

## **2005 Margaret Mead Award Remarks**

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**March 31, 2006**

I am extremely honored to be named the recipient of the 2005 Margaret Mead Award. As Margaret Mead, of course, was recognized widely for her commitment to anthropology and, more importantly, to our larger society, it's quite humbling that the awards committee would single out *The Other Side of Middletown* as representative of the kind of work that Mead championed.

For those of you not familiar with the book, *The Other Side of Middletown* was a joint research and writing project between groups of faculty, students, and members of the African American community of Muncie, Indiana—the site of the famous “Middletown” studies, first initiated by Robert and Helen Lynd in their 1929 book, *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture*. In *The Other Side of Middletown*, faculty, students, and community members together explore the undocumented history of Muncie's black community, the enduring legacy of race and racism in small town America, and the many facets of contemporary African American experience in Middletown USA, including—as in the original Middletown study—work and home life, schooling, leisure, religious and community activities. Within this framework, the book unfolds as a collaboratively-inscribed conversation about race relations past and present, engaged by both black and white students, faculty, and community members—all of whom are struggling together to understand the deeper experiential complexities of race in Muncie, in particular, and more generally, in America.

More than anything this project was a collaborative effort, and thus this award certainly doesn't belong to me alone. First and foremost, it also belongs to Hurley Goodall—community activist and retired Indiana state legislator—who was the main instigator behind this work, pushing us all to finish what we started (and he meant it). Along with Hurley, there were the many good people of Muncie, Indiana, who took us into their homes, cooked and served meals, and made us feel like we were a true part of their community. And the organizations that sponsored this project—the Commission on the Social Status of Black Males, the Muncie Community Foundation, the Center for Middletown Studies, and the Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry and its Director, Joe Trimmer—made all of our work possible. The Virginia Ball Center, especially, is an extremely unique place for undergraduate research, one that encourages and values community-centered, collaboratively-conceived, and product-based learning. If you don't know about it, look it up on the web—<http://www.bsu.edu/vbc>—they've sponsored many, many undergraduate research projects like *The Other Side of Middletown*.

Importantly, this award also belongs to a truly amazing group of students, who in the course of one semester conducted over 150 hours of interviews, spent many more hours doing participant-observation and, more hours still, collaboratively writing with their consultants the entire second half of this ethnography. Indeed, this group of undergraduate students became deeply committed to collaborative methodologies. Three of those students are here tonight—Anne Elizabeth Kraemer (now a graduate student at the University of Kansas) and Eric Efaw and Carrie Kissel (both of whom are graduate students at American University). Anne, Eric, and Carrie: would you please stand?

I have to mention, too, AltaMira Press and its Director, Rosalie Roberston—some of the most extraordinary folks with whom I've ever worked. Rosalie became committed to the project

when it was only an idea—she and her staff read the original *Middletown*, talked to students about the writing process via conference calls, and even flew out from California to help the students conceptualize the final draft. AltaMira Press freelance editor, Detta Penna, of Penna Design & Production, did the same. Rosalie and Detta are also here: Rosalie and Detta, would you kindly stand as well?

In the end, well over 75 people were involved in this project—community leaders, faculty, students, and those at AltaMira Press—too many to list here. But I’d be remiss—quite remiss, actually—if I didn’t single out my wife and partner, folklorist and ethnographer Elizabeth Campbell, who also co-directed this project. To be sure, it wouldn’t have happened without her. I wish I could ask her to stand, but she’s at my sister’s wedding rehearsal dinner in Wilmington, North Carolina—where I’m headed on a redeye flight at the conclusion of tonight’s festivities. I should also mention Michelle Natasya Johnson here, to whom I am deeply indebted, and who served as the project’s graduate assistant, and along with Hurley, Beth, and myself, also co-directed the project. Several of my former colleagues at Ball State University deserve mention, too, especially those who helped the students navigate the challenges of the overall project, notably Michael Doyle, Bruce Geelhoed, Melinda Messineo, and Robert Nowatzki.

Outside the contours of the actual book project itself, several folks extended their continued moral support and encouragement for doing this kind of faculty-student-community collaborative ethnography: these include Jim Peacock and Glenn D. Hinson of UNC Chapel Hill; Ruth Selig of the Smithsonian Institution; Lee Baker of Duke University; Celeste Ray of the University of the South; John and Colleen Boyd, Mark Groover, Thalia Mulvihill, Arijit Sen, Walter Smith, and Chin-Sook Pak of Ball State University; Robert and Marsha Quinlan of Washington State University; Lee Papa of CUNY-Staten Island; Clyde Ellis of Elon University;

Yolanda Moses, who also wrote the book's Foreword, of UC-Riverside; and Ted Caplow, who wrote the book's Afterword, of the University of Virginia. I so much appreciate their support when so many wondered if a group of undergraduates could actually research, write, and publish an ethnography.

I'm not entirely sure I believed we could actually pull it off myself. So I have to say that this project *changed* me in a substantial way: it made me realize once and for all the incredible potentials for student research and writing—especially now, when most universities are fond of offering lip service to undergraduate research, but rarely are willing to put the required time, effort, and resources into doing this kind of community-centered, collaboratively-conceived, and product-based learning. That said, Hurley Goodall, the Muncie community, the Virginia Ball Center, Ball State University faculty and students allowed me to participate in and practice a very rare kind of engaged pedagogy. As I write in *The Other Side of Middletown*, “I can think of no more powerful way to practice and teach the life of the mind.”

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My thanks to those who nominated this project, the Margaret Mead Award Selection Committee, the Society for Applied Anthropology, and the American Anthropological Association. To AAA President Alan Goodman, SfAA President Donald Stull, Past SfAA President Linda Bennett, Executive Director Tom May, and the Board of Directors and Officers, I and all those who worked on *The Other Side of Middletown* thank you for this extraordinary honor.