about—behavior that, in some cultures, is seen as disrespectful toward the audience. U.S. Americans of almost any station in life can be seen in public wearing jeans, sandals, or other informal clothing. People slouch in chairs or lean on walls or furniture when they talk, rather than maintaining an erect posture.

A brochure advertising a highly regarded liberal arts college contained a photograph of the college president, dressed in shorts and an old T-shirt, jogging past one of the classroom buildings on his campus. Americans are likely to find the photograph appealing: "Here is a college president who's just like anyone else. He doesn't think he's too good for us."

Similarly, U.S. President George W. Bush frequently allowed himself to be photographed in his jogging clothes while out for one of his frequent runs or in work clothes while clearing weeds at his Texas ranch. President Barack Obama was often photographed playing basketball, wearing shorts and a T-shirt.

The superficial friendliness for which Americans are so well known is related to their informal, egalitarian approach to other people. "Hi!" they will say to just about anyone, or "Howya doin?" (that is, "How are you doing?" or "How are you?"). This behavior reflects not so much a special interest in the person addressed as a concern (not conscious) for showing that one is a "regular guy," part of a group of normal, pleasant people—like the jogging college president and the jogging president of his superpower country.

More ideas about American notions of friendship appear in Part II.

THE FUTURE, CHANGE, AND PROGRESS

Americans are generally less concerned about history and traditions than are people from older societies. "History doesn't matter," many of them will say, or "It's the future that counts." They look ahead. They have the idea that what happens in the future is within their control, or at least subject to their influence. The mature, sensible person, they think, sets goals for the future, writes them down, and works systematically toward them. When asked about their goals, as they commonly are in job interviews ("Where do you want to be in ten years?"), most Americans have a ready reply. If

they don't, they are likely to apologize for their apparent inadequacy ("I'm sorry, but I haven't figured that out yet.").

Americans believe that people, as individuals or working cooperatively together, can change most aspects of their physical and social environments if they decide to do so, then make appropriate plans and get to work. Changes will presumably produce improvements. New things are better than old things.

Closely associated with their assumption that they can bring about desirable changes in the future is the Americans' assumption that their physical and social environments are subject to human domination or control. Early Americans cleared forests, drained swamps, and altered the course of rivers in order to "build" the country. Contemporary Americans have gone to the moon in part just to prove they could do so. "If you want to be an American," says cross-cultural trainer L. Robert Kohls, "you have to believe you can fix it." Crooked teeth, bulging waistlines, and wrinkled faces are all subject to improvement. Witness the amount of money Americans spend on orthodontics, diets and weight-loss products, and plastic surgery.

"The difficult takes a while," according to a saying often attributed to the United States Marine Corps. "The impossible takes a little longer."

The typical American sense of personal power—the belief that they can and should make things happen—does not exist in many other cultures. The fundamental American belief in progress and a better future contrasts sharply with the fatalistic (Americans are likely to use that term with a negative or critical connotation) attitude that characterizes people from many other cultures, notably Latin American, Asian, and Middle Eastern, where there is a pronounced reverence for the past. In those cultures the future is often considered to be in the hands of fate, God, or at least the few powerful people or families that dominate the society. The idea that people in general can somehow shape their own futures seems naïve, arrogant, or even sacrilegious.

Americans are generally impatient with people they see as passively accepting conditions that are less than desirable. "Why don't they do something about it?" Americans will ask. Americans don't realize that a large portion of the world's population sees the world around them not as something

they can change, but rather as something to which they must submit, or at least something with which they must seek to live in harmony.

GOODNESS OF HUMANITY

The future cannot be better if people in general are not fundamentally good and improvable. Americans assume that human nature is basically good, not basically evil. International visitors will see them doing many things that are based on this assumption. Some examples will help.

Getting More Education or Training. Formal education is not just for young people. It's for everyone. Many postsecondary students are adults who seek to "improve themselves" or to change careers by learning more or earning a degree. Newspaper articles at graduation time often feature grandmothers or grandfathers who have returned to school late in life and earned a college diploma. Educational institutions offer online courses, night and weekend classes, and correspondence courses so that people who have full-time jobs or who live far from a college or university have the opportunity to get more education.

"Continuing" educational opportunities in the form of workshops, seminars, or training programs are widely available. Through them people can learn about a huge array of topics, from being a better parent to investing money wisely to behaving more assertively. Professional development in many lines of work, such as teaching, nursing, and law, comes in the form of workshops or seminars.

Rehabilitation. Except in extreme cases where it would clearly be futile, efforts are made to rehabilitate people who have lost some physical capacity as a result of injury or illness. A person who learns to walk again after a debilitating accident is widely admired. Bicycle racer Lance Armstrong was acclaimed for continuing his career after overcoming testicular cancer.

Rehabilitation is not just for the physically infirm but for those who have failed socially as well. Jails, prisons, and detention centers are intended at least as much to train inmates to be socially useful as they are to punish