



Franz Boas ^[1]

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Franz Boas is one of the most influential and well-known anthropologists within the discipline. His contributions to anthropological thought have influenced countless anthropologists and academics.

Boas is particularly known for speaking out against the then-prevailing ideas of unilineal cultural evolution—the belief that culture is meant to progress in a set, hierarchical sequence leading up to Western civilization. Instead, Boas argued that culture can change in an infinite number of ways, and there is not one path that is inherently better than all others.

Boas was also a strong opponent to scientific racism—the theory that race is a biological concept that can be used to understand cultural thought and behaviour. Today, we can recognize this idea as highly racist, but at the time these ideas were prevalent in academic literature. Instead, Boas argued that culture is a result of social learning rather than biological differences. These thoughts influenced other anthropologists in the field, leading more and more academics to recognize that race is a cultural construct.

Boas influenced many other popular and successful anthropologists, including [Margaret Mead](#) ^[3], [Claude Levi-Strauss](#) ^[4], and Zora Neale Hurston.

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