



"I'm shocked people aren't rioting in the streets." What Europeans Think About American Life - NYT

Source:
<https://bit.ly/3wAjAlt>

LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Watch the video. Which difference is the most shocking?
Watch again and answer the questions below.

1. How much bigger is a large drink at McDonalds in America compared to one in Europe?
2. How do additives differ between the US and Europe?
3. How long is the legally mandated paid parental leave in the US?
4. How much is one year of tuition at Massachusetts Institute of Technology?
5. In 2015, how many American adults declared bankruptcy due to medical bills?
6. Why did the woman in the story not want an ambulance?
7. What happened to the handgun ban in Washington D.C.?

VOCABULARY

- ban = officially or legally prohibit
- disincentivize = discourage someone by removing an incentive
- riot = a violent disturbance of the peace by a crowd
- mass shooting = a shooting incident with at least three killings
- overturn = to reverse a previous decision

SPEAKING ACTIVITY

What do you make of the statements below?
Which ones do you agree with? Disagree with? Discuss with a partner.

a. What surprises me is that people are not rioting on the streets.

b. Americans are too friendly.

d. If you want to have a kid, you are on your own. Why should the state help you?

c. Sometimes it's good to have an outside perspective on life.

e. Free or low cost healthcare, education and family planning also has its disadvantages.

g. Everyone secretly has an American dream.

f. The lack of parental leave discourages people from having children.

h. America lets people fail. Maybe that's not such a bad thing.

i. An American degree is better than a European degree.

j. Healthcare in Europe is cheaper but not better than in the United States.

k. The wages are better in the US, so these problems don't bother me much.

l. The European system makes people lazy and irresponsible.

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1. How much bigger is a large drink at McDonalds in America compared to one in Europe?

In the US, a large drink at McDonalds is 77% bigger than in Europe.

2. How do food additives differ between the US and Europe?

Many common additives used in the US are banned in Europe.

3. How long is the legally mandated paid parental leave in the US?

There is no legally mandated parental leave in the US.

4. How much is one year of tuition at Massachusetts Institute of Technology?

One year full tuition is \$51,832.

5. In 2015, how many American adults declared bankruptcy due to medical bills?

1 million American adults declared bankruptcy due to medical bills.

6. Why did the woman in the Twitter story not want an ambulance?

She said she couldn't afford to pay for an ambulance.

7. What happened to the handgun ban in Washington D.C.?

Handguns were banned in Washington D.C. for a short period of time. The ban was overturned by the Supreme Court.

FROM AN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

It's easy to criticize how things are done in America when one lives in Europe. Below are a few reasons or explanations behind some of these bizarre differences.

1. The larger drinks at McDonalds in America may have something to do with our obsession with ice in drinks. It's not uncommon for a cup like this to be filled completely with ice before any soda is added. I would guess there is about the same amount of actual soda in both examples. We like things cold.

2. Why are some ingredients banned in Europe but not in the US? There are two main reasons. Firstly, in 1958 Congress amended the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act to ban potentially carcinogenic food additives from gaining FDA approval. However, some additives that were used before the Delaney amendment's passage are considered to have prior approval.¹ Secondly, the FDA *does* conduct studies on potentially harmful food additives, but their European counterparts have stricter limits.
3. Under the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 American workers are protected for 12 weeks unpaid by law². There is no mandated paid leave. However, many companies offer paid parental leave as part of their employee benefits package. Families must weigh these benefits before accepting a job offer. The theory is that it creates competition amongst employers for the best workers. Some companies offer as good as or better parental leave packages than many European countries.
4. There are a lot of reasons why college in America is so expensive. Here is a list of just a few: highly paid skilled workers at both public and private universities, many students go away to college rather than staying at home while they complete their studies, the facilities at American colleges are different, such as dormitories and student life facilities, lower state taxes means more take home pay but less public investment in the public university system, American universities attract full-paying foreign students, etc.³
5. Good healthcare in America is not impossible to find. Typically it is linked to the company you work for. Companies offer varying levels of health insurance in order to compete for the best employees. There are two wings of the American healthcare system that take care of certain patients through the government, much the same way Europeans enjoy their public healthcare systems. Medicaid is healthcare for the elderly (65 and older) and disabled, while Medicare deals with low income patients.
6. Guns, and especially handguns are an American pastime. Not everyone has gun fever, though. About 53% of Americans favor stricter gun laws.⁴ It's hard to explain, but it's cemented in the American psyche as an unalienable human right to own and operate a firearm.

source: 1, 2, 3, 4