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## ENGLISH CAFÉ – 197

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### TOPICS

Ask an American: segregation; paradise lost; to go off; trip versus journey versus voyage versus travel

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### GLOSSARY

**to come in** – to become involved in something or to be applicable to something  
\* As the city's grows, new problems are coming in, such as traffic and pollution.

**standard** – a rule or norm that everyone is aware of but that is usually not in writing  
\* Standards for housing should include electricity, heat, and clean water.

**to acclimate** – to become used to a new situation, or for a new situation to begin to feel normal  
\* How long did it take you to acclimate to living in South Dakota after you moved there from Hawaii?

**captain** – an elected team leader; a player who is chosen by other team members to be the leader  
\* Mateus was chosen as the team captain because he is a very fast runner who always scores a lot of points.

**representation** - the way that people are selected from a larger group and then speak or vote for the people in that group  
\* If the neighborhood association doesn't have good representation of the people who actually live in the neighborhood, then it won't be very effective.

**apparent** – seen; visible; able to be seen or understood  
\* Even if you just look at people on the street, it's apparent that Americans are becoming heavier.

**to work against (someone)** – to oppose someone; to make it more difficult or impossible for someone to do something  
\* They're trying to finish building the house by May, but the rainy weather is working against them.



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**to evolve** – to change slowly over time; to become better or more complex over time

\* The area has evolved from an agricultural community into a major industrial center.

**to defy** – to not do what someone tells you to do; to not follow the rules

\* Her quick recovery from cancer defied all the doctors' expectations.

**paradise lost** – a phrase used to describe a place as beautiful as God's paradise but that has become ruined in some way, or just difficult to travel to, taken from a poem by John Milton

\* He remembers his childhood home as a paradise lost.

**to go off** – to go or travel somewhere

\* When did you decide to go off to Boston?

**trip** – the length, or total amount, of the experience of beginning at one point and going to another point or place

\* What did you like best about your trip to Austin, Texas?

**journey** – the length, or total amount, of an experience of beginning at one point and going to another point or place, usually used to describe a long and varied, sometimes difficult, trip

\* He wrote a book about a journey to Mars in the future.

**voyage** – the length, or total amount, of the experience of beginning at one point and going to another point or place, usually by ship or into space

\* Why would you take a voyage across the Atlantic Ocean if you could fly instead?

**to travel** – to go on a trip; to go from one point to another, usually for work or for a vacation

\* Emilia wrote a book about her travels and now she wants to publish it.



## **WHAT INSIDERS KNOW**

### **The Jim Crow Laws**

Between 1876 and 1965, state and local governments in the United States “enacted” (made something become law) many laws for segregation in “public areas” (areas that are shared by people and owned by the government, not by individuals). “Collectively” (viewed as a group), these laws are known as the Jim Crow laws.

Jim Crow laws “mandated” (said that something must happen) segregation of schools, public transportation, restaurants, stores, “restrooms” (bathrooms), and even “drinking fountains” (devices on the street or in a park where one pushes a button and water comes out for drinking). In areas with Jim Crow laws, there were many signs that said “Whites Only,” meaning that African Americans were not allowed to use or do something there.

People thought that the Jim Crow laws were okay, because they gave African Americans a “separate but equal” “status” (classification). People thought that as long as there was public transportation for both African Americans and whites, then everything was fine. They might have agreed that not having public transportation for African Americans would be unfair and wrong, but as long as there was public transportation for people of all races, then they thought that the groups had “separate but equal” status. In this example, African Americans and whites were separate because they used different buses or different parts of buses, but equal because both groups were able to use the bus service.

In 1954, “separate but equal” education was “declared” (said to be) “unconstitutional” (not in agreement with American’s most important legal document). The other Jim Crow laws were “overruled” (undone, or changed so that they were no longer laws) in the mid-1960s.



## **COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT**

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 197.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café episode 197. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is eslpod.com. On it, you can visit our ESL Podcast Store, which has some additional premium courses in business and daily English that you will enjoy, I think. You can also download the Learning Guide for this episode, and every current episode. The Learning Guide will help you improve your English even faster.

On this Café, we're going to have another one of our Ask an American segments, where we listen to other native speakers talking at a normal rate of speech – a normal speed. We're going to listen to them and then explain what they are saying. Today we're going to talk about the topic of segregation, or the way that people of different races or ethnicities separate themselves or are separated by others. As always, we'll answer a few of your questions as well. Let's get started.

Our topic on this Café's Ask an American segment is "segregation," or what happens when people of different "races" or skin color are kept apart or keep themselves apart where they live, where they work, even where they study. In the United States, the word "segregation" usually refers to how African Americans – black Americans and white Americans are separated from each other, although it could also be used to talk about people of other races, such as Asian Americans, or Native Americans, or even Latino or Hispanic Americans.

Segregation has been officially illegal in the United States for many years, especially in education. There was a famous legal decision by the U.S. Supreme Court; the decision was called *Brown vs. Board of Education*. We talked about it in ESL Podcast English Café 166, so I won't go through that information again. You can listen to Café 166 for more information about that. Even though segregation in education is illegal, it still happens, not necessarily because the school separates people, but because parents move away from the school, or students themselves, within the school, segregate themselves by race.

We're going to listen to people talking about segregation in and around the city of Detroit, Michigan. Michigan is located in the central eastern part of the United



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States; it has a border with Canada. Detroit is the largest city in Michigan; it is a city that has a large African American population. Some schools that have traditionally been all white in the Detroit area, or mostly white, are now becoming all African American; that is, the students are now becoming all African American. When the school changes the kind of student they receive, this also can cause some problems – some challenges.

First we'll listen to someone who is the leader or the head of the East Detroit Public Schools; he'll describe some of those problems. After he's finished, we'll go back and explain what he said. Let's listen:

[recording]

"We've had more or less of a shotgun wedding in that regard. You have some different thinking that comes in, different styles, different art preferences, different standards of dress. And these are all things that can be acclimated into the school. But it takes a little bit of time."

[end of recording]

He begins by saying that East Detroit Public Schools has had a shotgun wedding regarding segregation. A shotgun wedding is something that is forced on someone very quickly. You don't have a choice. The phrase comes from the situation where a young woman would get pregnant before she was married and her father would force the father of the baby (the daughter's boyfriend) to marry her as soon as possible, back when having a baby and not being married was still considered something that was not acceptable. That has changed in many countries. It's called a shotgun wedding because the father is holding a shotgun to force the man to marry his daughter. Of course, he might not actually have a gun, but I think you get the idea. When we talk about shotgun weddings, we're talking about something that one is forced to do very quickly, not necessarily a wedding. In Detroit, the "demographics," the composition of the people who live in the area have changed so rapidly that schools have been forced to change and adapt to a new kind of students very quickly. They don't have the option; they have to teach the students who come to their school.

The head of the schools (the superintendent, he's called) then talks about some of the challenges that have been created by the rapidly changing demographics. As the schools have more African American students and fewer white students, some different thinking comes in, he says. The phrase "to come in" is a two-word phrasal verb usually meaning to enter. For example, "Please come in to my



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office and take a seat (sit down).” In this case, the phrase “to come in” means to become involved in something or to be applicable to something – to apply to something. With the changing demographics, a new way of thinking is needed or, in the superintendent’s words, some different thinking comes in – enters into the situation.

He says that there are also some different styles, different art preferences, and different standards of dress. “Preference” is something that you prefer, something you would choose over something else. So the new students have different art preferences, different styles, and different standards of dress. Standards of dress are the ways that people dress and are expected to dress, the kind of clothes that they buy. Standards, in general, are norms, what we would call rules that people are expected to follow, although they often are not written rules. Standards of behavior are ways that we expect people to act, for example using a quiet voice in the library, or giving an older person your seat on the bus. I have many people do that for me! Standards of dress might include, for example, whether you wear a tie or not, if you’re a man; how long your skirt should be, whether it’s okay to wear a hat indoors. These are all parts of a standard of dress, an expectation of the way people are supposed to behave.

At school, the standards of dress are changing as more African American students and fewer white students are there. In the school I went to, everyone had to wear the same clothing, what was called a uniform, so it didn’t really matter. Everyone had to wear the same ugly uniform. Well, the boys had a different uniform than the girls, so there was some difference. You could tell who was a boy and who was a girl by looking at their uniform, among other things.

The superintendent ends by saying that these are all things that can be acclimated into the school. The verb “to acclimate” (acclimate) means to become used to a new situation, or for a new situation to begin to feel normal. Just as new immigrants, when they arrive in the United States, are acclimated eventually into American society – they get used to it, the students’ changing styles, art preferences, and standards of dress also have to be acclimated into the school – become part of the school. The superintendent believes that this is possible, but says that it will take a little bit of time. A little bit means a small amount. He doesn’t think it can happen immediately – right away.

Let’s listen to his quote again.

[recording]



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“We’ve had more or less of a shotgun wedding in that regard. You have some different thinking that comes in, different styles, different art preferences, different standards of dress. And these are all things that can be acclimated into the school. But it takes a little bit of time.”

[end of recording]

Next we’re going to listen to a teacher at one of these Detroit schools. He’s going to talk about what happened on the football team at the high school when there were both African American and white students there.

First let’s listen and then we’ll explain.

[recording]

“The African American kids voted for the African American captains, and the white kids voted for the white captains and I didn’t want that kind of representation on our football team, so we didn’t elect captains. We sort of had fire captains that shifted, because I didn’t want there to be an apparent division. And that worked against us all season long, that sort of split in loyalties.”

[end of recording]

He begins by saying that African American kids (students) voted for the African American captains. On most sports teams, especially in high school, the students often select a captain, someone who will be a leader on the team. In this case, the football team voted for captains and the African American students all voted for the African American captains; the white students voted for the white captains. They have more than one captain, clearly.

But the coach didn’t want that kind of representation on the football team. “Representation” is the way, in this case, people are selected from a larger group to speak for or vote for people in that group. The United States government is based on a system of representation, where you vote for someone who then represents you – speaks for you in the government.

The coach didn’t want a situation where captains were selected just because of their race, so he decided that the players would not elect captains. Instead, he said they would have fire captains that changed or rotated. This might mean that one person was captain for a week, then someone else was a captain, and so



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forth. I have to say that I've never heard this expression "fire captain" before, but then again, I didn't play football in high school.

The coach did this because he didn't want there to be an apparent division on the team. Something that is "apparent" is something that is seen, something that people can understand by seeing it. If you look at our website, it will be apparent that we're trying to help people learn English; you can see that. If the coach let the students elect captains by race, using race as the reason why they elected someone, then there would be an apparent division, a visible separation between the African American and white players.

Finally, the coach says that this apparent division worked against the team all season long. The phrase "to work against (someone)" means to oppose someone, to make something more difficult or perhaps impossible for someone to do. If you're trying to save money, for example, but your husband keeps buying new cars and expensive clothes, then he is working against you. He might also be trying to impress another woman, so you should be careful and get yourself a good divorce lawyer!

So, the divisions between African American and white players worked against the team throughout the season, the period of time that they were playing football. The players had a split or a division in loyalties, meaning that players were more concerned about other players' race than whether they were good football players. Loyalty is who you are close to, who you are willing to do something for, or what you are willing to do something for.

Let's listen to the quote from the football coach one more time.

[recording]

"The African American kids voted for the African American captains, and the white kids voted for the white captains and I didn't want that kind of representation on our football team, so we didn't elect captains. We sort of had fire captains that shifted, because I didn't want there to be an apparent division. And that worked against us all season long, that sort of split in loyalties."

[end of recording]

Finally, we'll listen to the superintendent again. This time he's going to talk about his hopes for the East Detroit school system in the future. Let's listen.





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[recording]

“I would like to have East Detroit schools evolve into something that defies simple description. Then I can do them the biggest favor possible.”

[end of recording]

The superintendent says that he would like to have East Detroit schools evolve into something that defies simple description. “To evolve” means to change slowly over time. We talk about the noun “evolution” when we talk about animals and plants changing slowly over time, it takes a very long time for animals to evolve or change.

The superintendent understands that segregation is a difficult problem, but he wants the schools to evolve into something that defies simple description. The verb “to defy” (defy) usually means to not do what someone tells you to do, or not to follow the rules. Teenagers often defy their parents by, for example, changing the color of their hair or staying out – being away from home longer than they should be, especially at night. The superintendent wants the school to evolve – to change into something that defies simple description. He doesn’t want people to think of the schools as being all African American or all white, or as having problems because of the students’ race. He wants people to define or think about schools in terms of something other than race. So this is a somewhat common expression: “it defies simple description,” meaning it’s not possible to describe it in one or two words.

He concludes or ends by saying that if this happens – if this change happens, then he can do the biggest possible favor for the students. To do someone a favor means to do something for that person, something nice for that person usually. The superintendent believes that the biggest possible favor he can do for his students is by helping them go to a school that isn’t segregated – isn’t defined by race.

Let’s listen to his quote one more time.

[recording]

“I would like to have East Detroit schools evolve into something that defies simple description. Then I can do them the biggest favor possible.”

[end of recording]



Now let's answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Mahdi (Mahdi) in Afghanistan. Mahdi wants to know the meaning of the phrase "paradise lost."

A "paradise" is a perfect world, an ideal world where everyone is very happy; there's no pain or ugliness. "We went to Hawaii, it was like a paradise," or "it was paradise." It was wonderful, it was beautiful, everyone was happy. New married couples believe that they are living in paradise – for some reason, they'll learn!

"Lost" describes something that you don't own or you don't know where it is. "Paradise lost" refers to a famous poem by the English poet John Milton. It has a religious meaning; Paradise Lost describes, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, how God created the first man and the first woman in a paradise, an ideal place. But then, because the man and the woman, who we call in English Adam and Eve, disobeyed God (did something that God didn't want them to do), this caused Adam and Eve to be removed from paradise. They were kicked out of paradise, if you will, and so paradise was lost, at least paradise on earth. So if someone describes some location as a paradise lost, they probably mean that it was once beautiful, it was once almost perfect, but now something has happened. Something has changed and it is no longer a beautiful place.

Our next question comes from Giang (Giang) in Vietnam. The question has to do with the expression "to go off." "To go off" is a two-word phrasal verb; there are many, many phrasal verbs that use the word "go" in them: to go crazy, to go through, and so forth.

"To go off" means to get very angry, at least that's one possible definition, to lose your temper: "I got an F in math, and my Mom went off when she found out." Notice you can use it in the past tense as well: "He went off about my car and the fact that I had ruined it."

"To go off" can also mean to go or to travel to somewhere: "We're going off to the Philippines next month," we're going to travel to the Philippines next month. Not really!

To explode or shoot is also a definition of "to go off." "The gun went off," meaning the gun fired a bullet. Or, "The bomb will go off at midnight," meaning that it will explode at midnight.



So, “to go off” can mean to go somewhere – to travel somewhere; to explode or to shoot, as in a gun or a bomb; or simply to lose your temper.

Finally, we have a question from Farshad (Farshad) in Iran. Farshad wants to know the meanings of the words, and the differences among them, for “trip,” “travel,” “journey,” and “voyage.” Well, all of these words have to do with taking time and going to another place. Let’s try to talk about each one and explain the differences.

“Trip,” “journey,” and “voyage” all have to do with the amount of time that you go from your home, or go from one place to another place. “Trip” is probably the most common word. Sometimes people use it to talk about where they have to go for their business: a business trip. Sometimes a trip is a vacation, where you go to relax. A “journey” is usually something that is longer, perhaps even more difficult than just a trip: “They walked through the desert. Their journey took 40 days.” “Voyage” is usually used when talking about taking a trip on a ship or perhaps even in space: “Our cruise ship took us on a voyage that stopped at seven different islands,” we went on a ship.

“Travel” means to go on a trip, or a journey, or a voyage. “Will you travel to Spain next year?” Will you take a trip; will you go on a journey; will you go on a voyage? That’s the meaning of “travel.”

So, “trip” is the most common word used to talk about the length of time, to describe the time that you are going to be going to a different place. “Journey” is used, but it’s sometimes considered a little poetic, something that you would talk about, for example, in a traditional story or a children’s story or in a religious context. “Voyage” is probably the least common; it refers specifically to a ship, either a spaceship or a ship that is in the water. “Travel” can be used as a noun. Usually it’s plural, we say “travels”: “My travels have taken me to Europe and South America,” meaning I have traveled to Europe and South America; I have taken trips, I have gone on voyages, I have gone on journeys.

Our journey is now ended. If you have a question you can email us. Our email address is [eslpod@eslpod.com](mailto:eslpod@eslpod.com). Don’t worry, I won’t go off on you if you send us a question! We’ll try to answer it, instead, here on the Café.

From Los Angeles, California, I’m Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time right here on the English Café.



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