**Study Guide:** “What Is an American?” by St. Jean DeCrevecoeur

and “A Quilt of a Country” by Anna Quindlen

# *Readings in American Literature* pp. 91-97

1. According to the author, how does America compare to Europe in terms of social classes and wealth?

2. a) What occupation were most Americans engaged in during the 1770s?

b) What are a couple of other occupations mentioned by DeCrevecoeur?

3. a) According to DeCrevecoeur, how do Americans view the law?

b) Why do they feel this way?

4. DeCrevecoeur says that in America, man is free, and he describes America as “the most perfect society now existing in the world.”

a) Was he correct, do you think? Explain.

b) Have things in America improved since the 1770s, or have they deteriorated? Explain.

5. Was making North America “entirely peopled” a good idea? Explain.

6. DeCrevecoeur describes America as an “asylum,” a place people go to escape danger, etc. Is this still the case today? Explain how it is or is not.

7. According to DeCrevecoeur, why did people come here from other nations?

8. What does DeCrevecoeur say has been the effect of becoming Americans on immigrants?

9. What is the problem of DeCrevecoeur’s definition and description of “an American” in the sixth paragraph? Whom does it leave out?

10. a) Do you agree that in the U.S., “individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men”? Why or why not?

b) How was DeCrevecoeur using the term “race” in this statement?

11. What does DeCrevecoeur say about religion in the U.S.?

Whose rights does he seem to be ignoring in this statement?

12. In the first paragraph of “A Quilt of a Country,” how does Quindlen compare the qualities of the United States to those of a quilt? How does she weave the quilt imagery throughout the essay?

13. What does the author mean by mongrel nation in the second sentence? Why does she return to that phrase in the second-to-last sentence of the essay?

14. Why does the author say, “You know the answer” at the end of the third paragraph?

How does that affect the tone of the piece and her relationship with readers?

15. What does the author mean when she says people were concerned that “the left side of the hyphen-African-American, Mexican-American, Irish-American would overwhelm the right”?

16. What can you infer about the author’s childhood and her parents’ neighborhood?

17. What questions does the text raise but not answer?