

Three Things I Noticed Coming Home to America After Living Abroad

When you live abroad, the picture you get of America is pretty depressing. It seems like the country is falling apart.

I recently returned to America for the first time in nearly two years. Although a U.S. citizen, I have been living abroad since 2012. Flying internationally during a pandemic was never my plan, but a family emergency forced me to undertake the journey.

During my last visit, I wrote about [five things I noticed about America after living abroad](#). A lot has happened in America since then. Here are three more things I noticed this time around:

1. Americans Are Rich

With all the focus on poverty and inequality in America right now, I think people forget how wealthy this country truly is. A middle-class lifestyle in America far exceeds a wealthy lifestyle in other places – even Western Europe. American houses are generally larger and better quality. Americans can purchase a much bigger selection of goods, and at lower prices. Even the offerings at a Goodwill or Salvation Army in America are usually vastly superior to those of any store in other countries where I have lived.

2. Americans Are Friendly

Whenever I return to visit America, I'm always amazed at the friendliness of the people here.

In 1887, President Grover Cleveland [said](#), “The friendliness and charity of our countrymen can always be relied upon to relieve their fellow-citizens in misfortune.” I believe that is still true today. For example, last week, my son accidentally forgot his stuffed animal. A lady came running after us to return it to him. We had a brief chat about how tragic it is when children lose their beloved toys. This type of interaction is normal in many parts of America, but – in my experience – it’s rare in other countries.

The news and social media can give the impression Americans are all at each other’s throats. I don’t believe it. As I see it, Americans are remarkably open with each other.

3. Americans Are Safe

Purely in visual terms, one of the biggest differences between America and other countries is the absence of big fences.

I’m used to living in middle-class neighborhoods in other countries where every house has a tall fence – usually topped off with barbed or electric wire. CCTV and guards are commonplace. The average American might look at my old apartment complex in South Africa and wonder if it was a prison colony. In fact, it was a normal, middle-class residence.

By and large, America is a very safe country, yet I worry that Americans have started to take their safety for granted. People sometimes post slogans like “Defund the police” without considering the alternatives. Americans are blessed to be able to live largely without big fences and CCTV. I hope it stays that way.

These are three things I noticed upon returning to America after nearly two years abroad. Much of the news about America these days is negative. But I see a great deal to be optimistic about.

I'm happy to be home again.

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