

Jun-1995

Editor's Notebook: Made in the U.S.A.

Michael Kryzanek

Bridgewater State College, mkryzanek@bridgew.edu

Recommended Citation

Kryzanek, Michael (1995). Editor's Notebook: Made in the U.S.A.. *Bridgewater Review*, 14(1), 2.

Available at: http://vc.bridgew.edu/br_rev/vol14/iss1/3

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Made In The U.S.A.

Here are a few random snapshots of the world we live in for your consideration: The most popular television show in the world is *Baywatch*, that southern California beach bunny soap opera; the largest McDonald's restaurant in the world is in Moscow, with three more mega-fastfood emporiums planned; and the hottest selling CD in China is the pirated version of Madonna's latest recording, selling at the cut rate price of \$1.69.

What links *Baywatch*, McDonald's and Madonna is that American popular culture rules the world. Japan may have passed us in terms of a positive trade balance, the German mark may be a more solid currency, and the Swiss may enjoy a higher per capita income, but we lead the world in producing what people seem to want most — those little tidbits of Americana, which to many non-Americans are seen as examples of the good life.

Now of course the United States still leads the world in biotechnology, software design and communication along with countless other less visible industries and services, but it is our popular culture that gets all the attention, both as an agent of change and modernization and as a corruptive influence destined to tarnish unique civilizations. While the Russians have an insatiable

desire to wear our jeans, sweatshirts and baseball hats, the French are going absolutely ballistic over EuroDisney with its plastic commercialism and its overpriced entertainment. While the Mexicans can't get enough of the Dallas Cowboys, Wal-Mart and mall shopping, Iran has banned satellite dishes to ensure that its people won't be attracted to the evils of the United States. And while the Canadians continue to open their borders to all that is American, there is a sadness and deep concern that as a people they have lost their identity, and are becoming a country with its own problems of racism, crime and violence.



The influence of American popular culture is so pervasive that many governments are now addressing the issue of how much contact they want with the United States. It is nearly impossible to shut out countries from contact with America since the global economy and the communication revolution have made isolation a condition of the past. Yet political leaders, some concerned that our climate of freedom and individuality and our talent for commercialization will loosen their hold on power and others, worried that *Baywatch*, McDonald's and Madonna will strip their country of its roots, are beginning to speak out openly about the impact of our popular culture.

This may be a futile endeavor. Despite the fact that there are numerous incidents of anti-Americanism and regular charges by foreign governments that our way of life is having a degenerative effect on their citizens, the American culture remains an irresistible attraction. Quite simply, the world wants to be like us, not so much because of our constitutional democracy (although to the oppressed our governing system is the answer to their prayers), but because of the way we live, the way we relax, the way we are entertained, and the way we make money.

There is an important dynamic at work in the worldwide attractiveness of our popular culture. At a time when many in this country are decrying the collapse of our value system and our proclivity to pursue the fast buck, no matter the crass results of that pursuit, the world seems infatuated with those very examples of Americana that we are now questioning. People in this country desperately want to be seen as producing worthwhile goods and services rather than selling a phony image abroad; they want to take pride in the quality of their craftsmanship rather than in the glitter of public relations; and they want to return to a time when the name American referred to a people committed to excellence rather than to mediocrity.

It will be difficult, if not impossible, to return to the America of the past. The world has changed and we have changed. But there is no denying that what we are as a country and a people resonates outside our borders. The key question is — do we really want to be identified as a people who produce *Baywatch*, McDonald's and Madonna?

Michael Kryzaneck, Editor