

# Cultural background essay



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Introduction: Cultural Background Essay This paper compares the Philippines and the United States in multiple areas such as norms, values, beliefs, religion, economics, etc. The United States and the Philippines, compared from a sociological perspective, reveal fascinating similarities and differences. While English and Spanish are the most common languages in the U. S. , Filipino and English are spoken in the Philippines along with eight major dialects.

Filipino was declared the official language in a “ compromise” in 1973, but English is still widely used for business and politics in the Philippines (Culture 1). It would seem that the presence of dialects would inject an element of diversity in the culture, slightly mitigating the influence of the mass media. It is a “ mixed culture from the blending of foreign influences with native elements.... some of the isolated tribes are the only people whose culture remains unadulterated by ...influences” (Culture par.

1). They caution that although you can find traditional theatre, literature and love songs in the national language, visitors are more likely to witness “ beauty contests, lurid soap operas, violent and sentimental Filipino movies, and local bands perfectly imitating Western pop tunes” (Culture par. ).

Balancing between two different cultures is very challenging. I was born and raised in the Philippines. I came in the United States with my parents when I was 16 yrs old.

We decided to migrate here because of the higher standard of living. The rest of the family was also raised for the majority of their lives in the Philippines. In the Philippines, it is a strict custom to always show respect to

your elders, never talk back, and take care of your elders. However, here in the United States, it generally isn't so with the new modern culture emerging.

The American culture emphasizes equality, and the product of this is that sometimes power-conflicts may come up from time to time. Equally so, people have Cultural Background Essay 3 the chance to voice their own opinion, and on some levels, it may seem as rude or as challenging to others. In the Philippines, you take care of your relatives when they age. In the United States, there is concept of retirement homes. Our culture is also very conservative while the American culture tends to lean on the more liberal side. When you address others in the Philippine culture, you show your respect on where you stand.

For example, when you call or talk to other relative, you address them as tita/tito (aunt/uncle), kuya/ate (older brother/sister). In the United states, other than calling someone aunt or uncle, it is usually not done. It may be said that Filipinos are intelligent, with retentive memory, quick perception, and have talents for art and science. They also are gentle, friendly, cheerful, and noted for their courtesy and hospitality.

Filipinos are famous for their close family ties. The parents work hard and sacrifice much more for their children; in return, the children love and respect them, and also take care of them in their old age. The family is the center of their social structure which includes the nuclear family, aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, and honorary relations such as godparents,

sponsors, and close family friends. People get strength and stability from their family.

As such, many children have several godparents, the more the better.

There's a Filipino concept of shame. "Hiya" is a shame and is a motivating factor behind behavior. Filipinos believe that they must live up to the accepted standards of behavior and if they fail to do so, they bring shame not only upon themselves, but also upon their family.

One indication of this might be willingness to spend more than they can afford on a party rather than be ashamed by their economic circumstances. The Philippines' unemployment rate is only double the U. S. 's 5%, one of the most telling statistics regarding the Philippines is that 40% of the population lives below the poverty line Cultural Background Essay 4 (2001 estimate). Recent Filipino immigrants to America send such huge amounts of money back home to their relatives in the Philippines that they " add up to billions a year and are the biggest source of hard currency in the Philippines" (Schoenberger, 1994. ) This is despite a labor force of over 32, 000, 000.

This would lead one to conclude therefore that the Philippines have a huge sector of working poor. Forty percent of the labor force is employed by agriculture. Ironically, this is in a land plagued with typhoons, cyclonic storms, landslides, active volcanoes, destructive earthquakes and tsunamis (CIA, 2002). Financial devastation at the hands of a natural disaster occurs with alarming frequency in the Philippines. While in the U. S.

, 12. 6% of the population is age 65 and over and we struggle with issues such as whether or not to fund prescription drugs for seniors through

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Medicare, a mere 3.7% comprise this age category in the Philippines (CIA, 2002). While the elderly there are revered as part of their values highly respecting authority, they are more likely to have them living as part of the immediate household and not placing them in nursing homes. The Philippines birth rate is nearly double that of the U.S.

1 birth per 1000 population in the US and their infant mortality rate is nearly 4 times that of the U.S. (CIA, 2002). “The Philippines is the only Christian country in Asia.

Over 90% of the population claim to follow Christian faiths. The largest of the minority religious groups is the Muslims, who live chiefly on Mindanao and in the Sulu archipelago. There is also a Philippine Independence Church, some Buddhists, and a small number of animists” (Culture 1). According to the CIA World Fact Book 2002, in the Philippines 83% are Roman Catholic, 9% are Protestant, 5% are Muslim, and 3% are categorized as “Other” including Buddhist. This is in contrast to the U.S.

which is 56% Protestant, 28% Roman Catholic, 2% Jewish, 4% other and 10% none (CIA, Cultural Background Essay 5 sec. 3). This homogeneity in the social institution of religion is a powerful unifying force and sets it apart from other Asian countries. In conclusion, the Philippines and the United States naturally have similarities and differences. They profess to be Christian nations, both have stratified economic classes, including a lower class, and both have environmental challenges to face.

Some influences in the Philippines are from Spanish Catholicism, American occupation, Asian traditions, etc. The Philippines have an agricultural and

light industry base to their economy, while the United States is a technologically advanced industrial super power. The climate, terrain and its propensity for natural disasters more clearly define the daily life in the Philippines than the United States, especially in light of their agricultural base and number of impoverished citizens. I think a very important key in gaining insight into a foreign culture is to stop comparing one's own culture with another or identifying which culture is best. You have to understand that you can't dwell so much on what you are not used to and on what you hate. You have to look at the brighter side of life and learn to live with what you have currently, and also do bear in mind that open-mindedness always helps in one's process of adjustment not just in understanding cultural diversity but understanding life in its entirety as well.

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