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(英汉对照)

跨越大洋 看美国

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强国际交流的角度出发,多做一些跨文化交际方面的研究,以帮助广大读者更好地了解和接纳外来文化,清除文化差异所造成的交际障碍。

鉴于时间仓促,加之水平有限,谬误之处在所难免,敬请广大读者批评指正。

编 者

2003年3月

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第一章 美国性格

Chapter I American Character

1. Attitude Towards Democracy

Almost all Americans want to be democratic, but many Americans are confused about what, exactly, democracy means. How do you know when someone is acting in a democratic—or an undemocratic—way? Recently several groups have spoken out with particular bitterness against the kind of democracy that means equal opportunity for all, regardless of race or national origin. They act as if all human beings did not belong to one species, as if some races of mankind were inferior to others in their capacity to learn what members of other races know and have invented. Other extremists attack religious groups—Jews or Catholics—or deny the right of an individual to be an agnostic. One reason that these extremists, who explicitly do not want to be democratic, can get a hearing even though their views run counter to the Constitution and our traditional values is that the people who

do want to be democratic are frequently so muddled.

For many Americans, democratic behavior necessitates an outright denial of any significant differences among human beings. In their eyes it is undemocratic for anyone to refer, in the presence of any other person, to differences in skin color, manners or religious beliefs. Whatever one's private thoughts may be, it is always necessary to act as if everyone were exactly alike.

Behavior of this kind developed partly as a reaction to those who discriminated against or actively abused members of other groups. But it is artificial, often hypocritical behavior, nonetheless, and it dulls and flattens human relationships. If two people can't talk easily and comfortably but must forever guard against some slip of tongue, some admission of what is in both persons' minds, they are likely to talk as little as possible. This embarrassment about differences reaches a final absurdity when a Methodist feels that he cannot take a guest on a tour of his garden because he might have to identify a wild plant with a blue flower, called the wandering Jew, or when a white lecturer feels he ought not to mention the name of Conrad's beautiful story *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*. But it is no less absurd when well-meaning people, speaking of the physically handicapped, tell prospective employers: "They don't want special consideration. Ask as much of them as you do of everyone else, and fire them if they don't give satisfaction!"

Another version of false democracy is the need to deny the existence of personal advantages. Inherited wealth, famous parents, a first-class mind, a rare voice, a beautiful face, an exceptional physical skill——any advantage has to be minimized or denied. Continually watched and measured, the man or woman who is rich or talented or well educated is likely to be called "undemocratic" whenever he does anything out of the ordinary——more or less of something than others do. If he wants acceptance, the person with a "superior" attribute, like the person with an "inferior" attribute, often feels

obliged to take on a protective disguise, to act as if he were just everybody else. One denies difference; the other minimizes it. And both believe, as they conform to these false standards, that they act in the name of democracy.

1. 对待民主的态度

几乎所有美国人都想要民主,但许多美国人搞不清民主究竟意味着什么。你如何知道某人是以民主——抑或非民主——方式行事的呢?最近一些组织已经气愤地表明了反对这种意味着给所有人平等机会的、不考虑种族或出生国的民主态度。他们的所作所为似乎表明人类并不属于一个种群,似乎某些人种在学习那些别的人种的人已知道或已发明的事物的能力方面逊于另一些人种。另有极端分子攻击宗教组织——犹太教或天主教——或者否定个人成为不可知论者的权力。这些明确地表明了不要民主的极端分子,即使他们的观点与宪法和我们的传统价值观背道而驰,却能够获得倾听的一个原因是那些确实要民主的人常常如此地茫然而不知所措。

对许多美国人而言,民主行为必须彻底否定人与人之间存在任何意义上的差异。在他们眼里,任何人在他人面前指出肤色、举止或宗教信仰的不同都是不民主的。不论一个人内心的想法是什么,他都必须一直表现得似乎人人都极其相像。

这种行为的发展部分地是对那些歧视或者故意怠慢其他种族成员的一个反应。但无论如何它是假惺惺的,经常是很虚伪的行为,它使得人际关系变得无聊和庸俗。如果两个人无法轻松舒畅地交谈,而必须永远防备失言,防备两人脑子里的心照不宣,他们就会尽可能少地交谈。这种关于差异性的尴尬,最终达到了一个荒唐的地步。