

lie with the children themselves,” the Thernstroms say. “They are only kids, after all—kids who come into kindergarten already behind. But the solution does lie in part with them and with their parents.”

They cite the HOME (Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment) scale devised by researchers who found troubling racial differences, acknowledged by both white and black scholars, in how parents expressed physical affection, answered children’s questions, and imposed discipline. The Thernstroms say that reformers must acknowledge that “meeting the demands of schools is harder for members of some racial and ethnic groups than for others. Some group cultures are more academically advantageous than others.”

But there are plenty of solutions, they believe. They describe in detail successful school programs run by educators of all ethnicities. Among the Thernstroms’ favorites are the KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) middle schools, the North Star Academy in Newark, New Jersey, the South Boston Harbor Academy, the Amistad Academy in New Haven, Connecticut, and the work of Disney Teacher of the Year Rafe Esquith in his fifth grade at the Hobart Boulevard Elementary School in Los Angeles.

Even the Thernstroms’ friends and admirers (like me, who had Abigail Thernstrom as



Closing the gap? A teacher and child paint together at New York City’s Bloomingdale Headstart Program.

a college political science instructor 39 years ago) will not like everything in this book. I think the authors should have celebrated more the rise in black achievement, even if a similar rise in white achievement has kept the racial gap from closing. And I think they are wrong to suggest that the dearth of advanced placement courses in inner-city high schools is simply the unavoidable result of poor academic preparation.

But it is impossible to reason intelligently about how to fix the bottom 25 percent of our public schools without absorbing the research and analysis presented here. I can hear the Thernstroms’ adversaries rolling up their artillery, but I don’t think they’re going to do much damage, because the authors have been so honest about the hard work that lies ahead for anyone who wants to help those schools.

—JAY MATHEWS

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

INTERTWINED LIVES: Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Their Circle.

By Lois W. Banner. Knopf. 540 pp. \$30

At age 80, I confess to a long life before the advent of women’s studies, gender studies, and lesbian and gay studies. I thought I knew a lot about sexuality from my work as an anthropologist, and I considered myself a feminist. But I hadn’t closely followed the morphing of feminist theory and the women’s movement

into academic fields. This remarkable book has exposed me to new aspects of scholarly study and, more important, to new perceptions of anthropologists Ruth Benedict (1887–1948) and Margaret Mead (1901–78).

Benedict and Mead, preeminent American women of the 20th century, were also, as it happens, women who changed my life. Benedict’s *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (1946) inspired me to become an anthropologist. Mead’s first ques-

tion to me in 1951, when I began a 27-year association with her, was “What do you think of Ruth Benedict’s book on Japan?”

I knew a bit about their close relationship, and learned more when Mead brought me into what remained of their circle. Intellectually, the two women complemented each other. Benedict had done work in philosophy and Mead in psychology; they shared an interest in literature. Benedict, the older of the two, began as Mead’s mentor. In time, they mentored each other.

What I did not know was who slept with whom during what stages of professional development and across what gender boundaries. Banner’s masterpiece of historical reconstruction challenges those who believe in fixed categories of sexual orientation—Benedict had one husband and Mead three—as well as those who adhere to old-fashioned notions of privacy. Except as case studies for a latter-day Havelock Ellis, does any of this matter? I think so. The libido should never be excluded from intellectual history. Life is a seamless web.

A professor of history and gender studies at the University of Southern California, Banner weaves a narrative of backstage and bedroom interactions from newly available letters and unpublished drafts of the two women’s autobiographical writings, including poems. Mead always advised anthropologists and psychiatrists to use themselves as data sources for understanding human behavior. Now, the Benedict papers at Vassar College and the Mead collection at the Library of Congress

offer up the women’s private lives with no misgivings about feeding the voyeurs.

Banner provides insights into the intellectual history of the United States and anthropology’s place in that story. By focusing on the interplay of Benedict, Mead, their husbands, friends, lovers, and protégés, she takes readers well beyond the two women’s published work and shows the genesis of their thoughts on human plasticity, diversity, potential, configurations, and patterns, all pearls on a string of shared ideas. While going in and out of the closets of these great minds, the biographer also deftly links their ideas to the shifting Zeitgeist: the “free love” movement, the Depression, and especially the introduction of anthropology into public-policy discourse during and after World War II. As major thinkers who were also close to each other, the Mead-Benedict dyad and the circle around it can now be added to the Pre-Raphaelites, the Bloomsbury Group, and the American pragmatists chronicled in Louis Menand’s *The Metaphysical Club* (2001).

Current events give particular relevance to Banner’s last chapter, which recounts how Benedict and Mead—with funding from the U.S. Navy—organized an interdisciplinary study of contemporary cultures at Columbia University in 1947. The two women raised important questions about national character, the sort of questions that ought to be asked today about those parts of the globe resisting American hegemony.

—WILTON S. DILLON

ARTS & LETTERS

BROADWAY BOOGIE WOOGIE: Damon Runyon and the Making of New York City Culture.

By Daniel R. Schwarz. Palgrave
Macmillan. 346 pp. \$35

An apocryphal conversation from 1930s Hollywood: A mogul dissatisfied with a script says to the writer, “Put some Damon Runyon stuff in to give it some life.” The writer instantly understands. The script needs the sort of characters Damon Runyon (1884–1946) created for his popular short stories.

These days, Runyon’s name appears in

the news only when *Guys and Dolls*, the musical based on his stories, gets revived. In his time, the 1930s, he was the highest-paid newspaper journalist, good on all subjects—sports, headline trials, famous people, and everything about Broadway. His short-story collections sold in the millions, and 16 of the stories became popular movies. Every few years, someone discovers Runyon’s stories and finds in them the work of a gifted and unique writer. This triggers an analysis of the clever plots, the use of the present tense, and the fictitious gentility of conversation among bookmakers, heart-of-