

A Review of

Asitimbay, Diane, *What's Up America? A Foreigner's Guide to Understanding Americans*. 2005  
Culturelink Press, San Diego, CA, USA 0975-9276-0-4, 215pps. [www.culturelinkpress.com](http://www.culturelinkpress.com).

By George F. Simons, co-author of *The Cultural Detective USA*, [www.diversophy.com](http://www.diversophy.com)

If you want to get inside of US mindsets (they are plural) forget the travel books, the culture guides, and the tip sheets and grab a copy of *What's UP America?* This book is a potent concoction—a journalist's easy and friendly style and the ability to hear and respond to the FAQs about USians heard by the author in some 20 years of assisting international people to adjust to the USA.

*What's Up America?* is like watching a series of video clips in which the reader gets to observe how diverse families, women and men of various ages and generations, as well as children feel and think as they go about everyday life in the USA. Its cinema verité lets us poke our noses into their houses, their cars, their kitchens (when not eating out), their schools, their workplaces and their shopping centers. It pictures and explains US values, attitudes and behavior around beauty and success, politics and patriotism, religion and superstition, family and friends, mating and retirement.

“A good wholesome girl from the Midwest,” as she describes herself, Diane Asitimbay has made good both in the Big Apple and the fleshpots of Southern California. She has worked and traveled extensively through Europe and Latin America and has navigated a multicultural marriage. She has lived to tell about what she has seen and heard in ways that newcomers want to know, and that reflect US natives to themselves, perhaps at times too close for comfort, a bit like a magnifying makeup mirror.

Asitimbay exposes the soft underbelly of US mores with both delight and dismay. Mostly she lets USians speak for themselves through what they do and how they think. Unlike Ted Stanger's *Sacrés Américains* (when will someone please translate this so that USians can read it, too?!) Asitimbay's judgments of her own people are neither ironic nor acidic. They simply flow from the facts and behaviors of US life and her ability to be honest about what she and many USians see and worry about.

*What's Up America?* Is interspersed with illustrated pages that carry the punch of the some of the topics discussed, e.g., the kinds of friends we make and the houses we build as well as some that compare the US with other places or cultures. Comparisons can be odious but also enlightening. Asitimbay does not hesitate to compare—everything from transportation to pizza—to help the reader get a fix on how the US is different. Some of the author's images both of USians and foreigners may be disputed as “not the whole picture.” This is inevitable in a brief practical exploration of culture. No doubt some US readers (remember *they think of themselves as unique*) will cry “stereotype” without examining the core of truth found even in most stereotypes.

This book deserves to be in the bag of goodies that every expat gets on his or her way to the American Dream. It is easy on ESL readers—just enough “in” terms and slang to encourage the foreigner to ask questions when he or she arrives. There are also some good explanations of words that have multiple overtones in US speech.

The book is well indexed, and even provides notes pages with wit and wisdom about the tribes of people that make up the USA. One of them cites Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., “We are all tattooed in our cradles with the beliefs of our tribes.” *What's Up America?* gives an intimate look at the tattoos and piercings that distinguish US folk from neighboring tribes.