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Prefatory Note

Geraldine E. LaRocque
University of Northern Iowa

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Prefatory Note

Culture is an instrument wielded by professors to manufacture professors, who then when their turn comes, will manufacture professors.

Simone Weil

The "high" culture to which Simone Weil is referring in the above quotation is the kind of culture Professors E. D. Hirsch, Jr., and Allan Bloom refer to in their books *Cultural Literacy* and *The Closing of the American Mind*. It is not the culture which the authors of this volume are addressing. These freshmen Presidential Scholars are interested in the popular culture of their peers and associates.

Because popular culture is a reflection of the lives of people living at a certain time in a particular place, it often partakes of the emotion of everyday life and mirrors changes which affect the great majority of people. The popular culture of America (meaning the United States to most of the world) may be exported to other nations and, also, may import ideas and customs from afar. Billy Joel, a world-famous American musician, exemplifies the popular "star" performing a current hit that enumerates the names, places, and events of the common culture from 1949 to 1989.

We Didn't Start the Fire

- 1950: Joe McCarthy, Richard Nixon,
Studebaker, Television
North Korea, South Korea, Marilyn
Monroe
- ...
- 1980-1990: Wheel of Fortune, Sally Ride, Heavy
Metal, Suicide
Foreign debts, Homeless Vets, AIDS,
Crack, Bernie Goetz
Hypodermics on the shores, China's
under martial law

Rock and Roller Cola Wars, I can't
take it anymore
CHORUS: We didn't start the fire
It was always burning
Since the world's been turning on us
We didn't start the fire
But when we are gone
Will it still burn on, and on, and on,
and on?

Although we did not start the fire, we are engulfed by it; and the authors of *Draftings in American Popular Culture* have tried to capture in print some aspects of this culture in the articles which constitute this volume. The six contributors were members of my first-semester freshman writing course, and they are a part of the fourth group of Presidential Scholars on campus. Instituted by UNI President Constantine Curris, the Scholars' Program provides a special seminar each semester geared toward broadening the knowledge and understanding of its members. My students' interest in culture, piqued by their Scholars-only seminar "Culture and Modern American Business," resulted in their exploring popular culture as expressed through American televangelism, popular concepts of beauty and time, attitudes towards women and heroes, and television news.

We hope the reader will enjoy the articles and be surprised and enlightened by some of our findings. Special thanks to Dr. Michael Klassen, professor of "Culture and Modern American Business," and Mr. Lawrence Kieffer, head of Readers' Service, Donald O. Rod Library.

HAPPY READING!

Dr. Geraldine E. LaRocque
Professor of English

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- Joel, Billy. Jacket Notes. "We Didn't Start the Fire" from *Storm Front*. Words and Music by Billy Joel. CBS Records, 4 Oct. 1989.
- Weil, Simone, quoted in *The Portable Curmudgeon*. Comp. and ed. Jon Winokur. New York: New American Library, 1987: 74.