

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.

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▲ 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.

KEY ISSUE 1

Where Are Folk and Popular Leisure Activities Distributed?

- Characteristics of Folk and Popular Culture
- Origin and Diffusion of Folk and Popular Music
- Origin and Diffusion of Folk and Popular Sports

Culture was defined in Chapter 1 as the body of material traits, customary beliefs, and social forms that together constitute the distinct tradition of a group of people. Geographers are interested in all three components of the definition of culture:

- Chapter 4 focuses on the first part of this definition (material traits)—the visible elements that a group possesses and leaves behind for the future.
- Chapters 5 and 6 examine two important components of a group's beliefs and values—language and religion.
- Chapters 7 and 8 look at the social forms (ethnicity and political institutions) that maintain values and protect the artifacts.

Two elements of culture are emphasized in this chapter:

- **Daily necessities: Food, clothing, and shelter.** All people must consume food, wear clothing, and find shelter, but different cultural groups do so in distinctive ways (Figure 4-3).
- **Leisure activities: Arts and recreation.** Each cultural group has its own definition of meaningful art and stimulating recreation (Figure 4-4).

Geographers search for where these various elements of culture are found in the world and for reasons why the observed distributions occur. How does culture influence



▲ FIGURE 4-4 LEISURE Women play soccer in Dodoma, Tanzania.

behavior? To answer this question, habit must be distinguished from custom:

- A **habit** is a repetitive act that a particular individual performs, such as wearing jeans to class every day.
- A **custom** is a repetitive act of a group, performed to the extent that it becomes characteristic of the group, such as many students typically wearing jeans to class.

Unlike custom, habit does not imply that the act has been adopted by most of the society's population. A custom is therefore a habit that has been widely adopted by a group of people (Figure 4-5).

A collection of social customs produces a group's material culture; for example, jeans typically represent American informality and a badge of youth. In this chapter, *custom* may be used to denote a specific element of material culture, such as wearing jeans, whereas *culture* refers to a group's entire collection of customs.

A consideration of culture follows logically from the discussion of migration in Chapter 3. Two locations have similar cultural beliefs, objects, and institutions because people bring along their culture when they migrate. Differences emerge when two groups have limited interaction. For example, a group living in one mountainous area may have little connection with a group living in another mountainous area, such as in the Himalayas, described on the next page.

▼ FIGURE 4-3 MATERIAL CULTURE Roots are being cooked near Ghanzi, Botswana.



▲ FIGURE 4-5 HABIT AND CUSTOM As CEO of Fiat and Chrysler, Sergio Marchionne had a habit of wearing black sweaters, even when meeting other executives who adhered to the custom of wearing suits and ties.

Characteristics of Folk and Popular Culture

Learning Outcome 4.1.1

Compare the origin, diffusion, and distribution of folk and popular culture.

Each social custom has a unique spatial distribution, but in general, distribution is more extensive for popular culture than for folk culture. Two basic factors help explain the different spatial distributions of popular and folk cultures—the process of origin and the pattern of diffusion.

ORIGIN

Culture originates at a *hearth*, a center of innovation. Folk culture often has anonymous hearths, originating from anonymous sources, at unknown dates, through unidentified originators. It may also have multiple hearths, originating independently in isolated locations.

In contrast, popular culture is most often a product of developed countries, especially in North America and Europe. Popular culture is typically traceable to a specific person or corporation in a particular place, whereas folk culture typically has an unknown point of origin. For example, popular music as we know it today originated around 1900. At that time, the main popular musical entertainment in North America and Europe was the variety show, called the music hall in the United Kingdom and vaudeville in the United States. To provide songs for music halls and vaudeville, a music industry was developed in a district of New York that became known as Tin Pan Alley (Figure 4-6).

Popular music and other elements of popular culture, such as food and clothing, arise from a combination of advances in industrial technology and increased leisure time. Industrial technology permits the uniform reproduction of

▼ **FIGURE 4-6 ORIGIN OF POPULAR MUSIC** Shops such as this one in New York City's Tin Pan Alley sold popular music in records and sheet music in the early twentieth century.



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objects in large quantities (iPods, T-shirts, pizzas). Many of these objects help people enjoy leisure time, which has increased as a result of the widespread change in the labor force from predominantly agricultural work to predominantly service and manufacturing jobs.

DIFFUSION

Compared to popular culture, folk culture is transmitted from one location to another more slowly and on a smaller scale, primarily through relocation diffusion (migration). The spread of popular culture, such as popular music, typically follows the process of hierarchical diffusion, diffusing rapidly and extensively from hearths or nodes of innovation with the help of modern communications.

The diffusion of American popular music worldwide began in earnest during the 1940s, when the Armed Forces Radio Network broadcast music to American soldiers and to citizens of countries where American forces were stationed or fighting during World War II. In the late twentieth century, western dance music diffused rapidly from the United States to Europe, especially Detroit's techno music and Chicago's house music (Figure 4-7). Techno music was heavily influenced by soul, gospel, and ultimately African folk music. House music was heavily influenced by hip-hop that emerged in New York and other urban areas, which in turn diffused from funk, jazz, and again ultimately African folk music.

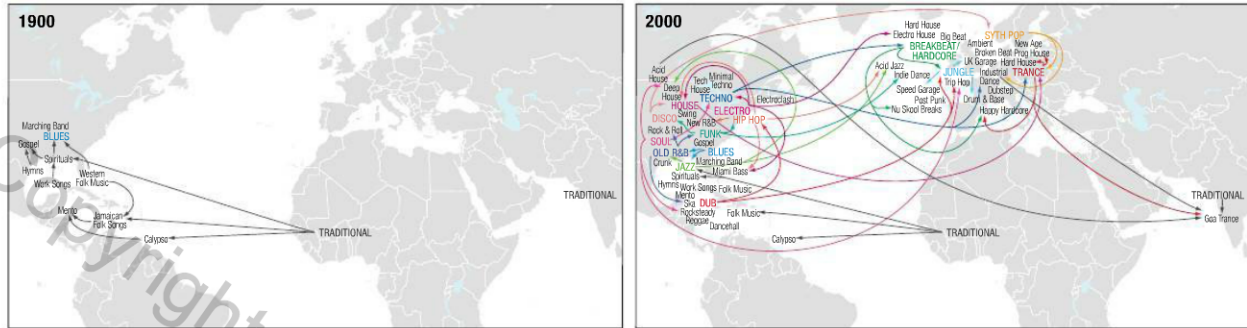
DISTRIBUTION

Popular culture is distributed widely across many countries, with little regard for physical factors. The distribution is influenced by the ability of people to access the material. The principal obstacle to access is lack of income to purchase the material.

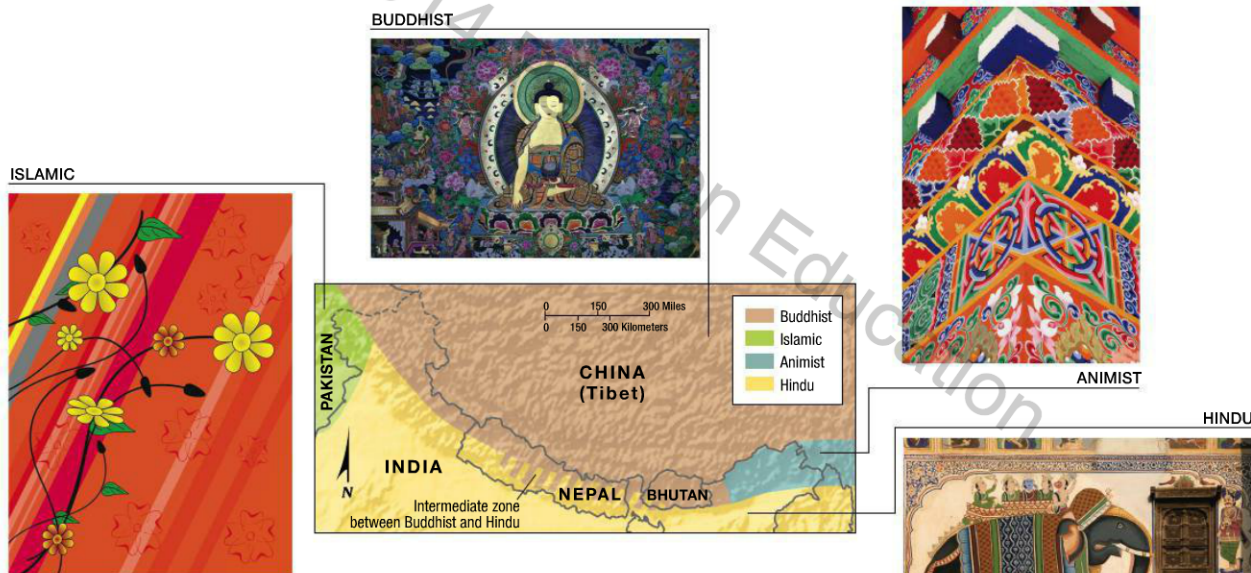
A combination of local physical and cultural factors influences the distinctive distributions of folk culture. For example, in a study of artistic customs in the Himalaya Mountains, geographers P. Karan and Cotton Mather revealed that distinctive views of the physical environment emerge among neighboring cultural groups that are isolated. The study area, a narrow corridor of 2,500 kilometers (1,500 miles) in the Himalaya Mountains of Bhutan, Nepal, northern India, and southern Tibet (China), contains four religious groups: Tibetan Buddhists in the north, Hindus in the south, Muslims in the west, and Southeast Asian animists in the east (Figure 4-8). Despite their spatial proximity, limited interaction among these groups produces distinctive folk customs.

Through their choices of subjects of paintings, each group reveals how its culture mirrors the religions and individual views of the group's environment:

- **Buddhists.** In the northern region Buddhists paint idealized divine figures, such as monks and saints. Some of these figures are depicted as bizarre or terrifying, perhaps reflecting the inhospitable environment.



▲ FIGURE 4-7 DIFFUSION OF WESTERN DANCE MUSIC Popular dance music originated in the Western Hemisphere and diffused to Europe and Asia during the 1980s.



▲ FIGURE 4-8 DISTRIBUTION OF FOLK CULTURE Distinct folk painting traditions are distributed within the Himalayas as a result of isolation of cultural groups.

- **Hindus.** In the southern region Hindus create scenes from everyday life and familiar local scenes. Their paintings sometimes portray a deity in a domestic scene and frequently represent the region’s violent and extreme climatic conditions.
- **Muslims.** In the western portion Muslims show the region’s beautiful plants and flowers because the Muslim faith prohibits displaying animate objects in art. In contrast with the paintings from the Buddhist and Hindu regions, these paintings do not depict harsh climatic conditions.
- **Animists.** Animists from Myanmar (Burma) and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, who have migrated to the

eastern region of the study area, paint symbols and designs that derive from their religion rather than from the local environment.

The distribution of artistic subjects in the Himalayas shows how folk customs are influenced by cultural institutions such as religion and by environmental processes such as climate, landforms, and vegetation. These groups display similar uniqueness in their dance, music, architecture, and crafts.

Pause and Reflect 4.1.1
What geographic factors account for the diversity of cultures in the Himalayas?

Origin and Diffusion of Folk and Popular Music

Learning Outcome 4.1.2

Compare the characteristics of folk and popular music.

Every culture in human history has had some tradition of music, argues music researcher Daniel Levitan. As music is a part of both folk and popular culture traditions, it can be used to illustrate the differences in the origin, diffusion, and distribution of folk and popular culture.

FOLK MUSIC

According to a Chinese legend, music was invented in 2697 B.C., when the Emperor Huang Ti sent Ling Lun to cut bamboo poles that would produce a sound matching the call of the phoenix bird. In reality, folk songs usually originate anonymously and are transmitted orally. A song may be modified from one generation to the next as conditions change, but the content is most often derived from events in daily life that are familiar to the majority of the people. As people migrate, folk music travels with them as part of the diffusion of folk culture.

Folk songs may tell a story or convey information about life-cycle events, such as birth, death, and marriage, or environmental features, such as agriculture and climate. For example, in Vietnam, where most people are subsistence farmers, information about agricultural technology was traditionally conveyed through folk songs. The following folk song provides advice about the difference between seeds planted in summer and seeds planted in winter:

*Ma chiêm ba tháng không già
Ma mùa tháng ruồi ắt là không non¹*

This song can be translated as follows:

While seedlings for the summer crop are not old
when they are three months of age,
Seedlings for the winter crop are certainly not young
when they are one-and-a-half months old.

The song hardly sounds lyrical to a Western ear. But when English-language folk songs appear in cold print, similar themes emerge, even if the specific information conveyed about the environment differs.

Festivals throughout Vietnam feature music in locally meaningful environmental settings, such as hillsides or on water. Singers in traditional clothes sing about elements of daily life in the local village, such as the trees, flowers, and water source (Figure 4-9).

Pause and Reflect 4.1.2

What type of music do you like? Where does it fit in the popular music maps?



▲ FIGURE 4-9 VIETNAMESE FOLK MUSIC Singers perform Quan Ho folk songs as part of the annual Lim Festival, which is held annually on the 13th to the 15th day of the first lunar month. Quan Ho folk music dates back more than 500 years and is recognized by UNESCO as part of humanity's intangible heritage.

POPULAR MUSIC

In contrast to folk music, popular music is written by specific individuals for the purpose of being sold to or performed in front of a large number of people. It frequently displays a high degree of technical skill through manipulation of sophisticated electronic equipment.

As with other elements of popular culture, popular musicians have more connections with performers of similar styles, regardless of where in the world they happen to live, than they do with performers of different styles who happen to live in the same community. The Landscape of Music project illustrates this point by depicting popular music as a world map, with different types of popular music represented as countries and musicians as places within the countries (Figure 4-10). "Countries" that are closer to each other have relatively similar musical styles. The most important musicians in each style are represented on the "world" map; the larger the size of the type, the more important the musician. Zooming in on a portion of the map reveals less important musicians within individual "countries."

In the past, according to Richard Florida, Charlotta Mellander, and Kevin Stolarick, musicians clustered in particular communities according to shared interest in specific styles, such as Tin Pan Alley in New York, Dixieland jazz in New Orleans, country in Nashville, and Motown in Detroit. Now with the globalization of popular music, musicians are less tied to the culture of particular places and instead increasingly cluster in communities where other creative artists reside, regardless of the particular style. In the United States, New York and Los Angeles attract the largest number of musicians so they can be near sources of employment and cultural activities that attract a wide variety of artists, not just performers of a specific type of music. Nashville is also a leading center for musicians, especially those performing country and gospel; it has the largest concentrations of musicians, when the number of musicians there is compared to a much smaller population than in New York and Los Angeles.

¹From John Blacking and Joann W. Kealiinohomoku, eds., *The Performing Arts: Music and Dance* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979), 144. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

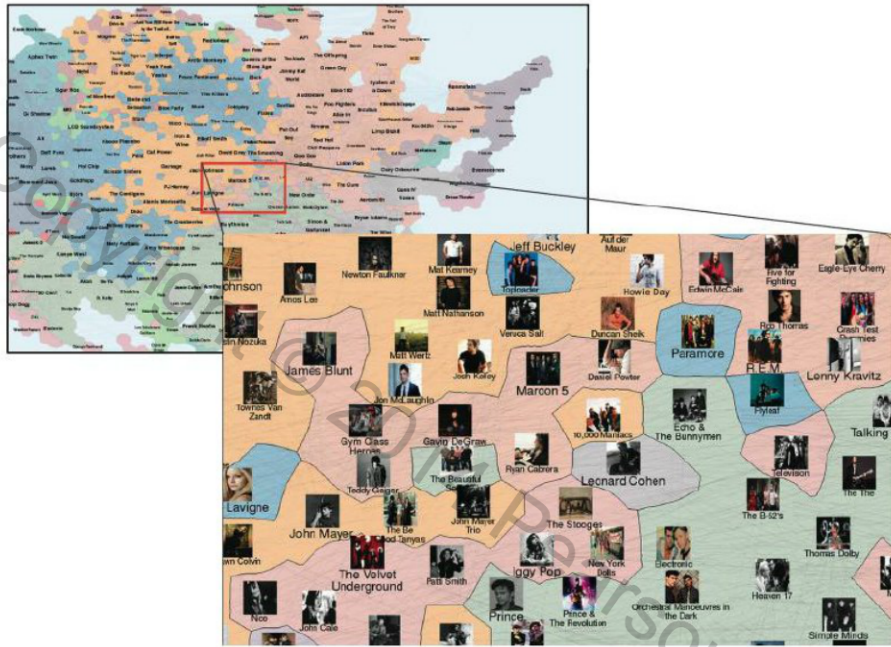


FIGURE 4-10 THE LANDSCAPE OF MUSIC The map shows relations among musicians. Musicians whose styles are closely related are depicted as inhabiting the same region. Musicians whose styles are unrelated are shown as inhabiting regions that are not adjacent to each other. The map was created by Yifan Hu, a researcher at AT&T Labs.

Popular musicians are also increasingly attracted to a handful of large clusters in order to have better access to agencies that book live performances, which have become increasingly important compared to recordings. Nearly all of the music festivals that attract the highest attendance are in Europe and the United States.

Connections between popular musicians are depicted in a transit map. Subway “lines” represent styles of popular music, and “interchanges” represent individuals who cross over between two styles. For example, Kanye West is placed at the interchange between hip-hop and soul, and Jimi Hendrix at the interchange between rock and blues and country (Figure 4-11).

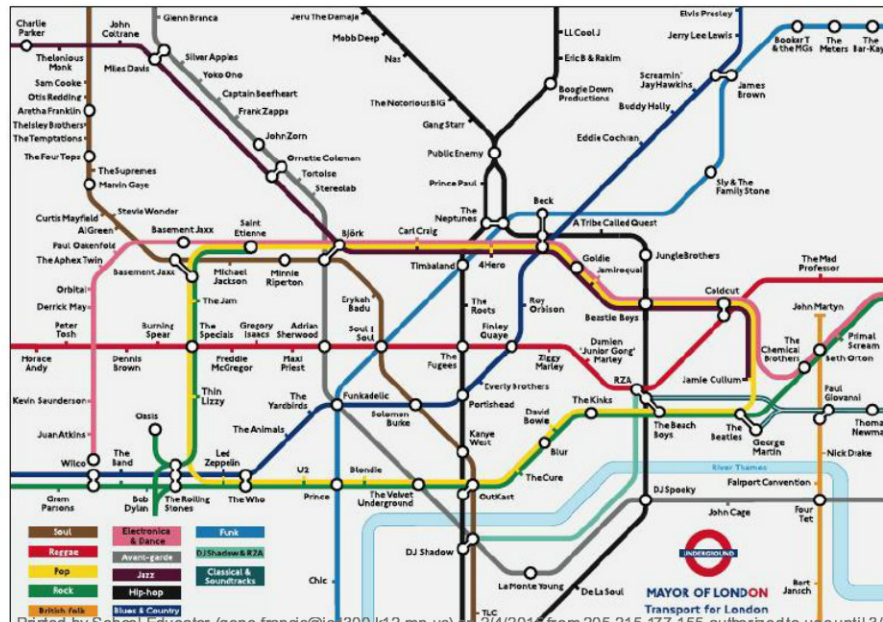


FIGURE 4-11 LONDON SUBWAY MAP OF POPULAR MUSIC This map showing relationships among musical styles is designed to look like the map of the London Underground (subway) system.

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Origin and Diffusion of Folk and Popular Sports

Learning Outcome 4.1.3

Describe how sports have been transformed from folk to popular culture.

Many sports originated as isolated folk customs and were diffused like other folk culture, through the migration of individuals. The contemporary diffusion of organized sports, however, displays the characteristics of popular culture.

ORIGIN AND DIFFUSION OF POPULAR SPORTS

Soccer, the world's most popular sport—known in most of the world as football—originated as a folk custom in England during the eleventh century. It was transformed into a part of global popular culture beginning in the nineteenth century.

ORIGIN OF SOCCER: FOLK CULTURE. As with other folk customs, soccer's origin is obscure. The earliest documented contest took place in England in the eleventh century. According to football historians, after the Danish invasion of England between 1018 and 1042, workers excavating a building site encountered a Danish soldier's head, which they began to kick. "Kick the Dane's head" was imitated by boys, one of whom got the idea of using an inflated cow bladder.

Early football games resembled mob scenes. A large number of people from two villages would gather to kick the ball. The winning side was the one that kicked the ball into the center of the rival village. In the twelfth century, the game—by then commonly called football—was confined to smaller vacant areas, and the rules became standardized. Because football disrupted village life, King Henry II banned the game from England in the late twelfth century. It was not legalized again until 1603, by King James I. At this point, football was an English folk custom rather than a global popular custom.

DIFFUSION OF SOCCER: POPULAR CULTURE. The transformation of football from an English folk custom to global popular culture began in the 1800s. Football and other recreation clubs were founded in the United Kingdom, frequently by churches, to provide factory workers with organized recreation during leisure hours. Sport became a subject that was taught in school.

Increasing leisure time permitted people not only to participate in sporting events but also to view them. With higher incomes, spectators paid to see first-class events. To meet public demand, football clubs began to hire professional players. Several British football clubs formed an

association in 1863 to standardize the rules and to organize professional leagues. Organization of the sport into a formal structure in the United Kingdom marks the transition of football from folk to popular culture.

The word *soccer* originated after 1863, when supporters of the game formed the Football Association. Association was shortened to *assoc*, which ultimately became twisted around into the word *soccer*. The terms *soccer* and *association football* also helped to distinguish the game from rugby football, which permits both kicking and carrying of the ball. Rugby originated in 1823, when a football player at Rugby School (in Rugby, England) picked up the ball and ran with it.

Beginning in the late 1800s, the British exported association football around the world, first to continental Europe and then to other countries. For example:

- **The Netherlands.** Dutch students returning from studies in the United Kingdom were the first to play football in continental Europe in the late 1870s.
- **Spain.** Miners in Bilbao adopted the sport in 1893, after seeing it played by English engineers working there.
- **Russia.** The English manager of a textile factory near Moscow organized a team at the factory in 1887 and advertised in London for workers who could play football. After the Russian Revolution in 1917, both the factory and its football team were absorbed into the Soviet Electric Trade Union. The team, renamed the Moscow Dynamo, became the country's most famous football team.

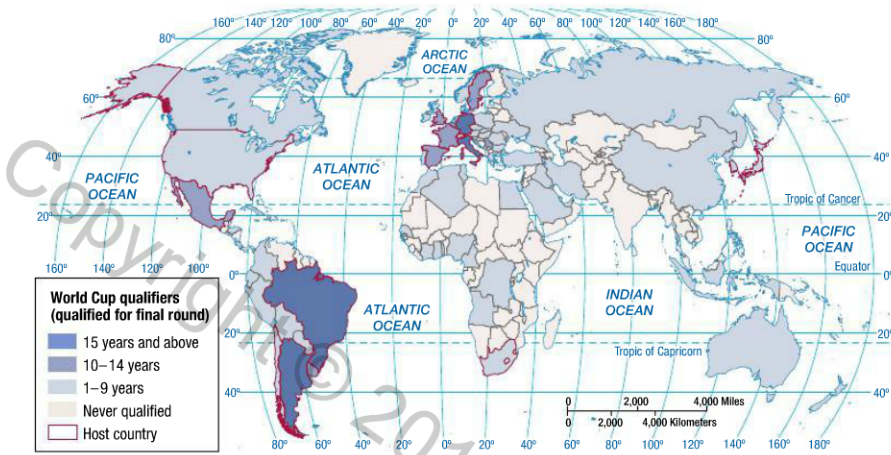
British citizens further diffused the game throughout the worldwide British Empire. In the twentieth century, soccer, like other sports, was further diffused by new communication systems, especially radio and TV.

The global popularity of soccer is seen in the World Cup, in which national soccer teams compete every four years, including in South Africa in 2010 and Brazil in 2014. Thanks to TV, each final breaks the record for the most spectators of any event in world history (Figure 4-12).

OLYMPIC SPORTS. To be included in the Summer Olympics, a sport must be widely practiced in at least 75 countries and on four continents (50 countries for women). The 2016 Summer Olympics features competition in 28 sports: archery, aquatics, athletics, badminton, basketball, boxing, canoeing/kayaking, cycling, equestrian, fencing, field hockey, football (soccer), golf, gymnastics, handball, judo, modern pentathlon, rowing, rugby, sailing, shooting, table tennis, taekwondo, tennis, triathlon, volleyball, weightlifting, and wrestling (Figure 4-13). The two leading team sports in the United States—American football and baseball—are not included.

Pause and Reflect 4.3.1

Are there any Olympic sports in which the United States does not even field a team?



▲ FIGURE 4-12 GLOBAL SPORTS: WORLD CUP Most countries in Europe and Latin America have qualified for the World Cup finals. As soccer diffuses worldwide, qualification has increased in other regions.

- Australia rules football is a sport distinct from soccer and the football played in North America. Distinctive forms of football developed in Australia, as well as the United States and Canada, as a result of lack of interaction among sporting nations during the nineteenth century.

Despite the diversity in distribution of sports across Earth's surface and the anonymous origin of some games, organized spectator sports today are part of popular culture. The common element in professional sports is

the willingness of people throughout the world to pay for the privilege of viewing, in person or on TV, events played by professional athletes.



▲ FIGURE 4-13 GLOBAL SPORTS: OLYMPICS Athletes from Turkey (in blue gear) and the United States (in red gear) compete in women's taekwondo at the 2012 Summer Olympic Games in London, United Kingdom.

CHECK-IN: KEY ISSUE 1

Where Are Folk and Popular Leisure Activities Distributed?

- ✓ Folk culture and popular culture have distinctive patterns of origin, diffusion, and distribution.
- ✓ Folk leisure activities typically have anonymous origins, diffuse through relocation diffusion, and have limited distribution.
- ✓ Popular leisure activities typically originate with identifiable individuals or corporations, diffuse rapidly through hierarchical diffusion, and have widespread distribution.

SURVIVING FOLK SPORTS

Most other sports have diffused less than soccer. Cultural groups still have their own preferred sports, which are often unintelligible to people elsewhere. Consider the following:

- Cricket is popular primarily in the United Kingdom and former British colonies, especially in South Asia, the South Pacific, and Caribbean islands (Figure 4-14).
- Wushu, martial arts that combine forms such as kicking and jumping with combat such as striking and wrestling, are China's most popular sports.
- Baseball, once confined to North America, became popular in Japan after it was introduced by American soldiers who occupied the country after World War II.



▲ FIGURE 4-14 CRICKET Boys play cricket in Katni, India.