

# Being American

Excepts from Storti, *The Art of Crossing Cultures*

Global Leadership and Diversity  
Reitz, 2017

## Instructions:

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Review the following quotes and note how true they appear to be in American society today. How do these values and characteristics shape how we relate across cultures? Post to the threaded discussion key points (or points of disagreement) you identify.

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“I’m not English. I’m American. We see all things as possible. We don’t allow anyone to be better than ourselves.”

-Norman Mailer *Manchester Guardian*

An American? I looked up. “How do you know?” “Wearing a hat,” he said. “Carrying her own boxes.” “That doesn’t mean she’s an American.” “Riding the night bus,” he smiled. “American.”

-Paul Theroux *The Consul's File*

“Khoo Ah Au liked Americans. He found them, on the whole, generous, easygoing, and completely predictable. They were rarely ill-tempered as the British often were, or eccentric in their demands, as were the French. They did not harass him with questions he had not been asked before and listened politely, if sometimes inattentively, to the information he had to impart...Above all he found their personal relationships easy to read.

It was probably a matter of race, he thought. His own people were always very careful not to give themselves away, to expose crude feelings about one another. Americans seemed not to care how much was understood by strangers. It was almost as if they enjoyed being transparent.”

-Eric Ambler *Passage of Arms*

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“Americans have no capacity for abstract  
thought and make bad coffee.”

–Georges Clemenceau

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“Just in this one matter lies the charm of life in Europe—comfort. In America we hurry, which is well; but when the day’s work is done, we go on thinking of losses and gains, we plan for the morrow, we even carry our business cares to bed with us and toss and worry over them when we ought to be restoring our racked bodies and brains with sleep. We burn up our energies with these excitements and either die early or drop into a lean and mean old age at a time of life which they call a man’s prime in Europe.

-Mark Twain *The Innocents Abroad*

We bestow thoughtful care upon inanimate objects but none upon ourselves. What a robust people, what a nation of thinkers we might be if we would only lay ourselves on the shelves occasionally to renew our edges.”

-Mark Twain *The Innocents Abroad*

“Once we were out in a rural area in the middle of nowhere and saw an American come to a stop sign. Though he could see in both directions for miles and no traffic was coming, he still stopped!”

-Turkish Exchange Student in *There is a Difference*

“For me there was only one place to go if I couldn’t live in my own country: America. It is a country of immigrants. There is such tolerance for the foreign and unfamiliar. America continues to amaze me.”

-Milos Forman *Time*

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“Civility cannot be purchased from Americans on any terms; they seem to think it is incompatible with freedom.”

-Isaac Weld

# Patterns of Culture

Categories adapted from Edward Stewart, American Culture Patterns

# Social Status

Class and Wealth do not ascribe status in American culture to the degree found in other cultures.

Exceptions- What are they?

# Formality

	American	Others
Manners	Unnecessary	Expected
Formal Address	Pompous	Proper
Status	Irrelevant	Significant for communication
Honorific	Antiquated	Respectful

# Egalitarianism

“...their continued insistence upon it as an ideal demonstrates their inclination to perpetuate a value through a social norm which is part illusion and part reality.”

(Stewart, 1991)

# Directness

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“Cut to the chase.”

“Straight from the horses mouth.”

“Give it to me straight doctor.”

- Americans tend to undervalue or misunderstand the significance of indirect communication in other cultures.
- Directness may lead to depersonalization.

# Property Ownership

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“You ain’t no kind of man if you ain’t got land.”

-O Brother, Where Art Thou

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How important is ownership to Americans?

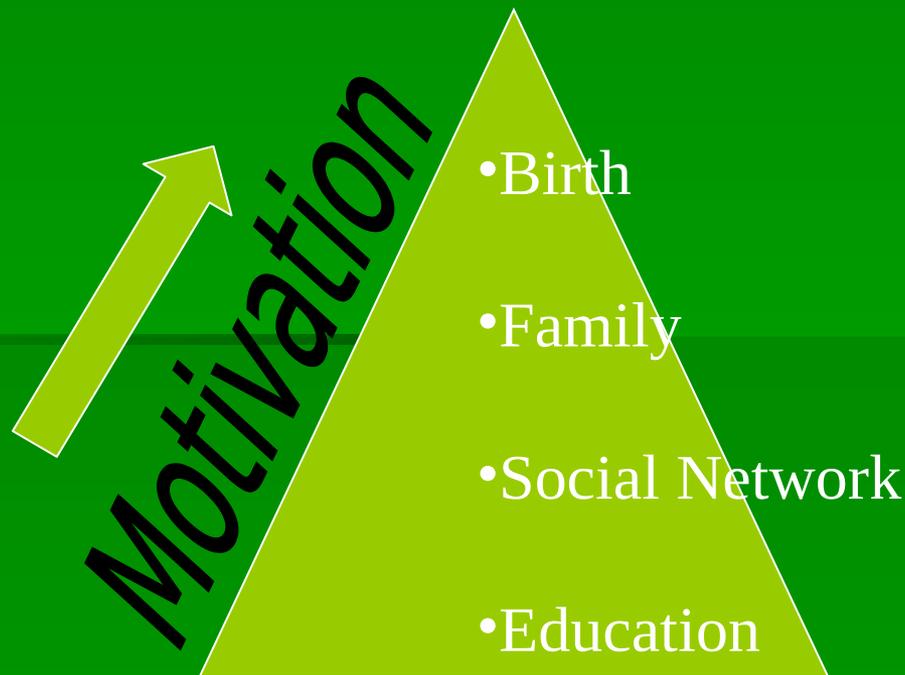
# Individualism

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- Achievement related to the individual
- Continued move away from organizational/institutional loyalty
- Morality becomes subjective due to unbalanced emphasis on the individual and their experience

# Social Mobility

“God helps those who help themselves.”  
-Ben Franklin



**What other values would  
you identify as often  
representative of  
Americans?**

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