

American Structuralism

- Boas Quotes from “The Mind of Primitive Man”

- 'Race, Language and Culture' (1940) – collection of essays
- Contributed mainly to cultural, biological and linguistic anthropology

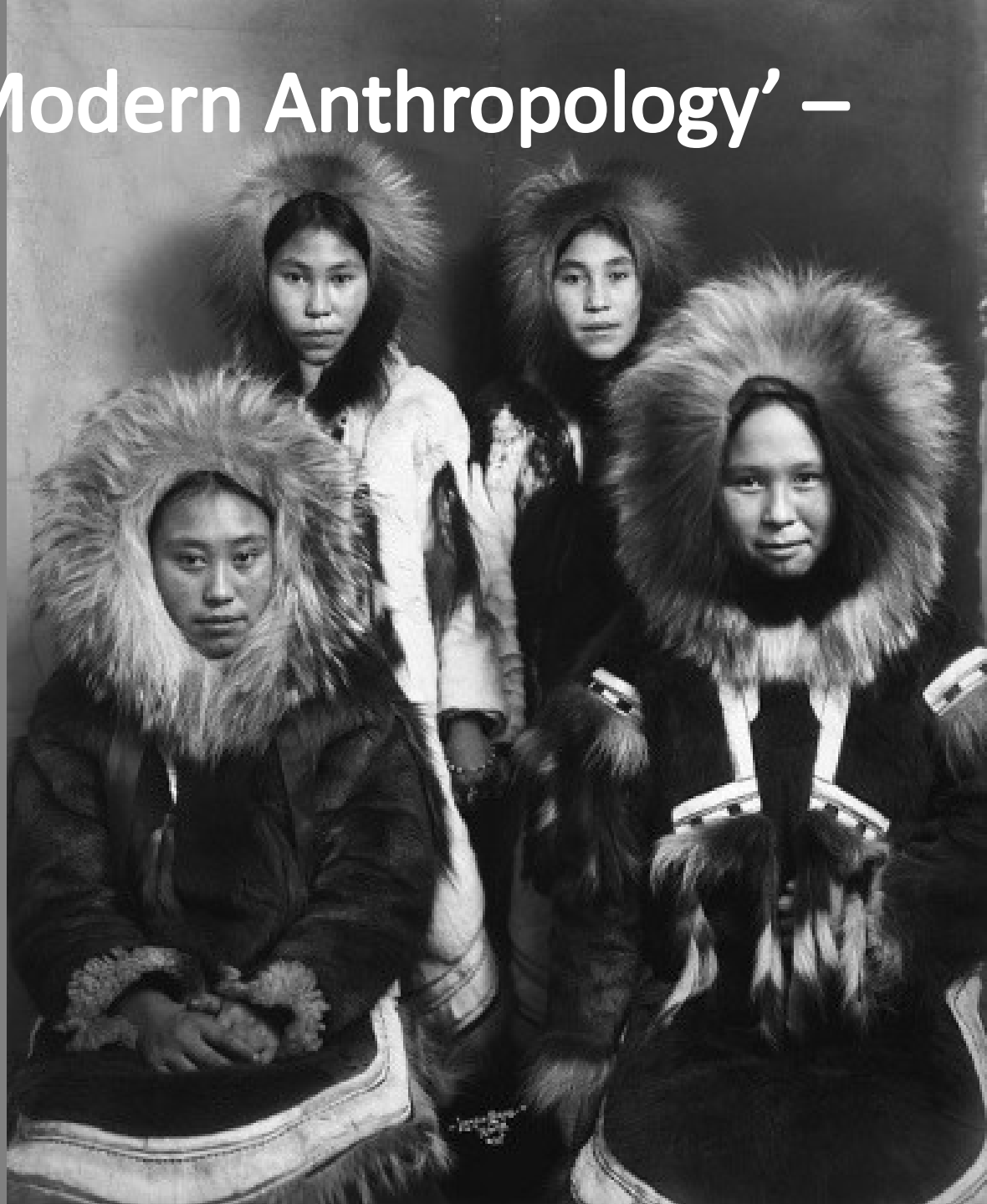
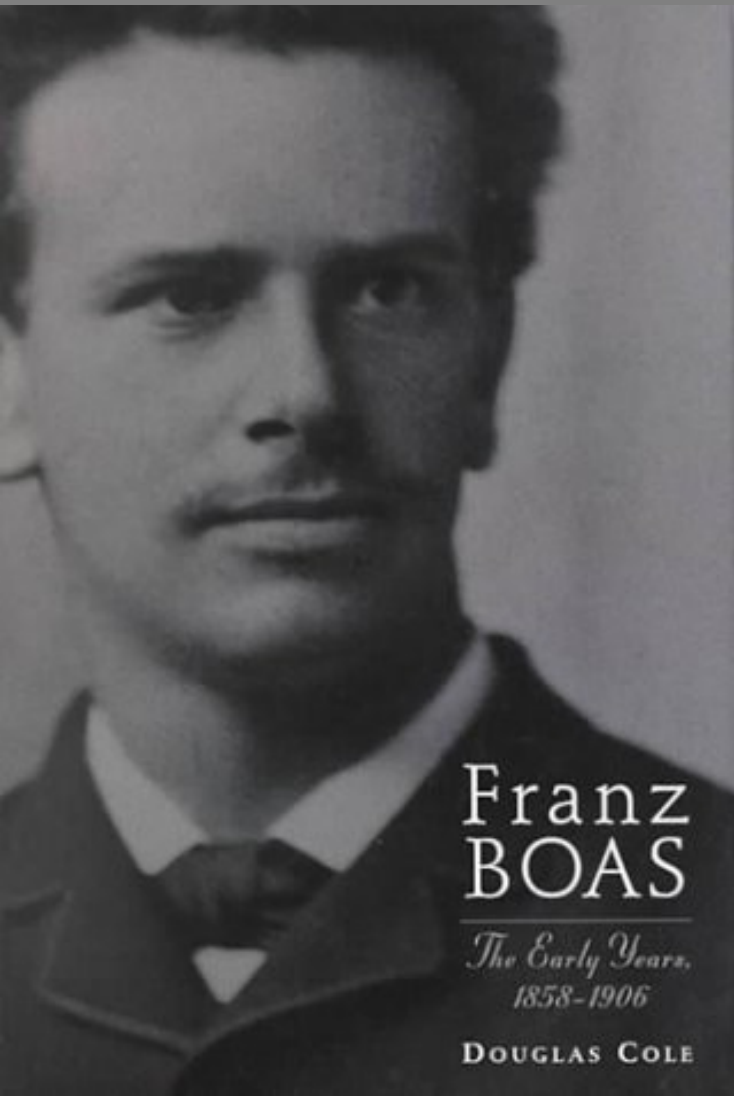
Franz Boas (1858-1842)



Franz Boas Onboard the Germania in 1883,
on his Expedition to Baffin Island

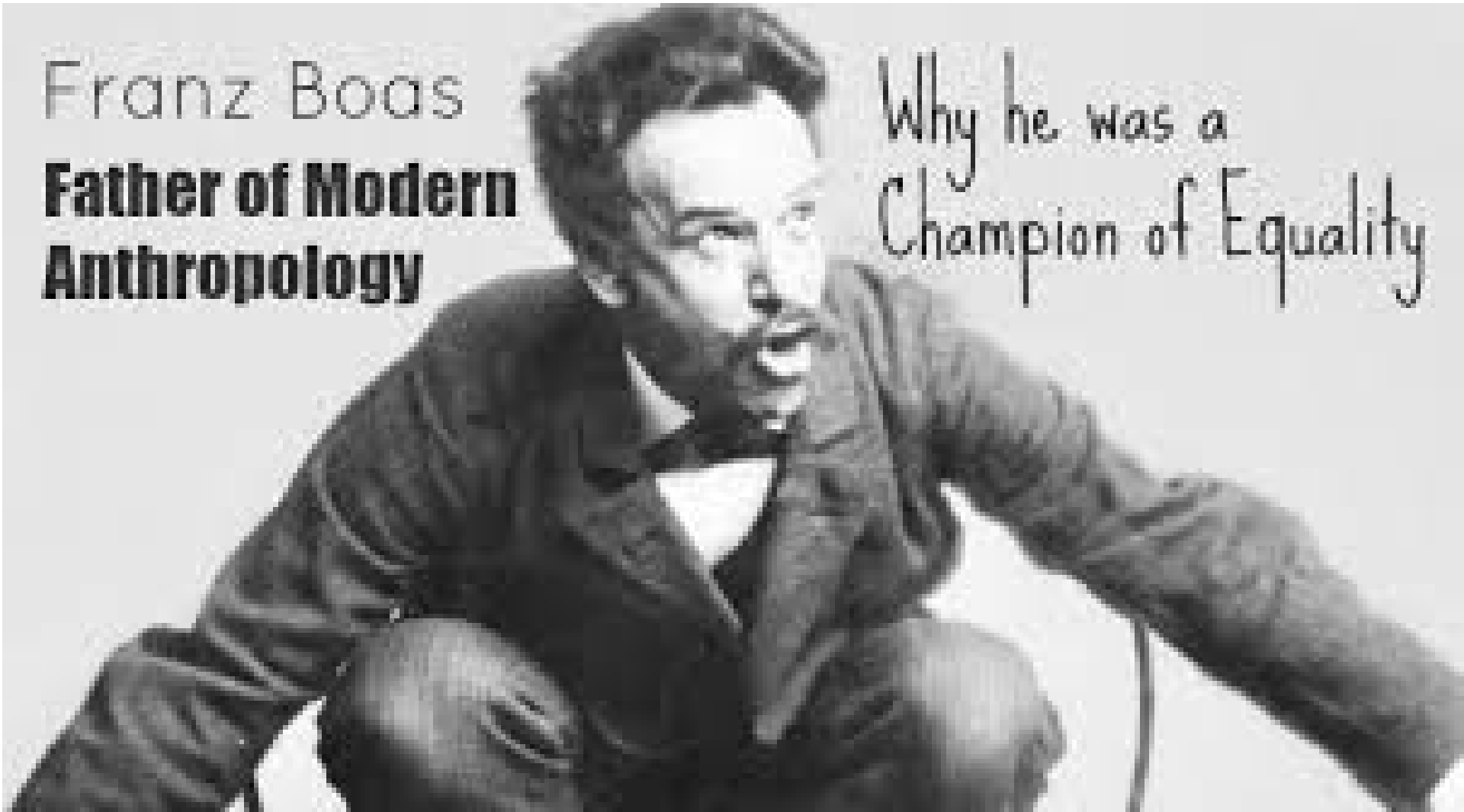


The 'Father of Modern Anthropology' – Franz Boas



Franz Boas
**Father of Modern
Anthropology**

Why he was a
Champion of Equality



The Mind of Primitive Man (1911), one of his best books, integrated his theories concerning the history & development of cultures:

- In any given population, biology, language, and culture are autonomous; no one of these dimensions is reducible to another
- Culture does not depend on any independent variables
- The biological, linguistic, and cultural traits of any group of people are the product of historical developments involving both cultural and non-cultural forces
- Cultural plurality is a fundamental feature of humankind, and
- The specific cultural environment structures much individual behaviour

In his Preface to it, he wrote:

“**The concept of racial type** as commonly used even in scientific literature is misleading and **requires a logical as well as a biological redefinition**. While it would seem that a great number of American students of biology, psychology and anthropology concur with these views, popular prejudice, based on earlier scientific and popular tradition, has certainly not diminished, for race prejudice is still an important factor in our life.”

“Still worse is the subjection of science to ignorant prejudice in countries controlled by dictators.

Such control has extended particularly to books dealing with the subject matter of race and culture.

Since nothing is permitted to be printed that runs counter to the ignorant whims and prejudices of the governing clique, there can be no trustworthy science.”

Boas: The Mind of Primitive Man (1911)

There is no fundamental difference in the ways of thinking of primitive and civilized man.

A close connection between race and personality has never been established.

THE MIND
of
PRIMITIVE MAN

FRANZ BOAS

REVISED EDITION

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

Race : Language : Culture

Proof of **diffusion of cultural elements** may be found everywhere. Neither differences of race nor of language are effectual barriers for their spread.

In North America, California offers a good example of this kind ; for here many languages are spoken, and there is a certain degree of differentiation of type, but at the same time a considerable uniformity of culture prevails (Kroeber 2, 3).

Another case in point is the coast of New Guinea, where, notwithstanding strong local differentiations, a fairly characteristic type of culture prevails, which goes hand in hand with a strong differentiation of languages.

Race : Language & Culture

The historical development of mankind would afford a simpler and clearer picture if we were justified in the belief that in primitive communities the three phenomena had been intimately associated. No proof, however, of such an assumption can be given. On the contrary, the present distribution of languages, as compared with the distribution of types, makes it plausible that even at the earliest times **within the biological units more than one language and more than one culture were represented.**

Summary_Race : Language & Culture

One race : many languages and cultures

“Within the biological units more than one language and more than one culture were represented.”

Examples:

- Europe
- Africa
- New Guinea

Race & Language

I believe it may safely be said that all over the world the biological unit disregarding minute local differences is much larger than the linguistic one; in other words, that groups of men who are so closely related in bodily appearance that we must consider them as representatives of the same variety of mankind, embrace a much larger number of individuals than the number of men speaking languages which we know to be genetically related.

Race & Language

Examples of this kind may be given from many parts of the world. Thus, the European race including under this term roughly all those individuals who are without hesitation classed by us as members of the White race would include peoples speaking Indo-European, Basque, Semitic and Ural-Altai languages. West African Negroes would represent individuals of a certain Negro type, but speaking the most diverse languages; and the same would be true, among Asiatic types, of Siberians; among American types, of part of the Californian Indians.

Summary_Race & Language

One race may have many genetically unrelated languages.

Example:

- **Europe:** Ugro-Finnish (Finnish, Hungarian, Estonian) and Basque versus the Indo-European languages
- **New Guinea:** Austronesian versus Papuan languages

So far as our historical evidence goes, ... the number of apparently unrelated languages was much greater in earlier times than at present.

...On the other hand, the number of [anatomical] types that have presumably become extinct seems to be rather small. ...

...We are thus led to the conclusion that presumably at an early time small isolated groups of people of similar type existed, each of which may have possessed a language and culture of its own.

Incidentally we may remark here, that, from this point of view, the great diversity of languages found in many remote mountain areas should not be explained as the result of a gradual pressing-back of remnants of tribes into inaccessible districts, but appears rather as a survival of an earlier general condition of mankind, when every continent was inhabited by small groups of people speaking distinct languages. The present conditions would have developed through the gradual extinction of many of the old stocks and their absorption or extinction by others, which thus came to occupy a more extended territory. However this may be, **the probabilities are decidedly against the theory that originally each language and culture was confined to a single type, or that each type and culture was confined to one language; in short, that there has been at any time a close correlation between these three phenomena.**

If type, language and culture were by origin closely related it would follow that these three traits developed approximately at the same period and conjointly. This does not seem by any means plausible. ...

...the differentiation of the more important subdivisions of the great races antedates the formation of the recognizable linguistic families. At any rate, the biological differentiation and the formation of speech were, at this early period, subject to the same causes that are acting upon them now, and our whole experience shows that these causes may bring about great changes in language much more rapidly than in the human body.

In this consideration lies the principal reason for the theory of lack of correlation of type and language, even during the period of formation of types and of linguistic families.

If language is independent of race this is even more true of culture. In other words, when a group of a certain racial type migrated over an extended area before their language had attained a form that we are able to recognize as a single linguistic family, and before their culture had taken forms, traces of which we may still recognize among their modern descendants, it will be impossible to discover a relation between type, language and culture, even if it had existed at an early time.

It is quite possible that people of a common type expanded over a large area and that their language during this process became so thoroughly modified in each locality that the relationship of the modern forms, or rather their common descent from a common tongue, can no longer be discovered.

In the same way their culture may have developed in different ways, quite independently of their ancient culture, or at least in such ways that genetic relations to the primitive form, if they existed, can no longer be ascertained.

If we accept these conclusions and avoid the hypothesis of an original close association between type, language and culture, **it follows that every attempt to classify mankind from more than one of these points of view must lead to contradictions.**

... the vague term "culture" ... is not a unit which signifies that all aspects of culture must have had the same historical fates. The points of view which we applied to language may also be applied to the various aspects of culture.

There is no reason that would compel us to believe that technical inventions, social organization, art and religion develop in precisely the same way or are organically and indissolubly connected. As an example illustrating their independence we may mention the Maritime Chukchee and the Eskimo who have a similar, almost identical material culture, but differ in their religious life;

Lack of cohesion appears most clearly in attempts to chart cultural traits

Limits of distribution do not agree, neither in reference to the distribution of types and languages, nor to that of other cultural phenomena such as social organization, religious ideas, style of art, etc.

Each of these has its own area of distribution. Not even language can be treated as a unit, for its phonetic, grammatical and lexicographic materials are not indissolubly connected, for **by assimilation different languages may become alike in some features**. The history of phonetics and lexicography are not necessarily tied up with the history of grammar.

The so-called "culture areas" are conveniences for the treatment of generalized traits of culture, generally based on sameness of geographic and economic conditions and on similarities of material culture. If culture areas were based on language, religion or social organization they would differ materially from those generally accepted.

Applying this consideration to the history of the peoples speaking Aryan languages we conclude that this language has not necessarily arisen among one of the types of men who nowadays speak Aryan languages; that none of them may be considered a pure, unmixed descendant of the original people that spoke the ancestral Aryan language; and that furthermore the original type may have developed other languages beside the Aryan.

... The considerations which in the beginning of our discussion led us to the conclusion that in modern times primitive tribes have no opportunity to develop their innate abilities, prevents us from forming any opinion in regard to their racial hereditary faculty.

In order to answer this question we need a clearer understanding of the historical development of culture.

(p. 158).