

AMERICAN CULTURAL VALUES

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There are few truly isolated peoples in the world. Everywhere people with particular cultures and societies are in contact with people who are different from them. If they learn each other's languages and understand each other's customs, they are on the road to useful communication. However, when those in one culture believe that by introducing change they will help those in another to improve their lifestyle, they face another difficulty. People do not want the same things; they do not go about getting what they do want in the same ways. In this article, Conrad Arensberg and Arthur Niehoff show how American values have often frustrated those who would help change "underdeveloped" countries.

MISINTERPRETATION

In order to understand how ideas are transferred from one culture to another it is very important to know the role and characteristics of the change agents involved. Several of the cases in this manual indicate that a failure was due to the change agent's misinterpretation of the motives and needs of the hoped-for borrowers of the innovations. Such misinterpretations may result from the change agent's failure to learn enough about the receiving culture; but they may also rest on false suppositions, derived from assuming that conditions taken for granted in the home culture also exist in the other culture.

All men, in agrarian or industrial societies, have much in common in the solution of their problems. A peasant farmer in India and a commercial farmer in Texas are both pragmatic and must be shown that an improvement is genuine before they will adopt it, and a Lao farmer tries to get help from the supernatural in producing rain just as the American turns to prayer when a close family member is seriously ill. Nevertheless, it still

does not follow that all the basic assumptions of people with different cultures are the same. Despite similarities, the unlikenesses are significant enough to block communication and thus impede change. If the change agent expects the people of the recipient culture to have precisely the same motivations or behaviors as are common in his culture, he is seriously risking failure of understanding.

The worst part of most such misapprehension of cultural realities is that it is unintentional. The individual does what is "natural" or what makes "common sense." He may not realize that his "natural" tendencies to action are inevitably limited by his own cultural experience, including his unconscious assumptions. To examine the cultural as well as individual premises of one's own actions is a difficult process. If one always stayed with people of the same background, this examination would never be necessary and most people would

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probably be better off without doing it. However, if one is to deal with people of another culture, or simply to understand them at a distance, knowing one's own cultural assumptions is of the first importance. Thus, hybrid corn grown by Spanish-American farmers in Arizona was superior in terms of the Anglo-American economy and the change agent assumed the value of corn was the same. However, these Spanish-Americans valued it primarily for its taste and texture as a human food rather than as feed for animals. The United States administrators of Palau assumed that if individuals participated in an American system of electing public officials, democracy would be absorbed into the culture. However, the islanders interpreted leadership and social control differently, and manipulated their way around the "democratic" idea. In both cases the problems arose principally because of the cultural misperception of the planners who were putting mistaken reliance on "natural" and "common sense" assumptions which were relevant to the American scene but inadequate in contacts with people of another culture.

Culture creates unconscious blinders for all mankind. Other people do not act "naturally," that is, in accordance with a universal value system. Thus the American or other change agent must be given some opportunity of knowing himself as a product of American and Western culture. This means principally that he look analytically at his own assumptions and values. He should have some idea what influences his decisions and actions in introducing new ideas and what his reactions will be to difficulties among the people with whom he will be working. In short, he needs to know how being an American and a Westerner may help or hinder him in his mission.

In the age of cultural pluralism, what is meant by "American culture"? Is not the United States several streams of culture flowing side by side? There is probably more acceptance of this idea today than at any time since the founding of the country. And yet, there is still a national core, usually characterized as that of the middle class, having its origins in Western European culture. The language is English, the legal system derives from

English common law, the political system of democratic elections comes from France and England, the technology is solidly from Europe, and even more subtle social values, such as egalitarianism (though modified), seem to be European derived. Thus, it seems justifiable to characterize the middle class value system of the United States, as derived originally from Europe but modified to suit local conditions, as the core of American culture.

All people born and raised in this country will have been conditioned by this national culture, although obviously the middle class will be most strongly marked. And though it is not implied here that there are no differences in other subcultural streams, it does mean that irrespective of region, national origin, race, class, and sex, there are points of likeness that will occur more frequently than among groups of people in other countries.

Where does this American character come from? As mentioned above, it seems to come from a European base that has been subsequently modified to meet local conditions. The values derived from life on the frontier, the great open spaces, the virgin wealth, and the once seemingly limitless resources of a "new world" appear to have affected ideas of freedom. Individualism seems to have been fostered by a commitment to "progress" which in turn was derived from expansion over three hundred years. Much of the religious and ethical tradition is believed to have come from Calvinist (Puritan) doctrine, particularly an emphasis on individual responsibility and the positive work ethic. Anglo-Saxon civil rights, the rule of law, and representative institutions were inherited from the English background; ideas of egalitarian democracy and a secular spirit spring from the French and American Revolutions. The period of slavery and its aftermath, and the European immigration of three centuries, have affected the American character strongly.

AMERICAN CULTURE

Is it possible to provide a thumbnail sketch of the most obvious characteristics of this system?

Most social scientists would probably agree to the following:

The number of people in America is considerable, compared to other countries, and they are located primarily in the cities and towns of a large area of diverse natural environments, still with considerable mineral and soil wealth and still not intensively exploited. There is an exceedingly elaborate technology and a wealth of manufactured goods that is now the greatest in the world.

Although the country has a strong agrarian tradition in which farming is still regarded as a family occupation, and although farming produces an extraordinary yield of foodstuffs and fibers, the nation has become urbanized and dominated by the cities. The farming population consists of less than 10 percent of the total, and agriculture has become so mechanized it can now be considered as merely another form of industry. Daily living is characteristically urban, regulated by the clock and calendar rather than by the seasons or degree of daylight. The great majority of individuals are employees, living on salaries paid by large, complex, impersonal institutions. Money is the denominator of exchange, even property having a value only in terms of its monetary worth. The necessities of life are purchased rather than produced for subsistence.

Because of the high standard of living and high level of technology, people have long lives. The birth rate is low but the death rate is among the lowest in the world. Thus, although there is a continuing expansion of population, it is much less rapid than in most of the agrarian nations.

Americans exhibit a wide range of wealth, property, education, manners, and tastes. However, despite diversities of origin, tradition, and economic level, there is a surprising conformity in language, diet, hygiene, dress, basic skills, land use, community settlement, recreation, and other activities. The people share a rather small range of moral, political, economic, and social attitudes, being divided in opinion chiefly by their denominational and occupational interests. Within the past decade there seems also to have been a separation of opinion based on age. There are some regional variations but these are far less than the

tribal or ethnic pluralisms found in the new nations of South Asia and Africa. The narrow opinion range throughout the country seems to be primarily a product of the relatively efficient mass education system which blankets the country and the wide spread of mass communication, from which all people get the same message.

There are status differences, based mainly on occupation, education, and financial worth. Achievement is valued more than inheritance in determining an individual's position. Although in theory all persons have equal opportunities, certain limitations exist, particularly those based on ethnic background and sex. A Negro may be appointed as a member of the Cabinet, but it is improbable and he would not be elected as President at the present time. There are now Negro mayors, but there are still no Negro governors. Women also are prevented from serving in certain positions or occupations. Despite these limitations, most people move about freely; they change jobs and move up and down in status with considerable frequency.

The basic American kinship unit, though evidently weakening, is still the nuclear family of husband, wife, and children. Newly married couples set up their own small households and move several times in a lifespan. The family rarely has continuing geographical roots. Most couples have few children. Marital relationships are fluid and not particularly stable, with divorce quite common. Old people, and unmarried adults usually live apart from their kin. Instead of strong kinship ties, people tend to rely on an enormous number of voluntary associations of common interest—parent-teachers' associations, women's clubs, social fraternities, church clubs, recreational teams, political clubs, and many others.

The general level of education is high, with literacy normal but not universal. From the age of five to eighteen the child usually is in an academic institution, learning the culturally approved goals of good health, character, and citizenship. Also, he learns basic and standard skills rather than any hereditary specialization—reading, writing, arithmetic, typing, liberal arts, driving cars, basic mechanics, housekeeping. Specialization comes later

in the professional training that ordinarily takes place in college. More and more young people are extending their education through four years in college, although this is not yet legally required.

The moral tone of the country is heavily Calvinist Protestant but there are many other sects of Christianity, besides other religions and cults. Religious beliefs and practices are concerned almost as much with general morality as with man's search for the afterlife or his worship of deities. Family relations, sexual customs, man's relationship to other men, and civic responsibility are all concerns of religion. A puritanic morality has become generalized and secularized, part of the total culture rather than that of any single religious sect. Formal religion is compartmentalized, as are many other aspects of American life. A high percentage of the Protestants who form the bulk of the population attend church infrequently, and religious ideas are seldom consciously mixed with secular ones. The church serves a strong social function, being the center of many clubs and groups. Religion can hardly be considered a particularly unifying institution of American life. The spirit of the country is secular and rationalistic. Most people are not antireligious but merely indifferent.

MATERIAL WELL-BEING

The rich resources of America, along with the extraordinary growth of its industrial economy, have brought a widespread wealth of material goods such as the world has not seen before. There has been a wholesale development and diffusion of the marvels of modern comfort—swift and pleasant transportation, central heating, air conditioning, instant hot and cold water, electricity, and laborsaving devices of endless variety. The high value placed on such comforts has caused industries to be geared to produce ever greater quantities and improved versions. Americans seem to feel that they have a "right" to such amenities.

Associated with this attitude toward comfort (which has itself resulted in elaborate waste disposal facilities), and an advanced state of medical

knowledge, Americans have come to regard cleanliness as an absolute virtue. A most familiar slogan is, "Cleanliness is next to godliness," and although this is not heard as often as it once was, the word "dirty" is still one of the chief epithets in the language, as in "dirty old man," "dirty hippie," "dirty business," "dirty deal," etc.

Achievement and success are measured primarily by the quantity of material goods one possesses, both because these are abundant and because they indicate how much money an individual earns. This material evidence of personal worth is modified by the credit system; but still, credit purchases will carry an individual only so far, after which credit agencies will refuse to advance more without evidence of fundamental wealth.

Since there is little display value in the size of one's paycheck or bank account, the average individual buys prestige articles that others can see: expensive clothing or furniture, a fine car, a swimming pool, an expensive home, or one of the endless variety of devices that may have other functions but can also readily be seen by visitors—power mowers, barbecue paraphernalia, television, and stereophonic systems. A person's status is affected to a secondary degree by his level of education, type of occupation, and social behavior; but even these qualities seem to be significant only in terms of how much income they help him to obtain. Thus, a college professor who has earned his Ph.D. will have less status in the general community than a business executive or film actor who has no college education but commands a much larger salary.

People other than middle class Americans also value comfort and the saving of human labor, and one of the motivations to change everywhere is to perform traditional tasks more easily. However, many people of the world have found themselves unable to acquire so many laborsaving devices and have thus concentrated on the satisfaction of other needs; and it should be recognized that many of the spiritual or esthetic goals they pursue will outlast most of the machine-made devices treasured in America. But, their choices have been limited by their comparative

poverty. Comfort in such circumstances has not been so highly valued; and in fact, Americans have been accused by this token of being excessively materialistic.

TWOFOLD JUDGMENTS

A special characteristic of Western thinking, fully reflected in American ways, is that of making twofold judgments based on principle. The structure of the Indo-European languages seems to foster this kind of thinking and the action that follows. A situation or action is assigned to a category held high, thus providing a justification for positive effort, or to one held low, with justification for rejection, avoidance, or other negative action. Twofold judgments seem to be the rule in Western and American life: moral-immoral, legal-illegal, right-wrong, sin-virtue, success-failure, clean-dirty, civilized-primitive, practical-impractical, introvert-extrovert, secular-religious, Christian-pagan. This kind of polarized thinking tends to put the world of values into absolutes, and its arbitrary nature is indicated by the fact that modern science no longer uses opposite categories, in almost all instances preferring to use the concept of a range with degrees of difference separating the poles.

Judgment in terms of principle is very old and pervasive as a means of organizing thought in Western and American life. It may derive from Judeo-Christian ideas. In any event, it is deeply rooted in the religions that have come from this base as well as in the philosophy of the West. Its special quality should be recognized. More is involved than merely thinking in opposites. Other peoples have invented dual ways of thinking: the Chinese Yin-and-Yang, the Zoroastrian dual (though equal) forces of good and evil, male and female principles, and the Hindu concept of the forces of destruction and regeneration as different aspects of the same power. However, other peoples do not usually rank one as superior and thus to be embraced on principle as a guide to conduct.

This kind of thinking seems to force Americans into positions of exclusiveness. If one posi-

tion is accepted, the other must be rejected. There is little possibility of keeping opposite or even parallel ideas in one's thinking pattern. This is not the case in other cultures. In Buddhism and Hinduism disparate local beliefs exist alongside beliefs that are derived from the main theology. No one questions the fact that in Japan people may worship in a Buddhist temple as well as in a Shinto shrine; or that in the southern form of Buddhism, in Laos and Thailand, people propitiate the local spirits ("phi") as well as observe the ritual forms of Buddhism. This is quite different from the Christian attitude in which all that is believed to be supernatural but is not Christian is classified as superstition or paganism.

The average Westerner, and especially the American, bases his personal life and community affairs on principles of right and wrong rather than on sanctions of shame, dishonor, ridicule, or horror of impropriety. The whole legal system is established on the assumption that rational people can decide if things have been "wrong." The American is forced by his culture to categorize his conduct in universal, impersonal terms. "The law is the law" and "right is right," regardless of other considerations.

MORALIZING

One of the most basic of the twofold decisions Americans make is to classify actions as good or bad. Whether in the conduct of foreign affairs or bringing up children or dealing in the marketplace, Americans tend to moralize. Judging people and actions as absolutely right or wrong may have been a source of considerable strength in American history but it has also created pitfalls, particularly in the way it has influenced Americans in their relationship with other peoples. The attitude has frequently led Americans to indignation and even to warfare about the behavior of other peoples, Vietnam providing the most obvious recent example.

Every people has its own code of proper conduct. This is such an important part of any culture that some effort to understand it must be

made. But this aspect of a cultural system is probably the most difficult to learn. And the greatest difficulties will occur if the outsider assumes that other people's basis of judgment is the same as his, or even that proper conduct will be based on moral rather than other kinds of principles.

In many other cultures, rank or esteem, the dignity of a person, the honor of an individual, compassion for an unfortunate, or loyalty to a kinsman or co-religionist may be the basis for judgment as to proper conduct. Most forms of sexual behavior may not be considered subject to moral considerations. The American, as an heir to the Western tradition, is familiar and comfortable with a code of conduct derived from absolute principles (mostly religious) and supported by a code of law enforced by central authorities. This entire code is supposed to be impersonal, and to a considerable extent it is. The morality tale of the honest, law-abiding policeman or judge who punishes his own law-breaking son probably does occur more frequently in America than in societies where kinship considerations are given more weight.

One other feature of this kind of thinking that can lead to considerable personal and public problems is that the American tends to overreact to the discovery that the ideal behavior he was taught to expect from parent, public servants, spouses, and other adults is not always present in real life. Some individuals react by becoming "tough" and "cynical" and "wise" to the corruption of the world. Others, particularly exemplified by the youth of the past decade, organize to eliminate by whatever means are available the "failures" of the older generation. This kind of thinking encourages the individual to believe that, whatever differs from the ideal version of high moral excellence is of the utmost depravity. It tends to direct the individual to see corruption and evil everywhere. And while such moralistic indignation may serve the culture well in some instances (as in the fight against pollution), it can also have negative consequences, particularly when the moralizer is trying to work with people of another culture.

WORK AND PLAY

Another kind of twofold judgment that Americans tend to maintain is based on a qualitative distinction between work and play. To most persons brought up in the present-day American environment of farming, business, or industry, work is what they do regularly, purposefully, and even grimly, whether they enjoy it or not. It is a necessity, and for the middle aged, a duty. A man is judged by his work. When strangers meet and attempt to establish cordial relationships, one of the first topics of discussion is the kind of work each does. It is a primary role classifier. Work is a serious, adult business, and a man is supposed to "get ahead" or "make a contribution" to community or mankind through his work.

Play is different. It is fun, an outlet from work, without serious purpose except possibly to make subsequent work more efficient. It is a lesser category, a later topic of conversation after one's occupation is identified. And although some persons may "enjoy their work," this is a matter of luck and by no means something that everyone can count on since all jobs contain some "dirty work," tedium, and tasks that one completes just by pushing on. Work and play are considered to be different worlds; there is a time and place for each, but when it is time for work, then lighter pursuits should be put aside. There is a newer emphasis in contemporary America on pleasure-seeking as a primary goal of life, but so far this seems to be an attitude espoused by a minority only, the young who have rejected the former goals of society and the retired old who have already completed their years of work.

The American habit of associating work with high or necessary purpose and grim effort and play with frivolity or pleasure seems to have a positive function in the American cultural context, but it may be quite out of place in another culture. For many peoples the times of most important work may also be times of festivity or ceremony. Work and play may be interwoven. A threshing floor may be a dancing arena, and building a new house or netting a school of fish may provide the occasion for a whole community to

sing and joke together. Preparing the proper songs or dishes will be as "practical" an activity as cutting thatch or caring for nets.

The combination of work and play is not completely foreign to Americans, although urban industrial society does not seem favorable for it. The American frontier, and even Midwest farming communities until thirty or forty years ago, combined the two in their husking bees, houseraising and threshing parties. In the early decades of this century, before wheat combines and farms of large acreage dominated agriculture in the Midwest, farmers made the social and work rounds for several weeks in midsummer. Not only did they work together, but they also feasted, socialized, and even managed a considerable amount of courting. It was a point of pride for each farmer's wife to have the largest quantities of elaborate food available for the men when they came in from the fields. The unmarried girls made a particular effort to be there to search out the bachelors. It was a gay time as well as a time of hard work. It should also be pointed out that song and work has been well represented in the American past in the vast repertory of work songs that were once sung by occupational groups.

Basically, the nonindustrial societies have patterns of work and play that are closer to those known to preindustrial Americans; work and play are intermixed rather than distinct forms of activity.

TIME IS MONEY

Closely related to the American distinction between work and play is a special attitude toward time. Whenever Americans interact with people in nonindustrial countries, both quickly become aware that their outlook in regard to time is different. In many such countries the local people actually make a distinction in the spoken language, referring to *hora Americana* versus *hora Mexicana* or *mong Amelikan* versus *mong Lao*. When referring to the American version, they mean that it is exact, that people are punctual, activities are scheduled, time is apportioned for sep-

arate activities, and the measure is the mechanical clock; their own time lacks this precision.

Probably misunderstandings with people of other cultures occur most frequently in relation to work. For Americans, "time is money." Work is paid for in money and one should balance his work against time or through regular periods for a fixed salary. A person works for a stated number of dollars per hour and eight or ten hours per day for 40 or 48 hours a week. Work beyond the normal is "overtime." Play or leisure time is before or after work time. An employer literally buys the time of his workers along with their skills, and schedules and assigns work to be balanced against the gain he will obtain. In this way of thinking, time can be turned into money, both for the employer and employee, and work turned out faster than planned can release extra time for more work and more gain.

Equating work with time, using the least amount of time to produce the largest amount of work, expecting that time paid for will be marked by sustained effort, budgeting of man hours in relation to the cost of the end product—these are central features of the American industrial economy that have contributed a great deal to its productiveness. And although Americans may complain about the necessity of routine and the tyranny of the clock during working hours, they are thoroughly accustomed to such strictures. The activities of leisure—eating, sleeping, playing, courting—must take place during "time off." No wonder time to them is scarce and worth saving.

Such a precise concept of time is usually foreign to peoples of nonindustrial cultures. In most agrarian societies, especially in the villages, time is geared to seasonal requirements and the amount of daylight available. Many routines reflect, not hourly or daily repetitions based on wage labor, but the needs of individual and social life, the cycles of crops, fluctuations in daily temperature, and the round of ceremonial observances. The cities of these countries have all adopted the Western concept of time to some degree, although it is frequently noted that the rural pattern is still maintained in modified form in the urban context. Individuals simply do not keep hours or

appointments precisely and are surprised when they learn that an American is irritated by a missed appointment.

EFFORT AND OPTIMISM

Americans are an active people. They believe that problems should be identified and effort should be expended to solve them. Effort is good in itself, and with proper effort one can be optimistic about success. The fact that some problems may be insoluble is very difficult for an American to accept. The high value connected with effort often causes Americans to cite the principle that "It is better to do something than to just stand around." This thinking is based on the concept that the universe is mechanistic (it can be understood in terms of causes and effects), man is his own master, and he is perfectible almost without limit (DuBois, 1955: 1233-1234). Thus, with enough effort, man can improve himself and manipulate the part of the universe that is around him.

This national confidence in effort and activity, with an optimism that trying to do something about a problem will almost invariably bring success in solving it, seems to be specifically American. Such an attitude is probably a product of the continual expansion of American culture during the past three hundred years, first along America's frontiers and later in its industrial growth. Obstacles existed only to be overcome, and bad conditions needed only be recognized to be rectified.

Effort and optimism permeate the life of the individual because of his cultural upbringing. Coming from an "open class system," where status is usually achieved rather than inherited, both privilege and authority should be deserved and won.

Effort, achievement, and success are woven through the fabric of American life and culture. Activist, pragmatic values rather than contemplative or mystical ones are the basis of the American character. Serious effort to achieve success is both a personal goal and an ethical imperative. The worthwhile man is the one who "gets results" and "gets ahead." A failure "gets nowhere" or "gets no results," for success is measured by results

(although there is a little "credit for trying"). The successful man "tackles a problem," "does something about it," and "succeeds" in the process. A failure is unsuccessful through his own fault. Even if he had "bad breaks" he should have tried again. A failure in life "didn't have the guts" to "make a go of it" and "put himself ahead."

This is a very severe code. No one is certain how widespread it is among Americans but it is probably recognizable to most. It indicates a culture in which effort is rewarded, competition is enforced, and individual achievement is paramount. Unfortunately, the code raises serious problems. One of the most important is that it calls all those in high positions successes and all those in low ones "failures" even though everyone knows the majority must be in lower positions. A code of this sort by its very nature creates much frustration in all those who have not been able to achieve high positions.

This traditional optimism of the American personality has been tempered to a certain degree in recent years, though primarily in the kind of goals sought rather than whether they can be achieved. Concentration on pragmatic effort seems unchanged, and even those Americans who are most disillusioned with the current state of affairs seem convinced that enough effort will produce success—for their new goals, however, rather than the old ones.

But it has become clear to everyone that whatever effort is expended, some situations are beyond the American's ability to control. Problems once thought to be simple are now seen to have a complexity not previously recognized. A weaker enemy cannot simply be bombed into submission with more and more explosives. Industrial production cannot be guided by the profit motive alone if one wants to breathe clean air and to swim in clean water. The inner city of an industrial nation cannot survive if it is abandoned by the well-to-do who move to the suburbs. These are some of the problems that have arisen because of a simplistic view of manipulation of the environment, both human and natural. Some pundits now feel they are beyond human correction, but although the optimism of the average man

has probably been tempered in recent decades, his method of overcoming these obstacles is unchanged—simply put in greater effort.

The American overseas is prone to evaluate people and situations according to this code. When he observes that those in authority have achieved their position by means other than their own effort, he may become bewildered, angered, or cynical. He may quickly make an activist judgment and try to remedy the situation, using his own code. Or he may shift (usually unconsciously) from the notion of work as task-oriented, which many peoples share in their own fashion, to an emphasis on busy work, on hurrying and pressuring, on encouraging activity for its own sake.

To peoples in other parts of the world, a history of failure in recent times has been as compelling as the technological and economic achievements of America. Their experiences may have taught them to value passivity, acceptance, and evasion rather than effort and optimism. This will not be because they have no interest in getting things done but because of their history of reversals. They lack the confidence of the American.

Before taking action, other peoples may therefore make many preparations which the American, so concerned with technical efficiency, will consider unnecessary. These may consist in extensive consultation with others to build up a consensus, giving favors to win personal loyalties, trying to adjust proposed plans to religious and other traditional beliefs, and considering all alternatives, including the real possibility of not risking action at all. American demands for bustle and effort, for getting down to business, may not only be interpreted as nagging, pushing, and ill-mannered, but sometimes as downright frightening, especially when a wrong judgment could lead to personal disaster. After an initial failure, the American determination to "try again" or "try harder the next time" may seem particularly foolhardy. Merely to intensify one's effort and to try again on a bigger scale when resources are limited may appear as the most reckless compounding of original folly.

And as is not unusual, other peoples frequently do judge American behavior correctly.

The American passion to exert greater effort in the face of continuing difficulties has not always produced the hoped-for success. In Vietnam, for example, although an admittedly much weaker enemy clearly and early indicated that they would fight differently than in previous wars, the military heads of the United States went ahead with conventional bombing and ground maneuvers for almost ten years without ever altering their procedures significantly except to intensify them. At the end of this decade, the enemy seemed hardly any weaker than at the beginning. And it must be admitted that such a procedure is only possible for America because it has unprecedented wealth and industrial production.

The effort to which Americans normally commit themselves is expected to be direct and efficient. Americans want to "get down to business" and confine themselves to the problem or proposal specified. Misunderstandings have consequently occurred because other peoples, particularly Latins, have tended to be less direct. They indulge more in theoretical speech during conferences and discussions, refusing to confine themselves rigidly to the agenda at hand. All this indicates more concern with social values than is usual in the American manner of conducting affairs. Perhaps the impersonal, technological approach leads to more production but the social verities have their place also, and they are still significant in many parts of the world.

American assumptions about effort and optimism include a faith in progress and a constant view toward the future. Practically all life is arranged to fulfill the needs of children and of the generations to follow. There is a pervasive accent on youthfulness; the values exemplified in commercial advertising and entertainment almost always emphasize the young, and the old are not commonly sought out for their experience. Adults attempt to hold back middle and old age. In general, elderly people are bypassed, either left in old folks' homes or in isolated retirement, in both cases removed from practical affairs. An ironic aspect of the situation in the 1960s was the rejection by a considerable part of American youth of

this idealized "youth culture." "You can't trust anyone over thirty," they say.

An accent on youthfulness is particularly American, although it seems to be shared to a lesser degree by other achievement-oriented industrial societies. In the agrarian nations or wherever tradition is important, people tend to equate age with experience. The old are treated with deference and the oldest male is usually the chief decision-maker of the basic kin unit.

Other cultures have had their periods of success, but it appears rare for progress to be a central value throughout the entire existence of a culture. It is only since World War II that American faith in the future has been modified significantly, with the realization that there are many undesirable consequences if technological progress is allowed to take place with few controls. But despite recent reversals, the general American attitude is still that the future should contain bigger and better successes, if not on this planet, then on others. This attitude also implies that the new and modern are better than the old and traditional. Technological and economic life must progress. No one—not even the strongest dissidents of the left or the right—expects to keep America as it is today or to return it to what it was yesterday.

MAN AND NATURE

The greater effort that normally marks the American's response to obstacles may sometimes seem shallow, irreverent, or premature to people in other cultures. Some obstacles deserve respect and there are limitations to what man can do, even if he is the cleverest manipulator of the environment to have appeared so far. The new ecological approach is an indication that the American is becoming aware of some limitations on his capacities, but whether this will deflect his value system in a basic way remains to be seen. Up to now, American man has attempted to conquer nature. It has been something to overcome, to improve, to tear down and rebuild in a better way. He has tried to "break the soil," to "harness" the natural resources, to treat the natural environ-

ment like a domestic animal. He has divided the plants and animals into categories of useful and harmful. Harmful plants are weeds and harmful animals are "varmints"—the first to be uprooted or poisoned and the second to be trapped, shot, or poisoned. American farmers and ranchers have been notorious for killing predators. The only kind of hawks they knew until recently were "chicken hawks" which were shot any time they appeared and their carcasses hung in long festoons on wire fences. Coyotes and bobcats are still trapped and hunted without compunction by Westerners, who can get bounties of a few dollars for the feet and ears of one of these animals. And although on occasion hawks and coyotes may kill a few chickens or sheep, they primarily live on mice, rats, rabbits and other small animals whose populations must be kept in balance by such predators. Even a weed is merely a "plant growing out of place" from man's point of view.

It must be admitted that many of the achievements of Americans are due to this conquering attitude toward nature. The enormous agricultural productivity is one such achievement, although credit must also go to the fact that there were large expanses of very fertile land available. But it must also be admitted that the American has paid and is continuing to pay high prices for these agricultural successes. Natural resources, particularly forests, water, and the air, have been squandered and despoiled over large areas. Nature's balance has often been upset. Such "wonder" insecticides as DDT are now under strong attack by conservationists as destroying many "useful" insects and birds, as well as for their effect on human health.

This conquering attitude toward nature appears to rest on at least three assumptions; that the universe is mechanistic, that man is its master, and that man is qualitatively different from all other forms of life. Specifically, American and Western man credits himself with a special inner consciousness, a soul, for which he does not give other creatures credit. In most of the non-Western world man is merely considered as one form of life, different only in degree from the others. The Western biologist also shares this view, which is the primary reason that traditional Western cul-

ture came into conflict with biological views in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the so-called animistic religions, all living creatures are believed to have something corresponding to a soul, with no sharp dividing line between man and the other animals. Spirits are even attributed to plants and inanimate objects, such as soil, rocks, mountains, and rivers. In the Hindu and Buddhist world the belief in a cycle of rebirths strongly affirms man's kinship to nonhuman forms. In the cycle of existences man can become an insect, a mammal, another type of man, or even a form of deity. The validity of such beliefs is far less important than the fact that man's attitude toward nature is influenced by them (and after all, there is no more empirical basis for Christian beliefs than for Buddhism or Hinduism). Basically, most people (except Westerners) consider man and nature as one, and they more often work with nature than simply attempting to conquer it.

During long periods of trial and error, peoples of all cultures have worked out adaptations to their natural environment. These adaptations may lack much by Western standards but they do enable the inhabitants to survive, sometimes in quite difficult circumstances. Such people through experience have evolved systems of conservation, methods of stretching and restoring their slim resources, and elaborate accommodations to climate, vegetation, and terrain. Some such adaptations now embedded in tradition and religion are the Middle Eastern desert-derived pattern of Islamic ritual hygiene, austerity, and almsgiving; preindustrial Japanese frugalities in house structure, farming, and woodworking; and Southeast Asian village economies in the measured use of rice, bamboo, and fish. These and similar adaptations to natural environments are high developments in the balanced utilization of limited resources.

When, with a facile confidence that nature can be tamed by ever costlier mechanical devices, Americans and other Westerners attempt to brush aside the experience of centuries, it is perhaps temporarily exciting to the local people. However, they are not apt to be reassured if they have information about the realities of the envi-

ronment that is ignored by the rushing, pushing, self-assured newcomers, particularly since the local solutions sometimes outlast the glamorous innovations of the specialists. For example, a well-drilling project in Laos was based on a system that had been worked out in Florida where the water table is high the year around. The specialist drilled wells in one large area of Laos during the rainy season and found water almost every time, at a relatively high level. However, all these wells went dry during the dry season, since in Southeast Asia the water level drops markedly during this period. Most Lao probably knew this and would have revealed it if asked.

In environments that seem adverse (such as the rainy tropics, the arctic, or the desert), experience has shown that Western man's goods and machines rot, rust, freeze, or grit up all too quickly, requiring huge and costly effort merely to keep them going. This is not surprising since this machinery was developed primarily for use in a temperate zone where precipitation is spread more or less evenly throughout the year.

A graphic example of the lack of adaptability of Western machines has been observed during the military struggles in Southeast Asia in recent years. Tanks and other mechanized equipment were developed with the solid land forms of America and Europe in mind. However, their use has been drastically curtailed in the rice paddies of Vietnam and Laos. The mobile foot soldier, unencumbered with heavy gear, can slip through the soggy fields and marshes in constant readiness to fight while the tank or halftrack is bogged down in mud. The insurgent forces in Laos and Vietnam have made their greatest drives just before the heavy rains set in, knowing that the mechanized forces with American equipment will be mostly immobilized until the land dries again.

EQUALITY OF MEN

The tendency to moralize has been operative in supporting another important trait of American culture, egalitarianism. Americans believe all people should have equal opportunities for achievement.

This is more of a moral imperative than an actual fact of American life and has always been so. From the earliest times there have been some groups of people who were treated as inferior, and great differences of wealth, education, influence, opportunity, and privilege exist in the United States. Nevertheless, the experiences that Americans underwent along the frontiers and through the process of immigration did represent a huge historical experiment in social leveling. The legal and institutional heritage prescribes equal rights, condemns special privileges, and demands fair representation for every citizen. The latest efforts to obtain equal treatment for minority groups have been spearheaded by legal resolutions (Supreme Court decisions) and other re-emphases of the egalitarian nature of the society. Inequality, unless a product of achievement or lack of it, is considered to be wrong, bad, or "unfair."

There are, of course, ethnic minorities which have not been assimilated into the major society and which are treated unequally. The main disadvantaged groups now are of African, Mexican, and Amerindian ancestry. Although it is currently fashionable to regard this difference of treatment as based on race, other explanations are just as plausible. None of these groups really constitute a race and people with basically very similar appearances and genetic background (such as those of Italian, Spanish, Chinese, or Japanese ancestry) face much less discrimination. But these latter groups have attempted to adopt the Euro-American cultural pattern while Mexican-American and Amerindians have tended to maintain certain distinctive cultural patterns. The case of the Afro-American is probably unique, in that these people constitute the only group whose ancestors were held in slavery by the majority.

It is probable that the American attitude toward equality of treatment really means "within the major value system"; that is, people are, or should be, treated equally if they accept the basic beliefs and behavior of the social majority. In this sense, the American idea is similar to that of the Muslims, who have always taught that all men are equal under Allah; discrimination by

race or any other criterion has been rare so long as one was dealing with acceptors of the faith, and within the ranks of believers the only significant feelings of superiority have been based on supposed relationships with the Prophet. People on a direct line of descent from Mohammed are considered higher than those on a more remote line.

There has been one other form of unequal treatment in American society, that between males and females. Although female liberation movements are fashionable now, the fact is that the American female is already in a position of more nearly equal treatment than in most other nations, and certainly those outside the West. In practice, women are barred from the highest positions and are discriminated against in certain professions. But there are few educational limitations and they can enter freely into economic affairs. Even marriage is considered to be a kind of partnership, an unusual arrangement among the vast range of cultures of the world.

Despite the remaining evidences of unequal treatment toward the unassimilated ethnic minorities and women, the basic American value judgment of equality among men (and women) has not changed. Open patterns of subordination, deference, and acceptance of underprivilege call forth sympathies for the "underdog" and American activist values call for efforts to do something about such matters. This impulse tempts Americans overseas to interfere directly in the life ways of other peoples. The American does not have the patience to deal with persons whose authority seems neither justified nor deserved, or to wait for the ordinary man who will act only when he has received the go-ahead from the figures of prestige or respect in his culture.

Another consequence of American egalitarianism is a preference for simple manners and direct, informal treatment of other persons. This can work to the American's advantage if kept within limits; but where people differ in rank and prestige, offense can be given if all are treated in a breezy, "kidding," impersonal manner. It is much better to try to acquire some of the local usages of long titles, elaborate forms of address and lan-

guage, and manners of courtesy and deference, than to try to accustom other peoples to American ways. American "kidding" and humor are very special products of an egalitarian culture and generally work best at home.

Since all Americans are supposed to be equal in rights, and since "success" is a primary goal that can only be measured by achievement, a high value must be assigned to individuality. This accent on individual worth seems to be largely a heritage of frontier days and later economic expansion when there were plenty of opportunities for the individual to achieve according to his abilities. However, with population expansion and the filling up of the country, individuality has had to be limited to some extent. It is now known that the ravages of the natural environment are largely due to unchecked drives by industrialists toward individual achievement.

Although individual equality has been stressed throughout American history, the goals and ways of achieving success have been limited. The successful man was one who was better than everyone else but in a way similar to theirs; one might have more and better things than another, but they should be the same kinds of things. And with the full development of urban, corporate life, this similarity of goals seems to have evolved into personal conformity. The organization man has superseded the rugged individualist. Thus, individual self-sufficiency has steadily decreased. One indication of this development is a growing demand for security. And since Americans have abandoned the kinship system for this purpose, they now try to protect themselves with impersonal group insurance which they hope will cover all contingencies. In their efforts to attract new employees, corporations now advertise insurance benefits as much as the challenge of the work and the salary, and these "fringe benefits" are just as often the main concern of prospective employees. Americans buy insurance for the smallest items in their lives, even insuring household appliances against breakdown. Government too becomes more and more a giant insurance corporation, to its direct employees and to the citizenry in general.

HUMANITARIANISM

The American trait of coming to the aid of unfortunates is widespread and well known. It expresses itself in impersonal generosity which is activated by calls for help when unpredicted events of unfortunate or disastrous effect occur. Earthquakes, floods, famines, and epidemics are only a few of the kinds of events that strike a responsive chord in American society. At the end of both world wars American generosity was primarily responsible for getting European nations back on their feet. Not only are they generous, but Americans also show a tremendous amount of efficiency at such times, often more than in "normal" times.

A dramatic illustration of this competence was witnessed in the aftermath of a battle in Vientiane, Laos, at which time the capital was badly damaged. American diplomatic and assistance efforts in the preceding years had not been particularly impressive. In fact, the battle occurred principally because American diplomatic and military bureaus had come to the point of backing two opposing ideological factions of Laotians, supplying both groups with weapons. U.S. assistance efforts had been bogged down by a lack of cultural understanding of the Lao and by administrative problems in the aid mission itself. But after the capital had been heavily damaged by shelling, the American International Cooperation Administration, as well as other American groups in the city, went into action in a manner that was truly impressive. Although many areas had been flattened and an unknown number of people killed, within two to three weeks the city was on its feet again. Besides providing needed goods, the American officials thought nothing of working day and night, and their organizational ability was much more clearly demonstrated than in their inept efforts at military diplomacy which led to the battle. In three to four months, there was hardly a sign that the battle had taken place.

American humanitarianism is a characteristic that can hardly be criticized. It is of a special type, however, and contains one possible basis of misunderstanding in that it is usually highly organized and impersonal. For many other peoples

humanitarianism is personal. They consequently do not share with everyone; they cannot. But through personal and kinship obligations, by religious almsgiving, and in other traditional ways, they give what they can. The American must not blind himself to the existence of these other patterns and also must perceive that other peoples are just not as rich as he is. The American tendency can hardly be praised if it is merely converted into a standard of negative judgment against other peoples' ways.

An American tends to condemn begging and the systems that support it, presumably because it involves personalized asking and giving. But it is worthwhile to look into the realities of such a sys-

tem, as for instance that of *baksbeesh*, the Middle Eastern begging tradition. The halt, lame, and blind line up with outstretched palm at the mosque or church door. The American is likely to condemn the cruelty of such a system, but in fact these people are being taken care of by their community according to traditional rules. Every member of the Islamic faithful is expected to give 10 percent of his income (*zaka*) in direct alms to the unfortunates who personally ask for it. This particular pattern of generosity is one that has been worked into the communal life of the society, in keeping with its meager resources. The difference between this system and the Community Chest is mainly one of organization and personalization.

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR PART 1

1. Spindler gives examples of cultural transmission from small, developing, homogeneous societies. Do such events of cultural transmission take place today within our contemporary American society? What are some examples of recruitment, discontinuity, and cultural compression in contemporary America?
2. Formal education is often encouraged in developing countries as a way to increase the standard of living and economic development in general. Does that work? What are your views of the pros, cons, and alternatives to such policies?
3. Arnesberg and Niehoff wrote about U.S. cultural values in the 1970s. In what ways are their assessments still accurate today? What would you add to their list? What would you delete?
4. How do you feel about those values? What values on the list are personally meaningful for you? Why? Are there values on the list that you personally find objectionable? Why?
5. In contemporary schools there tends to be little deliberate discussion of values embedded in the curriculum and in how the roles of teachers and students are defined. Why do you think this is so? What are the effects of this on teachers and students? What are some positive and negative consequences you would expect to be associated with a deliberate and on-going discussion of these values?
6. Should we have a national school curriculum? Why?
7. Do schools treat all students equitably? Explain what you mean by "equitable."
8. What might it mean to teach in a culturally responsive way? Should teachers teach all children in the same way, regardless of cultural differences? Why?
9. Given the diversity of cultural groups and social classes in our society, what should be the major purpose of our public schools?