



Marvin T. Neumann

*Amerikanismus. Die Ideologie
der westlichen Moderne*

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The question of what exactly “Woke” is has become one of the most important social topics in recent years. There is no consensus between supporters and opponents, and even among critics, it is not entirely clear what the roots and implications of this ideology are. While some authors do not take the phenomenon seriously and see it as a passing fad, others believe it is much deeper, more complex, and has wider consequences than are usually assumed. One of them is the German researcher Marvin Neumann, who in his book “Americanism: The Ideology of Western Modernity” seeks to place the contemporary emergence of “Woke” in the context of the development of American liberalism, which he refers to as the ideology of Americanism.

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Neumann is not the first to discuss Americanism as an ideology. It is a widely used and vague concept, and its frequent use has not contributed to its clarification. In his book, Neumann refers to the new civilization that emerged on American soil. He acknowledges that Americanism is not monolithic and without internal contradictions, noting the tension between ethnocentrism and faith in universal human equality (13). Thus, Americanism, combined with the Critical Theory of the post-Marxist left, culminated in contemporary “Wokeness”. On the other hand, conservatism translated private-civil and individualistic elements into neoliberalism (12). Neumann identifies two poles of Americanism, presenting it as the most complete expression of the project of Western modernity. It is widely accepted and underpins numerous contemporary phenomena: liberal democracy, multiculturalism, universalism of human rights, etc. (15). Neumann’s image of America is a far cry from the popular and simplistic image of the land of cowboys.

The basic elements of Americanism were brought from Europe. Firstly, it is the Enlightenment and liberal ideological heritage. Radically egalitarian thought influenced the understanding of the natural law order among American revolutionaries (15). The new society was to be created on the basis of the “state of nature”. In this regard, the ethnic substrate, that is, the idea of the egalitarian and democratic tradition of the Anglo-Saxons, also plays an important role. Another important moment to which Neumann rightly draws attention is progressivism (19–20), which also shaped America from the beginning. The influence of the Jewish Old Testament tradition, which played an important role in pre-revolutionary Protestantism, is also discussed in particular. The ideology of the “Manifest of Destiny” is explicitly linked to Puritan origins (22). Thus, the concept of American exceptionalism is reduced to the Judeo-Protestant interaction of the 17th and 18th centuries (23). In an ideological sense, this provides fertile ground for the later development of what can be called “autochauvinism”. Neumann uses Roger Scruton’s term “oikophobia” to describe the renunciation of heritage and home.

However, it would be incorrect to assume that things only progressed in one direction. Neumann rightly highlights the dualism between healthy ethnocentrism and universalist-egalitarian ideas. “The instinctive racial self-perception of the British settlers existed alongside the development of American national identity, i.e. it unreflectively preceded it. This parallelism always carried the potential for conflict” (30). In essence, from the outset in America there was a conflict between proclaimed ideals and political reality. This is not a new insight. However, unlike leftist critiques, Neumann does not view this as a matter of narrow-mindedness or cynicism but rather the impossibility of achieving professed ideals within a specific ethno-cultural context. Nevertheless, the simultaneous presence of ethnocentric and multiethnic-humanist ideas influenced the era of the founding fathers. Many of them held conflicting ethno-nationalist and liberal-cosmopolitan perspectives. The founding myth, which laid the foundation for future Americanism, existed on three levels: ethnic (Anglo-Saxon origin), state-ideological (Enlightenment principles and liberalism), and religious (viewing America as a New Israel with a chosen people and a global mission) (33–34). According to the author, the American dualism between ethnic particularity and Enlightenment-liberal cosmopolitanism combined with a universalist awareness of mission emerges from this era. Neumann interprets all subsequent American history as an acknowledgment of this incompatibility. This later manifested itself first



in Anglophobic sentiments and then in anti-white self-criticism. Simultaneously, the liberal-universalist aspect found expression in globalist development.

Neumann identifies the first wave of anti-white sentiment and self-criticism in America in the mid- 19th century as originating from an anarcho-Protestant blend, where the ideals of racial egalitarianism and a Puritan sense of mission intertwine (35). The author highlights how John Brown's abolitionism around 1859 took on terrorist undertones and how the early feminist movement in America combined pro-black sentiments with the ideology of sexual liberation. Following the Civil War, the Republican Party, at its 1868 convention endorsed unrestricted immigration, particularly from Asian countries. The *Sacramento Union* newspaper even suggested to its readers that "population exchange" was a part of "healthy trade relations" (39). Thus, even in the early period, the "egalitarian-universalist essence of Americanism and its burden of racial otherness" was politically defined (40). Neumann traces the progression towards "the Woke" through the "Ethical Culture" movement, focusing on Felix Adler and William James, with a particular emphasis on James's pragmatism. Neumann argues that even in these early stages of American development, there was a clear shift away from the Anglo-American ethos, specifically a deliberate separation of liberal ideals from the Anglo-Saxon group as the bearer (44). In other words, the Anglo-Saxon element was seen as a catalyst for the emergence of an enlightened humanity. To fulfil this sacred mission, it had to relinquish its own ethnic identity. Essentially, the universalization of America signifies its own self-abolition.

Neumann then follows James's students John Dewey and Jane Addams, who serve as perfect examples of the Enlightenment-liberal and Protestant-missionary traditions. Moreover, Dewey was considered the most important intellectual in the USA in the thirties, and Addams herself was a feminist and social activist pioneer. The author demonstrates that, according to Dewey, Americanism aimed to create a hybrid modernist culture formed from elements of all human cultures. This culture would embody a perfect liberal-modern way of life, ultimately leading to the establishment of a global civilization. It goes without saying that within this framework there is no room for a dominant role for WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) culture, which must also be assimilated into the new environment. Dewey also linked equality and liberalism, as he believed that equality was essential for liberalism to thrive. Only when freedoms and power are distributed fairly can each individual develop security. Like Dewey and Addams, she advocated breaking the dominance of WASP culture and was against the assimilation of foreigners. Instead, she believed in maintaining their ethno-cultural identity, which would imply the transformation of the country into a cosmopolitan society. On the other hand, the concept of Christian mission was secularized and transformed into "humanitarian interventionism".

Thus, according to Neumann, American dualism has split into two opposing currents since 1900, each developing its own ideological and political tendencies. The liberal-progressive movement has embraced the concept of Americanism. This tradition gave rise to the left-liberalism of the 1960s, reaching its pinnacle in the "Woke" culture of the second decade of the 21st century. Neumann notes: "Dewey, Addams and their followers are often disregarded, yet they played a crucial role in sharpening the conceptual framework of the post-war world" (49).

Specific countercultural variants of left-liberalism also played a significant role in this development. Neumann dedicates valuable attention to the group of "Young Intellectuals"



and their magazines, books, manifestos and theatrical performances. In these, the spirit of egalitarianism, progress and individual emancipation found its expression alongside contempt for one's own culture and enthusiasm for anything that deviates from the norm. Their rebellion against the dominant culture implied a search for authenticity within the framework of multiculturalism and a break from customs. Neumann rightly draws attention to the magazine *The New Republic* and its influence on the development of the American elite, as well as their desire to create a true Western civilization in which the values of Jerusalem, Egypt, and Greece would merge with the humanistic culture of the Renaissance, the ideals of equality from the French Revolution and the scientific concepts of the 19th century" (52). Neumann identifies Randolph Bourne as the primary representative of this ideological circle. He analyses Bourne's positions in detail, noting the shift from anti-Anglo-Saxon to anti-white, specifically anti-European Americanism (56).

The First World War was seen by the American public not only as a conflict between the nations, but also as a cultural struggle. On one side were the ideals of justice, freedom and democracy, while on the other were German ideas about power. Neumann describes the course of the Anglo-American struggle against Germany as well as various forms of discrimination against Germans in the USA. This led to the formation of "militant Americanism" on common ground between the majority Anglo-Saxon culture and various minorities in the fight against an internal enemy. This represented a further departure from Europe. Neumann quotes Roosevelt's speech in which he explicitly states that the United States was founded to preserve democratic principles, not the continuity of Europeans in the new world" (63).

In the book, Neumann does not lose sight of the development of Anglo-Saxon ethnocentrism and the efforts to establish a basis for Anglo-Saxon dominance in the USA, such as limiting immigration based on anthropological research. However, the author assesses that such initiatives failed, to have a strong influence in politics. Before World War II, there was a growing oikophobic cultural critique in the literary field that viewed a homogeneous, white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant America as an enemy.

In the 1930s, Marxism gave new impetus to oikophobic forces, although the initial enthusiasm for the USSR quickly waned.

From an ideological standpoint of Americanism, Neumann also analyses American involvement in World War II. He emphasizes that the conflict between the USA and the Third Reich could not have been clearer (77), while highlighting their ideological differences through German literature on America and American texts about Germany. During this time, the idea of America's global mission was articulated. Neumann maintains that globalism, both internally and externally, was the ultimate goal of the elite in the "Anglosphere" representing the pinnacle of modernity they championed (87). This ideal implied the eradication of European nationalism and better economic and military integration of democratic states. On the other hand, the conflict with Germany also meant, on an ideological level, rejecting their concept of race, which was reflected in American literature. This literature rejected America's Anglo-European or white identity, reducing it only to the liberal symbols of the constitution, while simultaneously praising minorities as a "permanent source of elan" (93–94). However, the New York elite was aware that they still lived in a country that was too conservative for them. The culture conflict with the USSR brought about the emergence of emancipatory tendencies in the truest sense, with



the state apparatus now assuming a more significant role (95). Neumann recognizes that anti-communist nationalism in America was not monolithic and developed left and right variants. In the right-wing interpretation, Anglo-Saxonism was replaced by anti-communism, i.e. the defence of the capitalist order and “negative freedom.” On the left, being American meant being a philanthropist and a cosmopolitan. Both sides referred to the same source: the US Constitution (96). The left advocated for a more liberal immigration policy to allow America to take a moral leadership and outshine the Soviets in this area.

In the post-war period, Neumann pays special attention to another countercultural phenomenon: the Beatniks. Similar to the early abolitionists or the interwar “Lost Generation”, Beatniks were motivated by ideals of emancipation, free development, sexual liberation, and the rejection of their own traditional culture while embracing something foreign. Neumann notes: “the commercialization of left-liberal criticism of society and artistic nonconformism as the fashionable self-understanding of a new managerial elite was completed by the early 1970s, symbolized by phenomena such as the globalist-multicultural Coca-Cola advertisement: ‘I’d like to buy the world a Coke’ from 1971” (102).

Neumann notes that the victorious march of the left-wing counterculture within the context of American hegemony was not simply a result of spontaneous development, but also a result of deliberate actions by state institutions in America. The goal was to utilize the left-wing, alternative culture as a way to counteract Soviet-socialist cultural influences, and promote Americanism as a genuine representation of freedom, with the communists serving as a substitute for the Nazis (103). In this struggle, the most important instrument of the CIA was the *Congress for Cultural Freedom*. Its purpose was to develop American hegemony on an ideological-aesthetic basis that would be simultaneously anti-communist and anti-fascist. The CIA assisted the left in their efforts to transform the Western bloc into an egalitarian-internationalist utopia to diminish the appeal of the communist vision (105). The left served American globalism, and the McCarthy episode does not alter the overall perspective. Many conservative authors from Evola to Nolte had noticed before Neumann that the ultimate visions of the Soviets and Americans were quite similar (the blending of all peoples and races in an egalitarian global civilization). The primary disagreement was in the approach taken to achieve this goal.

Neumann emphasizes the role of not only state institutions, but also of the capitalist oligarchy in financing and promoting the leftist counterculture, portraying America as the only true heir to modernity. It has been demonstrated once again that big capital and the left are not opposing forces. The liberals of the Cold War era who were on the CIA payroll were not promoting traditionalist America, but rather “democratic socialism” which served as a bulwark against totalitarianism. It can be argued that the intellectual elite connected to intelligence structures laid the groundwork for the hegemony of the New Left. In this respect, the members of the Frankfurt School are no exception. The “cultural-Marxist” subversion of cultural and academic institutions in America is seen as a partnership rather than a conquest (112).

In Horkheimer’s critique of capitalism Neumann recognizes the parallels with the critique of industrial exploitation found in the works of Jane Addams. Similarly, the anti-imperialism of Randolph Bourne served as an inspiration to opponents of the Vietnam War such as Chomsky. “Early progressive currents of Americanism which relied on pragmatism, democratic reform, and social justice merged with critical theory and other post-Marxist cur-



rents to form the New Left. This movement has shaped the Western world for more than sixty years and defined the ideology of liberal, universalist-democratic modernity” (111). However, Neumann’s book does not aim to provide a singular account of the development of liberalism from the first settlers on American soil to the New Left and its “Woke” successors. This becomes evident in the final chapter, where the author emphasizes that as early as the 1930s liberal understanding of antifascism and democratic egalitarianism as a moral ideal had taken root among a section of the American elite. Additionally, after World War II Americanism, with the assistance of the New Left, played a “world-revolutionary role.” The interconnection between liberal and leftist, or ex-Marxist, intellectuals has shaped the Western concepts of “modernity” and “civilization,” a development which would not have been possible without “American exceptionalism” (113). The United States was able to counter red internationalism with the left-liberal cosmopolitanism that had shaped its elites for a century prior. They utilised symbols and concepts of Marxism, while maintaining a strong foundation in American experience. This Americanism ultimately triumphed over Soviet competition and presented its version of a democratically organized, pluralistic, and ethnically diverse global society as the “end of history.” Considering America’s cultural and political power beyond its borders, it is not surprising that Europeans could also face a similar fate. This implies a process of cultural deconstruction and demographic replacement in the name of liberal modernity, driven by a small, elite circle associated with it (116). As Neumann points out, the European Union is ideologically rooted in the myths of 1945, while looking to the USA as a role-model. “Transatlanticism with its appeal to the Euro-American ‘community of values’ and the ‘Judeo-Christian’ heritage is and remains the essence of the EU” (116). Therefore, in order to avoid the fate of America, Europe would need to distance itself from the legacy of early liberalism, whether in American or French form. Instead of focusing on humanistic utopia, Europe should prioritize substantial survival as the cornerstone of civilization. This implies the need to outline a different project of modernity, that would restore Europe to its European roots (117).

Neumann’s booklet can be read as a history of oikophobia and self-contempt in America. It clarifies that the “Woke” ideology is not just a passing fad, but is rooted in an ideological tradition that spans almost two hundred years. It is possible to draw lines of continuity between the abolitionists and today’s Black Lives Matter movement, which is ultimately what the activists themselves do. Neumann agrees with Kaufmann’s perspective that this is a third “awakening” that aligns with the humanistic-Protestant, and therefore religious, “awakening” of Puritan America, with the post-Marxist influences of the 1960s being less significant. So, good old traditional America did not wake up one morning to push the Bible aside and raise the rainbow flag. Nor can everything be blamed on a handful of Trotskyists who infiltrated universities and high politics. Neumann demonstrates that the “Woke” phenomenon has a long ideological prehistory, and its emergence is, ultimately, the result of modern logic. We should recall Richard Weaver’s words once more: ideas have consequences. All those who disagree with the “Woke” ideology should consider this before dismissing it, believing that this storm will pass and America will return to its old ways with just a few changes here and there, put on a cowboy hat and ride off into the sunset. Neumann’s book raises the question: does this “old” even exist?

This short study also shows that the whole “Woke” phenomenon cannot be solely attributed to America, especially considering America’s cultural domination in Europe. Rid-



iculing American youth for their unconventional hairstyles or taking pleasure in their misfortunes will not protect Europeans from experiencing similar trends. This is due to the fact that European elites have largely embraced American ideology as a norm. In this sense, Neumann must be given credit: Europeans must create their vision of modernity beyond Americanism and Sovietism. However, this is not a new insight for conservatives. Thomas Molnar, for example, emphasized the same idea over thirty years ago.

Despite its positive sides, it is worth noting that Neumann omitted significant literature that would have been quite useful. For example, Neumann would have greatly benefited from Thomas Molnar's book *L'Américanologie – Triomphe d'un modèle planétaire?* It is also a shame that he did not address the views of Panagiotis Kondylis, who argued that liberalism did not triumph in the Cold War. Kondylis believed that in the West liberalism and socialism merged into a new ideology, signalling the end of the civil era. If one accepts this thesis, it implies that "mass democracy" emerged from civil society, but structurally represents a completely new formation. Therefore, the mass-democratic and planetary era is completely different from the liberal one.

While this book does not solely focus on "Woke" ideology, it is undeniable that within Antifa groups, there is still a significant influence of Marxist and anarchist ideological heritage. Their beliefs cannot be reduced exclusively to liberalism, as their activists often declare themselves Marxists. Even when the liberal roots of "Woke" are pointed out it does not mean that liberalism does not share the same roots as Marxism, as noted by numerous right-wing authors from Heidegger to Evola. Neumann accurately highlighted the ancient oikophobic layers in America and depicted their development. However, one cannot avoid the question: is this a uniquely American phenomenon, or can similar tendencies be found in Europe as well? "Tenderly they love foreign nations, and wisely they hate their own," wrote Pushkin. Neumann, relying on Benedict Beckeld, has aptly pointed out similar phenomena already among the ancient Greeks (16–18). This raises the more intricate question of the underlying sources of the spirit of self-contempt that precede Americanism. It suggests that oikophobia does not solely originate from external influences but is also inherent as a possibility in every culture that forsakes its own roots and seeks to transcend its circle.

