

Balancing Pop Culture, Power and Education in the Lives of Modern American Youth

In the modern day and age, the rising generation of American teenagers find themselves on the brink of determining the future of a global world order. Cultures across the world have found themselves drawing more towards global communication and a unified sense of partnership. As one of the leading nations in this shifting of global power, the United States serves as a key component in the international competition to maintain a powerful position. As the years go on, power will shift gradually into the hands of America's current teenage population. Only then will we be able to determine if our youth was prepared well enough to handle globalization.

American teenagers find themselves in the midst of an ever-changing society in which new ideas and technological advances seem to appear almost every day. The temptations thrown at American youth split the generation into deciding between three different factors that influence daily life. These factors include power, pop culture and education. In deciding between these three aspects, one must determine which factor will enable the future generations to shape the United States.

In recent times, power in the form of social hierarchies has emerged as a main component in the daily lives of American youth. In high school, it seems that one's social status determines one's success inside and outside of school. The idea of "popularity" has increased into a predominant factor in determining the lives of American teenagers. At the top of the social hierarchy reside those few popular, polished individuals that seem to have good fortune handed to them. Not only are the popular individuals well-liked by other individuals, but they also seem to wield social power over the rest of the school. However, popularity has divided into two categories in modern society. There is the stereotypical popularity that appears in the form of

perfect cheerleaders and athletes who attend the most social events and also have the best parties. But on the other hand, there is the elite, successful popularity that emerges in the form of individuals that set a place for themselves within the school system as a result of their academic and extracurricular success. These individuals are often labeled as “perfect” and while they may not be as socially popular, they have created a new form of popularity that resides in success.

Popularity as a power tool presents both positive and negative effects for American teenagers. On one hand, popularity allows one to have a definite place in the social sphere of high school. As an individual with a dominant sense of power and identity, popular individuals do not have to worry about being looked down upon by others in the school system. Nor do these individuals have to worry about insults being thrown their way. Yet the idea of holding ultimate power over others also presents multiple problems. If one remains at the top of the social pyramid, that means that they must always exhibit proper behavior and perform what is expected of them at all times. Popularity does not allow mistakes or faults, as one must always be conscious of his or her decisions. In modern times, teenagers will try too hard to become popular. These attempts often mean that individuals will alter their behavior negatively to “fit in” with the popular crowd. Not only does this entail engaging in dangerous and often illegal activities, but this can also include being mean towards other individuals and teasing them for no real purpose. As the drive to becoming popular includes changing one’s behavior, it may not be the best option for American teenagers to strive towards.

Another major factor that influences the lives of American teenagers appears in the impact of education. Education serves as the primary factor that allows one to succeed in today’s society. Education means more than mere talent, because education builds on talents that one already possesses. Learning helps in developing the mind and strengthening skills that were

previously unknown to the individual. The world has always functioned on the basis of spreading knowledge, and education allows for the new generations to learn and build upon what the past generations have already established.

The opportunities that education provides American youth are simply incredible and open the door to so many new experiences for the future. Yet it seems that many teenagers are not taking advantage of the education that they are provided with. Perhaps this is a result of the many distractions that are openly presented for American teenagers. Or perhaps the current generation has grown insolent and lazy over the years, and do not care as much for education. Yet education plays such an important role in society that it is surprising to see how many individuals lack interest in participating actively in their own education. With the abilities we have to explore new fields using information which is literally at our hands in the form of the internet, it seems rather disappointing that many teenagers are not taking advantage of this. Overall, education provides a gateway to new opportunities through the form of gaining new skills and knowledge. If we do not use education as our primary means of survival, then we will not enable ourselves to succeed in a global world.

The most influential factor on American youth is currently the pop culture. The dazzling world of Hollywood has stunned millions of individuals for decades. Yet in recent times, technology has allowed us to access pop culture in a closer way than ever before. We find ourselves having an almost personal experience with pop culture. On a daily basis, we can connect to pop culture through the use of our iPods, cellphones, computers and televisions. The influences of mass media are merely a touch away from our fingertips. Suddenly, we have found ourselves in the midst of this new world where we now know the latest fashions being displayed in Milan, the name of our favorite movie star's new baby, and the newest single out by a rising

singer we have our eyes on. This easy accessibility has streamlined itself into the daily lives and activities of American teenagers. Now many teenagers dress themselves according to the trends that Hollywood stars set. In addition, music has literally become a way of living for many American youth. Many teenagers are found constantly accompanied by their iPods or other technological devices. While this immersion in music is certainly a positive feature, as it has brought about more creativity, it also has negative impacts on society. The new technological items that allow us to listen to music are solely individualized. No longer do we share music openly with others around us, but instead we seclude ourselves with headphones. This new form of seclusion has escalated to such a level that most of our time is spent alone with a technological device instead of with another person.

Not only have iPods served to isolate teenagers, but computers have as well. Teenagers spend many hours of the day in front of their laptops, talking to friends and discovering every aspect of the world through surfing the Internet. Isolation has grown to become a main component of the lives of teenagers. It seems that we unintentionally relish in our seclusion, and find ways to entertain ourselves through technology. This lack of contact and communication with others has grown to such a point that the current American youth has lost various basic social skills such as how to carry a conversation with another individual face to face. Now, the majority of our conversations are done through texting, or a form of online chat. This instant communication causes us to shorten our language and also lose the intimacy of speaking face to face with another. Gradually, we have lost our eloquence in using figurative language to portray our various thoughts and ideas. We tend to now share our thoughts in more of a looser, less specific way in that we do not speak directly about what we feel, but instead hint at some abstract form of the idea. If we cannot manage to elaborate on our thoughts, feelings and

emotions then we will destroy our main means of communication through language. Overall, computers have served not only to isolate the American youth, but also to decrease their expansion in communication skills.

Pop culture has also caused many teenagers to mimic behaviorisms as seen on television series. American teens alter their mannerisms to fit the portrayal of accepted behaviors. Young teenage girls will follow their icons and display the behaviors that television stars emit in order to appear more “cool” and accepted by their peers. Often, modern television shows have shifted the mentality of how teenage girls are supposed to act. The norm of these actions is shown as being mean to other individuals and oftentimes exploiting oneself. As teenagers are exposed to more pop culture at younger ages, the purity of adolescents is decreasing slowly as teenagers literally try to become what they see on television.

Which of the three paths will American teenagers travel down upon when determining the future of the world? This modern situation is directly comparable to the Judgment of Paris. Dominance in social hierarchies offers teenagers the opportunity to manipulate power and wealth, much like Juno’s position as Queen of the Roman goddesses. Education allows teenagers to succeed and expand their knowledge, which is similar to the wise Athena. Lastly, pop culture gives happiness and life as a falsified fantasy. The decision remains up to American youth to decide which aspect they will hand the proverbial apple of discord to. But like Paris’ final verdict, American youth is leaning towards choosing the most appealing, tantalizing choice that beckons with a glittery hand filled with beauty, luxury and love. If we give ourselves up to the imaginary world of pop culture, society as we know it might very well fall into a chaotic jumble of cataclysmic wars and economic failures. The heavy burden of future lies in our hands; and the ultimate decision in our hearts, minds and souls.