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# That's The Way It Crumbles: The American Conquest Of English



## Synopsis

Are we tired of hearing that fall is a season, sick of being offered fries and told about the latest movie? Yeah. Have we noticed the sly interpolation of Americanisms into our everyday speech? You betcha. And are we outraged? Hell, yes. But do we do anything? Too much hassle. Until now. In *That's The Way It Crumbles* Matthew Engel presents a call to arms against the linguistic impoverishment that happens when one language dominates another. With dismay and wry amusement, he traces the American invasion of our language from the early days of the New World, via the influence of Edison, the dance hall and the talkies, right up to the Apple and Microsoft-dominated present day, and explores the fate of other languages trying to fend off linguistic takeover bids. It is not the Americans' fault, more the result of their talent for innovation and our own indifference. He explains how America's cultural supremacy affects British gestures, celebrations and way of life, and how every paragraph and conversation includes words the British no longer even think of as Americanisms. Part battle cry, part love song, part elegy, this book celebrates the strange, the banal, the precious and the endangered parts of our uncommon common language.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

An acerbically witty and entertaining survey ... a work of stubborn persistence, or resistance. \*

Sunday Times \* Highly entertaining. \* Spectator \* Engel [hunts] down his prey like a linguistic witchfinder-general ... short-tempered but consistently witty. -- John Sutherland \* New Statesman \* Praise for Engel's *England*: 'Wry, rueful, funny, packed with knowledge, and, like all good reporting,

entirely personal and subjective, it is simply the most enjoyable commentary on today's England that could be imagined. \* Sunday Times \* Highly personal and very funny \* London Review of Books \* The great pleasure in the book - for Engel as much as the reader - is in his love of the entertaining factual nugget \* Financial Times \* Engel has the perfect light, humorous touch for the task. \* New Statesman \* Immensely enjoyable... Engel is a wonderfully wry comic writer. \* The Guardian \* Throughout his entertaining history, Engel argues for a stout forward defence against this onslaught of "cool" and "fun" and "you guys". -- Tim Adams \* The Guardian \*

Matthew Engel is a journalist and author. He writes regularly for the Guardian and Financial Times, among other publications, and was the editor of the Wisden Cricketers' Almanack for twelve years. He is also a baseball enthusiast. His books include Eleven Minutes Late: A Train Journey to the Soul of Britain, Extracts from the Red Notebooks and Engel's England: Thirty-nine Counties, One Capital and One Man (Profile, 2014) [9781846685729].

Great fun! He's a Brit, who spent years in the USA and is neither prescriptive nor proscriptive. Especially recommended for those entartete Americans who think theatre is, somehow, more valid than theater, centre is more valid than center. Are you noting this, Manhattan Theatre Club at City Center?

Is it really The American Conquest of English? Is it really over? Are the English fighting back? These are the question pressed in this wonderfully written informative book. In many quarters, it will be read with alarm, but the best way to enjoy this book is to Stay Calm and Read On. Read how tomatoes became tomatos, fries became chips, and, for that matter, how cocks became roosters. This book is not just a citation of the differences between American words and their English counterparts, it tells how the Americans spread their culture and influence to England. One route was the cinema. But, Engels report, even British politics has also been Americanised. Where once, in Britain, one stood for Parliament, now the English are leaning towards running for office. Engels put it light-heartedly, Nobody stands now, they run. Like hell. Starting almost from birth. The House of Lords has become The Supreme Court. Coincidence? Of course, many English words were not English to begin with, so Engels helps by pointing out the history of some of those words and how the English become annoyed when those words become Americanised. Engels calmly tell us that many Americanised words have become acceptable and routine to the extent that

no many know that they were once frowned upon, by the English elite. He cites *‘talented’* as an example of the distortion of *‘talent’*, and the inappropriate use of *‘a reliable person’*. *‘we do not rely a man, we rely upon a man’*. American troops stationed in England and the popularity of the radio for entertainment brought with them more Americanised words and phrases. The advent of internet probably renders the English utterly defenceless. Engles reminds the English that the World Wide Web was invented by an Englishman, Sir Tim Berners-Lee, but nowhere in the world do we see *‘epost’*. The word is *‘email’*. Engels hint that all may not be lost, but the situation is complex. On the one hand, *‘Every language in the world now exists in opposition to English, and every form of English exists in opposition to American English. With just one possible exception’* and on the other, Multicultural London English (part Jamaican patois and part black British vernacular) may prove worse than American English. So perhaps, *‘in order to thrive in modern Britain, they need to speak American like everyone else’*.

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