
CAC 3

The concept of 'culture': 1

OBJECTIVES

- Be aware of the origins of modern thinking on 'culture'
 - Be aware of, and able to identify 'essentialist' views of culture
 - Start to understand the concept of 'cultural relativism'
-

OUTLINE

- Culture as 'growth'
 - Matthew Arnold: *Culture and Anarchy*
 - Essentialism (and a cruel experiment!)
 - Concepts of 'high' and 'mass/popular' culture
 - Cultural relativism
-

Culture as 'commodity'

The screenshot shows a news article from the Guardian dated Wednesday 24 April 2013. The headline is "British culture should be seen as commodity, says Maria Miller". The sub-headline reads: "Argument for funding must be made on economic grounds, culture secretary will say in first speech on arts". The author is identified as Charlotte Higgins, chief arts writer. A photograph of Maria Miller is included. The article text states: "British culture should be presented as a 'commodity' and 'compelling product' to sell at home and abroad, the culture secretary, Maria Miller, will argue in her first speech on the arts since taking up the job in September." The article also includes a sidebar with social media sharing options and a 'Related' section with links to other news items.

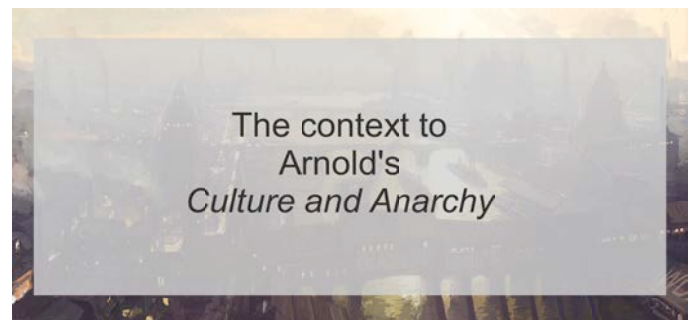
British culture should be presented as a **"commodity"** and **"compelling product"** to sell at home and abroad, the culture secretary, Maria Miller, will argue in her first speech on the arts since taking up the job in September.

Culture is 'growth'

- From Latin *colere* – to grow or cultivate
- C16: education = cultivation of the mind
 - Aesthetic
 - Intellectual
 - Spiritual
 - Physical



Culture & 'Civilisation'



The context to
Arnold's
Culture and Anarchy

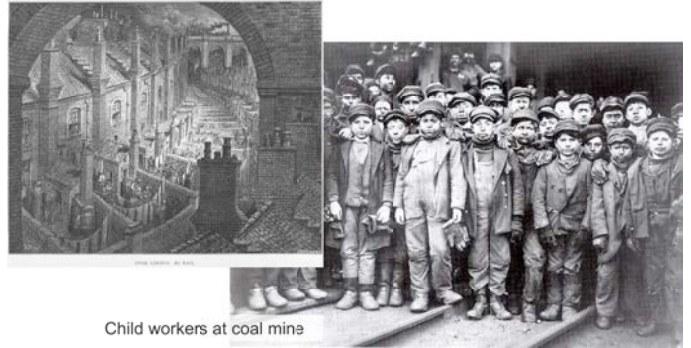
Industrialisation's 'dark satanic mills' c19

Culture & 'Civilisation'



Industrialisation's 'dark satanic mills' c19

Culture & 'Civilisation'



Child workers at coal mine

Culture & 'Civilisation'

- **Civilisation:** 'a standard of *material progress* best indexed by the development of industrial production'
- **Culture:** 'the embodiment of a set of higher standards in whose name material civilisation might be indicted for its shallowness, coarseness, or incompleteness.'

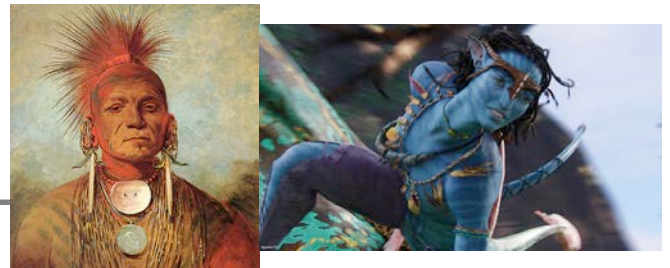
Tony Bennett
New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society

'The Noble Savage'

An idealized concept of **uncivilized man**, who symbolizes the innate goodness of one not exposed to the corrupting influences of **civilization**.

The glorification of the noble savage is a dominant theme in the Romantic writings of the 18th and 19th centuries, especially in the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

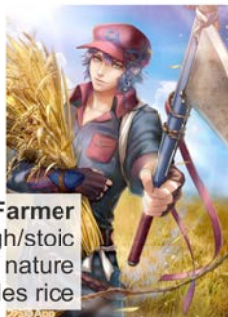
(Encyclopedia Britannica)



Modern versions...



USA: Cowboy
Freedom
Independence
In touch with nature



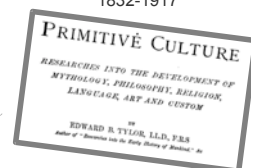
JAPAN: Farmer
Tough/stoic
In touch with nature
Provides rice

"Primitive Culture"

CULTURE or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. The condition of culture among the various societies of mankind, in so far as it is capable of being investigated on general principles, is a subject apt for the study of laws of human thought and action. On the one hand, the uniformity which so largely pervades civilization may be ascribed, in great measure, to the uniform action of uniform causes: while on the other hand its various grades may be regarded as stages of development or evolution, each the outcome of previous history, and about to do its proper part in shaping the history of the future.

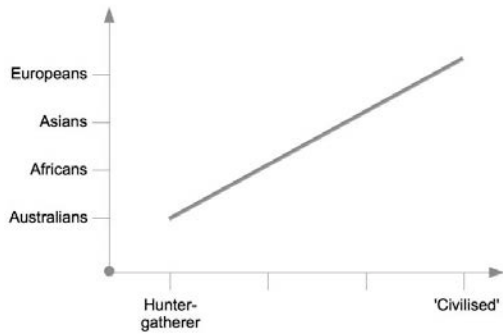


Edward B. Tylor
1832-1917



(Tylor 1874)

“Stages of development”



Matthew Arnold (1822-1888)

- Son of a headmaster
- Govt. Inspector of Schools (from 1851)
- Poet & Prof. of Poetry, Oxford Univ.
- *Culture & Anarchy*, 1869



“Culture and Anarchy”

- For Arnold...
 - what is culture *for*?
 - what is the *content* of culture?
 - why is culture important at the time he is writing?
- Do you see any problems with Arnold's idea of culture?

“Sweetness and Light”

“Culture [...] is a study of perfection... [It] seeks to do away with classes; to make **the best that has been thought and known in the world** current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of **sweetness and light...**”

Culture...

- Consisting of the *best of what has been thought, said, written* etc.
- A set of *standards* to aim at / strive for
- A means of **self** improvement
- A means of **social** improvement

...and Anarchy

“Culture for Arnold, was a means of alleviating the strain and hostility between classes in a deeply divided society, and the task of ‘civilising’ the masses had a **prudent political basis**. It was a means of incorporating the working classes within the existing social and political order, and thus **preventing the threat of revolt from below.**”

Problems and Questions...

- How do we know what is *the best*?
- Who decides?
- Who defines the 'standards'?
- What if we disagree?

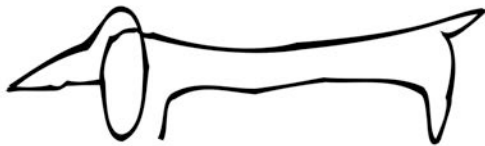


Essentialism



Essentialism

“What can you take away from a dog and have it still be a dog?”



Essentialism

“What can you take away from a dog and have it still be a dog?”

- Looks at the “**Essence**” of things
- Entities have certain features which are necessary to their identity and function.

Essentialism

- Culture is distant
- Beyond everyday experience
- Out of everyday time
- Pre-defined and unchanging



Essentialism

- **MONOLITHIC**
- Huge, unmoveable, unchanging, mystical



“Public Service” Broadcasting

- Link between 'culture' and 'mass media'
- BBC mission: “inform, educate and entertain”
- BBC model adopted by broadcasters around the world, including NHK.



BBC Broadcasting House, 1932

Mass culture: industrialisation

- Henry W. Ford
- Production line: 1910
- Time for chassis production fell from 12 hours to 90 minutes
- **Mass production of consumer goods**



Model T Ford

Mass culture: industrialisation

- **Mass circulation newspapers**
- **1837: Northern Star** (national weekly)
 - £690 to establish
 - break even: 6200 copies/month
- **1918: Sunday Express** (national weekly)
 - £2m to establish
 - break even: 1,000,000 copies/month

Other 'cultures'

- c19-20 urbanisation, industrialisation
- Technological changes
- “Mass culture”
- Arnold's 'culture' came to be perceived as 'elite' or '**high culture**'

Mass/popular culture

- Popular culture ('**low**' culture)
- Film, popular music, comics, *manga*, television and radio, music hall, 'tabloid' newspapers.
- Definitions vary

Acceptance of variation

- “Cultural relativism”
- **Franz Boas** (1858-1942) & students: *civilisation is not something absolute, our ideas are only valid within our civilisation*
- *Cultural ideas are 'untranslatable'*



Boas' definition of culture

"[T]he totality of the mental and physical reactions and activities that characterize the behaviour of the individuals composing a social group collectively and individually in relation to their natural environment, to other groups, to members of the group itself, and of each individual to himself."

Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, 1911

Summary

- There are competing and changing understandings of what 'culture' is.
 - People may often not be exactly sure which definition they are using!
 - When we talk about culture it is important that we agree on which definition we/other people are using.
-

Next Week

- More detailed look at changing views of culture in c20
- To read:

DAHL *Intercultural Research-The Current State of Knowledge*, 2004
