

WELCOME TO AMERICA!! CULTURE OF GOOD AND EVIL

America is a land of opportunities and people from all over the world flock the nation's borders for various motives. When I arrived and introduced myself to my first Christian communities, not a few parishioners were curious about my motives for coming to America. I never hesitated telling them: "I came to America to experience America." I wanted first hand information about stories that have been told about this wonderland. I had no other objectives, no hidden agenda. I would not like to prolong my stay or decide finally to settle in America. At the end of my sojourn I would return to my fatherland and diocese and work among my people. I would tell stories. I would write some of them down and that was why I started in time, right from the day of my arrival to take notes and store important documents that would help me in my write-up. A chapter, titled "**Back from America**" would seek to put my students and friends back home in Nigeria in a lighter mood as they read through this book.

Some amazing phenomena

America is a capitalist state and money is the center of life. There is job for everyone and you are free to hold more than two at a time. Outside some of the committed and morbid racists found in the political and ecclesiastical circles, the ordinary Americans are very friendly, kind, and loving people. But as for generosity - free gift - or what Africans refer to as "dash," the Americans generally fall below standard when compared with the awesome generous Germans. I was not surprised each time I received a miserly cash gift of \$5 (usually in check) from some of my friends at Christmas and Easter. The least cash gift I sent to my students in the minor seminary in Nigeria has been \$20, but each time I apologized for the smallness of my gift! The explanation for the low cash gift among Americans lies in their capitalist political and social security culture and individualism. Only a few give "big money."

Religion, Family & Life

Contrary to some gossips I picked up before I left home for the mission, I believe that most Americans are committed Christians and are in some cases more orthodox and morally upright than most Christians in Europe and elsewhere. One can find in the strong Christian communities ultra conservatives as well as extreme left radicals. But the total exclusion of religion from school and from the social and political culture of the nation is a terrible blow to the Christian faith and moral

values! School children know more about the theory of evolution and little about the bible, Christian faith and morals.

My Ex-Wife, My Ex-Husband, Lesbianism, Homo-Secularism

While I may have to avoid any exaggeration, I guess that nearly every married American man and woman I had ever talked to has been **divorced at least once**. They talked to me about their ex-husbands and ex-wives. It is a strange phenomenon. Many don't believe that marriage is a permanent institution.

There are equally a lot of aberrations in marriage contract, like same-sex marriage. There is a famous reference to this phenomenon in "**Heather has two moms!**" Some people marry today and divorce in a few weeks' time! The divorced find it easy to get new partners for there are many birds of the same feather. They usually flock together.

There are some bizarre family relationships where the great-grand mother was a single mother, the grandmother, a single mother, the mother talking to you, is also a single mother. Her two or three other daughters are also single mothers! Wow! There is no reason to doubt that more than 60% of the girls - black and white - above the age of 14 have got at least a child or had been pregnant many times. They suffer from AIDS as well as many types of STD. Condoms and pills help little. Their obsession for sex and sex-matters is excessive as most sex-related matters are given wide coverage in the news media.

But no matter the dept of their spirituality and religious practices, more than half Christians in the United States attend Sunday services **only** twice in the year - at Christmas and Easter. Some attend funeral services. Many attend the Ash Wednesday and Good Friday services during lent and Holy Week merely to receive the ash on the forehead or to kiss the cross. Some leave for their homes immediately the ritual is over and never care about the Eucharistic banquet!

Obesity and overweight

As a result of their booming economy, food is abundant and no one should be surprised that many Americans are obese and overweight. Some can be larger in size than ten normal men put together and can weigh between 900-1000 pounds! So they spend much money on weight-reducing drugs and therapies. Those who succeed in reducing their weights by half or more are revered like "celebrities"

who have accomplished incredible human feats. Most of their kids are over-fed and lack little except perhaps the most essential commodity, namely parental care. Most of their children are spoiled and don't show respect to their parents and adults as African children do.

Culture of violence

America is not a safe place to relax and enjoy a living. Except for a few safer zones or rural communities, the cities are full of danger day and night. Armed bandits make life miserable for people and children are affected much by the culture of violence in the news media and television in the name of entertainment. Shooting sprees in schools, parks, churches, streets are regular scenarios. School children often carry out commando operations and massacre their schoolmates and teachers. There are too many guns, ammunitions, bombs, and other weapons of warfare that are available everywhere. The easy access to drugs and intoxicating drinks by teenagers helps to complicate matters for the nation. Murder of victims of rape is a regular phenomenon. There are many bizarre "fashions" typical of the American youth. Some tattoos and rings worn on any part of human body, including the tongue and nose point to a primitive hippie culture of a disgruntled generation of youth. It is a sign of protest for a return to the unknown.

President Barrack Obama summarized "*the culture of violence*" on 20th June 2015, addressing a press conference at the outcry of the AME Church massacre in South Carolina: "I have had to make statements like this several times...at some point, we as a country will have to reckon with the fact that this type of mass violence does not happen in other advanced countries. It doesn't happen in other places with this type of frequency. Obama has addressed the culture of violence in America more than 14 times during his presidency.

In a racist motivated shooting in Charleston, South Carolina, a white male of 21, Dylann Roof shot and killed 9 black Bible Study Group Members of the African Methodist Episcopalian Church (AME) in what was described as most shocking hate crime or domestic terrorism in America!

The American cuisine

I was disappointed with the American food, which mostly is composed of fatty and dairy products. There is sugar or other forms of sweetener in most food products.

The rate at which Americans consume huge chunks of ice cream, cakes, cookies, and milk products is amazing. They have ravenous appetite and passion for dessert. In general coffee replaces water. As for their younger children pop, soda, or other mineral drinks take the place of drinking water. Although their menu is European in content, it is however different from what I saw in Italy, England, Germany, and France. While most Europeans consume their salad (what I used to refer to as "grass" and "flowers") at the end of the main dinner, the Americans consume their "grass" and "flowers" at the beginning. It was intolerable to me and I did not stop to show my displeasure. After such meals at the American restaurants and families I used to suffer from stomach upset, constipation and mostly running-bowels. So I had to invent a rule to avoid unpleasant meals when invited by families. I announced in church that I would not like any "grass" when invited to any meal. My parishioners and friends got the message and the news spread through the neighborhoods.

It was unfortunate that for the four years I spent in America I never had the opportunity to minister to a mixed racial community. My communities were always hundred percent Caucasian. There were no African or Nigerian restaurants or groceries and I had to rely for supplies from my people living in California, Chicago, New York, and Texas. In these places there are large numbers of Nigerians and Africans who operated eating-houses as one would find in Nigeria or elsewhere in Africa and Asia. I was bored by the bland American soup and their insipid chicken, pork, turkey, and lamb meats and was always on the lookout for goat meat and stockfish. Unfortunately I could not prepare the most delicious stockfish or "okporoko" soup. Our white friends find the odor very offensive and would not tolerate the cooking of stockfish in their kitchen. I didn't want to offend anybody, and so I had to suffer that deprivation of the most delicious Nigerian cuisine! Who does not understand that "one man's meat is another person's poison?"

The American English

Nigerian priests who studied in America had warned me for the first few months and even longer I would not understand the Americans. The Americans too would not easily understand me. It was a similar phenomenon, which I experienced when I was in London some 16 years ago. It was never easy to understand what the English people spoke in the streets. I understood only the professors in the

classroom and almost needed translators or interpreters when I went to buy things in the local shops in London. It did not take long however for me to discover how far apart our English world of the British and the Irish was from that of the Americans. I found the scenario in England and America almost the same. Colloquially they never observed the rules of grammar and most of the "Americanisms" and "Pidgin-English" are confusing.

In Secondary School in Nigeria, English teachers usually discouraged students from using abbreviations like don't, can't, won't, isn't, 've, etc. In America abbreviations are lavishly employed in written and oral speech. But what perplexed me most was the true American style, namely expressions and words like "I gonna," "I wanna," "ain't," and many others. In Primary or Secondary School we never met an expression like **ain't** except in American novels. We were warned never to use it. Webster's unabridged dictionary defines "ain't" in the following terms: "Nonstandard in the United States, except in some dialects; informal in Britain "am not." In everyday use, meaning - "are not, is not, have not, or has not..." I had great problem understanding my friends when they spoke dialect.

Foreigners like me in America usually got confused with certain English expressions. What are they saying? What do they mean when they indiscriminately employ certain expressions, phrases and clauses:

- **"I guess," "I suppose"** - Why are they never sure of something? Why do they "guess?" Ask someone when the game would begin. "At 4.00 PM, I guess." Where will you be spending the summer vacation? "In Hawaii, I guess." The same can be said about the use of **"I think," "I probably think..."**
- **"And stuff"** - What is "stuff?" There is too much quibbling and inability to give a systematic account of an incident or relate a story without stumbling here and there and making up with "and stuff." All sentences are kept hanging and are never finished. Most often the phrase "and stuff" is employed to fill in missing links and forgotten details. The listener is confounded when no required details are supplied and the story ends with "and stuff." "We were playing together, and he said... and then we asked for a ball and stuff...The same applies to the expression **"Or something!"**
- **"You know"** - The expression "you know" is excessively used in everyday conversations, interviews, and addresses that it bores listeners. There is no doubt that many Americans and their imitators are addicted to "you know" syndrome. This is related also to **"Like I said"** disease.

- **"Pretty"** - The hackneyed expression "pretty well" can be very confusing. In its normal use 'pretty' refers to beautiful and likeable things. In the United States it is loosely used to mean many different things. "How are you doing?" **"Pretty well."** **"Pretty bad."** The weather is **pretty nice**. The weather is **pretty nasty**. The woman is **pretty ugly!** The story is **pretty long** - Meaning "rather" or "somewhat."
- Their **pronunciation** of certain words is horrible and confusing. An old lady invited me to a meal. She explained that she had prepared many types of meat - brown, dark, soft-cooked etc. She asked whether I liked the **dark meat**. I was displeased with the offer and replied: No! We don't eat **dog meat** in Africa!" In another occasion a young man who came to pick me up to a party in his car told me to enter the **kuaa**. I stood looking at him until he motioned me to enter the **car**. Once a parishioner asked me whether I could say a **meeas** for her dead husband. I didn't know she wanted me to celebrate **Mass** for the dead person. Once I lost my way and when I asked a gentleman around a street corner, he told me to walk a few more **"blacks"** up the street. I thought he didn't like me because I was a black person. I also thought he wanted me to ask a black person instead of a white. But later I understood he meant a few **blocks** away!
- Once I told my parishioners that in Africa black politicians are **in-charge**. One old lady later told me that she understood that in Africa many people are found **in church**.
- **Double negative:** "You have not seen nothing." "I have not eaten nothing." "I did not see nobody"
- **Strange predication** - "I says" "I am it." "Where was you?" are common in colloquial American English.

Ebonics or Black English

An African visitor's English problem can be compounded when he speaks with African Americans. It is claimed that most of them speak Ebonics or Black English. Ebonics is contemptuously referred to as *ghetto language*, *nigger talk*, *gutter language*. It is also characterized as *slang*, *lazy*, *defective*, *ungrammatical and broken English*. There is nothing respectable about its use outside black environment. Although useful at home, most African-Americans vehemently opposed the introduction of Ebonics in black schools to help black kids learn easier and faster during the controversial Black English debate.

Many aberrations in English language usage in America are bound to affect foreigners. You have to be smart to understand them so must they be to understand you. Both the Americans and their visitors are at the risk of misunderstanding one another. When the Americans complain of the foreigner's heavy English accent, they fail to understand that they too help to complicate the matter. It is painful when the people fail to appreciate the efforts of the foreigner who struggles to make himself understood.

Americans make little effort to listen and understand. For me it was difficult to attempt to pick up a few of these American English expressions in order to communicate effectively with the people. Back home in Nigeria, the consequences of imbibing and employing Americanisms in English language are usually unpleasant and humiliating. Most Nigerians despise their people who mimic Americans and rate them low as intellectually bankrupt. To be rated high as an educated gentleman in Nigerian society you must speak good English, the Queen's style!

Africa in the American news media

It is foolhardy to attempt to refute the impressions of Americans about Africa. The American news media have damaged the image of Africa beyond repair. While some of their reports about the black world may be true, most of them are outlandish blatant lies and concoctions of prejudiced minds.

Wild life, airports, roads, cars

The impression shared by millions of Americans is that much of Africa is jungle, inhabited by ferocious animals and less than 2% of Africans live in cities. Since the interest of the cameramen is always on the bad side of Africa, there are few good reports about city life.

Once, one of my family friends promised to buy a bicycle for me so that I could easily reach my vast remote parishes in Nigeria. Why not a car? The old lady was convinced there were no roads in Nigeria, and Nigerians did not need cars. So a bicycle could help a poor priest like me.

Most American airports post a notice that the airport in Lagos is "not secure." So Americans are given the impression that they should be plenty apprehensive about flying into Nigeria. At the third-world airports, they believe,

there are mobs of dubious character offering cab service, but visitors don't want to trust their lives to them.

I assure both innocent Americans and my countrymen in Nigeria that no airport anywhere is secure. There are mobs of dubious character everywhere - in New York John F. Kennedy International airport - O'Hare Chicago International airport, name them.

Armed robbery is everywhere. Cab drivers in the United States carry passengers and on the way shoot them, drag them out of the cabs and disappear with their luggage and money. This is daily occurrence. In front of cameramen and armed policemen armed gangs, in broad daylight rob people and banks. It is not safer to travel and live in the United States than in Africa. It is not only in Africa that visitors should beware of con men. No country can boast of absolute security within its borders.

American journalists report that Nigerian cities are full of old cars. The roads are thronged with hawkers, , and miserable people.

As for old cars, I assure you that there are too many old ones in America, too. An American friend of mine told me his long Cadillac is more than 20 years old. He bought it from its third owner for \$50! There are too many of them and are long overdue for the "auto friedhof" - "car cemetery!"

As for hawkers and beggars, America has them in abundance. Visit the streets of New York, Chicago, Maryland, Washington and others. There are more street kids, beggars, poor and homeless people in the United States than one may find elsewhere, in Europe or Africa!

An American reporter who visited Nigeria wrote the following about the people he saw:

Even though Nigerians are poor in cash, they are well dressed and apparently well fed. It's obvious they like bright clothes and they like to dress up. It is astonishing to me to meet a woman on the path balancing a huge load, but wearing a stylish long gown and jewelry. Of course, it's easier to dress this way in a warm climate, but they do seem to have good taste in clothes.

What a pity, this visitor, like a 15th century colonialist explorer and missionary was disappointed he did not see naked, primitive people roaming the streets. He must have read western storybooks and fairy tales about the primitive tribes of Africa,

about Africans who spoke through their nose and had tails or slept on top of trees. He must be among those who believed Africans liked human flesh better than the millions of wild and domestic animals that swarm jungles of Africa!

That Nigerians have good taste for **nice clothes** baffled this visitor. That Nigerians look happy, healthy, and not poorly fed must have disappointed him. Thank God that our visitor did not contract AIDS in Africa. American news media and experts on AIDS report that more than **One million Africans** die of AIDS every week! By the year 2020, they say, no human being will exist in Africa!

The weather condition

Much of newspaper reports about hot weather conditions in African look ridiculous. Much imagery is used to describe this near hellish, worse-than-death weather condition.

Africans, who have not stepped out of Mother Africa, will only pity their American visitors who are not used to the African heat. But Africans who live in Europe and America and who care to read reports about African weather conditions are amused. Do Africans living in America prefer the tornadoes, hurricanes, blizzards, flooding, winter, snowstorms, and other terrible weather conditions in America?

Thanks to God that American experts could rescue millions of lives every year through their well-advanced weather forecast systems. Without extreme measures taken to warn people in time, surely Americans would be counting their dead in thousands. Many religionists believe that the gods are angry with America. For them America is already engaged in the War of Armageddon, predicted as one of the signs of the end of times. Only one who has not experienced these extreme weather conditions would doubt that the doomsday had not arrived! Devastations caused by terrible weather conditions in America cost the nation billions every year.

Will Africans prefer the snowstorms that ravage and close airports in America? What of the horrible cold windy weather conditions? I lived in South Dakota for almost 2 years and nearly froze to death. I watched cities swallowed up by floods. Not even the technologically advanced fire-fighting equipments could help. I fled South Dakota, passed the most detested North Dakota to Montana.

In Montana I pitied the miserable people who must heat their rooms for 10 out of 12 lunar months. For the 2 months of "life" in some American states, the

way people rush to the streets and beaches to enjoy hot sunshine shows what they had been missing. Some go naked in wild excitement!

But another side of the story is that some States in America are even hotter than Africa. In these desert regions of America, temperature rises beyond 100 degrees Fahrenheit throughout the year!

Measure of judgment

The worst tragedy is that some people think that their own systems, cultures, and lifestyles are the best. Any other system that does not conform to their standard is rejected as "evil. In their judgmental attitude, they fail to see that some of those people they think are less fortunate in the world might in fact be the happiest of all peoples. Those things people think are most essential for life are often the poison and fetters that prevent many from self-realization.

Most of the so-called modern life comforts for which America is so much revered are in most part sources of misery and self-destruction. The television, guns, and drugs, for example, are responsible for many deaths and tragedies in many American families, schools, and streets.

Surely most Americans are not aware of what is happening in their fatherland - before their very nose - in their neighborhoods! Otherwise those nosy journalists would hesitate to write about other countries. The indictment in great: "Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye...First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye."

Americans accuse other countries of trafficking in dangerous drugs. There is no doubt that drug traffickers have learned their trade from their foreign-counterparts in America. Who taught poor Africans that the stuff called cocaine, heroine, crack, marijuana, hemp, grass, hashish could yield fantastic sums of money? From where would poor Africans get fabulous sums of money to buy even an ounce of hard drug?

The consequences of scandalous and fraudulent activities emanating from the rich industrialized world should worry the Americans more than the "mess" they find in Africa.

Charity must begin at home. It is easy to assume the leadership and the policeman of the world. But many critics would not fail to remind the leader his

first duty: "Physician cure yourself. Do here also in your home country the miracles that we have heard you did in other places" [Luke: 4.23].