

How pop culture shapes us and the environment

[Art & Culture](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The term popular culture, or pop culture, often refers to the ideas, values and goods that arise from mass media. This mass media includes books, magazines, movies, and television. In American popular culture two themes are prevalent: a materialistic one and a simplistic one. The materialistic one, that is popular in times of prosperity, stresses that happiness comes out of material goods, while the simplistic one says that happiness comes out of modesty and spirituality. While researching popular culture however this and certain other trends become apparent.

One form of popular culture is fast food. Fast food has totally changed the face of this nation. In Erik Schlosser's book *Fast Food Nation*, he talks about how deeply fast food has changed America. In the book, Schlosser talks about how the invention of the automobile and the highway system helped bring about a revolutionary change in the eating habits of the typical American. This has to be considered Popular Culture because it was what the average American is eating. The McDonald brothers moved from New Hampshire during the Great Depression to try and make a living in southern California.

They saved up money working as set builders on a movie lot and bought a movie theater. The theater did not do very well and they bought a small drive in restaurant trying to cash in on the craze. After limited success they grew tired of the constant problems of a restaurant and in 1948 they closed it and installed larger grills and applied the idea of an assembly line to the kitchen. This is where the McDonalds, the popular culture giant, we all know today was born. Ray Kroc was the driving force behind the new and improved McDonalds franchise system.

<https://assignbuster.com/how-pop-culture-shapes-us-and-the-environment/>

He saw the massive success the McDonald brothers were having first hand and approached them asking to have the right to franchise McDonalds nationwide. Kroc would sell the franchise while the McDonald brothers sat home and amassed an even greater fortune. This company would become the greatest symbol of American capitalism there store even sells “ T-shirts decorated with a new version of the American Flag. The fifty white stars have been replaced by a pair of golden arches”(32). Schlosser used this incredulous example of consumerism to show how deeply the consumer mind frame is in popular culture.

It is this idea of consumerism that drove McDonalds to the top of the corporate world and in a way popular culture. Their dominance in these areas let them change the environment however they wanted and in 1979 they proved how powerful they became in the way that they changed the natural world. It was in 1979 that the chairman of McDonalds wanted a new chicken finger like food that would be approximately the size of a thumb. After a few months of development the Chicken McNugget was born. In order to meet the need for the chicken demand a new breed of chicken was developed “ Dubbed, ‘ Mr. McDonald’ the new breed had unusually large breasts”(140).

The fact the McDonalds company was able to basically change the environment to meet their own needs is just amazing. This is so significant because it shows how powerful that popular can be. No one questioned food processors about where the chicken in their McNugget was coming from because they didn't care. Fast food uses television to basically create a demand for their products and it is so successful in this that people eat it all

<https://assignbuster.com/how-pop-culture-shapes-us-and-the-environment/>

around the world many times a day. In the movie *Supersize Me* one man, Don Gorske, has even eaten 19000 Big Macs.

This shows how influential pop culture can be on an individual. One cartoon program called *Courage the Cowardly Dog* discusses important issues without becoming too preachy and stays entertaining. In one episode, called *the Last of the Starmakers*, the environment becomes the main issue discussed. In the episode a mother and father squid are shown holding their babies while floating through space. A giant whale begins to suck in the surrounding stars and satellites and the father sacrifices himself for his wife and unborn children.

The mother crashes into earth and is found by the hero of the show *Courage*. However the grumpy old farmer calls the government to get the reward money for the squid and it is up to *Courage* to save the mother and her babies. The babies hatch and break free from the soldiers and return to space to go on making stars. The mother however dies but disintegrates into a beautiful garden. I think this is important because it leaves on clear theme that respect for the natural world is crucially important and leads to happiness for the individual.

In the cartoon, *Courage* is shown to be a happy while the old farmer is shot into space because the money he was given was made out of rocket fuel. Yes of course that is possible, it is a children's cartoon. The children's cartoons that reinforce a message of care for the environment are important in how the country goes forward in its thinking about the natural world. As

more and more children are taught a sacred respect for the ground on which they tread, the planet will be treated with more and more respect.

Another animated feature, about a big green ogre does a good job as well. Shrek is a movie made by DreamWorks studios. It is a modern day spin on the classic fairy tale love story. Shrek lives in a swamp, or wetland, that in real life serves as a very important environmental area, however it is an area that is typically drained and paved over. What people fail to realize is how important the wetland areas are to the environment. Jane Caputi talks about this when she says “ Wetlands act as natural sponges, soaking up excess water from storms and preventing catastrophic flooding.

And wetlands provide those essential natural services of providing and filtering water, prevention of soil erosion, and preservation of biological diversity. ”(5). These functions of the “ swamps” are considered “ low” parts of the world in a culture that worships the ” high”. In the movie Shrek’s swamp is juxtaposed against the image of the ruling Lord Farquaad’s “ perfect” city of Duloc. Lord Farquaad represents the dominant part of society that worships the clean, neat and tidy and places these things above all else.

Disney World is an example of this draining of wetlands to make it more “ useful” to the general population. This policy that the environment is around solely for us to use and abuse is one that may jeopardize the future of every living thing on the plant earth. A popular figure near the center of the pop world is Sarah Palin. This former governor of Alaska was made famous in her bid for Vice President of the United States when in 2008 she ran with John

McCain. However, the main cause of her fame was not anything that showed in her a particular positive light.

Perhaps what made her most famous was the uncanny impression that Tina Fey does of Palin. Palin however is also known for her policies concerning Oil. She is famously quoted for her saying of “ Drill, Baby, Drill”. This saying became very prominent and changed many people's beliefs because of the attractive woman who was saying. People were so blinded by popular culture that disaster struck and no one knew what to do. The disaster was the BP oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico that took place in April of 2010. The most embarrassing part however was that the leak was stopped until July.

It was 85 days later that the leak was finally stopped. This serves as a big warning to all who follow popular culture too closely without thinking of the consequences. This overall idea of Popular Culture shows people things. The different groups have many different ways that they want the general public to feel and this is the point of all of it. When one looks at popular culture it is clear that all these different groups are just trying to get their own way. For the “ democratic”, “ liberal”, “ hippy” type people of the world an idea of respect and reverence for the environment is stressed.

For the “ old”, “ conservative”, “ republican”, type people of the world an idea of using the environment to better human's lives is stressed. For me however, the environmental tragedies that have occurred in the past ten years, all around the world, are a wake up call to everyone of this planet. Events like the tsunami, massive earthquakes, oil spills, glacier melting, are

all signs that the earth is being seriously hurt and unless something is done soon life as we all know it may end or at least change very drastically.