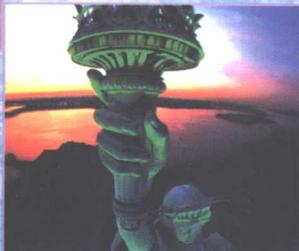
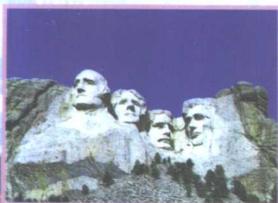


新东方学校实用英语丛书

美国文化教程

American Culture : a Coursebook



胡敏 [美] John W. Wilde [加] Nevin Blumer 著

世界知识出版社

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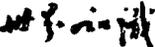
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Preface

America means many things to many people. Despite the quantity of information Chinese students receive about America, they frequently form a rather distorted picture of America that ranges from the ideal “golden mountain” view to a view of America as a sort of dangerous, lawless, crime-ridden land. The truth hardly lies in any of these extreme perspectives. Chinese students are typically filled with generalizations and stereotypes, both positive and negative, which are not very helpful for adapting to America. Before making decisions regarding studying, doing business, traveling, or even immigrating to America, Chinese students should have a balanced, factual and realistic picture of America. This is what *American Culture: a Coursebook* will provide for the reader.

Each chapter is a compilation of objective and analytical writings that should generate a broader understanding of America, without resorting to sweeping generalizations. It is largely a comparative study in its focus, providing a student with answers to the many puzzling aspects of America.

Much of the information in this book derives from the research and perspectives of Americans living in China and Non-Americans living in America.

Americans are different, despite the fact that they often do not view themselves as being different. And yet America also has much in common with China, perhaps more than many students realize. Too often the focus of comparative studies resorts to emphasizing only the differences, so while this book certainly points them out, it also highlights areas of similarity with China. At the same time, however, there are key areas that distinguish both societies and the aim of this book is to explore why and how America and its people are different.

This book deals with the features of America most relevant to students preparing to study or work. One can view it as a brief but informative handbook for the would-be student or immigrant who has no time to read about every single detail or aspect of America, but nevertheless wants to have a good understanding of why America is what it is today. It provides an informative outline of the history, political system, character, culture, social behaviour, customs, religions, nonverbal communication, education, University life, business behavior, and social problems. These topics are the ones that are typically most relevant for those who wish to

integrate well in American society.

This book can be used for self-study or in a class. It is not intended to be the final stop in a student's journey of understanding. Instead its purpose is to stimulate further interest and to encourage research into various aspects of America. Questions at the end of each chapter are designed to encourage further research and to force students to remember the most salient points. The questions are focused enough to allow students to find the answers in the chapter but also open-ended enough to provoke further research and analytical thinking into the questions on a deeper level.

As well, it is important that students pay particular attention to the various expressions and idioms in the book that illuminate American culture, lifestyles and political ideology. These linguistic expressions and sayings are so common to Americans that they often use them without realizing that there are deep concepts that underlie them. For example, when we say that the president is now a "lame-duck" what does that mean? What do we mean when we say that Americans often expect their friends to "hold their own"? Chinese students should not study English without consideration the cultural underpinnings of the expressions. Thus this book can also be viewed as a language study of various up-to-date expressions typically used by Americans.

The book is a shared effort by three authors who have special insights into the comparative aspects of China and America. Hu Min (MA), a well-known and leading Chinese teacher and researcher, is an expert in teaching English and preparing students in China for the realities of life in America. He devotes considerable time and effort to researching all aspects of American society and has contributed a number of publications in Beijing. John W. Wilde (Ph. D.) is an American business consultant working in Beijing. He contributes not only a wealth of research facts and knowledge but also special insights into America that he knows will be relevant to Chinese students. Nevin Blumer (M. Ed) is an English as a Second Language instructor from Canada teaching in Beijing. He has a particular interest in helping students adjust to the various educational, cultural and communicative issues of being a foreign student.

The authors

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Chapter One American Origins

The purpose of this chapter is to give the reader a sense of how the United States has evolved into what it is today. This will entail a general overall view of the important events and trends in American history. The United States is a constantly changing country. Only in the mid-20th century has it achieved a position of worldwide prominence. Since it is such a relatively young country, even modern American history is relevant to what is commonly referred to as "American Origins". Of course, this chapter is not meant to be a substitute for a complete study of American history, and readers are encouraged to consult more complete works of American history.

Only certain events that truly define the American character will be covered in detail. Thus, for example, the colonial development, the war of Independence, and the Civil War will be treated in more detail than the War of 1812 and the U. S. involvement in World War I .

When compared with Chinese history, American history may justifiably appear miniscule. Indeed several of China's imperial dynasties lasted longer than the total history of the United States. American history, however, does

not simply begin on July 4, 1776. Its intellectual, political, economic, and cultural foundations were slowly laid for centuries prior to 1776, in both North America and Great Britain. A proper, though truncated, study of American history must begin with the initial European presence in North America.

Europe's Discovery of America

As late as the mid-15th century, the Western Hemisphere was virtually unknown to Europe. This was to change with the epoch-making voyage of the great Italian explorer Christopher Columbus. Hoping to discover a shorter, hence more lucrative, sea route to China and India, Columbus sailed westward from Europe in 1492 under the flag of Spain. After several months, Columbus struck land on a small island in the Caribbean, which he named San Salvador. Mistaking the island for part of India, Columbus called the native inhabitants Indians. Far from discovering India, however, Columbus had located land in the Western Hemisphere and turned the eye of Europe to the "New World". After Columbus' return to Europe, the two great marine nations of the time, Spain and Portugal, began competing for economic domination in the Americas.

A period of fierce economic competition with Portugal followed, as well as brutal subjugation of the native iniabi-

tants. Inevitably, Spain gained dominion over most of the Americas. This domination lasted nearly one hundred years, until 1588. In this historic year, the English navy defeated the great Spanish Armada. This defeat signaled the decline of the Spanish Empire. Great Britain gained control of the main Atlantic sea routes, and began to replace Spain as the major force in North America.

The English Colonies

The first permanent English settlers in North America began arriving early in the 17th century. Private companies typically sponsored these settlements; such companies were hoping to win profits in resource-rich North America. Settled in 1667, Jamestown, Virginia became the first successful English colony. Early years at Jamestown were “rough-going” and the majority of the original 100 colonists died within the first year. The aid of the native Americans, who gave the colonists food in the harsh first winter, was crucial to the early survival of the colony.

Alienation and discrimination were what the Indians received for their generosity, as the colonists took what land they desired by force. The Indians did not yield passively to such treatment, and Indian retaliation threatened to destroy the young colony until a precarious period of peace developed early in the 1720s. More than anything, what saved

Jamestown was the highly successful cultivation of tobacco. First planted in 1612, tobacco fetched high prices in Great Britain, and soon virtually all the colonists cultivated the plant.

As the Jamestown colony managed to survive and prosper, another group of Englishmen headed for North America. This group of persecuted English Calvinists, became known as the Pilgrims. They yearned for religious freedom, and after receiving financial support they left for North America in 1620 on the *Mayflower*.

After an arduous voyage, they landed on the Massachusetts coast and founded a settlement at Plymouth. Despite a perilous first winter, the summer brought good crops, and in the Autumn more settlers arrived. That same Fall they gave thanks for their success by holding a huge feast, from which comes the American holiday of Thanksgiving. Instrumental to the colony's success was the aid of certain Indian tribes who taught the colonists how to cultivate certain crops. The settlers' relations with other Indian tribes, however, were less than cordial.

Soon, other English colonies were established in steady succession, perhaps the most successful one was the Massachusetts Bay Colony founded in 1630 by a group of "pure" English Protestants known as the Puritans. So successful was this colony that it spawned a number of offshoot colonies in Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hamp-

shire.

Maryland was first settled in 1634 and became a bastion of religious freedom. In the 1660's King Charles II of England granted land charters to eight of his favorite subjects and the colonies of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia were born. Later in the century, the colonies of Pennsylvania and Delaware were founded by the pious and visionary William Dutch traders, but the English remained adamant in their claim to the entire east coast. In the summer of 1664 three English warships arrived at the New York coast and snatched the colonies into British hands.

Though these colonies exhibited different economic and religious characteristics, there existed one all-important common feature; all of the colonies were populated by an unassailable majority of Englishmen. Thus, they harbored English traditions and customs, whether the colonists were in New Hampshire or Georgia.

Most important of these traditions and values were self-reliance and the desire for liberty. Clinging to their rights as freeborn Britons, colonists expected their due protection under the Magna Carta and the common law. Possessing a great degree of freedom in forming their colonial governments, the colonists lived and prospered, on the basic British political traditions; subsequently forming their own kind of constitutional government, with a stronger repre-

sentative system and greater guarantees of personal liberty.

Four fundamental facts distinguished the colonial political system from the British system. The first was the great value put on written charters and constitutions as guarantors of individual liberty. The second was the almost constant conflict between legislatures and governors, and the third was the control of appropriations by legislatures as opposed to governors. The fourth distinguishing characteristic of American colonial life was the remarkable spirit of religious toleration; this allowed persons of differing religious sects—though nearly all Christian—to live and work together without the deleterious effects of religious violence. This toleration greatly facilitated the prosperous growth of the colonies.

Differences Among the Colonies

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that there existed no significant differences among the colonies, for differences did exist. Originally settled by self-reliant religious dissenters, the colonies of New England were well-known, not only for the people's widespread individual economic success, but also for their intelligence, religious piety, and emphasis on education. The center of the fishing and shipbuilding industry, New England, exhibited the first signs of colonial industrialization.

The Middle colonies consisted mainly of numerous small farms. A more tolerant and open society, these colonies were perhaps less intellectually endowed than those in the North, but less religiously rigid.

In the Southern colonies, even more differences were apparent. Almost exclusively rural, the Southern colonies consisted largely of great plantations, which were the property of a single wealthy landowner. Producing large amounts of grain, cotton, and tobacco, which it exported to Europe, the South long maintained its predominantly rural character.

The great economic success of these plantations was due mainly to the exploitations of African slaves. First brought to Jamestown in 1619, nearly half a million slaves inhabited the American colonies by 1770. Though slavery existed in all of the colonies, only in the South did it become such an integral part of the economy. Although industrialization and the moral opposition of the religiously pious made slavery less attractive in the North, the Southern colonies continued to militantly advocate the institution of slavery until the Mid-19th century. This Southern militancy inevitably led to the catastrophic American Civil War.

Tightening British Control and Colonial Resistance

In British eyes, the American colonies existed to serve

the economic interests of the parent country, and for the first 150 years of colonial existence the colonists, feeling immensely dependent upon Great Britain, bowed to her with humble respect. By the mid-18th century, however, it seemed that Great Britain might need the colonies more than the colonies needed Great Britain. By 1760, the American colonies were a rich region with more than 1,500,000 people. In addition, the colonial army had played an indispensable role in the British defeat of France in the French and Indian Wars of the 1750s.

As Great Britain felt the colonists' dependency and respect towards its decline, it decided to tighten its control over the colonies.

The British Parliament had already enacted legislation that limited the right of the colonies to engage in trade with other nations, thus ensuring Great Britain an abundant supply of relatively cheap colonial products. Colonial merchants begrudgingly accepted this legislation, despite the adverse impact it had on their economic opportunities.

Colonial merchants, however, adamantly refused to accept legislation passed by the British Parliament in the 1760s. The Sugar Act of 1764 and the Stamp Act of 1765 increased the taxes of American colonies, greatly harming colonial economic interests. Outraged by the legislation, many colonists protested and pledged to disobey the Acts. "No taxation without representation" became the popular