**Ep93 Americano**

[00:00:00] **New Track:** Welcome to the Endless Knot Podcast

where the more we know

**Mark:** the more we want to find out

**New Track:** tracing serendipitous connections through our lives

**Mark:** and across disciplines

**Aven:** Hi, I'm Aven

**Mark:** And I'm Mark.

**Aven:** And today we're talking about America

**Mark:** and the Americano cocktail.

**Aven:** One patron to thank before we get started: a big thank you and welcome to James Nathan for supporting us. We are very grateful for your support.

 **Mark:** Thank you.

So today's cocktail choice is basically chosen for us by the the video that we are reviewing here. The original video was about the Americano cocktail as well as the related drink the Negroni.

**Aven:** So we're having a couple of Americano cocktails ourselves.

The recipe for it is very simple. It's one ounce of sweet [00:01:00] vermouth, one ounce of Campari, top up with soda, over ice, of course,

**Mark:** and for those who like their Americano stronger, as you will find out from the voiceover of the video, the substitution is to make it with equal parts vermouth, compari and gin, instead of the soda water.

**Aven:** So that's a Negroni. it's

**Mark:** That's a Negroni, yeah.

**Aven:** So cheers.

**Mark:** Cheers. This is a favorite cocktail of ours.

**Aven:** It's bitter, but it's got some sweetness and it's very refreshing. Cause it's, if you make it fairly long on the soda, it's a nice drink.

Yeah.

**Mark:** And the Negroni is also a very favorite cocktail of ours. So we love both these drinks and have them quite often.

**Aven:** All right. So this is really a companion piece to the quite recently released. Canuck episode, which was all about the origin of the word, Canada and related stories about the origins of Canada and was a [00:02:00] response to though not a celebration of Canada Day, July 1st. In the same way this is a response to though not a celebration of July 4th, Independence Day in the States. As non Americans, we don't usually celebrate that day, but we thought we would mark it ,this pair seemed sensible. And so this is a video that came out only a couple of years ago, I think. And it too touches on, anyway, some of the founding stories about America.

**Mark:** 2017, actually, is when it--

**Aven:** Oh, alright. Longer ago than I thought. Time has kind of done some weird kalaidoscope-y things recently. The video talks about the name America, but when we come back, we'll perhaps talk a little bit more about some other aspects of the origin stories and the foundation stories of America, or at least some of the stories that the Americans tell about their country.

So we can start by listening to the video and we will go from there.

**Mark:** The Americano is a tall drink made with Campari and Vermouth mixed with soda [00:03:00] water. It was first served in the 1860s by Gaspare Campari in his Caffé Campari. Gaspare, of course invented not only this cocktail, but also the bitters which bears his name. Of course at the time the drink wasn’t called an Americano. Instead it was known originally as a Milano-Torino after the origins of the two main ingredients, Campari from Milan and a particular type of vermouth called Punt e Mes from Turin. Legend has it that the drink became particularly popular with American expats during prohibition in the early 20th century, who then brought the Campari back with them under the loophole of it being classified as a medicinal product, and because of this American connection the drink became rechristened the Americano. Another, probably less likely, theory is that the name is derived from the Italian word amaro, which means bitter, Campari being a type of amaro—a class of Italian alcohol. Vermouth too is sometimes classified as an amaro, so I guess the Americano does indeed feature this particular type of bitter [00:04:00] liqueur. Vermouth gets its name from being originally flavoured with wormwood, which in German is called Wermut. Though it’s uncertain where this German word comes from, there is an Old English cognate referring to the wormwood plant, wermod. This has led some to etymologize the word as wer meaning “man” [think werewolf, literally “man-wolf”] plus mod related to our modern word mood but with the original sense of “courage”. Supposedly the reason the plant was called “man-courage” was that it was used as an aphrodisiac… if you see what I mean.

But if the Americano is connected with America, then going back further, where does the name America come from? Well, as you may have learned in school, the Americas were named after Amerigo Vespucci, the explorer and cartographer who demonstrated that what Europeans had ‘discovered’ was not in fact Asia, but a new-to-them continent. But we can go back even further and trace the origin of that name Amerigo, which comes from an old Visigothic name Amalric or Amalaric. The [00:05:00] Visigoths were a Germanic tribe who, at the end of the Roman Empire, marched through Europe and set up a kingdom in what is modern-day Spain, which lasted from the 4th to the 8th century. So that’s how this Germanic name made it to the Mediterranean. And of course we can etymologize even further and see in the name the Germanic components amal meaning “work or labour” and ric meaning “ruler”, coming through Celtic ultimately from the Proto-Indo-European root \*reg-, which meant something like “to move in a straight line” and thus “to lead or rule”. So a good name for a hardworking ruler, I suppose. In fact there was a King Amalaric of the Visigoths during the 6th century, though he may not appear very admirable to us. After a politically motivated marriage to the Frankish princess Clotilda, Amalaric beat his wife to coerce her into converting to the Arian heresy, and her appeal to her brother Childebert to punish him for this brought on a Frankish invasion which ultimately led to his death.

By the way, that Indo-European root \*reg- also gives us [00:06:00] such words as right, rich, rule, and in Latin rex meaning “king”. Appropriate then that this is an element in the name America, where many have gone to find the American dream of working hard to earn their riches, but odd that the country has its foundation in the republican movement of rejecting a king.

Speaking of the word ‘right’ and republicans, it’s the republican movement in revolutionary France that led to the left-right political labels. You see the supporters of the king [roi in French from Latin rex] appropriately enough gathered on the right of the National Assembly and the revolutionaries on the left. And before you point out that right in French is droit, I’ll point out that droit comes from Latin dirigo from dis plus rego, and is therefore cognate with English right. So, the left/right labels just stuck, and still today the political right refers to the more conservative factions and the political left to the innovators. Perhaps the labels have survived [00:07:00] because they seem appropriate, since the political right often sees themselves as following the straight and narrow path to rule, whereas “lefty” is often used pejoratively by the right to refer to what they see as the weaker side.

And in fact left did originally meant “weak” in Old English, and it was only in the 13th century that the word became the paired opposite of right, from the notion of the non-dominant hand. Before that the Old English word for “left” was winestra meaning literally “friendlier”, a euphemism due to the old superstition that the left side was unlucky. You can see the same thing in Latin with the word sinister, which probably originally euphemistically meant “more useful”, according to some etymologists. In modern English, however, the word only retains its pejorative associations. The French for “left” doesn’t come from sinister, but is instead gauche, coming from the Germanic Frankish language ultimately from a Proto-Indo-European root \*weng- meaning “to bend or curve”. The English borrowing gauche has a pejorative connotation, like sinister. [00:08:00] We may as well complete the set with the Latin word for right which was dexter, from which we get dexterity in English. This comes from a Proto-Indo-European root \*deks- which means not only “right” but also “south”, which would be on your right if facing east [I suppose because that’s where the sun rises so it’s easy to reckon]. The corresponding opposite in Proto-Indo-European was \*ner- which means both “left” and “north”, and indeed gives us the word north. Which I suppose brings us back to North America. And speaking of North America and pejorative meanings, the other meaning of the word Americano is the type of coffee, the Caffè Americano, which according to legend comes from WWII American GIs who watered down their espressos to make them more like US coffee, the term allegedly being used by Italians in a pejorative or derogatory sense.

Speaking of watering down drinks, or rather the opposite of watering down drinks, if the Americano cocktail doesn’t pack enough punch for you, you can replace the soda water with gin, and you’ll have a Negroni. [00:09:00] The story goes that this drink was first served at the Caffè Casoni in Florence in 1919 by bartender Fosco Scarselli to one Count Negroni, who wanted his Americano [or Milano-Torino as it was called at the time] with a little more kick. And who was this Count Negroni? Well he’s been possibly identified as Camillo Negroni, who was born in 1868 to Count Enrico Negroni and Ada Savage Landor and died in Florence in 1934. Camillo was quite a character and adventurer according to legend. He apparently travelled to America in 1892 in search of adventure and riches, spending time as a riverboat gambler, fencing instructor, cowboy wannabe, and even a banker, before returning to his native Florence in 1910 to invent his eponymous cocktail. Funny thing is, the picture that’s usually associated with him, with a dapper moustache and top hat, isn’t really him, it’s Arnold Henry Savage Landor, who may in fact be his cousin. Henry Savage Landor was also [00:10:00] something of an adventurer, an English painter, writer, explorer, and apparently cat fancier, who was a raconteur to Queen Victoria, and who during WWI designed tanks and airships. The grandfather of both these men was the romantic poet Walter Savage Landor, also a lively and wild character [so I guess it runs in the family], who as it happens wrote a play about the aftermath of the defeat of the last Visigothic king in Spain. Well, everything is connected!

But another possible candidate for the inventor of the Negroni cocktail is one General Pascal-Olivier de Negroni. This Count Negroni was born in France on the island of Corsica in 1829, and died in 1913. According to this story, Pascal Negroni invented the drink in honour of his wife [how romantic] while stationed in Senegal in 1857 [how colonial!]. Of course the problem is that Campari wasn’t invented until 1860, so it must have been a somewhat different drink with a different bitters. In any case, [00:11:00] General Negroni’s main claim to fame was that he led the charge of the mounted cavalry Cuirassiers in the Battle of Reichshoffen in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. Note that name REICHShoffen from that same root that’s been wending its way through this story of Americanos from the Visigothic Amalaric to the riches of America.

So was the Negroni invented in 1857 in Senegal by a bad ass war hero, or 1919 in Florence by an eccentric adventurer who liked to dress up as a cowboy? Who knows? The drink wasn’t mentioned in print until 1947 when notorious drinker Orson Welles was quoted as saying “The bitters are excellent for your liver, the gin is bad for you. They balance each other.” Maybe these two origin stories also balance each other!

But getting back to American riches, our story has an epilogue which takes us to the American dollar. The word dollar comes from the German Taler short for Joachimstaler, a coin made from the silver mined in Joachimsthal, a [00:12:00] town in Bohemia, now part of the Czech Republic. The coin was a popular one, and you could say the town of Joachimsthal made a mint from it! The town is named after St Joachim, who according to the non-biblical gospel of James was the father of the Virgin Mary, and was known as a rich man who gave to the poor. One of the theories of where the American dollar sign comes from is that it’s the monogram of St Joachim, with the S and J or I overlaid on each other, though the more well known theories are that it comes from the abbreviation ps for the Spanish American peso, another popular coin in the early days of America, or that it comes from the monogram US for obvious reasons.

Returning to Joachimsthal, the second part of the name, thal, means valley, so Joachimsthal is St Joachim’s Valley. It’s the same second element as in Neanderthal, because the first Neanderthal specimen was found in the Neander valley near Dusseldorf. That valley was named after a hymn writer named Neander — well actually his real name in [00:13:00] German would have been Neumann meaning literally “new man”, but his grandfather had translated the name Neumann into Greek Neander or in other words neo-ander meaning literally “new man”. Funny then that an older form of human, the Neanderthal, is named after a “new man”. As for our hymn writer Neander’s first name, as chance would have it, it was Joachim!

And finally, getting back to the Joachimsthaler, as I said, the coin became really popular, and suddenly everyone was minting their own thalers or dollars, not just America, but the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, and perhaps most importantly at the time, the Holy Roman Empire. And they called their coin the Reichstaler, with that same \*reg- root as the first element, bringing us right back to the Americano.

 Okay. So I have a few extra details to add.

So the word Americano in reference to the cocktail first [00:14:00] appears in print in the 1928 book "Ashenden, or the British Agent" written by Somerset Maughm. The quote is: "He sat in the cool and drank an Americano". So cocktails have often been connected with secret agents. Think James Bond and his vodka martinis, so this novel "Ashenden" kind of fits into that mold. It's the story of the adventures of a playwright turned spy, which is a really interesting progression there, named Ashenden, set during world war one. And apparently it's based on Maughm's own experiences as a member of the British intelligence during the war, just as Ian Fleming drew on his experiences during world war two for James Bond. Speeding of James Bond, the very first drink he orders in the very first James Bond novel, Casino Royale, is the Americano.

**Aven:** Oh,

**Mark:** So it certainly has a [00:15:00] spy pedigree. And in other stories, Bond, we hear him drinking a Negroni. So, you know, Bond's cocktail tastes extend beyond the now trademark martinis. He would often drink the sort of drink that was appropriate, where he was. Yeah. But in the movies, they just sort of always have him drinking the martini, the vodka martini. So as I said, the original name for the cocktail was the Milano Torino. So I thought I'd briefly summarize the etymologies of Milan and Turin. Sure. So Milan from Italian Milano comes from Roman Mediolanum from Gaulish medios, middle, plus lanu, plain, in reference to its situation in the Po valley.

So sort of in the middle of the plain, right. And that word lanu comes from the proto indo European root \*pelə- which [00:16:00] means flat or to spread. And it is also the source of words, like plain and plane, both spellings in all their various senses. As well as the word field, through the Germanic branch.

 As for Turin that comes from Italian Torino from Roman Augusta Taurinorum .

Which is probably from the Taurini, which is a tribe, in particular, a Ligurian people who had a capital in that place and their tribal name comes perhaps from Celtic \*tauro, meaning mountain, which is etymologically related to English tower and tor, which is kind of an old fashioned word.

I don't know that --

**Aven:** it's a Celtic word

**Mark:** for a sort of hill or mountain or something. But yeah, English tower, Latin turris and Greek turris, which probably comes from [00:17:00] a Mediterranean substrate, so it's one of those things we don't know, it's probably not indo European and otherwise we have no idea, right?

**Aven:** Probably has ritual purpose

**Mark:** or alternatively, it might come from a root \*tur, meaning water, which would come from proto Celtic \*dubros from proto into European, \*dheub- meaning deep or hollow, which is also the source of the words, deep and depth and dip and dive, and also Python which has the, the whole Greek mythological connection.

One of the many Greek monsters

**Aven:** specifically since I have so little classical stuff to add, I will add a little bit while I can. The Python is the monster that Apollo kills at the Oracle of Delphi and is a giant snake or a dragon. And that is what gives the [00:18:00] snake, later is named after it. The giant snake that people find is called the Python after that.

And that's why the priestess of the Oracle of Delphi has called the Pythia because she was once the Oracle of this snake or she replaces it. It's, it's all very confusing. So yes,

**Mark:** and I guess it's a monster that comes from the depths.

**Aven:** Yeah. It comes from the deep, it's an earth monster. All snakes are connected to the earth in Greek thought. Though actually the Greeks etymologized it, at least one of them, Ovid tells us that one etymology of it was that "putho" actually meant rotting because when Apollo killed the snake, it was left rotting in the sun. Now that's probably not right, but that was one etymology that the Greeks themselves thought it might be named after.

**Mark:** Well, speaking of folk etymologies the name of Torino, not just the Italian version, but the Latin version of the name, has long been interpreted as coming from Latin Taurus bull. Right. But that's, that is probably [00:19:00] not the case. As for the cafe Americano the, non alcoholic beverage.

Although the cafe Americano is supposedly connected with world war two, it doesn't find its way into print until a 1964 issue of the Sunday Gleaner of Kingston, Jamaica, of all places. Yeah. So it's presumably been, you know, the term has been in use for some time in, speech. But it never gets written down until then.

And in that particular citation in the Sunday Gleaner the text is "cafe Americano or cafe Latino. The first is what it says, mild American style coffee". The OED reports that the phrase cafe Americano is used in central American Spanish, at least as early as 1955. So that brings us back a little closer [00:20:00] to world war II.

But there's still a bit of a gap there, but it seems to have been somehow transported via Spanish or...

so it's hard to know exactly what the, vector for this word is on its way to English. Right. Now, the Negroni. As I mentioned in the video, it was first used in print quoting Orson Welles. The actual textual quote reads, "Orson Welles working in ‘Cagliostro’" and probably that is a poor pronunciation of italian. Yeah. Yes.

**Aven:** I don't think you pronounce that G but let us not spend that time on that right now

**Mark:** "in Rome writes that he's discovered a new drink there: Negronis. It's made of gin, Italian vermouth and Campari bitters," and then quote, within a quote, "the bitters are excellent for your liver.

The gin is bad for you. They balance each other." So that's the full context of that. Shortly thereafter, Ernest Hemingway used the word Negroni to refer to [00:21:00] something that sounds an awful lot, like an Americano instead. So this is in "Across the River and into the Trees" from 1950, quote, "they were drinking negronis, a combination of two sweet vermouths and seltzer water".

So 2 sweet vermouths, that's Campari and vermouth and the seltzer water.

**Aven:** So no gin, yeah.

**Mark:** Yeah. By the way there is a Negroni week, every year, to celebrate the cocktail and its history. And this year, 2021, it falls on the 13th to 19th of September. So mark your calendars and raise a glass to Count Negroni, whoever he is.

 All right. Now, Vermouth. That's the other key ingredient to the cocktail, to both cocktails. So as for the invention of vermouth, fortified wines containing wormwood seem to go back thousands of years, but the best claim [00:22:00] for the invention of the modern vermouth as we know it goes to Antonio Benedetto Carpano who introduced the drink in 1786 as a sweet, liqueur "more suitable for ladies". .And I hope you can, you can sort of hear the air quotes in my voice.

**Aven:** Wait, but, so I thought this was supposed to be a man stiffener or whatever.

**Mark:** Yeah, it's true. So the Carpano distillery also invented the Punt e Mes, that particular vermouth that was used in the original Americano.

And indeed you will see many vermouths saying that they have derived their recipe from the original Turin recipe. So, that's the kind of center of that. There are, vermouths made in other parts of the world that, diverge a little bit from that in the original ingredients. [00:23:00] So there are French red vermouths that are, you know, kind of different from the Italian ones.

So vermouth and compari are both classified as types of Amaro which means bitter, literally in Italian. The word amaro comes from Latin amarus which may come from the proto indo European root \*om-, meaning raw or sharp tasting.

That root \*om- also comes into Greek as omos, which can mean raw or crude, but it can also have the figurative sense "savage, fierce, cruel". And in an interesting paper at the recent CAC conference

**Aven:** Classical Association of Canada,

**Mark:** I can never remember, which C is which C

**Aven:** So it's taken me almost literally 20 years to basically get to the point that it's classical association of Canada.

Yes.

**Mark:** Anyways the paper was titled "A Late Antique [00:24:00] Recipe for Beer: Ethnographic Parallels from Ethiopia" by Kevin Solez. Well he talked about a Byzantine beer recipe that uses the word omos to describe bread that is used in the beer making process. And the idea is you cook the bread to the point where it is omos, and it's sort of unclear in that recipe exactly what that means. He argued that this didn't refer to being sort of raw or under cooked or anything like that. But instead on the other hand, burnt as a sort of semantic extension of Savage fierce, cruel, so really over cooked so that you get, you know, those really dark, I guess, more fiercely cooked.

So it has the kind of dark caramelly flavors, I guess you would get from overcooking a bread. And furthermore sort of supported this by comparing it with an Ethiopian beer producing method that is kind of [00:25:00] similar. And the Ethiopian parallel is quite intriguing, but I have a little bit of a problem with the semantic shift from this idea of fierce or cruel or savage to mean, over cooked or something like that, fiercely cooked since it essentially gives it the opposite sense of the root Greek, meaning of omos, which is raw or undercooked. Though of course, certainly strange shifts like that do sometimes happen.

**Aven:** Yeah. I mean, you've, you spend your entire surprisingly connected series explaining how words end up, meaning their opposite and other things like that. So,

**Mark:** but I did check and the figurative sense does not seem to be otherwise tested in Byzantine Greek. And furthermore, I think the, and I looked in the

new Cambridge Greek lexicon. Yes. which we recently acquired a copy of. So it refers to it as, you know, in reference to a [00:26:00] person or God or entity as being kind of cruel or to, it sort of gives a number of very specific contexts in which it can have that fierce, savage sense.

And none of them are anything literal or, could easily have a vector to refer to, something like cooking or bread. Right. So it's a big jump. It is a really big jump.

So, as I say, I really liked the Ethiopian parallel and you know, maybe there's a way around,

**Aven:** well, and it doesn't necessarily

**Mark:** It's linguistically a bit odd.

**Aven:**  It doesn't necessarily invalidate that, because it's unclear why undercooked would work either to do that.

So, yeah,

**Mark:** So anyways, that's my lexicographical contribution.

**Aven:**  Well, Kevin has now been mentioned in both of our country podcasts, because I mentioned Kevin in relation to his work on Indigenous feasting and Homeric feasting in the previous podcast. There you go.

[00:27:00] **Mark:** Now as for the name America. The etymology that I gave in the video is by far the most widely accepted one.

But there is an alternate suggestion that is worth mentioning. I don't think it's true, but it's. Intriguing that the Americas were not named in honor of America Vespucci, but instead named after a man named Richard Amerike. Oh,

**Aven:** right. Yes. Yeah.

**Mark:** So according to this claim, Richard Amerike, and that's spelled A M E R I K E.

He was an Anglo Welsh merchant, Royal customs officer and sheriff of Bristol. And he was a backer of John Cabot's expedition to the so-called new world. and so the idea is that the expedition was subsequently named after him in gratitude for this sponsorship. And so from there, supposedly according to this theory, it came to refer to therefore [00:28:00] the whole land mass.

Now the problem here is that there isn't really any evidence for any of it, textual evidence for any of it. And so few have sort of taken up the theory, but you know, there's a lot of texts that people haven't looked at, so who knows ?

**Aven:** Yeah, and it's true that the amount of Amerigo Vespucci connection is a weird connection, it isn't that he actually discovered anything.

Or he was

**Mark:** first, he was the first to sort of, show that this is a new land mass,

**Aven:** well, he said, he said that he knew that. Yeah. I mean, he didn't like prove it and he didn't,

**Mark:** and he didn't make it to the west coast.

**Aven:** It's just that somebody else picked up that he had said that. Added his name to a couple of maps and that's how it got.

And he didn't even know that that had happened or it's unclear that he knew that anybody credited him with that. So, yeah, they're both very tangential. I'm not saying that. I think the other, that the Amerike is more plausible. I'm just saying it's not like the Amerigo one is so obvious. [00:29:00] I don't know if you have anything about why it's not Columbia,

**Mark:** It very nearly was which is the point. Yeah, I mean, so many things in the so-called new world were named Columbia for that reason.

**Aven:** Well, and in the states, I mean, Columbia is the personification of America. You have the district of Columbia, you have all of those things. Yeah. And they came very close to calling the whole country, the United States of Columbia, or, But it had taken hold, I guess enough by then. Yeah.

**Mark:** So his last name Amerike is the Anglicised spelling of the Welsh name ap Meurig, son of Meurig. And again, I may not be pronouncing that correctly cause it's Welsh.

which is the Welsh form of the name, Maurice.

So that is what the name is. So son of Maurice, which comes from the Latin name Maurus. Okay. And this in turn, may be related to Greek mauros, meaning dark and or Moor, essentially. So in other [00:30:00] words, inhabitant of Mauritania. But lest we lose our connection to the PIE \*reg- root, Amorike's first name is Richard which is made up of the elements, Rich or Rick which means ruler from that root and harthu , which means hard, so literally hard or powerful ruler.

Right. So obviously a, good name for a leader, a king and whatever. And there are many, you know, Richard's obviously in Royal positions throughout history. And then the last, little bit, I talked about the dollar and the etymology of that word. And so speaking of that root, taler or Joachimsthaler, the coin.

The other countries that I sort of briefly mentioned that picked up the coin, many of them also added that Rick or rich element to the beginning of the, in addition to the holy Roman empire. So the holy Roman empire, [00:31:00] as I said, was Reichsthaler. But we also have, and I'm going to butcher some Dutch and Danish and Swedish here.

But rijksdaalder in Dutch, Danish rigsdaler and Swedish riksdaler. Again, all of those essentially mean national dollar. I think that's the sense of the 'rik' element. So it's calling it out as a national currency, right? As for the American dollar, of course, it's colloquially known as the buck which is an abbreviation of buckskin, which was a common unit of exchange between native Americans and Europeans in the early frontier days of north America.

Mm. And so the last little bit that I wanted to add to all of this, I talk about the political left and right and where that association of left and right comes from in reference to France. In terms of their color [00:32:00] association, red is usually associated with the left. If you think of socialism and communism and the Liberal party in Canada and the Labour party in the UK, they all have red as their color.

Whereas blue usually represents the sort of more conservative or right-wing. So the Tory blue in the UK or the Conservatives in Canada, for instance. The one big exception to all of this is in the US. They just had to do it differently, but only very recently. So the reason that the US has the flip side of that in which the blue is the Democrats and the red is the Republicans is because of simply the color associations used in on-screen graphics in television coverage of the 2000 presidential election.

And it [00:33:00] just so happened in that one year that a whole bunch of different TV broadcasters used the same colors. I mean, you're going to have, because of the American colors, right, red, white, and blue, you're gonna, you're going to

**Aven:** go with those two blue and red and they're good colors on

**Mark:** TV because they're nice and contrastive and so forth.

So it just happened in that one year that a bunch of them happened to use the same color. in previous elections, it was more random. They'd been both ways, but in that one year they had a bunch of them happen to use the same associations. And it just sort of stuck.

**Aven:** Maybe because that election was so controversial.

And so it was talked about for longer. Yeah. And that's, you know, which were the blue states and the red states became a thing you talked about for more than just that night. Yeah.

**Mark:** And so now it's just normal to talk about, red and blue states, red and blue in terms of electoral.

**Aven:** Yeah, well, and, and the parties have adopted those colors as their campaigning colours.

Yeah. Yeah. Which is kind of an amazing thing when you think about it. just [00:34:00] because CNN happened to use some colors one night.

**Mark:** So that is why they confuse the rest of the world. The rest of the world is totally confused by this because the, traditional associations have been so different. But there you go.

There's the political left and political right.

**Aven:** I want to pick up on something you said just right near the end, but when you were talking about the buck because that reminded us, me, that our podcast about Canada focused a lot on Indigenous issues and this hasn't, and that's fine. I mean there is much of course to be said about the relationship between America and indigenous peoples, but it doesn't have to be this podcast.

And also I feel less, much less able to speak on it that I feel able to at least start to talk about the Canadian issues.In case it isn't really clear by now we're Canadian, not American. But I do think it is interesting. I don't think it necessarily reveals any greater truth or anything else about it, but it is interesting that the name for Canada, even if it was a complicated origin story does come from an Indigenous [00:35:00] word and none of the mooted, or at least neither Columbia nor America have anything to do with Indigenous names for the, for the region or for any of the regions that were first met or found or anything like that.

I mean, there are parts of the Americas that do, of course, that are named after the lovsl

**Mark:** The United States of Mexico

**Aven:** Yeah for instance. And

**Mark:** one of the quotations that when I was researching for the Canada episode it was someone saying, it's not good that America doesn't have a home grown kind of name that that comes from an Indigenous word or something.

And it sort of holds up Mexico and Canada, as, you know, look, they've got Indigenous derived names

**Aven:** Names from this continent,

**Mark:** and America doesn't, and you know, that's too bad.

**Aven:** So, yeah. So it's just a point, I mean, on the other hand, names can disguise as well. You know, having a name that comes from an Indigenous word, doesn't make Canada less colonialist or less imperialist.

And so America being named [00:36:00] after some of the first peoples wouldn't make it any less of a call, you know, colonizing state. But it is, I think it's still interesting to note when we tell this story and, just, I just want to acknowledge that we're not touching on those issues, even though we did so much in the other one.

But I want to go back even further than that, you had one offhanded comment that I'm going to now spend 20 minutes talking about in that where you were talking about the origin of the name Amerigo, which goes back to the Gothic word Amalric, the name. And you mentioned the Visigoths the Germanic tribe who, as you put it "at the end of the Roman empire, marched through Europe and set up a kingdom in what is modern day Spain, which lasted from the fourth to the eighth century."

So I wanted to go back to that mostly because I have very little to contribute to modern history when we talk about it. So I'm going back to something. I have something to say about, plus it allows me to bring up a Roman poem, a Latin poem, which is my contribution to this podcast. So the Visigoths are as with all theGoths but in particular, the [00:37:00] Visigoths so strongly associated with the fall of the Roman empire, that whole period around the beginning of the fifth century, historically, or traditionally four 10 is said to be the fall of the Western Roman empire, when the goths sacked Rome, right?

 Now there is much dispute about the whole idea of when Rome fell, if Rome fell, what Rome falling means, what caused Rome to fall, et cetera. And I'm going to come back to that. But one of the things that I think is interesting is how we periodize and we look back and we pick particular moments and of course the ancient world did this too.

It's very normal, people do this. And we pick a moment. We say, well, before this, it was X and after this, it was Y right? Like the battle of Hastings is really easy. One you're in like before this, it was, English and after this, it was Norman or whatever, but the fall of Rome is treated that way.

But on the ground, and at the time, it's important to realize that you don't necessarily see those moments, and know those moments are that kind of watershed. And Most [00:38:00] of the time, we can't tell what people in the past, whether they knew or not, but we actually have a poem by a man named Rutilius Claudius Namatianus.

Anna's all we have for him is a floruit, we know approximately when he lived in the fifth century. But he wrote a poem that is set describing a coastal voyage from Rome to Gaul in 416. So that is six years after the fall of Rome, the sack of the Roman city. But what he is describing as he took a voyage from his home land of Gaul to Rome to carry out various political and jobs of a magistrate.

He went to do, you know, proper Roman tasks in Rome and then he returned to And when he talks about the story and describes Rome, he doesn't see it. He's not like, oh, Rome has fallen. I live in a post-Rome world. I live in a world where the empire no longer exists, where there is no such thing as Rome.

I now live in the [00:39:00] middle ages. I now live in a kingdom, not an empire. I now live ruled by goths and not by Romans. He doesn't see that. So he describes that the goths have over run the city and the land of Italy and all the rest of it.

**Mark:** I mean, regime changes during the Roman empire were a daily event.

**Aven:** I'm not going to go into the whole details of, you know, what the sack meant and what happened and all the rest of it. And of course, other people set the fall of Rome later in the fifth century. And there were multiple dates, right? There's Romulus Augustulus as the last emperor and all of these things, but.

He talks about the goths. So he speaks of seeing the evidence of the "outrages of goths with fire or sword". He talks about as he travels out of Rome and along the coast, he, it's a sort of a travel narrative in elegiac couplets.

And he describes, ruined farms and devastated, but not only that, but he does describe the devastation of the attacks, but of course, devastating war in Italy also not exactly unknown to Rome. I mean, yes, there were whole [00:40:00] periods where Italy itself wasn't but at the beginning of the Imperial period was a hundred years of wars in Italy.

And there were multiple periods in the third century when there were wars in Italy and, you know we look at one time and we say, okay, after this things have changed, but the people living through it, you don't see that necessarily. And it isn't necessarily true, even from our perspective. So he opens his poem with this long paean of praise to the unconquerable glory of Rome, the Rome eternal, right.

That has become a cliche and traces it from Romulus and uses all the lines about the great descent of Rome.

And he says "things which cannot be sunk rise again with greater energy sped higher in their rebound from lowest depths." I'm going to read from a Loeb translation, which is quite old.

So forgive me when it sounds very old and silly. "The span, which doth remain is subject to no bounds so long as earth shall stand firm and heaven uphold the stars. That same thing builds thee up, which wrecks all other realms. The law of thy new birth is the power [00:41:00] to thrive upon thine ills." So he's recognizing that it's going through a rough patch, a

**Mark:** bit of a rough patch, but it'll go up again.

**Aven:** I mean, it has, it has so many times, right. If this is 416 and it supposedly was founded in 753 BC, it has managed well over a thousand years at this point. And he says, the Goths will get what's coming to them. Because remember they sacked Rome, but they didn't stay.

But he sees the goths as oath breakers because they didn't swear out of loyalty or when they did they broke it.

So he says, "come then, let an impious race fall in sacrifice at last, let the Goths in panic abase their forsworn necks, let lands reduced to peace pay rich tribute and barbarian booty fill thy majestic lap," and then he goes on to sort of talk about all the rest of the empire as if it's still the empire, as though Rome is still Rome.

"Let the Rhineland plow for thee, for thee, let the Nile overflow, let a teeming world give nurture to its nurse, let Africa proffer to thee her fertile harvests, et cetera, et cetera.

**Mark:** Well, and certainly other parts of the empire barely felt it at all. Yeah.

**Aven:** So yeah, I'm not saying [00:42:00] he was right and we're wrong to say that this was a turning point.

I'm just saying that that wasn't his narrative, his narrative was not " Rome has fallen. We live in a post-Rome world". He saw it as yet another, you know, blow. Sure. And he goes on to talk about bad things and other people a little bit later, make it clear that a lot of the aristocracy as the Visigoths moved into Spain, a lot of the aristocracy there left, for instance, even though it was a fairly peaceful comparatively peaceful movement and setting up of an area some of them assimilated, others of them left, but of course that's only the aristocracy.

No one else even had the choice to leave. There's lots of cultural continuity. I really only bring that up partly because it's a poem, but also because I think it's really fascinating to see something so close in time to this watershed moment that yes, acknowledges it as a shocking and horrifying moment for sure, but doesn't, have that awareness of this as a, as a boundary marker, as it is often described. And we have to remember that the narrative on the [00:43:00] ground is not necessarily the retrospective narrative and that what we see as really important right now might not be what is seen as important later and vice versa, and that one of the things that's constructing his narrative form is the story of eternal Rome, Rome, Virgil said, is eternal. It's going to be eternal. And he had reason to say so at the time, and then the next 400 years seem to prove him pretty freaking right, comparatively. And that narrative constructs the way Namatianus and many of the other, there's a whole Gallo-Roman sort of flourishing of, Claudian was right around this just before him and Ausonius, and then there's later we have a few others.

They are all functioning in this continuation of Roman culture. This poem heavily draws on Ovid and Virgil, so it's all within this long continuous tradition.

And there's no reason for him to feel like this has been a disruption any more than the many disruptions that have been in the past. he didn't stop being Roman. And in fact, people, aren't going to stop being Roman [00:44:00] for a very long time.

**Mark:** Bede thinks of himself as a Roman.

**Aven:** Exactly, exactly. I just think it's important. This is a helpful moment for us to think about how people conceive of themselves, which I want to parallel that a little bit back to last episode, where we were talking about people using that classical past. Cause that's what Namatianus is doing here.

He's using his own classical past from 500 years ago, 400 years ago to construct the narrative of what's going on now, to place what happened, this tragic, horrifying, shocking event of Rome being sacked, to put it into a continuum that he can understand and say, what's the greater narrative here? The greater narrative here is the, you know, the eternity of Rome. And so I can see that and I can place this event, which is so hard to encompass in my understanding of the world, I can place it in a way that I can understand it by putting it into that narrative. And the same time we were talking last time about you know, a whole new continent, a whole new world, all these new peoples, well, how do I encompass this?

I frame it as the Aeneid. I [00:45:00] frame it in a classical text in a way that makes it comprehensible to me. And I mean, we need these kinds of framing narratives, but they also have, there are dangers because if you just say, Rome is eternal, you can shout Rome is eternal as you die, as Rome falls, if you just stand there shouting "But no, but Rome is eternal!" That narrative, isn't going to help you in the end if it's too contrary to reality. So, you know, it's helpful, but it also can be harmful. And that brings me to tying it back a little bit to what I said right at the beginning, we want to talk a bit about. to narratives of the US and American narratives about where they come from.

Rome is this narrative that has been used to construct the idea of America since the beginning. certainly since the revolution, if not before very consciously and explicitly and intentionally the Republic. Yeah, yeah.

**Mark:** Which is something that they're also drawing from French political ideology, revolutionary ideology and the idea of yes. A Republic

**Aven:** like the king [00:46:00] killers and the yeah. And the French are even more explicit about it because they are the tyrant killers. The Americans don't actually go ahead and kill any Kings. They don't have to have to, they just have to withdraw.

Yeah. Yeah, exactly. They just have to stop him from being in charge. So there's a sort of difference, but yeah, no, so they're not taking it directly from Rome, but of course the founding fathers and the various other people involved all had classical educations

**Mark:** it was a very tight philosophical group that shared ideas,

**Aven:** and they all came to it with this classical knowledge, this knowledge of the classical world and with a basic assumption that the classical world was probably to be emulated either by doing what they did or seeing what they did wrong.

And then, so, you have the tension between the Athenian democracy and Roman republicanism and, you know, all of these things like, which is the best way to go. But with that basic assumption that it's venerable and worth using as a model. and ever since parallels between Rome and America have been legion, to coin a term.

partly because, because of this [00:47:00] parallel from the beginning, partly because of the rise of the American empire and that Rome has been the go-to comparison for empires ever since it's been Rome. So then we get into the fall of Rome comparisons and that's where it ties back to the goths here.

You know, the narrative of is America going to fall, like Rome fell? So unlike Rutilius, whose narrative is Roma aeterna, eternal Rome the model of Rome is that, no Rome fell. They thought they were eternal, but they fell. So America take warning. So Rome has been used as either avoid the errors that Rome made and you, you can be eternal unlike Rome or take warning from the way Rome fell and make sure you don't fall that way.

Or, or just a general you are falling. Yeah. You are falling and it's, or even it's good that you will fall, you corrupt evil empire, right? Like it can be used from almost any position, both the right and the left. Both, people who love America and hate [00:48:00] America can all use this as a point.

And do.

**Mark:**  So who are the modern Goths? Well, are they the goths?

**Aven:** No. So the modern goths are immigrants, my dear. Okay. Right. So as far back as like 2012 I mean, further back than that, I'm sure. But in 2012 there's a JStor article. So there's an article an academic article being published in 2012, which means, we all know how academic publishing works, we know it was being written before that quite a long time before that, about the fall of it's called "The Fall of Ancient Rome and Modern US Immigration: Historical Model or Political Football?" by Frank Argote-Freyre and Christopher M Bellitto, one is a classicist and one is a Latin American scholar, I think, or a scholar of Latin American material. And they talk a lot about the classroom teaching. The point being basically, they're saying, look, people use this metaphor all the time and it goes two ways. Cause then they refer to a speech that was made in Congress.

I think about Rome fell because it opened its borders and it let in the goths and [00:49:00] because they let in the goths and they didn't pay attention to the immigrants within their borders and they were too free. Yeah.

**Mark:** And starved them and whatnot, they rebelled and

**Aven:** no, no, because they let them into their borders and they let them establish their state and they welcomed them and they allowed them and they paid them as mercenaries.

And then they formed a state within a state and then they rose up and they took Rome from within. No, no. This was a speech saying, treat those immigrants worse, stop treating them so nicely. Right? It was saying, America. We will be like, Rome. We will fall if we don't tighten up against illegal immigration.

**Mark:** Right. Which is not actually how the, well, I mean how it worked in Rome,

**Aven:** but yeah. Yeah. It worked in very complicated ways in Rome. And so part of this article is really saying, I don't care what your immigration position is. Let's talk about what actually, can we use the word immigration to even talk about the Roman?

Like, does that even make any sense? And what do you mean by a state within a state, in a pre-state world let's unpick these metaphors that people are [00:50:00] using and, be more accurate in our comparisons. And then you can make your policies on whatever grounds. I mean, it's quite clear from the article that they are not impressed with this anti-immigration use of the metaphor.

Right. But they're trying to say, we're not here to argue for a particular immigration policy. What we're here to argue for is thinking about whether you can use this comparison at all. But that is definitely when you say, who are the goths, it's illegal immigrants from Mexico, that's who it is in the American political imagination, not everyone's, but there is a whole set of right wing, mostly narratives about that's what's caused the fall of Rome.

It's too many people who don't speak Latin, () English, right? Too many people who aren't culturally assimilating, but are instead maintaining their own cultural context. And, the goths and various groups who did come in as groups in a different way than in earlier periods, you'd had sort of absorption by conquest.

Yeah. And they were migrating in their family groups and in their, in their political groups and they were being [00:51:00] settled and accepted and were causing forcing settlements either way, lots of different waves of this in their political groups and in their kinship groups. I'm not going to litigate the fall of Rome and what caused it.

And there, it's a very complex story, but I want to raise the point that this idea of using Rome as a parallel for America, actually does center around the goths. So just to tie it back to our old pal Amerigo, there is a narrative of that, and then it's being, countered sometimes by people flipping it and saying, well, Rome lasted as long as it did.

In fact, the whole rise of Rome was because of its willingness to assimilate and willingness to allow immigrants. And I mean, it is really true that that term is a very anachronistic term to use for the whole period. But, you know, allow people to come into Rome and acquire citizenship and acquire and fight in the armies.

**Mark:** Like the great American melting pot.

**Aven:** Well, yeah, and I mean, this is part of what the argument, that the metaphor, I mean, it's not the same, but it's part of the argument [00:52:00] that some of these anti-immigrant people use, is that too many people coming in all at once. And so they aren't assimilating into the melting pot.

They're maintaining their language ,shock of shocks. They're still speaking Spanish and how dare they.

It's use the argument any way you want, as long as the end result is. I don't like people coming in from Mexico, as long as the end is people coming in from Mexico are bad, it doesn't matter what you have to do to get there. And I think that's always important to notice if, if every metaphor somehow ends up with the same result, maybe it's the result you want, not the metaphor.

But also people saying, well, Rome, the strength of Rome was in its multiculturalism. you can make that argument too in earlier periods. It's a little tricky though, because again, yeah, they allowed a lot of immigrants, you know how those immigrants got into Rome? Mostly as enslaved people, and then they were maybe freed and, or, you know, generationally, then they became citizens over time.

But I don't call that immigration, that's not immigration. So, you know, I think we will never get away from [00:53:00] using historical parallels because that's how we function and we should be able to learn from the past, but they're never simple. And when you take a narrative and you try to fit it to a modern situation, because you want the story that worked in this other situation, it's almost always going to lead to

problems. Let's just say. The other place that you got the fall of the Roman empire narrative is with the decadence narrative. And that's when you get, Rome fell because it was decadent. And everybody had orgies all the time and that's why it fell, which is an argument that you see all the time.

And and people weirdly, they associate that with like the Julio-Claudian crazy emperors, so that, you know, Donald Trump was compared to Nero repeatedly and Caligula and things like that. And that this was a sign of the fall of Rome, which is ridiculous since that's the beginning of the round.

It's like, Nero died in 79 and Rome, if it fell at the earliest fell in 410 that's, literally three and a half centuries later, [00:54:00] it had nothing to do with the decadence, supposed decadence of a few Roman emperors. So watch for those, there are many, many facile comparisons between Rome and America.

And while there may be etymological links, it is important to recognize that basically those stories can be made to say almost anything anyone wants to say about America, partly because the Roman story is so long. And I'm not saying that there are no parallels or there are no lessons to be learned.

Of course there are, but just keep an eye out for the twists and turns of those parallels.

 And that's the bit I wanted to add.

 So we've drained our Americano to the dregs?

**Mark:**  Indeed.

**Aven:** And the story too.

I hope this helps you reflect back on the 4th of July and ahead to future celebrations of the date. If you feel so inclined,

 **Mark:** but on the other hand, enjoy a good Americano or Negroni. I can unreservedly [00:55:00] recommend those, so,

**Aven:** Yes. Much less problematic.

And that's it for now!

**Mark:** Bye-bye

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**Mark:** Bye. [00:56:00]

So happy 4th of July, if this does end up coming out on or before that.

**Aven:** Okay. Now let's record one for, if it comes out afterwards, I'll edit the right one in at the end.