

The Great American Sleepover

By John Mauldin | July 04, 2026



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This letter is going to be a little different, and much shorter. But on July 4 I hope it makes you feel good!

Regular readers know I spend most of my writing time worrying — in a constructive, analytical way, I hope — about what I think is a coming national and economic crisis, about debt trajectories, monetary policy missteps, and the various macro landmines that litter the path ahead. As well as arguing that we are still in a Muddle Through world and that things aren't really that bad. That is my job, and I take it seriously.

I interact with a lot of readers. One of the questions I get is how do you believe the country will come together after the time of crisis that you're describing might happen? It's a good question because as we look around it doesn't seem like there's a lot of willingness to cooperate with each other. But history and similar events suggest that we will come to a better place, after a very bumpy ride.

But this week, the Fourth of July, the 250th birthday of the greatest experiment in self-governance the world has ever seen, I want to do something different. I want to celebrate. And I want to use a lens I genuinely did not expect to be reaching for: the reactions of soccer fans from around the world who came to the United States for the 2026 FIFA World Cup and discovered, to their own astonishment, that they loved it.

Let me tell you what they found. And why it should make all of us optimistic for the future.

I want to tell you about Lawrence, Kansas.

You may not know Lawrence. It sits along the Kansas River about forty miles west of Kansas City, home to the University of Kansas, some fine barbecue, and roughly 100,000 people who tend to go about their lives without attracting much international attention.

This summer, the Algerian national soccer team set up its World Cup training base in Lawrence. And the town of Lawrence, unprompted, unscripted, without any directive from FIFA or the State Department, carved the Algerian national flag into the grass of a public space and unveiled it as a welcome gift.

If you want to understand what has been happening in this country this summer, on America's 250th birthday, the image of a Kansas town carving a foreign nation's flag into a lawn and saying, 'Welcome, we're glad you're here,' is the one I would hang on the wall.

The Reverse Tourist Gaze

Researchers at Northeastern University have a phrase for what has been flooding social media this summer: the 'reverse tourist gaze.' John Wihbey, professor of media and communications technology at Northeastern, explained it this way:

"We get this kind of 'reverse tourist gaze' through the eyes of people who haven't seen American culture up close. The big trucks, the Waffle Houses, the stadium infrastructure, the kind of supersized nature of American infrastructure and cultural life. It takes an outsider to come show us how it's different than other cultures and the rest of the world."

Source: [Northeastern Global News](#)

He is onto something important. We tend to become blind to the remarkable things in our own lives. Americans drive past Buc-ee's without a second thought. We have been to a Bass Pro Shop. We know what Texas barbecue is supposed to taste like. We forgot, long ago, to be amazed.

Then a few million visitors arrived from around the world, and they picked up their phones, and the amazement poured out of them.

These visitors did not arrive expecting to love us. According to Pew Research, positive favorability ratings for the United States are at or near their lowest since 2002 in many of the countries that sent teams to this World Cup. In many cases, they arrived expecting something close to the opposite.

What they found instead broke their expectations in the best possible way. This was from a Scottish visitor:

“The America we are experiencing right now is the America we were promised growing up. We were expecting to be met by ICE agents, aggressive police, and the political climate we all see on the news, and that could not be further from the truth of what we’ve actually experienced here. Honestly, every single person we’ve come across has been out of this world.”

Source: [yahoo! sports](#)

Read that again. ‘The America we were promised growing up.’ This person grew up somewhere in Scotland, watching American movies, absorbing an image of this country that the news cycle had largely buried. Then they came here and discovered that the image they had carried around since childhood, the open, friendly, generous America, was real. They just had to show up to find it.

Prof. Deana Rohlinger from Florida State University wrote:

“Social scientists have known for decades that when people from different groups interact under positive conditions, stereotypes often break down. The World Cup is one of the largest examples imaginable. Part of why this resonates is that it pushes back against a story we’ve been telling ourselves for years. Then outsiders, people with no reason to flatter us, arrive expecting one thing and encounter another. Their reactions interrupt the narrative. They provide a more generous, and probably more accurate, reflection of who we are.”

Source: [Florida State University News](#)

Texas Delivers, As Usual

I will confess a certain parochial satisfaction in noting that Texas has carried a disproportionate share of the viral load this summer. This should surprise precisely no one.

There are literally tens of thousands of social media posts about the US. The Texas installments alone could fill a travel memoir. A Japanese fan documented his first bite of monster Texas barbecue beef rib. As did the Norwegians, Scots, and others. And yes, a great big Texas barbecue beef rib is a religious experience. Another Japanese visitor traveled to Fort Worth and was amazed by the western character, the cowboy hats, the historic stockyards, the streets that look, in his words, like a real-life Western movie. Dutch fans went full cowboy at the Fort Worth Stockyards. An Irish visitor sat down at a Texas Roadhouse and emerged a changed man. And a South African traveler walked into a Buc-ee's and was rendered, by all accounts, temporarily speechless.

"You can explain Buc-ee's. You can show photos of Buc-ee's. But nothing really prepares someone for Buc-ee's."

I will note for international readers who may be unfamiliar: Buc-ee's is a chain of Texas roadside travel centers that are, by European standards, roughly the size of a small shopping mall. They sell beaver-branded merchandise, fresh brisket, kolaches, fudge, baby clothes, and an amount of beef jerky that would alarm most nutritionists. They are magnificent when you are on a road trip.

Funniest comment about Buc-ee's? One tourist looking at 120 gas pumps wondered if we were planning to fuel a squadron of planes. For those of us who have wandered around various countries in Europe trying to find a gas station, you can understand their amazement.

Norwegian fans toured a Bass Pro Shop with what FOX 26 described as genuine theme-park energy. I understand this completely. I first visited a Bass Pro Shop 28 years ago in Grapevine, Texas. Some of these are over 500,000 square feet. It is, in its own way, a temple to the American relationship with the outdoors, simultaneously overwhelming and inspiring.

Costco, Barbeque and Ranch Dressing

Something interesting is happening with all these viral videos, and Northeastern's Professor Wihbey put his finger on it precisely. The same algorithms that normally funnel people toward outrage and political infighting are — this summer, at least — promoting something else entirely:

“Algorithms tend to uprank and promote high-emotion content. It’s often pointed out as a negative, insofar as a lot of the high-emotion content is political infighting or name-calling or scandal. The endearing examples of World Cup camaraderie are going viral because of their emotional qualities as well, but it’s a celebratory form of high-emotion, and that’s cool to see.”

Source: [Northeastern Global News](#)

The same machinery that can make us miserable is, at this particular moment, making us feel good about ourselves. I will take it.

Consider what is going viral: a Scottish fan at Fenway Park singing with Red Sox fans. Japanese tourists riding mechanical bulls in Texas. European visitors turning an ordinary American sports bar into a full-blown international celebration complete with chants that echoed down the block. A group of Scottish supporters who discovered John Denver's 'Take Me Home, Country Roads' and turned it into an international anthem, belting every word with a passion that would have made John Denver proud. Thousands of attendees in some indoor monster stadium singing "Sweet Caroline" at the top of their lungs.

And then there is ranch dressing. I am not making this up. A single post on X praising the addictive delights of American ranch dressing was viewed more than ten million times. The appetite — if you will forgive the pun — was so intense that the TSA felt compelled to issue a public reminder: 'Pack it in your CHECKED BAG on the way home.'

This Is Why America Will Come Together After the Next Crisis

Yes, I get that college-educated voters are actively electing socialists/anarchists who want to abolish the police and army and open the borders. There will be a number of them in the next Congress. That socialist virus seems to be spreading way too rapidly.

But if you go back to the 1930s you will find actual communists were making their way into the mainstream. Socialism wasn't seen as a negative word in many circles. But that changed so fast.

The Civil War? Economic collapses? Bank panics? The Great Recession? Pandemics? Yes, all of that has happened in the past. And the Republic survived and prospered.

And the people that were at one point at odds with each other came together and moved forward. They picked up and moved on. And the country grew and prospered. Admittedly, not evenly. As William Gibson said, "The future is here. It's just not evenly distributed." And that will likely always be the case, as it has been throughout human history. And as uneven as the distribution has been, there is no country with more prosperous people.

I do believe we will have a crisis, but just as in every past crisis I believe that we will come together and power through it. And America will be stronger and better afterwards.

Happy birthday, America. Two hundred and fifty years. Still the greatest experiment in human liberty the world has ever attempted, still capable of surprising people with our warmth, still making the world drive nine hours across Texas and loving every mile of it.

You're doing something right.

You're still the America we were promised growing up.

July 4, Puerto Rico and How to Feel Good about America

Wednesday, I had to go to the doctor to get a thorn that had embedded in my foot cut out. The shot to numb the area was quite painful, although after that it was fine. But there was a mess up in the scheduling and I ended up waiting for two hours. The best two hours of the month. As I was researching this article I decided to go on TikTok to look at the social media postings for myself.

I spent almost 2 hours watching and listening to one tourist after another extolling the virtues of America and talking about how friendly the people were, the size of our big-box stores, Texas barbecue, how big the country was, the vastness of the West and more. You should do that this weekend. And simply ask for postings from tourists visiting the US. And then start scrolling.

First, it will make you smile and then pretty soon you see the world from a completely different standpoint. The tourists from around the world eating a 1-pound beef rib barbecue and having what looked like a religious experience. Someone in some small rural town invited a young British tourist to tour the local high school football and basketball arenas. This was in a town of 3,000 people. The basketball arena could hold half the town. There was an entire wall of just the trophies from the high school. The football stadium could hold almost everyone. He was clearly having a hard time wrapping his head around the concept of a small town supporting their high school that much.

God help him if he got taken to Allen, Texas, where they spent \$80 million on their football stadium.

Seriously, just go to TikTok and do it. I will confess that I had never been on TikTok, but this made me feel good.

Shane and I wish you a wonderful July 4. You have a great week!

Your grateful to be an American analyst,



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