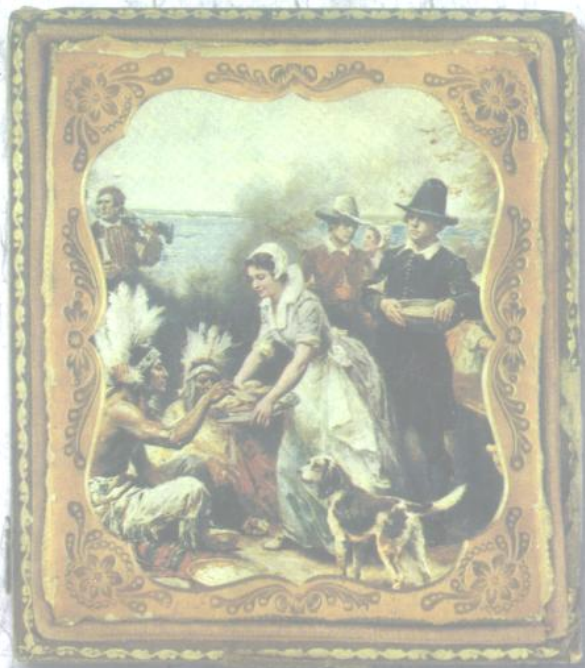


美國文化探奇

風 俗 背 后 的 故 事

American Probe

黃奕 馬琮



西安交通大学出版社

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内 容 提 要

本书收录了 142 篇关于美国社会风俗及渊源的短文,内容涉及迷信禁忌、节庆礼仪、娱乐休闲、婚丧嫁娶、服饰饮食、家庭琐事等诸多方面。本书内容丰富,语言风趣幽默,可使读者在轻松的阅读中了解一些美国文化背景知识,提高英语学习的兴趣。本书的读者对象是大学生、研究生以及对英语学习和西方文化背景感兴趣的广大自学者。

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前 言

现在学习英语的人越来越多,但不少人学习英语的主要目标似乎是克服交流中的语言障碍。然而,比起语言障碍,文化障碍在跨文化交流中似乎更加难以跨越,而后者又往往被语言学习者所忽视。实际上,“文化”这个词的涵盖量极大,它所包含的内容博大精深,在较短时间内想了解其全部是根本无法做到的。但是,粗略地了解一些西方文化知识,则必将有利于我们了解并理解西方人,有助于我们更好地与之沟通。

风俗是文化的一个重要组成部分。现在介绍美国风俗的读物不能说少,但其中大多只是泛泛地向读者介绍某些风俗本身,而很少涉及其渊源。说起“渊源”,并非像大多数人所想的,是讲一些“很久很久以前”的无据可考的事。比如,大家都知道在西方传统迷信中,如果星期五碰巧又是 13 号,那一天会被认为是非常不吉利的。但是,你知道“星期五”和数字“13”被人们认为不吉利和基督教有什么联系吗?读过这本书之后,你也许能体会到宗教和《圣经》对西方传统文化的巨大影响。再比如,棒球被喻为美国的“国球”。它之所以受到美国公众的广泛喜爱,不仅在于其比赛的精彩,更在于其所处的社会文化氛围。如果了解了这一点,那么你就能理解为什么美国的电影公司乐于花巨资,并利用高科技手段为观众不断塑造出一个个具有非凡智慧、勇气和力量的“英雄”,编造出一个个在各种生死攸关的危急关头,力挽狂澜、化险为夷的“大片”。

就本书所收集的所谓“美国风俗”,在此需做两点说明。首先,众所周知,美国是个移民国家,其文化就像是世界各民族文化的“杂烩”。曾有人说,世界上任何一个民族的人都能在美国找到本民族文化的影子。因此,本书中的所谓“美国风俗”是指被大多数美国人所接受的风俗。其中有美国所特有的,而另有许多却是英

语国家所共有的,更有一些则是非英语国家的移民所带去的。所以,请读者把视线不要过多地拘泥于“美国”二字上。另外,由于生活环境的变化,特别是年轻人对新的时尚的追求,有些风俗已不甚流行,或发生了改变。但我们仍然把这些收集在此,毕竟传统的是最长久的,并且更能够反映出一个民族的文化根基。因此,本书中所谓美国风俗若表述成“以美国为主的西方传统风俗”似乎更确切些。

总之,本书的目的是希望读者在提高英语阅读能力的同时,了解一些有趣的美国风俗,并且通过其渊源,能粗浅地了解西方深厚的文化底蕴及美国所特有的社会文化现象。而后者是我们编者更加注重的。

基于上述思想,我们在编写此书的过程中注意了以下几点:

(1) 在每一部分之前设计了文化背景知识测试,以最基础的文化背景知识和趣味性较强的内容为主。

(2) 在每篇文章之后所设计的阅读理解题主要是考查读者是否获得了文章所提供的文化背景知识,少部分以语言为主的题目则是以引导读者正确理解文章中个别难点为主要目的。

(3) 由于最后一部分文章大多篇幅短小、内容简明,因而省略了文章之后的阅读理解题。

本书内容广泛,覆盖了包括衣食住行、节庆礼仪等在内的方方面面的美国风俗。其语言风趣幽默,难度适中,适合于广大具有中等及以上水平的英语爱好者阅读。本书不仅可以作为一本英语读物,更可以作为一本有关美国风俗及其渊源的工具书。

我们衷心希望此书不仅能向读者提供一定的英语文化背景知识,更能提高读者对英语文化的浓厚兴趣。

编者

1999年6月

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Chapter 1

Believe It or Not

信不信由你

吸烟者之间经常互相送火点烟,但 1 根火柴不可一连点燃 3 枝香烟。到第 3 个人的时候,必须另外擦 1 根,否则你的好意会使他人陷入尴尬的境地。信不信由你!

中国人一向相信好事成双,所以送礼时一定要凑成双数:2 瓶酒,4 盒点心。但西方人此时却以 1,3 等单数为吉利:1 盒糖果,3 只水果。但你必须记住,数字“13”却没有这么幸运。西方人对这个数字总是敬而远之。所以楼层号没有 13,请客绝不能有 13 人,甚至戏剧院里没有 13 排 13 座。信不信由你!

即使一个自称为无神论者、信奉科学的人,在日常生活中也可能有所忌讳,愿这样做,而不愿那样做,这也许因为在他的潜意识中还有那么一点点“因果报应”在作祟吧。

本章介绍了在美国流传的一些有趣的“迷信”思想或行为,它们虽然仍被一些人所信奉,但大都早已失去了它们本来的“狰狞”面孔,而给人们的日常生活增添了不少趣味和幽默。

下列是有关迷信的两组词,请在第二组中找出分别与第一组词相对应的词。

- | | |
|--------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Friday | 2. thirteen |
| 3. black cat | 4. a ladder against the wall |
| 5. mirror | 6. salt |

7. wood

9. sneezing

A. witch

C. malevolence

E. the Last Supper

G. soul

I. the Cross

8. horseshoes

10. burning ears

B. the new moon

D. sacrifice

F. Crucifixion

H. future

J. the Holy Trinity's triangle

KEYS: 1. F 2. E 3. A 4. J 5. H 6. D 7. I 8. B 9. G
10. C

Friday the 13th 星期五、13 号

The standard nineteenth-century explanation for the supposed unluckiness of the number 13 was that there were thirteen at Jesus' Last Supper — Judas was generally thought of as the thirteenth. This widely repeated interpretation led to the fear of the number 13 in general, and people would avoid having 13 at table or in a party. The supposed misfortune of Friday also originated from Christian beliefs, for the Crucifixion took place on that day.

But both fears have their earlier roots than Christianity was ever created. The fear of Fridays may have been connected with the Norse goddess Freya; beginning journeys on her day was considered rude to Freya and would offend her. The number 13 has been considered ill since ancient times. Romans linked the number to death, destruction and misfortune. And people traditionally thought that the witch meeting had thirteen members.

Someone tried to give a more reasonable explanation for such number speculations. He noted that twelve is the result of the two favorable numbers, three and four; but that thirteen cannot be so easily divided. Like eleven, then, thirteen may be suspected of its supernatural quality.

NOTES:

Christian 基督教的

Crucifixion 耶稣被钉死在十字架上

Christianity 基督教

Norse 古斯堪的纳维亚的

Freya 古斯堪的纳维亚音乐女神(Friday 来自于 Freya 的名字。)

witch 女巫

speculation 推测

Choose ONE or MORE best answers for each question.

1. The standard nineteenth-century explanation for the supposed misfortune of 13 may have its roots in _____.
A. Christianity B. ancient Rome
C. ancient Greece D. ancient Egypt
2. People's fear of the number 13 may originate from the beliefs that _____.
A. Judas was the thirteenth at Jesus' Last Supper
B. there were thirteen members at Jesus' Last Supper
C. the Crucifixion took place on the thirteenth
D. the thirteenth was the day of the Norse Goddess Freya
E. this number was supposed to be linked to death and destruction
F. this number can not be easily divided, so it may have some supernatural quality
3. People's fear of Friday may originate from the ideas that _____.
A. Jesus had his Last Supper on Friday
B. the Crucifixion took place on Friday
C. beginning journeys on Friday would offend the Norse goddess Freya
D. witches held their meeting on Friday
E. Romans linked Friday to death

KEYS: 1. A 2. A,B,E,F 3. B,C

Black Cat 黑猫

It is probably because of its slyness and shrewdness, the cat is often supposed to be connected with witches and the devil. This fear may stem from the Middle Ages.

In Europe, the time between the Middle Ages and the 18th century is known as the witch-hunting era. In most of the cases, the “witches” were typically older women whose crimes were eccentricity, solitude and, especially, the inability to withstand the ordeals. Frequently, the evidence the witch-hunters gave was that the old woman owned a demon in the shape of an animal, most commonly a toad and a cat. Such belief of toads has died out today, but the prejudice against the black cat survives.

Interestingly, although black cats are widely held in awe, that awe is not always one of fear. In England black cats are considered lucky and this prejudice for the animal is believed to have existed from time immemorial.

NOTES:

slyness 狡诈

shrewdness 精明

stem from 起源于,来自于

the Middle Ages (欧洲历史上的)中世纪(约公元 1100—1500 年期间)

witch-hunting era “猎巫”时代(主要指中世纪欧洲异端审判所对巫士极为严厉和残酷的捉拿和镇压,它造成了对中世纪各种民俗信仰的压制和扼杀。在对巫士的描述中,一般把妇女说成是巫术的主要信奉者。)

eccentricity 行为怪僻

solitude 离群索居

ordeal 神裁法(古时决定某人是否有罪的方法,令被告受身体考验。例如将嫌疑犯的手浸于沸水中,受神主宰,手无损,则无罪。)

demon 恶魔,魔鬼

toad 蟾蜍,癞蛤蟆

die out 逐渐消亡,逐渐消失

prejudice 偏见,成见

hold... in awe 对……敬畏

from time immemorial 自远古以来

Choose ONE best answer for each question.

1. Linking the black cat to misfortune may originate from _____.
A. ancient Rome
B. Europe in the Middle Ages
C. ancient Greece
D. ancient Asia
2. The “witch-hunting era” refers to _____.
A. the Middle Ages
B. the prehistoric times
C. the time between the Middle Ages and the 19th century
D. the time between the Middle Ages and the 18th century
3. In that era, the evidence that an older woman was a witch was _____.
A. that she never went out of her house
B. that she owned a cat or a toad
C. that she did not like children
D. that she was always dressed in black
4. In England black cats are _____.