

**BOAS, CULTURAL RELATIVISM, AND THE
HISTORY OF THE AMNH NORTHWEST COAST HALL**

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Cultural relativism, arguably anthropology's most important contribution to American public discourse, derives from the influence of Franz Boas. Boas' relativism emerged from a coalescence of interests in physics, mathematics and physical geography, as well as a deep-rooted family background in social justice. Boas' views about culture were not some abstraction. He made his argument most demonstrably in the American Museum of Natural History's Northwest Coast Hall, when it opened in 1900.

This talk examines the philosophical, ethnographic, and museological seeds of Boas' relativism, and their ongoing influence in the contemporary reimagining of cultural representations in the Northwest Coast Hall.



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