Hello, and welcome to Sociological Studies. As always, thank you for taking the time out of your busy day to study society. In this lesson, we’re going to talk about values and beliefs.

For starters, values are cultural guidelines that delineate what is good and bad, and provide instruction for social living. Whereas, beliefs, on the other hand, are convictions, understandings, and ideas that people hold as truth. We’re going to talk a lot about the relationship between values and beliefs.

Beliefs flow from values. They’re different. Values come first and structure our beliefs. Many Americans value hard work and industriousness, for example. So we believe then, that someone who is lazy and idle will be unsuccessful. And that someone who works hard will be successful.

Again also, Americans value equality of opportunity. Therefore, many Americans believe that black and white people can be equally qualified for jobs and that no one should be discriminated against based upon their race. So values can be understood as broad, transcended cultural standards that guide our thinking. And beliefs are specific matters that flow from values about which we have true and false opinions.

All right, so now we’re going to have a little fun and talk about 10 central values of American life given to us by sociologist Robin Williams, Jr.

Now unfortunately, Robin Williams, Jr., is no relation to the comedian, Robin Williams. When I first saw that name, I thought that. It would've been great, but he's not. He was just a sociologist and a student of culture who made his career studying American culture. So according to Robin Williams, Jr. then, he wrote this book in the 1970s and laid out 10 core American values and the first of which was equal opportunity. Fairness in life chances. This is one of the 10 foundational American values.

Equal opportunity leads us to believe that Americans can pull themselves up by their bootstraps and get ahead. Next, we value achievement and success. Personal achievement.

We're a very competitive societies, so Americans place emphasis on accomplishments. Whether they be academic or economic. And often, success gets measured by dollar earnings. We put a premium on achievement and success in this culture.

Thirdly, Robin Williams, Jr. argued that we value material comfort. People want to be comfortable, safe, and secure. So we strive for comfort. We enjoy leisure, vacations, and consumption for the same reasons that we
strive for material comfort.

Fourth, we value activity and work over leisure, laziness, and idleness. America is the geographical and spiritual seed of capitalism, so we value hard work and industriousness. We must work before play this value dictates.

Fifthly, we value practicality and efficiency. America's value efficiency in getting things done quickly and cost effectively with immediate results. So kind of a funny story as I was preparing this lecture, this last value here, practicality and efficiency.

I was riding in a car with my girlfriend and the two 10-year-old girls that she nannies for. And one of them was talking about how she was going to study Chinese. How her parents wanted her to study Chinese, but she really liked Spanish. I was like, well, why don't you study Spanish? She's like, it's not practical or efficient. Those words came right out of her mouth. And I laughed. I was like, who told you that? She's like, my dad. So this illustrates just how practical Americans are. It's all about the future.

So if something's not practical or efficient, we're not going to do it. We value practicality and efficiency.

The sixth quintessential American value is progress. Progress for progress sake, really. We value the new over the old, the present over the past. Historical ways of living are looked down on and laughed at. This value is why a new version of your computer comes out every year, new iPad, new phones. And it's why Stephen Colbert once joked about how his day was going great until Steve Jobs made him hate his Christmas present when the new model got released. Progress.

Seven is science, science And rational thinking. Americans are imbued with a strong rationality, and we often rely on reason over emotion in our decision-making and in our social life. Science is believed to help discover and deliver truth and advance progress, industry, and society.

I'm thinking of that Coldplay lyric where he's talking about how science and progress do not speak as loud as his heart. Stuff makes it into music. Even though Coldplay is British, it doesn't matter-- science, progress.

Eight, we have democracy and free enterprise. We cherish democratic elections and abhor anything that seems entitled privilege-- monarchs, queens, things like that. America is founded on democracy. It's one of our founding values.

Finally then for the last two, freedom. Americans value freedom to pursue one's dreams. Being held down by obligations, duties, or roles is to be avoided because it may hamper us from pursuing our personal goals. So we value freedom.
Finally, 10, which may seem like an anti-value when I explain it. We value group superiority. Many Americans, in fact, still judge others based on race, class, or gender. And these issues tend to be amplified in American society relative to European societies.

So we tend to privilege certain groups over others. Men over women, whites over people of color, English, French, and German ancestry over Polish and Eastern European heritage. So this is the value of group superiority.

Well, of course, this is not an exhaustive list. I mean, we could have included religion. Religion and religious freedom is also a hallmark American value. We’re more religious as a nation than most countries of similar economic standing. And not every value on this list is held by each and every individual in this country.

Robin Williams, Jr. was only trying to get at the social values that describe American society as a whole. So of course, Americans then are free to disagree with any of these values if they want. But socially, these are the 10 American values.

Thank you very much for joining me. I hope you enjoyed this discussion of beliefs and values. Have a great rest of your day.