

The Britney Spears Culture

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In December of 1981, Britney J. Spears came into this world in the deep southern state of Mississippi to working class professional parents. In what seemed like a realization of the American dream, she appeared on Star Search in 1992 when she was only 11 years old and later joined the New Mickey Mouse Club with future boyfriend Justin Timberlake and fellow diva Christina Aguilera. Jive Records picked up her demo tape when she was 16 and only a year later, she was singing "hit me baby one more time" dressed in a suggestively redesigned Catholic schoolgirl uniform in the halls of the same high school where the classic American movie Grease was filmed.

After selling 76 million albums around the world, starring in her own feature film, and gracing the cover of hundreds of magazines, her career collapsed at the ripe old age of 23. A few months ago I sat and stared in bewilderment from behind my computer screen as Spears, two marriages and two children later, opened her legs to the paparazzi while giving them the 'thumbs up' during a night on the town with Paris Hilton.

Then it occurred to me that the rise and fall of Britney Spears revealed the fundamental problems with American consumerism, from her contradictory roots as a Christian conservative, to her bubblegum sexuality, all the way down to the implosion of her personal life. The pursuit of profit and the reduction of all value to performance in the marketplace has characterized our lives since the late 1950s, but my generation was the first to be baptized in the total submersion of this culture.

Corporations now cultivate entertainers from a very early age to be marketed to the public, who are harvested for their financial resources like a forest is clearcutted to grind and slice into raw materials. Britney Spears was not a human being to Walt Disney and her producer Max Martin, she was a product to be marketed, sold, and subjected to planned obsolescence so that she expired when Jive Records found a newer, fresher product to sell to the masses.

The Britney Spears culture transforms art into a commodity and makes human happiness reducible to the consumption of merchandise. Britney Spears' music, like all popular art characteristic of this culture, appeals to the lowest common denominator for maximum marketability. But there are no redeeming qualities in this process. As revealed by Spears' tragic personal life, our consumer culture is destructive of human social relations, as the marketplace takes all precedence over every aspect of our lives.

Britney Spears unwittingly represents the very worst of American culture, but in the end, as her song says, "I'm a Slave 4 U."