

Why do you love America?

Written by
Friday, 10 July 2009 12:24

My son was confused. "Why does everyone hate America?" Sadly he wasn't referring to Iran or even France. He was talking about the other children in his class. Apparently during his 6th grade class discussions a great many of his classmates expressed hatred for their country. Not only did they blame America for everything that was wrong in the world and condemn this nation for its greed and materialism, a great many of them expressed a desire to live someplace else. They believed New Zealand or Canada would allow them the opportunity to grow up without the stain and humiliation of being an American.

Now I was confused. I suspect the sentiments expressed by these children were more reflective of their parents beliefs than they were of any deep thought by the children themselves. Yet I am puzzled by such vitriol coming from children (and parents) advantaged with more liberty and opportunity than any other people in the history of the world.

I am, however, not discouraged. I know that in spite of the inclination of his classmates (and their parents) the majority of Americans love their country and love being Americans. No offense to New Zealand, but I suspect there are only a small number of Americans aspiring to live as ex-pats in Auckland. The truth is that even those that are critical of America love her dearly.

In order to demonstrate my theory I have begun asking people – friends and strangers alike - what they love about America. As one might suspect liberty, freedom of speech, freedom to worship and capitalism peppered most answers, but some of the other things people have pointed to may surprise you.

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Among the terrific answers I received were the Grambling State University marching band, over-priced coffee, Thelonious Monk, South Beach, Times Square, Levi's, Sandra Bullock and The Cosby Show. (To that list I would add: Western films, Gene Autry & Randolph Scott, The Fighting Irish of Notre Dame, Count Basie and Parliament Funkadelic.)

A teenager from Ecuador was adamant that she loves America because it is orderly. People obey traffic laws, wait their turn in lines and generally follow the rules. (Poor girl has obviously never spent any time in Manhattan.) When she goes home to visit relatives people tend to drive when, where and as fast as they like, push and shove -- disorder is the rule.

My favorite response was from a man I met at a public service conference. He was emphatic: "What do I love about America? Tacos!"

It may be that this gentleman's answer comes closest to articulating what is truly great about America: The American people, like American cuisine, are an amalgamation of different cultures and traditions that, once on these shores, begin to blend together-borrowing from and lending to each other until they become the essence of that being known as the American. It is this phenomenon described in our national motto: E Pluribus Unum – out of many; one.

But it is not what we have in America that continues to lure people across our borders, it is what we believe.

Americans are the most idealistic people on the planet. By that I do not mean a belief in some squishy utopianism. I mean that Americans are still committed to making real the ideals articulated in the principles of our founding.

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It's a shame that some American children are being taught to despise their country; that is folly for which their parents will have to answer in the future. They are, however, decidedly in the minority. Most Americans love America not because she is perfect but because most Americans esteem liberty, believe in the promise of equality and maintain a regard for private property. I would love to hear what you love about America. Give it some thought over the 4th and let me hear from you.

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