



## ***FULBRIGHT AND AMERICAN INDIVIDUALISM***

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**I**ndividualism serves both an aspirational and normative role in the American society. It is deeply rooted in the values of the American Revolution and it makes up for the lack of ethnic, cultural, and historical homogeneity in a country that was mostly built by immigrants who believed in freedom of action for individuals over collective or state control.

Spanning seven decades, part of the success of the Fulbright program is related to individualism. Science relies heavily on the creativity of individual researchers for scientific breakthroughs and individualism was found to have a strong positive effect on both scientific progress and technological innovation (Taylor and Wilson 2012). Particularly, American individualism favours creative minds and leans on a strong rewards system that fosters innovation and feeds the myth of the eccentric entrepreneur or star scientist. Thus, scientists from all over the world seeking freedom of scientific thought and autonomy in research have resorted to Fulbright to explore new ideas and carve a career in Science. Individualism leaves, however, little room for failure.

The idea that individuals should stand or fall on one's own merits (Mount, 1981) is at the same time liberating and daunting. Whereas Fulbright embodies individualistic values as it promotes autonomy, audacity and boldness, it masterfully mitigates the heaviness of individualism by providing access to a robust network of support and a safe and vibrant community.

Throughout my six-year tour in the U.S., I relied upon this community to gain insight on American culture, learn about foreign traditions, and overcome difficult



times. It was a ravishing love journey that started out in a sunny Summer day in Lisbon and enabled me to live in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, to navigate the intense U.S. research environment, and to meet outstanding and inspiring scholars. Ultimately, Fulbright allowed me to thrive for the first time as my own country, plagued by austerity, failed disgracefully on the young and on Science.

#### REFERENCES

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