

INDIVIDUALISM AND FAMILISM IN AMERICAN CULTURE

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Read as much of the class text, *Habits of the Heart* by Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985/1996), as you have time for. The following chapters will provide enough information for the class assignment. If you read the chapters in this order, they will make the most sense:

- Preface
- Chapter 1 - The Pursuit of Happiness
- Chapter 2 - Culture and Character, pp. 27-41 only
- Chapter 3 - Finding Oneself, pp. 75-84 only
- Chapter 4 - Love and Marriage
- Chapter 6 - Individualism
- Chapter 8 - Citizenship
- Chapter 11 - Conclusion
- Introduction to the Updated (1996) Edition

Write a reaction paper that is about 5 to 7 pages long. Address the following questions. In your response, think about ways that you could explain to your family or best friend the tension that exists between individualism and commitment in American culture. When you are citing the text, place the page numbers in parentheses. No other references are required for this assignment.

1. Is American culture focused more on individualism or commitment? What evidence do the authors provide? Can you think of any other examples from your personal experience? (10 points)
2. Can families counter American individualism? If so, how and why? (10 points)
3. Is a cultural shift away from individualism desirable? Is it possible? What other factors can counter individualism? What would have to happen for a cultural shift to occur? (10 points)

The important part of the assignment is to state your views clearly and to provide evidence in support of your opinions. You can also demonstrate your understanding of the ideas in this book by applying them to your own life or to issues that interest you.

Come to class prepared to discuss these three questions that you addressed in your paper. Discuss those aspects of the arguments raised by Bellah and his colleagues that you agree with as well as those that you disagree with.