The title of *What Makes America Tick?* is an interesting discussion feature, since it plays on an idiomatic expression. I think students should be familiar with the expression “to find out what makes somebody tick” because it is an important part of the underlying premise of the book, namely that in addition to learning language skills, students can expect to learn a little bit more about what drives members of the target culture. Such a discussion will likely generate interest and curiosity. Students can preview the chapter titles and look through the book to build expectations and try to formulate an initial answer to the overriding question of the course of study: What are the shared values and assumptions springing from the historical, collective cultural consciousness of U.S. Americans that make them act and think the way they do? What *does* make America tick?

As a side note, please make students aware that the phrase is an idiom and does not refer in any official capacity to the study of American culture, economics, politics, etc. I was made aware of this misconception (mostly a phonetic one, I think) when I found out to both my horror and amusement that several of my students had written journal entries to the teacher who was their level advisor that semester about how much fun they were having in “Americatics” (*America + ticks*). While I was flattered that they would mention it in their journals and pretty impressed with their linguistic ingenuity in doing so, it may help you from the outset to make it clear to students that the course of study outlined in the book is primarily sociolinguistic awareness and language practice in the four skill areas based within the context of the discipline of American cultural studies. EFL teachers espe-
cially need to make their students aware of the constraints of such an approach, as it is based heavily in popular culture and cultural artifacts that, while part of the collective consciousness of many Americans, do not systematically represent subcultural and individual concerns that ESL students will have the advantage of encountering more readily in their daily lives while interacting with individuals from the target culture. In other words, although What Makes America Tick? is a fairly comprehensive representation of some major historical events and cultural trends in the United States, it in no way can serve as a sum total of every historical and cultural relationship, and students must be reminded that U.S. history and culture is much more complex than that which a textbook of this scope can adequately cover.

I designed What Makes America Tick? for intermediate language students as an intelligent alternative to “dumbed-down” and overly simplified teaching materials often created at this level. The book actually grew out of my own anger and disappointment with the materials used in my German as a Second Language classroom in Austria. Having arrived with a BA in German, I was not very happy to find out that classroom materials consisted mainly of “kiddie” activities. I vowed then and there that if I ever became a language teacher, I would do my best to create something engaging for adult learners. I therefore made every effort to design and sell this project as an intermediate text and to keep the kind of language activities and skills needed to complete them at the ACTFL intermediate-level guidelines.

Because the text includes cultural artifacts, there are advanced-level materials contained in the text. However, the activities that learners are asked to engage in with the texts are intermediate per ACTFL guidelines. Such activities include: asking and answering questions; initiating, sustaining and closing conversations; comprehending connected discourse; combining and recombining given elements; and writing narratives, autobiographies, summaries, and paraphrases. You will note that unit activities progress from primarily narrative/descriptive activities and activities that call for question answering and simple recombinations of learned elements to slightly more complex activities involving stating observations to simple hypothesis and opinion support as the units progress. This push into limited ACTFL advanced-level indicators was factored into the book preparation as a conscious push toward lower-end advanced language use and should not be taken as an indicator of initial design for advanced level students.

**Unit Introductions**

My main goal with the activities on the unit opening pages is to provide an introduction to the unit, to provide visual stimulation for learners, and to
activate prior and/or related knowledge on the topic in a schemata-building manner. The activities are also designed to encourage intermediate speakers to speculate, formulate, and articulate simple hypotheses or express limited opinions without the need for supporting those opinions or using advanced indicators such as subjunctive case. This can serve to prepare intermediate students for more systematic advanced usage. The photo on each unit title page is intended to be used for schemata-building, brainstorming, and discussing ideas and engaging in information-gap activities and communicative work.

**Net Surfers, Presidential Suite, On TV, Music Box, At the Movies**

*Net Surfers* is comprised of a list of pretested Internet search terms bringing up Web sites that are related to the content of each unit. Because URLs change so rapidly, I thought that providing the tools for fruitful Internet searching would be more helpful than listing actual URLs themselves. The *Presidential Suite* accompanies the time line and gives an idea of who was president during the time that the chapter events were taking place. *On TV, Music Box, and At the Movies* all provide a few suggestions for authentic media realia related to the topics or eras covered in the unit that learners can watch or listen to in their free time; the lists are not meant to be exhaustive. This is also intended as a potential classroom resource, since permissions and copyright issues prevented them from being included more systematically in the curriculum.

**Preparing to Read about . . .**

This brief overview of each unit seeks to provide learners with schemata-building foreshadowing that provides both a content summary and context for understanding the unit as it relates to preceding and following units. Students are asked to do a self-reflective or interview activity based on the major concepts that will appear later. This serves both schemata-building and information-gap functions. Since students are asked to relate main concepts to themselves and their own experiences, personal information may be brought up in this setting. Each unit contains a reminder to students that they are in no way obligated to share information in public that they feel uncomfortable about. It is my belief that in making personal connections to texts and ideas, both personal and linguistic risks are taken. We as teachers should provide a safe place for that sort of risk-taking by assuring our stu-
dents that they, as adult learners, are both able and allowed to choose for themselves what information will be shared through language.

**Learning New Vocabulary about . . .**

The words chosen for each unit are mostly high-frequency words and derivatives taken from Bauman and Culligan’s 1995 frequency-adapted General Service List. The 2284-word list is derived from West’s (1953) General Service List, Bauer and Nation’s (1995) headword concept, and frequency numbers from the Brown Corpus (Frances and Kucera 1982). Unit vocabulary also highlights to some degree key concept words specific to U.S. American history and ideology. Whether vocabulary is pretaught or taught in conjunction with or even after the reading is left to the individual teacher. Research supports both approaches at the intermediate level, and the best approach may vary from class to class and even from student to student. In any case, vocabulary is a major component of the concept of the book and should be accorded a proportionate amount of time. Difficult vocabulary from cultural artifacts such as novels is glossed since these are included as demonstrations of language use influenced by history in cultural products. Learners are also encouraged to guess at words in context and to read for holistic comprehension without knowing every vocabulary word.

**Talking about New Words and Ideas**

I designed this section to give learners the opportunity to relate key new words/concepts to their own personal lives and to create personal synonym lists for certain vocabulary words. The learner is provided with information as to why the concept is important in the United States. Then the learner focuses on his/her own interactions with the concept by reflecting about how (whether) these concepts operate in their communities and how (whether) these concepts operate in the students’ own personal frameworks. Such discussion is genuine and authentic, information-gap and communicative. It also serves as a further schemata-building activity for the reading. Again, the activity can be done after the reading if the class/teacher prefers it, but it is suggested that it come before the reading. I recommend small group work rather than large class discussion (at least initially).

**Making Predictions about the Reading**

All good readers make predictions about the texts they are about to encounter, whether those predictions are correct or not. Each unit contains
prediction-making activities, explaining why it is important. Because this is an easily worn-out and repetitive activity, I made conscious efforts to include activities such as discussing, comparing notes, altering assumptions based on new information obtained during comparison, and slightly increased negotiation demands as the units progress. I believe that in addition to providing pedagogically sound prereading activities, this section also fosters the kind of discussion that lays a foundation for more advanced linguistic skill indicators.

**Reading about . . .**

The reading passages are designed to be challenging and will need to be given adequate time in the classroom. While I clearly focused the textbook on intermediate learners, I designed the vocabulary and sentence structures in the text to stretch the intermediate learner. I feel that the discussion of abstract historical concepts should occur in an accessible yet intelligent manner. While the resulting materials may seem intimidating at first, I assure you that ACTFL reading guidelines for intermediate abilities were adhered to closely during the writing and revision stages of the text, especially those regarding the use of grammatical forms related to advanced use such as subjunctives and hypothetical theses. Intermediate-mid and intermediate-advanced ACTFL guidelines in reading state that the student can understand and respond to texts in which the main ideas are presented via description and narration. They can also deal effectively with texts that address a variety of social needs and that activate schemata. While the sentence structure in the readings becomes more complex and varied as the chapters progress, there is nothing represented in the reading passages that cannot be processed cognitively by the intermediate adult learner. With special attention to key vocabulary and a “can do” attitude on the part of the learner and teacher, the reading activities should prove to be one of the main factors in helping the learner along the path from intermediate to more advanced usage.

**Responding to Information about . . .**

I am particularly happy with this section, which I designed to give learners the opportunity to engage in global interaction with the text before being asked to demonstrate discrete point comprehension. I added this section toward the final stages of revising the manuscript based on classroom action research that inquires into the reading processes of L1 learners. This shows that students who are asked to make connections between texts and themselves, texts and other texts, and texts and the world around them as well as
inferences such as imagery, conclusions, predictions, and synthesis learn to become more competent readers than students who are asked to merely respond to comprehension checks. I would like to acknowledge and thank Ellin Oliver Keene and Susan Zimmermann for recording their classroom experiences and for inspiring this section of the textbook.

Understanding the Reading: Comprehension Check

I designed this section with a dual purpose: (1) to make sure that learners understand the key points of the readings, as they are necessary to understanding information from the rest of the chapter, and (2) to introduce students to various evaluation techniques that are likely to be encountered in the U.S. academic setting. I chose to present evaluation tools as a cultural construct, highlighting their reasons for use, as well as the “tricks” to better maneuvering them.

Authentic Cultural Material Activity

These activities vary from unit to unit but have the common goal of exposing the learner to an original cultural artifact such as an excerpt from a famous speech or novel, a piece of artwork or advertisement, etc., with emphasis on one or more of the language skills. In addition to serving as a tangible representative cultural product of the historical, factual materials presented in the readings, these artifacts are also used in the units as a springboard to linguistic exercises that focus on the way in which language is used by native speakers to achieve communicative goals to a larger audience.

“About Our Own Experience” Activities

I designed these activities as spin-offs from the Authentic Cultural Material Activity to give intermediate-level language users an opportunity to express themselves meaningfully and to create with their level of linguistic resources. Although this section generally focuses on a specific linguistic structure, I did not conceptualize it as a grammar/structure section per se. Rather, I choose to highlight the link between cultural and pragmatic awareness. Sociolinguistic competency, or at the very least, an awareness of it via cultural materials, is the main goal outcome of this section. I feel strongly that students should have the opportunity to “publish” the work created during these activities. For example, in Unit 4, a speech day can be held in class. As the students listen to a recording, attention can be given to the
strength and conviction in Martin Luther King, Jr.’s voice as he delivers his speech. Students can then give their “I Have a Dream” speeches, focusing on speaking strongly and clearly. Other classroom publishing opportunities can be created by the use of “wall newspapers” in the hallway or a “language gallery” in the classroom.

**Link to Today**

This feature is perhaps the most important one of the textbook and the one of which I am the most proud. I designed Link to Today with the intent of drawing an explicit connection between cultural artifacts, historical events, and current values of U.S. Americans. This section consists of a brief explanation of the current situation and its relationship to the historical one. Short excerpts and story lines featuring actual U.S. citizens from more recent newspapers, opinion polls, magazines, etc., are presented along with various opinions and activities that are offshoots of the original historical event discussed. There are no formal activities linked with this section. I present it to you, the teacher, and your students to be used in whatever manner you find most useful, either as an informational activity, an impetus for discussion, or the basis for further projects.

Since many of the Link to Today topics are controversial and fall outside of the norms of what may be addressed in the classroom in the home cultures of many students, I would like to give you some general advice for this section. I feel that it is extremely important to both introduce and reinforce to students that the U.S. is a very heterogeneous society with many opinions and viewpoints represented. The excerpts chosen for this section replicate this multiplicity, and I made every effort to give voice to varying sides of and opinions about the issue. It may help to explain that culturally, U.S. Americans are educated and socialized from an early age to respect the opinions, viewpoints, and practices of others while being proud of and strong in their own. It may also help to validate the possibility that the viewpoints expressed by U.S. Americans may not be representative of the ones held by the students. It should also be made clear that the information is given only to help in the process of understanding the variety of current values and beliefs, not to force students to take sides on any issue presented. In addition, you may want to inform the students that teachers in U.S. American educational institutions are discouraged from and generally don’t give personal opinions in the classroom as part of the practice of encouraging individual students to formulate their own opinions, just as I have not included my personal opinions in the student portions of the textbook.
I believe that an atmosphere of respect for all reactions to the issues portrayed and one that encourages but does not enforce the articulation of opinions in the classroom is the most conducive to meeting the goals of the Link to Today sections. When the value of each individual contribution is recognized and when students understand that there is no right or wrong answers to these issues (including the teacher’s), their willingness to speak and share ideas should increase, thereby resulting in more authentic language practice. As always, students who do not wish to deal with certain issues brought up in these sections should not be forced to do so.

**Putting It All Together**

This section provides a capstone to the activities presented throughout the unit and is designed to allow learners to process the information in its entirety and to reflect upon how they understand the information and how they interact with it. It provides learners with the opportunity to reflect how the gained knowledge will be used upon return to the home culture or upon further integration into the target culture. The progression of questions in this section was originally conceptualized as a midterm exam and elicited consistently positive responses from students. It makes the testing of detailed, factual information more valid by integrating it with personal understanding. Therefore, along with a leading question that asks students to explain the factual events of the unit in as much detail as possible, any or all of the questions in this section could be used for short answer/essay exams.