

***The Search For  
the American Character***

“What then is the American, this  
new man?”

*Letters from an American Farmer (1782)*

J. Hector St. John

- When one speaks of Character, probably the main concern is Culture.
- Culture is that which shapes us; it shapes our identity and influences our behavior. Culture is our “way of being,” more specifically, it refers to the shared language, beliefs, values, norms, behaviors, and material objects that are passed down from one generation to the next.[1]

- It is a widely known fact that the Diversity that is found in the American Community can be traced back to the colonial times where it wasn't only the English who constituted the majority but there was also an estimated number of settlers from other European countries (mainly western Europe).
- This paved the way for more diversity in future generations.

- A majority of the people during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century were born European but thought American. i.e: The variety of the people at that time was already creating a New Identity.
- Large scale immigration during the 19<sup>th</sup>C from Britain, Ireland, Germany and other parts of Central Europe as well as Scandinavia, and in the late decades of the same century people came from other parts of the world (Large waves of Chinese immigrants who came during the Industrial Revolution) .

- 20<sup>th</sup> Century America... a “Melting Pot”. (The term was first used in after it was used as a metaphor describing a fusion of nationalities, cultures and ethnicities in the 1908 play of the same name.)

- The United States received large various waves of immigrants from all parts of the world.
- Simply because, immigration was never so encouraged as it was in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century...
- UN Refugee Convention (1951)
- Immigration and Nationality Act 1952 / 1965
- Refugee Act (1980)

- During the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, both Immigration and Intermarriages contributed in the creation of the most diverse community on earth.
- Issues!...
- Many “White” Americans did not welcome minorities (especially those of African origins) to the mainstream culture.
- Many African-Americans refused to join the mainstream and create their own society, while a majority demanded equal rights to the White.



- Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century America was way different from what it used to be before.
- The society was more of a Liberal rather than a Conservative.
- The fusion between the different races and cultures was clear!
- Intermarriages became more tolerable.
- People did not ask much about one's origins.
- Racism issues did exist but not as they used to do before.
- People did not care where did they come from or where their parents were born?! Instead they favored to enjoy the fact that they are "American".

- Regional Variations!!
- New England, the Mid-Atlantic states, the Southern United States, the Midwestern United States and the Western United States.
- E.G.:
- the Left Coast... left-leaning political orientation and tendency towards social liberalism.
- Southern United States are informally called "the Bible Belt" due to socially conservative evangelical Protestantism.

- The Debate:
- Is America really a “Melting Pot”?
- One cannot deny the diversity the American society has today...but...
- The society or culture of the United States is merely a Western culture.
- For years Americans have bragged about their society which (according to them) any one is welcome to contribute with his/her cultural background and participate in the mainstream.

- But the fact is:
- Although it is said that minorities (mainly Blacks and Hispanic) have contributed in process of the creation of the American identity, but the what is more reasonable is the fact that they were absorbed by the White majority.

- There is clear proof that many Americans (especially the Whites) still have a problem dealing with Multiculturalism.
- Racism!
- Islamophobia!
- Hatred and Prejudice against other races!
- Although the U.S. has no official language, English is everyday used language.



**THE END**