

## Worksheet #4:

### Explanatory Notes for “Americans”

**Directions:** Below are reasons some cultural anthropologists have offered to explain why Americans may come across the way they do to people from other cultures. As you are reading each explanation, think about whether or not you agree with it. Is the explanation true of all Americans, some Americans, or no Americans?

**1. Americans are always in such a hurry to get things done!**

Americans often seem this way because of their tendency to use achievements and accomplishments as a measure of a person's worth. They're in a hurry to get things done because it's only then that they feel they have proven their worth to other people. The more Americans accomplish, the more they feel they are respected.

**2. Americans insist on treating everyone the same.**

Americans do this because of our cultural roots as a free nation (e.g., “All men are created equal”). Americans have a deep cultural instinct toward social equality and not having a class system. This is a reaction to the European class system as well as the feudal system that existed in Europe. In cultures where inequality between social classes is more accepted, American insistence on egalitarianism, or social equality, may be annoying.

**3. Americans always have to say what they're thinking!**

Americans believe that being direct is the most efficient way to communicate. It's important to “tell it like it is” and “speak your mind”—to say what you mean and mean what you say. Being direct is often valued over “beating around the bush.” Americans value assertiveness and being open and direct about one's thoughts and feelings. Not all cultures have this same value. In some cultures, the normal way to disagree or to say no is to say nothing or be very indirect.

**4. Americans always want to change things.**

Americans think things can always be better, and that progress is inevitable. The United States is a little more than 200 years old, and American culture tends to be an optimistic one. Older cultures are more skeptical because they have been around longer, have experienced more, and have been in situations in which progress was not always made. In American businesses, being open to change is a strong value, because things really do change quickly, and it is necessary to adapt. Many Americans believe it is “good” to initiate change and “bad” to resist it.

**5. Americans don't show very much respect for their elders.**

Americans believe people must earn by their actions whatever regard or respect they are given. Merely attaining a certain age or holding a certain position does not in itself signify achievement.

**6. Americans always think things are going to get better. They are so optimistic!**

America, because of its resources and successes, has always had a culture of optimism. Americans believe that they are in control of their own destinies, rather than being victims of fate. Many Americans tend to believe that “the American dream” can be achieved by anyone who is willing to work hard enough. Many Americans believe that the only obstacle to things getting better is “not trying hard enough.” Americans also believe that a personal lack of determination or effort can be fixed. Other cultures may believe more in fate (“what will be will be”). When something bad happens, some members of these cultures believe it was fated to happen, must be accepted, and cannot be changed.

**7. Americans are so impatient!**

Americans believe that if things take a long time to do, they won't be able to do enough of them. Many Americans believe that more and faster is better. They do not like to stand in line and wait, and they originated fast food. Americans believe that getting things done (and doing them quickly) may be more important than other things. Many other cultures believe that slower is better and that building and maintaining relationships takes priority over getting things done at the expense of relationships.