

HOW TO RAISE AN AMERICAN

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Obvious Disclaimer:

While putting this list together, I can already hear certain objections to it, so I will begin by acknowledging that not everyone will agree with all of the items on this list and that some will want to criticize them or me for pointing them out. That's fine and you are welcome to your opinions, because that's what being an American is all about.

I am certainly not asserting that all or any of these systems or understandings operate flawlessly in practice all the time. But before criticizing or condemning something, it makes sense to fully understand what that other thing is. This is intended as a conversation starter, in an attempt to help us understand ourselves and each other better. It is also an ongoing work in progress.

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There's an old saying that you can't see the picture when you're inside the frame. A similar metaphor is that fish don't know they're in water, or don't appreciate water, until they've left the fishbowl. This applies to human animals existing in their cultural element as well as to the aquatic kind swimming in theirs.

This is part of the reason why immigrants to the United States are often so quick to take advantage of American opportunities: they perceive them readily, having personally, and sometimes painfully, experienced their antithesis. Cultural distinctions are plainly visible to them.

Native-born American schoolchildren don't have this natural advantage. They swim daily in the abundant American culture, enjoying its many advantages and taking them largely for granted without readily perceiving what it would be like to live in their absence, and without the historical context to anticipate how fragile they may prove to be. As Ben Franklin quipped, "When the well is dry we know the value of water."

It's also human nature to find fault readily with whatever lies close at hand, while imagining that the proverbial grass is greener elsewhere. As Mark Twain famously opined: familiarity breeds contempt. It doesn't help that, for at least a decade now (and I'm being restrained in this estimation) most American schoolchildren have been fed a steady diet of disproportionately discouraging American cultural criticism in schools without appropriate balance or full contextualization. Hence, most young people are fully primed to quickly point out societal imperfections, but if you ask them to extol the virtues of the American Way of Life, or even to define its distinctness, they will likely struggle, or present a distorted caricature. It's time to correct this imbalance.

It's easy to find fault and to criticize but often harder to appreciate what is right in front of us. And yet why do so many people risk their lives trying to get to America – and risk their lives to escape other countries? It's a question worth exploring.

Regardless of the level of ambient awareness, it would be foolhardy indeed to poison the water we all swim in, because obviously it is what sustains and upholds us. And we certainly don't want to drain the cultural tank without a clear understanding of what would rush in to replace it. The task, then, in fostering recognition and, hopefully, even appreciation, is to make the invisible, visible, and to draw attention to the elements that define us and that undergird the operation of our societal structures.

Interestingly, this task is becoming easier as those actively promoting replacement alternative ways of life (such as socialism, Marxism) ironically are providing us with the tools for better understanding our own culture by throwing it into stark relief, and they are giving us a firsthand appreciation for how we are to be treated in a world operating according to different base presumptions. Most people who have run up against proponents of what I'll call replacement ideologies have *not* liked their encounter with it, and if the medium is the message—and the way people treat you is representative of the philosophies they espouse—then there is a great deal to be gleaned and extrapolated from these personal encounters. For example: Do you like being told your opinion doesn't matter; being shouted at rather than reasoned with; being called names or threatened for expressing your thoughts; being ostracized rather than allowed to peacefully coexist with a different set of opinions? No? Me neither. These tactics rankle most Americans, who intuitively sense that something—even if you can't quite put your finger on it—is “off,” that something is “different,” and we feel somewhat violated. What is off? The lack of adherence to centuries of shared cultural norms that we have come to expect.

There are certain elements to our culture that cannot be divorced from our founding documents—which themselves are rooted in Judeo-Christian traditions, and associated Enlightenment thought—or from the systems by which citizens must abide and by which our economy operates, and these include:

- **Our political system** – Constitutional republic with transparent elections, confidential voting, majority rule and consent of the governed.
- **Our economic system** – free markets, voluntary exchange, and competition (capitalism) backed up with protection of private (individual) property rights.
- **Our culture** – Enlightenment individualism, built on the foundation of Judeo-Christian values.
- **Our legal system** – Individual justice with presumption of innocence, due process and rules of evidence, built on the English legal tradition.
- **Our method of advancement** – Protestant work ethic and meritocracy.
- **Our method of communicating and figuring things out** – Free speech (open voluntary exchange of thoughts in the free marketplace of ideas), no compelled speech or censorship, logical reason.
- **Our mode of interacting with one another** –Equality, live and let live, agreeing to disagree, free to disagree (right to petition, peaceably assemble).
- **Our outlook on life** – Self-reliance, American spirit, progress, optimism, American Dream, pursuit of happiness (freedom, liberty), resistance to authoritarianism (defiance), assertion of rights (it's a free country!).



If you're shocked or surprised by any of the items on this list, well, you may have gaps or distortions in your education. Do we always live up to the highest embodiment of them in practice? No, not always. (Neither, it must be pointed out, do other competing systems of government live up to the utopian visions they promote, which is a great understatement of their shortcomings when put into practice.) But this qualification does not discount them as worthy ideals to strive for, even when we fall short.

It is essential that these systems and values be deliberately and explicitly taught in our schools, to prepare successful future citizens capable of self-government. We cannot mandate belief in them, since that would be un-American, but schools must at minimum foster understanding of them. If your child's school isn't teaching these foundational concepts, then it's going to fall on you, the parents (in which case, you're going to be asking yourself why you're paying the school to do a job they're not doing).

Here's help.



OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM

Our political system – We live in a democratic, constitutional republic. Sure, Churchill called democracy the worst form of government except for all the others. Though it's open to critique, our children should explore its relative advantages fairly and objectively compare it to competing systems. Our system is of the people, by the people, for the people. Our leaders are to be elected through transparent elections with confidential voting and consent of the governed, meaning that bad leaders can be petitioned, held accountable, and recalled.

You cannot properly understand our political system and our founding documents without understanding the Enlightenment philosophy behind them, which means some familiarity with classical literature and people like John Locke, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Kant, and so on. In other words, students need to read the writers and thinkers who influenced the founders in order to properly understand the theory behind this system of government. Those who do will have an operating advantage over those who do not.

Having experienced tyranny under monarchy prior to our founding, Americans jealously guard their freedom and their right to engage in free and open elections of their leaders.

Sayings: Of the People, By the People, For the People, One man, one vote, E Pluribus Unum, In God We Trust.

Foundational Reading: Mayflower Compact, Selections from Cato's Letters, Federalist and Anti-Federalist Letters. Declaration of Independence, Constitution, Bill of Rights, The Constitution of Liberty, Washington's Farewell Address. Magna Carta (1215), The Articles of Confederation (1777), The Treaty of Paris (1783), The Constitution of the United States (1787), Norman Rockwell's Four Freedoms.

Films: [A More Perfect Union](#)



OUR ECONOMIC SYSTEM

Our economic system – free markets, voluntary exchange, and competition (capitalism) backed up with protection of private (individual) property rights.

Astonishingly, the principles of capitalism are almost never explicitly taught in American schools, but this is the economic system in which graduates will be required to operate during adulthood. Understanding the rudiments of capitalism is not intuitive, so we need to prepare students for their plunge into it after graduation.

Capitalism relies upon free markets and voluntary (not compelled or coerced) exchanges.

Essentially, capitalism is anticipating and solving other people's problems for money. It involves an exchange of value. Capitalism is imperfect and open to critique—what isn't?—but not without exploring its relative advantages fairly and giving it credit for what it has given and continues to give us. Capitalism drove the economic engine that defeated the mighty Axis powers. It has given us the highest standard of living in the world and in human history.

"It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker that we expect to eat our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest." —Adam Smith

While capitalism relies upon activating mutual self-interest, socialism and communism often claim to be motivated by concern for the welfare of others. However, the track record of state-controlled economies tells a much different story, involving ruthless compulsion, mass starvation and the dispiriting effects of a system that fails to understand the roots of human motivation. Winston Churchill famously referred to socialism as "the gospel of envy" and further intoned that "there are two places only" where it will work: "in heaven where it is not needed and in hell, where they already have it." Socialism and communism also enshrine breaking the 10th commandment against coveting your neighbors' goods and activate the deadly sin of Envy.

Karl Marx posited life as a struggle of class against class, whereas capitalists recognize it instead as a struggle of man against the elements. Again and again, the socialist model fails to produce basic sustenance, much less prosperity. Americans learned this lesson early on: at the establishment of the Jamestown colony in the early 17th century, land was held and worked in common and grain was stored in common. People were supposed to take what they needed and there was no private property. This provided no incentive or advantage to engage in hard work. This system quickly fell apart to the point where within two years half of them died of starvation while trying to eke out a living against the elements. As Captain John Smith explains: "When our people were fed out of the common store, and laboured jointly together, glad was he could slip from his labour, or slumber over his taske he cared not how, nay, the most honest among them would hardly take so much true paines in a weeke, as now for themselves they will doe in a day: neither cared they for the increase, presuming that howsoever the harvest prospered, the generall store must maintaine them, so that wee reaped not so much Corne from the labours of thirtie, as now three or foure doe provide for themselves. —John Smith, "General Historie of Virginia Vol 1: New England & the Summer Isles."

What saved them? The establishment of a system of private property that each family unit tended individually, resulting in hard work, thrift, survival and then prosperity for all. It is true that in capitalist societies, some people have much more than others; but that is because of abundance: "Wherever there is great property, there is great inequality" —Adam Smith. Does that make us greedy? Hardly. Americans [rank as the most generous](#) in the world, in terms of both time *and* money. We are happy and [eager to share our abundance and good fortune with others](#). In fact, a [new academic study](#) in [Psychological Science](#) found that more individualistic societies feature higher levels of altruistic generosity than more collectivist ones.

In America, you have the right to enjoy the fruits of your own labor but you must not expect to live off the sweat of another man's brow. You are expected to work and to contribute to the economy. We believe in providing equal opportunity to all citizens, but that it is up to them to make something of themselves through their own efforts.

Sayings: A self-made man; He who won't work, won't eat; If it's to be, it's up to me.

Foundational Reading: "The Goose that Laid the Golden Eggs" by Aesop; traditional American fable "The Little Red Hen;" "The Parable of the Talents" in Matthew 25:14–30; *Tragedy of the Commons* by William Forster Lloyd; *The History of Jamestown Colony* (regarding the establishment of private property); *The Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith; *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* by Max Weber. *Poor Richard's Almanack* by Benjamin Franklin.

Biographies of famous American entrepreneurs and inventors (Elijah McCoy, Madam C.J. Walker, Ben Franklin, Andrew Carnegie, Henry Ford, Thomas Edison); *The Road to Serfdom* by Friedrich Hayek; *Animal Farm* by George Orwell; *Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand; *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* by Ayn Rand; [Seven Deadly Sins](#) (Envy) by Pope [Gregory I](#); The 10 Commandments (10th) in Exodus 20:2–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21.

School Clubs: Future Business Leaders of America FBLA, Junior Achievement, and Future Farmers of America (FFA)

Films: *Titans* (miniseries); *Edison, the Man* (1940).



OUR CULTURE

Our culture – Enlightenment individualism, built on the foundation of Judeo-Christian values; individual liberty, individual rights.

There are two types of cultures: individualistic and collectivistic. America is individualistic, philosophically rooted in the Enlightenment and Western civilization's intellectual heritage of Judeo-Christian values. The individualistic cultures tend to be in the Western and Northern hemispheres and the collectivistic ones in the Eastern and Southern hemispheres, although there are exceptions, largely caused by colonial expansion.

Individualistic cultures put the individual before the group, whereas collectivistic cultures put the group before the individual. Americans have the freedom to express themselves, and boy, do they! You are allowed to stand out and to follow your own personal preferences in life, expecting that others will leave you alone to do your own thing. You get to make your own decisions (which entails taking responsibility for the outcome). Other cultures expect and sometimes even enforce greater and more pervasive demands for conformity and allow less room for personal expression.

Each way of life has advantages and disadvantages, but millennia of writings underpin this very foundational aspect of our culture. It is rooted as deeply as the Bible, another book with which educated Americans of all religions should be familiar in order to be contextually grounded. One reason for our strong belief in individualism is rooted in the strong religious beliefs of early founders of this country, and their faith in individual salvation. From this individualistic tradition comes our system of laws.

Sayings: Think for yourself; If everyone else jumped off a bridge, would you?; Whenever you find yourself in the majority, it's time to reconsider your opinion (Mark Twain).

Foundational Reading: *On Liberty* by John Stuart Mill; "Self-Reliance" by Emerson; *All Minus One* (Heterodox Academy); Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself."

Films: *Braveheart*, *The Patriot*, *Sons of Liberty* miniseries, *John Adams* miniseries.



OUR LEGAL SYSTEM

Our legal system – Individual justice with presumption of innocence, due process protections, and rules of evidence.

The American legal system is rooted in individual, not group, responsibility and culpability. This means that if an individual is guilty, we do not simultaneously condemn other members of his or her family, or future generations yet unborn, as we once did, a long time ago, and as they still do in, say, North Korea. If one person commits a crime, we do not hold others accountable. You are responsible for yourself.

Likewise, centuries of Anglo-American legal traditions have resulted in legal processes that presume an individual innocent until proven guilty, and that grant an accused person the benefit of due process. These are precious rights to be guarded and protected, and their adoption derives from a long history of experience in what goes wrong when these protections are absent.

Accused Americans are presumed innocent until proven guilty and they are entitled to receive due process in trial proceedings; there is no inherited, collective, tribal, or blood guilt. The accused has certain rights and the accuser has the responsibility to prove their case. Our system relies on truthful witnesses (the 9th commandment: thou shalt not bear false witness), includes careful rules of evidence, and relies on objective, impartial judgment by disinterested parties (judge and jury). Accusations must be subjected to careful cross-examination in order to arrive at the nearest possible approximation of truth. In American law, the intent of the accused matters.

In the absence of such protections and in other or prior systems, we find abuses such as show trials, witch trials, Kafka traps, and guilt by association.

American laws also enshrine secure property rights for citizens, which are foundational to prosperity for all because without them, the source of human motivation to expend effort to produce would be destroyed. Other countries want to do business in countries with sound legal systems like ours because they know that they function well, and that their own rights will be protected. Our prosperity relies on having a strong, functioning legal system.

Based on our broader Judeo-Christian heritage, our legal system also embeds biblical concepts of righting wrongs, making amends, confession, forgiveness, and paths to redemption.

Sayings: You will have your day in court. Two wrongs don't make a right.

Foundational works: Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights, Proverbs 18:17, Supreme Court decisions, The Trial (Kafka). The Crucible. Salem Witch Trial accounts, To Kill a Mockingbird.

Films: 12 Angry Men, To Kill a Mockingbird.



OUR METHOD OF ADVANCEMENT

Our method of advancement – Protestant work ethic and meritocracy.

America is meant to function as a meritocracy that offers rewards for effort, hard work, and achievement. This is also known as the Protestant (Calvinist) work ethic, which contrasts distinctly with aristocracy, in which the circumstances of one's birth determine one's opportunities and outcomes in life. The American system was deliberately set up in direct opposition to this, and the Constitution, of course, specifically prohibits the granting of titles of nobility, for important philosophical reasons deserving of study and understanding. Like capitalism, meritocracy implies and embraces competition and is meant to encourage and reward ambitious hard work.

This relates to our focus on individualism – in our country, we celebrate achievement and applaud the fruits of investment, hard labor, and individual accomplishment. In some other countries, they believe in “cutting down the tall poppy,” which means that a person who is outstanding should be shown their place and cut down to size, like everyone else.

Americans, instead, tolerate eccentricity, and, therefore, we often produce some uniquely outstanding individuals with tremendous creative output. As Ralph Waldo Emerson puts it in his essay on Self-Reliance:

“There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till.”

One of the greatest aspects of meritocracy is that it unleashes human motivation, creativity, and ingenuity for the betterment of all.

Other systems, such as socialism/communism, inevitably fail to capitalize on this vast human resource because they fundamentally fail to take human nature into account. People naturally want to accomplish something in life, and to feel pride and satisfaction in it—that is a universal human drive. No real satisfaction comes from having things handed to you. People whose ambition is squelched or co-opted become listless, hopeless, and dispirited, and the economies under such systems wither and stagnate.

Sayings: An honest day's work. Pull yourself up by your bootstraps. The harder I work, the luckier I get. Play the hand life dealt you.

Foundational reading: Aesop's fables. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* ([Calvinism](#)), Horatio Alger stories, The Book of Proverbs, Inspirational biographies of successful individuals. *The Fountainhead*. *Up From Slavery*.

Films: Rocky, On the Waterfront, Sergeant York, Stand and Deliver

OUR METHOD OF COMMUNICATING AND FIGURING THINGS OUT

Our method of communicating and figuring things out -- free speech (open, voluntary exchange of ideas – no compelled speech or censorship), marketplace of ideas, logical reason.

Americans have the strongest free speech protections in the world. There are historical and cultural reasons for this, and it's part of the reason why our culture is so prolific and groundbreaking. While free speech carries certain costs, we believe that the benefits far outweigh them and that American citizens are strong enough to bear up against the open, honest, forthright, and robust exchange of contrasting ideas—especially since each American has the First Amendment right to reply and to refute bad ideas (while a censored person has no recourse). Censorship societies inevitably stagnate and choke creative output and stall progress and human advancement.

We allow people to think out loud and say what they think, and most American regions are noted for their plain-spokenness (although there are exceptions). We also have a strong tradition of allowing satirists and other social commentators to poke fun at our foibles and to point out our flaws, which is one of the most useful purposes of free speech. Free speech allows the powerless to confront the powerful and to voice grievances or criticisms.

Our Enlightenment traditions and Western origins (rooted in Greek logic and philosophy) have equipped us with a reliable method of interrogating and discovering truth and discarding error. Boiled down to its basics, this process is similar to the scientific method in that it asserts that we must follow a rational process utilizing logic and evidence and ruthlessly submit it to outside scrutiny in order to ascertain if there are any flaws. To use the development of the COVID-19 vaccine as a ready example, the process basically proceeds from the null hypothesis. It's counterintuitive in that you try to prove that solutions don't work...until you can't. So, you produce a vaccine possibility and submit it to peer review. Try this: it's probably wrong and probably doesn't work. You test it, you interrogate it, and most of the time, you find out that indeed it doesn't work. And you keep doing it until you find one that you can't prove doesn't work. The process requires everyone to be supplying criticism, checking closely for errors, and honestly and faithfully recording their observations and experiences. It's similar to the way in which computer programmers try to "break" another's code, in order to find the flaws in it. You keep testing it until you find a solution that can't be broken.

Now, imagine trying that in a system where certain solutions are deemed to be "unquestionable" because of the source. How dare you try to break my code; don't you know who I am? Does that sound like a system likely to lead to the most reliable solutions?

Similar to a courtroom proceeding, each possible solution must be subjected to rigorous cross-examination in order to ascertain what is true or right. This requires being dispassionately objective about anyone's work, because if it is flawed, it needs to be discovered, discarded, and replaced with a better solution. Irrational attachments produce solutions that are likely to break down under actual conditions. Other terms for this are deductive reasoning, open inquiry, peer review, and the scientific process. We don't work backwards from preferred conclusions or



outcomes: we proceed forward, logically following the evidence where it leads us, asking tough questions all along the way.

Antithetical systems would be Lysenkoism, weltenshere, working backwards from conclusions, unquestioned advocacy, reliance on faulty induction, might makes right, accepting unfalsifiable claims (Karl Popper), orthodoxy, or party rule.

Sayings: Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me, the proof is in the pudding. Put your money where your mouth is.

Foundational Reading: First Amendment. Jonathan Rauch, *Kindly Inquisitors*, Selections from Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato. Study of Logic. Biography of Galileo. Emperor's New Clothes, A Plea for Free Speech in Boston by Frederick Douglass.

Films: The Story of Louis Pasteur, Lorenzo's Oil.



OUR MODE OF INTERACTING WITH ONE ANOTHER

Our mode of interacting with one another – Equality, Live and let live, agreeing to disagree, free to disagree (right to petition, peaceably assemble), presumption of goodwill.

Americans believe in equality. As the Declaration of Independence confidently asserted on July 4, 1776: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

From the Biblical ideal of humanity’s creation in the image of God comes our understanding of “natural, God-given rights,” which are written into our founding documents. The natural extension of this fundamental Judeo-Christian tenet is what ultimately propelled the later Abolitionist movement in the Western world.

We’re also forgiving and believe in second chances, mercy, and redemption, in keeping with our Judeo-Christian roots. We believe in the Biblical precept to love thy neighbor and we strive to deal honestly with others and not to bear false witness against them (8th commandment). Our legal and economic systems rely on honest truth-telling and we have stern penalties for engaging in falsehoods (both cultural and legal.) We teach our children to operate according to the so-called Golden Rule, which itself derives from the biblical admonition to “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Sermon on the Mount.) We also believe in the right to privacy and we do not spy on or monitor our neighbors.

Certainly, Americans value kindness and do not strive to hurt other people’s feelings; however, we place truth above these virtues when they conflict. When Americans see things differently, as they inevitably will in a pluralistic society, we agree to disagree, respecting the other person’s right to their own opinions. American generally operate plainly and honestly with the presumption of goodwill on the other party.

Our Biblical roots also teach us that people are flawed and imperfect and that we should judge not, lest we be judged and to forgive those who trespass against us, if we want to be forgiven for our own trespasses. Similarly, it teaches us in the very first chapter that there is no Utopia on earth as we have been ejected from the Garden of Eden. This is to warn us of the folly of seeking perfection on Earth and, not surprisingly, most Utopian fantasies wind up creating dystopian realities. Hence, we aim to practice the art of making and accepting sincere apologies (knowing that one day you may be in need of forgiveness) rather than holding endless grudges or engaging in utter condemnation of those who have wronged us. We also have a history of having a sense of humor about people’s individual quirks and appreciating, rather than despising these differences, rationalizing that it’s part of what makes life interesting and fun.

Sayings: Treat others the way you want to be treated (Golden Rule); Mind your own business; With malice towards none; with charity for all. Good fences make good neighbors. Let he who is without sin cast the first stone, Nobody’s perfect, Your rights end where my nose begins.



Foundational reading: First Amendment, Genesis, *The Gulag Archipelago*, *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. Stasi mass surveillance accounts, 1984, Emily Post, Dear Abby, *Merchant of Venice*, George Washington's Rules of civility. Gettysburg address, Yale Report of 1828, Chicago Statement, Mending Wall, Robert Frost. A Letter Concerning Toleration (John Locke), Lincoln's 2nd Inaugural Address, John Kennedy's Civil Rights Speech, We Shall Overcome, Lyndon B. Johnson,

Films: The Lives of Others (R)



OUR OUTLOOK ON LIFE

Our outlook on life – Self-reliance, American spirit, progress, optimism, American Dream, pursuit of happiness (freedom, liberty), resistance to authoritarianism (defiance), assertion of rights (it's a free country!)

The concept of the American Dream looms large in our collective imagination. Being an individualistic nation, the dream can mean different things to different people. Ultimately, it's up to each American to define it for themselves! Essentially, it's related to the concept of the pursuit of happiness and the chance to live your life according to the inner prodding of your own soul, without having your life choices dictated to you by others. In America, you're allowed to go your own way and chart your own path.

As a nation, we've developed certain cultural norms and behavioral traits that are instantly recognizable to outsiders. These include celebrating winners, adventurousness, pushing boundaries, taking initiative, cheering for underdogs, relentless optimism, a certain amount of defiance, tolerating eccentrics, the ability to buckle down and get an enormous job done quickly and efficiently, resistance to authoritarianism, and doggedly believing we can overcome hardships against tremendous odds. We also tend to make fun of "stuffed shirts" and people with pretentious affectations.

Attitudinally, Americans also try not to dwell on misfortunes but rather emphasize gratitude over grievance. This is precisely why we have the uniquely American holiday of Thanksgiving, during which we pause to count our blessings and appreciate how full our glass is, even if a portion of it remains empty.

Americans are naturally anti-authoritarian and defiant in the face of oppression, since that is part of our birthright that we celebrate on July 4th. If you tell Americans they can't do something, they are likely to push back to prove that they can (assuming it's legal, of course!) We are, after all, the country that landed a man on the moon, and now our sights are set on Mars. We believe that, if we put our minds to it, there's nothing we can't do! And that includes building a more perfect union: we fight for our rights and for the rights of others and we always strive to improve ourselves and to do better. The sky's the limit!

Sayings: It's a free country, the pursuit of happiness, One small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind, Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without. Necessity is the mother of invention. Don't make a mountain out of a molehill. If it's to be, it's up to me.

Foundational readings: The Little Engine That Could, Self-Reliance by Emerson, Little House on the Prairie series, Little Women, The Road Less Traveled, Robert Frost, Mark Twain, Will Rogers, Still I Rise (poem, Maya Angelou), I Have a Dream speech, MLK, Biography of A. Lincoln, *Autobiography of Ben Franklin*, Poor Richard's Almanack, the Bible. Red, White, and Black, The Life of Frederick Douglass. Thoreau, Civil Disobedience, Letter from Birmingham Jail, Ben Franklin's List of Virtues. Grant (miniseries), Walt Whitman, Song of the Open Road, Jack Kerouac, On the Road, Bartleby the Scrivener, Melville. Learned Optimism, Martin Seligman, FDR's fireside chats, Reagan's Tear Down this Wall speech,



Dale Carnegie's How to Win Friends and Influence People, Eisenhower's D-Day speech, Lincoln's House Divided speech. Teddy Roosevelt's Man in the Arena speech. History of Flight 93 (Let's Roll.) *Skywalkers: Mohawk Ironworkers Build the City*.

Films: Hamilton (play), Moon landing footage, Glory, Patton, Saving Private Ryan, Casablanca, classic Westerns, Rocky, Pursuit of Happyness, Apollo 13. Many American songwriters also embody this ethos.



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These are the basic operating systems that are written into American life and that distinguish us from other systems in different countries. Much like a computer or cellphone operating system, you have to run on one or the other; it can't be both at the same time. It is either MAC or DOS, iPhone or Android. These systems intertwine and cannot be separated from one another; they loop back to the Judeo-Christian worldview, which is inextricably embedded into our laws and founding documents.

A proper understanding and appreciation of the American operating system is the key to unlocking the potential to thrive within our culture that continues to attract eager immigrants from around the globe. We are a great country, but not a perfect one; certainly more good than bad, with much that is worthy of vigorous defence and enthusiastic maintenance. By passing this knowledge on to our children, we ensure that many future generations will continue to enjoy the benefits and blessings of American liberty and prosperity.

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Bonnie is an educator with 20+ years of experience in both K-12 and higher ed, certified in elementary education, secondary English, and secondary guidance. She was the Director of K-12 Outreach at the [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education](#) and is the author of [Undoctrinate: How Politicized Classrooms Harm Kids and Ruin Our Schools](#). Bonnie is connected with concerned teachers throughout the country who have reached out to her in recent years for help.

Opinions are her own.

