

for many of the things that are part of our Danish welfare system. If one's economic situation does not match one's needs, there is no welfare system to make it possible or at least not to the same extent as we find in Denmark. To put it bluntly, if you do not have the money for college, you simply do not get an education. You can learn more about the American welfare system in Chapter 4.

The following values are what primarily constitute American identity and what Americans want to define themselves by. These values drive Americans in their everyday lives and appear in political decision-making. It is the belief in the future and in themselves that shapes Americans and continues to attract immigrants.

IDEALISM

"the belief that a perfect life, situation, etc. can be achieved, even when this is not very likely"
(Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary)

American idealism expresses itself in a positive and optimistic view of life. The values of self-reliance and improvement and the supreme position of the individual in society mean that idealism permeates American identity.

Exploration, progress, and dreams

Through history, Americans have had a positive view of geographical expansion. As mentioned earlier, the settlers relished being the first ones in new territory, living on the edge of the unknown. This curiosity and fascination of exploration has spread into several other fields. Firstly, when the settlers reached the West Coast, exploration turned vertical. The invention of the skyscraper and the exploration of space are examples of this. Secondly, exploration and progress can be seen in industrialization and science. Americans are proud of being the first men to fly, the first on the moon, or the first in other areas of science and technology. The Americans have an unwavering faith in a technological future and see no limit to exploration. "All it takes is faith and trust" as Walt Disney's version of Peter Pan puts it.

Immigration

"Give me your tired, your poor ..." This message is engraved on the Statue of Liberty. When the immigrants arrived in New York City, the lines from the poem "The New Colossus" by Emma Lazarus greeted them. It welcomes immigrants saying that in America there is room for everyone, no matter what their background and personal history. Through time, the Statue of Liberty has been a symbol of hope for immigrants, welcoming and inspiring them to realize their dreams.

The history of immigration proves the value of idealism in the USA. Immigrants coming to the USA today do not face an easy transition and assimilation. However, the opportunity of advancing and accomplishing something in life still exists and carries enormous significance for the newcomers.

Religion

Idealism is also expressed through religion. Many Americans attend church on a regular basis or at least consider themselves Christian. They find comfort and counsel in religion, and it provides them with confidence and belief in themselves and their future. For many Americans, Christian values define their way of living. The church is a social network where people can rely on each other and find support if needed.

bluntly direkte
permeate gennemsyre, præge
relish nyde

unwavering urokkelig, fast
engrave indgravere
colossus kolos, kæmpe statue

transition skift
assimilation assimilation, optagelse
counsel råd, rådgivning

confidence tillid

MOBILITY

"The ability to move easily from one place, social class, or job to another"
(Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary)

Mobility refers to a geographical move from one place to another, but also the notion of moving socially.

Mobility and starting over "The rung of a ladder was never meant to rest upon, but only to hold a man's foot long enough to enable him to put the other somewhat higher" (Thomas Huxley, English biologist, 1825-1895). Despite Huxley being British, his words are quite true for Americans. Nothing keeps an American in one place for very long – they are always going somewhere: to a better job, to a new state, to a better school, to a better team, etc.

Americans are not hesitant to move to where opportunity is. Many young people tend to move when they start college. The truck rental company U-Haul estimates that around 16 % of Americans are likely to move every year, and according to www.census.gov, 50 % of Americans over 75 have moved to a different state to the one they were born in.

The willingness to move comes from the beginning of American colonization and the frontier experience. People moved west to find better land, more space or other opportunities. Many immigrants had left another country behind to seek opportunities in a new place. Moving and starting over was something that provided people with new chances.

Mobility enhances cultural diversity and openness towards other people and cultures. Americans are generally outgoing and welcoming towards new people. This makes moving or re-location a much easier transition.

Self-improvement

Americans are always striving for improvement – both in relation to work, social class, and personal and spiritual development. Social mobility is just as important as physical mobility. Many Americans never settle for average, but are driven by an urge always to improve. People change jobs to improve their career, take additional academic courses to improve their education, attend classes to be a better parent, a better cook, a better athlete, etc.

Some people may argue that American self-improvement manifests itself through materialism. A spacious home, several cars or maybe a boat show other people that you are doing well and provide for your family. Americans do not look down upon this. Instead it gives them faith in their own future.

Patriotism

Because Americans are not rooted in a specific state, town or community in the sense that Danes are, patriotism holds them together as a people. Americans feel united through their identity as Americans and through their belief in the values of their country. Americans celebrate national holidays where the flag and other national symbols dominate. "I'm proud to be American", "America is great" and similar nationalistic expressions are commonly seen. Flags by the main entrance decorate many private homes, and many schools assemble daily or weekly to "Pledge Allegiance to the Flag", while placing their right hand on their hearts.

American patriotism is centered around the freedom and the opportunities Americans have, and not physically about the land.

rung trin
enable gore i stand til, muliggøre
hesitant tøvende
enhance forøge, styrke

spacious rummelig
be rooted have rødder, høre til
patriotism fædrelandskærlighed
assemble samles

pledge tilsige, love
allegiance troskab

AUTONOMY

"The quality or state of being self-governing" or "the power or right of a country, group, etc., to govern itself"
(Merriam-Webster dictionary)

In this context, autonomy means the Americans' urge for independence and self-determination. Autonomy covers values such as individualism, self-reliance, 'do-it-yourself' spirit and volunteerism.

Individualism

Americans cherish individualism. Everyone has to make his or her own choices and focus on what is right for himself/herself and his/her families. In American society, the focus is on the individual to a degree which can be difficult for Danish people to fully grasp. Everyone is responsible for himself/herself in all aspects of life – economic security, education, employment, retirement, etc. Many Americans strive to stand out as individuals and excel in various aspects of life. It could be in sports, politics, business, school, sales, etc. Being 'the best' at something means you have the ability to work hard and be goal-oriented. Therefore, the individual is often rewarded and acknowledged in society. When you read a local newspaper, you will find articles about who graduated at the top of the class, who became the best football player, or what company had the largest turnover this year.

In politics, the role of the state and the federal government is to provide the ideal conditions for the individual to thrive and pursue individual goals. From a historical point of view, Americans found it important that the state was as small as possible and left all choices and decision-making to the individual.

Self-reliance

To be self-reliant means to be independent and able to take care of oneself. Self-reliance is a term that derives from the beginning of American society. The settlers did not rely on others to survive, but faced all kinds of hardships individually. To be self-reliant today means that you can support yourself and provide for your family without having to rely on social welfare. Americans prefer to solve their problems privately, depending on family and the close community.

Do-it-yourself spirit

Americans value the 'do-it-yourself' spirit. It is apparent in many aspects of American identity from the frontier men's drive to survive and succeed on the edge of civilization to modern inventors who developed many necessities to ease everyday life (such as the zipper, hearing aids, air conditioning, airplanes, the light switch, etc.) The 'do-it-yourself' spirit entails a curiosity to see what is possible and is a tribute to the individual's abilities.

Volunteerism

American society would not function without volunteers. Hospitals, schools, sports, events, social matters, local communities, homeless people, legal aid, etc. – everything depends on volunteers. Americans volunteer, sponsor and donate when they can. Instead of having a government to help, people want to do it themselves locally where the help is needed. Most American families volunteer in one way or the other.

Fundraisers are often held at the local football stadium or church to support a family who needs something extra at that moment. In many communities, people help each other out if they can – not only with money, but also with food and even Christmas presents.

urge trang
self-reliance selvstændighed,
selvhjulpenhed
volunteerism frivillighed
cherish værdsætte, sætte pris på
grasp forstå

retirement pensionering
excel udmærke sig
acknowledge anerkende
turnover omsætning
federal federal, forbunds-
thrive trives

pursue forfølge
derive stamme fra
rely være afhængig af
zipper lynlås
hearing aid høreapparat
entail medføre

legal aid juridisk hjælp
fundraiser begivenhed hvor der
indsamles penge