

BACKGROUND TO THE USA

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# 美国背景



光明日报出版社

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## **美 国 背 景**

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## 前 言

《美国背景》一书知识性很强,在中国读者中影响很大。一些省、市的电视大学把该书列为英语专业的教材,受到学员们的喜爱。为了满足教学的需要,我们正式出版该书的英汉对照版。

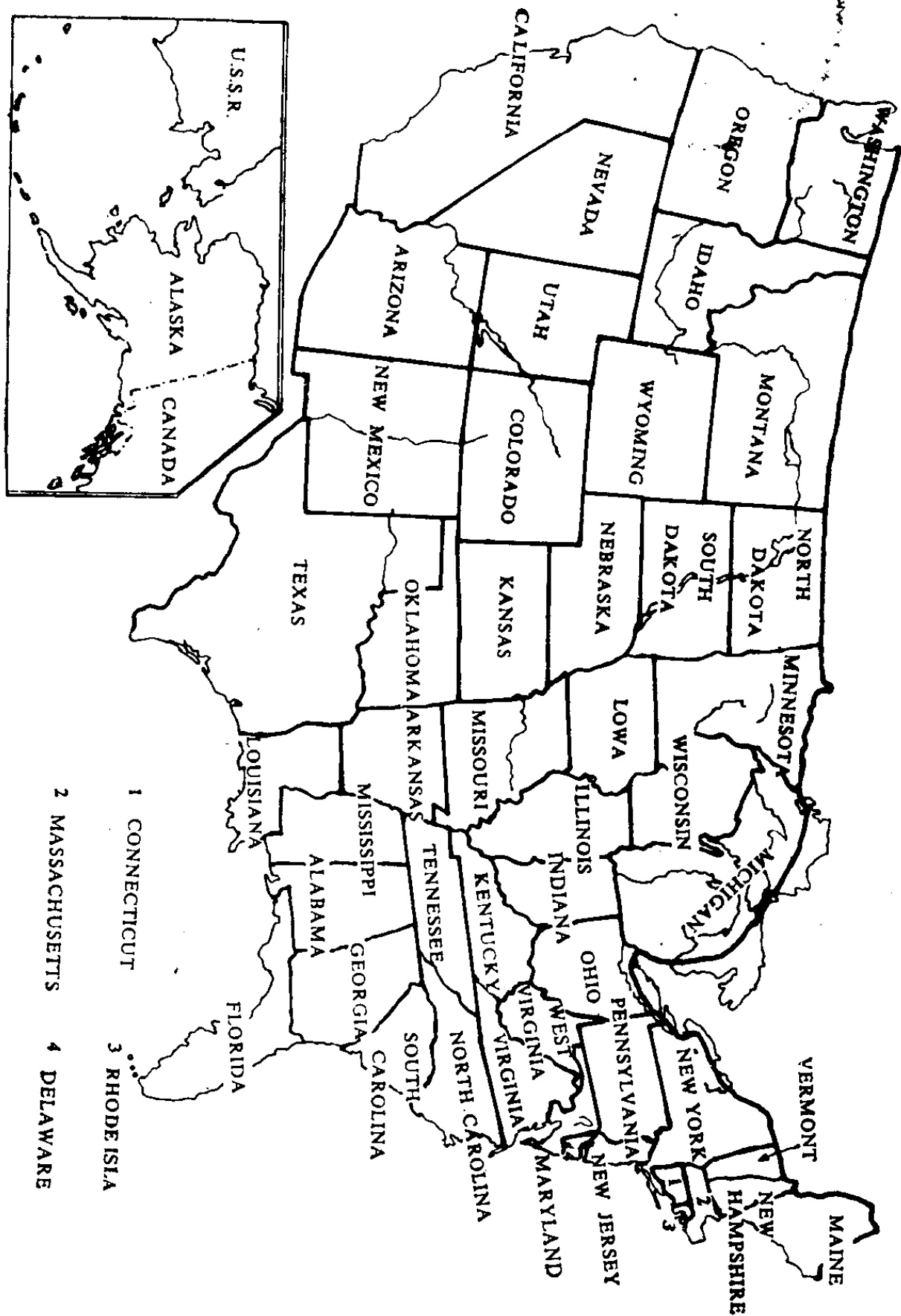
英汉对照版《美国背景》完全保持了原书的精神。为方便读者,给出了全部课文的参考译文,考虑到本书作为泛读教材这一特点及学员的实际情况,译文尽量采用了直译的形式。

本书的编译过程也是师生合作的过程。不少学员对每篇课文做了认真的翻译,在书中,我们采用了以下几位学员的翻译文章:徐群(21单元);曹京玲(23单元);郝俊(25单元和32单元)。此外,在本书的编译过程中,还得到了沈爱筑同志的大力协助。在此对上述各位同志表示衷心的感谢。

由于时间仓促,加之译者水平所限,书中难免有不妥之处,恳请各界同仁,广大读者不吝赐教。

译者 谨识

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# A Profile of the USA

by Shi Jingwen

The full name of America is the United States of America, which is often abbreviated to the United States, or just to America. The USA is the abbreviation of the United States of America. Washington is the capital (pop. 757,000) of the USA.

The total area of America is some 9.4 million square kilometers. Its mainland covers a distance of nearly 5,000 kilometers from east to west, and about 2,500 kilometers from south to north. The USA is bounded by three oceans and the Gulf of Mexico. It has a long coastline of about 20,000 kilometers which makes it one of the countries with the longest coastline in the world. The USA is situated in the South of North America and its southern tip reaches the subtropical zone. On the north the country shares more than 6,000 kilometers of land boundary with Canada. The boundary between the two countries is open and undefended. America's southern land neighbor is Mexico with which it shares a common boundary of some 3,000 kilometers. The USA borders on the Pacific in the west and on the Atlantic in the east.

The U.S. federal government is the central gover-



nement of the United States. The federal government is comprised of three branches----the legislative, the executive and the judicial. Under the principle of separation of powers, the power enjoyed by the federal government is distributed among the three branches whose officials are selected by different procedures. The Congress, whose members are selected by the 50 different states through state-wide elections, is the law-making body of the United States. The Congress consists of two chambers: the Senate and the House. The executive branch is granted the power to enforce the laws passed by Congress. The judicial branch of the federal government is the Supreme Court which is the highest defender of the U.S. Constitution. The three branches of the federal government embody the American principles of the division of powers and the check and balance system. Each branch has some authority to control the actions of the other two.

In the U.S. system, state governments are the second tier of government. But they are not called local governments. The United States of America has 50 states and some other territories. All these 50 states, with each represented by a star on the national flag, are "united" under the constitution. With the exception of Alaska, which is the largest state and Hawaii, all the other 48 states are on the mainland and border on each other. Alaska is separated from the mainland by Canada,

while Hawaii lies about 3,200 kilometers away in the Pacific Ocean.

Local governments make up the third tier in the U.S. governmental system. They are controlled by the state government. Generally speaking, the U.S. local governmental units consist of about 3,000 counties, over 18,000 municipalities and more than 16,000 townships and other units. The USA has a population of about 220 million. This is not very large against the size of the country. The majority of her people are descendants of the European immigrants who make up 85% of the whole population.

The United States is a country with rich natural resources. The USA is comparatively rich in water resources. There are many rivers and lakes that can be used to irrigate fields, transport goods, and furnish power. The Mississippi River is the most important and largest river in the country. It is called the "Father of waters" in America. The most important lakes in the USA are the Great Lakes. They extend about 1,600 kilometers and form part of the boundary between the United States and Canada. The Great Lakes consist of five big lakes: Lake Superior, Lake Michigan, Lake Huron, Lake Erie and Lake Ontario. Only Lake Michigan belongs to America completely while the other four are shared with Canada. All in all, the USA enjoys abundant water resources.



## Unit 1 Gateway to the USA

Perhaps no single monument in the USA is as famous as the Statue of Liberty. Standing on a small island in New York Harbor<sup>1</sup>, the crowned lady, holding aloft in her right hand the torch of freedom and in her left hand a tablet which is inscribed "July 4th, 1776," is a symbol of American democracy. She is colossal. She is 151 ft. high and the pedestal on which she stands is almost as much. An elevator<sup>2</sup> takes visitors to the top of the pedestal, around which a balcony runs. A spiral staircase goes up to the crown, and another to the torch. The Statue of Liberty was a gift to the USA from France in 1886, as a mark of friendship and also in memory of the aid France gave the Americans during the American Revolution.

For millions of immigrants, the Statue was their first sight of the promised land, and for a few it was also the last, as they sailed back home again to a desolate future. About a mile from Liberty Island, there is another small island, called Ellis Island, which was looked upon with dread by the immigrants. For it was here that they had to wait their turn to be examined by doctors and officials. Most of the immigrants could not speak a word of English. But only two out of 100 immigrants were refused admission to New York City. Often the person refused turned out to be a grandmother or a weary, frightened girl mistakenly labeled<sup>3</sup> "feeble-minded." Sometimes husbands and wives were parted because one of them happened to have a bad cough and was suspected of having

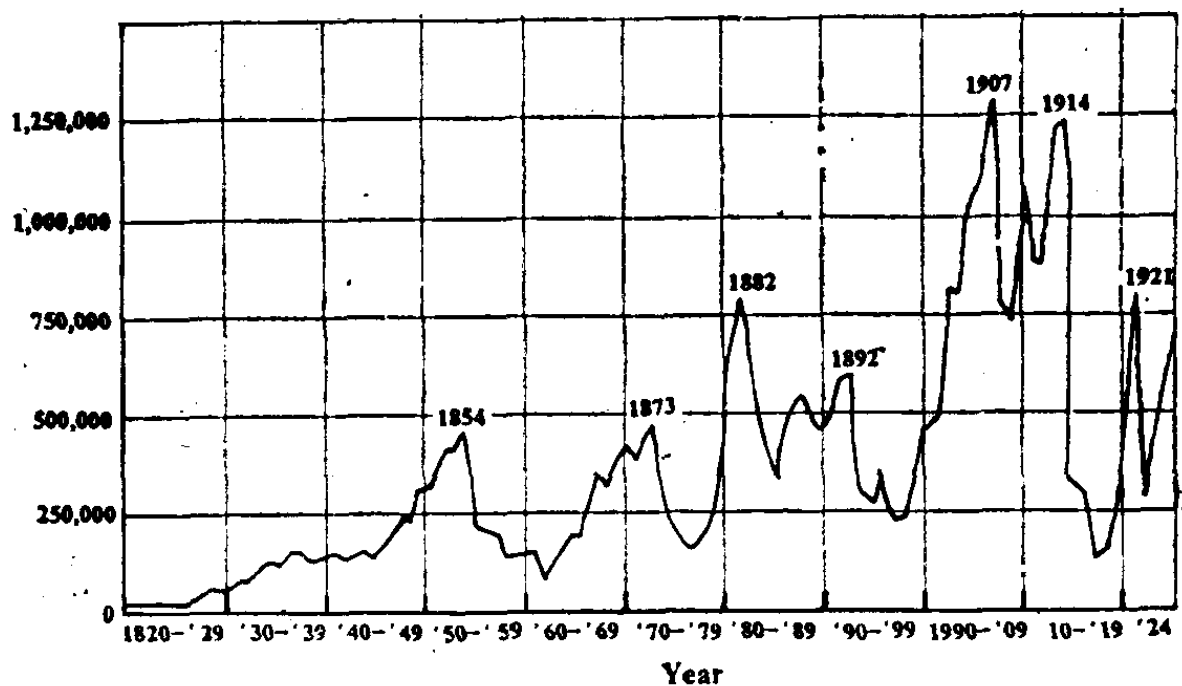
<sup>1</sup> Br. E harbour    <sup>2</sup> Br. E lift    <sup>3</sup> Br. E labelled

tuberculosis.

New York City was a bitter disillusionment to some immigrants. Far from being a city paved with gold, it was a city teeming with overcrowded, unhealthy and unsafe ghettos. The immigrants looked for earlier immigrants of their own nationality or religion. So Italian, Polish, Irish, Jewish neighborhoods<sup>1</sup> grew up. Because they could not speak English, the newcomers found it difficult to get work at once, and their living quarters were often slums.

However, they found in the USA opportunities of bettering themselves and of escaping from the tyranny which many of them had suffered in their own countries. To that extent, the Statue of Liberty did give them an honest welcome.

Today immigrants no longer have to endure the indignities of Ellis Island. The grim buildings were closed down in 1924. In 1976, Ellis Island became an historic monument.



the number of immigrants arriving in the USA by years for the period 1820--1924

<sup>1</sup> Br. E neighbourhoods

Most immigrants from Europe now pass through New York City via Kennedy Airport. But for immigrants from Asia--Koreans, Filipinos, Chinese--the gateway to the USA is San Francisco, not New York City.

#### A Vocabulary

- 1 Try to find a few other words which have the same meaning as *Colossal*.
- 2 What is an *immigrant*?
- 3 For what reasons were immigrants *disillusioned* with New York?
- 4 Why was the future of the immigrants who failed to pass the examination so *desolate*?
- 5 Why wouldn't the Americans accept *feeble-minded* immigrants?
- 6 What is meant by *teeming*?
- 7 What is the meaning of the word *neighborhood* in American English?
- 8 Why did the immigrants regard the USA as a *promised land*?

#### B Questions on "Gateway to the USA"

- 1 Why was the Statue of Liberty among the immigrants' first sights of New York City?
- 2 What does the Statue of Liberty commemorate?
- 3 What made the immigrants look on Ellis Island with dread?
- 4 To what special place in New York City did immigrants of the same religion or same nationality go?
- 5 Which "gateway to the USA" do most Oriental immigrants pass through?

#### C Grammar

- 1 Give the abstract nouns corresponding to the following adject--

ives :

famous, desolate, bitter, honest

2 Select either an active or passive verb in the correct tense for the following sentences :

a Mrs. O'Brien was one of the 2% of immigrants, who..... entry by Ellis Island officials.

b "You.....us like animals," said Mr. O'Brien.

c Just as a doctor.....up to him to explain why his wife was being refused, Mrs. O'Brien.....to cough.

d "Your wife.....tuberculosis," the doctor.....

e "It is just a cold," her husband argued, "She.....better in a few days."

f The doctor.....his head. "You.....a choice," he said. "Either you.....here alone, or you.....your wife back to Ireland."

g "We.....never separated yet, so we.....together," Mr. O'Brien replied.

## D Function

### *Asking for information (1)*

The following questions and answers of a tourist and a guide are mixed up. Rearrange them so that they form a dialogue, e.g.

Tourist.....?

Guide.....

What's on the tablet she's holding in her left hand?/Yes, a spiral staircase goes right up into the torch./Is there an elevator that goes right up to the crown?/Not really. It was a gift from the French in 1886./Is the statue very old?/July 4th, 1776. That's Independence Day./Why did the French give us the statue?/No, only to the top of the pedestal./Is it possible to climb right up her

right arm and get a view from the very top?/To commemorate the help they gave us during the American Revolution.

E Imagine that you are an immigrant writing to a friend you have left behind. Describe your new life in the USA.



## Unit 2 America—the Melting Pot?

Is the United States a melting pot? In other words, have immigrants to the USA merged with the native Americans and ceased to be Germans, Japanese, Poles, Irish, etc.? It has been suggested that a "pot of stew" might be a more suitable word than "melting pot", for in a stew the meat and vegetables keep their own characteristics, but thanks to the spices and the way it is cooked, the stew has a distinctive flavor<sup>1</sup> of its own.

The implications of "melting pot" disturb American social workers and language teachers, many of whom feel that racial and national groups should be encouraged to preserve their customs, traditions and languages. At the same time it is agreed that all Americans, whatever their origins, must learn to speak English clearly and fluently, and that they must learn to adapt themselves to the American way of life.

However, there are ethnic groups who still stick together, who speak their own languages and have preserved many of their old customs. There are Hispanic communities, e.g. Mexicans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, most of whom still speak Spanish as their first language. There are the American Indians and various Asian groups, all of whom speak their own languages. Then there are the 20 million blacks who, though they speak English, for the most part live separately.

Many descendants of European immigrants have also stayed together in groups. Large numbers of the hundreds of thousands of Italians live together in neighborhoods which are predominantly

<sup>1</sup> Br. E flavour