

A 20th Century American Anthropologist and 'First Woman': The Life and Work of Cora Du Bois

Susan C. Seymour

Pitzer College

2021

POUR CITER CET ARTICLE

Seymour, Susan C., 2021. "A 20th Century American Anthropologist and 'First Woman': The Life and Work of Cora Du Bois", in *Bérose - Encyclopédie internationale des histoires de l'anthropologie*, Paris.

URL Bérose : article2365.html

Publication Bérose : ISSN 2648-2770

© UMR9022 Héritages (CY Cergy Paris Université, CNRS, Ministère de la culture)/DIRI, Direction générale des patrimoines et de l'architecture du Ministère de la culture. (Tous droits réservés).

Votre utilisation de cet article présuppose votre acceptation des conditions d'utilisation des contenus du site de Bérose (www.berose.fr), accessibles [ici](#).

Consulté le 30 juin 2022 à 09h03min

Introduction

Cora Du Bois (1903-1991) was an American anthropologist whose life spanned much of the twentieth century and whose professional career reflects major developments in the history of that discipline. In addition, Du Bois was a twentieth-century "first woman", one of the few women of her generation to succeed in having a career that included both university teaching and research but also government service. We tend to associate Margaret Mead with the public face of American anthropology during much of the twentieth century and assume that the discipline was welcoming to women. It was not. Although in the first half of the century women were admitted into certain graduate programmes, few were able to obtain jobs commensurate with their degrees. This included Margaret Mead, who, unlike Du Bois, never had a full-time academic appointment.

I shall begin with a brief summary of Du Bois's childhood and youth and then proceed through the four phases of her professional life. [1] While Du Bois's life began as a lonely and awkward girl who liked being a distant observer of mankind, she matured into a formidable woman whose intellect, curiosity and presence took her on a remarkable journey – a journey that culminated with an appointment at Harvard University where she became the first woman to receive a tenured professorship – the Zemurray-Stone-Radcliffe chair in the departments of anthropology and social relations.

Early Life

Cora Alice Du Bois was born on October 26, 1903 in Brooklyn, New York. She was the daughter and second child of Jean Jules Philippe Du Bois, a Swiss entrepreneur, and Gertrude Martha Schreiber, a first-generation German American. When she was four, the Du Boises moved to St. Quentin, France, where Cora's father managed a chemical factory and she attended French schools. French, she reported, was her first language, although she grew up in a multilingual household. Her parents were fluent in English, French and German.

Du Bois's early years were lonely. The other French children were unfriendly and her older brother had discipline problems that absorbed much of her mother's attention. Nonetheless, Du Bois flourished academically and outperformed her problematic brother. When, in 1911, early signs of World War I forced her family to return to the United States, she had to learn English and repeat grades in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, where her father worked for a different chemical company. These abrupt transitions in cultures, languages and schools, combined with her mother's preoccupation with a problematic older brother, contributed to Du Bois's early emotional distancing from others. She became, she reported, "a distant observer of human affairs" [2] – a person who focused on doing well in school and engaging in outdoor sports, mostly with boys. If her brother was going to be the "bad" child, then she would try to be the "good" child. [3] Keeping a journal and writing poetry became emotional outlets for Du Bois during her school years and throughout much of her life.

In 1921, when Du Bois completed Perth Amboy High School at age eighteen, her parents sent her abroad to visit Swiss relatives in Germany and Switzerland. Serendipitously, they hired Virginia Wittens, a French college instructor and a covert lesbian, to accompany her on that voyage, and she helped Du Bois come to terms with her own emerging lesbian identity. Her trip abroad, however, ended abruptly when her father, the parent to whom she felt closest, died of throat cancer, and she returned home to spend a year attending her distraught mother. By then Du Bois's mother had thrown her older brother out of the house and told him never to return.

Du Bois's parents had not anticipated higher education for their daughter, but in 1923 Du Bois enrolled at Barnard College – a women's college located next to Columbia University in New York City – to which she could commute by train from home. Three years later, when her mother remarried, Du Bois received an inheritance from her father that enabled her to reside on campus and, in 1927, complete a bachelor's degree with a major in history.

In her senior year at Barnard, at the advice of her history advisor, Du Bois enrolled in an anthropology course that changed her life. It was a year-long course co-taught by Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict, with Margaret Mead serving as teaching assistant. These three are now iconic figures in the history of American anthropology. Boas, in 1927, was sixty-nine and a dominant figure in American anthropology. He had trained many of the next generation of significant anthropologists, including Alfred Kroeber and Robert Lowie, with whom Du Bois

would study in graduate school. By contrast, Benedict had only recently completed a PhD under Boas and was holding a series of one-year appointments as a lecturer at Columbia and Barnard. Mead, during Du Bois's senior year, had recently returned from her first fieldwork in Samoa and, with Boas's efforts, had an appointment at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, where she would remain for the course of her career. Thus, Du Bois had her first exposure to anthropology with three of the great figures in the field, two of whom were women. Benedict, Du Bois would gradually learn, was also a lesbian. [4]

"I was snagged", Du Bois reported about the course, which had a broad scope and covered history, archaeology, physical anthropology, cultural areas of the world, social organization, religion, and linguistics. [5] In that course she discovered a vision of the human condition that was not the culture-bound history to which she had been exposed, and she was particularly fascinated by Benedict, whom she found an alluring figure. Despite Benedict's odd clothing and problematic stutter, Du Bois found her lectures "fascinating" and "electrifying". [6] At the time, Benedict was thinking about issues that she would incorporate into her 1934 bestselling book, *Patterns of Culture*, which included examining sexuality and deviance in different cultural contexts. To Du Bois, these were both intellectually intriguing and personally meaningful. In retrospect, Du Bois wrote, "I remember only that even as a history major, the range of human thought and behavior of which [Benedict] spoke with ethnographic intimacy and directness (particularly in respect to sexual behavior) *shook* that rather smug sense of knowing just about everything which is often so characteristic of the bright college senior". [7]

Before settling on a career in anthropology, however, in 1928, Du Bois completed a master's degree in history at Columbia. Although Boas tried to woo her into Columbia's department of anthropology for her PhD work, she chose to go elsewhere. She sought advice from Benedict, who recommended studying with Kroeber and Lowie at the University of California, Berkeley (UCB). Du Bois did not like Boas's proposed dissertation topic for her, a study of the medieval contacts between Western Europe and East African societies, and she did not want to become one of his female "handmaidens" and "emotional daughters". So she sent letters to Kroeber and Lowie and received cordial replies from both of them, inviting her into their anthropology graduate programme.

Graduate Training and Post-Doctoral Research

In January 1929, Du Bois crossed the U.S. continent by train and joined the Berkeley graduate programme in anthropology. There she joined a small group of students who worked under the close tutelage of Alfred Kroeber, the chair of the department, and Robert Lowie, the second in command. [8] Kroeber was a somewhat distant and authoritarian figure, whereas Lowie was an avuncular person who enjoyed socializing with graduate students. Du Bois found Lowie "the most understanding, non-hortatory kind of elder", unlike "Papa Kroeber" who "could be pretty mean if he wanted to and very strict". [9]

Du Bois quickly learned that both Kroeber and Lowie were committed to “the recording of the rapidly disappearing American Indian tribal life as both a primary duty and the basic training device of a young anthropologist. We were all expected to go out and do an ethnographic monograph”. [10] Following her first semester of course work in the spring of 1929, Du Bois approached her mentors about doing summer fieldwork. Kroeber recommended that she and fellow student Dorothy Demetracopoulou (Lee), a linguistically oriented anthropology student, try to work with the Wintu Indians of Northern California who lived near Mt. Shasta. Du Bois bought a second-hand car, and together they headed north and had a successful summer making contact with numerous Wintu. Together and separately, they published several monographs about the Wintu (Du Bois 1935, Du Bois and Demetracopoulou 1931, 1932).

What Du Bois found most interesting was several Wintu shamanic rites that she was privileged to attend. These rites, which involved individuals entering altered states of consciousness, with frenetic dancing and singing, intrigued her. In a letter home, Du Bois wrote, “Just now I am on the trail of the psychology of shamanism, and since they themselves suggested the similarities between shamanistic trances, etc., and those which they received in their Pentecostal faith, we accompanied them last night to Redding [a small town in Northern California] to observe Holy Rollers in action”. [11] At the time, Christian missionaries were trying to convert the Wintu to a new Pentecostal faith and set of practices.

During this first piece of fieldwork, Du Bois had found a theoretical orientation that would dominate the next stage of her career – studying the psychological characteristics of seemingly aberrant individuals and their fit within society. And although she returned to the Wintu several times for further ethnographic research, she was required to write a library-based dissertation entitled “Girls’ Adolescent Rites in the New World” to qualify for a PhD. In addition, there were five days of written examinations and an oral exam that Kroeber called “unquestionably one of the most brilliant I have ever attended”. [12]

Du Bois completed the PhD in the fall of 1932, during the nadir of the Depression, which meant there were few jobs, especially for women. So she remained in Berkeley as a research associate with a small salary that Kroeber offered her. She told Kroeber that she was bored with “salvage ethnography” and wanted to investigate the 1870 Ghost Dance movement, a revivalist cult that had spread from the Northern Paiutes of Nevada to other groups of Indians in California, Nevada, and Oregon and that preceded the better-known 1890 Ghost Dance that spread to the Great Plains and culminated in the Wounded Knee massacre. [13] Kroeber concurred with that idea, so Du Bois spent the next several years tracking evidence of this new set of religious beliefs and practices, which resulted in two publications: a short monograph entitled *The Feather Cult of the Middle Columbia* (1938), and a book-length monograph, *The 1870 Ghost Dance* (1939). Both publications addressed efforts by Native Americans to regain some authority, through the founding of messianic religions that combined native beliefs and practices with the new Christian ones to which they were being introduced, in an effort to confront the impact of Euro-Americans and to make inevitable

adjustments to the new dominant society. In both works Du Bois used personal documents, such as life histories, to try to communicate the motivations underlying individual and group conversions to one messianic religion or another and to document how specific individuals became prophets and helped to spread particular belief systems and practices. Her scholarly contributions were twofold: the historical reconstruction of these movements and her psychological insights into them.

Culture and Personality

Wanting to pursue her interest in the psychodynamics of culture, Du Bois applied for and in 1935 was awarded a one-year National Research Council (NRC) fellowship for her proposal, “Personality Types in Shamanism”. This enabled her to move to Boston, Massachusetts and observe western doctors treating “mentally ill” patients at the Boston Psychopathic Hospital. She also worked with Harvard psychologist, Henry A. Murray, at the Harvard Psychological Clinic in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her NRC mentor was the Yale anthropologist and linguist, Edward Sapir. Together with Sapir, Ruth Benedict, and Margaret Mead, Du Bois would become a pioneer in the Culture and Personality movement within American anthropology – what Robert A. LeVine has called “arguably one of the most exciting intellectual explorations launched by American social science in the 20th century”. [14]

Whereas the first six months of Du Bois’s NRC fellowship were spent in Boston, the second six months were spent in New York City. In January 1936, the psychoanalyst Abram Kardiner invited her to collaborate with him in teaching a seminar at the New York Psychoanalytic Society. Together, they would expose young psychiatrists to cultural variations that affected personality development. Du Bois was excited by this opportunity and sought and received Sapir’s approval to make the move from Boston to New York City. This began a two-year collaboration with Kardiner as they used cross-cultural ethnographic materials to critique Freudian theory, in which most psychiatrists were steeped, and developed an alternative theoretical model for understanding the relationship of culture to personality. [15] The results of that collaboration were twofold: Kardiner’s book, *The Individual and His Society: The Psychodynamics of Primitive Social Organization* (1939) and Du Bois’s *The People of Alor: A Social Psychological Study of an East Indian Island* (1944). The latter cemented Du Bois’s reputation as a pioneer in psychological anthropology and as an accomplished anthropologist.

After two years of the Kardiner-Du Bois seminar, Du Bois convinced Kardiner that they had talked themselves out and that new fieldwork was required to test their hypotheses about the relationship of personality structures to different sociocultural ones. Accordingly, she began seeking financial assistance and a remote site for such research. In the fall of 1937 she set off for two years of fieldwork on the remote island of Alor, in the Netherlands East Indies (Indonesia). Alor was a small illiterate society of former headhunters who had never been studied and whose language was unknown to scholars and Dutch colonialists.

It took Du Bois several months of sea voyages to arrive at Kalabahi, Alor’s only port town,

and then to identify a remote mountain village, away from coastal Dutch influences, in which to do her research. She selected a cluster of villages, named Atimelang, situated in a mountainous region of the island, at a six-hour distance by horseback from Kalabahi. The local radjah and Dutch officials were reluctant to have her live alone there, especially because twenty years earlier these villagers had been involved in the murder of the radjah's uncle, but Du Bois was persuasive. She established a home in Atimelang and began recording and learning the Alorese language, which she called Abui, the word the villagers used to designate themselves as opposed to coastal people. Setting up a daily "clinic" where she could treat villagers for infections, ulcers, and other minor health problems helped her establish rapport in the village.

As Du Bois reported in the preface to *The People of Alor*, "Daily I bathed infections, dispensed quinine or castor oil or aspirin, and gradually even the women and children were sufficiently used to my touch to forgive me the size of my body, the whiteness of my skin, and the blue eyes, which looked so frighteningly blind to them. That my nose was long and sharp was, however, to the very end of my stay, a never-ending source of merriment". And she concluded her introductory reflections with these words: "It is therefore to those friends in Alor, to their shrewd but tolerant acceptance of my peculiarities and to their vigorous engrossment in their own affairs that any contributions which this volume may make to an understanding of the varieties of human character are primarily due". [16] The Alorese came to view Du Bois as a *nala kang* ("sky being" or "Good Being"), and she has attained a kind of cult status among the descendants of the people who knew her in the 1930s. [17]

What were some of the contributions that Du Bois's research in Atimelang, Alor made to psychological anthropology? First, she amassed an extraordinary amount of ethnographic data, together with such psychological data as in-depth observations of child-rearing and child development; autobiographies elicited from four men and four women, each averaging more than fifteen hours of interview time; Porteus Maze tests [18] administered to fifty-four men and women; word association tests given to thirty-six women and men; children's drawings collected from fifty-five girls and boys; and finally, Rorschach projection tests [19] administered to thirty-seven men and women. At the time, it was the largest set of such psychological data ever collected from one small, non-Western society. These materials then allowed her, together with the assistance of Kardiner and some other psychological specialists, to evaluate Kardiner's theoretical model of the relationship of culture to personality.

Kardiner had postulated that societies had two sets of cultural institutions. The "primary" ones, such as the subsistence system (e.g., procuring, sharing, and preparing food) and the family and kinship system (e.g., the way in which people handled marriage, reproduction, and the nurturing and socializing of children) served the basic needs and drives of a community of individuals. The "secondary" ones were more expressive institutions such as theories of disease and healing practices, religious beliefs and ritual practices, myths, folktales, and so on. These two parts of the sociocultural system, he hypothesized, were

integrated by the “basic personality structure” of a society – i.e., the shared individual personality characteristics that developed in response to the “primary” cultural institutions and created conditions of anxiety, repression, and conflict that were expressed through “secondary” institutions.

The Alorese data generally supported this theoretical model. In Alor, for example, the sexual division of labour – women were the primary food producers – combined with no reliable caretaking system for infants and young children while mothers were away gardening (primary institutions), produced both hunger and expressions of frustration and anger in children. These circumstances, Du Bois argued, produced in children deep feelings of insecurity and distrust of others that characterized their adult personalities. Alorese adults, she discovered, were emotionally brittle and easily provoked to anger, which affected the stability of marriages. Feelings of distrust were then projected onto the supernatural world, which they believed to be inhabited mostly by unreliable spirit – harbingers of ill health, hunger, and death that had to be placated by regular sacrifices of food (secondary institutions).

Du Bois refined Kardiner’s concept of “basic personality”. She preferred to use the term *modal personality*, a more statistical concept that recognized individual variability in the psychological make-up of members of any given sociocultural group and that tried to prevent any attempt “to reduce individuals to a level of uniformity” – one of Du Bois’s *bêtes noires* ever since her graduate days. [20]

World War II and the Office of Strategic Services

Du Bois was catapulted into the third phase of her professional life with the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 and the entry of the United States into World War II and the implementation of the country’s first international intelligence system – the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). By then an acknowledged Southeast Asian scholar, Du Bois was quickly recruited into the research and analysis (R & A) branch of the OSS in Washington, D.C. There, she was surrounded by such luminaries as William Langer (director of the R & A and eminent Harvard historian), Edwin O. Reishauer (ambassador to Japan in the 1960s and director of the Harvard-Yenching Institute), John King Fairbank (one of the leading historians of China and a Harvard professor), Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. (Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and special assistant to President John F. Kennedy), and Walt W. Rostow (economist and political analyst who served as special assistant for national security to President Lyndon B. Johnson), just to name a few. The OSS was a training ground for future statesmen.

Du Bois was one of the few women to be invited into this august group. Most women who joined the OSS held clerical jobs. Unlike Du Bois, they never went overseas or had administrative positions. There were, however, a handful of women, like Du Bois, who had regional and linguistic expertise that made them valuable for research work or an occasional

spy operation. Du Bois, who had learned both Dutch and Malay for her Alor research, was recruited as a Southeast Asia expert although her experience was pretty much limited to a remote island in the Dutch East Indies. She was, however, a founding member of the East Indies Institute of America, Inc., an interdisciplinary organization established in 1941 to promote the study of Southeast Asian history and cultures. The U.S., at the time, had few Southeast Asian scholars.

After a year and a half of writing confidential reports in Washington, D.C. and having no idea what became of them, Du Bois requested a transfer to the Southeast Asia Command (SEAC) in India, where she would be closer to the centre of action. The United States and Great Britain had a cooperative intelligence operation there led by Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, the British supreme commander for military forces and intelligence in South and Southeast Asia. The OSS became an American branch of this joint intelligence operation. Du Bois's transfer was ultimately granted and to make a long story short, she became first the Acting Chief and then the Chief of SEAC's Research and Analysis branch based in Kandy, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) – the only woman to achieve such a position in the OSS. In a letter home, Du Bois wrote, "For a woman in a G.I. world I've done very well. And people have been very generous about the sex-liability. I'm not being funny about that. It is very real. But I've tried not to embarrass them for their generosity. Harry the Chief calls me General Patton. There is truth in it and I am undoubtedly my mother's daughter". [21]

Du Bois oversaw the acquisition of detailed intelligence for Burma, Malaya, Thailand, Indochina, the Andaman Islands, Sumatra, and Indonesia—all parts of the Southeast Asia war theatre where anti-Japanese military operations were being contemplated and implemented. Over 120 such operations occurred during Du Bois's tenure as R & A chief for SEAC. The one she was most proud of was the "Free Thailand" effort for which, after the war, the Thai government awarded her the Order of the Crown of Thailand, third class, and the Santimala (Peace) Medal.

Du Bois became recognized for her acerbic cables to her bosses in Washington, D.C. She was never a person to mince words, and she believed in carefully constructed, clear writing, both as an OSS officer and later as a professor. In her communications, Du Bois kept trying to make Washington aware of the importance of Southeast Asia both during the war and in the future. Embedded in one of her cables was the following: "It may also be an impertinence to tell you that this area is the largest unexploited colonial region of the Far East and therefore, a potential bone of contention in the future". [22] These words were, it turns out, prophetic.

In Kandy, Du Bois was surrounded by an interesting set of people – several notable anthropologists, Gregory Bateson, David Mandelbaum, and Weston La Barre; the ornithologist, Sidney Dillon Ripley; and the future chef, Julia McWilliams (Child) and Paul Child, who became Julia's husband after the war. In letters home, Du Bois always referred to Julia McWilliams as "Tall Julia". It was here that she also met her future partner, Jeanne Taylor.

In 1946, Du Bois was awarded the Exceptional Civilian Award, the highest award granted by the secretary of the army to army civilian personnel. By then, she had joined the State Department, Office of Intelligence, as chief of the Southeast Asia branch of the division of research for the Far East. She was committed to the idea that the U.S. should build a staff of Southeast Asian experts to help oversee the transition of that part of the world from European colonialism to post-war independence. Unfortunately, most of her efforts fell on deaf ears, and the U.S. became enmeshed in a long and brutal war in Vietnam, the former French colony of Indochina. Du Bois kept trying to explain to American State Department officials that the unrest in different parts of Southeast Asia was the result of nationalist movements, *not* communist ones. And in a series of public lectures, given at Smith College in 1947, she tried to educate the public about the history and diversity of Southeast Asia, the differential effects of Western colonialism, and the forces that were reshaping this region of the world. Her lectures were published as *Social Forces in Southeast Asia* (1949).

Washington, however, was preoccupied with rebuilding Western Europe and with efforts to contain the Soviet Union during this Cold War period. Meanwhile, anti-communist paranoia reigned in Washington, and Senator Joseph McCarthy began publicly accusing numerous State Department officials, and many others, as spies and communist sympathizers. Du Bois was on his list of targets, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), under the authority of J. Edgar Hoover, began investigating her and her partner, Jeanne Taylor. Taylor was interrogated and fired from her government job whereas the FBI would investigate Du Bois for some fifteen years without finding evidence against her. But it was an unsettling campaign of intimidation.

These experiences, together with a loyalty oath programme required of all government servants, motivated Du Bois to consider returning to academe. In 1950, when she was offered a position in anthropology at UC Berkeley to replace her graduate mentor, Robert Lowie, she accepted it. She was to become the department's first woman professor. However, she postponed her start there in order to serve as a social science consultant to the World Health Organization for a year, a position she had already accepted. In 1951, when she received her University of California contract, it contained a loyalty oath with a newly instituted anti-communist clause. After considered deliberation, she refused to sign the loyalty oath and turned down her dream job. In a powerful letter to then UC president, Robert G. Sproul, she explained her reasoning, using her first-hand knowledge of the deleterious effects of loyalty oaths that government employees were forced to sign in Washington, D. C. [23]

While Du Bois's decision was principled and courageous, she had no other job to fall back on. Fortunately, the Institute of International Education (IIE), a non-profit organization in Washington, D.C. that sponsored international exchanges of students and faculty, offered her a research position. One of her IIE projects resulted in her book, *Foreign Students and Higher Education in the United States* (1956). But from 1951 to 1954, Du Bois was essentially marking time, waiting for a suitable academic job to materialize.

Harvard's "First Woman"

In 1954, Cora Du Bois became Harvard University's first tenured female professor in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. She held the Zemurray-Stone Radcliffe professorship with a joint appointment in the departments of anthropology and social relations. She was about to accept a position at Columbia University when her anthropology colleague at Harvard, Clyde Kluckhohn, phoned and asked her to wait. He knew that Du Bois was on a short list of women being considered for this special Harvard professorship that had been created in collaboration with Radcliffe College, a women's college served by Harvard faculty. It was an extraordinary appointment that served as the fourth phase of Du Bois's professional life.

While Du Bois was accustomed to being one of few women in the OSS and the State Department, the role of "first woman" was new to her. For instance, Harvard's department of anthropology, housed in the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, had operated as a kind of "male club" for nearly a century. Male faculty had reigned free of any female counterparts. Du Bois was given an office on the fourth floor, at the back of the museum, where she was physically removed from other faculty except when she descended to the basement, to a faculty lounge where one was permitted to smoke. Furnished with comfortable leather-upholstered chairs, the smoking room contributed to the male club atmosphere of the museum. Furthermore, she soon learned that Harvard's all-male Faculty Club required that she enter through a side door and take her meals in a separate dining room, thus preserving the all-male ambience of the main dining room.

Du Bois never complained about these kinds of factors and viewed her male colleagues as generally cordial and welcoming. However, she had entered a somewhat hostile environment, which is reflected in the gossip and joking that some former graduate students remember from that period. For example, people said jokingly, "It was better to have Du Bois, who only chews carpet tacks for breakfast, than Mead, who chews railroad spikes". The reference, of course, was to Margaret Mead, another powerful woman anthropologist. The joke, however, used a piranha-type metaphor that suggested women were dangerous. As one of her former students, Laura Nader, put it, "A first woman is never forgiven". [24] Most graduate students, however, simply viewed Du Bois – with her upright posture, deep voice, and commanding presence – as *formidable*, using the French pronunciation. Some students were afraid of her; others found her to be a kind of guardian angel, someone who took students who did not fit well into the anthropology programme under her wing. From the fall of 1954 into the early 1970s – after her retirement from Harvard – Du Bois mentored a large and diverse group of students.

Despite the fame that *The People of Alor* had brought her, Du Bois did not offer courses in psychological anthropology at Harvard. Instead she developed in-depth courses about India, Southeast Asia, and social change. Her years in the OSS and the State Department had changed her orientation from the study of small, remote societies to one focused on emerging nations and processes of rapid change and "modernization". During the 1960s and '70s, her research focus became India.

In 1961, Du Bois travelled to India to identify a locus for examining post-World War II, post-independence processes of sociocultural change in that large, complex nation. She selected Bhubaneswar, Odisha for a longitudinal study that would involve both Indian and American graduate students over the course of some fifteen years. Why Bhubaneswar? It was a “double town” – a small Hindu temple town in eastern India that had recently become the site for a new capital city of the state of Odisha. Odisha, with its own language and cultural traditions, had become a state following India’s independence from Great Britain and its political reorganization. For Du Bois, Bhubaneswar provided a dynamic locus for examining change – the impact of building a planned city of administrative (the “New Capital”) next door to an ancient temple town (the “Old Town”) with two different socio-political hierarchies juxtaposed. In the Old Town, there was a caste hierarchy headed by Brahmin priests who controlled a major Hindu temple complex, affiliated ashrams, and farmland, whereas in the New Capital, there was a new hierarchy of government officials who staffed and managed the newly established state government. In addition, there were a set of radjahs (princely rulers under the British) who still had some political influence, five villages that were gradually being incorporated into the city, and all the people and institutions required to build and maintain a new state capital. Bhubaneswar, therefore, provided an ideal microcosm for examining many of the forces of change and transformation that were occurring nationally as India became a new democratic state.

My association with Du Bois began in 1962 when, as an anthropology graduate student, I enrolled in her India course. She liked my work and invited me to join her Harvard-Bhubaneswar, India Project to study changing family organization and childrearing practices in Bhubaneswar. [25] She recruited other graduate students in anthropology, sociology, religion, and city planning to examine different facets of this changing town. We all went to Bhubaneswar at different times so as not to inundate the town with foreign researchers. Du Bois also recruited and trained several anthropology graduate students from Utkal University, Bhubaneswar’s new graduate university. With this interdisciplinary team of researchers, she hoped to capture some of the transformational processes at work in this city and, more generally, in India as a whole. [26]

Becoming part of the Bhubaneswar project gave me, and my fellow graduate students, access to a different Cora Du Bois from the one we saw in the classroom. She established at her home, in the “Annex”, a place with books about India and Odisha and a set of files where different researchers’ notes were carefully archived. We were given keys to the Annex and an invitation to come and examine all these resources. I tended to come on Friday afternoons, and at about 5 p.m. Du Bois would come to see how I was doing and invite me to join her for a drink and conversation in her living room. In this setting, with a drink in one hand and a cigarette in the other, Du Bois shifted from being a somewhat forbidding professor to an openly friendly and loquacious host. I came to realize that Du Bois had to keep separate her public and private persona. On campus, she was the Zemurray-Stone professor, a first woman who had to establish the right of women professors to be there. But she was also a lesbian in an era when that could not be publicly revealed. Accordingly, she and Jeanne

Taylor lived some distance from campus and kept their private lives *private*. Students and faculty who came to the house became friends.

Du Bois carefully mentored three Indian doctoral students through their PhDs and another eight from Harvard and MIT, all of whom worked on aspects of change in Bhubaneswar and published numerous books and articles about that project. However, she never completed her own book about Bhubaneswar, a project she had planned for retirement. Part of the reason is that she had become a critic of her own field. Anthropology, she believed, was trying to become one of the “social and behavioral sciences” that buttressed U.S. technical assistance programmes throughout the world with little or no understanding of those culturally diverse societies. In a 1966 address to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, she asked: “To what extent are we committed to a gradual understanding, empirically based, of other societies; and to what extent are culturally pre-determined techniques and rhetorics to form not only our own students, but our national and professional world view?” [27] The term “modernization”, which she herself had initially used in describing her Bhubaneswar project, became one of her *bêtes noires*. She did not want to join the grand theorists of her time, many of whom were at Harvard and MIT, who used Cold War rhetoric about *modernizing* “traditional” (formerly colonized) societies by means of Western-style economic, political, and social psychological development, so that they would resemble the United States and be less susceptible to influences from the Soviet Union. While she gave numerous public addresses about social change and “modernization”, she ultimately opted out of publishing her own Bhubaneswar research, which was to be a two-volume synthesis of the project as well as a critique of broad social theories that had evolved in the post-World War II era.

In 1969, Du Bois retired from Harvard and spent the next several years presiding over two major professional organizations – the American Anthropological Association (1968-69) and the Association for Asian Studies (1969-70). She led both of these associations through a turbulent period – one where there was heavy dissention among scholars over the American Vietnam War and U.S. counter-intelligence activities in Thailand. She proved to be an effective leader. Nonetheless, Harvard, together with these demanding public roles, had taken a toll on her. Afterwards, Du Bois turned inward, struggling with depression and a series of severe health problems. Fortunately, during this last stage of her life, she began keeping biographical notes and organized all of her professional and personal writings. Everything related to the Harvard-Bhubaneswar, India Project went to the Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, and everything else to the Tozzer Library of Anthropology, Harvard University.

Cora Du Bois’s remarkable journey through much of the 20th century ended on April 7, 1991 in Brookline, Massachusetts. Her intense intellect, curiosity, and formidable character had propelled her through a series of unprecedented accomplishments in both government service and academe. Within the discipline of anthropology she had moved from “salvage” anthropology to pioneering research in culture and personality, and then to a new form of

pioneering research – studying a complex society, through time, using an interdisciplinary, collaborative approach. Throughout her lifetime, Du Bois was a highly principled “first woman”.

References Cited

Du Bois, Cora, 1935, “Wintu Ethnography,” *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology* 36, no. 1, pp. 1-148.

Du Bois, Cora and Dorothy Demetracopoulou, 1931, “Wintu Myths,” *op cit.*, pp. 279-403.

Du Bois, Cora and Dorothy Demetracopoulou, 1932, “Study of Wintu Mythology,” *Journal of American Folklore* 45, no. 178, pp. 375-500.

Du Bois, Cora, 1938. *The Feather Cult of the Middle Columbia*, Columbia General Series in Anthropology, no. 7, Menasha, Wisconsin, George Banta.

Du Bois, Cora, 1939. *The 1870 Ghost Dance*, Anthropology Records, vol.3, pt.1, Berkley, University of California Press. (Reissued by University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

Du Bois, Cora, 1944, *The People of Alor: A Social Psychological Study of an East Indian Island*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press. (Reissued by Harvard University Press, 1960, with a new appendix to the preface).

Du Bois, Cora, 1949, *Social Forces in Southeast Asia*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press. (Reissued by Harvard University Press, 1959).

Du Bois, Cora, 1956, *Foreign Students and Higher Education in the United States*, Washington DC, American Council on Education.

Kardiner, Abram, 1939, *The Individual and His Society: The Psychodynamics of Primitive Social Organization*, New York, Columbia University Press. (Reissued by Columbia University Press, 1955).

Le Vine, Robert A., 2001, “Culture and Personality Studies, 1918-1960: Myth and History,” *Journal of Personality* 69 (6), p.809.

Seymour, Susan (ed.), 1980, *The Transformation of a Sacred Town: Bhubaneswar, India*, Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press.

Seymour, Susan C., 1988, “Cora Du Bois,” in Ute D. Gacs, Aisha Khan, Jerrie McIntyre, and Ruth Weinberg (eds.), *Women Anthropologists: A Biographical Dictionary*, New York, Greenwood Press, pp. 72-79.

Seymour, Susan C., 1999, *Women, Family, and Childcare in India: A World in Transition*, New York, Cambridge University Press.

Seymour, Susan C., 2015, *Cora Du Bois: Anthropologist, Diplomat, Agent*, Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press.

Welltfelt, Emilie, 2009, "Returning to Alor: Retrospective Documentation of the Cora Du Bois Collection at the Museum of World Culture, Gothenburg, Sweden", *Indonesia and the Malay World* 37, no. 108, pp. 183-202.

[1] This article is drawn from the research I did for my biography of Cora Du Bois (Seymour, 2015).

[2] Personal communication with Cora Du Bois, cited in Seymour, 1988.

[3] Judith Walzer, "An Oral History of Tenured Women in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University." Murray Center, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Session I, Part 1, p.7.

[4] One of Ruth Benedict's sexual relationships was with Margaret Mead. Despite Mead's several heterosexual marriages, she had a long-term relationship with Benedict and became the executor of Benedict's papers upon Benedict's death.

[5] Judith Walzer, *Op cit.*, Session I, Part 2, pp. 5, 8-10.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] "Intellectual History," outline for lecture, Brandeis University, February 1965, Cora Alice Du Bois Papers (SPEC.COLLETHG.D852C), Box 73. Tozzer Library, Harvard College Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

[8] Cora Du Bois's graduate student cohort at the University of California, Berkeley, included anthropologists Ralf Beals, Homer Barnett, Dorothy Demetracopoulou (Lee), George Devereux, Frederica de Laguna, Isabel Kelly, and Julian Steward.

[9] Judith Walzer, *op cit.*, Session I, Part 1, p. 3.

[10] "Intellectual History," *op cit.*

[11] May 15, 1929, letter home. Cora Alice Du Bois Papers, *op cit.*, Box 2.

[12] "Intellectual History," *op cit.*

[13] Du Bois had read James Mooney's ethnography about the 1890 Ghost Dance movement, "The Ghost Dance Religion," *Bureau of American Ethnology, Part 2* (1896), at Barnard College in Ruth Benedict's course on Primitive Religion. So when she undertook her own Ghost Dance research, she was familiar with the

more dramatic version that Mooney had investigated after the tragic massacre of Plains Indians who had gathered to dance at Wounded Knee in December 1890. So far as I can determine, she had no communications with Mooney. In her book she did correct Mooney's confusion over the identity of the person who had introduced a new religious dance and the doctrine associated with it (Du Bois 2007, p. 7). Both the 1870 Ghost Dance and the 1890 Ghost Dance religions had originated among the Northern Paiute of Walker Lake, Nevada. The 1870 version spread west among small groups of semi-sedentary foragers and had declined by 1877 when the apocalyptic prophecies did not materialize. The 1890 version moved north and east among Plains Indians, mounted hunting peoples who came to typify the "American Indian" for many white Americans. Hence, because of this and because of the Wounded Knee tragedy, Mooney's ethnography has received more attention than Du Bois's book. Both studies have been republished—Mooney's by the University of Chicago Press, 1970; Du Bois's by the University of Nebraska Press, 2007. Du Bois does indicate in her Ghost Dance book that she communicated with anthropologist Leslie Spier, author of "Ghost Dance of 1870 among the Klamath of Oregon, *University of Washington Publications in Anthropology* 2 (1927).

[14] LeVine, 2001..

[15] Ironically, these seminars have become known in the anthropological literature as the "Kardiner-Linton seminars." Ralph Linton, who became chair of the department of anthropology at Columbia University in 1937, when Du Bois left for Alor, took her place as the anthropologist leading the seminars with Kardiner. Initially, the seminars should have been called the "Kardiner-Du Bois seminars." Later they might have been called the "Kardiner-Du Bois-Linton seminars," but Du Bois's name has evaporated – yet another sign of the androcentric tendencies within anthropology at the time that has not been corrected in the most pertinent literature.

[16] Cora Du Bois, 1944, p.ix.

[17] June 30, 1936 letter to Robert Lowie. Robert Harry Lowie Papers (1872-1968) (BANC MSS C-927), Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, California. And Emilie Welltfelt (2009).

[18] The Porteus Maze test is a nonverbal intelligence test developed by psychologist Stanley Porteus and successfully administered to Australian aborigines before Du Bois used it with the Alorese.

[19] The Rorshach test is a projective test that uses a set of black and white, and colored, inkblots. Individuals are asked to describe what they see as each card with a different pattern of ink blots is held up for them. Emil Oberholzer, a New York psychiatrist who had helped Herman Rorshach develop the test, analyzed Du Bois's Rorshach data.

[20] Cora Du Bois, 1944, p.4.

[21] June 2, 1942, letter home. Cora Alice Du Bois Papers, *op cit.*, Box 6.

[22] Du Bois to Charles Burton Fahs, August 22, 1944, OSS General Correspondence, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

[23] For the full text of Du Bois's letter to Sproul, see Cora Alice Du Bois Papers, *op cit.*, Box 18.

[24] Author's interview with Laura Nader, April 2, 2007.

[25] For a synthesis of that work see Seymour, 1999.

[26] Seymour, 1980, contains a chapter by each participant in the Harvard-Bhubaneswar, India Project and is dedicated to Cora Du Bois.

[27] Cora Du Bois, "The Ethnographer and the Social Scientist, vice president's address to Section H, American Association for the Advancement of Science, December 29, 1966. Cora Alice Du Bois Papers, *op cit.*, Box 73..