



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 254

TOPICS

Famous Americans: Scott Joplin; American Cities: Memphis; picture versus image versus photo; a versus an

GLOSSARY

composer – a person who writes music

* Who is your favorite composer, Bach, Beethoven, or Brahms?

ragtime – a type of music with a very strong beat that was most popular in the United States in the early 1900s

* For several years, Jim played ragtime in a restaurant that had a 1930s theme.

talent – a special ability to do something, usually better than most other people can do it; natural skill

* Jeff has a talent for learning languages, and he is now studying Russian.

to be well-received – to be liked by people; to be popular; to be liked by an audience

* Do you think the company president's speech tomorrow will be well-received?

largely – mostly; mainly; for the most part

* The audience consisted largely of men, but there were a few women there, too.

posthumous – award given after a person's death; recognition given to someone after he or she has died; happening after a person's death

* In Sandy's will, she made a posthumous gift of \$1 million to the university she had attended.

lumber – wood used for building; wood used in the construction of homes and other structures

* Let's make sure we have enough lumber to build a large doghouse.

mule – an animal born from a donkey and a horse, often used for transporting heavy things

* The only way to carry these things into those steep mountains is by taking mules.



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these days – in modern times; today

* Do many people still send personal letters through the mail these days, or do they mainly use email?

cargo – goods carried by ship, airplanes, or cars and trucks

* The police searched the ship's cargo looking for stolen goods.

to be associated with (something) – to be thought about in connection with something

* There are many expenses associated with owning a home that renters don't have to pay.

barbecue – the grilling of food; a way of cooking outdoors over a fire

* On a nice summer day, there's nothing better than tasty barbecue and lots of cold drinks!

picture – a design or likeness made by different ways, such as painting, drawing, or photography; a description of something with so much detail it creates an image in one's mind

* Lena drew a picture of her entire family and gave it to her parents as a present.

image – a design or likeness made by different ways, such as painting, drawing, or photography; an idea about someone or something, or the way people think about someone or something

* Can you put the image of my dog's face on the front of a T-shirt?

photo – photograph; a picture or likeness of someone or something made with a camera

* Grandma's house is filled with old photos of the family taken many years ago.



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

Elvis and the Memphis Mafia

Most people know who Elvis Presley was and are familiar with a few of his many hits songs. But how many people know about Elvis' Memphis Mafia?

At the age of 13, Elvis' family moved to Memphis, Tennessee, and Memphis became Elvis' "adopted" (not original, but recognized now as) hometown. The Memphis Mafia was a nickname the "media" (sources of news, such as newspapers and magazines) called the group of friends, family, and employees who "accompanied" (went to places with) Elvis and worked around him.

A "mafia" is an organization of criminals who usually commit major crimes and make a lot of money illegally. This group of friends was called the Memphis Mafia because they liked to wear black clothing, black sunglasses, and ride around town in black cars, much like real mafia members.

From the beginning, Elvis liked having family and friends around him, and the early members of the Memphis Mafia were his cousins and a childhood friend. Later, as the Memphis Mafia grew bigger and bigger, the media said that the group "consisted of" (included) many "yes-men," who agreed with everything Elvis said and who told Elvis what he wanted to hear, but who did not have his "best interest" (what was best for him) in mind.

Some in the Memphis Mafia were those who Elvis employed to help him, such as "bodyguards" (people whose job it is to guard and keep safe some person or some group) and "tour" (the plan of performing in different cities, one after the other) "logistics" (coordination of people and things for an event). Others were not Elvis' employees, but were people who "lived off" (had their basic needs paid for by) Elvis' gifts and other "fringe benefits" (extra benefits, other than money or a salary).



COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 254.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café episode 254. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

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On this Café, we're going to continue two of our ongoing series. First, we'll continue our series on famous Americans, focusing on Scott Joplin, who was a composer, or a person who writes songs, and a pianist, or a piano player. Then we'll continue our series on American cities, this time focusing on Memphis, Tennessee. And, as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

This Café begins with a continuation of our series on famous Americans. Today we are going to talk about a man named Scott Joplin. Joplin was an African American (or black) musician born in 1867, shortly after, or soon after slavery ended in the United States. Slavery, as you probably know, is when human beings own other human beings as property. Slavery was abolished, or ended in the United States officially after the end of the Civil War. At least, it was at that time that slavery illegal in all U.S. states. This was a time, the mid 19th century, when African Americans were not expected to become popular musicians among white people, yet Joplin's music became well loved by Americans of all races and colors.

Joplin became a well-known "composer" (composer), or a person who writes music. He was also a talented pianist, a person who plays the piano. He's especially famous for writing ragtime music for the piano. "Ragtime" (ragtime – one word) is a type of music with a very strong rhythm or beat. The rhythm, or the beat of the music is what you typically hear with, for example, the drums or bass or lower chords. [Jeff demonstrates by clapping his hands.] *Bom, bom, bom...bom, bom*. That's the rhythm, it happens to be the Bo Diddley beat of a



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song. The other part of the song is the melody, that's the main tune or the main part of the song. The beat is usually fairly steady; it stays the same throughout the song or the piece of music. Well, ragtime has a very strong rhythm or beat.

This kind of music became very popular in the U.S. in the early 1900s, and you can still hear Joplin's music sometimes today, especially in movies and TV shows where the actors are supposed to be living in the early 20th century. Joplin's most well known piece was also his first piece; it was called the Maple Leaf Rag (rag). Another popular ragtime song, perhaps the most popular song today of his repertoire – of his compositions is The Entertainer. This song became popular in the early 1970s when a movie called The Sting (sting) starring Robert Redford and Paul Newman used the song as part of its musical background; it was the theme song for the movie. I'm going to let you listen to a minute or so of this song because it is so famous, and because the recording you're going to hear is by the composer himself, Scott Joplin, recorded in the early part of the 20th century. Let's listen.

[music]

One of Joplin's biographers, someone who write books about other people, wrote that Joplin "composed music unlike any ever before written." His music took Americans by surprise, but they liked it very much. Ragtime music, which was popular between the late 19th century up through the end of World War I, let's say 1918, was based on in part some traditional African American style music. It has what is called a syncopated beat. That's where the word "rag" comes from; "rag" is a short form of "ragged" (ragged), which means generally uneven. A syncopated beat is where you have a beat that irregular or somehow not expected, not the normal, traditional beat that you might hear in music. Syncopation is an interruption of that traditional, more common type of musical beat. In any case, ragtime started its popularity in some of the towns that had large African American populations such as St. Louis and New Orleans. Although it was extremely popular during the early 20th century, after the 1920s there very few people who were listening to ragtime music. It became popular again, as I said, in the early 1970s, especially with the movie The Sting. A "sting," by the way, is when you try to catch someone in a trap. It can be something the police does; it tries to catch the criminals by creating a situation where the criminals will come to a certain location for example. But it can also be criminals trying to trap you into, for example, taking your money.



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Scott Joplin was called the King of Ragtime. He was born into a poor family, but when he was seven years old he was allowed to play piano in a neighbor's home, and in one of the homes where his mother had a cleaning job. Joplin clearly had musical "talent," a special ability to do something better than most other people can do it. It was a German music teacher named Julius Weiss who recognized Joplin's musical talent and started to give him free music lessons to help him learn more. Years later, Joplin remembered Weiss's kindness and generosity, and he sent money to the old man when he wasn't doing well.

When Joplin was older, he studied music at the George Smith College in Missouri. He also played piano for church and at dances. Sometimes he played other people's music; sometimes he played his own compositions, the things that he had written on his own. He became a traveling musician, or a musician who always is moving from one place to another looking for opportunities to make money. However, because he was black he had very limited choices about where he could perform. Little by little, slowly, however, his popularity grew as more and more people – both blacks and whites – became familiar with his music.

Eventually, Joplin began writing and producing operas in addition to the rags or ragtime songs that he was so well known for. However, his operas were not well-received by the public. The phrase "to be well-received" means to be liked by people, or to be popular.

In 1916, unhappily, Joplin became very sick and was sent to a mental hospital, a hospital for people who have psychological or mental problems. He died there the next year.

After the 1920s ragtime music was largely, or mostly forgotten in the U.S. It came back in the 1970s with the movie The Sting.

Long after his death, Joplin received many awards. When you get an award after you die that's called a "posthumous" award (posthumous). In 1970, for example, he became part of the Songwriters Hall of Fame, and six years later he received a Pulitzer Prize for his contributions to American music. Of course, he had been dead for many decades – that is, many years, so he really didn't get to appreciate the prize. In 1983, his face was shown on a U.S. postal stamp as part of a series on Black Heritage, or the history and importance of African Americans in U.S. history.



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Now let's turn to our next topic and continue another series, this one on American cities. Today we're going to focus on the city of Memphis (Memphis) in Tennessee. Tennessee is located in the central eastern part of the United States. Memphis has about 700,000 residents, people who live in the city, and about 1.3 million people in the larger metropolitan area, the suburbs and cities around Memphis. It is one of Tennessee's most heavily populated area, where you will find more people than other areas in Tennessee.

In the past, Memphis had the world's biggest markets for buying and selling cotton, hardwood "lumber," or wood used for building things, and "mules," or animals like donkeys or small horses. "These days," or in modern times, Memphis benefits from a lot of business development. The city has a central location where the Mississippi River comes down. There are many railroads and highways which cross through Memphis, so it is a good transportation place, we might call it a transportation hub (hub). The hub is the center of a wheel, where all of the parts of the wheel come together. Memphis is used now primarily for transportation, shipping, that sort of thing. The Memphis International Airport is the world's largest airport for business "cargo" (cargo), or for sending things rather than people. So if you are sending a package, for example, it's likely that here in the United States it may go through the city of Memphis. One major reason for that is that the shipping company Federal Express, or simply FedEx, is located in Memphis, and so that is one major reason for its popularity as a place for shipping cargo. Again, cargo is just anything that you would send other than people.

Memphis is also very well known for something else in American culture, then that is its music, especially because Elvis Presley, the so-called King of Rock and Roll, was from Memphis. Elvis' home, Graceland, which so many people want to visit, is also there in Memphis. I won't talk about Elvis since we already talked about him and Graceland in English Café 232; you can listen to that. But there are many other famous musicians that came from Memphis, including the blues musicians Muddy Waters and B.B. King, and a musician that certainly makes me blue, Justin Timberlake. "To be the blue" means to become sad. I'm joking of course – not really! Don't really like Justin Timberlake, but everyone has their different likes. If you don't know who Justin Timberlake is, you are a lucky person.

Memphis is often associated with country music. "To be associated with" means that something is thought about in connection with this other thing. For example, for many people, opera music is associated with wealthy, or rich people.



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Memphis is normally associated with country music, but musicians who work with many other styles of music are also from this area.

Every spring, Memphis has a large celebration called Memphis in May. If you want to visit Memphis, May would be a good month to go. For the entire month, the city organizes events to celebrate the city's history and culture. It is here that you can find the World Championship Barbecue Cooking Contest. "Barbecue" (barbecue), often simply abbreviated with the letters BBQ, is a way of cooking outdoors – of grilling, usually with very flavorful, spicy sauces. So, you would take a piece of chicken and you would put it in this spicy sauce – barbecue sauce, which is a very thick sauce, and then you would cook it on a grill outside, like a stove but with fire underneath. The World Championship Barbecue Cooking Contest is the largest contest for cooking pork barbecue, meat from pigs, so if you like barbecue pork, you probably want to go to Memphis in May! Barbecue is a kind of cooking that is very popular traditionally in the southern United States and especially among African Americans. It's also popular among other groups; Koreans, for example, in the U.S. are known for their barbecue.

The following month, in June, Memphis celebrates the Cotton Festival. We talked about how Memphis was famous for its cotton. Cotton is a material that is used to make clothing and other goods. It was cotton that was the primary economic export of the southern United States. Cotton, however, requires a lot of – or used to require a lot of human labor, which is why the southern states had so many slaves, and why they did not want to get rid slavery because they needed this cheap labor – these cheap workers to help pick the cotton, take the cotton from the fields and make use of it.

Many visitors to Memphis like to go to the National Civil Rights Museum. We've talked about the U.S. civil rights movement before, the efforts of women and racial minorities to try to change society, to make Americans society more equal. Dr. Martin Luther King – the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. was a leader of the civil rights movement for African Americans, as you certainly know. He was assassinated, or murdered, at a hotel in Memphis, and that's where the National Civil Rights Museum is today.

So if you like barbecue, if you like Elvis Presley, if you like country music, you have some good reasons to go to Memphis. I have never been to Memphis, but someday I hope to go.

Now let's answer some of the questions that you have sent us.



Our first question comes from two people: Jawid (Jawid) in Afghanistan and Lexa (Lexa) in Ukraine. Both have the nearly same question, so we'll answer both of them. We have an old expression: "To kill two birds with one stone." You are able to throw a rock or a stone and kill two birds with one, that means you are making efficient use of your time. Here in my house we have an expression: "To kill two cats with one stone." Same thing. I'm joking, of course – no I'm not!

Their question has to do with the meanings of the words "picture," "image," and "photo." A "picture" (picture) is a general term that could describe a painting, a drawing, or photography, something made with a camera. It's also used as a way of describing something that is a very vivid or very detailed image in your mind: "I can picture walking down the beach in Santa Monica." I can picture that – I can see it in my mind.

"Image" (image) is the copy of the form of a person or thing, either in picture form or in solid form like a statue. For example, you may be on the Web and you may see an image of Abraham Lincoln. It's like a picture, but an image could also be, for example, a piece of sculpture. Something made out of rock or stone could be in the image of a famous person. "Image" also means an idea you have about someone or something, the way that you think about someone. I have this image of San Francisco as being cold and foggy. That's my image of it; that's the way I think about it.

"Photo" (photo) is short for "photograph," which is when you use a camera and you produce a picture, or something that looks like what is in front of the camera. A photo is a type of picture; both photos and pictures are types of images. It's very common for the word "picture" to be used when you really mean "photo," so some people will say, "Take my picture." They mean take my photograph, use your camera and take a photograph of me. Or, "Take a picture of that dog, who is running down the street." Take a photograph of the dog. Why is the dog running down the street? Well, it's trying to escape the children in my neighborhood – or maybe it's trying to escape me!

Our next question comes from Iran, from Dr. Rahmati, I think (Rahmati). The question has to do with the use of the indefinite article in English, which is either spelled with the letter "a" or "an," we'll talk about which you use with which in a moment.



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In general, an indefinite article means that you are thinking of something but nothing in particular, nothing specific. That's why we used the word "indefinite" – not definite. For example: "I want to have a sandwich for lunch." I don't say what kind of sandwich; I'm not saying a specific kind of sandwich or that sandwich sitting on the table. The opposite of an indefinite article would be a definite article, which in English is the word "the" (the). "I want the sandwich on the table." You want that specific, definite sandwich, not just any sandwich.

"A" and "an" are both indefinite articles; they're used in front of certain nouns. The difference depends on the pronunciation of the word that comes after it. "An" (an) is used in front of words that either begin with a vowel or begin with the letter "h" that is silent. An example of a word with a silent "h" would be "honor" (honor); the "h" is not pronounced. So, we would say, "Jesse would like an orange" – "an." "It's an honor to meet you." "Patrick is an American."

However, sometimes when people are speaking quickly the "an" isn't stressed and it may sound like it's just the letter "a". So, you may hear someone say "an American," and you may not hear that it was "an," you may have heard just the "a" part, and that happens when we are speaking quickly. Sometimes it happens because you are going to say one thing and then you change your mind and say another word, and if there's a pause – if there's a break in between it might not match. For example I might say, "I would like to meet a..." and then instead of saying "German" I might say "Englishman." I would like to meet a...Englishman." Well, the correct form is "I would like to meet an Englishman," "an," but because I changed my mind while I was speaking, the two didn't match. I do this, unfortunately, a lot. I try not to, but you may hear me do that sometimes. If you do, now you know why!

If you have a question for ESL Podcast you can email us. Our address is eslpod@eslpod.com.

Before we go to our credits I want to thank you for listening. I thought it would be nice since we were talking about Scott Joplin to listen to another one of Joplin's famous pieces of piano music called the Maple Leaf Rag. This is another public domain recording of that. I hope you enjoy it! After that, you'll be able to hear our credits. Thank you again for listening, and we hope you come back and listen to us here on the English Café.

[music]



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