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Worldbuilding Ep. 013: Setting Part Two, Creating Cultural Attributes

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Show Corrections

Since this show first aired, I received a comment in the forum stating that I made a few errors in translating ideas from the Peace Corps website. First, “Attitude Towards Family” should be “Attitude Towards Formality” (although I think both could be useful in defining a culture). Secondly, I left out “Concept of Face,” which would make this a list of 14 attributes rather than 13. [For more information, go directly to these note on the Peace Corps website.](#)

Worldbuilding Episode 013 Show Notes

Note: in the podcast, I mention that there are 14 cultural attributes; well, I guess there are only 13. Sorry for the inconsistency. When looking at these attributes, consider how

your invented or researched culture views the following (and why):

1. Attitude Towards Age
2. Concept of Fate and Destiny
3. View of Human Nature
4. Attitude Towards Change
5. Attitude Towards Taking Risks
6. Concept of Suffering and Misfortune
7. Source of Self Esteem / Self Worth
8. Concept of Equality

9. Attitude Towards Formality
10. Degree of Realism
11. Attitude Towards Doing
12. View of the Natural World
13. Concept of Time

Here is an example for American culture:

Attitude Towards Age

Americans do not really value age for two basic reasons:

1. Americans value accomplishments and getting things done. The older you are, the less you are perceived to be able to get things done.
2. Americans value “newness.” Older Americans are seen as not being “with it.” They may be less likely, and less eager, to adopt something new than younger generations.

Concept of Fate and Destiny

Americans don't leave much up to Fate and Destiny. They believe in self-determination. You can do whatever you want to do with your life and, most importantly, you are the one in charge. If you don't succeed, you have no one, and nothing, to blame but yourself.

View of Human Nature

Americans basically consider people to be trustworthy and good. Because of this, they are pretty friendly to strangers. They tend to look for the reasons why people go bad.

Attitude Towards Change

Americans love progress and are constantly seeking perfection. You can't have either without change, so change is a good thing. Traditions have their place, but they should not be the ruling force.

Attitude Towards Taking Risk

One of the things that I took comfort in when starting my own business endeavors was the fact that many of the successful businessmen we know of today had their share of failures and disappointments. But that was ok. They simply learned from their mistakes and moved on. That exemplifies the American view towards taking risk. Failure is seen as a temporary setback. You will only improve your product via trial and error and if you don't succeed at one endeavor, there are plenty of other opportunities just waiting to be tackled.

Concept of Suffering and Misfortune

If you are unhappy, it's your own fault. You are the one in charge of your life and destiny, so find what it is that makes you happy and do it.

Sources of Self Esteem/Self Worth

In America, you are the maker of your own self worth instead of being born into it or being given it due to your position, rank, or age. You earn your own self esteem.

Concept of Equality

One of the things that the first settlers wanted to leave behind was the debilitating class structure that was found in Europe. Because of this, American culture revolves around the notion of egalitarianism. Everyone is of equal value regardless of birth, power, fame, or wealth.

Attitude Towards Formality

Basically because of the concept that everyone is of equal value, Americans are usually pretty casual and informal when it comes to social and professional interactions. Americans don't stand on ceremony and don't really use titles or pay much attention to rank.

Degree of Realism

Americans are optimistic. One of the reasons could be the fact that they see themselves as being the ones in control. Americans tend to see things better than they are at times.

Attitude Towards Doing

Not only do you achieve because of what you do, but your survival is based on it. You can't depend on others. Mere talk gets you nowhere and while the arts are nice, it's the activities that lead to concrete results that are of the highest value.

View of the Natural World

There's nothing unnatural about the natural world. It can be studied, predicted, and even manipulated and controlled.

Concept of Time

Americans view time existing on a 365 day/year schedule, their days divided into twenty-four hours. They have a clear understanding of time as a mechanistic product of the planet's orbit. And there is never enough time to accomplish everything one needs.

The WHY: In considering why a culture values or devalues certain things, think about its GEOGRAPHY and HISTORY. For example, American culture is a result of its rebellious reaction to British, royalty, rule and values (HISTORY), as well as its vast amount of land and resources and isolation from other countries (GEOGRAPHY).

I found these resources here:

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/educators/enrichment/culturematters/Ch2/tocCh2.html>

You can use this template to design your invented cultures and think about how and why citizens within the culture view reality.

You can also use this template to analyze existing cultures, either real or fictional.

Lastly, try using completed templates and inverting them, to see if you can come up with new and interesting ideas. For instance, what would the anti-American culture look like? Or the anti-elf culture? Anti-Vulcan?

Go ahead and post ideas in the forum for discussion or comments.



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3 Comments so far

1. imworlds August 6, 2007 3:02 pm

test2

2. adamant August 7, 2007 9:49 am

Just wanted to tell you that the site's new look is nice — and long-awaited. Keep the episodes coming.

adamant

3. [Nils](#) October 2, 2007 12:19 am

So “Attitude Towards Family” is #14 then. Because there are quite some differences between how, say, the western world deals with family matters and how Asians deal with them. For some cultures, the

family is just the immediate family; for others, it's a clan or the entire village. And that's not even counting alien concepts like hives.

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