



### **AMERICAN VALUES: Examples from the Ordinary American Lifestyle**

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We often write and talk in length about the achievements gained in the economy, democracy and education in the United States. However, we rarely mention the lifestyle, inter-human relationships, and culture of ordinary Americans. In Azerbaijan, very often, there are wrong perceptions about the daily relationship and contacts that exist among Americans. We make comments like, "American culture is monotonous and incomplete", "in America, they shoot each other in the streets", "the level of education and order in American high schools are lower than those here" and etc. Each of you may have heard at least one of these stereotypes sometime. If some of these stereotypes appear from American movies that we watch so admiringly, the other comes from modest and self-critical Americans that we meet and chat with.

But from your first days in America, you realize that most of these stereotypes are just good for the movies and invented by Americans to amuse themselves, who are often so isolated from daily social problems. An encounter with the lifestyle in the Mid-Western states in particular, a large part of the United States, would instantly change for good your pre-made perception about America.

In America, you will notice that no one stares at you either when you are walking in the streets or waiting at the bus station. If your eyes accidentally cross with someone else, all you will see in return would be a big smile. Even if you are new to the United States, very soon, you start doing the same. One gets an impression as if there is a competition on who is more polite. There is no way out and very shortly you start believe strongly in the sincerity of these smiles. In the stores, buyers get

special kindness and attention from the sellers. Regardless of what you have put on and how you look that day, shopkeepers will tolerate all your caprices. People talk to you in the bus stops, stores and offices as if they know you for long time. If they see you with your child, love and kindness to you multiplies. Children mean everything for Americans.

The last “unwritten law” shows itself in American elementary and secondary schools too. Education there is without a doubt a much higher level than what we inherited from the Soviets. In America, the teacher does not treat a child as someone who needs to be taught. In contrast, the teacher sees the student as someone with an already established personality and education, and shows his/her full respect to this student. Children from day one are not taught to learn by rote. Students get broad information about the environment, nature, and wildlife. For their Geography class some schools invite international students in the town to give lectures to the schoolchildren about their native countries and cultures. The education system does its best to raise school children’s interest in science. In the same time, elementary, secondary and high school teachers are very strict and demanding. It is very rare that students would make noise or arrive at school wearing inappropriate clothing.

Americans of the Mid-West also express extraordinary hospitality. In this country, once they find out that you are from a different country you are automatically invited to someone’s house. In order to please you, the table will be full of various goodies, and your dietary restrictions will be surely respected around this table. For example, if they find out that you are a Muslim, they will not serve pork and alcohol, or at least warn you in advance that such products may appear on table and where to be cautious. And if they find out that you do not drink alcohol, they would never insist that you do the opposite...

Your day out in American house will not be limited to good food only. The feast will continue with good old stories being told and with interesting parallels being brought, similarities and differences of your respective countries. And it is here that you suddenly discover hidden talents of your hosts. You find out that the man of the house plays the violin very well, is part of the symphonic orchestra in the town and next thing he does is grab the musical instrument and perform something for you. At another time and house, the host can operate a small airplane and seriously invites you to join him next time he takes off. But for now, offers you a ride in his small rowboat in the small lake in front of his house.

Women in America have significant freedom and equality and this process is always in progress. Each person in America knows that women’s rights are protected by the state. Regardless of his position in the society, every man is obliged to observe these rights at work, home and basically everywhere. Otherwise, harsh laws are awaiting him.

Americans do not give up learning even at their senior years. The author of these lines was asked numerous times to deliver presentations on history, geography and politics of Azerbaijan in front of such silver-aged Americans. Some of them, often with moving difficulties have not stopped amazing me with their sharp minds. They ask very good questions.

Some may wonder: - "What are the secrets of America's progress not only in science and high technologies, but also in good inter-human character and relationships?" Some may argue that it all comes from the well-being of the majority of Americans. However, let's agree that there are enough well-to-do people in Azerbaijan and with few exceptions, none of them are willing to take some social responsibility as most of Americans do almost on daily basis. For example, none of us is in a hurry to paint the social building's inner walls or take lead in charity campaign that aims gathering clothing for the needy. A rich Azeri driving a very expensive car would not put his brakes on and yield the road to a pedestrian on the zebra (in the crosswalk) as every American would do in the Mid-West.

To be honest, I am not so sure whether these positive characteristics of Americans come from their obedience to the rule of law or their European-origin and human-centered religious and social values. Maybe both play a role. However one thing can be said for sure: If you are looking for the reasons why the U.S. is so successful in the global arena in numerous areas, you can find them laying on the shoulders of ordinary Americans, to be precise, in their great hearts, endless hospitality, their mercy to the vulnerable, and respect for laws and human beings. These traditions and values are not the same used in the rhetoric of some politicians, but practical and measurable indicators of success. Maybe there is some lesson here for some Azeris who are rapidly losing the similar traditions and values they once used to have.

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