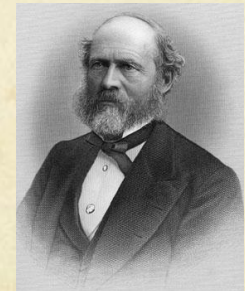


Cultural Anthropology Theories, Perspectives & Methodologies

Different ways of examining and
understanding different cultures

Social Evolutionism

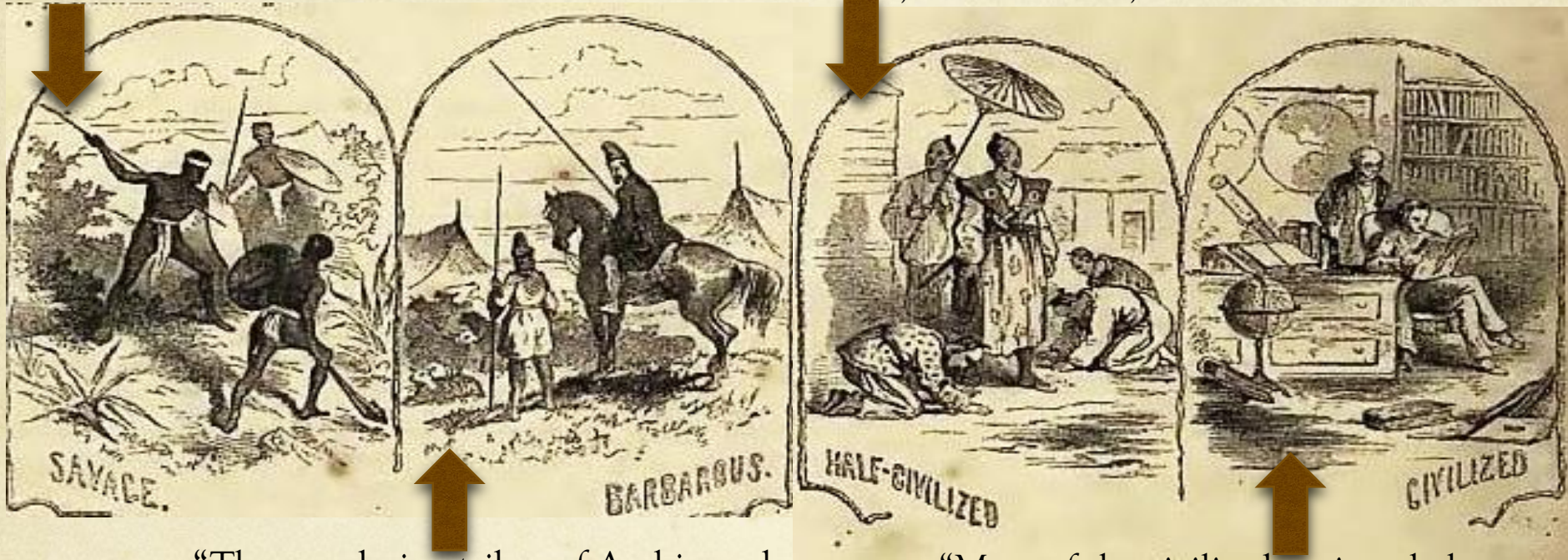
- The idea that cultures evolved in a progressive manner, from simple to complex
 - By the mid 1850s Europe had explored, conquered and colonized many parts of the globe – encountering a variation of cultures – with different lifestyles... this theory is an attempt to explain those differences and in some cases justify discrimination, colonization & slavery.
- According to Tylor and Morgan, most societies or cultures pass through the same series of stages to arrive ultimately at a common end – ta da... civilization.
- E B Tylor felt this happened in 3 stages
 1. Savagery
 2. Barbarism
 3. Civilization
- Lewis Henry Morgan felt it took 6 stages
 - This allowed for greater cultural diversity between groups
- Tylor felt strongly that some cultures that were “less developed” had not degenerated, as some theorists suggested, but that they were just lower on the “evolutionary scale” of culture.



Social Evolutionism example...

“The American Indians, many of the negro tribes of Africa, and all the native tribes of Australia are savages.”

“Most of the half-civilized nations belong to the Mongolian race, and inhabit the Eastern Continents. The Chinese, Japanese, Persians, Turks, and Hindous, are half-civilized.”



“The wandering tribes of Arabia and of Tartary belong to this class.”

“Most of the civilized nations belong to the Caucasian race. Nearly all the inhabitants of Europe, and their descendents in American and other parts of the world belong to this class”

Drawing and notes from Warren, 1869, The Common-School Geography: An Elementary Treatise on Mathematical, Physical, and Political Geography.

How many years ago was this used in schools?

Functionalism

- The idea that the way a culture works or functions is set up to meet the needs of the individuals within that culture.
- All social or cultural institutions and behaviours have a function or reason for happening in that particular culture.
- These institutions are interdependent - culture is like a system that needs all of its parts in working order.*



Functionalism example...

- Bronislaw Malinowski studied the Trobriand Islanders
 - Every year there was a ceremonial exchange of a necklace and an arm band between two men on each island in the South Pacific (at some risk to the men travelling between islands).
 - It seemed to be purely ceremonial, but he discovered that this exchange had very real economic, social and political functions or importance.
 - He discovered that the jewelry travelled the entire circle of the islands in two different directions in what he called the “Kula Ring”.*



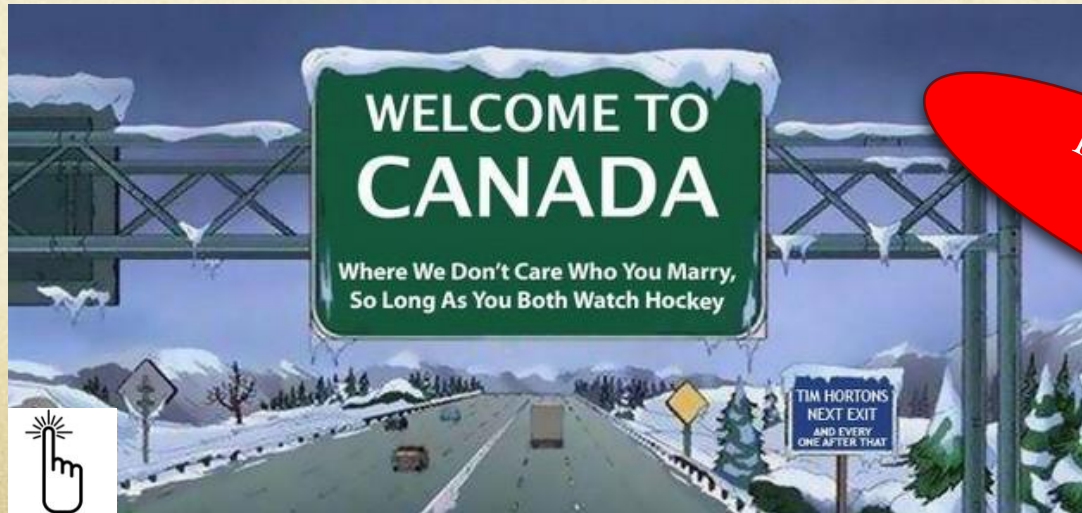
Historicism or Cultural Relativism

- The idea of **Historical Particularism** is often associated with Boas - it developed out of a theory called diffusionism and was a counter to the Social Evolutionism theory.
- With this position, a culture's context, historical period and or geographical location are important to understanding how a culture has developed.
 - If you understand the history of the culture through intense study, you will better understand their ways.
- **Cultural Relativism** is the idea that beliefs, customs, practices and rituals of a culture must be observed & evaluated from the perspective of where they originated.
- Anti Ethnocentrism - against the idea of judging a culture as inferior than your own.*

Historicism example...

- Judging the United States through a Canadian perspective is not fair or correct, if you were born and raised in the United States you might understand and appreciate the ways of that culture more than a Canadian would and vice versa.
- Instead we should look at another culture, like the U.S. on their own terms and avoid making snap judgments about other lifestyles.*

How do we view them?



How do they view us?



Culture & Personality

- This perspective basically says that culture influences personality development.
- Adult behaviour is conditioned through the socialization, teachings and experiences in their culture, and not through genetics or biology for instance.*

Culture & Personality example...

- Margaret Mead studied three different groups in the South Pacific islands.
- Each group had different gender roles, one group had men who were more passive and the women more dominant, another the men and women were both quite passive and in the third, both the men and women were quite aggressive.
- Mead came to the conclusion that biology does not determine that women are passive, that it is actually the type of culture that we grow up in that affects our personality development.*

