

OPINIONDECLARATIONS

10 Things to Love About America

An immigrant's social media posts express love for the land to which he came.



By Peggy Noonan [Follow](#)

Dec. 30, 2021 at 6:58 pm ET

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Amjad Masad came to America in January 2012. He was from Amman, Jordan, and 24. He came because his father, a Palestinian immigrant to Jordan and a government worker, bought him a computer when he was 6. Amjad fell in love and discovered his true language. He studied the history of the computer and became enamored of the U.S. and Silicon Valley. He imagined the latter as a futuristic place with flying cars and floating buildings. He saw the 1999 movie “Pirates of Silicon Valley,” about Steve Jobs and Bill Gates, and decided America was the place he must be.

His memory of arriving at John F. Kennedy International Airport is a jumble, but what he saw from the bridge going into Manhattan was unforgettable—the New York skyline gleaming in the distance. It was like a spiritual experience. He was here.

He settled in New York, worked at a startup, then moved west—he needed to be in Silicon Valley. Five years ago he became co-founder and CEO of Replit, a company that offers tools to learn programming. It employs 40 people full-time and 10 contractors.

On Tuesday afternoon Mr. Masad, who became a citizen in 2019, thought about the 10th anniversary of his arrival. He was so grateful for three things: a company, a family, a house. He and his wife and business partner, Haya Odeh, also from Jordan, started talking about America. At 3:56 p.m. ET, he posted a Twitter thread.

“I landed in the United States 10 years ago with nothing but credit card debt. After one startup exit, one big tech job, and one unicorn, I genuinely believe that it wouldn’t have been possible anywhere else in the world. Here are 10 things that I love about this country:

“1. Work Ethic. First thing I noticed was that everyone regardless of occupation took pride in doing a bang-up job, even when no one looked. I asked people: ‘why do you pour everything into a job even when it is seemingly thankless?’ And it was like asking fish ‘what is water?’

“2. Lack of corruption. In the 10 years in the US, I’ve never been asked for a bribe, and that’s surprising. When you know that you predictably get to keep a sizeable portion of the value you create and that no one will arbitrarily stop you, it makes it easier to be ambitious.

“3. Win-win mindset. People don’t try to screw you on deals, they play the long game, and align incentives in such a way that everyone wins. This is especially apparent in Silicon Valley where you can’t underestimate anyone because one day you might be working for them.

“4. Rewarding talent. From sports to engineering, America is obsessed with properly rewarding talent. If you’re good, you’ll get recognized. The market for talent is dynamic—if you don’t feel valued today, you can find a better place tomorrow.

“5. Open to weirdos. Because you never know where the next tech, sports, or arts innovation will come from, America had to be open to weirdness. Weirdos thrive without being crushed. We employ people with the most interesting backgrounds—dropouts to artists—they’re awesome!

“6. Forgiveness. Weird and innovative people have to put themselves out there, and as part of that, they’re going to make mistakes in public. The culture here values authenticity, and if you’re authentic and open about your failures, you’ll get a second and a third chance.

“7. Basic infrastructure. Americans take care of their public spaces. Parks are clean, subways and busses run on time, and utilities & services just work. Because life can be livable for a time without income, it was possible for us to quit our jobs and bootstrap our business.

“8. Optimism. When you step foot in the US there is a palpable sense of optimism. People believe that tomorrow will be better than today. They don’t know where progress will come from, but that’s why they’re open to differences. When we started up even unbelievers encouraged us.

“9. Freedom. Clearly a cliché, but it’s totally true. None of the above works if you’re not free to explore & tinker, to build companies, and to move freely. I still find it amazing that if I respect the law and others, I can do whatever I want without being compelled/restricted.

“10. Access to capital. It’s a lot harder to innovate & try to change the world without capital. If you have a good idea & track record, then someone will be willing to bet on you. The respect for entrepreneurship in this country is inspiring. And it makes the whole thing tick.”

I was sent the thread by email and thought: Beautiful. So much on the list is what I see. Hardworking: In my town everyone from bicycle deliverymen to masters and mistresses of the universe work themselves like rented mules. And, somehow most moving, that we’re open to weirdos: We always have been; it’s in our DNA; it explains a lot of our politics and culture; it’s good that it continues. “This Is Us.”

At the end Mr. Masad said he was speaking generally, that character limits don't invite nuance, that there's no call to sit back self-satisfied, that everything can be made better. But he added a warning: "Many of the things that I talked about are under threat, largely from people who don't know how special they have it. America is worth protecting, and realizing that progress can be made without destroying the things that made it special."

The thread went viral and he was engulfed in feedback. The reaction, he said Wednesday by phone from his Palo Alto, Calif., home, "was overwhelmingly positive." Tellingly, "the majority of the real positive, heartwarming, excited feedback has been from other immigrants. They add to the list what they appreciate." He noted the number of native-born Americans telling him, "Wow, this is an outside perspective that I don't have."

Mr. Masad got the most pushback on infrastructure. He stood his ground. When he got to New York, Central Park was a beautifully maintained gem, and on the streets he appreciated "the music, the arts, free concerts, random popups—all for free and open to all." By infrastructure, he also meant our system of laws and arrangements. "When we started the company, we got our health insurance through ObamaCare," to keep costs down. It worked.

Anyway, the thread was a breath of fresh air.

The past few years, maybe decades, we've become an increasingly self-damning people. As a nation we harry ourselves into a state of permanent depression over our failures and flaws and what we imagine, because we keep being told, is the innate wickedness of our system, which keeps justice from happening and life from being good.

Maybe we got carried away. Maybe we have it wrong. Maybe those who are new here and observe us with fresh eyes see more clearly than we do. As long as our immigrants are talking like this, maybe we've still got it goin' on. What a welcome thought. Thank you, Amjad Masad.

God bless all Americans, old and new, here by birth, belief or both, as we arrive together in an unknown place called 2022. Let's keep our eyes fresh, shall we?