

American Society and Culture

美国社会与文化

白莹 刘霜 许鹏 / 主编



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AMERICAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE

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前 言

《美国社会与文化》是一本关于美国社会与文化背景的学术著作。该书是帮助具有大学英语水平以上的英语学习者掌握美国的社会与文化概貌,如地理环境、历史发展、政治制度、经济、文学、宗教信仰、风俗习惯、教育、节日活动、种族关系及社会问题等方面的知识。

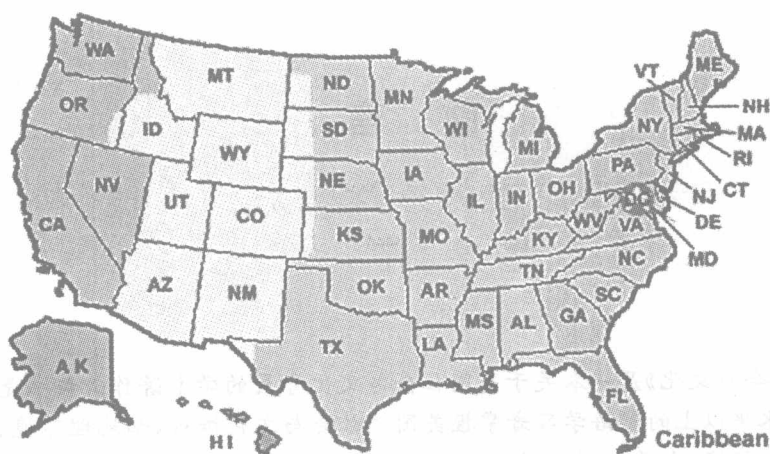
语言是文化的重要载体。英语学习必须贯彻语言学习与文化知识紧密结合的原则。英语学习者在英语学习中,会遇到许多来自文学或历史著作中的典故、名言、成语、人名、地名,或牵涉到各时期思想、科技、政治、社会方面的重要事件和人物。如果对这些所知不多,英语学习就会有困难,而对这些知识有较多掌握的话,则不仅了解程度会提高,而且由于通过文化来学习语言,语言也会学得更好。

本书的内容共包括十章。在编写的过程中注意到以下几个原则:知识性,对重要的事件、人物等以科学的观点进行扼要地分析和评价;选材新,内容充实,深入浅出,重点突出;语言上力求做到英语地道、流畅、规范,同时又注重简易性;注释部分尽量做到详细、实用。注释内容包括重大事件和人物的历史背景、典故、语言难点;每章后都设计了重要术语的解释题和问答题。这些问题可以帮助读者巩固和提高文化和语言知识,还可以帮助读者归纳所学的内容。

本书涉及的内容较广,难免有不足之处,恳请读者批评、指正。

编 者

2008年9月



Map of the United States of America



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Part One

Geography

内容提要

美国是一个地形多样的国家。在这一部分,只简要介绍一下美国地理的一般概况。美国大陆自东向西形成三大自然区域:东部的阿巴拉契亚山自东北向西南扩展,与大西洋岸平行;中间的中部大平原,占全国领土 1/2;西部是科迪勒拉山系。这种自然环境构成了两侧高、中间低的地形。

美国河流众多,以落基山为界分为两大水系:以西为太平洋水系,主要河流有科罗拉多河、哥伦比亚河、育空河,以东为大西洋水系,又分为流入大西洋的河流与流入墨西哥湾的河流。前者有哈德逊河、特拉华河、波托马克河;后者主要有密西西比河。在美国东北部有世界最大的淡水湖:五大湖和世界著名的尼亚加拉大瀑布。

美国本土位于北温带,大部分地区属温带和亚热带气候。佛罗里达半岛南端属热带。阿拉斯加州位于北纬 60 至 70 度之间,属北极圈内的寒冷气候。夏威夷州位于北回归线以南,属热带气候。由于美国国土幅员辽阔,地形复杂,所受气流影响也不相同,因而全国各地气候差异极大。

2006 年 10 月的人口普查表示,美国人口约 3 亿,主要人口是欧洲移民的后代,白人约占 74.7%,黑人约占 12.1%,亚洲人占 4.3%。大多数亚裔美国人集中在西海岸和夏威夷,最大的族群来自菲律宾、中国、印度、越南、韩国和日本。美国原住民,如印第安人和因纽特人等,占 0.8%。美国人口分布很不均匀,将近半数人口居住在两

大洋沿岸、五大湖区和墨西哥沿岸地区。

美国的人口是由来自不同民族、国籍和宗教的多个民族群体组成的。如此多的群体最终形成某一共同的文化生活,拥有共同的价值观。我们将这一过程称做“同化”。有些人将美国称为“熔炉”,认为不同种族和民族已经发生融合,形成了同一种文化;而另外一些人则倾向于把美国比作“色拉碗”,认为不同群体间仍相对独立和存在差异,这导致了整个国家呈现出了一种文化的多样性。

1. Geographical Division

The United States is a varied land—of forests, deserts, mountains, high flat lands and fertile plains. Almost every kind of climate may be found, but the country lies mostly in the temperate zone. Including the states of Alaska and Hawaii, the United States stretches 4,500 kilometers from the Atlantic Ocean on the east to the Pacific Ocean on the west. It borders Canada on the north, and reaches south to Mexico and the Gulf of Mexico. The United States' area is some 9.4 million square kilometers, bigger than the whole of Europe. The territory of the continental United States can be divided into three basic areas; the Atlantic Seacoast and the Appalachian Mountains in the east; the great Mississippi River Basin in the middle, and the Rockies west to the Pacific Ocean. These three areas have its own diversity in geography.

The Atlantic Seacoast was the first settlement for the early immigrants. The whole region was almost covered with virgin forests when the European colonists first came. On the west side of the coastal plain lie the Appalachian Mountains, which begin far south in Georgia and continuing northwards to Vermont and Canada.

The Great Mississippi River Basin includes the large area of Appalachian Mountain on the east side and the Rocky Mountains on the west side. The north end of the Great Mississippi River Basin reaches the border of Canada while in the south it borders on the Gulf of Mexico.

To the west of the Mississippi River Basin are the Rocky Mountains. These majestic mountains stretch from Mexico to the Arctic. They are high, sharp and rugged. The whole tremendous system of the Rockies includes many mountain ranges. It has an average altitude of more than 3000 meters above sea level. The world-known Yellowstone National Park is located in the northwestern part of Wyoming. It is the oldest national park in the world and the largest wildlife preserve in the United States. It covers 2219,785 acres. Established in 1872, the park got its name from the yellow rocks lining the Yellowstone River section north of it. Yellowstone has thousands of hot springs and over 200 geysers.

In the west of the Rocky Mountains lie two plateaus: the Colorado Plateaus in the south along the Colorado River and the Columbia Plateau in the north, bearing the name of the Columbia River which runs through the plateau.

The Colorado Plateaus are threaded by many deep valley or canyons among which the best known is Colorado valley in northern Arizona. It is one of the great natural wonders of the world. It measures about 277 miles long, up to 18 miles wide, and more than a mile deep.

Between the two plateaus lies the Great Basin, including the whole of Nevada, a small section of Oregon and the southeastern part of California. It is the driest part of the country. Much of the southeastern California is desert.

The Pacific coast and the southern part of it in particular can significantly represent the modern American image. Steinbeck's *Okies*¹ in *The Grapes of Wrath*, driven out of the dust-bowl land of Oklahoma, saw this as the promised land because of the hope of some work picking fruit. But now it is not just oranges that bring people west, nor just Hollywood. Fast-growing America has its centerpiece here, and each year until 1970 half a million people joined the search for the California dream. There are glorious mountains, sea with majestic cliffs as well as inviting expanses of sand. The orange and grapes and fertile land are still important, but the electronics industry, aeroplane factories, defense plants of many kinds, and a whole new industrial complex are more important still.

2. Rivers and Lakes

One of the distinct characteristics of US geography is the country's extensive drainage system comprising some of the world's largest rivers and lakes. In the river map of the USA, one can see an extensive network of water bodies covering the vast territory of United States in the North American landmass. While some of the USA rivers and lakes serve as vital waterways for inland navigation, others are useful sources of irrigation and power generation. For certain cities like New Orleans, river basins usher in growth and prosperity for the city and its people.

The Mississippi River² is the largest river in North America. Together with its tributaries, it drains a total area of about 3.1 million square kilometers. Nearly all

the rivers west of the Appalachian Mountains and east of the Rockies flow toward each other and empty into this largest river, the “father of waters”, of America. The Mississippi flows about 6,400 kilometers from its northwestern source in the Rockies to the Gulf of Mexico. Before America completed its railway system, the large Mississippi River system was the most important artery of transportation for the Middle West. Each year tens of hundreds of ships sailed to New Orleans at the mouth of this river, carrying many million tons of goods for export. In its lower course, the Mississippi flows along slowly, appearing lazy and harmless. But when the snows in the Rockies and the Appalachians begin to melt in spring, there would be more water than the bank could hold. It may change its course in some places and this causes serious flooding.

The Missouri River, the chief headstream of the Mississippi River, is also important. It flows into the Mississippi from the west.

The Colorado River and Rio Grande River are in Southwest America. The Colorado River has created brilliant gorges with spectacular landscapes and breathtaking scenery. The Rio Grande River runs about 3,200 kilometers. It is a boundary river between Mexico and the United States.

In the northwestern part of the United States, there is the Columbia River. It holds tremendous hydroelectric potential and are considered a vital source of power and irrigation

The Hudson River, linked by canals with the five Great Lakes, flows through the state of New York, having a length of only 520 kilometers. It is, however, one of the main arteries for inland waterway traffic. The Hudson River is famous because New York stands at its estuary. The Potomac River is famous not only because Washington D. C. , the capital of the United States, is situated on the river but also because it's the dividing line between the South and the North.

Located in east-central North America, the five Great Lakes are Lake Superior, Lake Erie, Lake Huron, Lake Ontario and Lake Michigan, the first four of which are shared with Canada. And only Lake Michigan falls entirely within the territory of the United States. The five Great Lakes form the largest group of fresh water lakes in the world covering a total area of 244,106square kilometers. Among the five, Superior is the largest freshwater lake of its kind in the world. Apart from being the site for large population concentrations and

industrial activities, the Great Lakes also handle the highest volume of fresh water shipping tonnage in the world.

The world-famous Niagara Falls³ is located on the U. S. A. Canadian boundary between Lake Erie and Lake Ontario. The width of the Falls is about 1240 meters and the drop average 49 meters.

3. Climate

The United States of America covers a large region, stretching from east to west across six time zones and therefore it is no surprise that the country has a varied climate, ranging from arctic regions to deserts.

Generally speaking, there is a cold winter for most of America's states because cold air masses from the north move in over much of the country in winter. But they seldom affect the coasts and the deep South. Pacific Northwest Coast has more of a maritime climate, with cooler summers and mild winters, influenced by westerly winds. California, on the west coast of the US, has a pleasant, Mediterranean climate.

In the northeast (New England) and the areas around the Great Lakes, the weather is hot in summer and cold in winter. There is much rain and snow.

The other states down the Atlantic Coast from New York to Virginia have a similar climate to that of New England except that the average temperature is a little higher because these states are farther to the south.

The southeastern part of the United States, including Texas in the west and North Carolina on the north side, occupies a little more than a quarter of the mainland of the country. It enjoys a warm climate and abundant rainfall. Here spring comes early and remains long. Winters are short and warm, though there is cool weather and a little snow in the northern part of this region.

In the central plain, the weather is hot in summer and cold in winter during which there is much snow.

4. Population

4.1 The Compositions of the Population

The United States is the third most populous nation in the world, ranking behind China and India. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, American reached a milestone on October 17, 2006, with its population hitting 300 million, up from 200 million in 1967. White people constitute about 74.7%, blacks 12.1%, Asians 4.3%, Native Americans 0.8%, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders 0.1%, mixed race people 1.9% and others 6%.

The majority of Americans are descendants of the European immigrants who are called white people. Though the first permanent English settlement in America was established by the Virginia Company in 1607, modern Americans choose to regard the Pilgrim Fathers, a group of 102 Puritans who came from England and founded the colony of Plymouth in New England in 1620, as the origin of the new country. The Pilgrim Fathers were followed by other English colonists. In American history these immigrants from England were generally known as the White Anglo-Saxon Protestants who played the major role in winning America's independence from Britain. Their mother tongue, English, became the official language of the new nation and their values constituted the basis of American social life and they controlled most of the national wealth. There are also immigrants from other European countries, such as France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, and Spain. All these European immigrants and their descendants make up the white population of America. They are the majority while people of other ethnic groups, including the blacks, Hispanics, Asian-Americans, and the native Indians, are known as the minorities.

Black people were first brought to America from Africa as slaves. Their descendants now make up nearly 12.1 per cent of the population. They once lived mainly in the agricultural South but now are scattered throughout the nation.

The Hispanics are the people of Hispanic origin. They are either immigrants or descendants of immigrants from Latin America which was once a large colony

of the Spanish Empire. More than half a million Cubans, for example, fled to the United States after the Cuban revolution in the 1950s. The Mexicans are the most numerous among the Hispanics.

Among the Asian-Americans, there are more than a million Chinese immigrants and their descendants. Many of them live in Hawaii, on the West Coast and in some big cities.

There are about 5 million Jews in America. Many of them went there during the Second World War when Hitler was frantically persecuting and killing off the Jews in Europe. Many Jewish-Americans are doing fine in the United States. Quite a few famous Americans are of Jewish origin, such as Einstein and Kissinger. Many Jews in America have become successful businessmen.

4.2 Distribution of Population

The distribution of the population in the U. S. is rather uneven. The most densely-populated region is the northeastern part of the country. It includes the six states of New England⁴, the Mid-Atlantic states along the Potomac River and the five states of the Middle West (Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin and Ohio) near the Great Lakes. The region takes up about one-quarter of the country's land area but it accommodates 2/3 of the total American people. Since most of the people here live in or around big cities, Northern New England is still rather empty with wild picturesque scenery for tourists while the Middle West still has huge, sparsely-populated open spare for farming.

From the Middle West down the Mississippi River is a great plain. Except for large cities, the whole area is empty where one can drive for hours without seeing much change of scene.

To the west of the Great Plains are the Rocky Mountains. The population here is thin because of the high mountains and large deserts. But towards the Pacific Coast, it grows dense again.

4.3 Melting Pot or Salad Bowl

The dominant culture is English-speaking, western European, Protestant and middle-class in character. The original settlers were of similar background, coming largely from northern Europe, and they were easily assimilated into the

existing society. As time went on, the characteristics of the dominant majority got solidified and they determined to what extent other groups are accepted. A large number of immigrants with significantly different characteristics tended to be viewed as a threat to basic American values and the American way of life. During the late 19th and 20th centuries, most immigrants came from poverty-stricken nations. For them, assimilation was much harder because of the differences between their culture and language and those of the established Americans. These new immigrants, feeling lost in strange surroundings, clustered together in close-knit communities. Soon, many cities had ethnic neighborhoods such as “Chinatown”.

Various American agencies, public and private, offered English instruction and citizenship classes to new immigrants in an effort to assist in their assimilation and becoming American citizens. It took quite some time for the adult immigrants to learn while the children quickly learned American ways by imitating their schoolmates. Through the efforts of new opportunities and new rewards, the immigrants came to accept most of the values of the dominant American culture and were, in turn, accepted by the great majority of Americans. The immigrants now have a much stronger feeling about being an American.

The process by which these many groups have been made a part of a common cultural life with commonly shared values is called assimilation. Scholars disagree as to the extent to which assimilation has occurred in the United States. Some have described the United States as a “melting pot”⁵ where various racial and ethnic groups have been combined into one culture. Others are inclined to see the United States as a “salad bowl” where the various groups have remained somewhat distinct and different from one another, creating a richly diverse country.

The truth probably lies somewhere between these two views. Since 1776, an enormous amount of racial and ethnic assimilation has taken place in the United States, yet some groups continue to feel a strong sense of separateness from the culture as a whole. Many of these groups are really bicultural. That is, they consider themselves American, but they may also wish to retain the language and sometimes the cultural traditions of their original culture. The contributions made by immigrants have helped America achieve its rapid social and economic development.