

American materialism

Philosophy



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The world is now filled with corporations dedicated to provide both wants and needs of the people. If a person is craving for Big Mac or missing any episode of a favorite show, the access to acquire what is wanted is delimited by just any means. Corporations are everywhere, go to any place in the United States and there are the hundred corporations waiting just to serve you.

American tastes accessibly satisfied anywhere nowadays. The proliferation of American products and corporations dedicated in giving them is not just mere coincidence of society development, but a result of globalization and the trend of conscious disintegration of American attitudes and values, aptly stated, is cultural imperialism.

(Galeota, 2004) In 1976, theorist Herbert Schiller defines cultural imperialism as “ the sum processes by which society is brought into the modern world system, and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions top correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominant center of the system”.

(Galeota, 2004) This statement regards the influence of corporate America as not involving simple consumer goods, but rather the fact those American principles such as freedom and happiness disseminates.

Although this is appealing at first glance, in a way it show how society is progressing, it covers the awful truth that many cultures in America, held by moral values and principles are gradually disappearing because of the influence of corporate America. There are many motivations to which American cultural imperialism can be attributed to. Throughout history, there

has been the desire to access foreign markets and the belief of the superior America, dominating the world.

This desire now transforms into greater desire to control not just the foreign markets, but also the entire consumers of the world, not just in America. This is the enabling factor for business enterprises to expand and franchise. The American corporation domination results to local enterprises' suffering. And because American corporations are able to gain profit, and conveniently serve America interest, they disregard the detrimental effects of American corporations' control of the global market.

Historically, materialism in America can be attributed to the Protestant Ethics and the Expansion of merchants in America. The first reason, attributed to the study of Max Weber "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" (1904-1905), states that because the original settlers of America are Calvinists, their beliefs supplies moral energy and drive towards a capitalist entrepreneur. (M. , 2001) They worked their way into development towards the accumulation of work, but at the same time lived simple lives and failed to enjoy the fruits of their labor.

(M. , 2001) This is the principle that governs the protestant ethic, that hard work is essential with simple living. More so, the ethic prescribed attributes religious reasons for the manner by which people and society should live. The idea is that hard work is prescribed by God, one of the reasons why we exist. Thus wealth is God-given and seen as God's reward to those who works hard. This attitude also relates to the nineteenth century belief of the jingoists which attempted to fulfill what according to them was divinely ordained American expansion.

The other reason for corporate America's influence on materialism lies in the expansion of merchants during the 1920's headed by the group Great merchants (the Sears & Roebuck, Wanamaker's, and Marshall Fields). (W. , 1993) The group experienced difficulties in expanding their business and thus was motivated to think of ways to have new methods in merchandising, fashion, advertising and consumer credit. Consumer credit became popular as businesses were getting more from credit taxes and interests. Even through the Great Market Crash of 1929 and the Great Depression, America did not lose its taste for consumerism and profit.

Newer corporations experienced the need for greater mass seduction and gaining of profit after a period of the market's recession. This did not hinder merchants to expand their options. Business schools started to emerge and the new theories in economics are now greatly reserved for the study concerning business and marketing. Marketing is one of the greatest influences on American materialism brought by corporate America. Advertisements, posters, billboards and others now promises greater benefits for the consumer at a cost which can be redeemed through work and even consumer credit.

What this does is to project the image of America as provider of all things and the land of greatness- the reason for American consumers' clamor for products. Corporation which reached the global market had employed localized strategies to gain their stance in a globally competitive world. Corporations are now capable to expand and sell their product worldwide with the thought that if in America they gain profit, much more in other

countries. (W. , 1993) Corporate America influenced not just American consumers to become materialistic, but even global consumers.

Corporations have succeeded in making them superior and globally competitive. Products and other items can easily be acquired and consumers find these products as necessity more than luxury goods. Money does not buy happiness. The essential goal in living a full life is not just mere acquisition of money to buy anything you want, or whatever is the hottest item in the market today. What is important is setting the priority to recognize the intangible rewards or life: family, love, relationships, friendships and others.

Section 2: No, Corporations does not cause Materialism Life is about achieving happiness. Borrowing Socrates' thoughts, the goal in life is to pursue happiness. Happiness comes in many forms; certainly the general idea on happiness comes from acquiring material possession or from the intangible perks of living life, like love, family and friends. The person who thinks of today will account wealth as an important factor in his happiness- not just being satisfied emotionally, spiritually and morally, but also materially.

In psychology's basic needs, we account food, shelter and clothing as the primary needs of the individual. Accomplishing those needs means that the person can now start to live his life comfortable. But as development in society transpires, as people sees the potential of available resources and service to other people as well, the concept of having more than the basic is a reason to work hard and do good in a chosen career. Having wealth is a personal and subjective goal.

When one has money, this does not mean that he/she is intrinsically materialistic, it can be said that the benefits of having money in a corporate and capitalism dominated world means a comfortable life for families and people. Work pays off with financial gains, and the more hard work put into it, the more rewards for a hard day's work. People who are somehow viewed as materialistic is charged with this false accusation. It can be realized that with wealth, happiness and other aesthetic meanings to life can be the ultimate and final goal of the person.

Acquisition of wealth is now deemed as a way to meet the ends. In a capitalist dominated world, corporate America is now greatly influenced with theories on the economy and business sector. These sectors can be stated as governing factors in the way people live. A country's market economy is a determinant and a reflection of the people in the society lives. In America, considered as one of the biggest nations in the world; the most competitive, and rich country, had made it a point to provide American consumers their needs and wants.

To satisfy their need with their financial ability contributed to their stance in a globally competitive world. Corporations and businesses should not be blamed for the materialistic Americans. Some Americans work hard for their money, even to the point of having no time for their family and personal life. We cannot blame Americans who has set their priority to work, because behind it, there lays the reason that they want to provide for their family and achieve a sense of self-fulfillment by accomplishing their goals in their careers.

It can also be said that those accused materialistic Americans are just reaping their rewards of hard work that their intention is to live fruitfully their given hard labor. After all, they deserve it. Corporations is not a reason for the materialistic America, their main goal is to provide consumers with a range of products they need, they want, and can afford. The society should also not be blamed for spending money or regarding financial status as important in their lives, after all, the true reason behind it all is to be self-fulfilled and happy.

Let us look behind the actions and focus on the reasons that reflect who Americans really are, people who are in pursuit of their happiness.

Reference: Galeota, J. (2004). Cultural imperialism: an American tradition [Electronic Version], 1. Retrieved April 23 from <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G1-116733753.html>. M. , W. (2001). The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (T. Parsons, Trans.). New York: Routledge. W. , L. (1993). Land of Desire, merchants, Power and the Rise of a New American Culture. New York: Random House.