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WRT 302

What is Culture?

Culture is such a big word. To me, culture holds many different meanings and can also mean different things to people around the world. After reading all nine of the definitions in the reading, “What is Culture?” there was one that really stood out to me. The first, “A culture is a way of life of a group of people – the behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next.” When I think of what culture is and what it means, this definition sums up exactly what I think culture is. After traveling to different places around the world, I experienced a lot of different cultures. The definition states that culture is, “A way of life of a group of people.” I could not agree with this more. When I traveled to Thailand, I quickly observed that the Thai culture is very accepting and forgiving. These characteristics of the Thai culture can teach the tourists what Thailand is all about and this is being how culture can unite us. I think that the more everyone knows about a certain culture, the more we can all come together and practice those same ideals in any culture. Culture is a togetherness of people in some ways in my opinion. The fundamentals of culture are passed down to children and friends all over the world and I think that this is exactly what the word, “culture” embodies.

However, I do believe that culture can divide us in some ways, but not always in a bad way. In the reading, “Culture and Anarchy by Matthew Arnold,” he wrote that Arnold had separated the English society into three different classes. Each class from my understanding of the reading has a different “culture.” The Barbarians, or the lower class, were said to have, “a passion for field-sports… (and) asserting one’s personal liberty.” The Philistines or the middle class were hard working and determined to make money. The third class, the ones with the most money, the Populace were written to be violent and to do as they pleased. To me, culture can divide us right in front of our eyes. When reading about the different social classes, this really stood out to me and made me take a step back and realize that the three different social classes all live their lives differently, or in their own “culture.”

This led me into thinking about culture in the modern era. I believe that today’s culture is changing and evolving just as we are. I did partially disagree with a statement from “What is Culture?” when the author was talking about their definition of culture. The text read, “Here’s my theory: more people looked up “culture” this year because it’s become an unsettling word. “Culture” used to be a good thing. Now it’s not. That isn’t to say that American culture has gotten worse.” I partially agree with this because the American culture has shifted and changed a lot. For example, there is not as much pressure to finish school in four years, get a job and start a family. The American culture has changed also in the working world. For example, women can obtain high ranking jobs and that has become more of a norm when in the past, men had all the top jobs. On the other hand, the word, “culture” can captivate a beautiful group of people in the world. The Thai culture or the Australian culture is different from America’s culture but they don’t portray a negative definition. I partially disagree with what the author was saying here because I think that the American culture is not only shifting in a negative way, but growing and evolving as we evolve as well. I think a useful way to think about culture in a modern era is to stop and think about the way we live our lives everyday. Culture is a hefty word that has a lot of baggage come with it. If we were to all take a moment a day and think about the word “culture” and what it might mean to someone else, I think that would be a great start.

The TED talk got me thinking about how and if I would change anything about my culture. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie did a great job right at the beginning of telling her story about how she wrote stories where all of her characters lived in the British culture, meanwhile, she was living in the Nigerian culture. However, she didn’t seem as if she would change any of that. When Adichie went to college and was talking about playing her “tribal music,” it made me realize that everyone comes from their own culture. If I could change anything about my culture, I don’t think I would change much. I believe that everyone comes from a different upbringing. Some people like how they were raised and what they were taught along the way, but others don’t. Personally, I think the culture I live is very care-free and easy going. The changes I would make are, I would like to reach out and help others more often than I do and the other thing I would change is learn more about other people’s cultures as well as share mine as well.