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COMM

Media & Culture

### **The State of the American Culture**

I believe that the state of the American Culture can be summed up by the fact that the President of the United States' State of the Union address was "allegedly" pushed up a week so that it would not interfere with the season premiere of ABC's *Lost*. This says so much about the culture of the American people today.

Culture, from the Latin *cultura*, meaning "to cultivate," is defined by Webster's Dictionary as the shared attitude, values, goals, and practices of a group of people. Today's popular culture seems to cultivate around two things...celebrity and technology. If the 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> Century was era of the Industrial Revolution, then the 20<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> Century is the Technology Era. Technology, including film, television, computers, the Internet, video games, and smart phones have encompassed all aspects of our lives. And, these new technologies have allowed us to take our focus on celebrity to new heights.

The overall *attitude* of the American people is a general focus on wealth and money as a status symbol. We live in a society where people believe that the more expensive, the better quality, in a society where teenagers get murdered over articles of clothing, a society where heiresses and socialites are revered and envied by our youth. Most Americans worship the lives celebrities. Technology has enabled us to not just get a glimpse into their lives, but to practically know their every move.

Has the economy has caused this change in *values*? Our struggling economy in recent years has greatly impacted our value system. Our *goals* are not what they once were. Today's definition of "We the People" includes a variety of social classes including people of all genders, races, and stature; the goals of Americans are determined by a larger group of people than in the days when the Declaration of Independence was written. Popular culture breaks helps down barriers between our social classes and helps set the tone for the *goals* for our country.

The general *practices* of today's society include the use of social networking and multimedia as a way of interaction. Multimedia is stronger than ever. However, Americans may not always know how to decipher or filter out the legitimate from the propaganda. Most American's get their news from networks such as CNN, Fox News, Comedy Central, and even the Internet. The question is can we trust them as a valid source of information?

The global media is setting the tone for society. We, as Americans, should be careful of who exactly owns the companies from which we rely on for our news. New media moguls like Rupert Murdoch or the Disney Corporation own many of the companies from which we receive our information. Are

we just being brainwashed or majorly influenced by *their* attitude, values, goals and general practices?

The rise and development of popular culture is directly related to the development of communication and technology. Today's culture is focused on using technology to help you learn how to think, make decisions and formulate opinions. Video games like SimCity help young people learn about economics or television. Television shows such as 24 make you analyze complex situation. Films like with intersecting plotlines help you exercise your brain and become an active participant rather than a passive viewer. In addition, the Internet has opened lines of communication and knowledge. Some may view this development as un-cultured just because it is going against the norm, but if used properly it is an excellent direction for our country to move in.

With regard to technology and celebrity, it is our job, as individuals, to discern the difference between the good and bad in today's popular culture. Today's American's must be knowledgeable about culture in order to operate successfully in today's society. All and all "Today's popular culture may not be showing us the righteous path. But it is making us smarter. (Johnson, 2005)"

## Works Cited

Johnson, S. (2005). *Everything Bad Is Good for You*. New York: Riverhead Books.