

## ***Book Review Section:***

### ***American Generation***

BY COLIN GRANGER AND DIGBY BEAUMONT

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***Colin Granger and Digby Beaumont. 1992. American Generation. Heinemann International***

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*American Generation* is a four-part series for secondary level students of English as a second language. Each part corresponds to approximately fifty hours of classroom instruction, with Book One designed for beginners/false beginners and Book 4 for intermediate level students. This course is an adaptation of the British English series, *New Generation*, for students in the Americas. Vocabulary and spelling follow the conventions of U. S. English, and most place names and cultural references are also U. S.-based.

Each level of *American Generation* consists of Student's and Teacher's Books, a Workbook and a cassette. Teachers unaccustomed to texts with so many components will be pleased by the overall coordination of this course. Cassettes are often the weakest part of multi-level texts, but the cassettes which accompany *American Generation* are of good quality with clear voices. The authors have also paid special attention to the structuring of the Teacher's Book. There are detailed plans for each lesson and answer keys for the Student's Book and Workbook. There are also three "Progress Tests" at each level, which can be duplicated and given to the class or to individual students. The introduction to the Teacher's Book contains useful suggestions for working with *American Generation*: how to organize group learning, how to handle students' first language in the classroom, and how to promote the use of English for classroom communication.

The Student's Book follows a modified grammar-based syllabus, each unit having both a focus structure and function. There are thirty units in each book, with each tenth unit dedicated to a "consolidation quiz" of the previous nine. At the end of each book there are several appendices, including a grammar review section and word list. The instructions and illustrations in the Student's Book and Workbook are adequate.

Two features set *American Generation* apart from similar efforts. Most importantly, the course does a good job of "recycling" structures throughout the series. Students will

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<sup>9</sup>With special thanks to Monserrat Rodríguez Amador for her expert opinion on the materials reviewed here.

encounter target structures in a variety of contexts before being tested on them. This feature is particularly important in a text to be used by full-time students who have other courses in addition to English. The second distinctive feature of the course is the amount of classroom research which went into it. In a series of workshops in Mexico last year, co-author Colin Granger spoke to observing classes in Spain and Latin America "to learn what students are interested and involved in and what leaves them cold." The results can be seen in the "problem-solving approach to learning" promoted throughout the course. Examples of this approach include: identifying people based on a family tree; finding an apartment in the classified section of the newspaper; ranking oneself on a physical fitness scale; and solving mysteries à la Sherlock Holmes. Teachers will recognize many of these techniques as the sort which are often used to provide a break from the regular text. For new teachers, their inclusion here is an attractive feature of this course.

On the negative side, the situations presented in *American Generation* are typical of those found in many English language texts. The mix of sports stars, rock musicians and secret agents seems so commonplace as to be boring to young adults. Several of the reading segments are predictable and far-fetched at the same time. In "The Accident," for example, a young woman is brought out of a coma after listening to a tape by her favorite rock group. In "The Ghost of Mary Boll" a seaside hotel goes from the auction block to no-vacancy status thanks to the invention of well-meaning bicycle tourist. The issues in such readings and their resolution is trivial; the sort of treatment one expects of television. More effective are the renditions of authentic stories like "The Elephant Man" and "Sherlock Holmes".

Although *American Generation* does not purport to teach North American culture, teachers who are concerned with the cultural component of their teaching will be pleased to learn that the course does a good job of portraying women in non-sexist roles. (In Book One, for example, women have roles as journalists, singers, spies, fast food workers, and nurses). Unfortunately, the course is not as successful in its treatment of people of color. In Books One and Two, the only African Americans are baseball players and boxers. Few Latinos or Asians can be found on the pages of *American Generation*. *American Generation* is by no means the only series that misrepresents U. S. culture, but teachers for whom cultural diversity matters may find the Anglo-centrism a drawback here.

Despite these problems, *American Generation* is a clearly-organized and structurally-complete course which gives ample attention to the four skills, and recognizes learners' need to experience vocabulary and structure in a variety of contexts before mastery is expected. This course is particularly recommended for use in programs where teachers do not have time to plan their lessons in detail.