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Q1(e)

Historical Particularism.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · Anthropology GS 1 · 10 marks · Historical particularism (Boas)

(b) Historical particularism (Boas); Diffusionism (British, German and American)

Core demand of the question

- Write a note on Historical Particularism
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length of about 150 words

Revision summary

Boas treated each culture as a unique historical product.

Unilinear stages of Morgan and Tylor were rejected.

Method was fieldwork, language, and trait history.

Kroeber and **Lowie** spread culture-area work.

The limit is description without later controlled comparison.

Introduction

Historical particularism, led by **Franz Boas**, said each culture is a unique product of its own history. It rejected one ladder of stages for all peoples.

Body**The claim**

- **Boas** attacked **Morgan** and **Tylor** unilinear evolution as armchair ranking.
- **Fieldwork, language, and museum collections must reconstruct how traits arrived:** invention, diffusion, or independent growth.
- **Kroeber, Lowie, and Goldenweiser** carried the method. Culture areas and trait lists replaced world stages.

Limit

- Particularism saved anthropology from racist ladders, but it could stall at endless local lists.
- Later **Steward** ecological evolution and **White** energy evolution answered with limited generalisation, without restoring Morgan's three ages.

Flow diagram

Boas -> Unique culture history

Unique culture history -> Field language museum

Unilinear stages -> Rejected

Conclusion

Historical particularism made culture history local and empirical. It is still the warning against ranking living peoples as leftovers of Europe's past.

Facts & figures

Boas

Kwakiutl and Inuit work, plus *The Mind of Primitive Man*, broke racial-stage theory.

Lowie

Primitive Society argued that clans and states do not appear in one fixed order.

Kroeber

Culture-area maps and superorganic culture grew from Boasian particularism.

Steward

Multilinear evolution later allowed limited generalisation without Boas's veto on all laws.

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