

U.S.A. Update

いま、アメリカを読む

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はしがき

日本のマスメディアから発信される海外の社会情勢は少ない。ある日の三大新聞の一紙では、国際面が一面と経済面や政治面にいくらか取り上げられている程度で、その内容も政治、経済、内乱、事件といったものであった。諸外国の人々が日常生活の中でどのような社会問題と直面しているかといった情報となると、身近に感じているアメリカであってさえも皆無といってよい。ある程度は知っているつもりでいるアメリカの実情について実は一般の日本人はほとんど知らされていないのである。

本書はアメリカの現状について述べられた 15 の文章から構成されている。内容はいづれもアメリカ人であれば誰もがよく見聞きし、体験している事柄である。その多くが今日のアメリカが抱えている問題に関するものであり、建国以来脈々と続いているものもあれば、近年新たに取りざたされるようになったものも見受けられる。アメリカ社会に通じている者ならばどれもまたかと思う話題であるが、多くの日本人にとって、普段イメージしているアメリカの姿とは異なっているのではないだろうか。いわば包み隠しのない等身大のアメリカがここには描かれているのである。具体的には、肥満の問題、複雑化する人種差別、離婚家庭、不法滞在、フェイスブックの思わぬ落とし穴、銃や裁判における陪審員制の問題など多岐にわたる。英語の語学力向上のみならず、今日のアメリカ事情を知るには大変有効なテキストに仕上がっていると考えられる。例えば学習者は、今後アメリカ映画を観る際にも、以前では見過ごしてしまっていた場面の意味することや背景を察知できることが期待できよう。学習者には語学の授業を有意義な国際理解につなげてもらいたい。

次に学習方法であるが、まずは本文をしっかりと精読することが望ましい。練習問題 (EXERCISES) は内容理解、単語・イディオムの習得、リスニングから構成されている。内容理解は 3 段階のレベルになっており、同時にリスニングも学習できるようになっている。単語・イディオムに関する問題はリスニングにより意味の確認を行い、さらに応用を目的とした実用問題を設けている。リスニング問題は書き取りと TOEIC の Part 3 に類似する形式の問題があり、教員の工夫によってはディスカッションやディベートなど発話へと応用できると考えられる。基本的には英文読解のテキストであるが、リスニング問題も充実しており、総合教材としても活用できるものとなっている。

林 孝憲

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READING: Read this essay carefully.

A social networking website recently conducted a survey of 30,000 people in 15 countries. Participants were asked to name the nationalities that they thought were the “funniest” or the “best at making people laugh.” According to Reuters, Americans topped the list, followed by the Spaniards and Italians. The British, known for their subtle sense of humor and brilliant comic history, surprisingly came in only seventh. The poll’s choice of the world’s “least funny people” was no surprise, however. That dubious honor went to the Germans, confirming, as Reuters pointed out, the view of American humorist Mark Twain that “a German joke is no laughing matter.”

Americans’ reputation for funny business, says Reuters, rests mainly on the global appeal of TV shows like *Friends*, movies like *The Hangover*, and the legacy of comedy greats from the Marx Brothers to Tina Fey. (Fey is best known for her impersonations of politician Sarah Palin, who is a riot in her own right, though usually unintentionally so.) But comedians aren’t the only funny Americans. We have some pretty laughable men and women on the street, whose antics can cause even the biggest grouch to crack a smile. And, if we read between the lines, they can tell us something “serious” about U.S. society and American ways of thinking.

Take the New York City policeman who not too long ago pulled over a young woman bicyclist for being “too sexy.” With her short skirt and shapely legs, she was “distracting and dangerous” to drivers, the officer told her. The woman thought he was joking and burst out laughing. But the officer was dead serious. He got angry and demanded to see the woman’s ID. He would have arrested her, too, for creating a public disturbance, if she hadn’t agreed to go home and change into some less revealing slacks.

Then there’s the woman passenger on a commuter train who was talking loudly and using profanity on her cell phone. When the conductor came up and politely told her that she was offending the other passengers and asked her to keep it down, the passenger answered, “Do you know what schools I’ve been to? Do you know how well educated I am? Do you think I’m just a little hoodlum?” She then demanded her ticket money back and dared the conductor to stop the train. But the conductor soon showed who was the smarter of the two. Back in her cabin, she came on the loudspeaker and reminded passengers to keep their conversations quiet. “Especially those who went to Harvard or Yale,” she said.

Notes

Reuters: ロイター通信社 Mark Twain: マーク・トウエイン (1835-1910)。アメリカを代表する作家、小説家。代表作に『トム・ソーヤの冒険』『ハuckleベリー・フィンの冒険』がある。 *Friends*: 『フレンズ』アメリカNBC系列で放送されている国民的コメディーテレビドラマ。 *The Hangover*: 『ハングオーバー』トッド・フィリップ監督作品。全米大ヒットのコメディ映画。 Marx Brothers: マルクス兄弟。20世紀前半のアメリカの4人兄弟のコメディ俳優(チコ、ゼッポ、グルーチョ、ハーポ)。 Tina Fey: ティナ・フェイ。アメリカの女優、脚本家。 Sarah Palin: サラ・ペイリン。共和党上院議員。副大統領候補にもなった政治家。 riot: 滑稽な人物
in one's own right: 正気で antics: ふざけた行為 pull over: 引き留める commuter train: 通勤電車
conductor: 車掌 hoodlum: 不良

EXERCISES

COMPREHENSION 1 DETAILS: Write the requested information on the lines.

1. _____ how many people in how many countries were surveyed
2. _____ who reported the survey
3. _____ who were the second-and third-“funniest” nationalities
4. _____ who placed seventh
5. _____ who Mark Twain was
6. _____ a popular American TV show and film
7. _____ what the Marx Brothers are known as
8. _____ what the woman bicyclist was wearing
9. _____ what she was asked to show the policeman
10. _____ where the incident with the cell phone took place

COMPREHENSION 2 READING BETWEEN THE LINES: Complete each sentence below with the best choice.

1. When he said a German joke was “no laughing matter,” Mark Twain was
 - (A) praising the Germans’ sense of humor
 - (B) making a pun and being ironic
 - (C) being serious
2. From the context, the informal word “grouch” can be interpreted as meaning
 - (A) a person who often does funny things
 - (B) someone who doesn’t think Americans are funny
 - (C) a person who is often in a bad mood or seldom laughs
3. The woman passenger on the commuter train implied that
 - (A) she was more intelligent and superior to the others on the train, particularly the conductor
 - (B) she wasn’t really talking that loudly on her cell phone
 - (C) the other passengers should move to another car

COMPREHENSION 3 TRUE-FALSE LISTENING: Listen to the sentences. Circle T if the sentence is true, F if it is false.

1. T F
2. T F
3. T F
4. T F



WORD STUDY 1 MEANINGS: Listed below are the key words for this lesson. Listen to the definitions. As you listen, choose the word that best matches each definition. Write the words on the lines.

subtle	dubious	impersonations
distracting	disturbance	revealing
profanity	offending	

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

WORD STUDY 2 WORD FORMS: Fill in the blank in each sentence below with the correct form of one of the words above.

1. A young woman was arrested for _____ a nurse and stealing money from patients' and visitors' purses.
2. When the demonstration turned violent, police began arresting the protestors for _____ the peace.
3. My best friend didn't come out and say it directly but _____ hinted that I wasn't dressed properly for my job interview.
4. Several people in the audience found the film's language _____ and walked out of the theater.
5. We all looked at him _____, wondering if such a fantastic story could be at all true.
6. The results of the global psychology survey _____ that the Danes are the world's happiest people.
7. What with TV, my iPod, the telephone, and other _____ at home, I couldn't concentrate on my studies, so I decided to go to the campus library.
8. Is there any other language that has more _____ language or more dirty words than English?



WRITING WITH IDIOMS

Rewrite each sentence below by substituting one of these phrases for the underlined part of the sentence. Make the necessary changes. Listen to check your sentences.

come in

pull over

dare to

- I was driving along Highway 5 when a police car came up behind me and forced me to the side of the road.

- I expected to easily win the national crossword puzzle contest, but I ended up in fifth place.

- One student was so bold as to challenge the professor's facts.



DICTATION/PARAPHRASE

Listen and write what you hear. Then choose the sentence that is closest in meaning to the sentence you have written.

- _____
 (A) She is also a well-known comedian.
 (B) She is very funny herself.
 (C) She is known to cause a lot of trouble.
- _____
 (A) The average person can also be funny.
 (B) Several passersby proved to be funny as well.
 (C) Lots of people do funny things in public.
- _____
 (A) She asked the woman to not be so noisy.
 (B) She asked the woman to stay in her seat.
 (C) She asked the woman to turn off her cell phone.



MAKING CONVERSATION

Listen to the three possible answers for each question below. Choose the best answer.

- How did the Japanese do in "funniest nationality" survey?
 (A) (B) (C)
- What do you think of what the New York City policeman did?
 (A) (B) (C)
- Should people be allowed to talk on their cell phones on public transportation?
 (A) (B) (C)