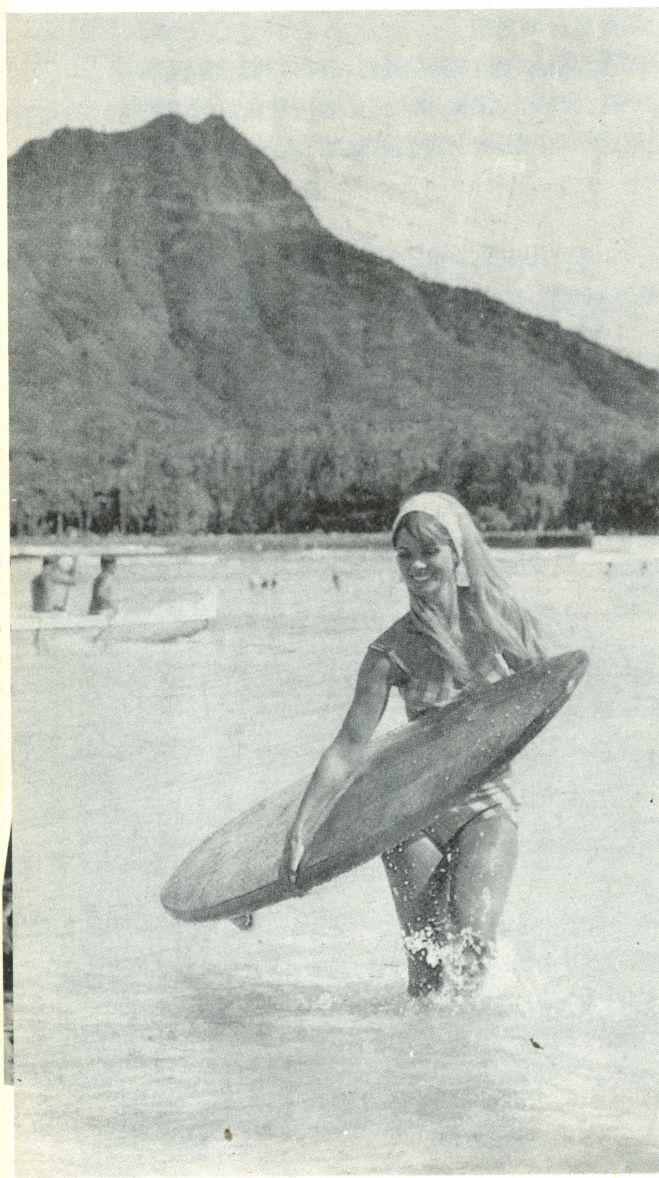


Life in the United States

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When I first came to Taiwan, quite a number of people asked me about the life in the United States. Under the encouragement of the editor of this magazine and the much interest of so many friends, finally I managed to start writing. It is my hope that this writing will provide a glimpse of the American life.

As everybody knows, the United States is a big country. But the modern method of communications has probably shrunk the size of this country somewhat. The life in one part of the country hardly differs from the other part. This is evidenced if one can find some time and travels around the country. It would certainly be a fun and unforgettable trip.

For most Americans, sport is a major pastime in their leisure. Whether it is baseball, basketball, football, boxing, or any item in the decathlon is of interest in the United States. This enthusiasm in sport, plus all the encouragement and rewards from the society, is one of the reason that the U.S. team can win so many gold medals from the Olympic games. From New York to California, from Florida to the Dakotas, sport fans will cheer for their own team in stadiums where there is a ball game going on. Besides athletic activities, there are many other activities as well. For the young at heart, life is anything but monotonous. There are movies, plays, concerts, dancing

travelling, and the list is endless. It only limited by one's imagination.

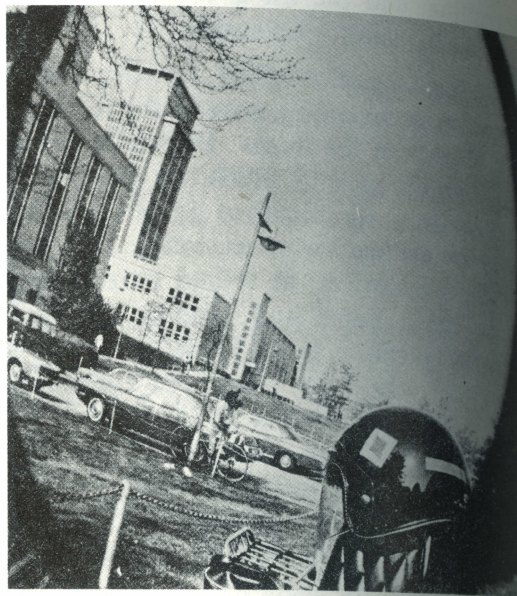
Speaking of travelling, Americans seem to have an absorbing passion for it. They are always on the move. Especially during the summer months which is a prime time for vacation, thousands of people, whether they are ordinary workers, college students, business executives, or retired citizens, will leave their home and heading for their favorite vacation spot. Some of them will find their way in a quiet and peaceful resort, some of them may end up in a distant city for sightseeing, still others may fly to their destination in a different country. The sunny states such as Hawaii, California, Florida and the Carribean islands are vacation paradises for many sun worshipers. The New England states are renowned for their exquisite beauty. Europe, a continent of antiquity, attracts many American travellers every year to visit its cities, museums, Cathedrals, and historical remnants. The Orients, many Americans consider it as a place which offers an exotic adventure. The cause of this popularity in travelling is that it is a privilege not only for the rich but the poor can enjoy it as well.

Ever since Henry Ford's model T gained public acceptance, automobile has become an indispensible and convenience form of transportation. (But in a way, it also turned America into a huge parking lot!) Without it, Americans will certainly be immobilized. This is precisely the reason that petroleum is such an important resource in the U.S. It powers the American industry and automobiles. Prior to Second World War, the U.S. was self-sufficient in oil supply. But as the demand grows, and the resource gets scarce, the country is importing more and more foreign oil to supplement its domestic supply. During

the Arab oil embargo, there was really a crisis, if not a panic situation. Nowadays, automobile manufacturers are making smaller and more efficient cars that run more miles for a gallon of gasoline. There is one benefit due to the oil embargo, Americans are being more conscientious about energy conservation. The population of the U.S. is less than 10% of the total world population, but it consumes about one-third of the total energy output of the world. People are starting to do their job on energy conservation, and the age of cheap energy is a thing of the pass. Big and luxurious cars are getting less popular. Indeed, this is good for the nation and the world as a whole. The solution of the energy problem may shape the course of America. Many government sponsored research projects aiming at this problem are being done at various research institutions and universities. Many scientists are working on other alternative forms of energy. For instance, solar energy, nuclear energy, geothermal energy, and coal. All these may well be the energy source of the future. Coal is still plentiful on the North American Continent. According to some expert's estimation, the amount of energy contained in all the coal in the U.S. is more than the total energy content in all the oil in the Middle East. If all the coal is properly exploited, it can supply the energy need of the U.S. for hundreds of years at the present rate of energy consumption. However, one disadvantage of coal is that it is difficult to use as a fuel. You cannot pump coal into a gas tank of a car. Also when burning, coal is not as clean as oil. A lot of communities object strongly to the burning of coal in their power plants because it pollutes the air. Other energy sources are still at an experimental stage and they are usually

expensive to use. The energy problem is neither easy nor is it inexpensive to solve; but it must be overcome and overcome quickly. Education plays a very important role in the American society. Compulsory education starts from first grade to the twelfth grade. However, a college education is optional, but the majority of students graduated from secondary school choose to continue their study. After all, gaining entrance to a college or university is not very difficult. If the student is from a poor family, there is always financial assistance to help him solve this problem. There are many universities across the continental United States. There are small ones and large ones, private schools and public schools. Some small colleges have only a few thousand people, whereas in large institutions there may be many thousands. In the U.S., there are colleges known as community college which only offers a two-year program. This kind of college is usually small, and their emphasis is to teach the students some practical rather than theoretical knowledge. The degree that these colleges grant is called an associated degree. But in universities, three types of degree are being offered: bachelor, master, and the doctoral degree. A bachelor degree takes four years to complete, a master degree may be an additional two years. A doctoral degree usually takes four more years after the bachelor; sometimes it takes longer, because it depends on the research done by the individual who is pursuing the degree. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that someone obtain the doctoral degree after five or six years of study beyond the bachelor.

American universities offer a fantastic variety of courses and programs for



their students. The curriculum encompasses a very broad spectrum of human knowledge. You can choose to study the natural sciences or literature, mathematics or the art. But the most interesting thing is that you can do almost whatever you want in an American university as long as you complete certain amount of credits and fulfill the required courses of your major field of study. Besides the usual classroom instructions, you are also involved in laboratory experiments, field trips, and various types of educational methods to aid the process of learning. For example: an archaeology student who wants to study the ancient civilization of the Incas can spend one academic year of his college years in Peru; a student majors in French can live in Paris so that he can get a better understanding of the culture and language of France; a future chemist can work in a chemical plant. This kind of instruction provides a rewarding experience to the student and is extremely effective in the learning process. Extracurricular activities

is another interesting aspect of college education. Within a college campus, there are many clubs and societies with different interest to suit even the quiescent. Usually there is a governing body to organize and coordinate these various clubs and other student activities. The students elect and run this student government which serves the above function in addition to express students' opinions about school problems. Sometimes members of the faculty are served in the student government so as to facilitate communication between faculty and the student body. In short, for those who are willing to learn and to participate, a college education is a valuable experience.

After four years of college, a student can go to graduate school or he can pursue a career in other professional schools, such as medical school. If a student wants to study medicine or any other health related discipline, he can apply to a medical school after he has completed college. Then, after four years of intensive training, the school will grant him the Doctor of medicine degree(M.D.). Following this formal education, the student then starts his two-year internship. So, in order to become a physician, a student needs about ten years of training started from the date that he graduated from high school. A dentist, an optometrist, or a podiatrist, all follows the same pattern of training as a medical doctor. If a student wants to get into a medical school, he must have very good undergraduate academic record. But besides grades, medical schools also consider such difficult to define human qualities such as personality and motivation of the applicant. Extracurricular activities of the student is also an important factor for consideration. To sum it up, the admission requirement demands more than scholastic achievements.

Therefore, an A-average record is not necessarily an admission ticket to medical school, rather, it is just a ticket to be able to get in line.

The medical profession in the U.S. is a prestigious and highly respected occupation. This may be part of the reason why it lures so many students to pursue a career in medicine. The financial reward offers the doctor a secure and comfortable living. But there are problems also. In recent years, the public is more conscientious about what the doctors are doing to their bodies. In some malpractice cases, the patient brings law suit against his doctor; if he won, he will be awarded, usually, with a generous amount of money. Therefore, the price of malpractice insurance for the medical practitioner is skyrocketing. This is not a healthy sign for both the doctor and the patient. The legal and the medical profession are trying to reverse this trend and bring things back to normal.

The superb quality of the American education system is unparalleled by any standard and this is reflected in its many accomplishments. It attracts students with different nationalities and backgrounds to attend college in the U.S. The governments of each level, federal, state, or local, pours in millions of dollars into the educational system. Another major contribution comes from the private — mostly business sector of the economy. Many research projects in colleges and universities all over the country are funded by private business corporations. In return for these supports, the learning institutions produces many inventions and scientific discoveries that are vital in the nation's development. In the future, it will continue to provide technological innovations that are bene-



ficial to mankind.

America is a multiracial country through immigration. In fact, it is an American tradition to accept and assimilate the new comers in this land of the free. Even though white is the majority of the whole population, but there is a significant number of other people. Let alone the American Indian who is the real native of the land, the rest of the people is either immigrant or descendent of immigrant to the American continent during the past few hundred years. In the U.S., you can find British, Norwegian, Italian, Brazilian, Chinese, Japanese, Arabs, Israelis, and people from all parts of the world. United

Nations cannot find a better place to erect its headquarter than in the U.S.

There is quite a large number of Chinese in the U.S. Most of them are living in big cities such as New York and San Francisco. To the older generation, because of the language barrier, they are not able to mix in the American society. Life is harsh for them. They have to work, usually in Chinatown, for long hours in six days of the week. Fortunately, the younger generation is heading the other direction and begins to creat an exodus from the Chinatowns. Not long ago, in the eyes of many Americans, Chinese are gentle, peaceful, and diligent workers who labor all day long in a street corner laundry shop. But this image is being broken by recent gangster-type violence in Chinatowns in some major cities. The scenario of laundry shops and chop suey restaurants is a fading memory that will soon be forgotten. Although there are still many Chinese restaurants all over the country. Replacing this is a younger, better educated, and more dynamic generation that can stay and benefit from the richness of the American life.

Despite the complexity of the American people, the racial problem is less acute than those in some other countries. This is due to the differences in government policy. The American government, instead of segregation, it encourages cooperation; instead of discrimination, it encourages assimilation. Under the law, all men are created equal. They should have the same right, privilege, and opportunity to compete in a free society. For a policy of discrimination is contradictory to the very idea of the democratic pioneers who founded those united states more than two hundred years ago.