

EPISODE 15: IN THE USA?

C: OK. I'm going to ask you some questions about the United States.

A: OK, is this my US citizenship test?

C: Let's...let's call it that.

A: OK.

C: OK. Well, first of all, if I were to say to you, you know, how often do you go back to the States, the US, America, what...?

A: Home.

C: How...how often do you go...?

A: Home?

C: Yeah.

A: I think that's probably what I would ask most people from another country. And it feels like what... what would be the default saying? For me at least?

C: To come back home, to go back....

A: To go back home, right? To come home, you know, as always, at least for me, is... is to, is from your point of reference, is coming to you, where you are. Like, someone is coming to the studio later. I am going to teach class somewhere else, right? So, come here, go there. Which is the same for you, right? Or...

C: Yeah.

A: But on the other hand, as with so many things with... with language, we... we say out loud what we think we actually say in real life, and I immediately think of a... somebody says 'hey, hey remember that the party's tonight, are you coming?' I'm like 'yeah, I'm coming, I'm on my way'. It would be if I'm... if I'm coming like now I guess, if it's... if it's in progress I would just come but not go.

C: But do you prefer the US, the States, America...?

A: America no. America... because America sounds a lot like 'merica starting with an apostrophe which you know, I don't know if people here... definitely my students are aware of it but... I make them aware of it. So, 'merica spelled with an apostrophe and then capital M, or not, I'm not



sure, you know, but 'merica is kind of a stereotypical way, I think, that those of us on the left kind of condescend a little bit towards many of them on the right. Cause they say "merica'.

C: It would sound right wing.

A: Oh, yeah, yeah, for sure.

A: You know, Bruce Springsteen doesn't say America.

C: Yeah, ah, ok.

A: Even though he is quite a working-class hero, as John Lennon would say.

C: So that...

A: So, it's not... I don't think it's a socioeconomic class question, for me at least, it ends up being perhaps a politically... and I'm probably totally wrong about this.

C: So again, with Trump's hat, now the famous Maga 'make America great again', yeah?

A: Yes... ohh, we're in my studio! My favorite hat. It's at home. It's... my brother got this as a present for me a couple of years ago. It's the exact same red baseball cap and it says 'make America Mexico again'.

C: OK

A: So, it's a MAMA hat instead of MAGA, it's MAMA. It's 'make America Mexico again'. I love that hat.

C: Yeah.

A: I can't wear it anywhere because people on the right will probably read it and then get angry at you. People on the left will not read it, but will immediately assume that it's a MAGA hat and get angry at you. So, like, it's a no-win situation.

C: But there's a great episode that Larry David, where he wears the MAGA hat because he doesn't want to have lunch with this guy. The guy arrives, he sees him wearing the MAGA hat and he's like 'I wanna go, I can't have lunch with you'. And Larry David is like 'this hat is fantastic'.

A: My hat is quite similar, yes.

C: OK, well, I'm going to do is, um, some of my observations when I first went to... I'm going to say the States, but I mean I went to New York.

A: Sure.



C: So, these are things I noticed that maybe made an impact on me.

A: And I can tell you if your experiences are valid or not?

C: Are valid or not, exactly.

A: OK.

C: You're judging these.

A: Yeah.

C: One of the first things I noticed, restaurants... well, restaurants was a big one. Tap water was like normal. I mean they... they... they serve you tap water.

A: Yeah absolutely. Except in Flint, Michigan, where they discovered that the... the amount of lead was criminally high for many, many years. And it's actually a really horrible, horrible event of the last, I don't know, ten years or so. But yeah, absolutely drink, drink tap water.

C: They bring you jugs of jars of tap water and...

A: Jars? I think we would say pitchers.

C: Pitchers?

A: Usually, probably they bring you a glass and then they come around and refill it and you like, have to, you know, say no if you don't want anymore.

C: Because they keep bringing it, yeah.

A: Yeah, they do. They do. That's part of good service, which is...

C: And I kept drinking it. And then later you have to go to the toilet several times during the day.

A: Yes. But look how much healthier you were, except, except for all the toxic waste that you ingested with that horrible New York water. I would like to point out that, that Chicago is said to have some of the best drinking water in the country. Definitely better than New York.

C: Yeah, yeah. Now that that surprised me. The idea that tap water was, you know, drinkable and would be served.

A: Hold on. It's drinkable in Barcelona. It is absolutely drinkable. It's not enjoyable.

C: It's not enjoyable.

A: You know, but depending on where you are, it's drinkable.



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C: You talked about service as well. Again, that would that made an impact where. I think when somebody declares themselves, you know, I'm going to be your waiter for today.

A: Yeah.

C: It's like wow, OK, so you're getting like this. You really feel (that's quite special?).

A: Well, remember the history of slavery in our country.

C: It's a... it's a long history.

A: Yes, it is. And... but, there... there is actually, keep in mind one of the things that bothers me, one of the many, many things that bothers me about the US, but things bother me everywhere, is the fact that, you know, money rules everything there.

C: Yeah.

A: Dollar, Dollar bill, y'all. So, the idea that a person who is. Serving you at a restaurant or is... is the... the salesperson at a store, there's definitely a much more obvious power dynamic there that you feel in both cases, both in the attitude of the consumer or the customer or the patron and in the way that you are treated by the person who's working there.

C: Because they're expecting a tip, a very generous tip.

A: well, in the case of service, they're expecting a tip. But in the case of... of retail and stores, it's just a question that, you know, Dollar, Dollar bill, y'all. Money. Cash money rules everything.

C: Right.

A: And in Spain in general and definitely in Barcelona, I don't feel that that's the same way sometimes to a fault. You could walk into a store and the person ignores you for 5 minutes until you, you know, go up and 'excuse me' and then they help you and it's fine. So, I think that's definitely a big cultural difference.

C: I think in Barcelona some of the service in restaurants and bars, maybe not the same as in the States.

A: Oh, no, never but it's... But what's your overall feeling about service there?

C: My feeling when I was there, I thought, you know, this overall chirpiness, the good 'happy Tuesday'. It was like, no, it's Tuesday. I'm not happy. You don't need to put on this. Yeah, this false...

A: It drives me nuts.

C: Yeah, no...



A: It does. That being said, I think overall people in the US are more friendly than they are here, so not all of that is the subservience.

C: I think one time what happened was, you know, I had ordered a drink and they didn't bring the drink and so I had to order it again. I wasn't that bothered, you know, just. By the way, you didn't bring that. They were devastated. And they said, oh, this ones on the house. We're not going to charge... you know, I thought this was...

A: Sorry, great expression 'to be on the house'. When the hosting entity pays for it.

C: Yeah.

A: I like that. I haven't thought about that expression for a long time.

C: Tipping, obviously, is what they're looking for, the generous tip. But I could understand this in restaurants because I had this idea, right. You get the bill, 15%, then somebody said...

A: Minimum 15.

C: Yeah. Somebody said 'let's go, come on just tell me what it's supposed to be'.

A: Yes.

C: And that's, you know, that is my feeling is that...

A: I'll tell you, recently this was a pre COVID of course, but in New York like a consortium of nice restaurants. I think they're pretty expensive restaurants but not like the... the top top. But there's a bunch of them got together and they decided they wanted... they were going to stop having tipping at their restaurants.

C: OK.

A: They raised all their prices of course because they... they need the money and this was going on for I don't know. Six months a year. I think that this study has talked about on the podcast Freakonomics, which is a wonderful podcast. And in the end, the average spending per table, total spending right before with the tip or here without tip, was exactly the same. So, people spent the same amount of money the servers were paid. They made a better wage, obviously. It's not that they so they raised their hourly wage to something more decent and the patrons expressed a more positive experience, you know, so it's not like it wouldn't work. They could also make the portions smaller.

C: Well, the portions was another kind of thing I was noticing. It was like they just, you know, the size of the portions. I also noticed that, aside from the tipping, was walking in the street. Um, you really shouldn't stare at anyone. And that's something...

A: I mean, unless you want to get shot.



C: Yeah, I mean this, I... I kind of ended up maybe it's just something we do here a little bit more. We look at people and maybe more in the eye. And I think in New York one, I mean I really one guy was about to punch me because...

A: Well, I mean you're... you're handsome but punchable.

C: Yeah. However, you gotta be more careful. You know, just head down and keep walking.

A: I mean, I'm sure people have told you this before, but you know, you have a face made for radio.

C: Yeah. It's a compliment?

A: It is. It is.

C: The other thing there was I felt, you know, don't stare. And when they did get angry, I was kind of, I felt very intimidated. But also, then it crossed my mind 'this person could have a gun'.

A: Yeah.

C: I thought 'no, they really could. It's not a joke, isn't it?'

A: I don't know. I have to say I've never really seen this staring thing. I feel like. I feel like in Barcelona people don't make very much eye contact with you. If you make eye contact means they wanna steal your mobile phone.

C: Yeah.

A: You know, for me that in Barcelona. I don't know if it's maybe Ireland... Well, in Ireland people are pretty nice. And friendly...

C: Yeah, yeah.

A: So, I'm sure that that's related to an eye contact thing you which...

C: Genuine. We're genuine, yeah, we're nice.

A: Yeah, OK, I didn't say that but sure we'll accept it.

C: And one of the other things I noticed a little bit was there seemed to be in New York especially this kind of obsession with looking good. Dressing well, obviously, but I think people... I noticed there's so many people were obsessed with their bodies, were working out, were exercising.

A: OK

C: Even to the point I was walking down the street and people when they saw scaffolding, which



we've talked about before.

A: Yeah. Scaffolding. And one of my students yesterday, by the way, mentioned the word scaffolding and I thought of you in our episode.

C: If you listen to us, you learn. And I just noticed there's some, some guy like used the scaffolding to do some chin ups.

A: OK

C: what is that...?

A: I mean, that's some macho stuff.

C: It was, yeah, yeah, yeah. But it was like this really...

A: Well, that's kind of, I'm sure perhaps he was a parkour participant. You know the people... you know what parkour is.

C: I do not.

A: Really? Like, the people that... that it's a sport and an activity, a leisure, leisure activity, but like one of the most physically demanding things around where people, you know, run through an urban environment, jumping from difficult place to difficult place, swinging like basically being like a stuntman, being Tom Cruise, you know, without the money, maybe a little taller. Running down the street.

C: Yeah.

A: That's the thing that developed from the urban desire for this kind of physical exercise.

C: Yeah.

A: It's PARCOUR, parkour. Probably from French "parcour".

C: Yeah.

A: Which would mean. Any idea? I don't know what it means. No, I don't know. I'm asking you. You, you're the French speaker here.

C: Ohh. Well, comments below?

A: There you go. Perfect. Let us know.

C: I think as well the part of the thing for me, drinking there? I'm Irish, so you know drinking is important.



A: OK, let's pause there for a linguistic point here.

C: Right.

A: You said drinking, which I interpret not to mean water or orange juice. We immediately know that it means consuming alcohol. Right. If somebody asks, do you drink?

C: Yeah.

A: Well, I mean, it's kind of necessary to life.

C: To life. Yeah.

A: You're talking about alcohol. Somebody says, do you drink? I drink a lot. I don't drink...

C: Yeah.

A: So, I think that that's interesting. And not exactly the same in Spanish. Or Catalan.

C: No, no, no, no. No.

A: Beure's?

C: Going into a bar, being asked for ID, was...

A: Sure, that was the age thing, of course.

C: But when it was so obvious that you were over. I mean, it's over 21? Is it?

A: Yes. But here's the deal. It's the law I believe is on the one hand that you have to be over 21 to drink alcohol, to enter a bar, if it's a restaurant no, but to enter a bar... But the other part of the law is that a bar I believe is required to check your ID. So that's why they ask you. It's not. Yeah, I know you're over 21 but if there's like if the... I guess it would be the health department. Whoever it is, the must be the alcohol, firearms and tobacco whatever. They come and like do a, you know, a check in at a bar. And if they were to walk through and they asked you for your ID and you didn't have it, then the bar would get...

C: The bar would be in trouble.

A: Yes.

C: OK well, that makes sense because a lot of the time because in restaurants I didn't get that as well. It wasn't restaurants. They don't seem to ask for an ID.

A: No, because you're not required to have ID to be in the restaurant.



C: Yeah. Yeah.

C: But there was this feeling, you know, like at that time I was mid 20s and there was a nice feeling when you were being asked for ID because...

A: Sure.

C: You think I'm young?

A: Yeah. Exactly.

C: I think a lot of us Europeans, when we go to the States, we think it's a compliment.

A: Exactly.

C: No, it's just like requirement.

A: Exactly. Well, OK. So, could I interrupt for one second just about the age thing. I have a couple of... because we had said maybe this was US trivia questions for me, but I have some some questions about ages in the US for you, you know. Driving age?

C: Ooh, I'm going to go... I think it's going to be quite young. I think 16 or 17.

A: It is 16.

C: 16!

A: Age to get your learner's permit, which means you can drive with a family member.

C: That's got to be younger. So...

A: Good.

C: Wow, 15?

A: 15.

C: That's too young.

A: Voting age.

C: Ohh I think this is 18?

A: 18. Good.

C: It was 21 until the early 70s?



A: Umm, I do not know.

C: I think it was.

A: I don't think so...

C: So, I'll tell you why. Because I think when John Lennon went to live in the States it was one of the things they were most scared of Nixon's government was the influence that Lennon would have on changing the vote. The younger voters that they were about to change it from 21 to 18. And they were terrified of Lennon's influence.

A: Interesting.

C: And this is where the government went after him.

A: I'm gonna... I'm gonna fact...

C: Fact check that.

A: ...that age thing, I like this story a lot. OK. Age to sign a legally binding contract.

C: Well, I guess 18?

A: 18, right. So, 18 is being an adult. So, you could theoretically, which is very relevant for both of us, we could both sign our NBA multimillion-dollar contracts yet not be allowed to drink officially for three more years. Military. What's the military age?

C: I guess what, 8-9 years old?

A: 5, depends on the state.

C: depends on the kid.

A: It's 18 also. So, you could be asked to die for your country without ever...

C: or someone

A: or to shoot someone for your country. Without ever legally having been allowed to taste alcohol. Legally, yeah.

Vocabulary bank

Tip: to give someone money to thank them for their service

Customer: the person who buys.



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Salesperson: the person whose job is to sell something (typically in a store).

Patron: synonym of *customer*.

Chirpiness: to be cheerful and energetic.

Genuine: said of a person who is honest and sincere.

Stuntman: someone whose job is to perform dangerous or physically challenging scenes instead of an actor, such as jumping off buildings, car crashes or fight scenes.



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