

Topic Page: [Boas, Franz, 1858-1942](#)

Definition: **Boas** from *Collins English Dictionary*

n

1 Franz (frants). 1858–1942, US anthropologist, born in Germany. He made major contributions to cultural and linguistic anthropology in studies of North American Indians, including *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911; 1938)



Image from: [Franz Boas, c. 1930–1950. \(Photo by R. H.... in Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance](#)

Summary Article: **Boas, Franz**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

(bō'ăz, -ăs), 1858–1942, German-American anthropologist, b. Minden, Germany; Ph.D. Univ. of Kiel, 1881. He joined an expedition to Baffin Island in 1883 and initiated his fieldwork with observations of the Central Eskimos. In 1886, Boas began his investigations of the Native Americans of British Columbia. He secured at Clark Univ. his first position in the United States in 1889, and was associated with the American Museum of Natural History from 1895 to 1905. Boas began to lecture at Columbia in 1896, and in 1899 became its first professor of anthropology, a position he held for 37 years. Boas

greatly influenced American anthropology, particularly in his development of the theoretical framework known as cultural relativism, which argued against the evolutionary scale leading from savagery to Culture, laid out by his 19th-century predecessors. He believed that cultures (plural) are too complex to be evaluated according to the broad theorizing characteristic of evolutionary "laws" of developing culture (singular). Instead, Boas sought to understand the development of societies through their particular histories. He established the "four-field approach" through his concern with human evolution, archaeology, language, and culture, each of which has become a sub-field in the wider discipline of anthropology in the United States. Boas reexamined the premises of physical anthropology and was a pioneer in the application of statistical methods to biometric study. Boas was an early critic of the use of race as an explanation for difference in the natural and social sciences, emphasizing instead the importance of environment in the evaluation of individual capabilities, and made important contributions to stratigraphic archaeology in Mexico. As a student of Native American languages, Boas emphasized the importance of linguistic analysis from internal linguistic structure, and pointed out that language was a fundamental aspect of culture. His insistence on rigorous methodology served to establish the scientific value of his contributions, and his methods and conclusions are still widely influential. Boas taught and inspired a generation of anthropologists, notably Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, who pioneered the "culture and personality" school of anthropology. A prolific writer, Boas's works include *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911, rev. ed. 1933); *Anthropology and Modern Life* (1928, repr. 1984); *Kwakiutl Ethnography* (1966).

See Stocking, G. W. Jr.'s *Franz Boas Reader: Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883-1911* (1982);

biography by M. J. Herskovits (1953, repr. 1973).

APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA

Boas, Franz. (2018). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Retrieved from https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/boas_franz_1858_1942



The Columbia Encyclopedia, © Columbia University Press 2018



The Columbia Encyclopedia, © Columbia University Press 2018

APA

Boas, Franz. (2018). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Retrieved from https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/boas_franz_1858_1942

Chicago

"Boas, Franz." In *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, by Paul Lagasse, and Columbia University. 8th ed. Columbia University Press, 2018. https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/boas_franz_1858_1942

Harvard

Boas, Franz. (2018). In P. Lagasse & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia*. (8th ed.). [Online]. New York: Columbia University Press. Available from: https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/boas_franz_1858_1942 [Accessed 19 September 2019].

MLA

"Boas, Franz." *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Paul Lagasse, and Columbia University, Columbia University Press, 8th edition, 2018. *Credo Reference*, https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/boas_franz_1858_1942. Accessed 19 Sep. 2019.