

Cora Du Bois

Cora Alice Du Bois, (October 26, 1903, in New York, NY-April 7, 1991, Cambridge, Massachusetts) was an American cultural anthropologist and a key figure in culture and personality studies and in psychological anthropology more generally.

Biography

Cora Du Bois's parents, Mattie Schreiber Du Bois and Jean Du Bois, had immigrated to the U.S. from Switzerland. Cora was born in New York City and spent most of her childhood in New Jersey, where she graduated from high school in Perth Amboy. After a year studying library science at the New York Public Library, she matriculated at Barnard College, where she received her BA in history in 1927. She went on to earn an MA in history from Columbia University in 1928. Encouraged by an anthropology course at Columbia taught by Ruth Benedict and Franz Boas, DuBois moved out to California to study anthropology with Native American specialists Alfred L. Kroeber and Robert Lowie.

She received her Ph.D. in anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley in 1932. In part due to prejudices against women academics, she was initially unable to find a university position. She remained at Berkeley as a teaching fellow and research assistant from 1932-1935. During this period, she conducted salvage ethnography on several Native American groups of northern California and the Pacific Northwest, including the Wintu Indians of northern California. published on the Ghost Dance of 1870 (Dubois 1939). In 1935, Du Bois received a National Research Council Fellowship to undertake clinical training and explore possible collaborations between anthropology and psychiatry. She spent six months at what was then the Boston Psychopathic Hospital, now the Massachusetts Mental Health Center, and six months at the New York Psychoanalytic Society. In New York she worked with psychiatrist Abram Kardiner, who became her mentor and collaborator for several projects in cross-cultural diagnosis and the psychoanalytic study of culture. Du Bois also taught at Hunter College in 1936-1937 while developing a fieldwork project to test their new ideas.

From 1937-1939, Du Bois lived and conducted research on the island