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American Football

Indeed, the growing complexity of business makes many corporate managers shy away from baseball as a metaphor. Baseball, more than most other major sports, is structured in ways that promote the emergence of improbable heroes. . . . Many business leaders see their game as more like football, with its image of interdependent players with multiple skills cooperating to move the ball down a long field 10 yards at a time.

—Jonathan Kaufman (1999)

The game of football, though, simply explodes. From the moment the ball is passed backward through the legs of the center to the quarterback, 22 players are in constant motion trying to execute complex instructions, each intimately involved in the way the play will be resolved. No writing can really capture such intricacy; it must be seen.

—“American Football” (2006, p. 95)

The game of life.

—Headline of *Los Angeles Times* article (Goldstein, 2004)

Baseball is where we were. Football is what we have become.

—Mary McGrory, journalist, quoted in *The Billion Dollar Game* (Allen St. John, 2009, epigraph)

I love football. It's the chess of the sports world, a game of strategy that's punctuated by hard hits, dramatic runs, and balletic catches. Unlike in baseball, every player on the field contributes to the action. And unlike in basketball, the action isn't continuous, so there's time to debate what might (or should) happen before each play.

—Steven Leckart, *The Game within the game* (Dec. 17–18, 2011, D17)

I am a traitor. I may as well come straight out and admit it. I've betrayed my family, my friends, and my country. . . . The shameful truth is this: I like football better than soccer. . . . Baseball fans will have to forgive me here, but the answer, I think, is that football is the quintessential American sport.

—Gerard Baker, a native Englishman, Football is better than soccer (2011, D6)

Business writers and pundits seem to be of the unanimous opinion that football (U.S. version; soccer is called *football* in most of the world) is the appropriate cultural metaphor for understanding U.S. Americans and U.S. business behavior. Geoffrey Colvin (2002), a *Fortune* columnist, analyzed the large number of U.S. corporate scandals since 2000 by comparing **the complex rules of football** to the complex accounting rules and laws that U.S. executives and citizens would like to evade. By comparison, **devotees of European soccer watch a simpler game with only half of the number of rules**, most of which are stated as **principles** that the referees use to make calls in a manner similar to the more general accounting principles governing European business. Appropriately, Colvin titled his article “Sick of Scandal? Blame Football!” In 2003, Colvin followed up with an article titled “For Touchdown, See Rule 3, Sec. 38,” in which he reiterated his beliefs:

We Americans like the idea of a national pastime, so let's hold a retirement party for baseball as it relinquishes the title. . . . We all know America's real pastime is NFL football. . . . The reason is that NFL football is the most legalistic, rules-obsessed, argumentative, dispute-filled sport on the planet, and that means we Americans simply cannot get enough of it. (p. 34)

The **Dodd-Frank Law** that was designed to avoid a repetition of the Banking Crisis and Great Recession of 2008 reinforces this viewpoint. It is over 800 pages long and filled with rules and exceptions to them, which will hinder the enforcement of the Law because of the multiple ways in which numerous terms, rules, and exceptions can be interpreted by lawyers and juries.

The intent of this chapter is to demonstrate that, if you don't understand U.S. football, you will have difficulty understanding U.S. culture and the manner in which business is practiced by U.S. Americans. Social critic Camille Paglia (1997) presents a similar argument, encouraging women to study football rather than attend feminist meetings. Shiflett (2000) echoes these sentiments by suggesting that presidential candidates should simply insist that football viewing be made mandatory for U.S. youth, because it “embodies and promotes the very values many parents seek for their offspring.”

Apparently both U.S. males and females are in agreement that football is the most popular sport in the United States: Well over 50% of both males and females watch and enjoy the game. As the *Economist* (“In a League,” 2006) states: “It remains the most popular of the four big American sports on almost every measure, from opinion polls to television ratings” (p. 63). **Super Bowl Sunday** has replaced Christmas as the national holiday on which families and friends gather together for parties to watch the winners in the two football conferences, the National Football Conference and the American Football Conference, play a single game for championship of the National Football League (NFL). Allen St. John (2009) highlighted the importance of Super Bowl Sunday in the title of his popular book: *The Billion Dollar Game: Behind the Scenes of the Greatest Day in American Sport—Super Bowl Sunday*. Similarly the trial of O. J. Simpson on

charges that he murdered his wife and her friend was billed as the “trial of the century” in large part because it involved a football idol. And the emphasis is not only on the NFL, where 1,696 players average \$1.9 million in salary, something that the average American can only dream of. There are 1.1 million players in high school and about 2.8 million in youth leagues. As Max Boot (2013) points out, football can provide an invaluable lesson in team effort, hard work, and discipline, along with a sense of camaraderie that can last a lifetime.

However, not everyone is enamored. Columnist George Will (2006) declared that football manages to combine two of the worst aspects of national life: violence and committee meetings. Journalist Alistair Cooke described it as a cross between medieval warfare and chess (“Punctured Football,” 1993). And there is some truth in these critiques. Blows to the head, which occur frequently in football, have been linked to **chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE)** among professional and nonprofessional football players; it is a degenerative brain disease that can lead to mood disorders and dementia. Many doctors have argued that players younger than 13 should not be allowed to participate in the game for this and other reasons. Twice in the history of football two U.S. Presidents, Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson (he was President of Princeton University at the time), had to intervene to stymie groups trying to outlaw the sport, and they provided the leadership that led to regulations creating a safer game; since their eras football has faced similar if smaller crises that have also led to improved safety. Further, as Boot (2013) has argued, football has resulted in serious injury or death as measured by admission to hospital emergency rooms in 2012 far less than other forms of exercise and competition: 4,573 for baseball; 8,246 for basketball; 10,115 for football; 28,040 for ATVs, mopeds, and minibikes; 31,844 for exercise and exercise equipment; and 42,221 for bicycles and accessories.

This chapter describes U.S. football in terms of the following topics: the tailgate party; pre-game and halftime entertainment; strategy and war; selection, the training camp, and complex plays/the playbook; individual specialized achievement within the group; aggression, high risks, and unpredictable outcomes; huddling; and the church of football and celebrating perfection.

The Tailgate Party

A professional U.S. football game typically starts with a **tailgate party**, a uniquely U.S. phenomenon. Some fans drive hundreds of miles to attend the game, and everyone arrives at the parking lot fully prepared for an **outdoor party**. They quickly unpack their barbecue grills, food, beer, and soda. Friends may cluster together, but they are sure to share their food and thoughts about the home team and its opponent with other fans in the vicinity. After the party, almost everyone is ready to attend the game. But not everyone. Many times in freezing weather, some fans stay in the parking lot in heated vans to watch the game on TV, presumably because they can see the game better, although they could have watched the game on TV at home.

High school football in some states such as Texas is, as the saying goes, the game of life. People in small towns and cities talk constantly and sometimes obsessively about each game for days and weeks before it occurs. In 2005, one father in Canton, Texas, severely wounded the school’s football coach, Gary Joe Kinne, ostensibly because the coach had cut his son from the team. Several years ago, one Texas mother even planned the assassination of her daughter’s chief rival for a coveted spot on the cheerleading team! Such incidents, however, are rare, and most citizens look forward to cheering their sons onward and participating in the tailgate party, for which they prepare elaborately.

At the college level, the tailgate party takes on additional social functions. For instance, at a University of Michigan tailgate party, fans who have never attended the university but identify closely with it wear blue to reinforce the team's motto, "Go Blue." Entire families, from grandparents to 5-year-olds, will arrive at the tailgate party with everyone dressed completely in blue, and some vans are covered in blue as well. Frequently part of the parking lot is set aside for special alumni groups, such as the class of 1980, and not only are friendships renewed but also major financial contributions to the university are encouraged and finalized.

After the game, all fans hurry to get out of the parking lot as quickly as possible. They drive safely but are not above cutting off another driver they met for the first time and with whom they had been friendly during the tailgate party. All conviviality is forgotten, especially if the team has lost. Fans return to the normal fast pace of U.S. American life in which getting ahead, even at the expense of cutting off another driver, is a strong cultural value.

Pregame and Halftime Entertainment

Before the game and during halftime, there is entertainment on the field. Let's look in on one particular case. There must be at least 300 performers on the field before the game, each with a flag and a lavish smile, all synchronized down to the slightest move. The sun is glittering on the dancers' shiny outfits, and the wind makes the flags dance to the beat of the drums and the sounds of the horns. The sky is clear except for a Goodyear blimp circling high above the outdoor stadium where the New England Patriots, one of the most successful teams in professional football history, play their home games. Although it is freezing and snow begins to fall, the fans are so responsive that they react spontaneously to anything and everything that occurs. They cheer the cheerleaders! They cheer the announcer! They cheer other fans! They even cheer the beer vendor! These fans are seriously committed to having a good time this Sunday afternoon.

The crowd seems to be homogeneous; fans are wearing the same colors, supporting the same team, and hoping for the same outcome. Yet every fan has added a personal touch to this weekly extravaganza. One man has painted his face with the team's colors. A younger guy in front of him has a huge banner with a witty message that indicates his frustration with the coach. Everybody is eating, yet no one is particularly engaged in this feast. They are just continuously munching and crunching while focused on doing something else.

The cheerleaders gather on one side of the field and intensify their dance routines. The music is suddenly blasted, shaking one's body. A bomb, yes a bomb, explodes on the field, igniting a thunderous roar from the crowd. Smoke fills the air, and the middle part of the field becomes virtually concealed. As the smoke clears, a car seems to appear on a podium right on the 50-yard line. Yes, it is a car. Now that the view is unclouded, one can see a Honda standing gallantly on a wide podium surrounded by dancers and models. The Honda jingle is played on the stadium's loudspeakers, the crowd is singing along, and then the announcer proudly proclaims Honda is one of the major sponsors of this week's game. Just as the announcer ordains, the reliable Honda Civic is driven away, followed by the dancers who are still frolicking and prancing in a marketing celebration.

Then the mood becomes serious. The military color guard marches with the U.S. flag to the center of the field and plays the national anthem while one of its members sings the words, accompanied by the voices of many fans, all of whom stand respectfully. During periods of war,

this period of silent awe takes on renewed energy. **If this mood is violated, fans are not happy.** For example, at the various Super Bowls, popular singers have been selected to give their renditions of the national anthem, and periodically these singers are roundly and publicly criticized for disrespecting the anthem and what it is supposed to convey—namely awe, respect, and honor.

At halftime, the Patriots' marching band comes onto the field to perform a spirited and complex series of moves and themed musical numbers under the leadership of the band's director. Accompanying the band are others, including a person carrying the team's flag, cheerleaders, and twirlers. When the second half starts, the home crowd is again ready to cheer on its beloved team.

The halftime entertainment, which is similar to the short breaks found at work—the coffee break, the celebration and presentation of awards for outstanding and/or long employee service, and so on—is over. It is now time to become serious once again and return to the action on the field.

Strategy and War

After the sponsor is announced (and never before), the stage is set for the actual game of football. A sport that captures many of the central values of American society, football has steadily become an integral component of the community. Football in the United States is not only a sport but also an assortment of common beliefs and ideals; indeed, football is a set of collective rituals and values shared by one dynamic society. The speed, the constant movement, the high degree of specialization, the consistent aggressiveness, and the intense competition in football, particularly professional football, all typify American culture.

Strategy is fundamental in football, war, and American business. Zbigniew Brzezinski (2000), a native of Poland who became a U.S. citizen and eventually former President Carter's national security advisor, was initially puzzled by football until he was able to define **the roles of the various actors in terms of war and strategy**. First, there are the owners of the teams, who host special guests in elaborate skyboxes during the game. They can be nasty dictators, aloof monarchs, and variations thereof. Next are the coaches or commanders in chief, who are the CEOs or generals responsible for the team's strategy and oversight of all activities. The head coach is assisted by 9 or 10 assistant coaches, each of whom specializes in a particular area, such as defense and passing. Other coaches sit high in the stadium to provide detached and immediate observations and information to the head coach through their electronic headsets. The head coach calls most of if not all the plays that the quarterback and the offensive team execute. Then there are the quarterbacks, who are the field commanders making last-minute tactical decisions. Finally, the home front or spectators play a key role in cheering on and energizing the home team while demoralizing the enemy.

Football is more like **chess** than the Chinese game known as **Go** (see Gannon, 2008, Chapter 6). As in chess, the objective is to wear down and destroy the enemy or opposing team totally. Just as the game of chess ends with the loser's pieces removed totally from the board, so too in football the winner is exalted while the loser is quickly forgotten. In Go, the objective is to conquer as much space on the board as possible while rendering the opponent powerless. However, saving face or the dignity of the loser is also important, because the winner may someday need his or her help, and it is considered best not to create an eternal enemy who may arise from the ashes to oppose you. For this reason the powerless opponent still has pieces on some of the board. In contrast, saving the dignity of the loser is of minor concern in football.

In business, it frequently takes several years for a firm to create a **new business model** against which other firms have difficulty competing. Examples include the cost advantage of 3% to 5% provided by Wal-Mart's efficient supply chain or General Electric's movement starting in the 1970s from commodity/low-profit products to high-margin differentiated products sold in a global marketplace. Similarly football has had several **such business models**, including the no-huddle offense pioneered by the Buffalo Bills and the one-back offense (freeing up the other back to become a receiver) pioneered by the Washington Redskins.

Bill Walsh, head coach of the San Francisco 49ers for 10 years, created one of the most successful strategies by having the quarterback use many short passes, which had a higher probability of being caught and a lower probability of being intercepted. He and other coaches also realized that they needed to protect their quarterbacks more strongly, because their injury rate was alarming and finding talented recruits for this position is difficult. Soon the left tackle protecting the quarterback's blind side rose in stature and compensation, and in some instances his salary is higher than that of the quarterback, usually the highest-paid player (see Lewis, 2006). This approach is consistent with the U.S. emphasis on linking pay directly to performance.

Selection, the Training Camp, and the Playbook

It is often said that selecting the right people for the job and training them about company expectations is the best guarantee of a firm's success. Companies devote enormous resources to selection and training. For example, U.S. companies spend more on training and education than do all the U.S. business schools combined. This emphasis on selection and training is mirrored in the practices of professional football teams. Their coaching scouts tour the entire country and the world evaluating college and semiprofessional football players and even high school players. The NFL administers a draft in which each team in turn, starting with the one with the poorest record in the previous year, selects players. The team's coaching staff has thoroughly evaluated all the players in the draft regarding the team's needs and strategies and selects draftees accordingly.

Once selected, players arrive at each team's summer camp to learn the numerous complex plays in the playbook. There are **three specialized teams**, each with 11 players: the offense; the defense; and the special teams, some of whose members are extremely specialized. For instance, one player may only kick field goals. The field is 100 yards long, and after the opening kickoff, the offense is given 4 plays in which to win a first down by advancing 10 yards, gaining it the right to another 4 plays. Each field goal is worth 3 points and is not attempted unless the offense faces a fourth down and a low probability of scoring a touchdown, which is worth 6 points; a successful kick after a touchdown is worth 1 point, although a run or a pass into the end zone after a touchdown is worth 2 points.

Every player is a **specialist** and responsible for specific actions during a particular play. These plays are complex and sometimes number 200 or more. Each coach has a **playbook** describing each play in detail, and during summer camp, players are expected to learn these plays thoroughly. At times some players have complained that the plays are so complex and numerous that they are confusing and hard to remember. Still, for the team to be successful, each player must know not only the intricate rules governing the game but also the particular team's complex plays.

Individual Specialized Achievement Within the Team Structure

Some researchers, such as Hofstede (2001), have ranked the United States ahead of all other nations regarding individualism; that is, identifying one's needs and interests and making decisions accordingly. The opposite end of this same scale is collectivism; that is, identifying primarily with the group and its needs. Such a perception is only partially accurate. Americans are also group oriented, and being part of a group or network and identifying with it is essential for success in almost all areas of life. Within the group structure, however, specialization is exalted, and everyone is expected to add value to the final product or service.

Similarly, it is no accident that the undergraduate business and the master of business administration degrees originated in the United States. American business schools moved away from the prevailing non-business-oriented model, which emphasized areas such as liberal arts and religion, in the early 1900s, to specialize in the functional areas of business such as finance, accounting, and marketing.

Emphasis on belonging to a group does not mean that everyone receives the same rewards and compensation. Depending on special qualifications, some players, such as the quarterback and the left tackle protecting him, are rewarded much more handsomely than others. Similarly, rewards in U.S. business are much more unequal than in all or most other nations, with some CEOs making 500 to 600 times more than the average salary in the firm. This trend has accelerated since 1960, when the comparable ratio was about 30 to 1. **Americans believe in equality of opportunity but not equality of outcomes.** In comparable surveys involving five nations (the United States, Germany, France, Britain, and Italy), U.S. respondents were far less likely to agree that it is more important for government to guarantee that no one is in need and far more likely to indicate that government's role is to provide freedom to pursue goals (Parker, 2003). While U.S. Americans have tempered their views since the beginning of the Great Recession starting in 2008, as noted directly below, they strongly believe that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is the ideal. If the company or team is successful, everyone benefits financially, but just as in football, all players benefit but to unequal degrees.

However, a recent survey of college-educated workers in the top quarter of wage earners in their respective nations indicates a more nuanced approach, at least in this subgroup. When the researchers asked respondents in 22 nations to indicate whether they agreed with Milton Friedman's famous statement that "the social responsibility of business is to increase profits," the United States ranked only 9th ("Milton Friedman Goes on Tour," 2011, p. 63). The respondents expressing the most agreement were from Saudi Arabia (84%), followed by those from Japan, India, South Korea, Sweden, Indonesia, and Mexico. Only 56% of U.S. Americans and 43% of respondents from Great Britain agreed, even though these are typically classified as market-pricing cultures.

There has always been a belief in the **Horatio Alger myth** in the United States; that is, one can lift oneself out of poverty through individual efforts and become a CEO or U.S. president. Football strengthens this belief, because many of the stars are assumed to have unbelievably superior skills and abilities that lead to success. **Ironically**, there is consistent empirical evidence across many studies indicating that since 1970, it is more difficult to move from a lower social class to a higher class in the United States than in Europe. In 2008, the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) issued a study of economic inequality in 20 developed

nations that confirms the fact that the United States now leads all these nations in the level of inequality among its citizens. Studies since 2008 have reinforced this finding (see Fisher, 2013).

Football is a team sport, yet the individual is glorified and celebrated. The extent of individualism in football seems to be unsurpassed by that in any other team sport. All the major trophies in football are named after individuals who have contributed to the sport. There are the Heisman trophy, the Vince Lombardi Super Bowl trophy, and many other awards that extol the individual. As indicated previously, every player has a particular role to play. The play's success depends on how well all the players perform, yet there is frequently one player who exerts extra and unusual effort. This distinguished player is seen as making the play happen and receives most of the accolades for doing so. However, he typically does not receive all the accolades, because clearly team coordination and effort are also required for success. Thus other players and sometimes the entire team are lavishly praised. There is, in effect, individualism within the team structure.

The New England Patriots exhibited under Coach Bill Belichick **the fusion** of individuals within a team structure more than other teams. Its members refused to be photographed individually but posed for team photos. Still, Tom Brady, their sterling quarterback, was rewarded much more handsomely than other players. Similarly, Tony Nicely is the CEO of the highly successful GEICO Insurance Company, part of Berkshire-Hathaway, and he has acted in a similar manner, refusing to be photographed unless in the company of other GEICO employees. The esteem in which Nicely is held is captured by the legendary Warren Buffett, the founder of Berkshire-Hathaway, who publicly commented that Nicely is a shareholder's dream ("Potential Heirs," 2011).

Extreme Specialization

Professional football teams are actually multimillion-dollar corporations subdivided into departments and divisions, each with a large, highly specialized staff. Each member of this football "organization" has one very specialized task. Each squad has its own coach or coaches, and there are also medics, trainers, psychiatrists, statisticians, technicians, outfit designers, marketing consultants, and social workers, all with specific duties and assignments. There is even a person assigned to carry the coach's headphone wire throughout the game so that he will not trip on it! **Professional football epitomizes specialization** for many Americans. The plays in football are complex and precisely executed athletic routines; the players' movements and maneuvers are designed to achieve a high level of physical perfection; and the NFL, in general, embodies all that is impeccable and optimum in the American mind: profits, fame, and glory.

Even the equipment is highly specialized; no other sport in the world provides such specialized equipment. Similarly, it seems as if every American carries around a gadget of some sort to do some kind of task. Look at the football player! He wears a helmet, shoulder pads, neck pads, shin guards, ankle pads, and thigh guards to protect himself; he wraps antistatic nonadhesive tape around his wrists and fingers for support; and he wears state-of-the-art astro-rubber shoes for artificial turf or evenly spiked fiber-saturated shoes for grass fields. Then each type of player has his own distinctive equipment: The receivers wear grip-aligned synthetic gloves to catch the football; the linebackers wear tinted-glass face masks (shatterproof, of course) to protect their eyes from the glare; and the cornerbacks wear ultra-light reinforced plastic back pads to maximize their speed. Even the coaches have their own specialized gadgets: They use sensitive cellular devices to communicate with the statistician and the assistant coaches watching the game from seats high in the stadium.

And there is constant pressure on football teams to gain even a small advantage technologically and scientifically. The latest focus is “**big data**,” pioneered by companies such as Amazon and Facebook that amass large data banks to probe the wants of the various groups of users of their services. In the case of the NFL, it struck a deal with Zebra Technologies Corp. to put radio-frequency tracking devices in the shoulder pads of each player in the NFL, which allows the collection of all kinds of data on each player, including average speed per play, the hesitancy of each player in the execution of each play, and the amount of joint stress that each player suffers on each play (Clark, 2014). NFL teams have also installed miniature cameras in the helmets of quarterbacks in an effort to answer the age-old question of what quarterbacks see when under extreme stress during a play, but so far it has been too difficult to collate the data in any meaningful way. There is even talk, but so far only talk because of the complexity involved, of creating a football game simulator, similar to a flight simulator, which would help a team practice but avoid the injuries associated with a real football game.

The “**families**” within a single football team are the three different groups of players forming a **squad**, each of which is one family that includes a group of players with similar attitudes and traits. Each player relates primarily to his squad. **The defensive squad** is usually the most aggressive and violent; **the offensive squad** includes the higher-profile, higher-paid players; and **the special teams squad** is characterized by big plays and high intensity. It is amazing how players try to fit in to their particular squads’ cultures, even to the extent of using nicknames such as “the Hogs” to describe a squad.

Even though football’s rules and regulations are constantly changing from one season to the next, the basic values and ideals of the sport have changed very slowly over the years. In U.S. society, innovation and modification are encouraged and sought, but usually not when it comes to values and ideals. U.S. values, like those of football, have developed rather slowly, and few radical shifts in ideals have taken place over the past two centuries. Coaches such as the late Bill Walsh who develop innovative strategies are esteemed, as are entrepreneurs and CEOs such as Microsoft founder Bill Gates and investor Warren Buffett. Equality of opportunity, independence, initiative, and self-reliance are some of the values that have endured as basic American ideals throughout history. All reflect a high degree of specialized individualism that expresses itself within the structure of a team.

Competition as a Goal

As this discussion implies, **competition** seems to be more than a means to an end in the United States; it has apparently become a **major goal** in and of itself. Just as over half the rules and regulations in professional football deal with protecting and enhancing competition in the league; so too **American antitrust laws and regulations** were essentially created to safeguard competition and equality of opportunity for individuals and groups. U.S. ideals and values trace their origin to successive waves of European immigrants. These diverse immigrants often came into heated conflict with each other. Although hostility could be intense when immigrants first arrived, feelings of animosity were not usually expressed through violence because the immigrants were tired of wars and bloodshed. Rather, these feelings manifested themselves in competition, specialization, and division of labor.

Each geographical area in the United States specialized in a particular category of production: the Northeast in manufacturing, the Midwest in agriculture, and the West in raising cattle. Even within parts of the country that specialized in agriculture, there was further specialization. The

more fertile regions of the United States (for example, Idaho) specialized in raising different crops than those grown in the less fertile (but more populated) South. The distinct, highly specialized immigrant communities were still competing with each other economically, but their use of the law of comparative advantage propelled them to focus their efforts on one particular domain of production in which they excelled.

Thus communities were involved in a new kind of war, one that once and for all was designed to settle the scores between Protestants and Catholics, Poles and Jews, English and Irish, and Germans and Danes. Competition prevailed, and the battles of the Middle Ages were refought in the United States but with new weapons and for new spoils. Each community frequently believed that it carried the burden of proving its own superiority through bigger dams, larger statues, more crops, and greater wealth. The legacy of competition continues to flourish in U.S. society today, but with more restraint.

European immigrants, although distinct and dissimilar, shared a deep suspicion of authority. They assumed that authority impedes competition and foils specialization, both for individuals and groups. Their main reason for fleeing Europe in the first place was corrupt and oppressive authority and/or government. Systems of checks and balances were developed in the United States primarily to protect the people from rulers who might control the economy, dictate religion, or dominate political power.

Similarly, the NFL uses a system of checks and balances during a game. There are **two sets of referees**, one on the field equipped with whistles and flags and the other in the review booth equipped with a videocassette recorder and a color TV. If one team does not like a call that a referee on the field makes, it can appeal to the review judges, who watch the play on video and make a final judgment. However, to avoid slowing down the action too much, a newer rule restricts the number of times that a coach can ask for a replay.

Technology and Tools

Technological development is a catalyst to competitive specialization. Technology is a key ingredient in the efficient competitive specialization required by an intensely capitalist society such as the United States. Similarly technological development plays a key role in the NFL. The weight machines that professional football players use, the cameras and satellites that follow them, and the specialized equipment that they wear are integral to their athletic performance and reflect the U.S. fascination with tools and machines.

The reason behind this fascination with tools is simple: America has historically been short on labor and long on raw materials. To use the abundance of raw materials available, U.S. Americans had to substitute machinery and equipment for unskilled labor. The success of highly mechanized industry in the late 1800s influenced U.S. Americans to continue to develop technology. To U.S. Americans, technology was empirically proven to stimulate growth and success, and their dependence on machines grew stronger as the number of U.S. patented inventions increased. A recent manifestation of this focus is the continuing success of Silicon Valley and the emergence of high-technology industries.

U.S. Americans are typically not influenced greatly by extended kinship or family groups; the nuclear family is the locus of activity and identification. In many ways, U.S. families are like the three squads in football mentioned earlier. A football player relates primarily to his squad and only secondarily to the team. Similarly **U.S. Americans relate to society through nuclear families**

and not kinship groups. As a general rule, U.S. children are taught to relate primarily to their nuclear family at a young age; they learn through the example of their parents that the nuclear family is the integral part of their lives. U.S. Americans normally encourage independence, self-reliance, and initiative in their children. Children are raised to believe that a rich, healthy, happy, and fulfilling life can be attained by almost anybody as long as they are willing to follow certain steps and procedures. The U.S. egalitarian spirit is nourished in children's spirits and accentuated in their minds by parents eager to help their children be successful. As a result, when children have matured to the adult stage, they tend to believe that success (wealth, health, and happiness) is an individual's responsibility and duty. U.S. society frequently views people who are poor, unhealthy, or unhappy as having failed to avail themselves of the opportunities offered.

As indicated earlier, U.S. Americans believe in equality, but only equality of opportunity; personal successes and failures are attributed directly to the individual (see Stewart & Bennett, 1991). Many if not most U.S. Americans tend to see poverty and misery as largely self-induced. When citizens lose their jobs, the United States provides far less unemployment coverage than do many other developed nations. *Business Week* ("Jobless Pay," 2010) reported that the United States compares very poorly with the following nations regarding replacing previous compensation with combined unemployment pay and state benefits during the first year of unemployment: Norway, 72%; Spain, 69%; France, 67%; Canada, 52%; Turkey, 46%; Japan, 45%; South Korea, 31%; the United Kingdom, 28%; and the United States, 28%. Stewart and Bennett (1991) point out that making the individual responsible for all actions, some of which are beyond his or her control, makes life difficult for the average U.S. American, who must be constantly vigilant to maintain self-sufficiency.

U.S. Americans are not honored for past achievements but for what they are currently accomplishing; in this sense their personalities tend to be constantly in a state of flux and evolution. Even during a closely contested football game, the TV sports commentators tend to begin to praise the first team that gets a big lead, only to reverse themselves immediately when the second team catches up and surpasses the first team. It is as if the commentators are trying to predict the final score of the game and align themselves with the winner by praising the winning team unconditionally and ignoring or, worse yet, heaping mounds of criticism on the losing team.

Openness to Change

One of the major results of this orientation toward achievement is that **U.S. managers are generally very open to change and are constantly introducing new programs** with which they can identify and for which they can claim much of the credit; it is not sufficient for them only to build on the programs of their predecessors (Kanter, 1979). **They tend to jettison programs just as quickly**, however, and the United States is famous for both the fads that it introduces and the short-term orientation of its managers.

In short, **competitive specialization**, both for each individual and the groups in which he or she participates, appears to be **the most evident feature of the United States**. Generally speaking, the notion of "specializing to compete" is the principal ideological ideal that U.S. Americans endorse, practice, safeguard, and promote worldwide. Competitive specialization is the tool with which U.S. Americans tend to tackle life's main challenges. This tool is often serviced and maintained with high levels of emotional intensity and aggressiveness. From this perspective it is not surprising that most U.S. Americans, when asked what they do, immediately describe their occupation or profession, unlike the Japanese, who tend to respond with the name of the company in which they work (see Chapter 3).

Aggression, High Risks, and Unpredictable Outcomes

The similarities between real life in the United States and a professional football game are astounding, especially in terms of the warlike atmosphere that pervades this sport. Football closely parallels the extroverted and sometimes even belligerent U.S. society. According to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, which is the most widely used personality scale in the United States, 75% of American males and females are extroverted and aggressive in personal relations (Keirsey, 1998). While such extroversion is in large measure a positive feature of U.S. life (Barnlund, 1989), the United States is a leading country in indicators that profile the negative aspects of extroversion and aggressiveness. For example, 313.1 million U.S. citizens own an estimated 400 million guns. As the noted political scientist James Q. Wilson (2007) points out, this fact in and of itself does not confirm violent aggression. However, he also points out that the nongun homicide rate is 3 times higher in the United States than in England. Relatedly, the United States leads the world in the number of prisoners as a proportion of the population at 1 per 100. As the *Economist* notes (“Too Many Laws,” 2010), no other developed nation is nearly as punitive as the United States: Britain’s rate of incarceration is only one fifth of America’s, Germany’s is one ninth, and Japan’s is one twelfth. If those on parole or probation are included, then in the United States 1 adult in 31 is under correctional supervision.

U.S. Americans recognize instinctively the link between life in America and what happens on the football field. Violence and aggression are part of football’s appeal to U.S. society, and they both correspond to real life. Aggression, which is often interpreted as energy and intense motivation, is encouraged in the United States. Analogously, aggression is celebrated in football. The teams compete with one another, players on the same team compete for starting positions, and even the fans compete for better tickets.

As noted previously, there have been periodic movements to outlaw football, and only through the intervention of two U.S. Presidents was the game sufficiently improved in safety that an outright ban was avoided. Similarly, while some U.S. states have moved to outlaw popular mixed martial arts contests, which are fought brutally in a cage with few rules, defenders of these regulated struggles point out that 63 deaths have occurred in football between 1993 and 2006 and only 2 deaths have resulted from mixed martial arts; furthermore, these deaths took place in unregulated contests in Korea and Russia (Schrotenboer, 2006). Still, as Max Boot argued (2014), football is far less dangerous than several other activities.

Survival of the Fittest

This type of individual competition and aggressiveness seems to be particularly suited to the United States. Richard Hofstadter (1955) graphically describes why social Darwinism or the survival of the fittest individual was a social philosophy that appealed to U.S. Americans at the turn of the 20th century:

With its rapid expansion, its exploitative methods, its desperate competition, and its peremptory rejection of failure, post-bellum America was like a vast human caricature of the Darwinian struggle for existence and survival of the fittest. Successful business entrepreneurs apparently accepted almost by instinct the Darwinian terminology which seemed to portray the conditions of their existence. (p. 44)

Given its violence and aggression, one might question why football has such pervasive popularity in the United States. It has, however, compensating characteristics, including its expression of deeply held U.S. values. Also, the complexity of football intimately involves football aficionados in every play, and they easily see analogs in their daily and business lives. Fans and experts compare statistics on each player and team along numerous dimensions, and they have developed a highly specialized vocabulary for doing so. A week before a major game, sports radio programs featuring call-ins from fans with decided opinions and vast knowledge are popular, and follow-up programs after the game use the same format. Having the knowledge to participate in these conversations creates a sense of in-group solidarity, and the clueless spectator is ignored.

Just as important is **the highly unpredictable nature of the game**. One team may be in total control of the game in the first half, only to wither and die through attrition or succumb to revitalized offensive and defensive/aggressive play of the opponent in the second half. Football is one of the most unpredictable sports games in the world. For example, a 2-minute warning is sounded before the end of the game, when play is paused briefly. When play resumes, it is not unusual for a seemingly defeated and discouraged team to score two touchdowns, creating a tie and taking the game into overtime or even winning outright. Similarly, one team may be losing 35–0 at halftime only to come back and win. In the 2008 Super Bowl, the Patriots were seeking a historic finish to an undefeated season of 19–0, but they lost in the final minute of the game to the underdog New York Giants, who used a modified no-huddle offense to save time (see “Huddling” below).

Expect the Unexpected

Furthermore, although each player is expected to perform a particular action in each play, the unexpected happens so frequently that the individual player must be creative. The best players can implement an inventive tactic on the fly that, despite its riskiness, may be successful and bring the crowd to its feet. For instance, a play designed for a run may be altered to include a pass when the designated runner is surrounded by the defensive team. All the players, both on offense and defense, must then adapt to the new situation.

There are, as we have seen throughout this chapter, many reasons to study football and to watch it. Among these reasons, complexity, risk taking, and unpredictability rank high.

Huddling

Another characteristic that differentiates football from any other sport in the world is **the huddle**, in which the offensive team comes together as a group before each play to hear what play they will execute. There is **no other sport in the world** where one sees the huddle before every play. In the huddle are different players from diverse backgrounds and with various levels of education. All have agreed that the only way to accomplish a certain task is to put differences aside and cooperate objectively. After the game, every player returns to his own world, living his own life in his own way. That is the essence of the melting pot, a diversified group of people who forget their differences temporarily to achieve a common goal. As early as 1832, Alexis de Tocqueville drew attention to this facet of the U.S. perspective (as quoted in Miller & Hustedde, 1987):

These Americans are the most peculiar people in the world. You'll not believe it when I tell you how they behave. In a local community in their country a citizen may conceive of some need which is not being met. What does he do? He goes across the street and discusses it with his neighbor. Then what happens? A committee comes into existence and then the committee begins functioning on behalf of that need. And you won't believe this but it is true. All of this is done without reference to any bureaucrat. All of this is done by the private citizens on their own initiative. (p. 91)

Can a football team afford the luxury of eliminating the huddle? In most cases no. However, the 1991 Super Bowl, one of the best Super Bowls to date, featured the Buffalo Bills, who did not huddle after each play, and the New York Giants, who did. It was a very close game that was decided only in the final minutes. The no-huddle Bills were able to use this approach only because of the expertise of their outstanding quarterback, Jim Kelly. Once again, an individual was able to shine within the group context. Still, the final result was that the huddling Giants won. The final verdict is not in, because other NFL teams have since employed the no-huddle offense successfully, but only sparingly thus far. Similarly, most if not all groups and organizations in the United States employ a version of huddling to handle their problems and achieve their objectives. Wal-Mart, for instance, pioneered the daily 10-minute early-morning meeting at which all stand so as to get down to business quickly, shorten the meeting time, and then go out to execute the plan. This company also pioneered Saturday morning motivational breakfast meetings at which awards are given to individual employees and managers and everyone shouts company cheers such as "In Sam we trust," in honor of Wal-Mart's late founder, Sam Walton. This is similar to what happens when a football team wins its league championship or, better yet, the Super Bowl, and the winning team is traditionally honored by a parade in its hometown.

Business Groups

The U.S. concept of huddling to coordinate activities **is quite different** from the Japanese sense of community within the organization. The Japanese normally socialize with coworkers after work, and if a major problem occurs, they will sometimes go off-site for an evening of drinking, dinner, informal camaraderie, and finally the discussion of the problem at hand and how to address it. Periodically they will repeat such sessions until the problem is solved. Other nationalities, such as the Chinese and the Koreans, also have similar practices involving frequent group activities after working hours. U.S. Americans, on the other hand, tend to huddle together in a business meeting specifically to address and solve the problem at hand, after which they scatter to complete their other work-oriented activities. If additional meetings are necessary, they are normally conducted in the same fashion.

As Daniel Boorstin (1965) has so persuasively shown, **the lone cowboy or lone frontiersman is a poor metaphor for the United States**. Rather, as adventuresome U.S. Americans moved westward to pursue a better life, they came together frequently to form temporary associations or teams to solve specific problems. However, given the rapid mobility of U.S. society—a characteristic still dominant today—**relationships among members of these groups tended to be cooperative but only superficially friendly**; there was no time to develop deep friendships. The United States is the classic **"doing"** society whose members are primarily interested in building and accomplishing goals. The focus in the United States is on accomplishing present goals to

ensure a safe future; little attention is given to past activities and history. Europeans and Asians frequently complain that it is very difficult to establish deep, personal relationships with U.S. Americans. As a general rule, U.S. Americans commit themselves intensely to a group effort but only for a specified and frequently short period of time. Unlike many Europeans, who live, work, and die within 30 miles of their birthplaces, U.S. Americans frequently huddle in temporary groups as they change jobs, careers, geographical areas, and even spouses throughout their lives.

In football, **the huddle** divides the game into smaller sets of tasks that, when accomplished, successfully lead to the fulfillment of victory. **A team is divided into independent jobs, which are realigned during short periods of position reassessment and fueled by continuous tactical evaluation. The huddle phenomenon** in U.S. culture—meeting together to subdivide a large task into smaller related jobs that are accomplished one at a time—is illustrated in the way that U.S. Americans tackle problems. Any intricate situation is broken down into smaller issues, which are then addressed one at a time. U.S. Americans tend to believe that any problem can be solved, as long as the solution process has a specific number of steps to follow and questions to answer. Likewise in football, no matter how complicated a situation may be, teams are convinced that they can overcome it through a standardized planning process.

Manufacturing System

The U.S. American system of manufacturing (ASM), a system that developed as a result of Frederick Taylor's time-and-motion studies at the end of the 19th century, is the huddle of American economic history. It reflects how the U.S. mind is tuned. Just as the huddle in football facilitates a standardized planning process for a specific situation, the ASM facilitates a standardized manufacturing process for different products.

The ASM emphasizes simplicity of design, standardization of parts, and large-scale output. U.S. Americans introduced the concept and use of mass production as a direct consequence of their intense use of machinery. Whereas it took a group of German workers 1 week to masterfully produce 10 high-quality shotguns in the 1800s, the same number of U.S. workers, with the help of standardized parts and ready-to-assemble components, produced in 1 day many more shotguns at less cost. U.S. products throughout history have generally been known not for their elegance but for their utility, practicality, and cheapness. The U.S. culture is one that respects machines and considers them critical to civilization. In fact, one of the major U.S. contributions to the development of society has been its emphasis on ingenious tools and technology, including the personal computer, the telephone, the photocopy machine, and the iPad.

U.S. society directly relates standardization to the ranking of individuals. Many decisions depend on ranking via a standardized process (often based on statistical analysis) in the United States. Usually there is no time to judge people subjectively. Stewart and Bennett (1991) point out that many “**being**” or high-context societies rank or rate employee performance in an **absolute** sense so as to save face; for example, Jones is a superior or good performer. However, U.S. Americans in their “**doing**” mode typically compare individuals to one another when evaluating performance. Standards are relative and not absolute, and an employee may well be replaced when someone else ranks higher.

General Electric, for example, pioneered the use of such a forced rating system, and other large U.S. American corporations have imitated it: 20% receive above-average rewards, 70% average rewards, and 10% few if any rewards, with some of the bottom group being advised to leave if

earlier warnings did not lead to positive changes in performance. General Electric is also the only multinational firm in the world that has a **public tournament** for the position of CEO, which must be vacated at age 65. Four or five long-time GE executives are selected and announced 2 years before the current CEO's departure, and their performance is closely scrutinized. Once the new CEO is announced, the other candidates typically depart. This Darwinian system, however, has encouraged other large firms to hire the rejected CEOs because GE thought so highly of them that they were asked to participate in the tournament.

Academic Competitiveness

Even in an academic setting, students in the United States are often evaluated and compared relative to each other. Students' grades are plotted as a curve of relative performance (usually a bell curve). This curve determines the students' final reported grades.

As might be expected, U.S. Americans normally want to know what the bottom line is so that they can objectively make a decision. This perspective is particularly disconcerting in U.S. schools and colleges, where many students want to know only what will be on the final examinations. The egalitarian character of the United States, together with the fast pace of life, necessitates one form of standardized ranking or another when assessing a certain situation. Such rankings are accepted by individuals, who still huddle and work together within the group structure.

Although many U.S. Americans consider mathematics boring and tedious, all forms of standardized rankings involve figures and numbers. When ranking quarterbacks, for instance, the NFL standardizes the ranking process by defining different numerical categories that cover all aspects of the position. Each quarterback has certain numbers and figures, ranging from "percentage of pass completions" to "interceptions over touchdowns" to "number of yards passed per game." The quarterback's livelihood depends on those numbers. To negotiate a raise, a quarterback has to improve his numbers, and when a quarterback is benched, it is often due to unsatisfactory numbers. Similarly, at least 13 million Americans belong to **virtual football leagues** in which participants select players from different professional teams; at the end of the season, the participant whose virtual team has amassed the most points, defined by each virtual league differently, wins the jackpot. Such leagues even have a draft at the beginning of the season.

Numbers have an immense impact on the decision-making process in American society, whether it is a financial market analysis, a college recruitment program, or a political decision. U.S. politicians are very sensitive to polls (which are nothing but bottom-line numbers), even to the extent that there is always a statistician on any major political staff. Similarly, a dependence on aptitude tests is crucial in the U.S. education system. Academic institutions normally require that students take one kind of standardized test or another. Although the admission decision is based on a larger number of criteria, the aptitude test score is extremely influential. Just as a college football player's "numbers" are the arguments on which he is judged for professional recruitment, so too the student's aptitude test scores frequently are the decisive factors for college acceptance or rejection and for the quality of the colleges to which he or she is admitted. Similarly, many if not most Americans are mesmerized by the Nate Silver phenomenon, who not only predicted the 2012 election results in all 50 states but also the winner of the 2014 Super Bowl; he relies exclusively on an analysis of data. For data-obsessed Americans, such results are not surprising.

Saving Time

This whole notion of standardized ranking evolves from the U.S. perception of time. Time is not thought of as a continuous and abundant commodity. There is frequently no time for conducting numerous specialized or personalized tests when judging recruits. There is only one standard test, to be taken once every so often, because naturally time is limited. Analogously, the sport of football is based on the notion that **time is limited**, and teams are continuously trying to beat the clock, particularly near the end of the game after the 2-minute warning has been given.

There is almost always a time limit in the United States, and **the huddle phenomenon in football reflects this time shortage**. There is a specific time limit for the huddle before each play. Football players often rush into or out of the huddle in an attempt to conserve time. Similarly, U.S. Americans constantly have a stressful feeling that time is running out and therefore they must talk quickly, walk quickly, eat quickly, and even “rest” quickly.

A concrete manifestation of this emphasis on a time limit is provided by speed dating, which originated in the United States. Young and not-so-young unmarried adults do not have time for traditional dating, so they attend sessions at which each of them talks consecutively with 30 to 40 members of the opposite sex, each for 3 minutes. An official sounds a bell after 3 minutes to signal that it is time to talk to another person. At the end of the evening, each person is free to accept or reject an offer for a longer meeting. Given that McDonald’s established the first nationally successful fast-food chain, the *Economist* fittingly titled an article on this phenomenon “McDating” (2002). The popularity of speed dating in the United States is so high that the practice has spread to many other nations.

When talking, U.S. Americans have mastered the art of developing acronyms for time-consuming words such as *economics* (*econ* for short). The concept of extended formal names—for example, Herr Professor Doktor—is not only anathema to egalitarian U.S. Americans but also runs against the grain of their time-saving efforts. Any combination of words that forms a name or a title of some sort is promptly diminished to fewer letters so as to save time when saying them. The National Football Conference and the American Football Conference are never referred to as such, but rather they are efficiently called the NFC and the AFC. The Grand Old Party is the GOP, *madam* is *ma’am*, President Kennedy is JFK, the federal bank is the Fed, *amplifier* becomes *amp*, and best of all, *howdy* is the time-conscious way to say “How do you do?”

Due to the prevailing notion that time is scarce, when improvident news events occur, especially scandals such as the O. J. Simpson trial or former President’s Clinton sexual mischief, they are vigorously discussed and energetically debated in U.S. society—but not for long. U.S. Americans do not have much time to dedicate to one news event. As Hall and Hall (1990) have shown, U.S. Americans are **monochronic**, doing one activity at a time rather than several activities. After intensely analyzing one major event for a short period, U.S. Americans become distracted and begin to focus on a new event. In recent years, however, because of the pervasive influence of computers and related activities such as the use of social media, U.S. Americans seem to have become **more polychronic in terms of multitasking**, as have the citizens in many nations.

Time is also limited in the United States because there are so many things to do in a lifetime. Society develops technologically at horrendous speed, and it is difficult to keep up. One has to be continuously on the move. This is the United States; there is little time for contemplating or meditating. Ideally one succeeds at an early age, and **success in the United States is often impersonal and lonely**. And the trend has accelerated: In 1985 U.S. Americans shocked pollsters when they indicated that they each had on average only three personal friends; in 2006 the number of

friends had decreased to two (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Brashears, 2006). While many young Americans have “friends” on Facebook and other social media, most of them tend to be superficial (Trotter, 2013). Similarly, de Mooij (2005) points out that Japanese advertisements tend to employ single-person ads presumably because there is a desire for individualism, while in the United States the opposite situation prevails; that is, groups at a party or a bar are emphasized in the idealized world presented in ads because of too much individualism and loneliness in real life.

Football provides that sense of belonging and the brotherhood/sisterhood atmosphere that success lacks, and the huddle is the ideal time-efficient approach for handling problems either in football or at work. The popular belief that the top is often lonely, however, does not inhibit most U.S. Americans from pursuing higher levels of achievement because life, they believe, is a test of self-reliance and independence.

The Church of Football and Celebrating Perfection

Robert Lipsyte, a well-known journalist, titled his 2007 article “The Church of Football.” This arresting title captures the esteem and awe in which most U.S. Americans hold both religion and football. U.S. Americans attend church regularly when compared to many citizens of European nations. However, a Pew Foundation study indicates that, in recent years, 44% of adults have abandoned ties to specific religions or switched religious affiliations. The Pew Foundation study profiled the major U.S. religious affiliations as follows: Evangelical Protestant, 26.3%; Catholic, 23.9%; mainline Protestant, 18.1%; historically Black Protestants, 6.9%, and other/unaffiliated, 24.8% (Kang, 2008).

The legendary **Vince Lombardi**, who took over as coach of the Green Bay Packers after the team had posted a 1–12 win-loss record in 1960, is an example of a leader who linked hard work, religious beliefs, and success closely. When he met the team for the first time, he thanked the Packers for allowing him to be their coach. Then he followed up by saying, “Gentlemen, we are going to relentlessly chase perfection, knowing full well we will not catch it, because nothing is perfect. But we are going to relentlessly chase it, because in the process we will catch excellence” (quoted in Schaap, 2008, p. 8). The adage “Winning isn’t everything; it’s the only thing” is also attributed to Lombardi. This relentless focus on perfection and winning led the team to capture five NFL championships from 1961 through 1967 and the first two Super Bowls in 1967 and 1968. Today Lombardi is revered by long-time football fans and coaches of all stripes.

Similarly the new immigrants had a utopian vision for the United States. The ideals that the nation symbolized were and still are considered sacred and perfect. Unlike in other major societies, U.S. values are based on written materials that are believed to be inviolate and perfect, namely the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. U.S. history is an ongoing battle to preserve the perfect values and utopian ideals incarnated in these documents.

With that in mind, one can understand why the portrait of the United States in the minds of the **immigrants** was actually **a utopian image**. Charles Sanford (1961) encapsulates the essence of this image:

The Edenic image, as I have defined it, is neither a static agrarian image of cultivated nature nor an opposing image of the wilderness, but an imaginative complex which, while including both images, places them in a dynamic relationship with other values. Like true myth or

story, it functions on many levels simultaneously, dramatizing a people's collective experience within a framework of polar opposites. The Edenic myth, it seems to me, has been the most powerful and comprehensive organizing force in American culture. (p. vi)

For centuries the United States was “**utopianized**” by people fleeing persecution, subjection, tyranny, and oppression. America the concept was actually an attempt to create utopia. America the value encompassed all that is perfect: strength, wealth, philanthropy, family, children, and glory. This is utopia. Analogously football personifies that unblemished portrait. Professional football is a symbol of the U.S. utopia realized.

Founding Documents

It is very important to note that the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, the basic written sources of U.S. values, were created by individual human beings, not gods, prophets, sacred apostles, or holy emperors. From this fact one can understand why the United States ceremonially glorifies the individual. The common belief in the United States is that individuals are capable of doing anything they want to accomplish. Individual achievements, whether earning a degree or scoring the highest number of field goals for one game, are considered precious and are entitled to commemoration in one type of ceremony or another. Ceremonial celebrations of more significant accomplishments, such as winning a major party's presidential nomination or the Super Bowl, become automatically a reflection of the U.S. pursuit of perfection and utopia.

When retired NFL players are selected to the Football Hall of Fame, the most prestigious honor in professional football, the induction ceremonies celebrate both the individuals selected and the country that bestowed such perfection. The high sense of nationalism felt around professional football is ceremonially reflected before the start of each game, as we have seen. The national anthem is played and sometimes sung by a celebrity, and the fans proudly sing along; the flag procession precedes every football game, and representatives from the Army, Navy, and the Air Force carry American flags and assemble on the field. Apparently there is nothing worth celebrating more or nothing more perfect than the United States. In the United States, sporting events in general and professional football games in particular are in essence ceremonies that celebrate how perfect teams can be, how spectacular the nation is, and how well the system works.

It is little wonder that the Super Bowl, watched by over 100 million U.S. Americans and by millions of other fans throughout the world, has become the major family holiday in the United States. At the first Super Bowl in 1967, there were vacant seats. Because of such factors as adroit marketing and promotion of this event, it is now very difficult, if not impossible, for average people to purchase a ticket, even if they can afford it. A TV advertisement of 30 seconds for the 2015 Super Bowl will cost 3.8 million dollars, and analysts minutely compare the effectiveness of each of these high-priced ads. Of course, the halftime show is spectacular, and many people are drawn to the game because of it. In the city where the contest is held, parties begin a week before the game, and invitations to them are scarce. In fact, there are so many glitterati, public relations specialists, and businesspeople who attend the parties but skip the game itself that the *Wall Street Journal* recently headlined its article on the event “What Game?” (Karp, 2008). In essence, the Super Bowl epitomizes the relationship between basic cultural values and material success.

Russell H. Conwell—the first president of Temple University, a Methodist minister and famous orator—provided an apt expression of **this relationship between religion and material**

success in his “Acres of Diamonds” sermon, which he delivered more than 10,000 times throughout the United States in the late 19th century:

I say you ought to be rich; you have no right to be poor. . . . I must say that you ought to spend some time getting rich. You and I know that there are some things more valuable than money; of course, we do. Ah, yes. . . . Well does the man know who has suffered that there are some things sweeter and holier and more sacred than gold. Nevertheless, the man of common sense also knows that there is not any one of those things that is not greatly enhanced by the use of money. Money is power; money has powers; and for a man to say, “I do not want money,” is to say, “I do not wish to do any good to my fellowmen.” It is absurd thus to talk. It is absurd to disconnect them. This is a wonderfully great life, and you ought to spend your time getting money, because of the power there is in money.

Greatness consists not in holding some office; greatness really consists in doing some great deed with little means, in the accomplishment of vast purposes from the private ranks of life; this is true greatness. (quoted in Burr, 1917, pp. 414–415)

Even today, leaders of mega-churches in the United States, such as Joel Osteen, link religion and worldly success by explicitly stating that God wants each of us to succeed in a material way.

The celebration of nationalism is evident not only in football but in most areas of socializing in the United States. On television, which U.S. Americans watch while socializing, many commercials are tied directly to nationalism, and innumerable marketable products or services are related to patriotism. In general, U.S. Americans perceive their nation to be young, successful, and prestigious. By associating products with the United States, marketers aim to relate the youthfulness, beauty, and sex appeal of the United States to their own products. For example, here are the words of a Miller beer commercial:

*Miller's made the American way,
born and brewed in the U.S.A.,
just as proud as the people . . .
who are drinking it today,
Miller's made the American way.*

The jingle is accompanied by pictures of smiling U.S. American faces and happy U.S. American children, all of whom are joined in a dramatic celebration of the perfect beer brewed by the perfect country. In the background and throughout the commercial, the U.S. flag is flying gracefully, symbolizing flawlessness. There is basically nothing stated about this beer other than that it is pure American. Well, that's enough for many U.S. consumers. The utopian U.S. character is partial to success, popularity, and prestige.

Nationalist Beliefs

Sometimes nationalism generates **ethnocentric behavior** in the United States. In football, for instance, the Super Bowl is referred to as the “world championship” in spite of the fact that only

U.S. teams compete in it. To many U.S. Americans, the United States is the world or at least the best part of it. The globe revolves around the United States, and the poorer members of the international community are protected by U.S. financial and military force, as confirmed by the ongoing but declining military operations in Afghanistan as American troops return home.

However, such confidence has been questioned in both the United States and elsewhere in recent years. As globalization has proceeded, other nations such as Brazil, China, and India are rising in influence. Even the U.S. preeminence in technology is in question, because about 50% of the patents filed in the United States come from foreign-owned firms and foreign-born inventors.

Still, the economic success and military might of the United States often induce egotistical reactions to international events among its citizens. These narcissistic feelings are frequently evoked by the media's persistent portrayal of and fascination with the world's disasters and mishaps. To the U.S. media, "no news is good news," and therefore the outside world is often reported as volatile, violent, and miserable. The positive features of foreign countries are rarely highlighted. Because average U.S. Americans are continuously bombarded with news of famines, wars, violence, and political turmoil from the outside world, they are frequently not aware of the pleasant and fascinating features of other nations. This ethnocentrism is so extreme that many U.S. Americans believe that their country is the safest and most prosperous country in the world, even when the facts do not support such a conclusion.

Religious Affiliation

As indicated previously, religion is held in high regard in the United States, and the U.S. utopia is not complete without the practice of religion. More than half the U.S. population attends church regularly. Only a few other nations surpass the United States on this measure. More than 400,000 churches in the United States appeal to all types of religious beliefs. Although the country is primarily Christian, there are numerous other denominations. Also, billions of dollars are spent on church-related activities. For example, it is often said with some justification that the Vatican would be in grave financial difficulties if U.S. Catholics decreased significantly their level of financial support.

In many ways, the church of football incorporates the values of all of U.S. churches, even when conflicting dogmas and creeds impede the possibility of mergers. During games and in interviews, coaches and players invoke God and religion as the source of their success. **Coaches have followed the late Vince Lombardi's lead** by espousing a football gospel of hard work, team integration and effort, religious inspiration, perfection, and worldly success. However, if a coach or player violates the ideals, members of the football church renounce him, as in the cases of fabled NFL player O. J. Simpson, currently in prison for multiple felonies, and legendary coach Joe Paterno, who was fired from Penn State after one of his assistant coaches was arrested on charges of abusing children. In the case of Paterno, however, feelings are mixed, because he was an exemplary man and coach who devoted his life to both Penn State football and academics, and there are passionate advocates on both sides of this sad event, shortly after which Paterno died unexpectedly.

Just as team managers try to relate to and identify with society through religious ceremonies, so too U.S. Americans participate in religious activities to belong to a social group. For the early immigrants who left their families and possessions, religion reestablished their social life in the United States. To these new immigrants, moving to a different society entailed a weakening ethnic

identification and rootlessness. Religion thus became a means of identification and belonging for U.S. Americans, and churches and religious organizations frequently formed political pressure groups to achieve goals that helped their members and were compatible with their beliefs.

By way of summarizing this discussion of U.S. culture, it is possible to relate the football metaphor to Hofstede's (2001) five dimensions of culture described in the first part of this book. As indicated previously, of the 53 countries in Hofstede's original study, the United States ranked 1st on the importance that its respondents attached to the belief in individualism. As we have seen in this chapter, however, this individualism is aggressive individualism enacted within the rules and structure of the team or group. The United States also clustered with those countries that accepted and even relished a high degree of risk in everyday life and that manifested a high degree of masculinity or an aggressive and materialistic orientation to life. Also, U.S. Americans demonstrated a preference for informality, low power distance between individuals and groups, and weak hierarchical authority. In light of our discussion in this chapter, these findings are not surprising.

Many throughout the world still view the United States as far better than the countries in which they live, despite the global financial crisis of 2008 that threw the American economy into recession and put many Americans on the unemployment rolls. The United States still attracts large numbers of immigrants, many of them illegal, who are willing to put up with the hardships of life in the United States because of the opportunities that are available to those who work hard and strive for success. The latest example of this attraction involved **over 50,000 children** sent to the United States by their families in **Central America** because of the hardship of living there. The children, many escorted only by "coyotes" who were paid by the families to take the children into the United States illegally through harsh desert conditions, overwhelmed the existing system in the United States for handling such issues, and some of them, as young as 5, died before crossing the border. Still, when they arrive, they tend to experience a distinctive form of culture shock resulting from the interplay among the factors described in this chapter. Much of this culture shock is encapsulated in common United States sayings and aphorisms, and we end by highlighting some of them:

- Life is just a bowl of cherries.
- Let's get together and work on this problem.
- It's not violent. It's energetic, dude!
- It's lonely at the top.
- Get out of my face!
- Gotta run man—maybe we'll talk later.
- America . . . Love it or leave it!
- Where there's a will, there's a way.
- One step at a time.
- It's never too late.
- You're from Nigeria? Is that a city in Germany?
- Hi! How are you? (As he or she walks by not really wanting or expecting an answer)