Folk and Popular Culture

An Introduction
Culture

• The combination of three things:
  – Values
  – Material artifacts
  – Political institutions
    • This chapter deals with material artifacts
Material Culture

• Two basic categories: folk and popular culture
  – Folk culture
    • Traditionally practiced by small, isolated, homogeneous groups in rural areas
  – Popular culture
    • Characterized by large, heterogeneous groups of people who share common habits despite differences in other personal characteristics
  – Geographers are interested in two aspects of culture:
    • Where cultures are located in space
    • How cultures interact with the environment
Where Do Cultures Originate and Diffuse?

• Origin of folk and popular cultures
  – Folk culture = hearth area; originators are usually unknown
  – Popular culture = hearth area comes from more developed countries (MDCs)
    • People in MDCs have disposable income and leisure time that allow for these innovations
Where Do Cultures Originate and Diffuse?

- Origin of folk and popular music
  - Folk music characteristics
    - Tells a story or recounts important life events or activities
    - Is personal in nature
  - Popular music characteristics
    - Written by individuals for the purpose of selling to a large audience
    - Highly technical
Figure 4-2

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Where Do Cultures Originate and Diffuse?

• Diffusion of folk and popular culture
  – Folk culture diffuses slowly, primarily through migration, and at a small scale
    • Example: Diffusion of Amish culture
  – Popular culture diffuses rapidly, via hierarchical diffusion, and over a large scale
    • Example: Sports
Distribution of Amish

Figure 4-4

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Iroquois Lacrosse
Questions

• 1. Give an example of something found in folk culture and an example of something found in popular culture.

• 2. Name some folk customs that are now part of popular culture.

• 3. Explain why pop cultures hearths are almost always found in MDCs.
Why Is Folk Culture Clustered?

• Influence of the physical environment
  – Folk culture = close connection to the environment
    • Most folk cultures are rural and agricultural
      – Clothing is often tied to environmental conditions
        » Example: Wooden clogs in the Netherlands
    • Folk cultures can ignore environmental conditions
Why Is Folk Culture Clustered?

• Influence of the physical environment
  – Food preferences and the environment
    • Food preferences are adapted to the environment
      – Example: In Asia, rice is grown in milder, wetter environments whereas wheat is grown in colder, drier environments
    • Food taboos may be especially strong
      – People avoid certain foods because of negative associations with that food
  • Terroir = the sum effects of the local environment on a particular food item
Swine Stock

Figure 4-8

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Why Is Folk Culture Clustered?

• Influence of the physical environment
  – Folk housing and the environment
    • Housing = a reflection of cultural heritage, current fashion, function, and the physical environment
    • Two most common building materials = wood and brick
    • Minor differences in the environment can produce very different house styles
Why Is Folk Culture Clustered?

• Isolation promotes cultural diversity
  – Examples:
    • Himalayan art
    • Beliefs and folk house forms
      – Sacred spaces
      – U.S. folk housing
Questions

• 4. What are some foods that are part of your culture?

• 5. Give two examples of food taboos from two different folk cultures.
Why Is Popular Culture Widely Distributed?

- Diffusion of popular housing, clothing, and food
  - Popular culture varies more in time than place
    - Food customs: consumption of large quantities of snack foods and alcohol
    - Clothing styles: reflect occupation rather than environment
    - Housing: reflects fashion trends since the 1940s in the United States
Consumption of Canadian Whiskey and Tequila

Figure 4-14
U.S. House Types (1945–1990)

Figure 4-16

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Why Is Popular Culture Widely Distributed?

- Electronic diffusion of popular culture
  - Watching television
    - The most popular leisure activity in MDCs
    - Diffusion from the United States to the rest of the world = 50 years
  - The Internet
    - Diffusion from the United States to the rest of the world = 10 years
TELEVISION

- TELEVISION IS THE MOST IMPORTANT MECHANISM FOR THE RAPID DIFFUSION OF POP CULTURE. It is also the most popular leisure activity in MDC’s throughout the world. There are four levels of television service:
  - Near universal ownership. US, Japan, Europe, etc.
  - Ownership common, but not universal. Latin American countries, etc.
  - Ownership exists, but is not widely diffused. Some African and Asian countries,
  - Very few televisions. Sub-Saharan Africa, some regions of Mid East.
Diffusion of TV, 1954–1999

Television has diffused widely since the 1950s, but some areas still have low numbers of TVs per population.

Much media is still state-controlled.

Ten Most Censored Countries:
1. North Korea
2. Myanmar (Burma)
3. Turkmenistan
4. Equatorial Guinea
5. Libya
6. Eritrea
7. Cuba
8. Uzbekistan
9. Syria
10. Belarus

Diffusion and Technology

• Diffusion of the Internet is following roughly the same pattern as TV did at the start, which is the U.S. has a disproportionately large share of the Internet hosts compared to its share of the world population. As the Internet increasingly becomes the people’s resource of choice, pop culture will have yet another conduit to rapidly and effectively diffuse to nearly every inhabited place on the planet.
The Internet is diffusing today, but access varies widely.
The Internet is diffusing today, but access varies widely. Some countries censor the Internet, but this is much harder to do.
Censorship of Media

- In the U.S., TV stations are typically private enterprises that receive licenses from the government in order to broadcast over a specific frequency.
- Elsewhere in the world, the governments normally control the stations or at least have a board that controls them.
  - This censorship is used to minimize the likelihood that programs hostile to current policies will be broadcast.
- This 1984-esque government regulation has lost some of its strength in recent years however.
  - The main reason is the increased number of small satellite dishes that allow the customer to receive signals from stations based in other countries.
  - Although some countries outlaw the ownership of these dishes, individuals continue to invent new ways to hide the dishes and thus continue to receive their contraband signal.
  - How did the internet play a key role in the Iran elections of the past year?
Key Issue 4: Why does globalization of popular culture cause problems?

- DOMINANCE OF WESTERN PERSPECTIVES
- Three MDC’s, the U.S., the U.K., and Japan, virtually control the television industry.
  - At least one of the three serves nearly every LDC on Earth.
    - The U.S. serves primarily Latin America
    - the U.K. serves primarily Africa
    - Japan serves mainly S. and E. Asia.
- Many LDC leaders claim that because the “westerners” own nearly all of the TV broadcast within their countries, a fair, unbiased report of local news is not presented. Instead, the media focuses only on sensational, rating-boosting stories.
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Pop culture is less likely than folk to be considerate of physical features.

- For many popular customs, the environment is something to be modified to enhance a product or promote its sale.
  - Ex: golf courses, destruction/modification of large expanses of wilderness to promote a popular social custom.

Quite obvious is the increased need of natural resources to feed the pop culture craze. As a new trend engulfs a population, a specific resource may be required to satisfy the demand, and little care is taken to ensure the preserving of that resource for posterity. This, in turn, can lead to higher pollution levels as a result of pop cultures.
Problems with the Globalization of Culture

Often Destroys Folk Culture – or preserves traditions as museum pieces or tourism gimmicks.

• Mexican Mariachis; Polynesian Navigators; Cruise Line Simulations
• Change in Traditional Roles and Values; Polynesian weight problems
Popular Culture

Effects on Landscape: creates homogenous, “placeless” (Relph, 1976), landscape

• Pop culture also promotes uniformity of landscape, as evidenced by the prevalence of nearly identical fast-food restaurants at convenient stops along highways.

  • Complex network of roads and highways
  • Commercial Structures tend towards ‘boxes’
  • Dwellings may be aesthetically suggestive of older folk traditions
  • Planned and Gated Communities more and more common
Surfing at Disney’s Orlando Typhoon Lagoon

Are places still tied to local landscapes?

Disconnect with landscape: indoor swimming pools? desert surfing?

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Muslim Women in Traditional Dress at Indoor Ski Resort
Environmental Effects of Globalization

Accelerated Resource Use in Consumer Societies:

- Furs: minx, lynx, jaguar, kangaroo, whale, sea otters (18th Century Russians) fed early fashion trends.
- Aggressive consumerism evident in most Western Media, including hip hop and rock and roll.
- Inefficient over-consumption of Meats (10:1), Poultry (3:1), even Fish (fed other fish and chicken) by meat-eating pop cultures
- New larger housing desires and associated energy and water use.

Pollution:

- Water treatment and improved public health may come with higher incomes.
- However, increased waste and toxins from fuel use, discarded products, plastics, marketing and packaging materials, etc.
Marlboro Man in Egypt
Benefits of Economic and Cultural Globalization

- Increased economic opportunity?
- Higher standards of living?
- Increased consumer choice
- More political freedom?
- More social freedom?
- Is Globalization good or bad?
  - Explain using the text to back your answers
A Global Projection of Subjective Well-being: The First Published Map of World Happiness

Map created by Adrian White, Analytic Social Psychologist, University of Leicester (2006)

Map and further analysis incorporates data published by UNESCO, the WHO, the New Economics Foundation, the Veerhoven Database, the Latinobarometer, the Afrobarometer, the CIA, and the UN Human Development Report.

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• Rubenstein, James- Cultural Landscape; An Introduction to Human Geography
• http://www.glendale.edu/geo/reed/cultural/cultural_lectures.htm
• http://www.quia.com/pages/mrsbellaphg.html
• Google
Diffusion of TV

Figure 4-18
Diffusion of Facebook

Figure 4-21

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Questions

• 6. Discuss with your partner 3 clothing examples since the 1980s that have become part of pop culture for each culture.
Why Does Popular Culture Cause Problems?

• Threats to folk culture
  – Loss of traditional values
  – Media imperialism
  – Satellites
    • Limit to government control of information
Why Does Popular Culture Cause Problems?

• Environmental impact of popular culture
  – Modifying nature
    • Golf courses
    • Uniform landscapes
  – Negative impacts
    • Increased demand for natural resources
    • Pollution
Questions

• 7. What is often the first aspect of folk culture to be lost due to pop culture?