

13 Commonly Held American Values

By L. Robert Kohls

www.uku.fi/~paganuzz/xcult/values/Amer_values.htm

1. **Personal control over the environment** - Americans do not generally believe in the power of fate; they see this as superstitious and reflective of an unwillingness to take initiative. Life's problems tend to be viewed as coming from one's laziness or unwillingness to take responsibility, rather than from bad luck.

2. **Change** - Americans tend to see change as good, leading to development, improvement, and progress. More traditional cultures see change as destructive; they value stability and tradition.

3. **Time** - Time is of utmost importance to Americans. Time is something to be on, kept, filled, saved, lost, wasted, and even killed. Americans tend to be more concerned with getting things done on time than they are with interpersonal relationships. Americans stop discussions abruptly in order to make appointments on time and to be productive.

4. **Equality and fairness** - Equality is so valued in American culture that it is seen as having a religious basis. At least in theory, Americans believe that all people are created equal and that everyone should have equal opportunities.

5. **Individualism and interdependence** - Americans tend to view themselves as highly individualistic and resist being thought of as part of any homogenous group. Individualism leads to privacy, which most Americans highly value. It is interesting to note that the word for "privacy" does not even exist in many non-Western languages.

6. **Self-help and initiative** - Americans tend to take credit for accomplishments as individuals, and they tend to value the "self-made" man or woman.

7. **Competition** - Americans tend to believe that competition brings out the best in people, and "free enterprise" is valued in many areas of life.

8. **Future orientation** - Americans tend to value the future, devalue the past, and to an extent, are unaware of the present. Many Americans work so hard and think so much about their future that a perfectly happy present often goes unnoticed.

9. **Action/work orientation** - Americans tend to see any action as superior to inaction. Americans tend to schedule an active life and schedule in time for relaxation. Often the first question people ask each other when meeting is, "What do you do?" meaning what is their profession.

10. **Informality** - Americans are more informal than many other cultures. For example, many Americans call their bosses by their first names, dress is more casual attire, even at formal events, and even greetings are

casual (e.g., “Hi” rather than, “Hello, how are you?”).

11. **Directness, openness, and honesty** - Americans tend to prefer the direct approach to delivering information, no matter how unpleasant. Americans tend to see honesty as most important, and anyone who uses an intermediary to deliver unpleasant information is seen as manipulative and untrustworthy.

12. **Practicality and efficiency** - The reputation of Americans is practical and efficient. They tend to value rational and objective decisions over emotional and subjective ones, and the pragmatic approach is the overwhelming philosophy.

13. **Materialism and acquisitiveness** - Foreigners tend to consider Americans to be very materialistic. Americans tend to give high priority to obtaining, maintaining, and protecting material objects, and they value newness and innovation.