

Ethel Tiersky · Martin Tiersky

THE
U.S.A.
CUSTOMS AND INSTITUTIONS
THIRD EDITION

PRENTICE HALL REGENTS

世界图书出版公司

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CUSTOMS AND INSTITUTIONS

A Survey of American Culture and Traditions

An Advanced Reader
for ESL and EFL Students

THIRD EDITION

Ethel Tiersky and Martin Tiersky



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Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 07632

世界图书出版公司

北京·广州·上海·西安

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Tiersky, Ethel, 1937-

The U.S.A : customs and institutions : a survey of American culture and traditions : an advanced reader for ESL and EFL students / Ethel Tiersky and Martin Tiersky. — 3rd ed.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-13-946385-2 :

1. Readers—United States. 2. English language—Textbooks for foreign speakers. 3. United States—Civilization. I. Tiersky, Martin, 1935-. II. Title. III. Title: USA.

PE1127.H5T5 1990

428.6'4—dc20

89-48289

CIP



© 1990 by Prentice-Hall, Inc.
A Division of Simon & Schuster
Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 07632

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 0-13-946385-2

Reprinted by World Publishing Corporation, Beijing, 1993
for sale in The People's Republic of China (excluding
Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan Province of China)

ISBN 7-5062-1517-9

Prentice-Hall International (UK) Limited, London
Prentice-Hall of Australia Pty. Limited, Sydney
Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., Toronto
Prentice-Hall Hispanoamericana, S.A., Mexico
Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited, New Delhi
Prentice-Hall of Japan, Inc., Tokyo
Simon & Schuster Asia Pte. Ltd., Singapore
Editora Prentice-Hall do Brasil, Ltda., Rio de Janeiro

PREFACE

TO THE STUDENT:

This third edition of *The U.S.A.: Customs and Institutions* has two main goals. One is to introduce you to the lifestyles, attitudes, customs, and traditions which are characteristic of Americans. The second is to increase your knowledge of the most widespread American custom of all—the custom of speaking English.

Let's begin with a brief description of the book's content. As its title promises, *Customs and Institutions* deals with customs—how Americans celebrate their holidays, what they like to eat, which forms of entertainment they prefer, what sports they play and watch, and how they behave toward one another. It also deals with the nation's most important institutions: its schools, churches, and governmental structures.

In addition to describing life in the United States, *Customs and Institutions* also attempts to analyze it. Why is the divorce rate so high? Why do so many American mothers work? Why is there racial tension in the U.S.A.? Why do so many adults attend school? These are questions that every student of American society wonders about, so we have tried to answer them.

We want to tell our readers not only about how Americans behave but also about what they believe. American philosophies of education and government; American attitudes toward religion, marriage, and family life; the American outlook on life in general; and the American dream—all are given as much attention as space allows.

A word about what this book is *not*: It is neither a defense of American culture nor an attack on it. Though the text does mention obvious strengths and weaknesses, its primary intent is to describe and analyze rather than evaluate.

Now let's turn to the second goal: to improve your comprehension of English. If you're ready to read this book, then you are already well on your way toward mastering the world's most popular and useful second language. But it's not quite correct to speak of mastering English. In truth, no one ever does, not even those who speak it as a native language. Learning English is a lifelong process. That's why this third edition of *Customs and Institutions* has a totally revised set of exercises designed to help you read with greater understanding, discuss your reactions to the ideas presented, learn a specific set of vocabulary words and idioms, and note some important characteristics of written English.

Why, you may ask, is there no end to the study of English? First, of the 2,700 or so languages in use today, English has the largest vocabulary—perhaps as many as one million words, including all of the scientific and technical ones. New technology keeps adding additional words to the language, as did the nuclear age and the computer age. Of course, a person can communicate fairly well with just a few thousand words, but the more you know, the better you will understand what you hear and read.

Second, English is a highly idiomatic language with thousands of two- and three-word phrases that have meanings quite different from the meanings of the same words used individually. (For example, give up does not mean either give or up.) This text, written in informal American English, introduces and provides exercises to practice idioms and expressions that often confuse the non-native speaker.

If your past instruction in English has been in British English, don't worry. The switch to American English will present no major problems. In terms of sentence structure, these two main versions of English are basically the same. The differences between the two Englishes are greater in pronunciation, colloquial usage, and slang than in the written language. British English has more irregular verbs than American English does (*learnt* versus *learned*, for example). There are some minor spelling differences (such as *colour* versus *color*) and some differences in vocabulary. (The British *lift* is the American *elevator*.) Still, you will find that British and American English are very much one language.

As you improve your English, you will learn more about the world's most widely used international language. Today, at least 750 million (and perhaps as many as one billion) people speak English. About 350 million speak it as their native language. (Only the speakers of the combined varieties of Chinese surpass that figure.) The rest know English as a second or foreign language. In terms of international communication, no language is more useful. English is the language of more than half the world's technical and scientific journals. It is the language of international business, sports, and travel. In short, English has become the global language of our shrinking world.

PREFACE

Whether you are living in the United States now, just visiting the country, working or studying with Americans who live in your country, or perhaps meeting Americans for the first time in the pages of this book, welcome to the U.S.A.!

TO THE TEACHER:

If you are familiar with the first two editions of *The U.S.A.: Customs and Institutions*, you will find this third edition quite similar in terms of the topics covered and quite different in many other ways. The second edition was published in 1975. So much has changed in the U.S.A. since then that, in the process of updating, we have almost completely rewritten the text. There is one totally new chapter on etiquette. Many of the other chapters have been reorganized. The words are new, the facts updated, but the book continues to create a general portrait of the U.S.A., both its virtues and its shortcomings. It provides answers to many of the questions that foreigners and immigrants ask about this nation, and it will help them understand and relate to Americans better.

What's been changed? You will find this third edition a more effective teaching tool because of several revisions:

1. The book now begins with a multiple-choice quiz designed to stimulate student interest in the text and indicate the wide range of information contained in it.
2. The vocabulary and sentence structure have been simplified somewhat (though not drastically) to make the information more accessible to intermediate and advanced ESL or EFL students.
3. There are now headings in all of the chapters so that students can follow the flow of ideas more easily and teachers can divide chapter assignments into smaller segments more easily, if they wish.
4. The paragraphs are numbered for easier reference.
5. Perhaps the most important change is in the design of the exercises. The exercises have been totally revised so that they now develop a wide range of language skills. Comprehension Questions (I) ask students to explain what they've read and also to react to the content by making cultural comparisons and stating their opinions. Vocabulary Practice (II) lists 20 vocabulary words to master after each reading. These words are in boldface type the first time they appear in the chapter so that students can study them in context. Students then select some of these vocabulary words (using them in a new but similar context) when they fill in the blanks to complete the sentences in the exercise. Word Study (III) teaches word parts, homonyms, common ~~non~~ verb endings, and more. Idiom Study (IV) provides practice with the phrasal verbs, other idioms, and common sayings used in

PREFACE

the chapter. In Reading Skills (V), many different styles of exercises provide practice in recognizing main ideas, finding significant supporting facts, making inferences, identifying facts versus opinions, determining word meaning from context, recognizing pronoun references, and more.

Accompanying this edition of *Customs and Institutions*, there is (for the first time) an *Instructor's Manual* containing teaching tips, exercise answers, and a test for each chapter.

This third edition will help non-native speakers of English better understand both the life and the language of the U.S.A. We hope you enjoy using it as much as we enjoyed researching and writing about this exciting country.

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THE U.S.A.—A QUICK QUIZ

(Answers to the following questions can be found in the chapters of this text. They are also listed at the end of this test.)

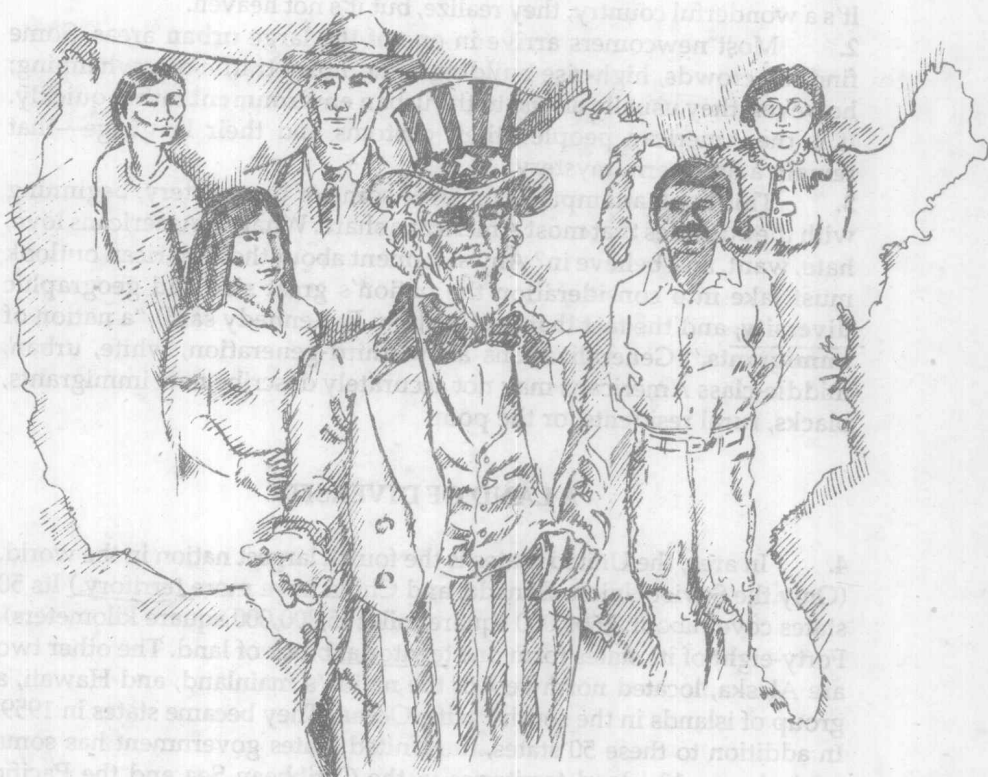
1. What famous landmark symbolizes the U.S.A. as a country that welcomes foreigners? a) the Statue of Liberty b) the Golden Gate Bridge c) the Empire State Building d) the World Trade Center.
2. A famous figure that symbolizes the United States government is a) a cowboy b) a thin, bearded man called Uncle Sam c) George Washington d) a fat, bearded man called Santa Claus.
3. The United States government spends about _____ a year. a) \$35,000,000 (35 million) b) \$5,000,000,000 (five billion) c) \$400,000,000,000 (400 billion) d) \$1,000,000,000,000 (one trillion).
4. If an American woman tells you that it is her birthday, the polite response is a) Merry birthday! b) How nice! How old are you? c) My condolences. d) Happy birthday!
5. The animal that symbolizes the U.S.A. is the a) bear b) donkey c) elephant d) eagle.
6. The national motto, which has been printed on all U.S. currency since 1955, is a) "In God We Trust" b) "America, the Beautiful" c) "Stars and Stripes Forever" d) "With Liberty and Justice for All."
7. The U.S.A., the oldest democracy in the world, came into existence in the year a) 1492 b) 1685 c) 1776 d) 1812.
8. The American flag has a) 50 stars and 13 stripes b) 13 stars and 13 stripes c) blue stars and red and white stripes d) white stars and red and blue stripes.
9. In terms of the amount of land it possesses, the U.S.A. is the _____ largest nation in the world. a) second b) third c) fourth d) eighth.
10. The largest state in population is a) California b) New York c) Illinois d) Texas.
11. The President of the United States lives in Washington, D.C. in a building called the a) Capitol b) Sears Tower c) White House d) National Mansion.

12. The tallest building in the world is 1,454 feet high. It is the
a) Empire State Building in New York City b) Sears Tower in Chicago
c) World Trade Center in New York City d) Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.
13. What percent of those Americans eligible to vote actually voted in the 1988 presidential election? a) 90% b) 75% c) 60% d) 50%.
14. Americans are considered adults when they reach the age of 18. Then they can legally do all of the following actions, except for one. Generally, Americans must be age 21 to a) vote b) buy alcoholic beverages c) get married d) enlist in the military service.
15. The average American woman gets married at about age a) 18 b) 20 c) 23 d) 26.
16. About what percent of married American women work? a) 15% b) 30% c) 55% d) 75%.
17. What is the average family income in the U.S.A.? a) \$15,000 b) \$30,000 c) \$45,000 d) \$60,000.
18. What percent of today's American adults are college graduates? a) 10% b) 20% c) 30% d) 40%.
19. A baby born in the U.S.A. today can expect to live to about age a) 55 b) 65 c) 75 d) 85.
20. The number of people employed by the Executive Branch of the federal government is about a) 35,000 b) 100,000 c) 500,000 d) 3,000,000.
21. American children believe that on Christmas Eve a) a witch rides through the sky on a broomstick b) Santa Claus rides through the sky in a sled c) Pilgrims ride through the sky on turkeys d) people should play jokes on one another.
22. What percent of American households have at least one TV set? a) 66% b) 82% c) 91% d) 98%.
23. The three American cities with the largest populations are a) New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago b) New York, Boston, and San Francisco c) Los Angeles, New York, and Philadelphia d) Los Angeles, Detroit, and Chicago.
24. About how many words are there in the English language? a) 200,000 b) 400,000 c) 1,000,000 d) 2,000,000.
25. What sport is known as the national pastime? a) baseball b) football c) hockey d) basketball.

THE U.S.A.—A QUICK QUIZ

Answers to Book Quiz

- | | | | | |
|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. a | 6. a | 11. c | 16. c | 21. b |
| 2. b | 7. c | 12. b | 17. b | 22. d |
| 3. d | 8. a | 13. d | 18. b | 23. a |
| 4. d | 9. c | 14. b | 19. c | 24. c |
| 5. d | 10. a | 15. c | 20. d | 25. a |



THE AMERICAN CHARACTER

1. "What a country!" says the Russian immigrant and popular comedian, Yakov Smirnoff. This exclamation expresses his surprise, delight, confusion, or disapproval as he learns something new about the U.S.A. Most newcomers to the United States probably share his mixed emotions. It's a wonderful country, they realize, but it's not heaven.
2. Most newcomers arrive in one of the large urban areas. Some find the crowds, high-rise buildings, and noisy traffic overwhelming; however, they usually adjust to the urban environment rather quickly. It is the American people—their customs and their language—that remain a long-term mystery.
3. This book attempts to uncover some of the mystery, beginning with the attitudes that most Americans share. What do Americans love, hate, want, and believe in? Any statement about the American outlook must take into consideration the nation's great size and geographic diversity, and the fact that it is (as John F. Kennedy said) "a nation of immigrants." Generalizations about third-generation, white, urban, middle-class Americans may not accurately describe new immigrants, blacks, rural residents, or the poor.

A LAND OF DIVERSITY

4. In area, the United States is the fourth largest nation in the world. (Only the Soviet Union, Canada, and China have more territory.) Its 50 states cover about 3,600,000 square miles (5,800,000 square kilometers). Forty-eight of its states form one territorial block of land. The other two are Alaska, located northwest of the nation's mainland, and Hawaii, a group of islands in the south Pacific Ocean. They became states in 1959. In addition to these 50 states, the United States government has some control over 12 island territories in the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean. These include Guam, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. Residents of these territories are American citizens.
5. "No one should have to see America for the first time," said one visitor, overwhelmed by America's size and the great variety of its

THE AMERICAN CHARACTER

climate and geography. A homesick immigrant from anywhere can probably find a place in the U.S.A. that is similar to his or her native land. (The United States has tall mountains and flat cornfields, deserts and tropical regions, prairies and forests, rugged coastlines and gentle, rolling hills. The climate, too, covers all extremes. Throughout the United States, summer weather is warmer than winter weather; but temperatures vary, from southern Florida, where visitors come to swim and sunbathe in December, to northern Alaska, where, in winter, the temperature may drop to -75° Fahrenheit.

6. The United States is also the fourth largest nation in population after China, India, and the Soviet Union. In 1988, there were about 240 million people living in the U.S.A. Although about 95% of the people now living in the U.S.A. were born there, the United States has one of the most varied populations in terms of national ancestry. Racially, the U.S.A. is about 83% white, 12% black, and 5% Asian. About 8% of the population is Hispanic, making the Spanish-speaking people the second largest ethnic minority in the country. Newcomers are often surprised by the variety of skin colors they see, but Americans take it for granted. These differences are more than skin deep. It may take a few generations before the values and customs of the "old country" are altered by an American outlook. Some are never revised.

7. Traveling around the U.S.A., one also becomes aware of regional differences, not only in geography, but also in the ways that Americans speak and act. Most Americans can tell what part of the country another American comes from just by listening to the speaker's accent. (The Midwestern accent is closest to what is heard on national TV.) Styles of cooking vary from place to place, influenced by the different immigrant groups that have settled in that area and by the edible plants that grow there. Recreation varies from place to place, determined in part by climate and geography.

8. In addition, American personalities may differ somewhat from one region to another. For example, New Englanders are often described as stern and self-reliant, Southerners as gracious and leisurely, and Westerners as casual and friendly. People from southern California are considered especially eager to try new fads. Midwesterners are considered more conservative than Californians and less worldly than New Yorkers.

9. However, many regional differences have been erased by modern transportation, communication, and mass production. From the East Coast to the West Coast, travelers see the same kinds of shopping centers, supermarkets, motels, homes, and apartment buildings. Franchise businesses have created stores and restaurants that look alike

wherever they are. National advertising has created national tastes in consumer goods. National news media determine what Americans know about world events and also influence attitudes and styles. Thus, it is safe to make some generalizations about this diverse nation, but it must be done with caution.

THE MEANING OF DEMOCRACY

10. The courage to try something new has been an American characteristic since colonial times, when the nation's founders started one of the greatest experiments of all times—the creation of American democracy. The citizens of the United States, through their elected representatives, establish the nation's laws and determine its foreign policy. Those who disapprove of these laws and policies may openly express their disapproval and try to elect new representatives.

11. American democracy is based on majority rule, but it also protects minority rights. There are certain freedoms which the United States promises to all its citizens. Members of minority groups cannot be denied these rights by a vote of the majority. The basic rights of every citizen, outlined in the first 10 amendments to the Constitution, are known as the *Bill of Rights*. These include freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom from unreasonable search and arrest.

12. In the United States, democracy is not only a form of government, it is a way of life. The idea that those who must live by the rules should help make them is basic to nearly all American institutions and organizations. American children are introduced to the democratic concepts of majority rule and representative government at a very early age. Many families hold weekly meetings to determine household rules and activities. Most schools have student councils with elected representatives so that students can voice their opinions about school regulations and activities. Social, civic, labor, and charitable groups elect their officers and make decisions by voting. In publicly owned businesses, stockholders elect the directors who control the company. Local and state governments are also based upon democratic principles.

13. "All men are created equal," says the Declaration of Independence. This statement does not mean that all human beings are equal in ability or ambition. It means, instead, that all people should be treated equally before the law and given equal privileges and opportunities.

14. The American belief in equality of opportunity is illustrated by the Horatio Alger myth. Horatio Alger was a 19th-century American