

Ten central values to the American way of life originally created in 1970 by the sociologist Robin Williams Jr. (as cited in Macionis, 2008):

1. **Equal opportunity.** People in the United States believe in not equality of condition but equality of opportunity. This means that society should provide everyone with the chance to get ahead according to individual talents and efforts.
2. **Individual achievement and personal success.** Our way of life encourages competition so that each person's rewards should reflect personal merit. A successful person is given the respect due a "winner."
3. **Material comfort.** Success in the United States generally means making money and enjoying what it will buy. Although people sometimes remark that "money won't buy happiness," most of us pursue wealth all the same.
4. **Activity and work.** Our heroes, from the golf champion Tiger Woods to the winners of television's *American Idol*, are "doers" who get the job done. Our culture values action over reflection and taking control of events over passively accepting fate.
5. **Practicality and efficiency.** We value the practical over the theoretical, "doing" over "dreaming." "Major in something that will help you get a job!" parents tell their college-age children.
6. **Progress.** We are an optimistic people who, despite waves of nostalgia, believe that the present is better than the past. We celebrate progress, viewing the "very latest" as the "very best."
7. **Science.** We expect scientists to solve problems and to improve our lives. We believe that we are rational people, which probably explains our cultural tendency (especially among men) to devalue emotion and intuition as sources of knowledge.
8. **Democracy and free enterprise.** Members of our society recognize numerous individual rights that governments should not take away. We believe that a just political system is based on free elections in which adults select government leaders and on an economy that responds to the choices of individual consumers.
9. **Freedom.** We favor individual initiative over collective conformity. While we know that everyone has responsibilities to others, we believe that people should be free to pursue their personal goals.
10. **Racism and group superiority.** Despite strong ideas about individualism and freedom, most people in the United States still judge others according to gender, race, ethnicity, and social class. In general, U.S. culture values males over females, whites over people of color, people with northwestern European backgrounds over those whose ancestors came from other parts of the world, and rich over poor. Although we describe ourselves as a nation of equals, there is little doubt that some of us are "more equal" than others.

Reference:

Macionis, J. (2008). *Society: The Basics* [VitalSource bookshelf version]. Retrieved from <http://online.vitalsource.com/books/0558563139/id/ch02bx13>