

## Chapter

# 4 Folk and Popular Culture



Why is the man in the middle wearing a sweater to work?  
Page 109



Why are these people posing for the camera? Page 117

### KEY ISSUE 1

Where Are Folk and Popular Leisure Activities Distributed?



### What We Do For Fun p. 109

Music and sports can be folk or popular. The differences between them involve geography.

### KEY ISSUE 2

Where Are Folk and Popular Material Culture Distributed?

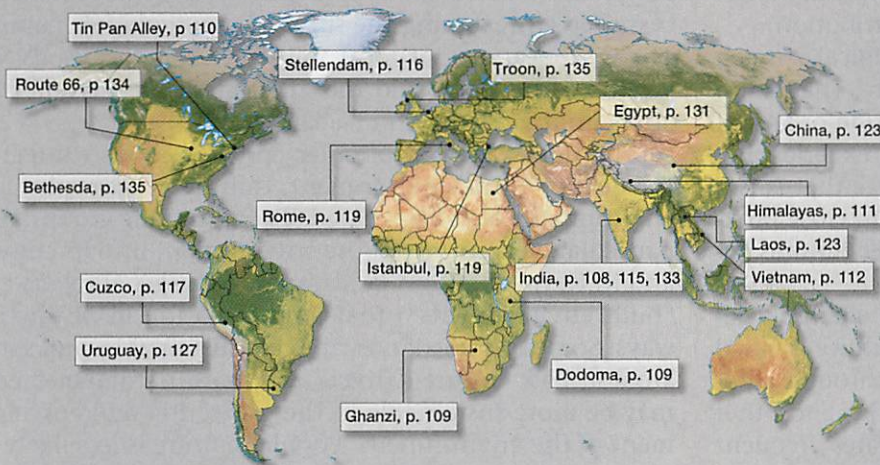


### Coke or Pepsi? p. 116

We all need food, clothing, and shelter. How we provide for these needs says a lot about our society's culture.



▲ These dancers from India are performing a Kathakali dance drama on the streets of New York as part of a dance festival. The drama depicts stories of Hindu gods Rama and Krishna. Audiences in New York can admire the costumes and the technical skills of the performers, but popular culture in the United States does not relate easily to the meaning of folk culture like this.



### KEY ISSUE 3

**Why Is Access to Folk and Popular Culture Unequal?**



## Accessing the World, if You Can p. 126

Watching TV is the world's most popular leisure activity. What about people who can't afford a TV? Or those who prefer Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube?

### KEY ISSUE 4

**Why Do Folk and Popular Culture Face Sustainability Challenges?**



## Don't Throw Away That Culture p. 132

The relentless push of popular culture can threaten the survival of folk culture—and the well-being of the entire planet.

## Introducing

# Folk and Popular Culture

Culture can be divided into two types:

- **Folk culture** is traditionally practiced primarily by small, homogeneous groups living in isolated rural areas (Figure 4-1).
- **Popular culture** is found in large, heterogeneous societies that share certain habits despite differences in other personal characteristics (Figure 4-2).

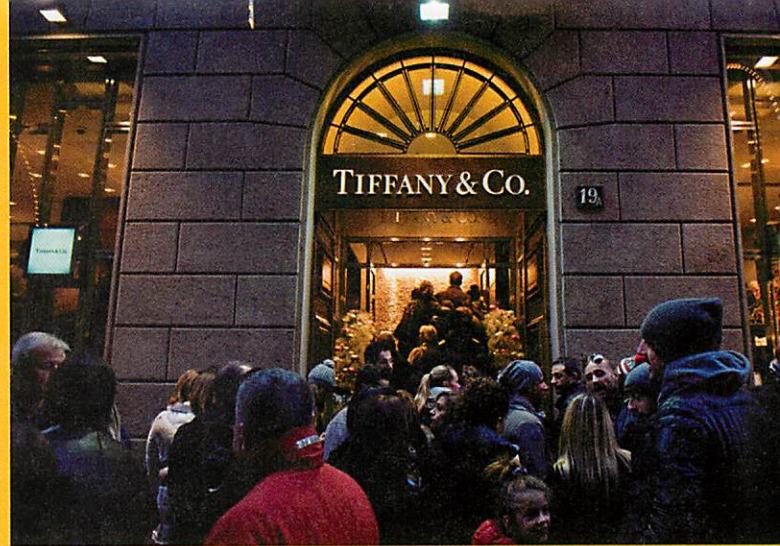
Geographers focus on where folk and popular cultures are located in *space*. Each cultural element has a distinctive origin, diffusion, and distribution. Geographers observe that folk culture and popular culture typically differ in their patterns of origin, diffusion, and distribution.

The *region* covered by a folk culture is typically much smaller than that covered by a popular culture. The reason why the distributions are different is *connection* or lack of it. A group's distinctive culture derives from experiencing local social and physical conditions in a *place* that is isolated from other groups. Even groups living in close proximity to one another may adopt different folk cultures because of limited connections.

Landscapes dominated by folk culture change relatively little over time. In contrast, popular culture is based on rapid simultaneous global connections through communications systems, transportation networks, and other modern technology. Rapid diffusion facilitates frequent changes in popular culture. Thus, folk culture is more likely to vary from place to place at a given time, whereas popular culture is more likely to vary from time to time at a given place.



▲ **FIGURE 4-1 FOLK CULTURE** The Gadaba people of eastern India wear jewelry that reflects local folk culture, including large, heavy neck rings that are not removed until death.



▲ **FIGURE 4-2 POPULAR CULTURE** In popular culture, jewelry is purchased in a store, including this branch in Milan, Italy, of Tiffany & Co, a U.S.-owned company that has nearly 200 stores around the world.

At a global *scale*, popular culture is becoming more dominant—at least for people with the income to have access to it—threatening the survival of unique folk culture. The disappearance of local folk culture reduces local diversity in the world and the intellectual stimulation that arises from differences in backgrounds.

The dominance of popular culture can also threaten the quality of the environment. Culture and the physical environment are interrelated. Each cultural group takes particular elements from the environment into its culture and in turn constructs landscapes (what geographers call “built environments”) that modify nature in distinctive ways. Some of these landscapes are sustainable, and some are not. Folk culture derived from local natural elements may be more sustainable in the protection and enhancement of the environment. Popular culture is less likely to reflect concern for the sustainability of physical conditions and is more likely to modify the environment in accordance with global values.

- **KEY ISSUE 1** describes *where* leisure and recreation elements of folk culture and popular culture are distributed. Art, music, and sports are used as examples. Compared to folk culture, popular culture is more likely to originate at a specific time and place and to diffuse over a wider region.
- **KEY ISSUE 2** looks at the distribution of folk and popular material culture, including food, shelter, and clothing. Popular culture is more likely to vary over time, and folk culture between places.
- **KEY ISSUE 3** explains reasons *why* folk culture and popular culture have different distributions. Especially critical in understanding differences is uneven access to media, especially electronics.
- **KEY ISSUE 4** looks at sustainability concerns raised by *globalization* of popular culture. The diffusion of popular culture threatens the maintenance of *local diversity* in folk customs.