



Newsletter for English Teachers About the USA – Virtual Classroom

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World Press Freedom Day (May 3)

Journalists investigate sensitive issues; they unveil unsettling truths; they question policies and politics. In doing so, they sometimes have to face attacks by those who are directly or indirectly exposed by their work. Repressive methods used against media outlets and individual journalists include: restrictive media and Internet laws and burdensome regulations, taxes and fees; libel and defamation laws that are applied for political reasons; efforts designed to narrow media diversity and block citizens' access to independent views; direct censorship or intimidation; and the targeting of members of the media and Internet bloggers for harassment, imprisonment, physical attack and even murder.

Every year, May 3rd is a date which celebrates the fundamental principles of press freedom; to evaluate press freedom around the world, to defend the media from attacks on their independence and to pay tribute to journalists who have lost their lives in the exercise of their profession.

Freedom of the media - a right protected by Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights - is the hallmark of a free society. A free press helps to sustain and monitor a healthy democracy. Wherever media freedom is under siege, all other human rights are under threat.

Media advocacy groups like the International Federation of Journalists, the World Association of Newspapers, the Committee to Protect Journalists, the Inter American Press Association, Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, and International Center for Journalists and Reporters without Borders are speaking out on freedom of expression issues and in defense of persecuted colleagues.

The United States government is strongly committed to media freedom worldwide and will work in partnership with other governments, multilateral institutions, NGOs and individuals around the world to that end.

Teaching Resources:

- [Censorship and Freedom of the Press](#) (Web English Teacher)
- [Press-ing Freedom](#) - Exploring the Importance of Journalism Rights and Ethics: Students will consider how free speech applies to journalistic practices in light of a legal case involving two reporters. They then participate in a fishbowl discussion about journalism codes of ethics and write response papers. (NYT Learning Network)

America.gov

- **Photo Gallery:** [Great Moments in American Media Satire](#)
- **America.gov Article:** [Attacks Against Sri Lankan Press](#)
- **Timeline:** [Evolving Media and a Free Press](#)

UNESCO: World Press Freedom Day 2009 - The potential of media in fostering dialogue, mutual understanding and reconciliation will be the topic of UNESCO World Press Freedom Day 2009 to be celebrated on 2-3 May 2009. As the only UN agency with a mandate to defend freedom of expression and press freedom, UNESCO has placed mutual understanding, and dialogue through media at the core of its mission. Indeed, UNESCO's Constitution, adopted in November 1945, states that the Organization will "collaborate in the work of advancing the mutual knowledge and understanding of all peoples, through all means of mass communication" and "promote the free flow of ideas by word and image".



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The new feature entitled "[Journalism Under Siege](#)" examines the risks journalists take to keep citizens informed and hold governments accountable & is accompanied by visual materials including a photo gallery explaining the importance of a free press. The spotlight is on Zimbabwean journalist Peta Thornycroft.

Facts

- [11](#) journalists killed worldwide in 2009
 - [14](#) deadly nations for journalists
 - [138](#) journalists and [51](#) media workers killed in Iraq since March 2003
- Source: [Committee to Protect Journalists](#)

Links

- [Reports Without Borders Site](#)
- [Freedom House](#)
- [America.gov: Democracy & Human Rights](#)
- [World Association of Newspapers](#)
- [New York Times: Articles about Freedom of the Press](#)



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Speak Up! - Dissent is an essential element of democracy. Find out how free speech acts as a catalyst for change and reform.

Publications

- eJournal USA: [Media Making Change](#)
- Publication: [Handbook of Independent Journalism](#)
- Publication/Power Point: About America: [Edward R. Murrow, Journalism at Its Best](#)
- Booklet: [A Responsible Press Office](#)
- Booklet: [An Unfettered Press](#)

PODCASTS

On May 3rd, the State Department will host a series of podcasts featuring interviews with foreign journalists based in the U.S. They will tell their stories as observers of the American press system and what it means to them to be part of the international press corps. [America.gov: Podcasting page](#)



Dancers perform a Jalisco-style dance during the Cinco de Mayo celebration in Los Angeles. © AP Images

Lesson Plans

- [Instructor Web: Mexican History Lesson - Cinco de Mayo](#) - A reading comprehension lesson on Cinco de Mayo. Includes printable teaching lesson worksheet.
- [Si, Se Puede!](#) - Investigating the Growing Influence of the Latino Community in the United States: In this lesson, students consider the growing influence of the Hispanic and Latino communities on U.S. politics and culture, using the 2008 Democratic presidential campaigns as a starting point for discussion. (January 16, 2008, (Grades to 6-8; 9-12)

Library of Congress

- The [Mexican American section](#) of the Learning Page's [Immigration presentation](#) features the history of Mexicans in the United States.



Korean-American dancers from Augusta, Georgia, perform at the Asian Festival in Charlotte, North Carolina. People who speak many different languages, practice different faiths and come from various traditions are honored during Asian Pacific Heritage Month. More than 15 million Americans claim Asian or Pacific ancestry, making them the third largest minority group. © AP Images

For more information please see [Asian Pacific American Heritage Month a Celebration of Diversity](#)

Links

- America.gov: [People & Places](#)
- Library of Congress: [Asian/Pacific Heritage Month](#)
- Library of Congress: [Coming to America](#)

Photo Gallery

- [Immigration: The Making of the American People](#)

The United States – A Multicultural Society

May 5 - Cinco de Mayo

When the Cinco de Mayo ("Fifth of May") holiday is observed in the United States, the annual festivity honors the Mexican heritage of a growing number of U.S. citizens, with a focus on Mexico's distinctive cuisine, folk dances, colorful costumes and mariachi music.

What many celebrants might not realize is that the holiday has evolved significantly over the years, often bearing little trace of its origins. Cinco de Mayo is not, as some believe, Mexico's Independence Day, which is September 16. Cinco de Mayo celebrates the legendary Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862, in which a Mexican force of 4,500 men faced 6,000 well-trained French soldiers. The battle lasted four hours and ended in a victory for the Mexican army under Gen. Ignacio Zaragoza. The battle followed a tumultuous period in Mexico's history.

Today, communities across the United States observe Cinco de Mayo, from small border towns in Texas and Arizona to metropolitan hubs like New York, Los Angeles, Cleveland and Atlanta. The holiday, now virtually ignored in Mexico, has become a vibrant annual event in many U.S. cities, with a strong focus on Mexican food and music, and traditional costumes in red, white and green, the colors of the Mexican flag. Typical Mexican fare -- salsa, guacamole, empanadas, enchiladas, tamales, burritos, fajitas -- tops the menu at these festivities. (Sources: [Census Bureau](#) and [America.gov](#) - "[Cinco de Mayo Shows the Americanization of a Mexican Holiday](#)")

Facts

- **29.2 million** - Number of U.S. residents of Mexican origin in 2007. These residents constituted 10 percent of the nation's total population and 64 percent of the Hispanic population
- **18.25 million** - Number of people of Mexican origin who lived either in California (10.97 million) or Texas (7.28 million). People of Mexican origin made up more than one-quarter of the residents of these two states.
- **25.8** - Median age of people in the United States of Mexican descent. This compares with 36.7 years for the population as a whole. Source: Census Bureau: [Facts for Features: Cinco de Mayo](#)

May - Asian-Pacific Heritage Month

In 1978, a joint congressional resolution established Asian/Pacific American Heritage Week. The first 10 days of May were chosen to coincide with two important milestones in Asian/Pacific American history: the arrival in the United States of the first Japanese immigrants (May 7, 1843) and contributions of Chinese workers to the building of the transcontinental railroad, completed on May 10, 1869. In 1992, Congress expanded the observance to a month long celebration.

Facts

- **15.2 million** - The estimated number of U.S. residents in July 2007 who said they were Asian alone or Asian in combination with one or more other races. This group comprised about 5 percent of the total population.
- **5 million** - The Asian population in California, the state that had the largest Asian population on July 1, 2007, as well as the largest numerical increase from 2006 to 2007 (106,000). New York (1.4 million) and Texas (915,000) followed in population. Texas (44,000) and New York (33,000) followed in numerical increase. In Hawaii, Asians made up the highest proportion of the total population (55 percent), with California (14 percent) and New Jersey and Washington (8 percent each) next.
- **2.9%** - Percentage growth of the Asian population between 2006 and 2007, the highest of any race group during that time period. The increase in the Asian population during the period totaled 434,000.
- **3.54 million** - Number of Asians of Chinese descent in the U.S. in 2007. Chinese-Americans were the largest Asian group, followed by Filipinos (3.05 million), Asian Indians (2.77 million), Vietnamese (1.64 million), Koreans (1.56 million) and Japanese (1.22 million). Source: Census Bureau - [Facts for Features -- Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month: May 2009](#)

Literature

2009 Pulitzer Prize Winners

The [Pulitzer prizes](#) are awarded in journalism as well as in arts and letters. The 2009 honors for reportage covered such topics as wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan, last year's U.S. presidential campaign, political issues in several U.S. states, and devastation caused by hurricanes and wildfires.

The Pulitzers are awarded each April by the trustees of Columbia University, on the recommendations of an advisory board composed of journalists, art and literary critics, cultural specialists and others. The prizes are funded through a bequest left by Joseph Pulitzer — an early 20th-century newspaper publisher — to the university trustees.

[2009 Pulitzer Prizewinners and Nominated Finalists](#)

Pulitzer Prize for Drama Honors Play About Women in Wartime

Congo: The African-American female characters created by playwright Lynn Nottage populate a vast expanse in terms of social class, time and place: a teenage girl in 1950s Brooklyn, a pretentious businesswoman, a seamstress, an affluent traveler in search of her African roots, a group of women brutalized during the civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As different as they are, Nottage's protagonists are inexorably bound together — a vibrant, indomitable sorority of sorts that sets a standard not just for African-American women, not just for women, but for humanity as a whole. Now Nottage's play, *Ruined*, set in a Congolese brothel populated by women seeking shelter from the horrors of war, has been named winner of the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for drama. [America.gov](#)

Authors of Young-Adult Books Reflect on Issues of Race

Part One: Sherri L. Smith discusses the price of racial "passing"

Does race matter? The concept of a "post-racial" society is popular, but America's youth, lacking memories of racial segregation and integration, offer unique perspectives. To capture a snapshot of those views, [America.gov](#) posed questions to two authors of young-adult books about issues they explore in their work.

[In part one](#), author Sherri L. Smith, who recently published her fourth novel, *Flygirl*, comments on two topics she tackles in her books. Her first novel, *Lucy the Giant*, was selected for the 2003 Best Books for Young Adults list by the young adult division of the American Library Association.

[In part two](#), author Chandra Prasad, editor and contributor of *Mixed: An Anthology of Short Fiction on the Multiracial Experience*, provides views on race. Prasad said the urge to explain her mixed-race identity and get past superficial categorizations inspired her to create the book.

American Fortune Cookie

Jennifer 8. Lee is author of *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles: Adventures in the World of Chinese Food* (2008) and maintains a "live-action blog" to go with her book, which traces the history of the fortune cookie. She is a *New York Times* reporter.

Americans love fortune cookies.

We have Christmas fortune cookies, wedding fortune cookies, Valentine's Day fortune cookies, Hanukkah fortune cookies. Even dogs have their own canine fortune cookies. [...]

Americans fervently believe in what is printed on those little slips of paper, to the point that they have inexplicable faith in the lucky numbers that are often printed on them. In March 2005, 110 people across the country won a combined \$19 million in the lottery because they had played the tiny numbers listed on the bottom of their fortune cookie. Two months later, another 84 winners won on the same day for largely the same reason.

The funny thing: Most Americans assume fortune cookies are from China because they get them from Chinese restaurants. I was once one of those people. After all, I was born in New York City and we got fortune cookies in the Chinese restaurants that we went to growing up. What did I know? I didn't step foot in China until I was in my 20s. Read more: ["American Fortune Cookie"](#)



© [Pulitzer.org](#)

Links

- [Click here](#) for finalists, jurors, bios and photos of winners, winning photos and cartoons, and links to winning stories.
- New York Times: [2009 Pulitzer Prizes for Letters, Drama and Music](#)

2009 PULITZER PRIZES — ARTS AND LETTERS:

- Fiction: *Olive Kitteridge*, by Elizabeth Strout
- Drama: *Ruined*, by Lynn Nottage
- History: *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family*, by Annette Gordon-Reed
- Biography: *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House*, by Jon Meacham
- Poetry: *The Shadow of Sirius*, by W.S. Merwin
- General Nonfiction: *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*, by Douglas A. Blackmon
- Music: *Double Sextet*, by Steve Reich



The number of Americans of more than one race is rapidly growing — a result, in part, of the growing population of diverse cultures. Read more: ["Identity in America: Are Perspectives Shifting?"](#)



Lee, Jennifer 8. *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles: Adventures in the World of Chinese Food*. New York: Twelve, 2008.



The 10th regular session of the U.N. Human Rights Council opened in Geneva March 2. (©AP/America.gov)



U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice (©AP/America.gov)

Links

- 100 Days Blog: [Day 70: United States will seek seat on UN Human Rights Council](#) (America.gov)
- [Remarks by President Obama and United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon](#)

In Focus: U.S.-UN Relations

Obama Administration Seeks Greater Involvement with U.N.

The United States' bid for a seat on the United Nations' Human Rights Council is part of the Obama administration's new focus on multilateral cooperation to grapple with tough issues, says Esther Brimmer, the new assistant secretary of state for international organization affairs.

United States to Seek Membership on U.N. Human Rights Council - U.S. Ambassador Rice says Human Rights Council must be balanced

The United States believes that working within the U.N. Human Rights Council is the best way to improve the council's goal of thwarting global human rights abuses, says the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice announced March 31 that the United States will seek a seat on the council this year.

The Human Rights Council is an intergovernmental body within the United Nations system made up of 47 elected members. Its mission is to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights globally, State Department acting deputy spokesman Gordon Duguid said in a prepared statement. ([America.gov](#), April 1, 2009)

U.S. Department of State: [Bureau of International Organization Affairs](#)

Co.NX Webchats - Enter the events



World Press Freedom

U.S. Support for Independent Media - May 4, 17:30 - Amb. Karen B. Stewart (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights & Labor)

Is Independent Journalism Possible? - May 5, 15:00 - Deborah Potter (Director, NewsLab)

Giving Local Media a Voice - May 6, 18:00 - David Hoffman (President, Internews Network)

Is The Economic Downturn a Threat to Journalism? - May 7, 15:00 - Dr. Ricchiardi (Professor of Journalism, Indiana University)

Hosted by the U.S. Dept. of State on Facebook.

The New York Times Learning Network

One of our favorite sources and always worth a look when you are looking for lesson plans on timely issues.

Daily Lesson Plan

From the Post Office to the Oval Office - *Reading and Writing Letters to the President: [In this lesson](#)*, students consider letters addressed to President Obama and what criteria make a letter likely to reach his desk. After perusing some of these letters as well as letters written to past U.S. presidents, they then write their own letters to the president. (April 24, 2009, Grades 6-8, 9-12, [companion lesson for Grades 3-5.](#))



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About the USA is a digital collection of background resources on American society, culture, and political processes. In addition to featuring selected websites, it provides access to documents in full text format (E-Texts) on topics ranging from the history of German-American relations, government and politics to travel, holidays and sports.

This newsletter is produced by the Information Resource Centers/U.S. Diplomatic Mission to Germany.

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