The Elements of Culture

World Geography and Cultures
Chapter 4

Defining Culture

- **Culture:**
  - The total knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, shared by and passed on by the members of a specific group
    - Shared
    - Learned
  - Culture affects a group of people by
    - guide for how to behave
    - Solidarity within the group
    - Separation from other groups

- **Society**
  - A group that shares a geographic region, a sense of identity, and a culture

- **Ethnic group**
  - A group that shares a language, customs, and a common heritage
Defining Culture

- What elements of American culture unite us?

Huli (Papua New Guinea)
Maori (New Zealand)
Padaung (SE Asia)

Cultural Change

- Cultures and societies are always in the process of changing (not always fast)
  - Innovation
  - Diffusion
Innovation & Invention

- Taking existing technology and resources and creating something new to meet a need
  - Accident (innovation)
  - Observation and experimentation (invention)
- Often innovation and invention work side by side to create changes
  - Ex: agriculture may have begun as accident, but quickly improved because of invention.
- Examples: innovation or invention?
  - Fire
  - The Wheel
  - Boats
  - Levers and pulleys
  - Farming & herding

Diffusion

- The spread of ideas, inventions, or patterns of behavior
  - Early diffusion occurred
    - Along trade routes
    - Through personal contact
  - Today, the Internet and TV play an important part in cultural diffusion
    - Where do you think diffusion happens less frequently?
    - Besides the Internet and TV, what are some other modern agents of diffusion?
- Culture Hearth
  - This is the site of innovation from which basic ideas, materials, and technology diffuse to many cultures
    - River civilizations
    - Nile, Indus, Tigris/Euphrates, Huang He.
Acculturation

- When a society changes because it accepts or adopts an innovation
  - Ex: wearing jeans instead of traditional clothing
- Sometimes individuals or a group will adopt innovations that radically change the society
  - Positive and/or negative ramifications

Language

- One of the most important aspects of culture
  - Communication within the culture
  - Reflects the culture
    - Bias & beliefs
    - Physical characteristics
- Language helps establish a cultural identity
  - Fosters nationalism
  - Divisive factor
Language Families

- 3,000-6,500 different languages spoken today worldwide
- Language families
  - Groups of similar languages with common origins
  - About 13 major language families
- Dialects
  - Version of a language which reflects changes in speech patterns related to
    - Class
    - Region
    - Other cultural differences

Anatolian Hearth Theory

- Origin of Indo-European languages
  - Nostratic
    - Anatolian Plateau = Turkey
    - Basis of modern Indo-European languages today
      - English, German, Russian, Hindi, Greek all have the same roots
Language Diffusion

- Languages traveled and spread around the world
  - Trade routes
    - Traders would learn local languages and teach their own languages
      - Eastern North America – Native Americans had learned French from the fur trappers
  - Invented
    - Language combinations
      - Swahili (Arabic + Bantu)
      - Spanglish (Spanish + English)
      - Louisiana Creole (African, French, NA English)
  - Migrations
    - Colonial migration
  - Foods
    - Some of the first words diffused of a language!

Religion

- Religion consists of a belief in a supernatural power or powers that are regarded as the creators and maintainers of the universe
- Characteristics of religion
  - Established beliefs and values
    - Supernatural
  - Worship and ritual
  - Social expectations and solidarity
Major World Religions

- South West Asia origins
  - Judaism, Christianity, Islam
- South East Asia origins
  - Hinduism
  - Buddhism
- Other Asian practices
  - Confucianism
  - Taoism (daoism)
  - Shinto
- Other world beliefs
  - Animism
- Universalizing vs. Ethnic

Creativity and Cultural Expression

- All cultures have ways of expressing their values, beliefs, and ideas in a creative manner
  - Performing arts, visual arts, literature (or oral tradition)
  - Clothing and adornment are also means of creative expression
- While some expressive forms have a relationship to cultural belief systems (i.e. the Muslim veil) – others began because they “looked cool.”
Judaism

- Oldest monotheistic religion
  - About 3,200 years old
- Ethnic religion
  - Long tradition of faith and culture
- Basic laws and teachings come from sacred text
  - Torah
    - Genesis – Revelations
    - Moses and Abraham
- Holiest location
  - City of Jerusalem
- Influences
  - Zoroastrianism
    - Persian religion
  - Slavic languages
    - Yiddish was unique to the Eastern European Jews and was diffused with their migrations

Christianity

- Evolved about 2,000 years ago from Judaic teachings
  - Monotheistic
- Text
  - Old Testament
    - Torah
    - Genesis – Revelations (moved to the end of the New Testament in the Christian text)
    - Jewish prophets and teachers
  - New Testament
    - Life and teachings of Jesus Christ
    - Jesus is believed by Christians to be divine
- Largest of all three SW Asian religions
  - Over 2 billion followers
- Holiest location
  - Jerusalem
- Three main branches
  - Catholic
  - Protestant
  - Eastern Orthodox
- Universalizing religion
Islam

- Originated in the early 7th century
  - Prophet Muhammad
    - Began teaching in 613 CE
    - Monotheistic
      - *Allah* (same deity as Jewish and Christian)
  - Text
    - *Qur'an* (*Koran*)
      - Same teachings and prophets as the *Torah* and the *Old Testament*
- Branches
  - Sunni
  - Shiite
- Holiest location
  - Mecca, Saudi Arabia
  - Medina, Saudi Arabia
  - Jerusalem
- Universalizing religion
  - Spread through SW Asia, North Africa, parts of the Balkans, and across the Indian Ocean to SE Asia

Hinduism

- One of the world’s oldest religions, Hinduism, is practiced by most people in India today.
  - Hinduism evolved over thousands of years and was influenced by the cultures and traditions of many peoples.
  - However a few fundamental teachings are shared by nearly all Hindus.
- **Brahman**
  - Among most basic tenets of Hinduism, belief in Brahman, eternal being that created, preserves world
  - Brahman all-encompassing
  - Many believe human mind incapable of understanding
- **Atman**
  - Hindus believe each person has *atman*, soul, aspect of Brahman
  - *Atman* shapes personality, cannot be destroyed, even by death
  - *Devas*, manifestations of Brahman, active in world, helping maintain order in nature

Three *devas*- Brahma, Vishnu, Siva -are particularly influential. Some believe in thousands; others worship only one as the true manifestation of Brahman.
Buddhism, which teaches people that they can escape the suffering of the world through the Buddha’s teachings, developed in India and spread to other parts of Asia and the world.

**Buddhist Beliefs**

- After enlightenment achieved, Buddha meditated at Bodh Gaya seven weeks.
- Set out to spread to others what he had learned.
- Lessons became basic teachings of Buddhism.
- Among ideas learned in meditation, central truths, called Four Noble Truths:
  - Suffering part of human life
  - Suffering from people’s desires for pleasure, material goods
  - Overcoming desires during life eventually brings end to suffering
  - Desires can be overcome by following Eightfold Path.

The Buddha taught that those who followed Eightfold Path could attain nirvana:
- State of perfect peace in which soul freed from suffering forever.
- Those not attaining nirvana reborn to live through cycle of suffering again.
- Basic teachings of Eightfold Path, Middle Way—living in moderation, avoiding extremes of comfort, discomfort in search for nirvana.