

Michel guillaume jean de crèvecoeur 1735- 1813 essay sample

[Parts of the World](#), [Europe](#)



Michel Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur was a naturalized American citizen whose observations on life in pre-Revolutionary America are still read today. His most famous work, *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), was instrumental in differentiating the life and culture of the American colonies from that of Europe, and in helping to establish an American literary tradition out of common cultural experience where none was believed to exist. He is credited with formulating the idea of America as a melting pot where “ individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men.” One of the book’s individual letters, “ What Is an American?,” has long been considered a classic articulation of the character and identity of the members of that new nation.

St. Jean de Crevecoeur wrote a collection of *Letters from an American Farmer* during the Revolution. Written from the point of view of an ordinary man, a happy American farmer, Crevecoeur’s letters are the first American text to ask and answer the question, “ What is an American?” (Saar 849). Crevecoeur defines an American as being any person who “ leaves behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds.... Americans are the western pilgrims who are carrying along with them that great mass of arts, sciences, vigour, and industry.... The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas and form new opinions. From involuntary idleness, servile dependence, penury, and useless labour, he has passed to toils of a very different nature, rewarded by ample subsistence” (Crevecoeur 857). Basically, he is defining an American as being a man who is dedicated to the

newly developed free country that he loves, open-minded to the changing opinions of the times, and willing to work hard in order to be rewarded by the land.

Summary - From " Letter III: What Is an American?" by John Crevecoeur

1. Part one: The author imagines himself an Englishman who has come to settle in America (in 1783). Through the eyes of this English settler, the author describes what he would see upon coming to America and how different it would be from Europe. Unlike in Europe, America has a far smaller gap between rich and poor and titles, based on class and honor, (such as prince, duke or lord) are non-existent. For the most part the people living in America are farmers and live in comfortable but modest houses. It is clear from the author's words that he thinks America is great place to live.

2. Part two: Describes the mixture of people who have settled in America. As immigrants from England, Scotland, France, Holland, Germany and Sweden pour into America, the country has become a melting pot of many different cultures. Struggling to make ends meet, people have come to America from their respective countries in Europe in search of a better opportunity and a new life where they might be able to be treated fairly and regarded as citizens under the law (unlike in their old countries). Since many of these immigrants left their countries due to poverty or persecution, they have no attachment to their previous homes and consider themselves to be truly American.

3. Part three: The author defines exactly what it means to be an American. According to his definition an American is a European or a descendent of an European. Therefore, America is the only place in the world where a person may have parents and grandparents all from different cultural backgrounds. The author then goes on to say that an American is one who has given up the old for the new and is motivated by hard work and opportunity to improve his life. Differences:

The beginning of the Americas

America was a place for dreams, a new beginning, religious freedom and rights. For the people of Europe America was a place to prosper, worship in their own way, and expand their kingdoms. The only problem is that they attempted to settle in their own way and all failed dismally. The New England, Mid-Atlantic and Southern Colonies grew differently in various ways, but each with the same state of mind, "do it our way". Examining the three sets of colonies will prove that they were all different in religion, government, and ways of expansion. New England started for the search of religious freedom from persecution. England's government required a strict attendance to the Anglican church. If a person were to refuse, holding separate services, they could be imprisoned and or fined! If the people didn't take oath of supremacy to the king, they could be jailed for life.

Since Charles I was head of the Anglican church what he said went; Charles removed all puritans ministers from their pulpits. The puritans got fed up with all this persecution...and headed for a better future in America, a new world. After all, how can someone who works and starves, whose life is a

continuous struggle, can that man call England or any other country his country? a country that has no bread for him? Who met nothing but the severity of the laws with jails and punishments? No , urged by a variety of motives here they came ...everything is tended to regenerate them , new laws , a new mode of living, a new social system, here they are become men , In Europe they were so as many useless plants but now with transplantation like all other plants they have taken roots and flourished. His country is that which gives him land , bread , protection(where my bread is earned there is my country)-motto of all immigrants.

In being a new nation that could welcome the destitute of Europe to begin new lives, early America becomes the `dream' of wealth and prosperity for those that have the courage and industriousness to be pioneers. This historical perspective is worth reading due to the information gathering techniques used by Crèvecoeur in relation to the American Dream.”