

**Fast Food.** The fast food industry has had an important influence on what and how Americans eat. McDonald's is the leader in this industry. It is now known throughout the world. McDonald's has made the American hamburger famous. One reason is that in every McDonald's the food is exactly the same and is cooked in exactly the same way. In addition to the nationally known burger chains (McDonald's, Burger King, and Wendy's), other famous fast food restaurants specialize in chicken (KFC), Mexican food (Taco Bell), donuts (Dunkin' Donuts), and pizza (Pizza Hut, Domino's, Little Caesar's).

**Local Options.** Although the fast food industry has restaurants in every American town, there are also local and regional differences in American food that you should look for wherever you live or travel. The differences and specialties are too numerous to mention in this small book, but you can find them. Ask, look, and explore.



## 1.3 Restaurants

**Family Restaurants.** Fast food restaurants are the same everywhere in the United States. Local restaurants offer more variety. Here are some general types to look for. Family restaurants are good places to bring children. The food is not very expensive and is probably typically middle-class American. These restaurants may not serve alcohol, so if you like a glass of wine or beer with your meal, ask before you sit down (see section 1.4).

**Cafeterias.** In cafeterias you walk through a line, choose your food, put it on a tray, pay at the end of the line, and carry your food to an empty table. The food is usually inexpensive, and it is ready to eat. Cafeterias are commonly found at schools.

**Other informal places to eat** are called cafes, coffee shops, sandwich shops, delis (a kind of sandwich shop), diners, and truck stops. While driving along America's highways, you may find it interesting to stop at a truck stop and listen to the conversations of the long-distance truck drivers.

**Steak houses and seafood restaurants** are often more formal and expensive, but they are very common.

Here are a few things you should know about American restaurants:

- Most restaurants do not allow smoking. This varies in different cities and states. Ask before you smoke.
- Many restaurants post menus in the window so you can see the prices before you enter. If they do not, it is acceptable to enter the restaurant and ask for a menu before you sit down, If it is too expensive, it is OK to leave.
- At many restaurants, lunch is less expensive than dinner.
- You can often save money on breakfast by ordering "specials."
- Bread and butter and water are usually served free with the meal.
- If you do not eat all your food you may ask for a "doggie bag." The waiter will put your uneaten food in a bag, and you can take it home.
- To ask for the check, signal the waiter with your eyes or a raised hand. If that doesn't work, you can say, "Excuse me," quietly when the waiter comes near you. Then say, "May we have the check, please?"
- The charge for service, called "the tip," is usually not included in your restaurant bill, usually called "the check." You may ask if the tip is included.
- You must calculate the tip. The normal amount is 15% to 20%. If the service is poor, you may leave less. Waiters are usually paid a low wage, and they need their tips to live on.



## BASIC INFORMATION

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- There is usually a meals tax added to your restaurant bill. The amount varies from state to state.
- Waiters or servers will be both men and women.
- In some restaurants, waiters have helpers called bus boys. They set tables, bring bread and water, and clear away used plates, but they cannot take orders.

**Restaurant Customs.** It is common in the United States to find a sign saying “PLEASE WAIT TO BE SEATED” when you enter a restaurant. This means you have to wait near the sign. Someone will come to show you to your seat. The wait is usually not very long. If the restaurant is crowded, you may be told there will be a wait. They will ask for your name. Then you will be called by name when there is a place for you. Before giving your name, ask how long the wait will be. You don’t have to stay. If the restaurant is not crowded, you may see a sign that says, “PLEASE SEAT YOURSELF.”

In restaurants, you should be prepared to answer some questions. Here is a list:

- *How many in your party (group)?*
- *Would you like something to drink before you order?*
- *(At breakfast) How do you want your eggs? (soft-boiled, scrambled, poached, fried either sunny-side-up or over-easy, or in an omelet)*
- *What kind of toast do you want? (white, wheat, or rye)*
- *What kind of dressing do you want (for your salad)? (see section 1.2)*
- *How do you want your steak? (rare, medium, or well done)*
- *Baked, mashed, or fries? (potato)*
- *Would you like some dessert?*
- *Regular or decaf (coffee)?*
- *Do you want your coffee black or with cream and sugar?*
- *(In fast food restaurants) Is that for here or to go?*
- *How’s everything? Is everything all right? (Waiters usually ask this to see if you need anything and if your food is OK.)*
- *How is everything? Are you still working on it? (Are you still eating?)*

**Ethnic Restaurants.** In large cities you can find a wide variety of ethnic restaurants. In small towns you may also find some special ethnic restaurants, depending on the nature of the local population. If there are Thais or Polish people in the community, you may find a Thai or Polish restaurant. All over the United States, from big cities to small towns, you will find Chinese, Italian, and Mexican restaurants. Indian, Japanese, French, and German are also common in some parts of the country.

**Counters and Bars.** Some restaurants have a counter at which customers can sit and eat. Many other restaurants have a bar at which customers can sit while drinking alcohol. There are almost always bottles of alcohol on shelves on the wall behind the bartender at a bar. Often it is possible to get food with alcohol at a bar. Children may always sit at a counter where only food is served, but in most of the country it is not appropriate for children to sit at a bar. Some places specialize in serving locally made beer (craft beer). These may be called breweries, pubs, or brewpubs, and yet they are appropriate for children who sit with adults at a table. However, bars, pubs, or breweries which are mostly for drinking alcohol will usually not allow children to enter, and women who are alone may want to avoid them.

## 1.4 Drinking and Smoking Laws

**Driving Laws.** There is a law in the United States that prohibits people under the age of 21 from drinking or buying any alcoholic beverage (“drink”). When you buy or order an alcoholic drink, you may be asked to show proof of your age. You must be 21 or over. You will need a photo-ID (identification card), such as a passport or a driver’s license. You will not be allowed in bars and discotheques if you are under 21. You may be stopped at the entrance and asked to show your ID. Bar owners can lose their license to serve alcoholic beverages if they serve alcohol to minors (people below the legal drinking age).

You should also be aware that there are very strict laws against drinking just before or while driving a car. In some places it is illegal to have an open can or bottle of alcohol in a car.

## 2.2 Names and Titles

**Titles** based on social class are not used in the United States. Some titles based on occupation, such as **Ambassador, Senator, Governor, Father, Rabbi,** and **Imam,** are used. Other occupations that usually carry titles are: court judge, military officer, and medical or academic doctor. Individuals in other occupations are usually referred to with **Mr.** (“mister”) and **Ms** (pronounced “mizz”) followed by the last or family name. You will hear the older titles **Miss** for unmarried women and **Mrs.** (“missiz”) for married women, but most professional women usually prefer Ms. Listen. If someone is introduced as Reverend, Professor, or Miss, use that title.

Many people do not like to use titles and last names. If a person is introduced to you as “Doctor Johnson,” do not be surprised if they say “Call me Bob.” In this case, you will be too formal if you continue to say “Doctor Johnson.”

As a general rule, young people should address older people as Mr., Ms, Miss, or Mrs., or a title. This is polite. It is quite normal to say, “Hello, Mrs. Brown” but not “Hello, Mrs.” Using occupation titles alone is generally OK – “Hello, Doctor.”

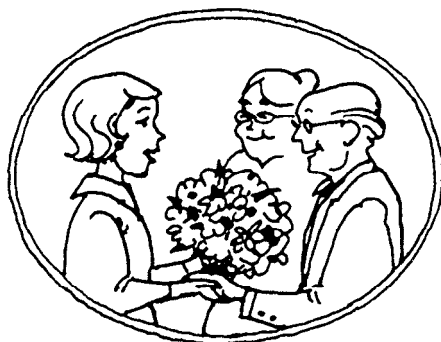
## 2.3 Conversation Topics

**Questions.** Americans often ask a lot of questions when they first meet someone, and some of these questions may seem quite personal to you. When an American does this, they are only looking for a common ground for building a relationship. Perhaps you will discover similar interests or abilities which can then be used as a basis for friendship.

**Topics to Avoid.** Although Americans ask a lot of questions, until you know a person well, there are some topics that you should avoid in conversation: the person’s age and financial status, the cost of the person’s clothes or personal belongings, their personal religious beliefs, and their love (or sex) life.

## 2.4 Friendship

Americans are open and friendly to newcomers. Perhaps this is because they are very mobile, and they have learned to make new friends quickly. This easy friendliness does not mean, however, that they will try to develop a long and deep friendship with you. This kind of relationship takes time in the United States, as it does anywhere. Remember, people often move from one town to another, so it is not easy for them to develop long-lasting friendships.



## 2.5 Invitations

**Guest Status.** Americans will quickly and easily invite strangers into their homes. You will find that you are treated as “one of the family” almost immediately after you arrive. Do not be surprised at American informality. It is quite common. Your hosts will probably not give you very special guest status. You should “make yourself at home” with them. If you are invited to a home for a meal or a party, you can ask, “*Can I bring anything?*” If you are invited for a stay of one night or more, then it is appropriate to bring a small gift – flowers, candy, or some souvenir from your own country.

**Written Invitation.** If you receive a written invitation, it is important to respond to it as soon as possible. Some invitations will have **R.S.V.P.** or “Please reply” written at the bottom, and these must have a reply. If a telephone number is given, then it is polite to call and accept or decline the invitation. If there is no

phone number, then a written note is adequate. If you receive an invitation over the telephone, make sure that you have correctly understood the date, time, and location. And if for some reason you should realize later that you cannot attend, then be sure to telephone to tell the person inviting you that you will not be there, and explain the reason why.

## 2.6 Personal Space and Privacy

**Touching.** These notes on personal space are very general. Customs vary in different parts of the country and with ethnic groups. However, in general, Americans don't touch each other very much in public. Touching between two people of the same sex is not common. (Touching between two men is sometimes considered a sign of homosexuality.) Touching between people of different sex is more common, especially if they are young lovers. You may see young men and women holding hands, embracing, and even kissing in public. In the past, this kind of open touching was considered very impolite. But times are changing, and nowadays people are more likely to touch and show affection in public. In fact, it isn't unusual to hug someone if you have not seen them in a long time, or if they or you are going away.



**Gestures.** In conversations, Americans stand about 2 to 3 feet apart and often use a lot of gestures. Some gestures involve physical contact. Sympathy is shown by putting a hand on another person's shoulder. Touching the other person's hand or arm shows support, agreement, or thanks.

**Privacy.** Americans are not especially private people. They leave the doors to their offices open, and often neighboring homes are not separated by fences or walls. It is also rare to find closed doors in homes. The doors to bathrooms are generally left open except when the room is in use. Nevertheless, people are concerned about their privacy when they deal with business and the government, particularly online. They do not want personal information shared by these agencies.



## 2.7 “On Time”

Being “on time” is important in the United States. A few guidelines are given here.

**For a Dinner Invitation.** When you are invited for a meal, you should arrive within 5 to 15 minutes of the time specified in the invitation. Do not arrive earlier, because people usually do their own cooking, and they may be working until the last minute to get things ready for you. If you are going to be late, it is polite to call and inform the people who have invited you. Then they can prepare the meal according to the time you will actually arrive.

**At Parties.** When you are invited to a party, you can arrive up to half an hour “late.” For cocktail parties and receptions, a time period is usually specified during which you are expected to arrive and leave. You may arrive at any time during that period, but remember that you are also expected to leave by the ending time indicated.

**At Public Events.** For movies and theater productions, you will want to arrive at least 10 minutes ahead of time to get your ticket/program and be seated. You should also be at least 10 minutes early for weddings, funerals, lectures, and sports events.

**For business** appointments, you should arrive exactly on time or a few minutes before your appointment. If the person you are seeing is busy, they may keep you waiting, but you should still be on time.



## 2.8 Silence

Many Americans are uncomfortable with silence when they are with another person. When there is silence in a conversation, they may start talking to stop the silence. Students often study with music playing in the background, and people working around the house will often have the television or radio on “to keep them company.”

If you are silent in a conversation or a gathering for a long time, Americans will try to “draw you out” (get you to talk) and may even ask if you are all right or if there is anything they can do to help you. One important note: Americans may remain silent when you say something they don’t agree with because they feel uncomfortable disagreeing with someone they don’t know well.

## 2.9 Equality

**Equality.** The concept of equality is extremely important in the United States. Americans generally say that all people are born with equal rights, regardless of social, economic, racial, ethnic, or gender differences. They expect to have an equal opportunity to achieve personal and professional goals. Americans can become very angry if they think they are not being given an equal opportunity to compete or improve their lives. Fair government and equal protection by law are very important. Americans may also become angry at people who expect special favors or treatment. When they think someone is not being fair or is looking for special treatment, they are likely to say, “Who do you think you are?” They also get angry at people who will not wait for their turn.

**Social and class differences** exist in the United States, of course, and there are many inequalities in everyday life. Most people are aware of these inequalities, but they would rather think that the United States is a country where, to quote the Declaration of Independence, “all men are created equal” and have certain rights, and “among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”



## 2.10 Independence

**Independence and self-reliance** are important personal values for Americans. This means that people believe they are responsible for their own happiness and future, and that they should not depend on others to make them happy and successful. This does not mean that they do not work together or help one another or cooperate. It means that each person is responsible for their own life.

**Individualism** is seen in many aspects of American life. For example, the great American hero, the mythical cowboy, is a strong, independent individual. The emphasis on individualism begins early. Children are encouraged to develop and express their own opinions and interests, particularly in school. In family life, children are often given household responsibilities at an early age. Teenagers are expected to find summer jobs when they are not in school. And American young people often leave home early to live “on their own.”

## 2.11 Eating Customs

**Knife and Fork.** Americans eat with the fork in the right hand, or if they are left handed, in the left hand. The other hand is usually in the lap. When cutting, they hold the knife in the right hand and the fork in the left. After cutting, the knife is placed on the edge of the plate and the fork is shifted to the right hand for eating.

## COUNTRY FACTS

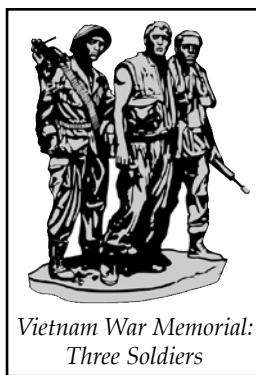
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**The Cold War.** Internationally, the Soviet Union had also won WWII, but it had suffered terribly. To strengthen his country, Stalin, its leader, was determined to take over as much of the world as possible for Communism. As the war ended, the U.S. and its new allies, NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and Japan, began the long competition with the Soviet Union and other communist countries called the Cold War. Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister, said that an "Iron Curtain" came down across Europe, and he spoke of the "balance of terror," the fear of the atom and hydrogen bombs, that the Americans and Russians developed, kept the major powers from starting WWII. The Cold War became an "arms race" and a long series of regional wars.

**The Arms Race.** The cost of the arms race was very great. The stockpiles of weapons that could kill everything on Earth, even if they were used by mistake, cost both sides money that should have been used in productive ways. The race was slowed by "arms control treaties," but it continued to weaken all the countries involved.

**The Korean War.** The first of the "proxy wars" was the Korean War between South Korea, aided by the United Nations forces led by the U.S., and North Korea, aided by Russia's communist ally, "Red" China. After three years of suffering (1950-1953), the war ended with no gain of land on either side.

**The Vietnam War.** Then came the long civil war in Vietnam and the rest of Southeast Asia. The U.S. was in direct combat from 1965 until 1973. The war poisoned the land and the lives of most of the people who fought and of those civilians who just lived through it. The United States left without winning, and the North Vietnamese eventually took over the South in 1975. But no one really won. The people of the whole region (particularly Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) were left an impoverished and brutalized world. Then the U.S. and the U.N. watched as a communist government in Cambodia killed millions of its own people.



**The Collapse of the U.S.S.R.** The Cold War continued. The U.S. became involved in a number of other civil wars and struggles around the world, usually with support from the U.N. The U.S.S.R., in an attempt to gain control of a neighboring Islamic country, Afghanistan, took the side of a Marxist government against Islamic resistance in another civil war. The U.S. and U.N. didn't fight directly, but supported the anti-communist mujahideen. After ten years (1979-1989), the Russians finally withdrew without winning. The loss of the war, the cost of the

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arms race, a steep drop in oil income, and failed domestic reforms contributed to the gradual collapse of the Soviet government between 1985 and 1991 – the U.S.S.R. broke up into independent countries. America had survived the Cold War and was left the world's strongest military and economic "superpower." But there were costs.

**Social Change.** American history during the long Cold War was characterized by continuous social change brought about through public protest on various issues. Some major issues have been: the civil rights movement, aimed at gaining equality for African Americans; the women's liberation movement; protests against American involvement in the Vietnam War; the gay rights movement (for equal rights for homosexuals); various movements against both military and industrial uses of nuclear power; and most recently, a growing awareness of the pollution and destruction of the environment. Young people were often behind these movements, and they created a "counter culture" that influenced politics but also style, music, morality, and the American language.

**The Rich-Poor Gap.** During the twelve-year Ronald Reagan-George Bush administration, starting in the 1980s and increasing through the Bill Clinton and early George W. Bush years, the nation and the international economy enjoyed growth. Among other policies, the growth of free trade on a worldwide basis brought greater prosperity to many people. During the same time, however, the United States and other leading industrialized nations made little effort to solve the problem of increasing poverty. The "gap" between rich and poor nations and individuals continued to increase.

**Terrorism.** This problem stimulated social unrest and popular protests against global free trade and giant international corporations in many parts of the world. "America" became a symbol and focus for these protests. And widespread unhappiness over economic, political, social, and religious conditions stimulated the growth of terrorism. It occurred in many parts of the world. On 9/11/2001, terrorism finally struck the United States with the infamous attacks on New York's World Trade Towers and the Pentagon. The U.S. government responded with the invasion of Afghanistan and soon after that with the very controversial invasion of Iraq. By 2010, the war in Afghanistan had become the longest war in U.S. history.

**The World Wide "Bubble."** In 2007-2008 the era of prosperity ended. The world economy began the greatest collapse since the 1930s. In the U.S. there were many causes: the cost of the Middle Eastern wars; policies that stimulated growth by deregulating most industries; the Federal Government spending money without raising taxes, thus greatly increasing the national debt and spending borrowed money while cutting taxes for the richest Americans. The short-term bubble of

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**Hudson River School** (1820–1850). Artists in this school portrayed American forests, rivers, and mountains in romantic scenes. In the twentieth century, a group of regional painters, sometimes called anti-modernists, tried to portray the strength and energy of rural America. Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri was one of the most successful artists of the 1930s.

**Art Museums.** There are over 7,000 art museums in the United States. Many of these museums have special collections of American art. The most important collections can be seen in the Los Angeles County Museum, the Chicago Art Institute, the Butler Institute in Youngstown, Ohio, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., and, in New York City, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art.



*Louis Armstrong  
(1901-1971)  
– aka Satchmo*

**Music and the African American Influence.** The African American experience has been the most important influence on music in America. In the nineteenth century, African Americans developed religious songs called spirituals. These choral songs, based on African call-and-response patterns, led to a variety of musical forms, from gospel music to blues and jazz. The jazz of African Americans is a unique contribution to the music of the contemporary world, from pop to rock to classical music.

**The Cinema and Skyscraper.** Throughout the twentieth century, American writers, musicians, dancers, painters, sculptors, craftsmen, and architects continued to find ways to express both the diversity and the unity of the American experience. Two art forms stand out

among others: the cinema and the skyscraper. The cinema, popularly called the movies, along with its cousin, television, dominates mass entertainment worldwide. The skyscraper dominates the skyline of America's cities as a symbol of America as the most powerful country in the world. As a symbol, the skyscrapers of the World Trade Center in New York City became the target of terrorism.

### 3.11 Technology and Change

The United States has been profoundly shaped and changed by technological developments, as has the rest of the world.

**The Railroad.** In the 19th century, the development of the railroad was a significant factor in the development of the continent. In 1869, the east and west coasts were linked by an intercontinental railway. From that time on, more and more Americans looked to the "Golden West" as a new frontier. The lives of the Native Americans of the West were changed forever.

**Electrification.** Late in the 19th century, Thomas Edison invented the light bulb. The day no longer ended with sunset, and the resulting electrification of the country intensified the great industrial revolution of the 19th century. The American family, and especially American women, began to enjoy dozens of labor-saving devices such as the electric refrigerator and the dishwasher.

**The Telephone.** In 1876 Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone, and instant communication over distance became part of everyday life in the 20th century. The cell phone of the 21st century expands telephone usage to anywhere, any time.

**The Auto and the Airplane.** Possibly the most profound development of the 20th century was Henry Ford's mass production of the **automobile** in 1908. This caused the roads of America to be developed, culminating in the Interstate Highway System. Cities changed as suburbs grew. The trucking industry replaced the railroad in importance. The auto industry of Detroit became a significant part of the American economy. And the