



U.S. Government

Core American Values

Name:

Section:

Score: ____/5

Directions: Look over the 12 American Core Values below as established by American Sociologist Robin Williams in 1965 (Summarized by Sociologist Henry Schissler) and answer the thought questions on the back of this paper.

1. *Individualism* (“Consistent Persistence”) Americans have traditionally prized success that comes from individual effort and initiative. They cherish the ideal that an individual can rise from the bottom of society to its very top. If someone fails to “get ahead,” Americans generally find fault with that individual, rather than with the social system for placing roadblocks in his or her path.
2. *Achievement and Success* (“Success Emphasis”) Americans place a high value on personal achievement, especially outdoing others. This value includes getting ahead at work and school, and attaining wealth, power, and prestige.
3. *Activity and Work* (“Work for Work’s Sake”) Americans expect people to work hard and to be busily engaged in some activity even when not at work.
4. *Efficiency and Practicality* Americans award high marks for getting things done efficiently. Even in everyday life, Americans consider it important to do things fast, and they constantly seek ways to increase efficiency.
5. *Science and Technology* Americans have a passion for applied science, for using science to control nature – to tame rivers and harness wind – and to develop new technology, from motorized scooters to talking computers.
6. *Progress* Americans expect rapid technological change. They believe that they should constantly build “more and better” gadgets that will help them move toward that vague goal called “progress.”
7. *Material Comfort* Americans expect a high level of material comfort. This comfort includes not only good nutrition, medical care, and housing, but also late-model cars and recreational playthings – from boats to computer games.
8. *Humanitarianism* Americans emphasize helpfulness, personal kindness, aid in mass disasters, and organized philanthropy.
9. *Freedom* This core value pervades U.S. life. It underscored the American Revolution, and Americans pride themselves on their personal freedom.
10. *Democracy* By this term, Americans refer to majority rule, to the right of everyone to express an opinion, and to representative government.
11. *Equality* It is impossible to understand Americans without being aware of the central role that the value of equality plays in their lives. Equality of opportunity has significantly influenced U.S. history and continues to mark relations between groups that make up U.S. society.
12. *Racism and Group Superiority* Although it contradicts freedom, democracy, and equality, Americans value some groups more than others and have done so throughout their history. The slaughter of Native Americans and the enslaving of Africans are the most notorious examples.

Thought Questions:

1. Choose one of Williams' core values that you believe should be eliminated as a core value. Explain why you believe it should be eliminated.
2. Come up with a core American value of your own and explain why you believe it should be considered a core value. (Even if it may not necessarily be as important now)
3. Which of Williams' core values do you hold to be most important? Explain why.
4. How does the idea of the American Core Values help understand the ideals of the United States' Government?