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A Book review of <sup>1</sup> *Woke, Inc.: Inside Corporate America's Social Justice Scam* by Vivek  
Ramaswamy

The world is evolving and values are changing with time. Some of these values like gender equality and inclusivity of all people regardless of their race, sexuality, or background are greatly beneficial to society. They have tremendous power of transforming the world into a better place for everyone. However, some entities have found ways of falsely and hypocritically championing these values, a situation that greatly undermines their intended purpose and expected results. All this is done for greater social or financial profit, further making it worse and unworthy. Vivek Ramaswamy, a long-time corporate leader turned writer and activist, delves into the murky waters of the corporate world that is vehemently trying to conjure trending social values into a means of making even more money and power. He terms this act as *wokeness*. <sup>2</sup> His book *Woke, Inc.: Inside Corporate America's Social Justice Scam* offers great insight into this topic through the discussion of various occurrences through which he expresses his detest. He premises that most of what the public sees as a championing of social justice causes like climate change and racial justice by corporations is, in fact, an exploitation of the same- just that it is done behind the scenes to hoodwink the public.

The book, which was an instant *New York Times Bestseller* and 368 pages long, was released in 2021 and has the ISBN 978-1-5460-5982-0 for eBooks. It is categorized under Economic Theory and goes for \$15.99 on *Amazon*. The author starts by giving a brief history of himself which perfectly sets him up as a credible source for such vital and hidden insight. Being an immigrant that was brought up in America, he details that he feels like a traitor to his class. This is backed by the numerous achievements that he discusses, which he feels were a sell-out to many others who come from the same background as his. However, his experience as a scholar

at Harvard and Yale, as a partner in a hedge fund, as a founder of enterprises that became multibillion establishments, and as a CEO of a biotech company gives him just the right edge with which he can present his argument with confidence and accuracy. Ramaswamy's book not only serves as a criticism of the capitalistic behavior of modern corporates but also gives the reader a suggestion of how to become a better American in this day and age. This makes it a holistic literary work as it shows not all is lost despite the deep-rooted rot in the corporate world.

*Woke, Inc.* revolves around the theme of social justice and capitalism and how these have intertwined in the modern world. Ramaswamy opines that corporates have found a way of creating social divides among the public. This is achieved by leveraging the deepest insecurities of people hence whipping them into a grand following of superficial social justice causes. It is done as a way of blinding the masses to the wrongs that are being perpetrated by the corporate elites and also to win over the trust of consumers hence increasing sales. The need for people to belong to a certain social justice cause has been misused by these companies and their elites who have managed to come off as allies but in the real sense, they are predators who are out to satisfy their personal needs and hunger for money and power. This review is in support of the stance that Ramaswamy has taken as it not only shows the world the true character of the corporate world but also gives the public a chance to liberate themselves from the division and misuse that they have been trapped in for so long now.

Ramaswamy uses storytelling and ties it with the theme as a means of presenting his argument. In the book, there are numerous stories, most of which are borne out of personal experiences in his career. Each chapter addresses a new aspect of *wokeness* through the narration of different accounts involving various leaders, governments, corporates, and political environments.

In the first chapter of the book, Ramaswamy addresses the issue of corporate companies using *wokeness* as a smokescreen to hide their atrocities. He begins by giving a small history of the word *woke* which was coined by Black activists to mean being alert to the struggles occasioned by racism. However, the term has now evolved to mean being alert to almost any perceptible injustices and has become quite popular among the public. Ramaswamy writes that being *woke* today translates to being highly aware of the invisible power structure that is running society and driving deeply entrenched divisions with superficial causes. Corporations have noticed this trend and have not held back from exploiting it to the benefit of their selfish goals of gaining the favor of Americans and the political class. Ramaswamy argues that so many companies have made *wokeness* their defining purpose as they seek to follow this path of deceit.

The author writes of the case of one such company, Goldman Sachs (p. 19). The CEO of Goldman declared in January 2020 that from there onwards, it would only be taking companies that are inclusive public. The boards to be considered would have to have at least one diverse member, preferably a woman. Goldman knew that there was a wave of championing gender equality and the inclusion of women in positions of power, not just in employment. However, they also knew something else. By the time of their declaration, all S&P 500 companies had already included at least one woman on their boards. As such, Goldman was making a zero-risk move that would lose them nothing in case it offended these companies. However, as Ramaswamy argues, companies like Goldman want to be perceived as pro-social justice and this declaration on diversity was a public relations gimmick with nothing to lose for the sake of the cause. Ramaswamy strips this ploy down to its bare hypocrisy by stating that diversity of thoughts and ideas, which Goldman claimed to be the driver behind their ‘newly-found’

commitment to gender equality, is achieved by a proper screening of candidates regardless of their gender, and not by forcing it (p.19).

However, the smokescreen becomes apparent when it is realized that by creating a buzz around this pro-diversity campaign, Goldman's corrupt engagements in Malaysia will be hidden from the public eye. The company was in the midst of obliging to a \$5 billion fine to various governments for its role in the Malaysian scheme that funded corrupt politicians with Goldman turning a blind eye to it. Ramaswamy capitalizes on this account to show just how much *wokeness* has become misused by corporates. If the public was to adequately know the legal and ethical quagmire in which Goldman was, the company would lose a considerable amount of trust and revenue. However, by pretending to be *woke* through the advocacy of diversity, it diverts attention to that. This chapter clearly showcases the deceit that is behind these social justice campaigns powered by corporations and Ramaswamy captures this quite well and names it *wokeconomics*.

*Woke, Inc.* goes on to tackle *wokeness* in a rather new light that will really enlighten the reader with regards to mixing the corporate world with other social spheres. In the third chapter, Ramaswamy considers his ordeal in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder which gave rise to a wave of anti-racism movements like *Black Lives Matter* and greatly penetrated the *woke* corporate world. During that time, as Ramaswamy details, numerous companies came out with statements that affirmed their commitment to the black community. He quotes companies like *Apple* and *Uber* (p. 52) which pledged to not only actively fight systemic racism but also promote the black community through funding charity causes geared towards fighting racism and promoting black-owned businesses. However, what Ramaswamy struggles to understand is that while other injustices were happening in other parts of the world like those

against the Uighurs in China, none of these corporate elites or their corporations expressed such fervent efforts towards them. It leaves only one conclusion: that their intentions were only a façade.

In the same vein, Ramaswamy was placed under a lot of undue pressure to state his stance on the matter by his subordinates. He expresses what many could agree with that: his personal views are not supposed to interfere with the delivery of the company's mandate which is to manufacture and develop treatments for diseases. His continued reluctance to engage in speeches and actions that would undermine this mandate and derail the company was taken to be a show of elitism and indifference to the plight of the black community although he personally detested racism. This leads to his argument that corporations were established under corporate law to only act in the best interest of their shareholders in the scope of exclusively maximizing profits. Corporations would in return not use the unlimited power afforded to them by the limited liability they enjoyed to meddle in other social spheres of public concern. Doing so would contravene their mandate.

Ramaswamy criticizes Milton Friedman in this chapter. Friedman who advocated for the inclusion of corporates in social responsibilities like what *Apple* and *Uber* did failed to explicitly acknowledge that doing so would be misusing the tremendous power that corporations have under that corporate law (p. 66). Ramaswamy argues that should corporations want to act *woke* and engage in social causes, then they should be required to be legally liable for any actions or results that come out of these efforts. Otherwise, it would be unfair that they continue to enjoy limited liability even when acting outside the mandate given to them under corporate law. This is further exacerbated by the fact that they do not do this genuinely. Instead, they use their power to influence other social spheres for selfish gains. Therefore, Ramaswamy advocates

for companies to bear full responsibility for their actions if they want to use social justice causes to gain moral mileage with consumers as this evens the playing field for the companies and genuine social justice activists who bear personal liability in case of anything.

Another aspect of this corporate *wokeness* that Ramaswamy addresses in the book, Chapter 10, is the fact that it is gradually starting to resemble a religion. Through his exemplary storytelling, he details the account of Emmanuel Cafferty who lost his job as a truck driver due to a very minor and innocent incident. Cafferty was innocently tricked into making the OK sign with his fingers by another driver at a traffic stop. Knowing that the sign meant OK and nothing else, he did it without putting much thought into it. However, his photo doing it made rounds on the internet and the invisible power structure that was earlier mentioned in this review ensured that he lost his job. One might ask how exactly did this happen. Well, *wokeness* has converted this rather innocuous gesture to mean 'white power' (p. 180) and is, therefore, forbidden. The forbidding of certain words, gestures, and other actions is similar to how religions act. Ramaswamy thus argues that *wokeness* has become a religion in every sense of the word including morally and legally and it is growing by the day (p. 181).

Under the religion of *wokeness*, people are taught to perceive injustices in every situation and everywhere. It does not offer room for dissenting views or partial subscription to its values. For people to remain a part of the woke religion, they must agree with all the beliefs, failure to which they are ejected and canceled. Ramaswamy (p. 192) argues that the Church of Diversity, a result of *wokeness*, has all the characteristics of a religion and rules over its members with an iron fist. He draws from the biblical story of the temptations of the devil on Jesus in the desert. With this, he argues that the Church of Diversity has given in to the temptations with the first sign being the sacking of employees who have dissenting views hence taking away their daily

living (bread) as a means of control- case in point being Cafferty. Therefore, employees have to believe in what *wokeness* has created or else they risk losing their livelihoods.

Further, the extent of the Church of Diversity supersedes ruling by fear and introduces salvation where it teaches people to see injustices like micro-aggressions, racism, and colonialism in every aspect of life. Only then can people gain true freedom from such injustice- it says. Ultimately, Ramaswamy writes that the 'church' promotes dominion over everything as it is not enough to just rule over a few people. Such undertakings by those who believe and exercise this *wokeness*, led by corporations are a stark image of how religion is run. Ramaswamy is able to capture this aspect of *wokeness* with such accuracy that triggers one to critically think and see just how much their lives have been affected by it. It goes without saying that corporations wielding such power on the public are tremendously detrimental given their already known intentions of advancing their capitalistic agenda. This insight by Ramaswamy acts as an eye-opener for those who might have been ignorant of the need to seek true freedom from *wokeness*.

Ramaswamy also delves into how American corporations have become a pawn in the capitalistic and draconian game of foreign dictators, all fueled by their *wokeness*. The author refers to the Chinese government which is led by President Xi Jinping and how it continues to exploit American corporations for their benefit. When corporates come out and claim to be pro-social justice by superficially promoting causes like *Black Lives Matter (BLM)* and diversity, they win the trust of consumers. This trust is then monetized in the form of sales and advertisements that are paid for by advertisers. All this is pretty much harmless in the grand scheme of things. However, Ramaswamy (p. 134) details that behind these superficial campaigns



are forces acting to deceive and fool Americans. He details the relationship that a company like *Airbnb* has with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

In his now characteristic narration, Ramaswamy writes of the resignation of the then Chief Trust Officer of *Airbnb*, Sean Joyce, and the events surrounding his resignation. The company had in January 2020 taken a rather unheard-of route by declaring <sup>1</sup> that it would henceforth make decisions based on its stakeholders. Stakeholders would include but not get limited to guests and hosts. The idea of doing right by the shareholders was abandoned. This was a ploy by *Airbnb* to portray itself as a company that cares for its most important part and, therefore, promote itself as the best service provider in its field. However, Joyce became privy to the unethical behavior of *Airbnb* that underpinned its success. The company was sharing the data and information of its American guests and hosts with the CCP. Ramaswamy writes that by maintaining a likable image to the public through its *wokeness*, *Airbnb* became ripe prey for the CCP to exploit with its proposition of accessing the vast Chinese market in exchange for user data. The unknowing consumers would not know what was happening behind the scenes and both the company and CCP would benefit from this. Once again, Ramaswamy shows how *wokeness* has become a tool for atrocious and unethical business models and activities.

Further, he criticizes how these woke American corporations have become two-faced because of their mutual ties to dictators and foreign powers. A CEO like Brian Chesky of *Airbnb* was quoted saying that “We are not here to promote American values” (p. 134). This was in response to the said allegations. Further, corporations like the NBA, its players, and executives were bold enough to criticize Trump and his administration and back social justice causes like the BLM in America but have never commented on the inhumane injustices being meted against the Uighurs in China or China’s breach of the autonomy pact of Hong Kong (p. 137).

Ramaswamy ties this to the fact that their lucrative deals with the Chinese administration and CCP bind them from speaking against it but are allowed to promote the Chinese agenda in the U.S through actions like those stated above. The loser, however, remains to be the American people who are tricked by the woke agenda of such corporations.

As he closes his argument and signs out, Ramaswamy offers his take in the fifteenth chapter on who Americans are and what they should aim to achieve as a people. He counters the idea that is promoted by *wokeness* that people's identities are tied to superficial characteristics like skin color, wealth, gender, or religion. He writes that *wokeness* has managed to teach people that they can only belong to one of these groups and are obligated to push their group's agenda and values (p. 259). This has created divisions among Americans as they have been trained to hate and cancel those that do not share with them these 'skin-deep' values and characteristics.

In contrast, Ramaswamy discourses that people are more than just one defining characteristic. They are a conglomeration of different values, mindsets, roles, characteristics, and morals. He terms this American pluralism. That anyone can be of any race, religion, and political view but still find a common ground with their comrades and other people. This is occasioned by the fact that those ideas pushed by *wokeness* are not who Americans are. *Wokeness*, according to Ramaswamy (p. 259) forecloses the possibility of people finding solidarity in common and shared values as it already shows people that if another does not share in your immutable characteristics, then they are the enemy and no positivity can be borne out of any engagement with them. This is the danger presented by the *woke* culture that is perpetuated by corporations and leaders in society. However, if people can look beyond this culture and appreciate others for their plurality, then true solidarity can be achieved.

The author further argues in the last chapter that America was founded on ideas that have been upheld by and enshrined in the constitution- capitalism and democracy. However, modern trends like capitalistic wokeness have threatened to distort the line between these two ideas and that puts America in jeopardy. Ramaswamy writes that sometimes, to achieve the true pluralism that is embodied in America and its citizens, it is needed that different institutions that serve these two main founding ideas remain separate and distinct (p. 260). Contrary to this, corporations and their leaders would be taking up an 'outsized role' in American democracy (p. 260) and the repercussions for this have been seen in the discussion above.

His closing remarks trigger a lot of deep thoughts in the minds of readers. He writes that America is an idea that is based on the American dream and the mantra that 'From many, one'. These are the ideologies that hold America together and should be the ones being promoted and sought after by all Americans if the country is to stand. He urges Americans to shun any efforts by corporations and politicians to divide them using *wokeness* as this only benefits the latter and affects the former.

*Woke, Inc.* is a book that sensitizes the reader on the advent of *wokeness*, a culture that is ravaging society and causing major divisions among Americans for the benefit of capitalistic corporations. It highlights the major theme of capitalism and democracy and provides various accounts to push its message. Through impeccable storytelling, the author has shown how *wokeness* has dealt Americans a bad hand rather than the purported championing of social justice. Companies like Goldman Sachs have been discussed to show how corporates use *wokeness* as a smokescreen to hide their atrocities. Further, the book calls for companies to bear full responsibility for their actions if they choose to engage in other social spheres outside the making profit mandate that they have been afforded under the corporate law. Additionally,

the book details how *wokeness* bears a resemblance to religion given its intolerant nature to dissenting views and an appetite for control and dominion. The book also discusses how American corporations like *Airbnb* and the NBA have gotten into mutual deals that deceive Americans through superficial *wokeness* campaigns with foreign powers like China. Finally, Ramaswamy urges Americans to embrace pluralism as only then can they achieve national cohesiveness and solidarity and defeat the narcissistic corporations and politicians who seek to divide them through the *woke* culture. In a nutshell, this a well-written book that weaves together storytelling and thematic expressions. It offers an interesting, objective, and holistic argument that can captivate the minds of many readers who hold the same view as the author.



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