

Managing Diversity

A monthly source of information, ideas, and tips for people managing a Diverse Workforce

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A Book Review

By Dr. George Simons

Citizen Diplomacy is an unpretentious, factual book that fills a need countless U.S. citizens have experienced but too few of us have handled as well as we might - curiosity about this country, its people, government, business, and economy. The world knows too much about us - the media have made sure of that - but beyond stereotypes, far too little about why we are the way we are.

Citizen Diplomacy is unique in the literature about U.S. culture in that it is organized around 70 of the questions we have heard over and over again from international visitors and colleagues. People want to know about - though they are often afraid to ask - such topics as:

- **Can't American parents control children?**
- **Why do you put the elderly in homes for the aged?**
- **How can you have so many homeless and unemployed in such a rich country?**

• **Why are you so against socialism? Isn't it far more humane than capitalism?**

• **Why does the U.S. train military dictators?**

Citizen Diplomacy contains ample and honest treatments of each question. In addition, it provides good advice on how to listen to and personally respond to queries that, especially coming from "outsiders, are likely to 'push our buttons' as US citizens." Living in the diverse U.S. there is certainly a greater variety of answers to the questions posed than this short book could provide. Nonetheless, it informs us well and sets us to the task of personally digesting and handing on our "American" experiences to others.

The reader does not have to go abroad to use the data and the wisdom found in this book. The world comes daily to the U.S. in the form of visitors, business colleagues, workers, and immigrants. They ask the questions that *Citizen Diplomacy* discusses and are looking for a native who is willing to understand and respond non-defensively.

Perhaps the 70 questions seem so poi-

gnant because they are our questions as well. They highlight the unresolved dilemmas that challenge the world's oldest democratic government and its people.

Citizen Diplomacy, as its new title suggests, is a culturally sensitive update of *Citizen Ambassadors* (1983). More than its predecessor, however, it forces us to look at our own culture as we try to find ways of explaining it to others. If the antidote to ethnocentricity is not just knowing the others but, more importantly, comprehending ourselves, our values, and our paradoxes, *Citizen Diplomacy* is strong medicine for stay-at-homes as well as travelers.

The David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies, *Citizen Diplomacy: Responding to Questions about America*, 1995, Brigham Young University, P.O. Box 24538, Provo, UT 84602-4538.

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