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English 15

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Material Culture

Throughout America’s History people have been chasing “The American Dream” and the year 1985 encompasses the reality of that actually happening for Americans. The American Dream is fulfillment in life from getting married to having a great job and living a comfortable life (Rollin, 273). In 1985, the year became memorable for all the events, people, and news that made it exciting for people to live through. Also teens wanting material possessions and worrying about material things like their parents that chased the American Dream became an important issue in the 1980s especially 1985.During this year music was very influential to the American people especially to teens in every genre from pop all the way to hip hop and heavy metal. Fashion and the way people dressed and expressed themselves was emphasized in American culture especially what they wore from famous styles to designer brand names. Movies were very popular as well in 1985; people loved anything from action movies to teen movies that year. The teen culture of the 1980s was changing and in 1985 the culture had fully taken a 360 turn from that of previous years. Celebrities influenced style of the mainstream society a lot especially musicians and hit movie actors and actresses. The year 1985 was a year of highs and lows like every year but it marked a great time in history because the effects of that year are still being felt in 2009.

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Music was a huge part of American culture in 1985 because it changed the focus of music off of just making money but to changing the way people think and to helping others as well. In this year Rock and Roll joined forces and created a concert called “USA for Africa”. This concert raised money for starving nations in Africa and it included over 40 prominent musical artists such as Stevie Wonder, Lionel Richie, Madonna, David Bowe, Phil Collins, Paul McCartney and Michael Jackson(Rollin,287). This concert was broadcasted live from different cities all over the world from London, Philadelphia and, Sydney and it was over 17 hours long. Out of this concert came a hit single sung by Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie called “We are the World” (Manning, 1). That song was number one for four weeks and sold over four million copies which made it one of the most successful singles of the decade. This was the year when genres mixed and the separation between music like rock, pop and soul did not exist. Additionally, it opened the door for hip hop to emerge into the scene with hot off the street style from artists like Run DMC. In other music news, the revival of heavy metal and hard rock started in this year and it continued all the way through to the end of the decade. Furthermore, heavy metal songs like “Out of the Cellar” by Ratt and “Shout at the Devil” by Motley Crue became very popular and went platinum that year (Manning, 2). The art of listening to music became so popular with young people that 14% of record sales went up compared to 1984(Manning, 2). The famous Apollo Theater in Harlem, New York reopened that year and it was a place where artists performed their craft especially African Americans. Another memorable fact was that Madonna, a huge artist of the 80s became the second female to ever have a hit song and album at the same time. Lastly, music was a huge tool to influence the teens of the 1980s (Rollin, 287).

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People dressed a certain way in the 80s which was different than any decade before. Especially in 1985 fashion trends popped up in style and in mainstream more than any other year. For example, a popular trend for woman was power dressing which was a “stylish and expensive clothing style, intended to convey the impression of assertiveness and competence and pre dominantly worn by women”(Martin, 1).Basically, power dressing came from the feeling that women could choose who they wanted to be and what they wanted to do with their life. Women wanted everyone to know that they were in control of their life now. The look was a suit and jacket with a wide shoulder using shoulder pads. The main influences of this style came from television shows called Dallas and Dynasty (Thomas, 1). Additionally, there were many fashion looks that was popular like the preppy look with designers like Ralph Lauren, IZOD and Lacoste. Also wearing designer clothing was a popular trend in the 80s and the designers that people wore the most were Levi Strauss, Liz Claiborne, Gucci, Sassoon, Sergio Valenti, Harley Davidson, and Nike (Rollin,284). Other looks that made it to mainstream society was the athletic look with sweat pants and sneakers, the hip hop street look, the Michael Jackson look and the Madonna look. To add, the crazy and inventive style of Madonna became a look that included miniskirts, crazy eye makeup, accessories, neon colors, and crochet gloves. Fashion was an important aspect of life to teens in the 80s because it was one of the best ways they could express themselves.

 Teenagers in 1985 are known as generation X because of the low number of baby births since the baby boom in the 50s and early sixties. Generation X was created by novelist Doug Coupland and this term came from the music, casual drug use, political apathy, cynicism about work, and taste in clothing in this generation( Rollin,271). Teens in 1985 cared more about

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material possessions such as clothes, music, cosmetics, sports and cars then anything else that society would characterize as “more important” like education and public issues. In addition, heavy drinking drug use was very common for teen between ages 14 to 19 years old. The drug marijuana became the drug most used by teen in 1985(Rollin, 287). Teens used alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, illicit drugs, medication and inhalants (Levy, 1). The use of drugs was very prevalent in teen society in every class. This was the down fall of teen culture because it was the start of bad habits that they had to pay for in the 90s all the way to the present.

 Famous movies came out this year such as “the Color Purple”, “The Breakfast Club”, ‘Out of Africa”, and plenty of teen movies. “The Color Purple” is a book that they made into a movie and it is about an African American woman named Celie Johnson and the movie just follows her life struggles in the early 1900s. Also the “The Breakfast Club” was a famous teen movie that came out of 1985 and it was bout a group of teen on Saturday detention and it just shows how different personalities and styles showed through at the high school age. Additionally, more famous teen movies came out that year such as “The Sure Thing”, “Back to the Future”, “The Goonies”, “Better off Dead”, “St. Elmos’s Fire, and many more. Also hit televsion shows were running during this year like “the Cosby Show”, “Family Ties”, “Dynasty” and “Dallas”. As you may know the “Cosby Show” was about an upper middle class black family that went through their lives and dealt with issues that weren’t talked about previously before. This show revived situation comedy and dealt with real issues that adults, teens and children dealt with any issue from race, culture, life, school, jobs, and class. The Cosby show was the number sit-com in 1985 and stayed at number one for the next 3 seasons. Dynasty and Dallas were soap operas and was different from the shows like “family ties” and “The Cosby

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show”. “Dynasty“was a popular soap opera that focused on the lives of the wealthy and rich with emphasis on greed, glamour, and materialism of the 80s. The movies and shows that came out reflected society from what they wore to the content that was in them.

 The famous celebrates that set the style and tone for 1985 are Michael Jackson, the Brat Pack, and Madonna. Michael Jackson was one of the most influential artists of the time his style inspired dance, music, and fashion for many years to come. The Brat Pack was a group of young actors and actresses that stared in most of the teen movies in the 1980s. The term “Brat Pack” came from the New York Magazine cover story and it came from the term rat pack. The actors and actresses included are Ally Sheedy from “The Breakfast Club and St. Elmo’s Fire”, Emilio Estetvez was in The Breakfast Club and St. Elmo’s Fire” as well, Anthony Michael Hall who was in Sixteen Candles, The Breakfast Club and Weird Science. Andrew McCarthy was in Class, St Elmo’s Fire and Pretty In Pink, Demi Moore was one of the most successful actresses out of the Brat pack and she was in St Elmo’s Fire, Rob Lowe was in The Outsiders, Class, St Elmo’s Fire and Youngblood, and Judd Nelson was in St Elmo’s Fire and Transformers, and Molly Ringwald was Sixteen Candles, Pretty In Pink and The Breakfast Club. The Brat Pack was the top pick of teen actors and actresses of the 1980s. Lastly, I would like to mention Madonna as an influential celebrity of 1985 because she made women bold and not in the background with her hit album “Like a Virgin”. Her funky and inventive style is still worn today and her influence is still in society.

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In conclusion, 1985 was a year of high and lows and it needs to be noted as one of the greatest years in the 1980s for everything that happened in it. The American Dream that was chased became was I call materialism. The teens in this culture envied what adults had and wanted it. They chased after possessions such as clothes and cars which still left them empty resulting in heavy drug use. They cared about what they had and making money. The term generation X is the perfect term to describe this generation and this year 1985. This year is a lesson to value the real this in life rather then what you have or what you can get.