

IV. Book Review

Is This Your Idea of Utopia?

by Daniel Platt

Tripping on Utopia: Margaret Mead, the Cold War, and the Troubled Birth of Psychedelic Science

by Benjamin Breen

New York, Grand Central Publishing, January 2024

Hardbound, 369 pp. with notes, \$30.00

Author Benjamin Breen has chosen, as the protagonists of this account, Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, two individuals who had gained some public recognition as scientists (principally as anthropologists, though they dabbled in other disciplines) and who shared a long-term relationship that included a period of marriage, as well as other, rather more complicated personal and professional interactions. Both of them, according to Breen, saw themselves as cultural pioneers who believed that science, loosely defined, along with LSD, could help in the creation of new cultural dynamics that might lessen the danger of war, as well as providing other things which they viewed as beneficial, such as a greater variety of sexual roles and relationships.

In pursuing these goals, they found themselves in a close working relationship with the CIA and private foundations who had their own agenda, less warm and fuzzy. These shadowy networks, which provided the funding, were clearly calling the shots.

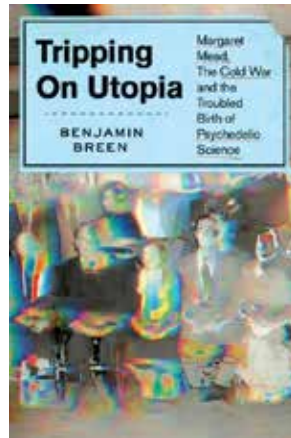
Fifty years ago, Helga Zepp-LaRouche, now *EIR*'s editor-in-chief, had an opportunity to study Margaret Mead in her natural habitat, at the UN's World Population Conference in Bucharest, Romania, in 1974. Years later, Zepp-LaRouche recalled that Mead:

... went into a disgusting and fundamentally racist portrayal of the population question. When I pointed this out in the discussion period, as well as the genocidal consequences it would have, if you were to deny the larger portion of the human species any access to development, a

similar explosion [similar to the response to Zepp-LaRouche's earlier question to John D. Rockefeller III at a different panel—ed.] occurred.

Half of the journalists present applauded wildly, coming over to me, shaking my hand and thanking me for my courage, while others raised their fists in the air. But then, waddling from the podium as fast as she could go, came Dame Margaret Mead, in an effort to hit me with the Isis stick that she carried around, as either a walking aid or a cult object—which one, was not clear to me.

—“[Population Control is a ‘Rockefeller Baby’](#),” by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, *EIR*, July 18, 1997



The MK-ULTRA Project

The MK-ULTRA project first came to public attention during the 1975 Church Committee hearings into abuses by the intelligence agencies. It has been presented in the popular press as CIA-directed research into the potential uses of LSD and similar drugs for interrogations or brainwashing, but as this book reveals, the real agenda was social engineering: the quest for a drug-fueled “utopia.” Benjamin Breen is not the first author to chronicle the Great Paradigm Shift, the process by which what was once known as the “counterculture” became the “culture.” But unlike some of the more titillating accounts which focus on the hippy-dippy excesses of the youth movement, this one examines the earlier, ostensibly scientific investigations that took place, intersecting the efforts by secretive government agencies to study and promote the uses of “psychedelic” drugs.

The historical background presented in the book is eye-opening; most people may assume that LSD became a “thing” around the time of the vaunted “Summer of Love” in 1967, but it had been available—and legal—for almost 30 years before then. During this period, a surprising number of government operatives and members of the social elite were enthusiastically

consuming the drug, and before that, many had sampled predecessor drugs such as mescaline and psilocybin, derived from natural sources in peyote cactus and certain mushrooms.

A central thesis in Breen's book is that:

Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson remained, at heart, representatives of the deeply idealistic moment in the history of science in which they came of age: the period in the late 1920s and early 1930s that witnessed a revolution in the scientific understandings of personality, culture and sexuality that has been likened to modernism in the arts and literature.

Breen may have at least an inkling of the fact that this "moment" was *engineered* by the intellectual courtiers of the British oligarchy, but he stops short of a full exploration of this. He reports that in the 1950s, the CIA, in addition to its LSD experiments, "anonymously bankrolled the launch of the *Paris Review*" and "an international touring exhibit of paintings by leading abstract artists." He fails to note the fact that this was done as part of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), another ambitious "paradigm-shifting" project which was designed to extirpate idea-rich classical arts and supplant them with modernism: irrational, Dionysian "special effects" (see *EIR*, June 25, 2004, "[The Congress for Cultural Freedom: Making the Post-war World Safe for Fascist *Kulturkampf*.](#)")

Publishing mogul Henry Luce (*Time*, *Life*, *Fortune*, *Sports Illustrated*), an important collaborator in the CCF project, shows up in Breen's book, along with his wife, the congresswoman and diplomat Clare Booth Luce, because both became ardent promoters of LSD in the late 1950s. Other well-known personalities who wound up in the CIA's orbit included "beat" poet Allen Ginsberg; psychologist/philosopher Erich Fromm; drug-culture "yell kings" Timothy Leary ("eighty percent of the decisions I made were suggested to me by CIA people") and Richard Alpert (aka Baba Ram Dass); popular novelist Ken Kesey; and movie star Cary Grant.

Mead and Bateson

Regardless of how they may have imagined their role, Mead and Bateson were clearly not the master-

minds of this grand experiment. Breen's book highlights the fact that if they were bright, they were also immature, neurotic, and confused, as demonstrated by the vicissitudes of their many attempts at marriage and romantic relationships, by Mead's projection of her sexual fantasies upon hapless Samoans, or Bateson's madcap experiments with feeding LSD to dolphins (which apparently made them suicidal). So, who was actually in charge?

Breen alludes to some individuals who were a bit higher up the chain of command. He quotes Aldous Huxley, writing to George Orwell: "I believe that the world's leaders will discover that infant conditioning and narcohypnosis are more efficient, as instruments of government, than clubs and prisons."



Library of Congress

Margaret Mead and her husband Gregory Bateson are shown doing field research in Papua, New Guinea in 1938.

And in a 1961 speech, Huxley "linked Margaret Mead's anthropological research to his hopes for a future in which psychedelic drugs might become integrated into the education system..." On the other hand, nowhere in the book is there a mention of the great nerve center of psychological and cultural manipulation, the London Tavistock Institute, despite the fact that Tavistock has sponsored an Annual Gregory Bateson Memorial Lecture.

Mead and Bateson were among the earliest proponents of what is now called environmentalism. Bateson may have been the first to publicly warn, at the 1967 "Dialectics of Liberation" conference in London, of a purported threat posed by "climate change." In 1975, Mead made a remarkable speech at a conference in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, entitled "The Atmosphere: Endangered and Endangering," in which she called upon the participants to "start building a system

of artificial but effective warnings,” imbued with “plausibility,” but most importantly, “as free as possible from internal disagreements that can be exploited by political interests” (see *EIR*, June 8, 2007, “[1975 ‘Endangered Atmosphere’ Conference: Where the Global Warming Hoax Was Born.](#)”) As *EIR* has documented for years, this artificially created crisis provides the oligarchy with leverage to suppress development and reduce population, moving them closer to their cherished Malthusian goal of a static, bucolic, more easily managed and feudal world.

The author asserts that Mead and Bateson were opponents of colonialism. And they themselves may have imagined that to be the case. But the “social science” of anthropology has been a key feature of how the British have administered their empire, by profiling and manipulating indigenous populations in an effort to stifle the universal human impulse for development that makes them difficult to control and exploit. Bateson was not oblivious to this fact; he wrote to Artificial Intelligence (AI) pioneer Norbert Wiener in the 1950s, warning of “the colonial administrator who uses anthropological insights to maintain law and order in a native population.”

Speaking of AI, this book amply documents the intimate connection between those who were researching it, and the people promoting psychedelic drugs. The virtues of both were extolled by Stewart Brand, the full-time public relations man for the paradigm shift. Both initiatives were funded by the same government agencies and oligarchical foundations.

EIR founder Lyndon LaRouche, at the very outset of his career as an opponent of oligarchy, picked a fight with Norbert Wiener and his associate John von Neumann over the issue of AI, insisting that computers, which are inherently limited to logical reformulations of existing knowledge, are incapable of the revolutionary acts of creative discovery which are the defining characteristic of humanity. The AI movement has been, in many ways, an effort to impose computer-like *restrictions* on human thought, to stifle creativity. Mead and Bateson imagined



EIRNS
Helga Zepp-LaRouche founded the Club of Life in 1982 against the tidal wave of Malthusian operations in which the work of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson was exemplary.

that psychedelics could be used to “reprogram” the human mind to eliminate undesirable impulses.

Political Effects

Although psychedelics have not proven to be effective in reprogramming individual minds, they have played an important role in reprogramming the culture. The oligarchy feared that the success of the American Civil Rights Movement might lead to it making common cause with the nascent anti-colonial movement in the Global South. However, the rise of the LSD-assisted “hippie” movement in the late 1960s coincided with the demise of the Civil Rights movement, as young people turned away from social conscience and political organizing in favor of “exploring inner space.” Mead was cognizant of this significant effect

of psychedelics, warning that they can make the user “solipsistic” and overly inwardly focused. Breen also reports on research which indicates that psychedelics disrupt the areas of the brain related to planning for the future, encouraging people to abandon the idea of progress and “live for today.”

Baby Boomers who jumped with all four feet into the counterculture during the 1970s thought that they were departing the stuffy and strait-laced America of the 1950s, with its dangerous flirtation with nuclear war, and entering a new, footloose and liberated world of nonconformity, hedonism, and spirituality. What they got instead was a corrupt and illiterate America engaged in murderous neocon bullying of the rest of the world, with an epidemic of homelessness and weekly mass shootings at home—and an even greater danger of nuclear war.

Recommended reading:

“[From Cybernetics to Littleton: Techniques of Mind Control](#),” *EIR*, May 5, 2000.

“[Drugs, sex, cybernetics, and the Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation](#),” *EIR*, July 2, 1999.

“[Psychedelics, Climate Change & How the British Wage War](#),” *EIR*, Sept. 7, 2019.

“[Information Society: A Doomed Empire of Evil](#),” *EIR*, Apr. 13, 2000.