Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness

Once upon a time, a group of American colonists rebelled against the country of their birth in order to secure their rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. So just how successful has the US been in protecting these rights? Let’s do a little comparison with other former British colonies.

Like the United States, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand are independently governed (albeit with the British Monarch as the figurative head of state.) Yet in measures of life expectancy, economic freedom, and happiness, these three British Offshoots outpace the US.

The [CIA World Factbook](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2102rank.html) states that US life expectancy (78.24 years) trails that of Australia (81.72 years), Canada (81.29 years), and New Zealand (80.48 years).

A ranking of economic freedom from the [Heritage Foundation (2011)](http://www.heritage.org/index/ranking) places Australia (3rd), New Zealand (4th), and Canada (6th) ahead of the US (9th). That means, the US has the lowest level of economic freedom of any of these countries.

According to [Forbes Magazine (Levy, 2010),](http://www.forbes.com/2010/07/14/world-happiest-countries-lifestyle-realestate-gallup-table.html) the Gallup World Poll ranked happiness in the US (14th) behind New Zealand (6th), Canada (8th), and Australia (8th).

In the areas of life, liberty, and happiness, the US seems to be lagging other British offshoots that share the same language and institutional heritage. It is also the only country in the list that achieved independence from Great Britain during the 18th century, and the only one to do so through war.

So where does the US beat the other British offshoots? It does so in per capita income. The [IMF](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_%28PPP%29_per_capita) ranks the US 6th in per capita income at $47,123 ahead of Australia (9th at $39,692), Canada (11th at $39,033), and New Zealand (32nd at $27,460). Not only is the US richer per person, its wealth generating power has been extended to many more people (immigrants) than the other offshoots.

Put these pieces together and what we find is that the US has been a land of opportunity. It has succeeded in providing people with an avenue in which to pursue happiness even if there are fewer guarantees of said happiness. People from around the world have come to the US to work. [Americans do work more than their English speaking peers.](http://www.billshrink.com/blog/4724/working-around-the-world/)  The average annual hours worked in the US are 1,792 hours compared to 1,727 hours in Canada, 1,721 hours in Australia, and 1,753 hours in New Zealand.

Would Americans be happier and live longer if they worked less? Perhaps, but if you are interested in living in a country that has rewarded hard work, the US used to be the place to be. But is it now? One has to wonder as the US continues to slide further down the economic freedom rank, will we one day wake up living shorter, less happy, and poorer lives? Increasing government control of the US economy is disincentivizing work, and that is distinctly un-American.