


● 王 岩 / 著

美国概况

A Survey of the United States of America

 吉林大学出版社

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藏书章

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前言

语言是文化的载体。对于语言学习者来说,了解相关的政治、历史、经济与文化是十分重要的。本人从事英语教学多年,深感需要一部内容丰富翔实的教材。要了解一个国家的现状,必须了解其过去,所以本书不但介绍了美国的现状,也较为详细地介绍了美国的历史及其发展。学生通过教材接触真实的语言环境,了解美国社会及文化背景,有助于拓展他们的知识面,让学习者在实践中学习语言、历史、经济与文化。本书重在强调学习的过程,让学生在主动参与中来提高其实际应用技能。

本书共有 31 个章节,介绍了美国的风土人情、礼仪习俗、历史简况和社会现状等。语言地道纯正,文字流畅,难度适中。

本书是为高等学校英语专业低年级学生编写的专业教科书,也可用作非英语专业高年级学生基础选修课的教材。

本书完稿后 Mike Miller 博士对全书进行校正并提出了宝贵意见,在此致以感谢。

本书纰漏之处在所难免,敬请各位读者批评指正。

著 者

2008 年 5 月

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Part I

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Culture of the United States is a Western culture, and has been developing since long before the United States became a country. Today the United States is a diverse and multi-cultural nation.

Its chief early influence was British culture, due to colonial ties with the British that spread the English language, legal system and other cultural inheritances. Other important influences came from other parts of Europe, especially countries from which large numbers immigrated such as Ireland, Germany, Poland, and Italy; the Native American peoples; Africa, especially the western part, from which came the ancestors of most African Americans; and young groups of immigrants. American culture also has shared influence on the cultures of its neighbors in the New World.

The United States has traditionally been known as a melting pot, but recent academic opinion is tending towards cultural diversity, pluralism and the image of a salad bowl rather than a melting pot. Due to the extent of American culture there are many integrated but unique subcultures within the United States. The cultural affiliations an individual in the United States may have commonly depend on social class, political orientation and a multitude of demographic characteristics such as ancestral traditions, sex and sexual orientation. The strongest influences on A-

merican culture came from northern European cultures, most prominently from Germany, Ireland and England. There are great regional and sub cultural differences, making American culture mostly heterogeneous.

2004 United States presidential election results by county, on a color spectrum from Democratic blue to Republican red Current political division in the US is an indicator of the degree to which American culture varies from across the nation

While an overwhelming majority of Americans claim religious affiliation, those who do not constitute more than 10% in most states. In Blue states 20% + of respondents did not claim religious affiliation; 15% + in green states; 10% + in orange states and less than 10% in red states.

Culture, whether in the United States or general, consist of beliefs and values learned through the socialization process as well as material artifacts. American society features a very diverse culture that features numerous sub-cultures ranging from the Orthodox Jewish community in New York, to Chinatowns in many major cities to agnostic professionals residing in urban lofts. Yet even in the United States, certain cultural norms and values such as a belief in the virtue of honesty are generally shared by nearly all groups and cultures. Culture guides the social interactions between members of society and influences the personal beliefs and values that shape a person's perception of their environment.

Culture does not remain stagnant, it evolves. Culture changes with advances and changes in public opinion, technology, geopolitics, and science. The female beauty ideal presents itself as an excellent example. Before the turn of the 20th century the beauty ideal for women in the United States and most other western nations included someone who was somewhat overweight or plump. Today, American culture has changes alongside most other western cultures. The modern female beauty ideal in

the late 20th century and early 21st century was a thin, tall woman with a somewhat athletic look. The relatively recent change in American culture concerning beauty among females is indicative of the manner in which culture and with it the manner in which person's perceive the world around them changes.

Variations

Variations in the majority traditions occur due to class, ancestral, religious, regional and other groups of people. Cultural differences in the various regions of the United States are explored in New England, Mid-Atlantic States, Southern United States, Midwestern United States, Southwest United States, Western United States and Pacific Northwestern United States pages. The western coast of the continental US consisting of California, Oregon, and the state of Washington is also sometimes referred to as the Left Coast, indicating its political orientation and tendency towards liberal norms, folkways and values. Strong cultural differences have a long history in the US with the southern slave society in the antebellum period serving as a prime example. Not only social, but also economic tensions between the Northern and Southern states were so severe that they eventually caused the South to declare itself an independent nation, the Confederate States of America; thus provoking the American civil war.

Examples of the great variations in norms, values and beliefs found across the United States can be found in the legal policies of some states. The state of California for example has passed environmental reforms and regulations rivaling those of Western Europe. With recent legislation California has become the only part of the United States with mandatory caps on greenhouse gas emission. Policy regarding human sexuality further indicated tremendous differences across the nation. In early 2003, 14 US

states had sodomy laws, before the Supreme court declared them unconstitutional in *Lawrence v. Texas*. Roughly one year later the Massachusetts allowed couples to obtain same-sex matrimony licenses. As laws represent a society's most profound and strictly held social norms and mores, great variations in laws reflect cultural variations as well.

Chapter 2: Body Contact and Personal Expression

The personal proximities generally utilized by Americans according to Edward T. Hall.

In terms of body contact and personal space the United States shows considerable similarities to northern and central European regions, such as Germany, the Benelux, Scandinavia and the United Kingdom. The main difference is, however, that Americans like to keep more open space in between themselves and their conversation partners (roughly 4 feet compared to 2 to 3 feet in Europe). Greeting rituals tend to be the same in these regions and in the United States, consisting of minimal body contact which often remains confined to a simple handshake. In 1966 anthropologist Edward Hall identified four different zones of personal space Americans like to keep around them:

Intimate distance: extends roughly 18 inches (45.7 cm) from the individual and is reserved for family, pets and very close friends. Displays of affection and comforting are commonly conducted within this space. The only strangers an individual typically tolerates within his or her intimate space are health care professionals.

Personal distance: extends 4 to 5 feet (1.2 ~ 1.5 meters) is reserved for friends and acquaintances. A handshake will typically place strangers at least 2 to 4 feet apart, preserving the personal distance.

Social distance: extends from about 4 to 12 feet (1.2 ~ 3.7 meters) and is used for formal, business and other impersonal interactions

such as meeting a client.

Public Space: extends more than 12 feet (3.7 meters) and is not guarded. Secret Service agents will commonly attempt to ensure 12 feet of open space around dignitaries and high ranking officials.

The toleration for body expression that deviates from the mainstream such as complete body tattoos or nudism is strongly linked to the sub-culture and location in which an individual may find him or herself. Generally speaking the United States tends to be less tolerant towards nudity than Western Europe, even in more tolerant areas such as California. As stated above the tolerance shown for personal expression such as cross-dressing, piercing, etc... varies greatly with location and sub-culture and may completely appropriate in one venue while being taboo in another. As a result a form of expression or behavior that might be completely acceptable in San Francisco's Castro District, might be offensive in a Wichita suburb. In early 2003 for example, the city of San Francisco and later the city of Portland allowed same-sex couples to express their mutual affection through the act of legally recognized marriage. As these marriages deviated too far from the majority sentiment at the time, however, the issuing of gay marriage licenses was stopped through court order. These events in early 2003 illustrate the great differences in what is acceptable in different parts of the United States.

Chapter 3: Social Class

There is considerable controversy regarding social class in the United States, and it remains a vaguely defined intellectual concept with many theories. To this day economists and sociologists have not devised exact guidelines for classes in the United States. Class models, with providing more or less congruent theories on the socio-economic stratification of American have been developed by social scientists. While many Americans believe in a three-class model that includes the "rich", the middle class, and the "poor", in reality American society is much more economically and culturally diverse. The differences in wealth, income, education and occupation are indeed so great that one could justify the application of a social class model including dozens of classes. A common popular approach to the economic and cultural diversity is belief in a large middle class that encompasses all households in between status extremes. Yet, this concept may be criticized for ignoring the relatively vast socio-economic differences found among those in between either end of the social strata. Sociologists Dennis Gilbert, William Thompson and Joseph Hickey as well as James Henslin have proposed class systems with six distinct social classes. These class models feature an upper or capitalist class consisting of the rich and powerful, an upper middle class consisting of highly educated and well-paid professionals, a lower middle class consisting of semi-professionals, a working class constituted by clerical as well as blue collar employees whose work is highly routinized and a lower class which is according to Gilbert is divided between the

working poor and underclass.

According to the nominal approach, however, American society is sociologically and economically fragmented in such a manner that no clear class distinctions can be formed. This means that there are no pronounced breaks in socio-economic strata, which makes class division highly subjective and disputable. Others such as sociologist Dennis Gilbert, however, dispute the idea pointing to distinct social networks, clearly identifiable as classes. Despite the lack of distinctive class boundaries and the vast majority of Americans being under the belief that they are members of the middle class, certain general assumptions have been expressed by leading social scientists, think tanks, research institutions, and social critics. While it is generally agreed that American society has a highly developed and complicated class system, Americans often attempt to deny the existence of social class.

What is social class?

Social class is the hierarchy in which individuals find themselves. The social class system is mainly a description of how the society has distributed its members among positions of varying importance, influence, and prestige. Those taking the functionalist approach to sociology and economics view social classes as components essential for the survival of complex societies such as American society. Class may be described as an indication of the positions a person may occupy within society, positions which are not equal, some are more agreeable than others and satisfy the incumbent intrinsically, while other occupations are more menial, repetitive and unpleasant. Some occupations or other societal positions may be, to some extent, influential and essential to the well-being of society itself, requiring a highly qualified incumbent. Societal functions are commonly rewarded with prestige and income, which may serve as class indicator alongside the training required to obtain such a func-

tion. One should note that a person's function in society does not only refer to his or her occupational role. A skill and function as well as position can also be non-occupational such as the role of being a parent or volunteer mentor, for example, and carrying out the function of aiding in the socialization of society's newest members. Yet other positions or statuses within society, such as being the son or daughter of a wealthy individual, seem to lack directly functional characteristics beyond guiding social interactions which that individual may encounter. So while not all functions and positions in society are those associated with occupation, the job role remains one of the most important status features in the United States. Social class continues to play a prominent role in the mundane lives of the members of American society.

It is impossible to understand people's behavior. . . without the concept of social stratification, because class position has a pervasive influence on almost everything. . . the clothes we wear. . . the television shows we watch. . . the colors we paint our homes in and the names we give our pets. . . Our position in the social hierarchy affects our health, happiness, and even how long we will live.

Occupational positions do, however, form the perhaps best examples. For example occupations that feature no influence over society whatsoever, requiring only minimal qualifications on the part of prospective incumbents. It is therefore improbable to have a classless society. The scarcer qualified applicants are and the more essential the given task is, the larger the incentives will be, income and prestige which are often used to tell a person's social class are merely the incentives given to that person for meeting all qualifications to complete a task which is of importance to the society due to its functional value. One should note that a person's function in society does not only refer to his or her occupational role. A skill and function as well as position can also be non-occupation-

al such as the role of being a parent or volunteer mentor, for example, and carrying out the function of aiding in the socialization of society's newest members. So while not all functions and positions in society are those associated with occupation, the job role remains the one of the most important status features in the United States.

The idea of a classless society somewhat persists in the United States; which explains the notion of the vast majority of Americans who place themselves in the same class, the middle class. The truth however, is that complex societies such as the United States need an equally complex social hierarchy. Social class itself is as old as civilization itself and has been present in nearly every society from before the Roman Empire, through medieval times, and to the modern-day United States. Even though the lack of set guidelines makes defining social class a subjective topic, there are certain prominent theories which can be used, to some extent, to outline the American class system.

Income

Median income levels									
Households			Persons, age 25 or older with earnings			Household income by race			
All house holds	Dual earner households	Per househo ldmember	Males	Females	Both sexes	Asian	White, non-hispanic	Hispanic	Black
46 326	\$ 67 348	\$ 23 535	\$ 39 403	\$ 26 507	\$ 32 140	\$ 57 518	\$ 48 977	\$ 34 241	\$ 30 134
Median personal income by educational attainment									
Measure	Some High School	High school graduate	Some college	Associate degree	Bachelor's degree or higher	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	Professional degree	Doctorate degree
Persons, age 25 + w/ earnings	20 321	\$ 26 505	\$ 31 054	\$ 35 009	\$ 49 303	\$ 43 143	\$ 52 390	\$ 82 473	\$ 70 853
Male, age 25 + w/ earnings	24 192	\$ 32 085	\$ 39 150	\$ 42 382	\$ 60 493	\$ 52 265	\$ 67 123	\$ 100 000	\$ 78 324

续表

Female, age 25 + w/ earnings	\$ 15 073	\$ 21 117	\$ 25 185	\$ 29 510	\$ 40 483	\$ 36 532	\$ 45 730	\$ 66 055	\$ 54 666
Persons, age 25 + ,emply- ed full-time	\$ 25 039	\$ 31 539	\$ 37 135	\$ 40 588	\$ 56 078	\$ 50 944	\$ 61 273	\$ 100 000	\$ 79 401
Household	\$ 22 718	\$ 36 835	\$ 45 854	\$ 51 970	\$ 73 446	\$ 68 728	\$ 78 541	\$ 100 000	\$ 96 830
Household income distribution									
Bottom 10%	Bottom 20%	Bottom 25%	Middle 33%	Middle 20%	Top 25%	Top 20%	Top 5%	Top 1. 5%	Top 1%
\$ 0 to \$ 10 500	\$ 0 to \$ 18 500	\$ 0 to \$ 22 500	\$ 30 000 to \$ 62 500	\$ 35 000 to \$ 55 000	\$ 77 500 and up	\$ 92 000 and up	\$ 167 000 and up	\$ 250 000 and up	\$ 350 000 and up
SOURCE: US Census Bureau, 2006; income statistics for the year 2005									

Income in the United States is most commonly measured by US Census Bureau in terms of either household or individual and remains one of the most prominent indicators of class status. As 42% of all households, 76% of those in the top quintiles, had two income earners the discrepancy between household and personal income is quite considerable. In 2005 the top 15% of income earners made \$ 62 500 or more, while 18% of households had incomes over \$ 100 000. Personal income is largely the result of scarcity. As individuals who hold higher status positions tend to possess rare skills or assume positions society deems very essential, have higher incomes. Overall the median household income was \$ 46 326 in 2005 while the median personal income (including only those above the age of 25) was \$ 32 140.

Per capita household income, the income a household is able to allocate to each member of the household is also an important variable in