

Glimpses of Hidden America

I'm a pretty cynical guy when it comes to nation-states. So it might be surprising to hear that I sort of love in the vision of America most of us learned in school.

It's a place where people generally tell the truth, work hard, love their families, help each other, stand up for the weak, tolerate differences, resist tyrants, chase frontiers, do justice, and create wealth.

If this seems like a dream, it is. This is "hidden America." Probably the America you've experienced hasn't worked out quite this way.

Part of the problem is that we may be looking in the wrong place.

I don't believe the "United States" has very much to do with a good vision of America. The bureaucrats and the enforcers typically just control, manipulate, and harass. The politicians grandstand, and the legislation corrupts and impoverishes. The corporate types join in.

But there's a whole lot more to America than the government, the big corporations, or the culture wars. I catch little glimpses of this "hidden America" here and there.

I see it in people who volunteer their free time to make things better, like when my friends and I showed up to help a forest cleaning crew this Saturday. They hardly asked any questions: we just grabbed saws and got to it. There was trust there, and an openness to strangers I doubt you'd find much elsewhere.

I see it in countless small businesses. There's a plumber I know who comes home every day to feed his horses alongside his wife and two young daughters. And he has the biggest grin and joy to spare for his kids despite a hard job.

I see it in every old-timer who passes on wisdom and every young person who listens. It's there in the kids who leave the countryside for the big cities, or leave the big cities for the countryside. It's the high-fives at 5Ks, the fierce competition that ends with a handshake, and the company that makes electric scooters the new fad.

In hidden America, cooperation is the norm, and people couldn't care less what your politics are. Character comes before party or belief. It's the America that could live without the American empire. It's the America that shares a common thread with the pioneers, the farmers, the inventors, the musicians, and all the decent people who came before us.

This is the America I suppose I will always love, even if it is a myth 9 times out of 10. And every now and then, I get to meet it.

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