

## What You Can Do for the Counterrevolution

*Counter Wokecraft: A Field Manual for Combatting the Woke in the University and Beyond*, Charles Pincourt, with James Lindsay, New Discourses, 2021, pp. 100, \$12.49 softcover.

### Robert Maranto

*Western Civilization is being ideologically colonized. In fact, it nearly has been ideologically colonized, and only now, at this late stage in the process, are people waking up to the fact . . . People in almost every sector of life often feel paralyzed and helpless now that this ideology is activating itself and wielding its captured institutional power.*

—James Lindsay, from the Forward (vii) to *Counter Wokecraft*

However much those on the left, and sometimes the right, might wish, our Madisonian republic remains a largely incremental polity where

state capacity never quite matches the ambitions of what Thomas Sowell calls our “anointed” classes.<sup>1</sup> When elite institutions go too far, opponents and fence-sitters push back to restore something more akin to the status quo. When Franklin Roosevelt tried to pack the U.S. Supreme Court in 1937, even as the Court retreated, the voters responded by voting conservative in the 1938 midterm elections, moving the New Deal from offense to defense. To take a lesson from Sowell’s classic half-century old first book, *Black Education: Myths and Tragedies*,<sup>2</sup> the craziness of Cornell University’s 1969 “guns on campus” crisis—faded to something like normalcy by the mid-1970s, as grownups regained control and restored order, at least to a degree.

It is Charles Pincourt’s hope that just such a correction can take shape in higher education and that his book, *Counter Wokecraft*, can help lead the way. By understanding wokeness, identifying its dangers, and using specific strategies—some of which the woke have devised and perfected themselves—Pincourt believes the non-woke can return the university to

1 Thomas Sowell, *The Vision of the Anointed* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

2 Thomas Sowell, *Black Education: Myths and Tragedies* (New York: David McKay Company, 1972).

**Robert Maranto** is the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Chair in Leadership in the Department of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas; rmaranto@uark.edu. He last appeared in *AQ* in spring 2022 with “Suppressing Speech: Worse than McCarthyism,” a review of James R. Flynn’s *A Book to Risky to Publish* (2020).

its liberal ideals and an honest search for truth.

But there are reasons why an effective non-woke push-back will be harder to execute in higher education today than in the past, the most important of which involves the left's ingenious imposition of an all-purpose workaround to constitutional governance: permanent, "expert" bureaucracies which use nontransparent micro-processes such as administrative rulemaking to maintain and expand leftist policy dominance, often in the face of public opposition, even when expressed in elections.

As Shep Melnick details in his brilliant *The Evolution of Title IX* (see my review "An Inconvenient Analysis: Title IX's Shortcomings" in *AQ* Fall 2020) leftist U.S. Department of Education bureaucracies have, with support from the news media and interest groups, had remarkable success in imposing Gender Theory on a sensibly reluctant nation.<sup>3</sup> To return to Sowell's example, Cornell's feckless administration purposely preferred academically marginal black students over black peers with the preparation to handle the school's workload, and

then created bureaucracies to serve this new constituency, with long term implications for both race relations and academic rigor.

More recently, Dion Pierre and Peter Wood detailed the long evolution of diversity bureaucracies at Yale, which eventually led to "neo-segregation" in admissions, dorms, social activities, and majors. A whole new administrative class dedicated ideologically and incentivized materially to continued segregation emerged, even though, and perhaps in part because, it damages intergroup relations. This led to calls for ever larger bureaucracies to manage demographic conflicts in ways that protect institutional reputations.<sup>4</sup> As my former colleagues Jay Greene and James Paul detail, diversity bureaucracies have grown rapidly even at non-elite universities, and are associated with *worse* rather than better intergroup relations.<sup>5</sup>

Republicans have proven ineffective in reigning in bureaucracies. Welfare reform was a rare exception, and succeeded by leaving bureaucrats' jobs intact while changing their roles from enabling dependence to fostering independence. Yet even this

3 Robert Maranto, "An Inconvenient Analysis: Title IX's Shortcomings," review of R. Shep Melnick's *The Transformation of Title IX*, *Academic Questions* 33, no. 3 (Fall): 471-77.

4 *Separate But Equal Again: Neo-Segregation in American Higher Education*, April 24, 2019, National Association of Scholars, <https://www.nas.org/reports/separate-but-equal-again/full-report>.

5 "Diversity University: DEI Bloat in the Academy," Heritage Foundation, July 27, 2021 at <https://www.heritage.org/education/report/diversity-university-dei-bloat-the-academy>, The Heritage Foundation. On this theme more broadly, see my "Work, Not Woke—Why on Race, U.S. Higher Education Should Copy the U.S. Army," *Minding the Campus*, March 4, 2021.

reform came nearly three decades after the public had soured on welfare.

Even more than welfare, campus (and office) wokeness are long past due for correction. The signs are all there. Despite an incredibly hostile news media, being massively outspent, and President Trump's own prodigious failings, the 2020 presidential election was remarkably close. Political correctness-related issues like crime, secure borders, and basic patriotism kept it close, and enabled significant Republican breakthroughs among minority voters—an empirical trend ignored by mainstream media and academia.<sup>6</sup> Trump would have likely beaten a more openly leftist Democrat than Joe Biden. One might also note the 2021 Virginia gubernatorial election and New York City mayoral election, in which the least woke major candidates prevailed, not to mention how (majority minority) voters drubbed well-funded elite efforts to return California to open racial quotas in 2020.<sup>7</sup>

The popular counterrevolution against what Matthew Yglesias dubbed the “Great Awakening” has already had considerable success in halting or even reversing efforts to

defund police and impose the *1619 Project* and other questionable Critical Theory innovations. But can the non-woke 90 some percent of Americans reform academia? Conservatives with Ph.D.s increasingly debate whether academia *can* be saved. For example, Richard Hanania sees academia as a lost cause which centrists and conservatives should defund, while Eric Kaufmann (joined by prominent liberals including Jonathan Haidt and Lee Jussim) argues we must defend free inquiry and ideological diversity in academia, and that liberal education can win.<sup>8</sup> To repeat, woke behaviors are unpopular, and often illegal. While the mainstream media looks the other way, courts increasingly rule against the most outrageous abuses of disciplinary codes. On the state level, elected politicians increasingly pass laws exiling Critical Race Theory from school curricula.

## Ivory Tower (and other) Wokeness

Lawmaking is all well and good, but how can the non-woke supermajority halt woke advances inside educational workplaces before it is too late? Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan

6 Musa al-Gharbi, “The Trump vote is rising among Blacks and Hispanics, despite the conventional wisdom,” *THINK*, November 2, 2020.

7 Robert Maranto, “Thomas Sowell Was Right As Usual,” *RealClearPolicy*, May 26, 2022.

8 See Eric Kaufmann on Academic Freedom, parts I and II, CSPI Podcasts, <https://podtail.com/podcast/cspi-podcast/4-eric>.

Haidt wrote a fine guidebook for society.<sup>9</sup> Now the anonymous “Charles Pincourt,” who describes himself as “a professor at a large North American university,” offers *Counter Wokecraft* (subterranean like spycraft), a short, useful guide for the sensible majority inside the belly of the beast. This is a book every (non-woke) student and professor should read.

Pincourt starts by defining woke-ness, that is Critical Theory, in ways familiar to *Academic Questions* readers. First, wokeness holds that since we cannot know anything with certainty, all knowledge is socially constructed. It thus dismisses the last five centuries of scientific progress which have produced longer lifespans, less famine, democracy, and the abolition of slavery.

Secondly, those who produce knowledge have power, and accordingly use their definitions of knowledge to keep power by oppressing others. Though Pincourt does not delve into it, this fails to explain hundreds of events when the powerful shared power, such as when most whites under no threat of violence backed the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. Of course, Critical Theorists argue that

the revolutionary gains of the period were illusory. This is just the sort of dodge that renders Critical Theory untestable, which is in fact the point.

Third, individuals are defined by their group identity, specifically by the degree of Manichean oppression or privilege the group has faced.<sup>10</sup> Unlike in the real world, money matters far less than one’s degree of *theoretical* (not empirical) demographic oppression or privilege. Liberal historian Alice Dreger wrote with snark about the National Women’s Studies Association annual meeting where she faced attacks as “privileged,” and where “[o]ne identity card after another was thrown down—which only made sense in a ‘feminist’ room where you win simply by having the most identity cards. I found myself thinking that Women’s Studies is about as sophisticated a game as Go Fish.”<sup>11</sup>

Following from the first three principles are two more. First, the woke see oppression *everywhere*, defining every aspect of life. Oppression is their Jesus or Allah. Activists thus push social justice innovations in every feasible place, all the time, through any means possible including slander and bullying. As Pincourt and

9 *The Coddling of the American Mind* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018).

10 As he should, Pincourt gives ample credit to Helen Pluckrose and James A. Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity, and Why This Harms Everybody* (Durham, NC: Pitchstone Publishing, 2020). Lindsay wrote the Foreword to *Counter Wokecraft*.

11 *Galileo’s Middle Finger* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015, 129).

others like John McWhorter show,<sup>12</sup> wokeness is fundamentalist. I would add that for Marxism, this is nothing new. Back in 1949 Richard Crossman edited a book of essays by former Marxists titled *The God that Failed*.<sup>13</sup> I would also add that we need to think more about wokeness as a business, a bureaucratic budget maximizing movement creating jobs for the woke. This stubborn fact makes it tough for non-woke Democratic lawmakers to curb wokeness, since cuts would send their primary voters to unemployment offices, where an M.A. in Critical Theory confers no advantage.

## Woke Tactics and Fighting Back

Pincourt sensibly divides the academy into parts already lost, the fine arts and humanities, and those we can still save, including the hard sciences, engineering, economics, business schools, and the more empirical sub-disciplines within psychology, philosophy, and my favorite, political science. To apply the Richard Hanania-Eric Kaufmann dichotomy, we should defund the former and defend the latter.

To fight wokecraft, we must understand it, and here Pincourt shows

he knows his way around higher education. Through both open disciplinary affiliations and woke dog whistles, the woke find each other, but then seek to go unnoticed until they have taken control of a committee, department, or whole academic field. The woke make “problematic” anything they deem contrary to social justice (and their own employment). The woke seek any “situation” to exert influence, from detailed work writing regulations to high impact hiring and promotion decisions. The woke use highly complex jargon to intimidate, but they also seek to insert compassionate-sounding words such as “diverse,” “equity,” and “antiracism” into mission statements, curricular requirements, and job descriptions; thus, linguistic imperialism drives policy and personnel decisions. For example, a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion statement required for a life sciences post at Berkeley eliminated nearly 76 percent of applicants: only the woke or faux woke survived. Such statements are now required in an estimated 19 percent of academic job postings nationwide.<sup>14</sup>

Once having taken control by subterfuge, the woke bully others to create a culture of fear, and indeed

12 *Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America* (New York: Penguin Press, 2021).

13 Richard Crossman, *The God That Failed* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949).

14 James D. Paul, Robert Maranto, “Other Than Merit: The prevalence of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statements in University Hiring,” American Enterprise Institute, November 2021.

take pride in doing so. A favorite woke tactic is to “make things awkward” for opponents by making scurrilous charges, tactics often enabled by university diversity bureaucracies and social media.

Yet the very fact that the woke must use coercion rather than persuasion shows their weakness, something Pincourt should do more to stress. The woke will insist on informal processes designed to produce “consensus” by bullying others into agreement. No one likes bullies, which is why the woke are beatable, even in most university settings. To counter the woke, Pincourt thus insists on using formal processes, with help from higher ups whenever possible. The most important such process is secret ballot voting on policies and personnel selection. The woke castigate the secret ballot as “binary” and “divisive,” as well they might, since secrecy exists to protect the powerless from intimidation by the powerful and aggressive. The non-woke must point this out at every turn.

In other respects, counter woke-craft simply involves using woke tactics for non-woke ends. The non-woke must take wokeness for the serious threat it is, avoiding complacency. Serve on any hiring or policy committee you can and while there, never

hire or promote the woke. One can do this on merit grounds, since woke hostility to science renders them unsuitable for higher learning (not that one can always be that blunt). Identify allies and potential allies and take pains to educate them on woke dangers. Resist cancelling and de-platforming, which are incredibly unpopular outside higher education and controversial even within. To spot wokeness, we must familiarize ourselves with woke’s obtuse language, from “decolonization” to “xdisciplinary.” (52-54) Stop small advances before they become institutionalized.

Pincourt ends with two broad sets of recommendations. First, expose what woke really means, and its unpopularity even in the academy. If “equity” is defined in the woke way as equality of outcomes rather than opportunities, this erodes merit and ends up discriminating not only against whites, but also against many non-white minorities whose incomes and educational attainment sit far above the mean, including Indians, Pakistanis, Middle-Easterners, and East Asians, as my collaborator on a racial politics project Wilfred Reilly points out.<sup>15</sup> That is often illegal and nearly always unpopular. Point out that past efforts to centralize power to

---

15 *Taboo: 10 Facts You Can't Talk About* (Washington: Regnery Publishing, 2020).

maximize equity failed big time, from Mao's Cultural Revolution to today's Caracas. (I enjoy saying this at academic settings and watching speakers squirm.)

Second, since you can't beat something with nothing, we must offer alternatives. Pincourt largely relies on the scientific method and formal processes of decision-making such as sticking to an agenda and secret ballots, each of which still command considerable respect, and which strike at the heart of the woke. If free of coercion and thus able to reveal their true preferences, most academics will choose science over postmodernism, just as East Germans chose democracy over communism once freed from fear. Pincourt should offer more. For example, the University of Chicago's Dorian Abbot proposes that Merit, Fairness, and Equality replace Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as guiding principles for higher education.<sup>16</sup> (Pincourt thanks Abbot in the acknowledgements.)

*Counter Wokecraft* suffers one blind spot. Pincourt avoids discussing our ever-growing bureaucracies, staffed by officials who often fall to the left of professors, and have far less regard for learning, data, and merit. Top administrators tend to promote

their own careers and empire building at the expense of higher learning. They are key woke allies, promoting the growth of the least intellectually rigorous segments of academia.

On the plus side, most administrators will switch sides and turn on wokeness the day the woke lose their ability to threaten. Pincourt's short guide offers invaluable advice on how to make that day arrive. Inspired by *Counter Wokecraft*, I successfully inserted a version of the Chicago Principles on Freedom of Expression into my own department's graduate handbook: Today one department; tomorrow, the world. The counterrevolution starts here.

---

<sup>16</sup> "Persona Non Grata at MIT," *Wall Street Journal*, October 29, 2021.