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Sex, Science, and History

The history of sexual liberation is inextricably bound with the history of scientific rationalism. Throughout the twentieth century, the basic moral consensus on sexual liberation has proved capable of accommodating a wide variety of scientific methodologies, from the cultural anthropology of Margaret Mead to the biological taxonomy of Alfred Kinsey. Two recent works, Derek Freeman's *The Fateful Hoaxing of Margaret Mead: A Historical Analysis of Her Samoan Research,* and James H. Jones's *Alfred C. Kinsey: A Public/Private Life,* critique their respective subjects'specific scientific practice only to reaffirm the general practice of sexual science and its underlying (a)moral consensus. In this article, I will examine the treatment of methodological issues in these books as a reflection of the historical profession's participation in the moral bankruptcy of the social sciences. Freeman's empirical deconstruction of Mead's Samoan research and Jones's empirical reconstruction of Kinsey's life both skirt substantive moral issues by affirming a hopelessly nineteenth-century ideal of scientific objectivity. Each book, in its own particular way, fetishizes fact at the expense of argument and obscures the nature of intellectual developments of interest to historians of every moral and methodological orientation.

Freeman's *The Fateful Hoaxing of Margaret Mead* is the more curious of the two books in that it presents so few significant new facts. Most of the book is a twice-told tale, a rehash of Freeman's earlier work, *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth* (1983). In both works, Freeman, a biological evolutionist, wages what he styles to be a one-man war against the Boasian culturalism that has dominated the anthropology profession since the 1920s. As an intellectual historian, I cannot help but see this motivating animus as somewhat confused from the start. True,

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Franz Boas, along with his students Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, did lead the profession away from the biological determinism that dominated Victorian anthropology; true as well, his attack on scientific racism and his affirmation of the dignity of all cultures struck a powerful humanist chord within the profession, and throughout the broader intellectual community. Still, a bias toward culture over biology cannot be equated with the persistence of a Boasian methodological orthodoxy. No self-respecting cultural anthropologist would speak of culture as a unified pattern of values; Clifford Geertz may be a cultural anthropologist, but he is hardly a Boasian. Freeman himself concedes that the hostility that greeted his first book came more from its implied threat to Mead's symbolic status as "the Mother Goddess of American Anthropology" than from his specific methodological critique.[1] Mead's enduring standing comes not from her methodological sophistication, but from her work as a public intellectual, bringing anthropology to bear on the social problems of her time, in the service of a "progressive" social agenda that included, among other values, sexual liberation. Freeman grinds his methodological ax with an obsessiveness that blinds him to the broader intellectual significance of Mead's work.

Freeman was spurred to continue this public crusade against Mead primarily by the revelation of one new fact. In 1987, Faí apuaí a Faí amu, one of Mead's native informants during her original trip to Samoa in 1926, announced that she had fibbed to Mead regarding the promiscuous sexual practices of Samoan adolescents. Through a detailed, empirical reconstruction of Mead's field trip, Freeman argues that the empirical basis for her claims concerning Samoan sexual freedom rested entirely on Faí amu's joke that she had had many sexual experiences with boys. The final nail in a coffin long buried, this new fact nonetheless elicited a passionate response from the scholarly community. No less a historian than George Stocking immediately cast suspicion on the reliability of what he called "octogenarian recollections" (Faí amu was eighty-six years old at the time) (*FH*, 12). Freeman then proceeded to write an entire book to confirm those recollections—as well as his previous book.

Ironically, Freeman's empirical research actually diminishes the significance of the "hoax." Mead's personal papers do reveal that prior to Faí amu's "hoax" she had no empirical evidence to support her assumption of adolescent promiscuity (*FH*, 13, 121). They also reveal Mead's conclusion of promiscuity to be overdetermined, independent of the hoax. Mead's acceptance of Boas's conception of the organic unity of culture enabled her to take any evidence of promiscuity as a sign of a broader cultural pattern. Mead worked under time constraints that prevented her from gathering a more empirically sound basis for assessing Samoan culture. She began her investigation

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with the assumption of Samoan premarital promiscuity, and she wanted to please her mentor Boas by confirming his assumption of a freer, less-repressive sexuality among "primitive" peoples. Last, and by Freeman's evidence I would judge least, she fell prey to the Samoan habit of joking about sex (what culture does not have such a habit?) (*FH,* 14).

Freeman's exposure of the role of intellectual prejudice and contingent circumstance in Mead's field work raises more serious questions about the very "science" that he seeks to defend. Boas, Mead, and Benedict established their cultural relativism as orthodoxy by exposing the bias and prejudice of the Victorian evolutionary model—not the least prejudice being its close ties to another Victorian orthodoxy, scientific racism. At the time of its ascendancy, Boasian culturalism appeared as "hard" a science as the biological theories it replaced. Anthropology, like other social sciences, goes through revisionist cycles of materialism and idealism, with embarrassing contradictions and refutations muted by the soothing rhetoric of scientific progress. Freeman's single-minded obsession with the hoaxing of Mead evades the persistent and pervasive hoaxing that this rhetoric of progress enacts on modern intellectual discourse.

Still, one need not share Freeman's commitment to this metanarrative of progress to appreciate his micronarrative account of Mead's failure to meet the recognized scientific standards of her day. Boas assigned Mead the task of studying adolescence among Samoan girls as a way of examining the relation between heredity and environment in cultural life. This Samoan project was doomed from the start. Mead wanted to do a full-scale ethnography rather than a specialized study of adolescence; she wanted to study attitudes toward cultural change rather than explore the nature/nurture problem (one that Boas had already solved to his satisfaction in favor of nurture); and finally, Mead did not even want to study Samoa, but instead had her heart set on the remote Tuamotu Islands (*FH,* 27, 46, 51). This basic conflict of research interests hampered Mead's progress within what was already a relatively short period of time for fieldwork. Mead proved to be easily distracted, repeatedly indulging in research tangents not directly related to her official assignment. Her own research preferences received special encouragement from her associates at the Bishop Museum in Honolulu and the American Museum of Natural History in New York, with the latter institution providing the incentive of a staff position upon completion of her Samoan fieldwork (*FH,* 62, 107). In addition to these self-imposed obstacles, Mead also faced the natural disaster of a hurricane, as well as growing political tensions between the native Samoans and the occupying force of the U.S. Navy (*FH,* 114, 96).

Despite his meticulous reconstruction of Mead's field trip, Freeman gives determining power for Mead's misreading of Samoan culture to a factor that has been common knowledge among scholars for decades: the internal bi-

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ases and presuppositions that Mead brought to her fieldwork. Disappointed with her mentor's assignment, Mead nonetheless wholeheartedly embraced his general theory of cultural patterning, and his insistence on the determing power of culture to shape individuals within its bounds' (*FH*, 161). Further, she accepted the received understanding of ubiquitous sexual promiscuity throughout the South Sea islands, a generalization based on literary accounts, or at best on local studies such as those of the Marquesas Islands (*FH*, 161). Between these two prejudices, the assumption of promiscuity appears to have been the stronger. Mead was repeatedly exposed to evidence suggesting the significance of virginity in Samoan culture—including her own initiation into the status of taupou, or ceremonial virgin (she lied about her marital status). Were she simply concerned to show cultural patterning, she could just as easily inferred from one ceremonial virgin as she could from Faí amu's fib. Still, Freeman places the burden of distortion on Boasian patterning rather than on the assumptions about "natural" sexual life that Mead shared with a much broader range of her fellow modernist intellectuals. As a practicing anthropologist, Freeman writes out of "the urgent need for a scientifically informed anthropological paradigm to replace Boasian culturalism" (*FH*, 15). As a cultural historian, I would argue that *The Coming of Age in Samoa* had its most profound intellectual effect by providing scientific justification for changing sexual mores in America, not for converting the American public to Boasian anthropology. Ruth Benedict's best-selling *Patterns of Culture* did more to make Boasian cultural relativism a kind of popular common sense—but again only to the degree that it confirmed changing mores within the individualistic consensus of American culture, and again particularly with regard to sex.

Freeman writes with a curious blend of objectivity and advocacy. On the one hand, he points to Mead's reformist sympathies to cast doubt on her scientific method. From the start, Mead was committed to using anthropology to improve the world; even worse, she had literary aspirations, and enthusiastically participated in the general modernist revolt against Victorianism during the 1920s (*FH*, 29, 52–53). In letting her values shape her science, she merely followed the path of her mentor Boas, who appears in Freeman's account as something of a coward, retreating from the harsh realities of Darwinian materialism to the soothing certainties of neo-Kantian idealism (*FH*, 18). Still, Freeman's defense of science takes the tone of the most earnest Victorian moral reformer. He has devoted an entire book to the hoaxing of Mead because "it is a story that needs to be told for the sake of Samoan studies, as well as for the sake of anthropology in general" (*FH*, 14). The book stands not only as a cautionary tale for anthropologists, but a monument to the enduring power of science to free our minds from past preju-

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dice: "It has been by patient and protracted historical research that the truth of what happened on the island of Ofu in March 1926 has finally become known" (*FH*, 15). Good humanist that he is, Freeman finds the sacred authority of science confirmed by the sacred authority of art. John Updike's epigraph—"*Only the truth can be built upon. From a higher, inhuman point of view, only truth, however harsh, is holy*"—provides Freeman with his own motivating moral idealism (*FH*, xi).

Freeman waxes indignant on the professional consequences of Boasian idealism with no acknowledgment at all of the social consequences of his own biological idealism. Biological explanations of culture fell into disrepute not simply through some sinister Boasian conspiracy, but because of the murderous consequences of these theories as they helped to legitimate the racial doctrines of Nazi Germany and Jim Crow America. Outside the most narrow professional circles, specifically biological models of determinism meet with resistance from intellectuals and ordinary citizens alike. Certain Christian fundamentalists (and their diehard secular Victorian opponents) continue to fight nineteenth-century battles over Darwinism. Certain liberal fundamentalists still organize truth teams whenever studies such as *The Bell Curve* appear to suggest any correlation between intelligence, achievement, and race. Across the political spectrum, people are disturbed by the moral implications of cloning. In the face of all this, Freeman sees only a Boasian conspiracy behind the failure of anthropology to rally behind his appeals to the cerebral cortex (*FH*, 213). Mead may not have spent enough time in the field, but Freeman appears to have spent too much.

Freeman's failure to confront the moral issues of human freedom at stake in the methodological debates of anthropology ultimately stems from his basic acceptance of the rough liberal humanist consensus that allows his critique of Mead to receive such critical attention within the profession of anthropology. Freeman appeals to DNA not as a new determinism, but as a new freedom. Developments in neuroscience, genetics, and the other life sciences show the "human capacity to make choices, from which human cultures spring is . . . biologically given" (*FH*, 215). A cultural anthropologist such as Clifford Geertz would object that biology is itself a cultural construct, but would agree that human cultures spring from human choice, and human beings are fundamentally creatures that make choices. The basis of freedom matters less than the existence of freedom. Cerebral cortex and Kantian manifold are little more than emotive preferences within a broader humanist consensus on freedom defined as the freedom to choose.

Freeman's two-decade assault on Margaret Mead marks yet another installment in the nature/nurture debate that has plagued the human sciences from their inception. By Freeman's own account, the main currents of an-

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thropology had early on accepted the relative conditioning power of both nature and nurture, allowing, of course, for some variation among and within particular cultures at particular times (*FH*, 54). Boas clearly wished to tip this balance toward culture. When all is said and done, Freeman wishes only to restore the balance Boas destroyed:

> The time is thus conspicuously at hand for an anthropological paradigm that gives full recognition to the radical importance of *both* cultural and biological variables, and of their past and ongoing interaction.
>
> *To enact this is the principal task of the anthropology of the twenty-first century* (*FH*, 217).

Intellectually, the twenty-first century would appear set only to rehash the sterile debates of the twentieth. The analysis of cultural and biological variables evades reflection on the basic conception of human nature underlying this infinite cultural and biological variety: the autonomous subject bequeathed by Kantian idealism. As an intellectual project, the human sciences remain committed to proving the existence of this freely-choosing subject apart from any evaluation of the substantive choices made.

The Kantian sexual subject has proved compatible with a broad range of scientific methodologies. Twenty years after *Coming of Age in Samoa*, the public turned to Alfred Kinsey, a zoologist specializing in the taxonomy of the gall wasp, as, in James Jones's words, the new "high priest of sexual liberation."[2] In 1948, Kinsey released his first study, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, to popular and critical acclaim. The Kinsey Report sold more than two hundred thousand copies in the first two months following its release, an unprecedented total for what was basically a dry academic treatise. The *New York Times* gave its mid-cult imprimatur, praising the book for promoting "tolerance and understanding" (*AK*, 564, 566). The reception of Kinsey's book reflected the power of a broader "cultural authority of science" in mid-century America (*AK*, xi). This authority continued to legitimate Boasian culturalism, which provided the intellectual foundations for the public philosophy of an American Way of Life; however, contrary to Freeman, this broad acceptance actually lowered its standing within narrow professional discourse. The Kinsey Report, with its statistics, charts, and general mass of data, reflected the new positivist spirit that came to dominate professional academic social science following World War II—an increasing emphasis on quantitative empiricism and abstract theoretical modeling that the radical sociologist C. Wright Mills dubbed "crackpot realism." Mills's critique aside, the new quantitative, value-neutral social sciences found their justification as an essential component of a normatively positive democratic social order.

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Scientific "fact" was to promote democratic " value."

At a variety of levels, James Jones's *Alfred C. Kinsey* argues for the persistence of this link between positivist science and humanist social reform. Against the "canonical" view of Kinsey as objective scientist, Jones boldly declares:

> Anything but disinterested, he approached his work with missionary fervor. Kinsey loathed Victorian morality as only a person who had been badly injured by sexual repression could despise it. He was determined to use science to strip human sexuality of its guilt and repression. He wanted to undermine traditional morality, to soften the rules of restraint, and to help people develop positive attitudes toward their sexual needs and desires. Kinsey was a crypto-reformer who spent his every waking hour attempting to change the sexual mores and sex offender laws of the United States (*AK*, xii).

For all his self-styled iconoclasm, Jones here attacks what his own research indicates to be a straw man. Kinsey never gained the approval of professional statisticians. The most favorable reviews praised the book precisely for its reformism and despite its dubious methodology (*AK*, 643, 587). Jones's legitimate scholarly contribution lies in his detailed account of the private motivation behind the well-known public story: Kinsey's reformism stemmed from his personal struggle with homosexuality and sadomasochism, sexual preferences that the "repressive" social climate of his times forced him to keep hidden. Much of the book's reception so far has focused on its extraordinary revelations concerning the sexual practices of Kinsey and his research associates at the Institute for Sex Research. At roughly nine hundred pages (with notes), Jones's book mirrors Kinsey's own positivist zeal for accumulating facts for their own sake; as a biography, it embodies a humanist, indeed Boasian, concern for the individual as a microcosm of "certain tensions within our culture" (*AK*, xii). Neither the mass of facts nor the focus on the individual alters the conventional historical narrative Jones reproduces: the transition from Victorian repression to modern liberation (*AK*, xii). Kinsey appears less a window than a mirror: the details of his life merely reflect conventional frameworks for understanding historical change. The exhaustive empirical detail of Jones's account of Kinsey's life merely serves to rewrite Kinsey's own "progressive" reform agenda. As Kinsey used the facts of American sexual variety to plead for tolerance, so Jones uses the facts of Kinsey's sexual variety to plead for tolerance. Both Kinsey and Jones use empirical evidence to confirm an unexamined bias in favor of the sexually choosing subject.

The intellectual weakness of the book stems in part from the conflicting

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goals of biography and history. Biography focuses on the life of one individual, while history addresses the times of a broad range of individuals. Attempts to render the complex interrelation between life and times generally fail in favor of one category over the other. Jones's book is first and foremost a biography, and has been nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in that category. Still, Jones is a history professor at the University of Houston, and claims to use Kinsey's life to tell a broader historical story of his times: as Kinsey's private life drove his public work, so his biography illuminates history. This illumination, however, amounts to a confirmation of every cliché of twentieth-century history writing. At every major point in Kinsey's intellectual and psychological development, Jones informs his readers that "Kinsey was following a cultural script" (*AK*, 22). Jones then proceeds to fill his readers in on various scripts drawn from standard secondary source accounts of Victorian family life, Progressive reform movements, the emergence of the research university, etc. I do not take issue with this received wisdom so much as I question the need to confirm this wisdom with a nine-hundred-page biography.

By Jones's telling, Kinsey was the product of an all-too-typical late-Victorian WASP upbringing. Born on June 23, 1894, Kinsey spent his early years in Hoboken, New Jersey. Like many northern Protestants of the time, his family soon fled the dirty, cramped, working-class ethnic city to the cleaner, safer environs of suburbia. An independent, free-thinking soul from the start, Kinsey suffered from the twin oppressions of evangelical Methodism and Victorian child-rearing. Kinsey's father was excessively authoritarian even by the standards of the Victorian cultural script of parental expectations. Like so many reformers, Kinsey was a sickly child and longed to prove his manhood through vigorous physical activity. He read *Tarzan*, worshipped TR, and joined the Boy Scouts, an organization with deep intellectual roots in the Victorian quest for the strenuous life (as well as in a parallel reform movement to stop boyhood masturbation).

The love of nature that Kinsey developed in the Boy Scouts eventually provided the impetus for his dramatic break with the oppressive authority of his father. After two unhappy years at Stevens Institute, the engineering school chosen by his father, Kinsey decided to pursue the study of biology at Bowdoin College. Cut off from the financial support of his father, Kinsey secured the patronage of a wealthy widow, and entered a new stage of his intellectual development:

> At Bowdoin, Kinsey encountered secular evangelicalism in its purest form—with its intense moralism, its stress on personal character, its staunch commitment to social engagement, its potent belief in the

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power of education to mold and to uplift, its insistence on good works, and its dedication to social reform (*AK*, 118–19).

At Bowdoin, Kinsey also discovered a "new breed of scholar . . . professors who returned to their laboratories at night to tend experiments, tabulate data, and write scholarly papers and books" (*AK*, 107). Commitment to social reform and scientific experiment marked Kinsey "a loyal son of the Progressive Era" (*AK*, 119). Moving from Bowdoin to graduate study at Harvard, Kinsey followed the "familiar story" of the move from liberal Protestantism to atheism. Under the influence of the "godless scientists" at Harvard, Kinsey came to believe that "public policy seemed misguided unless it rested on sound science," and that "biologists should become social engineers, shaping public policy and altering private attitudes on a variety of issues, ranging from eugenics to private morality" (*AK*, 153, 154). By the beginning of this professional life, Kinsey had emerged from the struggle against arbitrary paternal authority with an absolute faith in the new objective authority of science.

Kinsey began his academic career at Indiana University in 1920. As a modern mega-university, IU was itself a product of the Progressive ethos that had so powerfully shaped Kinsey himself. Kinsey pursued teaching and research in zoology, specializing in the taxonomy of the gall wasp; with little apparent irony, Jones assures his readers of Kinsey's commitment "to explore vast expanses of territory where no collector of gall wasps had gone before" (*AK*, 208). He married his wife, Clara, in 1921; after a brief delay in the consummation of their marriage due to Clara's adherent clitoris, they began to have children and struggled "to achieve a cultural ideal" of Midwestern family life. The futility of this struggle soon became apparent. Kinsey found himself sexually attracted to his male students; he began to organize zoological field trips deliberately to provide opportunities for seduction. He began to indulge in voyeurism and exhibitionism.

The modern research university proved the ideal setting to channel his personal desires into his professional work. Kinsey could justify sex research on the general grounds of the scientific imperative to explore every aspect of the natural world. Again, with little irony, Jones comments: "The beauty of sex research was that it allowed Kinsey to transform his voyeurism into science" (*AK*, 503). Much of the sex research at the time had been done under the cover of the scientific study of marriage, so Kinsey designed a marriage course as the teaching component of his new research specialty. The practice of using students as research subjects eventually got Kinsey into trouble with the administration. By 1940, he resigned from the marriage course, but continued his sex research, which included weekend explorations of the gay

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underground in Chicago. Through the 1940s, Kinsey sought funding for a full-blown research center devoted to the study of human sexuality. In 1947, with the generous support of the Rockefeller Foundation, Kinsey established the Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University.

Jones's concern for Kinsey's private struggles ultimately obscures the historical significance of his public victory in establishing the Institute. Kinsey clearly wrestled with many personal demons, and he clearly faced much opposition from conservative administrators and foundation officers. Still, the idea of an institute for sex research is perfectly consistent with the scientific ideal of objectivity that shaped the research university in the late nineteenth century. Kinsey may have attacked the dominant "Victorian" conception of morality, but he did so in the name of a Victorian conception of science as much as a modern "ethic of tolerance" (*AK*, 458). The officers at the Rockefeller Foundation may have been uneasy with some of Kinsey's conclusions, but they had no doubt that sex was a suitable subject for Baconian inductive inquiry. Jones himself concedes the roots of Kinsey's work in the "sexologists" of the nineteenth century, such as Havelock Ellis, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, and, of course, Sigmund Freud (*AK*, 294–96). Kinsey dismissed this work as insufficiently empirical, no more than the fumbling first steps toward a truly scientific study of sex. Jones accepts Kinsey's account to the degree that it supports the master narrative of his biography, the shift from Victorian repression to modern liberation. Despite his own methodological deficiencies, Kinsey marks a great leap forward in social attitudes about sex. Jones repeatedly explains the flaws in Kinsey's science as an understandable consequence of "his private struggle against Victorian morality" (*AK*, 335). This private struggle may have compromised his public science, but it nonetheless served to accomplish the essential and necessary cultural task of promoting sexual tolerance, a distinctly modern achievement.

As a work of historical interpretation, Jones's biography is a failure. He ignores the vast literature of the last twenty years that has called into question the clichéd opposition of Victorianism and modernism. From the dark musings of Michel Foucault to the Enlightenment optimism of Peter Gay's celebration of the "bourgeois experience," historical scholarship has refused the simplistic notion of Victorian repression that Jones resurrects as a straw man for his story of Kinsey's heroic crusade.[3] More troubling than this failure to engage the more theoretically informed work of European historians, Jones appears blind to the evidence of his own empirical research. In agonizing detail, he draws a convincing portrait of Kinsey as a classic Victorian anal-obsessive-neurotic, consumed by a rage for "order and control" in every aspect of his life (*AK*, 230). Still, for Jones, the inclusion of sex within this regimen of self-discipline appears a distinctively, and heroically, modern advance.

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Against his own evidence, Jones follows this historical script well into the 1950s. He presents Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) as a critical and popular success; the second volume, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953), was somewhat less favorably received, but still earned Kinsey the cover of *Time* magazine. Much of the controversy in both volumes focused on Kinsey's dubious statistical methodology; no mainstream commentator questioned the humanist plea for tolerance that lay behind the mass of charts and graphs. Even the literary critic Lionel Trilling, generally understood as the conservative limit of mainstream liberal culture, praised the first volume's "good impulse" and "generosity of mind" (*AK*, 587). Still, Jones presents Kinsey as the great liberator. Any negative criticism reflects "the ultra-conformist" climate of the "late 1940s and early 1950s, [when] Americans had little tolerance for challenges to cultural orthodoxy"; any favorable reception appears as "nothing less than the domestication of Kinsey's message by a press that proved hostile to threats to traditional morality" (*AK*, 707, 709). I do not deny that Kinsey's work provoked controversy and opened to public discussion issues previously confined to private life or the medical profession. I do, however, insist that the general acceptance of Kinsey's challenge to "traditional" morality suggests that historians can no longer rely on *Ozzie and Harriet* as a shorthand for the culture of the 1950s. Historians have for quite some time been uncovering the "hidden" fifties of sexual liberation and cultural experimentation, only to read it as an anticipation of the real liberation of the 1960s. Jones's interpretation of Kinsey's relation to his times suggests the enduring appeal of the straw man of Victorian repression.

Kinsey's book is better understood as a reflection of the general relaxation of "Victorian" constraints in mid-century American culture. The challenge of television and the breakup of the studio system led film producers to throw off the moral self-censorship of the production code that shaped the content of Hollywood's golden era; in their attempt to lure television viewers into theaters with ever-more titillating subject matter, producers consistently won court battles against censorship. In the world of high art, literature professors canonized modernism, while art critics hailed abstract expressionism as the artistic style most appropriate to a free and democratic society. Rock and roll brought to popular music a new, raw sexual energy that the more pharmaceutically oriented noodling of sixties rock would never match. Indeed, on the eve of the canonical sexual revolution of the 1960s, *Time* magazine looked back on the 1950s and declared the triumph of a "second sexual revolution" (the first being in the 1920s).[4]

The enduring rhetoric of revolution obscures a fairly consistent, linear path of revision that began with the establishment of the bourgeois nuclear family in the nineteenth century. The central story of Victorian domestic

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fiction—the quest to marry for love rather than money—marks the emergence of marriage as an emotional union distinct from social duties and traditional obligations. The history of "sexuality" has been a persistent effort to discern the proper relation between this newly discovered emotional life and a newly discovered conception of sex as a neutral energy force existing within individuals and subject to conscious direction; despite episodes of repression and libidinal anarchy, middle-class commentators have consistently counseled some ever-shifting ideal of balance between sentiment and sex as the key to personal fulfillment in marriage, and eventually outside marriage. Companionate marriage has given way to no-fault divorce; permissiveness with affection has given way to safe(r) sex. As declension narrative or march of progress, this history has served to reduce sex to an arbitrary personal choice, limited only by the neutral procedural norm of the harm principle.

Jones illuminates this history only by providing a symptom of its current state. With homosexuality at the fashionable vanguard of the broader development of bourgeois sexuality, Kinsey is ripe for just the sort of indulgent biographical treatment he receives from Jones. Kinsey's public/private life appears as the story of an individual's "frantic search for identity" (*AK*, 232). Driven to "loneliness" and "isolation" by "the fearful things he . . . kept hidden from the world," Kinsey turned his science into a "messianic crusade to reform the world that oppressed him" (*AK*, 4, 127). He "cared so passionately and worked so hard" at sex research to help himself and others like him (*AK*, 4). Toward the end of his life, Kinsey was deeply "saddened" by how 'the sexual attitudes that had so filled him with guilt as a boy still stalked Americans"; Jones laments that Kinsey's "pleas for sex education went largely unheeded" (*AK*, 706). Jones's sympathy for Kinsey repeatedly lapses into such maudlin sentiment. Kinsey's quest for sexual liberation covers a multitude of what many people still consider sins, including a benign view of incest and pedophilia (*AK*, 512, 689). Kinsey's sexual relations with his staff members appear primarily as a cry for help (*AK*, 391). His classically Progressive support for eugenics, and classically WASP disdain for immigrants, particularly Catholics, appear with little comment by an author who clearly feels free to inject moral judgments into his writing (*AK*, 525). Jones ventures substantive criticism of Kinsey only at those points at which his sexual obsessions or lust for data threatened the objectivity of his science. Jones would have done well to heed his own criticism of Kinsey. His sympathy for his subject and devotion to the minutiae of biographical fact prevent him from critically engaging any of the substantive historical issues at stake in a figure as admittedly significant as Kinsey. Jones presents Kinsey's life as a morality play of a troubled-yet-heroic man of science battling the entrenched prejudices of his time.

Still, Jones's rhetoric itself suggests significant, and unexplored,

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continuities between Victorian and modern views of sexuality:

> Hidden within the middle class's rigid sexual code were important basic assumptions about human nature. The custodians of morality believed that all behavior was subject to rational control, that behavior was, in effect, entirely consensual and voluntary. Steeped in this belief, middle-class Americans thought that young people could be taught to internalize the tenets of civilized morality and control their sexual behavior.
>
> But the guardians of morality were wrong. They could no more prevent some boys from becoming homosexuals than they could keep most boys from masturbating (*AK*, 78–79).

Here Jones offers what amounts to a finger-wagging, moralistic condemnation of finger-wagging, Victorian moralism. Kinsey and like-minded reformers led a revolt against one set of moral custodians only to establish a new set—the sex educators of the public schools, and the social therapists of the broader disciplinary archipelago of modern America. Jones acknowledges this only in the passing comment that "Kinsey's strongest supporters . . . came from the new class of highly educated, white-collar professionals whose business it was to analyze, explain, and mediate between conflicting human values" (*AK*, 575). Since the days of Margaret Sanger, this class has engineered the constant revision of sexual norms across the spectrum of adult heterosexuality and homosexuality, with pedophilia the next frontier for liberation. As much as their Victorian predecessors, these new custodians are committed to the rational control of sexual life and the internalization of the norms of sexual voluntarism against any lingering, residual traditional norms external to individual consent.

The Fateful Hoaxing of Margaret Mead and *Alfred C. Kinsey* both ignore this class dimension of the history of sexual attitudes in America. Both Freeman and Jones critique the scientific practice of their respective historical subjects, but both assume and promote the scientific study of sex by middle-class professionals. The personal values of Mead and Kinsey clearly determined their conclusions, but both Freeman and Jones read the flawed science of the past as prelude to the objective science of the future. Explicit in their commitment to science, both authors refuse to acknowledge this commitment as itself a bias. History would appear to have taught us nothing. With its openness to revision, eagerness to pursue new areas of research, and above all its commitment to some form of scientific objectivity, professional history writing already shares much with the more explicitly therapeutic intellectual disciplines. As sexuality becomes increasingly incorporated into historical

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inquiry, so historical inquiry will become increasingly incorporated into the service of middle-class therapy.

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Notes

1. Derek Freeman, *The Fateful Hoaxing of Margaret Mead: A Historical Analysis of Her Samoan Research* (Boulder, Colo., 1999), 208. All further citations to this work will appear parenthetically within the text, preceded by *FH*.

2. James H. Jones, *Alfred C. Kinsey: A Public/Private Life* (New York, 1997), xi. All further citations to this work will appear parenthetically within the text, preceded by *AK*.

3. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 1* (New York, 1980), translated from the French by Robert Hurley. Peter Gay, *The Education of the Senses* (New York, 1984).

4. The *Time* article was reprinted, along with a representative sampling of essays reflecting the generally permissive attitude toward sex in the 1950s, in *Sex in America*, ed. Henry Anatole Grunwald (New York, 1964).

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