

The Ideal American :

America is interesting. It captures the imagination and attention of the world but almost all of the attention it receives is negative. A gas guzzling, beer drinking, loud, and highly violent culture are some of the more common attributes dumped on America. It's the mass murders, militia standoffs, and government scandals that make the foreign press headlines. Asia feels were lazy and bloated with success. France thinks were un-cultured, and most of the third world views us as intrusionary bullies. Even the United Nations is beginning to despise our power. But not much changes in the way America is involved with the affairs of the rest of the world. We are despised but accepted. The rest of the world has no choice, they can't deny us because we are key to their survival and they know it.

This dichotomy plays havoc with how the ideal American is viewed. Because America and the rest of the world plays to the drum of the moment, America and what it believes is constantly changing and evolving. It is this fluidity of acceptance of new ideas, that keeps America vital and a step ahead of the rest of the world. It is a place where the adventurous spirit of the pioneers who settled the west is central to the soul of America and is valued above most everything else. Change and new ideas is essential to Americans. It is what their country is based on. Fresh ideas, whether accepted as true or right by the general public are discussed. Ultimately the new ways may be ridiculed, scorned, outlawed or viewed as evil and unfit for the country. But first the ideas are always debated and weighed with a generally open mind. Creative and new ways of looking at things are judged before being dismissed. People whose ideas are not accepted may be placed in a negative light or even hated. But no matter how vehemently opposed an American may be to the beliefs of a person or group, he/she can't help but respect the radical for the fact that they developed a new idea, and acted on it. Just as the pioneers who settled a hostile country, the radicals who believe and act on their convictions gain the respect of the American public. I feel that this creativity, conviction and hard work are essential to the life of an ideal American.

Moral purity and the golden rule attitude are also considered a basic tenet of being a good American. But these values can easily be replaced with hard work, dedication, success, and ultimately public recognition. In the mind of Americans, these qualities can effectively override the moral purity qualifications. People such as the great tycoons Rockefeller, and Trump. Or even some of our presidents, namely Nixon. They swindled, stole, cheated and downright stepped on the backs of others to reach their positions. At all times they certainly did not practice ethical business practices to achieve their stature. But, their stature is not diminished much because of how they achieved their greatness. Twenty five years later, President Nixon is eulogized as a great man by most of the country, and excluding text books, Rockefeller is remembered solely for his unselfish use of his money toward many splendid public works.

How quickly America selectively forgets what is was evil about the person, when the person is so powerful, and has such an impact on history. Because a man is successful and achieves great power, they are revered. It is this power and drive that is admired by Americans and considered ideal traits. That is not to say that humanitarians and religious prophets can't be considered ideal Americans, or to possess the ideal traits. Their power is not as obvious but are also respected only because they possess the same type of influential power enjoyed by tycoons and political leaders.

I believe the ideal American is the person who works hard for what they desire, or with conviction in what they preach, and succeed in gaining recognition, whether favorable or not. It is here in America where being noticed, commanding power, and/or being original and dedicated, are the virtues that people respect and see in an ideal American. These are the people that the American public reveres as ideal. In this country, all the conclusions drawn about ideal Americans inevitably

leads to equating the "ideal" American with the "noteworthy" American.

It is not common that a caucasian person as myself would usually claim Malcolm X as a person I would choose to follow as the ideal American. But using the terms laid out before the reasoning becomes clearer. I do not think of Malcolm X or El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz as the only type of ideal American. He simply possess most of the traits I established as being an ideal American.

How can this be true if one stops to consider the life of Malcom Little? Besides being a drug dealer, he was a murderer, mugger, thief, and consequently a convicted criminal. He was a uncotrollable drug user, and virtual socio path. He was even nicknamed "Satan", for being one of the meanest, most evil inmates in prison. For decades after being released from prison he succumbed to the inane racist philosophies of the Nation of Islam and it's bigot leader Elijah Muhhamed. Malcom X as he was now called preached hatred, bigotry and violence to all that would listen.. He was responsible for countless deaths, riots, and general prejudices being worsened all for the cause of the racist Nation of Islam. For most of his years he preached that the white man was "the devill", and should be wiped out from the earth. Finally, towards the end of his life he opened his ignorant eyes to what was so obvious to countless others. He saw that what he had been preaching was evil and wrong, and rebuked much of his earlier beliefs.

Malcolm cannot be rembered as an intellectual genius, nor as a testament to the virtues of a great man. He preached hatred and intolerance for too long, even with his upbringing taken into account, to be considered a brilliant visionary. He was not an ideal American in terms of being a good citizen, morally pure, or patriotic.for being the morally pure, upstanding American citizen. Instead, certain attributes of his life and it's effects, qualifies him as a different type of an ideal American.

While hated by many, none can deny that he changed the world around him permanently. His life was a testament to dedication, hard work, and perserverance. His pursuits were the wrong ones, but he believed that he was doing the right thing. The goals were morally wrong but his conviction was unfaltering. He never lagged with a gap between his thoughts and his actions. Whatever he desired he went and attempted, and continued until all options were exhausted. Wholeheartedly he committed himself to his work with the same hard work ethics that the great tycoons did. Only his goal was not to improve his standing in life, but to improve his peoples', he must be respected as they are because of his commitment to his goal. While the tycoons ultimate goal was simply self fulfillment, a selfish, morally incorrect purpose in life, they were viewed as ideal Americans because they achieved what they set out to do through dilligent hard work. Malcolm X did the same and so should be viewed in the same light as these "ideal" Americans.

As was already established, the thoughts and actions of Malcolm (or more precisely the those of the dishonorable Elijah Muhammed whose he followed) were inherently evil, and assinine. The general population may have desired Malcolm to die and not worthy of being alive when his beliefs became public, and he campaigned for them. Their hatred was fresh and vehement. These were new troublesome ideas that this young radical was claiming. It was because they were new or becасue they were voiced publicly for the first time that the population became so angry and worried. His thoughts were scary in their newness.

Like an ideal, free thinking American, Malcolm had used The Nation of Islam teachings to spring these creatively evil thoughts on an unwilling public. The population recognized the terrible creativity and freshness behind these ideas. They realized that like other ideal Americans in history, Malcolm had new theories, but more importantly that he new how to use them. His thoughts were unlike past notable Americans, but they were just as creative and original as those men and women who were considered ingenious role models. Malcolm's ability to implement these new ideas on the population effects the world around him. He sets out to change the world with fresh, new ideas, and succeeds in gaining recognition. For

good or ill use, he still embodies the pioneering attitude so key to America.

Some may disagree with my position. They may claim that no matter how creative, hard working, and dedicated Malcolm X was, he still preached hatred and cannot be considered an ideal American. His evil also outweighs his impact on history and his noteworthyness. I cannot begin to defend the views that Malcolm held for so long. As they are certainly wrong. All that can be done is to try to justify the reasons that Malcom may have believed these things. His cruel life all pointed him towards these beliefs. A much more honest and religious man, may have come to the same conclusions had he have lived the life that Malcolm lived. One of abuse, poverty, murder, and hopelessness, all at the hands of the white man. His actions were not justified, but can almost be considering his plight.

It is this partial justification that I offer as an answer to his inexcusable acts. What Malcolm X preached was what he truly believed to be the truth. Every shred of his existence rested on these racist beliefs. Until near the end of this life, he believed that what he was doing, was the word of god, Allah. He believed he was doing the most sincere and morally correct thing any man could do. Every time he preached the devil as the white man he believed he improved the world. How I ask can you hold a man completely accountable for his actions when he feels he is improving the world around him for the good of the people? I don't excuse him completely. I only say that like any ideal American he was following his set of golden rules. Be kind to black men, and hate white men. Just as a pious, American citizen believes that being kind to your fellow man, and being a good citizen is essential to being an ideal American. Malcolm believed that what he was doing was essential to being an ideal American, or an ideal person. His intentions were good, it was only that his whole philosophy was wrong, through no complete fault of his own.