

## “Stay Woke”

The phrase is rooted in African American Vernacular English. The novelist William Melvin Kelley may have been the first to introduce “woke” to the mainstream as an adjective, in his 1962 essay on Black idiom, “*If You’re Woke You Dig It*,” in which he noted how words change with the color of the people who use them.

In 1971, the phrase was used in a play by Barry Beckham: “I been sleeping all my life. And now that Mr Garvey done woke me up, I’m gon’ *stay woke*. And I’m gon’ help him wake up other black folk.”

It also entered popular culture thanks to singer Erykah Badu, who used the phrase “I stay woke” in her 2008 song *Master Teacher*. Ms Badu’s use of the phrase meant “not being placated, not being anaesthetised”.

## Politics

It started becoming a politicised word in 2014, after the death of Michael Brown sparked the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.

It was only in 2017 that the word “woke” was added to the Oxford English Dictionary, and was defined as “being ‘aware’ or ‘well-informed’ in a political or cultural sense”.

It evolved into an all-encompassing term to describe leftist political ideology signaling progressiveness, but on the right it is viewed as a sneering, dismissive term to denigrate those who do not agree with their beliefs.

## Wokeism / wokeness / wokery / woke culture

Like “politically correct” before it, the word “woke” has come to connote the opposite of what it means. Today it is more likely to be used as a stick with which to beat people who aspire to such values.

For those who would broadly consider themselves woke, the word has been weaponised against them. Turning the phrase into a noun, and the use of various suffixes are linguistic signs of condescension.



Woke books	Anti-woke books
<a href="#">Beloved</a> by Toni Morrison	<a href="#">The New Puritans: How the Religion of Social Justice Captured the Western World</a> by Andrew Doyle
<a href="#">The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness</a> by Alexander Michelle	<a href="#">Cynical Theories</a> by Helen Pluckrose & James Lindsay
<a href="#">A Thousand Splendid Suns</a> by Khaled Hosseini	<a href="#">The Madness of Crowds</a> by Douglas Murray



## The issue

Although all bills explicitly ban the teaching of classic racism, i.e. that “one race is superior to another race”, they also ban the teaching of institutional or structural racism, i.e. the idea racial discrimination is not just the consequence of a few racist individuals (“bad apples”) but that it is structural, engrained in the country’s key institutions – from election laws to law enforcement. The idea is simple: if kids are not taught about institutional racism, and the white supremacy it upholds, they won’t question it later when they are voters.

## The consequence

Across the state, teachers and universities had already started to self-censor. For instance, the University of Central Florida (UCF), the state’s largest university, removed all anti-racist statements from departmental websites, while several of its professors decided to cancel scheduled courses on race out of fear of breaching the “Stop-Woke” law.

“As Orwell knew,  
historical  
revisionism is  
always a project for  
the future.”  
(Cas Mudde)

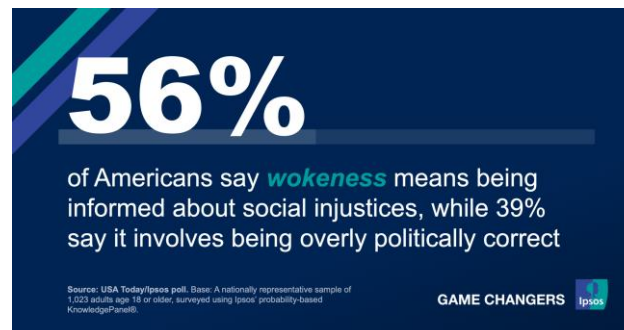
## Stop Woke Act

The Individual Freedom Act, commonly known as the Stop Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees (WOKE) Act, is a Florida state law which regulates the content of instruction and training in schools and workplaces. Among other provisions, it prohibits instruction that individuals share responsibility for others' past actions by virtue of their race, sex or national origin.

It was signed by Governor Ron DeSantis on April 2022, who intended to "fight back" against "woke indoctrination" and critical race theory, critics of the law have described it as whitewashing and an attack on the First Amendment.

## Trump’s return?

Building upon the misguided ideas of his 1776 Commission, whose work was cut short by his lost re-election bid, Trump wants to stimulate “patriotic education” and cut federal funding for any school or program that includes “critical race theory, gender ideology, or other inappropriate racial, sexual, or political content on to our children”. And, university administrators will not risk losing millions of federal funding for a “gender” or “race” class, not even at the private Ivy Leagues in solidly blue states.





**56%**

of Americans say *wokeness* means being informed about social injustices, while 39% say it involves being overly politically correct

Source: USA Today/Ipsos poll. Base: A nationally representative sample of 1,023 adults age 18 or older, surveyed using Ipsos' probability-based KnowledgePanel.

**GAME CHANGERS** 