

# CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION

Week 3



# QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What makes a person “cultured”?
- What makes a society civilized?
- Provide one cultural example of something that represents “the best that has been thought our said”?



# CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION TRADITION

- Power: Emanates from Crown/Elites – governs subordinate classes
  - The proletariat “knew” their place
- 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Industrialization & Urbanization = shifts relationship
  - End of “common” culture; emergence of mass (commercial culture/standardization/mass production) & subcultures
- Threatened traditional notions of cultural cohesion (dismantlement) and social stability (direct challenges to political and cultural authority) = ***Destabilizing of the Social Order! Collapse of Authority!***
- Hearkens back to a mythic past; Barbarism threatens Civilization



# MATTHEW ARNOLD: CULTURE AND ANARCHY (1867-9)

- Culture = The best which has been thought and said
- Our lives and their value depend upon the fresh and free play of the best thoughts upon our stock notions and habits
- All men can pursue perfection through attention to “sweetness and light
- A national glow of life and thought occurs when the whole of society is in the fullest measure permeated by thought, sensible to beauty, intelligent and alive.
- Culture nourishes us beyond class relationships towards a “profound sense of settled order and security”
- We should follow reason, not our impulses; authority should assure this
  - We need to disentangle ourselves from the “machinery” in pursuit of perfection in our humanity
    - Culture = order = society
    - Anarchy = bad (revolutionary activities/riots do not help society); should be forbidden and repressed by law that is authoritative and sovereign (STATE)
    - State is the embodiment and progenitor of culture; must be protected



# MATTHEW ARNOLD

- Inaugurates tradition positioning popular culture in broader framework of Culture
  - Draws upon Romantic tradition (Coleridge)
  - Dominant theoretical framework up until the 1950s; enormous influence
- IDEAS:
  - Class Nature of his discourse
  - Culture is a balm to “minister to the diseased spirit of the time”
  - Culture is the *seeking* of culture
  - Anarchy (popular culture) is a disruptive force; must be policed; lower classes had lost sense of subordination and deference
  - The fix = Culture and coercion (“education”); civilize the masses – Culture would defeat their impulses to question/rebel
    - Popular culture is symptomatic of a profound decline (politically and socially)
- Culture impacts all classes to find their true place (“Orientalism”)



# COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

- Culture
  - Activities, products, ongoing social process; way of life, everything we do, the way we interpret and understand the world in certain ways and exclude other ways of doing so; symbolic communication; construction of meaning

Are the arguments still valid?

High Culture?

Cultural Power?

Mass/Popular Culture?

Media Effects?



# COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

## Civilization

- A hierarchical system of symbolic meaning
- Industrialization reshapes this old order;
  - INTERPRETATION: Degeneration vs. Democratic Initiatives
- **Hegemony - complex processes of persuasion/social control**
- **Ideology - - systematic set of ideas**
- **Semiology - study of signs; cultural codes; deep structures of meaning**
- **Cultural capital - use of cultural awareness/knowledge structures (habitus) to secure socioeconomic status**



# MEDIA

- Communication = the creation and use of symbol systems that convey information and meaning
- Culture = the symbols of expression that individuals, groups, and societies use to make sense of daily life and to articulate their values.
- History of media evolution; emergence to convergence
- The *stories* that circulate in the media can shape a society's perceptions and attitudes
- **Culture as skyscraper?**
- **Culture as map?**





# MEDIA LITERACY

- Developing a media-literate critical perspective involves mastering five overlapping stages that build on one another:
  - Description: paying close attention, taking notes, and researching the subject under study
  - Analysis: discovering and focusing on significant patterns that emerge from the description stage
  - Interpretation: asking and answering “What does that mean?” and “So what?” questions about one’s findings
  - Evaluation: arriving at a judgment about whether something is good, bad, or mediocre, which involves subordinating one’s personal taste to the critical “bigger picture” resulting from the first three stages
  - Engagement: taking some action that connects our critical perspective with our role as citizens to question our media institutions, adding our own voice to the process of shaping the cultural environment



# LIVING IN THE MESSAGE-SATURATED WORLD

- Automaticity
- Media Literacy
- Three building blocks of media literacy
  - Personal locus
  - Knowledge structures
  - Skills
- Seven Skills of Media Literacy – analysis, evaluation, grouping, induction, deduction, synthesis, abstraction



# MEDIA LITERACY – THE BUILDING BLOCKS

Necessary Knowledge structures in five areas:

- media effects
  - media content
  - media industries
  - real world
  - self
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- How to read the political upheaval today?
  - How to read the appeal of “how it used to be”
  - What is at stake?



# MEDIA AND CULTURE

- Goal: to understand the complexity of representation in our world

