

anglo saxonism definition us history

Anglo-Saxonism definition US history refers to a cultural, political, and racial ideology that emerged in the United States during the 19th century. This concept is rooted in the belief in the superiority of Anglo-Saxon people, particularly those of English descent, and has been used to justify various social, political, and economic policies throughout American history. By examining the roots, implications, and legacy of Anglo-Saxonism, we can better understand its impact on American society and its relevance in contemporary discussions about race, nationalism, and identity.

Origins of Anglo-Saxonism

Anglo-Saxonism finds its origins in Europe, particularly in England, where the term was initially used to describe the early Germanic tribes that settled in Britain. The ideology gained momentum during the 19th century in the United States, coinciding with the rise of nationalism and the belief in Manifest Destiny—the idea that Americans were destined to expand across the continent.

Historical Context

The following factors contributed to the emergence of Anglo-Saxonism in the United States:

- **Colonial Era:** The early colonization of America by English settlers laid the groundwork for the perception of Anglo-Saxon superiority.
- **National Identity:** As the United States developed its national identity, Anglo-Saxonism became intertwined with notions of democracy, liberty, and progress.
- **Scientific Racism:** In the 19th century, pseudo-scientific theories emerged that classified races hierarchically, placing Anglo-Saxons at the top.
- **Immigration:** The influx of immigrants, particularly from Southern and Eastern Europe, led to a backlash among Anglo-Saxonists who viewed these groups as inferior.

Key Tenets of Anglo-Saxonism

Anglo-Saxonism is characterized by several core beliefs that influenced American thought and policy:

1. Racial Superiority

Anglo-Saxonism posits that people of Anglo-Saxon descent are inherently superior to other racial and ethnic groups. This belief was often supported by pseudo-scientific theories that claimed Anglo-Saxons were more intelligent, industrious, and morally upright.

2. Manifest Destiny

The idea of Manifest Destiny, which suggested that the United States was destined to expand across North America, was frequently justified through Anglo-Saxonism. Proponents believed that it was the duty of Anglo-Saxon Americans to civilize and Christianize the "savage" territories and peoples to the west.

3. Cultural Hegemony

Anglo-Saxonism promoted the idea that Anglo-Saxon culture, language, and political systems were superior and should be the standard for all societies. This belief led to the denigration of other cultures and an emphasis on assimilating immigrants and indigenous peoples into Anglo-Saxon norms.

4. Nativism

As immigration increased in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Anglo-Saxonism gave rise to nativist sentiments. Many Anglo-Saxonists advocated for restrictive immigration policies aimed at preserving a "pure" Anglo-Saxon America, viewing immigrants from non-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds as threats to national identity and social order.

Anglo-Saxonism in Politics

Anglo-Saxonism has significantly influenced American politics, especially in the context of immigration, foreign policy, and civil rights.

Immigration Policy

The influence of Anglo-Saxonism is evident in several key immigration laws:

- **The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882:** This law barred Chinese laborers from entering the United States, reflecting the belief that non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants were undesirable.
- **The Immigration Act of 1924:** This act established quotas that favored immigrants from Northern and Western Europe while severely limiting those from Southern and Eastern Europe, underscoring the prioritization of Anglo-Saxon heritage.

Foreign Policy

Anglo-Saxonism also shaped U.S. foreign policy, particularly regarding the Philippines and Latin America. The belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority often justified imperialism and interventionist policies, as seen in the Spanish-American War and subsequent American control over the Philippines.

Civil Rights

Throughout American history, Anglo-Saxonism has influenced civil rights movements. The ideology was used to justify segregation and discrimination against African Americans, Native Americans, and other minority groups. The Ku Klux Klan, which emerged in the Reconstruction era, was one of the most notorious groups promoting Anglo-Saxon supremacy through violence and intimidation.

Modern Relevance of Anglo-Saxonism

While the term "Anglo-Saxonism" may not be commonly used today, its legacy persists in contemporary discussions about race, nationalism, and immigration.

White Nationalism

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of white nationalist movements that draw on Anglo-Saxonist ideas. These groups often advocate for the preservation of a "white" America and promote anti-immigrant

sentiments, echoing the beliefs of 19th-century Anglo-Saxonists.

Political Discourse

Anglo-Saxonism continues to influence American political discourse, particularly in debates surrounding immigration reform and national identity. Politicians and pundits often invoke themes of "American exceptionalism" and "cultural preservation," which can be traced back to Anglo-Saxonist ideologies.

Social Justice Movements

Conversely, the legacy of Anglo-Saxonism has spurred social justice movements that seek to dismantle systemic racism and promote inclusivity. Activists challenge the historical narratives that prioritize Anglo-Saxon achievements while marginalizing the contributions of other racial and ethnic groups.

Conclusion

In summary, the **Anglo-Saxonism definition US history** encapsulates a complex and often troubling ideology that has shaped American society and politics for over a century. By understanding its origins, tenets, and implications, we can better navigate the ongoing conversations about race, identity, and belonging in the United States. Recognizing the lasting impact of Anglo-Saxonism is essential for fostering a more inclusive and equitable future.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the definition of Anglo-Saxonism in the context of U.S. history?

Anglo-Saxonism refers to a belief in the superiority of Anglo-Saxon culture and people, often associated with the idea that Anglo-Saxon Americans were destined to lead and civilize other races and cultures.

How did Anglo-Saxonism influence American imperialism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries?

Anglo-Saxonism was used to justify American expansionism by promoting the idea that it was the duty of Anglo-Saxon Americans to spread their culture and governance, which contributed to the U.S. acquiring territories like the Philippines and Puerto Rico.

What role did Anglo-Saxonism play in the development of racial ideologies in the U.S.?

Anglo-Saxonism contributed to the development of racial hierarchies in the U.S., reinforcing notions of white supremacy and justifying discriminatory practices against non-Anglo-Saxon groups.

Can you give examples of political figures or movements that embraced Anglo-Saxonism?

Prominent figures like President Theodore Roosevelt and movements such as the Social Darwinism of the late 19th century embraced Anglo-Saxonism to promote nationalist and imperialist agendas.

How did Anglo-Saxonism affect immigration policies in the United States?

Anglo-Saxonism influenced restrictive immigration policies that favored immigrants from Northern and Western Europe while limiting those from Southern and Eastern Europe, as well as non-European countries.

What is the relationship between Anglo-Saxonism and Manifest Destiny?

Anglo-Saxonism is closely related to Manifest Destiny, as both ideologies promoted the belief that the U.S. had a divinely ordained mission to expand and spread its cultural and political values, often at the expense of indigenous and non-Anglo-Saxon peoples.

How did Anglo-Saxonism manifest in American literature and culture?

Anglo-Saxonism influenced American literature and culture by promoting themes of racial superiority and the civilizing mission, as seen in works by authors like Rudyard Kipling and during the colonial narratives of the 19th century.

What critiques have emerged against Anglo-Saxonism in contemporary discussions of U.S. history?

Contemporary critiques argue that Anglo-Saxonism promotes ethnocentrism and racism, overshadowing the contributions and histories of diverse groups in America and perpetuating systemic inequalities.

How is Anglo-Saxonism viewed in the context of modern American identity?

In modern discourse, Anglo-Saxonism is often viewed critically as a relic of colonialism and racism, and it

raises questions about national identity and the inclusivity of American values in a multicultural society.

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