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**the tea party and
the great frontier**

INTRODUCTION

Back to the beginning. Where are you from? Today there are 281,421,906 people in the USA¹ and most of them can trace their family origins to another country. With the exception of American Indians, Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Alaskan natives, we are a nation of immigrants.

The attitudes and spirit, the hope and energy that propelled the first people to come, and that continue to entice people even now, are the foundations of the America we see today. A few words and phrases capture the essence of the country's spirit: Equality. Independence. Curiosity. Change is Good. New is Better. Hard work. Opportunity. In our lives, personal and professional, these words shape actions.

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

- ➔ The attitudes, not just the results of the actions of the country's founders are in evidence today.
- ➔ America, the Land of Opportunity, is also the Land of Variety. The origins of the population can be traced to all parts of the globe.
- ➔ Although the country can be considered young, with little history, it does have a history – one that influences the actions of its people today.
- ➔ There's no harm in trying. Americans embrace the idea that change can be a good thing and, even if things don't work out as you might wish, you can always have another go.

¹ US Census Bureau Quick Facts, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/36000.html>, printed 15/9/01

America for

Situation

Overheard in the corporate halls of Britain Plc: “It’s big, but so what, everyone speaks English, there’s that ‘special relationship’ with the UK, so it’s part hot and part cold, but how complicated can the market be?” The answer is – very complicated. With a rebellious history, a population representing the nations of the world, and an emphasis on independence, the American market can be segmented by age, sex, income, education, reading habits, even to blocks within zip codes! Complicated, segmented but still tied together by history and attitude.

Explanation

It’s a New World

The USA is often referred to as the “New World” and by contrast Europe stands as the “Old World”. The label “New World” is interpreted as a destination for a fresh start, an untouched place, one ready to accept everyone, a world that can be shaped in new ways, an implied promise. A place where you can realize your vision.

Although there are many today who would suggest that this time has past, that opportunities are limited, the actions of millions of others argue against this perspective. The continuing flow of immigrants suggests otherwise. (See Chapter 5 for a more detailed look at this

many remains the Land of Opportunity

topic.) While Americans may complain about reduced opportunities, people from other places have a different view. America for many remains the Land of Opportunity.

Who were they?

We think first of the settlers, the Pilgrims from the United Kingdom. America was, after all, a British colony. However, the founders represented a broader spectrum of Europeans: French, Irish, German and Spanish. Slavery brought people from Africa and the construction of the railroads drew workers from Asia. Although the majority of immigrants were Western Europeans, we count over 40 different countries as the original home of members of the US population.²

As people still do today, when they come to a new country, the early arrivals tended to settle in specific areas, with others from their country and culture. This created cities with concentrations of people from specific places, influencing the culture in each city. For example, Chicago drew people from Poland, Boston the Irish; New York is known for Italians and Puerto Ricans, and San Francisco for its Chinese community. The pattern continues today with Texas home to many from Mexico, Cubans living in Florida and California drawing from many countries in the Americas as well as being home to large

² Infoplease.com "Immigrants to the US by Country of Origin", <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0201398.html>, printed 17/11/01

Korean, Chinese and Vietnamese groups. You can analyze almost any US city and identify representatives of many nationalities, early arrivals and newcomers alike.

In some US cities architecture tells the story of their inhabitants' origins. The churches and buildings of Europe are reflected in the architecture of East Coast cities such as New York and Boston. Spain and Mexico are the inspiration for the West's distinctive missions and haciendas, and Louisiana shows the influence of France in the colours of its buildings and the famous ironwork balconies found in New Orleans. When an American visits London for the first time, the city looks familiar: "It's Boston!" or "It's New York!" they say, seldom stopping to acknowledge which city was first.

To understand what brought people to the US it is useful to look beyond their place of origin and consider their motivations and attitudes. One point of view is that the people who founded the US were explorers, adventurers, independent thinkers and risk takers. They risked everything, whatever they had, to start anew.

But, before we deify these people, it is worth noting that some were probably opportunists, thieves and misfits with nothing to lose, nothing to risk, by making the journey. They were revolutionaries focused on change, ready to use violence to achieve their ends. A management consultant has suggested that "they were the ones who, for whatever reason, couldn't fit in – some of them would be 'the best' and some would be 'the worst' (of their societies)".

However you view them, it is reasonable to hypothesize that there was a common tie. They were all willing to take a risk, to act upon their belief that changing their circumstances and their environment would bring about a better life for themselves and their families.

The US, the former colony, still has strong ties to the United Kingdom. It is often said we are "two countries separated by a

common language”.³ Traditions, history and more than 200 years of experience tie the two countries together. Today American Presidents acknowledge the connections by saying we have “a special relationship” between the two countries.

But not so widely recognized is that another country, one that has a somewhat tumultuous relationship with the US, played a critical role in US history. That country is France which provided both financial aid and philosophical support, during the American Revolution.

Today when the news is filled with stories of French farmers attacking McDonald’s it is hard to recall that early support. Overall the links to both countries remain strong not only from history and habit, but now through economics and institutions. The UK and France rank among the top ten US trading partners and all three are connected through treaties and membership in a multitude of institutions, including the United Nations, the WTO and NATO.

Independent and still young

The creation of the British Parliament in 1215 is often marked as the beginning of democratic traditions.⁴ In 1776, 461 years later, the Declaration of Independence was signed creating the United States which has come to be known as the Home of Democracy.

The country, the United States of America, with scarcely more than two centuries of history, is still young. Its present configuration – a total of 50 states and the District of Columbia – was completed with the addition of Hawaii in 1959, only some 40 odd years ago.

Contrast this with the longevity of England and France – two countries that can trace their culture to Roman times. As distinct

³ Attributed to George Bernard Shaw

⁴ Dean Foster, *The Global Etiquette Guide to Europe* (John Wiley & Sons, 2000): 12

nations, their histories date back to the eleventh and ninth centuries respectively, more than 1,000 years ago.

A Los Angeles based advertising executive, originally from the UK, likens the US to a teenager. He says the country has all the qualities of a young person: boundless optimism, vast energy, confidence, certainty that their opinions are correct, a sense of invincibility. The United States, which based on his description could be called a precocious youngster, thinks of itself as mature and wise, the leader of the free world.

The rebels and their tea party

Ask people what they remember about American history and many will tell you, it started with the Tea Party. They may not remember exactly where this happened, or the exact sequence of events, but they generally recall the idea of citizens throwing tea into the harbour as an act of rebellion against financial injustice.

Today one may argue that this was an act of urban protest no different than those targeted against globalization. But for American children learning the history of their country, this story is about freedom fighters, brave men, standing up for their rights.

Lost in history is the fact that this specific act was a protest against “taxation without representation”, only one element of a larger revolution seeking freedom and rights for each individual. Considered broadly, the American Revolution was a rebellion against traditional thinking and behaviour, against the formality and rigidity of existing society and institutions.

The new nation was created to be a land of freedom and opportunity for all, to give concrete form to the ideal that “all men are created equal”. Not only were people to be equal, they were to be free (with freedom defined broadly): to speak, to travel, to assemble, to bear arms, to be considered innocent until proven guilty. These philosophical concepts were codified in the Bill of Rights, further defined in the Constitution and have been the subject of debate, interpretation and legislation for the past 225 years.

History has been portrayed in many ways in many movies. For a clear statement of the idea of freedom of speech and responsibility, listen to Michael Douglas’s speech towards the end of *The American President*. It is a light-hearted movie while at the same time giving this powerful explanation of American democracy.

The American view of history

Americans tend to see their history as triumphant. We tamed a wilderness and created a dynamic, free society with endless opportunities. We are a “melting pot” with arms open to receive the newcomer.

Unfortunately, such a view tends to overlook the treatment of the Native Americans, the problems of slavery and of prejudice today. Americans fought a civil war (1860 to 1865) to end slavery. Slavery created the “separate but equal” relationship between whites and blacks, majority and minority. Although blacks were freed, they were still segregated in schools, in housing, in the marketplace. This division existed until the 1960s with the emergence of the Civil Rights movement. Then the battles that filled the nation were more often fought with words than with guns, with people marching in the

In America basic and business can

streets to press their demands. The goal was not to eliminate slavery but to end the concept of “separate but equal”, to bring full equality to all minorities as well as the descendants of the freed slaves.

But that was only part of the story of the decade. It was a time of great social unrest, of change, of slogans like “power to the people”, “make love not war”. America again rebelled against tradition and the existing definitions of roles for people and institutions.

According to David Brooks in his book *Bobos in Paradise*, “the experiences and authors of the 60s influenced the thinking of today’s business leaders”.⁵ Some of today’s advertising slogans echo those days and capture the attitudes that continue now – phrases like “Revolution not Evolution” and the famous Nike slogan “Just Do It”. We can hear the 1960s echo in people’s conversation when work is explained as “doing something you love, something meaningful”, not just “earning a living”.

When Americans shift their focus and think of history in terms of the world rather than their nation, they generally regard themselves as the guardians of the free world. Keepers of the flame of democracy.

⁵ David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise* (Simon & Schuster, 2000)

attitudes about work be traced back to the country's founders

The contributions of the Americans in World War I and World War II are widely documented and celebrated, in books, films, songs and stories. We were the saviours, the “good guys”. We’ve attempted to forget Vietnam and the way it divided the country and seldom discuss recent conflicts including the Gulf War and the war in Afghanistan.

Economically, the US sees itself as the leader, the superpower, although in the aftermath of 11 September 2001, Americans are being forced to recognize that this positive view of themselves is not shared by the entire world.

Business

In America basic attitudes about work and business can be traced back to the country’s founders. As a beginning, everyone came here for a change, a “fresh start” – embracing the idea that change has the potential to be good and that if matters didn’t work out as you wished at first, you could try again. In today’s society, a fresh start and change may mean a new job, a new city, a new marketing campaign, a new product, a company that you create.



BACKGROUND

An unspoken but critical element in the acceptance of this experimentation with new beginnings is the view that a failed attempt is merely a learning experience. If you try and something doesn't succeed as hoped, too bad, but "no harm done" and you should "put it behind you" as you "get on with it" (moving to the next idea). Failure, disappointment should not stop your efforts. Every school age child knows the saying: "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again."

Listen to the comments of two professional women from France when asked what surprised them about life in the United States: "Changing careers is okay. It's OK to fail and try again. Americans are so open, willing to experiment. It's okay to try something new even in your 40s. You can start a company or go back to school. People will help you and support you. If it doesn't work out that's fine too. No one thinks less of you. In fact, they will encourage you and help you to try again."

We often hear the expression "Protestant work ethic" to describe the American approach to work, the idea that work is important and one must be serious, focused, and above all, hard working. But Protestantism may have had a far wider impact, one that affects the entire world. According to Max Weber in the book *Culture Matters*, "Protestantism promoted the rise of modern capitalism by defining and sanctioning an ethic of everyday behaviour that was conducive to economic success."⁶ The idea that your success showed that you were leading a good life created an environment where it was acceptable, you could be proud of being a success in business. It was no longer your inherited title or wealth that marked your success – it was your own achievements resulting from your efforts.

⁶ Max Weber, "Culture Makes Almost All the Difference", *Culture Matters*, edited by Lawrence E. Harrison and Samuel P. Huntington (Basic Books, 2000): 11

So if you combine these concepts – change can be good, experimentation is approved of, hard work is valued, and achievement and success depend on individual effort and can be displayed – then you have the basis for the strong entrepreneurial attitudes that are fundamental to the US economy.

Is everyone alike and equal?

American society is varied and complex with such issues as age, education, income (yours, your family's), values, experience and location (rural, urban, suburban) influencing attitudes, employment and lifestyle.

Marketing companies study, dissect and discuss the American population looking for clues to values and resulting behaviours. Probably best known are the divisions by age: Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y. Less well known is the concept of lifestyle clusters that segment the population into groups such as New eco-topia, Old money flats, Kids & Cul-de-sacs and more.⁷ Each has its specific outlook but there are still values shared throughout the society.

Among those basic values is a generally shared view of America as a “classless” society where all are created equal. This is not entirely true. For example in the East and the South, the oldest parts of the country, there still exist “old families” and “old money” but there is not unified aristocracy, a titled elite where privilege is passed down through the generations. There are, however, varying levels of status. Today's elite is based on education and achievement. To quote David Brooks again, “genius and geniality” are replacing “noble birth and breeding”.⁸

⁷ Laura Tiffany, “If the Name Fits”, *Entrepreneur* magazine, March 2000, <http://www.entrepreneur.com>, printed 1/12/01

⁸ David Brooks: 14

Today's elite is

Whether this equality is technically true or not, it is important to acknowledge and respect this ideal during business dealings. Treat everyone with the same measure of respect and remember you cannot tell if the person in casual clothes is responsible for photocopying or negotiating contracts.

Moreover, Americans prefer not to acknowledge differences in status. For example, business cards with today's creative titles may not help sort out the hierarchy. Is the Master of Mischief a deal maker or not? Also they will seldom include a person's educational level. Your host may hold a doctorate in microbiology but you won't know that from their business card.

Another distinguishing feature of the US is the idea and the real possibility of being able to move within the society – to grow up poor and end up educated, wealthy and well regarded. Well known examples of this range from Abraham Lincoln to Bill Clinton. But it isn't just at the famous level that this possibility exists. It's seen in the person who moves from washing dishes in a restaurant kitchen to owning a restaurant, in the secretary who becomes president of her own company. People discover and create their own opportunities with headlines or without.

based on education and achievement

WORDS TO LIVE BY

- “” Mistakes are a part of life; you can't avoid them. All you can hope is that they won't be too expensive and you don't make the same mistake twice. **Lee Iacoca**
- “” Even a mistake may turn out to be the one thing necessary to a worthwhile achievement. **Henry Ford**
- “” I always tried to turn every disaster into an opportunity.
John D. Rockefeller
- “” This is America. You can do anything here. **Robert Edward (Ted) Turner**
- “” Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves, and, under a just God, cannot long retain it. **Abraham Lincoln**
- “” Only our individual faith in freedom can keep us free.
Dwight D. Eisenhower
- “” Freedom is not worth having if it does not connote freedom to err.
Mahatma Gandhi
- “” Freedom rings where opinions clash. **Adlai E. Stevenson**
- “” Those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom, must, like men, undergo the fatigues of supporting it. **Thomas Paine**