America in a Nutshell

Undoubtedly America has the largest and greatest diversity in terms of racial, ethnic, cultural and religious than any country in the world. Do you agree? I think it’s a nice, big bag of mixed chocolate M&M’s. The following are the various culture groups and where they first settled in America:

Native Americans in North America Spanish in the Southwest British in New England Dutch in New York Germans in Pennsylvania

These immigrant groups came to America knowing they would work hard, in addition to realizing they could direct and control their destiny. For immigrants America represented a land of abundant resources and opportunity. Remember now, a culture is defined as the total elements that characterize a group of people, such as mores, traditions and beliefs, language, in addition to values, food and eating habits, dress, knowledge, religion or spirituality. The family plays a very important role in teaching the child how to see the world; and the family gives the child a social role in the family. Schools are responsible for creating responsible students, to teach democratic principles, citizenship, achievement, self-discipline and how to obey authority figures.

**Is It About Material Wealth?**

I think making it in America can be expressed as “going from rags to riches.” I know you’ve heard this slogan before reading it here. Unfortunately material wealth has become a value in America. Not all Americans, however are driven to achieve material wealth; meaning it’s not the primary driving force in their lives. Materialism simply means assigning high value to material possessions because it shows one’s social status and success. I guess it depends on what each individual defines as success. Most of the time hard, disciplined work is the price we pay for material success. In America there is a tendency to think that differences in material possession reflects a difference in abilities. Do you agree? I think this is faulty thinking. In other words, just because I’m not interested in attaining material possessions doesn’t mean I don’t have the ability to do so. I may be very successful and possess lots of ability however I’m not interested in showing my success through owning luxurious cars or living in a multi-million dollar home.

**Diversity**

Lets define diversity as pluralism: meaning differences. This list shows the many dimensions Americans can express their differences:

Religion, job title, political affiliation, socioeconomic status, educational level, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, smoker/nonsmoker, married, divorces, widowed, athlete or non-athlete.

Think about this: Do Americans see diversity as a strength—a phenomenon that has the potential to enrich our lives and learn more about our special and unique life-ways? I think one of the greatest elements about America is the limited power of government and church, thereby eliminating any notions of an ideology that may be consistent with an aristocracy or autocratic government. America allows us our individualism, to be free and control our own destiny without government interference. I put it like this: Americans are self- directed and self-determined. I suppose this only applies to you if you are goal directed and your behavior is purposeful.

Now, the only potential problem with enjoying individual freedom is the potential for us to become too individualistic where an overemphasis is placed on self-reliance and our lives become less meaningful because we tend to isolate ourselves from the larger community. We don’t want to be detached from our community and institutions that we would normally be anchored to such as our church, synagogue, mosque, cultural centers and other organizations. In the end the concern is the following: The more free we are the more we’re at risk for being alienated, lonely and bored. What do you think? I think we need to be interested in reaching out to others and integrating into our communities. So in conclusion, individualism can create alienation from self and society and it can result in an over-importance on being self-contained and self-sufficient.

**Equality of Opportunity**

The idea of equality of opportunity doesn’t mean we’re all equal; it means we all have an equal chance to succeed and lead satisfying lives in America. I suppose on exception is if you’re born into a wealthy family and you inherit wealth and prestige. An individual in this situation enjoys what we call ascribed status—in comparison to someone who earned wealth and prestige through hard work, what we’ll define as achieved status. The reason everyone in America has an equal chance to make it is because we’re free of political, social and religious control by institutions. In other countries, one’s place in the community may be determined by his/her social class, ethnicity or political affiliation.

**The Socialization Experience in Mainstream America**

You need to remember that all of us who were born and socialized within a distinct, mainstream culture of a society did not have an opportunity to question or challenge the cultural assumptions and expectations our parents inculcated in us. In addition, we were reinforced for obeying and honoring certain values, beliefs and customs of our culture. As a result, we experienced a sort of cultural program, a structured program of cultural understanding in our socialization process in childhood. Interestingly, we came to accept the cultural assumptions of our society and internalized the values, norms and conventions of our society. In the end, we’re at risk for developing a sort of monocultural view.