

The Origins of Woke

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People of a conservative bent are concerned about the rise of woke in the United States and Western Europe. A large part of their concern, of course, is the fact that half their fellow citizens seem to cheer on every manifestation of woke.

Definition of Woke

Author Richard Hanania defines wokeness in his introduction:

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1. The belief that disparities equal discrimination: Practically any disparity that appears to favor men over women, or whites over non-whites, is caused by some combination of past and present discrimination. Disparities that favor women over men or non-whites over whites are either ignored or celebrated. This includes not only material outcomes like differences in income or representation in high-status professions but "disparities in thought," or stereotypes about different groups.
2. Speech restrictions: In the interest of overcoming such problematic disparities, speech needs to be restricted, particularly speech that suggests that they are caused by factors other than discrimination or that stereotypes are true.
3. Human resources (HR) bureaucracy: In the interest of overcoming disparities and regulating speech, a full-time bureaucracy is needed to enforce correct thought and action.

He writes that "The first and second components are key to whether an individual or idea is woke. If a person believes that discrimination is the primary cause of disparities but not that there should be speech restrictions to enforce that idea, we generally just call them a liberal instead of woke."

Most of us think of "woke" as having its genesis in the academic Marxism of the Frankfurt school and the ensuing "long march through the institutions" that put them strongly under the control of the progressives. We think it came about through a bleeding-heart sympathy for the underdog that led to stifling free speech through political correctness.

Hanania's thesis is that it came about as a byproduct of well intended legislation. Legislation is always subject to interpretation, and the people who do the interpreting do so to favor their own agendas. The cornerstone piece of legislation underlying woke is the Civil Rights Act of 1964, since supplemented by several other major acts such as the Civil Rights Act of 1991 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Bureaucratic Drift

The term "bureaucratic drift," which Hanania does not use, describes the process through which a piece of legislature spawns a multitude of unintended consequences. This is a homemade description of the lifecycle of a piece of legislation – simply scanning it gives the idea.

1. A special interest group sees a problem to be solved.
2. Lawyers and lobbyists draft legislation.
3. The lobbyists present it to sympathetic legislators.
4. Legislative staff reworks the proposal.
5. Legislators introduce the proposal to the cognizant committee.
6. Committees discuss the ways in which the legislation will be interpreted.
7. Legislation is released to the full congressional body, House or Senate.
8. The other house tackles the legislation.
9. The houses reconcile their differences.
10. Both houses pass the bill.
11. It becomes law when the president signs.
12. Executive agencies write directives on how to apply the law.
13. Administrators make their own interpretations and issue decisions on individual cases.
14. Affected parties challenge interpretations in court.
15. Courts review legislation, executive orders, sometimes committee discussions and issue decisions.
16. Public and private sector actors draft policies in accordance with legislation, executive orders, and the courts.
17. Private and public sector institutions apply the policies thus established to make their own decisions.
18. The cycle is continually repeated.

The bureaucrats charged with implementing laws are embedded in the system of government. They tend to be in place for decades, as presidential administrations and legislators come and go. They provide the greatest continuity in the American government. The result is what Robert Malone in [Lies my Government Told Me](#) calls "inverted totalitarianism," a despotism in which the despots are anonymous, buried in the bureaucracy.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964

According to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, nondiscrimination was to apply (among other things) to

- Public accommodations (Title II),
- Public facilities (Title III),
- Public education (Title IV),
- Public assistance programs (Title VI), and
- Employment (Title VII).

When the law was passed in 1964 it was intended to improve the situation for black Americans. Little thought was given to the differential treatment of men and women, disabled versus able-bodied persons, and straight versus homosexual and transsexual people. Those applications have mostly emerged in the six decades since its passage.

Hanania writes that judicial concepts have emerged in the interpretation of the Civil Rights Act that give it extraordinarily broad powers to reshape American society. Five of them merit further explanation:

Affirmative action for contractors

Hanania writes "President Kennedy in EO (Executive Order) 10925 required government contractors with business beyond a minimum threshold to 'take affirmative action' to ensure nondiscrimination in employment with regard to 'race, color, religion, or national origin,' and created the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. The year after the CRA was passed, President Johnson signed EO 11246, which, as amended throughout the years, has become the basis of the modern affirmative action in contracting regime. It created what would come to be called the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP), located within the Labor Department. In 1967, Johnson added 'sex' to its prohibited categories, and Obama included 'sexual orientation' and 'gender identity' in 2014."

The assumption was that if other classes of people had not suffered discrimination, they would enjoy the same level of success as the benchmark straight white people. Implementation was always somewhat schizophrenic. The liberals wanted those classes to do better, but the conservatives would not countenance quotas. The upshot was a vast amount of pretending.

The Nixon administration expanded the application to all employees of businesses that held government contracts, which had to apply affirmative action all employees whether or not they worked on government contracts. This had the effect of making affirmative action a standard throughout industry. Not to develop comprehensive affirmative action plans was courting trouble. Industry complied, attempting to do the impossible: achieve quotas without setting quotas.

Disparate Impact: Everything Is Illegal

The theory that all groups of people are the same leads to the conclusion that each group should enjoy equally positive outcomes in educational attainment, hiring and promotion and financial success. Moreover, negative measurements such as school discipline, incarceration and homelessness should be equal.

Of course, people are not equal. The sexes are not equal, the races are not equal, and even the genders are not equal. Those who implement civil rights law have ignored the situation when Asians earn more than whites, women have more educational achievement than men, and African Americans are more successful in sports. However, any time the measures go the other way, favoring out-of-favor groups, they find discrimination. Thus, Hanania's title – everything is illegal.

Harassment Law

Sexual harassment is essentially anything that a woman considers to be sexual harassment. It is a bludgeon to use against men. In his most crude application, it can be used to get them fired, demoted, or even jailed. In reality, since men understand the game, the mere threat of such actions is enough to make a prudent man very careful. Since the law is on their side, women get their way without a contest.

The upshot has been making the workplace more sterile and less hospitable to men.

Sports and Sexuality

Men have always enjoyed sports more than women. Men have more musculature and are naturally better at most sports. Spectators generally enjoy watching the men play more than women. Despite all this, Title IX has been interpreted to mean that women's sports must be equivalent to men's sports by all measures: funding, access to facilities, scheduling and so on.

The Skeleton Key of the Left

Though the wording of civil rights law is colorblind, the application is anything but. White men and now Asians suing for reverse discrimination have had very little success. Even when the courts decide in their favor, the downstream entities that interpret and apply the decisions continue to discriminate against them with impunity.

Human Resource Departments

Human resources departments have grown enormously since the advent of woke. They are tasked with the impossible business of achieving quota results without setting quotas. They have become extremely adroit at doubletalk. Universities in particular are hugely overstaffed with administrators who do nothing to advance the cause of education. If anything, they stifle it.

Free Speech

Free speech is antithetical to the woke agenda. People who call things as they are a danger. The most dangerous are those who recognize that there are fundamental, genetic differences between groups of people and between the sexes. Since the science is so clear, discussion of these differences simply can no longer be tolerated.

Action Plan

Hanania concludes with the observation that many of the adverse effects of "woke" come from Executive Orders and their interpretation by the courts and bureaucracies. Therefore, it should take only a strong-willed executive to simply rescind or rewrite executive orders. He observes that most American citizens agree that the woke phenomena and it has gone too far and will support a rollback.

The need to roll it back is clear. Antidiscrimination law has made American workers less productive. It has made American society a less pleasant place to live. And, though Hanania does not mention it, the cancer has spread worldwide. Europe is grappling with the inability to deport immigrants who cannot successfully integrate, are not productive in the workplace, and do not respect the laws or the people of their host countries. Brazil and other Latin American countries are tying themselves in knots with American inspired antidiscrimination laws.

The book is a five-star effort, providing a new, seldom heard and much needed point of view on what is widely recognized as a pervasive societal problem.