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About the USA – Virtual Classroom Newsletter for English Teachers

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A “UNITED STATES OF EUROPE”

The European Union was inspired by a vision of an integrated Europe unified around democratic values that would diminish the chances of another war. Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of Great Britain (1940-45, 1951-55) was one of the first to call for the creation of a united Europe. In a speech at the University of Zurich in 1946, he said: “There is a remedy which ... would in a few years make all Europe ... free and ... happy. It is to re-create the European family, or as much of it as we can, and to provide it with a structure under which it can dwell in peace, in safety and in freedom. We must build a kind of United States of Europe.”

The French statesmen Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman were also dedicated to the cause of European integration. Together they formulated a plan for the joint European coordination of coal and steel production. German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer recognized the opportunity for a peaceful Europe and agreed to the plan. The governments of Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands joined France and Germany in the initiative and signed the agreement for the European Coal and Steel Community in Paris in April 1951. U.S. President Truman responded to the developments by stating that he and all of the American people were not only very pleased with the initiative but solidly behind the plan.

Building on the success of the Coal and Steel Treaty, the six countries expanded cooperation to other economic sectors. Fifty years ago, in March 1957, these six states signed the Treaty of Rome, creating the European Economic Community (EEC), or ‘common market.’ The European Union has built political bonds and solidarity among European countries. EU expansion, along with the expansion of NATO, is tearing down permanently the barriers that divided Europe during the Cold War. Adenauer, Churchill, Schuman, and Monnet, among others, are regarded as the principal architects of European integration and are often called the “founding fathers” of the European Union. As Jean Monnet once said, “We unite people, not states.”

Since the end of World War II, the United States has been one of the strongest supporters of the idea of European integration and European unity -- a Europe that is “whole, free and at peace.” America’s commitment to Europe, launched with the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan, provided a foundation for the first steps in the European integration process. During the Cold War, NATO provided the umbrella to allow the EU to develop in peace. The two pillars of a strong transatlantic relationship are still the European Union and NATO.

More on current U.S.-EU issues:

★ [The United States and the European Union \(U.S. Embassy Berlin\)](#)



[http://europa.eu/50/
The History of the European Union](http://europa.eu/50/The_History_of_the_European_Union)

TIMELINE: U.S. – EU RELATIONS

September 6, 1946 - Secretary of State James F. Byrnes: “Speech of Hope” in Stuttgart. [Text](#)

March 12, 1947 - President Harry S. Truman asked for \$400 million in military and economic assistance for Greece and Turkey. [Truman Doctrine](#)

June 5, 1947 -- Secretary of State George Marshall proposes the [Marshall Plan](#)

April 4, 1949 - NATO is founded. [Historical background](#)

April 16, 1953 -- Pres. Eisenhower’s [“Chance for Peace”](#) speech: *“We are ready not only to press forward with the present plans for closer unity of the nations of Western Europe but also, upon that foundation, to strive to foster a broader European community.”*



(Eisenhower and Jean Monnet,
© European Commission to the U.S.)

May 9, 1955 -- West Germany joins [NATO](#)

January 10, 1957 -- [State of the Union Address](#) by President Eisenhower: *“We welcome the efforts of a number of our European friends to achieve an integrated community to develop a common market.”*

Excerpt: [Building the Transatlantic Partnership \(U.S. Embassy Berlin\)](#)

79th ACADEMY AWARDS



© [The Oscars](#)

More information:

- ★ Voice of America > [Annual Academy Awards](#)
- ★ About the USA > Arts & Entertainment > [Film](#)



© [Babel](#)

The movie takes you from posh San Diego to the poverty across the Mexican border; a journey familiar to that described by T.C. Boyle in *Tortilla Curtain*. Please see page 3.

“What is a “typical” American movie? People throughout the world are sure they know. A characteristic American film, they insist, has flamboyant special effects and a sumptuous décor, each a reflection of America’s nearly mythic affluence. [...] Yet over the past 15 years, for every high-tech, stunt-filled *Mission Impossible*, there are serious and even disturbing films such as *American Beauty* and *Million Dollar Baby*.”

For every conventional Hollywood blockbuster apparently designed to appeal to the predilections of 12-year-old boys, there have been complex and sophisticated movies such as *Traffic* and *Magnolia* that are consciously made for grown-ups. What is therefore remarkable about contemporary American movies is their diversity, their effort to explore the social and psychological dimensions of life in modern America, and their ability to combine entertainment with artistry.”

[Article](#) by Richard Pells, Electronic Journal “*The Arts in America: New Directions*.”

Please note: Richard Pells will participate in the U.S. Embassy’s Fachleiter Conference/American Studies Seminar “The U.S. in a Global Community.” Bonn, May 17-21, 2007 (in cooperation with the Amerikazentrum Hamburg and the Gustav-Stresemann-Institut e.V. Bonn). [Register here](#)

Best Picture Nominee: BABEL

While “The Departed,” a story of corruption among the Boston police, was the winner of the best film Oscar at Hollywood’s 79th annual Academy Awards ceremony Sunday, another nominee drew an equal amount of attention from critics and film fans alike. At the center of “Babel” is the subject at the core of 21st century life: the need to communicate. The film is an update of the Biblical myth that claims to be the origin of mankind’s lack of communication.

“With Babel I wanted to explore the contradiction between the impression that the world has become quite small due to all the communication tools which we have, and the feeling that human beings are still incapable of expressing themselves and communicating amongst themselves on a fundamental level.”

Alejandro González Iñárritu

Several interwoven storylines unfold across four countries as difficulties in communication and understanding complicate life in the shrinking global village. See the [NPR review](#) for interview and clips.

U.S. Immigration Policy

The U.S.-Mexico Border

The U.S.-Mexico border covers 2,000 miles, encompassing four U.S. and six Mexican states. In the pre-Columbian era, the land was inhabited by Native Americans who did not draw border lines. The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) offers information on how the area changed through the colonization of the Americas, the discovery of gold, wars, immigration, NAFTA and other historical events. www.pbs.org/kpbs/theborder/

More information:

- ★ New York Times > [Immigration and Refugees](#)
- ★ White House > [Immigration](#)
- ★ Center for Immigration Studies (CIS)
- ★ [About the USA > Society > A Nation of Immigrants](#)

In the United States immigration -- especially the status of the 12 million illegal immigrants, many from Mexico and already inside the country -- has become a hotly debated issue: “U.S. immigration policy is likely to be a highly contentious issue in the 110th Congress. The number of foreign-born people residing in the United States is at the highest level in our history and has reached a proportion of the U.S. population not seen since the early 20th century. There is a broad-based consensus that the U.S. immigration system is broken. This consensus erodes, however, as soon as the options to reform the U.S. immigration system are debated.” The report from the Congressional Research Center (CRS) on *Immigration Reform: Brief Synthesis of Issue* synthesizes the major elements of immigration reform in the 110th Congress. <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/80729.pdf>

Please see the CRS Report on *Border Security: Barriers Along the U.S. International Border* for detailed information on barriers currently deployed along the U.S. international land border.

<http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/78475.pdf>

TEACHING LITERATURE

"The Tortilla Curtain" by T.C. Boyle

"In this explosive and timely novel, T. Coraghessan Boyle explores an issue that is at the forefront of the political arena. He confronts the controversy over illegal immigration head-on, illuminating through a poignant, gripping story the people on both sides of the issue, the haves and the have-nots.

In Southern California's Topanga Canyon, two couples live in close proximity and yet are worlds apart. High atop a hill overlooking the canyon, nature writer Delaney Mossbacher and his wife, real estate agent Kyra Menaker-Mossbacher, reside in an exclusive, secluded housing development with their son, Jordan. The Mossbachers are agnostic liberals with a passion for recycling and fitness. Camped out in a ravine at the bottom of the canyon are Cándido and América Rincón, a Mexican couple who have crossed the border illegally. On the edge of starvation, they search desperately for work in the hope of moving into an apartment before their baby is born. They cling to their vision of the American dream, which, no matter how hard they try to achieve it, manages to elude their grasp at every turn.

A chance, violent encounter brings together Delaney and Cándido, instigating a chain of events that eventually culminates in a harrowing confrontation. The novel shifts back and forth between the two couples, giving voice to each of the four main characters as their lives become inextricably intertwined and their worlds collide. The Rincóns' search for the American dream, and the Mossbachers' attempts to protect it, comprise the heart of the story. In scenes that are alternately comic, frightening, and satirical, but always all "too real," Boyle confronts not only immigration but social consciousness, environmental awareness, crime, and unemployment in a tale that raises the curtain on the dark side of the American dream." (Penguin Group) [Read more](#)

TEACHING RESOURCE

T. Coraghessan Boyle – Biographical Essay (from *Authors and Artists for Young Adults*. Gale Group, 2003. *Gale Biography Resource Center*)

"A self-described "pampered punk" of the 1960s, Boyle did not set out to become a writer. Born in Peekskill, New York to Irish immigrant parents, Boyle led a life, as he saw it, full of rebellion and rock and roll."

Source: Biography Resource Center.

Please contact your IRC for a copy of the article.

More information:

- ★ Reading Club Guide > [Tortilla Curtain](#)
- ★ New York Times Book review > [The Pilgrim of Topanga Creek](#)
- ★ Wikipedia > [The Tortilla Curtain](#)
- ★ [Pew Hispanic Center](#)

Book Club/Reading Guides

A reading group is a great way to explore books in finer detail. Your students will find that getting together with a group to discuss selections once or twice a month adds to the pleasure of reading, and enhances their understanding of the work. [More information from Penguin](#)

LEGAL AND ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION

Immigration Nation. By Jacoby, Tamar, *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2006, v85,#6, pp50-65

The author argues that the majority of Americans want a combination of tougher enforcement and "earned citizenship" for the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants in the country. He says that the best way to regain control on illegal immigration is to liberalize U.S. laws by expanding quotas and establishing a guest-worker program to accommodate the half-million new workers now needed each year to keep the U.S. economy growing. [Full text via InfoAlert.](#)

For additional articles go to:
<http://infoalert.usembassy.de>



"Immigrants are the lifeblood of this country -- and neither of us would be standing here today if it wasn't."

Main protagonist Delaney Mossbacher
in *The Tortilla Curtain*



(© U.S. Consulate Duesseldorf)

T.C. Boyle's Official Website
www.tcboyle.com

"I wanted to see what liberalism really means, whether people really mean what they say and whether they would act on it."

T.C. Boyle

THIS MONTH:

St. Patrick's Day

"Don't you forget to wear green today."

St. Patrick's Day is celebrated on March 17, the religious feast day and the anniversary of the death of St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland. However, the first St. Patrick's Day parade took place not in Ireland, but in the United States. Irish soldiers serving in the English military marched through New York City on March 17, 1762. The parade helped the soldiers to reconnect with their Irish roots, as well as fellow Irishmen serving in the English army. More on History.com

On March 17, 1948, President Harry S. Truman held a [St. Patrick's Day Address](#) in New York City.

FACTS 34.7 million U.S. residents claim Irish ancestry. This number is almost nine times the population of Ireland itself (4.2 million). Irish is the nation's second most frequently reported ancestry, trailing only those of German ancestry. [More from the U.S. Census Bureau](#)

Women's History Month

The 2007 Women's History Month theme, *Generations of Women Moving History Forward*, celebrates the wisdom and tenacity of prior and future generations of women and recognizes the power of generations working together. [Read more](#) (USINFO)

More information:

History Channel > [Celebrate Women's History Month](#)

Library of Congress > [American Women](#)

U.S. Census Bureau > [Women's History Month](#)

Gale (free resources site) > [Women's History Month](#)

InfoPlease > [Women's History Month](#)

NOW > [National Organization for Women](#)

About the USA > [Women](#)

United Nations > [Women Watch](#)



Buffalo St. Patrick's Day Parade, 1946.
© Library of Congress

More:

★ Library of Congress > [Today in History: March 17](#)

★ Proclamation by President Bush > [Irish-American Heritage Month 2007](#)



[Democracy Dialogues > Women's Rights](#)
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Webchat Station

Celebrating International Women's Day 2007: Women's Growing Roles in Contemporary U.S. Politics

March 8, 2007, 16:00

Professor Georgia Duerst-Laht, Beloit College

Women have an increased presence and influence in the U.S. political arena, as exemplified by the election of the first-ever female speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. The increasing visibility of women on the political stage is the subject of a USINFO webchat to be held during Women's History Month, on International Women's Day.

[Registration required and more chats](#)

The Media Scene

Wonderful World; A Critic At Large by Anthony Lane. *The New Yorker*, December 11, 2006, v82, #41, p67

Walt Disney and the empire he built: "What attracted Walt Disney throughout his career was not so much the money that people traded for his art as the eager numbers in which they came to view it..." [Fulltext](#)

Why Hollywood Cannot Make Art by Teachout, Terry. *Commentary*, January 2007, v123, #1, pp48-52

The well-known critic explains why he believes the Hollywood studio system rarely makes artistically serious movies -- save by inadvertence... [Fulltext](#)

Television's Future. *CQ Researcher* Feb 16, 2007, v17, #17, 24p

Will the Internet kill television? Will television remain a viable medium for advertisers? Are scripted TV shows obsolete? [Order article.](#)
(From [InfoAlert – U.S. Culture](#))



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Contact: infoalert.de@state.gov