

## **INTERVARSITY®**

### **The Cultural Contributions to North Americans of Different Cultural Groups**

## **Gifts from African American Culture**

**Improvisational Expression** – African American peoples have developed over the years unique artistic expressions of spontaneous personal artistry, e.g. jazz music and Black preaching styles. These styles are characterized by impromptu composition.

**Relational Community** – African American experiences have produced greatly enhanced relationships in community, with appreciation for diversity of roles. This has grown out of having roots in African ancestry with its communal traditions and the need for survival skills necessary in this country during and following slavery.

**Intellectual Gestalt** – African American culture has developed a keen ability to see the forest and not get lost in the trees or in other words an ability to see the overall picture of events, perspectives and artistic expressions.

**Nuanced Allegiances** – African American culture has a strong sense of loyalty to institutions and individuals even when those institutions and persons have been historically problematic. This allegiance is not without criticism or critique yet the very act of criticism is often a sign of commitment. In particular because of the strange relationship that African peoples have had on this continent, we have developed ways of understanding the evil in a system while still being able to see and affirm the strengths.

**Confrontational Nonviolence** – modern black culture since the 40's but particularly during the Civil Rights Movement understood the insights of Gandhi and traced back the Gandhian commitment of nonviolence to its roots in the Gospels. The civil rights movement was particularly creative in developing a Christian understanding of and response to injustice that emphasized agape love.

**Lamentations** – African American people have developed a unique ability to express pain in a way that releases and empowers one to continue living in hope despite setbacks, hurts and even tragedy.

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## **Gifts from Asian American Culture**

**Loyalty to family and group:** strong sense of standing up for family members and defending family (or Group) honor to others.

**Perseverance and hard work:** Despite the odds or the difficulty, one should persevere and accept the challenge without complaint. A strong work ethic is valued in which hard work and dedication to doing the best is synonymous with one's identity

**High value in education:** Intellectual development and educational achievement is highly regarded.

**Frugality:** The practice of making do with very little now, for a bigger gain in the future. Taking great pains to get what you pay for and to not pay more than something is worth.

**Group consensus:** is value as the decision making process, collective decision-making, collective responsibility and teamwork is stressed.

**Respect for authority / elder:** Those who are in positions of authority based on titles, roles, or even age are respected without question.

**Humbleness/Humility:** A spirit of deference or submission. Not being arrogant, not bragging. Hard work will be recognized and rewarded.

**Hospitality/respect for people:** Spirit of welcome towards guests and family often is expressed with sharing a meal or food.

**Education and financial standing:** Intellectual development and educational achievement and wealth are highly regarded.

**Baring pain stoically:** Control of emotions, self discipline and self-control is emphasized. One should only speak when spoken to. Speak only if one has something important to say. Have inner stamina/strength to tolerate crises. Be a solid performer and not show any emotions.

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## Gifts from European American Culture

[Note: Many of these are rooted in a Christian world and life view, and distinguishing what is Christian from what is 'European' is very difficult, though by no means are the two synonymous. And, of course, sin, including racism, has profoundly distorted the creative and redemptive value of each of these, as it does in every culture.]

**Pioneering Spirit** – European Americans have used this spirit of exploration to “boldly go where no one has gone before.” Because we can move alone into new communities fairly easily, we have contributed much to world missions.

**Immersion in Nature** - European Americans love the great outdoors as a community. Often when we want to get back to our roots, it means that we get out in nature. What other group would camp in the rain, jump into freezing cold water or take a jeep through the mud?

**Organization** – Connected to our pioneering spirit, we have the ability to organize communities and create structure where there was none before. With these abilities, we have set up much of the educational, legal, business, medical and government systems that we live under in this country (and in many places around the world).

**Valuing the Mind** – European Americans place a special emphasis on the mind. We challenge people to think deeply and logically about most things and to act on rational bases, and we often love hobbies that will stretch our minds like reading, doing cross-word puzzles or solving riddles. We love to use newly discovered words. (Some of us may even page through a dictionary or encyclopedia for fun!)

**Systematic Theology and Scientific Inquiry** are two contributions that manifest our bent towards a pioneering spirit, intellectual curiosity and systematizing.

**Individualism** – European Americans value the individual over groups. Positively, this means that we often call people to personal responsibility and initiative-taking, moving them away from passive reliance or dependence on others. We can stand up against group pressure and when we worship as a community it is still also “me and God.”

**Work Ethic** – If you ask a European American, “How was your day?” they will often answer with what they have accomplished throughout that day. Usually we don’t mind long hours or hard physical labor, and it actually energizes some of us to “get our hands dirty.” We usually consider it a good day of we have crossed off a lot on our “to do” lists.

**Time Consciousness** – We have a lot we want to accomplish and only so much time in which to do it. This means that most of us appreciate when people are on time to meet with us and activities that begin and end when they are supposed to. We try to be on schedule to respect and honor other people and their other commitments.

**Hymns and Classical Music** – Although many hymns and classical pieces were produced in Europe, they have come with us to the US. Many of us listen to classical music to relax and worship with hymns in church. In our ethnic group, hymns are the testimonies of our people to God’s presence, truth and faithfulness. We love to preserve their stories.

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## **Gifts from Hispanic American Culture**

### **Hospitality/Welcoming**

- o Warmth
- o Generosity

### **Compassion**

- o Caring for people
- o Our big hearts

### **Community/family**

- o Love for family
- o Care for neighbor
- o "Familia"
- o relationships & affection
- o used to build trust and to influence
- o support
- o Inclusive-anyone can be part of family-we're kind to outsiders
- o Loyalty

### **Passion**

- o For God
- o Zeal
- o Effort

### **Music**

- o Desires to see spread to more of our Churches
- o "The rhythm is gonna get you!"

### **Diversity**

- o Needs to be developed as a strength

### **Strength and perseverance**

- o Committed/commitment
- o Hardworking
- o Very involved in meeting needs
- o Loyalty

### **Celebration and Rest**

- o We know how to chill and celebrate
- o "Celebrate good times, come on!"-basic celebration

### **Our Spirituality**

- o Evidence that God has been at work in our people
- o At the basic level, we believe...

### **Call to Mission (missions as in "world missions", not necessarily purely evangelism)**

- o Cross-cultural

### **Food**

- o ¿Need we say more?

### **Social transformation**

- o wanting to see change

*compiled by Sandra Van Opstal – March 2003*

## Gifts from Native American Culture

This question is complex because Native peoples cannot be conflated – “lumped together”. There are hundreds of people groups, who had different structures (religious, social, etc.) So any comments require a great deal of specificity.

**Here are a few examples** (some specific, some general):

- How **the Iroquois confederacy** shaped the American concept of democracy (quite different than the British governmental structure, or even than the earliest form of the class-based American one)—this is a famous example. Note that other Native peoples were governed differently. However, there are some common threads of **lack of hierarchy**, which is currently a very American trait.
- **Ascribing status for women** (vs. the European and early American laws, whereby women could not own property, vote, study religion, preach or have any formal leadership in the church, etc). Carol Berkin explores the gender/Native questions in a section of her book, First Generations: Women in Colonial America. Aside from her work, you can see this thread of influence by reading some of the "captivity narratives" of European women who lived among Native peoples. Even those who were forcibly removed often chose to stay.
- Our current American idea of **"freedom"** has links with Native cultures. Before first contact (between European explorers/settlers and Native peoples/cultures), European ideas of "freedom" were quite different. Modern or postmodern Americans would hardly recognize those early ideas.
- The value of **holism & the integration of life**—common to Native Americans and most indigenous peoples. This is much closer to Hebraic thinking, and to Biblical teaching, than our church's dualism. Along with this one could add the Native **appreciation for and understanding of nature**.
- **Food**. About half the world's current food groups have their origin in North America and were in some way harvested or domesticated by Native Americans.
- **Medicine**—traditional healing and the **use of plants and herbs**. This is not well documented and is, admittedly, mixed in with some strange spiritual ideas; yet, Native peoples have contributed in this area.