

# DAILY NEWS

## The myth that the right cancels as much as the left

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While mainstream America may associate cancel culture with woke progressives exiling those who cross lines newly drawn in the sand, left-leaning commentators want to let you know it's as much a problem if not worse on the right. The facts are not on their side.

Conservatives are behind the “real” cancel culture, says Salon. Conservatives try to “cancel” people and institutions they disagree with all the time, says BuzzFeed. “Nobody loves ‘cancel culture’ more than Republicans do,” claims a Washington Post columnist.

In this rendering, conservatives canceled Colin Kaepernick and now they're trying to cancel critical race theory and its purveyors. Nikole Hannah-Jones, we're told, was canceled when the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill denied tenure to the controversial author of the 1619 Project.

If the right really does cancel people for violating its orthodoxies, this makes a mockery of their claims that the left is engaged in vast, vile new wave of censorship against ideas deemed politically incorrect.

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This much is true: The instinct to cancel transcends political boundaries, and conservatives have a long history of canceling — by which I mean, the attempt to actually ruin a career or a life for perceived apostasies — from McCarthyism to the crusade against the Dixie Chicks. Moreover, social media has empowered us all, so that conceivably anyone regardless of persuasion can whip up an online mob that results in cancelation.

But in the real world today, the actual threat of being canceled is far stronger coming from the left than the right.

It is left-of-liberal progressives and their obsession with hurt feelings who have weaponized language to shrink the parameters of acceptable speech, and who insist that non-prescribed words amount to violence against “oppressed” groups.

And it is disagreement on subjects most important to them, like race and gender, that most often end in canceling.

Much of what we on the left claim is “conservative cancel culture” isn't cancel culture at all. It was wholly immoral and antithetical to democracy when Republicans made false claims about election fraud, and targeted minority voters in the process. But, plausible as it may sound,

Republicans didn't "cancel" democracy or the Black vote; that is a distortion of what it means in our age to cancel. They shamelessly sought to usurp political power, not push someone out of a job or destroy their livelihood because of a divergent viewpoint.

Insofar as conservatives do seek to cancel, their focus tends to be more purely political and on their own, like those who defy Donald Trump, such as Liz Cheney. They are less likely to take aim at the broader culture — those with strong disagreements on gender norms or race or other potentially contentious matters. They're not the ones roundly condemning Halloween and Abraham Lincoln. It's not the right demanding near-total allegiance to concepts like "anti-racism."

And it is not the right, but rather the left's growing fealty to woke dogma, that is leading more and more Americans to self-censor — that stops the comedian from telling a line-pushing joke, the fiction writer from taking on minority characters, the university student from thinking critically on complex issues, or parents from objecting to their child being indoctrinated with segregationist concepts like critical race theory.

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education found that 60% of college students are uncomfortable challenging peers and professors on "controversial" topics, and a Cato Institute poll found that 62% of Americans say they self-censor, with only a majority of those who identified as far-left-liberals saying they can openly share their political views — presumably because their views most closely conform to the reigning orthodoxy.

And while, as Ezra Klein has noted, not all of this new illiberalism may be intended to lead to canceling, it certainly paves the way for it. Accusing J.K. Rowling of "transphobia" for defending science or a political data analyst of "anti-Blackness" for sharing data suggesting that violence following George Floyd's death could help Donald Trump's reelection bid is to tar people with the most incendiary taboos, begging for a digital pile-on.

And mostly it is left-dominated institutions aligned with the new illiberalism that mete out the firings that follow. James Bennet of the New York Times and Gary Garrels of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art officially resigned but were in effect pushed out — canceled — for not adhering to the reigning orthodoxy, a scenario playing out across culture-shaping industries like higher education, technology, the arts and news media. Even the ACLU, whose founding mission was to defend free speech, has de-prioritizing the First Amendment in favor of identity politics, with no mention in its annual reports from 2017 to 2019 of "the First Amendment" or "free speech," or of colleges and universities, where the assault on speech is rife.

It is only defenders of the new illiberalism, sitting in relative positions of privilege, who are in denial about the left's epidemic of intolerance. In a recent podcast, New York Times columnist Michelle Goldberg said her reporting found the left's connection to cancel culture is largely a figment of the imagination. "I felt there was to some extent no there-there," to which her co-panelist, linguist John McWhorter, reminded her that the woke mob is precisely why Donald McNeil, Alison Roman, Bari Weiss and James Bennet no longer work at the Times, and that he hears every day from people impacted by far-left, identity-obsessed authoritarianism.

Even those of us on the left who do oppose cancel culture too rarely speak up. There was the Harper's Letter on Justice and Open Debate but many of the signatories have been silent since. There is a shortage of lively debate in our ranks as to whether the business of canceling

has gone too far, and no organizing effort to reclaim liberalism from the woke mob, just quiet complicity with vague reassurances from the wokest among us that the real perpetrators of cancel culture, the atavists in our midst, as always, are our political enemies.