

Here are some quotes to ponder about the difference between American and British temperaments:

1. From "[The Anglo Files: a Field Guide to the British](#)," by Sarah Lyall: (an American writing about the British)

"We look to the future; they look to the past. We run for election; they stand for it. We noisily and proudly proclaim our Americanness; they shuffle their feet and apologize for their Britishness. We trumpet our success; they brag about their failures. When they say they are pleased to meet you, they often mean nothing of the kind."

2. From "My American Friends," by Geoff Dyer (An Englishman writing about Americans): The first thing I ever heard about Americans was that they all carried guns. Then, when I came across people who'd had direct contact with this ferocious-sounding tribe, I learned that they were actually rather friendly. At university, friends who had traveled in the United States came back with more detailed stories, not just of the friendliness of Americans but also of their hospitality (which, in our quaint English way, was translated into something close to gullibility). When I finally got to America myself, I found that not only were the natives friendly and hospitable, they were also incredibly polite. No one tells you this about Americans, but once you notice it, it becomes one of their defining characteristics, especially when they're abroad.

This is very strange, or at least it says something strange about the way that perception routinely conforms to the preconceptions it would appear to contradict. The archetypal American abroad is perceived as loud and crass even though actually existing American tourists are distinguished by the way they address bus drivers and bartenders as "sir" and are effusive in their thanks when any small service is rendered. We look on with some confusion at these encounters because, on the one hand, the Americans seem a bit country-bumpkinish, and, on the other, good manners are a form of sophistication.

Granted, these visiting Americans often seem to have loud voices, but on closer examination, it's a little subtler than that. Americans have no fear of *being overheard*. Civic life in Britain is predicated on the idea that everyone just about conceals his loathing of everyone else. To open your mouth is to risk offending someone. So we mutter and mumble as if surrounded by informers or, more exactly, as if they are living in our heads. In America the right to free speech is exercised freely and cordially. The basic assumption is that nothing you say will offend anyone else because, deep down, everyone is agreed on the premise that America is better than anyplace else. No such belief animates British life. On the contrary. A couple of

years ago a survey indicated that British Muslims were the most fed-up of any in Europe: a sign, paradoxically, of profound assimilation.

VOCABULARY ANNOTATIONS:

ferocious-sounding – something that sounds ferocious. This may seem obvious, but I wanted to point out this way of forming adjectives. Here are a few other examples:
“His art is very interesting-looking, but I don’t understand it.”
“On the phone, she was very friendly-sounding, but in person, I found her rather cold and distant.”

quaint – charming in an old-fashioned way (it’s possible to use this word in a pejorative way, meaning dated)
“European cobble-stoned streets are quaint.”
“She has a display of knick-knacks in her hutch; how quaint.”

gullibility – the trait of believing everything without questioning
“Are Americans gullible or optimistic?”

country-bumpkinish – relating to a country bumpkin, or a hillbilly, a person from the country who lacks sophistication
“My grandparents seemed to find the West to be country bumpkinish and wild.”

being overheard – someone hearing what a person is saying, without being part of the conversation
“I overheard a lover’s quarrel in the hallway; it was quite embarrassing. – Were you eavesdropping? Well, not exactly, but it was fascinating and I couldn’t quite pull myself away.”

predicated upon – built upon – *The American government is predicated upon the ideals of democracy and civic participation.*

Mutter=mumble *Teacher to student: Don’t mumble! Don’t mutter under your breath! Speak clearly!*

Deep down – at heart, based on one’s conscience
Deep down, I wonder if he’s in the right profession. Maybe he should have been an architect instead of an engineer.