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FIRST FACTS FIRST (ABOUT GREAT BRITAIN AND THE USA)
by Grzegorz A. KLEPARSKI. NKJO-CHEŁM PUBLISHERS, 1999. PP. 167.
ISBN 83-911683-0-1

First Facts First (1999) by G. A. Kleparski is aimed at prospective students of English departments at Polish universities as well as Teacher Training Colleges. It contains 'first facts' everyone speaking English outside the native communities ought to be aware of. Below, I will outline the contents of the book and try to formulate some critical remarks.

In the introductory Chapter, the author explains the term "English-speaking countries" and outlines the idea behind the Commonwealth. Here, also, the reader will find basic facts about the English language, its origin as well as contemporary varieties. *Part One* of the book is devoted to the United Kingdom. Here, the author points out the location, regions, climatic pattern as well as the population of Great Britain. The history sketch follows in which one will enjoy brevity and matter-of-factness in the description of complex historical events. Should the reader be undecided as to which places are worth seeing, the author helps to clarify that issue by paying special attention to places of interest in the British capital.

First Facts First is the material to resort to if one is in need of basic information concerning the Queen and rudimentary information about British Administration and the government. Should the reader seek the text of the British anthem, it is to be found in the section entitled "British Administration, the Queen and the Government". Many a bad word has been said about the Polish educational system. For the differences between the system of education in Britain and Poland the reader might want to consult "The System of Education in Great Britain" section of the book.

Literature is the domain of art without which life would be dull and hardly poetic. The author brings the reader closer to a number of great names and their work, supplying brief descriptions for some titles as they are mentioned. *Part*

One ends with information on life, national holidays and traditions of the inhabitants of the United Kingdom.

Part Two concentrates on the United States of America. In the section entitled "The Land and the People" the author gives details concerning the size, neighbours and geographical features of the USA as well as the inhabitants of the country. The following sections describe the early settlers, their fight for independence and the American Civil War. In case the reader is unfamiliar with the notions of the Great Depression, Cold War or the Watergate scandal *First Facts First* is the source to consult for brief yet clear description. Similarly to *Part One*, here the reader will also find out about a great number of places to visit, with special emphasis placed on New York.

In sections "US Government, Constitution and Administration" and "Political Parties" readers will learn not only about the rights Americans have or the party system of the country, but also how it is governed. In the section "The American Flag and Anthem" one can find not only the text of the *Star-Spangled Banner* but also that of the *Pledge to the Flag*. The section "The Pillars of American Literature" points out the historical trends in American literature and names of their representatives offering short descriptions of some of their compositions. The remaining few sections of *Part Two* bring to light various aspects of American daily life, holidays celebrated and food favoured by its citizens.

The following sections "The Heroes of American Folklore" and "The American Inventions that Changed the World" offer brief descriptions of famous people who influenced lives of Americans at various points in history.

On the following pages readers will find a series of observations on Poland, Britain and Poland compared to the USA, as formulated by Anglo-Saxon and Polish citizens. They are all subjective and should be seen and understood as personal impressions made by their writers.

Likewise, the book contains a number of multiple choice tests on the culture of English-speaking countries presented in this work. To be able to check one's performance the key is included. There are five tests of various lengths by five different authors. In four of the tests each of the statements or questions is followed by four and in one by five alternatives to choose from in order to complete a statement or answer a question. The tests deal with information the reader is presented with in *First Facts First*. Every entry of each test additionally provides readers with the ability to supply an appropriate answer, should they decide neither of the options to be correct.

First Facts First presents rudimentary information about various walks of life, however, the author fails to mention painters or sculptors who, equally to giants of literature, create works of art. The readers would definitely appreciate both reading about the artists and having the opportunity to see the illustrations or pictures of their work, were they provided by the author. One must not forget

other works of art in the form of architecture. Although the reader finds some information about Sir Christopher Wren, it must be understood that he was definitely not the only meaningful example, even though he is the only one that is mentioned. Similarly, the author does not provide sufficient information about composers and performers of music in either Great Britain or the United States. The author mentions *The Beatles* but only in relation to their hometown – Liverpool in the "Places to See" section and the roots of jazz with one of its most famous performers also in the "Places to See" section devoted to the USA.

In the section entitled "The Land and the People" the author presents the map of the United States, however, it seems to be far from complete, as the states of Alaska and Hawaii are missing. Additionally, the author provides description of geographical features such as the Rocky Mountains or Death Valley, which would be easier to identify were they presented in the form of a map. The reader would also find it less troublesome to recognise mountain regions or rivers in Great Britain if a geographical map was included to go with the description.

More inquisitive readers could find it surprising not to be able to find other basic facts concerning other English-speaking countries, namely Canada and Australia. One should hope for another publication of that nature to make up for the shortage. In *First Facts First* readers will come across a few spelling mistakes, but their small number does nothing to deflect from the content and value of the publication.

The book is easy to read, follow and comprehend. It is a reliable source of basic information and facts about Great Britain and the United States. It must be noted here that the book is based on various reliable sources and among similar publications it is undoubtedly worth recommending to potential readers. It contains information every student of English should be acquainted with hence it is indispensable on every such person's bookshelf. This publication will undoubtedly be useful to every prospective student of any English department in a Polish university or Teacher Training College.