

## Cultural Snapshot: African American

### RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

- African Americans tend to have a strong religious orientation, influenced by the African world view of a fundamental unity between the spiritual and the material, with religion and nature viewed as one.
- Possess a value system that incorporates not only the desire for success, but also group unity, freedom, and equality.
- Place an emphasis on communalism, the importance or priority placed on social bonds and interconnectedness with others. Social relations rather than objects are fundamental to life. An obligation to one's social group is more important than individualism, and sharing and cooperation are encouraged.
- Positive benefits accrue from identifying with a larger group: children pay more attention to people than to things; they learn to work together; and the family support allows them to gather strength from the collective cultural group so that they are better able to maintain their self-esteem in the face of racism.
- Many African Americans have a keen sense of justice and are quick to analyze and perceive injustice.

### LANGUAGE & COMMUNICATION

- African American speech is characterized as vibrant and expressive with great variety in rhythm, meter, tone, and style. Traditionally, European American teachers tend to use a more reserved speech pattern.
- Storytelling, songs, poetry and the use of proverbs characterize a strong African American oral tradition.
- Speaker and audience are often interchangeable as an African American listener will frequently “call out” or respond to a speaker.
- When engaging in a debate, the African American mode of communication is often high keyed—animated, loud, interpersonal, and confrontational. This impassioned mode is viewed as a sign of sincerity and commitment. European Americans tend to be low keyed when debating—dispassionate, impersonal, and non-challenging, characteristic of detachment. This can be viewed by African Americans as consciously suppressing what one truly feels or believes, and is suspect. Conversely, European Americans can perceive the impassioned debate strategy used by African Americans as impolite.
- “Breaking in” during conversation by participants is usually tolerated. However, if not a recognized participant in a conversation, “butting in” may be seen as eavesdropping and not be tolerated. Competition for the floor is granted to the person who is most assertive.
- If a person is entering a conversation, it is expected that those already engaged would give a quick acknowledgement before continuing.
- African Americans may expect to be greeted in passing regardless of whether you have been introduced.
- Asking personal questions of a person met for the first time may be seen as improper and intrusive.
- African Americans often express themselves proficiently through considerable body language and have heightened sensitivity to nonverbal communication compared to European Americans.
- Individuals from African American culture often use emphatic gestures to reinforce their dialogue and punctuate their conversation with movement.
- Children listening to adults are often expected to avert their eyes to indicate respect and attention. Speakers are expected to look listeners directly in the eye.

### FAMILY & FRIENDS

- African American relations tend to be egalitarian. Women are often employed, and men share the responsibility for child care. Older children also participate in many instances by sharing in care of young siblings and working jobs outside the home to contribute to the support of the family.
- African Americans often employ authoritarian nurturing, providing strict guidelines for behavior and establishing high expectations to do well and be a credit to the family.
- The elderly are often accorded a great deal of respect.
- Many African Americans view teasing as playing an important role in social relationships.
- An informal system of adoption can operate in the African American community. Many African Americans are raised completely or for periods of time by an aunt, grandmother, or family friend.



## EDUCATION

- School is usually valued by African American parents if the school is positive in its dealings with them. There can be some distrust towards an educational system that has not been successful in meeting the needs of their children.
- Often person-centered in orientation, African American students look to the teacher for more direct instruction and for social cues for behavior. Close proximity, consistent and firm use of discipline, and a warm, encouraging, yet authoritarian figure are teaching styles that work well with many African American students.
- Many African American students speak out loudly and interrupt as a way of showing their interest, or even argue as they press their point. Their intention is to participate, not misbehave, although some teachers consider this behavior disrespectful.
- To orally engage African American students, use a rhythmic, expressive style filled with encouraging gestures. Use a variety of methods to captivate students: repetition, call-and-response, variation in pace, alliteration, and creative language play.
- African American students' learning styles tend toward cooperation, discussion, a focus tied to people, hands-on activities, and "whole-to-part" learning. Many would benefit from structured classrooms emphasizing extensive use of problem solving and discovery methods.
- African American students may learn best when they are asked to master a variety of skills relevant to their everyday lives. Making connections to their homes, families and personal experiences will also be beneficial, as will providing opportunities to choose how they prefer to work and allowing them to move freely, talk expressively, and share affective needs.

## CULTURE & CUSTOMS

- Many African American people place a high value on unique expression, developing a style of expression in both language and dress that is singularly theirs.
- Encourage dealing forthrightly and openly with problems.
- Showing emotions during conflict is perceived as honesty and as the first step toward the resolution of a problem.
- Using African American patterns of speech by non-African Americans can be considered an insult.
- Hats and sunglasses may be considered by men as adornments much like jewelry and may be worn indoors.
- Touching another's hair may be considered offensive.
- A premium placed on musical and physical expression through dance and gestures is often evident in African American culture.
- Many African Americans show a preference for psychological verve, characterized by heightened simultaneous levels of stimulation of sound, movement, and visual input.
- Many African Americans do not follow schedules as rigidly as European Americans. A focus on people is construed as more valued than a focus on time.
- In the African American community one is frequently more admired for personal attributes rather than status or office. One is admired for verbal ability, personality, wit, strength, intelligence, speed, and so forth.

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## Cultural Snapshot: Hispanic

### STATISTICS

- Hispanics comprise 15 percent of K-12 students overall, a proportion projected to increase to 25 percent by 2025.
- One third of the Hispanic population is under 18 years of age.
- Hispanics are in fact a diverse collection of groups. Federal statistics from 1997 show that 64 percent of Hispanics were Mexican-American, 13 percent were from Central and South America or the Caribbean, 11 percent were Puerto Rican, 5 percent were of Cuban origin, and 7 percent were categorized as “other.”

### FAMILY & FRIENDS

- Hispanics share a strong sense of family loyalty and obligation, with extensive interaction among family members.
- The family is considered to be a person’s primary support structure throughout their lives.
- Gender roles are clearly defined, with the dominant role played by the male. The term “**machismo**” (used by Anglos to refer to male chauvinism), refers to a concept of chivalry that encompasses gallantry, courtesy, charity and courage. The male role is to take care of females in the family, while the female role is usually domestic.
- Children are celebrated and sheltered. Children’s behavior reflects on the honor of the family.
- Groups are not segregated by age but often by gender.

### RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

- Long-standing, deeply ingrained Roman Catholic tradition.
- A belief in fate, i.e. “as God wills.”
- A sense of motivation that is other-directed rather than self-directed.
- Cooperative vs. competitive.
- Sensitivity to human need and peer reinforcement are important.

### LANGUAGE & COMMUNICATION

- Approximately two-thirds of Hispanic Americans speak Spanish at home, while nearly 25 percent speak little or no English.
- For some immigrants from indigenous groups, Spanish is the second language and English is the third. (About 10 percent of Mexicans speak an indigenous language.)
- Unlike English, which is phonetically complex, Spanish is a “what you see is what you get” language. Silent vowels, double letters, diphthongs, and the letters “k” and “w” (which are not found in the Spanish alphabet), pose special challenges for native Spanish speakers learning English.
- Politeness is reflected syntactically within the Spanish language itself, especially with the use of the familiar and polite forms of “you.” It is also customary to address individuals by title.
- Looking at the floor and being silent in the presence of teachers shows respect for elders and authority figures.
- Hispanics typically stand close to each other while talking.
- Tend to emphasize a warm personalized style of interaction and a need for an informal atmosphere for communication.
- Hispanics often use playfulness and light teasing as a means of correcting behavior of their children.



## EDUCATION

- While it is understood that a good education is the key to success, Hispanics in the US have historically had the lowest level of education attainment and the highest dropout rate of any racial or ethnic group.
- Hispanics view teachers in high esteem and it is considered inappropriate for parents (especially mothers) to disagree or question a teacher, even if such a situation should arise.
- Achievement is a function of honoring the family vs. self.
- In Spanish, the term *educación* encompasses not only academic skills and knowledge, but morals, values and personal responsibility as well.

Traditional Educational Setting (Country of Origin)	
THE TEACHER	THE STUDENT
Assumes a role of academic authority	Depends almost entirely upon the teacher as the source of subject information
May be the only one to possess a textbook	Copies in a <b>cuaderno</b> (notebook) anything and everything the teacher writes on the chalkboard
Lectures and writes critical information on the chalkboard	Focuses upon memorizing material, often word for word
Is able to provide little or no audio-visual or reference material to supplement the discourse	Is reluctant to question the teacher in class when something is not understood
Expects students to provide specific, detailed information on tests and examinations	Depends upon and will seek help from fellow classmates to explain points not understood
Tends to use fill-in-the-blanks and short answer testing techniques	Frequently consults with classmates outside of class to decipher unclear notations or statements by the teacher
	Readily shares notes, ideas, and knowledge with classmates

## CULTURE & CUSTOMS

- “Hispanic” is an umbrella term covering a wide range of cultural backgrounds, including those with roots in Mexico, Central and South America, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and other parts of the world. There are significant cultural variations within this grouping.
- The cultural value of “**simpatia**” emphasizes the need for behaviors that promote smooth and pleasant social relationships with an avoidance of interpersonal conflict. Etiquette and manners are seen as measure of good breeding.
- For Hispanics the concept of time is present-oriented rather than future oriented. Hispanics are often flexible regarding punctuality, especially for social occasions.
- Title and position often give more status than money in the eyes of society.

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## Cultural Snapshot: Native American

### STATISTICS

- Native Americans make up less than one percent of the total U.S. population but represent half the languages and cultures in the nation. More than half of the approximately two million Native Americans do not live on reservations.
- There is no single Native American culture. The term “Native American” includes over 500 different groups and reflects great diversity of geographic location, language, socioeconomic conditions, school experience, and *retention of traditional spiritual and cultural practices*.

### FRIENDS & FAMILY

- Strong allegiance to one’s family and community is important. Indian people see themselves as an extension of their tribe(s). This tribal identity provides them with a sense of cultural belonging and family security.
- The extended family is the basic model. Relatives who live in separate households often raise Indian children. The extended family structure often extends through the second cousin and sometimes to adoptions outside the family. It is not unusual to have youngsters stay in a variety of different homes.
- Observation and listening are skills expected of toddlers. Children are often given adult responsibilities at an early age.
- Elders speak to the child as an adult. Speaking down to a Native American child can cause resentment.

### RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

- Each human is a multidimensional being made up of a body, a mind and a spirit. All things in the universe are dependent on each other.
- Living in harmony with nature and not disturbing it unnecessarily is important. Like humans, plants and animals are part of the spiritual world.
- Native Americans have a tradition of the Quaternity, a common recurring theme of the sacred number four in oral cultures. Things move through four stages and then repeat themselves (e.g., four directions, seasons, life stages, etc.). The Quaternity is often represented visually by a circle with the solar cross in the middle. The circle represents the eternity of motion.
- There is an orientation to the present time, stemming from the philosophical emphasis on *being* rather than on *becoming*. Time is relatively flexible and generally not structured into compartments as it is in modern society. Schedules and deadlines are not emphasized as much as in Anglo homes. Hurrying is thought to be disharmonious with nature, and patience is considered very important.
- Gaining prestige and success are not as important as developing inner strength and wisdom.
- Bravery is expected, even in young children, and defending one’s friends is a responsibility.
- Traditionally, Native Americans have respected the unique individual differences among people, staying out of others’ affairs and verbalizing personal thoughts or opinions only when asked. Returning this courtesy is a sign of mutual respect.
- The virtue of patience is based on the belief that all things unfold in time. It is needed to demonstrate respect for individuals, reach group consensus, and allow time for “the second thought.”
- Work is directed toward a distinct purpose and is done when it needs to be done. Nonmaterialistic orientation is one outcome of this value. Work for its own sake is not valued, and schoolwork should be shown to have an immediate and authentic purpose.
- The value of mutualism permeates the traditional social fabric. Mutualism promotes a sense of belonging and solidarity with group members cooperating to gain group security and consensus.
- Caution, placidity, and a calm, quiet demeanor undisturbed by stress and emotion can also be valued attributes.

### LANGUAGE & COMMUNICATION

- Many Native American students speak nonstandard varieties of English collectively termed Indian English. Characteristics may include dropping articles, different pronunciations of vowels, and using less plural and possessive suffix marking than found in other English codes.



- Many tribal languages are “Free-word-order” languages, which allow phrase order to vary. For example: This man caught a fish can be expressed as *Man this fish caught*, *Man fish caught this*, and any of the other four orders, all completely synonymous.
- Many Native Americans will wait a much longer time to make certain the previous speaker has finished. Jumping into a conversation prematurely is viewed as rudeness. Careful listening is emphasized. Similarly, pausing for the time necessary to carefully consider a response to a question is considered appropriate.
- Direct eye contact is often avoided.
- Nonverbal orientation. Words have great power, and oral communication is done carefully. Talk must have a purpose. Small talk and light conversation are not especially valued except among very close acquaintances. Silence communicates. In social situations, Native Americans will often be silent when angry or uncomfortable. This is sometimes misconstrued as indifference.

## EDUCATION

- Starting in the fifth or sixth grade, Indian children typically do not achieve academically as well as their Anglo peers.
- Many students show strengths in processing visual, perceptual, or spatial information as opposed to information presented verbally and frequently use mental images rather than word associations.
- American Indians tend to learn how to perform an activity by repeatedly observing the activity being done by a competent other, perhaps practicing in private, and not attempting to perform the activity publicly until confident that it can be done well. Some American Indian children are more apt to ridicule a student making a mistake, as it is expected the individual should not attempt an action unless s/he knows how to do it.
- A preference has been shown for simultaneous processing (seeing the whole picture) instead of successive processing (analyzing information sequentially). Concepts learned are seen as interconnected and skills are learned in a meaningful context. Use a holistic approach, integrating curricula.
- Compositions may follow the Quaternity model, where students strike out in a certain direction to explore some ideas, feelings, sensation, and moods. After a while the essay suddenly turns into another direction without any connection, without a central theme, and without coherent markers. The whole paper is cyclical, based on the visual metaphor of the medicine wheel. Use of animals, color symbolism, and union with nature can also be common. Acknowledging the value of this organization of communication while teaching linear patterns will be important.
- Effective teaching methodology includes demonstrations and modeling by teachers and peers, integrated curricula, applied learning, authentic experience, and peer tutoring and cooperative learning. Group competition instead of individual competition is also beneficial. Assessment techniques might include drawing, building models, and other “hands-on” manipulative activities. Use an informal room design that allows varied seating patterns.
- Preview materials for bias, especially during Thanksgiving, Columbus Day, etc. Note that artists often depict Native Americans as many tribes combined into a general image that fails to provide accurate information about any single tribe. Make sure to include images of Native Americans in the present to counterbalance potential stereotypes.
- Learners should not be reprimanded publicly. Teachers have found that speaking quietly in private with a Native American student can be the most effective in correcting discipline problems.
- Competition can be a form of interpersonal conflict, so Native American children may avoid it to maintain harmony. They avoid calling attention to themselves or trying to “outdo” their peers.
- Visiting the homes of Native American students is important. Meeting parents on their own turf eliminates the possibility of placing them in what they might perceive to be the uncomfortable and intimidating environment of the school.

## CULTURE & CUSTOMS

- Sharing things, giving to others, and not owning a great deal or saving money are valued attributes.
- Age brings wisdom. Elders are greatly respected by all the people, and age is a time of leadership.
- Non-interference in child rearing encourages self-exploration and autonomy. This “permissive” attitude and respect for autonomy is often misunderstood. Noninterference means having respect for other persons’ decisions (regardless of age) and refraining from interfering with their way of life. There is a belief in the inherent ability of people to recognize the difference between good and bad. Left on their own, people will eventually do the right thing.
- Continued use of Native people as mascots, official symbols, emblems, and namesakes for schools is often offensive and demeaning, and can perpetuate negative racial stereotypes.



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## Cultural Snapshot: Russia

### RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

- Prior to the fall of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, religion was banned in Russia and those who chose to practice were often persecuted. Today, half the populace is said to be Russian Orthodox, with Muslims ranking as the second highest religious affiliation.
- Communal spirit and togetherness distinguishes Russians from Westerners.
- For most Russians the word “individualism” is synonymous with the word “selfishness.” This concept was considered dangerous in the previous political system, where one could be punished for expressing one’s point of view or standing out.
- The word privacy can not be translated into Russian. The concept of private life is associated with romantic relationships.
- Due to a history of political and economic oppression, many Russians expect things to go poorly and have learned to live with misfortune. The American habit of smiling all of the time can get on the nerves of some Russians.
- Because of their tumultuous history, the concept of change is fraught with uncertainty for many Russians. Consequently, they are more likely to be cautious and conservative when faced with change.
- Competition is not a tradition in Russia. Under Soviet rule, people were considered the “same” and competitiveness did not reap rewards. Additionally, many view competition as detrimental to relationships.
- Many Russians view Americans as workaholics. They believe in work and productivity as long as it is within reasonable boundaries.

### LANGUAGE & COMMUNICATION

- Russians, who tend to favor more formal courtesy and indirect communication, (especially when something negative must be shared), often think of American informality and directness as rudeness and poor upbringing.
- The notion of small talk is not considered typical of the Russian culture. Russians may go more in-depth or discontinue a “meaningless” conversation. However, discussing family and personal issues before getting down to business is considered appropriate.
- Direct and open expression of thoughts and feelings, be they positive or negative, is viewed by Russians as permissible and sometimes has the positive connotation of displaying concern and involvement.
- It is impolite to talk with one’s hands in the pockets or arms folded across the chest. It is also considered impolite to point with the index finger, though it is commonly done.

### FAMILY & FRIENDS

- Compared to United States culture, Russians rely more heavily on a close network of family, friends, and co-workers as protection against the risks and unpredictability of daily life.
- In public and at work, some Russians may appear to be brusque and impersonal to Americans. At home, they tend to be warm, hospitable, and sharing. They are also more apt to speak their minds.
- Russians greatly value their friendships. Friendships can become quickly intense, whereas close friendships in the United States typically take more time to develop. A friend of the opposite sex is construed as a love interest. It is also not thought unusual to have few friends in Russian culture, nor is the value of casual friendliness to all people viewed as necessary. Russians rely on their network of friends in hard times and will go to great lengths to help friends whenever possible.

### EDUCATION

- Russians have always shown a great concern for education and it is free and compulsory for eleven years. The literacy rate in Russia is 99 percent.
- Children in Russia begin school at 6-7 years of age as opposed to 5-6 years in the U.S.
- Russian children are often given many hours of homework each night.
- During regular school hours everyone takes the same core curriculum. Elective activities such as PE, art, and multimedia labs are available only after school.
- The Cyrillic alphabet is used in Russia and younger children in particular may have little exposure to the Roman alphabet.
- Students can specialize their coursework in the last two years of high school.

### CULTURE & CUSTOMS

- Handshaking is a common practice; both on arrival and taking leave.



- Visiting and having guests is a favorite Russian pastime, and it is common for guests to sit and visit for hours. Friends and family may visit at any time without notice, but will usually call beforehand. It is common, though not required, to bring a simple gift when visiting.
- When eating, people place their hands above the table and not in their laps. Russians put more food on the table than they can eat to indicate abundance. Refusing food offered is considered impolite. Guests can show they are full by leaving a small amount of food on their plate.
- Do not cross your legs with the ankle on the knee or put your feet on furniture, as it is impolite to show people the soles of your shoes.
- Being on time is considered secondary to nurturing relationships once one arrives. In fact, many Russians view the American concern with punctuality as demonstrating a lack of human compassion and being more “things” oriented than people-oriented.
- Russians have a number of beliefs concerning good and bad luck. For example, it is considered bad luck to shake hands, kiss, or pass an object through the threshold of a doorway. It is also bad luck to give someone an even number of flowers, as even-numbered bouquets are reserved for placing on graves.
- It is considered proper for men to show courtesy towards women such as holding doors open, assisting them in and out of vehicles, and helping them put on and take off coats. To omit such courtesies is considered rude by both sexes.
- Popular sports in Russia are soccer, hockey, ice-skating and cross country skiing. Theater, movies and the fine arts are also enjoyed.
- New Year’s Day is the most popular holiday in Russia. The Russian Orthodox holidays of Christmas (January 7) and Easter are also now observed in Russia.

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