

American Core Beliefs:

The following information includes several examples of different American Core Beliefs. In small groups come to a consensus of what the group believes are the 7 most important ones. Once consensus is reached, create a poster that includes the beliefs as well as a visual of the belief. The entire poster needs to be hand drawn.

Procedure:

1. Read the excerpts below and discuss American core values and decide on the seven most important according to the group
2. Create a poster that includes the seven values and an accompanying picture. Be sure that the size of the pictures is relatively uniform across the poster as larger pictures will imply a greater significance.
 - a. There should be no scribbles, scratches, or any other degrading marks on the poster.
3. Once all posters are complete we will attempt to come to class consensus via a nomination and voting procedure that also must be agreed upon by the class
4. Write a personal reflection about the process. Be sure to include whether or not your opinions and views were heard. Consider what hindered or helped the spread of ideas.

WHAT ARE THE BASIC AMERICAN VALUES AND BELIEFS ?

Sociologist Robin Williams attempted to offer a list of basic values in the United States:

Achievement, efficiency, material comfort, nationalism, equality and the supremacy of science and reason, over faith. There are certain ideals and values, rooted in the country's history, which many Americans share. These are: FREEDOM, INDIVIDUALISM, PRAGMATISM, VOLUNTEERISM, MOBILITY, PATRIOTISM, PROGRESS, AMERICAN DREAM.

FREEDOM – Americans commonly regard their society as the freest and best in the world. Americans' understanding of freedom is shaped by the Founding Fathers' belief that all people are equal and that the role of the government is to protect each person's basic "inalienable" rights. The U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights assures individual rights, including provisions for freedom of speech, press and religion. No one single church dominates or controls in the US, there is a religious diversity.

INDIVIDUALISM – Americans' notion of freedom focuses on the individual, and individualism has strong philosophical roots in America. Thomas Jefferson believed that a free individual's identity should be held sacred and that his or her dignity and integrity should not be violated. America's 19th c. Transcendentalists philosophers (Emerson, Thoreau, Fuller) argued for more individual self-reliance. Encouraged individuals to trust in themselves and their own consciences and to revolt against routine and habitual paths of conduct. Early 20th c. Pragmatists (James, Dewey) insisted upon the individual's ability to control his or her fate.

Individualism, understood not only as self-reliance but also as economic self-sufficiency, has been a central theme in American history (frontiers heroes who braved the wilderness alone, farmers whose success depended on their ability to confront the hardships of land and resourcefulness, the celebration of the small businessman who became a financial success on his own; individual proprietorship in business is still extolled as the ideal). + "Self-made man" like B.Franklin.

IDEALIZING WHAT IS PRACTICAL - Many historians believe that most of the beliefs and values which are characteristically American emerged within the context of the frontier experience. Survival in the wilderness was best achieved to robust individualists. Survival experiences also explain the American tendency to idealize whatever is practical. In America what works is what counts. Inventiveness was necessary for survival. This "can-do" spirit is something Americans are proud of today. They like to think they are natural-born do-it-yourselfers (a variety of self-help books).

VOLUNTEERISM – means people helping people through privately initiated, rather than government-sponsored, agencies. Volunteers are highly motivated people, workers who organize themselves and others to solve a particular community problem or meet an immediate social need, rather than waiting for someone else – usually the govt- to do it. The willingness to participate in such groups is so widespread that six out of ten Americans are members of a volunteer organization. Volunteerism reflects Americans' optimistic pride in their ability to work out practical solutions themselves.

Americans like to form associations of different kind (Tocqueville and Mead wrote about that).

MOBILITY – Tocqueville in “Democracy in America” wrote: In the United States a man builds a house to spend his latter years in it, and he sells it before the roof is on: he plants a garden, and lets it just as the trees are coming into bearing: he brings a field into tillage, and leaves other men to gather the crops: he embraces a profession and gives it up: he settles in a place which he soon afterwards leaves, to carry his changeable longings elsewhere.” American habit. As a nation of immigrants, Americans have shared from the beginning the assumption that the practical solution to a problem is to move elsewhere and make a fresh start. Mobility in America is not a sign of aimlessness but optimism (hoping to secure a better job or enjoy a warmer climate: after the WWII inner migration from the Frost Belt to the Sun Belt). Moving about from place to place is such a common and accepted practice that most Americans take it for granted that they may live in four or five cities during their lifetime. Americans hate to feel that buying a house might immobilize them forever.

PATRIOTISM - Americans develop relatively little attachment to place (mobility). In this century, national pride has become generally stronger than regional pride. The prevalence of patriotic symbols: flags fly in suburban neighborhoods, bumper stickers announce “I’m proud to be American”, the national anthem is played at every sporting event. National holidays such as Thanksgiving and Independence Day intensify the sense of national identity. American patriotism is concentrated upon the particular historic event of the nation’s creation as a new start and upon the idea of freedom which inspired the nation’s beginnings.

PROGRESS - directly associated with the idea of freedom is the ideal of progress. The nation’s progress has been measured by the taming of the frontier and industrial expansion. The desire to progress by making use of opportunities is important to Americans. In this immigrant society, progress is personally measured as family progress over generations. Many Americans can boast that with each succeeding generation since their first ancestors arrived, the family’s status has improved. The classic American family saga is all about progress. The great-grandparents, arriving from the Old World with nothing but the clothes on their backs, work hard and suffer poverty and alienation so that they can provide a good education for their children. The second generation, motivated by the same vision of the future and willingness to work hard and make sacrifices, pass these values to their children. The attainment of the vision of one’s grandparents is part of the American Dream.

AMERICAN DREAM – J.T.Adams in The Epic of America expressed the term as “the dream of a land in which life should be better, richer, and fuller for every man with opportunities for each according to his abilities and achievement”. It teaches Americans to believe that contentment can be reached through the virtues of thrift, hard work, family loyalty, and faith in free enterprise system. History: American Dream is not open to all. Segregation and discrimination are effective tools which have barred minorities from equal opportunities in all spheres. American Dream is based on people’s ability, provided they use enough effort, to reach any goal.

- Values are subject to change as a society encounters distinctive pressures and strains. That is why now Americans place a high value on “national security” because of the external attacks, insecurity. / The 1980s saw a return to conservative family values and morals, as well as a renewal of national pride.
- Values may not always be upheld. The Bill of Rights, which guaranteed the freedoms of speech, the press, and religion, is one important expression of American national values. Yet even this historic document cannot be seen as defining a set of values that all Americans share. Beginning with Samuel Stouffer in the 1950s, sociologists have asked people whether these First Amendments rights should be extended to certain groups. While the right to speak or publish seems clearly established in the Bill of Rights, many Americans balk when asked if such privileges should be extended to atheists, communists, and a variety of others. Apart from this, the notion that America offers freedom for all has not always correspond to reality: the inconsistency of black slavery in a society supposedly dedicated to freedom and equality plagued the nation from the very beginning. Reality continues to demonstrate that some social groups and individuals are not as free as others. Because of religious, racial, sex, or age discrimination some Americans have not enjoyed the same rights and opportunities as others.

http://www.goldenline.pl/grupy/Uczelnie_studia_studenci_absolwenci/american-studies/what-are-the-basic-american-values-and-beliefs,901536/

Liberty, self-government, equality, individualism, diversity, unity

<http://study.com/academy/lesson/americas-core-values-liberty-equality-self-government.html>

CORE VALUES OF AMERICAN CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY

Core democratic values are the fundamental beliefs and constitutional principles of American society, which unite all Americans. These values are expressed in the Declaration of Independence, the United States constitution and other significant documents, speeches, and writing of the nation. Below are definitions of some core democratic values.

Source: *CIVITAS: A Framework for Civic Education*, a collaborative project of the Center for Civic Education and the Council for the Advancement of Citizenship, National Council for the Social Studies Bulletin No. 86, 1991. You can obtain a copy of “Civitas” by calling 1-800-350-4223

FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS

LIFE: The individual’s right to life should be considered inviolable except in certain highly restricted and extreme circumstances, such as the use of deadly force to protect one’s own or others’ lives.

LIBERTY: The right to liberty is considered an unalterable aspect of the human condition. Central to this idea of liberty is the understanding that the political or personal obligations of parents or ancestors cannot be legitimately forced on people. The right to liberty includes **personal freedom:** the private realm in which the individual is free to act, to think and to believe, and which the government cannot legitimately invade; **political freedom:** the right to participate freely in the political process, choose and remove public officials, to be governed under a rule of law; the right to a free flow of information and ideas, open debate and right of assembly; and **economic freedom:** the right to acquire, use, transfer and dispose of private property without unreasonable governmental interference; the right to seek employment wherever one pleases; to change employment at will; and to engage in any lawful economic activity.

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS: It is the right of citizens in the American constitutional democracy to attempt to attain – “pursue” – happiness in their own way, so long as they do not infringe upon the rights of others.

COMMON GOOD: The public or common good requires that individual citizens have the commitment and motivation – that they accept their obligation – to promote the welfare of the community and to work together with other members for the greater benefit of all.

JUSTICE: People should be treated fairly in the distribution of the benefits and burdens of society, the correction of wrongs and injuries, and in the gathering of information and making of decisions.

EQUALITY: All citizens have: **political equality** and are not denied these rights unless by due process of law; **legal equality** and should be treated as equals before the law; **social equality** so as there should be no class hierarchy sanctioned by law; **economic equality** which tends to strengthen political and social equality for extreme economic inequality tends to undermine all other forms of equality and should there fore be avoided.

DIVERSITY: Variety in culture and ethnic background, race, lifestyle, and belief is not only permissible but desirable and beneficial in a pluralist society.

TRUTH: Citizens can legitimately demand that truth-telling as refraining from lying and full disclosure by government be the rule, since trust in the veracity of government constitutes an essential element of the bond between governors and governed.

POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY: The citizenry is collectively the sovereign of the state and hold ultimate authority over public officials and their policies.

PATRIOTISM: Virtuous citizens display a devotion to their country, including devotion to the fundamental values upon which it depends.

CONSTITUTIONAL PRINCIPLES

RULE OF LAW: Both government and the governed should be subject to the law.

SEPARATION OF POWERS: Legislative, executive, and judicial powers should be exercised by different institutions in order to maintain the limitations placed upon them.

REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT: The republican form of government established under the Constitution is one in which citizens elect others to represent their interests.

CHECKS AND BALANCES: the powers given to the different branches of government should be balanced, that is roughly equal, so that no branch can completely dominate the others. Branches of government are also given powers to check the power of other branches.

INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS: Fundamental to American constitutional democracy is the belief that individuals have certain basic rights that are not created by government but which government should protect. These are the right to life, liberty, economic freedom, and the “Pursuit of happiness.” It is the purpose of government to protect these rights, and it may not place unfair or unreasonable restraints on their exercise. Many of these rights are enumerated in the Bill of Rights.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION: There shall be full freedom of conscience for people of all faiths or none. Religious liberty is considered to be a natural inalienable right that must always be beyond the power of the state to confer or remove. Religious liberty includes the right to freely practice any religion or no religion without government coercion or control.

FEDERALISM: Power is shared between two sets of governmental institutions, those of the states and those of the central or federal authorities, as stipulated by the Constitution.

CIVILIAN CONTROL OF THE MILITARY: Civilian authority should control the military in order to preserve constitutional government.

http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&ved=0ahUKEwjn-ztvqnKAhUMWT4KHfWZDqOQFggqMAI&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.aforcemorepowerful.org%2Fresources%2Fdocs%2FLesson1%2Fcore-values-of-american-constitutional-democracy.doc&usg=AFQjCNHJsauCJ74LM1zrVE24PIGg_B9-bg&sig2=ZJnTdeZ2hnG_uUhpDG0nAw

10 Core American Values

individualism

- o belief that each person is unique, special and a “basic unit of nature”
- o emphasis on individual initiative
- o stress need for independence
- o premium on individual expression
- o value privacy

equality

- o open society that ideally treats everyone equally
- o little hierarchy
- o informal
- o directness in relations with others

materialism

- a “right” to be well off and physically comfortable
- judge people by their possessions

science and technology

- values scientific approaches
- primary source of good
- major factor in change

progress and change

- belief in changing self and country
- “Manifest Destiny”
- optimism -- nothing is impossible

work and leisure

- strong work ethic
- work is the basis of recognition, power.
- idleness seen as a threat to society
- leisure is a reward for hard work

competition

- aggressive and competitive nature encouraged
- Be First (#1) mentality

mobility

- a people on the move
- vertical (social / economic) as well as physical mobility

volunteerism

- belief in helping others (related to equality concept)
- philanthropy admired
- a personal choice not a communal expectation

- involves associations / denominations rather than kin-groups

action and achievement oriented

- emphasis on getting things done
- priority on planning and setting goals
- tendency to be brief and business like,
- practical
- measure results
- focus on function and pragmatism

<https://www.andrews.edu/~tidwell/bsad560/USValues.html>

AMERICAN POLITICAL CULTURE

American political culture contains a number of core ideals and values. Not all Americans share the same views, of course, but the vast majority subscribes to these general ideals, including liberty, equality, democracy, individualism, unity, and diversity. Political debates tend to be over how best to achieve these ideals, not over whether these ideals are worth having in the first place.

Liberty

Americans today tend to define **liberty** as the freedom for people to do what they want. We also tend to believe liberty is essential to personal fulfillment and happiness. Nevertheless, liberty must be restrained on some level in order to create a stable society. A widely accepted principle of freedom is that we are free to do whatever we want as long as we do not impinge on other people's freedom.

A limited government is a government that places relatively few restrictions on its citizens' freedom. There are some things that the government cannot do, such as limit freedom of speech or impose a single religion on its citizens. A limited government usually has a constitution that defines the limits of governmental power. In the United States, the Constitution outlines the structure of government, whereas the Bill of Rights guarantees some of the citizens' specific liberties.

Economic Liberty

For many Americans, liberty includes economic liberty. People should be free to do as they see fit in the economic sphere without government interference. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, the American economy was based on **laissez-faire capitalism**, an

economic system in which the government plays almost no role in producing, distributing, or regulating the production and distribution of goods. Today, people want some governmental intervention in the economy, but most Americans want this intervention to be limited in scope.

Equality

Although no two people are truly equal, they are considered equal under the law. Some Americans may be poorer than others, and some may have cultural backgrounds different from the majority, but all Americans have the same fundamental rights. The term **equality** refers to a number of ways people are treated the same.

Political Equality

Political equality means that everyone is treated in the same way in the political sphere. This means, among other things, that everyone has the same status under the law (everyone is entitled to legal representation, for example, and every citizen gets one vote) and that everyone gets equal treatment under the law. Everybody must obey the laws, regardless of race, creed, religion, gender, or sexual orientation, and in return, everyone enjoys the same rights.

Equal Opportunity Versus Equality of Outcome

In American political culture, political equality also commonly means **equality of opportunity**: All people get the same opportunities to compete and achieve in the world. Some people will succeed and some will fail, but most Americans believe that everyone, no matter what, is entitled to the opportunity to succeed.

Most Americans oppose **equality of outcome**. Under this system, the government ensures all people the same results, regardless of how talented or hardworking they are. Most Americans consider this unfair because this system means that talented and diligent people do not get the success they deserve.

***Example:** In the United States, the government tries to ensure equal opportunity among its citizens by giving everybody access to a solid public education. For example, President George W. Bush and many members of Congress championed the No Child Left Behind Act, passed in 2001, because the law aimed to give all American students a good education. A good education gives people the ability to compete for good jobs, which means that they can achieve success if they so desire.*

Equal Opportunity to Succeed

Many liberal social policy advocates argue that Americans do not actually have equal opportunities to succeed. Women, for example, still earn less than men in the same professions, whereas young African Americans from inner-city neighborhoods are much less likely to attend college than young whites. Democratic and Republican political leaders both try to level the playing field so that everyone has equal opportunity, but the two groups have radically different ideas about how to do so.

Democracy

Most Americans believe that democracy is the best form of government and therefore tend to support policies that protect and expand democracy. The importance placed on democracy in American political culture usually appears in domestic politics, but sometimes a desire to spread democracy to other countries drives American foreign policy.

Example: American foreign policy during the Cold War often aimed at supporting and spreading democracy around the world. During the 1980s, members of Ronald Reagan's administration illegally sold arms to Iran in order to raise money for the Nicaraguan contras, who were fighting the communist regime in power.

Popular sovereignty, when the people rule, is an important principle of democracy. Democracy is government by the people, so political leaders in a democratic society are supposed to listen to and heed public opinion. Democracies hold elections to allow the people to exercise their power over government.

Majority rule, the belief that the power to make decisions about government should reflect the will of most (the majority) of the people, is another important principle of democracy. In fact, American political culture relies on majority rule: The candidate who wins a majority of votes, for example, wins the race. Likewise, a bill that wins the support of a majority of members of Congress passes. Without majority rule, a democracy could not function.

The flipside of majority rule is that the majority does not have unlimited power. In a democracy, the **rights of the minority** must also be protected, even at the expense of overriding the will of the majority. The minority always has the right to speak out against the majority, for example. Similarly, the minority cannot be arrested or jailed for disagreeing or voting against the majority. Without minority rights, majority rule would easily evolve into **tyranny of the majority**, in which the majority would ignore the basic rights of the minority.

Speaking for the Majority

Because of the power of the majority, political groups often claim to speak for the majority even if they do not actually do so. Making such a claim gives the group some legitimacy. Many authoritarian dictators, for example, hold rigged elections in order to claim popular support and legitimacy even if the election results are fabricated. International elections officials monitor the casting and counting of ballots in elections around the world to make sure democratic elections are really fair.

Individualism

According to the concept of **individualism**, humans are fundamentally individuals who have the freedom to make choices and join (or not join) groups as they wish. An individual's life belongs to no one but that individual, so people should make choices that are right for them regardless of what other people think. A true individual is unlike anyone else. Americans value individualism and respect people who make independent choices.

Individual Rights in American History

The protection of individual rights had been a hallmark of American politics even before the American Revolution. Many colonial governments had bills of rights that, to some extent, granted freedoms of speech, religion, and assembly. At the start of the revolution, states wrote new constitutions for themselves and listed rights that the government could not take away. The first ten amendments to the Constitution, known as the Bill of Rights, were added as soon as the new government took office in 1789.

Rugged Individualism

Rugged individualism is the quintessentially American view that we are responsible for our own lives and ultimately must rely only on ourselves. People who ignore society's wishes and do as they choose are rugged individuals. These people make their own way in the world at the risk of being ostracized by the rest of society.

Example: Many American movie heroes are individuals who disdain authority and flout tradition.

John Wayne's characters often fit this mold, as do other film heroes such as Bruce Willis's character John McClane in Die Hard and Clint Eastwood's "man without a name" in The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly.

Conformity

The opposite of individualism is **conformism**, a term used to describe the act of people trying to be the same. Over the centuries, many observers have noted that even in democracies, conformism is

common. Americans, for example, frequently watch the same shows on television and read the same books. This seems to conflict with the ideal of individualism but is nevertheless an important component of any civil society.

Unity and Diversity

Two interconnected ideals in American political culture are unity and diversity. **Unity** refers to Americans' support of the republic and democracy, even if they disagree with one another about policies. Politicians and other leaders frequently appeal to this sense of unity, especially during times of national crisis. The name of our country—the United States—emphasizes the importance of unity to our national political culture.

Example: In the aftermath of September 11th, President George W. Bush rallied the country by appealing to common feelings of patriotism. Leaders made similar appeals after the devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005.

Diversity refers to the fact that Americans have many different cultural traditions and hold a variety of values. Nearly all Americans descend from immigrants, and many of them take pride in their heritage and cultural history. Americans also hold diverse views and creeds.

Example: Many American cities hold parades and celebrations for holidays of different immigrant groups. Irish Americans, as well as others, celebrate St. Patrick's Day every year, whereas Columbus Day parades honor the contributions of Italian and Spanish Americans.

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is the view that we should embrace our diversity and learn about one another's cultures. Much of American culture derives from western European cultures (the British Isles in particular), which makes some other groups feel excluded. Learning about new cultures and respecting diversity have taken on new force in recent years. For many people, being American is about adhering to ideas and principles, not to a particular religious or ethnic identity. So one can be a patriot while still honoring one's ancestral traditions.

The American Dream

Nearly every group that has come to the United States has embraced the idea of the American dream, which, in turn, has different meanings for different people. Some immigrants escaped brutal regimes

and therefore pursue an American dream of living in freedom. Others subscribe to an American dream in which hard work leads to economic success.

American Ideals in Practice

Although Americans have always cherished the ideals of liberty, equality, democracy, individualism, unity, and diversity, the United States has not always lived up to them. Slavery, the mistreatment of Native Americans, and the failure to give women the right to vote for more than a century are the most glaring examples.

American Symbols

Americans have embraced a number of concrete symbols to stand for the abstract American ideals discussed in this chapter. The best example is the American flag, which we honor as a symbol of the United States. The soaring eagle is another significant American symbol that stands for freedom. In popular culture, the trio of mom, baseball, and apple pie encapsulates what many see as the core of American identity.

<http://www.sparknotes.com/us-government-and-politics/american-government/american-political-culture/section3/page/3/>