

Essay on Culture and Its Influences

Culture

Culture is the way of life of some society, including its artifacts, beliefs, accumulated knowledge, and the system of values in which its members live. Also the arts, family life, child rearing, the custom of marriage and courtship, education, occupations, the government, in short, the total effective legacy of the society which is potentially available to its members.

The culture concept has the advantage of enabling us to look at the whole society, making clear the fact that one cannot understand group behavior except as part of the culture pattern.

To understand a people, then we must look at their physical environment (geography, climate, natural resources, food supply, power resources and industrialization), the human influences (parents, siblings, friends, neighbors, colleagues, teachers, police and other officials), their institution (families, schools, churches, peer groups, government, occupations), their artistic expressions, their ideology (as expressed in national or local rituals, constitutions, religions, group loyalties, ancestor-worship) and the manner in which they go about achieving the three basic needs: self-preservation, self-reproduction, and self-expression.

The international exchange has become so quick and easy nowadays that we are able to have more contact with other cultures than ever before.

This crossing of cultures is stimulating and enriching. In fact, it is by such cross-breeding that civilization has advanced. Greece was fertilized by what it learned from the ancient empires of the East. Rome was brought out of barbarism by its contact with Greek culture.

Northern Europe raised its civilization upon the contact with Roman culture. After the dark Middle Ages, contacts with Islam and the rediscovery of the classics brought on a new flowering throughout Europe.

Although the crossing of cultures is enriching, it also has its dangers. The different cultures can lead to confused signals, as when an Indian shakes his head, he means "Yes", but it is understood "No" by foreigners; or when the Japanese answers a negative question, "Didn't you go?" with "Yes" meaning "No". These confused signals become more serious when they involve what we regard as discourtesies or deceptions.

The German's respect for authorities and officials produces a kind of politeness or deference which is discomfoting to Americans who try to treat everyone with an equal casualness and to pretend that no rank exists. It even seems insincere, and therefore irritating.

The crossing of different cultures can lead to misunderstandings and may cause conflicts. Therefore they are divided into cultural groups by their differences. And we should study such groups so that when we go to distant places, we can understand the others and can live with them more friendlyly and peacefully.