

Who is considered an american



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Who is considered an American? What does mean to be an American? It is perhaps unsurprising that the traits Americans like to ascribe to themselves are somewhat different from those that foreigners tend to ascribe to them. Indeed, if you ask an American to describe his fellow citizens, he is likely to tell you that they are affable, hardworking and patriotic people; but if you ask some foreign commentators or observers such as a prominent photographer from Switzerland, Robert Frank, he will have a different point of view towards the idea of an American.

Robert Frank, a Jewish photographer, was born in Switzerland. He plays an important role in the photography field because of his most famous work *The Americans*, which was published in 1958. His unique and fresh outsider's view of American society received criticism in the U. S when the book first came out. The reason is that the Franks photographs are unlike other photographic essays, which portray Americans in a positive way instead it demonstrates the idea of Americans by taking the violent and desolated photos.

Criticism aside, in order to make a fair judgment, we will analyze specifically the photos from the Frank exhibit, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The exhibition features all 83 photos picked by Frank from the 28, 000 shots, which he took during a road trip between 1955 and 1956. The work is divided into four sections. The first section shows different comparisons such as politicians to civilians, White to black, and rich to poor. The first photo in the first section titled "Parade" Hoboken, New Jersey' shows two windows: above them is an American flag and two women look out from the window.

It is definitely not showing a parade, but rather Frank ironically portrays the idea of sadness and isolation. In the second section, Frank is more focused on the social and economical inequality. For example, the photograph in the second section titled " Trolley" New Orleans" shows the passengers in the bus are separated and segregated. A white woman sits in the front of the bus, and two white children are right behind her. In the back of bus, an old black woman is sitting with a smile on her face.

The third section of The Americans considers religion work, media and politics. " Santa Fe, New Mexico" is the one in this section; it shows a " Shamrock" gas station, topped with a sign proclaiming that the nation can " Save" or possibly be saved. Indeed, Frank suggests that the nation's political system and religion are not eparated but linked. The last section is hopeful but brutal; move rover, it implies the social class statues affect our politics, economy and cultures. In Robert Franks eyes, Americans represent sadness, tensions and ironies.

We are not sure that Frank took these gloomy photos either because of his pessimistic personality or the reality of this lonely nation, but one thing we can confirm that his work is one of the most influential photographic essays in 1950s. The Americans is notable for the way in which it focuses on all strata of American society - young and old, rich and poor, white and black. Frank portrays that White Americans are lonely and emotionless, for example, one of his photographs, " Charity Ball" New York" shows a white woman with tasteless Jewels is sitting in a chair, and her face Just as a stone without a smile.

So why did White Americans in 1950s feel solitary? From Alex Tocquevill's work " Individualism leads a man back to himself and threatens ultimately to imprison him altogether in the loneliness of his own heart. "(Tocquevill 586) If Tocquevill's point is correct, then richness, material, privilege and even individualism cause White Americans' solitude in 1950s. In contract, Frank is fascinated with Black. Through his photos, it is not hard to find that Blacks are emotional and free.

In " San Francisco", Frank disturbed the quiet of a black couple who was sitting on a hillside enjoying a beautiful view of the city, and they reacted to his distribution with anger. As a professional photographer, Frank was sick of the White Americans' unfeeling, on the other hand, he enjoyed with Blacks' emotions and freedom. Even though Black Americans do show their feeling and emotions; however, they never show happiness and enjoyment. The reason is clear, because Black Americans were suffered before he Civil Rights Movement.

As I mentioned before, the shot of a New Orleans streetcar, with white people up front and African-Americans in the back, perfectly captured the nation's racial divide. Blacks were unhappy because of the segregation, racism and second class position; while whites were gloomy, because they sucked out by a materialistic and absurd society; Just as George Cotkin says in his article The Photographer in the Beat-hipster Idiom, " Blacks must freed from the shackles of segregation, and Whites must be liberated from conformity and spiritual alienation so that they may live feely and authentically. (Cotkin 31)