

HANDOUT A
BEING AN AMERICAN

Directions: Read the selections below and think about how they reflect what it means to be an American. Then answer the questions below.

 **What We Say** 

The steady character of our countrymen is a rock to which we may safely moor...
Unequivocal [clear] in principle, reasonable in manner, we shall be able I hope to do a
great deal of good to the cause of freedom & harmony.

–*Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), third President of the United States*

In the long run, we shape our lives, and we shape ourselves. The process never ends until we
die. And the choices we make are ultimately our own responsibility.

–*Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962), First Lady of the United States*

Now, I say to you today my friends, even though we face the difficulties of today and
tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a
dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed:—‘We
hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’

–*Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968), Baptist minister and civil rights leader*

 **What Others Have Said About Us** 

Americans of all ages, all stations of life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations....

–*Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1856), French historian and author of Democracy in America*

Europe will never be like America. Europe is a product of history.

America is a product of philosophy.

–*Margaret Thatcher (b. 1925), Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

There’s the country of America, which you have to defend, but there’s also the idea of America.

America is more than just a country, it’s an idea. An idea that’s supposed to be contagious.

–*Bono (b. 1960), musician and activist*

1. Choose one quotation from each section and write each in your own words:

2. What are these quotations saying about what it means to be an American?
