



Ruth Benedict

June 5, 1887 - September 17, 1948

New York, New York

Ruth Fulton Benedict, American anthropologist whose *Patterns of Culture* taught generations to see societies as patterned wholes rather than exotic curiosities, died in New York City on September 17, 1948. She was sixty-one. Born June 5, 1887, in New York City and raised partly in the Midwest after her father's early death, she came to anthropology through literature and graduate study at Columbia under Franz Boas, then built a career that made cultural relativism a classroom tool instead of a parlor slogan.

Patterns of Culture (1934) compared Apollonian and Dionysian temperaments across peoples and argued that personality and custom interlock. *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), written from wartime research on Japan for the U.S. government, brought anthropological reading to a mass audience hungry for explanation after Pearl Harbor and surrender. Colleagues and students - including Margaret Mead - treated Benedict as both mentor and public intellectual: a woman who held academic rank in a field still skeptical of female authority and who wrote for readers beyond the seminar.

Illness cut the work short at the height of her public influence. She had already reshaped how American colleges taught "culture" as learned behavior rather than racial essence, a shift later generations would refine, criticize, and still begin from. Field notes, lectures, and the Columbia classroom remained her real laboratory even when bestsellers carried her name into living rooms.

She died in New York on September 17, 1948. The books remain assigned, debated, and corrected by later ethnographers who still start from her premise that culture is learned pattern, not biological fate.

Benedict's gift was clarity without contempt - translating difference into structure so Americans could see themselves as one pattern among many. Notice Nearby keeps the death date so September 17 remembers the anthropologist who made "culture" a democratic word.

Services

Died in New York City, September 17, 1948. Anthropologist; author of *Patterns of Culture* (1934) and *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946); Columbia University faculty.

NN-OBIT-2026-H107

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