

Cultural Studies

Overview

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Day One: Beginnings

What is Culture?



TES STUDY MATERIAL

What is Culture?



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"Understanding Religion Evolution: Animism, Totemism, Shamanism, Paganism & Progressed organized religion"



What is Culture?

- Social behaviour
- Art, festivals, dance, music, fashion, lifestyle
- Morals, law, customs, habits
- Margaret Mead: Culture is the learned behaviour of a society
- Raymond Williams: Culture includes the organisation of production, the structure of the family, the structure of institutions which express or govern social relationships, the characteristic forms through which members of the society communicate.
- Clifford Geertz: Culture is the ensemble of stories we tell ourselves about ourselves.

What is Culture?



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High Culture

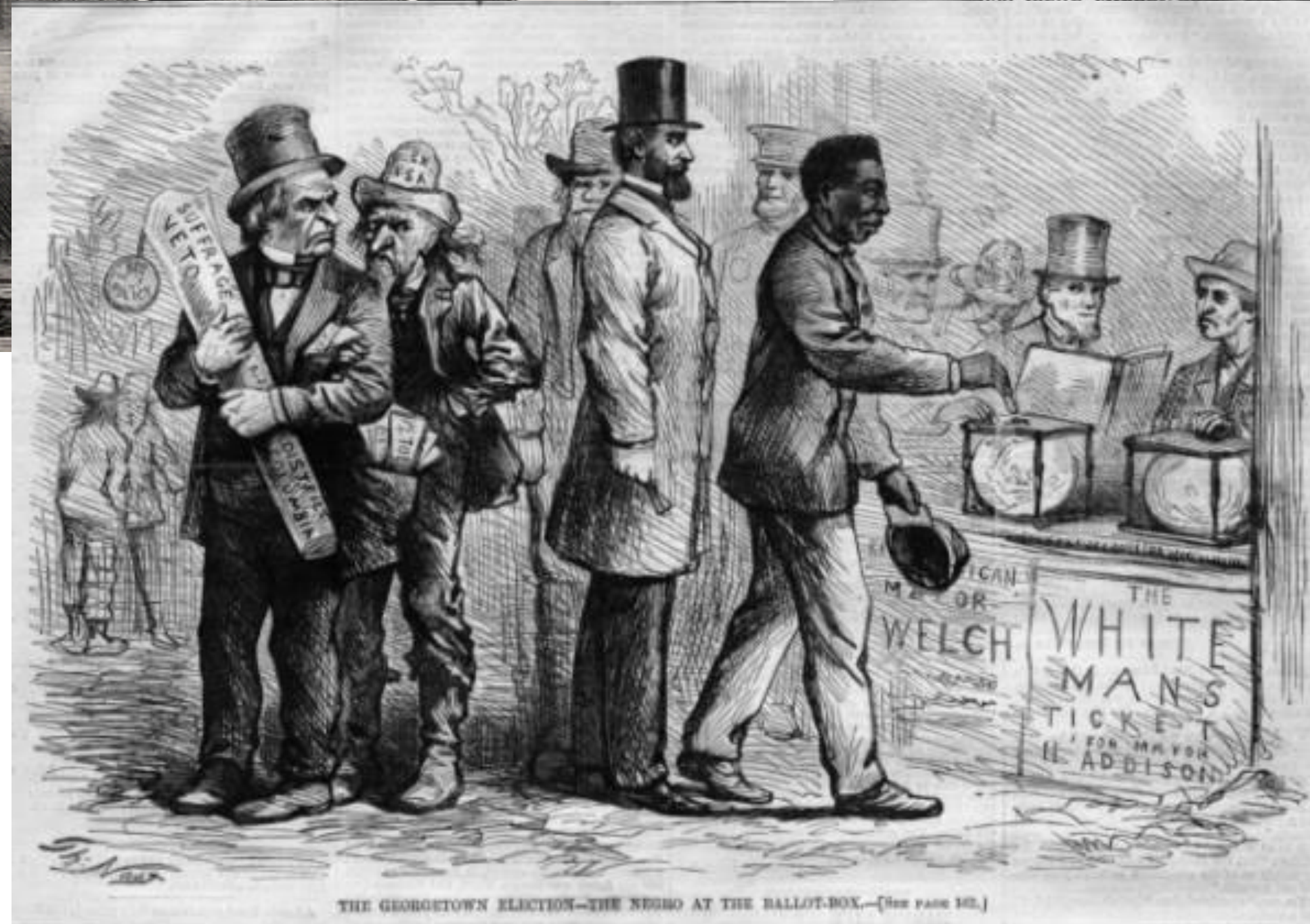
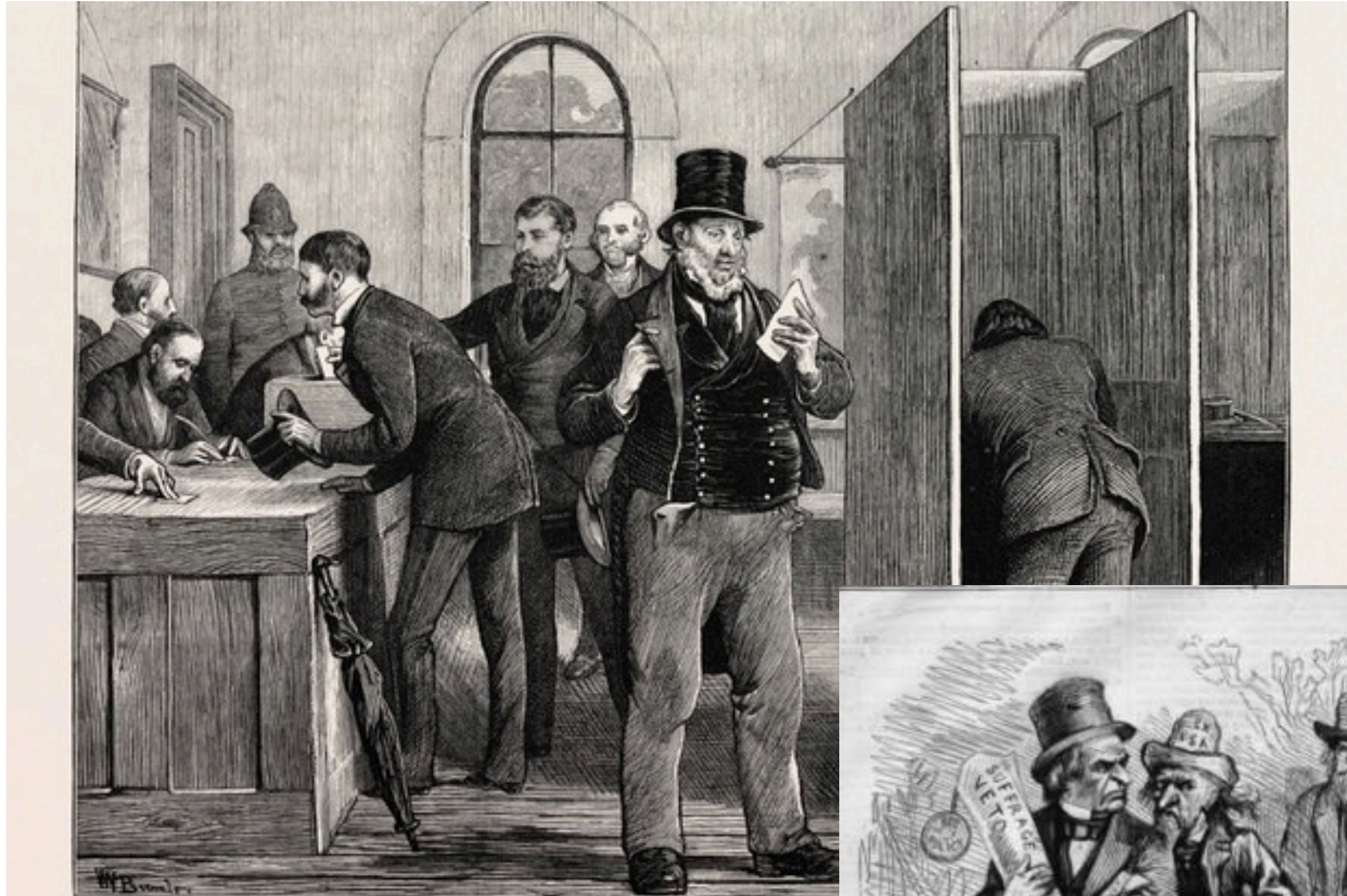


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Low Culture



Universal Voting Rights



Cultural Studies

- Values working class culture and popular culture.
- Understands that what is considered “universal” or “natural” culture is rooted in power relations and is homogenised and naturalised by marginalising other elements of culture.



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What is Cultural Studies about?

What is Cultural Studies?

- Interdisciplinary study
- How culture relates to the larger society
- Political dynamics of mass media and everyday cultural practices
- How culture transforms individual experiences, social realities and power relations
- Draws on social theory, philosophy, history, linguistics, media

Main Features

- Cultural studies examine cultural practices in terms of their relation to **power**.
- Cultural studies deal with culture in all its **complexity** within its **socio-political** context.
- Cultural studies involve **theory** (of culture as an object of study) as well as **practice** (culture as the location of political criticism and action).
- Cultural studies is based on both knowledge as **subjective** experience and knowledge as **objective** and universal.
- Cultural studies attempt to evaluate and **change** structures of **dominance**, especially in industrial, capitalist societies.

Basic Assumptions

- Culture as constituted by signs organised as codes.
- Cultural signs involve representation and Othering.
- Culture is discursive – involving a structure of knowledge and power.
- The diverse cultural forms and practices should all be studied, as also how different groups / classes compete for cultural domination.
- The focus is on how culture is practised and how culture is made.



POWER

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IDENTITY

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IDEOLOGY

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MODERNITY

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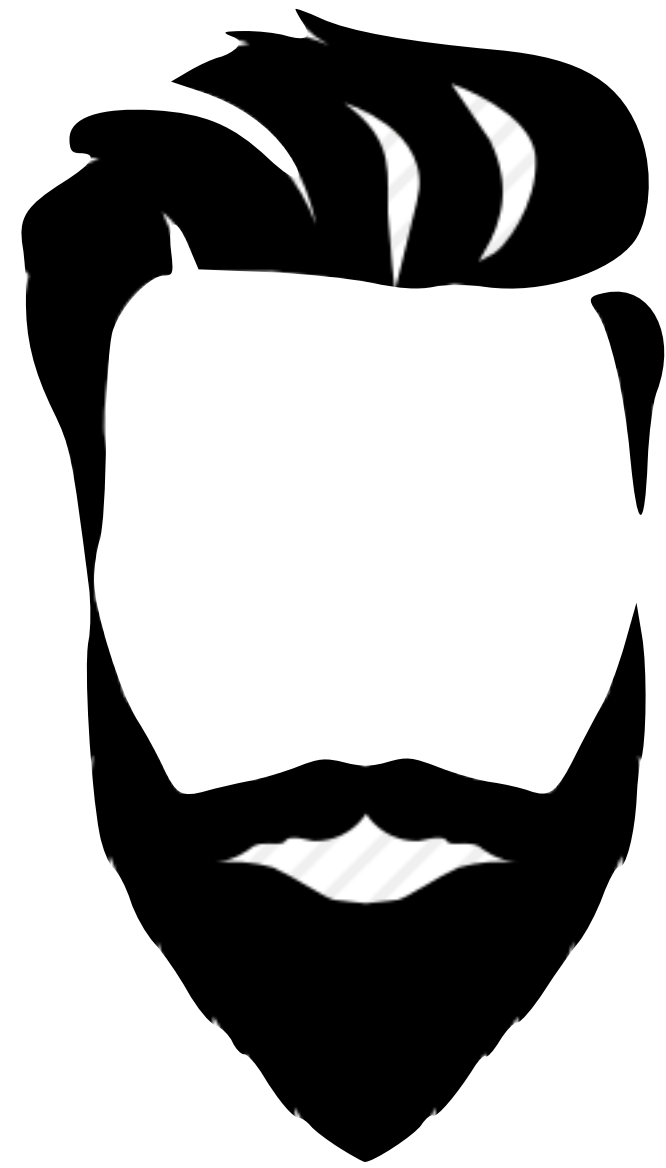


POSTMODERNITY & GLOBALIZATION

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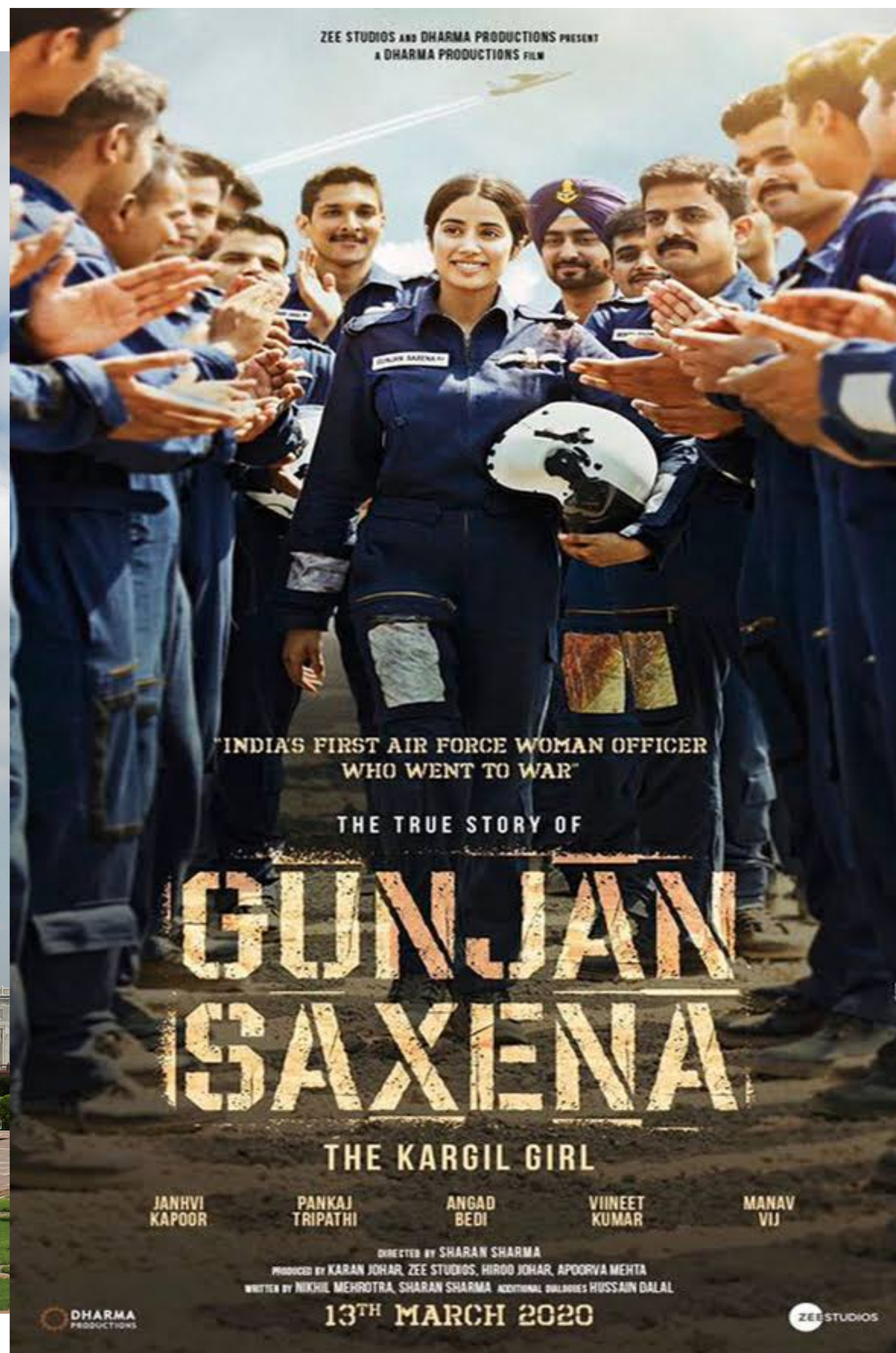


EVERYDAY LIFE
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RESISTANCE & COUNTERCULTURE

TES STUDY MATERIAL



NATION
TES STUDY MATERIAL



MULTICULTURALISM
TES STUDY MATERIAL



FUNDAMENTALISM
TES STUDY MATERIAL

The Beginnings

- Cultural Studies developed in Britain as a reaction against
 - Liberal humanism and orthodox Marxism
 - As an engagement with New Left in the 1950s
- The discussion of ‘culture and civilization’ in literary studies from Matthew Arnold
 - *Culture and Anarchy* (1869)
 - High, elite culture
- Reached its peak in the works of F.R. Leavis and Q.D. Leavis (1930s-1950s, Leavisism)
 - Great Tradition
 - Narrow definition of value in culture
 - Rejected popular culture as contaminated by capitalism
- From here, Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams took up the discussion of culture
 - Rooted in New Left, and in Frankfurt School

Frankfurt School

- A group of philosophers and social scientists
- Influenced New Left and Cultural Studies
- Associated with the Institute of Social Research at the Goethe University, Frankfurt
- Emerged during the Inter-war period (1918-39) in Weimar Republic (Germany)
- Important figures were intellectuals, academics, political dissidents
 - Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, Frederick Pollock, Leo Lowenthal
- Jurgen Habermas
- Critical of capitalism as well as orthodox Marxism / Leninism
- Explored alternate paths of social development

Institute for Social Research, U of Frankfurt

- Founded in 1923 by Felix Weil and Friedrich Pollock under the Directorship of Carl Grunberg
- In 1930, philosopher Max Horkheimer became the Director
- It was the time of the growing influence of the Nazis and the rise of Hitler
- In 1933, the Institute was shifted to a branch in Geneva and in 1934 to New York
- In New York, became affiliated with Columbia University
- Reopened in Frankfurt in 1951
- Second generation began with Jurgen Habermas
 - There is also a third generation
- Major Ideas and Practices
 - Critical Theory, Culture Industry, Negative dialectics, Eclipse of reason, Dialectical method, critique of modernity and capitalism

Critical Theory

- Horkheimer defined it as anti-dogmatic social critique meant to effect sociological change and intellectual emancipation
- To analyze the significance of dominant ideologies of the bourgeois society
 - To show how these ideologies misrepresent human relations of the real world
 - To show how these misrepresentations legitimise the oppression of people by capitalism
- This is against traditional theory which understands and explains the world (while Critical Theory critiques and changes it)

Hegelian Dialectical Method

- As a method of social criticism
- Struggle of opposites
 - Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis
- Ability to view an issue from multiple perspectives
- Arriving at conclusions by reconciling contradictory information
- Hegel said Logic has three moments
 - The Moment of Understanding
 - The Dialectical Moment
 - The Speculative Moment

Dialectic of Enlightenment

- Book by Adorno and Horkheimer published in 1944
- Written during the Institute's exile in New York
 - Response to the disastrous effects of the two World Wars and Hitler's Nazism
- Critique of Western civilization as a whole
 - Explore what themes have dominated social thought in recent years
- Using the metaphor of Odysseus (40 pages), analyze bourgeois consciousness

What is Enlightenment?

- In 1784 Kant wrote
 - Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another... Sapere Aude! Have courage to use your own understanding.
 - Motto of the Enlightenment
 - The Enlightenment led to the greatest achievements in science
- To Adorno and Horkheimer, it looked like Enlightenment has failed
- Later Habermas would also say Modernity is an unfinished project
 - Modernity, the child of Enlightenment, has not finished its project of reason and democracy. It has to be finished before Postmodernity dawns

Why has Enlightenment failed?

- Questions
 - Why is humanity sinking into a new kind of barbarism?
 - Why did the Enlightenment go wrong?
 - Why have our ideas of human rights, scientific progress and secularism failed?
- The Answer
 - Reason has a dark side
 - Enlightenment was against Myth, Religion, Unjust Power (phenomena that people accepted blindly)
 - But, using Odyssey, they show that Myth involves Enlightenment and vice versa
 - Enlightenment collapses into primeval forms of repression that it seeks to overcome (Enlightenment defeats its own purpose)

Culture Industry

- Discussed in the chapter “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass deception” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*
- A phenomenon of late capitalism
- Art no longer denotes pure autonomous forms, but are commodified products that carry power
- Art is now imitative and superficial whose aesthetic goal is merely to entertain superficially (not to convey truths)
- Even when we seem to make “free” choices, we don’t make any; our actions and preferences are noted and manipulated by the industry; we are part of the system inevitably
- Present-day entertainment merely appeases us or distracts us
- Example of Disney Movies (Video)
 - Routine, recycled, formulaic narratives and images

New Left

- 1960s-70s
- Partly a reaction against orthodox Marxism and Communist Party's authoritarianism; inspired by Gramsci, Althusser
- Engaged in issues like civil rights, women's rights, gay rights, etc
- Herbert Marcuse
 - German-Jewish philosopher associated with Frankfurt School; "father" of New Left
 - *Eros and Civilization*: In the Post-War mass culture, there is a profusion of inauthentic false needs, sexual provocations and instantaneous gratification that keep people repressed, apolitical and uncritical (Repressive Desublimation)
 - *One-Dimensional Man*: Bourgeois life in Europe and America is one-dimensional; with no critical thought

New Left in Britain

- 1950s
- Emerged as a British response to the Russian invasion of Hungary in 1956
 - The New Left comprised European Leftist thinkers who denounced the Stalinist variety of Marxism
 - Students and intellectuals from former British colonies who were not part of the mainstream institutions earlier, played a major role in the New Left
- E.P. Thompson
 - Along with John Saville, he founded the journal *The Reasoner*
 - They were members of the Communist Party Historians Group (CPHG)
 - Asked to stop the journal; refused; suspended from the Party
 - Started *The New Reasoner*
 - Later merged with another journal and became the famous *New Left Review* (1960 onwards)
 - Departed from orthodox Marxism; engaged in Marxist revisionism; Party's confused response to the suppression of Hungarian Revolution by the Soviet Union and the British and French invasion of Suez Canal Zone

New Left in Britain

- 1960s
- Raymond Williams
 - Very influential thinker of the early New Left
 - Laid the foundations of Cultural Studies and Cultural materialism
 - Terry Eagleton was his student

New Left in the US

- 1960s
- Student movements
 - Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)
 - For free speech and academic freedom
 - Coined the term establishment; were anti-Establishment
 - Advocated anarchist, countercultural values
- Associated with
 - Anti-Vietnam War
 - Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or Wobblies)
 - Black radicalism; Black Power Movement; militant Black Panther Party
 - Rebirth of Feminism
 - Environmentalist Movement

Other Theoretical Influences

Theorists

- Michel Foucault
- Jacques Derrida
- Jacques Lacan
- Louis Althusser
- Antonio Gramsci
- Martin Heidegger
- Roland Barthes
- Julia Kristeva
- Claude Levi-Strauss
- Jean Baudrillard
- Noam Chomsky

Michel Foucault (1926-1984)

- French philosopher who applied philosophy in sociology, culture, history, literature, psychology and other Humanities
- Stressed on phenomenology, or subjective experience of the world
- Studied HOW a discourse (or subject) came into being (rather than WHAT it is)
- Not what madness is and how it can be cured; by WHY certain behaviours are categorised as madness
- Madness and Civilisation (1961), The Birth of the Clinic (1963)
- The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences (1966)

Archeology and Genealogy

- How knowledge systems came into being, or the conditions under which knowledges are constructed, is called Archeology (The Archeology of Knowledge, 1969)
- Foucault's Archeological approach to History
 - History doesn't develop smoothly or coherently as in textbooks
 - History is chaotic and contradictory; constructed based on some pre-conditions of knowledge and certain processes of power (E.g. heterosexuality)
- Archeology is about how a discourse or knowledge is constructed
 - Genealogy is about how a human being is constructed (E.g. prison and methods of punishment; sexuality)
 - A human being is defined entirely by his/her position within a network of power relations

Power/Knowledge

- Discipline and Punish (1975): Power is not an instrument wielded by people or groups (agents) as an instrument of coercion.
- Rather, power is everywhere and comes from everywhere
- It is diffused, embodied in discourse, knowledge and “regimes of truth” (which exist as the result of scientific discourse and institutions such as education, media, political and economic ideologies, etc)
- Power is created and maintained through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding and “truth”
- For e.g. Confession in 18th-19th centuries

Episteme and Dispositif (Apparatus)

- Episteme (term used in *The Order of Things*) to denote the unconscious structures or set of rules and conventions that make certain knowledges possible in any particular period of time. (E.g. Gravity)
 - Derived from a Greek word which means knowledge or skill
 - Contrasted in Plato with Doxa or common belief or opinion
- Dispositif (Apparatus) indicates the various institutional, physical, and administrative mechanisms and knowledge structures which maintain the exercise of power within the social body.
 - E.g. prisons, lunatic asylums, schools, factories, literature, philosophy, agriculture, navigation, computers, cell phones

Biopolitics

- In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1976) titled *The Will to Knowledge*
- The complicated mechanisms through which human life processes are “managed” within the regime of authority in relation to power, knowledge, and the processes of subjectivation (how one becomes a subject)
- Further developed by Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben
- Biopolitics involve Biopower
 - The way in which power is used to manage human beings large groups, thus leading to control of entire populations
 - Rules and regulations, habits, health and reproductive practices
 - Use of State power on people as essential to their well-being

Discipline and Training of Docile Bodies

- Biopower is related to disciplinary power
 - While (until the 18th century) absolutist and juridical power produced punishment in the form of the spectacle of public torture, in the 18th and 19th century began disciplinary power
 - More humane; manipulated the body of the convict through a system of constraints and obligations, thereby depriving the individual of liberty
 - E.g. Panopticon
 - Training is an important way in which power operates upon the Docile body (as against the Protesting body) which exists within the system of surveillance and regulation, thereby leading to normalisation and acceptance of that system
 - Governmentality is the organised set of practices used by governments to rule over people

Carceral Archipelago and Panopticon

- Carceral archipelago (means a group of islands which form a prison)
- The term denotes the surveillance systems and technologies used by the Carceral State or Prison State
- Panopticon is originally a circular prison envisaged by the 17th century philosopher Jeremy Bentham that controls the prisoners by constant surveillance (not by physical force)
- The Disciplinary State functions like the Panopticon, and people are no longer free here