

外语学习手边册

美国国情

Meet the U.S.

王明珠编著

北京大学出版社



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前 言

《美国国情》一书是编著者多年来教学用的美国概况课的讲稿。它经过数轮教学实践和修正补充,也数次印成讲义。由于本书是针对大学低年级学生编写的,因此力求文字浅近,易于阅读,同时能从中获得有关美国历史及当今美国社会方方面面的知识,所以较受欢迎。鉴于各种需要,现将讲义重新整理修改出版。

编写中尽量搜集国内外有关美国学的专著,采纳并参考了许多有用的资料和观点,为节省篇幅,在引用时未一一加以注明,书后列出各种参考书目,供读者进一步研究之用。编写过程中得到美国友人文丹(Betty Windham)和林洁(Jennifer E. Nolin)的大力支持和帮助,特别是文丹女士还拨冗为本书仔细审阅并提出许多宝贵的意见,在此,我谨向他们表示衷心的感谢。

美国学是一门涉及范围广泛、可包容多方问题的综合性学科。本书只提供了一些研究美国学的基础知识,难于面面俱到。书中的错误和不足,望读者批评指正。

The Editor's Preface

Meet the U. S. is actually part of my lecture notes in Understanding the United States, a course which I have been teaching for several years. As the notes provide some basic concepts about past and present-day America and the language is easy to read, they are quite welcome and have been printed several times in the form of handouts. To make things easier, I have now revised the notes and published them.

In the course of preparing the teaching notes, I have benefited much from the reliable materials and views of those famous writers on American Studies. To save time and space, I have listed the sources not in separate notes but in the bibliography. In addition, I want to express my heartfelt thanks to Betty Windham and Jennifer E. Nolin for their great assistance and support, especially Betty Windham who contributed immensely to this book by discussing its ideas and revising the whole book from the beginning to the end. Both of them have helped to edit the materials and have also provided most of the questions for each chapter of the book.

Since American Studies embodies a wide range of different courses such as history, literature, politics, economics, and social problems, it is hard for the editor to include all aspects in depth. I welcome readers' comments and suggestions.

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PART ONE

American Geography

I . The United States

The United States of America, usually referred to as the United States, is the fourth largest country after the former USSR, Canada and China. It lies in the middle of the North American continent with an area of more than 9.3 million square kilometers and a population of about 248.7 million, according to the 1990 Census count.

The United States has 50 states and some outlying territories in the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean.

Except for Alaska and Hawaii, which are geographically separated from the other states, the nation is fortunate to be situated between two great oceans; the Atlantic on the east and the Pacific on the west. It is bordered by Canada on the north and by Mexico on the south. From the east to west coast is a distance of about 4,500 kilometers and about 2,575 kilometers from the northern to the southern borderlines. Most of the boundary line between the United States and Canada lies along 49 degrees north latitude while the Tropic of Cancer cuts through the northern coast of Cuba which is to the south of the U. S. People often liken the nation to China by saying that it is almost on the same latitude as China in the other hemisphere; China extends a bit further

south than the U. S. as the Tropic of Cancer cuts through some of her provinces such as Taiwan, Kwantung, and Kwanxi in the south.

Of the total land area, about 29 percent (655 million acres) is forested, 26.4 percent (597 million acres) is grassland, and 17 percent (383 million acres) is used for crops. Like China, the United States also has many natural resources such as coal, iron, petroleum, lead, copper and other useful metals.

II. The Mountains of the United States

Look at the map of the continental U. S., you will find that there are many mountains and rivers dividing the land into several parts. It is true that they are all very important to the nation's economy, weather, and even the social and cultural heritage of the people.

Moving across the land from east to west, we come first to the famous old mountains, the Appalachian Mountains, which extend from the Gulf of St. Lawrence in Canada to the state of Alabama. They run from northeast to the southwest, almost parallel to the east coast. Worn by years of rains and other kinds of weather, the mountains have an average height of only 800 meters above sea level. Between the mountains, there are many coal-rich valleys. The northern part of the land between the mountains and the Atlantic Ocean is mountainous and rocky; the middle part, rising gently from the sea, forms a narrow coastal plain; and the southern part is a wider coastal plain. To the west side of the mountains lie plateaus built up over the centuries from bits of stone washed down from the old mountains.

Moving westward across a large expanse of land, we reach the Rocky Mountains, the highest of all in the country. The mountains rise more than 3,000 meters above sea level with a peak Mt. Elbert about 4,300 meters high. Running from the Arctic to the Mexican frontier, the mountains are often spoken of as the backbone of the continent. In addition to the simpler term **Rockies**, the mountains are also called the Continental Divide because all the rivers east of them flow into the Atlantic Ocean while the rivers on their west go to the Pacific. Tumbling up and down rapidly, the mountains are quite rough and irregular. Between them there are plateaus and valleys. The tops of the mountains are often covered with snow all year round, and the temperature is cold. As the mountains are too high for the rain from the Pacific Ocean to reach their east side, there are scarcely any trees growing there.

Going further west, we can see the Cascade Mountains and the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Extending from north California, through Oregon and Washington to Canada, the Cascade Mountains are over 3,000 meters above sea level. They are said to have been built by volcanoes. As for the Sierra Nevada Mountains, which are to the south of the Cascades, they were formed by change in the earth's crust. The peak of the Sierra Nevada range is Mt. Whitney. At 4,418 meters above sea level, it is the highest peak in the contiguous United States. As the two ranges are close to the west coast of the country, they can catch the rain off the Pacific better than the Rockies. In some places west of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, people get 250 centimeters of rain fall every year whereas the places of the Rockies usually receive only 12.7 meters of rainfall.

Along the coast of the Pacific Ocean are the Coast Mountains or the Coast Range. With a height of no more than 1,000 meters above sea level, they are relatively low. Occasionally, there are earthquakes along this range. The shape of the range is still in the process of being made by nature.

III. The Rivers and the Lakes in the United States

There are many rivers in the U. S. among which the Mississippi River is the best known. After the Nile in Africa and the Amazon in South America, the Mississippi is the world's third longest continental river. Flowing from its northern source in the Rocky Mountains to the Gulf of Mexico, it is about 6,400 kilometers long and covers 31 states. With plenty of water and a number of tributaries, the river was named by the Indians the Mississippi, that is, the "father of waters" or "the Old Man River".

The longest branch of the Mississippi is the Missouri River. Originating in the Rocky Mountains, the Missouri flows eastward and pours into the Mississippi. Due to topsoil from the western areas, its waters are brown. Another chief tributary, the Ohio, joins it from the east. The waters of the Ohio are blue and clear because the regions they are running across are hills and valleys covered with plentiful forests and plants. They prevent the precious top soil from being carried away by the flowing water. Like the phenomenon of the Jing and the Wei in China, the difference between the land west and east of the Mississippi is apparent as they are different in colour though each borders the river.

The erection of the Erie Canal in 1825 connected the

Mississippi River with the Great Lakes through the Ohio River. It became the main artery for inland waterway traffic before the growth of railroad construction in the 1860's. Transportation by water was not largely replaced by trains until World War I. In 1959, the St. Lawrence River the border between the U. S. and Canada in the northeast was opened. Ships can now sail directly from the Atlantic Ocean through the Great Lakes to the interior.

The **Great Lakes** is a general term for the five lakes in the north of the country. Except for Lake Michigan which lies within the country, the other four, Lake Ontario, Lake Superior, Lake Huron, and Lake Erie are shared by Canada and the United States. Because of the important role they have played in transportation, they are also called the "Mediterranean" of the American Continent.

Starting from the Rockies in the state of Colorado, the Rio Grande River runs to the south and forms part of the U. S. -Mexican border. It enters the Gulf of Mexico.

Originating also in the Rocky Mountains, the Colorado River flows southwest and reaches the Gulf of California. This river is wild and furious, cutting deeply into the rocks for ages and has formed the magnificent Grand Canyon.

In the northwest is the Columbia River, the biggest river that flows to the Pacific in North America. With its source in Canada and flowing northward, the river has a length of 1,954 kilometers, 85% of which is in the U. S. The river is very rich in salmon and other fishes.

IV. Regions and Divisions in the United States

Except for the last two states, Alaska and Hawaii, all

the other 48 are on the mainland. They can roughly be divided into six regions; New England, the Middle Atlantic States, the South, the Midwest, the Great Plains, and the West.

A. New England

The area lies in the northeast of the country. One could guess which country the early settlers came from just by hearing the name. It surely was given by an Englishman called John Smith, an ex-soldier who came to the new-found land seeking his fortune. He made a map of the land calling it "New England". The name became official in 1619 when King James of England declared the section of America to be New England.

The area is made up of six states; Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut and Vermont. Except for Vermont, all the states there border the Atlantic Ocean. Like the northeast in China, New England is very cold in winter but is comfortable in summer. Autumn is beautiful with the mountains covered with leaves of different shades. As people can either ski in winter or swim in the sea in summer or even climb mountains all the year round, the tourist industry is widely developed there.

Stony and poor, the land is not very good for farming. There are small farms just large enough to support one's own family. They are mainly devoted to raising dairy cattle or growing vegetables and fruits. Many New Englanders are traditionally skillful in making watches, shoes, clothing and machine tools. They can also make heavy electrical motors, looms and other precision instruments. With the development of industry in other parts of the country, New England still keeps its position as one of the great production cen-

ters.

Ever since the colonial period, New England has been famous for its fishing. Not only do most of its states lie on the coast, but some of the world's best fishing waters are just off the coast of Maine and Massachusetts. The section from the outer point of Long Island northward is called one of the great "fish bowls" in the world. Taking advantage of the location, many New Englanders work as fishermen or factory workers in factories where fish are canned and prepared for shipment.

Of the six states, Maine is the largest and Rhode Island is the smallest. However, Massachusetts is generally taken as the most important state of this area. It has a large population of nearly 5.8 million, whereas the state of Vermont has only a little over 0.5 million. What is more, no other state in the entire United States has ever played such an important role as Massachusetts in American history. Its capital Boston is also the largest city in New England. We'll deal with it in detail in the section on cities in the United States.

B. The Middle Atlantic States

Lying in the middle between New England and the southern states are New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, and West Virginia.

As most of these states also border the Atlantic Ocean, many important seaports have been established there. Although Pennsylvania lies inland, it is on the mouth of the Delaware River, and ocean-going vessels can easily reach it through the river. In addition to the coastal land and seaports, there are also many heavily wooded high mountains and deep valleys cut by wide rivers. The two important

mountains are the Allegheny mountains and the Catskill mountains. Both belong to the old Appalachians. The important rivers in this region are the Hudson and the Delaware. The Hudson River lies only in the state of New York and reaches New York Bay. The completion of the Erie Canal and other canals has made it possible for the Hudson to connect with the Great Lakes, the Delaware and the St. Lawrence. It has become one of the most important waterways of the country and has helped a great deal in the development of the Midwest and New York. Beginning in the Catskill Mountains, the Delaware flows southward and forms a boundary between Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

Owing to its geographical position, the whole region is not only famous for its good harbors but also rich in such minerals as coal and iron for industry. For instance, Pittsburgh, the leading city of the nation in the production of steel before it was surpassed by Chicago. Its steel had been used for making railways, bridges and girders for skyscrapers. The main factor of its achievement is that it lies within a soft coal section in the south of Pennsylvania and it can get iron within easy shipping distance. Though surpassed, it still ranks second only to Chicago. With West Virginia ranking second in the production of coal, Pennsylvania is the leading state in the United States in the product. As the region is well-known for its industry, it is often described together with New England as the "Industrial Northeast".

C. The South

The region is very large including 11 states. In some books the section also contains a small part of Missouri and Oklahoma and the eastern part of Texas. Instead of the South, it is called the Southeast. For convenience, we keep

the traditional division of the region including such states as Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky, Louisiana, and Arkansas.

The region is often spoken of as the "Sunny South," but the climate varies depending upon the different position of each state. For example, Virginia and North Carolina have a temperate climate as they are in the north. Farther south, one feels warmer and warmer until he reaches southern Florida where it is very hot because it belongs to the tropical climate. The states in between Virginia and Florida are all warm and have almost no winters and no distinct dry seasons.

Except for the parts along the Atlantic coast where the land is all pure sand, most of the southern land is rich. With warm weather and plentiful rainfall, the land is good for farming. Before the independence in 1776, the economy in the South was dependent predominantly on agriculture. Many planters amassed their wealth by growing tobacco, rice and indigo. After 1793, some began to grow cotton because the cotton gin, invented by Eli Whitney that year, made it easy to separate cotton fiber from the seeds and with the help of slave labor, they could make huge profits from cotton. Before long, the South became the Cotton Kingdom of the nation. Only Virginia and Kentucky continued to grow tobacco.

However, the soil was damaged through long years of the one-crop economic system. In the past, planters just bought more slaves to work on another piece of land as there was an abundance of land to be cultivated. But the slaves being forced to toil day and night for the slave-owners were

surely irresponsible and careless in planting. In addition to the low productivity resulting from slavery, soil erosion was also very severe because of heavy rains which fall very often in the South and carry away its good top soil. Finally, some states like South Carolina, Georgia, and Mississippi have devoted less land for agricultural use. Because of the waste of soil, the South remained poor and backward even when the slaves were freed after the Civil War. Some farmers realized that the one-crop economy would quickly waste the soil. They turned to raising other crops like sugar, rice, peanuts and garden vegetables. Their experience proves that a diversified agriculture is better suited to the land and they must do something to conserve water so as to prevent soil erosion.

With the changes in agriculture, there has also been a growth of industry in the South. Packing and processing have become important because of a variety of farm goods, poultry and dairy products. In addition, factories producing farm machinery, tools, shoes, garments, electronics, chemicals, and aeroplanes have all been developed in the South. During the 1940's and early 1950's, the textile industry was even dominated by five of the southern states; North and South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama and Virginia. Since then, much cotton grown in the South can be processed directly in the southern textile plants instead of being sent to the North. Another industry which has also done much to develop the South is oil. Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi are all very rich in crude oil. In addition to the power provided by oil, a river can also be used as an energy source for machines. The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) has played a very important role in the new industries of the region. The Authority was built to tame the Tennessee River according