

Definition of American Pop Culture

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Simply stated, American pop culture is the vernacular or popular culture of the American people. It comprises the tastes, preferences, customs and behaviors embraced by the broad mass of the American public at any given point in time. American pop culture, like the popular culture of any society, functions to bind together large masses of diverse individuals into a unified cultural identity.

Examples of American Pop Culture

American pop culture derives from a multitude of sources, particularly commercial mass media. Examples of pop cultural items include film, television programs and commercials, video games, Internet memes, brand names and symbols, sports, slang words and catch phrases, clothing fads and even food. Additionally, the pervasiveness of the Internet in the 21st century drastically increases the speed of communication, which facilitates the sharing of cultural items from person to person through mobile devices and social media. This can cause pop culture items to explode in popularity almost instantaneously.

Characteristics of American Pop Culture

American pop culture differs from other forms of culture in several significant ways. While high culture -- such as fine art, opera or literary works -- is meant for an elite audience, pop culture is easily accessible to the general public. The average consumer does not need previous exposure to pop culture or higher levels of education to consume it. Also, pop culture differs from folk culture in that it is ever-changing. In contrast, folk culture, which emanates from tradition, tends to be conservative and fixed.

The Origins of American Pop Culture

The origins of American pop culture lie in the Industrial Revolution of the late 18th century, when rural people migrated to American cities in large numbers. Several factors unique to the era allowed pop culture to develop and flourish. For instance, densely populated cities permitted news of cultural items to spread rapidly by word of mouth, new means of mass production made consumption of cultural items less expensive and a rising middle class gave larger numbers of people the income necessary to consume them. Examples of early American pop cultural items include serial novels and tabloid news magazines.

American Pop Culture Abroad

Many American pop culture items enjoy wide popularity overseas as well. American films account for as much as 70 percent of European box office sales. Also, some American companies, like McDonald's, have a ubiquitous presence overseas. As such, McDonald's' symbol, the golden arches, is as recognizable abroad as it is in the United States. Some sociologists believe the effect of exporting American pop culture abroad is harmless or neutral. Others, however, express concern that the global dominance of American pop culture amounts to cultural imperialism and has the potential to dilute local cultures.

McAdams, Claire. "Definition of American Pop Culture." *eHow*. Demand Media, 1999-2014. Web. 30 Dec. 2014.

The Effects That American Pop Culture Has on Our Everyday Lives

by Kristyn Hammond

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Pop culture can have a positive influence on society. Popular culture influences contemporary lifestyles through music, movies and literature. American popular culture is hard to ignore -- It affects nearly everyone's daily lives, acting as a social glue for society, allowing individuals to consider difficult subject matter and provides a strong economic engine as it encourages new purchases.

Social Glue

Popular culture is the primary conversation starter for people at work, school or during their everyday lives. It forms a unifying foundation that pervades individual differences and allows those conversations to extend from a point of unity. A shared appreciation for a new television show or popular new movie can create a context for mutual understanding and a basis for friendship building. Additionally, it is a social icebreaker, allowing individuals to overcome their shyness and engage in group conversations without the fear of isolation.

Multiple Evaluations

Pop culture topics can each be viewed from multiple evaluation points, allowing individuals the freedom to assess and form opinions about topics with as much depth as they choose to give the subject. For instance, in a group talking about a new television show, a passing statement of "I liked it" can be as welcome of an insight as a more in-depth evaluation of the director's vision for the show. This allows different individuals to engage themselves with the content as deeply as they would like.

Challenging Topics

American popular culture allows people to consider, express views on and evaluate issues that they might normally avoid. Considerations about sexuality, social propriety and cultural motifs are exposed within pop culture, forcing those watching to face these issues and form their own opinions. The benefit is the exposure to ideas that people may not normally be willing to consider, while the actual exposure is from the safe distances of a television screen or computer monitor.

Trends

Pop culture influences trends in music taste, television preferences, clothing lines, technology and popular cars. While the pressure to stay ahead of the trend can seem excessive, it pushes consumers to put money back into the economy. While this influence is often regarded as a negative effect of popular culture, the economic benefit can be positive as long as individuals are reasonable in their purchases.

Hammond, Kristyn. "The Effects That American Pop Culture Has on Our Everyday Lives." *eHow*. Demand Media, 1999-2014. Web. 30 Dec. 2014.

Influence of American Pop Culture

by Thea Theresa English
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American pop culture has had a major influence on our country and around the world. For example, you can find fast-food joints like McDonald's and Burger King in countries such as China and Germany. In the United States, pop culture has influenced families, language and the educational system.

Food

American pop culture has transformed the way we eat. With the introduction of pre-packaged boxed meals such as Hamburger Helper and Rice-A-Roni, it is now more convenient for families to eat together. The prevalence of a fast-food culture has contributed to the rise of childhood obesity.

Music

American music has contributed greatly to culture and has played an important part in social change. During the civil rights movement, there were musicians such as Sam Cooke, Aretha Franklin, Joan Baez, The Beatles and Jimi Hendrix who sang about the turbulence and pleaded for change.

Television

American television has also influenced the way Americans think about politics, religion, history and relationships. For example, the show "Good Times" attempted to show mainstream audiences the realities of African-American urban life and the consequences of unfair social policies.

Expert Insight

According to the Library of Congress, because America was originally a part of Great Britain, there has always been an relation regarding how both nations influenced each other culturally. For example, the British sport of rugby transformed itself into football in America. In the 1960s, British television shows enjoyed success in America.

Ethnic Influence

African-Americans have contributed greatly to pop culture in the form of cuisine, jazz and blues music and spirituality. Hispanic-Americans are making strides in entertainment with popular shows such as "The George Lopez Show" and "Ugly Betty." And the cuisine of Asian-Americans is found at many American restaurants.

English, Thea Theresa. "Influence of American Pop Culture." *eHow*. Demand Media, 1999-2014. Web. 30 Dec. 2014.