



By Krystal Sato

国際交流員コーナー

CIR's Corner

September 2023 – Issue #16



Hello everyone! "CIR's Corner" is my monthly article about international exchange and cultures around the world. I will introduce a variety of interesting international topics.

This Month's Topic: American Life and Culture

On August 29, I spoke about American life and culture at the Takasago Neighborhood Council Meeting Hall. My presentation was about 45 minutes long, and there were 23 people in the audience. This month, I will summarize the content of my speech.



Differences between Japan and the US

I've been living in Japan for 16 years. There are many similarities between Japan and the US, but I believe there are five main differences.

The first difference is size. In Japan, the portions, the people, the houses, and even the country are small compared to America. For example, a medium drink at McDonald's in America is bigger than even a large drink at McDonald's in Japan. When comparing BMI, the average Japanese person is normal weight, but the average American BMI of 28.8 is considered overweight. The average American house is about twice the size of the average Japanese one.

Another difference is how each culture expresses their thoughts. Japanese people tend to be indirect, and many don't say how they really feel. However, many Americans speak their mind. From childhood, we get a lot of practice expressing our opinions freely through class discussions. But just because Americans value direct communication, it doesn't mean we always say whatever we're thinking. It is better not to talk about things such as religion, politics, salary, and age with people you don't know well. In addition, if you show prejudice or bigotry, you are sure to upset people, so be careful.

The third difference is formality. While Japanese people seem to love formality, American people do not. We prefer to be more casual. For example, as I wrote in last year's September issue of *CIR's Corner*, we don't have school entrance ceremonies, and our graduations are more cheerful. In this year's June issue, I introduced a typical American wedding, and how there are many DIY elements. Another point is English does not have honorifics, so we speak to everyone the same way, regardless of age or rank. We even refer to our bosses by their first names.

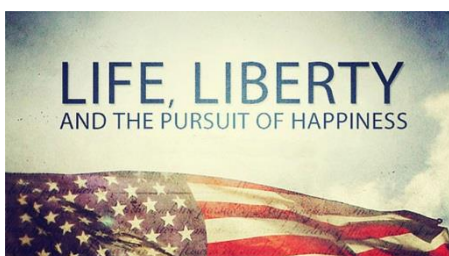
The fourth big difference is diversity. Japan is 98% Japanese, but America is a multicultural and multiethnic society. About 60% of the population is white, but there are also African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and other races. In addition, immigrants and their American-born children make up 27% of the population. English is the most widely spoken language, but there is no official language. Over 300 languages are spoken. Spanish is the second most common language, and 18.7% of the population is Hispanic.

By the way, many Americans don't even know this, but "Hispanic" is not a race. "Hispanic" means that person has roots in a Spanish-speaking country, so white people, black people, and people of other races can be Hispanic American.



My middle school classmates. We were a diverse group.

Finally, I think the biggest difference is that Japan is a collectivist culture, but America is an individualist culture. As it is written in the Declaration of Independence, Americans have a right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," so we take this right very seriously in our everyday lives. We tend to make decisions and solve problems on our own. We value self-sufficiency. We also value individuality. I believe that Americans are able to live their lives more freely than Japanese people are.



Issues Facing America in the 2020s

In my opinion, America has four major issues.

The first issue is the cost of living. There is a housing shortage, so the cost to rent or own a home is extremely high. Americans' wages are not keeping up with inflation, so it puts them in a situation where they can't afford to live. Many people are struggling financially right now.

Another issue is the healthcare system. Unlike other developed nations, the US does not have a national health insurance system. Americans must purchase their own insurance, or join their employer's healthcare plan. Out-of-pocket costs vary widely, but are generally more expensive than in Japan.

Discrimination is another major issue. America is supposed to be a country with "liberty and justice for all." However, racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, and other types of discrimination are still serious problems.

Lastly, guns continue to be an issue that needs to be solved. About one third of Americans own a gun, and for every 100 Americans, there are 120.5 guns. That means there are more guns in the country than people. Every year guns kill over 40,000 Americans.

Currently, America is divided. There are the "red states" that tend to vote for Republicans in the national elections, and the "blue states" that tend to vote for Democrats. American people may have wildly different beliefs depending on what state they live in. Since the opinions of Americans are so divided, I think it will be extremely difficult to find common ground and agree on solutions to the problems facing America today. The 2024 presidential election is quickly approaching, and whichever side wins will greatly affect American life and culture moving forward through the 2020s. ★

Contact Information

Ebetsu City Board of Education
Takasago 24-6, Ebetsu, Hokkaido 〒067-0074
Tel: 011-381-1049 Fax: 011-382-3434