AP Human Geography

Folk and Popular Culture
Culture and Customs

- People living in other locations often have extremely different social customs.
- Geographers ask why such differences exist and how social customs are related to the cultural landscape.
Folk and Popular Culture

- The Key Issues are:
  1. Where do folk and popular cultures originate and diffuse?
  2. Why is folk culture clustered?
  3. Why is popular culture widely distributed?
  4. Why does globalization of popular culture cause problems?
Material Culture

- Material artifacts of culture are the visible objects that a group possesses and leaves behind for the future.
  - Here we look at two facets of material culture.
    1) Survival activities.
    2) Leisure activities
      - The Arts
      - Recreation
Material Culture Defined

- Culture can be distinguished from habit and custom.
  - A habit is a repetitive act that a particular individual performs.
  - A custom is a repetitive act of a group.
- A collection of social customs produces a group’s material culture.
Folk vs. Popular Culture

- Folk culture is traditionally practiced primarily by small, homogeneous groups living in isolated rural areas.
- Popular culture is found in large, heterogeneous societies.
Folk vs. Popular Culture Continued

- Landscapes dominated by a collection of folk customs change relatively little over time.
- In contrast, popular culture is based on rapid simultaneous global connections.
- Thus, folk culture is more likely to vary from place to place at a given time, whereas popular culture is more likely to vary from time to time at a given place.
Effects of Popular Culture

- In Earth’s globalization, popular culture is becoming more dominant, threatening the survival of unique folk cultures.
- The disappearance of local folk customs reduces local diversity in the world and the intellectual stimulation that arises from differences in background.
- The dominance of popular culture can also threaten the quality of the environment.
Issue 1: Origins and Diffusion of Folk and Popular Cultures

- Origin of folk and popular cultures
  - Origin of folk music
  - Origin of popular music
- Diffusion of folk and popular cultures
  - The Amish: Relocation diffusion of folk culture
  - Sports: Hierarchical diffusion of popular culture
Origin of Folk and Popular Cultures

- A social custom originates at a hearth, a center of innovation.
- Folk customs often have anonymous hearths.
- They may also have multiple hearths.
- Popular culture is most often a product of the economically more developed countries.
- Industrial technology permits the uniform reproduction of objects in large quantities.
Folk Music

- Music exemplifies the differences in the origins of folk and popular culture.
- Folk songs tell a story or convey information about daily activities such as farming, life-cycle events (birth, death, and marriage), or mysterious events such as storms and earthquakes.
Fig. 4-1: U.S. country music has four main hearths, or regions of origin: southern Appalachia, central Tennessee and Kentucky, the Ozark-Ouachita uplands, and north-central Texas.
Origin of Popular Music

- In contrast to folk music, popular music is written by specific individuals for the purpose of being sold to a large number of people.
Tin Pan Alley and Popular Music

Fig. 4-2: Writers and publishers of popular music were clustered in Tin Pan Alley in New York City in the early twentieth century. The area later moved north from 28th Street to Times Square.
Diffusion of American Music

- The diffusion of American popular music worldwide began in earnest during World War II, when the Armed Forces Radio Network broadcast music to American soldiers.

- English became the international language for popular music.
Hip Hop

- Hip hop is a more recent form of popular music that also originated in New York.
- Lyrics make local references and represent a distinctive hometown scene.
- At the same time, hip hop has diffused rapidly around the world through instruments of globalization.
Fig. 4-3: This mental map places major hip hop performers near other similar performers and in the portion of the country where they performed.
Diffusion of Folk and Popular Cultures

- The broadcasting of American popular music on Armed Forces radio illustrates the difference in diffusion of folk and popular cultures.
- The spread of popular culture typically follows the process of hierarchical diffusion from hearths or nodes of innovation.
- In contrast, folk culture is transmitted primarily through migration, relocation diffusion.
The Amish: Relocation Diffusion of Folk Culture

- Amish customs illustrate how relocation diffusion distributes folk culture.
- Amish folk culture remains visible on the landscape in at least 17 states.
- In Europe the Amish did not develop distinctive language, clothing, or farming practices and gradually merged with various Mennonite church groups.
- Several hundred Amish families migrated to North America in two waves.
- Living in rural and frontier settlements relatively isolated from other groups, Amish communities retained their traditional customs, even as other European immigrants to the United States adopted new ones.

**FIGURE 4-4** Amish settlements are distributed throughout the northeastern United States. According to William Crowley, who documented this distribution, the number of church districts within a settlement indicates the relative number of Amish in the community. Amish buggies and motor vehicles must share the highway in the larger Amish settlements, such as Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, shown in the photograph.
Amish Settlements in the U.S.

Fig. 4-4: Amish settlements are distributed through the northeast U.S.
Sports: Hierarchical Diffusion of Popular Culture

- In contrast with the diffusion of folk customs, organized sports provide examples of how popular culture is diffused.
- Many sports originated as isolated folk customs and were diffused like other folk culture, through the migration of individuals.
- The contemporary diffusion of organized sports, however, displays the characteristics of popular culture.
Folk Culture Origin of Soccer

- Early soccer games resembled mob scenes.
- In the twelfth century the rules became standardized.
- Because soccer disrupted village life, King Henry II banned the game from England in the late twelfth century.
- It was not legalized again until 1603 by King James I.
- At this point, soccer was an English folk custom rather than a global popular custom.
Globalization of Soccer

- The transformation of soccer from an English folk custom to global popular culture began in the 1800’s.
- Sport became a subject that was taught in school.
- Increasing leisure time permitted people not only to view sporting events but to participate in them.
- With higher incomes, spectators paid to see first-class events.
Soccer was first played in continental Europe in the late 1870s by Dutch students who had been in Britain.

British citizens further diffused the game throughout the worldwide British Empire.

In the twentieth century, soccer, like other sports, was further diffused by new communication systems, especially radio and television.

Although soccer was also exported to the United States, it never gained the popularity it won in Europe and Latin America.
Sports in Popular Culture

- Each country has its own preferred sports.
- Cricket is popular primarily in Britain and former British colonies.
- Ice hockey prevails, logically, in colder climates.
- The most popular sports in China are martial arts, known as wushu, including archery, fencing, wrestling, and boxing.
- Baseball became popular in Japan after it was introduced by American soldiers.
Lacrosse as a Popular Sport

- Lacrosse is a sport played primarily in Ontario, Canada, and a few eastern U.S. cities, especially Baltimore and New York.
  - It has also fostered cultural identity among the Iroquois Confederation of Six Nations.
  - In recent years, the International Lacrosse Federation has invited the Iroquois nation to participate in the Lacrosse World Championships.
Issue 2: Clustering of Folk Cultures

- Isolation promotes cultural diversity
  - Himalayan art

- Influence of the physical environment
  - Distinctive food preferences
  - Folk housing
  - U.S. folk house forms
Folk culture typically has unknown or multiple origins among groups living in relative isolation.

A combination of physical and cultural factors influences the distinctive distributions of folk culture.

Folk customs observed at a point in time vary widely from one place to another, even among nearby places.
In a study of artistic customs in the Himalaya Mountains, geographers P. Karan and Cotton Mather demonstrate that distinctive views of the physical environment emerge among neighboring cultural groups that are isolated.

These groups display similar uniqueness in their dance, music, architecture, and crafts.
Himalayan Folk Cultural Regions

Fig. 4-5: Cultural geographers have identified four distinct culture regions based on predominant religions in the Himalaya Mountains.
People respond to their environment, but the environment is only one of several controls over social customs.

Folk societies are particularly responsive to the environment because of their low level of technology and the prevailing agricultural economy.

Yet folk culture may ignore the environment.

Broad differences in folk culture arise in part from physical conditions and these conditions produce varied customs.

Two necessities of daily life - food and shelter - demonstrate the influence of cultural values and the environment on development of unique folk culture.
Distinctive Food Preferences

- Folk food habits derive from the environment.
- For example, rice demands a milder, moist climate, while wheat thrives in colder, drier regions.
- People adapt their food preferences to conditions in the environment.
- A good example is soybeans.
  - In the raw state they are toxic and indigestible.
  - Lengthy cooking renders (soybeans) edible, but cooking fuel is scarce in Asia.
  - Asians make foods from soybeans that do not require extensive cooking.
In Europe, traditional preferences for quick-frying foods in Italy resulted in part from cooking fuel shortages.

In Northern Europe, an abundant wood supply encouraged the slow stewing and roasting of foods over fires, which also provided home heat in the colder climate.
Food customs are inevitably affected by the availability of products, but people do not simply eat what is available in their particular environment.

In Transylvania, currently part of Romania, food preferences distinguish groups who have long lived in close proximity.

Soup, the food consumed by poorer people, shows the distinctive traditions of the neighboring cultural groups in Transylvania.

Long after dress, manners, and speech have become indistinguishable from those of the majority, old food habits often continue as the last vestige of traditional folk customs.
Food Attractions and Taboos

- According to many folk customs, everything in nature carries a signature, or distinctive characteristic, based on its appearance and natural properties.

- Certain foods are eaten because their natural properties are perceived to enhance qualities considered desirable by the society, such as strength, fierceness, or lovemaking ability.

- People refuse to eat particular plants or animals that are thought to embody negative forces in the environment.

- Such a restriction on behavior imposed by social custom is a taboo.
Fig. 4-6: Annual hog production is influenced by religious taboos against pork consumption in Islam and other religions. The highest production is in China, which is largely Buddhist.
Other social customs, such as sexual practices, carry prohibitions, but taboos are especially strong in the area of food.

Hindu taboos against consuming cows can also be explained partly for environmental reasons.

- A large supply of oxen must be maintained in India, because every field has to be plowed at approximately the same time: when the monsoon rains arrive.

But the taboo against consumption of meat among many people, including Muslims, Hindus, and Jews, cannot be explained primarily by environment factors.

Social values must influence the choice of diet, because people in similar climates and with similar levels of income consume different foods.
Fig. 4-8: Four communities in western China all have distinctive house types.
Distinctive Building Materials

- The two most common building materials in the world are wood and brick.
- The choice of building materials is influenced both by social factors and by what is available from the environment.
Distinctive House Form and Orientation

- Social groups may share building materials, but the distinctive form of their houses may result from customary beliefs or environmental factors.
- The form of houses in some societies might reflect religious values.
- Beliefs govern the arrangement of household activities in a variety of Southeast Asian societies.
Fig. 4-7: Houses and sleeping positions are oriented according to local customs among the Lao in northern Laos (left) and the Yuan and Shan in northern Thailand (right).
Older houses in the United States display local folk culture traditions.

The style of pioneer homes reflected whatever upscale style was prevailing at the place on the East Coast from which they migrated.

In contrast, houses built in the United States during the past half century display popular culture influences.
Diffusion of House Types in the U.S.

Fig. 4-9: Distinct house types originated in three main source areas in the U.S. and then diffused into the interior as migrants moved west.
Diffusion of New England House Types

Fig. 4-10: Four main New England house types of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries diffused westward as settlers migrated.
US Homes Today

- Today, such distinctions are relatively difficult to observe in the United States.
- Rapid communication and transportation systems provide people throughout the country with knowledge of alternative styles.
- Furthermore houses are usually mass-produced by construction companies.
Wide Dispersion of Popular Culture

- Diffusion of popular housing, clothing, and food
  - Popular housing styles
  - Rapid diffusion of clothing styles
  - Popular food customs

- Television and diffusion of popular culture
  - Diffusion of television
  - Diffusion of the internet
  - Government control of television
Some regional differences in food, clothing, and shelter persist in more developed countries, but differences are much less than in the past.
Popular Housing Styles

- Housing built in the United States since the 1940s demonstrates how popular customs vary more in time than in place.
- In contrast with folk housing that is characteristic of the early 1800s, newer housing in the United States has been built to reflect rapidly changing fashion concerning the most suitable house form.
- In the years immediately after World War II most U.S. houses were built in a modern style.
- Since the 1960s, styles that architects call neo-eclectic have predominated.
Fig. 4-11: Several variations of the “modern style” were dominant from the 1940s into the 1970s. Since then, “neo-eclectic” styles have become the dominant type of house construction in the U.S.
Fig. 4-1-1: Small towns in different regions of the eastern U.S. have different combinations of five main house types.
Rapid Diffusion of Clothing Styles

- Individual clothing habits reveal how popular culture can be distributed across the landscape with little regard for distinctive physical features.

- In the more developed countries clothing habits generally reflect occupations rather than particular environments.

- A second influence on clothing in MDCs is higher income.

- Improved communications have permitted the rapid diffusion of clothing styles from one region of Earth to another.
Rapid Diffusion of Clothing Styles

- Until recently, a year could elapse from the time an original dress was displayed to the time that inexpensive reproductions were available in the stores.
- Now the time lag is less than six weeks.
- The globalization of clothing styles has involved increasing awareness by North Americans and Europeans of the variety of folk costumes around the world.
- The continued use of folk costumes in some parts of the globe may persist not because of distinctive environmental conditions or traditional cultural values but to preserve past memories or to attract tourists.
An important symbol of the diffusion of western popular culture is jeans, which became a prized possession for young people throughout the world.

Locally made denim trousers are available throughout Europe and Asia for under $10, but “genuine” jeans made by Levi Strauss, priced at $50 to $100, are preferred as a status symbol.

Jeans became an obsession and a status symbol among youth in the former Soviet Union, when the Communist government prevented their import.

The scarcity of high-quality jeans was just one of many consumer problems that were important motives in the dismantling of Communist governments in Eastern Europe around 1990.
Popular Food Customs

- People in a country with a more developed economy are likely to have the income, time, and inclination to facilitate greater adoption of popular culture.

- Consumption of large quantities of alcoholic beverages and snack foods are characteristic of the food customs of popular societies.

- Americans choose particular beverages or snacks in part on the basis of preference for what is produced, grown, or imported locally.
  - However, cultural backgrounds also affect the amount and types of alcohol and snack foods consumed.

- Geographers cannot explain all the regional variations in food preferences.
Alcohol Preferences in the U.S.

Fig. 4-12: Per capita consumption of rum (top) and Canadian whiskey (bottom) show different distributions and histories of diffusion.
Wine Production per Year

Fig. 4-13: The distribution of wine production shows the joint impact of the physical environment and social customs.
Role of Television in Diffusing Popular Culture

- Watching television is an especially significant popular custom for two reasons. First, it is the most popular leisure activity in more developed countries throughout the world. Second, television is the most important mechanism by which knowledge of popular culture, such as professional sports, is rapidly diffused across Earth.
Diffusion of Television

- Inventors in a number of countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union, simultaneously contributed to the development of television.

- The U.S. public first saw television in the 1930s. However, its diffusion was blocked for a number of years when broadcasting was curtailed or suspended entirely during World War II.
Fig. 4-14: Television has diffused widely since the 1950s, but some areas still have low numbers of TVs per population.
Fig. 4-15: The U.S. had two-thirds of the world’s internet hosts in 2002. Diffusion of internet service is likely to follow the pattern of TV diffusion, but the rate of this diffusion may differ.
In the United States most television stations are owned by private corporations.

Some stations, however, are owned by local governments or other nonprofit organizations and are devoted to educational or noncommercial programs.

In most countries the government(s) control TV stations to minimize the likelihood that programs hostile to current policies will be broadcast - in other words, they are censored.

- Operating costs are typically paid by the national government from tax revenues, although some government-controlled stations do sell air time to private advertisers.

- A number of Western European countries have transferred some government-controlled television stations to private companies.
Reduced Government Control

- In the past, many governments viewed television as an important tool for fostering cultural integration.
- In recent years, changing technology - especially the diffusion of small satellite dishes - has made television a force for political change rather than stability.
- Governments have had little success in shutting down satellite technology.
- The diffusion of small satellite dishes hastened the collapse of Communist governments in Eastern Europe during the late 1980s.
- Facsimile machines, portable video recorders, and cellular telephones have also put chinks in government censorship.
Key Issue 4: Impacts of the Globalization of Popular Culture

- Threats to folk culture
  - Loss of traditional values
  - Foreign media dominance

- Environmental impacts of popular culture
  - Modifying nature
  - Uniform landscapes
  - Negative environmental impact
Threat to Folk Culture

- The international diffusion of popular culture has led to two problems.
  - First, the diffusion of popular culture may threaten the survival of traditional folk culture in many countries.
  - Second, popular culture may be less responsive to the diversity of local environments and consequently may generate adverse environmental impacts.
- When people turn from folk to popular culture, they may also turn away from the society’s traditional values.
Loss of Traditional Values

- One example of the symbolic importance of folk culture is clothing.
- In African and Asian countries today, there is a contrast between the clothes of rural farm workers and of urban business and government leaders.
- The Western business suit has been accepted as the uniform for business executives and bureaucrats around the world.
- Wearing clothes typical of MDCs is controversial in some Middle Eastern countries.
Change in Traditional Role of Women

- The global diffusion of popular culture threatens the subservience of women to men that is embedded in many folk customs.

- The concepts of legal equality and availability of economic and social opportunities outside the home have become widely accepted in more developed countries, even where women in reality continue to suffer from discriminatory practices.

- However, contact with popular culture also has brought negative impacts for women in less developed countries, such as an increase in prostitution.

- International prostitution is encouraged in (some) countries as a major source of foreign currency.
Leaders of some LDCs consider the dominance of popular customs by MDCs as a threat to their independence.

Leaders of many LDCs view the spread of television as a new method of economic and cultural imperialism on the part of the more developed countries, especially the United States.
Western Control of News Media

- Less developed countries fear the effects of the newsgathering capability of the media even more than their entertainment function.

- Many African and Asian government officials criticize the Western concept of freedom of the press.

- They argue that the American news organizations reflect American values and do not provide a balanced, accurate view of other countries.

- In many regions of the world the only reliable and unbiased news accounts come from the BBC World Service shortwave radio newscasts.
Environmental Impact of Popular Culture

- Popular culture is less likely than folk culture to be distributed with consideration for physical features.
- Popular culture can significantly modify or control the environment.
- It may be imposed on the environment rather than springing forth from it, as with many folk customs.
Golf Courses in Metropolitan Areas

Fig. 4-16: The 50 best-served and worst-served metropolitan areas in terms of golf holes per capita, and areas that are above and below average.
Uniform Landscapes

- The distribution of popular culture around the world tends to produce more uniform landscapes.

- In fact, promoters of popular culture want a uniform appearance to generate “product recognition” and greater consumption.

- The diffusion of fast-food restaurants is a good example of such uniformity.

- The success of fast-food restaurants depends on large-scale mobility.
Global Diffusion of Uniform Landscapes

- Uniformity in the appearance of the landscape is promoted by a wide variety of other popular structures in North America, such as gas stations, supermarkets, and motels.

- These structures are designed so that both local residents and visitors immediately recognize the purpose of the building, even if not the name of the company.

- Diffusion of popular culture across Earth is not confined to products that originate in North America.

- Japanese automobiles and electronics, for example, have diffused in recent years to the rest of the world, including North America.
Negative Environmental Impact

- The diffusion of some popular customs can adversely impact environmental quality in two ways: depletion of scarce natural resources and pollution of the landscape.
- Diffusion of some popular customs increases demand for raw materials.
- Increased demand for some products can strain the capacity of the environment.
- With a large percentage of the world’s population undernourished, some question inefficient use of grain to feed animals for eventual human consumption.
- Popular culture also can pollute the environment.

- Folk culture, like popular culture, can also cause environmental damage, especially when natural processes are ignored.

- A widespread belief exists that indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere practiced more "natural," ecologically sensitive agriculture before the arrival of Columbus and other Europeans.

- Geographers increasingly question this.
  - Very high rates of soil erosion have been documented in Central America from the practice of folk culture.