrators. The first oral history focused on President Sproul himself. Interviews with thirty-four key individuals dealt with his career from student years in the early 1900s through his term as the University's eleventh President, from 1930-1958.

Gifts such as these allow the Regional Oral History Office to continue to document the life of the University and its link with its community. Through these oral history interviews, the University keeps its own history alive, along with the flavor of irreplaceable personal memories, experiences, and perceptions. A full list of completed memoirs and those in process in the series is included following the index of this volume.

Harriet Nathan, Series Director  
University History Series

Willa K. Baum, Division Head  
Regional Oral History Office

September 1994

Regional Oral History Office  
University of California  
Berkeley, California



Regional Oral History Office Interviews in Anthropology

Burton Benedict, *A Social Anthropologist in Britain and Berkeley*, 2002

J. Desmond Clark, *An Archaeologist at Work in African Prehistory and Early Human Studies: Teamwork and Insight*, 2001

Elizabeth Colson, *Anthropology and a Lifetime of Observation*, 2002

George M. Foster, *An Anthropologist's Life in the 20th Century: Theory and Practice at UC Berkeley, the Smithsonian, in Mexico, and with the World Health Organization*, 2000

Mary LeCron Foster, *Finding the Themes: Family, Anthropology, Language Origins, Peace and Conflict*, 2001



## INTRODUCTION by William Simmons

With his research experience in urban anthropology, small territories, and plural societies, Burton Benedict brought exciting new intellectual directions to Berkeley's Department of Anthropology. His commitment to initiating the first segment (on British Social Anthropology) of the year-long seminar required of all entering social anthropology graduate students, and to teaching the dissertation seminar for students who had completed their doctoral dissertation research, gave coherence and community to graduate training for many generations of Berkeley anthropologists.

During the extraordinary period of campus unrest and counter-cultural florescence of the late 1960s and early 1970s, both Burton and Marion did their best to understand the varieties of cultural and political invention that absorbed our community. I recall a year-long Monday evening discussion group that I convened weekly in 1968-1969 at a private residence in South Berkeley on the anthropological study of religion. Burton had been a visitor the previous year and this was his first year as a member of our faculty. I was in my second year as a beginning assistant professor. We (a group of undergraduate and graduate students, interested Berkeleyans, and very occasional faculty) focused on such topics as spirit possession, Victor Turner's theories of liminality, mind altering hallucinogens, ritual poverty, pilgrimages, communes, trance, and more. John Ogbu discussed his research on glossalalia in an Oakland store-front church. Irving Zaretsky presented his findings on spirit mediumship in San Francisco Bay. Dale Fitzgerald and Morton Marks explained their innovative work on African and African-American spirit possession and music. Even Carlos Castaneda attended two meetings to discuss his field research for *The Teachings of Don Juan*. Burton and Marion attended these meetings twice, I believe, and easily built trust and respect that crossed the unprecedented generational divide of that unusual time.

The leadership qualities that Burton showed in his research choices and teaching carried over into university governance where he always pulled a long oar. After serving as a member of the Executive Committee, the title used by the Department of Anthropology to refer to its storied governance committee (now replaced by a more conventional chairmanship), Burton was invited to serve as the first divisional Dean of Social Sciences at Berkeley, from 1971 to 1974. In this capacity, he oversaw the chairs and departments of Berkeley's largest academic division, most of which dominated the National Research Council rankings of American graduate programs. Burton successfully set the standard that successive deans of the Division of Social Sciences, David Hooson, Geography, Geoffrey Keppel, Psychology, Gerald Mendelsohn, Psychology, William Simmons, Anthropology, and George Breslauer, Political Science, were proud to carry forward in leading this distinguished division of Berkeley departments. I always admired and hope that I learned from Burton's ability to lead with integrity and a clear head while being close to those with whom he worked. His combination of clarity, humor, and appreciation of his colleagues' interesting qualities contributed to many lasting and trusting relationships. In my most recent visit to Berkeley's magical campus I found Burton in the Faculty Club for his weekly lunch with George Foster and Elizabeth Colson, the three who remain of the anthropology emeriti who meet there every Wednesday, and have for many years.

From 1978 to 1981, Burton served on the Committee on Budget and Interdepartmental Relations. More generally known as the budget committee, the Committee on Budget and Interdepartmental Relations has responsibility for campus-wide recommendations for FTE allocation to professional schools and L&S departments, approval of new appointments, merit increases, promotions, salary recommendations, and academic priority setting for the Berkeley campus. Burton chaired the budget committee in 1980-1981. Service on the budget committee, particularly as its chair, is the highest and most distinguished form of faculty committee service at Berkeley. The role requires vision, stature, wisdom, decisiveness, fairness, the trust of faculty and administration, and extraordinary commitment to a most demanding task. The budget committee is central to the academic governance of the University. The anthropology faculty was proud when Burton was selected. Although budget committee members remove themselves from departmental governance to avoid conflicts of interest, once their service ends, they can contribute valuable insight and experience to their departments. Having served both as divisional dean and chair of the budget committee, Burton was a valuable guide to his colleagues in Anthropology on numerous matters of university business. One of the most regular events at Anthropology Department meetings for many years was for someone to exclaim in the midst of a runaway discussion—"Wait a minute, let's hear what Burton has to say about this." Last year I worked with Bob Middlekauff, distinguished American historian and former Berkeley Provost, on a visiting committee to review the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University. When Bob and I had a few minutes to chat about Berkeley, he recalled how much he enjoyed and admired Burton for his leadership on the budget committee.

In the mid-1980s Burton began his active involvement with the Lowie (Hearst) Museum, as associate director (1984-1986), acting director (1988), and director (1989-1994). He enlivened the museum in many ways beginning with his highly innovative and successful exhibition on the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. Burton and the late Jim Deetz developed a strong working friendship through the museum, and were seen often at the end of the day in the Faculty Club bar, engrossed in happy discussions. Burton, British educated, always well-dressed, and with a second home in London, and Jim, who loved country music and dressed western, became known to some respectively as the city mouse and the country mouse—which of course reflects the fact that Burton and Jim saw the humor around them and in themselves.

Burton's enthusiasm for unconventional topics (Islamic sects in London, world fairs, small island territories, zoos), his willingness to lead, ease with laughter, youthful curiosity about people and things, and loyalty to his colleagues has brightened the University of California at Berkeley for a long time. He also brightened the Amigos, another friendly Faculty Club get-together late Wednesday afternoons (now on hold) that included myself, Kent Lightfoot, Pat Kirch, Gerry Berreman, and occasionally Stanley Brandes.

William S. Simmons  
Professor Emeritus, Anthropology

Providence, Rhode Island  
March 2002

## INTRODUCTION by Lesley A. Sharp

I can not remember the precise circumstances under which I first met Burton Benedict, although I recall vividly that I held him in great awe. He was, after all, among the few scholars in the Anglophone world and, more precisely, in North America, who had long-term experience in the Indian Ocean, a tract of territory that held great fascination for me as a budding anthropologist who was drawn to Madagascar. When I entered the graduate program at Berkeley in 1983, Burton's name was nearly synonymous with the islands of Mauritius and the Seychelles, where he had worked as an ethnographer in the late 1950s, and in 1960 and then 1974-75, respectively. My awe was a sentiment shared by many of my young peers, a feeling that did not diminish with ease upon one's first encounter with him. More precisely, if you did not know Burton you might fear him--he seemed, after all, very proper and reserved, at least in his appearance. For one, he always wore a suit and tie and, for another, he preferred a pince-nez to a pair of reading glasses. As a result, young students who had just emerged from their college years were generally uncertain what to make of him.

I remember that it took me some time before I had the courage to approach Burton and speak to him of my interests. As I soon found, however--as did the many others who sought his guidance and counsel--Burton embodied the very best qualities that one could hope for in a mentor. He was brilliant, thoughtful, extraordinarily fair, and, well, at times, very funny. As I soon learned, for example, we two shared three things in common. The first was merely a starting point for establishing rapport: we had each spent significant portions of our childhoods in southern California. The second and, clearly, more important fact was a deep commitment to the study of societies in the Indian Ocean, a territory far too frequently neglected by anthropologists and even, at times, cartographers. The third was a more esoteric and thus whimsical interest: we were both absolutely crazy about reptiles. Whereas I had had a pet snake for several decades, Burton's life was marked by his caring for a host of scaly creatures. As I soon learned, when I first met him he not only owned (if I recall correctly) several horned chameleons, but he could also do a killer imitation of a barking gecko.

Geckos aside, it is, of course, Burton's scholarly activities and sharp mind that made him such an extraordinary mentor in graduate school and beyond. Burton has never been afraid to think outside the box; for this reason, students with radical or eclectic ideas would wisely seek his advice and training. Burton would, in turn, subtly assist them in refining their ideas into workable projects, always insisting upon intellectual rigor throughout, piling your arms high with books and articles to take home, digest, and later critique for him. Among the most memorable experiences for me was his dissertation writing seminar. This was an astounding experience for several of us as we worked together, under his tutelage, on such topics as the folklore of bestiality on the Brazilian pampas, the performative displays of mafia trials in southern Italy, the gendered nature of power in Malagasy spirit possession, and the tension between rural and coastal identities in Kenya. In addition to the intellectual challenges of our group effort, elaborate exercises in gourmet cooking were also central to the seminar enterprise. These paired activities fostered a deep sense of kinship among us as we worked together under Burton, refining our projects and theoretical arguments.

As a scholar, too, Burton has always been a maverick in the field, albeit a cautious and thoughtful one. What I mean is this: Burton's theoretical concerns have been guided consistently by the pristine logic of British structuralism, and in this sense one could receive no better training from any of his peers. As a result, his writings from four decades ago on Mauritius remain essential reading within anthropology, standing as tacit reminders of the truly complex nature of inequality in pluralistic societies. More generally, his approach was so appealing (even when many students of my generation pooh-pooed British anthropology as stodgy, static, and old-fashioned) in part because of the subtle humor that inevitably laces his understanding of human behavior. Consider this: *Men, Women and Money in the Seychelles* could have been written as a straight and serious work authored by one man alone, an ethnographer entrenched solely in the rigors of methodical data collection. Instead, he co-authored this with his wife, Marion Benedict. As a result, this book consistently teases the reader into considering what precisely defines the essence of ethnographic writing. It is important to note that these two authors chose not to blend their ideas so as to produce one united voice. Instead, each claimed one half of the book, adding, interestingly, little commentary on the other's section. The book, then, is an intriguing experiment in anthropological writing, part survey, part memoir, part fiction, where one can even find humor in the deadpan of statistical analysis. This was indeed a ground-breaking work in anthropology, a proto-post-modern exercise, if you will, and one published well before more reflexive (and self-absorbed) texts began to flood the discipline a decade later.

By the time I was working under Burton's tutelage, however, it is important to realize that he had already started to move away from the Indian Ocean and on to other projects. For one, he was fascinated by the world of collecting (although he himself may not have labeled it as such). Thus, he had begun to write on the phenomenon of worlds fairs, publishing a stunning work (in both theoretical and visual terms) that addressed deeply entrenched Euro-American desires to display cultures, animals, and environments to curious publics. Such concerns led him to experiment with visual media, so that his scholarly, printed work later yielded an award-winning film on this topic as well. Who else was doing this sort of thing at Berkeley at the time? No one. In fact, most of us--students and faculty alike--hardly knew how to think about visual media, yet there was Burton in the thick of it. From worlds fairs he then shifted his attention to museums: at the very moment when he retired from the faculty at Berkeley he stood prepared to assume the directorship of the University's ethnographic museum. In a few short years Burton transformed the dusty (and underfunded) space of the Lowie Museum into the vibrant (and, it seemed, finally 20th century) Hearst Museum, where his curatorial decisions were driven by a cautious, thoughtful interest in the politics of display. Most recently, Burton's work has focused on zoological parks, where earlier scholarly writings have now given way to the pleasures of docent work based--where else?--at the Oakland Zoo.

In short, there has always been something magical about Burton's qualities as a teacher and mentor. Clearly his skills include his intellectual rigor and original character. Yet his skills run deeper than this. In graduate school, one always knew that Burton would consider even the most mis-guided concerns seriously, assisting students in refining their ideas so that they finally, and ultimately, made sense. Sometimes you had to listen or watch carefully--if you were taking up too much of his time (as graduate students inevitably do), he always had a subtle way of leading you to the door as if you yourself had made the decision to do so. I now find myself using such techniques

when confronted with overly talkative students of my own. But there were never any short-cuts--he always seemed to have time for you. When I completed my dissertation, for instance, he went over the entire manuscript page-by-page, inserting comments as he went along, deciphering his often illegible script, and refining half-baked ideas in the making. This same meticulous quality has always characterized his own scholarship. One is indeed blessed in knowing Burton Benedict.

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Department of Anthropology

Barnard College  
New York City, New York  
May 2002





## INTERVIEW HISTORY by Suzanne B. Riess

Burton Benedict, emeritus professor of anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, wrote his Harvard honors thesis on the adjustment problems of second generation Chinese in Boston. He received his Ph.D. in social anthropology from the University of London where his doctoral thesis was on Muslim and Buddhist associations in London. He prepared himself further for field work with a year as senior research fellow at the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University where he created an "Annotated Bibliography Relating to the Sociology of Muslim Peoples." His extensive field work centered on Mauritius and the Seychelles. When he went out to Mauritius under a grant from the Colonial Social Science Research Council he was looking at the political and economic structures of the whole society. He found himself in a richly heterogeneous country and began his work on "Stratification in Plural Societies." In 1972 he wrote "Controlling Population Growth in Mauritius," a reflection of time spent on that challenging problem. In the appended two articles by Benedict one sees a move from keen observer to committed participant. His oral history describes, among many things, this evolution in his practice of anthropology.

Benedict offers in this oral history an compelling look at his profession. His lifelong interest in museums and the ordering and interpreting of material evidence, and his gifts as a teacher and particular skills as a raconteur, were a fortuitous blend for an interviewee. As Benedict thinks back to his professors at Harvard, his research at the Institute of Islamic Studies, his fieldwork in Mauritius in the late 1950s, and his several visits to the Seychelles, he summons up still-bright images of people and place. His years at the London School of Economics, where he taught from 1958 to 1969, introduced him to a brilliant crowd of friends and further made of him a man of at least two continents. As in Britain, so in the Berkeley years, 1967 to 1991, Benedict took on administrative assignments that took him straight to the inside track, a place where he functioned comfortably, and from which he reports. We were delighted that Burton Benedict agreed to be interviewed, and the oral history was initiated in August, 2000.

The interviews took place at Burton and Marion Benedict's rather hard-to-reach-the-first-time multi-storied aerie in north Berkeley. The initial meeting, a planning meeting, was in his study, a generous museum of a room with a view, lined with the traditional academic's bookshelves, but also a treasury of pots and rugs and statues and art and artifacts, the kind of room you wish your host would vacate for an hour or so, bidding you, "Make yourself at home!" We used that room for the first several interviews, but querulous comments from the transcriber made us realize that there was some inexplicable radio-like feedback coming through on the tape.

So we moved down a story to the living room, but the ghostly music and chatter were still there. Settling for the bottom floor of the house, we finished the interviews free of feedback, although for me regrettably away from the treasury above!

The interviews were conducted in a chronological manner. We started with Burton Benedict's family and his singular childhood, both sources of excellent stories with well-cast characters. He offered these tales somewhat hesitantly, thinking perhaps it was "all too much," but I seized on them. Surely they are important to the oral history, I thought, because they introduce the researcher to the evolving charm and adept social skills of this anthropologist who went on to operate so effectively at all levels, from the proverbial village hut to drawing room. Certainly it must be in the definition of anthropology, the ability to function at many social and cultural levels, but Benedict seemed particularly able to make it work. Thus it was that when he came to Berkeley, as William Simmons says in the Introduction, he "brought exciting new intellectual directions to [the department]." And in those university governance assignments he always, says Simmons, "pulled a long oar."

After the interviewing was completed and transcribed, the edited oral history was returned to Benedict. He reviewed it carefully, responding to queries, checking names and so on, and strenuously black-penciling the nearly continual counterpoint of "[laughter]". He declared that things were either funny or they were not; he objected to the inclusion of the transcriber's parenthetically indicated merriment. While stage-directions are typically included in oral history transcripts, in this case it had looked a bit like a laugh track throughout. But I hope the reader will take from tone and content the spirit of amusement and bemusement that frequently marked the twenty or so hours of interviewing.

Benedict's is one in the series of University of California Department of Anthropology interviews. Several earlier oral histories completed with anthropologists George and Mary Foster and J. Desmond Clark and Elizabeth Colson painted memorable pictures of personalities and issues and the excitement of locating one's particular interests in what was then a very new profession. George McClelland Foster was a student of Herskovits, Kroeber, and Lowie and a member of the department since 1953. The title of his oral history introduces him: *An Anthropologist's Life in the 20th Century: Theory and Practice at UC Berkeley, the Smithsonian, in Mexico, and with the World Health Organization*. His wife, the late Mary LeCron Foster was a linguistic anthropologist and worked in peace and conflict studies. Paleoanthropologist and Africanist the late J. Desmond Clark's oral memoir reaches around the globe in its scope, and includes supplementary dialogues with other colleagues doing early human studies. Elizabeth Colson, who came to Berkeley in 1964, continues her fieldwork with the Gwembe Tonga of Zambia, began in 1956 through the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute.

William Simmons, formerly of the department at Berkeley, now at Brown University, accepted our invitation to write an introduction to his friend, Burton. J.R.K. Kantor, University Archivist emeritus, read the final draft with his usual critical and appreciative eye. Suzanne Calpestri, head of the George and Mary Foster Library of Anthropology, provided, as always, great services. The Anthropology Emeritus Lecture Series web site that she has created leads to an abundance of historical material, speeches, photographs, a rich collection of department history, to which we now add the Burton Benedict oral history.

The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to augment through tape-recorded memoirs the Library's materials on the history of California and the West. Copies of all interviews are available for research use in The Bancroft Library and in the UCLA Department of Special Collections. The office is under the direction of Richard Cándida Smith, Director, and the administrative direction of Charles B. Faulhaber, James D. Hart Director of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Suzanne B. Riess, Senior Editor  
Regional Oral History Office

Berkeley, California  
May 2002



Regional Oral History Office  
Room 486 The Bancroft Library

University of California  
Berkeley, California 94720

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name Burton BENEDICT  
 Date of birth 20 May 1923 Birthplace Baltimore, MD  
 Father's full name Burton E. Oppenheim  
 Occupation U.S. Govt. Birthplace Baltimore, MD  
 Mother's full name Helen Dieches Benedict  
 Occupation Housewife Birthplace Baltimore, MD  
 Your spouse/partner Marion S. Benedict  
 Occupation Writer Birthplace Chester PA  
 Your children Helen b. 1952  
Barbara MacVean b. 1955  
 Where did you grow up? Baltimore, New York, Hollywood  
 Present community Berkeley, CA  
 Education AB cum laude Harvard 1949  
PhD London School of Economics  
 Occupation(s) Professor of Anthropology  
 Areas of expertise Social structure; Mauritius, Seychelles;  
Economic anthropology  
 Other interests or activities Natural history, Museums,  
expositions, zoos, history  
 Organizations in which you are active Royal Anthropological Institute,  
Oakland Zoo, Zoological Society of London  
 SIGNATURE B. Benedict DATE: 10-VI-01



CURRICULUM VITAE

BURTON BENEDICT

Born: May 20, 1923. Baltimore, Maryland, U. S. A.

Married: Marion Steuber, September 23, 1950.

Children: Helen, born 1952; Barbara MacVean, born 1955.

Military Service: 1942-1946: United States Army Air Force.

Education:

June, 1941: Hollywood High School, Honor Society, California Scholarship Federation.

February, 1949: A.B. cum laude in Department of Social Relations, Harvard College, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Supervisors: Drs. David Aberle, Gregory Bateson, Florence Kluckhohn.

Honors thesis: "Some Adjustments Problems of Second Generation Chinese in Boston, Massachusetts." magna cum laude.

Examiners: Drs. David Aberle, Florence Kluckhohn, Benjamin Paul.

June, 1950: Certificat de français usuel, degré moyen, mention très honorable, 1er sur 17 candidats. Université de Paris, Sorbonne. Certificat d'études pratiques de prononciation française, mention honorable, Sorbonne.

June, 1954: Ph.D. in Social Anthropology, London School of Economics, University of London.

Supervisors: Professor Sir Raymond Firth, Professor Maurice Freedman, Professor Sir Edmund Leach.

Thesis: "Muslim and Buddhist Associations in London"

Examiners: Professor Sir Raymond Firth, Professor Meyer Fortes, Professor Maurice Freedman.

Appointments:

1954-55: Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Montreal, Canada.

1955-58: Sociological Research Officer, Government of Mauritius under a grant from the Colonial Social Science Research Council (U.K.).

1958-61: Assistant Lecturer in Social Anthropology, London School of Economics and Political Science.

1961-64: Lecturer in Social Anthropology, London School of Economics and Political Science.

1964-68: Senior Lecturer in Social Anthropology, London School of Economics and Political Science.

1966-67: Visiting Professor of Anthropology, University of California at Berkeley.

1968-1991 Professor of Anthropology, University of California at Berkeley.

1991 - Professor Emeritus.

1970-71: Chairman, Department of Anthropology, University of California at Berkeley.

1971-74: Dean of Social Sciences, University of California at Berkeley.

1978-81: Committee on Budget and Interdepartmental Relations, University of California at Berkeley. (Chairman 1980-81).

1981-83... Guest Curator for an exhibition on the Panama Pacific International Exposition of 1915, Lowie Museum of Anthropology, University of California at Berkeley.

1984-86: Associate Director, Lowie Museum of Anthropology, University of California at Berkeley.

1986-88: Director, Study Center for the United Kingdom and Ireland, London. Education Abroad Program, University of California.

1988: Acting Director, Lowie Museum of Anthropology, University of California at Berkeley.



1989-94. Director, Hearst (formerly Lowie) Museum of Anthropology.

1991. The Berkeley Citation for distinguished achievement and for notable service to the University.

#### Fellowships and Grants:

1955-58: Colonial Social Science Research Council (U.K.) for research in Mauritius.

1960: Colonial Social Science Research Council (U.K.) for research in Seychelles.

1962: Department of Technical Co-operation (U.K.) for research in Malawi.

1963: Grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation of New York to organize a conference on applied anthropology at the London School of Economics.

1974-75: Humanities Research Fellowship, University of California at Berkeley for research in Seychelles

1981-82: Humanities Research Fellowship, University California at Berkeley to curate an exhibition on the Panama Pacific International Exposition of 1915.

1981-83: Principal Investigator under a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to mount an exhibition on the Panama Pacific International Exposition of 1915.

#### Exhibitions:

1982-83 The Panama Pacific International Exhibition of 1915. Lowie Museum of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley.

1990 The Hearst Collections. Lowie Museum of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley.

1991 Money: Tokens of Value from Around the World. Lowie Museum of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley.

1993 Seychelles: Commerce in Paradise. Hearst  
Museum of Anthropology.

2000 Footsteps from the Past: Early Hominids in Africa.  
Oakland Zoo

Fieldwork:

1948: Second Generation Chinese in Boston,  
Massachusetts.

1952-54: Muslims and Buddhists in London.

1955-57 Indians in Mauritius.

1960: Seychelles.

1962: Malawi.

1974-75: Seychelles.

Professional Associations:

Association of Social Anthropologists of the British Commonwealth.

Royal Anthropological Institute, Fellow

Member of Council, 1962-65; 1967-68; 1986-89.

Member of Standing Committee, 1963-65.

Book Reviews Editor for *MAN, the Journal of the Royal  
Anthropological Institute*, 1965-68.

Chairman, North American Committee, 1978-81.

British Sociological Association, Fellow, 1957-69.

Society for Applied Anthropology, Fellow, 1958-76.

Royal Society, Population Study Group, 1965-68.

American Anthropological Association, Fellow.

Society for Cultural Anthropology, Fellow.

British Film Institute: History Selection Committee, Member for  
Anthropology, 1963-66.

Hon. Secretary, The Ethnographic Film Committee of Great Britain  
and Ireland, 1955-60.

Secretary, Higher Degrees Sub-Committee, Board of Studies in  
Anthropology, University of London, 1964-66.

Member, Committee of Management, Institute of Commonwealth  
Studies, University of London, 1965-68.

The Atheneum, London. Elected 1968.

A Governor, St. Paul's Girls' Preparatory School, London, 1965-68.

Contributing editor: *World's Fair*, Corte Madera, California.

Scientific Fellow: Zoological Society of London

Trustee: East Bay Zoological Society



## INTERVIEW WITH BURTON BENEDICT

**I FAMILY**

[Interview 1: August 1, 2000] ##<sup>1</sup>

**Early Background, Baltimore**

Riess: We should start by you telling me about your parents on both sides--how they got to Baltimore.

Benedict: I guess the first thing to say is that I'm an only child among four parents, which probably accounts for a number of things.

Riess: Let's start with the birth parents.

Benedict: Okay. Well, my family were German Jews, and they came to this country, on my mother's side, I guess in the middle of the nineteenth century, that is, after the revolutions of 1848 when a lot of people left Europe and came to America. They started into department stores. They were merchants.

Riess: Did they come to Baltimore? Is this Hutzler's or Hochschild's?

Benedict: Yes, what in Baltimore is pronounced "Hosheld's." I think I must be related to them. My grandmother was called Kann, and there used to be a department store called S. Kann and Sons, one in Washington and one in Baltimore. They did not arrive penniless. They brought some capital with them.

They were all reform Jews. They were very Protestant Jews, very non-religious. They celebrated Christmas. Baltimore was a city that was divided between Jews and non-Jews and they each built their own castles, as it were. I think that's much less the case now, but it certainly was then.

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<sup>1</sup>## This symbol indicates that a tape or tape segment has begun or ended. A guide to the tapes follows the transcript.

Riess: I wonder what drew them to Baltimore?

Benedict: I don't really know. They tended to go to the cities that were commercially lively, and Baltimore was a seaport. It was an important city. But they went to Baltimore; they went to Cleveland; they went to Cincinnati; they went to New York, obviously; they went to Boston.

There was another tradition of the poorer German Jews who really became sort of itinerant merchants and went to the South where they occupied a niche. It was interesting because this--again, we're talking about the middle of the nineteenth century. You had the landowners, the plantation owners, because this was pre-Civil War, you had the slaves and the poor whites, but the middle stratum was very much occupied by Jews. That is, the non-Jewish whites weren't storekeepers. So the Jews occupied that niche, which is kind of a traditional Jewish thing that happened in Europe, too.

I don't know the details. I know that a lot of them became extremely successful. One of them, for instance, again a distant relation, operated something called the Cone--which by that time was spelled C-O-N-E--Mills, which made all the denim in the world and which was in North Carolina.

Riess: Then you are related to Etta Cone and the Cone sisters?

Benedict: Those Cones--probably. Yes. They also intermarried a lot, these families. That's on my mother's side.

My father's side was the same kind of thing. They came earlier. I think the first one arrived here in 1795. And some of them were Sephardic Jews who came from Spain and Portugal. My paternal grandmother's maiden name was Núñez, and that was, of course a Spanish name. My paternal grandfather, whom I didn't know, was a manufacturer. He had a clothing factory and he manufactured pajamas and underwear and shirts. He had two factories. He was quite successful, became very prominent in the Jewish community, and he founded a major private school, where there's a bronze bust of him, in Baltimore.

So that was my father's side. They lived in big houses and they had horses and carriages and later chauffeur-driven cars. It was that kind of an atmosphere. So--I don't come from a poverty-stricken background. Anyhow, that's the background, and I still have, of course, relatives in Baltimore. I don't go there very much, but I still do have cousins. That older generation--they were really quite remarkable people. There are lots of nice anecdotes about them, which I won't burden you with.

Riess: Did they function for the community the way that generation of Jews in San Francisco did? Creating the museums and cultural institutions?

Benedict: Very much so. I don't think as much as they did here, nor were they accepted as easily as they were here. Here there seems to have been very little anti-Semitism--at least on a comparative basis--whereas there really were restrictions on them in the East. Of course they came to Philadelphia too, and they did the same thing in Philadelphia. But they were

behind the Baltimore Museum of Art and the Baltimore Symphony. I don't know how directly those people are related to me, or how directly I'm related to them.

Riess: And then your immediate mother and father?

Benedict: My father was one of three children.

Riess: And he's Benedict.

Benedict: No. I changed my name. We'll get into that in a minute.

My grandfather's name was Oppenheim. And their company was called Oppenheim, Obendorf & Company. They were a manufacturing company. My father more or less inherited the company, he and his brother--the sister married a man from Chicago. But my father hated it and he said he didn't want to spend his life "biting buttonholes" was the way he put it.

By this time it was the twenties, and of course in 1929 everything sort of blew up and the company failed. And they sold out. It didn't fall flat, but they sold out to an underwear company called BVD. Do you remember BVD? I don't know whether they still exist.

Riess: What did it stand for, I wonder.<sup>2</sup>

Benedict: I don't know--bloomers, vests and drawers!

My uncle, my father's brother who was a very sharp businessman, went with them to BVD and he did quite well there. But my father didn't--he was really glad to get out of it. What he did was--it was shortly after that that he and my mother were divorced, and what he did was to go into government, and he became part of the New Deal.

First he was involved in one of these alphabets that Roosevelt set up called the Prison Industries Reform Administration, or something like that. Anyhow, he went around inspecting prisons. A lot of prisoners in those days made clothing. Of course the unions hated that because it was unfair competition--which it was. He was very much interested in prison reform. It was a familiar but quite different thing from what he'd done earlier in his life.

Riess: He stayed in Baltimore doing this--or he went to Washington?

Benedict: No. He went to Washington and lived in Washington. And then after that he got into the wages and hours division of the Department of Labor. His job was under the NRA--and you remember what that was.

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<sup>2</sup>Bradley, Voorhees & Day were the founders of BVD.

Riess: The National Recovery Act.

Benedict: His job was to help set wages in the various industries throughout the country. And he set up boards. The boards consisted of a representative of manufacturers, a representative of labor, and a representative of the public--a disinterested citizen, if there is such a creature, which, of course, was the hard one to find. He did that and he did it very successfully. He got some very interesting people in there. He would meet people and sort of assess them for this. He continued to do that right up until the beginning of the war. And then he died at the early age of forty-seven.

Riess: And your parents had divorced?

Benedict: Yes. They divorced and they each remarried.

Okay, so that's what he did. That was my father. My mother who's still alive, as you know, she was married when she was eighteen, and she had me when she was twenty--I guess that's what they did then. At any rate, after the divorce we moved in with her mother for a couple of years. We were still in Baltimore. My grandmother spoiled me and so did her servants: a cook, a butler, a maid, and a chauffeur, everyone except the cook.

And then my mother married Howard Benedict, who was my stepfather, and Howard Benedict was also from Baltimore.

Riess: Was all this traumatic?

Benedict: Yes. I was eight when they were divorced. Very traumatic.

Riess: Acrimony?

Benedict: No--not between my parents. It was traumatic for me, but it wasn't for them. Well, it must have been for them, but they were very careful--I never saw them fight, never heard them fight. Never. And they made arrangements so that there was never any dispute over my custody. I was entirely under the custody of my mother, but I could visit my father when it was convenient for him. I usually would spend a month or so with him in the summers--something like that. Or he'd come and see me, or we'd go out. But there wasn't any--that part of it was really done very smoothly.

### **Move to New York, and then Hollywood**

Benedict: Let's see, all right, I was eight years old when they were divorced. My mother and Howard Benedict married two years later in 1933 when I was ten. And we moved to New York and lived in the village. Howard Benedict was a press agent in New York and he worked for Max Gordon, who was a big producer in New York and he did those Gershwin





Burton and Duke, in 1934.



shows, and he also worked for Noel Coward when *Private Lives* and all of those were being shown.

So it was a life that was entirely different. It was a very theatrical life. Nobody got out of bed until eleven o'clock in the morning, and they didn't go to bed until three o'clock in the morning. And there was a lot of drinking and speakeasies and all of that stuff before the repeal. It was really quite a different kind of life. And we lived, as I said, in Greenwich Village, and I went to a wonderful school called the City and Country School, a progressive school, just a terrific school.

Riess: Was it in the Village?

Benedict: It was in the Village on Twelfth Street. I can tell you a lot about that school, but I think that's too irrelevant. But it was very important to me. It was very interesting and I really liked it and it was just altogether a wonderful school. I wish that there were more schools like it.

Riess: And did you know it was wonderful at the time?

Benedict: Oh, yes. I did. And so we were there for two years, and then my stepfather was offered the position of director of publicity at RKO studios in Hollywood.

Riess: Had he just been passing through Baltimore when he met your mother?

Benedict: Oh, no. He was from Baltimore and his family was there, so he came down there all the time. He had started life as a newspaperman and he had worked for--I guess he started on the *Baltimore Sun*, and then he went to New York and he had a hard time breaking in. There was a very famous columnist in those days called Heywood Broun, and he wrote to Heywood Broun, wrote him a very funny letter, something about how hard it was to break into the newspaper game. It was a very amusing letter and Heywood Broun published it, and so he got an offer and so he became a newspaperman and then from that he got into the theatrical stuff.

He was always very closely allied to Baltimore. His mother was there, his sister was there, his brother, who was a socialist, was in Washington and ran something called the *Editorial Research Reports*, which he ran all his life. It was a wonderful thing. He did research to give material to editors all over the country to write their editorials. You wonder why editors know how to write their editorials, it's because of my stepuncle. At any rate, he was a very interesting guy. Very smart. He married twice, and his second wife was a pacifist. They were friends of Alger Hiss, they were--but I don't want to go into detail, that's too peripheral.

Riess: But you thrived in this atmosphere. They didn't send you off to boarding school--that's interesting.

Benedict: Yes, they did eventually, but not at that point. So we're now at 1935. First two years in New York, and in 1935 we moved to Hollywood. By this time they were very much

involved in the movie business and studio parties and that sort of life, and my mother got very concerned that this was not a healthy atmosphere in which to bring up a young man. So she sent me to a boarding school, in Covina of all places. I absolutely detested it. I can't tell you how much I hated it. At one point I got up--we were allowed home once a month, and at the end of the time I got up on the roof and I said, "I'm going to jump off the roof if you make me go back there." I didn't. I did go back, but I only stayed there for one year.

Riess: Tell me about your mother. She fell right into this life?

Benedict: Well, she was always really stage-struck, my mother was--still is. She was a real twenties girl. Bobbed hair and those bras that made you flat-chested. She just loved it. And my stepfather was a pretty romantic character, and really very amusing, and of course he knew all those people and they all came to the house. We used to have movie stars and directors and writers, and also it was of course an extremely interesting time to be in Hollywood. From 1935 to the war, in fact through the war, when you had all these German intellectuals who came over and settled in Hollywood. So there were some really major figure there and very important people.

Riess: And was it very political also?

Benedict: Some of them were extremely political.

### Clifford Odets, and Friends

Benedict: Now this is a little diversion, but I think it's worth making. One of my stepfather's friends was Clifford Odets, and Clifford Odets took a shine to me--he just liked me. So he would take me around, and he was at that point--he had of course migrated to Hollywood. He had done early plays in New York for the theater group, you know, that sort of radical theater group in New York who did *Waiting for Lefty*--the Group Theater, that's what it was called.

Riess: Yes.

Benedict: At any rate, he took me along. He was very interested in painting and he collected paintings, and I remember he would take me--I had a little apartment, this was later, I've skipped some time--he would take me to his house, and we'd look at these paintings until I'd say, "Oh, I like that." It was, say, a Dufy, or a Braque--I know he had both of those. He'd say, "Okay, you can take it and hang it on your wall until I come and get it again." So he loaned me these wonderful pictures.

Riess: They were originals?

Benedict: Yes. Pretty unusual. He would invite me to his parties. He said, "You should come to these parties and see how these people are." He was very intense, and he had really terribly intense, staring eyes. I'd go to these parties, and they'd be very small parties, and they would consist of Charlie Chaplin and Oona, Edward G. Robinson, Sherwood Anderson, Stella Adler, John Garfield, Jean Renoir, all of these people--never more than about ten people and me.

Riess: Why was he inviting you?

Benedict: Well, those were the parties that he was giving anyhow. But he just said, "You come along." And they were always very nice to me and talked to me and everything. They would get very excited--this was during the time of the Un-American Activities Committee, which they all hated, of course, because of the Hollywood Ten and the witch hunt that was going on.

Riess: Yes. That's what I'm wondering about, the political.

Benedict: It was very political. I remember one evening Chaplin, who really was a very simple kind of man, a really poor boy brought up in the East End of London. He wasn't sophisticated or well educated or anything like that, but my goodness. So he said, "Well, I know what to do about the Un-American Committee. I'm going to make an old-fashioned Keystone Cops slapstick comedy about the Un-American Activities Committee, because they are all really basically comic characters. And I'm going to get all those old actors--I still know where they are--Chester Conklin and all these people."

Then he started creating the script in the living room. He played all the different parts and ran around and jumped over the sofa and he did all kinds of stuff. He said one character would have a suitcase labeled "Atomic Secrets." It would fall open and toilet paper rolls would fall out. It was just an amazing thing to sit and watch this. It was wonderful for me and I just loved it.

Clifford wrote some plays--and we're really talking about a later time at Harvard--and then he'd try them out. One of his plays, he tried it out in Boston, and he called me at Harvard and he said, "You come to the opening night. Bring a couple of your friends." I brought a couple of my friends, and it was not a very good play, I'm sorry to say. It was called *The Big Knife*.

He was trying to cope with being successful. He wasn't good at being successful. He had two characters in the play named for me: one was called Burton and one was called Benedict. At the end of the play he said to me, "Okay, now we'll go up to my room and we'll have some drinks." So we went up to his room in the Copley Plaza, and we had drinks. He said to these two friends of mine--here we were, three freshman--"Okay, what did you think about the play. What was wrong with it? What about this scene, what about that scene?" He wanted our reactions.

Riess: But what are you saying about he couldn't cope with success?

Benedict: I mean his early plays, *Golden Boy*, were about his own background, about Lower East Side Jews who were poor and struggling. That was something he knew, and he did it very well, and he had a great ear for the language. When he got to Hollywood, he was faced with, "Create. Here's a half a million dollars. Create something." And he couldn't do it. He really couldn't do it. He was bitter about it, but he really felt he should be on the outside criticizing. On the other hand, he was taking their money. So he got himself into a bad state about that.

Riess: Did you continue to stay in touch with him?

Benedict: Yes. Well, later on I went to England, and he died fairly young. He did some paintings. I have paintings, and I have other things of his.

Riess: What would you say you learned from him?

Benedict: I think I learned something about drama, and something about the way to present things. And something about the personalities of these famous people and how there was an image created about them, and they weren't really like that underneath, that kind of thing. Nothing very startling, basically only clichés, I would say.

Riess: This group of ten people, all of whom are famous names, they were only comfortable with each other?

Benedict: They were all close friends. Many of them had been in the Group Theater. For instance, I know John Garfield was. And Stella Adler was, of course. And politically they were in accord.

Riess: I was thinking about the discomforts of fame.

Benedict: Well, that's a good point. They were all famous, so fame didn't enter into it. They weren't showing off to each other. Charlie Chaplin was showing off, sure, but he was really concerned about the Un-American Activities Committee, and he had this idea, and of course we all got hysterical because he did it so magnificently. He couldn't move without--he was enormously graceful, so we were all laughing about it.

But there wasn't any sort of jockeying for position or competition for status or anything like that. That was not part of it. So these were all people that were very comfortable with each other. I was simply out of the circle--I didn't belong, I was just an outsider, was neither here nor there--so that I was no threat for them. They kind of enjoyed having a young guy there, and they would be very nice to me and everything and so it was very pleasant.

Riess: It all sounds very fortunate.

Benedict: I'll say!

**High School, Friends and Interests ##**

Benedict: When I got out of the boarding school I was put into public school, the first public school I'd ever been to. And of course, what had happened to me in all this private schooling that I had was that I'd learned pretty good work habits, which I'm afraid you don't learn in public school. So if the teacher said, "This is your homework and do it," I would do it. I remember being absolutely astonished that other kids would come to school without having done their homework. It would never occur to me. It just wasn't in the realm of possibility. So I had very good work habits, and so, of course, I did quite well.

Riess: When did you go into public school?

Benedict: Well, 1941 was when I graduated from high school. So it would have been four years before that--1938? Something like that. I went to Bancroft Junior High School, and then I went to Hollywood High School. And I continued to do very well scholastically and I made some very, very interesting friends.

Riess: Who was at Hollywood High School?

Benedict: A lot of young girls whose mothers had brought them to Hollywood to get them into the movies. One of them was Lana Turner. Another one was Judy Garland.

Riess: They were in your class?

Benedict: They were never there, but they were technically in my class, yes. I don't know that they were in my class, but they were in the school. I think I saw them once or twice, but I didn't know them certainly.

Anyhow, I did make two or three friends who were quite remarkable. One was an autodidact, and he came from a very poor family--lived way down in the bottom of Los Angeles somewhere, and he made his living by selling newspapers on the corner, when cars would come. But he taught himself--he read Plato and he taught himself Greek!

Then there were several--I won't go into all of them because that's too peripheral, but there were basically four or five of us who became great friends, and they would all come up to my house, and we would play music together. We had gramophone records, what were then I guess called phonograph records. In England they would have been called gramophone records, and of course they were 78s, and we learned to appreciate music that way. And we would just come and sit around for hours playing these records.

Riess: Classical music.

Benedict: Classical music. Playing classical music together.

Religion

Riess: Were these kids united by being part of the émigré Jewish community?

Benedict: No, none of them were Jews. In fact, I think I--oh, I forgot to tell you, I never got into the name change thing. I have to go back to do that, because that is important. My father, who I think was an anti-Semitic Jew--anyhow he didn't have much use for the Jews--he said to me one day in 1934 or '35, "I want you to change your name, because in my time here in Washington I have found that I was unable to get positions that I wanted to have in government simply because my name is Jewish and they wouldn't take me. And it makes me furious, and I think it's rotten, unfair, etc., and I don't want you to have that, so I want you to change your name."

I said, "All right." And he said, "I think it would be good if you changed your name to some name that had the same initials, so you can keep the initials, like 'Otis' for instance." I said, "Well, look it doesn't really make much sense if my mother is called Helen Benedict, and my father is called Burton Oppenheim, and I'm called Burton Otis. That doesn't seem to me to make much sense. So if I'm going to change my name, why don't I change it to Benedict, which is not so overtly Jewish, and that would make some kind of sense." Well, of course he didn't like that.

Riess: Because he loses you a little bit by doing that.

Benedict: Sure. I mean that was my stepfather's name. And it's an anglicization of probably, Baruch. On the other hand, he was determined that I should change my name, and he reluctantly accepted that finally. I don't think he ever liked it, but he accepted it. So I changed my name, I guess it was in 1935, to Burton Benedict and that's what I've been ever since.

Riess: Did you talk about religion with your family? Is that as close as you would have gotten to issues of what it was to be a Jew?

Benedict: I remember my mother thought--don't forget how young she was--my mother thought that I ought to have some religious education, just because she thought you ought to. So I was sent to Sunday school. Of course, reform Jews had Sunday school, not Saturday school. So I was sent to Sunday school, and I went two or three times, and I didn't like it, and they started teaching you some phrases in Hebrew, and I came home and I said, "I don't like going there, and I don't like it." And my father said, "I don't see why you should go there. You don't have to go there anymore."

Riess: And that was it?

Benedict: That was my religious education. And then my mother at one point was starting to tell me Bible stories, but I didn't like them as well as I liked Uncle Wiggily or something. So nothing really happened. We never discussed it. My grandmother, my mother's mother, had these Friday night dinners in which the family would be gathered together--all the



cousins and uncles and aunts. I mean, they were all interrelated, and my grandmother had been married twice and so on and so on. Well, anyhow, they would all come together in these giant feasts on Friday night, but nothing religious was ever done. We never lit candles, we never said prayers, we just argued with each other. The uncles all argued with each other. Some of them were Democrats, and some of them were Republicans. So they would argue together. So I never really had any religious instruction at all.

Riess: Were there issues of them being rejected from clubs they'd wanted to join?

Benedict: Well, what they had done, before my time, was they'd formed parallel clubs. Everything was parallel. They had their country club and their golf course, and everything was exactly parallel to the gentile things.

I've inherited this business. I think there's a considerable streak of anti-Semitism in me, which is absurd for an anthropologist. I mean intellectually, of course. But I never, I didn't choose Jewish friends, and of course I didn't marry a Jew either, so it was a real crash course in assimilation.

Riess: At Hollywood High I'd think the best and the brightest were the Jewish kids.

Benedict: Not at all. Some of them were. And I had a couple of friends who were bright, but they weren't close friends, but we were good friends. But not all of them--I think the brightest kid in our class was called Cooper. And I didn't go out with Jewish girls either.

These friends of mine, one of them is still a close friend, and I was his best man at his wedding. About three weeks ago I went down to L.A. for his fiftieth wedding anniversary and we had a splendid time. So he's the only one that's left of that crew. Two of them committed suicide and one died. There were five of them. None was Jewish.

### **More Family, Summers**

Riess: Where did you live in Hollywood?

Benedict: We lived up in the Hollywood Hills in a biggish house. We had a couple of servants. We didn't have a chauffeur-driven car--we had two Buicks.

Riess: And summers?

Benedict: Summers I would spend often with my father. Meanwhile, and this is of some interest I think, my father much later remarried, and he married another Baltimorean called Ellen Frank, who just died. She came from an extremely interesting family. Her mother was Rose Ellen Hecht, and she was related to the Hechts and the Gerstles here, and the Zellerbachs, and the Fleishhackers, all of those people. Also, she had been married twice.

Her first husband, Simon Frank, died when she was quite young, and she married secondly Julian Stein, who was the cousin of Gertrude Stein.

Gertrude was very close to Rose Ellen and particularly close to her son Julian, who is still alive and a good friend of mine. He's five years older than I am and we see each other usually at least once or twice a year, either in Paris or London or here or somewhere. Gertrude used to come over and visit them, and when I went to Paris--this was a later thing when I went to Gertrude's apartment, and Gertrude had died, but Alice was still there. Shall I tell you now about it? Or do you want to wait?

Riess: Let's wait. [See page 56]

Benedict: Okay. Something to look forward to. Anyway, it was pretty interesting. I became very close to that family, and in the summers the Steins had a camp, a summer camp in Rangeley, Maine. They had that place since around 1909, and the families always went up there. It became a huge encampment, in which they each built a house. I would go up there in the summer. We just had a splendid time.

Or sometimes my father would take us on a trip. We went to Nova Scotia once. We went to a ranch in Colorado. I would spend the summer with them, and I really loved my stepmother.

### The Pet Store and the Aviaries

Riess: Was there any plan for you? Did you have a sense that there was a career path?

Benedict: You mean had they mapped out a career for me? No, they didn't. I was allowed to do pretty nearly whatever interested me, and of course I had millions of hobbies and collected like crazy. And I had huge electric train sets. When I took chemistry, I made my own chemistry lab.

I was always crazy about animals, and even in New York I had aquariums with salamanders--in Greenwich Village you can't have much other than salamanders. So when we moved to Hollywood, it seemed to me I could have some animals. It was difficult to have animals--we always had a dog, of course, or two--so I started having birds. I saw all these marvelous exotic birds which you could get in those days, and which I had not seen before. Mostly Australian birds, which are pretty colorful. So I started out with little finches, and eventually I ended up with 400 birds.

Riess: What did they have to build for you? How did you do it?

Benedict: We built a bank of aviaries in the back.

Riess: And were they all separated? Or they were flying together?

Benedict: I had some aviaries in which they would fly together, but I wanted to breed them, so a lot of them were separated. I don't know, I must have had fifteen, sixteen aviaries, I would think. Fair size.

Riess: How fantastic. And you were successful at breeding?

Benedict: Yes. Pretty good. Not as successful as I would be now, because I didn't know as much.

Riess: I wish you'd tell the story!

Benedict: Well, this is turning out to be quite--I don't know when we'll ever get to anthropology! Will we?

Riess: Actually, I have a fatal weakness for the first thirty years of people's lives.

Benedict: I think you're right. They are by far the most interesting. Certainly in the biographies I read, they're the most interesting. A friend of mine has just sent me a book that he wrote on George Perkins Marsh, who was a pioneer in conservation and involved with the Smithsonian--well, you're right, after Marsh's thirtieth birthday he was getting much duller. Anyhow, do you want to go back to the birds?

Riess: I'm interested in who was your mentor for the birds. Or whether you just did it from books.

Benedict: I did it from books. As I look back on it, my mother and stepfather were very busy entertaining and getting into this whole Hollywood business, and that's why they'd sent me to the boarding school. When I came back, they really basically didn't want to be bothered with me very much because they had all these other things. I mean, they were always very nice to me and everything. I didn't suffer in any way, I assure you.

When I got this hobby of birds--I started out with a couple of birds in a cage of course, and then I wanted to breed them, and there were a lot of bird farms in Southern California, where there are a lot of breeders. And then I found out that there's something called the Avicultural Society, so I joined the Avicultural Society, and then I began to read all about them, and then I got some more birds. We had a couple working for us then, who were African Americans. The man I guess was part Mexican, Brian Howard, and he was really nice and I liked him very much, and he got interested in what I was doing, so we would go out on expeditions to get these birds. I still wasn't old enough to drive, so we'd go out and bring them home and put them in the aviary. And he helped me build the aviaries.

Riess: Were they all exotic birds?

Benedict: They were all exotic. In fact, you were not allowed to keep native birds. I did, I think, have some California quail. And I guess I had a magpie once, too. I had a few mammals, a fox and a monkey and so on, but they were not great successes. I had chipmunks and ground squirrels and that kind of animal. But mostly I just concentrated--I got more and more interested in the birds. At one point I had--this is really a terrible story!

What happened was that I thought that I should have my own pet shop. My parents went off somewhere, I guess to Europe or Mexico or someplace, and they left me alone with these two servants in their house. I thought I would like to have this pet shop, so Brian and I went down and we found--now this was in the thirties so everybody was suffering. I wasn't suffering, but everybody was suffering. So I went down--do you know Los Angeles?

Riess: Not really, but some.

Benedict: Well, I went down on Fairfax Avenue and I found this little shop, and I signed the lease for it. Of course I was under age, but Brian was there saying, "Oh, yes, it's all right if he wants to do that he can do that." I signed the lease, and so I had this pet shop. And then I had to go and buy all the supplies for it--I had to buy bird seed and the little cages and cuttle bones and all this. We found the Mercantile Supply Company down in L.A. somewhere, so I bought all this stuff, and I stocked this whole place, and I had all these birds in there, and goldfish. We had to have goldfish, so we had to have a tank with goldfish.

Riess: Did you go around to look at other pet stores to know what you needed?

Benedict: I'd been to a great many pet stores, I assure you!

Riess: It never would have occurred to just go and work in another store?

Benedict: No, it didn't occur to me, never. Anyhow, so then Brian and Woody, his wife Woody, said to me, "You know, you've got to go to school"--this was in the summer--"Who's going to look after the pet store?" "Oh," I said, "We've got to find somebody to look after the pet store." Woody said, "Well, I know a woman who lives down in Long Beach and she's looking for a place to live, and maybe she could come and look after your pet store, and I said, "That's a great idea. She can live in our guest room." My parents were still away you understand. We went down to Long Beach and we found this woman, and she seemed to be a nice woman. She came up, and I showed her the guest room, and she said, "Oh, that's very nice."

When my parents came home they found a strange woman in the guest room. They found just stacks of bills! There is one kind of bird seed, which is called rape seed; my stepfather found this bill for \$43 dollars for rape. At any rate, so there it all was. Of course the woman was packed out of there pretty quickly, but what to do about the store, which was full of all this stuff? My parents said, "Look, you've got to get rid of that pet store. You can't have a strange person living in the house." I said, "What am I going to do with all my birds and my supplies?" [pauses] It's more complicated than that.

But at any rate all of the stuff was taken and moved to the house of the cook that we had, Clara, to her house in Watts. She had a big back yard. We built aviaries in the big back yard in Watts, and she had all these birds and all these goldfish and all this stuff in her house for a long time--until I realized that she was gradually selling it all off.

Anyhow, I think it was at that point--I didn't have my own aviaries, but it was at that point that my parents threw up their hands and said, "All right. You can have aviaries in the back yard, just don't do anything like that again." So that's when I got my aviaries in the back yard.

Riess: Did you build them?

Benedict: I built some of them, along with Brian. We built them together. I hammered away, but he did most of it. And then at one point finally, when it was getting to be a fairly big thing, my parents for my birthday or something had this bank of aviaries built. I was pretty indulged, as you're gathering, I think.

Riess: Did you really know birds? Were you scholarly about what you were doing?

Benedict: I think so, because I tried to find out everything I could about them. I had this avicultural magazine, and my hero was the Marquis of Tavistock who was a great aviculturist in England, and he--Marquis of Tavistock is the second title of the Duke of Bedford, so he became Duke of Bedford eventually--he wrote and he started collecting birds. He had Woburn Abbey--I don't know if you've ever been there, this vast estate, and his father was responsible for saving the Père David's deer--it was a Chinese deer that was extinct everywhere except in the Forbidden Palace, and he got some of them and bred them at Woburn and they've been rescued. And there are some now in the Bronx Zoo and in zoos all over the world.

He wrote a book on parrots, so I was crazy to get that book, and he wrote articles for the aviculture magazine. And the other great aviculturalist was a man called Jean Delacour, who was obviously French and he had an estate at Clères in France where he had a huge collection of birds and animals.

The Avicultural Society in California would have meetings every month where you'd visit somebody's house, where they had the aviaries, and then somebody would give a talk and we'd have refreshments and so on. Brian would drive me to these meetings. So I went to all those meetings, and I learned a lot about it. I learned that the proper way to house birds is not in a cage that goes vertically but in a cage that goes horizontally because birds don't fly like helicopters. You learn a lot of things like that, so yes, I was pretty knowledgeable about it, and I read a lot. I remember reading William Beebe's pheasants book.

Riess: What do you think the attraction to birds was?

Benedict: They're obviously beautiful to look at, but also, of course, the fact that they fly is so extraordinary. And the more you learn about why and how they fly, the more amazing it is. These terribly light--an eagle, for example, which has a wingspan of six or seven feet only weighs about eight pounds. It's just amazing. Of course, birds' bones are hollow and they have no water in their bodies except for their bladder, which is why it makes such a mess on your car--because there is no distinction in their intestinal tract.

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Riess: Your interest in this was a solitary interest?

Benedict: Yes. I was pretty solitary as I grew up. I got friends when I was in high school. As a small child, I certainly played a lot by myself, mostly with little animals. I had hundreds of little animals.

Riess: Do you know why you were an only child?

Benedict: I know that when my mother and stepfather were married, my stepfather--at least so my mother said--didn't want any children. In fact, it's a curious thing, neither he nor his brother, nor his sister had any children. But he didn't want any children. And I think my mother must have not been happy with my father. I don't think they were very sexually compatible--my mother has more or less indicated that. And when my father married my stepmother, he didn't want any more children either. Of course, I didn't want any of them to have any more children!

Riess: So you didn't mind that at all.

Benedict: I didn't mind that at all. It's never worried me that I was an only child. And I was horribly spoiled by many other women in my family. It was really quite disgusting when you stop and look at it--well, I don't really think it was disgusting, I think it was great. I remember after the divorce, and I was living with my grandmother, my grandmother sent me and her chauffeur--because I wanted to go to Schwarz's toy store in New York, she sent me and Julius, the chauffeur, a German who had worked for my grandparents since he was a boy, and we went to Schwarz's, and I just bought lots of toys, and I got away with it.

### **Material Culture and Museums and Education**

Riess: That ability to accrue things--I wonder whether eventually that becomes an interest in material culture.

Benedict: I think so, because I always had some idea from the time I was quite young that if you collected things that you had some responsibility towards them. That is, that you had to find out about them, and you had to do something with them. It wouldn't do to just take them and stash them away somewhere, and that was not something that appealed to me at all, hoarding. I wasn't interested in having a lot of stuff and hiding it away.

From the time I was small, I always had bookcases full of all my things, and I would try to arrange them, and when I had lot of little toy animals, I would try to arrange them on the shelves in natural habitats with little trees around and so on. I'd have Africa or India, and I'd put a little label on it. So I always was interested in doing that, and I guess

you could say that was an interest in material culture. That was an interest in displaying the objects, it wasn't an interest in how people used objects which is something that came much later. How people used objects, which is much more anthropological, became an important aspect of my collecting and my work in the museum.

Riess: Were there museums that you went to in Los Angeles?

Benedict: In Los Angeles, museums were kind of thin on the ground in the thirties. I used to go down to the county museum, which at that point was down on Exposition Boulevard near USC.

And I was always interested in the La Brea Tar Pits. I got the dinosaur bug very early, before anybody else--well, I don't say before anybody else, but it wasn't a big thing, you couldn't get toy dinosaurs when I was little. So what I did was I got books about dinosaurs and about early mammals, and then I always liked to model in clay and so I made--I was sick at one point and so I had to stay home. I had a fall off a horse.

Riess: You fell off a horse? Should we pursue the equestrian part of your life?

Benedict: It's not very interesting really. Anyhow, in England you never "fall off a horse," you're always "thrown."

So while I was at home I made clay models of all the prehistoric animals that I could and arranged them in a chronological sequence on big boards on the floor. They were all labeled the Jurassic Age, the Triassic, etc. I must have made a hundred of them.

Riess: More about the museum opportunities? Would you go to the L.A. County Museum?

Benedict: That was very hard to get to. You had to drive in the middle of Los Angeles--that was a horrible place to get to, still a horrible place to get to if you're down there. There weren't any museums in Hollywood where I lived. I don't remember any museums in the Wilshire area where they are now.

Before we moved to Hollywood, of course, we lived in Greenwich Village in New York and that was a different proposition. I used to go on the subway up to the American Museum of Natural History. There is a subway stop right under the museum. I was allowed to go up there on my own and look at the exhibits. I did that quite a bit, and I was very interested in it.

And this wonderful school that I was telling you about, one of the things that they did when we studied Egypt--and this was at the ages of ten and eleven, mind you--the teacher said, "Would you like to learn hieroglyphics." Of course we all said, "Yes." So we learned hieroglyphics, and then we went to the Met and we translated the hieroglyphics which were on the sarcophagi. Isn't that wonderful?

I used to go to the Met, not as often as I went to the Natural History Museum, but I would go there. I went to museums quite a bit, I guess, in New York in those two years when I was there, but not in Los Angeles.

Riess: And libraries and book stores? What kind of access did you have to great stuff?

Benedict: My mother was very supportive. Any book I wanted, she bought for me, so I had a lot of books. I don't think I used the library very much. I obviously used the school libraries when I was there, but not very much. I didn't do that very much at that period in my life.

Riess: If you had wanted a book about birds, your mother would have seen to it that it was ordered.

Benedict: My mother would have bought it for me, and she did.

Riess: Did your mother have an education beyond high school?

Benedict: She went to Smith.

Riess: She had you when she was twenty?

Benedict: Yes. She didn't graduate. She went to Smith when she was sixteen, and she stayed for two years, I think, and then she and my father were married.

My father went to the University of Pennsylvania, but he didn't graduate either, because his father insisted that he come into the business. He was in the First World War--he didn't go overseas but he was in the First World War, in the Navy.

Riess: You said there was no pressures on you from your family to be anything or do anything? But you assumed that you would go to Harvard?

Benedict: No, I didn't. True, there were no pressures on me to do anything or be anything. There was no business for me to inherit, which is of course what most of my family had done for several generations. I wasn't going to inherit a Hollywood studio, that's for sure. It was always of course assumed that I would go to college, but there was no pressure for me to go to Harvard or any place else.

Going to Harvard--it was really Julian Stein, my stepuncle, or my stepmother's half brother if you really want to get technical about it, he's five years older than I, and he went to Park School, the school that my grandfather had founded, as I did--of course he was ahead of me. And he loved my father. He thought my father was just great. Julian's a very funny man, he really is. In the first place, he's full of energy, and in the second place, he's full of jokes, and I don't mean jokes that you get out of the joke book, he's just naturally amusing. He went to Harvard and he's never gotten over it, still at the age of eighty.



Anyhow, he kept saying, "You've got to go to Harvard. You just absolutely have to go to Harvard. That's where you have to go." Nobody else was telling me what to do. I said, "All right." I applied to Harvard and I was admitted, and I went to Harvard in the fall of 1941, and a whole new career begins there, which has at least one very amusing anecdote. But maybe we should save that for next time.

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## II EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF WORLD WAR II

[Interview 2: August 4, 2000] ##

### Fall of 1941 at Harvard

Riess: Did you enter Harvard thinking about anthropology?

Benedict: No, I didn't.

Riess: Tell me how you got to anthropology.

Benedict: When I went to Harvard, this was the fall of 1941. Of course it was a fairly turbulent period because of the impending war. War was already going on in Europe, of course.

At any rate, I went to Harvard with the idea of studying ornithology, which won't surprise you. When I got there as a freshman, it was all quite bewildering and very different from high school, of course, and I think what happened to me was what happens to many people who go up to a first class college, and that is you were a fairly big frog in your high school and you turn out to be a little tadpole when you get to college.

Anyhow, they assigned me an advisor, and the advisor was Ludlow Griscom. Now Ludlow Griscom was a leading ornithologist, and he was in the museum--then it was the Museum of Comparative Zoology--and so I went to see him. He was a sort of grizzled, big guy. And he said to me, "Do you know German?" I said, "No." And he said, "Well, the most important literature on ornithology is written in German." Which I'm sure was true in 1941. "Go away and learn German," he said, "and then come back and talk to me." So I went off and I enrolled in a German class. But I couldn't learn German. I simply could not do it.

Riess: Because of the times.

Benedict: Because of the times. I couldn't. It was the only course I've ever flunked.

Riess: You could actually feel a sort of revulsion?

Benedict: I just simply could not do it. I tried to memorize it, and I tried to do everything I could. Yes, exactly. It was like a real revulsion inside of me. So that was really frustrating. Also Griscom was, as you gather, a fairly formidable character, so I didn't want to go back and say, "You know, Dr. Griscom, I tried, but I really can't learn German." It didn't seem to me that that would go over well. So I didn't do it. Of course, I was just a freshman.

I had also made the mistake in my arrogance of signing up for five courses, which you could do, instead of four which was normal, because I was such a hot shot in high school. And of course, that turned out to be much too much for me. I didn't have the background. Plus the fact that there weren't very many people from the West Coast at Harvard at that time. Very few. Most of the people were from the East Coast, generally from the Boston area and they'd all gone to Boston Latin or some place. Plus there were an awful lot of prep school people from Exeter and Andover, and so on. And they all knew each other and were very sort of clubby and so I was kind of an oddball out there. Of course there were other people who had been to public school there, but there were an awful lot of people who came from private schools.

Riess: You were in a dormitory.

Benedict: Well, it was a house. The first year at Harvard you live in the Yard, which is the oldest part of Harvard. I lived in something called Thayer Hall, a very old building, and I had a very nice room. In those days, they still had the idea that Harvard students were gentlemen, and so you had maid service, and you were served in the dining room, and so on. None of that exists any more, but that's the way it was.

Riess: Did you have a roommate?

Benedict: I didn't have a roommate. I was one of the few people that had a room on my own. I wanted a room on my own, which I think now was probably a mistake. But there were only about six rooms to a floor, and so I got to know, of course, all the other people on my floor. Two of them turned into lifelong friends. Of the two, one just died, and the other I still see. He's now a professor of law at the University of Washington. So that was all right. I wasn't a poor, lonely thing that nobody spoke to or anything like that.

Riess: Did you join any clubs?

Benedict: No. Harvard's funny in that way. And the clubs, they're very, very exclusive, those clubs, and I don't think--many of them had Jewish members, but it didn't much matter, because they were so exclusive that hardly anybody belonged to them. Hasty Pudding was a little different, because it was kind of a catch-all club. I could have joined Hasty Pudding. These others had their little clubhouses, and it was the kind of thing if your father belonged, you belonged. It was that kind of business. So I never felt deprived. In fact, I don't think anybody on my floor belonged to any of those clubs.

Riess: Ornithology was a possible major? To graduate in ornithological studies?

Benedict: No. I think I would have had to do zoology or something like that. Ornithology was sort of a branch of zoology. I don't think you could have just done ornithology. Maybe biological sciences or something. But of course, I never got that far. And at Harvard you don't major, you "concentrate."

Riess: You enrolled in five classes.

Benedict: That's right. And I decided that anthropology sounded kind of an interesting thing to do, I thought I would enroll in an anthropology course. So I did, and it was a very interesting course. You did a little bit of physical anthropology, a little bit of archaeology, a little bit of social or cultural anthropology. I took that and I quite enjoyed that.

### A Couple of Stories: Maria Montez

Benedict: But several other things happened to me while I was at Harvard as a freshman, and I'm afraid this will be somewhat anecdotal, but they are important, I think. One of them is a kind of ridiculous story, and I think you may want to cut it out, but it is amusing, so I'll tell you. All right?

Riess: All right.

Benedict: They have every year, sort of a get-together dance for the freshmen. The freshmen organize this dance, and it's in Memorial Hall which is this gigantic Victorian thing that was built to commemorate the Civil War and it's a huge, gloomy building. It's enormous and what they do is they have all the freshmen come, and then they bring in freshmen from Radcliffe and Wellesley and Simmons and all the girls' colleges.

Riess: That's a mixer.

Benedict: A mixer. Exactly. It's a mixer. I don't think they used that word, but that's exactly what it was. All right. So they had a dance committee that got together, and somebody put me on the dance committee. I was considered somewhat exotic coming from the West Coast, and especially coming from Hollywood, so these people on this dance committee said, "Look, we've got to do something to publicize the dance. Can you do something? Have you got any ideas?" I said, "I don't know. I'll ask my stepfather." So I called my stepfather and he said, "Well, how about if I send you a starlet?"

So, there was a young woman called Maria Montez, who was at that time not a star yet, and it was all arranged that this Maria Montez would come. Well, of course, the studio wanted to get maximum publicity for that and what had happened--the background of this was that a year or two before the [Harvard] *Lampoon* had voted Ann Sheridan as the worst actress in Hollywood. This had gotten enormous publicity, which shows you something about the times. And you know the studios took absolute advantage of it, so of course

they were very interested in this, but the administration at Harvard wasn't all that thrilled with it.

Well, to make the long story short, when Maria Montez came, I met her at the train with flowers and everything. And of course there was all kinds of publicity and photographers and so on. And we went out to Harvard, and you can imagine all the students loved this. There was lots of attention and everything. Finally the administration called me and said, "Look, we want you to stop this." By this time, it was totally out of my hands.

The night of the dance I was supposed to go in and get Maria from the Copley Plaza where she was staying and drive her out. And a friend of mine loaned me his convertible to drive her out to the dance. Well, when I went to pick her up, she came out of the hotel in a white lace dress with nothing underneath it. Even at that point I said, "No, no, you can't go to Harvard looking like that. You have to go back and put on something else." She reluctantly did.

So we got into the car, and we drove out to Harvard. Meanwhile the administration--because the publicity hadn't stopped, it had got worse if anything--the administration was really pretty angry at all of this and wanted to stop it. What they had done was that they had driven away all the newspaper people off Harvard property, so there were no newspaper people in the front of Memorial Hall, no photographers and everything, and Maria said, "Go around again--why aren't they here!" But of course, they couldn't come in.

Finally we had to go into the hall, and it was full of freshmen, and all these chaperons, these sort of gray-haired ladies all around the edge of the dance floor, sitting in chairs and looking very disapproving. Meanwhile the administration had got hold of [James Bryant] Conant, who was of course the president of Harvard. And Conant had called the head of the studio and said, "You know, we don't want this. You'll have to stop it."

The head of the studio had looked to see who was the press agent that was in charge of this--it was some poor little Irishman named Murphy--and had called this guy to whom his name was simply something in the stratosphere and said, "You either fix this up or you're fired." Whereupon Murphy, went out and got absolutely plastered. And he began to think, "Why am I in this mess? I'm in this mess because of Burton Benedict. Where is the son of a bitch?"

He came out looking for me, and I was involved in something else that was even worse with Maria Montez, but never mind about that. At any rate, he was drunk, and he started making a fuss, and he got to Maria who was in the dance hall, and he told her what was going on. Well, she walked into the middle of the dance floor and she threw out her hands and screamed at the top of her voice--she had a fake Latin accent--and she said, "What they think I am? They think I'm whore? They think I'm prostitute!" Screaming and screaming and carrying on.

As I say, I was up--they were taking pictures of me in the Yard--so I came into the dance hall when all this was going on, and I ran up to Montez and I said, "Come on we have to leave." I dragged her out of the dance hall, put her in the car, and she was screaming and carrying on and everything--all for effect, of course. And she said things like, "Don't you worry, baby! I sue them for two million dollars--one million for you, one million for me."

We started to go into Boston, and the newspaper people, who were of course outside of Harvard property, realized something was going on and there was this sort of car chase, and I got to the Copley Plaza, and I pushed her into the elevator. And we went up to her room, and I pushed her into her room, and I shut the door. And the newspapermen were banging on the door, and the phone was ringing, and I was in a panic. Finally Murphy sobered up enough to come back and take charge, and I slunk back to Harvard.

The next day there was a note under my door saying, "Please report to the dean." I did, and I got there, and he had his whole big table covered with clippings from all newspapers all over the world--every time Harvard's name was mentioned it was underlined with red--and he said, "Look what you've done. You're just a stupid, ignorant freshman and we should expel you, but we won't if you can fix it so that there's no more publicity. But if there is more publicity, we'll not only expel you, but we'll expel all the people on the dance committee."

I called my stepfather, and I said, "This has to stop." Well, they'd got their publicity so they didn't care. It was really a kind of shattering experience. But, it of course meant that I acquired a reputation--you can imagine the kind of reputation I had--the students all thought it was great, of course, they loved it.

Riess: It was an okay reputation?

Benedict: Oh, yes. Something exotic, and it was fine as far as the students were concerned. They weren't at all shocked by all this. Of course, it didn't help my studies either.

### **The Defense Bonds**

Benedict: All right, that's one thing that happened. The second thing that happened is a little more serious because there was, as you can imagine, a lot of political activity going on. The Young Communists were very active. There was a socialist club and there was a liberal club, and I joined the liberal club. A lot of them were for--it was the argument between the isolationists and the America-firsters and all those people who wanted to keep us out of the war, and the interventionists who said we have to get into it. Then it wasn't very long after that before December 7th arrived--everybody remembers what he was doing on December 7th, but I wasn't doing anything very important, so never mind.

However, what I wanted to do then was to help the war effort. And at that time they were selling, I guess they were called Defense Bonds. You could get a little stamp book, and you could stick these stamps in--they were, I think, twenty-five cents each. Don't forget, this was when twenty-five cents was money. And then after you filled your book you could turn it in and get a war bond for it. They were called Defense Bonds until we got into the war and then they changed to War Bonds.

So I started doing this. I wasn't the only one and these people in this liberal club, we were doing it. I would go around and knock on students' doors and say, "Wouldn't you like to buy some of these stamps? And get one of these books, and so on." Quite a bunch of us were doing this, and of course there were some people who were really dead against it, so it was pretty interesting.

However, after I'd been doing this for a while I got another slip saying, "Please report to the dean's office." And they said, "We don't approve of you going around and doing that." The dean was this sort of dried up old stick and I remember his saying, "You know, in the last war, a lot of our faculty here invested in liberty bonds and the government defaulted on them, so we're not going to have that again." He said I couldn't do that anymore, and I accepted that, but a lot of the other students didn't accept it and went on doing it anyhow. All right. So that was a fairly turbulent year.

Riess: Did you have Japanese friends when you lived in Hollywood?

Benedict: No. There were some Japanese in my high school, but I didn't--I knew about the deportation into the camps and everything, it was in the papers and all, but I never knew anybody who was deported or anything.

Riess: When did you first hear anything about the camps in Germany?

Benedict: In Germany--[long pause] I remember my stepfather talking about it, and my--it wasn't about the German ones--my aunt, my mother's sister took some Jewish English kids. You know, they were evacuating children from London, and, of course, Britain was all alone at that point, and that was really the lowest point. France had fallen, Dunkirk had happened, that was a disaster. I think she took two of these kids and took them into her house in Baltimore, and I remember my stepfather and his friends, sort of kitted up some money to bring over a German child from Germany. You had to guarantee that he wouldn't become a charge on the government. They did that, but apart from that, I don't remember that there was a lot of discussion about it at home. Not a lot. We were all pretty horrified at it. We didn't know about the camps.

Riess: You were talking about the Defense Bond debacle.

Benedict: Really that wasn't--I wasn't at all ashamed of it or anything like that. No. I thought I did the right thing, and a lot of other people thought they were doing it too. I remember after Pearl Harbor, the *Harvard Crimson* came out in saying, "Remember, we're only at war with Japan, not with Germany." So there was a very strong isolationist feeling there.



Volunteering for the Air Force, Troop Revue

Benedict: At any rate, I didn't do very well that first year. My grades were terrible. I got three C's, a D, and an F in German, which was just about the minimum you could get and stay there. But I left--then of course we didn't know what was happening, the draft was now in full force, and of course I was 1-A. I went back to Hollywood and decided I wasn't going to return to Harvard. So, meanwhile, of course my father, my real father, was very much involved in all this because he was in Washington. He talked about it a lot--when I saw him. I didn't see him that much, but he came up to see me in Cambridge once or twice.

Riess: He talked about?

Benedict: About the war.

Riess: He was talking about it as a war to get into?

Benedict: As a war to get into, and of course, the Roosevelt administration was pretty committed to getting into it, and he was very committed to it, and he was an admirer of Roosevelt, and he'd been asked to the White House and all that, so he was really quite involved. And my stepfather, who was basically all involved in movies--that's what he was doing. So he was--they started making war films, so called, little features about life in the camps--life in the army.

Anyway as I say, I went back to Hollywood, so there I was with my high school friends out there. And so we sat around and talked about it a lot, and we all knew we were going to be drafted. So my closest friend, who is the one I still see, the one that's left besides me, he and I decided that the best thing to do was to volunteer--not to wait to get drafted, but to volunteer in the air force. And the reason for that is in the first place it's better to go in the air force than the infantry, which we would have probably been put into if we had waited to be drafted. We didn't want to go in the infantry. And in the second place, since there were so many people volunteering for the air force, there was a long, long delay before they called you up.

So we both volunteered, I guess in what was then known as the U.S. Army Air Force, because it wasn't a separate branch at that point. And then we had several months to wait, and during those months I enrolled in Extension, I guess it was, at UCLA and took courses there. I took a course in sociology, and I took a course--I knew I would have to be taking a mathematics test when I was called up, and I wasn't very good in mathematics, so I took a course in algebra.

##

Benedict: I had a brilliant teacher. I can't remember what his name was, but he made me understand it. I took sociology, and that course, and I think something else. I can't remember what the other one was. It was some months before we were called up, and we were both called up at the same time, the same day. So we went down to the railroad station in Los

Angeles, and they had us in big lines, and we were talking. We stood in parallel lines instead of one behind the other. Well, that was a mistake because his line went to one camp and my line went to another camp, so we were separated. So our whole air force careers were entirely different because of standing in the wrong line.

I was sent to a camp in Denver for basic training, and then we were to get some education, so they sent me to the Southwest Missouri State College in Springfield, Missouri. Now, I'm just trying to pick out the things that might have some bearing on my subsequent career, not just all the trouble I got into. One of the people in the same camp that I was in--we were in this college and our dormitory was the gym, we'd sleep in the gym, and we used to have to scrub the gym floor. It was a terrible mistake because it was a hardwood floor basketball court, and of course after we finished scouring and scrubbing it, it warped!

But one of the other people there was an actor from Hollywood called Rand Brooks. Did you ever see *Gone with the Wind*? He was Scarlett's first husband. Rand Brooks, a real typical Hollywood actor type, very much a public personality, handsome, so on. He said, "Look, here we have to do all this drilling and everything. Instead of that, why don't we go to the camp commander and say we'll put on a show for the troops?" I said, "Okay." So we went to the camp commander and he said, "Okay. Go ahead and do it."

So Rand and I wrote this revue, which was as bad as you might expect, and we put on this show, which of course they all liked. I mean they didn't have anything else to do except go to the movies and drill and go to classes. Later on, funnily enough, Rand went to the same places that I did. He followed on the same track that I was, so I saw him through the war pretty much. Okay. So after that time in Missouri we were sent to Texas, to something called the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center, which was this gigantic place where they were training people to fly.

### Altitude Training Center

Riess: You wanted to fly.

Benedict: Yes. I didn't think I would be very good as a pilot, I thought I would be better as a navigator. Usually the crews were--the three officers were a pilot, a navigator, and a bombardier. And then there were the gunners and so on who were enlisted men.

The training had started in Southwest Missouri, because we got some training flying. We were flying Piper Cubs and Porterfields, little airplanes, and we were taught how to do it. I was very bad at it, I was frightened, and it became clear to me that I would never be a pilot. That's why I decided to go for navigator. The instructor would do things like put the airplane in a spin and say, "So now what do you do?" "I don't know what to do!"

So anyhow there I was at SAACC, and while I was there they gave me a whole lot of other tests. They kept testing you, physically, and mentally with various IQ type tests. I did all right on most of those, but they discovered that I had some kind of astigmatism. And so they said, you know we're not sure that you're going to be able to fly at all, so they gave me a whole lot of tests and they kept me up all night and all that kind of thing to see what would happen. And they did things with your nerves. I had the most--well, I won't go into that--it's too many tangents. At any rate, to make that long story short, which I don't seem to be very good at doing, they washed me out.

Now the people that got washed out they didn't know what to do with, and there were an awful lot of them, and they were still at SAACC. Then the air force, which of course was expanding like crazy, they didn't know what to do either. I mean it was real chaos, it really was. Huge numbers of soldiers, really a big logistical problem there. So what they had us doing, for instance, was picking rocks up out of a field and putting them into a bucket, and then you dump the bucket out and put the rocks back in again--it was not a very morale-building activity.

Most of those people, of course, became air crew people, and many of them became gunners. Now the mortality rate for gunners was extremely high, especially tail gunners. So there I was in this situation. One day, the officer in charge said, "We're looking for volunteers to go into the altitude training unit." I didn't know what that was, and I know there's one basic rule in the army which is "Never Volunteer," but I thought, "If I don't do that, I'm going to end up as a tail gunner." So I volunteered.

I went over to the altitude training center, and I was accepted into it, and what that was is that they had an idea in those days that certain people were physiologically predisposed to get the bends at high altitude. Do you know what the bends are?

Riess: I think of the bends in deep sea diving.

Benedict: It's the same thing. So they had these big chambers, and they would take the air crews, and they'd put them in a tank almost as long as this room and about as wide as from where I'm sitting to the windows, and then they would suck the air out of the chamber. You had an oxygen mask. And if you got the bends they washed you out. Now, if you get the bends once it doesn't mean you'll ever get it again, and there's no such thing as natural immunity to the bends.

Riess: Acclimation wouldn't correct it.

Benedict: No. What the bends is is like a bottle of Coca Cola. When you open up a bottle of Coca Cola, it [making a sound of Coke foaming out of the bottle]. So if there are little bubbles of nitrogen, they collect in your joints, and when you go up and the pressure goes way down, of course those bubbles expand and that hurts like crazy, and if it happens in your brain, it kills you. But, it really depends on how much nitrogen is in there. And that depends on things like what you've been eating, and what you've been doing, and so on. It doesn't have anything to do with being acclimated.

Well, I had to go in there with these people, because if they collapsed, I had to take them out of the pressure chamber and there was a lock.

Riess: And so that was your job, to go in with them?

Benedict: To go in with them. That was one part of it. The other part of it was to train people to use oxygen. Now that sounds easy, but it's a very difficult thing to do because when you become anoxic it feels good because it's like drinking. It's the same physiological process. The alcohol combines with the oxygen in your blood and you feel lightheaded, and you feel great. So if you're not getting enough oxygen, you feel more confident and happier! Now these people who were flying fighter planes are up there all by themselves, so they have to make the judgment and they're not in a good condition to make that judgment. So what we had to do was basically to frighten them to show them that.

So we would put them in this chamber, we'd take out the air, which meant that we were simulating the altitude--and we had altimeters in there to show that--and then I'd cut the oxygen off of one and the rest of them could see what happened to this guy. Sometimes they'd sing or laugh or something like that, and then they'd collapse, and of course we'd quickly give them the oxygen back. Never lost anybody, but--.

Riess: That's very interesting.

Benedict: It is interesting. And what had happened--and I do have to tell you this because it's very interesting in itself--one of the reasons that we nearly lost the war in North Africa was that the Germans had a much, much more efficient oxygen mask than we did. We had oxygen masks that were left over, really, from the First World War. They consisted of something that went over your face and a bag underneath and two little sponges here. And when you went up to very high altitudes, those sponges and the inhalation tube froze because, of course, they were moist from your exhalation, and that cut off your oxygen supply.

The Germans had a mask which didn't have any of that. It just fitted over the face like this [demonstrating]. And it was regulated by a regulator and not by anything in the mask itself, so they were always getting the right amount of oxygen. And the Germans learned about this difference, so what would happen--it was a real mystery to the Allies because their best fighter pilots were getting killed in what looked like stupid maneuvers up in the sky. And what the Germans would do is that they'd get into a dogfight with one of the Allied planes--and they'd go [whistles] straight up, we'd follow, and then, you know we'd get goofy, and then the Germans would turn around and shoot you down. Nobody could understand it for a long time. So we had to really show them how important that was to do.

Riess: You must have been trained to do the training.

Benedict: Oh, yes. The officers in charge of that unit were mostly Ph.D.s, and they were physiologists. It was a very good unit to be in because they didn't go in for all that army rubbish--it was a wonderful thing to be in. I was in it during the whole war. And after Germany was defeated we then began to have bombers which were pressurized--the B-29,

a huge plane, was pressurized the way a commercial aircraft is now--but then what air crews were afraid of is if the plane gets punctured, what would happen to you.

Riess: We're all a little afraid of that.

Benedict: That's right. The fact is that although it makes a terrible noise, and it's very frightening, nothing happens to you, except you have to use an oxygen mask. Your guts don't spill out and through your nose or anything like that.

What we used to do then was--and the army has such a nice subtle way of doing things--we'd have a pressure chamber divided into two, and one would be at a simulated altitude of say 38,000 feet, and the other would be at an altitude of 5,000 feet, which is what a pressurized cabin is and there would be a heavy paper partition between the two, and we'd take them up in there, and then I'd go over and kick a hole in this, and it would make the most godawful noise! So I had to do that.

Also at the end I had to train pilots how to see things when it's very, very dark. How to see where you are when you can't really see very well. And the way you do that is you don't look directly at it. You know yourself that when you, say, are looking at the sky, that you might see a flash of a star from the corner of your eye, and you turn around to look at it, and you can't see it because of the way the cells are arranged in your eye. The cells in the middle of your eye see color and very sharp definition. The cells around it see black and white and movement very well. But not definition. So you have to--you can train yourself. We used to have little models, and you were supposed to say how many crossbars were on the telephone pole, that kind of thing.

I stayed in San Antonio for a couple of years, I guess, a little more than that, and there were several things that happened to me in San Antonio which helped. One of them was that I had a cousin, my father's first cousin, who was a colonel in the air force. I guess he ended up being a general in the air force. He was stationed in San Antonio. He'd been an early flier. He had flown the U.S. mail. And he was very nice to me. He used to invite me out to dinner, which was a pretty big deal, because of course I was just an enlisted man. I eventually got to be a sergeant, but I was just an enlisted man and here I was mingling with these high-ranking officers.

Then we sort of gravitated--there were a couple of other people, there was a pianist, and there were some people who had had some education from other units, and we all get together. And there were a couple of warrant officers who were really very amusing, and they managed to hire a house in San Antonio, and we used to go out there and have parties and play music. So it was not exactly what you'd call a tough war. But at any rate, what I guess I'm saying is I was able to keep up a certain amount of intellectual interest during all that time and able to read and so on.

Riess: Asking yourself all the time about what you wanted to do?

Benedict: No, I was not. I was simply saying, "Am I going to survive this war?" What was happening towards the end there was that they were taking people from these units and

putting them into combat units, you know, "You guys have had it soft all this time." So they were always doing that at a terrific rate. We'd all been together for quite a while, this whole group. It wasn't a big unit, I suppose there were maybe fifty people in it altogether and so it was sort of luck of the draw, you didn't know what [would] happen.

But the commanding officer called me one day, and he said I'm reserving you, you're not going to be drafted because you know how to work this machine for the night vision. It was always breaking down, and I knew how to fix it, and the reason I knew how to fix it was that it worked just like the electric trains I'd had when I was a kid. I think I mentioned to you last time I had fifteen engines and fifty cars in a huge layout in the basement in our house in Hollywood, so I knew how to wire these things up.

### Pueblo Indians

Riess: When you were there, was there any gossip about work on the bomb? Did you hear about that?

Benedict: Yes. Yes. Because after Texas--as I said, most of the time I was in Texas, and then sort of towards the end they decided to close that unit in Texas, that they didn't want to train people there any more. And so the whole unit broke up and we got sent to different air bases. And I was sent to Albuquerque. When I got to Albuquerque, to Kirtland Field, where they were doing B-29 training--that's when they had that business that I just told you about, that business about kicking holes--when I had leave, when I'd get off the post, I would go up to Santa Fe. I had a 1937 Ford and I would go up to Santa Fe. Well, I became absolutely fascinated with the Pueblo Indians. And I went and visited all the pueblos.

Riess: Did you purchase these beautiful pots around us then?

Benedict: Yes. See that big one over there with the bird on it? I purchased that from the woman who made it in Zia Pueblo at that time. And the furthest black one also came from there and so did this little Cochiti one, the one with the lizards on it behind the radio, right next to you.

All right. So what happened, and that's probably worth telling about, was that I just became absolutely fascinated with them. And of course there were all these ruins around. It was just terribly interesting. So in my spare time I would go to the library at the University of New Mexico which was in Albuquerque and read about the Pueblos.

Riess: Were you out among the people, or were you more in the library?

Benedict: Oh no. I'm coming to that. Between Albuquerque and Santa Fe there's a little place called Bernalillo. Bernalillo is on the site of a ruined pueblo, and that pueblo was, we're pretty sure, a pueblo that Coronado visited in 1540, roughly. It was a state monument, and the

man in charge of it, named John Sinclair, was a Scotsman and made his--he didn't get a very high wage for being in charge of the ruin, so he made the rest of his money by writing cowboy stories, a Scotsman writing cowboy stories! But we became friends, and I would go out there whenever I could, and we would sit around and drink whisky and talk. Then the Indians--there's a modern pueblo just next to this called Santa Ana, modern, it's not very modern--but the Indians from Santa Ana would come over and talk to us.

What we did--and this is another anecdote, but it is perhaps one of the most interesting ones--the building that housed some of the artifacts was built in the Pueblo style with a flat roof. And the pueblo is on the Rio Grande. So we would go up on the roof at night and the moon would be out, and you could see the river. It was absolutely beautiful, and we would take some whisky, and the Indians would come, usually three or four Indians would come. Of course, in those days it was illegal to give whisky to Indians--so we gave whisky to the Indians, and all of us sat around and drank. They would usually bring their drum and then they would play their drums and they'd sing Pueblo songs to us, and we'd stay up there until we fell asleep. It was really quite magical.

Riess: Did they speak English?

Benedict: They spoke English, but they spoke their own language, and the older ones knew Spanish very well. Quite a lot of them knew Spanish. I learned a great deal, not only from them but from John Sinclair, because he was very interested in the Penitentes--you know who they are?

Riess: Yes I do.

Benedict: There were a lot of those in New Mexico, so it was altogether fascinating.

One night, I'll tell you this, after we'd been doing this for some months, there was one old man--Santa Cruz, his name was--and he came one night with a big parcel. He said, "You have been very nice to us. You give us whisky, you sing with us, and you don't ask questions. So we have brought you this gift. And you may open it after we leave and don't ask us any questions about it." We said, "Okay."

We drank and everything, and then finally they went down the ladder and went back to their pueblo, and we opened this parcel, and it was a sixteenth-century Spanish breastplate. We were pretty astonished, as you might imagine, so we said, "We'd better take it to the museum in Santa Fe, in the governor's palace."

So we took it up there, and they got really excited about it. They kept saying, "It's genuine." We said, "Well, of course it's genuine. Where do you think they would have got a fake?" Of course, we couldn't stand it, and when they came again we said, "You told us not to ask any questions, but where did this come from?" They were usually quite silent. Finally as they were about to go, Santa Cruz said, "We've got lots of them."

Riess: The question thing, were these Indians being studied by anthropologists?

Benedict: Oh, yes. They were certainly being studied. There was the University of New Mexico and people like W.W. Hill and Leslie [A.] White had been out there studying them. And then it goes back to Matilda [Coxe] Stevenson and Alice [Cunningham] Fletcher. Some of the earliest anthropological work. There were many people who had studied the Pueblos before the Second World War.

Riess: Do you think that's what he meant by "Don't question us?"

Benedict: I think what he meant really was, you treat us as equals, you don't treat us as subjects. You're just friends with us. You're not demanding of us in any way. I don't think he was thinking about anthropologists.

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Benedict: There's one more thing about the Pueblos that I have to tell you about because that's important. I don't know how important it is, but you can see it's pushing me in the direction of anthropology. I was absolutely fascinated by the Pueblos, and I kept reading about their mythology and the kachinas.

At any rate, just on the border of Santa Fe there was an Indian school, and I met the head of that school, Miss Page, and she was very nice. The government had an idea that they would take the children and put them in these schools and then they'd become Americans and they wouldn't be Indians anymore. That one in Santa Fe was better than some of the others. At least they didn't kidnap the kids and lock them up the way they did in some of the other places. They were fairly close to where the pueblos were, although of course, New Mexico's pretty big.

I would go there with another friend of mine, and one of the other people who got terribly interested in it was one of our officers in the unit, and he and I used to do a lot of this stuff together because, as I told you before, the distinction between officers and enlisted men was less strong there than it would be in the traditional army. Miss Page let us stay there when we would go up. She had plenty of dormitories, so we could sleep there.

They made pots there. That's where I got the Cochiti pot, and I was able to buy some from her, and so did my friend. But the Zia pot, I actually got that from the woman who made it in Zia Pueblo. Of course we went around to see as many of the pueblos as we could. But we couldn't go to very many because there was gas rationing, so we couldn't really drive around a lot. So that was a whole other contact, with her and that Indian school, which was different from John Sinclair and the state monument.

Okay, now when I would go up to Santa Fe, we'd go into the hotel there and have drinks. And there were clearly a lot of people around that weren't your ordinary ranchers, and they weren't your ordinary soldiers. I met a girl there, and we got to talking, and she was--I now know, of course, she was working there. We knew there was something going on around Los Alamos. Los Alamos itself was close to an Indian ruin--a very early Indian ruin which we'd gone to see. We never saw Los Alamos, and when I'd ask her about what



she's doing, she'd say, "I really can't tell you." But we had a very nice time together, and we read stories from *The New Yorker* to each other. That was very nice.

Riess: Reading stories from *The New Yorker* to each other?

Benedict: Well, we had the same sort of intellectual background. At any rate, I remember one night at Albuquerque, on the base, it was just an ordinary evening, and all of a sudden the sky lighted up. Now Los Alamos is a long, long way from Albuquerque. It's a long way from Santa Fe, and Santa Fe is what?--about eighty miles from Albuquerque, so it was a long way away. We thought it was lightning, but it seemed so funny to have lightning, because it was not lightning weather. That's all we knew, we didn't know what it was. But of course, it was the test. It must have been at Alamogordo. So that's all I knew about it. I knew that something was going on and I didn't connect it to the flash until much later.

Riess: Where were you when the bomb was dropped, and what did you think about it? Or when you heard about it?

Benedict: I think I was on leave. I was home. I thought, "Good. The war is going to be over." I thought maybe that would help the war being over, and I had absolutely no qualms about it at all. Of course, I didn't know what it had done either. No, I was all in favor of that. There wasn't any question. I think almost everyone was. We were in the war to win it. We weren't in the war for humanitarian reasons. Well, we were, but not for that. And in fact, if I had to make the decision again, I'd make the same decision.

### **More on Indian Cultures, San Antonio Intellectuals**

Riess: It's interesting, this first contact of yours, and your interest in the artifacts and the people. Which was the most compelling?

Benedict: I was interested in both. I was terribly interested in their legends and their stories and I loved their religion which seemed terribly rational to me. I just liked the way they thought about things. At least that's from what I read about it. I didn't really do any intensive field work with them and ask them much about it, but there were three or four of us--I don't want you to think that I was all alone doing all of this, because I wasn't. There were three or four of us who were very interested and who became friends with the Indians and so on. And John Sinclair was very hospitable and nice and that was important, because he really knew the Indians and he had a lot of sympathy for them.

Their cultures were more or less intact, at least compared with many of the other Native American groups. I remember going to the pueblos. They held their lands from the King of Spain and they had been given governorships by the Americans. The governor of the pueblo had a cane which had been given to them by Lincoln, in fact, which was the symbol of office. They showed me those things, so they were kind of well established. Of course, they were in a rivalry with the Navajos, who were a very different group. I got

very much into the--I had all these different strands. You had the Indians on the one hand, this sort of intellectual group, if you can call it that, on the other.

That had happened to me in San Antonio, too. I became very friendly in San Antonio with the woman and her husband who ran the most important independent bookstore in San Antonio. She and her husband introduced me to a lot of writers and poets and things that I had never heard of or would have been interested in--Randall Jarrell and people like that that I didn't know about. So that was very interesting, and I was reading a lot of things. I got into Irish literature, I got into that because her husband was Irish, and I was reading George Moore and--I don't know, there were all kinds of people in San Antonio, and I remained friends with them for a long time.

She would have these parties at her house in San Antonio where people who had some education and some intellectuality would gather--we would play Berlioz records, and we would have a picnic or barbecue supper. I remember one of the people that came out there all the time was a private called Daniel Schorr. There were a lot of really interesting people and that was all in San Antonio. The same kind of thing happened in Albuquerque, but not quite. It wasn't exactly the same group.

Riess: Did you go up to Taos? Wasn't there that kind of community up there?

Benedict: There was, but I didn't get up to--Taos was a little bit out of our gas range. I went there once, I think, but it was too far.

### **Back in Hollywood, Filmmaking and Biding Time**

Riess: Then you were mustered out, or something like that.

Benedict: I went back--I was mustered out. I was finally separated, I guess the term was, in Salina, Kansas, of all places. I do not recommend Salina, Kansas. They gave you fifty dollars and turned you loose, and so I took my little Ford, and I was going to drive from there back to California. But I went to New Mexico, to Santa Ana Pueblo. I remembered that there was one of the Indians there called Jumbo--he was a great big guy--and he always loved my uniform. I found Jumbo, and I said, "Here Jumbo--you can have my uniform." Of course, it was much too small for him, but he loved it.

They gave me a big welcome and everything, and when I got ready to go they absolutely filled my car with melons and squashes and corn--this whole car was full of all this stuff! Which of course, I really couldn't use, but of course I took it.

Riess: This all validates you as a great people person. Was that one of the things that you began to see? That these were skills that you had? Did it seem all very natural?

Benedict: It seemed kind of natural. It didn't seem--I wasn't making any conscious effort to do it really, I don't think. But I do like to relate to people, which you may have noticed.

Anyhow, I drove away with all my pumpkins.

Riess: You went home to Los Angeles.

Benedict: I went home. And all my friends got back. Actually, two of them I had seen when I was in San Antonio because that was a place that the air force people kept coming back to, so two of them came back, and we would have reunions and everything. So it wasn't as though I hadn't seen them at all. But the other two I hadn't seen them very much.

We all got together again, and we didn't know what we were going to do with ourselves, so we decided to make movies. We were in Hollywood after all. So we did. We had more fun doing it. We had an 8-mm camera, and we just made up the movies. Two of these friends were real movie buffs--they knew every bit player that's ever been in any movie, it's incredible what they knew. We made several films, but the best one was called *The History of the Movies*, and we made a sort of lampoon on the whole history of movies, and it was a lot of fun. We did that, and then we were just biding our time.

Riess: You did that for your own entertainment?

Benedict: It was never released, really we just did it for ourselves.



### III ANTHROPOLOGY STUDIES: HARVARD AND LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

#### To Harvard on the GI Bill

Benedict: We all decided that we really had to go back to college. Besides, we had the G.I. Bill, and the G.I. Bill was fantastic. I had really made a kind of a flop of Harvard. I thought, "I'll go back and see if I can't do a little better." I reapplied to Harvard--I had quit, I wasn't on leave or anything--I reapplied and they accepted me. Two of my friends went to UCLA. One of them went into their film program actually.

When I got back to Harvard it was a very different place from the place that I had left. It was full of veterans, so there were older students, and they knew what they wanted, and they also knew what they weren't going to put up with. It was just a totally different atmosphere. My cliché for Harvard and Boston in general was that it's a deadly combination of snobbism and puritanism. I'm not against snobbism, but to be any good it has to be corrupt, and if it's mixed with Puritanism, it's deadly. But with these veterans, it was very different. And the professors thought it was very different, too, because they were very good students, and they really were concentrating on what they were doing. It's true they would go out and get drunk all the time, but they didn't scant on their work.

Riess: What was all the drinking?

Benedict: Oh, well that was something that you just did in the army. It was something that--everybody did it. It released tension and it was fun and we just did it all the time. And of course we had also come out of a generation that had lived through prohibition. I mean my parents, they were going to one of those speakeasies, and there was always drink around. One of the first things I remember when I was just a little kid, before my parents were divorced, I remember the local policeman coming around to our house and my father giving him a bottle of whisky and then he went away of course.

Riess: So anyway, hard-drinking GIs, but good students.

Benedict: Very good students. And I began to take some really interesting courses.

**Conant and the Liberal Education**

Benedict: The main reason I decided to go back to Harvard was not what I just told you, it was because Harvard published a book that came out about that time called *General Education in a Free Society*. It was a book that was written by a group of Harvard professors including Conant, and it set forth the ideals of a liberal education. I read it when I was in the army and I thought, "That sounds pretty good. If they're really going to do that, I would like to go." It was that book that influenced me more than anything else to return to Harvard.

Riess: Have you ever talked to anyone else who was influenced by it?

Benedict: Not that I remember, although I must have at that time. When I got there, it was just starting, and they were redoing the whole idea of a concentration, and the whole idea of a liberal education. I thought that was wonderful, and I wanted to be a part of it. There were some marvelous teachers doing it.

There were these general education courses, and whatever your concentration was, you had to take general education courses in the other fields in which you did not concentrate. So as my concentration was in the social sciences, I had to take general education courses in the physical sciences and in the humanities.

I loved those courses, especially the one in the humanities, and they were taught by the absolute top people in the field. The physical course was taught by Conant, the humanities course was taught by I.A. Richards and Theodore Spencer, and they were the best courses I ever took, so that was really thrilling.

You might say that I was interested, to put it in anthropological jargon, in the holistic viewpoint. I was pretty excited about being there. And I also said to myself--I gave myself a semester, and I said, "If I don't do well in the first semester, I'm going to quit and go back to California."

Riess: You knew you could do okay in California?

Benedict: I wasn't thinking about what I could do in California, except I liked living in California, and I didn't like living in Boston or Cambridge. But I said, "I'm going to give it a good shot." So what I did was [gets up and retrieves a book], I went to the co-op, and I bought these ledgers. There it is--I picked out the humanities one. And every time I went to a lecture, I took notes, and then I would come back and copy out my notes, and I would date them. This was this wonderful course I was taking, which was the Iliad, the Old Testament, and Plato. I did that for every course that I took. It was quite a lot of work.

Riess: Would you say that you taught yourself how to study?

Benedict: I had got pretty good work habits from those private schools that I'd gone to, so that I knew how to do it all right. Everybody was serious. So that was one thing that went on.

I roomed with a classmate that I had known before from Harvard, and he was a little older than I. We'd known each other in 1941, so we got on quite well. This was now 1946. Oh, and I took a course in music. I had a lovely time. Then I decided that what I wanted to do was something in the social sciences, but I wanted to get a broad education. The whole idea was getting a broad education, which is what this book had done for me. At that very time was the founding of the department of social relations. I don't know whether you've heard about that?

### Social Relations Courses, Professors in Anthropology and Sociology

Riess: Soc Rel?

Benedict: Soc Rel. That's right. Lovely name. At any rate it's actually quite important. What happened was--it was really along the same lines as *General Education in a Free Society*, in that some of the professors at Harvard got together and said that it's really artificial to separate the social sciences in the way they were separated, because it's perfectly clear that their fields overlap. To have a separate department of sociology and a department of anthropology, at least in its social aspects, and a department of psychology in its social aspects--social psychology--is really distorting and intellectually indefensible, so we should put all these things together.

The moving forces there were Talcott Parsons, Clyde Kluckhohn, a psychologist called Gardner Murphy, George Homans, a statistician called Frederick Mosteller. They decided to start this department of social relations and make a social relations field in which students could concentrate. So I enrolled in that, and I guess that was the first year that it was going. They had introductory lectures in which they touched on all these fields, and there were lectures that were given by--Gordon Allport was the other psychologist--and they were given by the top experts in their fields.

They were really pretty exciting courses, and they dealt not just with theory but with contemporary problems. They dealt with some of the problems of war neuroses, for example. At that time there was a terrible disaster in Boston called the Coconut Grove fire in which many people were killed, and they dealt with that and the more sort of psychological parts of it, how do the survivors and their families deal with this.

Riess: Was it team taught?

Benedict: No, you had individual lectures. Usually one person would come, say like Kluckhohn, and he'd be on for maybe a week or two weeks, and then somebody else would come and be on for a week or two. In some ways it was a bit disparate because the material that they were using was their own material and it didn't always link in, the links were just

being forged. They wrote a book together called, *Towards a Common Language in Social Science*.

Riess: It was 1946 that this all began?

Benedict: Yes. There was still a department of anthropology which consisted of physical anthropology and archaeology, and they still had their own courses, and they still did their own things, and they were linked with the Peabody Museum. There were still courses in social anthropology. And of course there was still a department of psychology with all the physiological psychology and clinical psychology and all of those different branches of psychology. It was only social psychology that got into the Soc Rel--the department of sociology had been almost entirely gobbled up.

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Benedict: Except that one of the professors in sociology was called Pitirim Sorokin. He was an officer in the Kerensky government, which was the government of Russia just before the revolution. He was a pretty tough egg, and he absolutely refused to go into this department which he thought was a lot of rubbish, and he was going to do his thing. He had a sidekick called Zimmerman, Carl Zimmerman, and those two made up a two man department of sociology. He gave a course called contemporary sociological theory, Sorokin did, and it consisted entirely of Russian sociologists, none of whom I'd ever heard of--I never met anybody who'd ever heard of them. He wrote a great tome called *Contemporary Sociological Theory*, and we had to deal with all of these people!

But basically he used the lecture platform to attack Parsons, and so from that point of view it was quite amusing. I remember his getting up, and he had a very heavy accent, and he would glare at the audience and say, "What is this Parsons [imitating accent]. He is nothing, he is not worth a nickel, not one little nickel." So that was not really part of my main education. Of course I took courses from Parsons, and Parsons was a very dull lecturer. If you took down everything he said, what he said was interesting, but you had to do that because he was a really most dreary lecturer.

Riess: When you graduated as a social relations major, what did you call yourself?

Benedict: A sociologist, or an anthropologist, a social anthropologist. I really don't know.

A lot of people didn't end up that way--[David] Schneider among them. Schneider was a graduate student at that point, and so I knew him. And the other person that was there that I knew very well and still do is Dave Aberle. Aberle tutored me.



### **Advice from I. A. Richards**

Riess: What were you particularly interested in? You were still having this wonderful general education.

Benedict: That's right, I was having a wonderful education. Then there comes the moment when you have to decide what your concentration is, what your major is. I didn't know what my major was, I was interested in so many different things--and I've always thought that dilettantes had a bad name.

I went to the teacher I admired the most, and that was I.A. Richards. I.A. Richards was a little, gnarly Welshman, a mountaineer, and the inventor of basic English, and a philosopher, Cambridge-educated, taught in China. He wrote some really wonderful books, and he gave the most staggering lectures. They were just absolutely wonderful. I remember one question from an exam that he gave, which gives you some idea of the flavor of it. The question was, "Plato defines courage as the knowledge of what is truly to be feared. Discuss in relation to Hector standing in front of the gates of Troy." Wonderful question.

I said to him, "I have to choose a field of concentration, and I don't really want to concentrate in anything. I like messing around in all these different subjects. What is the least specialized subject I can take?" He said anthropology, and I think he was right in a way. So I said, "Okay. That's it."

Riess: This is true?

Benedict: Yes it's true. I've made it into a story, but that's what he recommended. He suggested that, and I had been interested in it, so that's what I decided to do.

Now, I don't remember all the courses I took, and you don't want to know. But the next important thing was that I had a chance to do an honor's thesis.

### **Gregory Bateson, Filmmaking, and Thesis**

Riess: Tell me more about your classes. You had a class from Bateson, didn't you? Gregory Bateson?

Benedict: Well, I'll tell you about Bateson.

What happened was that there was a group at Harvard, some students who were interested in film--and of course I was still interested in film--and they got together and decided that they were going to form a film club. In fact one of them, well, two of them went into film in a big way; one of them makes his own films in New York and another

one is a director. They were really committed to it, and they wanted to make a film, and they wanted to make a film that could be released. They wanted to make it in 16mm and really do it right. So I got very involved in that.

The director of the film was a German refugee, a student, and very heavily influenced by the films of René Clair. Do you know those films?

Riess: No.

Benedict: Well, he did some wonderful films, the most important of which I think is called *À nous la liberté*. They're kind of Chaplinesque, they have a sort of balletic quality, and they're also iconoclastic--they're really very good. Anyhow, so he wrote this script, and we were going to do this film, and part of it took place in the Boston underground, the subway. And we got the permission to use a subway car.

At that time Gregory Bateson, who was still married to Margaret Mead but the marriage was breaking up, came to Harvard as a visiting professor. And he, well both of them, both he and Margaret, were very interested in film as you probably know.

Riess: I don't know that.

Benedict: Margaret made some wonderful films about Bali, and one of the most interesting films she made was called "Bathing a Baby in Three Cultures," which was about how mothers bathe their babies among the Iatmul of New Guinea, among the Balinese, and in New York. It's a good subject because when a mother is bathing her baby she's not paying any attention to the camera, so you can really film.

And which of those three do you think is the most dangerous for the baby?

Riess: Oh, it's got to be New York.

Benedict: You're right. And that's because of course you bathe the baby in a bathtub. In New Guinea you bathe the baby in the river and if it falls in the mud, it falls in the mud.

So the whole way--the mother's attitude and physical stance in relation to the baby is very different in these three places. In Bali, where in general there's a sort of emotional turn-off, what they do is stimulate and then withdraw, stimulate/withdraw, a very Indonesian kind of thing to do. They stimulate their babies, and then when the babies react they withdraw. Anyhow that's what her thesis was.

Bateson--they were both very heavily influenced by Ruth Benedict, and they were both very interested in what was called in those days, I think, "national character." They were interested in psychology and anthropology. They were interested in things like basic personality types. A lot of these things have gone out of fashion and then are gradually coming back, the way they always do

Bateson had done some quite remarkable analyses of film, of Nazi film. There was a Nazi propaganda film called *Hitlerjunge Quex*, which was about a German boy who was being influenced by two girls, one was a Hitler *junge* and the other one was a communist. And the way these were depicted was that the Hitler *junge* girl was, of course, blonde and blue-eyed--I guess she was blue-eyed, it was a black-and-white film--and athletic, and clean, clean, clean. The communist was dark-haired and had big rouged lips and was very voluptuous, and so on. Bateson analyzed these. He would make the film, he would stick in a little bit of analysis in the film--they made just amazing films. He did the same thing with the *Triumph of the Will*.

So he was terribly interested in film, and when he came to Harvard as a visiting professor I went to see him and said, "I am also interested in film." He said, "All right, let's see what we can do." He talked to me and found out about my background and all the rest of it, and he said, "I think it would be a very interesting thesis for you to do about what it is that goes into making a film. How do the various people interact that make a film. What is the sociological context in which a film is made? I think that would be a good thing for you to do."

I said, "Oh, yes. That sounds great." So I became his student, and he was a very wonderful man. He really was. He was so bright--and have you ever seen him? Great big, tall guy. And he had been in the intelligence service during the war, and he had lots of stories to tell about that. Okay, so that's what we decided on. Now, the trouble was that then when that idea was submitted to the university authorities, they disallowed it. He wanted the thesis to be in the form of a film, and they said, "No, no. You can't do that."

Then I didn't know what to do. Meanwhile I had got to be quite a good friend of Bateson's. Bateson was giving a freshman seminar, and one night about eleven o'clock my phone rang, and he said, "Have you read T.S. Eliot?" I said, "Yes." And he said, "Well, I have my freshmen down here, and I've discovered they haven't read T.S. Eliot." Didn't surprise me, but at any rate it seemed to surprise him! He said, "If you haven't read and understood T.S. Eliot, you can't do anthropology. So would you come down, and we'll talk to them about it."

I came down to his rooms, and there were these sleepy freshmen sitting around, and he was making the point that Eliot reveals so much of himself in his poetry of which he's not really fully conscious himself, so that the underlying pattern is what you have to get out, and he's after all talking about contemporary society, but he's such a good poet and such a wonderful wordsmith that you can, in fact, dig this out if you pay attention to what you're doing and think about it. He thought that the analysis of a poem like *The Waste Land* was really essential if these people were going to try to analyze the way other people behave.

Riess: It has to do with self-awareness as an anthropologist?

Benedict: Yes, it has to do with that. And very much awareness of what lies behind what people are saying. So that you have to really analyze very carefully what they are saying, just as you

have to analyze the way Margaret Mead did very carefully about what they're doing with their bodies. You have to really pay attention to that. That's what he was doing!

Riess: What was your role?

Benedict: I don't know, I was just sort of trying to contribute to the conversation and so on. It was quite a thrilling thing. He was at the same time giving a course on the Iatmul. The course was called The Iatmul and the Balinese. The first lecture, he said to the class--"I want you to understand that I loved the Iatmul. And I hated the Balinese. Now we'll have the course." Of course, this is all the rage now, but he was very much involved in that kind of thing.

Riess: To have a feeling about your subject.

Benedict: Well, you didn't say that kind of thing. You never said that. You said you were objective. You didn't say what you felt about your subject.

At the same time--these things get interwoven, I can't give you an intellectual history of myself without the personal aspects of it and without understanding what's going on with the people that I was talking about--Bateson was going through a divorce from Margaret Mead, and it was very wrenching and horrible for him. And he was at the same time, of course, being analyzed.

Riess: Who was his analyst?

Benedict: I don't know. But I do know that the analyst was in New York, and he was in Cambridge. So he had to go down to New York a lot, and my friends would drive him down to New York sometimes and we all became rather friendly.

Riess: Were there any girls in this group?

Benedict: No. All men.

### **"Something" on the Chinese in Boston**

Benedict: Now I had the problem of what I was going to do for my honor's thesis, and so he said to me, "Why don't you do something on the Chinese in Boston? It might be an interesting thing to do." I said, "I don't know anything about the Chinese." So he said, "Well, find out." Except that I had--when I took I.A. Richards' course, since he had spent so much time in China, I did find out about that. I also had taken a course from [J.K.] Fairbank and [E.O.] Reischauer on China and Japan--another wonderful course. So I knew a little bit, but not much.

I said, "How in the world do I get to know Chinese people in Chinatown. I don't know how to do that." He said, "It's very easy. What you do is you learn Chinese chess, and then you bring in your Chinese chess set, and you sit down at a table in a restaurant, and you put out the pieces, and somebody will challenge you to play, and that's how you'll get in."

"Okay. How do I learn Chinese chess?" He said, "Go to the library and look it up."

I went to the library, to Widener, and I looked, and the only reference I could find to Chinese chess was an article called, "The End Game in Chinese Chess," which was in the *Journal of the Royal Central Asiatic Society for 1888*. I got it out and I read it, and of course it didn't do me any good because I didn't know the beginning, let alone the end game!

I went to Bateson, and I said, "I'm sorry, but I can't find out in the library how to play Chinese chess." "All right," he said, "I'll tell you what you do." He pulled out a little piece of paper and he said, "You go to this address, tell them I sent you and they're to teach you Chinese chess." I looked at the address, and it was on Avenue B in New York. Do you know where Avenue B is?

Riess: No.

Benedict: It is the lowest of the Lower East Side. East of First Avenue where there was Avenue A, B, and C way the hell at the bottom of Manhattan. I got on the train, and I went down there, and I found my way to Avenue B. I went up, and there were these cold-water flats, ghastly, a horrible place, and they were dirty, and I [raps twice on wood] on the door.

This very pale young man in a silk wrapper answered the door, and I told him who I was and where I came from, and he said, "Come in." I went in, and the place was almost totally unfurnished. The tables were orange crates, and there were some cushions and things on the floor. I remember on the windowsill there was a saucer with a withered piece of bacon in it. And there was another person in the flat which was a very fat young woman, and these two were playing go. You know the Japanese game?

He swept the go away, and he said, "Sit down and I will show you." So we sat down, and he pulled out this chess set. Now a Chinese chess set doesn't look like a chess set that you know. In the first place, the board is a piece of paper, so you unfold the paper. The pieces are checkers with ideograms on them, so you have to know what those mean. The board has a river in the middle, and then there's a palace on each side. There's no queen. There's a king and two counselors--none of whom can leave the palace. They can move in one direction--one space either vertically or diagonally. And then there are the other pieces.

All this of course Bateson wanted to analyze--you can imagine what he would do with all that. So we sat down, and I was there for two or three hours or something, and finally I learned how to play, and then he told me to roll it up--the whole thing fits in a box, and he said, "Okay, take this away, and when you're finished with it, bring it back to me."

It turned out that he was the son of American missionaries who had lived in China, and he was born in China, so he knew a lot about China. He looked as though he was about to drop dead. He was really the most pallid young man I've ever come across. At any rate, I went back up to Cambridge with my chess set in my pocket, and then I went to Bateson. I said, "I learned how to play Chinese chess."

He said, "Good, let's play." He knew the whole time! So we went to the pub--we were always going to the pub, he liked to go to the pub, so did I--and we played Chinese chess. He said, "All right. You don't play very well, but it's okay, you go ahead and do what I said."

I took my chess set in my pocket, and I went down to Washington Street in Boston, and I went into a Chinese restaurant, and I sat down at the table, and of course, nobody knew how to play Chinese chess, they didn't know what this was.

They came over and said, "What's that? What are you doing?" They didn't know anything at all about it, because it was really a kind of northern Chinese game, and most Chinese-Americans are from the South or are from Guangdong, so that didn't do me any good at all. I can still play it, but that doesn't help me much. Some of these people said, "What are you doing here?" And I told them what I was doing.

### More on Bateson

[Interview 3: August 9, 2000] ##

Benedict: I still hadn't committed myself at all to a career in anthropology. It was clear that I was getting more and more in that direction, I think. But I had started out with natural history and with birds and so on. Incidentally, Bateson is the grandson of William Bateson, who was one of Darwin's opponents, in fact, but a famous Cambridge biologist. He was always very interested in the natural world, and so we had that in common as well.

However, a big change is about to appear, and that is that Bateson only had a one year appointment. And so he really couldn't remain as my advisor for my honors thesis because he would have to leave Harvard. They were not going to offer him a permanent position. Their foolishness in my opinion, but never mind. You know he later became a regent of the University. Did you know that? Jerry Brown appointed him as a regent.

Riess: That's interesting. Did he have a notable tenure as a regent?

Benedict: Oh, yes. Well, you know he really became--I could tell you more about Bateson, but it's a bit peripheral.

Riess: I think it's interesting, and also about Margaret Mead, anecdotal things.

Benedict: Well, I told you of course that they were getting a divorce, and he found that very traumatic. And they had this daughter who is also an anthropologist, Catherine Bateson, but she was just a little girl then.

Bateson was a Cambridge man--his whole family was one of those Cambridge families, and he was always a maverick. He wrote an extremely important book called *Naven*. *Naven* is the name of the ceremony of these Iatmul people which I mentioned last time, and the book was an absolutely pioneering book, which was outside of the mainstream of what was going on in anthropology in Britain in those days, which is before the war--the thirties or perhaps early forties.

When he gave this course that I was talking about, the book was out of print, and had been out of print for quite some time. These two friends of mine with whom we formed this group to make a movie at Harvard, which I mentioned before, were also taking this course, as I think I also mentioned, and they decided that they would photocopy the whole book because Bateson wanted to use it in the course. Photocopying a book in 1941 wasn't so easy.

Riess: It was literally photographing.

Benedict: Yes, that's right. And it was expensive, and it was difficult. But one of them had access to a photographic studio, and so they did it and produced a tome, a huge thing, because of all those photographed pages.

Riess: What was *Naven*?

Benedict: *Naven* is the name of the ceremony, and what he did was he analyzed it both for what it did for the people and for the psychological aspect that it had on its participants. So he tried to do a kind of dual approach, both the individualistic and the social approach, which was a very difficult thing to do, and which anthropology had been struggling with forever, and that's what he tried to do.

You see, in general one of the reasons that anthropology and psychology have never gotten together very successfully is that the psychologists, particularly those who were/are Freudians, are really interested in the individual and the history of the individual and the early experience of the individual. That's what it comes down to. And the anthropologists are interested in the social structure and the culture and the more general things.

So there have been many attempts to try to figure out a national character, which I think I mentioned last time, which Bateson and Mead were both very interested in. Can you make a sort of national profile? What makes a Frenchman different from an American? That kind of thing.

Bateson was very interested in that, and Margaret Mead trained a whole lot of people like that, and it comes out of the work of Boas, and especially Ruth Benedict who wrote a very influential book called *Patterns of Culture*, which you may have been submitted to at some point, which was again, about the character. She tried to characterize whole cultures

in terms of whether they were what she called Appollonian or Dionysian--whether they took things calmly and adjusted to things, or whether they--that kind of thing. And Bateson was very interested in it.

So what happened to Bateson was that he then came out here and went to work for the Veterans Administration and the Veterans Hospital at Palo Alto. He got very interested in cybernetics. You know about that? Basically, it was feedback mechanisms. He was really one of the first people to talk about how feedback mechanisms work. He invented something called schismogenesis, about how--he was one of the first people to talk about the double bind, what we now call the double bind. I remember talking to him about this. I met him out here a long time afterwards, after the war when I came out here on a visit.

He became very interested in mental illness because, of course, the other question that they were very interested in, Mead, Bateson, Geoffrey Gorer, Abraham Kardiner, those sorts of people who are not really looked at much anymore, was whether there are specific patterns of mental illnesses which go with particular cultures? Malays run amok, other people don't run amok. What's going on here? That's basically what they were interested in, and it's not a trivial question.

Riess: No.

Benedict: So Bateson was very interested in that, and when Norbert Wiener came out with his cybernetics thing, with a feedback mechanism which was of course highly mathematical, Bateson really latched on to this, and he said, "This is the way we make schizophrenics"--I can't really do it in his words, but close.

He said, "What you do is you have your child, and you say to your child, 'It's bed time now. Go to bed.' And the child says, 'I don't want to go to bed, I don't want to go to bed. And you say, 'When I say go to bed, you bloody well go to bed. Now go to bed.' And so the child goes to bed. And the next night, the parent says 'It's bed time.' The child says, 'I don't want to go to bed.' And you say, 'Oh, well, that's all right, you can stay up a little while.' And if you keep doing this, you develop a kind of split in the child." That's a very simplified example, but that's what he was talking about.

He was working at the Veterans Hospital in Palo Alto on this thing, and he got quite a long way with it. Then he was eventually appointed to a special professorship at Santa Cruz. And he was very much interested in, what was the name of that place down there?

Riess: Esalen.

Benedict: Right. Exactly. He was very much involved in that, and of course, so was Jerry Brown. So that's how it all happened. Now, if you talk to any of the regents, or any of the former chancellors, they all thought this was a crazy appointment, and that he was crazy. He kept saying things in the regents' meeting which they didn't think had anything to do with running the university, and probably didn't. But at any rate, that's sort of the history of Bateson, and when he got cancer, he did all this Esalen stuff too.



I can tell you one more anecdote if you can stand all this, but it's quite interesting actually. I came out here after I had settled in England and had a position in England and everything. I came out here to visit my parents who were still in L.A. Then I came up here, and this must have been maybe late fifties or something, and I called Bateson and said, "Can I come and see you." And he said, "Yes, come and see me." By this time he and Margaret Mead had divorced, and he had remarried a much younger woman and had a couple of children by her. He said, "This is my address."

Marion and I drove out to Palo Alto. It was a Sunday, and this was of course pre-Silicon Valley and there was Palo Alto--quintessentially middle class with beautiful neat houses and lovely lawns and everything. We drove along this street, and all the lawns were lovely, manicured, with flower beds. One house--the front door was open, and all the furniture and the rugs and everything were out on the front lawn. Of course, that was Bateson's house. We stopped, and we went in, walked into the room, you couldn't see anybody about, but there were bits of badger all over the room.

Riess: Badger--the animal?

Benedict: Eventually Bateson appeared with his son, who must have been about eight years old--and it's so funny, he lived in this modern place, and yet he had a portrait of his grandfather, a marvelous Victorian portrait over the fireplace. At any rate, he said, "You see, we caught this badger, and my son wanted to know how it worked, so we took it apart." Anyhow, that was Bateson. That was the way he was.

Riess: Bateson really did advance anthropology? He's not considered to be marginal?

Benedict: He did advance anthropology. Especially recently, when anthropology became more self-reflective, people began to look at him. He wrote a whole lot of interesting essays which are collected in a book called *Steps toward an Ecology of Mind*.

Riess: Very modern stuff.

Benedict: Very modern stuff. And he started doing this a long time ago. So I think he's a very important figure.

Riess: And for you, how did he affect you?

Benedict: I very much liked his approach, and of course his willingness to consider things like making a film thesis, that kind of thing was what originally attracted me to him.

Riess: Did it make you want to be what he was? Did it influence your decision to be an anthropologist?

Benedict: I didn't think I could ever be what he was. I didn't have that long a contact--I was with him for not even a whole year, because I didn't start this thing until the year that I returned to Harvard.

Riess: Why didn't they keep him at Harvard?

Benedict: I think they were short-sighted. I don't think that they appreciated what he was doing. I think he wouldn't have fitted in with what was going on then, which was the formation of the Department of Social Relations, as I started to tell you last time. But I was in no position to know what the politics were at that point at Harvard. It was a one year appointment, perhaps there was no other intention to do that. I have no idea really. I think he would have liked to stay at Harvard, he said so. But they didn't offer him anything.

Riess: Did you do the film?

Benedict: No, I didn't do this film thing that I was going to do with Bateson. I didn't do it because it wasn't approved as a project, and so I did something called "Some Adjustment Problems of Second-Generation Chinese." And that came out of a suggestion of Bateson's to do something on that.

### **Florence Kluckhohn Takes Hold, Thoughts on Roles and Social Structure**

Riess: Where we left off last time is that in fact you had learned Chinese chess, but it was not an entree to the community because no one played it.

Benedict: No one knew how to play it! That's right! But he knew how! So, what was there for me to do now? Well, I had to have another tutor. And I don't remember exactly how it happened, but the tutor that I was landed with was Florence Kluckhohn.

Now Florence Kluckhohn was one tough egg, she really was. It couldn't have been easy being married to Clyde, but she was, and they had a son who was finally arrested for firing a gun out of the window at people walking by on the street. So you can see there were things that were wrong. However, I didn't know anything about that. All I knew was that, I don't know, maybe it was Dave Aberle, I can't remember how I got Florence Kluckhohn or how Florence Kluckhohn got me. It may have been that Florence Kluckhohn got me.

Anyhow, Florence Kluckhohn was a totally different kettle of fish from Gregory Bateson. They couldn't have been more different. She was really a sociologist. She was very interested in a systematic approach to things. And the big influence--of course Parsons was the big influence, and what Parsons had done--I'm sorry if this is getting too rambling.

Riess: It seems to me you're telling the history of anthropology.

Benedict: I think I am. Somewhat. At any rate, what was going on was that Talcott Parsons, who was a sociologist and who as I said earlier was very, very bright and enormously learned

and incredibly dull, but you knew, if you took down everything that he said and read it afterwards, it was pretty good. He wrote the book called *The Structure of Social Action*, which is a great thick thing, it was published in 1937, and that's pretty early.

Parsons had gone to Europe and studied in England and in Germany, and he was very taken with the great sociological theorists of the nineteenth century--namely [Vilfredo] Pareto in Italy, [Emile] Durkheim in France, and Max Weber in Germany. They were all systematologists who said that you had to look at whole social systems, and that all parts of the social systems were related to all other parts, and if you changed one bit, you changed the others, you know, it was like a net. And the units that you looked at were not individuals--this is a Durkheimian notion--but roles.

Riess: Roles?

Benedict: Roles. What you were playing. For example, if I were to do an analysis of what you and I are doing right now--

Riess: --we're doing teacher/student.

Benedict: Teacher/student, and those are roles that we're playing. And if I was somebody else and you were somebody else, the basic relationship would be pretty much the same, although the tone might be different and the peripherals would be different. And how do we know this? Because roles are really defined by expectations. There are certain ways of talking, certain topics--if I started trying to tell you who I thought was going to win the next race at the racetrack or something like that, you would do exactly what you're doing--which is you're applying a sanction to me. You're smiling!

Riess: That's right. In fact you could give me a stock market tip and I'd probably take it.

Benedict: That's right, exactly. So they're very closely defined, all of these roles, and you can analyze a whole society this way. It's a very powerful analytical tool which has been enormously important in sociology and in anthropology.

Anyhow, that's what they were interested in, and you can see it's not the same as Bateson at all. Basically it is not at all psychological, it's sociological. That's what she was keen on, and she gave me all this stuff to read, and I read it, and I was getting a complete sort of switch in my intellectual baggage. She was a very thorough teacher, and she was a very good teacher. She was quite strict in what she expected, and she was very thorough and very helpful. She wanted to make sure you really understood what was going on and what she was saying.

Riess: Well, she was a teacher and you were a student, but Bateson didn't play by the rules?

Benedict: He was a teacher and I was a student too, but the boundaries were not so clear. That of course fitted in with the social relations department, which was what was going on then.

Okay. So here I was in the restaurant with this chess set, nobody was playing, so what was I going to do? Well, Florence Kluckhohn said, "First of all you have to find out about the social structure of peasant life in China." And there was a very good book which had come out quite recently by a Chinese anthropologist, Fei Hsiao-Tung, called *Peasant Life in China*, [1939], and he had been a student at the LSE, he had been trained in Britain. So I read *Peasant Life in China*, and I found out a lot about the way the Chinese did things, and about this very strong patriarchal, patrilineal joint family that operates in China and the clan structure, a very structural view. She made me get that background before I started messing around in Chinatown, which was a good thing to do.

Then it came to messing around in Chinatown. Well, I didn't know what to do about how to get into Chinatown. There were a number of Chinese students at Harvard, and so Florence said, "Well, why don't you talk to"--Dr. Kluckhohn, I never called her Florence--"why don't you go and find some of those students and ask them? Maybe they can help you."

### Meeting the Chinese

Benedict: So I found the students, and of course what I found out was that the students all came from very good families in China, and they were Mandarin-speaking. The people in Chinatown were Cantonese or Hakka, and the students had contempt for them--they were sort of just lower class Chinese as far as they were concerned, and they weren't interested at all. They talked to me, and they told me about China, and they were all really nice and all, but they couldn't help me in Chinatown, they didn't go there! So what to do.

Finally I thought--I can't remember exactly how that went, but either somebody suggested it, or I thought of it myself or something--I thought, "I'll go to some kind of meeting. What kind of meeting? I'll go to church." So I went to church in Chinatown. I think it was Methodist, but I'm not sure. They had a youth group, young people who came there, and they met and they talked, and they played games, and they were quite happy to have me around. The fact that I went to Harvard helped because, of course, that has enormous snob appeal in Boston. They were extremely eager to be Americans, they didn't want to be Chinese at all, they wanted to assimilate into America. So that's what I started to work on. Of course, they spoke perfectly good American English, and then I analyzed--well, that's what I wrote my thesis on. I can tell you what the thesis is about if you think that's worthwhile, but at any rate, that's what happened.

Riess: Did you have some of the standard experiences of anthropological field work? The informant, for instance?

Benedict: I didn't have one particular informant. And, of course, I wasn't living with them, I was coming in from Cambridge. I took field notes, and I wrote down everything that I did, and I would take the notes to Florence Kluckhohn, and she would criticize them. I had to face the problem which all anthropologists have to face about what do you leave out?

Because you really can't put down everything. So you have to think about that. And how important is phraseology, for example, and how important is verbatim quoting, and then of course it really comes down to what are you after.

Interestingly enough, it was the girls that were the most forthcoming and could talk more easily. The boys were very shy. And I found out a lot of interesting things about the way Chinatown was organized,

Riess: The tongs?

Benedict: The tongs and the fongs. The fongs are the family groups, the tongs are the sort of gang groups.

If I could just digress for a minute about the Chinese in America. It was quite interesting because, unlike almost all other American immigrant communities, the Chinese migrated from West to East. They came originally to California in large numbers, and they gradually drifted eastward. The other thing about them is that it was almost entirely a male community because females didn't come. And I did a whole lot of demographic--that's the other thing that Florence Kluckhohn put me onto, she said, "Go to the census, find out over the years what the sex ratio was. The censuses are very useful."

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Benedict: You know, she became quite friendly, and we developed a good relationship, I think. But I don't think we should go on about that. You just want to know the context of the thesis.

Riess: You introduced this by saying you still weren't sure that you were going to be an anthropologist.

Benedict: No, because I thought to myself, "This is really terribly intrusive. What right have you got paddling around in other people's lives like this?" And it kind of made me feel bad. I didn't really like it. I thought it was an intrusion, I thought it was arrogant and manipulative, and I didn't like it. I felt that as I was doing it, but by the time I got finished I really felt it very strongly. I said, I know one thing, I'll never do this kind of thing again.

Riess: I've never heard anyone talk about that.

Benedict: Really?

Riess: Is that a stage that anthropologists go through?

Benedict: I don't know, I haven't heard many people talking about it either, but I can't imagine that if you're at all sensitive you don't go through it. I should think you would. I think you do. And later on when I did more intensive field work--you go through sort of stages in your field work. Because it certainly affects you, you're not some neutral recording machine.

### Summer Travels and Friends and Meeting Marion

Benedict: I'm trying to think of what else happened. Oh, well, a couple of other things. In the summers I usually went back to California, and these friends that I had, these high school friends, all of whom were more or less in the same position, we took trips in the summer, particularly with this one friend, the one I still have. One summer we went to Canada, and one summer we went to Mexico, and one summer we went to Yucatan and Central America. We were very interested, especially in the pre-Columbian ruins, and we visited those. So that feeds into anthropology too.

And also from freshman year, the two best friends that I had from that class--my class at Harvard, which was the class of '45, was of course totally dispersed, and it wasn't a class that had much cohesion. But the two particular friends who were on my floor in the Maria Montez days, I maintain friendship with them, and I'm still friends with one of them. One of them just died, but I'm still friends with the other one who's a professor of law at the University of Washington, retired now.

One of those two, Cornelius Peck, was getting his law degree and had been in V-12, which was a naval officers training course that allowed people to finish their college, and then they had to go and serve on a ship. He did that because, unlike me, he didn't quit and run off the way I had. He stayed at Harvard and finished. He was from Iron Mountain, Michigan. The other one was Dudley Perkins Frasier from Concord, New Hampshire. He was very literary, very smart. He majored in English, rather an aesthete, and he went into book publishing.

The two of them were living together in an apartment in Boston. Peck was getting his degree. Dudley was working for Little, Brown. So I would go in there after my classes--and I was, of course, behind them because I was still an undergraduate, but we were all of an age. I'd go in there, and we'd have parties and drink and play jazz and all that and go to the nightclubs.

Dudley went off to New York, and he worked for publishers in New York, which he did for the rest of his life. He was a brilliant editor. He and I used to go down to New York. I'm not sure exactly of the time sequence, but this was all during that period. And he had met a woman down there, and then he said that that woman was a perfect wife for Cornelius Peck, and would Cornelius Peck come down and meet her. So Cornelius and I went down, and of course what happened was that she was Marion.

Marion came from Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. She attended Swarthmore College, as had her brother before her. She had been born in Chester. Her brother was a physicist working for Du Pont, and she had a married sister. She had been brought up a Presbyterian. One day when she was twelve, she informed her mother that she was resigning from the Presbyterian Church. Her mother's amazingly mobile eyebrows shot skyward, and she said, "As long as you live in this house you will be a Presbyterian, and a happy Presbyterian!"

During the war, Marion worked in the Baldwin locomotive works. Afterwards, she moved to New York and got a job. She was working for Ely Culbertson, the bridge expert. Culbertson had made a fortune from bridge, and he had decided--he came from a Russian mother, and his American father had been an engineer and had gone to Russia in the twenties. Culbertson was brought up in Russia, and he decided he wanted to reform the United Nations. He said if the United Nations doesn't have a military force--mind you, this was just after the war--they'll never amount to anything, so he formed a committee called the Citizens' Committee for United Nations Reform. Marion worked for that. They were very interested in politicking in Washington, and they had many supporters, including senators. So that's how Marion and I met, in New York.

So now I'm back in Cambridge, and I finally finish the bloody thesis, which was a terrible struggle, I must say.

Riess: Is writing difficult for you?

Benedict: Writing was difficult. I'm not a natural writer, as perhaps you've already discovered if you've tried to read anything. At any rate, I finished my thesis, I got my degree, and I went back to California. And I didn't know what to do with myself, really. I had this Harvard A.B., but I didn't know what to do.

### Paris, and Language Study, and Identity Crisis

Benedict: However, I had a whole lot of G.I. Bill left because you got one month of education for every month you'd served in the service, plus twelve months if you'd served at all, so that you could have a maximum of forty-eight months. That's a lot. That's five school years, and I hadn't used it all up at Harvard, so I still had quite a lot left. And so did my friends, so we didn't know what to do.

What happens to Americans after the war? They go to Paris, of course. So we decided that we would go to Paris. Three of us. This one friend that I still have whose name is Brocki, and Buchanan, the other friend, Brocki and Buchanan and I decided we would go to Paris. And my parents--my stepfather was dying to get rid of me and was quite supportive of all of this, so that's what we did. We got onto a ship, the *DeGrasse*, and we sailed to Paris. This was in 1949.

When we got to Paris we didn't know where to stay, but we knew we had to stay someplace that was quite cheap. And it was so cold. Oh my God! It was a very cold winter, that winter. And there was a fuel shortage in Paris, and there was a gas strike, of course. So it was cold. And it was kind of seedy you know. Although Paris hadn't suffered in the war much, but still--.

Finally we found a hotel that was warm. We were delighted with this hotel and it was quite cheap, and the reason it was warm, we found out a little later, was that they let

rooms by the hour. Except on the top two floors where they had rooms that they let by the month which were very cheap--and not very commodious. At any rate, so we took rooms there. Hotel de Bois on the Rue Vavin, right off Montparnasse.

Well, besides me, there was my birdcage. The bird market on the Ile de la Cité is a very extensive bird market on Sundays. I went there, and I was quite excited about it, so then I went to the flea market and found an absolutely marvelous birdcage. It was roughly in the shape of the Pantheon, and it had a big dome on the top, and three or four compartments in it. Really, I think it was about three and a half feet high. It was big. I staggered back and put it in my room, in which there wasn't much room anyhow. Then I went back to the bird market.

I worried that perhaps the proprietress of the hotel would not like it if I had birds in my room, so I decided in my halting French to ask her if I could have them. I went down, and I asked her, and I said would it be all right, "*Madame, ils ne chantent pas.*" And she said, "*Ah, c'est dommage.*" So it was clearly all right.

Riess: Earlier, you told me that when you were in Paris in 1949 you met Alice Toklas. And that would have been when?

Benedict: It happened because my stepmother's half-brother, Julian Stein, was in Paris in 1949, working for the Marshall Plan. And his wife too, and I think they only had one child then. He knew Alice because when Alice and Gertrude [Stein] came to America on one of Gertrude's rare visits, one of the first ones, the only relative that Gertrude liked was Julian's father, Julian Stein, Sr., who was her first cousin.

When she came, she went to Baltimore. Julian Stein, Sr., was dead by that time, but he was married to Rose Ellen Hecht--I mentioned her before. So Gertrude stayed with Rose Ellen, who is my friend Julian's mother. And Gertrude and young Julian hit it off. He's very funny, funny looking, and funny. She delighted in him, and they always kept up a kind of relationship.

Then they went back to Paris, of course, and when my stepmother, that is, Julian's half-sister, after the war joined the Red Cross and went to Paris and the Red Cross--I think Gertrude had died by that time, but Alice was still there, and as I think I mentioned to you, she stayed in Gertrude's apartment.

So my stepmother and Alice saw each other, and then when Julian came, Julian of course saw Alice, and at one point he took me over to meet her, and that was the only time I ever met her. I remember her as a little kind of black woman. She wasn't black, but she gave the impression of being black. Very dark woman. Very intense. And she was, of course, a very good cook. She made some cookies for us. We found out afterwards that some of the cookies had pot in them!

Riess: You found out because you felt it or because you were told it?

Benedict: I was told it. I didn't think I actually ate one.



At any rate, there really isn't much to tell. She showed us around the apartment, and I remember, above all, the chairs. She had straight chairs, like these we're sitting on. Those chairs had been in there during Gertrude's time. Picasso had come and drawn on them. He drew his designs on the seats. After he left, Alice said, "I think I can embroider those," and she said to Gertrude, "Shall I embroider them?" Gertrude said yes, so all the chairs--I think there must have been only three or four--had original Picasso drawings on the seats, which Alice had embroidered.

Riess: She had turned it into needlepoint?

Benedict: Yes.

Riess: Had he drawn right on the fabric?

Benedict: He drew on the fabric seat, and then she embroidered it. And they were wonderful, I must say! So there was that. And then, of course, the famous portrait was still there, which later went to the Metropolitan Museum Art, the famous portrait of Gertrude by Picasso.

Riess: That monumental portrait.

Benedict: That's right. That was there. Otherwise, it's such a long time, and I don't really remember very clearly, except I remember the apartment was actually crammed with stuff, full of things. Really that's about all I remember about it.

And when in Paris, what did you do? You had to enroll in a course, and there was something called the *Cours de Civilisation*, which was a real rip off. It was something that the French had dreamed up, and there were a series of lectures that were supposed to civilize you. Because, as you weren't French, you couldn't possibly be civilized, so you went to these lectures which were given by an exceedingly old man who whispered. It was really not much use.

Anyhow, the whole tradition in Europe was not the kind of tradition that they have in this country where you go to a lecture, you listen to the lecture, and later are examined on it. I mean there are no classes or anything else. So I went to that for a while. I guess we all went to that. You had to go to get your stipend, which was \$75 a month. The course was full of Americans doing this. When you got your stipend at the beginning of the month, you went to the sidewalk café, and you had aperitifs and wine. At the end of the month, you hardly had anything at all, you had enough for a glass of citron pressé or something like that.

After a little while, I couldn't stand this damn course. It seemed to me so intellectually dishonest and such a waste of time. I thought, well, what do I really need to know? I need to know French. So I transferred into another branch of the Sorbonne which gave courses to prepare teachers of French who were going to teach abroad, not in France. And I enrolled in that. A highly intensive course in the French language. Excellent course, really excellent. You were given homework, and you had to write essays, and they took you on little walks around Paris, and then you had to describe things that you saw.

One day a week you went to a place called the Institut de Phonetique which tried to teach you to pronounce correctly. Americans have a lot of trouble pronouncing French correctly, mainly because they don't use the lips. So they would do all kinds of things to teach us, like putting toothpicks in our mouths to try and get us to use the lips. I enjoyed that course, and I learned some French. And of course we took trips around. We went to Belgium and we went to Italy.

Now finally it was getting toward the end of the year, and it was 1950, and there comes again the question of what are you going to do with your life. I thought, I'd like to get a higher degree of some kind, and the only thing I know how to do is anthropology. I had tried, I'd written to people. To an uncle in Washington and others, but nothing came of it.

Riess: Was this really a crisis? Would you describe it now as a kind of identity crisis?

Benedict: Yes. It was a crisis in the sense that I really felt that I had to make some kind of decision about what was going to happen to the rest of my life. I was twenty-six or so and I wasn't really qualified to do anything, I hadn't really started on any kind of a career. I had a good undergraduate education, and I knew how to write a paper and do research, but that was all.

Riess: Do you think this was a dilemma for the post-war classes more so than other twenty-six year olds?

Benedict: I think on the whole, judging from the other people that I knew, probably less, because most of them had been in the service. From the people that I knew in the service and the people that I knew afterwards at Harvard and elsewhere, a lot of them had a very good idea what they wanted to do. They had made up their minds while they were in the service what they were going to do. They weren't coming back to the kind of cushy circumstances that I returned to. So they damn well had to make up their minds what they were going to do. I remember one of them said, "Well, I'm going to open a laundromat." That kind of thing. I think that they were probably somewhat less at a loss than young people are now, or that young people were before the war, but I was at a loss.

### "Those Things Which I Believe I Want"

Riess: Before we started the tape, you gave me this document, written in November of 1949 in Paris, titled, "Those Things Which I Believe I Want." Were you bouncing these ideas off people?

Benedict: No, I was bouncing them off the four walls of that little bedroom I had! I spent a lot of time alone in there. That's when I wrote that.

I was thinking about "What do I do next? I can't stay in the Hotel du Bois forever, and I'm not going to stay in Paris forever. I don't have anything to do here except finish

my course. What do I do next?" I wasn't enrolled in any school. I hadn't applied anywhere.

Riess: Did writing these things down help consolidate your thinking?

Benedict: I think it must have done.

Riess: Why don't you read it out loud, and we'll put it in the text.

Benedict: This is a note I wrote. It's dated Paris, November 12<sup>th</sup>, 1949.

"Those things which I believe I want now are:

Respectability of occupation

A discipline within which to work

An ordered set of work habits

A variety of interest in my work

An income large enough to allow for some luxury

Vacations to allow for some travel

An independence sufficient to keep me energized but not so great as to make me any lazier than I am.

I believe social anthropology or sociology can provide me with these. Aim: a professorship."

### **England and Acceptance at London School of Economics**

Benedict: All my life I'd been a terrific Anglophile, brought up reading Shakespeare and seeing British films. I'd visited England, and I loved what I saw in England. And really those years--it was a very exciting time in England because it was the first post-war Labour Government. Churchill, to everybody's surprise, had lost the election after the war, and Clement Attlee was the prime minister. They were really trying to build a different kind of society, with very strong social legislation and welfare payments and a national health service.

The contrast with France was enormous. Here were the French who hadn't really suffered--well, certainly not in Paris really suffered--full of their usual cynicism, this *ça me-t-egal* kind of talk.

Riess: What?

Benedict: *Ça me-t-egal*--"it doesn't matter to me," basically. Whereas the Brits had in fact had the bejeezus bombed out of them. If you went to London in 1949, there were huge areas that had been laid waste. Yet they were really buckling down and trying to do something, and trying to do something different. The British working class was a very poverty-stricken and oppressed class, had been for a very long time. I was very impressed with that, and I thought that was just great.

The first time I came to London, I had some wonderful experiences. But this gets too anecdotal. I won't get into all of that, although they're very good stories. Anyway, I thought well, I'll continue my education in anthropology in Britain. So I wrote off to Cambridge. Naturally I would have tried Cambridge because of Bateson, and because Harvard was founded by a Cambridge man. I wrote off to Cambridge and they wrote back and said, "Well, yes, that sounds very interesting, but you see you cannot go on to a higher degree at Cambridge unless you have an M.A. And you can't have an M.A. from Cambridge unless you have a B.A. from Cambridge." Because the way you got an M.A. in those days in Cambridge and Oxford was you got a B.A., and then you applied two or three years later and sent them fifty pounds, and you got an M.A.

In order to enroll in the Ph.D. at Cambridge, I would have had to start as an undergraduate again. I didn't want to do that. So I wrote to--I also have to say that at Harvard I had studied a number of British anthropologists, they were part of my course, and I had taken a course on contemporary anthropological theory from Clyde Kluckhohn. So these names that were on the faculty, or the academic staff as they call it in Britain, were very familiar to me.

Riess: On the faculty of the LSE?

Benedict: Cambridge, and Oxford, and the LSE. Next I wrote to LSE and said that I would like to come and study anthropology there. The professor there was Raymond Firth, who had been a student of Malinowski, who was, of course, a famous figure in anthropology. They wrote back and said, "Yes, come." So I was pretty excited about that.

Meanwhile Marion was still in New York. I thought, well, we'll just start a proper life. I wrote to Marion and said, "Why don't you come over and we'll get married." After some hesitation, she agreed, and she came to Paris.

Well, you can do anything in Paris, but you can't get married. It is a most difficult place to get married. As you may know, in France a marriage is a contract in which there has to be a *partition de biens*--that is, a partition of goods. You have to say who owns this and who owns that, and it's a legal contract. If you're a foreigner, you have to have an American lawyer, a French lawyer, and the mayor of the *arrondissement* in which you happen to live--you can imagine the complexity of it. In Britain, all you have to do is be there for a couple of weeks and publish your banns. So we decided that we would go to England to get married, and off we went to England.

Okay, so we got to London, and I went to the LSE and talked to the graduate advisor there. She arranged an appointment with Professor Firth for me, and I didn't show up for the appointment. So I got hauled in and, "What kind of a way is this to start your career. What excuse have you got for not showing up at your appointment?" I said, "I was getting married!"

I started taking their courses and their seminars, and it was a very different way of studying and learning than I had been used to, or that any American would be used to. What happens is you don't take courses--it's different now--they've gone much more toward the American style. There are lecture courses, but you're not examined on your courses, you're examined on a subject. You're examined at the end of the second year, I think it is, and any way you can get up your subject is all right. You can go to the lectures, you can read in the library, you can talk to your friends, or whatever you want--you're not compelled to do any of those things.

Riess: Are the examinations oral or written?

Benedict: Written. They're a series of three-hour examinations. They're tough exams. So you're responsible for the subject, not for the course--that's the whole idea. Tutorials are very important, because you write essays for your tutor, and the tutor tears them apart in front of you, and you learn a lot, and the main thing you learn is how to write. You really do. The British students, at least in those days, knew how to write a lot better than Americans did, a lot, lot better. So, that's the way it worked. And it's not a bad system.

Riess: But for the graduate?

Benedict: For the graduates, it was mostly seminars. Of course, I had a tutor as well, an advisor, and I went to the seminars. The main thing--you take some exams for an M.A., and you get an M.A., and then you go on to a Ph.D., or you can be switched. They switched me right up to a Ph.D.

Also, British education tends to be much more specialized than American education. They don't have this idea of a broad liberal education, or they didn't then. You have to remember, I'm talking about what it was like in the fifties. You would take a B.S. in Economics or a B.A. in Art. It's not general. And the other thing you have to remember--different now--is that of people of college-going age in the fifties in Britain, about 3 percent went to university. At the same time in this country, about 30 to 40 percent went to university. We're talking percent. That's really a tremendous difference. Very elite. To have any kind of a higher degree, even to have a first degree, was a very elite thing to have in Britain. Most kids left school at an early age, and you had an exam called an eleven plus. Have you ever heard of that? Which sort of decided your fate for life.

**Raymond Firth and Finding a Thesis Topic**

Benedict: At any rate, so then I was supposed to find a thesis subject.

##

Benedict: Firth said, "Well, you did your undergraduate thesis on the Chinese. Wouldn't it be interesting to do one on the Chinese in Britain? There's a very old community down in Limehouse, and if you went down there, maybe you could do an interesting comparative study, since one of the things that anthropologists are supposed to be is comparative."

I said, "Okay, that sounds interesting," and so I got on the bus, and I went down to Limehouse. And it wasn't there. It had been bombed out of existence. It was nothing but rubble. He didn't know--he never went down there. I came back and I said, "I'm sorry Professor Firth, but my field site seems to be missing."

Riess: Grottesque somehow.

Benedict: It really is. We sat around and talked about that some more, and he said, "One of the things that's happening in this country is that we're getting some Muslims coming over here, and nothing is known about them, as far as--nobody has written anything about them. Do you think you could be interested in that?" So I said, "Yes. I'll go and see."

There was a mosque in Woking, a suburb of London, and I went out there, and it turned out to belong to a dissident sect of Muslims. It was a proselytizing sect, so it was quite easy for me to get into it. I started to work, and I found out quite a bit about the Muslim community, which in those days was mostly Pakistani, because this was after partition. Partition was in 1947. Then I found out there was a rival mosque, and there was another mosque in London. I used the mosque as a sort of base of operations.

That kind of field work, as I'd already found out in Boston, although it sounds kind of easy--because there you are, living at home, and you just saunter out to your field site and do what you want--is really terribly difficult, and it's terribly difficult because it's not really a community. It's really an association. You know, you're not part of that community, and the people in it themselves are only partially in it. They've got other lives that they lead elsewhere that have nothing to do with their attendance at the mosque. They're running little shops, or they're working in a factory or something else. It's the problem of doing intensive urban research, which is a very difficult problem which sociologists have been trying to deal with for decades. So that kind of field work is really hard and very unsatisfying because you never feel you're really getting there.

Riess: What questions do you ask then?

Benedict: Well, the first thing I had to try to find out is who these people are, where they're coming from, how did they get here, how important are these associations for them. In this case, if they're Muslims, how difficult is it for them to keep the Islamic rules of prayer five

times a day and a fast at Ramadan and all of that kind of stuff? How is the association run? How is it financed? It's really sort of sociological. You try to find out something about their kinship structure, where their families are, what kind of communication, but it's very unsatisfactory field work--at least I've always found it so.

Riess: But once you figured that out, you committed to that?

Benedict: I was pretty committed to it by the time I found all this out, and besides, to have gone in another direction would have probably meant more years and I'd have to go overseas somewhere, and I didn't know where to go or what to do or how to start it, and I was already in one foreign culture, and I liked it there.

### **Anthropological Traditions at LSE, Malinowski**

Riess: The tradition at the LSE was not to go off to Africa?

Benedict: Yes, it was the anthropological tradition, but not necessarily Africa. The important thing, and this will come up later when I talk about the contrast between American and British anthropology, possibly the most important thing that happened in British anthropology was Malinowski's field work. Malinowski was a Pole, and he went to do field work in the Trobriands, which is off New Guinea. He went to Australia, actually, and he got caught there by the First World War, and he was an enemy alien.

But the Australians said, "Oh, well, if you just stay in the Trobriands and don't bother us, we're not going to intern you." So he did, and that meant that he was there for two years. He was living there, and he was living with the people, and that was a very important thing because that made intensive field work. You learned the language, and you became sort of part of the community--you never really become fully a member of the community, but a sort of member of the community. And that really formed the basis of field work, which was a great British tradition.

Malinowski--and [Alfred Reginald] Radcliffe-Brown was the other important figure--trained a whole generation of British anthropologists, of whom Firth was one. Evans Pritchard, I don't know if you've ever come across that name, he's another famous one. He was the professor at Oxford. Meyer Fortes who was the professor at Cambridge. That whole generation, the generation senior to me, was trained in that way, and they all went and did intensive field work somewhere, some in Africa, many in Africa, some in the Pacific, and some in Asia. But mainly in Africa.

### Comparing Islam, Buddhism

Benedict: Now all of that has enormous consequences, which we'll get into later--enormous consequences--and was a great contrast to what happened in America, where they were visiting Indians who were in what they thought were dying cultures. An absolute contrast to how I started. So to me, the ideal was to do this Malinowski type thing. And what I was doing was not the ideal, and also I wasn't all that crazy about Islam. The more I found out about Islam, the less I liked it.

In fact, at one point I felt I wasn't getting anywhere at all; you know, I'd found out the kinds of things I just mentioned to you. I talked it over with Firth and with some of the other teachers and professors and colleagues and fellow students, and there were a lot of people who had influence on me in those days, and finally I decided with their help that it would be interesting to look at a second religious group.

How much of what I was seeing was a result of simply any foreign religious group finding itself in England, and how much of it had to do with Islam itself? I thought that the biggest contrast that I could think of was Buddhism, because the philosophy of Buddhism is really radically different from the philosophy of Islam, so I began to study the Buddhist groups in London. And my thesis eventually turned out to be a sort of comparison between the Muslim and Buddhist associations in London.

Riess: Who were the Buddhists in London?

Benedict: Well, there were two kinds of Buddhists in London. There were the scholarly Buddhists--there was a long tradition of orientalism in London, in England, and these were people who studied it as a philosophy. Really they were orientalists.

Riess: Caucasians?

Benedict: Mostly Caucasians. But they would bring over Buddhist priests, usually from Burma, which was a British colony when they were doing all of this, and from Ceylon, which was also a British colony. So those were the two big British colonies. They didn't bring them from Japan, and they didn't bring them from Thailand, and they didn't bring them from Vietnam or Tibet. That was one group.

Then there was the other group, which were believers. They were very attracted to Buddhism, they thought it was a wonderful religion, and they wanted to become Buddhist. They were also almost all Caucasians. There wasn't a big native Buddhist community in London. There were some people from Burma and Ceylon and so on, but not many. Not like the Pakistanis. They weren't working there, and often they were priests or students or something like that who had come over temporarily. So it was a terrific contrast, almost too much of a contrast.

Well, so that's what I did. So, we won't go into all of that.



### Thesis Committee, Theory

Riess: What about these people who were on your thesis committee, like Maurice Freedman and E.R. Leach?

Benedict: Maurice Freedman was a student of Firth's, and he had done field work, first in Singapore and then in Hong Kong. The reason that he got on my committee right away was he became a great expert in China from his work in Hong Kong. He wrote a couple of very important books about Chinese clan organization in Hong Kong. Especially in what were then called the New Territories. That's how I got him and he got me. And then when I switched into this Islamic thing, he was interested in that too, because in Singapore where he worked, which was at that point still part of Malaya, there were a lot of Muslims there. His wife, who was an Egyptian Jew, had a lot of contact with Muslims in Egypt, so she was very interested in Islam, particularly in divorce. You can divorce quite easily in Islam, and that was a kind of thing that interested her.

Leach was a highly important figure in British anthropology and, indeed, in anthropology in general. He was one of the last of Malinowski's students, and then he'd worked with Firth. He had worked among the tribal peoples of Burma, near Thailand, the Kachins, the people they've been having all the trouble with because they're always rebelling and trying to break away from the central Burmese government. He'd written a very important book called *Political Systems of Highland Burma* in which he tried to show how the political systems altered over time.

I guess we have to get into the theory a little bit. Part of the trouble with the kind of approach that Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown had--they were very interested in the stability of social systems. How do social systems maintain themselves? Why don't they fly all apart? What's going on? And that had to do with roles and sanctions, and they put forth some very convincing theories about how this works. But the problem is that if you've got something that's in perfect equilibrium, how do you account for social change?

That became a really important intellectual problem, you see, because what Radcliffe-Brown in particular was showing was the way sanctions work, the way the system always tries to get back into balance. But if it were always in balance, as I say, you would never have any change, and we know that that's not the case.

### British Anthropology and the Colonies

Riess: Were the British so interested in this for practical reasons? Was this a colonial issue?

Benedict: Okay. That's interesting, and then we will have to get into this sooner or later, we might as well do it now. One of the major differences between British and American anthropology

is where they worked. As I mentioned a couple of times in passing, Americans worked mostly with American Indians. They tried to find out--and this was Boas and his followers--what was it like before you were impacted by the Europeans who came over? They were very much interested in reconstructing the way these societies were. All of them had been very heavily impacted, of course, by the fact that they were internal colonies of the United States, and they'd been greatly interfered with, moved about, and massacred. So that was the situation on the ground, and that was the situation in which American anthropologists were working.

British anthropologists were going out to the colonies. Now the British were not at all interested in turning their colonial peoples into Britons. Americans were interested in turning American Indians into Americans, the old melting pot kind of thing, but the British weren't interested in that. They were interested in administration and trade. Trade and administration is the way I should put it because trade was primary.

So when the anthropologists went out, they were going into societies which were not non-functioning. They were ongoing societies. Of course, they'd been impacted by what had happened to them by being conquered by the British or whoever, and by all the population movements that had gone on, especially in Africa. But in fact, they were ongoing societies, and in general what the British tried to do was rule through those societies. They didn't try to rule them directly. It was sort of "take me to your chief" syndrome. They tried to operate that way, and that's the way they operated, and they did it quite successfully. They did it also in India.

Now that itself was not as neutral and non-interfering as it might sound in the first place, because there were certain things that they wanted done, and when the chief didn't want to do them, they forced him to do them. There were also certain native customs of which the British didn't approve. So there were a number of things like that, but on the whole, what they were looking at were functioning societies.

Riess: Did the government underwrite the travel of anthropologists?

Benedict: They did later on. They did by the time I got there. They did in India, especially in India. India's a case all its own. Of course the British had been there since the seventeenth century and they were very much interested in the first place in what *is* India. India is the most complicated place in the world.

Riess: That's a little more abstract a question.

Benedict: What do you mean?

Riess: Well, if they're interested in trade and administration that's one thing. But when you ask what *is* India.

Benedict: Yes, but when they were interested in trade and administration they wanted to find out--as they conquered India, they only took India bit by bit, and they didn't really want to take it, they only took it more or less as they had to for trade reasons. First they established

themselves in ports, and then they gradually spread into other areas, and then when these states started fighting each other--started, they always fought each other!--well, that's bad for trade, so they would want to stop that. So they would send in British troops and then, the first thing you knew, they were ruling that state. It happened in that kind of way. So they had to know what was going on. They had to know the obvious Hindu/Muslim difference, which still is such a hot issue.

Riess: So you're describing anthropology as a kind of handmaiden to trade and administration.

Benedict: Well, they didn't see it that way. In India, they saw it as a branch of administration. Not in Africa, it was different in Africa. And of course India--there was an India office in Britain, so India was separate, it was not considered a colony. And it's always separate. Originally it was run by something called the East India Company, which was a private company. And the British--in the eighteenth century that was the way to do it, they did that in North America too. Then the government finally had to take over--the thing got too big and too difficult and too corrupt, and so on.

In Africa, then, they were trying to do the same thing. They did have an East Africa Company at one point, but the African colonies were very much later. The real scramble for Africa really didn't begin until after the First World War. Oh, later there was some government idea of having anthropologists there to assist the government, not that government paid much attention to their advice.

Anthropology was never a very important tool to the British government because anthropologists came back and they tended to give reports which would say basically, "The best thing to do is to leave these people alone." Well, they didn't want to hear that. So they didn't finance very much, and they didn't pay much attention to what they got. That's my opinion, and of course it's not the opinion of radical left wing students. It's very fashionable to talk about colonial exploitation and so on, but having done it and seen it and been in it myself, I can tell you it's exceedingly ineffective.

### **Edmund R. Leach**

Riess: Now I'm not sure that we finished talking about Leach.

Benedict: The reason we got off on that was that I was talking about Leach as an important figure. The reason that he was important is that he tried to get some kind of movement into this equilibrium model, to try to account for change. And he did this by this intensive study of the political systems in the north of Burma and in the highlands of Burma. He showed how the political systems alternated from an egalitarian to an authoritarian model and back again. It kept swinging back and forth. It was a brilliant analysis; nobody had done that before, and he made a very convincing case. It had a lot of effect in anthropology, because it was an attempt to deal with change. He wasn't, in fact, giving up the

equilibrium model altogether, but he was showing that it was an unstable equilibrium. And that was progress.

He was a very brilliant guy. He was really in a way much more like Bateson in that he was highly imaginative. He wrote a piece called *Magical Hair*, in which he was saying that hair has a lot to do with basic philosophical stance, that if you think of ecstatic religions, the practitioners of ecstatic religions tend to have long hair and they're sort of wild. If you think of ascetic religions, their priests have shaven heads. So he elaborated that kind of notion. He would do things like that, which is very Batesonian and not very social structure oriented.

When Firth went away--Firth went back to Tikopia, which is the place he'd done his work. It's a small Polynesian island, and I once figured out that he'd written twenty-two pages for every inhabitant of Tikopia. He went back to restudy Tikopia in the fifties and Leach, who was the reader--you know what I mean by reader in the British sense? It's like an associate professor. It's a title. Traditionally there was one professor per department, and then you might have one or two readers who were like associate professors. There was no title associate professor.

Riess: But you'd call them professor?

Benedict: You'd call them doctor if they had Ph.D.s, Mr. if they hadn't.

Leach was a reader at that point. He later became Professor of Anthropology at Cambridge. He was a Cambridge man, and he was also wealthy and helped finance a lot of anthropological work. So for a time I came under his supervision while Firth was away. He was very helpful because he introduced a little bit of movement into my analysis. And I plugged along at that, and I became very involved at LSE and very involved in Britain.

### Marriage, a Cold-Water Flat, and an Entree via Inland Waterways

Benedict: Then another strand developed. Can you stand all this?

Riess: Yes! But you're creating a level of detail that you don't have to maintain in everything.

Benedict: I hope not. Actually I think I'm doing it probably too much. But it helps me understand what was going on.

##

Benedict: When Marion and I first went to London we lived in a cold-water flat on Holland Road, which is in West Kensington. It was very hard to find any place to live when we went to London, there had been so much bombing, and everything was controlled. When we got

there in 1950, after we were married at the Paddington Registry, everything was rationed. Soap was rationed, meat was rationed, butter was rationed, cheese was rationed, clothes were rationed. Everything but vegetables was rationed.

I remember we had one egg a week. When we first we moved into this place we had this tiny gas cooker--a little thing with a tiny gas flame. And we had our one egg. Well, what are we going to do with our egg? We decided the best thing to do would be to boil it --that way we wouldn't waste any--so we got the water to boil, and we put the egg in, and it exploded! It had come from Poland and it had been dipped in silica gel to preserve it, so it couldn't make those little bubbles that boiling eggs do, and it blew up. So anyhow, it was kind of austere--life in London in 1950.

Riess: It struck me when we started out that you were a fellow with a certain family fortune, from the Oppenheim side and maybe the Benedict. So why the struggle? Why didn't you have an allowance?

Benedict: I did have some money, but it wasn't very much, and anyhow you couldn't get anything.

Riess: I wondered if this was an exercise in poverty or reality?

Benedict: Well, when I went to Paris with my friends, they didn't have much money. I certainly didn't want to go swanning around with a lot of money while they didn't have any. I wanted to live the way they did. Anyhow, when you're young like that, it isn't such a great hardship. You're so interested in everything else. It didn't really concern me very much. I never thought about it very much. But, in fact, I guess we always lived as though we were much poorer than we were.

When we got married, Marion thought she should get a job. She had had a job in New York, and she was interested in being a working woman, she didn't want to just sit at home in the cold-water flat, for which I certainly don't blame her! So she put an ad in the *Times*. Now in those days, the London *Times* had the ads on the front page. And they always started with a big capital letter. And she made up an advertisement which began-- "Attractive-something from New York, worked for famous author, seeks similar position in London." Well, the *Times* person called her and said, "We're frightfully sorry, but the *Times* frowns on the word 'attractive.'" So she changed it to intelligent.

At any rate, she got a lot of answers--including people who wanted her to go to Brighton for the weekend--but among them was a letter from Robert Fordyce Aickman, Esq., President of the Inland Waterways Association. Marion thought this looked pretty interesting, and she went to see him. He sat her down, and he said, "Do you know why Britain is becoming a second-rate power?" Marion said, "No." And he said, "Because she has neglected her waterways." Marion hadn't heard that thesis before, so she thought that was pretty interesting. At any rate, they talked for a long time, and he was clearly a very cultivated, interesting man and finally he agreed to take her on as his assistant. As she was leaving, he said, "Do you mind if I ask you a personal question." And Marion said, "No." He said, "Do you type?"

So that meant that Marion was working for the Inland Waterways Association, which was a group dedicated to the preservation and expansion of British canals. Now as you may know, Britain had a very big network of canals which were built in the eighteenth century, some of which are beautiful, and the bridges are beautiful. Canals were the best way of getting around in the eighteenth century. It was before railways, and you can move big loads.

These canals are plied--this is a diversion, but it has some point--they're plied by craft called narrow boats. Narrow boats are seven feet wide and seventy feet long, and the canals are fifteen feet wide, so two of them can just pass each other. And they used to be pulled along by horses on the towpath, as you may remember from *Wind in the Willows*.

Riess: I also remember it from New Hope, Pennsylvania, and the towpaths.

Benedict: That's right. Well, this was pretty interesting, and it also was very British, and we didn't want to be in the American community, which is one of the reasons I quit the *Cours de Civilisation* in Paris. I don't want to go to Paris and sit around with a bunch of Americans bitching about local conditions. And I didn't want to go to England and be part of the American community and invited to the embassy and everything--I just didn't want that. I mean, what's the point of going to England if you do that? They only do it worse than we do it here.

She took the job there, and from that job there sprang a whole network of people whom we still know, who are still our friends, and whom we visit when we go to London. And they are all British, very British, and we're the only Americans among them. One of them said to Marion, "You know, Marion," she said, "you're awfully nice for an American." So typical. At any rate, that had a lot of consequences, which has a lot to do with our career in England.

So Marion had that job, and Robert Aickman took us under his wing and decided that he would educate us because it was clear we didn't have an education, and he took us--I had a little tiny Fiat 500, you know what that is?

Riess: I can imagine how small that might be, yes.

Benedict: We went around England together. He took us to country houses and provincial theaters and on canals, and it was really a fascinating thing to do. And it was also about that time the government decided to put on a festival, the Festival of Britain, which was 1951.

Riess: Your first festival?

Benedict: No, it wasn't my first--I had been to the Chicago World's Fair in 1933, believe it or not, and the Golden Gate Exposition out here and the New York World's Fair, in '39.

No, but one of the things that the government had decided to do was to rebuild the South Bank. The South Bank had been devastated, so they made the South Bank the site of the fair. One permanent building, which is still there, the Royal Festival Hall, was built

for that fair, and the Festival also commemorated the 100th anniversary of the very first exhibition, which was in the Crystal Palace in 1851. So it was very exciting. And Robert Aickman and all this network of friends were very, very involved in it.

One of the things that the festival organizers were going to do was to have a whole set of British water craft moored off the South Bank, among which, of course, had to be a narrow boat. And the narrow boats, I forgot to tell you--there were people who lived on the narrow boats who were called bargees, and they had their own lingo which is very difficult to understand, and they--the narrow boats are painted with roses and castles, which derive from Romany, from the gypsies.

Riess: As the pubs are often named castles and roses.

Benedict: That's right, same kind of thing. And many of the pubs are built right on the canals or rivers where the traffic was.

### Narrow Boat Adventures

Benedict So how did one find a traditionally painted narrow boat to moor off the South Bank in 1951? During the war, the whole of the canals had been taken over by the government who had nationalized the canals and had put them under the railways and painted all the boats blue and yellow.

It was very interesting because--this is an aside, just an anecdote, but it is kind of interesting, because when it looked as though Britain was going to be invaded, it was alone. We [the United States] weren't in the war, and France was finished. One of the problems was what to do with the gold in the Bank of England. They didn't want the gold to fall into the hands of the Germans, so how were they going to get the gold to North America? How were they going to get it out of Britain to North America?

Riess: How?

Benedict: They put it on a narrow boat, which nobody would have ever thought of; instead of rushing it out, it went slowly along the canals until it got to a port, and then they got it over to Canada. I don't think many people know that.

Well, so we had to find this narrow boat, and we finally found a boatyard in a place called Leighton Buzzard. There was one sort of decaying narrow boat still with its original paint. So the inland waterway people beavered away, and they restored it. Then there was the problem with getting it from Leighton Buzzard to London. A lot of the canals were silted up. When the railways came in in the nineteenth century, they of course wanted to take over, and they bought up canals, and they deliberately let them go to pot. What the Inland Waterways Association was doing was trying to get them dredged

out and started again, which has been successful, because they're now a great recreational thing. You can take a narrow boat vacation in Britain if you want.

We had to bring this narrow boat down from Leighton Buzzard to London, which is a distance of about 100 miles. And you have to go through many locks; you come to a hill and you go up one side and down the other side in a series of locks. It's enormous fun and very interesting. The crew was all volunteers, so we would come up and stay on it for a day and then go back to London, and somebody else would come up, and so on.

Riess: It didn't take any great expertise?

Benedict: It didn't take great expertise. You just had to have enough strength to work the locks, and you had to have somebody who knew how to fix the engine, which was always breaking down. The person who knew how to fix the engine was Lord Jeffrey Percy, who was a younger son of the Duke of Northumberland. He liked fooling with engines, so he would go down and get covered with grease, and he'd come back up with some part from the engine and he'd say, "I can't figure out where this goes, I don't suppose it's important," and he'd throw it overboard!

Well, we finally got it down there. And so we were involved in the Festival of Britain.

It was also a time of great hope for Britain, when they really looked as though they were going to make a new society. It was really quite interesting. Their national health plan--it's basically a wonderful plan, I think, and for a long time it worked extremely well. And their social welfare, cradle to grave stuff, also worked extremely well.

Riess: But the Inland Waterways Association sounds more like a throwback.

Benedict: Yes. But they also wanted to open the canals again, to have them functioning and working, as working canals.

Riess: So it's not just nostalgia.

Benedict: It wasn't just nostalgia. Well, there was a lot of nostalgia in it, but then everything in Britain has a lot of nostalgia. You can't do anything there without there being a lot of nostalgia in it. It's often the marrying of those two things that does get things done.

So all of that was going on, and on November 5, 1952 our first daughter Helen was born. She was a National Health baby. We had moved out of the cold-water flat and were living in St. John's Wood in Michael Wornum's flat. Michael was my stepmother's first cousin once removed. His father was a prominent British architect who had redesigned Parliament Square and the Royal Institute of British Architects after the war. Michael was training as an architect, and, through him, we got to know a whole other network of interesting and lively young people. Michael later moved to the Bay Area, where he became mayor of Mill Valley and an assemblyman.



We got caught up in the Festival of Britain, which was going on all over the country. The mother of one of our friends was organizing a fête in her village, Wisborough Green in Sussex. Everyone was supposed to come in sixteenth-century costume, so Marion had a spectacular Elizabethan dress, and I had a slashed doublet and hose and carried a cross bow. We drove down to Sussex in our little open car, and no one even noticed. When we arrived, our hostess had arranged the villagers in a procession. The Lady of the Manor was dressed as the Lady of the Manor, and the peasants were dressed as peasants. As we made our way along the procession, she called out, "That's far enough!" We were getting perilously close to the peasants.



#### IV 1954 CHOICES

##### Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill, Wilfred Cantwell Smith

Benedict: It was getting close to the time for my oral examinations for the Ph.D. In Britain, you write your thesis, and then you have to defend it in front of examiners. And the examiners consist of one or two from inside your university, and an external examiner who hasn't worked with you and who judges your thesis from outside. My examiners were Fortes, Freedman, and Firth, and I had to defend it in front of them, which I did, and they gave me the Ph.D. And now I was faced with the same kind of a problem that I had had before.

One of the people that I knew in England was an American called Marian Smith. Marian Smith had been a student of Ruth Benedict's at Columbia. She was badly crippled by polio, but indomitable, and she was a really delightful and very sweet woman. First she had worked among the Indians of the Northwest Coast here, and then she had worked in India. And while she was in India she married an Englishman. They came to London, and she got involved with the anthropological community in London, and we became friends, and she used to invite us over and make cookies for Helen for Thanksgiving, which of course is not a British holiday.

We became very friendly, and she knew what I was doing, and she said to me one day, "Well, what are you going to do afterwards." I said, "I don't know what I'm going to do." So she said, "All right, well, I have a friend called Wilfred Cantwell Smith."

Have you ever heard of him?

Riess: No.

Benedict: Wilfred Cantwell Smith was a Canadian. He was an historian, but he had also been a Presbyterian missionary in Pakistan, in Lahore. He had written a book called *Modern Islam in India*, which was one of the few books about Indian Muslims, and was basically a kind of Marxist analysis. He was very bright, very austere, very--as I say, Presbyterian--what can I say?

He was running something called the Institute of Islamic Studies, at McGill which had been funded by the Rockefeller Foundation to build a bridge between Islam and Christianity, if you like, or Muslims and Christians, or Muslims and the West. The idea was that they would have an equal number of scholars from Islamic countries and from Western countries, and they would have seminars and do research projects together in this institute, and they would build their own library and research institute.

It turned out that he [Cantwell Smith] was looking for a social scientist. He had biblical scholars, he had Islamic scholars, he had people who were doing the literary aspects of it, he had historians. But he wanted a social scientist. So Marian recommended me because I had done work on Muslims in London, and he offered me a fellowship to come to Montreal, so that sounded all right. Meanwhile--two other things I have to tell you, and I guess that will be the end of it.

Riess: I have a question too. How did you deal with your aversion to the Islamic or to Islam?

Benedict: Well, I suppressed it.

Riess: Do you think that affected your work?

Benedict: Yes, because I never did it again.

The Institute of Islamic Studies was housed in the School of Divinity which was very Presbyterian--of course, that fits with Canada--and I remember walking down the hall of this great looming Gothic building, unbelievably looming, and meeting one of the teachers there, a cleric, and he had his dog collar on and a little white fringe of hair, and he looked at me and wanted to know what I was doing. I told him I was in the Institute of Islamic Studies. "Och," he said, "'Tis a great failure." I said, "Why do you say that?" "No converts," he said.

### **The Colonial Social Science Research Council**

Benedict: To go back to London: After I received my degree, I still had to find some place to go to do field work, to make my career. At that point--this was 1954 when I got my degree--it was very tight in this country. Grants and positions were very difficult to get, and besides, I was in a very poor position to get them because--if I had graduated from an American university, I would have had a professor who could have helped me to get these kinds of things, but I didn't have anything like that. So there wasn't anything I could do about that. Britain was even worse. There wasn't anything, except the Colonial Office.

The Colonial Office--when the Labor Government came in, they saw the writing on the wall. They were, of course, presiding over the dismemberment of the Empire, and they saw all quite clearly, I think, or at least most of them, that the empire was finished, that they had to basically get rid of these colonies. The big ones weren't such a problem

because they would more or less do it themselves, but the little ones, of which there were a very large number--and the few that are still left are a big problem because economically they're not viable. They're a real drain and a headache. They're not producing revenue, and, on the contrary, they're draining revenue. And so they were very interested in finding out what they could do about them.

Basically they had not paid much attention to these places, they were merely appendages. When they had this giant empire, they were paying attention to India and Nigeria and East Africa and the Asian colonies, Malaysia and so on. But they weren't paying any attention to Mauritius and Seychelles and places like that. So the Labor Government set up something called the Colonial Social Science Research Council, which was exactly what it sounds like. It was to send out social scientists, particularly anthropologists--and anthropologists always had a much better press, much better reputation in England than did sociologists for a number of reasons which we can go into later perhaps. They sent out anthropologists to do this.

One of the first ones they sent out was Leach. In fact, he went to Southeast Asia, and he recommended that the CSSRC send anthropologists to study the peoples of Borneo and Sarawak. They sent people to various places in Africa, such as Paul Bohannan, to study the Tiv of Nigeria. The results were published in a series of monographs, of which my Mauritius book is one.

I had always wanted to go to India. India always fascinated me. But I couldn't go to India because India was no longer a colony, so the Colonial Social Science Research Council didn't do me any good. So I looked to see which colonies had the most Indians. Well, the most Indians were in Mauritius. There were quite a lot in Fiji, and there were quite a lot in Trinidad, and there were others, but Mauritius looked kind of interesting to me, especially since it was the place where the dodo had come from. And naturally I was the sort of kid that collected stamps, and, as you may know, one of the world's rarest stamps comes from Mauritius.

[Interview 4: August 16, 2000] ##

Benedict: I applied to the Colonial Social Science Research Council to do field work on the Indian community in Mauritius. I didn't really think I had much of a chance because I didn't think they were going to give it to an American. I had gone back to the States, and I was staying with my parents--that is my mother and stepfather, who had by that time moved to New York. Marion and I were there with our older daughter, Helen, who was only about two. Well, I got this letter from the Colonial Office, which was misdated 1854, which should have put out some kind of signal.

It said, "You are being considered for a grant from the Colonial Social Science Research Council. Would you kindly appear at Great Smith Street"--which is where the Colonial Office was in those days, right behind Westminster Abbey--"Would you kindly appear at Great Smith Street on Thursday next. Enclosed is a railway warrant."

Well, in the first place, it practically was Thursday next. In the second place a railway warrant wasn't going to get me from New York to Great Smith Street. I sent a telegram that explained all this, and to my absolute delight and astonishment, they gave it to me anyhow. Then I was in a dilemma, because, of course, what I really wanted to do was to go to Mauritius. I told you I chose Mauritius because it had a lot of Indians. On the other hand, I had already committed myself to go to Montreal.

I agonized over that, and I finally decided I couldn't really not go to Montreal, because I'd said I would. So I sent them a letter explaining everything, and said, "Would it be possible to put this grant off for a year?" And they said, "Yes."

Riess: Was the position advertised?

Benedict: It didn't work that way. I mentioned that it was set up under the post-war labor government, and the idea was to get some social science research on areas of what was left of the empire about which they knew very little. They were very careful that the research was to be entirely independent. We were not supposed to be government agents. We didn't have any kind of agenda about what we were supposed to do or what we were supposed to find out. We were supposed to be independent scientists. I think I told you that Edmund Leach was crucial in that.

The woman in charge of it was called Sally Chilver. She was very interested in anthropology, extremely bright, and she was the niece of Robert Graves. I became friendly with her. She was a terribly interesting woman, very active in the Liberal Party, and later she became principal of St. Catherine's College, Oxford. Sally--I didn't know it then, but she would be a person with whom I corresponded. But the idea of this thing was that you were to put forward--they didn't say, "We want somebody to go to Mauritius," it was up to the individual scholar or student to propose something.

So you had people proposing to go and do things in all kinds of places, and then they would consider this. The board that would consider it consisted of mostly academics, and mostly anthropologists, but certainly social scientists from all over Britain. You had a pretty free hand, and you made your own research proposal.

The grant was generally for two and a half years, which was really a remarkable kind of a grant, of which six months was supposed to be for your writing it up. There was none of this nonsense about you have to write a report every three weeks or something like that. You were considered mature scholars who did your own work and made your own schedules and so on.

Riess: I guess we should finish about the Islamic institute.

Benedict: Yes. Of course, in the first place, my heart wasn't in being in McGill. In the second place, theological discussions were not my bag at all. And you know they would have seminars on what really happened in the Garden of Eden--the Koranic version versus the Old Testament version.

Riess: The institute was really to reconcile religious thought or religious history?

Benedict: It was to foster an exchange of ideas about the religions and their historical context. And I was supposed to sit around making social scientific remarks, as far as I could gather. They had no social scientists. Most of them were--all the rest of them were historians or theologians of one kind or another. They were people who were experts on some of the reform movements in Islam, for example, or on some of the important figures like the Muhammad Iqbal, who was an important poet in what's now Pakistan.

Riess: Would you be what we might think of as a facilitator now? Would you make interpretive remarks?

Benedict: Well, that was what I was supposed to be doing, but I couldn't do it. My point of view or the point of view of anthropology was so different from this idea of a revealed truth, for example, that it just didn't work very well. Finally I went to Smith, who was very understanding. He was a remarkable man. He had a fine career after that. He died recently. He ended up as a professor at Harvard.

Incidentally, my successor was Robert Bellah. Of course, his point of view was much closer to what they were looking for than mine, since he was very interested in religion and "habits of the heart" and so on. I don't know how he knew Smith, but he was a great admirer of Wilfred Cantwell Smith. It's quite interesting how all these things knit together, isn't it?

Riess: I wondered if, as observer, you detected that in fact it wasn't a discussion or a dialogue, but it was an effort to convince.

Benedict: No. No. I don't think that's true. I think it was a dialogue. It really was a dialogue. And that was certainly what Smith wanted. There were a couple of Englishmen there who were experts in Arabic. And literature--there's a lot of literature there too. They talked a lot about Arabic literature and Western literature.

Riess: What was the role for an anthropologist in this?

Benedict: What he wanted was somebody who would engage in conversations with these people. I did engage in conversations with them. I got along with them perfectly all right, but I don't think there was any idea of converting them. Unlike that cleric that I told you about--there was no idea that Christianity is the true way and Islam is an error. There wasn't anything like that. Absolutely nothing like that.

In fact, Smith was very sympathetic to Islam. If anything, he was wanting to try and educate people that Islam is not this image that we have from the Crusades, that it's in fact a remarkable religion which enunciates eternal truths that are just as good as the Christian eternal truths. That was certainly his stance. Why he wanted a social scientist there was that especially in Islam--and Islam is a kind of total religion, there isn't any distinction between the sacred and the secular, they're all considered one thing, which we can see in the world today.

From his point of view you needed somebody who was an expert in analyzing social systems. Islam is a social system; it's not just a religion. That is a very important point which is still not very widely appreciated in the West. So that's what he was interested in, and he thought that I could help do that. I think if I had been a different person than I am, I might have been able to do something like that. I don't say that there isn't any anthropologist who could do it, but I'm not the one that could do it. But I think that's what he was after. And of course he got me because I'd done this thesis.

### Terminology

Riess: You go back and forth between calling yourself an anthropologist and a social scientist. I think I have to understand why you would use one term or the other.

Benedict: All right. Well, I call myself an anthropologist. The anthropological tradition in England, at least since the time of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, who of course were my grandfathers, my intellectual grandfathers, was considered a kind of sociology. It was exclusively concerned with the social. It didn't, for instance, at the LSE--well, no place in Britain--that's not quite true. There are only two places in Britain where they deal with physical anthropology at all.

Similarly with archaeology they don't do that. There's an Institute of Archaeology which is part of the University of London. University College does have physical anthropology--or now they call it biological anthropology. But none of the other places--not LSE., not Oxford, not Cambridge, not Edinburgh--none of those places do anything except social. That's why they call it social anthropology, and that's why we've got this business about social/cultural anthropology.

I think it's a bit different now, but in those days, they tended not to use the word culture. Culture was something that had to do with material objects. It had to do with the dressing, as it were. What I used to tell my students, which I think is a fairly good analogy--it's a biological analogy--but it's that what social anthropologists were interested in, it was like the difference between a red squirrel and a gray squirrel. If you look at the structure of the squirrels--that is, if you look at their skeletons and their viscera and all of that, they look very much the same. Of course they do both belong to the same genus. But if you look at them from the outside, they look very different. They have different habits, they live in slightly different environments, and so on. So that would be the culture, you see. So that's the sort of idea.

In Britain, in those days, it was the social structure that people were interested in, and Malinowski, in fact, very often called himself a sociologist. But a sociologist in that sense, not a sociologist in the sense that goes out and studies slums or gathers statistics. So that's why I keep doing that. It's a habit of discourse, I suppose you'd say.



**Stories of "Ethnographic Stuff," Douglas E. Newton**

Benedict: At any rate, to go back to McGill. There I was in McGill, and Smith was establishing a library, and he felt that there were certain things that we ought to have in the library. I was interested in that, and I went to him, and I said, "Well, you know, there is, after all, the Redpath Library," which is the main university library at McGill. "There must be a lot of material in there which you ought to know about." And especially--they've got long runs of journals, and, it being Quebec, they had French journals. There was something called the *Revue du Monde Musulman*, for instance--the Review of the Muslim World. There were several like that.

I said, "There are bound to be articles in the journals that are of importance to you. Why don't I go through all this stuff and make an annotated bibliography." So he said, "Yes." And off I went to the Redpath, and I spent the year going through all these journals and making an annotated bibliography, which you'll see in my CV there, which I think was probably unique in its time.

At the same time when I went there, I discovered--you know, it's kind of tedious work doing that--but I also discovered that in the basement of that library there was a whole lot of ethnographic stuff that people had chucked in there over the years. I guess all of those Scottish missionaries had come back and put all of this stuff in there. Well, I had always been interested in that, and [retrieving something in room] when I was in London I got very interested in these things.

Riess: What are these things?

Benedict: They're throwing knives, and they are pretty interesting objects. They're rusting, I see.

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Benedict: The way it works is you throw it this way, and it spins. It's like a boomerang, but fortunately it doesn't come back! You throw it, let's say, at the legs of an animal or at a person, and it of course cripples the animal. So that's the way it started out. But of course, as you can see, they became extremely elaborate. You can see the handle is made of snake skin, I think.

Riess: Yes. But it's broken here, isn't it?

Benedict: It's broken there--yes.

Riess: I was thinking that this was for letting the wind whistle through, or something.

Benedict: Well, it does let the wind whistle through. But the point is that iron was a very important material in Africa, and very valuable material, and the Africans learned to smelt iron, oh, more than a thousand years ago. They got native iron and did it. So it was very valuable, and it became a symbol of office. Some of these things they turned into symbols of office.

For example, look at the one up there. It's not functional, but it became like a scepter. After all, that's what a scepter is--a scepter is really a weapon, isn't it?

Riess: I hadn't thought of it that way.

Benedict: No. We don't think of it that way, but that's what it was. So exactly the same kind of thing happened with these, you see. Each tribe if you like, each group of people, tended to have a different design. They also, as you can see, became symbols of males.

Riess: Well, yes. They did.

Benedict: They certainly did.

Riess: That other piece is very different, it's rough edged.

Benedict: This is an old one you see, and it has deteriorated. At any rate, I got very interested in this. I was collecting them, and I have a whole lot of them. And this all happened--I have to go back a little, I'm sorry, this is becoming a bit disjointed.

What happened was that when I was a student and we lived in London, one of the people that we met was Douglas E. Newton. Douglas Newton was a genuine starving poet, a very interesting starving poet, married to an American, Mary Lee Settle, who became quite a famous novelist later. It was her second marriage. Her first marriage was to an Englishman. At the beginning of the war she had gone to England and volunteered in the air force. She was a member of the British Women's auxiliary, whatever it was called, the WRAF, Women's Royal Air Force, something like that.

They lived in London and Den--Douglas E. Newton, D.E.N., but he was always known as Den--was fascinated with ethnographic objects. He and another friend would go to the British Museum, and in those days their ethnographic exhibits were totally unreconstructed. That is, there were these cases that were absolutely chock full of all this stuff, which is my favorite kind of way to show things anyhow--I think these modern exhibits where you have one object glowing in a case isn't as interesting as when you have a whole bunch of them. So they would go there, mainly because it was warm--but not really, because he became very interested in this--and he totally educated himself. He spent hours looking at this stuff.

He got to know the dealers that were dealing with it and everything, and he became the curator of Nelson Rockefeller's collection--he eventually of course came to America. Although he had no academic qualifications, he was an extremely intelligent man and he knew this stuff. He'd studied all those things in the British Museum. He worked originally for the Museum of Primitive Art in one of those brownstone houses behind the Museum of Modern Art. And then Rockefeller decided to build this wing in the Met and they brought all this stuff in there and Den stayed there, eventually as curator, until he retired a few years ago.

Riess: This is an amazing story.

Benedict: At any rate, the reason I brought it in is that it does show that all this time I also kept my interest up in museums and libraries and in this kind of the material culture. So, while I was doing this bibliography, I was also making a list of all the stuff that they had in the bottom of the Redpath Library. And it was mostly a thousand spears. But at any rate that was another strand that was going on.

Riess: You call it "ethnographic stuff?"

Benedict: Well, I guess ethnographic objects. I don't know. It used to be called primitive, but you don't use primitive anymore because it's not PC. You don't do it. So it's just like using ethnic group or something--I just use that term. It's very difficult to know what kinds of terms to use nowadays--honestly, no matter what you use, you get into trouble.

So, okay.

Riess: So you found something quite interesting to do, or relatively interesting to do.

Benedict: That's right. I was doing that at the same time that I was making this bibliography. And you know, I was participating in the work of the institute to some degree. I think I was, but I didn't feel part of it at all. It was clear that's not what I was going to do with my life, and I was of course very eager to get to Mauritius. I was trying to find out all I could about Mauritius, which wasn't very easy in Montreal.



## V MAURITIUS

### Background Preparation

Riess: You said you were interested in finding out everything you could about Mauritius. Was there some material in the McGill library?

Benedict: There was a little. Sometimes I would go down to New York and go to the public library, which of course is a very good library, and try to find stuff in there. But there had never been any sociological or anthropological work on Mauritius ever. The one book that I first found, and I found it in London before I went back, was *Subtropical Rambles in the Land of the Aphanapteryx*--splendid Victorian title. It was written by somebody called Nicholas Pike.

It just happens to be right here so you can look at it. That's an Aphanapteryx. Well, you know, he was trying not to say dodo, you see. [looking at book] There he is, you see, with his collections. Isn't that terrific?! I think that is splendid! He was the American consul to Mauritius. Mauritius was a pretty important place for American whalers, if they were hunting in the Indian Ocean in the Southern Hemisphere.

Don't get me started here on Mauritius! Mauritius is a volcanic island which had no human inhabitants when it was first found by the Portuguese at the end of the fifteenth century. Not only had it no human inhabitants, it had no mammals except for bats, which is why you got things like the dodo. The dodo occupied the ecological niche that a grazing animal would. So it was their ungulate, if you like. And of course, it had no fear of humans. When you were hungry, you simply went out and bonked one on the head and cooked it. And it was a pigeon, about that high. Of course, it became extinct.

Mauritius wasn't settled really until the eighteenth century, when the French did it. It was this little spot of civilization, if you like. It was very important for that, and it was very important during the eighteenth century and the Napoleonic Wars. That part of the world was extremely important because the French used it to raid British shipping, and that's why the British took it eventually. But that's all in my book.

Well, I found that book in London, and I kept looking for other things like that. I just became very interested in that book, which is a very interesting book. The subsequent history is quite interesting too. Where was I--finishing my year in Montreal, right? What happened was that when my year was up at McGill, we went down to Swarthmore where Marion's family is. We rented a house there, and I was getting myself ready to go to Mauritius.

Meanwhile Marion was having our second daughter, Barbara, who was born in Swarthmore on January 19, 1955. I was going to go out to Mauritius and set us up so that Marion could join me. Well, of course, first I had to go to London. I had about a month in London in which I did a lot more research, because of course there was lots of stuff on Mauritius in England. That was really very valuable. Then I wanted to interview all kinds of people in the Colonial Office, and the former governors, if I could get hold of them. One of them was called Sir Hilary Blood.

At any rate, I spent a lot of time going to the Colonial Office and being shown maps and talking to the people in various parts of the Colonial Office who were responsible for different programs, which included Mauritius and so on. I really did a lot to prepare myself.

Riess: You were saying that you were not being sent out by the government?

Benedict: It was true that I was being paid by the government, but I wasn't a government agent or anything like that.

Riess: Did they want to know anything for any purpose?

Benedict: Not that they ever told me. But they wanted to know a lot. They wanted to know about how these people are living. To what extent was there friction between the different communities or among the different communities? But they never asked me those questions really directly. Sometimes they would ask me--if I would go and see health people, they would ask me could I find anything out about the health and nutrition of people out there. Very general.

Riess: But with no sense of mission, that there would be consequences from your reports.

Benedict: Not that they ever told me. I mean, they may have had an agenda like that, but they never told me that. The initiative was all mine, who to see, and so on. I mean, they didn't say--oh, sometimes they'd say, "Well, you might go and see old so and so. He might know something about that," you know, if I'd ask a question. But they never said to me, "You should go and see this person, that person, and the other person."

Riess: Mauritius was not contributing anything to the economy of Britain.

Benedict: Mauritius was at that point, and really up until fairly recently, almost entirely dependent on sugar. So it was governed by the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement, which was a protective agreement for sugar from commonwealth countries like Mauritius and West

Indies, and so on, which was a main economic concern. When I got to look at the books and the annual report--they put out reports every year, each colony does, and the Colonial Office had a very extensive library, and I was looking at that--the amount of money that was remitted to Britain wasn't very much. It was mostly in the form of trade of one kind or another.

They would get British products, that's perfectly true. I mean, Britain, after all, one of the reasons that it's so poky is that it had this protected market. It has all these commonwealth countries that they would export their radios and their Pear's soap, and all that kind of stuff to. When things opened up, they found that they were--surprise, surprise--not competitive.

But that wasn't government. The whole idea of the colonies was they were supposed to pay for themselves. They were not supposed to be a drain on Britain. Paying for themselves meant that they should also pay for whatever administrative or military help they got from Britain, which is one of the reasons we had our revolution, if you recall.

Riess: You got yourself well prepared. You understood that you would have to be speaking Creole?

Benedict: Well, I didn't know to what extent I'd have to be speaking Creole. I mean I knew that there was Creole, and that people spoke Creole, but I knew that also the Brits had been there for 150 years, so presumably a lot of people were speaking English. I knew that some people were speaking French, and I did speak French, or enough to get along.

Riess: How much of the material that you have in your book on Hindu customs or marriage ceremonies was library research, and how much did you redo all of that on the ground to find out about their customs.<sup>1</sup>

Benedict: It was both. I did do library research on Indians. When I had done my thesis on Muslim groups, there was some, there were some Mauritian Indians that I met there. In fact, I did most of my research, most of that Indian stuff, when I came back because I didn't know when I went out how much I needed to know that. But I found out I needed to know a lot about that. I found that out on the airplane, actually. It's very interesting--shall we get me on the airplane? But the answer to that is I did some, but not as much as I did later.

Riess: It would strike me as maybe an extraordinary amount of work for you to understand from informants all of what was going on in all of those traditional many steps-of-life ceremonies.

Benedict: Well, I saw a lot of them. So that wasn't so hard as you might think.

Riess: But my question was whether they were transported intact from their original place.

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<sup>1</sup> *Indians in a Plural Society: a report on Mauritius*, London, HMSO, 1961.

Benedict: No. And that was one of the things that I got very interested in, what was dying out, and what was being maintained.

Riess: I was wondering whether the thinking of the Indians was that eventually they would return to their homeland, and they were keeping traditions intact.

Benedict: When they went there as indentured laborers, they were under a contract, and they were supposed to be returned to India after they finished their indenture. A lot of them never went back, and part of the reason for that was that the planters fiddled their indenture, and they kept changing the conditions for it.

Riess: You said fiddled their indenture?

Benedict: Their term of service. For instance, if they were absent, for every day they were absent, they had to serve two more days. That kind of stuff. Or that they had to pay their own fare on the way back. They kept changing the rules. The government of India kept trying to improve the conditions of indenture, because indenture, of course, was not only in Mauritius, it was also in Trinidad, it was also in what was then British Guiana. There were a number of places--some in Jamaica--there were a number of places where Indian indentured laborers went. The government of India wanted to make sure that they weren't really some kind of serf or slave, and so they kept doing that. The planters, of course, were resisting this and wanted to have as much cheap labor as they could get.

Riess: They did think that they were going to go back.

Benedict: Oh, yes. No question about it. And they were oriented towards India.

Of course by the time I was there, the Indians were not going to go home. Although the ones that could afford to did get spouses from India. The Gujeratis always did. They never attempted to find local spouses. Well, in the first place, they came from a different culture in India, and they maintained their ties very much with India. It was the same kind of situation as obtained in Uganda; it was the same kind of thing, that commercial community. Different from the indentured laborers. But, yes, your point is well taken. They are all people who expected to go home.

The Creoles didn't expect to go home, and they often would refer to themselves as, "We are true Mauritians." Of course, they weren't any truer Mauritians than anybody else, because they also had been imported into Mauritius. There were no natives. So it's a kind of interesting place from that point of view and different from say, Fiji.

Riess: This I couldn't find in the book, and I also couldn't find much by way of interpretation. You were not permitted to interpret?

Benedict: I think that was my fault. I think I could have interpreted; I just didn't do it.

Riess: I just decided that that was the way you had to work.



Benedict: No, I don't think so. Looking back on it, I think that was an error. I don't think I should have done that. I think I should have tried to interpret more. I think I was perhaps afraid to, or not confident enough to do it.

Riess: I am curious. In the study you never mention homosexuality. I wonder whether it didn't exist?

Benedict: I think it certainly existed. I don't think I was looking for it. Certainly when I was doing my work with the Muslims in London, there was a lot--well, in the first place, the Indians do a lot of things which we would consider homosexual. For instance, they very often hold hands--men very often hold hands. They'll walk down the street holding each other's hands. I remember one informant that I had in London telling me about when he was a young man that he was sent to live with his uncle, and that he and his uncle shared a bed. And there was that general feeling--I never really discussed it, but I imagine there really was homosexuality that was going on. Anyhow there are very close bonds between males.

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Benedict: One of the reasons that some people gave for early marriage was that it was the only way to control female sexuality. That if you didn't marry off girls when they were in their very early teens or just immediately before puberty, that you wouldn't be able to control them. They would be sexually rampant, you couldn't control them.

Later on when I was discussing all of this with Richard Titmuss when he went out there to do this study on family planning, one of his proposals was a payment to fathers if they could delay marriage of their daughters. His idea was that if you got them married late, then they wouldn't start having children so early, and that's the way you would help control the population. And when he put that to the Indian fathers they said, "Oh, God, we couldn't. It would be impossible to control them. We couldn't do it."

Riess: A wild fantasy.

Benedict: Yes, that's right. Only that wasn't the only reason, because they have this whole elaborate system which is very old, about marriage payments and so on. So I think that may have very well been a later rationalization. I don't know.

### **Fortunate Meetings, Door Openers**

Riess: Now, you were on the plane, going over to set up a living arrangement and make your first contacts.

Benedict: That's right. Of course in those days they were prop planes--there weren't any jets. It was a fairly long flight with quite a lot of stops. You had to fly to Africa, and you had to fly to

Nairobi. Then you'd stop in Madagascar, and you stopped in Reunion, and so on. But on the airplane sitting next to me, as luck would have it, was a Brahmin from Mauritius. Of course we started to talk, and when I told him what I was doing, he got interested, and then he began to fill me in.

I got a huge dose on the Indian community. And then he said, "Well, when you get there, I will ask my family to get in touch with you, and we will take you to these ceremonies, and you'll be able to see how it is yourself." That was just a piece of luck. Incredible luck. So when I landed, I already knew a lot, you see--well, not a lot, but I'd had all these hours with this guy, and he turned out to come from a very prominent Mauritian Hindu family.

Riess: He had no trouble with the idea that you were coming to report on them, in a way.

Benedict: No. I always told people what I was doing. I don't think they'd believe me, but one of the things that you find is if you tell people that, and if they think you're a spy, which they very often do, and you're talking to some people, before very long some other people come by and say--"Well, you know you really shouldn't believe what he tells you because the way it really is is"--and you're in. You see? So in a sense it doesn't matter.

When I landed in Mauritius--they hadn't known quite what to do with me. But since I was being paid by the government, and I was in a sense a government employee, they had to put me in a department, so they put me in the Department of Social Welfare. So it was the head of the Department of Social Welfare who met me and welcomed me, and then he took me to what was then really the only decent hotel in Mauritius.

Now it's very different because it has been developed as a tourist spot. But it was very beautiful, I mean, the place is really very beautiful. So I stayed in this hotel. Then, you know, the thing to do when you go to a place like that--in fact, if you're doing any anthropological study--the thing to do is to start at or as near the top as you can. You don't want to start at the bottom and try to work your way up. That's all very well if you're Horatio Alger, but it doesn't work if you're an anthropologist.

Riess: Because you need doors opening?

Benedict: You need doors opening. And it's always easier to go down than go up. You want to get the people at the top aware of what you're doing. You don't want them wondering, "What is this guy doing rooting around in the village, what's he after?" That's not a good thing. So the first thing for me to do was to go and sign the governor's book, and so I went and signed the governor's book. And that means that it is up to the governor, if he wants to invite you to a party or whatever it is, but you officially register.

I did that, and I was taken around by this social welfare person to visit some other government people, to get me all fixed up. But then just under the governor there is what in some colonies was called a deputy governor, but in Mauritius was called a colonial secretary. Now the colonial secretary in Mauritius at that time was a very wonderful man called Robert Newton, and I went to see him. It turned out he was a very interesting and

very intelligent man who had read some anthropology, and he was very interested in what I was doing. He had previously worked in Jamaica, and he was altogether extremely helpful. So then I said I really would like to go and live in a village and try to see what it's like.

Mauritius at that time was divided into four districts, and each district had what was called a civil commissioner. That is what in Africa probably would be called a district officer, or a provincial officer. He said, "Well, I think the person for you to go to see, the civil commissioner who would be most sympathetic, is Major Lane." Major Lane was Civil Commissioner North. I went to see Winton Lane, who turned out to be marvelous. We just hit it off, like that, and then I invited him to come to the hotel for dinner, and we had a good time. He said he would help me, and he opened his books, he did everything, and he became a good friend. I still am friends with him.

Riess: Is he still there?

Benedict: No, no. He's retired. He eventually married an American and lives partly in England and partly in this country.

### **Settling in and Finding a Mode of Work**

Benedict: Winton Lane introduced me to the community, he took me around. I did all kinds of tours. I went around with the youth officer, I went around with the education officer, I went around with the medical officer. I did all these different tours with them, and talked to all these different people. I was getting a very comprehensive view, so far as I could. Then he said, "Well, I think that this village, that village, and the other village-- they seem the most likely villages to help you."

So I went to these different villages. One of them was called Piton. The head of the village council there--each village had a village council--was an Indian called Naik, and he said he thought he could find a place for me to live. He was very nice, and he spoke good English--it's interesting, those people all were at least bilingual, and many of them spoke three or four languages. At any rate, he then put me in touch with the district medical officer whose name was Rajah.

Dr. Rajah was a Gujerati Muslim, and he was a quite severe character. The Gujeratis had not been indentured laborers. They came over much later, and they were merchants. And there were two principal groups of them, the Sunni Surtis and the Kutchi Maimens. All of them were really based in Port Louis, in the center, but Dr. Rajah had this place where he came and stayed. I would say he had a pretty arrogant attitude towards the villagers, whom he considered uneducated riffraff, basically. I don't know how good a doctor he was. He probably knew his stuff. I don't know.

Dr. Rajah gave me a room in his house. Mostly he wasn't there. There was an old woman who cooked for him and for me. I would go down to the village--the house was on a little hill--I'd go down and walk through the village. Naik would introduce me to different villagers, and I would just take different walks through the village, to try to let people get used to me.

Riess: How was it? This was your first big fieldwork. Did you have culture shock?

Benedict: I was just fascinated with what was going on. I felt, of course, a bit lost and lonely, but I was terribly interested in what they were doing. I started to do things like--you know Raymond Firth had told me, "When you get to a place, if you don't know what to do when you first get there, and it's very difficult," he said "Count things." So I did that.

There used to be a book that was the standard sort of bible for a field worker, called *Notes and Queries in Anthropology*. It was compiled by the Royal Anthropological Institute. I think the first issue must have been in the nineteenth century. The cover of it even had a little ruler marked on it so you could use the cover to measure things. It was for district officers or for workers who were going to the colonies, just to record everything they could about what they saw and what was there. They had a whole lot of questions for you to work with. It's a very useful book.

Riess: I was interested in what your note taking style was--how you would learn from Firth about how to record data.

Benedict: Well, the first thing is to keep a diary, and the first thing you do in the diary is to date it. You'd be surprised how many people forget to date it, and two years later they don't know even what year it was, so first you have to date it. Then it's not a bad idea to say what kind of a day it is--whether it's raining or not. Then you just try to record everything that happened to you during the day, and what you did all day long, to whom you talked and what they said to you. Now very often, what they say to you, of course, is important. And you make little drawings and maps.

Sometimes you want to get down absolutely the exact wording, but often you don't want to take notes in front of the person, which is off-putting especially if you're dealing with somebody who is not very literate. They may think that you're trying to get the goods on them or something, and they don't really like that. You can't depend on your memory--you can more when you're young than when you're my age, but you can't do it. So it was very useful to have a weak bladder.

Riess: And you run off and scribble?

Benedict: That's right. Then as you are doing that day after day after day, you begin to find that there are certain topics which recur, which you are interested in. Being trained in the way that I was, of course, kinship was very interesting to me, so I was trying to find out about their families and their kinship. It's also a very good entree because people like to talk about it.

You would say to them, "What do you call your mother's brother? What's the name for that?" And of course, with Indians, the name for mother's brother is different from the name for father's brother. And then you write it, and that gives you a real clue, because, for example, the name for mother's brother is a word that is quite different and basically translates into "somebody whose daughter I may marry." The name for father's brother is "father", and I couldn't possibly marry his daughter who is my sister. So you learn a lot from kinship terms that way.

So you do that, or you begin to find out something about the sugar work, or their religion. And you're beginning to get categories like that, broad general categories. Then I would make another set of books. I used big ledgers--I've got them in the other room if you want to see them--great big ledgers, which were treated with an insecticide, which is very useful in that climate. I would get them from the social welfare department.

Riess: And would you transcribe your notes?

Benedict: Yes. I made another set which were classified notes, so I'd have kinship, economic activities, religion and so on, and I'd fill that out when I found that information out. And of course, it begins to raise questions, and you think about how you would answer those questions, or what questions you would like to ask as a result of this.

Riess: This is still a good way of looking at a community?

Benedict: I think it's best to go, yes, with as open a mind as you can. That's not the fashion now, but that's what it was certainly in my day. Now it's much more about how you feel--I don't think how I feel is that interesting. You know, I don't think it's as interesting as trying to be as objective as one can. But then of course nowadays they'll say there isn't any objectivity, and of course there isn't, but you have to pretend there is.

### **Weddings and Taboos**

Riess: How did you use your acquaintance with the Brahmin, and how did you decide where to bring Marion and family and so on?

Benedict: What happened was that the Brahmin got in touch with me, and he said that his brother was getting married and would I like to come to the wedding and watch the ceremony and everything. I said, "Yes, of course I would." This was, of course, a very much higher social level than the village. So I went.

Then he introduced me to a pandit, a priest who had come from India and who knew all about Hindu ritual and everything. He said, "This man will be with you the whole time, and he'll explain to you everything that's going on," and he did, and so that was the first one. Of course, it [the ritual] was, to me, quite involved, and I didn't know what was

going on. The couple was going around the fire and holding handkerchiefs, and I don't know what in the world was going on.

Riess: Your research might not have included that event if it hadn't been for that meeting.

Benedict: Yes. It was just lucky that I did that. Later on I saw lots of weddings. I saw them in the village, but they weren't as elaborate as this. This was a really elaborate business, and they spend enormous amounts of money on them.

So I had two connections. That was very useful. Those same people invited me to their *campement*, which was a little beach house, where I made a terrible mistake. Very prominent people, very wealthy--he later became the ambassador to England. I went to their *campement*, and it was nice to bathe in the Indian Ocean, which is beautifully blue and clear and warm. I was swimming around, swimming around, and there were some rocks, and I swam to these rocks, and they were covered with oysters.

I thought, "Ooh, yum, yum, oysters." I broke off a couple of oysters, and I bashed them, opened them up, and ate them. Well, of course, I couldn't have done anything that was more horrifying to the Indians than eating raw oysters. That was the most polluting thing I could have done, you know. Eventually they forgave me.

Newton was very useful to me, and Lane was very useful to me, so I was connected at a whole lot of different levels. It happened very fast, and I was very lucky.

Then I had to find a place for Marion and what were now two children to come. There was another government officer who was going on leave, and he had a big rambling house in an area called Phoenix, and he let me rent that house. It was a big rambling place, quite lovely, with a veranda and everything. You know these big colonial style houses.

I sent for Marion. Marion arrived with Helen and Barbara, who was three months old. In the airplane, called a Constellation, they had a kind of a hammock luggage rack that Marion put the baby in, and it swung. So she came, and we got both kids there. We hired two nannies, a Creole and an Indian, and a cook, and we inherited a gardener.

### An Anthropologist's Paraphernalia

Riess: Did you feel that you needed to bring a lot of stuff with you, what you would have thought of as essential trappings of civilization?

Benedict: I tried, of course to find out all I could about what was available there. I knew I needed to bring my camera, there weren't really any very efficient tape recorders at that time.

Riess: Did you use a tape recorder?

Benedict: No. I never did.

Riess: Did you photograph?

Benedict: I used to go on photographic expeditions. One of the things I wanted to do--you know, you were asking how do you first get in there, and I said you count. But also the other thing I was interested in was the way they were building their houses. Because it was all handwork. So I would go and make little drawings of how they put them together. And then, you know you get into conversation with people, and it's a neutral topic, and that's the way you get to know people. When I took photographs, I would always try to give a copy to the person I was photographing.

I didn't need to bring much equipment. I didn't really have any equipment to bring. I don't think I remember bringing anything special. Besides, I also had the feeling that it wasn't a good idea to have too much junk, and it wasn't a good idea to become--and this was very much reinforced when I was teaching later on and I saw people coming back with all this stuff. What tended to happen, especially in the early days when the equipment wasn't all that reliable, was that you spent all your time looking at the equipment, and making sure it was working right and everything else, and not enough time observing what was going on or talking to people so it would lead to something else.

I'm rather against having too much stuff like that around. I think it takes your eye off the ball. I really do. I don't know that I had all that theoretical justification when I was first there, but I didn't have these things anyhow. I had a little portable typewriter, but I think really that's about all I had, a typewriter and a camera.

### The English Community, Schools, Friendships

Riess: You said you and Marion, because of your living arrangement, had access to widely different social milieus, and you talk about that bringing depth and perspective. What are you referring to?

Benedict: When Marion came, she was pretty well tied down. We had nannies and all that--servants were very easy to get and very inexpensive--but still, they were awfully little, those children. And also we were pretty nervous about the health situation.

At any rate Marion was accepted by the English community. And the English community was almost entirely made up of government people, plus a very few commercial people. Most of the sugar estates were owned by Franco-Mauritians. There was one that was owned by Anglo-Ceylon, which is an English company. Franco-Mauritians were very welcoming to begin with, and they invited us around. Then after we had gone to one of their parties, they invited us to their *campement*, which was very elaborate.

There one of the women said to Marion, "Well, I understand you've been going to Indian festivals." Marion said, "Yes, we've been going to those." And she said, "Well, if you continue to attend those functions, we will no longer receive you." And that's what happened. We were no longer being received by the Franco-Mauritians. The British--it didn't affect the British at all, they didn't care. Anyhow, we were considered sort of honorary Brits.

Riess: Is that because the Franco-Mauritians had a less certain social status?

Benedict: No. They simply thought these people--for them they were *noirs*--they were all blacks, and they didn't mix with them socially at all. The British mixed with them, or tried to mix with them, in their usual sort of stiff way. We had one or two disastrous parties in which we tried to mix the communities. We'd do things like pin signs on people's backs so they would be able to introduce themselves to each other, that kind of stuff.

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Benedict: The commercial Brits tended also not to interact much with the Indians. But the government ones--the government people there were not there permanently, they were only there for their tour of duty.

Riess: Did Marion have a role in your work?

Benedict: Not then, because she was pretty well occupied with the children. Well, inadvertently she did. For example, we wanted to put Helen into some kind of a nursery school, so I said, "You know, Marion, we really ought to put her in a school that's not just this little English school with other little English children. We ought to put her in a school where she can interact with the local people." Marion went along with that, and we put her in this local school.

I went to fetch her one day, and the teacher had her--there was a table in the middle of the room, and a little chair on the table, and Helen was sitting in the little chair on the table. And everything that Helen said, the teacher would have all the other children repeat.

Riess: They were studying her?

Benedict: They were trying to learn English, and she was being treated as though she were a little queen! We didn't think that was the best for our daughter, so we took her out of there, and she ended up in the English school. At any rate, we got very much in with the English community. We went to the Gymkhana Club, and there were people we'd exchange drinks with. We had much more in common with them, and we exchanged dinner parties, and we did all those kinds of things. They had an amateur dramatic club, and Marion directed one of their productions. So we had a whole life with the English community.

But much of the time I wasn't there because I was living in the village.



Riess: You had two centers. You've only introduced the center in the north.

Benedict: I didn't go to the south one until much later.

Anyhow, the one in the north--I lived there. And after I was living there for a while with Dr. Rajah, I began to feel that that was not a good place for me to live. In the first place, there were a lot of people in the village that didn't like him. I was too remote, I was too far away to hear what was going on in the village, or know what was going on in the village. It was just a little too far.

I started looking around seeing if there wasn't some other place I could go, and eventually I found one, which was in a tobacco barn. They also grew some tobacco in Mauritius, and they had a tobacco barn where they dried the leaves. I went down there, and that was much better, I was much more into things. Then people would invite me to their ceremonies. And there were these ceremonies that would go on in the village--some of which I describe in the book.

Riess: There's a lot of forming friendship that goes on in this business. But do you call these things friendships?

Benedict: You mean the people that are in the villages?

Riess: Yes. In a way it's a series of sort of engaged relationships.

Benedict: Yes, that's right.

Riess: And that's okay?

Benedict: Well, you're never really a part of them, you can never really be a part of it, you're always an outsider to some extent. Friendship is a kind of hard word--I mean you tend to kind of like the people that you're working with, you like some of them, you don't like some of the others, and that makes a difference.

### **A Story about Beliefs**

Benedict: Let me tell you a story. There was one young man in the village who was a Brahmin, and he was quite well educated. He spoke excellent English, excellent French, he spoke Creole. He spoke a kind of Hindi that they had there which was called Bhojpuri, which was a dialect of Hindi which came from where most of them came from--Bihar in United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh). So he spoke all of that, and he knew some Sanskrit too. And he was always dressed in a suit and a tie and everything. We became good friends.

One day he came to me. He was on the village council--incidentally, Naik had allowed me to come to all village council meetings, so I was always sitting in the village council

when they were having their meetings and having disputes about drains, or whatever it happened to be, so that was also very advantageous to me. So Jankee came to me one day and he said, "My three-year-old daughter has an infection in her eye. I heard that penicillin ointment would be a good thing, but I can't get penicillin ointment. Do you think you could get me some?" I said, "Well, I'll certainly try." I went around, and we activated our English community, and I got some, and I gave it to him.

A month or two later--I woke up at 5:00 a.m., and I decided I'd walk around the village to see what was going on at 5:00. I was walking down the village street, and I looked, and there was Jankee dressed in a dhoti with his sacred thread--with his tika, and barefoot. We were the only two people in the street, and we stopped, and I blinked and looked at him, and he said hello, and I said hello. And he said, "Well, you're interested in strange customs," he said, "I'm about to perform a strange custom--you can come and watch if you want."

I said, "Oh, thank you, okay." We went to the edge of the village, and at the edge of the village there was something called a Kalimai--Kali is the Indian goddess, and the Kalimai is for mother Kali and her six sisters. It is a concrete thing, oh about that long, with seven lumps on it, each of which represents one of these goddesses. Each goddess is responsible for a particular disease.

We were alone. I sat on the bank, and he started to do puja to these things and recite Sanskrit verses. And then he reached into his dhoti, and he pulled out seven pairs of silver eyes. They were made out of foil, and they were in the shape of eyes, and then he stuck these--a pair of eyes on each of these lumps. He did some more puja and we went away.

As we were walking back, he said, "I'm going to the big temple in Triolet," which was a big village near us, and there was a great big Hindu temple. "You can take me down there if you want," because I had a car. I said, "Yes, well sure." So we got in the car, and we were driving towards Triolet. We passed a Catholic Church, because of course the Creoles are Catholics, don't forget--and of course Franco-Mauritians are Catholics. He says, "Will we stop here?" And I said, "Okay." He got out of the car, we went into the church, and he lighted a candle and put it in front of the Virgin.

Then we went and got back in the car, and we drove to Triolet. There was this great big--not a lump but a big image of Kali, and he did his puja there. Then he got a pair of gold eyes, and he stuck on the gold eyes. Then we got in the car, and we went back, and I said, "Well, how's your daughter, and how's her eye?" He said, "Oh, fine, she seems to have recovered." And he said, "You know, the trouble with you is you only believe in the penicillin."

Riess: Yes. That's a great story.

Have you been tempted to write about the time in Mauritius differently--write about it in terms of stories and fleshed-out characters?

Benedict: You know, I made a great mistake when I went to Mauritius. I was much too bound by the kind of training that I had had, which is not anecdotal, not stories. It's very structurally oriented, very statistically oriented--plenty of statistics in there. Of course, I'd done all that work in the archives and everything that I think I mentioned. It's useful, I don't regret that.

But I remember another great friend that we had in Mauritius was the financial secretary, with whom we're still friends and whom we visit. He's now retired, and he lives in Suffolk, and we go and stay in his house with him--he's a lovely man. He said to me once--they had little kids about our age, and we used to all go sailing together. He said, "You know what you're really doing? You're really studying the colonial English." And he was right. And that's what I should have done, because I was really in with those colonial English. I still am, and of course they were fascinating people.

The best of them, such as the three that I've mentioned to you so far, were totally dedicated to what they were doing. They were totally dedicated to their own extinction, and they were really remarkable. Most of them had had similar sorts of training. They were very interested in the people with whom they were working. They had standards of behavior among themselves, and with the Indians. They were certainly very good, as the British tend to be, at maintaining social distance, appropriate social distances in different situations, which is of course an interesting thing in itself.

Riess: Interesting to study.

Benedict: Yes. I remember when I first came here from England I was really--and I still am--quite horrified at how people here don't maintain social distance. They want to know your life history the moment you meet them. It seemed to me quite inappropriate.

Riess: Now why was it that you were not able to return? You wanted to return. What happened? Is that a whole separate story for another time?

Benedict: I think it is, because that's how I got to Seychelles the second time.

### **Applied Anthropology, Defined by Mauritius**

Riess: Would you say that your work in Mauritius defined your work as an anthropologist?

Benedict: Yes, I think so.

Riess: And how?

Benedict: Well, I never published anything out of my thesis, which is unlike most anthropologists, whose first book usually is their thesis. Mine wasn't. And, as you said a little while ago, this is the first time I was doing fieldwork, or something like that.

Riess: And that wasn't right, was it? Because London was fieldwork.

Benedict: Yes. But remember we talked before about how difficult it is to do fieldwork in a place where you're not part of the landscape--and I wasn't in London, but I was much more in Mauritius and also in Seychelles. So there was a big difference there. I worked very hard on that book, and did a lot of research for it, and so I think it did define me.

The fields that I was most interested in were what used to be called applied anthropology. Same kind of thing that George [Foster] was interested in. In fact, that was the main reason I was brought here--because I was considered an applied anthropologist, and an anthropologist who's interested in economic problems as well. I had a--there was very much a sort of do-gooder in me. In fact, most anthropologists if you scratch them are really do-gooders underneath.

Riess: Were you engaged in Mauritius in the way an applied anthropologist is really engaged? Doesn't applied mean that you're involved in change?

Benedict: I became engaged in Mauritius, especially when I got into that family-planning business, in just the way that you say. Although I didn't consider I was doing applied anthropology, I just really considered I was doing a kind of basic, descriptive study, which is what that is. I wasn't there to effect a change. I didn't see my job as effecting a change until I got into that family-planning thing, and then I really was trying to effect a change. So yes, I think Mauritius did define me in a way, although I was not able to go back.

Riess: At the end of Mauritius, were you still feeling at loose ends?

Benedict: Well, I was pretty committed to Mauritius. I was terribly interested in it, and I found it fascinating. And it did use my Indian interests. I didn't feel at loose ends from that point of view. I wanted to go back, I expected to go back. I guess you could say I was interested in effecting change. I was interested in helping the people there. I was interested in getting the point of view of the people with whom I've worked across to the people who were running the place.

Riess: Next you had an appointment at the LSE.

Benedict: Yes, I was in London for six months. Then I went out again to Mauritius and worked in the south, in another village.

Riess: You had to establish new contacts.

Benedict: Well, Naik's father-in-law lived in this village in the south. The village in the south was very different from the one in the north because it had a very large number of Muslims, which the one in the north didn't. So there was a whole lot of difference there. The village--and it comes out in that article on factionalism, which I don't know whether you've got to, but, anyhow, it does come out in there--there were factions, and they were totally different in Piton and in Camp Diable. I've forgotten what I call them there, but those are the real names.

Riess: Beaumont and La Vallée?

Benedict: Beaumont and La Vallée, yes. That's right. So, but they were very different. The split tended to be a Hindu/Muslim split there, whereas, in the north, it wasn't a Hindu/Muslim split at all because there were very few Muslims. So that was interesting.

I also spent some time living in Port Louis, in the slums of Port Louis, which wasn't very nice, actually. I had a room there and lived there for a while. I was trying to do an overview of the whole place. That's why I did these three things, because it was really quite comprehensive from that point of view, as you can tell from my book.

Riess: Two and a half years is quite a hunk of time.

Benedict: That's right. They gave me a lot of time, and as you know, I collected an enormous amount of data.

### Electoral Boundaries Commission and the Mauritian Constitution

Riess: When and where did you begin to write?

Benedict: I didn't begin to write until I went back to London. When I went back to London--and we haven't got to the Electoral Boundaries Commission yet, either, have we? That's very important, because that was trying to establish a constitution for Mauritius, so I got very involved in that with Sir Malcolm Trustram Eve and all that lot--that was an extremely important thing.

There was an Electoral Boundaries Commission which came out to Mauritius from London to advise Mauritius on a constitution when it became independent.

Riess: I've read about none of that.

Benedict: No, it's not in there, but it was very important--I should have written it up, but I never did. I was very involved with it because they kept consulting me because I was considered the only objective observer. Everybody else was *parti pris* in some way or another, but I wasn't.

When they came out from London, this very high-powered commission, I saw a lot of them, and they asked me a lot of questions. I took them around to the villages, and showed them how the people lived, and they were very impressed. When I came back to London, and it was time for me to write up, they said "We'll give you an office in the Colonial Office." So I was probably the first American to have an office in the Colonial Office since the eighteenth century! It was wonderful, I had an office there and they brought me tea every day. I had an office there for six months while I was writing it up.

Riess: You also said that if you hadn't gone to study Mauritius, nobody was necessarily going to study Mauritius.

Benedict: I think that might have been true in those days. Of course, since there have been quite a few people who have gone, but not then.

Riess: Those steps to independence might have happened without that information.

Benedict: That's true, yes. What they wanted to know, at the boundaries commission, was how much of a community were these various ethnic groups, because they were trying to make a constitution which would give Mauritius a democratic government without creating minorities which would be persecuted. Now that's a tough job. And the constitution they came up with is the most extraordinary constitution that I've ever heard of, and the most extraordinary thing about it is that it has worked because Mauritius is probably the only African country that has never had a coup. They've changed governments about four times without anybody getting killed. So it's really pretty interesting. In fact, somebody has just written a book about that, about how Mauritius is so different from anyplace else. I've got the book there. I can't remember what it's called, but, yes, I'm afraid there's more about Mauritius.

First I think it's necessary to say that I did go back to London. I had a break. I decided that after I'd been in Mauritius for a year, I really wanted to go back to London, and I wanted to present some of my findings in Firth's seminar. So I just basically took a leave from my grant saying, "Give me six months' leave, and I'll go back to London, I'll present some of this material in the seminar. And that might help me when I return to Mauritius to focus on something as a result of this."

Riess: And did that work?

Benedict: Yes. And when I came back--now at the same time I was doing my Mauritius work, Adrian Mayer was doing the same thing in Fiji. I talked to you about Adrian Mayer. So he was around, too, and then there was another anthropologist who had been working on Indians in East Africa. And we had this seminar on factions--factions were the fashion around that time--we had this whole seminar on factions, and that's where the papers on factions came out which were published as an issue of the *British Journal of Sociology*.

The *British Journal of Sociology*, which was an LSE publication, was run by a sociologist who was very attracted to anthropology, as indeed were many sociologists in Britain, and put an awful lot of anthropological papers into that journal. Since it's become much more sociological, but then it was really almost social anthropology in itself. So it comes back to the social scientist question that you asked me before.

Okay, so I went back, we lived in London for six months, and then we returned to Mauritius, and we took another house. We had the children with us of course, and I think it was then that I went to work in Camp Diable--in La Vallée--and as I say, that was very, very different. Well, actually that couldn't be true, I must have gone to La Vallée first, because the whole factionalism thing came out of that.

**Attempting a Family-Planning Program in Mauritius ##**

Riess: You were pointing out that even though we have talked about Mauritius we haven't dealt with family planning. How did that come into focus for you?

Benedict: I was always interested in applied anthropology. I think, in fact, if you scratch most social anthropologists, you will find a social reformer in the overwhelming majority of people who take up that subject, you know? When I first came to Berkeley, that's what I was teaching [applied anthropology]. George Foster and I were doing that together, really. That was his topic, of course.

[Interview 5: June 7, 2001] ##

Benedict: At any rate, when I went to Mauritius I'd been thinking about family planning, that it was perfectly obvious there were too many people in the world, and it seemed to me that so many of the problems of the world were due to overpopulation. When I first got to Mauritius and started working in the village--I can approach this story a number of ways, but one of the ways that I like to tell the story, and I'm not sure if it's really true anymore, you know how one elaborates! But I used to say that the women in the village, when they talked to Marion, asked her three questions: "How much money does your husband make?" "Where are your jewels?" And "How come you've only got two children?"

And of course, they knew nothing at all about contraception. These people were Indians, and there was very marked segregation between the sexes, and I couldn't possibly talk to women about such a thing, it would be totally unacceptable for me to do that. But Marion could. So we got the idea of trying to do something about this, of trying to at least tell them about what methods of contraception were available.

Now, in 1955, when I was there, '55-'56, it was before the pill, so the methods available were not very easy to manage, especially for people who didn't have any money. Things like the diaphragm and so on were out of the question.

I'm just trying to remember what the sequence was, but what happened was that I talked to my particular friend, who was the president of the village council there, who was a young man, and an educated man. We talked about family planning, and he was very much in favor of it.

It was perfectly obvious, the thing about Mauritius is it's this really small place with a burgeoning population, and everybody could see what the problem was. It wasn't as if they were in the middle of a great continent or something. And there wasn't much economic development there. The place was still almost totally dependent on sugar, which only employed people seasonally when the canes were ready to be cut. So there was an enormous amount of unemployment and an enormous amount of poverty. And

they were terribly sensitive to the price of sugar--when the price of sugar dropped tuppence in London, people starved in Mauritius. I mean, it was that kind of thing.

My friend, the village council president, thought it would be a good idea if we could do something about this. I could see that there was some interest in it and some support for it. But now the question was how to get it implemented, how to get some kind of contraception to these people. Well, the only practical kind of contraception was something called foaming tablets. Did you ever hear of them?

Riess: I've heard of foam, but not foaming tablets.

Benedict: They were tablets that you put into the vagina and they foamed a kind of spermicide. They were very cheap, but they were not very romantic.

Riess: After intercourse you did it, or before?

Benedict: No, you'd do it before, or after. Of course, it was also not 100 percent effective, as you can imagine. At any rate, after I decided I wanted to do this, I went to London--there was a break in my field work--I stayed in Mauritius for a year, and then I went back to London for six months and presented part of my findings to seminars, in Firth's seminar and so on.

While I was there, I got in touch with Family Planning Association, to get their advice. The Family Planning Association was extremely active. They were trying to get legislation through for family planning. You have no idea--well, maybe you do--but it was very difficult in those days. There was enormous sentiment against it, let alone abortion.

But this wonderful woman, Vera Houghton, who was the head of family planning in London--there was the Family Planning Association, and then there was the International Planned Parenthood Federation, which was also based in London. Anyhow, I started talking to those people and told them what I wanted to do, and they, of course, were all in favor of it and offered to supply the pills.

Then when I went back to Mauritius, I went to see--the governor was away, but I went to see my friend, the colonial secretary that I mentioned last time, and I told him all about this. Well, he said he was all in favor of it, but he couldn't possibly be officially in favor of it because the dominant people in the island were French Roman Catholics. Although they practiced birth control privately, they would not publicly advocate it.

He said, "You just do it on your own, but if you get in trouble about it, you know, you're on your own. Or I might have to ask you to leave or something. I'm not willing to put my neck out on it." I said, "Okay, I understand that perfectly well."

So then I went back to the village--this is all rather truncated--I went back to the village, and I went to my friend, the village council president, and I said, "Well, look, let's try something." By this time, I really knew this village quite well, and I knew how it was



organized. They had socio-religious organizations called Baitkas, and these organizations had been formed by the immigrants who had been brought to Mauritius to work the sugar, Indian immigrants.

They were kind of self-help organizations. They were religious. I mean they held ceremonies, and during the Hindu festivals they would recite the *Ramayana*. But they were also kind of little meeting houses, and people would get together. It was, of course, all male.

We cooked this up between the two of us. We said if we could get these Baitkas to back the family-planning thing, and we could distribute these pills through the Baitkas, that might work. Of course, the men would have to talk to the women because we can't talk directly to the women. So it got to be a little complicated.

Riess: There were no public health agencies there?

Benedict: Oh, yes, there were public health agencies, and there was a village dispensary, and there were all those kinds of things, but they wouldn't touch this. There was no use going to them. Often they were quite sympathetic, but they wouldn't do it.

Anyhow, we thought about it, and having read various things on applied anthropology and so on, I said, "Well, you know, we're not just going to give these pills." They're going to have to buy them. I mean, at a very low price. And then we will use the money to buy more pills. But if we just give them to them, they'll just--you know, they'll just take them and throw them away or something. Which they might do anyhow."

That's what we did. We started this. We got all these pills and everything, and it kind of started to work. By this time it was nearly the end of my period there, so I turned the whole thing over to the president of the village council, who later became the president of the Family Planning Association of Mauritius. When Mauritius became independent, the government had an official policy, a pro family-planning policy, and he ended up in it.

Riess: You wrote about it?

Benedict: One of those articles tells this history more or less. I think I may have it a bit garbled, but it does seem to me roughly what happened.

### Working with Family-Planning Organizations, London

Benedict: Anyhow, so the people in London--I wrote a little piece for them to put in their family-planning bulletin. And when I got back to London, Vera Houghton and all of those people, and Jean Medewar, Lady Medewar, who was Peter Medewar's wife--does that name mean anything to you?

Riess: Yes. But I don't know why.

Benedict: Well, he was a Nobel laureate who was a physiologist in London, and she was very interested in family planning. She was quite a remarkable woman. At any rate, they all got very interested in what I was doing. By this time--I'm really telescoping a long time period here--by this time, the general social atmosphere had changed. The pill was coming in, and it was much more acceptable. The Family Planning Association was now agitating for abortion, which was still totally a taboo subject.

They asked me if I would be interested in running the Family Planning Association. That was kind of tempting, you know, quite a tempting thing to do.

Meanwhile, I came back to the States for a visit or something, and I had a sort of cousin--I don't know whether he was a cousin or anything, he was one of the enormous Baltimore morass of people--called Alan Guttmacher. You know that name.

Riess: Yes, of course!

Benedict: He was a close friend of my father's, my real father. He knew of me. And he was a very good friend of my stepmother's, too. So that was another kind of connection. At any rate, as you know, I didn't do it. He was a twin, incidentally, his twin brother was a psychiatrist. Anyhow, he knew about my interest, and he started saying why didn't I do this, why didn't I make a career of out this.

Riess: Did you meet Margaret Sanger at that time?

Benedict: No. Margaret Sanger must have been dead by that time [1879-1966]. My network wasn't here, you see, it was in London. All the conversations around Guttmacher took place in Maine, in fact, at the family place. The Guttmachers had their family place next door. They'd done the same kind of thing and started about the same time.

Riess: Did you ask yourself the question of how you could be most effective doing that? I mean, how did you make the decision not to go into it?

Benedict: I didn't think I would be too good at that thing. I saw that what it was really going to be was an administrative and a P.R. job, and I didn't think I really wanted to do that. I preferred to go the academic route. It seemed more compatible somehow. So I just decided not to do it. It didn't get to the point where they actually said, "We're going to give you a salary of such-and-such and so on." It never got to that point. I don't want you to think that I was teetering on the edge with people dangling all kinds of delicious fruits in front of me. It wasn't really like that at all. I really sort of opted out before that.

I could see by talking to people and everything that it was like any of those other big organizations. There were factions, and there were this, that, and the other, and I didn't really think that I wanted to spend my life doing that. It didn't seem to me--my training didn't go in that direction. So I didn't do it, but I always retained interest in it. It's been

something that I'm still interested in. And I just wanted to make sure we put that in there somewhere because it was kind of an important thing at the time.

Riess: Did you stay interested and involved with Mauritius? I know you couldn't return.

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Benedict: The Colonial Office wanted me to go to the Seychelles, and I think that was because of the people I met on the Electoral Boundaries Commission. I don't really know that. One was James Robertson, who was quite a remarkable man, married to a woman who's been made Dame because of her work in the Treasury. James and another man used to try to explain cricket to me, which I never did--still don't understand. At any rate, they were instrumental, I'm sure, although they never said so, in the Seychelles thing.

And if they wanted something done in Seychelles, I was an obvious person to do it because I already spoke Creole, and I had done Mauritius, and there was enough similarity there. So my grant from the Colonial Research Council--

Riess: --was from the Department Technical Cooperation.

Benedict: --was from the Department of Technical Cooperation. Now, at that time, the Colonial Office was being dissolved. The Colonial Office was first amalgamated with the Commonwealth Office. You know the distinction between commonwealth countries and colonies. Commonwealth countries were India, Canada, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, and the colonies were all the others. And, of course, when they were set up, they were really quite different kinds of units.

But the Colonial Office was dissolved, basically. There were still quite a lot of colonies. There still are, you know, about a half a dozen or so that they can't get rid of! I mean, who wants Tristan de Cunha? So they formed the Department of Technical Cooperation, which was to aid third-world countries. In particular, of course, they felt an obligation towards their former colonies--in fact, many still were colonies, like Seychelles. So that's what happened.

Riess: The Seychelles were called a grant-in-aid colony.

Benedict: Yes. That basically meant that it didn't pay for itself.

Riess: It was not self-supporting.

Benedict: It certainly wasn't. I think I may have mentioned the whole colony was in receivership to the Treasury. So it was grant-in-aid, so they just had to keep it going by giving it money, which of course they were not mad to do.

Riess: Yes. Now, how were you prepared for the Seychelles, other than the Creole?

Benedict: Other than the Creole. Well, the histories were linked. Seychelles was a dependency of Mauritius until 1903. Certainly, some of the early governments, particularly a man called [A.H.] Gordon, had spent some time in Seychelles and written about them. It was thought, correctly, that the African population was really the same. My experience with the Creoles in Mauritius, the African-descent people in Mauritius--it would have been--they were very much the same.

Riess: Did your experience in Mauritius allow you to conceptualize the project in the Seychelles differently? Were you a better scientist there?

Benedict: I certainly knew a lot about the way colonies worked. So I did know how to work that. I mean, I knew how it was organized.

Riess: And you knew that you had to make the same kind of connections.

Benedict: Yes, that's right.

I guess what you really are asking for is some kind of intellectual organization orientation.

Riess: First of all, they wanted a descriptive report?

Benedict: I don't think at that point they knew exactly what was going to happen to Seychelles because it was just non-viable. The reports that had been written on the Seychelles--those gloomy reports about "the people are lazy," you know, "nothing will ever happen there"--that all changed because of Diego Garcia and the Cold War.

Did I tell you about that? You know, when they were able to develop tourism. When we went there in 1960.

Riess: No.

Benedict: Oh. So what they wanted, I think, was a general description. Again, they never told me precisely that I had to do this, that, and the other, or what they wanted was this, that, and the other. They wanted a description. They wanted to know--I mean, for instance, this Baitka thing that I had done in Mauritius. That was useful and interesting information because it showed some kind of indigenous organization was going on here. I think they wanted to know whether there was any such thing in Seychelles. Well, there wasn't.

What was important in the Seychelles in those days was the church, because it was overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, and it had been "missionized" by Swiss Capuchins. They had all these great churches. Poverty-stricken villages and these giant churches all over the island.

So we needed to know something about the social structure, the political structure. I think they wanted to know--or at least the way I interpreted it was they wanted to know something about the family structure. I mean, one of the things that had been so striking

in Mauritius was this really rather strong patriarchal structure among the Indians and this very loose family organization among the Creoles, which some anthropologists have called matrifocal. It focused around the women, with the men being sort of peripheral. That certainly was the case in Seychelles.

It turned out to be really quite different from that point of view, because of course I had come straight from the Indians in Mauritius, and although I knew Creole--you couldn't avoid it--I didn't do any really serious field work among the so-called Creoles there. But in Seychelles I had to do that, because that's what the majority of the population was. The few Indians that were there were almost all merchants, and they were not like the Indians of Mauritius. I mean, the overwhelming majority of Indians in Mauritius had been indentured laborers, and they came from the working classes of India. They didn't all come from the low castes, but they came from there.

On the other hand, there was another group of Indians in Mauritius who were the merchants, and they generally came from Gudjurat, so they came from a quite different part of India. They were from the west, whereas the laborers were mostly from Bihar and what was then the United Provinces, Uttar Pradesh and the Tamil-and Telegu-speaking areas of the south. In the Seychelles those were the same kinds of Indians, like the Gudjurati Indians. They were the merchant Indians.

### **Finding a Methodology: Statistics, History**

Riess: Was it hard to go to a new place and recognize that these are different people? You have to keep in mind, "I'm not in Mauritius, these Indians are different Indians." Or is it quick that you get past that?

Benedict: I think as far as the Indians were concerned--it just struck me as quite different. When I think back, the two places were quite distinct in my mind. I never wonder, "Did that happen in Mauritius or did it happen in Seychelles?" I almost always know, even though it's been a long time.

Riess: My question, which you phrased much better than I did, about your intellectual organization. How were you a better anthropologist when you got to the Seychelles?

Benedict: I think by that time I had decided that the way to do things was, in the first place, to go around and work from the top down, try to see the most important people first, and then work down--rather than the other way around, which a number of anthropologists have tried to do in their own field work. Sometimes you have to do that because there's such a gap between the top and the bottom, and if you start at the top, the people at the bottom won't talk to you. So I knew how to do that.

The other thing that struck me--well, two things I think were very important. One is, I think history is terribly, terribly important. I am very much of the mind set that thinks that

you really can't do a proper anthropological study unless you've studied the history very intensively, as much as you can. I wanted to find out everything I could about the history, and that meant going into the archives, and the Seychelles archives were not in very good shape, as you might well imagine--unlike the Mauritius ones, which *were* in very good shape.

The other thing is that I thought it was extremely important to gather statistical information, that it seems to me one of the problems with anthropology as it has traditionally been done is that it is so particularistic that you can't generalize from it. That's a real problem.

Riess: That's a point you make in your publications from the Seychelles, that you got 100 percent, or very close to it.

Benedict: Yes, very close to it. You know, it's very easy to fiddle around with those kinds of things, and you can do it forever, but it did seem to me that if I were going to make generalizations--and as the place was so small, I could take that kind of sample. Which is what I also tried to do in Mauritius, which is why I went to three different places in Mauritius and did it. So it just seems to me that that's terribly important.

## VI LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

### Assistant Lecturer Position at the London School of Economics, 1958

Riess: You did your work in the Seychelles in 1960. And you submitted your report.

Benedict: When I got back to London.

Riess: And you also went to Nyasaland [now Malawi] in 1962. How did your colonial studies work with your teaching at LSE?

Benedict: I think we have to go back a little bit. When I came back from Mauritius I was in the Colonial Office, as I told you, I did my work there. Then the position opened up at the LSE, the assistant lecturer position. I put in for that, with a couple of other candidates, and was interviewed for it and so on. Then when I got it--that was in 1958, and I went to the LSE and started to lecture there. So when I went to Seychelles, I was already a lecturer at LSE. When I went to Mauritius, I didn't have any academic appointment, so I had to get leave from the LSE to go to Seychelles. Then when I came back, of course, I could go right back into the LSE, so that wasn't any problem at all.

Riess: Was doing field work valued at LSE the way it would be in this country?

Benedict: Oh, yes, it was valued, all right, very much so. But grants were pretty thin. Sometimes you had to take a leave without pay. I took a leave without pay because I was, of course, being paid by the Colonial Office to go there, so that wasn't any big problem.

Riess: Did you develop courses at LSE around your work?

Benedict: No, because the teaching I was doing--it's structured differently. The way that you taught undergraduates at the LSE was there were lecture courses. Mainly the lecture courses were only ten weeks long, and there were ten lectures. They were not courses. That is, you didn't have an exam on the course.

Riess: And you didn't have to go to the lectures.

Benedict: And you didn't have to go to the lectures. So you would give those. But the other part of the teaching was there were classes, first, second, and third-year classes, in which you actually went over the material. But the approach was very different from the way it is here. It was, you might say, like a French *explication du text*. I mean, what you did is you took a book, say, E.P.'s [Evans-Pritchard's] *Nuer* or something, and you spent two or three weeks dissecting it with the class, and they had to write papers on it. Now, that never happens here. Almost never happens here.

The result is, of course, they know some things extremely well, and a lot of things they don't know anything about at all. So the major part of the teaching is the classes and tutorials. Lectures--there are these series of lectures, and they all have to be given, but they don't figure as crucially as they do for us here.

So that's what I was doing. I would not be teaching Seychelles when I came back, I would be teaching the *Nuer*, you see?

Riess: Was it a publish-or-perish kind of system also?

Benedict: Not the way there is here. Not at all. I mean, I was unaware there was such a thing as tenure. The assistant lectureship, I think, was a three-year lectureship, and then you got it renewed. And then finally--I think I asked some official there, "Do I have a permanent position here, or am I still on contract?" I had just been renewed or something. He said, "Well, unless you actually attack the director on the front steps, I think you can say you're here permanently."

It was not the crisis it is here. In fact, once you got into it, you were always in it, you would just stay in it. It was a whole different way of looking at things. Now that's no longer true in England, it's much more like here now. But it certainly was then.

Of course, you were supposed to be a serious scholar, and there's a certain moral pressure on you to publish your research, and you certainly wouldn't get promoted to be a reader or professor unless you'd done some publishing, but you could go on being a lecturer until you retired, and never publish a thing. And there were plenty of examples of that.

### Colleagues at the London School of Economics, and Evolution of British Social Anthropology

Riess: Did you have any particular friends at LSE? How were you welcomed there?

Benedict: Well, of course, I had been a student there.

Riess: A student of [Raymond] Firth.



Benedict: Firth was my principal advisor.

The way it was set up then was that usually, traditionally, there was only one professor per department. That was the traditional way of doing it. So in the traditional way--I don't think that it's true anymore at all--the department consisted usually of one professor, who was the head of the department, and maybe one or two readers, who were kind of like associate professors but really a bit more important than that, and then a bunch of lecturers, some of whom were permanent, senior lecturers and lecturers, and some of whom were on time contracts, like assistant lecturers.

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Benedict: There's a distinction between professors who were part of the table of organization--that is, they were permanent professors in the table of organization--and professorships which were given the title almost as honorary things. So if you got somebody who was very prominent and who you wanted to give a professorship to, you would give that professorship, it was called a personal chair. But when that person retired or left, there would be no professorship there.

The other person that was important to me at that point was Isaac Schapera. He was an Africanist. He ran the seminar.

Riess: Did you experience any anti-Americanism?

Benedict: No. I would say I experienced very little anti-American sentiments. Sometimes teasing.

Riess: Were they keeping track of what was going on in anthropology departments in this country? Was there a lot of interest in Berkeley, Harvard, Chicago?

Benedict: That began to grow. It happened in several ways. I think the most--it's very interesting, this relation between the Americans and the British. The whole British tradition of social anthropology, which had come down from Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, mostly Radcliffe-Brown--was pretty highly structured. Radcliffe-Brown was the English interpreter of Durkheim.

The way they saw society was really as a congeries of roles and statuses, so that they would argue that everything you do is really a result of the role you were playing, and that the roles are, society is kept--well, the question they were asking, really, was why do societies persist? The question they were asking in America was why do societies change? That's a very different perspective. And one seems very British, and one seems very American, actually.

Riess: Very interesting. Persist rather than break down and collapse.

Benedict: Yes, what keeps them going? How is that they keep going? They don't keep going because there are police around. They keep going because of the roles people are playing. We keep talking about this because you expect me to keep talking, and if I start talking

about something else, you will get me back on track, and you have various sanctions--we talked about this somewhat earlier.

Now this distinction is no longer viable. But at the time we're talking about, it was a very important distinction. Americans were hipped on culture. I remember Lucy Mair, who was another important influence, saying, you know, why use the word "culture" when you have a perfectly adequate English word, "everything."

Riess: That's what I expected, that there would be a lot of merry laughter over there, in the common rooms in England. Particularly around culture--Americans studying culture must have seemed ironic.

Benedict: I don't think that kind of culture was in question at all, culture in the sense of "he's a cultured person."

I mean, they used "culture." When they talk about material culture, they were talking about things, and they talked about certain habits or certain kinds of things that people did which were culturally different. One of the things they were interested in was you can have the same structure--you can have, let's say, strong patrilineal family in India and China--but the cultures are different, even though the structure is the same. They were very interested in that kind of thing. But that's the way they took it apart. They took it apart like that, and that seemed to them a much more precise way of looking at things.

Riess: And it seemed to you also?

Benedict: Oh, yes, I was totally convinced. I thought that was a very productive way of going about things. However, there's one great trouble with it. There's probably more than one, but the biggest problem with it is that, of course, it does not account for change and it's perfectly clear that things do change. So how do you get around that? That was one of the problems, the big problems, that Leach was particularly interested in, as I mentioned before.

Leach was saying what you need to do is look at politics. What Evans-Pritchard and Meyer Fortes and those people were doing was looking at structure almost entirely in terms of kinship. Kinship structure, that was the most important thing. And, of course, in the societies they studied, kinship structure *was* the most important thing.

I mean, in many of those societies--those two people in particular, Evans-Pritchard studying the Nuer and Fortes the Tallensi--they didn't have chiefs, it was all kinship structure. That has important consequences. For instance, in such a society there is no crime, there are only torts, because you can't commit an offense against the state, as there is no state, only against a person.

So that was where they were concentrating, and it really comes down to the whole difference between--you could say it's an important difference between sociology and anthropology, but it's a very important difference between American anthropology and British social anthropology because the Brits were studying societies which were still

pretty much intact, and they were societies which were not in Britain but overseas somewhere, and they wanted to know how they persisted, these societies, how they keep going. How does it work?

When British colonists came into these societies, they found there were no chiefs. That raised all kinds of questions. In America, anthropologists were looking at American Indians, Native Americans, which were almost all totally clobbered by the time the anthropologists started to look at them, and so they got interested in, "What was it like when?"--which is what a lot of early American anthropology was. And then they began to look at things like cultural traits--that was one of their favorite words--which persisted and still persist in some kind of attenuated form now. Very different way of looking at things. And based actually on what was there.

Riess: Yes. You describe that well. That's great. How about looking at themselves? Was there any kind of self-awareness anthropology, any looking at communities in Leeds?

Benedict: No. In those days--I remember once we were all--after Firth's seminar, usually we would all go around to the pub. It was the standard thing after any British seminar, you'd go around to the pub. Which was really one of the nicest parts. You know, you'd sit there for hours, drinking beer. I remember at one of these things, one British student said, "I think it would be very interesting to do a field study on a British public school." And I remember Raymond saying, "Oh, we're not ready for that."

There were a few studies on Britain which had come out, which had been done not by anthropologists but by sociologists, and they were mostly in working-class areas. There were some studies which had been done on East London, and it was a pretty long time before any anthropologist did any studies of that kind in Britain. They exist now, but certainly not in the way that happened in this country.

### The Cambridge Conference, and Connections with American Anthropologists

Riess: All that time were you keeping up with anthropology gossip? I mean, whether back in 1960 you would have known about David Schneider and Lloyd Fallers and things at Berkeley. How would you hear about all this stuff?

Benedict: I wasn't very aware of Berkeley, but I certainly was aware of David Schneider, because he came to London and spent a year, maybe two years, at the LSE. He was at LSE, he and Elizabeth Bott. Have you come across that name?

Riess: No.

Benedict: Schneider came to LSE I would say in 1952 or '53, certainly before I got my degree. I knew him at Harvard slightly, but I got to know him very well when he was at LSE. He didn't like it. He didn't like living in Britain.

Riess: He didn't like the kind of anthropology there?

Benedict: Yes, he didn't like their anthropology much. But he didn't like--I don't think he really liked the English very much, although he was very involved with them. At any rate, so I certainly was aware of that, and he was very helpful and kind and everything, and when I came back to the States eventually, he was enormously helpful. Anyhow, that's a whole other story.

Riess: Then a more general question of anthropology gossip. I think of anthropologists going to meetings, and lots of gossip, I should think.

Benedict: Oh, well there's one important thing I forgot to mention. I don't know how I forgot it because it's vitally important. And that was those famous conferences, the Cambridge conferences that happened, when they decided to get the Americans and the Brits together.

Fred Eggan, and Sol Tax from Chicago, and Max Gluckman, whose name you must know from Elizabeth Colson, and a couple of the other British anthropologists decided in about 1962 or '63 that they should have a conference, to which they would invite British and American anthropologists to come together and give papers. At Cambridge, there were about twice as many British as American anthropologists. The Americans included Marshall Sahlins, Clifford Geertz, Schneider and Eric Wolf. And the Brits included I.M. Lewis, F.G. Bailey, Victor Turner, and even me.

Riess: Did the British choose who would be invited from America?

Benedict: Eggan and Gluckman chose them together.

Anyhow, this went on for three or four days, and they each gave papers, and they had discussions, and we were all there. It was terribly important, and it has continued ever since. Every ten years they have another of these conferences, and it still goes on.

But what was so interesting then was that they really thought there was quite a bit of difference between the British and the American approaches. Of course, now there isn't. But what they wanted to see was where the differences were and where could they get together. What they found was that there wasn't as much difference as they thought and that intellectually the divisions were not national but on the basis of various approaches.

All those papers were published, and they've continued to be published. There's this long series of papers that come out in volumes. They're like those Annual Reviews of Anthropology published at Stanford.

Riess: And what is it called?

Benedict: It's called the ASA Monographs. It was sponsored by the Association of Social Anthropologists.

**The RAI [Royal Anthropological Institute]**

Benedict: The professional organizations in Britain at that time were really only two. One was the Royal Anthropological Institute, which of course had been going since the middle of the nineteenth century and which included all of anthropology and which had its own premises in Bedford Square--an absolutely marvelous place, but the Duke of Bedford put the rent up to such an extent they had to move out.

The Royal Anthropological Institute was the traditional place where--when you came back from the field you gave your paper at the Royal Anthropological Institute, and all these ancient people would come in and sit down, people whose names you knew but who you thought had been dead for a long time. I used to say, "I don't think they really exist. I think they cover them over with dust sheets between meetings." People like J. H. Hutton, and Ethel John Lindgren, and Brenda Seligman.

At any rate, they would sit there and make acerbic remarks, and you would give your paper. It was pretty formal. I mean, the whole way papers are given in Britain then, maybe less so now, was very formal compared with what happens here. I remember when David Mandelbaum came to London and was asked to give a paper at the RAI. (I think, incidentally, it was David Mandelbaum who probably got me here. We'll get to that.)

I remember his [Mandelbaum] giving his paper, and he did it in the sort of chatty Berkeley style, sort of one foot up on the desk kind of thing. I was in the audience and I remember thinking, "Oh, God, don't do that. Don't do that! Stand up and get behind the podium and read your paper and don't chat." Because it absolutely put everybody off. You could just feel it. What you were supposed to do was to get up and read your paper, and then you could answer questions if you agreed to answer questions.

Okay, that was one organization, and that was an organization which was really quite formal, as I just told you. They would have a garden party every year in Bedford Square. It was that kind of thing. And they had a royal patron. They still have a royal patron. They always had a royal patron. They've had Prince Charles, and they had Princess Diana.

Riess: Charles sounds perfect.

Benedict: Yes, Charles read anthropology at Cambridge.

Riess: And they had the journal, *Man*.

Benedict: They had two journals. They had the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, and they had *Man*. They both came out of the RAI.

Riess: Was it a great honor that you were book reviews editor of *Man* for three years?

Benedict: Yes, it was. I was, of course, considered a British anthropologist in that conference that I was telling you about.

Okay, so that was the RAI. And, as I say, it was everything--for instance, *Man* in those days really would have an article, "A Tobacco Pipe from West Africa." And there would be pictures of the tobacco pipe and a minute description of the tobacco pipe and where it was found and how it was used and all that kind of thing--that's the kind of articles that were in *Man*. But there were also other things.

Riess: Could you publish your population studies there?

Benedict: In *Man*? I don't know. Probably. I didn't. I published in the *British Journal of Sociology*.

At any rate, so that was not what you call a very intimate thing. When you'd go to those meetings, those big meetings, afterwards you'd tend to break up, and the social anthropologists would sort of break up and go in one place, and then the others would go somewhere else. But there were archaeologists and there were physical anthropologists and so on.

### The Association of Social Anthropologists

Benedict: The other organization, which was much more important for social anthropology, and much more important for American anthropology, was the Association of Social Anthropologists, known as the ASA. They're the ones that published these conference papers that I was talking about before. That was founded by Radcliffe-Brown after the war, and all of the social anthropologists in Britain were members of it. I mean, Firth and Fortes and Evans-Pritchard and Schapera and Gluckman and Kenneth Little and all the ones that followed them. They were all members of that.

That was strictly for social anthropologists, and it used to be something that, you know, you couldn't get into just by wanting to join it, you had to be invited to join it. And they had conferences, and their conferences were about topics that you would recognize. Well, of course, the early ones tended to be about kinship, but then they would be about political structure, they would be about economic structure, they'd be about all those sorts of things, sometimes about art and religion, a whole range of things of that kind.

Those conferences, which still go on--the ASA was the organization which sponsored, from the British side, and in fact, it may have even been their initiative that started it, the decennial conferences I was telling you about. So the ASA was the real place, and that's where--it wasn't a place, but that was the real organization.

Riess: It's where things were happening.

Benedict: Where things were happening, that's right. And that still goes on. It's still an important organization, and it's now the Association of Social Anthropologists of the Commonwealth, because it has branches in Australia and Canada and--where else? Oh, yes, they have members in Africa and so on. So it's very important. Elizabeth [Colson] was in it.

### Attitude toward Applied Anthropology in Britain

Riess: One more question about this teaching at LSE. Did you enjoy it? Did you carve out something that you did particularly?

Benedict: Yes, I taught the courses in applied anthropology. Later I taught the courses in economic anthropology.

Riess: Applied anthropology was not a problem for the British anthropologists?

Benedict: No. They all did applied anthropology at one time or another. No, it was considered quite a legitimate thing to do. Of course, it was something that other people did--it didn't have high prestige. Lucy Mair was a reader in applied anthropology. That was her title. No, it was quite a legitimate field.

You know, the whole history of anthropology in Britain is really applied anthropology because that's what it was all about. That's why they got grants to go out and do the kind of field work that they did. I mean, they didn't often do very applied stuff, but that was the rationale: what the anthropologists were doing was supposed to help administer the British colonies, and the whole thrust of early anthropology was on that basis, if you look at any early books on social anthropology--I mean, books in the pre-Malinowski days. That's what they're about: how can we administer these people better?

Riess: But that does imply changing them.

Benedict: Well, it implies making sure they don't make a fuss. Not so much changing them. That's another huge difference between American and British anthropology. Applied anthropology in Britain simply meant understanding what these people do.

You know, there's a marvelous story about Tom Driberg, who was an early anthropologist. He had been a district officer, but he had a short career, and this is why. He was administering a district in West Africa--I think it was in Nigeria--and they were having a witchcraft trial, in which they were going to execute this witch. And so he came to this place and asked them, "How do you know this person is a witch?" "Well," they said, "we have these oracles who read these bones, and we roll them out, and if they come out in this particular pattern, then it's perfectly clear that he's a witch."

He said, "That's interesting. I've never seen that done. Would you mind doing it for me? I'd like to see." "Yes, certainly we'll do it." They did it, and it came out in that pattern that they said. So he said to them, "You must think I'm awfully stupid, but it really takes us foreigners quite a long time to learn about these things. Do you think you could possibly do it again?" And so they said, "We'll do it again."

They did it again. Came out in the same way. He said, "All right, kill him." I don't know whether that's a true story. But at any rate, it does illustrate--now, in America, of course, it was very different because in America, applied anthropology was really assimilation. I mean, it was about how do you get these people to turn them into good Americans? You want to change the culture. You want to basically eliminate their culture and turn them into Americans. The whole thrust of our impact on Native Americans has been that.

That's not what the British wanted to do. They had no idea of turning these people into Brits, absolutely.

### The Royal Society Population Study Group ##

Riess: I want to go back to population studies. We're all interested in reducing the population, but is it a quality of life thing? Is that the larger thing that you're interested in? What makes controlling population interesting for you?

Benedict: Simply we don't have enough resources to deal with more people.

Riess: Do you get into a lifeboat thing about what kind of people we want?

Benedict: No. I think that if you start trying to figure out which people are going to be allowed to increase and which are not, then you run into all kinds of problems.

Riess: Have anthropologists ever gotten into that?

Benedict: Yes, they have. Certainly there was a man named [Joseph Arthur de] Gobineau, whose writings were used by the Nazis, and then there was the whole eugenics movement, which was very prominent in Britain and the United States, very strong in the United States. Linked into, of course, the idea of the anti-immigrant movements in this country. Very strong in the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, maybe even longer. So there was that.

To me, I think that's all kind of abhorrent. I don't think that anybody's in a position to make judgments about which people should be allowed to increase and which not. What you have to do is to give individuals the right to decide about whether they're going to have children and how many children they're going to have. You can't regulate it. I



mean, there have been some problems, of course. China, as you know, has tried to do that. India tried to do it.

In that Royal Society population study group, we talked about that a lot. I mean, that was the whole idea. The Royal Society, which is the top scientific organization in Britain, like our National Academy of Sciences, they got together this conference, really a working group which was chaired by Lord [Howard] Florey, an Australian, Nobel laureate, one of the discoverers of penicillin. We talked about all those kinds of things, and we would have guest speakers. We would meet regularly, in the rooms of the Royal Society, which are pretty elegant--by "regularly" I mean two or three times a year. And we'd always have a topic to discuss. There would be papers up for discussion, and there would be minutes. They had a lot of very high-powered people: Julian Huxley and all kinds of people coming to give us talks

This went on for quite a long time. I think it must be in here [CV] somewhere. I've got papers on all this stuff, which I could easily look up. I even know where they are, I think--1965 to 1968. Three years it went on.

Riess: The problem gets defined, but you can't do anything.

Benedict: We made recommendations to the government about what kinds of things to do to help limit growth of population. I think that was what they were aimed at. But I would really like to pull out my file on it because I think it's important.

### Cutting through Bureaucracy in Nyasaland, 1962 ##

Riess: Let's get something in here about Malawi, or Nyasaland as it was. You were there in 1962?

Benedict: Yes. I was only there for a short time, as you know. And I went out for the Department of Technical Cooperation. Again, that was really their idea. It probably came out of this youth thing that I'd tried to do in Seychelles, which hadn't worked because they wanted to see if there weren't some possibilities. [See page 131] Malawi is a country with a very big population and very few economic opportunities. It has survived economically because it's right next to Zimbabwe and Zambia, which are big countries which need labor, and also not far from South Africa, which also needed labor at that point.

The project was called something like The Needs of Youth. I mean, really! The Needs of Youth in what was then Nyasaland. When I went--it was really very interesting because I was still, of course, in the Colonial Office mode, and I knew how to do that, I mean, I'd done it a few times. So I went out with the British government backing, and I arrived in Blantyre, where the airport is, and I went to the hotel and all the rest of it, and I met the governor, and I met some British officials and everything, and I went around. But I wasn't meeting anybody. I was meeting British colonials, and I was meeting, you know,

Africans who were the employees of these people, the civil servants, but I wasn't meeting any young people.

And, of course, there was this big movement. This was at the time when the federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was breaking up, and so each country was very active. And in Nyasaland they had this movement which was called Malawi, which was led by Dr. Banda, Hastings Banda, who had been trained as a physician in the United States. That was more or less the independence movement, which was dead-set against the federation and wanted independence. They were going to get it, it was perfectly clear they were going to get it, and the British were dying to get out, you know.

Malawi was very odd in another way because it had been settled by Scottish missionaries, and so you had Africans speaking English with a Scottish accent.

At any rate, I wasn't getting anywhere. I went to the different government offices and everything. I just wasn't getting anywhere. I wasn't anywhere near getting into some kind of village, or some place where I could meet the actual people. Finally I decided I had to take matters into my own hands, and I walked into Malawi party headquarters in Blantyre. And two great big guys came, one on each side of me, and asked what did I want, and I said--oh, I had tried to make appointments with Dr. Banda, with various other party officials. Got nowhere at all.

I said, "I'd like to see Dr. Banda." They said, "You go back to your hotel. We'll get in touch with you." So I went back to my hotel. The next day they said, "Dr. Banda will see you." They said, "We will take you up there." I was driven up to this great big place where he was, and I went into his office--I don't know, it was like an Italian film. It was a huge, empty office, and this gigantic desk, with nothing on it, and little Dr. Banda behind the desk.

I came into the room, and he said, "Who sent you?" His first words to me. I said, "I was sent by the Department of Technical Cooperation."

"I didn't ask you that. I said, 'Who? What man sent you?'"

Riess: Scary.

Benedict: Yes! So I said, "Well, you know what the British civil service is like. There's isn't any 'what man.' There isn't any one man. I mean, I was given this assignment, and So-and-so is the head of this, and So-and-so is the head of that." And he said, "You've come to spy on us."

I said, "No, I haven't. I've come to do this." And he kept after me in this very aggressive manner. Finally I said, "Look, if you don't want me here, I'll go. I'll leave the country."

Riess: You told him that you were really just mostly interested in the youth club thing?

Benedict: Yes, I told him. I said, "If you don't want me here, I'll go. It's all right. I'll go." He said, "I didn't tell you that. I didn't tell you we didn't want you. I didn't tell you to go." So he said, "All right," and from that moment the whole country opened up to me. It was extraordinary. They then assigned some people to me who were very active in the place. They took me all over the country. They flew me around in a little airplane.

What I saw was that they had created an entirely parallel administration to the British administration. They had the same kind of officials and everything else. The British administration--they were raising and lowering their little flags and everything every morning, but they were a total shell, there was nothing behind them, at all. And the Malawians were doing exactly the same thing a half a mile away and were really running the country.

From that time on--I wasn't there very long--I was able to have access. That's really the most interesting thing that happened. I did produce a little report, but I don't think it was of any significance really.



## VII SEYCHELLES, 1974

[Interview 6: June 14, 2001] ##

### Thwarted Return to Mauritius, and on to the Seychelles

Riess: Last time you referred to the Seychelles as if the first trip wasn't very important.

Benedict: That's not true. It's really not true. Of course, my first trip was important. I was disappointed at my second trip because, of course, I planned to go to Mauritius, and it [the trip to the Seychelles] was very last minute. For years I had been trying to go back to Mauritius, and there had been all this fuss about my book.

Riess: Fuss?

Benedict: What happened was when my book came out, *Indians in a Plural Society*, it was published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, which made it look very official--and, for some reason or another, the usual disclaimer which is put in such books about whatever is said here is the sole responsibility of the author and not of any government authority, that kind of statement wasn't put in there, so it sounded as though it were a kind of official document.

When it came out in Mauritius, it was at the time that Mauritius was getting its independence, and there was a big battle going on, a political battle, about who was going to control Mauritius: the Labor party, which was almost entirely Indian but with some Creole dock workers, or the Parti Mauritian, as I think it was called in those days, which was the party of the French planters plus the sort of intellectual Creoles plus some Muslims, some of the big merchant Muslims.

So my book, which is simply quite descriptive, got into the middle of this debate. People were saying, "Well, look, it says in this official report here that the Tamils are different from the northern Hindus, so they should have separate representation in the legislature." You see? So it got all mixed up with that.

Well, of course, the people in the Labor party were very angry about that, and when the election came, one of my informants, who was the editor of one of the left-wing papers lost his seat. Incidentally, many of the papers appeared in French. It was such a strange place, Mauritius, with French civil law and British criminal law.

At any rate, what people began to do was to take statements in the text and attribute them to people that I acknowledged in my long list of acknowledgments. My favorite was a sentence which went--I think I can quote it--"Sexual relations often take place in the cane fields." And that was attributed to the minister of education, who lost his seat! So he wasn't too happy, as you can imagine! So there was this big fuss.

Riess: How were you hearing about this?

Benedict: I still had friends in Mauritius, and the question--the book came out in 1961, so I guess I was still in London. I don't remember exactly how I heard. Well, people kept writing me, and kept sending me cuttings from the newspaper and all of that. And not only that, but it got raised in Parliament!

So what happened was the governor of Mauritius sent me a telegram saying, "Look, you've caused all this fuss. What are you going to do about it?" I telegraphed back to him. I said, "I don't think there's anything I *can* do about it. What do you suggest?" Later on I met him, very nice man, Sir John Rennie, and I asked, "What did you expect me to do?" "Oh," he said, "I simply wanted you to put out a statement that it's all lies." I didn't do that.

Riess: You're talking about something that's a problem for anthropologists.

Benedict: Oh, absolutely, it's a big issue in anthropology, and I did present papers and seminars and so on, detailing all of this.

Well, so I'd wanted to go back to Mauritius, and I kept writing to my friends in Mauritius, particularly this man who later became head of the family planning, who was the village council president, saying, "Can I come back?" And he kept writing back and saying, "No, not yet." And I had other friends in Mauritius who more or less told me the same thing.

Then years later, in 1974, when I was already here, they finally said, "Yes, we think it's okay if you come back [to Mauritius]." I wrote to the Mauritius Embassy in Washington and they gave me a visa, and everything seemed to be okay, and Marion and I packed up, and we got on the airplane, and we landed in Plaisance, which is the airport in Mauritius, and we were going through Immigration, and the guy stopped me, and he looked at me and said, "Just a moment, sir." And he came back and said, "I'm sorry. We can't let you into the country."

Meanwhile, there were people meeting me. There were some of these Indian merchants. There was one family in particular to whom I was close, a Muslim family, and they had come to meet me with their big car. They were waving, and the guy said to me,

"What's the trouble?" "Oh," he said, "the book." He said, "Don't worry, I'll call the prime minister."

Marion and I sat in the airport, not officially in the country. He finally came back, and he said, "No, I'm sorry, he won't let you in." Not only that, but his attitude had changed, he didn't want to be seen with me, he was dying to get away. He said, "Let me buy you some drinks."

The Immigration official said, "We're going to have to send you back to England." Well, I had not come from England, I had come from here. I said, "I don't want to go back to England. England is no longer 'back' to me. I don't want to go back there. How about my going to Seychelles?" All right. There was an airplane that went to Seychelles. I could go. As long as I got out of Mauritius, they didn't care where I went, really.

Marion and I sat in the waiting room with our baggage until the Seychelles plane was called, and then we loaded ourselves and our bags onto the plane and off we went to Seychelles!

Riess: Where you had been before.

Benedict: Where I'd been in 1960.

Riess: And your funding for the trip to Mauritius could transfer?

Benedict: The funding was from here. I mean, I had one of those humanities research grants, whatever they were called.

Riess: The Mauritius--if you went back, you were going back to do a sort of follow-up study?

Benedict: To do a follow-up, to see what had happened. I mean, a lot had happened in Mauritius since 1955, when I first went.

Riess: Was it anything about your family-planning work that made you *persona non grata*?

Benedict: No, it was all this political thing. It wasn't the family-planning work. In fact, the prime minister, the new prime minister, Ramgoolam, who was an old Labor leader with one eye, he thought it was a good idea. That was not the issue. As I said earlier, the French planters couldn't officially condone it [family planning], but it never became a political issue. That wasn't the issue. The issue was what political use would be made of my coming there and "the book," as it got to be known, because another election was coming up.

Riess: Okay.

Benedict: So that was the end of it, and I've never been back to Mauritius. And it had been a long time, after all, since I'd been there. It was 1955, and we're talking about 1974, nearly twenty years later.

Okay, this is a good lead-in to the Seychelles. We landed in the Seychelles in the middle of the night, not prepared to be there. Not only that, I didn't have any of my field notes or anything from the Seychelles. They were all here in Berkeley. I had all this stuff for Mauritius, but none of my field notes from the Seychelles, and I had books and books of field notes up there [in his upstairs office].

So we went to a hotel, and we sat in the hotel, and I thought, "Well, the first thing I'll have to do, I'll have to go and see the governor. That's obviously the first thing to do." So the next day I got myself dressed up, and I went to Government House, which is this marvelous French Colonial house, which sits on a hill.

The governor, a New Zealander, was in his office, sitting at his desk, and I sat in front of him--and he was a rather short, jolly man. Behind him was a bookshelf, and on the bookshelf were a whole lot of copies of *Man* [the journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute]. I thought to myself, Oh, boy! It turns out he was a sort of amateur anthropologist, and he was very sympathetic, and we had a very pleasant talk.

I explained to him exactly what had happened, and he said to me what had been said to me before about family planning in Mauritius, by a different governor. He said, "You know, I'm delighted to have you here, and you can certainly go ahead and do what you want, but don't get in any trouble because, if you get into any trouble, I am the last governor of Seychelles because it'll be independent afterwards, so I can't do very much to help you, protect you. If you get in any trouble, I'll just ship you out."

I said, "All right. I'll try to keep a low profile."

### **Background on Seychelles History, 1960-1974, and Memorable Naval Visits**

Riess: What was your study going to be in the Seychelles? I know you had to improvise quickly.

Benedict: I certainly had to improvise. Well, I thought I could do the same kind of thing. I mean, it had been fifteen years since I'd been there, and the Seychelles had changed enormously. It was a poverty-stricken place, as I told you, in receivership. The colony was in receivership to the Treasury. And now, with the airport, which had been built as this deal with the United States--I explained that to you, didn't I?

Riess: No.

Benedict: I have to explain that. So brackets, parentheses.

All right, when the British began to withdraw from the Indian Ocean--and they had bases all around the Indian Ocean: in Aden, in Colombo, in East Africa, of course, so that the Indian Ocean was considered sort of a British pond in a way. Well, they could no longer afford to do this after the war, so they began to close these bases. They got out of



them, they abandoned them. They had a huge base in Ceylon. Trincomalee it was called. And in Aden, an enormous naval base in Aden. All of that was abandoned.

That created the thing that nations hate, i.e., a power vacuum. So the United States came rushing in to fill the power vacuum before the Soviets did. What they conceived of is why don't we get one of these little islands that's a dependency of either Mauritius or Seychelles--because they both had lots of little tiny islands, I mean, Seychelles is spread over something like 600,000 square miles of ocean, it's just an enormous area, and most of them are coral atolls--"Why don't we get one of these, lease it from the Brits, and build a base there?"

The most likely place was called Diego Garcia, which was actually a dependency of Mauritius, not the Seychelles, and had a few people on it. Most of these little islands simply grew coconuts, and every once in a while a freighter would come by and pick up the copra and take it away, but it wasn't really a paying proposition. So there were a few hundred people on these places, mostly Creoles, African-French mixtures, and so they made a deal.

What happened was--it's a nice trivia question: when was the last British colony created? The answer is 1965, when they took a number of these little islands, most of which I think were dependencies of Mauritius, but a few were dependencies of the Seychelles, and created a new colony called the British Indian Ocean Territory. That was a whole new colony. They issued stamps.

But the whole idea was to lease this one island to the Americans, which they did, and the Americans built a perfectly gigantic base there, which was a principal staging point for the Gulf War.

Riess: And an economic boon to the Seychelles?

Benedict: That's right. So the Seychelles took the money and built an airport. Now, the only way you can build an airport in Seychelles is out into the ocean because there isn't any flat land in Seychelles. I think I told you that the governor told me--he was trying to impress me with some statistics about Seychelles--he said, "Do you know," he said, "the Seychelles has the highest per capita use of dynamite in the world?" I said, "No, sir, I didn't know that." "Well," he said, "yes, because there's no flat land, so if you want to plant something, you have to blast."

At any rate, so they created this very expensive airport that put Seychelles on the map. When I got back--here's this long-winded digression--when I got back there, it was the beginning of a building boom. They were beginning to build hotels and modernize everything and so on. It had been this place--I think I told you before--that only two ships a month stopped at.

I just have to tell you one other thing because it really fits in here, although it happened during my second visit to Seychelles. I was in my village in the south part of the island--Takamaka, it was called, Takamaka is a kind of tree that grows in Seychelles--and I was

doing my anthropology things, when the governor's car, which was something called a Mayflower, which I think was a Triumph but built to look like a Rolls-Royce, a mini-Rolls-Royce, it came into the village, with the little flag flying on it. The driver was looking for me, and when he found me, he said, "You must come to Government House right away. The governor wants to see you."

I thought, Uh-oh. I got in and was whisked--we're talking about an island which is only seventeen miles long and four miles wide--to Government House. I went in--it was actually during my first visit this happened--I went in and saw the governor, Sir John Thorpe.

He said, "Tell me, Benedict," he said, "the Americans are coming."

I said, "I beg your pardon, sir?"

He said, "Well, it's International Geophysical Year"--or something--"so the Soviets have been sending a fleet around the Indian Ocean, and when the Americans heard about this, of course, they sent a fleet to the Indian Ocean." Here I was, on the absolute end of the world, with all these geopolitics going on. And, of course, we were really the only Americans on the island.

"Tell me, Benedict," he said, knitting his brows. He said, "Is it true that one cannot consume alcohol on an American naval vessel?" I said, "Well, yes, sir, I'm afraid it is."

"Good God," he said, "how dreadful! What am I going to do?" There was an admiral coming. "I know," he said, "we'll give them a party on shore." I said, "Well, that sounds like a good idea."

Anyhow, when the American naval vessel arrived with its admiral and a couple of other little ships, it caused absolute consternation on the island, and they had this big dinner at Government House, to which Marion and I were invited. It was a real typical British colonial dinner. It was hot as hell. So what did you start with? You started with brown Windsor soup, you know? And it had five courses. There were all these naval officers in their whites, and the British colonial servants, and a few Seychelloise bigwigs.

I was sitting next to the naval intelligence officer at the table. The room was being ventilated by a punka. Do you know what a punka is? A punka comes from India, and what it is is a big sheet of canvas in the middle of the room, which is connected by a rope to a pulley. Somebody pulls the rope, and it goes back and forth like this [demonstrates], and it circulates the air. They wet it, so it produces a little bit of a breeze.

We were sitting at the table, and the punka was going [makes squeaking noise], and this naval officer, young fellow, looked me and said, "Say, what's that?" I explained it to him. He said, "Well, how does it work?" I said, "Do you see that rope? It goes through a hole in the wall and there's somebody behind the wall, pulling that."

He said, "Really? Gee, do you think I could see that?" And I said, "Well, when the gentlemen get up to join the ladies, we might just nip around behind the wall, and you can see."

When the time arrived, and we got up, I took him around behind the wall, and there was an old man lying on his back with one leg crossed over the other and the rope tied around his ankle, and he was moving his leg up and down, and that was what doing it. So here he was, confronted with this vision in white and gold braid. He leapt up, and of course the rope tripped him, and he fell down. They stood, looking at each other for some few seconds, and then the naval officer put out his hand, and he said, "Thank you very much."

But before that, when I was talking with the governor, he said, "There must be some precedent for how you entertain the U.S. Navy. Could you go down to the harbor and see the harbor master and see if you can find out when the last American naval vessel came to Seychelles?" And I said, "Yes, sir, okay."

I went down to the harbor master, and we got out all the books, and we started looking. Here was a record of all the ships that had come into Seychelles. We looked through until we got to the Second World War, and there had not been one single American--not only not an American naval ship, but no American ship at all had been to Seychelles during that period between 1945, the end of the war, and 1960.

Then we began to look at the war years, the whole war years. During the entire Second World War, no American ship had ever put in at Seychelles. By this time I was getting kind of interested. Then we began to look at the period between the wars, and no ship had been there. Then we looked at the First World War, and no ship had been there.

Finally we found the last time an American naval ship had been there was Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet in 1912! No American ship had been there in forty-eight years. When I went back and told the governor that, he was delighted. It was a perfect press release. It really was quite something. But it does demonstrate how the Seychelles was completely the end of the world, untouched, and it's why it had that eighteenth-century flavor.

There's another factor, too, of course, and this was true by the time I--again, I'm a little confused about which visit it was, but it must have been the second time because there weren't any Americans there the first time. Well, there was one, actually. They set up a tracking station to track the satellites, and that was true the second time I was there. But they set up the tracking station before they finished the airport, so they had to fly some little aquatic plane to get there.

**The Expectations of Benedict's Quasi-Government Position**

Riess: It's interesting how you were used by the government. When you were sent down to the harbor master, who did they think you were that you were going to do this job for them?

Benedict: Well, of course, I could have said, "No, I won't do that." Except, you know, I was a quasi-government servant, if you like, because I had been sent by the Colonial Office, so that although I wasn't British, and I certainly was not really a part of the government service, I was being paid a British salary, through the Treasury, I guess, and so I was more or less considered as some sort of expert that had been hired by the government to do things.

Riess: Interesting.

Benedict: But, of course, my agenda was that I wanted to stay on the good side of these people and do what I could to help. Also I found it very interesting! So I was doing that. But that's not what I was supposed to be doing. I was not, of course, supposed to be looking up when American naval vessels had visited the Seychelles.

Riess: That was not an issue of tarnishing your professional standing?

Benedict: No, I didn't see that I was compromising myself in any way if I went down to the harbor and looked at the shipping records.

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Benedict: I was never asked to do anything about which I had some kind of conflict or moral decision to make or something.

You could say that there was some kind of a problem there, say in Mauritius with the Electoral Boundaries Commission that we talked about before, because they did talk to me, they did ask me questions. Often the people in the government would ask me questions, and then I had to decide whether it was all right for me to answer questions.

For instance, I remember one occasion when--I think it may have been back in London, I don't remember exactly--but one of the Colonial Office people asked me, "Do the Indians have lots of savings?" Do they have lots of money under the mattress or something.

I said, "I really don't know, but I don't believe so. What they do have, what takes the place of that, the women have these necklaces which are made out of gold sovereigns." You've probably seen them. I mean, it was kind of a standard thing in India, and you can still see it. Sovereigns are still minted. But often these sovereigns date from--a lot of them date to Victoria.

Riess: So why was that a possible compromise?

Benedict: What the Colonial Office was interested in is what kinds of assets are there in this island. Are there some that we don't know anything about? From the Indians' point of view, what these things were--of course, they were the woman's guarantee, really. But also when the family was in trouble, she could turn them into food or clothing or whatever they needed.

Riess: Were they worn all the time?

Benedict: Very often they were worn all the time.

Riess: It's a lot of weight, isn't it?

Benedict: There weren't that many. I mean, I was talking about peasant women, really, so they would only have maybe half a dozen or eight or ten of these things on a string. Individually they're not very heavy. They're only about the size of--they're smaller than a quarter.

### A Comparative Study of Conjugal Patterns

Riess: We introduced this with getting you to the Seychelles at night in that hotel, and then I derailed it by asking you what your mission was going to be and how you could just move it from Mauritius to the Seychelles, so let's go to that.

Benedict: When I had been there before, one of the techniques I always used, as you know, is to do these censuses, sociological censuses. This was something that was very much in the tradition of British social anthropology, and it had been done by a number of British social anthropologists.

Riess: Did you wire for all your field notes? Was it possible to get them?

Benedict: Well, very fortunately my mother--who is still here at ninety-eight, but she was younger then--I told her where they were, and she came to this house. We had let the house, of course, but she came and got them and sent them to me. But that took a while.

I thought, "What I'll do is to go back and try to work in the same two places that I worked in in 1960." And those two places were--I don't even think we discussed this.

Riess: No.

Benedict: The point was that I wanted to look at an urban and a rural environment. Now, the difference in Seychelles is much less marked than it is in Mauritius because the place is so small. But I went back to my urban informant, who was still there, and I worked with him. It was much harder than it was before, very much harder because everything was much more in flux in Victoria, the only town. I never felt that was very satisfactory. It was easier to do in Takamaka, which had changed less and where the same people were

mostly there. But, of course, in Victoria they mostly weren't there, which in itself was significant.

So that was the idea, to go back there and see. I was very interested in Seychelles in the whole marriage pattern, in the whole conjugal pattern or whatever you want to call it--it doesn't seem actually right to call it marriage--and to see whether that was changing and what was happening in the relations between the sexes. I was very interested in that, and to see whether I could perceive any change in there. There was some change, there's no question.

That's what I was looking at.

Riess: And that rose out of your 1960 study.

Benedict: That's right. When I went to Seychelles in 1960 it was perfectly clear--I mean, it had been clear from Mauritius that there were two kinds of patterns between the sexes. There was what I might call the Indian pattern, which was always marriage and very patriarchal. And then there was you might call the West Indian pattern, which was this sort of weak conjugal link and what used to be called a matrifocal emphasis. I knew about that because I had read a lot of this West Indian stuff, since both Mauritius and the Seychelles are, as I've said before, really West Indian islands in the wrong ocean. From the point of view of their social structure, they're very similar to the West Indies. I was pretty well up on that literature, so I could do that.

### **The Youth Club Project**

Benedict The other thing--I don't know whether this is an aside, but it's important to get it in here, and I realized when I was thinking about it the other evening, that I hadn't touched on this. One of the problems in the Seychelles is that all of the reports, or the few reports that had been made on the Seychelles in all those years that it had been a British territory, talked about how the people were lazy, they were not motivated, there was no organization there, there was nothing but the church, and so on and so on.

It was true that there weren't villages in the sense that there were in Mauritius, there were sort of congeries of dwellings. There was no such thing as a village council. There was no local government. There was none of that structure which had been there in Mauritius. So what was there? Well, there was the church, and the church--in Seychelles' terms it was fairly rich, and so it had some benefits to dole out. The people--I mean, the whole place was nominally Catholic. There were very few non-Catholics in Seychelles.

But there wasn't anything in the way of some kind of local organizations which could spearhead development. There were a few people, young people I talked to, who were interested in youth clubs, and they liked football, and they did that kind of thing. So I thought to myself, "Maybe that's a place where there could be some kind of

development." I think I mentioned last time that Marion and I tried to do something with family planning, and that was also kind of rudimentary.

What had been going on in Seychelles in those years between my two visits was the kind of thing that went on all over the world, this sort of constant stream of experts who had come out and spent two weeks there and then wrote these authoritative reports, based on inadequate information, and nobody paid any attention to the reports anyhow.

At any rate, I thought that maybe we could do something with the youth clubs. Well, about this time, and I don't remember to what extent, really, or whether *I* started it or whether it came from some other source or whatever it is, but the head of the Nuffield Foundation--and the Nuffield Foundation is like the Ford Foundation, Nuffield made Morris and Austin cars--the head of that was a man called Leslie Farrer-Brown, and he came to Seychelles, and we met, and we sort of hit it off, and I put this idea of maybe developing some kind of youth clubs there.

He got very enthusiastic about that, and I took him all around and showed him what I could do. Gave him a little tour and everything. And he said, "Okay, we'll just finance some social work here. You find people who can do the social work and we'll see if we can't finance it."

Okay, so a little applied anthropology!

Riess: It's not that you put it into a report and walked away, you put it into action.

Benedict: I tried to put it into action. Well, it was not a success. He then went back to England, and we saw him later. He became quite prominent.

But the first problem was it was very, very hard to find people [to staff the youth club]. There were some people who had some education and so on, and some interest, but it didn't work, it just didn't work. There wasn't the structure there, there wasn't the will there, they had no experience in doing this. It all seemed--I don't know, it was really like being in a bin of cotton wool. So although we did set it up and they tried to run it for a little while, it just didn't work in the least.

Anyhow, I kept doing my census. I kept doing that and going around. I did it both times, of course. We're in 1975 now?

Riess: We're in 1975, yes. By 1975 was it possible to have youth clubs, or was that something you were trying to do?

Benedict: I didn't even try to do it in 1975.

*Men, Women, and Money, and Marion Benedict's Co-Authorship*

Benedict: I have to tell you--I think it's very important to realize how you feel as a person about the place you're working in. Now, I loved Mauritius. I thought it was fascinating, and I was very interested in it, and I was very involved in it. I did not like the Seychelles. Marion liked the Seychelles, but I didn't like it.

Riess: Could I ask something about Marion's role? It is of great interest to me. I'd like to know how involved she was, how she was trained, how much a part of the package she was, how you had thought about that ahead of time, how she fits into some tradition of wives coming along on the team, how improvised it all was, or whether it was really thought about ahead of time.

Benedict: It was pretty improvised. What happened was--don't forget, when we went there in 1960--

Riess: --you had little children.

Benedict: They were very little, and so Marion had to spend a lot of time with them, looking after them. She was always interested in what was going on, and, of course, we had servants and everything. We had nannies, you know, had to have, actually. But she didn't do any serious field work then. She had had no formal training in anthropology or anything else. But, of course, she'd been around anthropologists for a very long time, and so she knew. And she is also extremely intelligent.

So when I started to do this in 1975, she got the idea that she wanted to do something, too, and I thought that was a good idea as well. But we soon found out we really couldn't work together. In the first place, she didn't have any entree into the places where I worked because I had done that all by myself in 1960, so she didn't even know those people. I mean, she'd met some of them, but she didn't know them.

On the other hand, she was much more comfortable in the area in which we lived, and she got to know those people, especially the one she talks a lot about in the book.

Riess: Her informant.

Benedict: Her informant.

And we had heard all this stuff about witchcraft, of course. Socially we moved mostly with the upper British civil servants, as we had in Mauritius. You know, by the time I got to Seychelles--well, that will come later. At any rate, we never had--you know, some of the questions that you raised really don't apply, but let me try to answer them because it does seem to me it will make it clearer. Is that okay?

Riess: Yes.



Benedict: All right. Now, that business about the two separate titles. We made those up afterwards. I never thought of it that way.

Riess: My question was what's the meaning of the two separate titles in the book, the structure of the book. The book is called *Men, Women and Money in the Seychelles*. Marion's section of the book is about the pursuit of the Seychelloise, and yours, of Seychelles. Whether you thought about it before or after, it's an interesting distinction.

Benedict: Well, it is. What we found, when we were trying to work on this together--we would read each other our field notes and so on, but our approaches were very, very different. Marion's whole training had been in English literature. Her basic approach was really very different than mine, and we just couldn't work together. We either fought or we laughed. And so we realized that we couldn't do that.

On the other hand, we did act as correctives to each other because I never felt that anything that she wrote was just way out of line with anything that I had seen, and vice versa, so that we were in general agreement about what we were finding. We both were on the same island.

Riess: Did you know when you set out that you would include whatever she did in your report?

Benedict: Well, when it came to writing this up--in the first place, of course, I wasn't doing a report because the second time I was coming from here and simply had this grant from the university.

Riess: So did you think of writing a book?

Benedict: Oh, yes. I mean, you always think of writing a book.

Riess: Did you think of writing a book with two points of view?

Benedict: We thought of writing a book jointly, and then we realized we couldn't do it jointly, and so we got this idea: why don't we do it in two bits? We thought that might be an interesting way of doing it. We hadn't really known anybody who had done that before, so we thought, "Let's just try doing it that way."

Then the question was which part comes first and which part comes second.

Riess: I think you might have envied her her liberty to play with ideas in a way that you couldn't. Did you?

Benedict: No, I didn't. I couldn't do that. I couldn't do what she did. I mean, I need to work with some kind of constraints. I couldn't be as free a person as she is. So I didn't envy that at all. It was just something I couldn't do. And, of course, she couldn't do what I--or she didn't want to do what I was doing. We just decided to try and do it that way, and when we approached UC Press, Jim Clark was really interested in that idea. He thought it

would be interesting to try and do a book that way. He was very enthusiastic about it, and they agreed to publish it, although I don't think it made much of a splash.

The whole business of creating that book--of course, my part of the book was presented here in seminars and so on, so it was much more of an academic--I had Elizabeth [Colson's] criticisms and so on, which were always very trenchant.

Riess: You had her criticisms of the manuscript?

Benedict: Of the manuscript, before. And I ran--one of the things I innovated in Berkeley was a thesis-writing seminar, but we'll get to that later. Anyhow, I presented my papers in that seminar, so I had a lot of feedback of that kind, and Marion didn't. But on the other hand, she's a much more graceful writer than I am, and she has a sort of natural talent for doing that. She's very good at that, and I'm not.

Riess: Who did Jim Clark think the audience for the book would be? Who did *you* think the audience would be?

Benedict: I thought it would be for a wider audience than the anthropologists. Of course, basically you write for anthropologists, I suppose. On the other hand, I thought that people who were interested in development and were interested in the whole pattern of matrifocal societies would be interested in it. I don't know that I thought very specifically about who would read it.

Riess: Did Jim Clark think it was sort of a cutting edge book in which you had the humanities and the sciences coming together?

Benedict: I don't know. I didn't talk to Jim [Clark] that much about it. But that is certainly what I thought. At that point in my life at Berkeley, I was very much interested in promoting the humanities. I thought the humanities were getting kind of a short shrift at the university, which was going all out for science, and I wanted to promote the humanities. During my time as an administrator, that's one of the things I was doing. So this fitted into that, of course.

Riess: How was this received in the anthropology department?

Benedict: With a yawn.

Riess: With a yawn? Was it a big challenge to their perceptions of book writing?

Benedict: No, I don't think so. You know, there wasn't very much of that kind of internal criticism going on in the department at that time. I don't think they paid any attention to it, frankly.

Riess: It's wonderfully packaged, and it's really an attractive, interesting, fun book.

Benedict: It is fun. And, it was also delightful because we knew this artist there, Michael Adams, who did the illustrations for us. I've got a couple of those illustrations, which were

paintings of his, which I have upstairs--in fact, the one that's on the dust jacket of that book. He is very talented.

Riess: Is it for sale in bookstores now in Seychelles, do you think?

Benedict: I don't know. I sent a whole bunch of them. And he still lives there, Michael and his wife, Heather. I sent him a whole bunch of these books and said, "See if you can flog 'em." They certainly were for sale when it came out. I mean, there isn't really a bookstore in Seychelles, but certainly a couple of the merchants stocked it. It's out of print now, but I think they did. Whether anybody bought it or not is something else again.

Riess: If I were a tourist there, and I came across that book, it would be what I'd want--something about where you are.

Benedict: Well, you know, it's funny because since that time--of course, when I wrote the first sort of pamphlet-y thing<sup>1</sup>, there just wasn't anything on Seychelles. There was nothing. Nobody had ever done any work there *at all*. And then, when it became a tourist destination, then you got all these tourist-y type books. You got the coffee-table type, and you got, What to do when you're in Seychelles. Seychelles sells itself as a tropical paradise, so it was all about tropical paradise.

Riess: Yours was about trouble in paradise.

Benedict: That's right, yes.

### Intrusive and Abusive Possibilities in Anthropology

Riess: Another question--I read somewhere that you thought that anthropology was "far too intrusive."

Benedict: Absolutely.

Riess: I wish you'd talk about that.

Benedict: Okay, I'm happy to talk about that. When I had done my first piece of field work, which, you remember, was among the Chinese, second-generation Chinese in Boston, I felt that it was much too intrusive, that I had no business rooting around in people's lives in that way, and I really made up my mind that I would never, never do that again. I just thought it was a violation of people's privacy. So what? It's like all those great resolutions one makes.

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<sup>1</sup>*People of the Seychelles*, by Burton Benedict, Overseas Research Publication No. 14, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1968.

Of course, you end up doing the very thing that you said you wouldn't. But I always felt that. In fact, I think--when I think about what you were asking before, it's probably the reason that I couldn't do the kind of thing that Marion does. I just didn't do that, I didn't feel comfortable.

Riess: For you it was sticking with the facts.

Benedict: For me, it was sticking with the facts.

Riess: Measurable.

Benedict: Measurable, and at one remove.

Riess: Have you along the way had an informant with whom you've really been close? Or is it the lack of that that's made it less comfortable? Could that have made a difference, is what I guess I'm saying, intrusively?

Benedict: Well, I think that probably this guy in Mauritius I've mentioned several times. I was a pretty close friend of his. He told me a lot about his marital life and so on, and I can say that we became friends. But I never had any really very close, intimate relations with people with whom I worked, I don't think. There was always some distance there. Perfectly friendly, happy relationships. I don't think there was any problem with it, or at least I didn't perceive any problem.

Riess: Is this something that gets discussed in anthropology, this issue of what you might call "too friendly" or "intrusive"? I mean, to be friendly is to be intrusive.

Benedict: In a way, in a way. Well, it is. I mean, people have talked about it. There have been some books recently about the relationships with informants. Certainly sexual relationships between anthropologist and his subjects, if you like.

Riess: Good heavens!

Benedict: Yeah, and there have been plenty of examples of that. Of course it's not ethical, but you certainly hear about it. I think it's not uncommon in anthropology. I mean, if you've got--and somebody has written, there's a recent book about it, which is a collection of stories about this. It's all sort of coming out, this business. And not just males, either. I certainly have known some colleagues, not here, but I had one colleague--.

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Benedict: --people who have married their informants. I knew a female student in England who married a New Guinean.



Burton Benedict examining a bamboo rat trap, Praslin, Seychelles, 1960.



Marion, Helen, and Barbara Benedict wearing locally made hats, Beau Vallon, Seychelles, 1960.



### Rethinking Assumptions about Conjugal Couples

Riess: Another question is about epiphanies, what you can remember of moments when something gelled.

Benedict: When it came together, yes.

Riess: Particularly with the Seychelles? About money?

Benedict: What was striking to me--I think anthropologists always are interested in the relations between the sexes, because it's so such a fundamental link in every society. When you go and work in non-Western societies, that's one of the things that you have to get over, because they're "not like us." And that brings you smack up against your own assumptions, and those *are* assumptions, I mean they're basically not at the conscious level, or not articulated, at any rate.

In this case, one of them is the kind of close relationships between conjugal couples. That's just not an expectation--that is, among Indians, it's not an expectation. It's not what it's about. Women have close relations with other women, and men with other men, but not with each other. And they don't expect it. It's not that they're suffering or missing anything, it's only from our point of view.

Riess: Close relations. You mean emotionally close.

Benedict: Emotionally. No, I'm not talking about sex. For instance, Marion used to tell me when she would go to one of these gatherings of Indian woman in Mauritius that as soon as the men were gone, they would become totally different people. They'd make sexual jokes, and they'd do all kinds of things that they wouldn't dream of doing around a man. And of course, this was very relevant in our family-planning work.

But there was just the feeling that you wouldn't go to somebody of the opposite sex for understanding. You wouldn't expect them to understand you, and you wouldn't expect to understand them. It's probably overstated, but you see what I mean.

Now, it's different--I was talking about Indians, and it's very clear among the Indians, where there's such a distinct structural difference. But if you're talking about the sort of conjugal relationship, it's really the same thing. In Seychelles, it's the women who have close relationships with each other, and the men with each other, too. Not the same way as among the Indians, but--.

As far as epiphany is concerned, what I had seen was--it wasn't any sort of sudden *éclaircissement*, or something. It was just that I had seen this hostility--in the Indian case, you don't see the hostility. What was so striking in the Seychelles' case was that there was real hostility between the sexes. And given the kind of training that I had, I looked for what were the structural aspects which were creating this hostility, or maintaining this hostility. That's where the money came into it, of course, because that was all that

business about the men earning money and what they did with it, which I'm sure you saw in the book. So that was a very striking phenomenon.

Now, with the Indians, that wasn't the case. The women were expected to be dependent, or if they were working--for instance, if they had a shop and the woman was doing some of the work of the shopkeeper, it all went into the family pool. I mean, they did it that way. They looked on it--that's why that article that I wrote about "Family Firms and Economic Development"<sup>2</sup>--I tried to get the developers to understand what the value of a family firm was, which had to do with what we're talking about.

It was really borne in on me. I guess that was one of the things that was so striking about being in Seychelles, was seeing that. It's not very pleasant, you know.

### Looking at Prostitution and Arranged Marriages

Riess: Back to an earlier thought, Marion had women as her informants, so did you always have men as your informants?

Benedict: No, I didn't. In fact, from that point of view it was easier in Seychelles because you *could* talk to the women, and the women often provided the most insights.

I told you the story about the governor who asked me about, could I look at this terrible problem they had in Seychelles?

Riess: I don't think so.

Benedict: This was the first trip. I was staying with that governor, and he said to me, "You know, Benedict, we've got really quite a difficult problem here."

"Yes, sir, what is that?"

"It's prostitution. Do you think you could find out something about it for me?"

I said, "Well, I'll try." I think I probably made this into a better story than it actually was, which I tend to do, but what I did was when I got in my village and worked there for a while--and I guess you could say this was an epiphany--there was an old woman who worked for me, who did the cooking and so on. She would come into my place and prepare a meal for me, and--there wasn't anything to clean because there wasn't anything there!

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<sup>2</sup>*Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, Spring 1968.



At any rate, I would ask her questions. I asked her one day, I said, "What about a woman who--?" I forget now how I put it. I had gone around asking a number of men and women this question. I said, "What about a woman who--?" I used every synonym I could think of in English and French and Creole to mean "prostitute." Nobody seemed to know what I was talking about.

This old woman--I was asking her about the same thing, and finally she said, "Oh, you mean a woman who does something bad." And I said, "Yes. What does she do?" And she said, "She sleeps with a man and doesn't expect to get anything for it." That was her definition of a bad woman. So, you know, I guess that made it pretty clear!

Riess: Yes, it did.

Benedict: I was never able to satisfy the governor. He really couldn't understand that at all! But I didn't really go back to him, I really didn't think that was part of my brief, to go and talk to him about that kind of thing. I really didn't. So at any rate, I guess you could say that was a kind of epiphany.

And in Mauritius--there was another epiphany there. I remember coming home and saying to Marion at one point, "Marion, you know, I really think arranged marriages are best." And she said, "What?" Because I had by that time got so into what the Indians were doing and how they were arranging their marriages and their reasons for doing it that way, that it seemed to me a very logical, good way of doing things. Of course, it's done by not only the Indians but the Chinese, so it's a majority pattern in the world.

I began to see that, and that was the same problem that I had when I was working with Richard Titmuss and all those social improvers at the London School. They were trying to devise some plan to introduce some kind of family planning into Mauritius. One of their notions was they were going to do it by increasing benefits to people. One of their ways of doing this was that you paid a benefit to the father of a girl if he prevented her from getting married until she reached the age of twenty-one. And these guys had figured out on their charts and everything that if that became a regular pattern, then the birthrate would go down.

Well, it's a real example of this idiotic way that people behave--I'm afraid economists are very much at fault in this way, as though people behaved in a rational way. You can't--if you talk to an Indian father about this, he would say, "Oh, you can't do this. In the first place, you have to arrange for a good marriage for your daughter, and she's very hard to control. I mean, after she gets to be about fourteen, she's almost impossible to control, so the best thing to do with her is to marry her off. Otherwise she will go out of control and it would lead to all kinds of chaos." So he felt real constraints on him for her early marriage, which, of course, is an Indian pattern. You know? You can see the logic in it. So that was, again, a kind of epiphany.

Riess: But on the other hand, you can make constraints on their childbearing. They could marry early and it would take them out of play.

Benedict: That's right. That was the other thing that Titmuss and Co. were saying. Yes, they would give benefits, child benefits, to the first three children, but no more.

Riess: I remember reading about this. So they all rushed to have the first three children.

Benedict: That's right. They all rushed to have the first three children, you see, to get the benefit. And, of course, their general idea was that the more children you had, the more likely somebody would take care of you when you got old. In a society which has no social security, it's not so stupid, you know?

### **Influence of Berkeley's Anthropology Department on Seychelles Work**

Riess: Having been at Berkeley for nearly ten years before you went out to the Seychelles the second time, were you looking at things differently? After all, now you were an American anthropologist.

Benedict: I don't think so. And I think there are a number of reasons for that. Probably the most important reason is that in a way my return trip to the Seychelles was already structured, since I was going to go back to the same villages and try to find the same people and ask them the same questions that I'd asked before. That's the first thing.

The second thing is that Elizabeth [Colson] and [William] Shack and I had formed a kind of little British enclave within the department, and that worked out in our teaching, too. We'll get to that when we get to Berkeley. But we wanted to do things in the way that we had been trained to do them and we felt was right, and we did not like the kind of what seemed--well, let me speak for myself--what seemed to me the sort of flaccid way in which American anthropology proceeded.

And the three of us taught the introductory graduate seminar together. I don't know whether Elizabeth mentioned this to you, but we taught [that], and we taught this thesis-writing seminar together. So we had graduate students at the beginning and at the end of their careers as graduate students. When I came here--let's see, Elizabeth came first, and then I came, and then Shack came. When I came here, there was a lot of interest among my colleagues in British anthropology, so they were quite receptive to this. It wasn't until later that they stopped being receptive to it, that they became hostile to it.

## VIII APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY AND ROLE ANALYSIS IN ANIMALS AND MEN

### “Scratch an Anthropologist...”

Riess: The Wenner-Gren 1963 Applied Anthropology conference. That looks important.

Benedict: That can be easily disposed of. It looks rather grand, but was in fact quite unimportant. What happened is that I was doing applied anthropology at the LSE, and I was working with a woman called Theresa Spens, and she was the daughter of the Bishop of Ely, near Cambridge. She was a do-gooder. I'm not denigrating her.

Riess: Was she also teaching there?

Benedict: She was an occasional lecturer there, but she worked a lot in West Africa. She was very much interested in health education. We worked together quite a bit. One of the things that we did is we trained social workers of various types, both at the LSE and at the School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. I did classes and so did Terry. So we did these things together, and we became friends.

Well, we got this idea of having a conference, and getting people from various disciplines together.

Riess: You got money for a conference from the Wenner-Gren Foundation.

Benedict: We got a little money--it was a very small grant. And we got together people who were interested in this who were in Britain at that point. They were people who were teaching at various British universities, and they all came together, and we had a conference for two or three days, and we produced a little report, a precis of which was published in *Current Anthropology*? Someplace like that.

Riess: It didn't turn into a book.

Benedict: It didn't turn into anything. It only lasted two or three days. So really it probably shouldn't even be in my CV. It wasn't important.

Riess: On the issue of applied anthropology, you wrote the paper that was published in *Man* in 1967. And I did pick up the fear that one's scientific integrity would be compromised.

Benedict: Oh, yes, that was certainly a very great fear. It's a very odd business, but as I told you last time, I think--you know, when you scratch an anthropologist you find a social reformer. Almost all social anthropologists, even such an austere anthropologist as Evans-Pritchard, started out as applied. I mean, they all got some applied work at some point or another. And they were often sent to the field to do what might be called applied.

Riess: And then?

Benedict: And then what happened is that they got into doing theoretical work and developing various schemes of their own, schemas, and applied anthropology became a sort of orphan child. I mean, it was devalued, dis-valued. I remember talking with Lucy Mair about this quite a lot. She was an applied anthropologist. She wrote a whole book on applied anthropology. I remember her telling me, "If you continue on to being an applied anthropologist, you won't make it to the top of the field because it's not considered--"

So there was a lot of feeling about that, and I thought, and still think, that was quite wrong. As I said in that article, it's a place where you can test your theories. What's happening to anthropology now, seems to me is it's retreating into some kind of woolly philosophy.

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Benedict: What E.-P. [Evans-Pritchard] was doing--he said that, really, anthropology is a kind of history and that what it should do is to face up to this and be history.

Riess: You mean record history.

Benedict: Well, that anthropologists are basically historians. That's what they're doing. You record what's there, and that's history. You try to record the difference between, say, the Nuer, where he worked, and the Dinka, who were the people next door. You see what the minute differences are between these, and that would give you perhaps some historical principles about the way societies develop or something like that. But it's not practical. And [he says] that anthropology has no practical application at all. That was certainly the orthodox thing that I knew in Britain. There is no practical application for anthropology, so it's just a delusion to think that there is.

Riess: In the article in *Man* in 1967, which was expanded from a paper given at the SAA (Society of Applied Anthropology) meeting, you say: "...three ways in which I believe applied anthropology is related to anthropological theory: The first is through the prediction of the likely consequences of a proposed innovation. The second is through the making of recommendations. The third is through the application of a theory to a

situation where the results may have practical consequences. All three involve an intimate knowledge of the field, the formulation of testable predictions, and follow-up studies to see if predictions are borne out. Applied anthropology, properly conceived, should be the testing ground of theory."

Benedict: I do agree with that.

Riess: But people would stand up and say no.

Benedict: Well, they wouldn't stand up. But they simply didn't want to do it, and I don't know why. Actually, Elizabeth [Colson] has done it more than anyone else I know. And George, too. Interesting, because, of course, they come from very different kinds of training.

Riess: Done it in the ways that you were writing about? Not so much hands on, but the predictions, the formulations?

Benedict: I think so. What Elizabeth has done is ask, what are the consequences of moving people out of the way of this [Kariba] dam, out of the way of this lake, and how is that going to affect all of their religious structure and those spirit shrines and all that she talks about.

Riess: Applied anthropology, then, has to be linked to long-term work.

Benedict: I think it does. I don't think you can just go in and try to do a quick fix, and that's what the demand is for, a quick fix. You send an expert out, and he comes back and gives you: "Oh well, it's simple. You just do this, that, the other." But, of course, it often doesn't work.

So yes, I still think that's important, I think that's the way to do things. That means that you can't be an expert everywhere. You really have to confine yourself, the way Elizabeth and George have done, to one particular field which you know very well. I think that the best anthropologists have done that. I think the ones that sort of fly about are not able to do it.

I think what you just read in that article--Jonathan Benthall, the director of the Royal Anthropological Institute, was always trying to get me to write a follow-up to that article, which he really liked. I never did it.

Anyhow, I don't think I did any applied anthropology after that, really. I mean, what I did was in connection with Mauritius and Seychelles. If I had been permitted to go back to Mauritius, I might have done something along those lines, but I don't know. Who knows?

Riess: When you and George [Foster] taught applied anthropology, what did you teach? How to think about it?

Benedict: Yes. I don't exactly--the way he teaches it, you can see in that book of his, called *Technology and Social Change*. It's funny. I reviewed that for *Man* before I ever met

George. I did not give it a very good review! But he's never held it against me. Because he wouldn't.

I can only tell you the way *I* taught it, and the way I taught it was what kinds of problems happen when--I would look at the economic problems that especially occur with globalization and development. I would look at health problems. I would look at problems with trying to do community development or family planning or even architecture, because part of the problem is that the architects become the planners, become social planners, so you've got to fit into this particular box, which very often doesn't work.

I mean, for instance, if you think of architects making little teeny weeny Levittowns all over the place and think of what you know about Seychelles, you can see that's not going to work, you know? So there are a lot of things like that that can be seen right off. What happens in most development agencies is that the technicians become the planners, willy-nilly. And it's not good. I mean, you build in failure in many cases. There's plenty to say about that kind of thing.

Riess: It's interesting, teaching eighteen- and nineteen-year-olds to think about something that they can't even imagine, can they?

Benedict: No. At Oxford, where E.-P. was, anthropology is only a graduate subject, you can't take it as an undergraduate.

Riess: That suggests that you have to have something under your belt.

Benedict: Yes. Here--now, of course, it's really become a kind of general education subject. It's true that it has something to offer there because at least you can get across the idea to people that there are other ways of doing things.

### More on Royal Society Population Study Group

Riess: Let's pick up again on population. You introduced the subject last week, and how intensely you had gotten into it. And how you were courted and considered being a big population administrator.

Benedict: That's right, and how I didn't do that. That's right. The reason I brought this [document] along was to show you about the population study group, which I think I had mentioned last time. This is the Royal Society. This was in England. It was really very interesting and important. In the first place, as I think I've told you, it went on for several years.

Riess: Sponsoring studies?

Benedict: Sponsoring studies and having these meetings. It was a pretty distinguished group of people who were in it. You probably don't recognize most of those names, but they were all pretty hot-shot types. I mean, they were all leaders in their fields. They would have these meetings at the Royal Society, in which papers were presented, and they would publish the papers in little things like this. [presents document to interviewer] You can take it and photocopy it, if you want.

Riess: This was a very idealistic group?

Benedict: It was very idealistic. They were trying to look at it in the broadest possible kind of way. They asked me and Raymond Firth to give [papers]. I was on it. Raymond wasn't on it, but they asked him to come along and give a paper about population control. They were interested in, are there any sort of social mechanisms of population control which operate without contraceptives, that operate in the social structures of various places?

Raymond was interesting to them because he worked in this tiny island called Tikopia, which is a sort of Polynesian outlier in the Pacific where, in fact, you can't have too many people, it is such a tiny island. It has a population of something like 1,200. He wrote these enormously detailed studies of Tikopia. His first book is that thick [demonstrates size], and there are several others. I don't suppose there's anyplace that's been as thoroughly covered as Tikopia. He just had his 100th birthday, by the way.

Riess: Really?

Benedict: Oh, yes. I see him every time I go to London. We take him a meal. And he's still sharp, just the way George is.

At any rate, so what they did in Tikopia is that if a woman had a baby, and the father decided that they couldn't have it, he would come along and just turn the baby over. They didn't like doing it, but they saw the problem and that's the way they handled it. That was sort of an indigenous thing that grew up there. Nobody told them to do that.

Riess: It was easier than abortion.

Benedict: Yes, I guess they didn't know how to do abortions. I don't know.

Riess: Or easier than contraception.

Benedict: They didn't have contraceptives. I mean, all they had was coitus interruptus or something.

Riess: It's interesting, though, that there haven't been any kind of natural contraceptives.

Benedict: Well, there have been. I don't know about Tikopia, but certainly in India and Indonesia and other places there have been, where people take stuff that bring on contractions.

Anyhow, that's the kind of thing that they were very interested in, and that's why they wanted anthropologists on it. Raymond came along and told them about Tikopia.

Then they said that they wanted me to try and survey the field and look at what kinds of constraints there were on population growth in non-Western societies or whatever word you want to use for these people. So that's what I did, and that's--"Population Regulation in Primitive Societies," I guess I called it, although I wouldn't use that word now.<sup>1</sup> There had been a study of this by an Indian, called Moni Nag. It was published by Yale quite a long time ago [1962]. So I spent a long time doing this--and the U.N., UNESCO had done some work on this.

Riess: So you were doing a library report.

Benedict: I was doing a library report, I looked at monographs and reports, and I presented this paper. That got me a kind of reputation as somebody who knew about this sort of thing. I mean, I think the conclusion was that certain societies in certain circumstances could do something, but in general it was not going to work. They couldn't rely on that kind of thing. So they were very interested in this.

They were also interested--there was a man called [V.C.] Wynne-Edwards who had this sort of homeostatic scheme, brilliant thing.

Riess: What does that mean?

Benedict: Something that comes into balance by itself. If it goes too much one way, then it corrects itself.

Riess: Like animal populations, maybe?

Benedict: Exactly, and that's what he was doing, animal populations. They wanted to look at that as a kind of possibility. It was really an amazing group to belong to, and it went on for, I don't know, three or four years. It's in my CV, how long it went on [1965-1968].

Riess: Was there an official relationship between the group and LSE?

Benedict: No, because they got people from all over. They would get distinguished visitors in from outside or overseas.

They had these crazy ideas about the distribution of contraceptives. When the pill became available, they were going to get huge truckloads of pills and take them all around Indian villages. I mean, really, you know. And put them in strips. And somebody pointed out that if they put them in strips, and the women were to take them every day, if they did this for very long, all women in India would menstruate at the same time!

Riess: Do you think there were any racist aspects to this?

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<sup>1</sup> "Population Regulation in Primitive Societies" in A. Allison (ed.), *Population Control*, Harmondsworth and Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1970.



Benedict: No, I don't think it was thought of in a racist way at all.

Riess: Well, but you're looking at under-developed countries.

Benedict: No, because they looked at European countries, too, and they looked at Britain. I mean, they had--David Glass, who was a professor of sociology at the LSE, he was looking at this kind of thing. You know, they were starting with Malthus. They really went into it. They went into it in every possible way they could. I mean, it was absolutely fantastic, the seminars, you can imagine.

Riess: Where did they meet?

Benedict: They met at the Royal Society. And then we all had dinner, with wine.

### Initiatives for Change. Against the Odds

Riess: It must have been exciting to be in the middle of that, and yet you couldn't do a darned thing, could you?

Benedict: Not much we could do. I guess at the end they made recommendations. I don't suppose anybody paid any attention to them, but they were certainly very earnest. They saw at that point--this was some time ago--that there was a really serious problem they really needed to do something about, and then they had to look at it from every point of view, and the idea of getting this group of high-powered academics together was not to be constrained by governments and not to be constrained by time or anything like that, but to try and just deal with it.

Riess: How did they throw their weight and influence behind the Family Planning Association or the International Planned Parenthood?

Benedict: It wasn't that kind of a group. I mean, they specifically were not going to do that. They were going to look at everything, and make their reports and publish these things.

Riess: The United Nations' unwillingness to take a stand about family planning--is there anything you can say about that?

Benedict: The United Nations is basically a political forum, and it can't force people to do anything. It can't even force the United States to pay its dues, you know? So in many ways it's quite ineffective. I think this is one of the reasons they wanted to disassociate themselves from all that.

And then each country had its own kind of aid program. I mean, we had AID [Agency for International Development], we had the Peace Corps, the Brits had something called

VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas). And there were all the agencies that were operating within Britain, itself, as there are in the United States and many other countries.

Riess: How do you discuss change within the context of anthropology?

Benedict: Well, of course, anthropologists have done a lot in trying to document and even recommend changes. There has been some very interesting work that was done fairly early on, the kind of thing George was involved in. There were two very important books. One of them was called *Human Problems in Technological Change* [a casebook, Russell Sage Foundation, 1952]. They did talk about how you can change things. It was a series of case studies, and then each case study was analyzed.

There was one group--I can't remember the details, I think these were American Indian groups, and one group was the Navajo, and then there was another group, a smaller group, the Papago. They found that in the big group, which had a lot of government backing and a whole lot of agencies and so on concentrating on it, they weren't able to produce much change. In the small group, which had very little backing, the people, themselves, had to take the initiative, and things did change.

That's very crudely put, but it was something like that. And then there was another book called *Health, Culture, and Community* [case studies of public reactions to health programs, Russell Sage Foundation, 1955] which also did that same kind of thing. So there were some good case studies of this sort of thing. Both books were very important in applied anthropology. I guess they would seem hopelessly out of date now--.

### Institute of Commonwealth Studies--"Sociological Aspects of Smallness"

Benedict: I don't think I ever talked about the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, did I? Because that was fairly important, and it kind of relates to what we're talking about. I became a governor of that, or on the Committee of Management of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, from 1965 to '68.

Riess: We haven't talked about that.

Benedict: And the Ethnographic Film Committee, we haven't talked about, either.

All right, the Institute of Commonwealth Studies--this won't take very long--was an institute within the University of London, which was set up to study the commonwealth countries. It still exists. It drew its membership from any branch of the University of London. The University of London is like the University of California, a huge conglomerate with a whole lot of colleges and institutes and so on.

They had seminars. And what's important about it is that one of the seminars was about these very small places that are now trying to be independent. What's the future for

these places? Can they be independent? In what sense are they independent? I was in charge of that seminar, and we went on for, I don't know, a few years, and then we produced this little book, which I edited, called *Problems of Smaller Territories* [Athlone Press, 1967].

The piece that I wrote for it, which was published in a number of different places, in different versions, was "Sociological Aspects of Smallness" Also in the *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* [1968], my article is "Small Societies." What are the problems of small societies that are not the problems of big societies? One political problem, for instance, is in a small society there can be no effective opposition. You see?

Riess: Yes.

Benedict: And so the efforts of the British to impose the Westminster model, or the Americans to impose a congressional model on small societies are doomed to failure from the beginning, because the opposition has to make a deal with--I mean, they all have to be part. You see the problem?

Riess: Yes.

Benedict: So things like that. These are quite simple things.

Riess: Interesting to figure out the cut-off point.

Benedict: Exactly. So this "Sociological Aspects of Smallness"--that was the paper that I also presented at the ASA conference that we talked about last time.

By this time--the British government and all these various connections that I'd had--see, I got myself into a real British network. So then they began to have very fancy things like this [shows document]. This one was a Colonial Office conference in 1965, and you can see from this what kinds of people were involved in that.

Riess: A lot of knights and esquires.

Benedict: That's right, but also they were governors of small territories.

Riess: "The Colonial Office Conference." And what was it about? And it's all private and confidential.

Benedict: Oh, yes, it was all confidential, but I don't think it has to be anymore. Well, let's read the first paragraph.

Riess: All right. [reads]: "The Colonial Office remains responsible for thirty-one territories. They have a total population of under ten million, half in Hong Kong and South Arabia. Most of the remaining territories are small, many of them remote or with very limited natural resources... Questions to be settled for those territories for which independence can be the goal. The main outstanding problem is to determine what kind of

constitutional arrangements there should be in a post-colonial era for those territories, which do not wish for or would not be able to sustain independence as separate, sovereign states or within a federation."

Benedict: You see? So it was fairly important. And I was a member of that, and that was really pretty interesting. For instance, one of the things that they were considering was integration. Now, this is what the French had done, with small colonies like Reunion.

**More on Methodology. Using Notes and Queries**

[Interview 7: June 21, 2001] ##

Benedict: I have been thinking about what particular things I have done that I would consider significant in my history. We've talked about population, we've talked about applied anthropology, we've talked about small societies. We have talked somewhat, in passing, about plural societies. The two other things are--ethnographic film, we haven't talked much about that, have we?

Riess: No. A quick question before we go to that is about what you kept in the way of daily journals, if you did any diary-keeping, whether that's something you've done all your life.

Benedict: No. I've done it sporadically, and, of course, when I was doing my field work I did it religiously.

Riess: And you used that material.

Benedict: I used that. I kept two kinds of journal. One was a daily journal of what I did every day, and the other was a classified journal in which I classified the observations that I made under various headings, like kinship and economics and politics and so on. And these two things were cross-referenced, so I've got, I don't know, fifteen volumes, foolscap volumes of these things, which cover Mauritius, Seychelles.

And then I have a third type of journal that I kept, which was a census, because I went around and visited, as I think you saw in my book, every single household and took a census and wrote it all down and made kinship charts of every family. I still have all that material. It's a great whole shelf-full of stuff.

Riess: Can you mine those notes? Would you think there would be material that would be valuable to mine at some point?

Benedict: Gosh, I haven't looked at it in a while. Mine it for what?

Riess: Oh, you know, the world looks at things differently thirty years later, so you might put together new questions. And would your notes be broad enough, let's say, to mine for new answers?

Benedict: Well, I think the one thing that I learned somewhere was that it's very important to put down your first impressions, because you never see things the same way again. You get quite used to things. I remember when I first went to England, I was amazed at a lot of things which, of course, I don't even see now. I was amazed at pillar boxes, for instance, you know? So I did a lot of that when I went to the field. It might be fun to look at that again, but I haven't done that.

Riess: Did you innovate any of your note-taking techniques, or were they more or less what you had learned to do?

Benedict: I guess they're more or less what I'd learned to do, but of course you adapt them to what you want to do.

There was a sort of "bible" that anthropologists used to take out with them--we mentioned this earlier--which was called *Notes and Queries in Anthropology*. It ran to six editions. It was published by the RAI, and I have a couple of editions of it upstairs. I guess maybe the first edition might have been the very end of the nineteenth century or certainly the very beginning of the twentieth. It was to be given to missionaries and district officers and so on who were going to these strange places. It was a sort of compendium of what to look at and what to note.

For instance, the cover had a ruler so you could use the cover to measure! It told you all kinds of things: how to pay attention to house construction, how to pay attention to this, that and the other--all kinds of stuff. I always had that with me, or I did certainly when I went to Mauritius, and when I sort of didn't know what to do, I would look up something in there and then go down and look at house construction or something of that sort.

Riess: That's interesting. American anthropologists didn't have that.

Benedict: They never had anything like that, I don't think.

Riess: That's nifty.

Benedict: Yes, I think it is nifty, and I think it's kind of a pity that there isn't such a thing, because it was very comprehensive. Of course, it was based on a cataloguing view of things, but it was certainly very useful to me. It was compiled by committees at the RAI, which consisted of physical anthropologists and archaeologists and material culturalists and social anthropologists and so on, so they had a lot of input. That is, it wasn't just put together by one person or anything like that. It's interesting. I'll show it to you.

Riess: And you said you don't tape record?

Benedict: No, I didn't tape record. When I went out to Mauritius was in the days when the tape recorder was as heavy as a typewriter. Anyhow, I have a prejudice against these things, and the reason--I mean, there's a basis to it. It's I think been borne out in what I've seen in my students. When you have something like that, you tend to pay more attention to it than you pay to what's going on in front of you. It's not like this, where we're just talking and the recorder is running.

I got very much into this, and this will lead us into the films because it applies, of course, to filming too. When these things first appeared, tape recorders and so on, there was the idea you just tape record, and then you make notes afterwards from the conversations. It doesn't work. I never did it, in fact.

I did do a few little films, but I didn't do any films until after I had been there for a long time, so I knew what it was that I wanted to film, and I took a lot of still photographs. I took both color and black and white, and I would get the black and whites developed and then give copies to the people whose pictures I'd taken. People really liked that.

### Ethnographic Film Committee, and David Attenborough

Riess: You and film go way back.

Benedict: Yes, we go way back. And the RAI had some very interesting, really very old films. One in particular was taken by an American missionary in Japan in the twenties, about the Ainu bear ceremony. That was really a unique film.

Well, I was interested in the whole idea of filming, and so I helped form the Ethnographic Film Committee at the RAI. I was quite active in the RAI, as you can see from my CV. I was on the Committee of Management and all of that. And when the Ethnographic Film Committee was organized, one of the people who wanted to be on it was David Attenborough.

Riess: Oh, David Attenborough!

Benedict: Yes, so he was on it, and I was on it. At that point, of course, he had already been making some of these nature films. He started out as a collector for zoos, you know.

Riess: I didn't know.

Benedict: His early books were called *Zoo Quest for a Dragon* and things like that. Two or three like that. Anyhow, as you can tell from looking at him on television, he's an absolutely, utterly charming man.

He and I became great friends. We just hit it off. He got more and more interested in the people that he was encountering when he was making these wildlife films, so he said,

"Why don't I come and take a certificate in anthropology at the LSE, and you can be one of my teachers?" I said, "That sounds great." So he took a year off from the BBC--well, he'd been there as part time--and he came to the LSE, and he went to lectures and behaved like a regular student.

Riess: A certificate has some value? What does that mean?

Benedict: It's called a diploma in social anthropology. Yes, it has some value in England, or it did have, I don't know whether it does anymore. You take a course, I think you write a paper. Anyhow, he did that. I mean, he didn't, certainly, need a diploma in anthropology, but he did it, you know. He's very serious about what he does. He's also extremely musical.

Riess: He has a wonderful ear for the birds.

Benedict: Yes, he has a wonderful ear, and also he's an absolutely incredible mimic. He can mimic almost any accent. And, of course, his brother is the famous actor, Richard Attenborough, now Lord Attenborough.

At any rate, so David was very interested in this. At the same time all this was going on--a little bit of a tangent here--there was an anthropologist called Elizabeth Bott, who was a Canadian who had been trained in Chicago in anthropology and had a one-year appointment at the LSE when I first came there. She's about my age, I think almost exactly my age. She was teaching there, and so was Dave Schneider. This was all at the same time. We got to be good friends.

She eventually married another Canadian called James Spillius, and they went to do field work in Tonga, the island of Tonga. When they went out there--and there are many wonderful stories about them which I won't get into--David wanted to make a film, and so he went there to make a film with them. But it didn't work out very well because their idea was they had these huge ceremonies, where people came and presented stuff to the queen. What they wanted was for David to take a film of every single person and what they were presenting. Well, they were presenting yams and pigs, and after a while, you know, it doesn't become what you'd say sort of a prime-time kind of film, so he didn't want to do that. So they had a little squabble about it.

Anyhow, eventually what David did was to put together a series for TV called "The Tribal Eye" [1976]. I don't know if you ever saw any of them, but they were wonderful. One of them was about the Indians of the Northwest coast, one of them was about an African group, and so on. Those films are used--I certainly used them in teaching when I was giving the introductory lectures here. Anyway, that is why he took his anthropology [diploma]. They were not sensationalist, "life among the cannibals" or anything like that. Okay, this is the end of the digression.

So I was very interested in this Ethnographic Film Committee. It was in its infancy then, although it's become very important, as you know, and now in England they have an ethnographic film festival every year, [at] which they give prizes, and the commercial TV over there has taken it up, and it's really become a big thing.

**British Film Industry, History Selection Committee, and Films in Teaching**

Benedict: But at that point, what they were interested in was preserving--they didn't have any money, of course--preserving some of these early films and making a sort of archive. That's how I got onto that committee, whatever it was. And the British Film Institute was the one that was doing this.

Riess: [looking at CV] Yes, British Film Institute, History Selection Committee [1963-1966].

Benedict: They were trying to preserve a selection of these films because during the war they had made an enormous number of propaganda films. All kinds of films were made during the war. Most of these early films, as in Hollywood--of course, the really early ones were made on nitrate film, and you know what happens to nitrate film.

Riess: No. It self-destructs?

Benedict: Yes, and sometimes it blows up and starts a fire. So you have to copy it. I mean, it's very dangerous. If you have old nitrate film and you put it in a projector, the friction of the projector--[sound of catching fire]!

So this history selection committee--there were large numbers of films, and we had to decide which films should be preserved. There was a committee that was made up of experts in various fields. There was an historian and an anthropologist and a political scientist and so on, and some film people. We would meet and make these decisions. And then they all went into an underground storage facility in the Midlands or somewhere.

Riess: Was there technology to copy the films?

Benedict: Yes, there was, and they did that. But they had to be selective about it because, again, it's expensive to do that. So I got quite interested in doing it.

Meanwhile, this film committee of the RAI, which I think is on there also, I became secretary of that, and we were sort of promoting that. I did that for about five years--it came before the British Film Institute.

Riess: You did films as part of your field work?

Benedict: Yes, but not commercial ones. All I had was a little 8mm camera, so I did films about, say, how people prepared food, for example. I later used these as a teaching device because, of course, they were silent. And when I gave a course in field methods, one of the things I would do: I had one about people making manioc cakes, casava. They had to beat the casava tubers and strain it, and then they made these sort of big flat tasteless cakes out of it.



So I would bring this film to class, and I would say to the class, "Now, you're anthropologists in the field, and this is what you're watching. Make notes. Write it up and tell me what it is that you observe." Of course, they couldn't hear anything. They could just see it. The idea of that was to get them to see *how* they observe things.

Basically, the classes usually fell into two groups. One group would start out with, let's say, "This is a film about people making some kind of cakes." And the other group would start out by saying, "First they did this, and then they did that, and then they did the other."

Riess: Oh, that's very interesting!

Benedict: I said, "Now, that tells you something about yourself and how you observe." They were really quite surprised at that.

Riess: Was that diagnostic of who's going to be a good anthropologist?

Benedict: I don't think so. I think it produces two different kinds of people. One the one hand, it produces a sort of taxonomist who's going to take down all the details. On the other hand, it produces somebody, like a Ruth Benedict, who's going to make some kinds of grand, sweeping generalizations about "these people." "These people are Dionysian," or whatever it happens to be, you see?

Riess: Did other people use your films to make that lesson, or was that just your thing?

Benedict: I think it was just my thing, actually. I didn't make any secret of it. I mean, people recognized the value of that, but you could do it in different ways. You can ask people to go and actually observe a flea market or a funeral. I did that, too.

### Ethology, Comparative Behaviors

Benedict: At any rate, that really is, I think, mostly about the film. I didn't make any serious films, except that David, and Desmond Morris, who was also in on all this, and I had this great idea. What we were going to do--we all got very interested, and this really leads into the other big thing that we haven't talked about, and that is ethology. Do you know that word?

Riess: No.

Benedict: It's a word which means the study of the behavior of animals. Not ethnology, but ethology, e-t-h-o-l-o-g-y. It's a word which was used in England and the Continent. I think it's kind of fallen out of use. You don't hear it much in this country.

Riess: Had Desmond Morris written his--whatever his big book is?

Benedict: *The Naked Ape?*

Riess: *The Naked Ape*, yes [1967].

Benedict: Yes. He was curator of mammals at the London Zoo, Desmond Morris was. About this time, there was a considerable interest in animal behavior--this was in the sixties--and what did animal behavior have to tell us about human behavior, and to what extent was animal behavior cultural. That is, to what extent was it learned behavior, and did it differ in the same species in different environments, which we now know in chimpanzees it does.

There was a lot of interest in it, and there was an interest in what signals animals were giving each other that elicited cooperation, say. [transcriber notes: *See "Mating Dances Go On and On," New York Times, 7/10/01.*]

Riess: Language.

Benedict: Yes, and gesture. Not spoken language but body language, if you like. So there was an interest in sexual selection. Some people got terribly interested in it. [Edmund] Leach got very interested in it, for example.

I had a young colleague at the LSE called Robin Fox--he had a friend whose name was Lionel Tiger, and the first paper that they wrote together was called "The Zoological Perspective in Social Science," and everybody thought it was a put-on, you know, by Robin Fox and Lionel Tiger? But it wasn't, it was really their names, and that's what the paper was called.

Anyhow, Robin, who was a very lively and interesting person, now at Rutgers, he did field work off the coast of Ireland--he was terribly interested in this. So he and I and David formed a little sort of animal group, as it were. You can see this feeds--this is sort of another strain in my biography. When I first went to England, the Huxley Memorial Lecture, which is the highest honor that an anthropologist can get in England, the Huxley Medal--Thomas Henry Huxley, that would be--was given by J. B. S. Haldane. I heard him talk about "The Argument from Animals to Men." That had been a sort of theme, and I was still interested. For instance, in our flat in London I had built some birdcages into the wall and the first paper I published on Mauritius was called "The Immigrant Birds of Mauritius." [*The Avicultural Magazine, 1957.*]

Riess: Can birds tell us about human behavior in the way that animals can? I have a hard time picturing that.

Benedict: There's an enormous variety in what birds do, and what they can tell you is really kind of about ritual behavior. I'm trying to think. There was a paper I heard once about some poor frustrated cocks, I think they were, that had been brought up in isolation, and when they got sexually excited, they fixed on their own tail feathers, and they started going around and around, chasing their tails. When they saw a hen, instead of fixing on the hen,

they'd go around and around. Finally they would pull out one of their own tail feathers and copulate with it.

At any rate, we didn't know, but we thought that this was something that might be very interesting.

**Huxley's Conference on Ritualized Behavior in Animals and Man, 1966**

Benedict: Now, I have to pause at this point to show you that this became something very interesting. [retrieves document]

Riess: "The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London: A Discussion on Ritualization of Behavior in Animals and Man,' organized by Sir Julian Huxley, Fellow of the Royal Society, December 1966."

Benedict: And look at who was there.

Riess: And look who's there. In the first group, Konrad Lorenz. "The Psychological Approach" is one section. "Play" is another section. "Abnormal Rituals and Stress," R. D. Laing.

Remind me, who was R. D. Laing?

Benedict: R. D. Laing was a psychiatrist who wrote a famous book called *The Divided Self*.

Riess: And Desmond Morris in that section, "The Ontology of Ritualization," with E. H. Erikson.

That's the Erik Erikson?

Benedict: Yes.

Riess: "Ritualization of Animal Activities."

I'm looking for your name.

Benedict: No, I wasn't there. I mean, I was there in the audience.

Riess: "Human Cultural Activities." [E. H.] Gombrich, art. "Ritualization in Man," with Huxley and Leach. "Ritualization and Man in Relation to the Modern Crisis." "Films and Sound Recordings," with David Attenborough.

Was this a week?

Benedict: I don't know, two or three days, three or four days.

Riess: It was an amazing collection of people.

Benedict: Yes, and an enormous variety of people. Maurice Bowra, who was head of one of the Oxford colleges and who had basically written about early oral literature--and [Niko] Tinbergen, who wrote *The Herring Gulls' World*.

Riess: Who actually pulled it all together?

Benedict: Huxley, I guess, to some extent.

There were a lot of very important animal behaviorists, like [Irenaus] Eibl-Eibesfeldt and, of course, [Meyer] Fortes was there, and some psychologists.

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Benedict: The difficulty was semantic. Everyone was using "ritual" in a different sense. When psychiatrists talk about ritualized behavior, they often talk about people who are continually doing this [demonstrates hand-wringing]. They are using ritual one way. Whereas if you're using ritual to talk about art forms, or if you're using ritual to talk about the mating displays of certain birds, that's again different, and if you're using ritual to talk about human religious behavior, that's something else again. But it's all subsumed under this single word.

So really, although they were the most fascinating [talks], as you can imagine, they weren't really talking to each other, they were all sort of talking past each other. At any rate, I only show you that to show you the extent of the interest.

### Desmond Morris's Seminars at the Zoo, Role Analysis in Animals and Men

Benedict: At the same time, Robin and I were going to a series of seminars at the zoo, which was run by Desmond Morris, who was still at the zoo, and which were mostly about primate behavior.

I'll just have to tell you this little anecdote. One of the people who was there was a very serious Dutchman, who was serious in the way only a Dutchman can be serious, and that's very serious. He had conceived the idea that human language developed from grooming behavior in non-human primates, and that if you observe the grooming behavior of, say, macaques, you would notice that what they did was go through each other's fur and pick out little pieces of skin, which they would eat. But when they were wanting to approach another animal to do this, they would go [makes small popping sounds with pursed lips], like that. And then the other animal would turn around, and they could do it.

He thought that was really a rudimentary form of language, because you were signaling the other animal about what it is you wanted to do, and the other animal

understood it and turned around and presented itself and allowed you to groom it. He said this was really one of the basic elements of language. You can see how you might think that. He got very excited. He said this is so basic that it ought to work with all primates, including human primates.

Well, what he did was, one morning he got onto the Underground, and he sat down in the Underground, and it was one that was going into the city, and there were a number of city gents in striped trousers with their *Timeses*, and he turned around to the man next to him and he went [makes kissing sound]. The man stared at him, took his paper, and went [makes huffy sound], like this, and turned away. He reported all this to his seminar. He said he tried it with a number of people. Curiously enough, they did not react.

Riess: They *did* react.

Benedict: Yes, but not in the way he expected. So at any rate, that's the kind of thing that was going on then. That one article I wrote that's in my bibliography somewhere has to do with role playing in animals, in non-human animals, in animals.<sup>2</sup> And humans. So that was really quite an exciting and interesting time.

Then Robin and I managed to get--in England there were very few places that did any physical anthropology. All the famous places in England only did social anthropology. The LSE, the School of Oriental and African Studies, social anthropology at Oxford, Cambridge, Manchester and so on--although Cambridge did have a physical anthropology section--they were all really just social anthropology. Physical anthropology was not part of the curriculum the way it was and still is in this country.

Robin and I thought that it ought to be, or at least the social aspects of it ought to be, part of the curriculum. So we managed to present lectures, which he and I gave at the LSE for the undergraduate degree.

Riess: Was it that physical anthropology was somewhere else?

Benedict: Yes, it was at University College. They had physical anthropology there, which was mostly concerned with the study of evolution. All of these branches were subsumed in the RAI--the RAI looked after all of them. But the Association of Social Anthropologists, which I mentioned last time, was just what it says. So on the whole, there was a very big division because anthropology in Britain, from a theoretical point of view, or from the disciplinary point of view, was really much closer to sociology than it was to any kind of physical anthropology.

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<sup>2</sup>"Role Analysis in Animals and Men," *Man*, June 1969.

**London Life, Clubs and Connections and Friendships**

Riess: You are a member of the Athenaeum. Was that a great honor?

Benedict: Yes.

Well, the Athenaeum was a club which was formed in the 1820s. You had to be put up for it. You couldn't just go and join it. What they do is they write your name in a book, a great big ledger. You're taken there by your sponsor, and you're given a dinner, and you look over the club premises, which are magnificent. You know where they are? You know London?

Riess: A little, yes.

Benedict: You know that at the foot of Regent Street there's this enormous column to the Duke of York, and there are two huge buildings, one on each side. The one on the right is the Athenaeum. It has a gold statue of Athena on top of it.

Riess: Who sponsored you?

Benedict: Raymond Firth. But by then I knew quite a few other members. Then other people have to sign in, and that takes a while. It used to be that--you've heard of people being blackballed?

Riess: Yes.

Benedict: Do you know what that means?

Riess: Yes. Well, I assume there was actually a black ball.

Benedict: That's right. But at any rate, the point is that you are then put up, and you have to have a certain number of people who will agree to sponsor you. I can't remember how many it is. And then you come up before the committee and they vote on whether to admit you or not.

Riess: Did being a Jew make a difference?

Benedict: I don't think being a Jew made much difference, and I really don't think being an American made much difference because they had a number of Americans--not only Americans but other foreigners and many Jews. And they have a category now of overseas members. You can be an overseas member, in which case you pay a little less than you would if you lived in London.

Riess: Was it an important thing to do? A career-furthering thing to do?

Benedict: Yes. I mean, it is. You know, it's a fairly exclusive kind of thing. It's all exceedingly grand, I can tell you. You know, Dickens and Huxley and Darwin were members. They're very conscious of their history.

Riess: No women.

Benedict: Well, for years several of us, including me--and Adrian Mayer is a member, and his father, Sir Robert Mayer had been a member. And Jonathan Benthall, the director of the RAI, was a member. So I knew quite a few people. For years they'd been trying to get women into it. It took two-thirds vote to do it, and just this year it finally passed. They always had a majority in favor of admitting women, but not two-thirds.

Riess: So they would vote every year.

Benedict: They didn't vote every year. They agreed that they didn't want to do it every year, that would be too disturbing. So every *ten* years they would do it. The last ten years was up, I think, in 2000, and it passed quite substantially, so now women can be members.

They used to--I mean, the discrimination, I wrote a paper about it. Did I tell you that?

Riess: No.

Benedict: It's a little aside, but it's amusing. When I was director of the museum here, the Anthropology Museum, we had a couple of extremely earnest and rather square, physically square, women from the Cologne Museum in Germany. They were going to do an enormous exhibit on men's groups--there had been a lot of stuff about women's groups, and they wanted to do one on men's groups. They came here because they wanted to learn about the American Indian men's groups, clubs, and tobacco societies, and things like that that existed here.

I was taking them around in the museum, and I said to them, "You know, you really ought to do an English club if you're doing men's groups."

"Good!" they said, "You do it!"

I said, "Okay." I started to do it--I don't if they know this in the Athenaeum, I think they might boot me out if they did, well, they wouldn't now. But I started to go around and look to see how I would do it. And I thought the first thing to do was to look at the furnishings. The place is full of gigantic oil portraits and marble busts and bronze, and I went around to see if there were any women depicted. Well, the only women depicted were, of course, Athena, who stands in the front. But the others were all mythological.

Riess: Not the queen.

Benedict: Not the queen. Not the queen. I finally found--there was a place called the women's annex, where women could be taken. It was kind of a nasty little room in the basement.

And there was a portrait of Queen Victoria there. But she was the only human female that was in the place.

The other thing that amused me about the furnishings--they're brass, green leather, and mahogany. But in the women's annex it's all pink and lime green and pale furniture. So anyhow, I wrote all this up. You can imagine. It was part of their exhibit, and they published it in their catalog, in German.

Riess: Did you draw some conclusions?

Benedict: Yes, a few obvious conclusions.

But at any rate, yes, it's a kind of prestige thing, belonging to the Athenaeum. I don't know how important it is anymore, it seems to me it's probably out of date. But it's rather enjoyable, you know?

Riess: Where in this country could you have such an experience?

Benedict: I think the Harvard Club is probably a bit like that, and the Cosmos Club in Washington and the Union Club in New York would probably be like that, but I would never join one of those things in this country.

Riess: Why?

Benedict: Why? Well, you know, in England--in the first place, I can't tell you how entertaining I found living in England. I thought it was the most amusing place I'd ever been in, and I really wanted to get into it. I guess I was being very much of an anthropologist, you might say. I don't feel that way about this country. You know, here is just where I am.

The way I've been brought up--my general political views, which are liberal, wouldn't permit me to join such a thing in this country. But in Britain I didn't feel that I was making a political statement--I didn't vote in Britain or anything, I was just getting in, as it were. I liked that. And, of course, it is a society which is absolutely status mad. If you're going to play with them, you really ought to play. You ought to have as high a status as you can manage.

Riess: Back to this question, of did you experience any anti-Semitism, academically or socially?

Benedict: I don't think I did. In the first place, I was looked on chiefly as an American, not as a Jew. If I had been an English Jew, I would have been. Certainly the English Jews that I knew in academia--I mean, Meyer Fortes, for example, who was the professor of Cambridge before Leach, was subject to a lot of anti-Semitism. He couldn't even get into a college. You know how it works in Oxford and Cambridge? There are university appointments, and then there are college appointments. But to be anybody or to do anything, you really have to have a college appointment. He for a long time couldn't have a college appointment. He finally got one, but yes.



Certain people I knew at LSE, like Maurice Freedman--he's the main one I can think of, and Julius Gould--there were a few people like that who certainly were very aware of anti-Semitism. But I wasn't. And our friends--all these people that I'd known from the beginning--no.

Oh, I have to mention that one of the people that we met in those early days through the Inland Waterways Association and all that, and who still is a friend, is Sir Oliver Scott, who is a baronet. He and his wife, Phoebe, became and still are very close friends. They let us have their house when we were looking for a place to live in 1968. They had this very beautiful arts and crafts house. Gorgeous place. He said it was really getting too small for his family, and he had to have someplace else, but he didn't know exactly what he wanted to do with it, so if we'd like to live in it for a while, why, we should go ahead and live in it. Paying him some kind of peppercorn rent. I mean, it was ridiculous, because it was an absolutely magnificent house.

And so we moved into it, and then he bought a giant house in Kensington Square. Very, very fashionable. After a year or two, he came around to us and said, "I'm terribly sorry, but it's awfully difficult for Phoebe and me to keep up our charities, and I think I'm going to have to sell this house." I didn't know what to say, but Marion said, "All right, we'll buy it." It was an absolutely marvelous house, just an unbelievable place. It was early English arts and crafts. Like idiots, we sold it when we moved over here. The house we have now in London is not nearly so distinguished.

Riess: You turned to talking about him from my thing about anti-Semitism. What was the association?

Benedict: Well, it didn't seem to make any difference. It really didn't. Oh, the other--no, I don't think Marion would agree if you were talking to her.

The other person that we got to know was a man called Michael Behrens. I don't know if I mentioned him or not. Collected banks. I mean real ones. He had a thousand-acre estate near Henley, with an incredible eighteenth-century house on it. We got to be very good friends, and every summer he had a villa in France, on the Riviera, and he'd invite us to this villa on the Riviera, and we would go there for two or three weeks. We stayed friends with them, and through them we met all kinds of people, like Laurie Lee, Stephen Potter, Solly (Lord) Zuckerman, Lady Antonia Fraser. But he [Behrens] was a Jew.

One of the people that we met through him was Nigel Lawson, who was also Jewish and who worked for the *Financial Times* at that point but later became Margaret Thatcher's Chancellor of the Exchequer, which is like secretary of the treasury. So that was a whole lot of connections that way, and we still see some of those people, although Mike, himself, is dead.

He also was a great patron of the arts. He had wonderful paintings around, Rouaults in the dining room and Marino Marini sculpture in the garden. I mean it was that kind of a set-up, you know.



**IX UC BERKELEY ANTHROPOLOGY DEPARTMENT, TEACHING,  
FRIENDSHIPS, WRITING**

**Visiting Appointment, Charms of the Department, 1966**

Riess: Now, we'd both like to get to Berkeley. I can see how one might ask why you would even want ever to come home.

Benedict: Well, exactly, and that's really what I'm building up to. Why would I ever want to come home? I was very divided about it. It happened this way: In 1966, David Mandelbaum was on a visiting professorship to Cambridge. When he came to London, I guess I entertained him or something. At any rate, I had met him before on one of my trips over here.

He said, would I like to come to Berkeley as a visiting professor to teach in his South Asia course. The South Asia Center was just getting started here, and that was at a time when--I've forgotten exactly what they're called--area studies, Africa studies, East Asia studies, South Asia studies. There was a great fashion for those in anthropology in the fifties and sixties, and a lot of universities created these sorts of regional departments, which would have anthropologists, political scientists, sociologists, and so on, all of whom specialized, in this case, in South Asia.

I think these really started at Chicago and at Harvard, too. They had a great sort of efflorescence. It was at a time when the United States thought that they really ought to know more about some of these places, and so it was being promoted by considerable government grants. A lot of places did this. And journals started and all kinds of academic activities. So Berkeley was doing it as well.

David said, "Why don't you come over? You can be half in our South Asia center and half in anthropology." I thought that sounded like an interesting thing to do, and so I came.

Riess: It can't have been quite that simple.

Benedict: It was only a visiting appointment, so I didn't think of it as a permanent move. I thought I would come here and be here for a year and then go back to the LSE. That's what I thought. So that seemed interesting. I never taught in the United States. I never had a job in the United States except breaking up a gas station with a jackhammer when I was in high school! So I didn't think of it as any great move.

Also it was kind of funny because although here I was being hired basically as a South Asia expert. And although I'd worked, of course, with Indians in Mauritius, I'd never been to India. But the person that I worked with mostly was Alice Ilchman. Does that name mean anything to you?

Riess: Yes. She was president of Wellesley?

Benedict: Well, she was from Wellesley. She went to the LSE. She became president of Sarah Lawrence. She also was in the Carter administration, in education in some way, and she was married to a political scientist here called Warren Ilchman.

Riess: So you were co-teaching.

Benedict: I was co-teaching with Alice. At that point, Alice was just one of these slave laborers here. You know, they had this system of lecturers, who were usually female and very smart and highly qualified and never got a position? She was one of those.

Then I was partly in anthropology, and during the course of that year, I guess the department—Gene Hammel was the chair at that point, maybe John Rowe and Gene Hammel—anyhow, they said would I like to come here. I said, "Certainly not."

Riess: That's how bad it was here?

Benedict: No, it wasn't that. I was just really fully committed to being in London. You can see how anchored I was in England. I had a very good position there, and I was clearly on my way to being a professor or something there, and I had a house there, and I had two children there who were in St. Paul's Girls School. You know, lots of friends. Went to the Riviera every summer. It wasn't too bad.

On the other hand, of course, I really didn't belong there. I really wasn't part of it. I was always an outsider, and that was a great advantage, being an outsider, because I could move around. Marion and I could move around in the class system in the way a Briton couldn't. So that really was very good, and we had an enormous range of people that we knew. It was a delightful kind of thing.

**Thinking about Family's Future in London or Berkeley**

Benedict: Okay. So I went back to London. But the other thing to say is that during that year that I was here, I really found this department enormously stimulating. There was a lot going on at that point. The department was not fractious the way it became afterwards. They had dinner meetings in which they got together and talked, and people presented papers to each other. It was very collegial, really very good.

And while I was here, I worked on that paper about "Family Firms and Economic Development." That, I think, was one of the best papers I ever did. And I was working with an Indian here who was a member of one of these family firms in East Africa. He and I worked on this paper together. He didn't want to be a co-author because he didn't think it would be good for his business connections.

So I found it very stimulating and very interesting here. When I got back to London--you know, the scales fell from my eyes. In fact, it began to look kind of--well, a lot of things were happening. In the first place, the LSE had seen its best days. Leach had left and gone to Cambridge. Raymond was about to retire. It wasn't nearly as stimulating there as it had been, to me.

And Marion thought that we really ought to go back and have a bash at being in our own country. Also she thought that it would be a good idea for our children to have something of their American heritage and go to American schools. Of course, the children were with us that year, in '66-'67. They went from St. Paul's Girls School, where they were, to Berkeley High School. You can imagine what a shock that was.

Riess: Those weren't good times at Berkeley High School, were they?

Benedict No, no. But--

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Benedict: Marion thought that it would be good for the children, and the children--Helen, the older one, certainly liked it after she got used to being here. As I say, they were way ahead of their classmates, and they had extremely good work habits from their school.

Riess: So you were back for what, a year?

Benedict: I was back in London for the '67-'68 year. I was here '66-'67 as a visiting professor. Then I went back. But they said if I could change my mind, to let them know.

Riess: Did it make you think about even going to Harvard or Chicago or some other place?

Benedict: No, because I don't think I would have done it. I would never have come if I hadn't come as a visitor. I would never have done it if I hadn't had an offer. I didn't think of applying

or anything like that. I wasn't looking to see what positions were open or anything of that kind.

So the fact is, I was basically invited to come, invited to apply, so I did. Of course, I didn't have to go through all of the tenure stuff.

Riess: You came in as a full professor.

Benedict: I came in as a full professor. I was a Step One or something, bottom rung. Of course, the salary was much better than in England. The salaries in England were just a joke. At any rate, so we decided to come. Basically, we decided we just would. So we packed up, and we sold our house, and came.

Riess: Was your mother living around here?

Benedict: No, my mother and stepfather at that point were living in New York. When we came here, they decided to come and live out here, so they did. They bought a house in Tiburon, where my mother still is.

As I told you before, I'm an only child, so--.

### Impressions on Return to Berkeley, 1968

Riess: What were your first impressions of Berkeley?

Benedict: When I came here in the first place, I was absolutely delighted to be in California because, of course, I had grown up in California, although it was southern California, and so the atmosphere of the place and the smell of it and all of that just really moved me quite a lot. Not Marion, of course, who was brought up in the East.

And my impressions: I just thought the university was great. I mean, I thought the anthropology department was really an exciting department. There were some awfully good people in it. They were doing terribly interesting work, I thought.

Riess: When you were in Berkeley in 1966, were there still reverberations of the Free Speech Movement?

Benedict: There was still a lot of ruction going on, and certainly during that year, in '66-'67, there were--I've forgotten what the issues were, but there was a lot of discontent and so on on campus. The department met all the time, the longest faculty meetings in the history of the world. But I was very interested in what was going on. I thought it was quite stimulating and interesting.

And, of course, when I started to do my teaching here, I taught in the way that I learned to teach in Britain. It was lucky for me, because Elizabeth was here. She and I had the same kind of training, so we were very compatible.

Riess: When you were in the South Asia studies center, did things get messy about what this country was doing in Vietnam?

Benedict: No. All of that really blew up when I came back. I came back, you see, in '68, and between '68 and '70--'70, I guess, was Kent State, and then things really blew up here, at that point. That was when we had tear gas on campus and all that nonsense.

Also, when I came back I wasn't doing that South Asia stuff, I was fully in anthropology. I was teaching applied anthropology, I guess, with George. Not with George, but--I've forgotten what courses I was teaching then. But no, there wasn't any problem [earlier] teaching in the South Asia program. I just remember giving my lectures and having lots of students interested in it.

[tape interruption]

Riess: [looking at a catalogue] In '66-'67, you were teaching 188A, "Development of Cultural Traditions in South Asia."

Benedict: That's right. That was the area course. Mandelbaum was on leave, and I was substituting for him.

Riess: In '71-'72 you were teaching "Plural Societies" and a graduate seminar in social / cultural anthropology.

You were saying that you found the energy on this campus exciting.

Benedict: Yes. I got very fed up--the British way of doing things is that you get an idea, and you present it, and everybody tells you what's wrong with it and why it won't work, and they're almost always completely right. Whereas when you do that in this country, the reaction is, "Oh, let's try it." And that's a big difference.

Riess: An idea?

Benedict: A course of action, especially a course of action.

Riess: Did you have what we think of as department meetings at the LSE?

Benedict: We had departmental meetings, but, of course, the department was very small compared to here. I mean, the staff was only about eight people. They were not really the way--they didn't discuss much of anything. Really, they discussed the curriculum, and basically you were told, "You will teach this." You were told, "You've been assigned such-and-such students to tutor." So it wasn't really like a faculty meeting here.

Department Members, Elizabeth Colson

Riess: Let's look at who was on the faculty here at Berkeley. I'd be interested in who you bonded with or hung out with.

Benedict: When I first came, one of the people that I got to know right away was Gerry Berreman, who was teaching South Asia and who, of course, was very much involved in student politics and was quite "left." I always liked him and still do. Elizabeth, of course.

Riess: Tell me a little bit about the younger Elizabeth.

Benedict: The younger Elizabeth was really kind of like the older Elizabeth. She was totally--is, was, totally devoted to her subject, totally devoted to her field work, absolutely clear in what she says, not very much patience with waffling, and a wonderful critic.

Riess: She brings out the best in people?

Benedict: I think she brings out the best in people who are willing to take it, to take what she brings out. She puts some people off, but those who could profit not only do profit but become her devotees, they really do. So she was always like that.

Riess: Would you ask her to read your papers?

Benedict: Yes, I often asked her to read my papers, and she always gave me very good criticisms. She used to give me her papers to read, too, and I would do the same. She sets a very high standard, and so you have to live up to that standard, and you want to live up to that standard. It's not painful. And she's always been like that, as far as I'm concerned. I don't see a whole lot of change in her.

Actually, when Marion, the children, and I first came, we stayed in her house. I think she was away, probably she had gone to Zambia. So we stayed in her house while we were looking for a house to buy, when we found this house.

Riess: You and she seem very different to me.

Benedict: We are very different. Very different. I think I amuse her. I remember when I met her first at the LSE. I had just come from a visit here. Somebody asked me--I don't remember, it was a bunch of the English academics, and Elizabeth was visiting. Elizabeth, of course, was very close and very admiring of Lucy Mair, and Lucy Mair was there. I remember, when they asked me where I had been and what had I done in America, I said, "I went to a barbecue wedding." Well, they thought that was so funny. It seemed to me a perfectly ordinary thing to do.



**Graduate Student Seminar with Colson and Shack**

Benedict: We worked very well together--we ran these seminars together. That really happened a little later, but perhaps it is as good a time as any to tell you. It happened in the early seventies, when Elizabeth was on the Budget Committee. I guess I was either a dean or still chair of the department--I don't remember--I was only chair for a year before they gobbled me up to be a dean.

Riess: You were dean in '71 to '74.

Benedict: Yes. And [William A.] Shack, I think, was about to be graduate dean--or else he was--I don't remember. At any rate, we were all three very, very busy, doing a lot of administrative nonsense. And we all had new graduate students, incoming graduate students. So we decided to pool all of these students and make a little seminar out of them, and the three of us would teach it.

What we devised, a way of teaching it, which was straight out of England, was that they would not be given huge amounts of reading, but they would be given one article a week to read that we considered an important article, like an article by Durkheim or Weber, or somebody like that. Or Leach, or whoever it was. And then everybody had to write a paper on it.

So they had to write one paper a week, which they didn't like much, but I'm a firm believer in the way you learn is to write, and I always made my students write a lot. Of course, Elizabeth also thinks that. And so did Shack. So they all had to come, having read this article, which was never a very long article. We told them, read it two or three times. Read it, just don't go reading from page 184 to 215, and think about it, and write this thing. And they all came, and we would draw a lot as to who was to read the paper out loud. It was pretty anxious-making for students.

Riess: It would be one out of the group?

Benedict: Sometimes there was time for two of them to do it. Usually two of them. Then everybody turned in his paper, and we read and corrected the papers and gave them back to them the following week.

Riess: That's a lot of work.

Benedict: A lot of work. But I'll tell you, the students who had to do that have never forgotten it. I still get people coming up to me.

Riess: Because they had to think critically?

Benedict: They had to think critically. They had to do a lot of work. They couldn't sort of bluff their way through it. And our criticisms were pretty tough criticisms.

Riess: Elizabeth refers to a seminar you were both in where she saw for the first time some real differences in the way men and women write.

Benedict: No, it wasn't that, it was the other seminar we did.

So that was one seminar we did, that was called 240, and we kind of institutionalized it in the department.

Riess: "Fundamentals of Anthropological Theory. Two-hour lecture, and two two-hour section meetings per week. Required of all graduate students doing their work in social-cultural." [refers to '66-'67 catalogue]

Benedict: In those days it was different. It was a kind of smorgasbord where a lecture was given by every single member of the faculty so that the graduate students would get some exposure to all the different faculty members when they came to choose their advisors. Our 240 grew out of this, but we changed the way it was done. And for years and years, that's the way it was done. It became a regular thing that we did. Now I think it still exists on the books, but it isn't the same at all.

### Thesis Writing Seminar

Benedict: At any rate, so that was one thing we did. The second thing we did--and I think the one you're referring to--was the thesis-writing seminar. One of the big problems, and still a problem, is that students go and do their field work, and they come back with all this stuff, and then they have a terrible time writing it up. It drags on for years and years, and some of them never do it. And they don't get very much help--they go to see their advisor, who may or may not offer much assistance. But they're quite isolated in that they don't get any other kind of criticism or anything else.

So we decided--this really derives from the Firth seminar, which derived in turn from Malinowski's, about people who came back from the field had to report on their field work to the seminar, this famous Malinowski seminar, which had about every famous anthropologist in Britain, and some Americans, in it for many years. Firth carried that on, and I think it still goes on. I don't know who runs it now.

At any rate, what we made them do was write up a chapter of the thesis. We didn't want them to write just a chapter giving the longitude and latitude of where they worked. We wanted them to write up some kind of substantive chapter about their work. It was to be reproduced and passed out to all the members of the seminar before the seminar met. They all had to read it, they all had to criticize it with a pencil in their hands. Then during the seminar it was discussed, and at the end of the seminar, all these versions were turned back to the person who wrote it.

Well, those were, again, hard. Of course, we also had to read them.

Riess: That's a lot of work again.

Benedict: A lot of work, but it really did produce results. Again, people still come up and talk to me about that. I used to put really terrible pressure--one of the people I remember pressuring like crazy was Nancy Scheper-Hughes, who was, still is, a very independent-minded person, and she wouldn't do it. I kept after her and after her and after her. I said, "You just have to do it. I'm sorry, Nancy, but you just have to do it." And she finally did do it.

It was not a seminar that you could escape. You had to do it. You had to be in that seminar. It got to be--at one point when we had so many students, I remember having to meet that seminar something like two or three times a week, and sometimes even on the weekends, to do this.

Riess: It was you and Elizabeth who were doing it?

Benedict: It was Elizabeth and Shack and I.

Riess: It was the same three.

Benedict: The same three. But sometimes I was the only one doing it. I mean, when Elizabeth was away, or Shack was away or something, I found myself doing it on my own a number of times. I did do it with some other members of the department. I got--I can't remember who now. One or two other people came in and did it with me.

But everybody agreed that it was an important thing to do. In fact, several people from other departments came to me and said, "How do you do this? Can we do it, too?" So they did it. They started it in sociology, and I think maybe then in political science.

I still am a strong believer in it. It's a lot of work, but it's a lot of work to write a thesis, and if you're going to do it, you've got to get down to it. And you've got to be able to take the criticism. Not only did you get the criticism of your contemporaries, which were, after all, the people who were going to be reading it, but you also learned what they were doing, because, formerly, you never knew what the other graduate students were doing. Some of them just went way off on some tangent.

Riess: Did you take them from being inarticulate to clear and theoretical? What could you achieve in this situation?

Benedict: Yes, well, I think so. I mean, you know, who knows? I think that they certainly became more articulate because I used to savagely correct their grammar.

More on Working from Theory

Riess: What about theory? Do you work from theory, and particularly if you're coming back and writing for your Ph.D. I'm asking you because I really don't understand. Does the theory come out of the work, or do you go in with the theory?

Benedict: The answer is both. And it really depends--it's a lot like I told you about the field work. Do you say this is about a global idea or this is about this, and then it's about that, and then it's about the other? A lot of it depends on what kind of a personality you have, how you approach it. It used to be said that if we were going to be scientists we should have a theory, and then we should go out and test the theory. I don't think that really works.

In the first place, I don't think most of the so-called theories in social sciences are really testable in this kind of way at all. Social science is more or less high-level description, and it needs to be. And you can learn a lot from comparative studies, say if you look at kinship. One of the great things about the fascination with kinship is that in the structure of kin relationships you can see why we have jokes about mothers-in-law. You know why?

Riess: Why?

Benedict: Well, because if you've got a man who is married to a woman, and that woman is actually a daughter, her mother has certain expectations of how she should behave as a daughter. Her husband has certain expectations of how she should behave as a wife. Those expectations are very often incompatible. She cannot be both a good daughter and a good wife, so they come into conflict, so the husband blames his wife's mother. And, of course, it works the other way around, too.

It's because of the structure. I mean, you could draw it. It's also because of the structure, because these roles are incompatible. There are all kinds of relationships like that. A department chair is supposed to be supportive of the people in his department or her department, but he or she is also a member of the administration and is supposed to support the dean. You can't do both successfully all the time. You can't. They're incompatible. So that's a kind of structure.

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Riess: Because you know about these conflicting roles, you have an explanation, does it make it easier?

Benedict: I think it can prevent you from getting terribly upset, because you can understand what's going on, and you can also explain it. You can explain it to your colleagues, "Look, I've simply got to do this particular thing because I've got all this pressure on me from the administration. So help me with doing this." Or you can explain to the dean, "I simply can't do this. My colleagues won't put up with it. If you push me to do it, I'll resign." So I think it does help to know that. It's not because you're a bad person, it's not because of

something in your particular personality, it's because of your structural position in this situation.

Well, you can call that theory if you want, but it's that kind of thing which you can go and test.

Suppose you're in a society, for example, that's matrilineal, where your primary affiliation is not to your wife but to your sister, and your sister's children are going to inherit from you and not your own children, that's going to make different kinds of tensions. See? I don't know if that really answers your question [about theory].

### More on Department Members, Washburn, Others

Riess: Now, what we were doing is asking who was here, who you got involved with, who you worked with.

Benedict: Okay. I got along with almost all of them, I think.

Riess: George and Mickie Foster--was their house a social center?

Benedict: They used to have everybody up, and they used to have parties. I mean, they certainly were into that tradition. And we used to have these wonderful dinners, which I described, in which we presented papers, and they were often at a restaurant, where we'd get everybody together.

Riess: That would just be faculty.

Benedict: That's right. But then George would give these parties in which he'd invite everybody up. They were really something. Very often--well, they were a lot of good-time parties, but also sometimes we would discuss--usually it was something about where the department was going.

Hammel I got quite close to. He and I taught a couple of seminars together. He, I think, came into this thesis-writing seminar, and then he gave a seminar on grant writing--he was very good at that--in which I participated. So that was a good one.

I didn't teach with [Bob] Heizer or [Clark] Howell. Paul Kay--I was interested in what he was doing because he was very interested in these pidgin and Creole languages, and of course, in Mauritius and Seychelles they spoke Creole. He and Brent Berlin were investigating this kind of thing. And that was when he and Brent were working on their famous color categories paper.

Riess: Color categories?

Benedict: Yes, that was very famous. There used to be an idea that many peoples could not distinguish between blue and green, they didn't have different words for blue and green. Could they really not see the difference between blue and green? Of course, they could see the difference between blue and green, but it wasn't significant to them. It was very interesting. They did a cross-cultural survey on that, and it's become quite a famous thing.

Riess: Tell me about your connection with the archaeologists, or paleo-anthropologists, like Desmond Clark.

Benedict: Desmond--and Bob Heizer--I didn't have much to do with. I mean, I was always friendly with them. Desmond, being English, we had certain rapport.

Riess: Did you? The old boy thing?

Benedict: Kind of old boy thing. Desmond's very much of an old boy.

Riess: And what about [Sherwood] Washburn?

Benedict: I had a lot to do with Washburn. You know, this whole ethology thing I was talking to you about before, he was very interested in that, and so we would have long discussions. He and I gave a course together. He was a brilliant teacher, Washburn, really a brilliant teacher. That Anthro 1 was a fantastic course.

And he would also come along to our 240 seminar. He often sat in with Elizabeth and me when we were giving that seminar, which is very unusual for a physical anthropologist to do that. He was very interested in Durkheim. He had the kind of mind that could take in a lot of different things.

At any rate, we decided we would give a course--I can't remember what the damn course was called--in which we would try to find topics to which both physical anthropology and social anthropology could contribute. I don't remember what they all were, but the one I do remember was aggression. And of course, Washburn was very interested in non-human primates, and Phyllis Jay, as she was then--her name before she remarried was Jay, and now she's Dolhinow, and she's a primatologist.

Washburn had been a pioneer in studying non-human primate societies. He'd identified the alpha male, and studied the way social primates regulate their lives. Very important. That fed into hypotheses about man, the hunter, in human evolution.

The other thing that he was famous for was knuckle walking. Chimpanzees and gorillas walk on their knuckles, and that seems to be a stage for beginning to assume an upright posture. He was always fascinated, and watched people when they leaned on tables. Did they do it this way [gestures with a flat hand] or did they do it that way [gestures resting on knuckles]. You see?

Riess: Yes.

Benedict: Okay. So one of the topics we decided we could do was aggression, because there's a lot of aggression in primates. And how do human societies handle aggression and what uses are made of aggression. We would alternate lectures. One week he'd give one, and I'd give one the next week, and we'd sit in on each other's lectures. That was quite a stimulating course.

Riess: That's very interesting. There was a freedom to innovate course offerings?

Benedict: That had to go through a really dumb committee called the Course Committee [Committee on Courses], which was maintaining standards but which often served to stifle innovations.

Riess: The Course Committee. That was an Academic Senate committee?

Benedict: Yes. It always used to make me furious. But if you persisted, they always collapsed.

Riess: But if you wanted to do something quickly?

Benedict: Well, you could always do it as a kind of an experimental course or something like that. You could always find some way to do it. The whole thing is so flaccid, you can do it. You can always find a way around.

You know, the only reason that Berkeley works is its inefficiency. I think one of the great lessons I learned as an administrator is that no administrative system can work unless it can be fiddled. You've got to be able to do that.

All right. So I saw a lot of Washburn. I did a lot with him.

Another person who was very interesting in this respect was Glynn Isaac. Glynn Isaac, who's dead now, was a prehistoric archaeologist. He was one of the first people to look at the idea of a home base. These very early hominids must have had a home base because you could find that they had brought stone tools which were clearly manufactured somewhere else--you could tell from the stone--back to some central place. So it was the beginning of some kind of settlement. Really interesting. He worked a lot with that.

He was an enormously innovative, brilliant guy and a protege of Desmond's. I think he meant more to Desmond than almost anybody else.

Riess: English?

Benedict: Yes. Welsh. He finally left here and went to Harvard, and then he did field work in China, and he got sick in China and died at a young age. At any rate, he would do things like--both he and Desmond would train students to make stone tools, and then at one point he got some of them out there, and he said, "Okay, you've just found this dead elephant, or you killed this elephant. Now cut it up with stone tools." You can do it. They did it. That's the kind of thing he would do. Very innovative.

He had a seminar on predation.

Riess: Predation is different from aggression?

Benedict: Yes, because predation--you've got a prey, you're after something, you're going to eat it. Aggression--you're fighting.

I was on pretty friendly terms with almost everybody in the department. Those days, the whole idea of the department was that everybody helped each other and that it's no skin off my nose if somebody else gets promoted to be a professor. I mean, we wanted to make them all professors.

Riess: Really?

Benedict: Yes! That was the ethic: make them all professors. This was in the sixties when that was happening a lot. Of course, that didn't last.

Riess: There was more money then, more grants.

Benedict: More grants, and the university had money then, and the state was more generous.

The other person I got to know was Bill Simmons. He's at Brown now. But he was here, and he was an anthropologist and dean of social sciences after I was, from 1993 until 1998 or 1999.

Riess: How about Laura Nader?

Benedict: Laura is a little difficult. I know she and Elizabeth are close friends, but I always had some problems with Laura. She's a very socially active person, and she's the sort of person that thinks--she wants to reform the world. Well, that's great, reform the world, but leave me out of it. So she's always sort of after you to do this, stand up for that, and so on. It's not my way of doing things. I had some problems with that. Gerry is a bit like that. Nancy is certainly that way.

Laura is very bright, and she's very insightful, and she wants to do anthropology on you and me. I think she often goes off the deep end, but that's all right. She's full of good ideas. I don't find her very compatible.

Riess: That's interesting. In talking about a psychology department you might fault someone because they were always doing psychology on you. Doing anthropology on a person can be equally invasive? In other words, studying you--is that what you're implying?

Benedict: No. I mean she--I don't know whether you would call it doing anthropology on somebody. I don't think it's like the psychologist who says, "Aha, you're doing that because something happened to you when you were young" or something like that. It's not like that. She just thought that you should be socially active, that you should be trying to reform society. I told you before that anthropologists are basically reformers, and she's very much in favor of reforming society. She's all for doing that. I think when I was younger, I was like that too, but I'm not like that anymore. Perhaps I've just given up.



Riess: Is that the same as applied anthropology, though?

Benedict: Well, you could make a case that it was the same. Yes, when I was doing all that family planning stuff, I was very personally involved in it. I wanted to be very much in it and doing it, part of it. Later on, when I became more removed--it's the way I feel about animals. I like to look at animals, and I like to study them, and I like to learn about them and everything, but I don't want to be emotionally involved with them. I don't love animals. I don't think they're cute. You know? I don't have that kind of feeling about them. To me, they're of great interest, and I guess that's the way I feel.

It's a kind of remoteness, if you like. It's not being so involved. Laura wants to be involved, and she is involved, but she's also very analytical--you have to give her her due, she can be. But she tends to create villains, and I have a lot of trouble with villains, you know? But she gets very het-up about that kind of thing.

### **Chairmanship, 1970-1971, Kent State, and Student Rebellion**

Riess: The year that you were chairman, what kind of issues were you dealing with?

Benedict: Oh, God. When I was chairman, the whole bloody place blew up. Wasn't this Kent State? It all blew up. I don't know if you were around, but they were going to remake the university.

Anthropology was one of the main departments that blew up. So they would have these endless faculty meetings, in which people would get very excited and very angry. I was very much of a new boy. As I said, I was feeling somewhat remote from it. There used to be a tradition that they would have sherry at these faculty meetings. That was a terrible tradition because academics are overly garrulous, academics suffer from logorrhea, and if you give them sherry, it makes it that much worse. They just run at the mouth that much more. So the first thing I did was to take away the sherry.

The next thing--we'd meet in the Gifford Room--I don't know if you've ever been in it, but it was a fairly big room. The chairs are all around the edge of the room, as they very often are in these rooms in the university. So the second thing I did was I took all the chairs, and I put them around the table, very close to where I was going to be, and I had just enough chairs for the number of people that were coming, or maybe one too few, and then we would have to go get another one. And so that meant that they all had to be very much engaged with each other, and with me, because we were so close.

Riess: Interesting, yes.

Benedict: A little bit of group dynamics, you could call it. It worked. I mean, it did kind of shorten the meetings. I don't know how much it improved them, but it did work.

I was I think very patient with everybody. I managed to get--I don't remember what my particular achievements were, except the department didn't fly to pieces. There were all kinds of weird things going on. I remember one professor who was--they were all reconstituting their classes, too. All the classes had to be about Vietnam, and I remember one professor, who was teaching the introductory course, who had said--he got so carried away, he said that they could write papers about anything they wanted as long as it was about Vietnam, and that that would be by far the most significant learning experience that they could have.

He took it upon himself to write letters to all the parents of these freshman, telling them about this wonderful innovation that he was making. Well, you can imagine the parents of some freshman from Humboldt County getting a letter like this? You can just imagine. So all hell broke loose. The vice chancellor came over to see me, and he said, "Can you please tell me what's going on with Professor So-and-so? What is all this about?" So there were crises of that sort.

Riess: The anthropology department was willing to reconstitute itself?

Benedict: A lot of them were, yes.

Riess: They rationalized it in anthropology in a different way?

Benedict: That's right, they rationalized it. And they were very reactive. Students would form committees, and they'd come into class, and they'd challenge you. This happened to me in my "Plural Societies" class. I remember they came to me before the class and said, "We're coming in, and we're going to ask the class to vote about whether they want to hear your lecture or whether they want to talk about Vietnam."

And I said, "I'll give you five minutes to do that, but as long as somebody wants to hear my lecture, I will give the class. There has to be at least one person who wants to do that. If nobody wants to do it, I leave. And then the ones that don't want to listen to it, they can leave and you can take them out on the lawn and talk about Vietnam." That's what I did. It was interesting because, you know, I'd say two-thirds stayed, and one-third walked out.

Riess: And there were grades for this?

Benedict: I told them that they had to do the work that was assigned. They had to turn in their papers if they wanted a grade. If they didn't do that, they were going to fail because I wasn't going to give them incompletes.

Riess: What about this fiddling that you're talking about?

Benedict: That's called over-fiddling. No, I was not going to put up with that. After that class, these guys came into my office and threatened me, basically.

Riess: And then what did you do?

Benedict: I said, "You're a bunch of thugs. Get out." And they went out. They were terribly offended that I called them thugs. They were absolutely, wildly offended at that. But they didn't do anything, and I just wasn't going to do that, you know?

Riess: What could the department do?

Benedict: The administration itself was pretty wishy-washy. They didn't know exactly what they wanted to do or how they wanted to handle it. They really weren't equipped or didn't know exactly how to cope with it.

Riess: What about other departments? Like history.

Benedict: Well, history--the worst departments were anthropology and sociology and probably psychology.

Riess: Do you mean the worst hit?

Benedict: The worst hit by all this stuff. They were social scientists. They knew all about this. And they were less rigidly structured.

I mean, you didn't get much of this in the natural sciences or the physical sciences where they had to learn certain things, and if they didn't learn it, they weren't going to get through the course and they weren't going to be able to go on to the next course. These anthropological courses--you know, they're not cumulative. Although we structure them so that you have to take Anthro 1 before you can take Anthro 100, they're really not very well structured. They are to some extent, and that's what Elizabeth and Shack and I were trying to do. That's why we were giving these basic readings that I told you about, because we wanted them to have a base, and then they could go on to the next thing.

But it's not like learning elementary mathematics in order to go on to calculus, you see. It's really a very different thing. I don't think it happened in those kinds of departments to the extent that it did in the social sciences, and in some of the professional schools. Again, the sort of floppy professional schools like education and social welfare.

Riess: This was your second year at Berkeley that you were made chairman? You didn't have to say yes, did you?

Benedict: I don't suppose I did, but I thought, if I'm going to be here, I guess I ought to get into it. So I got into it. And that was just one year, because at the end of the year they asked me to be the dean.

Riess: You did well.

Benedict: Well, I guess they thought I did, you know?

Riess: What about hiring women? Was that talked about a lot?

Benedict: By the time I got here, I don't think there was any controversy about hiring women in the department. I think we wanted to hire women. We were looking for women, in fact, because there weren't too many qualified women then. That's not true anymore. That wasn't an issue in our department. It wasn't like the history department, for example.

Riess: What else was happening in those department meetings?

Benedict: There was talk about what should the curriculum be. This is an ongoing problem in the department. How did we want to structure the degree? Did we want everybody--we structured it so everybody had to take physical anthropology and archaeology and social-cultural anthropology. And then there was a question about where does linguistics fit in. It's a big problem in the discipline, itself. It's called the four fields problem. That was an issue which was continually coming into it. And there were a number of courses which we thought were absolutely essential to be taught, and we wanted to make sure that those got taught.

It became more and more difficult, especially as grant money became available--it was very different from England, where you were told, "You teach this one this year, and you teach that one next year." People were getting grants and going on leave and so on, and so you often got the situation, and not only in our own department, where the most basic courses were being taught by outsiders, by visitors, which I think is a very bad situation. But anyhow, that kind of thing certainly came up: what courses were to be considered core courses that essentially had to be taught.

Then the question came up about to what extent should we give quantitative courses? To what extent do we expect people to be able to handle statistics.

### Alan Dundes' Folklore, A Floating FTE ##

Riess: A couple more questions about the department. I noticed in the general catalogue for the university that there was a switch at some point in the 1970s from "A" for Anthropology, in other words Anthropology as the first area you saw in the catalogue, to Anthropology being under L&S. I wondered what it reflected--for instance, in 1985 there was a folklore program. Programs were separated out.

Benedict: Folklore was always a special thing because folklore is basically Alan Dundes.

Riess: And yet it's also listed under anthropology.

Benedict: Yes, and it's in the anthropology department, but it was curious--it still is a curious thing because it has a floating FTE. That is, there's only one person who does it, and that's Alan, although it's one of those things that has sort of ramifications in many other departments. And, as you know, there are people in Scandinavian, for example, who do Scandinavian folklore. He draws on people from all over, and he has this one floating

FTE, in which he can appoint somebody for a year, who comes from outside. So he's appointed people from all over the world. They come.

And that floating FTE thing--at some point we tried to get that used as a more general thing because it gives a lot of flexibility. But the university would never go for it. It's the only one, as far as I know, and Alan, although he's a full member of the department, has this kind of special floating FTE that he uses.

Riess: Wonderful, yes.

Benedict: Some student just left him a million dollars. You know about that?

Riess: No.

Benedict: Incredible. It's an incredible story. It just happened about a month ago, two months ago. He got this letter. His wife opened up this letter, and she said, "It's from an old student, seems to have sent you check for \$100." Alan said, "Well, let me see it." And it was a million dollars! He'll use it for making folklore a more permanent kind of thing. An endowed chair or something like that. I don't know exactly what he's going to do with it.

### Responding to the 1977 Student Guide to Classes ##

Riess: I dipped into the Fall 1977 student guide [*Primer: A Student's Guide to Cal Classes and Professors*]. It says about anthropology, and I'd be interested in your comments, that "the students felt a lack of unity, especially in the area of socio-cultural interests."

Benedict: Absolutely right. That's true.

Riess: "Large upper-division courses with no assigned sections."

Benedict: Yes, that was true.

Riess: "Lack of sequence courses."

Benedict: That's right.

Riess: "Courses were not challenging in the major."

Benedict: I think that's true as well.

Riess: "Flexible advising, so students could seek advice from any faculty member..." but this engendered criticism because student needs are so diverse, considering they may major in four fields, and they requested assigned faculty advisors. The positive thing that they say about the department was that "it was doing lectures, dances, and student-faculty teas."

Of course, let's agree the only people who fill out these reports are unhappy, but what about this criticism?

Benedict: No, this is right. When the department was investigated--or I don't know what they call it. What do they call it?

Riess: Reviewed?

Benedict: Reviewed. When the department was reviewed, these things came out. There was, I think, a general sort of loosening of discipline in the department, which probably wasn't helped by the executive committee thing that I was telling you about. The department was very much coming apart at the seams, especially in socio-cultural, which instead of--so there could never be a book like that one I showed you, there just wasn't enough agreement as to what the discipline was about. And also all this post-modern stuff was coming in, about "do we really know anything?"

And then there were people in the department who just didn't believe in academic disciplines, you know? They didn't believe that you should be confined to any particular discipline or any particular kind of topic to investigate. That often led to their not believing in grades, for example. It was anarchic, it really was. It got quite bad, I thought. I don't know how it is now, and maybe I'm overstating it, but it does seem to me that these were very well-founded criticisms. I would agree with all of them. I don't remember the teas and dances. I don't know what that's about.

Riess: So what was the review of the department you referred to?

Benedict: The review of the department--there have been a couple of those. They're reviews which are appointed by the dean, and they are of two kinds. There's the internal review, which is what it sounds like. It's a review by people on campus. And then there is the external review, in which you appoint people from other universities to come review the department.

Riess: And is that only done when a department is seen to be in trouble?

Benedict: Yes, exactly. For instance, the most important one that happened during my time here was the review of the biological sciences, because the biological sciences--when I came here, there were I don't know how many departments of biology, different kinds of biology. There was one department that had only one professor in it, for instance. This external review, which was really high powered, was something that Rod Park, who was a botanist, was very much in favor of, and it led to the Department of--significant word--Integrative Biology.

Riess: And was the anthropology department fixed up after the review?

Benedict: I don't think so. I really don't. What's going on right now in the anthropology department--this shouldn't be part of this--is that the archaeologists are trying to split off and become a separate department.



Berkeley anthropologists, 1984: back row, l. to r., Stanley Brandes, Nelson Graburn, Ruth Tringham, Burton Benedict; middle row, Vincent Sarich, Gerald Berreman, Jim Anderson; bottom row, Alan Dundes (half-hidden), Claude Levi-Strauss (at Berkeley to give the Hitchcock Lecture), Mme. Levi-Strauss, John Gumperz, Gail Kligman, John Ogbu.





Riess: And that would be a great loss.

Benedict: I think it would be a great loss, but they're a very gung-ho group. They're highly disciplined. They're very good. What they do is excellent.

##

Benedict: I think the department was not in good shape. I'm sorry to say that because that was one of the things that Elizabeth and Shack and I were trying to do. That's why we started that seminar that I told you about. We were trying to give some kind of basis, by giving them these basic readings, so that there could be a progression to something else. But almost every course in socio-cultural began with the basics, so everybody--it was ridiculous.

Riess: And yet in 1977, or in those years, I thought Berkeley was the great department.

Benedict: It was a great department, and it was great because it had some very great people in it who were publishing and doing excellent work. I think the graduate training was very, very good. I thought the undergraduate training was a mess.

Riess: A department is judged by its graduate students.

Benedict: Yes, but the graduate work was--graduate students received an enormous amount of attention from faculty and a great deal of help. I told you of the thesis-writing seminar and so on. But I mean individual help. A lot, a lot. And a lot of those graduate students are now professors and have produced good books and so on, so that's something to be proud of. That's very good.

But the undergraduate curriculum is a mess and has been for a long time.

Riess: Interesting.

The student guide mentioned the Kroeber Anthropological Society. They call it "a forum for the exchange of ideas and scholarship." I thought it was a faculty group.

Benedict: No, it's the oldest student anthropological association in the United States. It's run by students, but they almost always had a faculty advisor. For many years it was John Rowe. He was very interested in it. They have an annual meeting, in which student and faculty give papers. It's like a regular meeting only it's really run by students, and they can invite faculty. It's for the whole department, undergraduates, graduates, and faculty, and they publish these papers. It goes up and down because it depends on how interested the students are. Sometimes it's almost moribund, and then it revives.

Benedict's Graduate Students

Riess: Who were your graduate students? Who are your intellectual heirs?

Benedict: I've had quite a few, not as many as--well, I don't know. I guess I should start with my first one, who was Sandra Wallman, but she was from LSE, she wasn't from here. She's now professor at University College, London. She did work in what was then Basutoland, which is now called Lesotho, and then she worked in East Africa. She was interested in applied anthropology. She did some work in what she calls the anthropology of work. She became president of the Association of Social Anthropologists in England, and I still see her when I go to England. She had a very good career. She taught in East Africa, she taught in Canada, and then she went back to England. She's South African by origin.

And then I had another one called John Harré, who is a New Zealander. He worked on Maori-White relations, *pakeha* as they call it, the Maori word for Whites. And then there were a few others. I don't remember them so well.

I guess Tony Robben would be one, a Dutchman, now professor at Utrecht--I'm not sure. At any rate, he worked on fishing villages in Brazil, and then also he did work with "disappeared people" from Argentina. He's an economic anthropologist, I would say.

And Lesley Sharp. She's now at Barnard. She worked in Madagascar. She wrote a very good thesis, and it's a good book.

Riess: So, anthropologists become professors.

Benedict: That's right, except I was reading today in *The [New York] Times* about the Pew Charitable Trust. Did you see who the chairman of it was?

Riess: No.

Benedict: He's a social anthropologist.

Riess: I've forgotten the article--why they were writing about them?

Benedict: Because they're the biggest supporters of environmental change. The head of it is a social anthropologist. I never heard of him, but anyhow, I guess there are other jobs.

Riess: But academia is comfortable for an anthropologist, the freedoms of academia.

Benedict: And also for a long time there just weren't any other jobs for anthropologists. I think now that's much less true. We've had people in our department who have gone on in government. Somebody was hired by Xerox, who went up to investigate their personnel. So it's opening up a bit. But I think all my students went into academics.

I could give you more graduate students if you want them. I had contact with an awful lot of them because of that seminar. Many of them, I was not their principal advisor, but I was on their committee. The ones I've given you, I was their principal advisor, but there were several others that I feel were very important, who have now become--on whose committees I served. Like, Catherine Newman, who is now at Harvard, and Elaine Combs-Schilling, who is at Columbia.

### Gourmet Club Friends

Riess: You mentioned earlier how you really enjoyed in London the social pleasures of being a professor, and how you were trying to achieve that here. How did you move into the social life of San Francisco? Did you and Marion find that you had connections here that were interesting, like the connections you made when you were in London?

Benedict: We didn't have so many connections in San Francisco. We had a few. We knew the Lilienthals at one point quite well--you know, Sally Lilienthal. And then I had this sort of cousin from my stepmother's family, Michael Wornum. He was mayor of Mill Valley. He's dead now, but we saw a lot of them.

And then here we had--this was something, the Gourmet Club. The members were Walter and Sara Knight--Walter was a physicist and former dean of L&S; Bill and Grace Fretter--Bill was a physicist and vice president of the university; John and Ann Reynolds--he's a physicist; and Ken and Isabel Stamp--he's an historian. Those five couples would meet about three times a year and put on sumptuous feasts. Each couple was responsible for one course. We would rotate the houses in which we met. That went on for, I don't know, fifteen years or something. Several of them unfortunately are dead now. So that was sort of an "in," because they all were fairly important in the university.

Riess: And when did you become a member of that?

Benedict: Well, we formed it--or no, I think Sara Knight formed it. Sara was a very good cook. Walter and Bill Fretter and John Reynolds were all in the same department--they were all physicists--and were all very close friends, and they were sort of core. And I knew Walter because of the dean business.

When I was doing the Panama-Pacific--we haven't got to that yet--Sara Knight was very interested in Berkeley architecture, and she belonged to the [Berkeley] Architectural Heritage Association here. And I asked her if she would try to find out whatever buildings or anything remained from the Panama-Pacific exhibition of 1915. So she did, and we published it as a pamphlet, to which I gave the title of "Remains to be Seen."

Anyhow, that was a nice little group. Marion and I still see those that are left, although, of course, we don't have the Gourmet Club anymore.

Riess: George had a group, the Little Thinkers.

Benedict: George had gotten me into the Little Thinkers, and I still go to that. It's a lunch group, every Friday. It's very good because it has people from all different departments. Both Bowker and Heyman are members of it, so that's quite interesting.

Riess: How about Bohemian Club?

Benedict: No, I was never in that. Never in the Bohemian Club, and I was never in the Golden Bear. I think I was insufficiently sporty.

Riess: Anyway, you made Berkeley work for you.

Benedict: Well, I think so.

**"Role Analysis in Animals and Men," 1969, and Exciting New Stuff**

[Interview 8: June 28, 2001] ##

Riess: Let's spend some time talking about what seem to be your important papers. Like, the applied anthropology paper. You gave it to the SAA in May 1967.

Benedict: That's right. Well, I remember there was quite a lot of discussion. They seemed to like the paper, but I don't remember that the world turned upside down or anything like that.

Riess: When you're writing a paper, instruct me. Are you trying to raise an argument?

Benedict: I really have something on my mind that I want to say. Of course, I hope people will listen to it and respond to it, but I never got into these controversies very much. I think "Plural Societies" was the paper that I got into the most arguments about.

Riess: The role analysis paper, "Role Analysis in Animals and Men" [*Man*, June 1969]. In that paper you start out by saying you believe it will lead to insights into the nature of social relations. And in fact, it's amazing, when you're so inclined, how instructive it is to look at animals.

Benedict: Yes, very instructive. Well, this really came out of--this was something that happened after I got here, really. I mean, of course, I've always been interested in role analysis. Role analysis to me is one of the key concepts, and it's a very old concept. It goes back to Shakespeare at least, and probably earlier.

Riess: Did this have anything to do with [Jacob L.] Moreno and role play or anything like that?

Benedict: You mean as therapy, that kind of thing? No, because it was a sociological concept that I think developed quite separately from its psychological use. They're clearly related. I suppose in this country the anthropologist who was most responsible for that was Linton, Ralph Linton. Have you come across his name yet?

Riess: No. In your paper you refer to S. A. Nadel.

Benedict: Nadel was a British anthropologist. He was Viennese, actually. He was trained as a psychoanalyst, interestingly enough. He wrote a very important book called *The Foundations of Social Anthropology*, which is not much read anymore. He took the role concept and tried to make it more sophisticated.

Linton really talked only about two kinds of roles, what he called ascribed roles and achieved roles. That is, you're a woman, and that's an ascribed role, there's nothing you can do about that. But what you're doing right this minute, of course, is an achieved role, something you trained for and that you achieved. So that was a very simple kind of division, and that was for a long time what students were taught.

Nadel said that roles are really more contested than that, and that there are different ways of looking at it, and that there could be a lot of negotiation about role playing. He developed a whole system of looking at roles in a more complex way. He was also very much interested in how roles were defined: who says that you're playing such-and-such a role?

Basically he came out with the idea that roles are defined by expectations; they're not something that you can just do by yourself. I mean, in the first place, there have got to be at least two people involved if you're going to play a role. Even if you're--and this gets into the therapy thing--if you're playing an imaginary role, there is always another in your mind, or there somewhere. So, I thought it was terribly important.

Then I got interested in this business of animals, and do animals have culture, which is, of course, one of the things that [Frans] de Waal was talking about. And I was going to these seminars and Robin Fox and I were starting a course at the LSE. When I came here, Sherry Washburn was terribly interested in this, and so was Phyllis Dolhinow. It became something that a lot of people got interested in, as I showed you last time in the book about that conference at the London Zoo.

I tried in that [1969] paper to see what could be done by looking at animals and then looking at role playing. And I thought there was a great deal of interest in it. It died out, the interest died out, as far as the translation of making the transition from animals to humans. That whole idea died out. Some of the anthropologists who were very interested in it then said the difference is too great, because you get into the question of language, and once you get into the question of language, then everything is very, very different.

Riess: That's right. And consciousness.

Benedict: And consciousness. You know, you just can't go any further with that. So that's what happened. It looked as though it might be something very exciting and creative of insights, but it doesn't seem to have turned out that way. Except that I think it's had a big effect on animal behaviorists, as you can see from that program. It's had more of an effect on them than it has on social anthropologists. That's my view. But I don't know whether that answers your question.

Riess: Well, you're fortunate to have had a new idea, aren't you? Don't you think they are hard to come by?

Benedict: I think they are. They almost always turn out not to be new. That's right. And this has been an interesting exercise for me, because if you look at my whole career, it goes back to that thing I told you at the very beginning, when I said something to I.A. Richards, "I want to do something that is the least specialized thing that I can do." And he said, "Well, go and be an anthropologist." I told you that.

Riess: Yes.

Benedict: Well, that's certainly what's happened. And really, you know, I have been very much of a dilettante.

To me, being a dilettante is not a bad thing. I think it's kind of a good thing. You can tell from my career, I've gone in all different kinds of directions. It probably means that I haven't made any really important contribution in one direction; it probably means that I've spread myself too thin or something like that. But I get interested in this, and then I run off and get interested in something else. That's just the way I am. And it's very different from, say, Elizabeth [Colson], or George [Foster]--very, very different. Now, I have great respect for them, but I can't do that. I get bored with it.

My career, if you look at all those different things that I've done, they don't make a coherent whole.

Riess: Actually, like Elizabeth, you in many cases end up using your initial place of field work as the text.

Benedict: Yes, that's very common among anthropologists. I think the first field work that you do, the first really intensive field work that you do, in a way that's your work. That's what you have done. It's the most important thing that ever happens to you. And your subsequent field work--I don't care what it is, and I could give you chapter and verse for many, many anthropologists--their second and third field trips are never as insightful and as good as their first one.

The kind of emotional commitment that you make--and, of course, you're also young--is something that doesn't happen again, and the impression that you get from working in a strange culture, in a different society, and your empathy for that society, just doesn't happen again. And it has a permanent effect on you. So when you start writing or

thinking about something, your reference is that first, intensive field work. And you can see it over and over and over again.

**“Family Firms and Economic Development,” 1968**

Riess: The family firms paper is a good example of that?<sup>1</sup>

Benedict: Did we talk about the family firms?

Riess: No, we haven't.

Benedict: We should talk about that, because I think probably that may be the most important paper that I ever wrote as far as what you were talking about, as far as the reaction. It got a lot of reaction.

I did it, as I started to tell you, I think, last time, when I was here as a visitor. I came across this East African Indian who belonged to the Ismaili sect. The Ismaili sect was a sect that was headed by the Aga Khan. The Aga Khan, by his believers, is a descendent of the prophet, so he is very important. They have a huge following. There are millions of them. There are a lot in East Africa, there are a lot in Persia, there are a lot in India. They're spread all over the world. And they tend to be merchants.

I just have to tell you one anecdote. I had a colleague in London, a very close friend, who's a colleague at the LSE [London School of Economics], and he worked in East Africa with some of these Ismailis, and when he came back and started to--the Aga Khan, the old Aga Khan was based in Switzerland, lived in Switzerland, and this young one has more or less bought Sardinia. I mean, they're enormously rich. Remember, they used to get weighed in diamonds? Do you remember that?

Riess: No, I didn't know that.

Benedict: For his birthday, he would be weighed, literally weighed in diamonds. They'd make a huge scale. And he was a big fat guy, and they'd pour diamonds on the other side until it balanced.

Riess: Tasteless.

Benedict: A little tasteless. Anyhow, so my friend was writing up all this stuff about the Ismailis. This was at the LSE. And the secretary came in and handed him a card, and it was from a lawyer in London, from a very prestigious law firm, very important law firm, saying could he spare him a moment. And so he was confronted by this man in striped trousers, and he

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<sup>1</sup>"Family Firms and Economic Development," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, Spring, 1968.

said, "His Highness understands that you are writing something about the Ismailis, something about his followers." My friend said yes, and the lawyer said, "His Highness is delighted that you're doing this, but only wishes to remind you that he retains the finest legal talent in the world."

So this chap that I met here had been sent--well, the way it works is the Aga Khan is based in Switzerland, and of course with his fingers in everything, gives advice to his followers. For instance, he sends prayers to his followers all over the world. And at the end of the prayer it says something like, "Buy jute" or "Sell cotton."

Riess: All of his followers?

Benedict: Well, the ones that are in that kind of business who can do it--you're not talking about little farmers, you know. It's really an important network.

Anyhow, this guy that I met here--the reason he was here was because he belonged to a family firm in East Africa, and he didn't know what to do, so he wrote to the Aga Khan, told him who he was and gave him all his qualifications, and he got a letter back, and the Aga Khan said, "Go to Japan and get a job in a bank. I will arrange for you to have a job in a bank in Japan."

So he went to Japan. He joined the bank, and he learned Japanese, and he came back to East Africa with a fistful of franchises. And then he [the Aga Khan] said to come here and take a business degree here. So he came here. He married the daughter of a bank manager here, in America, and--I mean, that's what they're like. You know, it's really quite something.

Riess: I can see why it's worth studying.

Benedict: Yes. Well, at any rate, I guess I was giving a course or something--I don't remember exactly how I met him--but as you can imagine, he was very personable, and we hit it off all right. I started talking about this family firm stuff, and he told me all about it. He came from one of these traditional family firms in East Africa. I mean, they had a shop, and they began to get bigger, and then they had more shops all over. It first started in Uganda, I think, and then they spread to Tanzania and Kenya and so on.

I, of course, recorded all of this, and I said, "I want to write about this."

Riess: What do you mean, recorded?

Benedict: Not the way you're doing, but I took notes on it and wrote it up in my field notes. And then I said, "I want to write an article about this, and I think we should write it jointly." He said, "No, I don't want my name in there at all. Disguise who I am, but you're perfectly free to use what we've been talking about."

I wrote this up, as "Family Firms and Economic Development," and it was published in the *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, which is now called the *Journal of*



*Anthropological Research*, I think. It caused quite a stir, not among anthropologists, but among people in development and all kinds of people.

Now, remember my telling you that we had this banker friend that we used to go to south of France with? Well, one of the people--those were house parties that lasted two or three weeks and were very grand. One of the guests was a financial columnist for the London *Financial Times*, that sort of pinky-orange paper, and he wrote a lot about this. And I don't know, we got to talking, and I guess I told him I was all hot on this family firm stuff. He said, "I'd like to see your article." So I sent him my article, and he wrote it up in the *Financial Times*.

Riess: He used the examples you used, like the Rothschilds?

Benedict: Yes, like the Rothschilds. He wrote it up, and what I was saying in that article was politically it's a mistake to try and disband these family firms, that they're your growth points. What you really ought to do is to help them, not clobber 'em. I mean, that's the conclusion. I didn't actually say that. But it was perfectly clear from my article that they were valuable growing points for developing economies. The reason I used the Rothschilds, of course, is to show that the same process happened in the West.

So this was written up in the *Financial Times*, where it had some kind of an impact. This man, whose name was Nigel Lawson, later became Margaret Thatcher's Chancellor of the Exchequer--I think I mentioned that before.

Riess: Did your paper have an influence on policy?

Benedict: I think it had an influence on policy. It certainly fitted in very nicely, of course, with a Conservative viewpoint. He was a Conservative--you know, British Conservative Party, and little "c" conservative as well.

[tape interruption]

Riess: I was asking you why family firms were threatened.

Benedict: They were threatened because these new Socialist regimes in East Africa were all for state enterprises. They wanted to nationalize everything. They wanted state enterprises. They didn't want private firms. They didn't want family firms. They wanted state enterprises.

I don't think they would actually persecute these people, but they saw them as holding back the nation from moving towards a Socialist utopia. That's the way they saw these private firms. It was a Marxist view. It's the same kind of view that existed in Communist countries, too. And the family firm is the epitome of private enterprise, so that that's what they were threatened by. I wasn't really trying to make any kind of political point there. I was just showing what they did and how they did it.

Well, this had further ramifications because it then turned out that there were a couple of people in this country, at the University of Wisconsin, as it happened, who read this and got all excited about it. They had been working in South America, where they were also

looking at family firms, so they got very interested in my paper, and they wrote to me. They said, "We want to have a conference all about family firms, and so we are going to apply to the School of American Research."

Riess: Is that in Latin America?

Benedict: No, it's in New Mexico, in Santa Fe. They have conferences on anthropological subjects. It was founded by two maiden ladies who stopped in Santa Fe and thought, "What a lovely place. We'll just stay here." They founded the School of American Research, which is now quite a big research institute.

At any rate, we had this conference which lasted, I don't know, three or four days. And then the papers were all published in a book. My paper was the key paper. They were all given my paper to read, and the conference was really about my paper and about this family firm thing. So it was a real consequence.

Riess: You referred to "prestations" in that paper. What is that?

Benedict: The idea of prestation comes from Marcel Mauss. Do you know that name?

Riess: No.

Benedict: Marcel Mauss, French. He was part of that group which eventuated in Levi-Strauss. They started--they were really followers of Durkheim, and in fact, I think Mauss was his son-in-law or something like that. At any rate, he wrote a very important book called *The Gift*, in English, and in French it's called *Essai sur le Don*. Anyhow, the reason I'm bringing in the French is not just to show you how well educated I am but because in French there is a difference--there are two words. We use the word "gift," but there are two words that can be translated as "gift" in French. One is *don*, and the other is *prestation*.

Mauss was talking about this difference, and what he was saying was that there's a hook in the gift. If you give somebody a gift, that person feels an obligation to you, and this is a very important--you can see, you can build a whole structure on this thing. In Northwest Coast Indian potlatches, for instance, this is extremely important, and you can do all kinds of things with gifts. You can insult somebody with a gift, too, you know.

My favorite example there is from *Henry V*. I don't know whether you remember, but he receives a gift from the Dauphin, from the French Dauphin, and he opens it up, and he says, "Tennis balls!" And they were tennis balls. And that was an insult because that's not really what one king gives to another. So he went to war!

This idea of gift and counter-gift, of prestation and counter-prestation and what's involved--and the best example of this is the Northwest Coast potlatch, where you give enormous amounts of stuff to your rivals, and the only way they can reciprocate is to give even more back to you, and that developed to such an extent that--

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Benedict: --you'd pile it up in front of your rivals, and then set it alight, and burn it, and that shames them. So it's very important. And lots and lots of people have written on it. It's a very live issue today. I wrote several things on this. In one of my articles, I started with Christmas cards.

Riess: Well, I'm glad we talked about that.

Speaking of articles, I want to include in the appendices to the oral history your article "Controlling Population Growth in Mauritius" from *Technology and Social Change* [Macmillan, 1972]. It is good to have the whole account, I think. But I was alarmed by the ending, suggesting putting contraceptive chemicals in the water supply.

Benedict: I don't suggest that. I don't approve of that. But there were all kinds of crazy things being proposed. Yes, that was being proposed. It was like that business of going around with truckloads full of pills and giving them to everybody.

Riess: I did wonder whether this was on people's lips, and that's why it was okay for you to mention it.

Benedict: Yes, well, it's still with us. Desperate measures need to be taken, and nothing seemed to work very well.



## X ADMINISTRATIVE ROLES OF THE 1970S

### A Department Run by Committee, and How That Came About

Riess: The anthropology department, as I read, was being administered by a committee.

Benedict: I was going to talk about that.

Riess: I'm interested in that.

Benedict: The department had got itself into such a mess, I guess--this was before I arrived--that they couldn't get anyone to agree to be chairman. There was not a single member of the department who would agree to be chairman. Of course, the dean's office was not very thrilled with that, as you can well imagine, so they said, "Okay, well, if you can't do it, we'll just have to appoint a chairman from another department," which has been done in other departments here. And so we got together.

We were not at each other's throats, I must say. At that time, as I think I mentioned before, the department was really pretty cooperative. Everybody was trying to help everybody else pretty well. So we got together, and we said, "No, we don't want that to happen. We certainly don't want that to happen."

I think it was really Gene Hammel, who was very good at these kinds of administrative shenanigans, who suggested, "Why don't we have an executive committee? We will have a committee of five people. There will be five vice chairmen, and each vice chairman will be in charge of a particular aspect of the department, and we can make sure that we have an archaeologist and a physical anthropologist and social anthropologist and so on." One would be in charge of personnel, one would be in charge of curriculum, one would be in charge of graduate students, and so on.

So we went to the dean, who was at that time Walter Knight--there weren't divisional deans then. We went to him--he was a very sweet man, he wasn't tough enough to be a dean. We said, "We'll do this. We'll just have this executive committee." And he said, "Okay, all right. You can try it." So we did. And we had that for quite a long time, in

fact for a very long time. It wasn't, I think, until Stanley [Brandes] became--and we didn't have, I mean, I put myself down there as chairman, but I was really vice chairman for personnel.

Riess: Oh, really? I didn't understand that.

Benedict: Yes. So it wasn't until Stanley became chairman, which was much, much later, that we reverted back--of course, the administration never liked a committee-run department, as you can imagine.

Riess: Who reported?

Benedict: Well, the vice chairman for personnel, his office in a way was the most important because he did all the personnel actions. He would report, but not about everything. It would depend. The graduate dean, for example, if he wanted to find out about graduate students, he'd have to get in touch with the vice chairman for graduate affairs. The administration absolutely hated that. And we saw it--we were all sort of dancing around, giggling, because we thought it was a very great advantage because the administration could never really quite figure out who was in charge! And so it went on for a long time.

The disadvantage was that nothing got done much, because we spent hours and hours and hours and hours in faculty meetings, arguing, and posturing, and carrying on. So that was the disadvantage, that things didn't get done. The advantage was that the administration couldn't really cope with it.

Riess: You were only on the committee for a year?

Benedict: I think I was on the committee for two years, because the year before, which was really my first year here--not counting my visiting year--I was on the committee.

Riess: Did the committee turn over a lot?

Benedict: Yes, it would. That was another thing the administration hated. "She's not doing it anymore. He's doing it."

Riess: Did it catch on in any other department?

Benedict: Well, a lot of the other departments were interested, but the administration hated it, and they weren't going to do it. I don't think any other department ever actually did it.

At any rate, that's what was going on. And it doesn't exist anymore, but that's the way it was. Does that explain it?

Riess: Well, yes. Now, when we first met, before we started taping, you talked about the critical issues during those years being loss of faculty to Chicago. But that had happened earlier.

Benedict: That happened much earlier.

Riess: And rebuilding the department. I wondered about how that worked, in your personnel role.

Benedict: I don't really remember when various people came. I mostly remember having to write up these cases endlessly.

Riess: Cases for promotion, you mean?

Benedict: Cases for tenure and for promotion--well, appointments, merit increases, and promotions. Promotions are like from associate professor to professor. Merit increases are what they sound like, you know, more money.

### Letters and Science Divisional Dean, But Why Do It?

Riess: I guess we should move to becoming the dean of social sciences. It's hard to understand why you wanted to do that.

Benedict: Sure it's hard to understand why I wanted to. I don't understand it to this day.

Riess: Maybe this is part of that eclectic dilettante?

Benedict: Well, yes. I'll tell you what my problem was. As I think I mentioned before, I was very much of two minds about coming here anyhow. I've always been interested in having a good status, and there was no question in my mind that the status of being a professor in England was much higher than the status of being a professor in the United States. There's no question about that. In England, professors rank above businessmen. But not here. So, you know, it used to be that anybody who got the title of professor was automatically in *Who's Who*, in England. I don't think it's true anymore.

And you can tell from the circles in which I moved in England--I wasn't going to do that here. They weren't open to me, and I wouldn't be able to do it here. Anyhow, the scale is so much bigger here. So all of those things militated against my taking the appointment. But then there were a lot of things that militated for it, like greater dynamism here, the fact that the department was much more exciting than what was going on in England, the question of my daughters and Marion's wishes, and all of that.

But once I got here, I thought, "I better get into it as much as I can get into it." The good old anthropological dictum: you start at the top, if you can. You get as close to the top as you can rather than grovel around at the bottom. So I thought, "That'll be a quick and effective way to learn about it."

Okay. Now, what was going on in the administration as far as I knew was that this was--I think [Al] Bowker had just become chancellor, but I'm not sure. When I first arrived here, [Roger] Heyns was the chancellor, but I never had anything to do with him.

Bowker came in--well, the administration was skewed in a very odd way. All the deans were at the same level, so the dean of L&S, which is enormous, had the same status as the dean of social welfare or the dean of optometry. On the organizational chart they were all units. But this is really quite ridiculous. L&S had something like 70 percent of the students or 80 percent of the students and 70 percent of the faculty or something. I don't know. I'm making up those figures. But you know, it was just totally out of balance.

One of the things that all these deans had to do was to write personnel recommendations for their faculty. Well, that wasn't too hard for the School of Social Welfare, but for L&S it was more than Walter or anybody else could do. He just couldn't do it. I mean, he did it, but eventually it tended to be kind of rubber stamp. Whatever the department said, you just let it go through. What else was he to do?

Now, before Walter the dean had been Bill [William] Fretter, who later became vice president of the university. That's another story I'll tell you in a minute. I don't know whose idea it was, whether it was Bowker's or--I don't know whose it was, but at any rate, they decided that they would have what they called divisional deans. It was a new title, and they would divide L&S into four bits: humanities, social sciences, physical sciences, and biological sciences. And they'd have a divisional dean for each of these, and that the divisional dean would do the personnel cases for its division.

So I was the first such dean of social sciences.

Riess: Is that an appointment? How did you get that job?

Benedict: It was an appointment. Walter came to me and said would I do it? I mean, I had, of course, written personnel cases as chairman of the department. The department was getting along very well, and I guess that people all liked me in the department at that point, so that probably had something to do with it.

Riess: I just wondered whether you had let it be known that you were available.

Benedict: No, I didn't apply for it or anything like that.

Riess: Yes, but you were saying you might as well get involved.

Benedict: When I was offered it, not before. I didn't expect to be offered it. It didn't even exist. It was completely--no, I never applied for it. In fact, I never applied for anything. I've never applied for tenure. I've never in my whole life ever applied for anything. Well, that's not true. I've applied for grants occasionally. But at any rate, I said yes.

At that point the dean's office was in Moses Hall. We were all jammed up in little rooms, and it was pretty disorganized. And I started writing up these things. There were a couple of controversial cases, where there was enormous friction in the department, real animosities going on, and this was taken out in personnel cases. These things got passed on and came back from the budget committee. I looked at the history of the things in the budget committee, and I could see that this prejudice, in fact, had gone right up and had





Burton Benedict being dean, winter 1973-1974.



Burton and Marion Benedict, at home in Berkeley, 1980.



worked against a particular individual who had been really quite unfairly treated because people didn't like him. He wasn't nice, but anyhow, that wasn't the point!

Anyway, I unraveled that. I kept protesting and sending stuff back. I mean, it went from me to Walter. Everything from the divisional deans had to go through Walter again. Of course, at this point he just rubber-stamped it. Then it would go to the budget committee, and if they disagreed, then they'd have to send it back. So a few things like that were going on.

### **Departments Under the Dean of Social Sciences, Structural Problems, Strategies**

Benedict: I think I had six or eight departments, and they were very different departments. They were history, which was very well run, I never had any problems with them. Very well run, very highly organized, very clear what their criteria were and so on, so that their cases were beautifully written up.

Did you do Gene Brucker, by the way?

Riess: No.

Benedict: Oh, okay. At any rate, there were some good people there, like Gene Brucker and Bob Middlekauf and Bill Bouwsma. I mean, some really good people. They were very bright, they were wonderful scholars, and they were brilliant administrators. And I think at that time Bouwsma was vice chancellor for academic affairs. He was under Heyns.

Riess: So you had history and you had what else?

Benedict: I had history, and I had psychology, which was totally the opposite. It was divided into at least three bits, each of which had a little sub-chairman, and they all had to report to the chairman, and the chairman had to sort of adjudicate between these, which he couldn't do. He wasn't a very strong chairman, and what he would do would be to agree with whoever had talked to him last. So that was quite a mess.

And then there was geography, which was also a mess, which was very badly split between the sort of social geographers and the sort of physical geographers, who were interested in climate and that kind of stuff, and they didn't see eye to eye at all. They really were totally different disciplines. Geography doesn't even exist as a department in most universities, which is probably why no Americans know their geography. No, it's because they don't get it in school.

I had linguistics, which was a small department. I had sociology, which was a great big mess, which was politically divided between left-wingers and right-wingers, and came to a complete halt on a number of occasions. And political science. And those were all really big departments. I mean, history, political science, and psychology were really big

departments, economics and sociology were fairly big, anthropology was fairly big, linguistics was small. We had had a demography department, which was very small. What else did I have? I can't remember. I think I had something else, too. Anyhow, so that kept me very busy. I had to write up these cases.

Riess: It meant you taught less.

Benedict: I taught less. You had course relief for doing this. Yes, I taught less.

Riess: Was it satisfying?

Benedict: I thought it was really interesting, yes. I really did. And it made me see--I really could see how the system worked. I got very familiar with the strengths of various departments and the people in various departments. I knew that so-and-so was well known for this and so on. I got to know an awful lot of people. And I liked that. I'm particularly attracted to historians. I like them. Got to be friends with a number of them.

Riess: Friendship was part of it.

Benedict: Well, if you want people to do something, it's better to be friends with them than enemies. And I wanted to understand where these people were coming from, so I often had interviews with them.

Riess: With the top people.

Benedict: With the top people, yes. Or they would come to see me. Now, I ran into some troubles because the other thing I found structurally in the dean's office was that it was really run by the budget office. A man called Edward Feder controlled the budget, and he shouldn't have done it. The budget should have been controlled by the dean.

I think this is a common problem, as a matter of fact--in most every organization, if you come right down to it it's the budget officer that really controls it. It's especially the case here because these academics--I mean, they can add, but that's about it. You know, they're not very good at that. They really aren't. Also they change so often, whereas the budget officer, of course, gets really anchored in there, and he's got connections to the purse strings of the university.

Riess: And Sacramento.

Benedict: And Sacramento.

This Edward Feder, who was I think very efficient as a budget officer, he had his favorites, and there were some departments he liked and there were some he didn't like, and there were some that could get things and there were some that couldn't get things. Now, of course, really clever chairmen found this out right away, and then they would spend a lot of time buttering him up.

Riess: Did the four deans of the four divisions act in concert ever?

Benedict: Yes. I mean, they were bumping into each other all the time, but we met--we had a meeting every week.

Riess: But you couldn't negotiate financial things?

Benedict: We didn't, you see, because Ed Feder was doing all that. We should have done that. We were supposed to really be the deans, we were not supposed to just be doing personnel. If, say, somebody in sociology would come and say, "Our Sociology I class usually only has an enrollment of 100 but we've got 300 this year. What am I going to do? I have to get a bigger room and this and that," I couldn't do any of that. I didn't have any control over any of that. I would have to go to Ed and say, "Ed, how am I going to do this?" Then he, depending on how he was feeling or what other demands there were on him, he would either do it or say, "Well, they'll just have to not take so many."

Riess: Oh, that's a problem.

Benedict: Yes, it's a real problem. Then, of course, if they said, "We really need more nonacademic staff. We haven't got enough. We can't cope with all this," well, that would all be Ed. None of the deans had any power over that at all.

Riess: Did any of these things come up in Academic Senate meetings? May I ask whether Academic Senate was a forum for anything?

Benedict: Well, no, these things didn't come up very much in Academic Senate. Academic Senate meetings were a whole lot of routine business, and then they were very much involved in whatever was going on politically on the campus, unrest of various kinds. Ethnic studies was the big thing in those days, whether there should be a Department of Ethnic Studies.

Riess: And that got argued out in the Academic Senate.

Benedict: A lot of it got argued out in the Academic Senate.

### **Accomplishments as Dean: Washburn Labs, and Split Appointments ##**

Benedict: I have to say something else about when I was dean. I had a couple of little campaigns going on. I decided when I became dean that I could probably only accomplish one thing every year, given the nature of the bureaucracy. The first thing I wanted to accomplish was something for the [anthropology] department, which was to convert the shooting gallery! Can you believe this? In the basement of the girls' gym, the Hearst Gym, there was a rifle range for years. It had been some deal that had been made by Sproul—or God knows who made it, maybe Wheeler--long, long ago with some gun club--I don't know if it was a gun club.

Riess: How interesting. I'm not sure I've ever heard of this.

Benedict: I don't think many people have. But anytime anybody tried to do anything with that space--and it was a big space, besides the fact that they were shooting guns down there--it got blocked by this group, whatever it was. I can't remember what it was. Something very honorable, like the Boy Scouts. Though it couldn't have been the Boy Scouts, but it was that kind of thing.

Anyhow, I decided that I would devote myself to getting those guns out of there and giving that space to the anthropology department to make a lab for physical anthropology. And I did that. It was a helluva battle, I can tell you, and it lasted for a very, very long time. It went into great ramifications in Sacramento and God knows what all. But I won. Those are the Washburn labs. That was what I did the first year.

Riess: So please, the second?

Benedict: The second year, I decided that it was quite wrong that a husband and wife should not be allowed to be both appointed.

Riess: Ah, yes, nepotism.

Benedict: Nepotism. I thought that was wrong. There was a case that I had in one of the departments where the husband and wife, both of them very well qualified in their field--

Riess: --which were law and history?

Benedict: No, not law and history. I don't know if I should tell you or not. It doesn't matter. But they wanted both to be here, and they wanted to split their appointment.

Riess: In the same department.

Benedict: Yes.

Nepotism, split appointment, it had everything against it. I fought and fought and fought and fought for that. We went up and back, and back and up. And I won, and they were both appointed in the department, and then they got divorced!

Riess: That was groundbreaking, the split appointment?

Benedict: There were split appointments, but everybody hates split appointments.

##

Benedict: [talking about the campus during the early 1970s] One of the things that was happening was, as I think I mentioned before, this reconstituting of classes, that the students were asking that all the classes be reconstituted. It also impacted on grades. I mean, they had all kinds of crazy stuff. We had a visiting professor in our department, and student

projects for him could be anything. I remember one of them--some student brought in a cross with little packets of marijuana hanging on it. That was his thesis.

Riess: What did you think the duration of all of this would be? It seems to me that would change how you would view it.

Benedict: I don't remember anybody ever talking about it. They were simply all trying to put out the fire. I don't think they had any notion of how long it was going to last because we didn't have any notion of how long the war was going to last. They were burning their draft cards, and there were protests. Reagan was dumping tear gas on the campus. You know, there was a whole lot of ruction.

They came up and they confronted Walter [Knight] in his office, and he basically closed things down--I'm sure this is all written up somewhere--he in fact gave in to the student demands, which had to do with, you know, they would get credit for whatever they were doing, basically. He caved into them. Well, this made a lot of people very angry. Of course, the upper echelons in the administration got very angry, but there were a lot of faculty members who were very angry about this and were opposed to it. Some of the more conservative departments especially were.

Riess: But it was L&S that got hit got more than any other.

Benedict: Yes, because most of the students were L&S. You didn't have much trouble in the engineering department. Engineers just kept doing their thing. It was all L&S. Maybe education.

Riess: What was your stand?

Benedict: I took a fairly hard line. I wasn't confronted the way Walter was, except once in one of my classes, which I told you about.

### On the Receiving End of Pressure Politics

Benedict: At any rate, that ended up with Bowker firing Walter. I'm sure it wasn't put that way, but Walter was succeeded by Rod Park. Rod ran a much tighter ship than Walter--and that's an apt metaphor because, of course, he spent a lot of time sailing about! At any rate, he did, but he was very fair and very good, I thought, and we had the same--I guess some of the deans had changed, but I was still there as dean of social sciences.

Riess: So you didn't bear the brunt.

Benedict: I used to get pressure--I remember the political scientists were great at pressure politics; I suppose it's one of the things they learn. Oh, and economics, I forgot to mention economics. The economists and the political scientists always gave me quite a bit of

trouble because they used pressure tactics. The political scientists, when I would say, "I would like an appointment with the chair," six of them would come. They were sort of at me all the time.

The economists were always threatening to leave. We had a terrible time keeping young economists because economists want to be on the East Coast, they don't want to be out here. So if they had anybody who was any good, he immediately got gobbled up by Princeton or something. They were always frantic about keeping their people. So that meant they always wanted to get big promotions for very young people.

I had that kind of pressure, but I didn't have much political pressure. I wasn't in an important enough position for the students to concentrate on. They saw I couldn't do anything anyhow, so I wasn't worth their while, worth their trouble.

Riess: You were in that deanship until '74.

Benedict: I decided in '74 that I wanted to go back to Mauritius. So then Park came to me, and he said, "I don't want you to go to Mauritius. I want you to stay here." I said, "I really think I ought to go there." He said, "Okay, I will give you leave to go. Take leave, and you can go to Mauritius for a year, and then come back and be dean again." I said, "I think I've been dean for long enough." So I quit. They gave me a party and all that, and that was very nice.

Riess: It must be hard to step down.

Benedict: They gave me a wonderful party, and they made a big picture, with everybody in there and testimonials and stuff.

Riess: Was there any chance of your succeeding Park?

Benedict: Not at that point. There was later, though.

### **Budget Committee, 1978-1981, Day to Day**

Benedict: What happened was then was that when I came back [from Mauritius /Seychelles], I was approached to go onto the Budget Committee by the--you know, they have something here with the perfectly absurd name of the Committee on Committees. I was approached by the head of that and asked if I would be on the Budget Committee. So I said yes.

Riess: That is the most powerful committee.

Benedict: Oh, no question about that. So I got onto the Budget Committee, and I stayed on that, and I became chairman of that. I'd been preceded by Elizabeth, actually, and she was, of course, very good at it, but I don't think she liked it. I'm sure she didn't like it.



Have you talked to anyone else who's been on the Budget Committee?

Riess: No, no. Tell me about it.

Benedict: What it is, or rather, what it was like then--I can't speak for it now, although another anthropologist has just finished being chair of it, and that's Meg Conkey. You have this secret room. Of course, it isn't really secret, but people are not supposed to know about it. It's in California Hall. You go there, and you have your special key to get in, and you can go at any time, and in that room is everybody's file, everybody's personnel file, so there are walls full of this stuff. It has a staff of about five people.

The committee in my day consisted of, I think, eight people who were drawn from the different parts of the university. You are given a group of departments for which you are responsible, to write up their cases. In my case, of course, they were the social sciences, but some of the social sciences are not in L&S, like social welfare, education, those kinds of things, which are kind of social science-y, but they are the schools.

Then you looked through the files, and you looked through everything. When you get the file of somebody, it's the whole history, from birth, practically; it's got all the things that they've done. You look at the history of the case, how it's been treated before by the administration, by the Budget Committee. You look at how it's been written up, who made the recommendations, whether outside recommendations were received, from whom they were received. And, of course, some of these people get reputations for always writing nice bland letters, and some of them get reputations for just the opposite. And you see how substantive they are. Are they really specific about what this person has done, or are they full of nice general comments?

Then you make a judgment, and you write up what you think. Now I guess you do it on the computer, but in those days you did it by hand or on the typewriter. Then once a week, or sometimes twice a week, depending on the workload--I mean, it's really a lot of work, I can tell you!

Riess: You're looking at entry-level people also?

Benedict: Yes.

Riess: You're looking at everyone.

Benedict: At everyone. Not only that, we're supposed to also review the departments because the departments, themselves, get budgets every year. So it's really called the Committee on Budget and Interdepartmental Relations. You're given, "Should this department be given more than that department?" kinds of questions.

Anyway, we would meet as a committee once, or sometimes twice, a week, depending on the workload--with the chairman at the head of the table. Each case is taken up, and the person who has written up the case reports on it, and then other people ask him questions, him or her, and then we vote on what the recommendation should be.

Sometimes we had to refer back. Sometimes we'd say, "The case is not clear enough." Sometimes we'd say, "Okay, well, let's give it to somebody else on the committee to redo it, to get another perspective." Sometimes we'd send it back to the department and say--we'd send it to the dean, who sends it to the department--saying, "You haven't given us enough information." Sometimes we'd say, "We need more outside letters."

Riess: It's impressive, the high seriousness of this.

Benedict: Oh, I'll say. And you really bond with the other people who are on that committee, as you can imagine. You're meeting at least--well, informally, there's always somebody else there, and you meet as a group at least once, and usually twice, a week, all year 'round, summer too. So yes, it's really quite something. It's an amazing system, and it's a lot of work, but it's the price you pay for academic governance. In my opinion, it's worth it because in most places these decisions are simply made by the dean, and that's that. But here they're really made by your peers.

Now, what happens is that often--of course, the actual promotions and appointments and so on are made by the chancellor or the vice chancellor. Usually they just go along with your recommendation. You send it to the vice chancellor, and he makes the appointment, and you, the candidate, get the letter from the vice chancellor. But sometimes, of course, there's conflict, and the conflict is very often political because the vice chancellor wants to appoint a professor of sports, let's say, and the Budget Committee doesn't want to go along with this, so they reject the case.

It goes up to the vice chancellor, and he says, "Well, I really think we need to have--sports are very important," blah, blah, and sends it back to you, and then you discuss it again, and then you say, "We're sorry, but we don't agree." And then he has to come to the committee and make his case in person, in front of the committee, and he's questioned pretty closely about why he wants to do this.

Now, of course, he does have the power to do it. He can just ignore the Budget Committee and do it. But he can't do that very often. So what we would do when one of these political things came up is we would just make it terribly clear that it was the vice chancellor or the chancellor that was making a political appointment.

Riess: How did you make it clear?

Benedict: Because we would reject it.

Riess: How widely known were your decisions?

Benedict: Well, that wouldn't be widely known, but the chancellor would know it. There's always potential that it could be known if it happened very often because, after all, there are at least eight other people who know it.

Now, there's one other aspect of this. Have you been through all this with some other people?

Riess: No.

Benedict: It's pretty interesting.

Riess: Yes, it is.

Benedict: There's one other aspect. When somebody comes up for tenure, and the department wants to do that, they then make their case. It goes to the dean, the dean sends it to us, we look at it, and we say, "All right, we can consider this for tenure." But then you appoint a committee to consider this person for tenure. The committee consists of three people: one from the person's department and two from outside, from two other departments. And they have to look at this very, very carefully, make the case, and write it up.

Then they send their write-up to the Budget Committee, and the Budget Committee decides whether they've made the case or not. It's called an ad hoc committee, and it's an absolutely secret committee. That is, the candidate does not know who's on the committee. Of course, leaks sometimes happen. But it's totally confidential, totally secret. Sometimes it happens that there's disagreement. They may dissolve the committee and appoint another committee. If there's been a leak, for instance.

Riess: Who appoints the ad hoc committee?

Benedict: The Budget Committee.

Riess: So you find the outside people.

Benedict: We find them. We decide by looking at the case, which we've seen, of course. We decide who would be the appropriate people to put on this committee.

Riess: It's interesting that you don't actually deal with "the people" ever, do you? It's always the case.

Benedict: We deal with the case. We never see the people, the actual people, the candidates. We never see them.

Riess: How do they swear the committee members to secrecy?

Benedict: They don't swear us to secrecy. I mean, you don't take an oath or anything like that, you just know that that's what you have to do.

Riess: Now, you said you became close to the people on the committee. Who were your particular friends in those years?

Benedict: Well, that's why I asked you if you knew Gene Brucker, because he was the chair for one of the years or maybe two of the years that I was on the Budget Committee. He didn't become a particularly close friend, but he was somebody I liked very much.

Riess: Were there any women on the committee when you were there?

Benedict: Yes, Herma Kay. You know her?

Riess: I know who she is, yes.

Benedict: She was on. There weren't any other women, I don't think. I don't think that would be true now.

**Education Abroad Program, 1986-1988 ##**

Riess: From 1986-1988 you were Director of the Study Center for the United Kingdom and Ireland, based in London--the Education Abroad program.

Benedict: Yes. Well, there's really not too much to say about the Education Abroad.

Riess: Was that a plum, to be given that?

Benedict: Yes, it was a plum. I applied for it, I applied to go to London. At that point we had fifteen British and Irish universities, and we sent, I think, about fifteen hundred students. Could it have been that many? No, it couldn't have been.

Riess: From all the University of California campuses.

Benedict: From all the campuses. We took a much smaller number of British students and brought them to various campuses here.

Riess: It was conceived of as an exchange.

Benedict: It was conceived of as an exchange, but it was an imbalanced exchange because we sent many more than we received, and it cost us more money than it cost them, so it wasn't a real balance at all.

My job was basically to be a home base for these students. We had a little Dickensian, decrepit flat near Victoria in London, which was our office, and we had a staff--basically, really only a staff of one, who really ran the thing. She was excellent. She sometimes got in an assistant. And there was a director and an associate director, and they usually came from two different campuses. Their terms were staggered so that there was always somebody who had been there for a year.

Riess: The students chose a particular campus?

Benedict: They applied. Where did they want to go? Well, the trouble is, they had all heard of one or two places, like Sussex, so they all wanted to go there. We couldn't do that because

they couldn't take that many. We had a quota from each one of these British universities about how many they could take. They'd have to give their choices, and I would have to give them their second or third choices, if possible. And if not, I'd just have to assign them somewhere. So that was the first thing I had to do.

They all arrived in an airplane at Heathrow, and I went out there to meet them with two big buses, and then loaded them all onto the buses, and drove them into London, and then put them up in King's College dorms, which were on the King's Road in Chelsea. Then we gave them a little introductory tour--we'd tour them around London, or I'd put them on a boat and take them down to Greenwich--and we sort of generally soothed them. Then they went off to their various universities.

They had to get their program, and we had to make sure that what they were taking was going to get credit here, so there was continual communication with Santa Barbara, where the thing is headquartered, to do this. Also, before we went we were all taken down to Santa Barbara and given a sort of orientation course down there.

Riess: Who all?

Benedict: All the directors, from all these different places, because there were a whole lot of them. And they were all over the place.

Actually, the whole thing was a racket.

Riess: Why did you do this?

Benedict: I did it because I wanted to go to England.

Riess: Did you want to go back and work on anthropology?

Benedict: Yes, I wanted to do some anthropology work. And of course we still had all these friends.

We used to go back to London when I was here. We didn't go back very often, not every year the way we do now, but we went back quite a few times. We ended up by buying another house there. Actually, we were looking for a flat, and one of our English friends said, "Oh, you don't want a flat. You should buy a house." And she found this place. She said, "Here, it's not very far from where we live." So we bought a small house, which we still own.

It was very nice for me, and I was able to pick up with all these things that I had done before. I can't say that I did much work. I was trying to do some work on India, I think. I can't remember what I was doing. But anyhow, I didn't do anything very serious.

Riess: Was there real troubleshooting with this job?

Benedict: Yes, well, you got some women who got pregnant. Not many, one or two. You had to ship them home. My main thing was to try to persuade them not to go home, the children,

because they wanted to go home all the time. That is, I think, a big mistake, because they never really get into being in England if they're always running back to California. You get people coming in. They're babies! "It's too cold here. I can't stay here. It's too cold." You know, that kind of stuff.

Riess: Makes me think of culture shock.

Benedict: Yes, they were having culture shock, and I tried to explain that to them. What I'm talking about is a very small minority. Most of them did beautifully, most of them absolutely adored it and made lifelong friends there. They would then exchange with the people that they met there. This was especially true if they went to some of the more outlying universities up in Scotland or Yorkshire or Wales. It was really, I think, wonderful for them. They really got a lot out of it. And in their breaks, they would travel over to the Continent.

The only other ritual we had was Thanksgiving. We would bring them all back to London on Thanksgiving and give them a big Thanksgiving feast that I had to arrange. I'll tell you, the biggest problem was cranberry sauce. You just couldn't get it in London. "What?" they would say.

Riess: But they did have the bird?

Benedict: They had the bird all right, but "you want some nice bread sauce," they would say.

Really, I don't think there were any particular adventures there, except that I got back into the RAI, and they put me on the Executive Committee again, on the Management Committee, whatever they called it, the council of the RAI [1986-1989]. So I worked there. I don't remember what I was working on. I was working on something, but nothing came of it. I think there's really not much more to be said about that.

Now, how much time have we got?

Riess: Oh, I don't know, eight minutes.

Benedict: I think if we start on the Panama-Pacific or start on my time in the museum, that's a whole section. So let's see if there's anything else we have to pick up on. Let's see if I've made any notes here.

[tape interruption]

**"Stratification in Plural Societies," 1962**

Riess: We are going to fill in a bit about your work on plural societies<sup>1</sup>.

Benedict: I think there are just a few things to be said. Let me just say them, from these few minutes that we have, and then you can dump them or not, as you please.

Really, the point about that is that there was, as there still is, the difficulty of dealing with--I guess the okay word now is multi-ethnic societies, or what we used to call race relations. I mean, that's just an ongoing problem which we have never solved, especially in this country. So one possibility was the idea of a plural society. And that was an idea which had been invented, I guess you could say, in Indonesia, of all places.

There was a man, a British civil servant, called [John Sydenham] Furnivall, who was looking at what was then the Dutch East Indies, or the Netherlands Indies, and he was very struck by the fact that there were all these different ethnic groups there that seemed to have nothing to do with each other except in the marketplace.

Furnivall devised this notion of a plural society which was really plural. There were a lot of different parts, but they were all in one society, which had an overarching political authority. They had economic relations with each other, but they didn't have any other relations with each other. That's too baldly put, but it's basically what the idea was.

This notion of the plural society became--Furnivall was not an anthropologist. He was, I guess you would say, a political scientist and an administrator. But the anthropologists picked it up, especially people who were working in Southeast Asia because, of course, it also applied to Malaysia. So they were very interested in that.

And then some workers in the West Indies picked it up, and it started to be used in the West Indies, in places like British Guiana--or Guyana, as it is now--and Trinidad. And so it became quite a fashionable term, and it seemed to have some things going for it. It got you away from the idea of ethnicity as the most important thing. It was more structural, so it fitted into the structural views that were so prevalent in anthropology in those days.

I applied it to Mauritius, and what I tried to do there, as you saw, particularly the case in that article. Not so much in the book, where I tried to show that there were these different groups, each of which had a class system of its own, and what was happening as the society developed was that there were certain places where these began to come together and there were certain places where they kept very apart. It was that kind of thing.

That was a notion that was very important. I gave several papers on it, and people were very attracted to it. Also the Africanists got very interested in it, especially people in

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<sup>1</sup>"Stratification in Plural Societies," *American Anthropologist*, December 1962.

Pittsburgh, which was starting a big anthropology department. They wanted me to come. They offered me a professorship. Would I come there? I went there to visit, but I didn't go.



## XI LOWIE [NOW HEARST] MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY

[Interview 9: July 5, 2001] ##

### Aside on Ritual Activities, Here and There

Riess: Before we get to the heart of the matter, I wonder if you, as an observer of ritual, have anything to say about the Fourth of July, which was yesterday.

Benedict: I don't think I have very much to say about it. I did hear somebody say something which is interesting. He said, "It's rather curious that we call this thing by the name of the date and not by what it's about." That is, we don't call it Independence Day.

And the more you learn about it--I'm only beginning now to become interested in eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century American history--the more you learn about it, the more interesting it becomes, that Continental Congress and so on. But everybody knows all this except me, probably. Of course, in England they don't celebrate it, as you might well imagine, and so all those years that I lived abroad there wasn't a celebration, although the American embassy always had a celebration to which Americans were invited, but Marion and I never went.

However, there were other kinds of rituals, which really struck me when I came back here. Remember--I think I told you that when you go into the field, you have to be very careful to write down everything you see at first because it never strikes you the same way again. Well, when I started teaching here, I was teaching Anthropology 3, which is the huge introductory course. I had been talking about ritual, and after one of the classes, three young women came up and said that they were allowed to invite a professor to their sorority for dinner, and would I come to dinner. I said yes, and I went to dinner, and talk about ritual! I did a very bad thing, but I was so struck by it.

We went in, and there were all these girls, and they were all dressed--they all had the same costume on, which consisted of a skirt and a sweater and a string of pearls. And they sang some kind of little sorority song, and then we all had to stand behind our chairs, and the house mother came in, or whatever she was called--and there were maybe half a

dozen professors there--this house mother came in, and she clasped her hands together and said, "Oh, I've never seen so much male pulchritude."

Riess: Wonderful!

Benedict: I tried very hard to keep a straight face.

Before we sat down to dinner, we gathered in a reception area, and these young ladies talked to me. They had, you know, perfectly ritualized things that they asked you. I wish I could remember them more. Very uncontroversial subjects. You could tell it was a regular kind of routine. Then we all sat down. At the end, after the meal, I can't remember exactly how it happened, but they all lighted candles, and then the one that had become engaged put out her candle, and everybody screamed!

I thought this was the damndest ritual that I had ever seen, and so the next lecture, I gave a whole lecture on this ritual. I mean, I thought it was terribly funny, but, of course, they were immensely offended. They were really deeply offended. They came up and said that I'd abused their hospitality and so on and so on and so on. They stopped flirting with me after that.

Every one of these places that I went to, especially Mauritius and Seychelles--they're terribly interested in America, and they questioned me a lot about it. They had very bizarre ideas about everybody having a big car. On the other hand, some of them were extremely ignorant and thought, for instance, that it was some kind of British possession off Newfoundland or something. They didn't really know.

The thing is that their own education was so bizarre in Mauritius--I'm sure this isn't true now. But when I was there it was still a colony, and they had to learn British history. They acted Shakespearean plays in the villages, and Marion and I were often asked to be the judges at these Shakespearean plays--or they were scenes from various plays, not always Shakespeare. They also did Victor Hugo, this business about stealing candlesticks, if you remember that.

So when the Fourth of July came around--I mean, they weren't really aware of that, so there was no point in doing it. After all, Marion and I were practically the only Americans in both of those places. I think sometimes we were the only ones. But even where there were two or three others, we never did anything. The big things for them were Commonwealth Day and the queen's birthday. And in Mauritius they did celebrate Indian Independence Day. There was an Indian commissioner there, so they were quite proud of what had happened in India.

**Some Other Friends, and Louise Clubb and I Tatti**

Riess: You said there were a couple of things you wanted to bring up today.

Benedict: Just one or two things. When you asked me about when I was on the Budget Committee, and had I made any friends, I mentioned Gene Brucker. I said he didn't become a particularly good friend. But I did, of course, make some very good friends there, one of whom was George Starr in the English department. He was very much involved with the library, incidentally.

Riess: I don't know who George Starr is.

Benedict: He's an eighteenth-century specialist. He's married to another professor of English called Julia Bader, who walked out of Hungary as a little girl in 1956. They're also very much interested in the whole Art Nouveau, Art Deco period, especially because it flowered, particularly Art Nouveau, very much in Hungary. They go to Hungary a lot. Julia still has a house there. We got to be very good friends, and we still are. That was one friend.

The other person who became important to Marion and me was Louise Clubb. Do you know her? She's a professor of Italian and comparative literature. We got to be very good friends. We still are. In fact, she became dean of humanities at one point. She was chair of the Budget Committee before I was--I think maybe after Elizabeth and before me. She's very smart. She's the daughter of a Southern general. She's a Roman Catholic, and she is a woman of very high standards. She's what in old-fashioned terms used to be called a "lady," and very elegant. She really is.

Riess: Unmarried?

Benedict: Oh, no. She married Will [William G.] Clubb, who was a professor of French and English, I think, at University of San Francisco. He died recently. She became the Education Abroad person for Italy, at the same time that I was for the United Kingdom, and that Education Abroad program is headquartered in Padua, so we went to visit her. They bought a flat in Padua which Louise still has. In fact, she's there this minute. Afterwards, she let Marion and me have it, and we stayed there for ten days or so, in this marvelous flat, right on the Campo. It was absolutely fantastic.

Sometime in between all those, she was asked if she would like to become director of I Tatti. Do you know that?

Riess: [Bernard] Berenson's place?

Benedict: Yes. And with that goes a professorship at Harvard. So she accepted that, but she just took a leave of absence from here because she wasn't sure she really wanted to do it. And she found that it was a terrible job, in fact. You know the old Harvard thing about "every ship on its own bottom." Have you ever heard that?

Riess: No.

Benedict: Well, it's a "charming" New England expression, which means every unit has to finance itself.

So she stayed at Berenson's villa, and she invited us, and Marion and I went and stayed there at I Tatti for a week, which was quite an experience. But she was supposed to raise all this money, and that's a helluva job, as I'm sure you know. It wasn't what she really wanted to do. She stayed there for her full term, which I think was either three or five years, and then she decided that she didn't want it and she came back here.

When she was there, just to give you an idea of some of the problems that she had, the place--it's kind of a gloomy place, actually. It's surrounded by these black cypress trees, and no light ever gets into the place, which is fine for the pictures, but it's a little depressing. And, of course, it is filled with marvelous Renaissance pictures.

Louise, having realized that she was responsible for all this, asked at one point, "How are these pictures insured?" Oh, no, none of them were insured. Well, she got very upset about that, and so she called Christie's or Sotheby's and said, "Would you come over and value these pictures?" So they sent somebody from England, I guess. Louise said this man came in, and he looked over the pictures, and he said, "Yeah, that's about \$12 million. That's \$30 million, that one. That may be \$2 or \$3 million."

By the time he got around the house, she realized that there was no possible way that she was going to be able to insure these pictures, that she was going to be able to pay for it. It was absolutely impossible. She said to this man, "What shall I do?" And he said, "Get a dog." That turned out to be a problem, too, because I Tatti is right on the border between Florence and Fiesole, and under two municipal jurisdictions. And, you know, you can't fire anybody in Italy.

She got this dog, and the people said to her, "Well, you don't want a dog, you want a bitch because they're much easier to train," and so on. So she brought home the dog and she said to the watchman, "I've got this dog." And he looked at it and said, "I don't have no bitch!" It was a challenge to his masculinity.

At any rate, it goes on and on and on, but it's really her story, not mine. I hope, in fact, that somebody does an oral history of her. It would be fascinating, her whole life. She was an army brat, brought up in New Orleans--it's really very interesting. I don't know whether they're going to do it or not. They really should.

Anyhow, you're supposed to be doing me, yes?

Riess: Yes. Louise Clubb was she the first director after Berenson?

Benedict: Of I Tatti? Oh, no. There had been a whole series of them. They were usually Renaissance scholars, and I Tatti is a Renaissance research center. It has a huge library. It gives resident fellowships to scholars from all over the world who come and live there and

work on their projects, whatever they are. I mentioned Gene Brucker. He was one of them, for instance, that went there.

It was fascinating being there. We had these marvelous formal dinners. The dinner party that I remember was one at which the other guests were Harold Acton, who was very genial and very nice, and Sir John Pope-Hennessy, who was another Renaissance scholar, who had been director of the Victoria and Albert [Museum].

Riess: I read a *New Yorker* profile of Acton. Didn't he give a lot of money to I Tatti?

Benedict: No, but he gave a lot of money to the British Institute of Florence. And he, himself, had a very fine collection. Pope-Hennessy, who's a rather nasty man, was there. Anyhow, that was quite a dinner party.

But that's all by the way. I suppose in some way Marion and I tried--I don't know if we actually tried, I guess we did--to replicate the kind of social circle that we had in London. Most of our friends were in the departments of history and English and classics or in comparative literature, which, of course--I don't think anybody has a full-time appointment in it, they're all split appointments.

The other great friends we made were Vicky [Victoria] Bonnell, professor of sociology and director of the Slavic Center, and her husband, Grisha [Gregory] Freiden, professor of Slavic literature at Stanford. Their daughter, Anna, is our goddaughter.

Riess: When you talked about the Budget Committee, it sounded like a secret society--do you look at institutions like that as an anthropologist? You know, bring your discipline to it?

Benedict: It is sort of secret. I never did write it up. I told you about writing up the Athenaeum, didn't I? And the two German curators from the museum in Cologne? So I analyzed the Athenaeum a little bit, as a male bastion, but I never tried to write up the Budget Committee or the administration here in any way.

Riess: It could be a vicious tool, a way of reducing polite society to tribal behavior.

Benedict: That's right. And that's what those German women were after. But no, I never did it here. Actually, it didn't occur to me to do it. I suppose it should have, but it didn't.

### Long-standing Love of Museums, Ethnic Art and Artifact

Riess: On to the Lowie Museum.

Benedict: Let me start, if I may, with my own interest in ethnographic objects, because that's where it comes from. That's one aspect of it. As you can tell from looking around this house, I've always been very much interested in material culture. And when I lived in London--.

Riess: Your mother and father encouraged going to museums, I imagine.

Benedict: They certainly did.

And those two years that I lived in New York, between the ages of ten and twelve--you know, in those days a ten-year-old boy could travel perfectly safely on the subway. We lived in the Village [Greenwich Village], and I would take the subway to the American Museum of Natural History on 81st Street. There was a subway stop, the IND, underneath. I would go there on a Saturday and wander around. I just loved it.

As you know, the American Museum--it's an interesting fact that in the United States, tribal, or primitive as it used to be called, cultures are always housed in natural history museums. They're not in Europe.

Riess: The people, along with the minerals and tools and plants.

Benedict: That's right, it's a nineteenth-century Darwinist view--I mean, it's not really Darwin's view--but it's the survival of the fittest, the idea of progressing towards nice white Europeans. It's a social evolutionary notion. So they put them in there, whereas "high culture" goes into the art museums.

Anyhow, so yes, I had that. And in Baltimore one of my parents' friends was a big collector of art and had a sculpture garden. When he died, he left this big collection of things to the Baltimore Museum of Art. Then, of course, the Cone sisters. Etta, and Dr. Claribel. So there was that involvement. It was kind of peripheral. I was quite young.

Then when I went to London and was studying anthropology there, I spent a lot of time in the British Museum and in the Horniman Museum. The Horniman Museum is very interesting.

Riess: How is that spelled? I don't know it.

Benedict: Practically no American does. H-o-r-n-i-m-a-n. Horniman was a tea merchant who became enormously wealthy. Horniman's Tea in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was like Lyon's Tea became, like Lipton's Tea. He was a collector, as so many people were in that era. He collected a lot of ethnographic objects from all over the world, until his house was overflowing.

He decided to build--he lived in the south of London, which, of course, is the non-posh part, or East, I guess you would say, East End--he decided to build a museum. So he built this beautiful, very early Art Deco museum, which still exists, by some miracle was not bombed, the Horniman Museum. You know, you would never go there. A tourist would never go there, which is too bad because it's really quite something.

Riess: Is it used as a study collection?

Benedict: He gave it, it says on the inscription, to the children of South London. It's free, and it always will be free. It has this terrific collection. It is like an American museum in that it's both natural history and ethnography, and also they give lectures. The other thing he collected was musical instruments. It has one of the finest collections of early and tribal musical instruments in the whole world, and they give concerts. It's really an amazing place.

So I used to go there a lot. In fact, I still am a member there, and I did do something to help save it at one point, when [then Prime Minister Margaret] Thatcher had her hatchet out. I've lectured there. So that was an interest.

Then I had another friend in London, Den --I told you about him, Douglas E. Newton. He knew all of the big ethnographic dealers, and through them I got to know people, not very well, but I got to know people like the Sainsburys. The Sainsburys had a big collection. In fact, they endowed a whole ethnographic section and a museum at the University of East Anglia in Norfolk. This is all a bit long-winded.

And after I got my Ph.D., remember, my first job was at McGill, at that Institute of Islamic Studies. But it really wasn't my major interest. I mean, I didn't want to be an Islamicist. And it turned out that in the Redpath Library, which is their main library, the basement was absolutely chock full of ethnographic objects which nobody had looked at since the nineteenth century. When I talked to the librarian and said, "Would you like me to go down there and sort them out?" she said, "Yes." I used to spend quite a lot of time down in there--I think I told you--getting absolutely filthy because nobody had dusted these things since 1890. I was sorting them out and trying to identify what they were. Some I could. Quite a lot I could not.

##

Benedict: I used to go to Sotheby's and Christie's and look at their auctions. I very occasionally bought something, but very rarely. We'd go to second-hand stores, of course. In those days there were quite a lot of them in London, Portobello Road and places like that. They often had these kinds of things. When I would go on the Continent, I would look at the Musee de l'Homme in Paris, which, of course, was full of them. So I'd become quite--I wouldn't say an expert, but I knew a bit about it.

Riess: Did you think--are these things tools, or are they art objects? Do you get into that argument with yourself?

Benedict: Oh, yes. Of course, one of the things that you learn right away is that in most of these societies there is no such category as art. On the other hand, there's no society which has not decorated its implements. The human urge to decorate is absolutely universal. It goes back to the Paleolithic.

Riess: But it's only another culture that ascribes artistic motive.

Benedict: There is no room for an artist--I mean, there is no such profession in most traditional societies. It's not that they have no aesthetic judgment, because they do. There's a very nice example from the South Seas, where people bring their carvings and they have kind of a little art show. They're all quite traditional.

The thing about almost all ethnographic art is it is highly traditional in the way that, say, early Christian art is traditional: the virgin always in blue or whatever it is, and in Byzantine art it's always exactly the same posture. It's highly conventionalized, and innovation is not valued. Innovation is aberration, in fact. That's something that is a fairly recent phenomenon.

At any rate, yes, I was certainly concerned with that kind of problem. I was very interested in it. It's, in a way, unfortunate that we have made this kind of division. There was a wonderful exhibit put on by the museum in New York, the Museum of African Art or whatever it's called, by a woman called Susan Vogel. The exhibit was called "Art/Artifact." She showed these things. Were they art, or were they artifact, and how did one move from one to the other?

She had--this is a digression. Perhaps I shouldn't go on about it, it's a digression. But what she did was show ethnographic objects in four or five different settings: a natural history museum, an art museum, a commercial art gallery, a curio room such as people had in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and with film, the way things actually were used. It was a superb exhibit.

Riess: That sounds very interesting.

Benedict: Yes. So it was a subject which interested me a lot.

### **The Lowie under William Bascom, and Jim Deetz**

Benedict: Okay, so that's the background. When I got here--and, of course, in the early days here I was doing my teaching, and I was doing all this sort of administrative nonsense, but I was always interested in the museum. Now, when I came, the director of the museum was William [F.] Bascom, who was a great expert on Yoruba art and has written extensively on Yoruba art. He had been director for some time at the museum, but he was really totally devoted to his own subject, and he did lots of research on that. He was a miserable administrator, he couldn't administer at all, and so he just turned the administration over to the principal anthropologist, who was not a faculty member, who basically ran the place.

Riess: They were not acquiring things then?



Benedict: Yes, they kept acquiring things. But they had absolutely no policy at all. People would call them and say, "I've got all this stuff. Could you come and get it?" And Frank [Norick]--that's the guy he turned it over to--would go out and get all this stuff.

Riess: Like baskets, old clothes?

Benedict: Yes, everything. You know, you could make a case that everything is of interest ethnographically. Everything. So yeah, they were giving all kinds of things. And that museum--I don't know if you've ever been through it.

Riess: No, I haven't.

Benedict: I'm sorry I'm not still director because I'd take you through. It's an amazing experience.

Riess: You mean behind the scenes.

Benedict: Yes. It has 3.8 million objects. Think about that for a minute!

Riess: It should be a great museum.

Benedict: It should be. That, of course, was my big crusade, although I didn't win. But it was exactly that point that I was trying to make, that here we are in the Bay Area, which has no first-class museum at all--I mean, at the very best we may have a second-class museum in the Asian Art Museum, and the rest of it is third-class or lower compared to collections elsewhere. But we've got this collection, which is really a first-class ethnographic collection.

I kept trying to persuade the administration that "If you just exploit this, you will have something that's really important which could bring a lot of support to the university, which would become a major tourist attraction, and which would be very important to exhibit, if you'd just wake up and do it. But you'll have to invest some money in it. You can't show it in two or three rooms in Kroeber Hall."

That was a big, big struggle.

Riess: And were you in one of your powerful dean positions when you were trying to make this case?

Benedict: No, because after I stopped being dean I went to Seychelles, and when I came back from Seychelles I went back into the department and was teaching, and then they asked me to go onto the Budget Committee, which took me right out of the teaching again. I mean, I still continued to teach, but that was the time that Elizabeth and Shack and I did these seminars together. I didn't get involved with the museum until afterwards.

When I stopped being on the Budget Committee [in 1981]--while I was still on the Budget Committee I was messing around in the museum, and by that time, Bascom had retired and they hired Jim [James J.F.] Deetz, an historical archaeologist.

Riess: He was in the department?

Benedict: He was hired in the department. He had been at Brown and at Santa Barbara, and he was a graduate of Harvard. He was after me, but his tutor at Harvard had been my proctor when I was a freshman at Harvard--his name was Harry Hornblower, a New England name. So we had that connection.

Jim, who was a very curious combination--he died very recently--was a sort of guitar-playing redneck, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, he was a very sophisticated scholar. He was a really marvelous, very unusual combination, which a lot of people didn't understand. But I really valued it. I thought it was great. And he used to drink something called Rebel Yell, which was some kind of corn whiskey. So he and I would drink Rebel Yell.

Riess: So did he come in and get a grip on the museum?

Benedict: No, he didn't. He came into the museum, and--well, yes, in the sense that he put on some very, very good exhibitions. But his real love was not the museum, it was his own field work. He was famous because he restored Plymouth--you know, Plymouth is one of those places where they act out the history--and when he did it, he put Blacks back in because there had been Blacks. He put the Blacks and the Indians back in. He made this enormously successful thing, and he showed how our whole myth of Thanksgiving is nothing but a myth. He became very well known for that.

His main interest was in Colonial history, in the seventeenth-century settlement of America. He spent the rest of his life--when he left here, he went to the University of Virginia. He was from Maryland, so there would be another connection [between us] there. But he was from rural Maryland. And so he spent the rest of his research effort on places like Jamestown, mainly in a place called Flowerdew Hundred.

Riess: Say that again? Flowerdew Hundred?

Benedict: Yes. The reason it was called that was that in the seventeenth century they used this old measure. They measured things by the hundred, which was a hundred feet, I guess, square, so that instead of talking about acres, you talked about hundreds, so many hundreds. And that's the way Virginia was divided up. And the first governor of Virginia, whose name escapes me--his wife was called Temperance Flowerdew.

At any rate, Jim and I became friends. He was teaching some very interesting seminars. He was very lively, and he had nothing but unconventional people around him. And he had nine children. None of them went to college. And he was a great cook. One of them runs a restaurant, and so on. I could go on and on with that, but I won't.

I spent a lot of time in his seminar, and we would do seminars together. He was interested in other colonial areas like South Africa, which was being settled about the same time, a little later, than the States were being settled, and the same kind of

architecture and so on. Of course, I was interested in that because Mauritius was a similar situation: first settled by the French, but then by the English.

### **Japanese Mannequin Find Leads to 1982 P.P.I.E. Exhibition**

Benedict: Anyhow, I used to spend a lot of time rooting around in the museum. And one of the things that I found in the collection were seven huge boxes, and when I opened the boxes they were seven Japanese women, with their heads off. They were mannequins. Incredibly realistic. The heads had real hair, and real hair on their eyebrows, real eyelashes, and they were so realistic, they were really quite unsettling.

Well, it turned out that these were part of the exhibition which the Japanese had sent over for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915. Then I began to look around in there--Jim encouraged me--I began to look around in there to see what else we had from the exposition, and we had a helluva lot. We had a whole Chinese temple, about a quarter of the size of this room, in lacquered wood, complete with little figures and musical instruments and everything.

I got quite excited about this and really interested in it. I used to talk to George about it, George Starr, when I would go back to the Budget Committee, because this all started then, I guess. George was interested in it because that period was, of course, the period of the California arts and crafts era. Van Erp lamps. You know what they are?

Riess: Yes. Dirk van Erp.

Benedict: Dirk van Erp. And [Gustav] Stickley furniture. All of that. And there was quite a bit of that in the fair. So I got onto Jim about it, and we started talking about it, and we said, How about if we try to recreate the fair? Suppose we have an exhibition of the fair of 1915. He thought that was a great idea, so I got terribly fascinated with that.

When I got off the Budget Committee, I began to devote all my time to doing this, all the time that I could spare from the teaching that I was doing.

Riess: And you became fascinated with the idea of world's fairs.

Benedict: Yes, and the idea of world's fairs--I said that if an anthropologist from another culture came and looked at the West and saw these--these are giant rituals is what they are, gigantic rituals in which you've got everything represented, in a highly symbolic form and sometimes in realistic form, and this is really very important, and nobody has paid any attention. Nobody has done any kind of anthropological analysis of them or anything like that. They've never been thought of in that way.

Riess: Subsequently, there have been world's fair organizations and journals.

Benedict: That's right, but not then.

Riess: So interesting.

Benedict: It is interesting. They were very important. Certainly Henry Adams recognized it. He wrote about the Chicago fair of 1893, about how it revolutionized American architecture--in a very bad way, according to him--but that fair had the first building by Louis Sullivan.

The more I looked into this, the more fascinated I became. So then I starting going around collecting all this stuff. Marion and I would go to the flea markets--I've got cupboards full of it upstairs.

Riess: You were looking for artifacts from the fair.

Benedict: From 1915, souvenirs and that kind of stuff. And they were very easy to find in those days, or relatively easy to find. They're not so easy to find now.

### Funding Informants, and Installation

Benedict: Then Jim--I guess it was Jim's idea, I don't remember--Jim said, "Why don't you apply to the National Endowment for the Humanities and try to get a grant, and we'll see if we can put this on? We'll put it on, anyhow, in some way, but if we could get a grant, it would be easier."

So I did. I got the grant. I can't remember how much it was--it was a pretty big grant in those days, maybe \$150,000, or \$200,000. I got the money, and this thing began to take off, as you can imagine. First, I hired two assistants, who turned out to be absolutely wonderful, just incredible. One of them now is the curator of art at the Minneapolis Museum of Fine Arts. She was an art history major here. Elizabeth [N.] Armstrong. And the other one is called Miriam [M.] Dobkin.

Riess: Ah, yes, there is an essay by her in the catalogue.<sup>1</sup>

Benedict: That's right, and there's one by Elizabeth Armstrong. And, of course, there's one by George Starr in there.

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<sup>1</sup>*The Anthropology of World's Fairs: San Francisco's Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915*, Berkeley and London, the Lowie Museum of Anthropology and Scholar Press, 1983. Also see, *A Catalogue of Posters, Photographs, Paintings, Drawings, Furniture, Souvenirs, Statues, Books, Medals, Dolls, Music Sheets, Postcards, Curiosities, Banners, Awards, Remains, Etcetera: from San Francisco's Panama Pacific International Expoisiton of 1915 at the Lowie Museum of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley, October 30, 1982- December 31, 1983*, Berkeley, Lowie Museum of Anthropology, 1982.

Riess: And by Gray Brechin.

Benedict: And by Gray Brechin. He was, of course, very interested in it, and he's made kind of a profession of it. So that was terribly interesting.

Then I began--you know, the networking around just became incredible. Some of the people, who were still around--one of the amazing ones was Peggy Calder Hayes, who's the sister of Alexander Calder. She remembered it very well. Then there was this marvelous judge, [Matthew O.] Tobriner, whose son [Stephen Tobriner] teaches here, and who [Matthew O.] must have been an absolutely poisonous little kid, who went to the fair every day and wrote down everything. I got hold of these little notebooks. He wrote down everything. Everything. He was ten or twelve years old.

Riess: Did you include the notebooks in the exhibition?

Benedict: No, but I used quotations from them. I didn't put the actual notebooks in it. And then I started looking around for a Star Maiden--you know, these statues by Sterling Calder. Each court in the Panama-Pacific was designed by a different architect, and one of the courts, Court of the Universe, had around it a kind of colonnade, on the top of which were these women, holding their hands up like that [demonstrates], with diadems on. They were called Star Maidens.

Anyhow, so it got bigger and bigger and bigger. And then I got the idea that we should try and take some oral histories of the people who had actually been to the fair.

Riess: How did you find your subjects?

Benedict: Mostly through networking, but there was another way, too. One of the things I wanted to do was to try and recreate in some way the Tower of Jewels, which was the central structure. And it was covered with more than 100,000 of these little glass "jewels"--I have one upstairs--about this big [demonstrates].

Riess: Didn't they have a mirror back?

Benedict: With a mirror on the back. And they hung so that they moved with the wind, so the whole thing must have glittered, must have shimmered. I wanted to get as many of these things as I could, so I put ads around, and people came out of the woodwork. Anybody who had anything to do with that fair became an enthusiast. It absolutely knocked people out. It was really an enormous event.

One of the people I found was a extraordinary woman called Donna Ewald. She was an independent press agent. What do you call it?

Riess: Publicist?

Benedict: At any rate, her grandparents had met at the fair and got married and everything, and she was obsessed by it. She had this huge collection, amazing collection. There's an exhibit, a

whole business now at the California Society of Pioneers, their new headquarters over on 4th Street in San Francisco.<sup>2</sup> They borrowed some stuff from me, and they borrowed a lot from her. She loaned us a lot.

Then I found out what commercial companies had actually been at the fair, so I wrote to Eastman Kodak, and I wrote to General Electric and all those people, and I said, "I'm putting on this thing. Have you got any of your products from then?" And they did! And they sent them. And so we had all these marvelous objects. Then it was the first transcontinental telephone, so I had some telephones there. People could go to them, and they could pick up this telephone, and they could hear waves of the Atlantic Ocean, which seemed to me crazy because I heard Pacific Ocean waves right out here. But anyhow, that's what they were doing. So it became really a total-immersion project.

Riess: The overarching idea--you were just interested in whatever you could turn up, and then you were going to pack it into the show.

Benedict: Pack it in. Then I got interested in the whole idea of the fairs. Of course, one of the things that interested me anthropologically, which got quite a few people excited, was the idea that in these fairs you actually displayed people, so that a display of dependent people became a very important project. That, of course, interested a lot of people, including-- Stephen [J.] Greenblatt got very interested in that, in the English department.

Then there were a lot of conferences. God, it just got so big, it was unbelievable! It was enormous fun, as you can imagine.

Riess: The physical space that you had--is it the same space that we now think of?

Benedict: That's right, but I decided to incorporate the patio as well. Were you here? Did you see it? Were you here in '82?

Riess: I did not see it.

Benedict: I decided that I would make the patio into the fun fair part of the fair, which was called--of course, you wouldn't be able to call it that now--it was called the Joy Zone. One of the things that they had was about a fifteen-foot-high caricature of a suffragette. So I got the museum to reproduce it. There's a picture of it somewhere. We set that up.

Then I found somebody in this area who made big model airplanes--he had done the model airplanes that were along the frontage road [Tyler James Hoare]. I asked him, could he make me--there were these flights by Lincoln Beachey and Art Smith, who did the loop-the-loop, with fireworks tied on their planes, if you can imagine such a thing. You know what the planes were made of in those days! So he made one, and we had one of those airplanes on the patio, about 1/3 size.

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<sup>2</sup>"The Kiss of the Ocean: Commerce and Culture at the 1915 World's Fair."

Riess: Why was it a caricature of the suffragette?

Benedict: Because people thought it was comic that women were doing this. They made fun of them all the time. There are lots and lots of cartoons and comic postcards and so on about suffragettes, women "not knowing their place." Oh, yeah, a great deal of ridicule.

In the Joy Zone was a concession called Toyland Grown Up. They had big tall wooden soldiers and so on. The suffragette was one of the figures that was there. It was just a big comic figure, like the wooden soldiers.

Riess: When did the totems go out into the patio? Were they there at the time?

Benedict: No. We had one big totem pole outside on the patio, a big Northwest totem pole. It was for many years a landmark. But, of course, what began to happen, with pollution and everything, it began to deteriorate. So very reluctantly, we decided it couldn't stay there anymore. So it's in storage. That's where it sits now. It's too bad.

Anyhow, I found some very talented people, and that whole wall of the museum which faces the patio was done as though it were the Joy Zone. They copied it. They had all these figures up there, laughing faces. The whole thing. It was enormous.

### **Involving Anthropologists in the Exhibition**

Riess: How did you do the interpretive material?

Benedict: I'll have to show you the catalog, and then you can see exactly how it was divided up. But I was interested in how did nations represent themselves, so I had a whole section on how various nations represented themselves, and how native peoples were depicted.

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Benedict: I looked at the way the Native Americans were depicted. As they were in a lot of different places, they were very much taken over by the railways because that's where the big tourist--the Santa Fe and the Great Northern Railroad in particular. It's all in the book. Then I looked at souvenirs: what kinds of things did people take home, what kinds of things did manufacturers think that people weren't going to use, and that sort of thing.

Riess: Fresh territory to hypothesize about.

Benedict: Oh, it is. There's no doubt much more can be done with it.

Riess: Did you bring in other anthropologists? You have your assistants?

Benedict: Neither of them was an anthropologist. Those two women--one was an historian; one was an art historian. And, of course, my colleagues, other people who wrote, they were not anthropologists.

Riess: Had there been critiques or reviews of the fair? There must have been newspaper reports.

Benedict: Oh, yes, we got all that stuff from the newspapers. That was fascinating. We had a whole section on newspapers. For instance, the opening--we had pictures of Phoebe [Hearst] and pictures of FDR [Franklin D. Roosevelt] when he was an assistant secretary of the Navy. Oh, yes. And, of course, we had Hollywood actors: Charlie Chaplin, Mabel Normand, Fatty Arbuckle.

Yes, I think it was quite innovative. My colleagues thought it was fun and funny, but they didn't take it very seriously. A few of them did. Alan Dundes, the folklorist--he took it seriously. I think Nelson Graburn, who was interested in art, did. People like George and Elizabeth--they were very supportive, but they weren't at all involved in it. It didn't have anything to do with their research.

Riess: It makes me wonder whether it was used in courses.

Benedict: Yes, it has been used in quite a few courses, but not at Berkeley.

Riess: You mean the subject, itself, has been used.

Benedict: And my book. But not here.

Riess: Did you teach it?

Benedict: Yes, I usually devoted one lecture to it. In addition to these two seminars which I've talked about, I very often taught Anthro 3, that big introductory course, which was a lot of work because I made the students write papers. My TAs hated it. But anyway, not only that, not only did I make them write papers, but at the end, when they wrote the exams, I always arranged it so that the TA that they had had all this time did not correct the exam of the students that he or she had taught. The TAs didn't like that, but I thought that that was only the fair way of doing it. I did that to try to make it less personalized, trying to have standards that were standards.

At any rate, I wouldn't say that it had a big effect on the department at all, except that it was very successful. It was, I think, the most successful exhibit that the museum ever had after the Dead Sea Scrolls, a long time ago, before I got here.

The opening was an absolute sensation. At the opening, we had the whole thing as 1915. I found a ragtime band here run by a professor of philosophy [Chrysanthemum Ragtime Band], so we had them all dressed up. Everybody came in costume. I got hold of the wineries, because a lot of the wineries had exhibited at the fair, and they donated the wine. So we had lots and lots of wine and lots of food, and we took over the whole of



that arcade that goes into Kroeber Hall and the whole of the lobby for this big party. It was wonderful.

Riess: Now all those things are back down in the museum basement, except the ones that were borrowed, back down in the collection?

Benedict: Yes, they all went back in there.

Riess: You were really motivated by these Japanese mannequins, and you wanted more people than you to see them.

Benedict: I was terribly motivated by the fact that nobody was seeing these wonderful things that we had. We had all kinds of things. We've got some Paul Revere silver, for Christ's sake. I mean, it's ridiculous. We've got a lock of Jane Addams's hair.

### Finding Meaning, National Identity, in Fairs, Museums

Riess: In an essay you wrote, you made a point about fairs being theatrical, rather than power representations.<sup>3</sup> What are you saying?

Benedict: I think they are a lot about power, but the presentation is theatrical. Let me just give you an example that's fresh in my mind because I just finished writing it this week. In the Great Exhibition of 1851, which is what my paper is about—that was the very first world's fair that there ever was, the Crystal Palace. And what I'm looking at there is how did Britain show her colonies. In 1851 she did not have most of her African colonies, but she had India and she had Canada and she had New Zealand and she had Australia, which was still a set of colonies, not a unified federation, and she had Cape Town and Gold Coast, but that's about all in Africa, and a bunch of islands to the West Indies.

The Crystal Palace, as you know, had all these exhibits from the different countries, and my contention is that the very fact of exhibiting them as units promulgated the idea that they *were* units, and that wasn't a problem for some place that was already a nation, like the United States, but it was very interesting for colonies which were not nations. So the very fact that they had an exhibit of, say, a West African colony as a unit sitting there in the Crystal Palace promulgated the idea that it *was* a unit.

My point is that this was the beginning of a building of these places as nations because even though they weren't in charge of their own exhibitions, they had to act as though it was a unit. And then the people, themselves, who were there, the native inhabitants of these places, began to think of themselves as units, and that was extremely important,

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<sup>3</sup>"Rituals of Representation: Ethnic Stereotypes and Colonized Peoples at World's Fairs," in *Fair Representations: World's Fairs and the Modern World*, Amsterdam, VU University Press, 1994.

especially later on in Africa, where all of these colonies were made up of disparate groups, various tribes.

Riess: Ah. That's very interesting.

Benedict: It's extremely important, I think. This is the big point I'm trying to make in this paper. It developed. And then the exhibits themselves became stereotyped because there were so many of these fairs. You could see from my book there were just dozens of them throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. For a hundred years there were these fairs almost every year, certainly every five years. Some of them were enormous.

Riess: Are you saying that these groups gained self-awareness?

Benedict: And that became much clearer--it wasn't so clear in the Crystal Palace, which was supposed to be only products. But the products themselves--how did they display the products? They displayed them as though they were in a museum. And what did these countries do when they become independent? They founded museums, which was a way of asserting their national identity. And they founded museums based on the kinds of exhibits that were in these fairs. So it's really pretty interesting.

Riess: It is. Can you say that it damped down innovation because they were so committed to this image?

Benedict: No, I don't think it has damped down innovation at all. I mean, it *was* innovative because there wasn't any idea that these things were units.

Riess: Are you saying that they sort of become stereotypes of themselves?

Benedict: The exhibits became stereotyped. What's really interesting is if you look at the fairs, as I think I tried to do in one of those articles, before and after independence of these places, they still kept doing the same thing. Now, partly, of course, it was a practical matter because they didn't want to think about it, and they had all this stuff in some warehouse, so they probably just used it.

But in the case of the West Indies, for example, they had all these exhibits which were shown in these fairs. They had them in 1851 because Britain had most of its West Indian colonies by then, including what's now Guyana. But in those places--when they founded museums, they got interested in their history, so the museums had a lot of archaeological exhibits.

Riess: You mean the people, themselves, became interested?

Benedict: No, it was the British colonials that were doing this, or the white settlers in these various places.

Riess: They're the ones who founded museums.

Benedict: They founded museums. They organized exhibits and sent them to the Crystal Palace and subsequent exhibitions. But after these colonies became independent and the British were no longer there, the museum governors in the West Indies said, "This is no good. You haven't shown anything about the Africans and the Indians, who are really the majority populations in places like Trinidad and Guyana."

So they began to redo them, to show this kind of history as well. Of course, the idea was already there of doing it, but the exhibits changed. Instead of being Eurocentric kinds of exhibitions, or else based on the extinct Carib Indians, who were gone, they began to show how East Indian immigrants and African slaves had been brought in and what their contribution to the culture was.

But the whole form of it was really something that was inherited. Of course, there was a museum tradition. It's terribly interesting, this history of museums. I found one marvelous example, not from Britain or the British colonial empire at all, but the first national museum in Greece was founded the same year that modern Greece became an independent country. I guess it was part of the Ottoman Empire. I'm not sure.

Riess: It's a device for clarifying the history.

Benedict: It clarifies. It makes it absolutely concrete. Actually, that's one of the most interesting things about these fairs, is that they make so many of these ideas--there are limitations in what you can do with objects, but the objects themselves become loaded with meaning. Certain objects become so loaded with meaning, like a throne, for example, that they can stand for all kinds of things. And, you know, what's a gavel? A gavel is a club with which you assert your authority by bonking somebody if they don't agree, right?

### **The Crystal Palace, 1851, and Waning Importance of Fairs**

Riess: Were you working on this paper [that Benedict will present in Coburg, Germany] when you were in England? I mean, I'm wondering whether this is a "think" piece or whether it's a research piece. I'm just curious.

Benedict: I've always been interested in the Crystal Palace exhibition as the first world's fair. I go down to the Museum of London, which is a terrific museum.

Have you ever been there?

Riess: Yes. It is terrific.

Benedict: They've got a big model of Crystal Palace there, about as big as this room. The original Crystal Palace covered nineteen acres! Amazing. One building.

I do research there [at the Museum of London], but of course, I have collected a lot of materials on it, and what I've been doing for this one, since I have all this stuff--most of which, of course, I bought in England--I have the catalogs that were published at the time. There were five volumes, each one that thick [demonstrates], that list everything that was on exhibit in the Crystal Palace. In the nineteenth century, when they did something, they did it right, they did it that way. No shortcuts. Everything is there. And they were also not very concerned about being objective. They would put in--I mean, a lot of it is just sort of empty praise, but they put in what the cataloguer thought.

Riess: That's interesting. The statistical method, and once again what you find useful is in there.

Benedict: Yes, I do.

As I may have mentioned early on, one of the big problems about anthropology is that it's very hard to generalize from what anthropologists do. Is what I'm saying peculiar to this particular village, or can I say that the X, whoever they are, whatever their name is, particular peoples, do this? A lot of anthropologists, many anthropologists, especially in the early days, studied intensively their village or maybe two villages, and then assumed that what they had found there was true throughout the culture.

Riess: Where it's not true, that's what's interesting.

Benedict: That's right. And the only way to do that is to go and do it in several places. When I did my field work in Mauritius--of course, it's much easier on islands--that's why I went to two different villages and the town. That's exactly why.

Riess: In your study of world's fairs, it's not like you're looking at a people, but you're looking at an institution, and you're still looking at it as a census issue.

Benedict: Yes. I think you have to do that. Given all the limitations and the crudities of doing it--I'd hate to have to stand by those figures that I gave in that article because it's very tricky, and I'm sure I missed a lot, and I'm sure I classified some in one way which really shouldn't have been classified that way, and so on. On the other hand, I think you have to have a stab at it to give credence to what you're trying to say.

Riess: Yes. You made the point that "colonial exhibits may show people as curiosities, as artisans with their products, and as trophies."

Benedict: Yes, that's right.

Riess: You suggest that in some sense we really don't need world's fairs anymore. That sort of implies that there was a need in the first place. They had a real usefulness.

Benedict: Several things have happened. Television. I mean, when these fairs were on, what was amazing was that just everybody flocked to them. It was the opportunity of seeing other countries and other peoples and inventions and things like that which just weren't

available anywhere else. Some of it might be published in newspapers or books, but there wasn't any radio and there wasn't any television.

**Prize-winning Film about the P.P.I.E.**

Benedict: The manifest purpose of the Crystal Palace--it was really Prince Albert's inspiration. He was very liberal, Prince Albert. We don't think of royalty as ever being liberal, but he kind of--he softened up Queen Victoria. He thought that the solution to world conflict was trade, that open markets and trade were the way--of course, now it's a commonplace, but it certainly wasn't in the first half of the nineteenth century. And so everything was competition.

Riess: What function did the 1915 fair fill?

Benedict: Well, of course, the world was at war in 1915. I mean, we weren't in it yet, but World War I had started. Manifestly, it was the same idea, that this was going to be about peace. Have you seen the video on that?<sup>4</sup>

Riess: No, and I'd like to see it, yes.

Benedict: I wrote it. I did it with a woman called Monica Fletcher, who was in the Media Center--I don't know if it's called that now. She was very good. We did this film together.

When I had my exhibition, it was very, very successful, as I told you, and I was asked--I don't know how many talks I gave. I went to Lions Clubs and places like that. I must have given fifty of those talks all over the Bay Area, and I got pretty good at it! Then the Media Center decided they wanted to make this film--I certainly didn't suggest it. They had this young woman there who was very good at doing what she was doing, and we worked together. I used the basic narrative that I had developed, and we made this film. It also has a lot of very old footage because, of course, the other thing about the 1915 fair was that there were hundreds and hundreds of feet of films.

Riess: Home movies?

Benedict: No, professional ones. Of course they were silent, but they became--this is also one of the reasons that I think fairs disappeared, because these other forms of spreading the word began to take over.

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<sup>4</sup>"1915 Panama-Pacific Fair," written, produced and narrated by Burton Benedict, 1984. Winner of the Western Heritage Award for the best television documentary film of 1984, given by the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Foundation.

At any rate, we made this film, and then, to our surprise, we were written to by the Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City. I'm sure you haven't been there.

Riess: No.

Benedict: Well, I don't think you'll go, either. But at any rate, they gave a prize every year to the best depiction of the early West, or some damn thing like that. And they decided that this film was going to get the prize, and would Monica and I come to Oklahoma City for this formal presentation and to show our film. The prize--and I'll show it to you upstairs--was a reproduction of a Remington bronze, about that high [demonstrates].

We went there and--God, that museum! You know, they've got a whole room devoted to John Wayne, and they've got all kinds of stuff there. So we had this formal dinner, and everybody had to have a dinner jacket, but they all arrived with dinner jackets and cowboy hats. At the beginning of the thing, they played "Oklahoma," and everybody got up and put his hand on his heart. So we showed our film, and that caused quite a stir.

Riess: The 1915 fair was the last of its kind?

Benedict: I think so, although there were major fairs in the '20s and '30s.

What happened then, the other important aspect, which I haven't mentioned, is that--after all, these fairs were basically trade fairs, weren't they? They were supposed to be. People were supposed to be showing their goods, and that's what was supposed to happen. Well, trade fairs as trade fairs began to proliferate, so you had automobile shows and food fairs and appliance shows and so on. And they took a lot away from the world's fairs. They became very, very big, and people came from all over the world to see these things, like the book fair in Germany. It's that kind of thing.

Riess: Right.

Benedict: And so that took the guts out of world's fairs.

Riess: What is the gathering that you're going to in Coburg?

Benedict: Well, as you probably know, Prince Albert was Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. He was born and brought up in Coburg. I think it's the only thing that ever happened in Coburg, as far as I can figure out! But Coburg has a Prince Albert Society, and that society, together with the Victorian Society and the Royal Society of Arts in London, has decided to put on this conference in September to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the great exhibition, which is, of course, this year. It was 1851. It also happens to be the centenary of Queen Victoria's death.

They have invited people from--well, mostly, I suppose, from Britain and Germany, and a few from the United States, who are people who have worked on world's fairs, to give papers. It's a two-day conference, and then the keynote speaker at the end is Asa

[Lord] Briggs, who is a Victorian scholar and was Chancellor of Sussex and the Open University.

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Benedict: I think the thing about these fairs is that you can find anything in any of the fairs. That's an exaggeration, but really--I mean, I think that people who try to look at the fairs as nothing but imperialistic displays, for instance, often miss this. There was a lot that wasn't about imperialistic displays. Now, it's perfectly true, as you just said, that they do reflect the times, as you said about the Montreal fair. They do. The 1915 fair, as I think I said, had a kind of air of innocence about it that seems quite bizarre now, as we're a more hardened and cynical generation. But basically the American fair--well, they all were kind of hopeful exercises. And, of course, the 1915 fair, one of the things was it was celebrating the rebuilding of San Francisco. It had only been, what?--nine years since the earthquake.

And also the other thing about it was--this comes out very clearly in George Starr's essay in my book--that a lot of people went to those fairs not just to go to the fair. They went to learn. Like Judge Tobriner, they took notes, and they learned, and they were full of wonder. I think this business about wonder is very important. It's a point the Stephen Greenblatt makes in much of his writing.

These quotations that we got from the oral histories of the people who had been there--we put them up on signs and hung them in the museum, near the exhibit. One of them said, "What I remember was going to the Hawaiian exhibit. They had a place there where they served you pineapple juice! Can you imagine drinking pineapple juice!" You see? That sense of wonder, the kind of innocence, naiveté.

### **Director of the Museum, 1984. New Funding, Staffing**

Riess: You moved on to become director of the museum?

Benedict: I became director. As I say, Jim didn't want to be director, you really had to twist his arm. He wanted to do his colonial research. And he was a wonderful teacher. He got the teaching award. He was really very good at it, and it's what he liked to do. And he liked to take his students out on digs at Flowerdew Hundred. He made me associate director, I guess I was, and then he decided that he wanted to stop doing that, and then I became director.

Meanwhile, that period that I had in London with the Education Abroad intervened there.

Riess: You were associate director from '84 to '86, and then acting director in '88, and then director '89 to '94.

Benedict: That's right, when I retired.

Riess: What was being shown in the museum at the time? Indian baskets?

Benedict: Deetz's idea was to try and show--since we had such a small museum, we had to circulate stuff all the time to try and show people the extent of the collections. We had an inadequate staff to do that, but they did their best, I must say. And so he had a wonderful exhibit, which was on when I came back, which was called "Held in Value." He had all these different kinds of value: traditional value, innovative value, and so on. He would bring up different parts of the collection to show.

The only permanent thing we had there was a little exhibit on Ishi, since everybody knew about Ishi and was very interested in Ishi, and we always were asked about Ishi. We used to have a physical anthropology exhibit, but that kind of fell by the wayside. They stopped doing it because the physical anthropologists wouldn't give the time to it.

Riess: Was it curated for the university community or for the anthropology community or for the Bay Area community?

Benedict: All three.

Riess: Were exhibitions advertised?

Benedict: They were advertised. They appeared in the pink section, some. But they were never extensively advertised. Of course, there was always the danger you advertise this big thing and people come and there's one room with six baskets in it. An exaggeration, but--.

When I became director, I wanted to try to put on as many exhibits as we could. But we just didn't have the staff, let alone the problems that we had with conservation. After all, we had to try and keep this stuff, and much of it was in dreadful shape. So that was a big problem, too. And we only had a part-time conservator. Honestly, we had nothing in that place. We had no membership. We didn't have a membership program.

And there was this conflict among the people who were in the museum--most had been there since before the birth of Christ. Some of them felt very strongly that this is a research museum, and it shouldn't be showing things to the public. It should be like the museum of comparative zoology, or vertebrate zoology, whatever it's called here--vertebrate here, comparative at Harvard--which is not open to the public.

Riess: The 3.8 million objects in the basement were catalogued?

Benedict: Pretty well catalogued. Not adequately catalogued, but pretty well catalogued. But it was in a mess. I mean, they weren't computerized, and they were in all different systems that had been used over the years since 1901, which was when the museum was founded.

Riess: Yes. So there you were, with this rather moribund museum.



Benedict: You remember what the old Bancroft Library was like. The new Bancroft isn't that hot, but the old Bancroft was incredible! And it was worse than that, much worse than that. Not only that, but there was no room, although we had the whole basement of Kroeber Hall, and the basement of the Hearst Gym across the way, and the warehouse in Richmond.

Riess: What was your plan?

Benedict: My plan was that I wanted to have a campaign--well, of course, I wanted to build a whole new museum, but that looked quite impossible, so I wanted at least to remodel the museum so that more things could be shown, to gobble up that patio, to make the entrance of the museum on Bancroft so that people could see it. I mean, nobody knew where the damn thing was! There were no signs on it. I put those big banners there that are there now. There was no publicity, no nothing'.

The first person I hired was a development director, who turned out to be an absolute firecracker, Louise Braunschweiger. And she did an awful lot. But it used to drive us crazy. Of course, the Development Office drove us crazy, because they had all these restrictions about who you could approach and so on. I, of course, wanted to go around them--in fact, sometimes I did go around them. That's one of the advantages of being a faculty member with tenure. At any rate, so that's what I wanted to do.

I went to Joe Cerny [Dean of the Graduate Division and Provost for Research] and said, "Look"--and I gave him the argument I just gave you a few minutes ago about how you could turn this into something really good. He went for it. And the other thing was--it's unbelievable, but every time we wanted to move something or do something, we had to hire a car. The museum had no vehicle. I said, "The first thing is we need some kind of little bus or something, and we better buy it because have you looked at what it costs to hire a van each time we want to move something? Insane!" So he gave me the money for that. Then I said, "We need to make a plan." So he gave me \$10,000 to have a plan drawn up to expand the museum. So we got the plan drawn up, and it was pretty damn good, I must say.

Then the ax fell, and we had this period when we didn't have any money, and the state was cutting back on us like mad, so all of that was no good, and so I said, "Well, we have a development director. Let's raise some money." So we started to try to do that. One of the people we got hold of--we got hold of Phoebe Hearst Cook, who is the granddaughter of Phoebe Apperson Hearst. What interested her--her husband was a rancher, and he was a Cowboy Hall of Fame kind of guy.

And one of the things that we had in the museum was--there was this painter named [Joseph Henry] Sharp, a painter of western scenes. He painted Indians and cowboys. No, not so much cowboys, it was mostly Indians. And Phoebe, the original Phoebe [Apperson Hearst], as she did very often, said, "Okay, paint me some paintings, and I'll subsidize you." He did, and those paintings have become highly collectible, and Mr. Cook was very interested in them.

Well, on the market they now go for about \$50,000 each, and we had a hundred of them! And he wanted to buy them or get them. I said, "You can't buy them. They belong to the university, you can't buy them." So he asked if I would lend them to the Cowboy Hall of Fame? Yes, I would lend them to the Cowboy Hall of Fame for a fee.

So they then put me in touch with the Hearst Foundation, and the man in charge of that, Tom Easton, was very helpful. They gave us a grant of \$1 million for conservation because when Phoebe and Jack--that was his name--when they saw the condition, the way we kept those paintings, they were horrified, and rightly so. I mean, we had them stacked as though they were a bunch of driftwood or something. We got \$1 million from the Hearst Foundation, and they've just given a second million, I'm happy to say. They were all for conservation. But we had no full-time conservator, if you can believe it, with a collection like that. So next I hired a full-time conservator.

I had Louise, and I had a conservator, and then I wanted to have some professional museum people in there. We had one who had been there for a long time and was about to retire, so I hired two of them. One was Ira Jackniss, who's in there and who came from the Brooklyn Museum and worked on the Brooklyn Museum's collection and was an expert on American Indians.

Then the other person I hired was Steve Shackley, who is an archaeologist who specializes in obsidian. If you give him an obsidian point, he can find out where it came from because of the water content. Believe it or not, obsidian has water in it.

Riess: Did these people all have university appointments?

Benedict: Yes, but they weren't academic appointments, they were something called museum anthropologists.

Riess: Funded out of your Hearst money?

Benedict: No, funded by the university. The other thing is that, of course, the famous Ed Feder that I talked about last time, he had this museum, too, under his jurisdiction.

The other absurd thing about the way museums are in this university is that--we have a whole bunch of museums at Berkeley, but if you look at the whole university, I don't know, there are fifty of them or something, and they're all under different kinds of administration. On this campus, some of them are Organized Research Units, which of course they shouldn't be because they're not organized research units. Some of them are parts of departments. Some of them are some kind of special status. Some of them are kind of independent, like the art museum. So there's no overall museum category, even though you've got all these museums.

At any rate, we tried to get that straightened out. So I was jumping up and down. Of course, the fact that I'd been on the Budget Committee and knew a lot of the administrators and knew--I mean, the administrators aren't important, but their secretaries are really important! So what you want to do is get to know the MSOs [management



Burton Benedict, dressed for the occasion of the opening of the PPIE Exhibition, 1982, with Herb Caen, *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist.



Marion and Barbara, and unnamed friend, dressed for the occasion of the opening of the PPIE Exhibition, 1982.



Marion and Helen with Burton, on the occasion of his receiving the Berkeley Citation, Morrison Library, Berkeley, 1991.



service officers] because those are really important people. Without them, this place would collapse. I was pretty busy doing a lot of politicking around with that, and trying to get that stuff all organized.

With Louise, we got a membership program going.

And we came across Kenneth [H.] Behring. Do you know that name?

Riess: Yes, because of the Smithsonian business now, but also because of Blackhawk.

Benedict: Well, I don't want to record here what I think of Kenneth Behring, but at any rate we had a big problem with him. I'm not sure this should be in the oral history, but I will say that he wanted at one point our material in this Blackhawk [museum]--have you ever been out there?

Riess: Yes, I went out there to see the Mark Twain show.

Benedict: Okay. Well, he wanted to have a big ethnographic display, and would we lend things from our museum for the ethnographic display. There was quite a lot of negotiation about that. Basically I said, "If you give us some money, we will." So he did, and we loaned them the material, and they put on a very good show there. I mean, really it was excellent. No expense spared. We had many of our finest pieces there. We had a much bigger display than we could have here.

Riess: American Indian?

Benedict: Everything, everything. We had Eskimo, we had Pacific islands, we had African, we had a lot. I don't think we had much archaeology, but we had ethnographic stuff up to our eyebrows, really. They had videotapes, and I made a tape where I gave a commentary, and people could tune in on the commentary. And Nelson did the commentary on the Eskimos, Nelson Graburn, and so on.

So that was very successful, and we had that out there for a couple of years, I think, and then it all came back to our museum, and they decided to do other things with that space.

### **Acknowledging the Contribution of Phoebe Apperson Hearst**

Riess: What about the renaming of the museum?

Benedict: Okay, that was a real controversy that I got myself into.

We go back now to Phoebe Cook. When Phoebe Cook was here and the Hearst Foundation was interested, and they wanted to give us this \$1 million, or said they might

give us \$1 million, they wanted more acknowledgment of Phoebe Hearst's contribution. Now, Phoebe had actually founded the museum. She was in big competition with Jane Stanford, and she wanted a sort of Athens of the West. She wanted to found a really great university, and a really great university, in her view, had to have a great library, had to have great architecture, and had to have a great museum. She had that famous contest, you know, the designing of the campus and everything. I'm sure you know about that.

So one of the things she wanted to have was a museum. And she hired a man called [George Andrew] Reisner. He went out to Egypt in about 1902, he excavated, and he brought back to this museum the finest pre-Dynastic collection in the United States. I mean, it's really a knockout collection. We have a stele which is on loan to the Louvre right now. Much better than what they have.

She hired another scientist called Max Uhle, a Peruvian expert, and he went to Peru and got this collection of very early Peruvian pottery, which is the finest in the world, probably. And that we have in the museum.

Then she sent a professor of classics, [Alfred] Emerson, and he sent back ten barrels of Greek and Etruscan antiquities. The point about Phoebe Hearst was that she financed the museum and the department for seven years before the university picked it up. But she had never been acknowledged, her contribution had never been acknowledged. You know, the three I've listed are just three of the ones that she backed. She financed many, many others. I mentioned the Sharp paintings and so on. But there were others.

So basically the Hearst Foundation said, "We'll give you the money. You rename the museum." My problem was I didn't have any money, and the really crucial problem was conservation, because if you don't conserve your collection, what the hell have you got? And nobody had really seriously done this. And the other thing is that the university kept cutting the budget, our friend Ed Feder--since there was no voice for the museum, since the previous directors were not sufficiently interested in the museum to fight for it, and since everything was in charge of this principal museum anthropologist who wasn't a faculty member--he just kept cutting the budget of the museum. Cut, cut, cut, cut. It was very easy for him.

At any rate, I said, "All right, let's change the name of the museum." "Well, let's look into it." It then turned out that--well, Lowie [for whom the museum was then named] was a very great anthropologist, but it turned out that he had no interest in the museum at all. I think he contributed one or two objects to the museum. His own field work had been among the Crow in Montana, but those collections all went to the American Museum in New York.

The way it got to be called Lowie--the museum was not called anything for a long time, it was just the museum of anthropology. When Kroeber Hall was built in the fifties, they wanted to name the building after Kroeber. Up to that point, no building on campus had ever been named after a living person--Kroeber was still alive.<sup>5</sup> So there was a big fuss about that, it went through endless faculty committees, and finally the decision was made

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<sup>5</sup>Wheeler Hall was named for Benjamin Ide Wheeler in 1917. Wheeler died in 1927. J.R.K.K.

to call the building after Kroeber and call the museum after Lowie, who was already dead. That's how it happened<sup>6</sup>.

It had only been called the Lowie Museum since Kroeber Hall was built, so there wasn't a historical connection. Lowie had no heirs and no relatives, so I didn't see why I shouldn't do it. I can't say I was happy about it, but I did want the money. I thought we had to have the money, and we weren't going to get it from the university, and we hadn't been very successful about getting it anywhere else, and this seemed kind of logical.

I got it through the damn committees, and I got it past the chancellor, who by this time was [Chang-Lin] Tien, and, of course, when it hit the department, all hell broke loose, as you can imagine. There were some people in the department who thought why not, but there were some who very vociferously objected to it. When we had the naming ceremony, they picketed. They dressed up in their academic robes, and they picketed. And I was reviled.

At any rate, I did it, and we got the money, and now we just got another million. So I can't feel too heartbroken about it.

Riess: What was the policy against deaccessioning?

Benedict: Oh, yes, that was the other thing. That was one of the first things I did. I went to Cerny and said, "Can't we deaccession some of this junk we've got?" George Foster had, in fact, cleaned out some stuff when he was acting director some years ago. I think he just did it. Nowadays, you can't do that. It has to go through committees. I wanted to do that, and I thought we should do it, and I just got nowhere. I tried. And you had to have all these different opinions about it, about each object. It just became too much. I would have had to spend all my time doing that. At least I tried to be more discriminating about what we accepted.

Riess: What about the museum store? Has that been a profit center?

Benedict: That started under Jim. The museum store had always been a little pokey operation which had been in the charge of a woman who had been there forever, who was very protective about it and very fierce if you tried to interfere with her in any way. But Jim did that, and then I continued that, and I hired a woman who's still there--well, she's now been charged with something else. She was very good, and the store began to turn quite a good profit.

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<sup>6</sup>Kroeber Hall opened in 1959. The Regents, on December 18, 1958, named the museum after the late Robert H. Lowie. [*The Centennial Record of the University of California*, UC Printing Department, Berkeley, 1967]

**Faculty Use of the Museum Facilities**

[Interview 10: July 5, 2001] ##

Riess: Talking about the Museum of Anthropology, how much did the faculty use the museum? And how adaptable was it to the teaching function?

Benedict: Yes, it is used, but it is not used as much as it should be. When there was an exhibit about human evolution in it, which was a long time ago, it was used quite a lot in courses about human evolution, but that was a long time ago when Bascom was still, I think, the director. In more recent times, Desmond used it, Desmond Clark, because he gave a course on the evolution of technology, so he had exhibits in which he showed early stone tools and other kinds of tools and how they were used.

The classics department used the museum quite a bit, especially Greenewalt. You know Crawford Greenewalt?

Riess: No, I don't.

Benedict: He was a professor of classics--Greenie, everybody calls him Greenie. He always brings classes into the museum. He works a lot with the early Greek and Roman coins that we have, but also with the other Greek and Roman materials that we have. And there's another professor of art history who does that, too. Several art professors have used the collections.

Then the anthropologists. When I was director, we had an arrangement where we asked the faculty if they wanted to have special exhibits put up for them for use in their classes, and a few anthropologists took advantage of that. Gerry Berreman, who gave a course on India, often had us put up an exhibition of Indian materials.

I think [Stanley] Brandes may have. There were several other--I can't remember now, but there were a number of professors who did this. Not as many as should have. Jim Anderson did it, I remember, on Southeast Asia, and Nelson Graburn on the Inuit.

Riess: Isn't material culture part of every anthropology class, or do some classes really teach it?

Benedict: It used to be, classically. In the last generation or perhaps the generation before, it was a standard thing to talk about material culture, but social anthropology and cultural anthropology moved away from that. Social anthropology, when it started to study kinship, you didn't have to look at material culture to study that, so they didn't do that.

And, of course, the cultural anthropologists, when they got into questions of what really exists and can you trust anybody's interpretation of anything, were really getting into kind of philosophical debates, so they didn't use the museum very much.



Then also there was a trend when anthropologists began to study our own society and began to study modern Western society. They weren't looking at material culture. They were looking at things like ethnic relations or urbanization or delinquency behavior or gender studies or that kind of thing, and that didn't require them to use material culture.

Riess: Where do those pots and baskets and things fit into scholarship? Do they?

Benedict: They certainly used to fit into it, and they're still, of course, crucial to archaeologists. If you're talking about American Indians, for instance, prehistoric Indian cultures are described by their pots. I mean, that's the main thing that they go on in the Southwest are the different kinds of pottery. The archaeologists used the museum a lot. They would take classes into the museum and then look at a range of things.

Somebody else who used the museum a great deal was Nelson Graburn. He did his study among the Inuit, the Arctic peoples. He started by looking at material culture, because these are the people who make those soapstone carvings you probably have seen. And he has recorded the whole thing. It's very interesting because they started--well, I don't want to go on about it, it's really his field. But he has recorded all of that and collected examples of it, most of which he's given to the museum over the years. So he used it a great deal, and in fact, he's got an exhibit on right now.

Nelson was interested in questions like what was their own aesthetic judgment of these things? And he's very creative in how he's using material culture. He had students make their own exhibits and arrange them and write their rationales for them, that kind of thing. There's an enormous potential there, and I think there's some movement back towards that.

Riess: A museum is an interesting crossroads between the perception of something as art and something as piece of useful ware.

Benedict: Exactly. The utility. Well, I think there's a lot of interest in that. I think I started to tell you last time about the exhibit called "Art/Artifact."

[phone interruption]

Benedict: I was associate director of the museum before I left to go back to England. When I came back, I became acting director, and then I finally became director. This is in my CV. And then I put on these exhibitions. The first one I guess I put on--that is, after PPIE--was on the Hearst collections, and I've explained to you how the museum is very much a creation of Phoebe Hearst.

The tendency in museums in recent years is to treat the objects as art objects, which means that you put on object on a lucite stand and light it dramatically in an empty case. That was totally different from the Victorian museum, which put huge amounts of stuff into the case. I rather liked that. Certainly as a child and even as young adult, I liked going into the old museums and just standing in front of a case and looking at all those different things, all the stuff in there.

So for the first exhibit I put on, I wanted to show the Hearst collections, and I wanted to show them that way. I had big arguments with the art person that we had, who was a real character. God! He was a Russian. He was really quite a difficult man.

Riess: Nameless?

Benedict: His name was Alex Nicoloff. He's not there anymore. Anyhow, but I finally got him to agree, and we filled the cases up full of all this stuff which we got up out of the basement, and I thought it was good also to give people some idea of the extent and the richness of the collections. So that was the first exhibit I put on.<sup>7</sup>

Riess: And then "people" you would be showing would include the faculty.

Benedict: The faculty knew very little about it. The other thing I did is that I arranged for our entering graduate students to be given a tour of the collections, in the basement. And so they all had that to introduce them to the museum. In a few cases it kind of took, but mostly it didn't, I would say. But I tried to do that.

Also I tried to report to the faculty at every faculty meeting news about the museum, and I kept that up until I left. So that was the first exhibit that I put on.

#### "Tokens of Value" and "Seychelles" Exhibitions

Riess: Next was the money, in 1991?<sup>8</sup>

Benedict: Yes. These are the ones that I personally put on. Of course, we had many other exhibits. We had an Egyptian exhibit that was really excellent, which was done by the people in the museum. We had an exhibit on fakes, which was done by the people in the museum. And we had one on American Indian pottery. We have a very good Southwest collection.

Riess: You had fakes in the collection? Who discovered that they were fake?

Benedict: Sometimes we actually knew they were fakes and took them. Fakes have an interest of their own.

Riess: In Phoebe's collection were there fakes?

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<sup>7</sup>"The Hearst Collections," Lowie Museum of Anthropology, UC Berkeley, 1990.

<sup>8</sup>"Money: Tokens of Value from Around the World," Lowie Museum of Anthropology, UC Berkeley, 1991.

Benedict: I think so. I think there were. I don't think there's any museum that doesn't have fakes in it.

Riess: Tell about the exhibition on money.

Benedict: I felt that money would be a really interesting subject, but I didn't want to talk about--I published a catalogue on it, too, which unfortunately is not illustrated--I didn't want to use the term "money" because it's such a loaded term. Also, there are--well, one way of looking at it, an economist's way of looking at it, is there is general purpose money versus special purpose money. That is, there are certain kinds of things which are used for only special purposes, you can only use them in certain conditions. And most money in tribal societies is special purpose. It's valuables which are used for such things as bride wealth, for example, but it can't be used in any other way. And what happens when general purpose money--I think it's Gresham's Law about bad money driving out the good, general purpose money drives out special purpose money.

I decided--instead of talking about money, I talked about "Tokens of Value." I started out by looking at cattle, because cattle in Africa are really very important, especially in bride wealth. And I had a very wonderful--after Alex Nicoloff left, thank God--I had this wonderful person working for me called Renee Ross, who was a really talented designer and artistic person, and she was really interested in her job.

Anyhow, to go back to the cow--what we did was we used the Evans-Pritchard book, *The Nuer*, in which he talked a lot about cattle, and he had drawings of different cows and what their value was, depending on their markings and everything. And we made styrofoam cows, big styrofoam cows. They weren't full size, but they were maybe a third size of real cows. When you came in, the first thing you saw was this herd of styrofoam cows, which was quite sensational.

We showed all kinds of things. We showed--for instance, there's a place called Yap in Micronesia, which uses stone money. That's money that really has to do with prestige, and you don't actually use it, but really big ones, like the ones sort of almost as big as a bed, are famous.

Riess: King-size money.

Benedict: They're king-size money, exactly, but you don't use them. The most famous one of all was being transported from one island to another, and it sank.

Riess: What happened then?

Benedict: Well, they just knew that somebody owned that. They never dredged it up. They didn't have to dredge it up. It's like the gold in Fort Knox. Nobody ever sees it, you see?

Then, of course, you get into--the reason the tokens were so important is, when you actually get into currency, I mean, these are only pieces of paper, so what do you do to make a piece of paper look legitimate?

Riess: You put somebody's face on it?

Benedict: That's one thing you do. Then it gets very much involved with politics. This was about the time of the beginning of the Gulf War, and the first thing that Saddam Hussein did when he went into Kuwait was to issue new currency with himself on it, and that's exactly what we did when we occupied Germany or Japan, and that's what Japan did. You put in--of course, you do it with postage stamps, too--you put in new currency which is supposed to be legitimate, and the old currency is not legitimate. So I went into all of that, we did all kinds of things, and it was a quite extensive and very interesting and exciting exhibit.

Riess: Did you have to do a lot of research to put that together?

Benedict: I had to do a lot of research. But Gene Hammel helped me a lot with that. We tried to work out some kind of a chart, and I made sort of a list of all of the different kinds of special-purpose money and different kinds of general-purpose money, and showed what money was used for. I had about--I really should have that book here because I can't remember very well, but we dealt with perhaps a dozen societies, and we showed the different kinds of currency they had.

And then you get situations where you've got two kinds of currency operating at the same time. It becomes quite complicated. But I was very pleased with it. I thought it was very interesting. At least it interested me a lot.

Riess: Were you also teaching some then?

Benedict: What happened was that I retired, and then I was recalled, and I was recalled to continue to be director of the museum, so I was recalled at 49 percent because I couldn't be recalled at 50 percent or I wouldn't have been retired. Before I did that, I think I still may have taught an introductory course. I'm not sure. I certainly kept my seminars. And after I retired I still kept the seminars. I kept my thesis-writing seminar, and I had a seminar on material culture the whole time I was at the museum.

Riess: In that case, you used the collections extensively?

Benedict: We used the collections, and also I had people write papers.

Riess: Speaking of tokens of value, you probably saw the piece in *The New York Times* ["Where a Little Coca Is as Good as Gold," by Juan Forero, July 8, 2001] about trading coca paste, coca powder.

Benedict: No.

Riess: What the Colombians in some villages were doing was paying for goods from little sacks of coca which were weighed on a scale. They are prohibited from using the stuff, but they could use it as money. And the merchants consider it money, and eventually it gets into the drug trade, I guess.

Benedict: It's very much like what they were doing in the Gold Coast, in Ghana. Remember upstairs all those little figures that I have?

Riess: Yes.

Benedict: Those are gold weights, and that's what they did. They carried around a little box of gold dust, and they did exactly the same thing, only they had to carry a pair of balances, too, because they had to weigh it. A little tiny pair of balances.

Anyhow, that was the money exhibit.

And, by the way, that reminds me of something I forgot to mention when I was talking about the PPIE. One of the things I wanted to show in that exhibit was not just the PPIE, but also what was happening to world's fairs, so I made ground plans of all the world's fairs, all the major world's fairs from 1851 through 1964, I think, in which I colored what were government buildings, what were corporate buildings, what were purely amusement buildings for the fun zone or whatever you called it--I think those were the major categories. There may be one other category, like states or something like that, which would only work for America.

These were colored, and I had a big chart, I had these diagrams up on one of the walls in the PPIE exhibit, so that people could see how world's fairs changed from being state-run to being corporate-run. You could see the beginning of the global economy. You could actually see it.

You could see the actual blending of the amusement zone with the serious part of the fair, whereas in the early fairs they were quite segregated. There were a lot of theoretical points, but the idea of tokens of value in itself raises many questions. And then this business of special-purpose and general-purpose money was very important.

Then the next one was the Seychelles one, in 1993, and that was in the lobby. You know the lobby in Kroeber there?

Riess: Yes.

Benedict: Where there are some cases. Now it's just a permanent display in there, but when I was running the museum, I changed those cases every few months. I put something new in there for people to look at.

I wanted to do a whole exhibit on Seychelles.<sup>9</sup> The one I liked best was a case that I turned into a Seychelles shop, filled with all the different stuff that you could buy. It really looked good. It looked very much like that painting that you saw on the cover of our book. That's what it was modeled on.

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<sup>9</sup>"Seychelles, Commerce in Paradise," Lowie Museum of Anthropology, UC Berkeley, 1993.

Then I had another case which I filled with sand, and I placed different kinds of shells in there and talked about the Seychelles as a tourist place. It was a very entertaining exhibit. It wasn't a major exhibit in the main museum, but it was quite good, I thought.

### Continued Interest in Birds, Archaeology

Riess: To what extent have you gotten back into birds at all? Did you ever do anything with birds? We began with birds.

Benedict: Apart from looking at them, you know, going out to Point Reyes and stuff like that, no, I never did any research or anything. Not really. I keep up with reading about it.

Riess: Are there cultures that are very involved with birds?

Benedict: Oh, indeed there are, especially in New Guinea. But birds are very important in North American culture, too, especially in Indian myths. In fact, pretty well every culture has paid attention to birds one way or another.

Riess: I was reading this morning in the *Times* ["Fossils May Be Earliest Human Link," by John Noble Wilford] about Tim [D.] White, "hominid hunter."

Benedict: I read that.

Riess: Would you like to have been a hominid hunter?

Benedict: Well, I don't know.

Riess: Or even an archaeologist. Did you have occasional times when you thought archaeology was compelling?

Benedict: When I was in the department, as I continued in the department, I was very interested in what the archaeologists were doing, and I became more friendly--and of course, Jim Deetz was an archaeologist. But I was very interested--and the other social anthropologist who became very interested in archaeology was Bill Simmons--I was interested in it, but I can't say that I really did anything with it. I would go to their seminars, and we had discussions sometimes about it, but I don't think I would have ever--I mean, it's damn hard.

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Benedict: Not only is the climate absolutely impossible, but people are apt to shoot at you.

Riess: It's interesting--there are so few of these famous paleontologists and archaeologists. You have the Leakeys and the Tim Whites.

Benedict: There are very few successful ones, it's true, but there's a lot of interest in it. Of course, one of the big problems is that a lot of it has to do with just plain luck, whether you're going to find artifacts or not. Some people were very fortunate. [Louis] Leakey used to call himself Lucky Leakey. That's the father. But Lucky Leakey was doing it all the time. He lived in Kenya. They went out and dug and dug and dug. And, of course, the real fossil finders are not Europeans or Americans but the native peoples because they're the ones--they can see. We wouldn't be able to distinguish a tooth from a stone.

Riess: But then do they step aside.

Benedict: Sometimes they do, or sometimes they pick them up and try to sell them. You know, there are all kinds of people.

What's been happening in recent years, what Tim does, and what the Leakeys did, in fact they all do now, is that you work with them, and you give them full credit, and you give them training, give them proper training. This department has been a pioneer in that, Desmond [Clark] and Clark Howell, Glynn Isaac. They've brought Ethiopians and Kenyans here and trained them as archaeologists, and then they went back. So it's a cooperative effort now. But to answer your question, no, I didn't think of ever becoming an archaeologist.

### **Volunteer Zoo Docent in Retirement**

Riess: When you retired, in 1991, you were given the Berkeley Citation. What did that particularly recognize?

Benedict: I think it probably recognized my University service. [Bill] Shack and I got it at the same time. He had been dean of the graduate division. We had a very nice ceremony in the Morrison Library, and John Heilbron presented each of us with one of these framed citations.

Riess: I know you were recalled and continued then.

Benedict: I continued [until 1994 as director of] the museum, and I was very eager to do that. I liked working in the museum, except the museum became more and more a question of raising money, and I didn't like doing that very much. It's very wearing.

So, when I retired, I really decided I did not want to do--you know, I retired during that big wave of retirements.

Riess: The golden handshakes.

Benedict: The golden handshake, yes. That's when I retired. I retired, and I saw all these people, my cohorts, my age-mates, all--not all, but many of them were hanging onto the

university. The university certainly has plenty of committees, as you know, so it's very open to go and join these committees. These are committees which basically don't do very much except yammer at each other and give each other a sense of being important.

I decided, I don't want to do that! I've done that. I've done it at a time when I did have some power, when I saw that I could get things done. But to be on a committee that investigates parking or how to name different things or God know what all, I just decided, no, I didn't want to do that. I'd like to do something quite different. So I thought I would go back to my original love of animals and birds and see whether I can't do something in that line.

Now, all this time, of course, I had been a scientific fellow of the Zoological Society of London. I became that in the early sixties, I guess, a long time ago. I kept getting their journal. Of course, I was interested in primate evolution.

And you know, we had bought that house in London, and we kept going back to London. So I decided that I would volunteer at the London Zoo, which I still do when I'm in London.

Riess: As a docent?

Benedict: Yes, but they call us volunteers.

Riess: But you take people around?

Benedict: Yes, but mostly I have what they call a trolley, which is a little cart with artifacts on it--we had one for the bird house and one for the ungulates and one for the primates and so on. So I would do that. And you can't just do one [part of the zoo], you have to know enough to be able to do all of them. So you have to take a course.

I didn't take the course there because at the same time I started to do it here, and I wanted to do it in Oakland, which is much more convenient than trying to do it in San Francisco.

Riess: Even though San Francisco was probably much more desirable at that time.

Benedict: No, because the San Francisco Zoo is not a good zoo, and it's still in a bit of a mess. I wasn't really tempted to go to San Francisco.

I went to Oakland and looked at it, and I thought it really was trying to do something. It had been one of the worst zoos in the United States, but it was on its way up. I went in and said, "I would like to be a docent and take your course." So I took this fourteen-week course, with an exam at the end. You had lectures on ungulates and lectures on fish and lectures on evolution. It was really a wonderful course. And these are taught--they got people in from California Academy of Sciences and from different museums and zoos to give you these lectures.



Then you were trained on the job. You were given a mentor, and you're trained on both tours and what are called, here, stations, which are the same thing--you have a little cart with artifacts on it.

Riess: Were you the star? I mean, you had so much going for you in this.

Benedict: Yes, they were pretty pleased to have me there.

Riess: I mean, it's not necessarily populated with retired faculty.

Benedict: No, I'm the only faculty person there. But the other volunteers there, or the other docents there, are generally well educated. They're mostly, overwhelmingly women, many retired, who have had professional careers. About three or four Ph.D.s. Educated people, and certainly I would say upper-middle-class people.

Riess: Did you find yourself drawn into running the place?

Benedict: Yes. Of course, in London, since I'm not there as much as I am here, I couldn't really start running the London Zoo, but I got to know the director well. Eventually they formed a North American Committee, and I'm on it, and I know what goes on in council because I have another couple of friends there who are on the Council. The London Zoo is run by something called Council, and the London Zoo has many, many problems, which I won't go into. So I'm not really running it, but I would say I have some sort of special status there when I'm there.

The volunteers there are a different kettle of fish from those over here, which makes it very interesting. Not only, of course, are they English, but on the whole they are not as well educated. Dedicated, very dedicated to what they're doing, but they're just not as well educated as the ones here. And they're a lower class of person than they are here. That's such a bad word to use in America. Probably an easier word to use in England.

At any rate, I don't end up by running the London Zoo in any way at all. I'm very persona grata there, and I can certainly do what I want. I did talk to David Attenborough about it. He's really sort of turned off zoos at this point, although he began as a collector for zoos.

Here, yes, I'm now on the board of trustees of the Oakland Zoo.

Riess: That's often fund-raising.

Benedict: Yes, but I told them at the beginning--I mean, and they're into big fund-raising. The people on their board are Clorox and Bank of America, that kind of stuff. That's not my speed, and I don't have those sorts of contacts, either. But I'm decorative. They need somebody like me.

**"Footsteps from the Past," Oakland Zoo, Oakland, 2002**

Riess: You curated an exhibition at the Oakland Zoo in 2000.<sup>10</sup>

Benedict: When I went to the zoo, they were building a whole new exhibit called "The African Savanna." In this exhibit, there were to be three Kikuyu huts which were to be reproductions of real Kikuyu huts. Real Kikuyu huts are thatched, and the walls are made of a mixture of mud and cow dung, which the Department of Health in Oakland would not allow the zoo to do, but they made wonderful reproductions of it in concrete.

Well, one of these huts is a food stand, one of them is a kind of shelter where people can sit out of the sun and have picnics, and the other is a little hut in which they planned to have exhibits of some kind, but they didn't know just what. So I went to the director and said, "Why don't you have an exhibit in this hut about the people of Kenya, the people who live on the savanna? I mean, after all, if you're having all savanna animals here, you have meerkats in the middle and vervet monkeys, hyrax and so on, why don't you have something like that?"

He thought that was a good idea, and he said, okay, would I do it? I said yes, and I then started doing research on the peoples of Kenya. I knew a little bit about it, but I'm not an Africanist, really. So I went to the library here and beetled around in the library, and I put on quite a good exhibit.

Meanwhile, just as luck would have it--did I mention Linda Donley-Reid to you before?

Riess: No.

Benedict: It's worth taking a minute to talk about her. She was originally an archaeology student. I guess I met her in Jim Deetz's seminar. She had done her field work on the island of Lamu, which is a small island off the coast of Kenya which is inhabited by Muslims. She worked there for six years, I think, and she bought a house there on the island. I think she took a degree at Cambridge, and she may have taken something here.

Anyhow, we became friends. Her husband is a doctor--her name is Donley, his name is Reid. Their story is quite fascinating, but it's really tangential here. At any rate--I mean, one of the things they did was to transport a fifteenth-century English manor house to Napa Valley! It's got a minstrel's gallery, and a moat. Really quite amazing. She gives terrific parties there.

Anyhow, I told Linda about this, and she said that she could help me, and she could, because she knew the people at the museum in Nairobi, one of whom had been Richard

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<sup>10</sup>"Footsteps from the Past: Early hominids in Africa," Oakland Zoo.

Leakey's assistant. He was an enormous help. He came over here, and I took him to the zoo, and they were pretty thrilled to meet him.

She had all these wonderful photographs of the various people who live in Kenya. So I had these photographs blown up. The hut is circular, and they're put around the hut. They represented all the different--not all, but most of the people who live in the savanna: the Masai, the Kikuyu, the Pokot. You know, there are many different groups. Turkana is another one.

I had these photographs put up, and I got some artifacts--I had some upstairs [Benedict's home], and she had some. Meanwhile, the person who succeeded me at the museum had basically shut down the museum. She was getting rid of all the cases that I had had made to put on these different exhibits.

Riess: Who was that?

Benedict: Her name was Rosemary Joyce. She's an archaeologist, works on middle America.

Anyhow, I got the cases, and I took them to the zoo, and I put this stuff in. People were interested in it. It was unusual.

Riess: And the zoo docents were trained to talk about it?

Benedict: I taught them how to explain what was going on in there and what this was. And as the hut, itself--the Kikuyu people, the men and women live in different huts, and they have plural marriage. That is, they have polygyny. Men marry several women, and each wife has her own hut. I was able to explain that, and I had a diagram, which is still in there, about how the hut would have been arranged if it were in Kikuyu-land.

We left that exhibit up for about a year, a year and a half, and then we thought, "Why don't we do another one?" Linda got interested in it, and she said, "Why don't we do another one in which we look at African dress?" We called it "From Animal Skins to Printed Cloth," something like that. She again, through her contacts, managed to get all these kanga--you've seen pictures of them, they're a wraparound kind of thing, very handsome, and they're printed in Kenya, although they were originally Indian, from India, but now they're made in Kenya. They very often have Swahili mottos written into them.

So we got all these kangas, and we put them in there. And then we had a demonstration, and Linda showed people how they could wrap themselves in kangas.

Riess: Oakland's African-American community, did they get into this?

Benedict: Well, the trouble is they don't come to the zoo very much. The middle-class blacks come, but not the working class.

We had that up for about a year or a year and a half, something like that. Then I said to the director, "Look, why don't we do an exhibit on hominid evolution? After all, most of

these early hominids have been found on the savanna, in the same area that you're showing all the animals. So let's do one on human evolution." And he was willing to do that.

We were a little nervous about creationists, but we haven't had much trouble. Just a little, but not much. There's an organization here run by a woman called Eugenie Scott, which is dedicated to fighting creationism. I got in touch with her. And then I got in touch with Tim [White] and Desmond [Clark] and Clark Howell, but mostly it was Tim. He said yes, that he would help me.

He was an enormous help because not only did he straighten me out about what to put in and how to do it, but through him and Linda I was able to get the footprints. Did I tell you the story of the footprints? The footprints are actually in Tanzania, but the excavation and all that was funded from Kenya, and when they uncovered these footprints they made a cast of them and took it back to Nairobi. Since that time, the Getty [Museum] has gone there and has preserved the original site and built a museum on the original site.

The museum in Nairobi will sell you these footprints. You can have them in sets of two, four or six. So I got a set of six. Then, when we got them here, I got hold of Renee [Ross]. Renee had been at the [Hearst] museum, and she got interested in this. We got in touch with the Oakland Museum people and said, "If we bring you these things"--the footprints were made out of a kind of plastic--"could we make them out of something really hard so that kids can actually step in them?" Because that's what I wanted to do. They said they could do that.

Well, I wanted to have the three sets of footprints, I wanted to have a set of human ones. So I went to Joel Parrott, who is the director--a wonderful name for a zoo director--who has a seven-year-old daughter, and his seven-year-old daughter is about the size of an Australopithecine. I said, "Can we make footprints from Lindsay?" He was quite pleased about that, so the human footprints are Lindsay's footprints.

We then had to get the chimp footprints, and we couldn't use any of the chimps in the zoo because they were wild, we had to find a chimp that would walk on two legs. And that meant a trained chimp. Of course, the zoo is ideologically opposed to trained chimps. So I went behind their back, and I found an organization called PACT, which stands for People and Chimps Together. They're up in Auburn. Renee and her daughter and some friends of the daughter's, we all got in a couple of cars and we drove up there, and we talked to the guy, and he agreed to do this.

You know, it's hard for a chimp to walk six feet on two feet. I mean, they always want to go down on their knuckles. But he got the chimp by the hand, and we walked--. Of course, the chimp was very suspicious and got down and sniffed the clay and everything, but finally it walked across the molding clay, so that's how we got the footprints.

Riess: Nice story.

Benedict: And then the casts of the skulls came mostly from the museum in Nairobi--they came from all over. Tim and Tim's assistant helped me a lot, and we got the very best reproductions that we could, the most accurate, that is. Many of them are found only in little fragments; there is so much reconstruction on them. We put them in a case, except for one which we have as a touch skull, which is on a pipe stand, and you can actually touch it, and I think that's a very good thing.

It has proved very popular, that whole exhibit. We have signs around the wall. We made no compromises about evolution. People do come in, and they're very interested in it. It's been up for a year. I just talked to Joel the other day, and he said, "Could we keep it up for another year?"

Riess: Controversial at all?

Benedict: It's not really been. There's just been one or two people that have come in and said, "That's not really the way it happened. It happened in seven days," and so on.

Riess: I can tell from the way you describe this what fun it has been.

Benedict: It has been. It's been really quite another thing. It beats sitting on committees on parking.

Riess: In some way that brings us to the end of this. I would love some last words from you.

Benedict: Well, you used the word "fun." I think my life has been fun. I think that I have been able to make good use of my modest talents, among which are curiosity and persistence.

### **Talented Wife, Talented Daughters ##**

Riess: With just a little bit of time, I would like to hear more about your wife Marion, and about Barbara and Helen, all your talented women.<sup>11</sup>

Benedict: They are talented.

Let me start with Marion--Marion MacColl Steuber, to give her full maiden name. Her mother's family was Scottish. They farmed in upper New York state in the town of Leroy. Marion's father, Walter Steuber, also came from Leroy and was of German stock. He was an architect and contractor, and they settled in Ridley Park, Pennsylvania, where Marion was born--the hospital was in Chester. Later they moved to Swarthmore, where Marion's brother, Walter, attended college. After high school, Marion went to the Pennsylvania College for Women but then transferred to Swarthmore. I've already told

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<sup>11</sup> Some of the following text was added in editing by Burton Benedict.

you how she went to New York on her own and worked for Culbertson in the Citizens' Committee for United Nations Reform.

When we came here in 1966-67, Marion completed her B.A. and then took an M.A. in English literature. She has always been an avid reader and is a talented and graceful writer. For a number of years, she wrote a highly entertaining column for the now-defunct *Berkeley Gazette*, and she often reviewed books, both there and for the *San Francisco Chronicle* where she was fiction editor for a year. As you know, Marion was co-author of our Seychelles book. She also wrote an article for *Anthropology Today*, "Fact Versus Fiction: an ethnographic paradox set in Seychelles" in which she confronts the problems of ethnographic reporting. It has been reprinted in books of readings in contemporary anthropology. Our social success, such as it is, both in London and Berkeley is largely due to Marion. She is responsible for breaking us out of the narrow professional circle to which we might have been confined. It has certainly made our lives more interesting.

I told you that Helen was born in 1952, in London, on national health, and Barbara was born in 1955, and she was actually born in Swarthmore, but it was when we were here on a visit. It was about the time that I was going to Mauritius. They were both brought up in their early years in London. They went to a girls' public, in the English sense of public, called St. Paul's. First they went to St. Paul's Junior School, of which I became a governor. I remember Helen's teachers thought she had a great talent for writing, and she was always writing! Ever since she learned to write, she was writing things and making up stories. So was Barbara, but Barbara in a somewhat different way.

Then we came over here for a year, you remember, so they had to leave their London school, come over here and start going to public school in the American sense. And then go back there. Which was pretty tough for them. I think they learned excellent work habits in their English schools. And they learned to be quite articulate. That gave them a big advantage over their age-mates when they got to the schools here, a really big advantage. But they were very naive.

I remember Barbara went to the junior high school here. But at any rate--and the girls are both rather small--Barbara was going down the steps, and a large black girl pushed her down the steps. Well, Barbara didn't have any feeling about black girls. The only black girl in her school had been the daughter of the Ghanaian ambassador. So she was very surprised, and she turned around to this girl and said in her little English accent, "I shouldn't do that if I were you." And this absolutely astonished the black girl.

They both made the adjustments here. Helen went to high school, and she wasn't a very serious student in high school. Barbara was a very serious student, and she had the good fortune of finding a wonderful Latin teacher at Berkeley, Mrs. Small. Mrs. Small loved Barbara, and Barbara loved Mrs. Small, they got on beautifully, and she shot ahead here. She kept up with Mrs. Small, she always writes to her. Well, I don't know whether she still does, but she certainly did for a long, long time. So Barbara got quite a good education at Berkeley High School.

Helen, when she graduated from Berkeley High School, went to Reed College, where you could do pretty nearly anything you wanted for the first couple of years. This was, of course, during the time when everything was in turmoil, the middle to late sixties. She got fed up with what was going on. I think she was interested in psychology. She got very fed up with what was going on at Reed, so she wrote the University of Sussex--I didn't even know it--asking would they take her.

Of course, most of her education had been in England--she had taken her "O" levels, and I don't know if she took any "A" levels or not. They wrote back and said, "We will take you, but we won't count any of the nonsense you've been doing at Reed. You'll have to start at the beginning." Since the British university course is only three years, she said that she would do that.

So she went over to Sussex and enrolled there, and she read psychology. She did very well, and she got a 2-1, which is a good degree. Then she got a job in Brighton, writing for a little magazine called *What's On in Brighton*, and then she went to London and got a job on a newspaper in London, not one of the big newspapers, but a newspaper in London. She worked in that, but of course, it was very difficult. I mean, the field was crowded. It was very hard, nobody was getting jobs.

She felt she wasn't getting anywhere, so she decided she better come back here and take a degree in journalism. She came back to Berkeley, the School of Journalism, and got a journalism degree. Meanwhile, she had written a novel, which was based on her field work in a girls' borstal--that's a girls' reformatory, in England. The book was called *A World Like This*. It's her first novel.

She has published two others and has two more in the works. Her most important book of non-fiction is *Virgin or Vamp*, published by the Oxford University Press. It is an examination of the ways in which the press reports rape. The victim is usually portrayed as one or the other. Helen notes, for example, that a word like "vivacious" is never used for a male. Her book traces several notorious cases, such as the "Preppie" murder rape, the Central Park jogger case, and the New Bedford gang rape. She interviewed the reporters of these cases. Afterwards, she wrote *Recovery* and a book for teenage girls about rape which has been adopted in a number of schools both here and in England. She now is an Associate Professor in the School of Journalism at Columbia. Her book, *Portraits in Print* [Columbia University Press, 1991], a collection of pieces she did on Susan Sontag, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Beverly Sills, Bernard Malamud, Joseph Brodsky, et cetera, has been adopted in a number of journalism courses around the country.

Helen is married to Stephen O'Connor, also a teacher and a writer, and they have two children, Simon, a freshman at Wesleyan, and Emma, still in school. Steve's latest book, *The Orphan Trains*, is about destitute and abandoned children who were picked up off the streets of New York in the late nineteenth and very early twentieth centuries and sent on trains to be adopted by farming families in the middle west.

Barbara took her undergraduate degree at Harvard and her Ph.D. in English literature here in Berkeley. She worked with John Traugott, George Starr, and Robert Alter. She specialized in eighteenth-century English literature and is an expert on Jane Austen. She has just been asked by Cambridge to edit *Northanger Abbey* in the new definitive Austen

edition they are publishing. Her first book, *Framing Feeling*, is about the development of the English novel.

Her latest book, *Curiosity*, has been published by the University of Chicago Press. She has just had a most interesting interview, just to give you an idea of how it's being received. She was interviewed by Roy Porter. Do you know who he is? He's a sort of guru of contemporary English--he writes books on London and that kind of thing. A quite prominent person in England. So she was in Hartford, and he was in London, and they did an interview.

Riess: And his interviews are for BBC?

Benedict: Yes, on Radio 3.

Riess: How does she make the connection between the thing that we call a curiosity, and curiosity, the state of mind?

Benedict: She talks about curiosity in what she calls the early modern period, that is, late seventeenth, beginning of the eighteenth century, when curiosity had the double meaning you talked about, but it had another double meaning because, after all, it was curiosity that led to the fall of man, so it was not something that was looked upon as a desirable trait, especially in women. But it has gone round 180 degrees, and we consider scientific curiosity or curiosity about the world to be a desirable trait. Partly this book is about that transition, but it's also about the other dichotomy that you mentioned, that is, curiosities and curiosity. It's a terribly interesting study, and it's kind of breaking some new ground. She's very pleased about it. She's in London now, doing more research. And she churns out articles like nothing on earth.

Barbara is married to Mark Miller, a lawyer who practices in Hartford and also teaches. They don't have any children. Barbara teaches at Trinity College, Hartford, where she is a full professor and chair of her department.



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ROYAL SOCIETY POPULATION STUDY GROUP

The eleventh meeting of the Group was held in the rooms of the Royal Society on January 12, 1968.

PRESENT Lord Florey (Chairman)  
 Sir Alan Parkes )  
 Dr G.A. Harrison ) (Secretaries)

Dr B. Benedict	Lady Medawar
Mr A. J. Boreham	Professor N. F. Morris
Dr A. J. Boyce	Professor T. McKeown
Dr C. G. Butler	Professor W. D. M. Paton
Sir Colville Deverell	Mr N. W. E. Pirie
Dr R. G. Edwards	Dr M. Potts
Professor D. V. Glass	Dr D. Pyke
Professor E. Grebenik	Professor J. A. Stallworthy
M. J. Hajnal	Dr G. I. M. Swyer
Dr W. D. Hamilton	Professor J. M. Thoday
Professor H. Harris	Sir Norman Wright
Sir Aubrey Lewis	Dr E. A. Wrigley
Professor J. E. Meade	

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At this meeting the reports of the Group's Committees on Contraceptive Technology, Family Planning Services and Demography and Economics were presented. Various suggested amendments were approved and the Committees were asked to redraft their reports, incorporating these modifications.

Business

1. It was agreed that the next meeting of the Group should be on current fertility trends in Europe and possibly the United States, and Professor D. V. Glass was asked to organize this meeting, if possible for May 10, 1968.
2. The Group agreed to increase its number (currently there are five vacancies) and members were asked to submit names for consideration to the secretaries before the next meeting of the Group, bearing in mind the present composition of the Group in terms of subject areas. It was noted that since the formation of the Group, Professor D. V. Hubble, Sir Julian Huxley and Sir Peter Medawar had resigned, and that of those who were asked to join the Group in June 1966, Dr B. Abel-Smith and Sir Joseph Hutchinson had declined.



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## *Stratification in Plural Societies*<sup>1</sup>

BURTON BENEDICT

*London School of Economics and Political Science*

### INTRODUCTION

WHEN one talks about stratification, one is talking about structure. When one talks about plural societies, one is usually talking about ethnic or cultural categories (Morris 1957). It will become evident in the course of this paper that the use of ethnic and cultural criteria to differentiate sections of a society will not give us a clear description of the strata within it, nor enable us to see with clarity the relations between strata. To do this one must turn from cultural labels toward the major political and economic structures of the whole society.

### THE CONCEPT OF THE PLURAL SOCIETY

The term "plural society" which is associated with the writings of J. S. Furnivall (1944, 1945, 1948) has gained wide currency in the last few years. On the one hand it has been hailed "as essential for comparative sociology" (M. G. Smith 1960:763) and "as a field of crucial and strategic importance for sociological theory" (Rex 1959:114). On the other hand, it has been criticized as "misleading because it concentrates attention upon differences in race and custom and upon group conflict while at the same time directing attention away from the processes making for unity and integration in the society" (R. T. Smith 1958). "To emphasise plurality may also encourage people to look on societies with minority problems as if they did not have coherent social systems that are strictly comparable with societies that do not have 'minority problems'" (Morris 1957:125).

A difficulty has lain in the attempt to push the concept to cover all sorts of differences in culture and institutions within a society. Every society has pluralistic aspects in the sense that different values and attitudes are produced by any functioning social system (Braithwaite 1960:821). In this sense, pluralism is apt to become a synonym for "complex." A second difficulty arising from the first has been the attempt to describe all societies which contain more than one ethnic or cultural category in terms of pluralism. This has led M. G. Smith, for example, to describe the United States and Brazil as "heterogeneous societies that contain plural communities and evince pluralism without themselves being plural societies" (1960:771). This difficulty has bedeviled both the 1960 conference on Pluralism in the Caribbean and the 1957 INCIDI conference on pluralism in tropical territories. Underlying these difficulties is the fallacy of thinking that pluralism is an analytical concept, whereas it is a simple classificatory one.

The term has been most successfully used when applied to single societies. Freedman (1960) assumes that his readers know the meaning of "plural society" and applies it, only indirectly defined, to Malaya. Both H. S. Morris (1956) for East Africa and E. P. Skinner (1960) for British Guiana stress the inadequacy of the concept of a plural society. Yet their analyses of its shortcomings give excellent insights into the complexity of the problems of such societies. It is as a label for multi-racial societies that I believe the term plural society has its place; "it has the merit of summarizing in two words a series of very complex problems" (R. T. Smith 1961:155).

#### *Stratification*

One of these very complex problems concerns stratification. Let us begin by attempting to see how far the sections of a plural society, defined in ethnic and/or cultural terms make up significant categories for stratification. Are they, in Nadel's terms, aggregates of individuals who share in relevant respects the same status and are marked off from other aggregates by different status? (1951:174). Can they be said to be groups or quasi-groups or potential groups, to use Ginsberg's term (1934), and, if so, in what contexts? Using ethnic and/or cultural criteria alone I do not think we can distinguish such groups. The difficulties will appear if we attempt to do so in a specific context.

#### MAURITIUS

Mauritius is an island of 720 square miles in the Indian Ocean. Its economy is almost entirely based on the production and sale of sugar. Upwards of 630,000 people inhabit this British colony which is moving rapidly towards self-government.

Sixty-seven percent of the population of Mauritius is of Indian origin; twenty-eight percent is Creole, i.e., of mixed African and/or Indian and European descent; three percent is Chinese; and two percent is European or of European origin.<sup>2</sup> Each of these ethnic categories can be further subdivided: the Indians into Hindus and Muslims and five linguistic categories, the Creoles according to color, the Chinese into Christian and non-Christian, and the Europeans into English and French. Mauritius is a plural society, but the principles in general use to mark off the sections within it are varied. Thus I have just used ethnic origin, language, color, national origin, and religion to differentiate sections of the population. These are all basically ascribed statuses.

#### *Ethnic and Cultural Criteria*

Are there any grounds for seeing even a vague sort of group consciousness (Lowie 1948, MacIver 1950) on the basis of such criteria? Ethnic origin is perhaps the primary index of differentiation in ordinary conversation in Mauritius, though it is often fused with the notion of color. By ethnic origin one can distinguish categories deriving from Europe, Africa, India, and China. There is, however, a large category whose antecedents were both African and European



which it is difficult to place in such a simple classificatory system. A further difficulty is the long residence of all categories except the Britons in Mauritius, so that strictly speaking all are of Mauritian birth and nationality. Yet, except to foreigners or when overseas, few Mauritians identify themselves or others as Mauritian. Instead they use an appellation of nationality, religion, color, or some finer distinction of caste, sect, or linguistic origin. It depends on the context which sort of appellation is used, for they are not all mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, primary identification is nearly always with a section smaller than the total national group. In this there is a difference in degree rather than kind from societies in which individuals identify themselves with a tribe or kin-group (cf. Morris 1957).

#### *Language*

If we take language as a criterion differentiating sections of the population, we find that each ethnic section has a language or group of languages associated with it. Yet, within sections, finer distinctions can be made on the basis of linguistic origin, and several languages traverse linguistic and ethnic origins and provide links between communities. Language can become symbolic of the differentiation between sections in a political context, as disputes in Mauritius, India, and other countries have shown. Language can also become symbolic of upward social mobility. A rise in the social and economic scale in Mauritius often leads to the abandonment of the local Creole *patois* or of an Indian language in favor of French or English. This is an example of the way in which cultural traits of those in the upper social strata are used as reference points for those lower down. It demonstrates the necessity of looking at a plural society as a single social system and not as separate social systems only making contact in the economic sphere as Furnival (1944) maintains.

#### *Religion*

If we turn to religion we note similar phenomena, for each ethnic section has one or more religions associated with it. Yet within sections there are many distinctions of ceremony and sect, and a number of religions traverse linguistic and ethnic boundaries. As with language, religion can become an important political symbol in some contexts differentiating political blocs. It can also become symbolic of upward social mobility by conversion to Christianity. In Mauritius only the Christian religions have significant representation in each of the major ethnic sections.

Awareness of other religions is one of the characteristics of the plural society as found in Mauritius. This means not only awareness of differences but of similarities. Beliefs and practices of one religion are often rationalized in terms of another. In this it is usually the religions of the lower strata, Hinduism and Islam, which are rationalized in terms of the higher, Christianity. In the villages, all of which are multi-racial, one rarely hears the adherent of one religion dismissing another religion as idle superstition. Instead there is a belief in the possible efficacy of other religions, particularly of certain saints, deities,

which it is difficult to place in such a simple classificatory system. A further difficulty is the long residence of all categories except the Britons in Mauritius, so that strictly speaking all are of Mauritian birth and nationality. Yet, except to foreigners or when overseas, few Mauritians identify themselves or others as Mauritian. Instead they use an appellation of nationality, religion, color, or some finer distinction of caste, sect, or linguistic origin. It depends on the context which sort of appellation is used, for they are not all mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, primary identification is nearly always with a section smaller than the total national group. In this there is a difference in degree rather than kind from societies in which individuals identify themselves with a tribe or kin-group (cf. Morris 1957).

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and rituals. Vows are often made to saints of other religions. Thus the knowledge of other religions is an important part of the belief systems of many Mauritians, and again emphasizes the importance of treating the whole society as a single social system. Mitchell (1960) has noted the incorporation of apparently conflicting values into a single social system in the plural societies of Central Africa.

Such criteria as ethnic origin, language, and religion are only significant group determinants in a political context, that is in a context which looks at the political structure of the whole society. Here they become symbolic not so much of cultural separateness as of lower political status. If Roman Catholicism and the Church of England receive government subsidies in Mauritius, Indians want similar subsidies for Hinduism and Islam. If French and English are taught in schools, there are Indian demands for Urdu, Tamil, and Hindi.

Nadel's definition of social strata as aggregates of individuals who share in relevant respects the same status, leads us to ask what the relevant features are. As Nadel is at pains to point out, they do not refer to all physiological and behavioral differences, but chiefly to access to political status and wealth. It is in these contexts that ethnic and cultural differences can become important because they can serve as symbols of differential status.

This can be seen in the use of stereotypes to define social distance and differential status. As Morris (1956) has shown in East Africa, members of one section tend to regard other sections as undifferentiated.

### *Stereotypes*

In Mauritius the Franco-Mauritian refers to "les indiens" and is scarcely aware of the many differences of caste, sect, and linguistic origin which differentiate such a category. Similarly, the Indian is unaware of the many social gradations among "les blancs." Both tend to regard the Chinese as similarly undifferentiated. Such stereotypes must be assessed in the context in which they are uttered. The Chinese shopkeeper will be aware of many of the distinctions among the Indians and Creoles in the village in which he has his shop. The Franco-Mauritian estate manager may be similarly aware of distinctions among the laborers inhabiting his estate camp. In a Franco-Mauritian drawing-room white and black are adequate distinctions, but in politics Hindu and Muslim may be more significant, while in the occupational sphere Indian and Creole may become the important categories. The tendency for individuals of one section of the plural society to look on the others as undifferentiated appears to be a function of lack of communication between individuals of different sections. It is most pronounced where the social distance is greatest. From the Franco-Mauritian drawing-room the Indian village is socially remote. Physically it is rarely more than a quarter of a mile. Where social contact is more frequent and sustained, this undifferentiated stereotype breaks down. The Chinese shopkeeper knows not only the ethnic and religious differences among his clientele but their individual differences in wealth and power.

From this brief survey it can be seen that such factors as ethnic origin,

language, and religion do not mark off congruent categories. They may be indices of a certain "consciousness of kind" (Giddings 1896). They provide some measure of social distance and can be activated as symbols in certain political contexts. Are there any grounds for ranking the ethnic sections? In Mauritius only the European element would be placed with any certainty. There is a consensus that they are on top. In fact, of course, only some of them are on top. Their cultural traits are prestigious and are adopted by individuals of other sections who are attempting to rise. Below the top there is less agreement as to ranking *on the basis of ethnic or cultural criteria alone*. From the European point of view either all the other ethnic sections fail to meet their racial standards or some sections meet cultural standards more than others. Individuals in each non-European section tend to rank their section above other non-European sections.

So far in this discussion I have been using only ethnic and cultural criteria to differentiate sections of the plural society. I do not think the effort has been very productive. I have been unable to distinguish groups or describe a system of stratification. It is hardly surprising that in dealing with cultural phenomena the social structure does not emerge. What is surprising is to find those who think pluralism is an analytical concept, believing that a description of cultural categories is a way of analyzing the relations between the categories. To do this one must turn from cultural labels—including, I believe, even the institutions of, say, religion and kinship which may characterize one section, and which I have not treated—towards the major political and economic institutions of the total society. The Europeans in Mauritius do not hold their positions at the top of the social hierarchy because of ethnic or cultural characteristics, but because they control the political, legal, and economic machinery of the island.

#### *Economic Structure*

It is in an economic context that Furnival saw the meeting of the various sections within a plural society, each of which was economically specialized. It is in an economic context that Ginsberg and others see the primary determinants of social strata. It is by examining the economic structure of the whole society that we should be able to discern significant strata and the relations between them. We should also be able to see how ethnic and cultural characteristics affect an individual's position in the economic structure, including his opportunities for mobility within it.

Occupationally, Mauritius is traditionally described as ethnically stratified with top positions in the hands of Europeans, Creoles as clerks and artisans, Chinese and Muslims as traders, and Hindus as laborers. This is, of course, an over-simplification, but even if it approximates the occupational structure, it cannot persist over time unless backed by strong political measures, as in South Africa. Economic classes develop within ethnic categories which can be differentiated not only by income but because they adopt distinctive forms of behavior. They become status groups in Weber's sense. Such behavior is

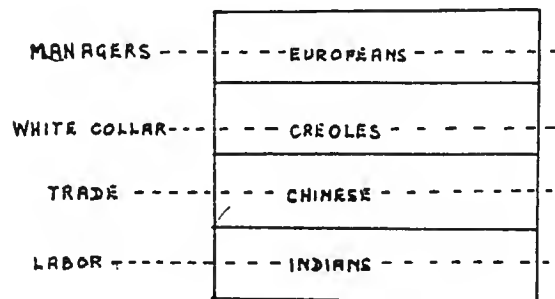
imitable. It crosses ethnic boundaries so that, political conditions always permitting, the society becomes class stratified.

I doubt if the ethnic sections of a society are ever completely undifferentiated economically, but indentured laborers arriving penniless under similar conditions of servitude come close to it. How did Indians in this position in Mauritius develop differential economic status? One way was by becoming an overseer who received higher wages and double rations. Overseers achieved their positions by being appointed by estate managers, by recruiting labor onto the estates from the immigration depots, or by being "elected" by the laborers themselves. They often advanced loans to laborers at interest. Another way Indians could rise economically was through concessions granted by estate owners or managers to keep livestock or grow vegetables. One of the motives from the estate owner's point of view was to keep a laborer nearing the end of his indenture attached to the estate. Indians with such concessions could and did become market gardeners and milk and egg sellers. More important still were the opportunities which Indians had to acquire cane land. These lands were initially in the form of concessions from estates. Often such lands were uneconomic for the estate because of rocky soil or poor irrigation, but they were not uneconomic for the Indian using family labor. (See Benedict 1958a.) The land provided was on a share-cropping basis with the proviso that all canes be crushed at the estate owner's mill. During periods of economic depression<sup>3</sup> Indians were able to acquire land on long term purchase agreements, payments being deducted from the proceeds of the cane sent to the mill. In all these ways Indians were able to acquire wealth. With this wealth they were able to train their sons for government service and the professions. There thus grew up within the Indian section of the plural society a series of economic classes which to some extent began to cut across traditional categories of differentiation, such as caste and linguistic origin. At the top of the hierarchy this facilitates contacts between sections. Muslim importers, big Hindu planters, Franco-Mauritian estate owners, British bankers and exporters, big Chinese merchants have economic interests in common. Such interests are leading to increased social contacts. Similar contacts also develop within the professions between doctors, lawyers, and teachers of different ethnic categories.<sup>4</sup> Even at the lower levels occupational specialization by ethnic category seems to be breaking down. There is still a predominance of Chinese in the retail trade, a predominance of Indians in agricultural pursuits, a predominance of Creoles among craftsmen and related workers. Nevertheless no ethnic category is exclusively confined to a single set of occupations. There are opportunities for mobility from one sort of occupation to another, though as yet access to certain jobs—such as managerial and technical jobs within the sugar industry—are confined to one ethnic section. Economically and occupationally Mauritius appears to be changing from a society which is ethnically stratified with each ethnic section confined to a single set of occupations to a society which is economically stratified with each ethnic section pursuing a whole range of occupations. This is an emerging structure. More top positions are still to be found

among Europeans; more lower positions are still to be found among Hindus; retail trade is still largely the province of the Chinese. It will be noted that this transformation does not necessarily abolish the plurality of the society. The distinction between ethnic sections may remain, and this means that there will be several upper classes, not a single one embracing all sections. Nevertheless, the possibility exists for the rapprochement of communities on class lines rather than on purely ethnic, religious, or linguistic ones.

The process can be represented diagrammatically as follows (Fig. 1): This is oversimplified. The traders do not necessarily rank below the white collar workers. From the point of view of remuneration they rank well above

### 1. TRADITIONAL.



### 2. TRANSITIONAL.

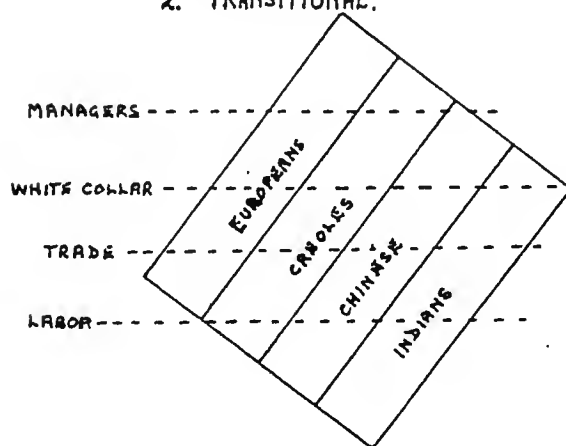


FIG. 1.

them, but from the point of view of prestige and educational qualifications, which are among the prime indices of prestige, white collar workers rate higher. They are also apt to have more political influence.

In the transitional phase the occupational structure begins to rotate through 90 degrees. As it does so, the lines differentiating ethnic categories become blurred notably in the managerial, trading, and laboring categories. In the white collar category, however, which is one of the chief avenues of upward social mobility, the lines may become more pronounced owing to competition for jobs. The competition between Creoles and Indians in this sphere is marked in Mauritius.

#### *Access to Occupation*

In the occupational sphere we are dealing primarily with statuses of achievement. In discussing the plural society we need to look at how far ethnic origin, or the adherence to a particular religion—in other words statuses of ascription—fosters or inhibits access to certain occupations.

Certain cultural characteristics may inhibit or foster access to certain occupations. Thus, Hindus in Mauritius do not become shoemakers or leather workers, but leave this to Muslims and Creoles. Muslims may be butchers, but they leave pig slaughtering to Creoles or Chinese. The fact that the upper reaches of commerce and government are conducted in English and to a lesser extent in French, makes it easier for native speakers of these languages to gain access and inhibits access to those brought up speaking a Chinese or an Indian language. The degree to which such factors limit access to economic status will vary with different societies, within different sections of one society, and over time. In Mauritius it would appear that such factors are diminishing with the increased opportunities for education and mobility in the occupational sphere. (See Benedict 1958b)

A chief factor inhibiting or fostering access is wealth. Lipset and Bendix (1959) have described a syndrome of poverty, lack of education, absence of personal contacts with the powerful, lack of planning, and failure to explore fully the available job opportunities. The process is no different in plural societies except that the poor can be ethnically, religiously, or linguistically differentiated from the wealthy. As I have shown, even this does not persist over time. If one looks at the relevant groups controlling economic opportunity they turn out to be not ethnic groups but something much less comprehensive, i.e., they do not include all members of a particular ethnic division but only a portion of the ethnic division associated on a basis of kin ties, economic association, or some other criterion. Not all Franco-Mauritians are rich and control the sugar industry. Certain Franco-Mauritian families do. Similarly for Chinese merchants and Gujerati importers. Thus the relevant factor of ascription, as far as access to economic opportunity is concerned, is not membership of an ethnic unit per se, but as Parsons (1940) pointed out more than 20 years ago, membership in a kinship unit.

*Political Structure*

A characteristic of societies described as plural is the concentration of political power and legal machinery in one ethnic section. Sometimes the other ethnic sections suffer legal disabilities and so approximate to the estates of feudal and post-feudal Europe and the ancient world (Ginsberg 1934:165). This is the case in South Africa and has been the case in Mauritius and elsewhere, where indentured laborers were subject to special laws defining their status. At a later stage in Mauritius, laws were no longer phrased in ethnic terms, but had the same effect. Thus, property and literacy qualifications on voting had the effect of disenfranchising most Indians until 1948. Various schemes of communal voting in a number of countries also give differential politico-legal status to different sections of the population.

The development of a series of economic classes cutting across ethnic boundaries in Mauritius has led to political alignments on a class basis. In the Mauritius Labour Party Creole dock workers are allied with Indian agricultural laborers. The leadership of the party includes both Indian and Creole intellectuals. The conservative *Parti Maurician* allied Franco-Mauritian planters with wealthy Gujerati Muslim importers.

Ethnic and cultural characteristics can become symbols of political allegiance driving the sections apart. Though it was in the economic interests of wealthy Gujerati Muslims to support the *Parti Maurician*, many poor Muslim followed their lead because they feared political domination by Hindus in the labor party. The position of the dominant ethnic section is obviously significant. It may bring about an alliance of divers sections against it, as has been the case in many colonial territories. In Malaya, as Freedman (1960) has pointed out, nationalism was a factor creating pan-Malayan ethnic blocs out of what were merely ethnic categories.

In this sort of situation, access to political power can often be obtained by stressing or emphasizing the cultural peculiarities of a given section as opposed to other sections. (See Benedict 1957.) There are thus possibilities for individuals to gain positions of power by emphasizing the separateness of sections and becoming leaders against the dominant sections. There are also opportunities for individuals to gain power by approximating the norms of the dominant section and becoming government servants. In Mauritius, and elsewhere, it is striking how individuals can switch from one to the other of these roles. In general, in Mauritius and elsewhere, the leader who emphasizes only traditional values and statuses of one section seems to be losing out to the leader who has achieved high occupational status in the dominant total system. In Mauritius, Western educational and occupational achievement is a more important ladder upward than high traditional status. (See Benedict 1958b.)

## CONCLUSIONS

In this paper I have tried to examine social stratification in plural societies. I began by looking at the various statuses of ascription such as ethnic group,



religion, and language by which the sections of a plural society are usually differentiated. I found that for Mauritius, and I believe for most other societies, corporate groups cannot be differentiated on this basis, but they sometimes serve as symbols which differentiate blocs in certain political contexts.

A more fruitful approach was to be found in examining the economic and political structures of the total society. Economically I found increasing differentiation within each section over time with a tendency for economic classifications to cross ethnic boundaries. Where the political climate permitted there arose a number of parallel economic classes and the vertical barriers between sections tended to diminish notably at the top, though in the positions just below the top competition may be increased. The society began to change from one which is ethnically stratified, with each ethnic section confined to a single set of occupations, to a society which is economically stratified with each section pursuing a whole range of occupations. Thus plurality tended to diminish.

Much depends on the political structure of the society. Where ethnic sections suffer political and legal disabilities they tend to be driven apart, and political leaders tend to represent one section only. In other cases there may be alliances of nonprivileged sections against a dominant section of leaders and parties arising which are based on economic class rather than ethnic affiliation.

Pluralism appears to be unstable. Where political and economic conditions permit, pluralism tends to break down. Communication between sections increases and common cultural forms develop. Groups and institutions cutting across sections foster this tendency toward fusion. Where political and economic opportunities are distributed on the basis of ascribed ethnic or cultural status divisive tendencies develop. In the societies we describe as plural there are always tendencies in both directions.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A version of this paper was read at a Conference on Social Stratification held at Oxford under the auspices of the Association of Social Anthropologists, 23rd and 24th March, 1961. The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Mr. H. S. Morris in clarifying many of the points treated in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Based on the 1952 Census. The percentages for Creoles and Europeans are approximations, as the census does not distinguish these categories.

<sup>3</sup> These same economic depressions also tended to differentiate the European estate owners, many of whom were ruined, so that there was social mobility downward.

<sup>4</sup> Similar processes have been noted in other plural societies: East Africa (Morris 1956, Gutkind 1957), Trinidad (Crowley 1957), British Guiana (Skinner 1960), Surinam (Van Lier 1957).

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# FAMILY FIRMS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

BURTON BENEDICT

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## FAMILY FIRMS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT<sup>1</sup>

BURTON BENEDICT

### INTRODUCTION

Where the family does play an important part in business it is often a reflection of the economic immaturity of the population, the absence of a tradition of impersonal service in industry and the unreliability of employees who have no kinship ties to the firm. Industrial development cannot but be handicapped by inappropriate standards of economic morality (United Nations 1955:20).

ECONOMIC PLANNERS commonly assume that family firms are detrimental to economic development because they are based on nepotism and paternalism which foster inefficiency. Such a point of view assumes that impersonal role relationships are necessary for economic development and that the major economic effort should come from the public sector. It maintains that the private sector must be controlled to fit in with this (United Nations 1951).

My investigations have led me to dispute this point of view. This paper contends that the private sector as represented by the family firm is an important growing point in the economies of low income countries. I do not claim that family firms are suitable for every sort of enterprise required by a developing economy but that for commerce, industry, and many types of financial activity they are extremely well-placed to assist economic growth because they combine a number of unique sociological and economic characteristics. This paper examines the sociological characteristics of the family firm. It attempts to isolate a number of variables and treat them diachronically with the development of the firm. The principal data are drawn from two family firms from East Africa, but material from Europe, India, the Lebanon, and Pakistan is also used.

I hypothesize that family firm organization is more important in the early stages of the growth of the firm than in the later stages. Indeed it seems likely

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to acknowledge the very great assistance of Mr. Iqbal Mamdani in the preparation of this paper. I must also thank Professor David Apter, Professor Elizabeth Colson, Dr. Charlotte Erickson, Professor Paul Kay, and Professor B.S. Yamey for helpful comments. None of them, however, bears any responsibility for the views expressed in this paper.

that role relationships in the firm must change qualitatively if the firm is to grow. At what stage the change occurs and how the transition is brought about are important problems for future fieldwork. On the economic side I shall attempt to show that the family firm is extremely well placed to take risks in a developing and perhaps not very stable economy, that it can make investments in the training of personnel which can hardly be matched by large private firms or by public sector agencies, that it is well placed for raising capital, and that it provides continuity and social security which can scarcely be matched by large private or public enterprises.

#### SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS

In Parsonian terminology (1939, 1951) family roles have long been characterized as clustering around the particularistic pole of role relationships. The behavior of individuals playing such roles depends on *who* they are. An individual's father, for example, is set off from all other males by virtue of his particular relationship to that individual. Parsons has also characterized such roles as being functionally diffuse. They are not organized around one or a few specific functions, such as the relationship between a customer and a shop assistant, but around a host of functions which are usually not very specifically defined. Gluckman (1955:18-19) has called these multiplex in that the social relationship "serves many interests." A further characteristic of such relationships is that they are affectively charged. The incumbents of such roles have strong positive or negative feelings about each other. Finally, such role relationships extend over a considerable span of time.

All these characteristics of particularistic role relationships are important in analyzing the family firm, but I wish at this stage to place emphasis on the last—the time span. It is the development of family role relationships over time which I feel is crucial in understanding the development of the family firm. In other words I do not wish to construct two static models, one of the family firm with its particularistic role relationships and the other of the impersonal business enterprise with its universalistic role relationships, and merely contrast them. This has some heuristic value, but it does not permit us to study process either to perceive how the family firm develops or to learn how it transforms itself from a family to a non-family business.

For this dynamic analysis I shall attempt to use the concept of transaction as developed by Fredrik Barth (1966). Transactional analysis is based on reciprocity and the ideas of prestation and counter-prestation. In Barth's formulation each actor in a set of role relationships keeps a kind of mental ledger of value

gained and lost in his relations with other actors. Each successive action affects that ledger and so affects subsequent choices of behavior. Each actor must make an assessment of whether he will gain or lose by a given action, and this means he must make some estimate of what alter's moves will be. "Many possible courses of action are ruled out because . . . an actor must expect that value lost will be greater than value gained" (Barth 1966:4), but this still leaves him a choice. The range of choice will depend on the situation. This is a kind of games analysis based on a somewhat Leachian notion (1954) of power as a chief motivating force in human actions. It is also a model of process as it depends on successive actions over time. Barth maintains that this type of analysis enables us to see the ways in which a variety of social forms are generated from a much simpler set. I am not sure that it is necessary to make the assumption of a simple set of social forms. I think it is possible to start from any set and observe the generation of new forms. What is required is some definition of the status involved in terms of rights and expectations, which, of course, assumes an underlying set of values. It then becomes possible to see, through the observation of transactions between the incumbents of such statuses, the way in which new forms appear. I assume that these are not random (they cannot be because of underlying values and the assumption of gain or loss by a given form of behavior). They become patterned, but this does not mean that they are in a state of equilibrium. It is this feature of transactional analysis which represents an advance over equilibrium theories of social structure associated with Radcliffe-Brown (1952). In transactional analysis attention is focused on the individual actor. Instead of looking at the external sanctions which bring an individual actor back into line if he has transgressed the norms of a particular role, we look at the transaction itself in terms of gains or losses to the interacting actors. Thus attention is focussed on forces internalized within the individual, at his range of choices in a given social transaction.

In applying this model to the family firm I shall be particularly concerned with family roles. I shall try to show how business roles are generated from these and how they change as the business develops. I must emphasize that my field data are inadequate, but I hope at least to set up a paradigm which may be applied in the field.

#### FATHER-SON ROLES AND THE GENERATION OF TRUST AND CONFIDENCE

In any family firm the relations between father and sons are of crucial importance. If confidence is not built up between them, the firm cannot grow. The son as a child is dependent upon his father for maintenance, instruction, affection,



encouragement. He is continually making prestations of trust to the father, and these are reciprocated by counter-prestations of confidence in the son. In the family firm these prestations and counter-prestations are not simply confined to the domestic scene. Many of them take place in the context of the business. Indeed the business and domestic spheres overlap, as business matters are apt to be the major topic of conversation within the family. Very early the son is given such tasks as helping with the merchandise, opening the premises, or cleaning up. As the son grows older the father begins to give him more responsible tasks. At first these may be simple, such as carrying messages. The father here makes a prestation of trust in his son. The son makes a counter-prestation in delivering the message successfully. This permits the father to make greater prestations of trust in the son for carrying out more complex tasks. But the son has alternatives. He may go off to play instead of delivering the message. He has then failed to make a satisfactory counter-prestation to his father, whose trust in him will be diminished.

Even at the message-running level the bonds of trust between father and son can be vital to a business transaction. In one case in East Africa when an important meeting of the shareholders of a large enterprise was to be called, the manager sent his son with a form which each shareholder was required to sign, testifying that he would appear at the meeting. The boy travelled long distances and far into the night to obtain the required signatures. The corporation had a paid secretary, but such service could not be expected of him. There were not the same kinds of ties binding him to the service of the firm as bound the manager's son to his father.

By the time one of the sons of a firm in East Africa, which I shall call firm A, was 12 or 13 he spent 2 or 3 hours a day in his father's business in addition to attending school. He served customers and began to learn how to keep the books. The father made greater and greater prestations of trust in more and more aspects of the business, and the son made more and more counter-prestations. But a new pattern of relationships was also being engendered. The roles were not just those between father and son but between business manager and business associate. The content of the roles began to have more to do with business and less to do with family relationship. But there was always a range of choice for father and son. The father could make choices which would give his son more or less responsibility in the firm. The son could make choices accepting or rejecting the opportunities given him. One firm in East Africa was managed by a man with 7 sons. He failed to train his sons, who made choices outside the family business. The business failed to expand, and the sons dispersed to other areas. Thus it is of major importance for the family firm that there be transactions between father and

sons to generate patterns in the business sphere. If these transactions are successfully carried out, the sons (and often the daughters) have made very large commitments to the family enterprise before they are old enough to make significant alternative choices. A pattern of roles has been generated which can be seen, from the point of view of the firm, as a device for accumulating labor and capital, for the children are not paid salaries.

#### THE PROVISION OF TRAINING

We have already seen how training in the family business is given to sons as they mature. In this way they come to know every aspect of the family business. For successful expansion specialized training is required. An outstanding characteristic of successful family firms is the amount they invest in the education of their members. This again can be regarded as a transaction. The father invests a large sum in his son. The counter-prestation by the son not only involves the successful completion of his studies but also his return to the family firm to apply his expertise. Here we can see more clearly the fusion of family and economic obligations in the pattern of transactions. In firm A the father planned to divide his business into five shares. He began by giving 20% to his wife and retaining 80% himself. As each of his three sons attains the age of 21, he will receive 20% *provided he is still working for the family firm*. Thus, each son during his period of training has a potential interest in the firm, which becomes an actuality on his return to it. All money for the education of sons is withdrawn from the firm. The son is obligated to repay the cost of his education from his 20% of the firm's profits when he returns to it. If he does not return, he need not repay the money, but it is both his duty and in his interest to return. Apart from the purely financial aspects there are strong moral obligations to the family built up over many years. As one younger member of a family firm put it, "If I don't go back, my father will feel bad and my brother will say, 'See, he betrayed us.'" This pattern of investment in training is found in firm A. The eldest son was sent first to England and Germany and later to Japan for training. A daughter was trained in book-keeping and typing, and she performed these duties for the firm until her marriage. The second and third sons were also sent to Japan for training as was the wife of the eldest son who was trained as a cosmetician. (The firm handles a line of cosmetics.) Two other young kinsmen were also sent to Japan for training, but, perhaps because the forces of obligation were not as strong, they failed to return to the business.

The investment in training, especially overseas training, by family firms pre-

sents an interesting contrast with similar investments by the governments of developing countries. Most such governments have scholarship schemes for sending promising students overseas, but they experience considerable difficulty in getting them back. This can be explained, at least partially, by transactional analysis.

The student makes prestations to the teacher by his mastery of the material which he is set to learn. The teacher makes counter-prestations by conferring or withholding good grades for the student's performance, not for his personal qualities. It does not alter the basic pattern if we start with the teacher making prestations of material to be learned by the student and the student reciprocating by mastering the material. The student has a range of choice which will generate various transactional patterns with the teacher and vice versa. The lack of a continuing relation over time means that there is a discreteness about the transactions. At the end of the course or the end of the year the relationship ends. There are no further prestations to be made. This contrasts with the transactional patterns between father and son described above. When the student has completed his education, which has been paid for by his father, he still has further counter-prestations to make to the father.

The student who wins a government scholarship does not feel that he has further counter-prestations to make, though governments attempt to make him feel this. But no transactional pattern has been built up between the student and the donor of the scholarship. The student feels he has made the final counter-prestition in the series by winning the scholarship. The verbs used are revealing. From the student's point of view he has "won" or "earned" his scholarship, but government officials speak of having "given" or "granted" such scholarships. If students, having received their training overseas, fail to return home, governments respond by attaching conditions to the scholarship to insure a return. Sometimes these are carrots in the form of a promise of a job; sometimes they are sticks, such as refusing to give a scholarship unless the student guarantees to return or forcing him or his family to pay back the cost of his overseas training if he fails to return. In the cases that I have encountered in Mauritius, the Seychelles, and England, the student does not feel a strong obligation to return. There is not the feeling of letting down people who had trusted him, a feeling which characterized the reactions of the young member of the family firm mentioned above. How could there be? There was no pattern of transactions between these students and *any individual* in their countries in which the scholarship itself was a significant prestation.

This transactional analysis, sketchy as it is, would seem to have some practical applications for developing countries. I do not think it is practical for govern-

ments to enter into the kind of transactional pattern with students which will insure their return, but something more personalized would help. More practical might be the encouragement of training through the family, perhaps by some form of subsidy through the family business. Of course, this will not be suitable for all kinds of training, but it is a possibility worth exploring. The discouragement of family enterprise, which is the policy of some governments of developing countries, would seem to operate against providing the country with trained personnel.

#### THE FAMILY FIRM AND THE STRUCTURE OF AUTHORITY

Sending sons and daughters away for training represents a great prestation of trust by the father, for he is investing an important part of his human capital as well as considerable financial resources. It also generates new transactional patterns affecting the structure of authority between a father and his children. The trained sons will bring new ideas into the business and will want a greater say in how it is run. This is a situation which is fraught with potential conflicts.

For daughters these conflicts do not arise. Although daughters accumulate equity in the family firm, they do not accumulate authority. Even the mother in Firm A, though she has a 20% interest, has no formal authority in the firm. Her interest is regarded by other members as an assurance that she will be supported when her husband dies. The most usual pattern for daughters in family firms is marriage out. In this case they receive their equity in the form of a dowry, but they have no share in the business. Should a daughter's husband be brought into the business, it would be he, not his wife, who would exercise any authority in running the firm. The question of the type of family structure most suited to the development of the family firm is important but falls outside the scope of this article.

In the early stages of the development of the family firm the father holds almost complete authority, both in his role as father and as head of the firm. Indeed, as we have seen, there is no clear distinction between these two roles. The transactional pattern is one in which the father sets the tasks and the sons reciprocate by carrying them out. We have also seen how this pattern generates new patterns as the father entrusts more and more important tasks to the son and the son successfully carries them out. The pattern thus generated in a successful firm moves towards consultation. It also moves toward separation of the roles of father and manager, son and business associate. If the firm is to persist, the father must give more responsibility to the sons. But this is not just a matter of the father relinquishing power; it is also a matter of the son taking it. In firm A, a retail

business, the father did not wish to sell radios, but the son by using a matrilineal kinship connection procured three radios which he sold at a profit. In his transaction with his father he made a choice other than unquestioning obedience. The father also had a choice. He could continue to oppose his son's idea of selling radios, or he could acquiesce. In doing the latter he continued the generation of the new pattern of transactions between them. The son now had more authority in the firm. He wrote letters to obtain franchises. A greater equality, at least in a business context, characterized father-son relations.

Clearly this is a delicate stage in the growth of the family firm. Insistence by the father on an authoritarian role can break up the firm. Desai (1965:5) points to conflicts in the East African family firm when a person occupies a managerial role which is not compatible with his status in the family. There exist several ways of resolving this conflict. One method is to accord deference to the father, by structuring affairs so that he is seen to be the authority. Thus, in firm A it was the father who first went to Europe and Japan to investigate the possibilities of importing radios, at the urging of the son. Publicly he is seen to be the prime mover, even though in fact he may not be. Another way is for the father to take a prominent part in community affairs. This gives him much prestige, which reflects on the whole family, but also removes him from much of the day-to-day running of the business. This course has also been taken in firm A, where the father is the leader of the local Ismaili community. In a second East African firm, which I shall call firm B, we can see a variant of the process. When the father died, the 4 sons decided to remain associated in the family business. The youngest was by far the most enterprising, but family norms require deference to the elder brothers. When decisions are taken, they are taken in consultation with and in the name of the eldest brother, though in fact they are often initiated by the youngest brother. In this firm the youngest brother sent all 3 of the older brothers to Japan before he went himself, again publicly demonstrating their seniority. The second brother is now a member of his country's legislature, again showing the use of this avenue of activity.

These examples show how new transactional patterns are generated. The father in firm A recognizes the worth of his son. The elder brothers in firm B have increasingly turned to their youngest brother in business matters. The systems of prestation and counter-prestation are complex and protracted. Prestations of deference must be accorded to the elders, and these are returned by counter-prestations of confidence. Conflicts occur, and sometimes outside relatives or friends are called in to mediate, but a pattern emerges in which the elders can accept innovation from their juniors provided it is properly presented. It is in the interest

of all parties to maintain amicable relations, both for the good of the family and the good of the firm.

Yet another way of resolving the conflict in authority roles is through opening branches of the business. This has occurred in both firms A and B. In firm A the eldest son now operates the branch of the family firm in Nairobi, where he is in complete charge. In firm B the youngest brother manages the firm's company in Dar-es-Salaam. This solution, however, carries a risk of dissolution. It is essential that the family firm members meet, especially when there are important decisions to be made. Both firms have evolved this procedure, but it results in generating a pattern of nearer equality between members. This pattern of development would appear to be very prevalent in family firms.

Similar patterns seem to have operated in the history of one of the best known family firms of Europe. Meyer Amschel Rothschild began to incorporate his children in the family firm when they were very young. The two eldest children, both daughters, were trained as bookkeepers, and the sons by the age of 20 were incorporated into the business (Corti 1928:23). Around 1796 Meyer Amschel entered into a deed of partnership with his two eldest sons (Corti 1928:24), in which profits and losses were to be divided among them. Later the two younger sons were included (Corti 1928:85-87). The parallel with the system of shares for sons in firm A is clear. As the Rothschild firm expanded, sons were placed in the capitals of Europe—London, Paris, Vienna, and later Naples. One of the reasons for sending Nathan Rothschild, the third son, to London was that he "felt that his elder brothers did not give him sufficient scope" (Corti 1928:26). A major factor in the success of the firm was the degree of communication which the brothers maintained. Despite wars and revolutions they managed to meet to discuss major business innovations, and the lines of communication which they established frequently yielded them great profits. Though we do not have sufficient information, it appears that the same conflicts and the same transactional patterns developed among the Rothschilds in the late 18th and early 19th centuries as developed in firms A and B in the 20th.

#### THE FAMILY FIRM AND RISK TAKING

A member of a family firm in describing another family firm attributed its lack of success to the fact that there were not enough sons. What are the advantages of using family members in the firm? One advantage is keeping information about the firm and its operation secret. Business secrets are family secrets. This was clearly very important for the Rothschilds, and their biographer claims that

the abundance of family members "made it unnecessary for Meyer Amschel to take strangers into his business and let them into the various secret and subtle moves of the game" (Corti 1928:23). The confidence built up among family members as well as their own self-interest insures this. A second advantage lies in the incentives that family members have for putting forth effort. Members of the family can be expected to do more work and put in more hours than paid employees. Again this is built on the transactional patterns among them. A third advantage rests in the use of liquid resources. The members of the firm, at least in its early stages, usually live as a joint family. Firm A's original premises were both a residence and a place of business. The eldest son with his wife and small children formed part of a joint household with his parents, thus reducing expenditure. The consumption level was kept low. Salaries and profits were ploughed back for investment and inventories, and father and son withdrew only a small percentage of their total salaries, just enough to take care of family expenditures. All members of the firm, including women and children, performed some duties for the firm, thus minimizing the expenditure on hired labor. Besides achieving economies of scale in family finances, the family firm is able to generate capital and manpower resources for the firm. This kind of arrangement could not be matched by a firm employing outsiders. It gives the family firm considerable advantages in the use of its liquid resources. It also commits family members further and further to the firm as they invest more and more in it. Should a son leave firm A, he is entitled to his back salary; but it can be seen that this might be crippling to the firm and acts as a sanction against his leaving.

A fourth advantage of having family members in the firm lies in the manner in which they can make the most of new business opportunities. In the early stages the father himself takes the risk on behalf of the firm. Later, after a pattern of consultation has been generated between father and sons, they are still able to move quickly to profit by a favorable situation. They are in constant communication. Their relations are built on trust. They are partners in the enterprise. They often have considerable advantages over large impersonal firms which must check with the home office or over public corporations which must consult a bureaucracy and call in experts. Firm A, for example, was able to purchase a large consignment of radios when the opportunity arose without having to consult outsiders, by which time the opportunity might have been lost.

Over and over in the history of the House of Rothschild we see the brothers making a relatively quick decision to take advantage of a change in events. The family firm is well placed to take risks. Of course, they are not always successful, but the flexibility which they exhibit often gives them an advantage over more

bureaucratic organizations. I suggest that this is particularly important in conditions of economic and political instability. Again the Rothschilds are a classic case. The Napoleonic period in Europe was certainly one of political and economic instability. But this is also the case in many developing countries. Indeed it is just such conditions which make it so extremely difficult to secure foreign investment. The family firm operates within the country. It is tied to the country by residence as well as by kinship and friendship networks. I think a good case could be made for showing that such firms stimulate the economic growth of such countries not only in commerce but in many branches of manufacturing. The opposition of the governments of developing countries to such firms would seem to be short-sighted. In their examination of family firms in the Lebanon, Khalaf and Shwayri (1966:68) conclude that "family firms have exerted a positive effect on industrialization." Papanek (1962) makes a similar point for Pakistan. The evidence needs to be collected and analyzed by anthropologists, sociologists, and economists. It is a topic of major practical importance.

#### THE USE OF WIDER KINSHIP LINKS

There would seem to be three ways in which kinship connections outside the domestic group can be used to develop the family firm: by obtaining financing, by making useful business connections, and by recruiting new personnel for the firm.

In the early stages of development before the credit-worthiness of the business has been established, it appears very common for financing to be sought through kinship connections. Thus, firm A probably received some of its initial financing from the wife's father. In firm B, which has interests in 15 businesses, the second brother's father-in-law supplied some capital and is a partner in some firms. In firm A the second daughter's husband belonged to an already established family firm, which went into partnership with firm A to open an office in Kampala. A merger is proposed of part of the business of firm A with that of firm B, which is matrilaterally linked to it. This is a further example of the use of kinship to expand and finance a growing business. When firm A began to look for dealers for its expanded line of products, the first two dealers were the father's sister's son and the father's sister's daughter's husband. They were assisted by being given favorable credit terms. They also, at the beginning, dealt exclusively in firm A's products.

As a number of the above examples illustrates, connections advantageous to the growth of the firm are often made through marriage. Nathan Rothschild, at



the age of 29, married the daughter of a wealthy Jewish business man who had emigrated to England from Amsterdam and with whom Nathan had already had business dealings. His wife's dowry was an important financial asset. Shortly afterwards his wife's sister, Judith Cohen, married Moses Montefiore, an extremely prominent and wealthy London businessman who became associated with the Rothschilds in a number of ventures (Corti 1928:111ff.). A large number of other cases of this kind could be cited from other parts of the world (see, for example, Lundberg 1937, chapter 1). The point should be made that these alliances are not mere business deals. The contracting families usually belong to the same social milieu and share common values, including allegiance to the family firm. Such marriages, therefore, serve both personal and business interests analogous to the way that family role relationships in the firm serve both family and business interests.

Kinship or membership in the same community or caste in East Africa can be used to obtain credits in terms of commodities purchased from big wholesale enterprises. Such credits are never fully paid back but are rotated as only part payments are made. Larger amounts of credit can be given to a family than to an individual, for the family can offer more security to an outsider. It should be remembered that all the members of the family share the "joint responsibility" of the debt, as there is no separation between household and business accounting and no separation between the private wealth of the family members and the property of the firm. The reason is that a family firm is considered to be an integral part of the organization of the family.

The fact that kinsmen can be used for financing and for making useful business connections again derives from the nature of the transactional pattern between them. Failure to lend or to repay not only alters a relation between business associates but one between kinsmen. Of course, this kind of dereliction sometimes occurs; but, when it does, pressures through other kinsmen are often brought to bear. Failure to cooperate with kinsmen often leads to a complete rupture of relations. The nature of the system of prestation and counter-prestation built up throughout the years affects such relations. As an example, the dissatisfaction of the founder of firm A with the share of the fish buying business he was getting from his brother led to his breaking away to found a firm of his own. If we trace the history of the relationship of the two brothers we can see some possible reasons for this. The founder of firm A was only 5 years old when his father died. He was much the youngest of his brothers. His older brother did not send him to school. He was not trusted by his older brother, who would not let him into the tobacco factory in which he had an interest. Thus the pattern was not one of a

building up of trust and confidence but rather the opposite, and the younger brother broke away when he could.

Sons are vital to the family firm, especially in its early stages. A lack of sons in the first generation after the founder can be crippling and, even in the second generation, can be a serious handicap.

A large family, which to so many people is a cause of worry and anxiety, was in this case [the Rothschilds] a positive blessing as there was abundance of work for everybody. . . . Since the number of available children increased in proportion as the business expanded, it was possible to keep all the confidential positions in the family (Corti 1928:23).

Where this abundance is lacking, attempts must be made to find other kinsmen to enter the firm. We have seen that the father in firm A sent two young kinsmen to Japan to train with his sons though they did not remain in the business on their return. The incorporation of sons-in-law is a common solution to this problem.

Firm B is now faced with this problem. Although 3 of the 4 brothers have sons, only the eldest son of the eldest brother is old enough to take an active part in the business. Yet with 15 companies firm B has a desperate need of personnel. Some have been obtained through affinal links: the third brother's wife's sister's husband is an important businessman; his sister's husband and the husband's brother both take an active part in the business, but clearly there are not enough kinsmen to run the enterprise.

#### THE INCORPORATION OF OUTSIDERS

If a family firm is to grow, non-family members must be brought into it. There are a number of reasons for this. In the first place, sheer size means that there will not be enough family members to perform all the necessary tasks. As the firm spreads geographically, this problem becomes more acute. Secondly, the need for expertise and specialization of roles increases as the firm grows. The family cannot provide enough experts (though it can provide some as we have seen in firm A), and outside technicians or other specialists must be employed. Thirdly, the need for the financing of expansion involves the firm in extra-familial credit relationships with banks and financing companies. These creditors, in a desire to protect their investments, will insist on certain patterns of business management and procedure which bring in outsiders. Fourthly, the firm becomes involved with many other firms as suppliers and customers; business arrangements will be entered into with such firms and may lead to a more impersonal organiza-

tion of the family firm itself. Fifthly, as the firm becomes more successful, a number of family members may wish to pursue other careers in politics, the professions, or other businesses and so are lost to the firm. Sixthly, over the course of generations the transactional patterns between family members alter. Cousins are not as close as brothers, and even brothers operating in widely separated areas are less close than they were in the parental household. The original joint family breaks up, and new families evolve, bringing different sets of values and different transactional patterns.

The first non-family employee in firm A, apart from servants, office boys, and casual laborers, was an accountant whose principal job it was to deal with income tax returns. Here is a case in which expertise was essential but in which it would have been impractical and indeed wasteful to train a family member. The second outside employee was a salesman, necessary because the volume of business could not be handled by family members. The third non-family employee was hired to collect payments from customers who had made purchases on credit. Again, this is a time-consuming occupation which would have cut down business volume if a family member performed it. The fourth employee was a travelling salesman hired to increase business volume over an area greater than that which could be covered by family firm members. The fifth employee was a manager for one of the firm's stores. By this time the firm had two stores in the town in which it had started and was establishing a branch in Nairobi under the management of the eldest son. There were not enough family members to manage all these enterprises, as two sons were still being trained abroad. The sixth employee was a repairman, a technical expert needed to service the merchandise that the firm was selling. By 1966 there were 20 non-family employees in firm A, excluding servants, office boys, and casual laborers.

As the size of the firm grows, administrative tasks increase, and the father and his sons find themselves spending more time at these duties. A complaint the sons of firm A sometimes make about their father is that he is too willing to do the menial tasks of the firm—to rush forward to serve a customer, for instance. This, they maintain, is not an economical use of his time.

The introduction of non-family employees into the family firm alters the pattern of role relationships. Desai (1965:3) asserts that the introduction of an extra-familial partner or manager may give rise to conflict. He maintains that when a family member wishes to secede from the firm, he may bring in outside management to start the process of fission. I lack data on the effect of the introduction of outside employees, but it seems certain that a more impersonal transactional pattern develops between such employees and family firm members. It is also likely

that the relations between family members themselves will alter, if it is borne in mind that outsiders are brought in with the expansion and geographical dispersion of the business.

Firm B represents a further stage of development than Firm A. It is a generation older, a good deal bigger, covers a greater diversity of products and services, and is more dispersed geographically than firm A. In the first place, we note that only 2 of the 15 companies are 100% owned by the 4 brothers. Five others are jointly owned with kinsmen; 2 are owned with kinsmen and non-kinsmen who are Ismailis; 1 by kinsmen, non-kinsmen Ismailis, and a foreign (Japanese) company; 4 others with non-kinsmen Ismailis; and 1 with non-Ismailis. This is a clear indication of the degree to which non-kin elements have entered. Moreover, there are indications that family loyalties do not take precedence over business considerations. When the younger brother moved to Dar-es-Salaam, he sold the majority interest in company number 8, which he had been managing, to 2 local Ismailis, only 1 of whom was a kinsman. Firm B has also shown willingness to acquire interests in firms in which there were no kinsmen. Many of its enterprises have been financed by local banks, and recently there have been attempts to raise capital overseas. Companies granting franchises, especially the Japanese, have insisted on certain criteria of performance. Partnerships with other companies have introduced standards of procedure which are not family oriented. These and similar considerations tend to alter transactional patterns. Transactions center about business performance and not family obligations. The fact that the 4 brothers are widely dispersed and pursue different careers also alters transactional patterns in the direction of business oriented transactions.

The incorporation of outsiders clearly benefits the economy as a whole. It provides additional employment and training which can generate new enterprises. It also shows how, as the firm develops, strictly business considerations begin to take precedence over family obligations. I do not possess sufficient data to analyze exactly what occurs during the phase of expansion; but it seems clear that if the firm is to grow and diversify it must introduce outsiders, and if it is to retain good outsiders they must be given responsibility and perhaps an interest in the firm. Some of the younger members of both firms A and B propose giving shares to capable outsiders. The recognition of this principle is well established in large American firms where stock incentive plans are the order of the day. If, in this phase of its growth, a family firm fails to bring in competent outsiders or insists on filling vacancies in the firm with relatives no matter what their competence, it seems likely that its expansion will be inhibited or even reversed. It is in this situation that nepotism and paternalism can operate against business success. The ob-

ligation to care for family members remains. If the firm grows enough and if family members are properly trained, this can operate to the advantage of the firm or at least be a neutral factor. I once discussed the matter with the manager of a very large London firm (a daughter's daughter's husband of the founder). He saw the firm functioning as an enormous balance wheel. He maintained that if he did not hang too many "nepots" (his word) at one place on the wheel it would continue to turn. Balance them around the wheel, and its rate of turning will not decrease. It may even accelerate. But if you put all the nepots in one place, e.g., in the head office, the wheel may grind to a halt.

Where family members are no longer active in the business but remain large shareholders, the effects of unprofitable nepotism may be reduced, for the non-active owners are interested in profits, not job opportunities. On the other hand such large shareholders can hold back the development of the business through lack of knowledge or interest in it and/or reluctance to interfere.

#### THE FAMILY FIRM AND THE MINORITY GROUP FACTOR

The family members of firms A and B all belong to the Ismaili sect. The Rothschilds are Jews. How important is minority group status for the development of the family firm? My data does not permit me to give an unequivocal answer to this question. The family firms in Lebanon described by Khalaf and Shwayri (1966) do not appear to belong to any particular minority group—except that nearly every group in Lebanon could be called a minority. Family firms as they developed in the United States and Britain seem to come from many ethnic, religious, and national backgrounds. In Nigeria family firms are found among the Yoruba, one of the dominant categories of the population. But a difficulty arises in deciding what we mean by a minority in this context. Are we to follow Weber and define the minority as the group with the protestant ethic? Geertz seems to incline towards this view when he defines the businessmen of Modjokuto as a "socially well-demarcated entrepreneurial group" "set apart both by their social origins and their religious intensity" (1963:76, 74), but I feel this involves us in a chicken-egg argument. The transactional patterns which are generated by business activities produce entrepreneurial values. We run the danger of attributing to every successful group of businessmen the elements of the protestant ethic and to find them lacking among the non-entrepreneurs.

There are certainly economic advantages in belonging to the Ismaili community (see Morris 1958). Ismailis have a number of useful organizations: a series of financial institutions which lend money to members, an advisory service which

investigates business prospects for new ventures in which individual Ismailis are interested, various sorts of cooperatives, an excellent educational system, and a scheme which will enable every Ismaili in East Africa to own his own home. Of course, these projects must be financed, and Ismailis make large contributions to the community. Entering into business with another Ismaili involves less risk than dealings with a stranger because there are community sanctions. If an Ismaili businessman is going bankrupt, his Ismaili creditors meet and make some arrangement to bail him out and, of course, retrieve their own investments. If he goes to court and is declared bankrupt, nobody wins, because the court is apt to rule that he pay back his creditors as some very low figure per week. If he should go to court, he will be unlikely to be able to start in business again, as he will have lost the good will of the Ismaili community and will be unable to get financing.

Another factor which may strengthen the community sense of a minority is prejudice and discrimination directed against them. Corti (1928:23) maintains that this was an important factor in the case of the Rothschilds. As they were unable to have transactions with non-Jews, they mobilized support, at least in the early stages, among other Jewish businessmen. Yet this seems to require modification. Nathan Rothschild in London and James Rothschild in Paris, capitals in which there was relatively less anti-semitism, seemed to have a much easier time and become more quickly successful than did the eldest brother, Amschel Meyer Rothschild, in Frankfort, and the second brother, Solomon, in Vienna, where Jews suffered restrictions as to residence and type of business in which they could engage. In Pakistan, which has experienced an extremely high rate of industrial growth, much of it through family firms, it is the trading experience of such firms rather than their minority status which appears to be crucial (Papanek 1962:53,55). "The more significant of them (Memon, Chinioti) are Sunnis, the majority division among Muslims, and are distinguished primarily by geographic origin" (Papanek 1962:54). Kasdan's (1965) study of entrepreneurship among the Basques would seem to indicate that family structure and the transactional patterns generated among family members are more crucial variables than the minority factor.

My own guess would be that the minority factor is not crucial for the successful development of the family firm, though it may be a factor inducing some members of a population to enter certain types of business because other avenues of upward social mobility are closed to them. Once the business is started, however, it is the generation of roles within it which is crucial and can lead to its growth.

## SUMMARY

In this paper I have tried to indicate the importance of family firms for economic development particularly in economically underdeveloped countries. The use of family roles in a business context can generate maximum use of liquid resources and, where patterns of trust and confidence are built up, can provide efficient training for firm members and encourage the firm to embark on enterprises involving considerable risk with a good chance of success. These factors should make the governments of developing countries pause to consider whether it might not be good policy to encourage such firms. Because they are based on the family and thoroughly embedded in the culture of the country, they provide a form of organization which, with relative ease, can be activated for development.

Family firms appear to face two major crises in the course of their development. The first arises when the sons reach maturity and want to have more influence in the management of the firm. The second makes its appearance when the firm has grown to such an extent that outsiders must be incorporated. If these two crises are not met by an alteration in the pattern of relationships between firm members, the firm will be unlikely to expand and may even dissolve.

A great deal more work needs to be done on family firms. We have no intensive studies of the sociological characteristics of the family firm and the changing patterns among members as the firm develops. We need to know what types of family structure are best suited for the development of family firms and what types of enterprises family firms can best engage in. A much closer examination of the factors making for success or failure of the family firm is required. This necessitates both historical analysis of family firms in a wide variety of societies and intensive field work on family firms in developing countries.

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shall attempt to show how the situation arose, how it exacerbated, and what the difficulties were in attempting to introduce birth control. The emphasis will be on the social structure, for social factors were instrumental in accelerating population growth and in obstructing plans to decelerate it. The social factors were neither uniform nor static. I shall examine the ways in which they changed over time so that, for example, some form of birth control became acceptable to some people.

Between 1955 and 1957 I spent twenty-one months in Mauritius doing anthropological field work<sup>1</sup> (Benedict, 1961a). Toward the end of my stay my wife and I were involved in setting up the first family-planning clinic on the island.

### THE SETTING

The island nation of Mauritius lies in the Indian Ocean some 500 miles east of Madagascar and 20 degrees south of the equator. On its 720 square miles, an area about one tenth the size of New Jersey or Wales, are crammed

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Carrying cane through the fields. (Photo by *Burton Benedict*.)



## CONTROLLING POPULATION GROWTH IN MAURITIUS

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Overpopulation, like sin, is quite safe to be against. Scientists, politicians, preachers, and protesters of all sorts warn us daily of the disastrous future which awaits mankind because of his propensity to breed. Yet, at the same time that we are desperately attempting to find ways of controlling population growth, we are increasing our efforts in combating disease and improving world health, thus creating conditions which greatly accelerate population growth. Our general failure to connect these two desiderata and to make intelligent plans so that we do not control death without controlling birth is nowhere better demonstrated than in the small island of Mauritius. Here the humanitarian efforts of the government to control malaria after World War II have led to a disastrous population explosion in which the population has nearly doubled, unemployment has risen, and the costs of government services—particularly education, relief payments, and health—have soared. This outcome was entirely predictable, yet there were no plans to deal with the problem. It was not until it was already too late to avert disaster that attempts to limit population growth were made. Will Mauritius be a pattern for other parts of the world? One hopes not, but the overpopulation of Mauritius and the attempts to deal with it deserve close attention. In this paper I

nearly 800,000 people, and the population is increasing at a rate approaching 3 per cent per annum. Three geographical factors inhibit the development of Mauritius: its small size, its isolation from world markets, and its lack of natural resources. The island is entirely dependent on agriculture, and one crop, sugar, accounts for more than 97 per cent of all exports. The arable land of the island, comprising about one half of its area, is 92.6 per cent planted in sugar cane, 3 per cent in tea, and only about 4 per cent in food crops (figures derived from Mauritius, 1966:44, 51). Mauritius must import most of its food. Rice constitutes the largest import, both in quantity and value. Flour, grain, meat, edible oils, and fats constitute major imports. Fresh vegetables are grown in small gardens or between the maturing rows of sugar cane. A variety of tropical fruits grows throughout the island and some fresh fish may be had from the lagoons, but by and large the inhabitants must buy imported food. Mauritius is agricultural but it produces cash, not subsistence crops.

Most sugar cane is grown on large plantations, which produce over 60 per cent of the sugar in twenty-three factories. The remaining sugar comes from some 26,000 small holders, cultivating plots from under one quarter of an acre to about 100 acres. Many of these have grouped themselves into cooperatives for consigning their crop to the company-owned factories. As one would expect, the sugar industry is the highest employer of labor on the island. Sugar even divides the year into crop and intercrop seasons. Sugar is the source of prosperity, indeed the economic *raison d'être* of Mauritius, but it also lies at the root of many of the social problems affecting the island.

## THE PEOPLING OF MAURITIUS

When the Portuguese discovered Mauritius early in the sixteenth century, they found a richly forested island with no human inhabitants, virtually no mammals apart from large fruit-eating bats, and several species of large flightless birds, the most famous of which was the dodo. The Portuguese made no attempts to settle the island, merely using it to provision their ships on the voyage to India. They did, however, greatly alter its ecology by releasing pigs, goats, monkeys, and, inadvertently, rats. In 1598 the Dutch took possession of the island, naming it after Prince Maurice of Nassau. The Dutch imported slaves from Africa and exploited the ebony forests of Mauritius, but they never had a large enough labor force or sufficient support from Holland to colonize the island successfully. They abandoned Mauritius in 1710. In 1715 the French formally took possession of Mauritius, renaming it Île de France. The French successfully colonized the island with settlers from the neighboring island of Bourbon (now Réunion), which had been occupied by France since 1654, with slaves from Africa and Madagascar and with artisans from Pondicherry in south India. The plantation system was established and coffee, sugar cane, cotton, indigo, cloves, and other spices were

introduced. Thus from the earliest times the emphasis was on cash crops, though manioc was introduced from Brazil as a food for the slaves.

Mauritius is subject to fierce tropical cyclones, and planters soon discovered that the tough, flexible sugar cane was better able to withstand these storms than coffee, cotton, and spices. More and more planters turned to sugar. More and more slaves were imported to work the sugar. They came from many tribes and spoke many different languages. On their arrival in Mauritius men were separated from women and small children to be sold separately (St. Pierre, 1800:112ff.). The African cultures of the slaves did not survive such treatment and gradually slaves and their descendants developed a variant of French culture. The situation was complicated by the emergence of a class of free blacks and coloreds. The former were freed slaves; the latter were the products of miscegenation between white men and black women. Until 1803 free blacks and coloreds were legally equal to whites, but after this date the French governor, Dacoen, promulgated laws intended to separate free coloreds from whites. They were kept on separate registers, attended separate schools, served in different sections of the National Guard, and were forbidden to intermarry without the express authorization of the Governor (Prentout, 1901:142). Thus legal sanction was given to a social color bar that already existed. Today the legal sanction has disappeared, but the social color bar remains. The coloreds and blacks, known today as Creoles, have French language, manners, and culture. They have established a social hierarchy based on color, education, and ancestry.

The Île de France was a thorn in the British flank during much of the eighteenth century. As early as 1746 an expedition from the Île de France had captured Madras from the British, though the French later sold it back to them. Privateers operated from the island, capturing British East Indians and often selling the cargoes to Yankee traders from Salem, Boston, Philadelphia, and New York (Toussaint, 1954:9). Finally, in November 1810, the British captured the island with a force of sixty ships and 10,000 men. The capitulation signed by French Governor Dacoen on December 3, 1810, provided that the inhabitants be permitted to retain their religion, laws, and customs. Thus the Roman Catholic Church, the French civil code, and the French language and culture were given official sanction and to this day have remained prominent cultural features of Mauritius.

The British restored the name Mauritius to the island. They set up the machinery of colonial government, but very few Britons settled in the island. The plantation owners, much of the commerce, and many government positions remained in the hands of the Franco-Mauritians. In the 1820's the combination of the introduction of steam engines in the sugar mills and the reduction of duties leveled on Mauritian sugar imported into the United Kingdom greatly increased sugar production. The colony became virtually a single-crop plantation. More and more slaves were required for this increased production and British attempts to stop the slave trade were systematically evaded by Mauritian planters (Mauritius Slave Trade, 1826). In 1835 slavery

was abolished throughout the British Empire. The population of Mauritius at that time totaled 101,469, of whom 76,774 were slaves. The planters received a little over 2 million pounds sterling compensation. Ex-slaves were supposed to remain with their former masters for a period of four years as apprentices. They were to be paid wages and learn a trade. In fact, little was done to help them find new modes of livelihood or attract them to the estates. They left as soon as they were able. In 1839 perhaps 30,000 left the estates (Barnwell and Toussaint, 1949:153) and went into the town or formed settlements in uninhabited parts of the island. Laboring on the estates was associated with their former despised status as slaves. The planters were faced with a serious labor shortage. They turned to India.

Indians were brought to Mauritius under a system of indentured labor that was in many respects little better than slavery (Benedict, 1961a:22-23). They were engaged in India by agents of the planters on five-year contracts. In the early years of immigration, between 1834 and 1839, there was virtually no government regulation of immigration. Deception as to the location of Mauritius and the conditions of work, overcrowding on ships leading to death and disease, and other abuses led the government of India to suspend emigration from 1839 to 1842. In 1842 the government of Mauritius appointed a Protector of Immigrants in Mauritius and emigration agents in India and guaranteed return passages to India. In the years that followed, however, most of these safeguards were withdrawn or evaded by the planters. In 1847 the "double cut" was introduced, which provided that no month in which an engaged laborer was absent for more than six days should be reckoned as part of his service. Between 1853 and 1857 free return passages were withdrawn and great pressure was put on immigrants to reindenture. One method of doing this was the introduction of the pass system in 1867, which restricted the movement of Indians who had completed a period of indenture. The courts and the police were used to maintain a controlled cheap labor market. The abuses of the indenture system have left a legacy of distrust between Mauritians of Indian and European descent.

The influx of Indians radically changed the size and composition of the population of Mauritius. In 1835 Indians constituted only a minute proportion of a population of 100,000. Ten years later they made up one third of a population of 158,000, and fifteen years after that, in 1861, they made up two thirds of a population of 310,000, a proportion they have maintained to the present. Between 1834 and 1910, when regular immigration ceased, more than 450,000 Indians were brought to Mauritius and only about 160,000 were repatriated (Kuczynski, 1949:791).<sup>3</sup> They were shipped to Mauritius from the ports of Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay. They included both Muslims and Hindus of many castes and even a few Christians (Benedict, 1967). The majority came from Bihar, the United Provinces, Orissa, and Bengal and

<sup>3</sup> In 1923-1924 another 1,400 immigrants arrived, but subsequently most of these returned to India.

spoke dialects of Hindi. The second largest category were the Tamil and Telegu speakers of south India. Third, with many fewer immigrants, were the Marathi speakers of the Bombay area. In the early years of immigration only males were brought in, but disorders on estates led government officials to fix the percentage of females to males. Later whole families were brought in together.

Another group of Indians reached Mauritius between 1829 and 1865. These were traders from the Gujarati-speaking areas of west India and Bombay. Most were Muslims from the states of Kutch and Surat. They settled in Port Louis and their numbers greatly increased after World War I (Bejjadhur, 1935:66-67). They became dealers in rice and cloth. Today nearly all trade in these commodities is in their hands. Unlike the indentured, they were able to maintain contact with India, where they often returned to marry.

The final ingredient in the ethnic *pot pourri* of Mauritian society is the Chinese. A few Chinese were to be found in the island in French times (Milbert, 1812, Vol II:186-91; Biliard, 1822:42) and a few came during the early nineteenth century. In the latter part of the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth century their numbers increased, so that by 1962 they numbered 23,000 and constituted nearly 3½ per cent of the population. They came as traders and shopkeepers. Today nearly every Mauritian settlement has one or more Chinese shops in it. Like the Gujarati traders, the Chinese have maintained contact with their mother country, though in recent years this has been Hong Kong rather than mainland China. Relatively few Chinese women came to Mauritius and the Chinese have intermarried with the Creoles (Benedict, 1965:20-21).

## THE PLURAL SOCIETY

Mauritius is a plural society. Her immigrants have amalgamated into a single people but have maintained a separateness in varying degrees in varying social contexts. The plural nature of Mauritian society is an important factor in the introduction of any change, including the attempt to regulate population growth. It is easy to remark cultural differences among Mauritians: the clothes they wear, the languages they speak, the religion they practice, differences in kinship structure, in traditions, and in customs of many kinds. Physiological clues are less certain. Physiognomy is a poor guide for distinguishing an Englishman from a Frenchman, a Muslim from a Hindu, or a Hindu speaker from a Marathi speaker. The Creole population contains individuals who look Indian, African, European, and Chinese. The nature and extent of pluralism in Mauritius can be better appreciated if one looks at the whole economic and political structure of the island. To what extent are ethnic, cultural, linguistic, or religious differences reflected in the economic structure? To what degree do they play a part in the political and legal structure?

There are correlations between occupation and ethnic groups. Most sugar estate owners are Franco-Mauritians; most agricultural laborers are Indians; most retail shopkeepers are Chinese; most artisans and fishermen are Creoles; most importers of rice and cloth are Gujerati Muslims.<sup>3</sup> However, these categories are not exclusive. There is no legal backing to them as there is in South Africa. There are some Indians who have large sugar-cane holdings or interests in large estates. There are Creole laborers, and Indian shopkeepers, artisans, and fisherman. There are Chinese, non-Gujerati Indian, and European importers. After the sugar industry, government is the largest employer in Mauritius, and one finds members of all communities in government service, often furiously competing with one another. The professions, too, contain members of all ethnic groups. Occupational mobility appears to be increasing in Mauritius, aided by a widespread educational system, the availability of scholarships and such devices as a public service commission for government posts. The occupations which require the most capital, such as the sugar estates and the trading and commercial concerns, are most restricted of access.

Though occupational mobility and differential economic status may tend to diminish pluralism, they do not necessarily abolish it. They can create economic and social classes within each ethnic section of the population rather than a single class cutting across all sections. This has occurred to a certain extent in Mauritius and it is here that cultural features, including language, religion, traditions, and customs, play a part attaching an individual to his ethnic section rather than his economic class. To say that Franco-Mauritians control the sugar industry is not to say that all of them do, but only that certain individuals and families do. Many Franco-Mauritians lead lives of precarious gentility close to the poverty line. Economic mobility does mean, however, that there are opportunities for class loyalties to override ethnic ones. Muslim, Chinese, and Franco-Mauritian businessmen have more economic interests in common than they do with poorer members of their own communities. Muslim, Hindu, and Creole dock workers join the same labor union. Small planters of various ethnic categories have formed cooperative credit societies. Economically Mauritius shows signs of diminishing pluralism (Benedict, 1962), but economics are intimately linked with politics, and in Mauritius both are about to be engulfed in the flood of population increase.

## POLITICAL STRUCTURE

Politically, ethnic considerations have always played a part in the island's history (Benedict, 1970a). In French times slaves, of course, could not vote. The island quickly turned its back on the French Revolution when it was

<sup>3</sup> For a more complete listing see Benedict, 1965:26.

proposed to emancipate the slaves. Under British rule, even after an elected element was introduced into the legislature in 1886, the property qualifications placed upon the franchise effectively disenfranchised virtually all Indians and the overwhelming majority of the Creoles. This restriction persisted until 1948, when the franchise was extended to both sexes with a simple literacy or property-holding qualification. The electorate increased from 12,000 out of an estimated population of 428,000 in 1946 to nearly 72,000 out of an estimated population of 447,000 in 1948. For the first time Indo-Mauritians, who composed two thirds of the population, controlled a majority of seats in the Legislative Council.

Prior to 1948 ethnic politics had taken the form of a struggle between the Franco-Mauritians and the Creoles, who as early as 1843 had petitioned Queen Victoria for greater representation in the Legislative Council. With the constitution of 1948 both Creoles and Franco-Mauritians as well as other minority ethnic communities, such as the Chinese and Muslims, began to fear that they would be overwhelmed by the Hindu majority. Ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious affiliations became symbols of political solidarity, especially at times of election (Benedict, 1965:60ff.). Various schemes were introduced, including to date, three new constitutions to try to solve the Mauritian dilemma of giving minority ethnic groups adequate representation while at the same time playing down communalism in politics.

The latest constitution, under which Mauritius achieved independence in March, 1968, provides for a Legislative Assembly of seventy seats. The island is divided in twenty three-member constituencies and every voter casts three votes. The hope is that even if the first and second votes are cast along ethnic lines, the third will be cast along lines of political conviction. After these sixty members are elected, eight "specially elected" members are chosen. The first four of these go to losing candidates who received the largest number of votes in the election and who come from ethnic categories of the population that are underrepresented in the legislature. The second four specially elected members are chosen from losing candidates with the most votes on the basis of both ethnic category and political party. The final two members are elected from the small island dependency of Rodrigues, some 350 miles east of Mauritius. These provisions are designed to ensure that the legislature contains members of various ethnic categories proportionate to their numbers in the population while at the same time enabling party politics to operate on other than ethnic lines. The specially elected members can preserve the ethnic composition of the legislature but cannot be used to frustrate the will of the electorate. The single election held so far under this constitution appeared to go smoothly (Mauritius General Election, 1967), but it is clear that communal conflict is an ever-present danger in the island. Many issues and factions are apt to assume a communal cast (Benedict, 1957). In 1967 unrest in Port Louis apparently caused by the recent laying off of large numbers of workers from public works projects took the form of gang wars between Creole and Muslim youths. During elections politicians appeal to

voters along ethnic, religious, or linguistic lines. Indeed, cultural characteristics previously not much emphasized may be appealed to. In the elections of 1963 appeals were made to Tamil voters against Hindi voters and to low-caste voters against high-caste voters. The multiethnicity of Mauritius makes it possible to structure any program of social and political change in terms of ethnic conflict. Attempts to control population growth have not escaped this difficulty.

## POPULATION GROWTH

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the population of Mauritius grew by immigration, first of Europeans and Africans and then of Indians. It did not grow very much by natural increase. This was due to very high mortality rates. Although the slave population increased from 15,027 in 1767 to 65,367 in 1807, "deaths probably exceeded births" (Kuczyński, 1949, Vol. II:762). Smallpox, cholera, influenza, plague, and malaria periodically decimated the population. The first reported smallpox epidemic was in 1742 and further epidemics occurred in 1754, 1756, 1758, 1770-1772, 1782-1783, and 1792-1793. The epidemic of 1756 was said to have killed half the slaves belonging to the planters; that of 1770-1772, one fifth to one quarter of all slaves; and that of 1792-1793, 4,000 people in three months out of a total population of 58,000 (Kuczyński, 1949:873). Vaccine was introduced in 1802, but there were still small outbreaks throughout the nineteenth century. Cholera first struck Mauritius in 1775, and there were epidemics in 1819-1820, 1854, 1856, 1859, and 1862. It seems to have been imported from India on each occasion and to have struck most severely in Port Louis, where it was estimated that one in eight died (Anderson, 1918:111). Influenza first broke out in epidemic proportions in 1851. A second epidemic in 1893 caused 3,441 deaths, but the greatest devastation was during the post-World War I pandemic, which reached Mauritius in April, 1919, and killed 12,860 by the end of the year (Kuczyński, 1949:875). The plague was a fairly steady killer from 1899 until its eradication in 1927, though it rarely killed as many as 1,000 in a year (Kuczyński, 1949:875). Dysentery, typhoid, and enteric fever were endemic, as was malnutrition, and no doubt contributed to the low rate of natural increase.

Except for a few cases of people who had contracted the disease outside the colony, malaria was unknown in Mauritius until 1865. In that year there was an outbreak of the fever which quickly spread to reach epidemic proportions by 1867. Between January, 1867, and June, 1869, it is probable that 40,000 to 45,000 people died of malaria, representing one ninth to one eighth of the population (Kuczyński, 1949:877). Colonel Nicholas Pike, the American Consul at Mauritius at the time, describes the scene as follows:

*It was distressing to pass through the streets; in every corner was some poor creature, suddenly struck down, and crouching on the ground to die. In the out-*

*skirts of the city and country roads the victims were so numerous, that the police and sanitary committees were insufficient to succour half the poor wretches and many died by the roadsides before help could be brought to them. Near Roche Bois I have seen them lying in groups, dying and dead. Not a house within a radius of half a mile from the one I then occupied had a living person in it, except at a shop belonging to three Chinoises, two of whom died later. In many cases as soon as a Malabar got the fever, he would hasten to his house and shut himself in to die; for such was the fear of it, to be attacked was the toxin of death to him.*  
[Pike, 1873:105-106]

The disease altered the population distribution of the island. Port Louis, where one twelfth of the population died in April, 1867, alone and where the death rate for the year reached 247 per 1,000, became an anathema. All who could moved toward the uplands, for it was found that there were few cases of malaria above 600 feet. By 1869, malaria had encircled the island and became endemic on the coast, with a regular summer rise in incidence. By 1906 it was invading the higher areas of the island (Brookfield, 1959:7-9). Malaria became the principal cause of death. Population growth in Mauritius was controlled by malaria. Between 1881 and 1944, the average annual rate of increase was less than one half of 1 per cent (Titmuss, 1961:45).

As early as 1907, Sir Ronald Ross had identified *Anopheles gambiae* as the vector responsible for transmission of malaria on Mauritius. He recommended filling and clearing, combined with the distribution of quinine, but very little was done. In 1922, a second vector, *A. foveolatus*, was identified, but little progress was made in eliminating breeding places. Finally, in 1948, a new scheme consisting of house spraying with DDT was introduced. By 1952 both *A. gambiae* and *A. foveolatus* had been eradicated (Dowling, 1953). The effect on population growth was dramatic. In one year the death rate fell by 32 per cent (Titmuss, 1961:47). The birth rate rose, though it is not clear how closely this is associated with the eradication of malaria. Between 1948 and 1958 population increased at the rate of 3 per cent per annum. The final report of the officer in charge of malaria eradication warns of the dangers of population increase (Dowling, 1953:32).

## GOVERNMENT ACTION

In April, 1953, the Governor appointed an investigating committee of twelve members "To consider the problem presented by the present trend of increase of population of the Colony in relation to its economic resources and potential productivity; and to investigate and report on the practicability of any methods of resolving the problem" (Mauritius, 1955:i). The committee did not present its report until February, 1955. It is clear that it had had great difficulties. One member had resigned and was replaced; two members were added. Only eleven members signed the report. Four members added statements to the end of the report, two of them being notes of reservation and

dissent. The report analyzed demographic trends and examined the impact of rapid population growth on employment and the social services, including schools, old-age pensions, and housing. It faced the problems of control of population growth by emigration and birth control, comparing Mauritius to India, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaya, Singapore, and Barbados. Finally the report recommended (1) the highest priority to increasing productivity on the island; (2) the promotion of family planning; (3) the opening of negotiations with other countries for emigration of Mauritians and the setting up of a fund which would allow families rather than individuals to emigrate; (4) a reorganization of the building industry in Mauritius so that houses could be more cheaply built, as a recent report had indicated that Mauritius would require over 10,000 new houses annually. The dissenting statements added to the report came from Franco-Mauritian and Creole members of the committee who opposed birth control in varying degrees. The Report of the Committee on Population did not result in any governmental action, but it did lead to a discussion of the problem in the press and in the Legislative Council.

Late in 1957 an extensive survey into employment, unemployment, and underemployment was begun under the direction of R. W. Luce. This report, published in 1958, estimated that there were 25,000 able-bodied unemployed and 3,000 underemployed persons in Mauritius at the end of March, 1958 (Luce, 1958:30). Moreover, the rate of unemployment among school dropouts was increasing and would probably double within the following decade. All this was due, of course, to the rapid growth of the population. The report recommended emigration, though it provided no indication as to what countries would be willing to receive Mauritians. It also recommended increased production of food crops, particularly the potato (Luce, 1958:31-32). Government reaction to this report took the form of a statement issued by the Legislative Council entitled "The Luce Report: A Time for Decision." The major emphasis of this statement was on increased production, both industrial and agricultural. The government piously hoped, "To slow down, and if possible arrest, the increase in population" (p. 4), but at the same time timorously stated, "It is not for the Government to advocate methods of birth control which are offensive to important sections of the population, as in any case such methods are only of contributory importance and are usually confined to those social strata where the problem of population increase is least acute. The main activity is required in the masses of the people, who suffer most from excessively large families and there are many methods of family limitations which can be advocated without offence to any section" (p. 6). There was no indication as to what these methods might be. The statement also exhibited a kind of upper-class ethnocentrism, assuming that birth control was only needed among the "masses," which is demographically quite untrue for Mauritius. One might also make the point that elites, by definition, are not as numerous as nonélites.

The major point, however, was that the colonial government was afraid of the political consequences of the birth-control issue. At this time the

Roman Catholic Church was very much opposed to birth control. The Bishop of Port Louis had declared he would oppose its introduction anywhere in the island, not just among Roman Catholics. Nearly all Franco-Mauritians and Creoles are Catholic; they make up over 28 per cent of the population. Whatever they might do in private, Roman Catholic leaders would not support birth control publicly. Many Muslim leaders were also opposed to birth control. The specter of ideological conflict was real enough to intimidate the government. The government statement concluded by asking for a technical mission to advise the government.

Accordingly, in November, 1959, a commission was appointed under the leadership of Professor J. E. Meade, an economist from Cambridge. Another commission under the leadership of Professor R. M. Titmuss of the London School of Economics had been appointed earlier in 1959, to consider the "whole field of social security, health and welfare in Mauritius" (Titmuss, 1961:xi). These two commissions worked very closely together and their reports were published in 1960. I have criticized them in some detail elsewhere (Benedict, 1961b). Both reports faced the population problem squarely and maintained that if steps were not taken to stem population growth, no other form of development could succeed. Both reports agreed that emigration could not solve the population problem. It was not under Mauritian control, but depended on the willingness of other countries to accept Mauritians. Few countries had shown such willingness, and those that did could not pay for the immigration of Mauritians. This cost would have to be borne by the Mauritian government, which was clearly beyond its means. The Meade report investigated very thoroughly the prospects for agricultural and industrial expansion, including modifications that would have to be made in government and in the educational system. Both reports noted that pluralism was wasteful of the economic and social resources of the island. This is evident in the inhibition of social and economic mobility, where criteria of ethnicity can override criteria of ability. It is also clear in the educational system, where, for example, a large part of the curriculum had to be devoted to language (v. Benedict, 1958). The Meade report stressed, however, that without population control even its 129 recommendations could not avert disaster (p. 230).

The Titmuss report dealt more directly with the population problem by proposing a series of disincentives for large families which they hoped would keep population growth within manageable limits. At the same time that the Titmuss Commission was trying to limit population growth, it was also trying to reform the system of public assistance which, in effect, subsidized large families by basing relief payments on the number of children an applicant had. By 1963 public assistance had become the most costly element of government expenditure, surpassing education for the first time (Mauritius, 1963:25). The commission was faced with the dilemma of trying to give real force to a program of birth control, and at the same time trying to help the poorest families, which were often the largest. They opted for the three-child family

and attempted to encourage it by proposing to pay a cash benefit to all families with three or more children under the age of fourteen, provided that the mother was over twenty-one and that the household head had not been liable to income tax in the previous year. The subsidy was thus only to go to the poor. No payments would be given to families with fewer than three children, nor would there be additional payments for more than three children. Families which had fewer than three children would be rewarded with higher old-age pensions. To encourage the spacing of children, a cash maternity payment would be made to a woman who had not borne children in the previous two years, again provided she was over twenty-one and had fewer than three living children. As an incentive to delay marriage, a cash payment would be made to the father of the bride provided the bride and her husband were twenty-one or older at the time of marriage and that the girl had not previously borne children and the father was a non-taxpayer. Essential to the plan was the wide dissemination of information about birth control. Clinics were to be established throughout the island.

I had been consulted about this plan and had expressed serious misgivings as to whether it would work, because it was based on assumptions that were not those of Mauritians. It assumed a degree of planning among more Mauritians, which they could not afford. Mauritians live in a cash economy; nearly all necessities can be bought only with cash. The demand for cash, particularly among the poor, is overwhelming (v. Benedict, 1958b). In these circumstances I predicted that large numbers of couples would attempt to secure the cash benefit, which is paid only on the birth of the third child, by having three children as quickly as possible. Even if a woman delayed marriage and childbearing until she was twenty-one (thereby allowing her father to receive a payment) and spaced her children at two-year intervals (thereby qualifying for the maternity benefit), she could still have three children by the age of twenty-five, leaving a considerable period of fertility before her. In my view, however, few women would do this.

The incentives to qualify for the three-child cash benefit would probably outweigh the incentives for the spacing of children, for the maternity benefit was not worth nearly so much as the three-child one. At the low economic levels at which most laborers live, a family which was receiving a cash benefit on the birth of the third child would probably not consider itself to be much worse off, and probably would not be much worse off on the birth of a fourth child. The fourth and possibly subsequent children were unlikely to be seen as diminishing opportunities for those who already exist. They might be the very ones who would succeed. Certainly the promise of a higher old-age pension, which one might not live long enough to collect, was exceedingly unlikely to inhibit procreation. Such long-term planning is a luxury that is not available to the very poor.

Both Hinduism and Islam place a very high value on the production of children, particularly male children. Wives can be and are returned to their parents if they fail to produce children. A woman does not gain fully adult

status until she is a mother, not just a wife. Her future depends not on an old-age pension, but having sons. They are her social security. They win the respect of her husband and her mother-in-law. They assure her that she will be a mother-in-law herself. A man, too, must have sons to carry on his lineage, to help him in this work, to bring him honor and status in the community. The pressures to marry early and to produce children early (especially sons) are very strong. They operate against provisions for spacing children and for postponing marriage.

Postponing a girl's marriage until she is twenty-one runs counter to a whole range of Indian (both Hindu and Muslim) religious and social values. Moreover, from an economic point of view, no poor Indo-Mauritian family could afford it. It is well known that Indians favor early marriage for girls. A girl must be a virgin when she marries, but she has natural sexual desires and it is not only unkind to frustrate these by keeping her from marrying but it becomes increasingly difficult to control her and keep her away from men as she gets older. Among Indo-Mauritians marriages are still arranged by the parents and it is a major religious duty for a man to marry off his daughters. The longer marriage is postponed, the more difficult it becomes to arrange, for doubts are cast on the girl's character and that of her family. An unmarried girl must be protected and her reputation carefully guarded. She cannot be allowed to wander about or to go to work alone, but must be kept in the house. Poor Indo-Mauritians cannot afford to keep a girl in relative idleness until she is twenty-one. A further difficulty arises from the fact that patrilocality is the rule among Indo-Mauritians, at least in the early years of marriage. A girl in her late teens or early twenties is not apt to get along very well with her brothers' wives. They resent her interference, particularly if she is not working as hard as they are. They have enough trouble with their husband's mother without having to deal with an adult unmarried sister's claims on their husbands. The newly married man is put in a difficult position. Does he side with his wife or his sister when they quarrel?

A curious aspect of the Titmuss proposal was that the marriage benefit was to be paid to the father of the girl, not to the girl herself.<sup>4</sup> This could hardly be an inducement for the girl to wait patiently at home for four or five years after the normal age of marriage in Mauritius. It also assumes that the father would be able to control his daughter. Even in Indo-Mauritian families girls grow more independent as they grow older. Few fathers in Mauritius, particularly in poor families, could exercise such control. Few mothers would support the attempt. The whole notion is based on an idea of a very autocratic patriarchal family which hardly exists in Mauritius, particularly among the poor. Only the wealthy can be effectively autocratic; only the wealthy can afford late marriage for their daughters, but wealthy fathers would not be eligible to receive the marriage benefit. It is clear that

<sup>4</sup> Another curiosity about this proposal, coming as it does from leading socialist intellectuals, is that it runs counter to efforts to raise the status of women as it supports arranged marriages and patriarchal authority.

the small marriage benefit could not outweigh the factors conducive to early marriage among Indo-Mauritians. Among Creoles, who tend to marry later, the marriage benefit might be more frequently paid, but there would be even less excuse for paying it to the girl's father. Many of the poorer Creoles live in consensual unions of varying duration. Illegitimacy is common. The husband/father is often a peripheral role, as has been described for the West Indies. To pay a benefit to a girl's father under such circumstances could hardly affect the decision of a girl to postpone marriage to the age of twenty-one.

A final difficulty with the Titmuss and Meade proposals was a political one. Both reports stressed the need for determined government action. Both demanded their acceptance or rejection *in toto*. Mauritius was moving rapidly toward independence. The British government wanted to help solve the population problem, but it also wanted political stability. Many politicians wanted power. The problems of pluralism were ever present. The temptations to pluck the roses, such as the payment of family cash benefits, and avoid the thorns, such as a vigorous birth-control program, were very strong. Yet attempts were made. In April, 1960, the Financial Secretary, a British civil servant, announced in the legislature that the government had decided to implement a policy of planned parenthood based on the Titmuss proposals, backed up with birth-control clinics and a massive publicity campaign. These proposals met a storm of opposition from the Catholic Church, from leading Franco-Mauritian politicians, from some Hindu and Muslim leaders, and even from some supporters of the government. The opposition was so strong that the government, fearing defeat, adjourned debate for a year. In April, 1961, the debate resumed. By this time the Catholic opposition had agreed that the rhythm or safe-period method of contraception could be used. This, of course, is a very inefficient method of birth control. The Legislative Council failed to set up an effective birth-control program, but it passed a family allowance scheme granting Rs. 15 per month to nontax-paying families with three children under fourteen years of age. In 1964 the Roman Catholic Church informed the Minister of Health that it would have no objection to government funds being used to subsidize voluntary family-planning agencies, even where their methods differed from those approved of by the Church. Aid was solicited from overseas organizations and publicity campaigns were mounted in 1965-1966.

#### THE ANTHROPOLOGIST AND FAMILY PLANNING IN MAURITIUS

A combination of fortuitous circumstances and my own actions and wishes enabled me to play some part in establishing birth control in Mauritius. I reached Mauritius in 1955, shortly after the publication of the "Report of

the Committee on Population, 1953-54," referred to previously. I was, of course, aware of the population problem and had discussed the matter with officials in the Colonial Office in London before going out to Mauritius, and with Government officers in Mauritius shortly after my arrival, but I did not see the investigation of population problems as one of the main aims of my field work. I was in Mauritius to carry out a study of the social structure of the Indo-Mauritian community. I settled into a village in the north of the island and began my work. This work included the collection of data on marriage and the family, the domestic economy, and the political, economic, and religious organization of the community.

As already mentioned, the population problem was discussed in the press and by politicians. As one would expect, awareness of the problem was differentially distributed throughout the population. The more educated, who were usually those in the higher income groups living in urban areas, were more aware of the problem than rural agricultural laborers. Discussion of family planning extended from the town to the village elite, but to the laborer, feeding his family was a much more immediate problem than limiting it. "That can wait till later," said a Hindu laborer to me in 1956; "the important thing is to have more work and better pay for the poor laborers." Statistics about the size of the population, the island's resources, and the rates of population growth had little meaning to those not trained to think in such terms. The reasons for birth control had to be seen in immediate personal terms by the people involved, not in long-range statistical trends demonstrated by outsiders.<sup>5</sup> The villagers of Mauritius did not see their own lack of employment in terms of overpopulation. Yet some understood the problem in personal terms; some women wanted respite from childbearing; some newly married men wanted to know how they could postpone having children for a year or two. Men in the village in which I was working began to ask me about birth-control methods. I had also received inquiries from a demographer who had worked in Mauritius in 1954 (Brookfield, 1957, Appendix 1:120-21). Finally, in February, 1957, I had been asked by the International Planned Parenthood Federation whether in the course of my research I had been led "to formulate any ideas how, taking into account local sentiment, diversity of races and religion, the recommendations of the Committee on Population in Mauritius could be implemented." By this time I had already completed more than a year's field work in the island.<sup>6</sup> In April, 1957, I submitted a short report on family planning in rural areas of Mauritius to the International Planned Parenthood Federation in London, the Colonial Office, the government of Mauritius, and Professor Raymond

<sup>5</sup> This tendency is not confined to poverty-stricken Mauritian villagers. A recent survey carried out among 1,059 faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates at Cornell University showed that although 84 per cent favored family limitation as a way of solving the population crisis, 65 per cent wanted three children or more. Only 30 per cent favored two children and a mere 5 per cent wanted one or none (Eisner et al., 1970:337).

<sup>6</sup> I had returned to England between August, 1956, and March, 1957.



Firth at the London School of Economics, who had been one of the major academic sponsors of my trip to Mauritius.

### FACTORS AFFECTING FERTILITY

Three sets of factors can affect fertility and fecundity within a population: 1. The first set involves such physiological factors as diet, disease, or length of fertile period in women. These clearly operate in Mauritius. As we have seen it was a radical change in the disease pattern which was almost entirely responsible for the meteoric growth in population.

2. A second set of factors might be called indirect social factors, in the sense that they consist of customs or practices which affect both fertility and fecundity but which people themselves do not primarily think of as such. These practices include age at marriage, incidence of separation or divorce, absence of spouse, incidence of celibacy, periods of sexual abstinence associated with religious or other ceremonies, postpartum sexual abstinence, widowhood and incidence of widow remarriage, and polygamy. Evidence from other societies, though of very poor quality, would seem to indicate that most of these factors do not affect fecundity significantly (Nag, 1962). Only a late age at marriage, a high rate of separation and divorce, widespread polygyny, and along period of postpartum abstinence would appear to be significant in reducing fecundity (Benedict, 1970b). In Mauritius there was some evidence that Indians were marrying a little later than in former generations, but this mainly has meant a diminution of child marriages, when brides are unlikely to be fertile in any event. Age at marriage differs for different sectors of the population. The Indo-Mauritian women marry earliest, the Sino-Mauritians next, and the general population (a category including Creoles and Franco-Mauritians) marries latest, as Table 1 shows. It also shows that a greater proportion of Indo-Mauritians and Chinese women marry than do members of the general population. Since 1881 the fertility of the Indian population has been from 20 to 25 per cent higher than that of the general population. In 1952 it was 45 per cent higher. The fertility of the Chinese has been even higher (Mauritius, 1956:29).

Divorce and separation rates are low in Mauritius, particularly for Indo-Mauritians. As mentioned previously, a major cause of separation would be the failure of a woman to produce a child. Among Creoles of the lower economic class, consensual unions are common and may be limited in duration. Robertis (1954) has shown that this type of union is correlated with lower fertility rates in Jamaica. The same may hold true for Mauritius. Polygyny barely exists in Mauritius, nor are there significant periods of postpartum sexual abstinence. It appears unlikely that any of these indirect social factors has much effect in reducing fertility. They certainly do not counteract the enormous rate of population growth now occurring.

3. A third set of factors involves conscious efforts to limit population and

Table 1.  
Proportion of Mated to Total Women in Each Age Group 1911-1952<sup>†</sup>

Age Group	General Population					Indo-Mauritian					Chinese				
	1911	1921	1931	1944	1951	1911	1921	1931	1944	1952	1911	1921	1931	1944	1952
15-19	10.2	12.2	10.0	10.1	12.0	57.2	58.2	40.6	49.9	54.7	32.0	30.7	28.7	16.3	11.8
20-24	45.3	44.0	42.1	39.0	48.6	83.8	80.4	71.7	79.3	84.3	80.0	64.0	78.8	72.6	71.3
25-29	48.0	62.9	64.1	58.9	70.8	80.1	84.5	79.5	83.3	88.7	90.0	81.9	87.5	81.5	86.4
30-34	64.3	68.5	69.8	65.8	74.6	86.4	83.8	79.1	82.1	88.0	92.0	91.9	85.0	83.2	89.7
35-39	66.1	66.1	68.8	66.2	74.9	83.5	80.0	78.1	78.8	85.1	90.0	89.0	82.8	83.6	88.0
40-44	64.0	61.1	63.5	63.1	71.3	85.6	72.3	70.2	70.5	78.6	80.0	70.1	80.4	82.0	88.9
45-49	58.9	52.5	56.9	58.4	65.9	60.7	62.3	66.7	63.2	70.0	80.0	52.3	83.3	80.9	79.5
Total	47.6	50.4	49.7	47.2	56.3	76.4	74.7	67.7	71.3	78.1	81.0	73.1	76.6	69.1	67.0

<sup>\*</sup> From Mauritius, 1956, p. 44.

<sup>†</sup> The term *mated* here comprises women who are civilly and/or religiously married and who live in "de facto" or "consensual" unions. It leaves out widows, separated, and divorced women.

<sup>‡</sup> The census of 1962 does not distinguish ethnic categories in the tables of marital condition. But the percentages for the ages and marital condition for the whole population appear consonant with patterns for previous censuses (V. 1962 Census Vol. I, Table 6, p. 13).

includes voluntary sexual abstinence, all contraceptive practices, abortion, and infanticide. Infanticide appears to be rare. At least it is rarely reported in crime statistics. Abortion is certainly practiced, but because of its illegality, it is very difficult to estimate its incidence. One Mauritian doctor has reported that he turned away 176 women requesting termination of pregnancy in a period of ten months. Fifty-eight of these were Muslims, fifty were Hindus, and sixty-eight were Catholics. The ten most recent of these were all married, were mostly poor, and had had among them fifty pregnancies and five abortions already (Mansoor, 1965: 34). My own impression is that abortion is common, particularly for illegitimate children. The cost at the time of my field work was reputed to be Rs. 50,<sup>7</sup> and many of the practitioners were reputed to be nurses and midwives. There are also plenty of home remedies in use, ranging from jumping off tables, to drinking infusions, to insertion of foreign objects into the uterus.

At the time of my field work contraceptives were rarely used in the villages. Where they were, the initiative invariably came from men who had frequent contacts with the town, for contraceptives could be purchased only from a very few pharmacies in town. The contraceptive used was the condom. It was not used regularly, was more apt to be used outside marriage than within it, was disliked as interfering with sexual pleasure, and was very expensive for the average village budget. Other contraceptives, such as the diaphragm, foaming tablets, and spermicidal jellies were virtually unknown. Neither the oral contraceptives nor the intrauterine device were available in 1955-1957. A very few men attempted to practice the rhythm, or safe-period, method, but coitus interruptus seemed to be more regularly used. It is noteworthy that both the use of condoms and the practice of withdrawal depend on male initiative. The woman has no control over these contraceptive techniques.

Despite the readiness of people to say they wanted family planning without really considering the problem, I believed that there really was a demand for birth-control techniques among the more educated villagers and that the possibility existed for the spread of this demand to other villagers. The attempts at birth control, however sporadic and inefficient, indicated some demand. The factors militating against this demand were religious and political and were intertwined. There were also economic problems and problems of where and with whom to begin a family-planning campaign.

## THE RELIGIOUS FACTOR

Hindu objections to birth control centered around the idea that it destroys life, or as one informant put it, "What is planted must be allowed to grow." This view was not a deep-seated belief among most Hindus. Like most of the

<sup>7</sup> The Mauritian rupee is linked to sterling. At the time of my field work 1 rupee equaled 1s., 6d., or 21 U.S. cents. At present it equals 48 U.S. cents.



Muslim Ghoon festival, Port Louis. (Photo by Burton Benedict.)

ethnic groups of Mauritius, Hindus look outside the island to their country of ancestral origin for a charter for many aspects of their beliefs and behavior. The fact that India officially supported birth control convinced most Indo-Mauritian Hindus that there could be no major religious grounds for opposing it. By language and sect Hindus can be divided into at least a dozen categories, but such sects are not organized on an islandwide basis comparable to a church which can pronounce dogma. This militates against organized objections to birth control on religious grounds.

Islam is a more rigidly defined creed than Hinduism. The Muslims of Mauritius have a more closely knit religious organization than the Hindus (Benedict, 1965: 37-39). A number of Muslim leaders opposed birth control as un-Islamic. This position was countered by some younger Muslim professionals and intellectuals who discovered *hadiths*, or traditions of the Prophet whereby he was said to have sanctioned coitus interruptus in certain cases. They also cited a 1937 *fatwa*, or religious ruling, issued in Cairo which sanctioned birth control. Nevertheless, religion was more often cited by Muslims than by Hindus as an objection to birth control. They wanted to know what the position of Islam was on the matter. Hindus would not phrase it in this manner.

In the middle 1950's the Roman Catholic Church was adamantly opposed to any form of birth control except the rhythm, or safe-period, method, and even this was permissible only in certain cases, such as if childbearing were a

danger to the mother's health. Despite this stand, some Catholics did practice birth control, though they would not support it openly. The Church of England and the other Christian religions in the island did not oppose birth control. In 1962 these only constituted about 1.5 per cent of the population.

The official opposition of Muslim leaders and the Roman Catholic Church constituted a political deterrent to the spread of birth control but in my view would have little to do with whether the adherents of these religions actually practiced contraception. In general, it would appear that birth control is not inhibited by religious belief *on an individual level*. Denunciation by the Bishop of Port Louis would have little effect on whether the individual Creole fishermen used contraceptives, but it would inhibit legislation on family planning or even the formation of voluntary family-planning associations.

### THE POLITICAL FACTOR

Mauritius in the 1950's was also a colony approaching independence. The British government, for economic and political reasons, was eager to grant this independence, but it wanted to turn over power to a stable community with a reasonable chance of forming a viable nation. The colonial government was exceedingly reluctant to encourage any program which might foster communal conflict. In the middle 1950's birth control seemed to be such a program. There was the strong official opposition of the Roman Catholics, which included the Franco-Mauritians, who were the most economically (and, until 1948, politically) powerful section of the population. There was also Muslim opposition, and some Hindu leaders were claiming that birth control was a governmental device for limiting the Hindu population so that Christians might increase. Though many colonial officials were personally sympathetic to birth control, they were reluctant to give it official sanction.

Approaching independence also meant an intense power struggle was underway among Mauritian politicians. Birth control could be a factor in that struggle. It could be used to rally Roman Catholics behind certain politicians or parties. Rival factions among the Hindu population could also use the issue. At this period one of the daily papers frequently warned against the "Hindu menace." Certain Franco-Mauritian politicians maintained that it was Hindu policy to increase their numbers in order to swamp other ethnic groups. They appealed not only to the Roman Catholic Creoles, but to the Muslims.

### THE ECONOMIC FACTORS

The poverty of the vast majority of Mauritians meant that they were unlikely to buy diaphragms, condoms, and spermicidal jellies. Without some form of government subsidy, even foaming tablets, the cheapest contraceptive

available in 1957, were unlikely to be bought by many. Yet at this time government subsidies were out of the question. The whole concept of economic planning (of which family planning is an instance) is based on notions of economic and social mobility held by middle-class Westerners, not by poverty-stricken Mauritians. The poorest Mauritians do not conceive of upward social mobility in terms of having fewer children. On the contrary, children are a source of support and social security in an economic system with low employment and inadequate pensions. It seemed likely that the very poorest Mauritians would neither be able to afford nor be much interested in practicing birth control.

### PROBLEMS OF APPROACH

Family planning seeks to control human fertility. It is therefore concerned with relations between the sexes. These differ not only from society to society, but, leaving individual variations aside, between various groups and classes within the same society. In Mauritius different patterns obtained among Franco-Mauritians, Creoles, Hindus, Muslims, and Chinese. In addition, there were considerable differences associated with class and to some extent with sect within each of these broad ethnic categories. In studying relations between the sexes two fundamental questions need to be asked: "With whom do sexual relations take place?" "With whom are sexual matters discussed?" These rarely coincide. In very many societies one can discuss sexual matters with people with whom it would be unthinkable to have sexual relations, and it is very often considered highly improper to discuss sexual matters with one's sexual partner, particularly if that partner is the spouse. This pattern prevailed among Indo-Mauritian villagers. Men discussed sexual matters with other men of their own age, but generally not with kinsmen and not with older men. A man could discuss sexual matters with a mistress or a prostitute, but not with a fiancée or wife. Indo-Mauritian boys often get their first heterosexual experiences from prostitutes, older married women, or widows, often from the Creole population. They enter into marriage with strangers. As related previously, young Indo-Mauritian girls are carefully supervised. Marriages are arranged by parents. There is no dating or period of sexual experimentation and no discussion of sexual matters with any member of the opposite sex. Girls gain sexual information from their mothers or older women. Before and after marriage both men and women seek companions of their own sex. It is often only in old age that men make close confidants of their wives. The stringent segregation of the sexes is marked in such places as the cinema and weddings or other religious ceremonies, where men and women are seated separately and do not converse with each other. Within the household an Indian woman should speak only to her husband, sons, father-in-law, and husband's younger brothers. Traditionally, a woman should avoid her husband's older brothers. Women do not appear when

male guests are entertained, and female guests are taken into the women's quarters. Some of the wealthier Muslim families still keep their women in purdah. A woman interacts chiefly with other women who are members of her household, neighbors, and relatives.

A fundamental question in introducing family planning was whether initial approaches should be made through men, women, or both together. The latter alternative was clearly out of the question. Men and women had to be approached separately. Although the ultimate success of family planning in Mauritius depended on women, because it was female contraceptives which were to be used, to approach women without first approaching the men would be almost certain to lead to failure. Though many women have considerable informal authority within the family, all formal decisions are made by men. To approach women without first consulting their husbands would, if possible at all, be likely to engender suspicion on the part of women and opposition on the part of men. Moreover, there existed in Mauritian village various associations in which family planning could be discussed by men.

A second fundamental question was where to begin, in the town or in the rural areas. The towns of Mauritius—Port Louis, Beau Bassin/Rose Hill, Quatre Bornes, Phoenix/Vacoas, and Curepipe—have less sense of community than the villages. There are fewer face-to-face contacts, greater differentiation in economic and social status, greater political diversity, and few associations which bring large numbers of the population together. The social organization of the village is more compact, and social relations exist among all or most villagers.

The politics of the town are to a large extent the politics of the island. Thus, a new program, particularly a controversial one, quickly becomes a national issue. Anyone important enough to direct such a program in town is important enough to have important enemies. Village leaders, on the other hand, are less involved in national politics and have only to contend with local rivalries. In villages where these are not too strong, I believed there would be a good chance of the acceptance of a family-planning association. There was also the rather negative point that failure in the town might represent a major setback to family planning in the island, whereas failure in a village would not be so devastating.

The report I submitted to the International Planned Parenthood Federation in April, 1957, concluded as follows:

- (a) Demand for family planning exists in rural areas among a small but influential section of the population. There is a possibility that demand may spread to other sections of the population.
- (b) There is no serious religious objection to family planning among Hindus.
- (c) Family planning should be carried out by a voluntary organization and not through government.
- (d) The greatest possible use should be made of existing village organizations such as village councils, socio-religious associations, sewing classes, etc. The cooperation of village leaders should be sought.

(e) Family planning should be introduced quietly on an individual basis, at least to begin with, but final decisions in this matter should be taken with the advice of village leaders. Some villagers may prefer group discussions.

(f) A pilot program of family planning might be undertaken in one or two villages which would serve as a guide in planning a larger program.

### SETTING UP A FAMILY-PLANNING ASSOCIATION

The I.P.P.F. responded favorably to my report and agreed to help by sending literature and a supply of foaming tablets. Government officials informed me that they would do nothing to hinder the setting up of a family-planning association but reaffirmed that they would give no help or recognition to such efforts. The most serious immediate consequences of this stance were difficulties in importing the foaming tablets, as at that time there were restrictions on the importation of contraceptives; in addition, the association was denied use of government facilities. The ideal way of distributing foaming tablets would have been through government dispensaries, which are located throughout the island and which women are used to attending. A woman could pick up foaming tablets at a dispensary without advertising the fact that she was practicing birth control, as she would if she went to a special family-planning clinic. The restriction also meant that we could get no official assistance from government doctors, nurses, or midwives. In a country as small as Mauritius one cannot proceed very far up any ladder without running into government. Virtually every social service is a government service and nearly all trained women are employed by government.

Despite these handicaps, leading members of the village in which I worked were determined to go ahead. We had been receiving more and more inquiries about birth control from villagers and from leaders and acquaintances in neighboring villages. Planning the first meeting was a political operation of some delicacy. It was necessary to assure a wide base of support taking into account the various alignments in the village: territorial, linguistic, religious, ethnic, associational, kinship, and economic (v. Benedict, 1957; 1965).

The village was bisected into unequal portions by about 300 yards of sugar-cane land belonging to a neighboring estate. The lower section is the more populous and also differs in ethnic composition from the upper section. Leaders from the two sections have often been opponents in village council elections, and disputes as to the allocation of village services or improvements have frequently been structured in terms of opposition of the two sections. Territorial alignments often override alignments by kinship, ethnic, religious, or linguistic affiliation. Therefore it was important to have leaders from both sections at the inaugural meeting. Of the twenty-four village leaders invited to the inaugural meeting, five came from the upper section and nineteen from the lower section of the village. The meeting itself was held in the lower section.

The village population of 2,853 was 62 per cent northern Hindu, 13 per cent Telegu Hindu, 9 per cent Tamil Hindu, 10 per cent Muslim, 4 per cent

Roman Catholic Creole, and 2 per cent Chinese. Members of the last two categories took little part in village political affairs. Eighteen of those invited were northern Hindu, two were Tamil, two Telegu, and two Muslim.

Every village in Mauritius has one or more Indian socio-religious associations. These are usually known under the generic term *baïtka* (from the Hindi verb *baïtana*, "to sit"), though Muslims term their association *jamaat* and some Hindu sects and linguistic groups prefer the term *subha* ("society"). The *baïtka* is chiefly devoted to religious ritual and mutual aid of its members. Before the advent of village councils (the first village council was not formed until 1946), the *baïtka* was the principal village organization, settling disputes among its members and protecting them from the alien society in which they lived. Membership in a *baïtka* is acquired by the payment of a small entrance fee (usually 1 rupee) and maintained by the payment of monthly dues (usually 25 cents of a rupee). The active members are men, but they represent their wives and children. A boy must become a member in his right on reaching a certain age (usually eighteen) or upon marriage. A member is entitled to use the *baïtka* premises, which is usually a small hut of thatch or galvanized sheet iron, for recreation and ritual. It is a general meeting place for members. Women may use it on special occasions when there are religious ceremonies or special classes for their benefit. *Baïtkas* often sponsor schools for the children of their members where an Indian language (Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Urdu) is taught and religious instruction is given. A member may borrow *baïtka* property, such as benches, mats, tarpaulins, lamps, and large cooking vessels, for a marriage or other ceremony at his house. If a death occurs it is the duty of members of the *baïtka* to notify the relatives of the dead person throughout the island. Members must assist the deceased's relatives with mourning and funeral rites. Failure to attend is punishable by fine. The family of the deceased receives cash compensation from *baïtka* funds, the amount of which varies with the age and sex of the deceased. Each *baïtka* has a president, who may be the founder of the *baïtka* and is usually a man prominent in the village. There are other officers, such as vice president, secretary, and treasurer.

There were eleven *baïtkas* in the village. Representatives from nine of them were invited to the meeting, including northern Hindu, Tamil, Telugu, Muslim, and both the orthodox (*Saivatant*) and reformist (*Arya Samajit*) sects of Hinduism. The presidents of the five largest and most influential *baïtkas* were invited. A federation of five northern Hindu *baïtkas* had been formed under the leadership of a popular priest (*panait*) who was president of one of the *baïtkas*. We approached him and he agreed to allow the inaugural meeting to take place in his *baïtka*. Thus we were assured a familiar setting in which villagers would feel at ease.

Broadly speaking, there are two types of village leaders, the traditional and the "modern." The traditional leader derives his position through his connections with the sugar estates. Often he is a job contractor who brings laborers onto estates to perform set tasks (Benedict, 1961a: 24, 70, 149-50;

Meade, 1961: 62-65). He will often make loans to laborers during the inter-crop season to keep them tied to him for the crop season, when labor is short. He has good relations with the estates and can often obtain such privileges as the use of uneconomical land for planting vegetables or permission to gather fodder for himself and his clients. Job contractors frequently found *baïtkas* or become their presidents. There were nine job contractors invited, three of whom were also *baïtka* presidents. Another type of traditional leader is the middleman who makes loans to small planters to help them harvest their sugar cane. Two of these were invited. Traditional leaders tend to be older men who stress traditional Indian religions, languages, and cultures.

The "modern" leader tends to be younger and to have some Western education. Instead of relying exclusively on an Indian language or the Creole *patois*, which is the *lingua franca* of the island, he knows some English and French. His connections are not with the sugar estates but with the government hierarchy. Typically he is a civil servant, such as a schoolteacher or welfare officer. He is often active in the local youth club (football—i.e., soccer—is wildly popular in Mauritius) and draws support from the younger people. Older people may also go to him to receive help and advice in dealing with the government. Both traditional and "modern" leaders may have connections with national politicians. Five of these invited were "modern" leaders. Both types of leaders were to be found on the village council, which at the time of my field work was composed of eight elected and four nominated members. Nine of the twelve members had been invited to the inaugural meeting.

The president of the village council was a young Western-educated leader employed in the government youth service. He was an astute politician who had won the largest number of votes in a recent village council election. He had also been elected to the district council which comprised representatives from the villages in the north of the island. He worked at district headquarters and through his job as youth officer visited all the villages in the north. He was the first person I approached about family planning. He quickly became an enthusiastic supporter of the idea. It was he, in consultation with other village leaders, who drew up the list of people to be invited. It was a measure of his political astuteness that he predicted correctly four out of the five officers who were subsequently elected at the meeting.

The inaugural meeting of the Mauritius Family Planning Association was held on the evening of October 2, 1957, in a thatched hut which served as the *baïtka* premises. About fifty men attended, including twenty-three of the twenty-four invited leaders. Through my interest in family planning I had contacted a Muslim doctor from Port Louis and his wife, who was also a doctor, and they attended to explain contraception to the villagers. The president of the village council explained the purpose of the meeting and the two doctors gave brief talks on birth control and displayed various contraceptives. There was general agreement to establish the association formally,

and villagers then proceeded to found it exactly as if they had been founding a *baïtka*. A president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer were elected, taking into account the power structure of the village. In order to make matters equitable on this score, an assistant treasurer, two auditors, and an executive committee were chosen. Thus twelve village leaders were incorporated into the association, representing all the alignments mentioned previously. From the more populous lower village came eight of the twelve committee members, including the president, vice president, treasurer, assistant treasurer, and one of the auditors. The other four, including the secretary, who was the president of the village council, came from the upper village. One Telugu (the president), one Tamil (the assistant treasurer), one Muslim (a committee member), and nine northern Hindus reflected the main cultural categories in the village. Among the twelve were eight traditional leaders, including the president, vice president, and treasurer, and four "modern" leaders, including the secretary, assistant treasurer, and both auditors. Leaders of five *baïtkas* were on the committee, including both Sanatani (orthodox) and Arya Samaji (reformist) sects. Three of the wealthiest men in the village were also included.

Still following the *baïtka* model, members agreed to charge an entrance fee of one rupee and a monthly subscription of 25 cents of a rupee. This had an added advantage in that contraceptives would not be issued to non-members, thus possibly evading Catholic objections. Membership would be open to anyone, regardless of religion, on payment of the entrance fee. Contraceptives were to be purchased by members at cost and the proceeds used to buy more supplies.

The following week, on October 9, 1957, members met again to raise money to launch the association. Again proceedings were traditional, following the same pattern that would have been used to raise money for a religious festival or the building of a temple. The amount given by a village leader was to be matched by other leaders. Those lower in the hierarchy give proportionally. The contributions are made in public at the meeting but are often the subject of informal negotiations beforehand, so that the over-all scale of contributions can be fixed. A man who is consistently and publicly generous rises in prestige and influence. The system allows for a certain mobility and jockeying for position and there is interest and excitement at this display. By the end of the meeting 250 rupees had been raised.

Shortly after the founding of the Mauritius Family Planning Association the woman doctor and my wife addressed the women of the village in the *baïtka*. There were no men present and discussion was fairly frank and open. Contraceptives were displayed. Yet it was clear that much more intensive efforts would have to be made. The greatest need was for trained women, preferably from the village itself, who could explain birth control to the women.

My wife and I left Mauritius on October 20, 1957, so that my firsthand knowledge of family planning in Mauritius ends on this date, yet I kept in

contact to some extent. The president of the village council remained an enthusiastic proponent of family planning. Moreover, he began to see his own career as bound up with family planning. He has attended conferences in London and a special training course in the United States and has become a major figure in the family-planning movement on the island.

### SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS IN FAMILY PLANNING

The association itself suffered a number of vicissitudes, though it has survived them all to date. For a considerable period it was successful as an association but not very successful in promoting family planning. Branches sprang up in other villages. By July, 1958, twenty-two villages had family-planning associations. Yet in all of this activity Mauritians demonstrated their ability to set up associations rather than practice birth control. The association lacked steady supplies of contraceptives; it had no trained personnel to give instruction; it failed to keep adequate records of supplies distributed or women contacted. Yet it did help keep the idea of family planning before the public. It was a channel of communication between Mauritius and the I.P.P.F. and other overseas organizations which were interested in helping Mauritius check its population growth. It was there with some knowledge and expertise when the climate of opinion became favorable to birth control. It contributed to bringing about this change of climate and its history reflects this change (v. Brouard, 1965).

The association was officially registered in February, 1958, and a national politician who was also a doctor became president. In May, 1958, the first clinic was opened in the original village in the presence of the Minister of Health, an indication that birth control was gaining importance as a national issue. This clinic, however, was forced to close within a year, mainly because of personnel difficulties. The association remained in existence. It was recognized by the I.P.P.F., sent delegates to International I.P.P.F. conferences, and received visits and advice from I.P.P.F. personnel. In January, 1960, it changed its name to the Family Welfare Association in an attempt to mollify antinatalist-control sentiment and win some support from the sugar industry. Then the Titmuss and Meade reports appeared and caused the furor reported earlier in the paper.

With funds from the I.P.P.F. and other foundations, a clinic was built in Port Louis, which now became the headquarters of the association. By 1963 oral contraceptives began to be issued and shortly replaced all other contraceptives. In 1965 the association changed its name back to Mauritius Family Planning Association. There were still many difficulties because of inadequate finances, government indecision and vacillation on birth control, and inauguration of a Catholic-sponsored family-planning movement called Action Famiale, which advocated only the safe-period method (Guy, 1968). Finally, in 1966, a government campaign for family planning was launched

with assistance from a number of overseas bodies. At the end of 1967, 5,695 women were registered with the Action Familiale and 10,732 with the Mauritius Family Planning Association. Also there was a slight drop in the crude birth rate and the rate of natural increase (Mauritius, 1967:7). It is not clear what the causes of this drop are or whether it marks the beginning of a trend. Family planning no longer rests entirely on the efforts of unofficial voluntary associations, but has become government policy, a move which must appear inevitable if Mauritius is to make a serious attempt to stem population growth.

### THE ANTHROPOLOGIST AS AN AGENT OF CHANGE

My own position as an agent of change was in many ways peculiar. I was a source of information. Some men wished to practice birth control, but the only means they knew were abstinence, coitus interruptus, or the condom. A few had heard that there were other methods but did not know what these were. I was able to tell them about female contraceptives and to explain, at least in a rudimentary fashion, how they worked. Thus I helped to create or at least focus a demand. When I began to receive information from I.P.P.F., this communication function was greatly expanded. Birth-control pamphlets were translated into French and later into Hindi. I also had useful contacts in the town, such as that with the Muslim doctor and his wife.

More important was my position in the village. Villagers assumed that I was working for government. Many thought I was some sort of spy. I told people that I intended to write about them and that I hoped what I wrote would benefit them. Many people befriended me and suspicion diminished as the months went by. Even those who distrusted me disliked my getting only one side of the story, especially if it were not their side. Many assumed I had some vast unspecified power which derived from the British government in London and could be exercised over the governor if necessary. I remained an outsider, but a friendly one with some sort of power. This status assisted me in helping to found the Family Planning Association.

From the government's point of view I was also an outsider. I was in Mauritius under a special fellowship. I did not belong to the overseas colonial service and was not even a British subject. I could give no orders. I had no specified duties. I was attached to no government department. If I chose to involve myself in family planning and it was a failure or drew indignant protests from religious or political leaders, the government was not responsible. It was only the irresponsible activity of an ill-advised American. On the other hand, such a failure would not make much difference to me, as I had no permanent stake in Mauritius or the colonial service and was about to leave the island. Nevertheless, what I was doing was of interest to the government, for if it could be shown that there was a real demand for birth control, this might move the government to implement a family-planning program.

In other words, government officials could credit or discredit my activities as they saw fit without harming the government or me. Thus my position as an outsider was of considerable use to both villagers and government. It allowed me to move within the village social structure and between the village and the wider social structure of the island, a mobility denied to those more heavily committed to that social structure. Paradoxically, villagers paid attention to me because they thought I was connected to government. Government paid attention to me because they knew I was not.

In a small multistranded community like Mauritius the outsider can be used to considerable advantage. The overseas expert is a common phenomenon nowadays, but he rarely spends enough time in a country to effect real change, and often his advice, particularly on questions of social policy, is inappropriately based on his experience in another country. The anthropologist who spends a year or two in a country can help to effect changes. One way he can do this is by his interstitial position in the local power structure. He must make his own moral decisions. I had no doubts about family planning, but the real decisions were taken and the real changes were made by Mauritians and not by me.

### CONCLUSION

In many ways Mauritius can be viewed as a microcosm of the earth's population problem. The eradication of disease and improved health services have led to an unprecedented increase in population, which continues to grow at a dangerous rate. This population growth has outstripped the country's ability to support itself. Unemployment is rife and increasing, and this is leading to political unrest. Divisions within the population are such that concerted action by government cannot be taken. Political leaders feared conflict or sought the advantage of one community over another. By this vacillation and political infighting, valuable years were lost, for the population explosion was clearly predictable. The analogy can be pushed too far. Mauritius is a tiny, isolated, agricultural country with a one-crop economy and few possibilities of diversification. The rest of the world has more opportunities than this.

Yes, with the possible exception of Japan, the rest of the world has not been noticeably more successful than Mauritius in foreseeing or controlling its population growth. It is probably too late to avoid a demographic disaster in Mauritius, and the rest of the world may have to rescue this island people from the consequences of their overbreeding. A somber question remains. Even if birth control had been introduced in the 1940's, would enough people have practiced it to slow or halt population growth? One cannot be easy about the answer. Most Mauritians are too poor to plan their families. It is difficult to imagine what would have persuaded them to do so. Yet attitudes change. In the 1950's most people in Mauritius were ignorant, misinformed,

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and/or hostile to birth control. These attitudes have changed. Mauritians can now choose whether or not to practice birth control. Some are practicing it. The experience in Mauritius shows that birth control depends on a great many more factors than the availability of easily used contraceptives. On the one hand, there must be an understanding of the social structure of the community. If family planning concerns intimate relations between men and women, it also concerns political and economic relations within the whole community. On the other hand, it must be recognized that family planning succeeds or fails insofar as people see *their own individual life chances* in terms of more or fewer children. These estimates not only vary between groups and individuals but can change for a given individual over the course of his life. Governments can influence these attitudes and estimates. There can be tax disincentives for large families such as those proposed by Professor Titmuss or even sterner measures which would actually tax children. More drastic would be to put contraceptive chemicals in the water supply. Such "solutions" clearly raise grave moral and political questions which go beyond the scope of this paper.

But by whatever means planners attempt to limit population, they should at least avoid the mistakes of failing to look ahead. Those who fought disease did not consider the population problem they were engendering. Let those who are fighting population increase be aware of the future economic, political, and demographic consequences of their own campaigns.



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Documenting the history of the University of California has been a responsibility of the Regional Oral History Office since the Office was established in 1954. Oral history memoirs with University-related persons are listed below. They have been underwritten by the UC Berkeley Foundation, the University of California Office of the President, the Chancellor's Office, University departments, or by extramural funding for special projects. The oral histories, both tapes and transcripts, are open to scholarly use in The Bancroft Library. Bound, indexed copies of the transcripts are available at cost.

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