**SAMPLE KELT LISTENING 2 SCRIPT (note-taking)**

Foreigners from older cultures with traditions dating back hundreds and hundreds of years sometimes react with surprise and skepticism when the topic of U.S. culture comes up. Commenting on the United States, they sometimes say things like ‘But the United States has no culture.’ People in the United States find comments such as this one amusing at best, and sometimes downright infuriating. In all fairness, I have to say that it’s understandable that foreigners have trouble identifying an American culture because not even the best minds in the country – writers, educators, and politicians – agree on the basic nature of U.S. culture. Today, **I’ll try to contrast three ways that U.S. culture has been perceived over the years.** Then perhaps you can decide which point of view seems the most logical to you. We’ll take a look at the older **monoculturalist view; a newer, multiculturalist view; and finally a third view, which I’ll call the pluralistic view.**

First in our discussion is the monoculturalist view of the United States as a melting pot. A melting pot, literally a pot in which metals like aluminum and copper are melted in order to blend them, is **the traditional metaphor for the way the different groups of immigrants came together in the United States.** Now, theoretically, the result of many nationalities blending together is one big unified common culture, an alloy of all the parts in it. In other words, the result is a combination of all the different parts, which have mixed together and are no longer recognizable as separate parts. However, many people today feel that the idea of one common U.S. culture is a myth and has always been a myth. To support their view, opponents point out that many groups, **notably African, Asian, and Native Americans, have at times been excluded from participating fully in society through segregation and discrimination.** Furthermore, a trademark of U.S. immigration has been that the most recently arrived group, whether Irish or Italian or Chinese or Jewish, typically faced strong discrimination from those already in the United States. We know that all these groups have made important contributions to the culture, that is not the point. The point is, given the climate of discrimination at different times in the past (and even now), U.S. society does not assimilate new cultural input until much later – after the new immigrants are viewed with less prejudice. Let’s move on to another view of U.S. culture.

The second view of U.S. culture that we’ll look today is the multiculturalist view. The multiculturalist view focuses on the many subcultures that make up the U.S. population – all the different ethnic and racial groups we talked about in a previous lecture. Now, each group brought its own distinct culture when it immigrated to the United States. The multiculturalist view does not see U.S. culture as a melting pot; rather, the metaphor that **multiculturalists often employ is the patchwork quilt**, a bedcover made of numerous pieces of differently-colored material. (Have you seen quilts like these on beds?) The metaphor of the patchwork quilt is appropriate in that the multiculturalists see the United States as a mosaic of separate, autonomous subcultures, each one distinct from the other. U.S. culture, in this view, is a sum of the distinct parts, with little or no mixing of subcultures. Opponents of this view, those who disagree with it (and there are many who do), say that the multiculturalist view ignores the characteristic mixing of groups, both ethnic and racial, that has been common in the United States. Americans of European background have always intermarried. Many people are a combination of four or more ethnic backgrounds – and often of more backgrounds than they can keep track of. I do not want to imply that the United States has overcome its race problems – far from it. But recent census statistics give two indications of somewhat more mixing than previously. First, **one in fifteen U.S. marriages is now interracial.** An interracial marriage would be any combination of white, black, Asian, and Native American spouses. Admittedly, there are many more marriages between Asians or Native Americans and whites than between blacks and whites. Second, of the **1.6 million children who are adopted, 17 percent make their families multiracial** because of the adoption of local children of another race or of children from abroad, especially from Asian or Latin America. Intermarriage and adoption of children of another race make a difference in how people in a family look at themselves. The point here is, the ethnically and racially pure individuals implied by the multiculturalist view are more the exception than the rule. Take, for instance, an African American man married to a Filipina, whose two sons married white women. Where in the patchwork quilt do the grandchildren of the African American former Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall belong? This is an extreme example, but I think it shows that Marshall’s grandchildren share many subcultures; they do not represent just one square on the quilt. For this reason, many people prefer another, more satisfactory, view of U.S. culture.

The last cultural view we’ll discuss today, the pluralistic view, is a combination of the first two views. The pluralistic view says that individuals have a number of cultural influences, some of which they share with others and some of which are different from one person to another. These cultural influences have three distinct sources: **we inherit some of our culture from our families; we absorb some of our culture unconsciously from living in the culture** (television figures importantly in this unconscious absorption); and third, **we choose some cultural influences that we find attractive from the many subcultures in the United States.** In this way, the population shares a large portion of common culture, but people also have individual cultural characteristics that make them different from others. The pluralistic view of culture recognizes the strong role of assimilation, becoming part of the larger group. **In assimilation, one becomes part of a larger, dominant culture by accepting much, if not all, of the culture.** The pluralistic view differs from the monocultural view in that pluralistic assimilation does not mean that immigrants must deny their original cultures or that they must forget them. But in all likelihood, immigrants become a little less Mexican, Chinese, or Arab as they assimilate parts of the new culture. Assimilation is not required by the dominant culture, but we do know that it occurs regularly among immigrant groups. If assimilation does not take place in the first generation, it most certainly does by the second or third generation.

Opponents of the pluralistic view of culture cite Latinos especially Mexican immigrants, the single largest immigrant group since the 1990s. These opponents say that instead of assimilating as other groups have, Mexicans maintain strong ties to neighboring Mexico through frequent visits home. As a result, opponents fear a fragmentation, or even destruction, of U.S. culture as we know it. On the other hand, proponents of the pluralistic view point out that even Latinos follow the pattern of previous immigrants; indeed, **a fifth of Latinos in the United States intermarry.** If this seems like a small number, I think we could safely predict higher intermarriage rates in future generations.

It would be wrong to assume that the dominant, or common, culture we’ve been speaking about reflects the culture of only one ethnic or racial group that makes up the United States. At the same time, if U.S. society is an open one, as Americans like to believe, it would be hard to deny the changing nature of U.S. culture. **It has always reflected the cultures of its immigrants and will likely continue to do so.** If we accept this premise, the continuation and possible increase in Latino immigration will change the character of the U.S. culture somewhat. Not as drastically as monoculturalists fear, I think, **but a change no doubt will occur.** I suspect U.S. culture, to use another metaphor, will continue to seem like the same dish – but it will be a dish with a **somewhat Latino flavor in the future. The real test of the future of the United States as a culture may well be whether its cultural ideal of tolerance is a reality.** Well, I really have taken much more of your time than I should have. Good-bye for now.