

# Tablet

## The New Gatekeepers

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On or around December 1910, human character changed,” wrote Virginia Woolf. Between 2010 and 2012, American culture changed. Within a few years, what had been obscure concepts in politicized university departments like gender studies and ethnic studies became orthodoxy not only in the academy, media, and the nonprofit sector, but also in the boardrooms of national and global corporations, banks, and in professional associations like the American Bar and Medical associations.

In 2010, if you had said that unisex bathrooms in public schools were necessary to accommodate nonbinary students, hardly anyone, even among progressives, would have known what you were talking about. Then in 2016 the Obama Education Department suddenly threatened to cut off federal funding to K-12 schools that did not allow students suffering from gender dysphoria to use bathrooms reserved for the opposite sex. The Obama Justice Department threatened to sue North Carolina for passing a law requiring people to use bathrooms corresponding to the sex on their birth certificates. By the time it rescinded the law, HB 2, in 2017, the state of North Carolina had lost billions of dollars thanks to simultaneous boycotts by the National Basketball Association, the National College Athletic Association, Deutsche Bank, PayPal, and other corporations and financial institutions.

In isolation, the transgender controversy might have been viewed as a strange aftershock of the gay rights movement, which achieved its much more moderate goals of civil and marriage equality for gay men and lesbian women by the first decade of the 21st century. But the imposition of transgender ideology through economic compulsion by the federal government and major private sector institutions was only the beginning. It was followed by the march through the institutions of “diversity, equity, and inclusion” (DEI) based on “critical race theory” (CRT), a sectarian ideology that holds that all whites and “white-adjacent” Asian Americans, no matter how poor and powerless, are “privileged,” while all Black and Hispanic Americans, no matter how rich and powerful, are “marginalized” members of “underserved communities.”

By the 2020s, at one university after another, applicants for faculty positions were required to submit “DEI statements,” listing the ways that they would personally advance this particular ideology through their work as teachers and researchers. Campus commissars were appointed to ensure that faculty reading lists and guest speaker panels had the appropriate race and gender makeup. In corporations, banks, universities, and government agencies, the relatively anodyne “diversity training” of the late 20th century, designed to minimize the possibility of racial or sexual discrimination lawsuits, gave way to DEI trainings. The goal of such exercises was not to promulgate knowledge of specific anti-discrimination rules and procedures, but to engage staff in

Maoist-style struggle sessions designed to break down the personalities and identities of non-Hispanic white Americans and Asian Americans through confession of “microaggressions” and “racial privilege.”

Meanwhile, large corporations and banks, universities and major foundations, and the Democratic Party—now the party of college-educated whites and most of the super-rich—ostentatiously signaled their virtue as one new social justice cause succeeded another: Black Lives Matter, climate change, gender radicalism. Ironically, the rainbow flag of the gay rights movement became the logo of U.S. corporations and U.S. embassies, even as gay men and lesbians who questioned the new orthodoxy were hounded out of the T- and Q-dominated LGBTQ+ acronym alliance for the sin of “transphobia.”

Seeking historical analogies for this sudden revolution in American institutional life, some spoke of the Great Awakening, alluding to the two Great Awakenings that animated Anglo-American Protestantism in the 18th and 19th centuries. A case can indeed be made that wokeness is a secular religion, complete with its own ersatz rituals, like “taking the knee,” invoking the imminent apocalypse of anthropogenic climate change, and icons of George Floyd, a victim of police brutality who was elevated into a martyr. Suggestively, the movement has flourished in the English-speaking nations, which share a heritage of Calvinist Puritanism, while being relatively unsuccessful in countries with Latin and Catholic traditions like France or Italy.

Nevertheless, the Great Awakening is a misleading term. Woke activists are not honest missionaries; they are infiltrators, acting with the specific goal of seizing control of institutions and imposing their views on others. Unlike the Protestant evangelists of the Great Awakenings, today’s activists do not use simple language to spread their message to sinners in need of repentance. On the contrary, they camouflage radical beliefs in bureaucratic acronyms like DEI and CRT, and anodyne-sounding terms like “gender-affirming health care”—in practice, often a euphemism for castrating boys and men and sterilizing and performing irreversible mastectomies on girls and women. Where Protestant evangelists sought voluntary and whole-hearted conversion, the new activists seek submission, imposed on penalty of ostracism.

If these activists are not evangelists, what are they? They are “entryists.” The term “entryism” has been associated with the Trotskyist denomination of Marxism since the 1930s, when the exiled Leon Trotsky urged his followers in Britain to infiltrate the Labour Party and influence it from within, rather than form their own small, ineffectual party. But the tactic is not limited to the political left. In the United States there have been cases in which Protestant fundamentalists ran for local school boards as moderates and then, once they had majorities on the board, used their power for goals like teaching “creation science” along with evolutionary biology.

The center left of the political spectrum has historically been vulnerable to entryism by small, radical sects of zealots. Today’s illiberal radicals, like yesterday’s communists, have profited from a “no enemies to the left” policy among liberals. Mild-mannered liberals and progressives believe in civil rights, so therefore something called “anti-racism” must be worth supporting, even if there are a few problems here and there: Ibram X. Kendi’s sectarian lunacy thus hitches a free ride on the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. Similarly, adding “T” and “Q” to LGB

legitimated public acceptance of radical gender ideology, as though insisting that controversial and often dangerous “gender transitions” are a natural and unobjectionable continuation of the campaign to allow same-sex couples to marry.

Wokists, then, are not the new Protestants, any more than they are the new Trotskyites. They are entryists in their methods, but not in their ideology. Such identity politics is not the kind of coalition of college students and minorities that Herbert Marcuse and other Marxists hoped for in the 1960s, after they were disappointed by the lack of revolutionary fervor among the American and European working classes. Black nationalism, the model for all racial and ethnic nationalisms on the Western left, has its roots in 19th-century German racial and cultural nationalism, not cosmopolitan Marxism. Radical feminism, which spawned gender ideology, has its own tradition as independent of socialism, even if some radical feminists have also been socialists. Indeed, real communist regimes like the Soviet Union, China, North Korea, and Cuba have usually been repressively traditional in matters of sex and gender.

This, however, raises a question. The various streams of identity politics that feed into today’s radical ideology are not new. Indeed, they have existed on the margins of politics and intellectual life for generations. As recently as the 1980s and 1990s, “political correctness” was ridiculed into irrelevance everywhere except on university campuses and a handful of sectarian left institutions. What exactly is it that changed in the structure of American institutions so that the new entryists were able to successfully infiltrate and capture so many major organizations and professions in the 2010s, after such tactics had repeatedly been tried and failed before?

One way of answering the question of who the woke actually are is by posing a historical question: Why did political correctness (PC) fail to escape from its laboratories on university campuses while becoming an object of ridicule and derision in the 1980s and 1990s, while its successor, wokeness, succeeded in capturing major corporations, banks, universities, nonprofits, and government agencies beginning around 2010? The question is all the more interesting because many of the schools of thought that have been united in PC and wokeness date back to the 1970s, the 1960s, or earlier. For example, the term “intersectionality,” used to refer to hierarchies of real or alleged oppression, was coined by the Black feminist scholar Kimberle Crenshaw as early as 1989, yet the term was obscure even on college campuses before suddenly it was everywhere in the 2010s.

Control of three gateways in particular has been critical to the success of woke entryism. The three gateways are college education, professional accreditation, and commercial services, particularly new online media platforms like Twitter, sales platforms like Amazon, and financial platforms like PayPal. All three wield variants of the same power: the power to exclude people from the economy. Good Trotsky-style entryists that they are, woke activists, knowing that they would be defeated in free elections and in open public debates, have sought to infiltrate institutions to control key chokepoints or gateways, which empower them to be gatekeepers.

Today, unlike a generation ago, young Americans typically must pass through three gateways, in order to be economically successful. They must obtain college diplomas; they must join

professional accrediting organizations; and they must be able to do business via platforms in the marketplace.

The American Medical Association was founded in 1847, and the American Bar Association in 1878. Colleges and universities assumed their present form only in the late 19th and 20th centuries, and as recently as 1960 only about 10% of American men and around 6% of American women had bachelor's degrees or higher.

Of the three kinds of gateway—the professional, the academic, and the platform—the third is the newest, a product of the early 21st century. As one writer recently put it, “the Woke is a vanguard movement that seized control of a new technology and used it as a force multiplier to discipline and terrorize the larger institutional landscape.”

Waiting for people at each gateway, like trolls under a bridge in a fairy tale, are woke leftists, who demand that they recite the in-group passwords before they are allowed to pass through the gates. What makes these gateways particularly vulnerable to capture by disciplined, zealous entryists in the United States is the fact that they are mostly private and unregulated. America's most prestigious universities are private, and they set the standards for other universities in the country, both private and public. Whether private or public, all American universities are accredited by private, nonprofit accrediting agencies and not by America's federal or state governments.

Old-fashioned commerce and banking are heavily regulated in the public interest. But since the 1990s, Silicon Valley, helped by ample offerings of campaign cash and post-political jobs, has persuaded Washington policymakers to allow online platforms to make up their own rules—the infamous, arbitrary “community terms of service” with “community” referring to their passive, powerless customers. No “sunshine laws” control the proceedings of Facebook's privately designed and privately appointed Oversight Board, which includes John Samples, vice president of the Cato Institute; Helle Thorning-Schmidt, former prime minister of Denmark; Khaled Mansour, an Egyptian writer; and Afia Asantewaa Asare-Kyei, program manager of the Open Society Initiative for West Africa. It seems entirely fair to say that none of these people is in any way representative of or responsible to Facebook's users.

To be sure, none of the customers of conventional corporations has any say in corporate governance, either. But most traditional corporations either face rivals in competitive markets, or, if they are natural monopolies, are subject to regulation and government oversight. In contrast, platforms like Facebook, Amazon, and PayPal, along with search engines like Google, are near-monopolies in whole sectors of the economy, and yet have won the right not to be regulated by federal, state, or local governments. As a result, they can “deplatform” people, including the president of the United States, at will—and those who have been deplatformed, canceled, or otherwise disappeared from the marketplace or the public realm have little recourse, except to a rubber-stamp board appointed by the platform's executives, on the basis of “rules of service” that the corporate managers and their puppets make up and can change at any time. This combination of exemption from regulation with legal impunity would have been unthinkable in

the age of AT&T and the three broadcast networks, before the rise of the tech sector at the end of the 20th century.

No wonder that woke entryists prefer worming their way into immense, centralized quasi-monopolies and oligopolies in the private sector instead of trying to capture the government by persuading voters and winning in thousands of elections at all levels. They are helped by the fact that, for many Americans, particularly those on the political right, the private sector equals “freedom” while the public sector indicates “tyranny.” It is no coincidence that Facebook’s board includes the vice president of the Cato Institute, which is funded by corporations and rich donors to invoke “liberty” in order to justify various kinds of despotic and unaccountable private power. Even if a platform functions as a de facto public utility, for which there is no realistic substitute or alternative, the mere fact that the agency is privately owned can be invoked to screen it from public scrutiny or government oversight and regulation.

So let’s review how and why control over each of the three gateways allows woke zealots to impose their views on the rest of society outside of the normal processes of public debate and legislative oversight. In the 1990s—which wasn’t all that long ago—only about a quarter of American men and 18% of American women completed four or more years of college. By 2021, it was 36.7% of men and 39.1% of women. Even as the B.A. has been dumbed-down by academic bureaucrats, who are now eliminating SATs and other objective measurements of academic merit, it has become increasingly necessary to have a B.A. or a higher degree to get a decent job, if only because employers use it as a screening credential. Meanwhile, private sector membership in trade unions, which once won living wages and benefits for high school-educated workers, has collapsed from a third to around 6% of the private sector workforce—lower than it was under President Herbert Hoover, before the New Deal.

The increasing polarization of the American class system along educational lines, along with a massive oversupply of college graduates for too few jobs that actually require college degrees, breeds conformity and submission in undergraduates. In the 1990s, you could mock your politically correct professor or classmates and go on to a successful career in law, medicine, business, or even the academy. In the 2020s, if you mock your politically correct professor or classmates, you can be put through Kafkaesque trials and Maoist reeducation on campus, and the mark on your permanent record can prevent you from getting into a good professional school.

Students who dissent from enforced woke orthodoxies on campus run the very real danger of summary punishment by university administrators for a very wide variety of potential crimes, which will be adjudicated by those very same authorities. These crimes can range from holding incorrect opinions about racial essentialism (you’re supposed to be for it) or the existence of multiple genders (there is no exact number, gender being a subjective and elastic concept).

In addition to acceptable opinions, the code of wokeness mandates questions of personal manners and behavior unrelated to education, like the need for men to obtain institutionally prescribed forms of “affirmative consent” before attempting to make potentially unwanted advances toward women—a rule that appears to lean hard on the otherwise nonexistent gender binary. In such a Mad Hatter-like environment, it’s only rational for college students to keep any

skeptical or heterodox opinions they might harbor to themselves, and to ritually recite whatever nonsense the campus DEI commissar imposes that week as a litmus test of ideological orthodoxy.

The next gate is the professional gateway—and here again, we find that our entryists have seized the sentry positions and imposed new passwords. The AMA recently issued a glossary of Woke Newspeak, instructing medical doctors to say “equity” instead of “equality” and “systemically divested” instead of “poor.”

Last year, the AMA Board of Trustees passed a resolution demanding that sex cease to be noted in all future birth certificates, on the theory that a boy might have been born by accident in a girl’s body or vice versa, and that the individual might not realize he or she was in the wrong body until decades later. Yes, this is the American *Medical* Association, not the American Association of Astrologers.

Meanwhile, the American Bar Association has proposed making the accreditation of U.S. law schools depend on their success in promoting goals like rigid race and gender quotas among faculty and students. Noting that such accreditation requirements might cause law schools to run afoul of federal and state laws like the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which established nondiscrimination as the legal standard, the ABA says its own private, made-up accreditation requirements trump actual laws: “The requirement of a constitutional provision or statute that purports to prohibit consideration of race, color, ethnicity, religion, national origin, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age, disability, or military status in admissions or employment decisions is not a justification for a school’s noncompliance with Standard 206.”

Let’s assume that a submissive, deferential American professional of the 21st century, having mouthed the platitudes necessary to obtain a B.A. and graduate from a professional school, now seeks to practice a career in sales, authorship, or politics. If you wish to buy or sell a gun in a perfectly legal transaction, Visa will allow it but PayPal and Square will not.

If you publish a book critical of the new gender ideology, Amazon may disappear it, the way it disappeared Ryan T. Anderson’s *When Harry Became Sally*. Inexplicably, Amazon sells Abigail Shrier’s *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters*—but then, despotic power is more frightening when it is arbitrary.

And if you run for office, you may find yourself banned or suspended by social media platforms. As of Aug. 15, 2022, Ballotpedia listed seven elected officials who had been banned or suspended by Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube—all Republicans. In addition to Donald Trump, the list includes Rep. Jim Banks of Indiana, suspended by Twitter for 14 days in 2021 for “targeted misgendering or deadnaming transgender individuals,” and Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky, a medical doctor, suspended by YouTube for seven days for allegedly spreading misinformation about COVID-19.

Piece by piece, woke activists are assembling a private version of China’s social credit system, which can cut off individuals who run afoul of ideological orthodoxy from acquiring educational credentials, practicing a trade, or engaging in political speech. While Trotskyist entryists spent

decades trying to infiltrate and influence social democratic parties and trade unions, woke entryists in only a decade and a half have captured many of the leading communications, sales, and financial platforms in modern society, along with professional associations and universities. Leon Trotsky would be impressed.

Only one solution to the threat of woke hegemony can work: a massive expansion of the regulatory powers of government.

The triumph of the 21st-century entryists is as fragile as it is sudden and comprehensive. The greatest threat to wokeness is the lack of direct government regulation of the private sector entities whose chokepoints they have seized. So how can democratic government thwart the schemes of the sectarians who have burrowed into the private and nonprofit sectors?

One response to entryism that is doomed to failure is debate. Self-described “classical liberals” who call on social media platforms, professional accrediting agencies, nonprofits, and universities to embrace “viewpoint diversity” are wasting their time. It is no more possible to persuade the commissars in corporate HR departments, professional accreditation agencies, social media platforms, or university diversity offices to allow nonwoke views than it would have been to persuade Trotskyist conspirators who had infiltrated and captured a labor union during the Cold War to be open to debates among Trotskyists, Stalinists, social democrats, and libertarians. Having entrenched themselves in massive, powerful bureaucracies, these zealots will not willingly relax their grip on bureaucratic chokepoints. Why should they?

Equally doomed to failure is the idea of creating all-new institutions to replace the major, centralized commercial and nonprofit institutions that have been hijacked by secretive activists. Good luck with that. Try creating a nonwoke alternative to Twitter, or YouTube, or the American Bar Association, or Harvard University. Success is unlikely and would take decades or generations—during which time the entryists will have burrowed even more deeply into the institutions they have captured.

Alas, only one solution to the threat of woke hegemony can possibly work: a massive and permanent expansion of the regulatory powers of American government. Because of the longstanding ideological habits and precommitments of those who broadly agree with the above diagnosis of the problem, this is typically the last solution that occurs to them. Paradoxical though it may seem, however, political intervention is necessary to depoliticize the institutions that have already been diverted from their limited missions and competencies. Reluctant but determined intervention by the elected branches of government can compel neutrality on the part of professional and commercial institutions that have been captured and weaponized by the new entryists.

In America’s federal system, occupational and professional licensing as well as much financial regulation takes place at the state level. Each state has broad powers to assume democratic control over education, professional accreditation, and commerce and banking, by ending its delegations of government power to self-regulating private agencies and corporations.

The institutions with chokepoints that are most vulnerable to capture by the new gatekeepers are private: universities, professional accreditation organizations, social media, and financial platforms. These private institutions have been delegated vast powers on the basis of an implicit promise that they will be viewpoint-neutral and sector-specific. For example, the ABA's legitimacy in accrediting American law schools, and the power of state bar associations to define the requirements for practicing law in a state, are based on the premise that bar associations will make their judgments solely on the basis of technical legal standards—not politics, religion, or personal or group identity. Likewise, banks and other financial institutions, including those online, are legitimate only to the extent that they accept all customers who engage in transactions that are allowed by law.

Banks and other necessary public accommodations cannot and should not be allowed to accept or reject customers solely on the basis that their managers like or dislike their opinions or disapprove of particular transactions, like legal gun sales or selling hats proclaiming that “Trump Won!” Bank managers, like professional accreditors or university deans, are technicians who have no legitimacy as moral arbiters of society.

If the delegation of authority by the government to private institutions empowers the activists who capture those institutions, then the solution is to repeal those delegations of authority and replace them with direct government regulation. The power of the AMA and ABA and other private associations to license professionals should be revoked. Professionals of all kinds should be licensed by government boards that are appointed by elected officials and subject to legislative oversight, and whose decisions are subject to judicial review.

Major social media and fintech platforms present a different issue: They have been allowed by policymakers of both parties to regulate themselves. The self-regulation of Google, Amazon, Twitter, and other platforms should be ended and replaced by government regulation by commissions overseen by elected officials.

What form would online platform regulation take? To begin with, the terms of service for particular kinds of online transactions would be identical for all vendors and written by legislators or by public commissions answerable to legislators and visible to the public. No longer would you be required to “accept” take-it-or-leave-it terms of service as a prelude to accessing an online website or using an online business. You don't have to sign a form agreeing to complex and arbitrary terms of service to board an airplane or create an account with the local public utility, because those industries are regulated in the public interest by democratic government.

In addition to one-size-fits-all terms of service imposed by the public sector on all firms in an area, each sector should have a customer's bill of rights. These would include protection against the denial of services on the basis of opinion or partisanship. We do not allow telephone companies to abruptly end your call and cancel your service if they overhear you say, “A transwoman is not a woman” or “I read a recent peer-reviewed study that said COVID vaccines have little to no effect on viral loads.” A traditional bank cannot decide to close all of the



accounts of customers who vote Republican. Why do we allow equally important platforms to do so?

Even those accused or convicted of crimes should be allowed to access online media, commercial, communications, and financial platforms without discrimination. Convicted prisoners are allowed to make phone calls from jail. Should phone companies decide on their own to end that government policy? Of course not. In a free society, powerful private actors cannot be allowed to engage in additional, private punishments of those who have already been punished by the state.

Even more sinister, illiberal, and un-American is the practice of private companies blacklisting individuals who have been accused of crimes but not convicted. The secret government “No Fly List” shared by American national security agencies is clearly unconstitutional, as well as tyrannical. Private sector blacklists of suspected communists, Black Americans, homosexuals, and others have been all too familiar in the past—and are generally presented in public discussion as clear examples of wrongdoing. Private sector blacklists, including those directed against people deemed insufficiently woke by companies and banks, should be outlawed, and those affected by them should be empowered by law to sue those businesses and banks into bankruptcy in government courts.

In the case of public schools and state universities, created by state legislatures, the authority of the legislature to regulate curriculum and teaching in order to prevent radical ideological minorities, whether left or right, from capturing and indoctrinating captive students can hardly be questioned, even though university entryists will use cries of “academic freedom” to defend their current monopoly.

What about private universities? As nonprofit institutions, private universities are showered with subsidies by American taxpayers in the form of generous tax expenditures. If private institutions want to impose any particular ideology on their faculty and students, they should be free to do so—on the condition that they lose their nonprofit status and are redefined as for-profit corporations, subject to federal, state, and local taxes. With an endowment of over \$50 billion run by highly paid professional money managers, Harvard University has often been described as a hedge fund with a college attached to it—so why shouldn’t its profits be taxed at the same rate as those of JP Morgan and Bain Capital?

The obvious objection to expanding the power of the states and the federal government to eliminate control by the new entryists over key social and economic chokepoints is the libertarian belief that government itself is the enemy. One response might be that the belief that private enterprise would be more inherently fair than a state grounded in the democratic process and the rule of law is what got us into this mess in the first place.

It is also the case that, contrary to popular belief, the federal government does not have vast plenary powers. The federal government chiefly influences state and local policy by means of “fiscal federalism.” The Obama administration abused fiscal federalism when radical activists ensconced in his Department of Education made federal funding for K-12 schools contingent on public schools adopting controversial gender ideology.

The best way to prevent the federal government from using this kind of economic blackmail against state and local government institutions, of course, is to keep woke parties and politicians and appointees out of power in Washington, D.C. If that fails, states should refuse federal funding that comes with strings attached, rather than submit to blackmail by tiny cadres of activists who have infiltrated and captured specific federal agencies like the Department of Education.

Increasingly, state governments led by anti-woke elected officials have begun using state power to check the ideological excesses of corporations and banks. Far from being an assault on liberty, this is a healthy and overdue reassertion of democracy. Elected officials answer to citizens. Corporations and nonprofits answer only to their boards of directors and shareholders or donors. And as entities that can exist and do business only because of government charters, corporations and nonprofits must follow rules promulgated by representatives of the people.

Will anti-woke governments commit abuses in responding to the abuses of woke companies and nonprofits? No doubt they will sometimes. But if they do, their misdeeds will be easily identified and have clear remedies, unlike the hidden decisions of vast private bureaucracies. Abusive legislators and governors can be voted out of office, unlike the obscure individuals who belong to Facebook's self-regulating bureaucracy.

It might be objected that, whatever may be the case in other countries, American government officials at all levels lack the competence to engage in reasonable regulation of accreditation agencies and internet platforms in the public interest. But it would be a mistake to assume that the corporate and nonprofit staffers who now perform these functions are more competent or less corrupt themselves; we simply cannot see what they are doing, while public governance is subjected to public scrutiny and criticism. We don't need Singaporean technocrats or Prussian bureaucrats; ordinary legislators and appointees who must conduct their work in the light of publicity will do. Sunlight is the best disinfectant.

In other eras, and in other countries, public tyranny has indeed been a major threat to individual freedoms. In the United States, in the third decade of the 21st century, the private tyranny of universities, professional associations, and tech platforms is a greater threat than the tyranny of an oppressive state. When it comes to reducing the power of the new entryists in the private sector, the restoration of our liberties requires an expansion of democratically accountable government.