

THE CENTURY'S GREATEST MINDS

TIME

100



AP/KEystone—FABRICE COFFRINI

AROUND THE WORLD!

THE GREATEST SCIENTISTS & THINKERS OF THE CENTURY

The fourth in our series on the
100 most influential people

Bill Gates on **THE WRIGHT BROTHERS**

David Ho on **ALEXANDER FLEMING**

Richard Rhodes on **ENRICO FERMI**

Peter Matthiessen on **RACHEL CARSON**

Donald Johanson on **THE LEAKEYS**

Wilfrid Sheed on **JONAS SALK**

Robert Reich on **JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES**



1981. We were the Young Turks of anthropology in those days, staunchly defending our interpretations of human evolution. Perhaps now, with the mellowing of age, it is time to break the silence.

Much like his father, Richard has strong opinions and is often hasty to make pronouncements about his discoveries. This was especially true when he presented, in 1972, a *Homo* skull that he believed was 2.9 million years old. Adhering to his father's belief in very early *Homo*, this find, older than all *Australopithecus* fossils then known, was a welcome and stunning endorsement of Louis' views. Louis and Richard had been feuding over museum matters, and this discovery brought them together again in a final meeting shortly before Louis died. He spent his last days comforted by the knowledge that he had been proved correct. Since then, however, the skull has been correctly dated to 1.8 million years; despite Louis and Richard's objections, most anthropologists today believe *Australopithecus* is indeed one of our ancestors.

Richard, meanwhile, continued his rise to prominence. Fossil finds such as the astonishingly complete 1.6 million-year-old skeleton of an African *Homo erectus* (*Homo ergaster* to some) and the Black Skull have added immeasurably to our knowledge of human origins. His career benefited from best-selling books, a television series on human evolution and popular lecture tours.

Paleoanthropology has not been his only passion, however. He will probably be best remembered in Africa for founding an opposition political party in Kenya in 1995, after which he suffered public humiliation, including being beaten with leather whips. But Richard has proved astonishingly resilient. Even after a life-saving kidney transplant in 1979 (a gift from his estranged brother Philip) and the partial loss of both legs in a 1993 plane crash, he continues to exude confidence.

In 1989 President Daniel arap Moi appointed Richard head of what is now the Kenya Wildlife Service. Richard raised hundreds of millions of dollars and revamped Kenya's approach to wildlife conservation, heavily arming antipoaching units

MARGARET MEAD

The century's foremost woman anthropologist, Margaret Mead was an American icon. On dozens of field trips to study the ways of primitive societies, she found evidence to support her strong belief that cultural conditioning, not genetics, molded human behavior. That theme was struck most forcefully in Mead's 1928 classic, *Coming of Age in Samoa*. It described an idyllic pre-industrial society, free of sexual restraint and devoid of violence, guilt and anger. Her portrait of free-loving primitives shocked contemporaries and inspired generations of college students—especially during the 1960s sexual revolution. But it may have been too good to be true. While few question Mead's brilliance or integrity, subsequent research showed that Samoan society is no more or less uptight than any other. It seems Mead accepted as fact tribal gossip embellished by adolescent Samoan girls happy to tell the visiting scientist what she wanted to hear.

—By Leon Jaroff



and instituting a controversial edict permitting the shooting of poachers on sight. He resigned in 1994 amid politically motivated accusations of corruption, racism and mismanagement—only to be reinstated by Moi 4½ years later.

Nevertheless, the Leakeys will forever be synonymous with paleoanthropology and even today show all signs of being alive, well and contributing productively to the

field. Richard's wife Meave, a trained zoologist, and their eldest daughter Louise are currently leading teams to northern Kenya, where hominids in excess of 4 million years old are being found. The stage is set for the first family of anthropology to continue well into the next century.

Donald C. Johanson is director of the Institute of Human Origins at Arizona State University

WHERE ANTHROPOLOGY MEETS PSYCHOLOGY

At mid-century, anthropology textbooks painted a simple picture of the plight of our ancestors on the African savanna: them against the world. Lions menaced and starvation loomed. This hostile environment was considered the driving force behind human evolution. It put a premium on inventing tools and tricks for finding food and not becoming food. So large brains evolved.

During the 1960s and early '70s, three biologists—William Hamilton, George Williams and Robert Trivers—ushered in a new view of evolution that would complicate this story line. Among its messages: for a highly social species, it isn't just a jungle out there; it's a jungle in here. Society is deeply, if often inconspicuously, competitive. Evolution favored traits that helped our ancestors get more genes passed on than their neighbors got. People's brains are designed less to deal with lions than to deal with other people's brains.

Oddly, Darwinian success in a dog-eat-dog social world turns out to involve lots of mushy feelings. Swoons of romance, love of kin, devotion to friends and pity for the needy could be useful tools in the social jungle. Even conscience and the sense of justice are now said to have roots in our genes.

That's the good news. The bad news is that a subtle, often unconscious, bias toward ourselves, our

kin and our friends can narrow altruism and color moral judgments. "Deception and hypocrisy are very human devices for conducting the complex daily business of social life," wrote Edward O. Wilson in *Sociobiology* (1975), which brought the new paradigm to the world's attention.

Wilson's book, though mainly about nonhuman animals, made enough such pronouncements to get him vilified as a "biological determinist" and a menace to society. While he was speaking at a scientific conference, a protester called him "all wet" and dumped water on him.

It didn't work. Today the new, improved version of human sociobiology—evolutionary psychology—is flourishing. Such scholars as Leda Cosmides, John Tooby and Steven Pinker (author of *How the Mind Works*) have begun to explain human language, logic and perception in Darwinian terms.

You know a discipline has arrived when its detractors start depicting themselves as radicals assaulting the intellectual status quo. This fall John Horgan (*The End of Science*) will come out with a book that, according to its publisher's catalog, "boldly contradicts all standard views" of psychology, "including those of Steven Pinker and E.O. Wilson." Ah, vindication at last.

—By Robert Wright



ILLUSTRATION FOR TIME BY HUNGRY DOG STUDIO