

Key terms and Definitions

Culture wars

Identity politics

Woke – wokism

CRT – Critical Race Theory

“systemic racism” / “unconscious bias” / “internalised racism”

NAACP

...

AP Courses

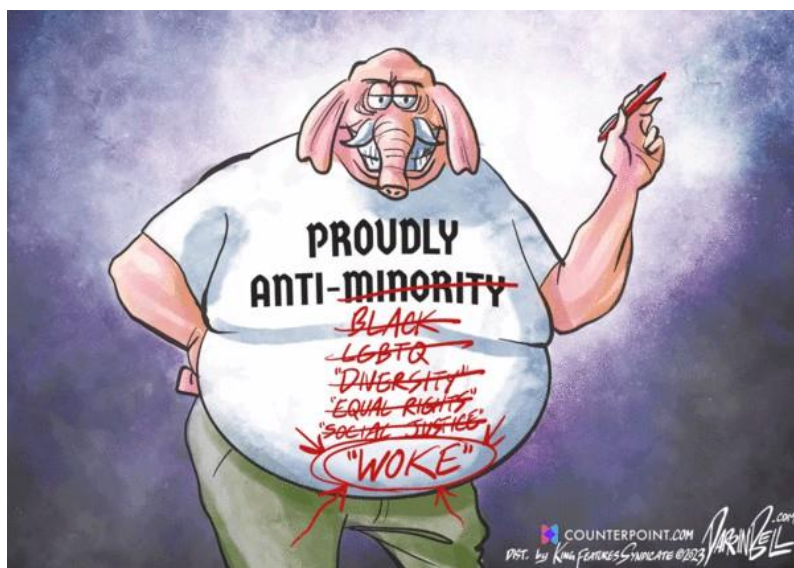
Deplatforming / No Platforming

Cancel culture

Moms for Liberty

The 1619 Project

The 1776 Commission



SKILL

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CREATORS SYNDICATE



The Daily Breeze, Editorial Cartoon, June 16 2021

Document 1 – AUDIO- NPR, What does the word 'woke' really mean, and where does it come from?

<https://www.npr.org/2023/07/19/1188543449/what-does-the-word-woke-really-mean-and-where-does-it-come-from>

Document 2 – Video

CBSN explores cancel culture and the culture wars

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90KFHqx-1Ho&ab_channel=CBSMornings

(The audio Document has been uploaded onto The Cahier de Prépa)

Document 3 - The Economist explains How has the meaning of the word “woke” evolved?

Originally a black slang term, the word is now pilloried on both the right and the left

Jul 30th 2021

“WOKEISM, MULTICULTURALISM, all the -isms—they’re not who America is,” tweeted Mike Pompeo in 2019 on his last day as secretary of state. Until a few years ago “woke” meant being alert to racial injustice and discrimination. Yet in America’s fierce culture wars the word is now more likely to be used as a sardonic insult. How did the word turn from a watchword used by black activists to a bogeyman among conservatives?

5 In 1938 singer Huddie Ledbetter warned black people they “best stay woke, keep their eyes open” going through Scottsboro, Alabama, the scene of a famous mistrial involving nine young black men. The word was first defined in print by William Melvin Kelley, a black novelist, in an article published in the *New York Times* in 1962. Writing about black slang, Mr Kelley defined it as someone who was “well-informed, up-to-date”. Black people used it in reference to racism and other matters for decades, but the word only entered the mainstream much later. When the Black Lives
10 Matter movement grabbed global attention during anti-racism protests after the killing in 2014 of Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager, it was inseparable from the phrase “stay woke”.

As the word spread into internet culture, thanks in part to the popular #staywoke hashtag, its usage quickly changed. It began to signify a progressive outlook on a host of issues as well as on race. And it was used more often to describe white people active on social media than it was by black activists, who criticised the performatively woke for being
15 more concerned with internet point-scoring than systemic change. Piggybacking corporations, such as Pepsi and Starbucks, lessened the appeal to progressives. Woke’s usage went from activist to passé, a common fate of black vernacular that makes it into the mainstream (other recent victims include “lit” and “on fleek”, two terms of praise).

Almost as soon as the word lost its initial sense it found new meaning as an insult—a linguistic process called pejoration. Becoming a byword for smug liberal enlightenment left it open to mockery. It was redefined to mean
20 following an intolerant and moralising ideology. The fear of being cancelled by the “woke mob” energised parts of the conservative base. Right-wing parties in other countries noticed that stoking a backlash against wokeness was an effective way to win support.

Another semantic conflict is brewing. This is over the term “[critical race theory](#)”, a new *bête noire* of the right. What was once an abstruse theory developed in American law schools—one that helped seed core tenets of modern-day
25 wokeism like intersectionality and systemic racism—has burst into the open. Conservatives panic that it is being taught

in schools. Christopher Rufo, a conservative activist, told the *New Yorker* that “‘woke’ is a good epithet, but it’s too broad, too terminal, too easily brushed aside. ‘Critical race theory’ is the perfect villain.” Progressives insist that it is a more honest way of teaching history. Despite using the same terminology, both sides seem destined to talk past each other. No sooner is a language battle of the culture wars over than another emerges.

Document 4- Ne soyez plus cool, soyez « woke »

Cool n’est plus à la mode chez les Noirs américains, qui affichent désormais un état d’esprit « woke », plus combatif, pour lutter contre les injustices.

Par Marc-Olivier Bherer **Le Monde, 03 mars 2018**

Il y a encore peu, pour être dans le coup, il fallait être cool. Désormais, mieux vaut être woke, éveillé. Une transition qui constitue une révolution discrète mais non 5 moins retentissante, rien de moins que la redéfinition d’une figure centrale de notre modernité : le rebelle. Autrefois incarné par le cool anticonformiste des jazzmen, il est aujourd’hui personnifié par le woke des admirateurs de Black Panther, réalisé par Ryan 10 Coogler, film phénomène du début de l’année aux Etats-Unis, en salle en France depuis le 14 février.

Les deux termes ont chacun une histoire singulière et sont porteurs de valeurs opposées. Woke est dérivé du verbe to wake, « se réveiller ». Etre woke, c’est être 15 conscient des injustices et du système d’oppression qui pèsent sur les minorités. Ce terme s’est d’abord répandu à la faveur du mouvement Black Lives Matter (apparu en 2013) contre les violences policières dont sont victimes les Noirs aux Etats-Unis, pour ensuite se 20 populariser sur le Net.

Enfin, woke s’est étendu à d’autres causes et d’autres usages, plus mondains. Car, en effet, tout semble maintenant ainsi « éveillé » : la récente cérémonie des Golden Globes, marquée par l’affaire Weinstein et la 25 volonté d’en finir avec le harcèlement sexuel, était en partie woke, selon le New York Times. La cérémonie des Oscars, le 4 mars, promet de l’être à son tour. Même la famille royale britannique serait désormais woke. C’est du moins ce qu’affirmait le magazine London 30 Review of Books après les récentes fiançailles du prince Harry avec l’actrice métisse Meghan Markle, dont les positions anti-Donald Trump sont bien connues.

L’expression d’un changement d’ère

David Brooks, chroniqueur conservateur au New York 35 Times, s’est récemment emparé de ce mot pour souligner une évolution des mœurs. Même s’il lui arrive d’opérer des raccourcis critiquables, on peut reconnaître à cet observateur une certaine acuité : c’est à lui que l’on doit, notamment, le néologisme bobo, ce « bourgeois

40 bohème » qui est chez lui partout mais partout indifférent aux autres.

Pour lui, le phénomène naissant est l’expression d’un changement d’ère. Désormais, l’esprit de rébellion s’exprime sur un ton plus directement revendicatif. 45 Poursuivre une quête personnelle, mettre à distance le monde, afficher un style distinctif, trois démarches propres au cool, sont remises au profit d’une posture plus engagée. David Brooks y voit le signe de l’émergence d’une nouvelle culture, qui ne cache plus 50 sa colère, qui se fait même volontiers grégaire et moralisatrice.

Joel Dinerstein, professeur d’anglais à l’université Tulane (Louisiane) et auteur de *The Origins of Cool in Postwar America* (The University of Chicago Press, 55 2017, non traduit), estime, lui aussi, que nous vivons là une transition majeure. « Le cool, c’est une forme de rébellion esthétique, et très personnelle. Mais à l’origine, avant la diffusion dans le monde de cette posture, le cool est surtout un phénomène propre à la 60 culture noire américaine et intimement lié à l’histoire du jazz. » Dans les années 1930-1940, les jazzmen trouvent dans la pratique de leur art un mode d’opposition à l’oppression, à une époque précédant l’essor du mouvement pour les droits civiques.

65 La contestation s’inscrit dans la culture, puisqu’elle n’a pas encore de langage politique. « I’m cool », disait ainsi le légendaire saxophoniste Lester Young (1909-1959) pour montrer qu’il ne se laissait pas intimider par la ségrégation. Sur le plan musical, son style 70 révolutionnaire et son inventivité mélodique démontraient, s’il le fallait, que les Afro-Américains étaient capables de créer des œuvres artistiques d’un grand raffinement. Lester Young refusait également de sourire. C’était l’image de l’homme noir rieur et primitif 75 qu’il combattait. A travers sa musique et la façon de se mettre en scène, il a marqué l’histoire du jazz et défini la personnalité type du jazzman : un certain détachement, une forte quête esthétique et la volonté de vivre selon ses propres termes. En un mot, cool. En 80 deux, un stoïcisme stylisé, selon l’expression de Joel Dinerstein.

Cette manière d'être s'est peu à peu diffusée dans la culture populaire, au point de devenir une référence incontournable. Elle a connu mille réinventions, de 85 Sonny Rollins (né en 1930) à Miles Davis (1926-1991), de Humphrey Bogart (1899-1957) aux beatniks, en passant par la France d'Albert Camus (1913-1960), puis le Las Vegas de Frank Sinatra (1915-1998). A force, « le cool est devenu la principale exportation 90 américaine ». L'esprit de rébellion d'après-guerre avait trouvé sa matrice, et le soft power américain, l'un de ses produits phares.

Depuis, l'esprit original du cool a pu être perverti par la publicité, mais cela ne l'empêche pas de 95 persister. « Barack Obama, un personnage calme et élégant, était cool, ajoute Joel Dinerstein. On peut même dire que le cool triomphe avec lui. Toutefois, lorsqu'il quitte la scène politique, un backlash [retour de bâton] extrême se produit. Les Etats-Unis ont 100 aujourd'hui renoué avec quelque chose qui ressemble beaucoup au nationalisme blanc. »

Sentiment de révolte

Le woke pourrait donc être la traduction culturelle d'un basculement politique du monde. Non qu'il soit 105 l'expression du ressentiment qui anime les électeurs du président milliardaire. Mais il pourrait plutôt se rapprocher d'un sentiment d'inquiétude soulevé par ce que plusieurs observateurs, après l'entrée en fonctions de Donald Trump, ont appelé la fin de l'ordre libéral, 110 qui reposait sur l'Etat de droit, la démocratie, l'économie de marché et le libre-échange – une liste à laquelle on pourrait ajouter la protection des minorités. Cet ordre s'effondre, certes, sous le poids de ses propres paradoxes, mais les injustices trop longtemps laissées à 115 l'arrière-plan suscitent aujourd'hui un sentiment de révolte d'autant plus grand que la Maison Blanche de Donald Trump est accusée de vouloir repeindre les Etats-Unis à sa couleur. « Sous Obama, les militants de Black Lives Matter disaient en substance : “Un 120 président noir, c'est une bonne chose, mais rien ne se passera si vous ne vous mobilisez pas.” Avec l'arrivée au pouvoir de Trump, ouvertement hostile aux minorités, le woke est désormais plus un appel à lutter contre le pouvoir qu'une manière de 125 l'aiguillonner », rappelle Pap Ndiaye, professeur des universités à l'Institut d'études politiques de Paris et spécialiste de l'histoire sociale des Etats-Unis. Joel Dinerstein va plus loin : « Maintenant que Trump est président, l'esprit woke est devenu important auprès 130 d'une bien plus grande part de la population. »

Tout comme le cool, différents musiciens l'incarnent, bien que l'on ne puisse pas parler d'un véritable phénomène artistique. C'est la chanteuse américaine Erykah Badu qui lance le mouvement en employant, 135 en 2012, l'expression « stay woke » (« restez vigilants ») dans un message de soutien au groupe de punk russe Pussy Riot. La formule fait mouche et referra son apparition à la faveur du mouvement Black Lives Matter, un an plus tard, au point de devenir le credo du 140 mouvement. Mais c'est le rappeur américain Kendrick Lamar qui en est bien davantage le visage. Sa chanson Alright (2015) fut un peu l'hymne de Black Lives Matter. Ses albums laissent d'ailleurs entendre un discours politique absent des morceaux du rappeur star 145 des années 2000, Jay Z.

« Un risque de recroquevillement »

L'écrivain et journaliste Thomas Chatterton Williams, qui en avait fait la bande-son de sa jeunesse, a fini par délaisser cette musique, gêné par les valeurs machistes 150 et vaines qu'elle colportait. Cette rupture avec la culture hip-hop, il la raconte dans un livre autobiographique intitulé... Losing my Cool (Penguin Books, 2011, non traduit).

De ce moment de sa vie, il a gardé une certaine méfiance 155 à l'égard des effets de mode et insiste sur l'appartenance du terme à la culture numérique : « Combattre les injustices est noble et nécessaire. Mais beaucoup de gens se disent woke simplement pour afficher une prétendue vertu. Cette prise de conscience ne se traduit 160 pas toujours en actes. Il y a une espèce de paresse qui s'installe. Il y a également un risque de recroquevillement : on se dit woke mais on nie à son contradicteur le droit de l'être. »

Dans le monde de Trump et des réseaux sociaux, il est 165 en effet de plus en plus difficile de débattre, les esprits ont vite fait de s'échauffer. Et certains adoptent une posture revendiquant une forme supérieure de vérité, #woke.

Cette prétention existe aussi au sein de la droite 170 américaine, remarque Thomas Chatterton Williams. Elle transparaît notamment dans l'expression taking the red pill (« prendre la pilule rouge »), une référence au film de science-fiction Matrix (des sœurs Wachowski, 1999), où un comprimé rouge permet de dissiper 175 l'illusion créée par les robots qui ont asservi l'humanité. Pap Ndiaye réfute toutefois cette comparaison : cette « pilule rouge » relève, selon lui, de la paranoïa propre à l'extrême droite, rien à voir avec le woke, donc.

Document 5 - The Problem With Wokeness

By David Brooks, Opinion Columnist

The New York Times, June 7, 2018

A few weeks ago, I mentioned on “Meet the 5 Press” that for all the horror of the recent school shootings, we shouldn’t be scaremongering. There’s much less gun violence over all in schools today than in the early 1990s. Four times as many students were killed per year back then than in recent 10 years.

This comment elicited a lot of hatred on social media, of a very interesting kind. The general diagnosis was that I was doing something wrong by not maximizing the size of the problem. I was draining 15 moral urgency and providing comfort to the status quo.

This mental habit is closely related to what we now call “wokeness.” In an older frame of mind, you try to perceive the size of a problem objectively, and then you propose a solution, which might either be radical or 20 moderate, conservative or liberal. You were judged primarily by the nature of your proposal.

But wokeness jams together the perceiving and the proposing. In fact, wokeness puts more emphasis on how you perceive a situation — how woke you are 25 to what is wrong — than what exactly you plan to do about it. To be woke is to understand the full injustice.

There is no measure or moderation to wokeness. It’s always good to be more woke. It’s always good to see 30 injustice in maximalist terms. To point to any mitigating factors in the environment is to be naïve, childish, a co-opted part of the status quo.

The word wokeness is new, but the mental habits it describes are old. A few decades ago, there was a small 35 strain of Jewish radicals who believed that rabid anti-Semitism was at the core of Christian culture. Any attempt to live in mixed societies would always lead to Auschwitz. Segregation and moving to Israel was the only safe strategy, and anybody who didn’t see this 40 reality was, in today’s language, insufficiently woke.

This attitude led to Meir Kahane and a very ugly strain of militancy.

In 1952 Reinhold Niebuhr complained that many of his fellow anti-communists were constantly requiring 45 “that the foe is hated with sufficient vigor.” This led to “apoplectic rigidity.” Screaming about the imminent communist menace became a sort of display art for politicians.

These days we think of wokeness as a left-wing 50 phenomenon. But it is an iron law of politics that

every mental habit conservatives fault in liberals is one they also practice themselves.

The modern right has its own trigger words (diversity, dialogue, social justice, community 55 organizer), its own safe spaces (Fox News) and its own wokeness. Michael Anton’s essay “The Flight 93 Election” is only one example of the common apocalyptic view: Modern liberals are hate-filled nihilists who will destroy the nation if given power. 60 Anybody who doesn’t understand this reality is not conservatively woke.

The problem with wokeness is that it doesn’t inspire action; it freezes it. To be woke is first and foremost to put yourself on display. To make a 65 problem seem massively intractable is to inspire separation — building a wall between you and the problem — not a solution.

There’s a debate on precisely this point now **surrounding the writer Ta-Nehisi Coates.** Coates is, 70 of course, well known for seeing the problem of racism in maximalist terms. The entire American story was and continues to be based on “plunder,” the violent crushing of minority bodies. Even today, “‘gentrification’ is but a more pleasing name for white supremacy.”

Coates is very honest about his pessimism and his 75 hopeless view of the situation. But a number of writers have criticized his stance. Cornel West has argued that it’s all words; it doesn’t lead to collective action. In *The New York Review of Books*, Darryl Pinckney argues, 80 “Afro-pessimism threatens no one, and white audiences confuse having been chastised with learning.”

I’d add that it’s a blunt fact that most great social reforms have happened in moments of optimism, not 85 moments of pessimism, in moments of encouraging progress, not in moments of perceived threat.

The greatest danger of extreme wokeness is that it makes it harder to practice the necessary skill of public life, the ability to see two contradictory truths at the same time. For example, it is certainly true that 90 racism is the great sin of American history, that it is an ongoing sin and the sin from which many of our other sins flow. It is also true that throughout history and today, millions of people have tried to combat that sin and have made progress against it.

The confrontation with this sin or any sin is not just 95 a protest but a struggle. Generalship in that or any struggle is seeing where the forces of progress are swelling and where the forces of reaction are marching. It is seeing opportunities as well as threats. It is being 100 dispassionate in one’s perception of the situation and then passionate in one’s assault on it.

Indignation is often deserved and always makes for a great media strategy. But in its extreme form, whether on left or right, wokeness leads to a one-

sided depiction of the present and an unsophisticated strategy for a future offensive.

Document 6 - The U.S. and British right ramp up the war on 'wokeness'

Ishaan Tharoor, Columnist, *The Washington Post*, April 9, 2021

On both sides of the pond, the “woke” wars are 5 **raging**. The long tail of the racial justice demonstrations last summer is still winding its way through American and British politics after both countries experienced a societal jolt. Statues of enslavers, imperialists and white supremacists 10 were knocked off their pedestals. The cries in the streets were heard in the political and corporate halls of power, where lip service, at the least, was paid to recognizing legacies of racism and exploitation — and the ways in which those legacies 15 persist to this day. But the backlash is now in full swing.

In the United States and Britain, the right-wing establishments are embracing a doctrine of anti-anti-racism. Grievance over “wokeness” and “cancel 20 culture” — two amorphous terms, with the former now often invoked as a pejorative for overzealous left-wing dogmatism, usually around issues of identity, and the latter as a condemnation of liberal censoriousness and intolerance — is now the coin of 25 the realm on right-wing U.S. media. It’s also driving a slate of Republican legislative initiatives, including bills to ban the teaching of critical race theory in certain public institutions and control the way schools instruct American history.

30 All of this, at best, is tangential to the real domestic issues shaping the country’s politics, whether that’s President Biden’s statistically popular effort to inject massive stimulus into the economy or his Republican opponents in state legislatures 35 moving to tighten voting laws. But the potency of the culture war is undeniable — and Republicans are directing their outrage toward companies that spoke out or withheld their business from Georgia after the state’s Republican legislature passed a controversial 40 election law.

“Corporations will invite serious consequences if they become a vehicle for far-left mobs to hijack our country from outside the constitutional order,” Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) 45 declared earlier this week, no matter that the bulk of

his political career, like so many in Washington, has been spent furthering the interests of a clutch of oligarchic billionaires and numerous corporate lobbyists.

50 “Woke is a nebulous term stolen from Black American English, repurposed by conservatives as an epithet to express opposition to forms of egalitarianism they find ridiculous or distasteful—in this case, the idea that constituents of the rival party 55 should have an unfettered right to vote,” wrote the Atlantic’s Adam Serwer. “Wedded to the term capital, it functions as an expression of the hollowness of conservative populism, which is opposed not to the concentration of corporate 60 power so much as to the use of that power for purposes of which conservatives disapprove.”



In Britain, a similar game is afoot. The country’s right-wing tabloids, which routinely rage about the 65 supposed leftist disposition of public institutions, are up in arms over “woke” activists questioning the legacy of figures like Winston Churchill or staining the story of the British Empire with inconvenient — and curiously little-discussed 70 — facts about the depravity of colonial rule.

After losing his job at one of Britain’s most popular morning shows over his incessant attacks on the erstwhile Duchess of Sussex, Meghan Markle, broadcaster Piers Morgan gave his first major 75 interview to Fox News’s Tucker Carlson, a leading right-wing proponent of the U.S. culture war.

“So if most people in Britain — and I think you speak for America, too — see what’s going on here, they see that it’s a scam, they see that wokeness is 80 really an effort by the people who are already in charge to gain more power and wealth for themselves — it so clearly is that — why is everyone putting up with it?” Carlson asked.

Morgan responded that it was “terrifying” that
85 “people feel so cowed by the fear of the woke mob
that they can’t express an honestly held opinion
without being immediately branded a racist.”

But in Britain, it’s the Tories who are in power
and, in some instances, weaponizing “anti-woke”
90 sentiment. A cabinet minister in January proposed
legislation to protect historic statues from the
“baying mob.” In February, it emerged that
Education Secretary Gavin Williamson was planning
legislation that would condition public funding to
95 universities on “free speech” — a reflection of long-
standing conservative grievance that also exists in
the United States over left-wing orthodoxy on
campuses, but an effort, in its own right, to police
thought and expression.

100 Then, last week, a government-commissioned
report concluded that there was “no institutional
racism” in Britain, buttressing a long-standing
talking point of British Prime Minister Boris
Johnson. The study triggered a widespread backlash,
105 with even some experts whose work it
cited questioning the commission’s conclusions.

**What’s driving this war on
“wokeness”?** Politics, obviously. “Republicans are
110 trying to recast the removal of [former president
Donald] Trump’s accounts from Facebook and
Twitter as a narrative of liberal tech companies
silencing a prominent conservative, instead of those
platforms punishing Trump for using them to incite
115 violence and encourage overturning the election
results,” wrote Perry Bacon Jr. for Five Thirty Eight.
“If Republicans suppress Democratic votes or try to
overturn election results in future elections, as
seems entirely possible, the party is likely to justify
120 that behavior in part by suggesting the Democrats
are just too extreme and woke to be allowed to
control the government.”

“These attempts to breathe new life into
suspiciously old fights aren’t merely about telling
125 the Tory base what it wants to hear, or distracting
Tory backbenchers restless about the lifting of
lockdown, although they usefully serve both
purposes,” wrote Guardian columnist Gaby Hinsliff.
“They’re also about trying to dictate the terms on
130 which normal domestic politics might resume, as the
pandemic begins to recede.”

That means making life harder for the opposition
Labour Party, which is desperately trying to cobble
together its ungainly coalition of cosmopolitan,
135 urbane voters in places like London with members

of the more traditional working class in other parts
of the country, who defected in droves to the Tories
in the last election and would be potentially more
animated about the “woke” agenda.

140 During a Thursday webinar, Labour member of
Parliament David Lammy said his party can’t shirk
calls for racial justice even as it seeks to appeal to the
White working class. “We have to act together,”
Lammy told Today’s WorldView. “It would be a huge
145 travesty if we vacated the stage and were not making
these arguments. It’s not pinning one against the
other, but standing together and facing modernity.”



Prof Kate Williams
@KateWilliamsme

In 2010, landing cards of Windrush arrivals were
destroyed. Then people who’d come as kids, like this little
boy, now seniors, threatened w deportation, loss of NHS
treatments, benefits. Many lost everything & suffering
continues. But [#SewellReport](#) says no institutional racism.



9:41 PM · Apr 3, 2021

6.3K 56 Share this Tweet

150 .

Document 7 - Everything you wanted to know about the culture wars – but were afraid to ask

Observer special report Social history

Andrew Anthony, Sun 13 Jun 2021

Last week produced an eventful but not untypical weather-front of news stories about **culturally contentious issues**. There was the **microstorm** about the Queen's photo being taken down in the common room at Magdalen College, Oxford; the tiny tempest of Test cricketer Ollie Robinson being dropped for racist tweets dating from when he was a teenager; the squall over the England football team's commitment to taking the knee; and the sudden shower of Oxford academics boycotting Oriel College over its decision to retain its reviled Cecil Rhodes statue.

These were examples of what might also be called skirmishes in a larger and ongoing series of battles: the culture wars.

- As a recent report by the Policy Institute at King's College London shows, there has been an exponential rise in the past couple of years of news stories that use the term "culture wars". Exactly what constitutes a culture war is just one of the many issues that people fight about in the culture wars, and there's a sizeable minority of participants who go so far as to argue that the main characteristic of this present culture war is that it's not really a culture war.

According to the Policy Institute, a quarter of the articles it analysed took the position that "culture wars are either overblown or manufactured – if they exist at all". If that's just the media being contrary, then take a look at the public at large. In a Times Radio poll conducted in February, respondents were asked "When politicians talk about a 'culture war', what do you think they mean?" Only 7% came up with a relevant answer, 15% got it wrong, and a slightly concerning 76% said they didn't know.

Just because people don't know what a culture war is doesn't mean they're not in one. For, as all those feverish headlines suggest, there does appear to be something afoot.

- Phenomenon and causes** "I do think we're in a culture war," says Matthew d'Ancona, an editor at Tortoise Media, where he has written perceptively about the politicisation of culture. "There have always been cultural conflicts but it's become much sharper in the last 20 years thanks to declining trust in institutions that were meant to hold together the cohesion of society, some of the growing inequalities, and most of all the

proliferation of technology that enables and indeed encourages people to cluster in their cultural groups."

The historian Dominic Sandbrook agrees that a culture war is under way but cautions against overstating its dimensions. **"I think one of the mistakes people make when they talk about culture wars is they think that it's something that necessarily sweeps up the whole of society, and everybody's invested in it."** He thinks that more often than not it's a dispute between two sides of an educated elite.

What does seem clear is that symbolic issues and questions of identity occupy a larger and more antagonistic position in the general culture than they did 10 or 20 years ago. As d'Ancona suggests, this development and the explosion in social media, where millions of people can seek out like-minded opinion-holders, are unlikely to be coincidental.

Just as significantly, confidence in the traditional concerns of politics – political parties, economics and wealth redistribution – has taken a bit of a battering. Bill Clinton's campaign strategist James Carville famously said "It's the economy, stupid" to explain what made the difference between electoral victory and defeat.

While that's still a vital factor, the financial meltdown and the bailout of banks in 2008 left many voters baffled as to what was going on.

As old-style political parties struggled to articulate what needed to be done, the opportunity was there for populist politicians and narratives to fill the comprehension void.

For the simple truth is that while it's not easy to express an informed opinion about the effect of collateralised debt obligations on the American housing market, it doesn't take a doctorate to decide whether a statue should be pulled down, or to work up an unbending judgment about the character of the Duchess of Sussex. As Sandbrook puts it: "People are more interested in flags than inflation."

- Impact and political strategy** If public focus has shifted towards more symbolic and emotive issues, then it's a change that can be both exploited and directed by the cynically astute.

"There have always been stories like the one about Magdalen College and the image of the Queen," says d'Ancona. **"What's interesting now is the speed with which cabinet ministers or indeed No 10 respond.**

That to me signals we're into a different kind of political game. One where a strategy is at work."

He points out that the combined effect of Brexit, the pandemic and the government's commitment to a levelling-up agenda means there is an extremely challenging period ahead in terms of policy and its implementation. "Everything the government has on its to-do list is hard."

It's a human instinct and practically a political rule that when confronted with a number of tough priorities, the first job is to hunt around for easier options. "The culture wars suit the Johnson way of doing things," says d'Ancona. "He's good at things that involve short, memorable slogans and showmanship. Is he good at test and trace? Not conspicuously so. Is he good at PPE? No. Is he good at lockdown timing? Absolutely not. But the thing that he's quite good at is spotting a dividing line."

• A more historical perspective Sandbrook is less inclined to see debates about national and personal identity in terms of political distraction. He thinks they plug into deep-rooted and timeless matters of belonging and place. Along with his fellow historian Tom Holland, he co-presents a podcast, *The Rest Is History*, which recently looked at the history of culture wars.

For Sandbrook, culture wars have always existed. They are what was fought as the Roman empire moved from paganism to Christianity in the early fourth century, and – just as today – that process involved clashes over statues and shrines.

"What is certainly true," he says, "is there are moments in history when disputes about history, identity, symbols, images and so on loom very large. Think about so much of 17th-century politics, for example, when people would die over the wording of a prayer book." The same applies, he believes, to any number of periods, including the arrival of the permissive society in the 1960s, in which there is an attempt to establish new mores.

For Holland, the term culture war has a stricter meaning, relating to the German word *Kulturkampf*, which described the clash between Bismarck's government and the Catholic church in 1870s Prussia. It is therefore specifically a dispute between religious and secular forces. Certainly if we look at America, where the modern incarnation of the culture wars was first identified, the conflicts over abortion and gay marriage have been fought, at least by one side, from an explicitly religious perspective.

The US sociologist James Davison Hunter gave popular currency to the term in his seminal 1991 book *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*. He argued that they were about the orthodox versus the progressive. That division remains visible in the UK, but without the religious component.

"I don't think the Christian side of it matters," says Sandbrook, disagreeing with Holland. "You can have culture wars in a non-Christian society." Yet he agrees there might be a religious impulse at root. "The Puritans took the culture wars with them," he says. "Now America has re-exported the arguments back to us."

He says that Holland thinks that "woke social justice warriors don't realise they're really 16th- and 17th-century Christian Puritans".

If, as Holland believes, today's social justice warriors are the unknowing heirs to Puritanism, then their preoccupations are less about morality than identity, even if dissenting opinions can still be denounced with a puritanical zeal. • Nowhere is this tendency more evident than within the university system. The drive to "decolonise the curriculum" has led many academics to complain, usually off the record, of what one English professor described as a "dispiriting witch-hunt atmosphere" and professional intimidation.

As much of the intellectual motivation for challenging established power structures has emerged from the humanities, and in particular the field of critical theory, it is hardly surprising that this should also be the scene of some of the most conspicuous stands. In any war there are always innocent victims caught in the crossfire – and no doubt that's how the 150 Oxford academics boycotting Oriel think of the students they are refusing to teach.

• **Divisions on the "progressive" side too.** What's notable is that the left initially saw issues of identity – those concerning race, gender and sexuality – as an area of straightforward progressive gain. The struggles were all about liberating oppressed minorities from under the yoke of white male power. But as the battles became both more complex and particular – what's the correct position on whether self-identifying trans women with birth-male genitalia should have access to women's lavatories? – so did rights begin to conflict and solidarity fray.

The divisions that have opened up within the Labour party are to an increasing extent grounded in differences in cultural politics between its middle-class metropolitan supporters and its traditional provincial working-class base. But there are also other tensions, for example between trans activists and gender-critical

feminists. At almost the same time last week that Maya Forstater was winning her appeal against an employment tribunal, after saying that people cannot change their biological sex, the Labour leader Keir Starmer was reaffirming the party's commitment to introducing self-identification for trans people.

The former leader Tony Blair has publicly advised Starmer to steer clear of these culture wars, because they are polarising areas that have limited voter appeal. But d'Ancona believes that's an unrealistic ambition.

"A modern left-of-centre coalition has to include that social justice movement element ... Starmer can't just turn to BLM [Black Lives Matter] or #MeToo and say, away with you all."

By contrast, there is a sense that each of No 10's pronouncements on cultural or identity issues is calculated to maximise public support, even if it offends metropolitan sensibilities. As d'Ancona notes, this is why, in the run-up to a crucial G7 meeting, which is also President Joe Biden's first foreign visit and the first time the international community of leaders has gathered in a long while, Boris Johnson was able to find time to admonish the England and Wales Cricket Board for suspending Robinson over his historical racist tweets.

It's one thing to generate social media noise, and provoke a few high-minded columnists, but it's hard to know if Johnson's strategy has any deeper meaning or political capital. (...)

Yet if the culture war is leading to ever more entrenchment and acrimony, d'Ancona complains that "the standard Conservative response is, 'We didn't start it'. That's not the response of true leadership. It's the response of the playground."

• **Whoever started it, the culture wars look set to continue for a while yet.** With their preference for gesture over action, they don't cost very much to participate in – if you discount hurt feelings – and require no great expertise or experience. Doubtless within them are worthy and perhaps essential debates, along with the familiar vices of name-calling, point-scoring and virtue-signalling.

The problem is that specific issues are seldom discussed on their merits, but packaged together into ideological job lots, the better to establish clear moral battle lines. The demarcation is not so much between left and right as right and wrong. If you accept one position, goes the thinking, it's immoral not to adopt the rest. (...)

The trick is to respect the principle of free speech, while maintaining the standards of civil discourse.

But the threat of righteous contempt is never far away. **It would help if there were responsible figures cooling the debate. In the past, one person to whom you might look to perform that role would be the prime minister. In these culturally weaponised times he's more likely to be flame-heating it.**

A few Key flashpoints

The murder of George Floyd

Most aspects of the culture war are vividly symbolic rather than messily actual. But Floyd really was killed; the violence wasn't silence but a police officer's knee.

The key thing, though, is that the murder was filmed and its documentation proved to be internationally inspirational, not least in the UK.

The Rhodes statue at Oriel College

The Rhodes Must Fall movement began over six years ago in South Africa. His statue in Oxford remains a provocative symbol of imperialism and, as its critics would say, white supremacy. This controversy is not going to go away anytime soon.

Winston Churchill's statue in Parliament Square

The defacement of Churchill's statue in last year's Black Lives Matter protests was a galvanising moment. Whereas the toppling of slave-trader Edward Colston's monument in Bristol was met with either support or complacency, the graffiti denouncing Churchill as a racist prompted a cultural backlash against BLM.

The Last Night of the Proms 2020

The most patriotic and indeed jingoistic of musical evenings, it was announced that its traditional climax of Rule Britannia was to be played without singing, much to the annoyance of those who cried censorship. Online choirs were organised by way of cultural resistance. But the BBC caved into pressure and the words were sung by a cohort of 18.

The European Union referendum

Although it was on the surface a political decision about where sovereignty resides, the issues surrounding Brexit were as often as not cultural at root. More than anything the referendum exposed faultlines in the nation that remain open and prey to exploitation.

The Oprah Winfrey interview with the Duke and Duchess of Sussex

It's a mark of the weird political landscape that an American celebrity interview with a couple of fugitive royals could become the subject of so much hostility and polarised opinion. Prejudices and preferences concerning race, class and nationality created a meta-narrative that successfully overshadowed the banality of the conversation.

Document 8A - Florida is offering an advanced lesson in anti-Blackness

Opinion By Karen Attiah, *The Washinton Post*, January 24, 2023

There's that saying that goes, "White privilege is when your history is the core curriculum, and mine is an elective." Well, to Florida and Gov. Ron DeSantis (R), Black history isn't even worthy of that bare minimum.

5 Last week, it was revealed that the Florida Department of Education had sent a letter to the College Board, saying it would not adopt the board's new Advanced Placement African American studies course for its public schools. The course is "inexplicably contrary to
10 Florida law," the letter said, "and significantly lacks educational value."

Meanwhile, AP courses in European history, American history, world history, U.S. government and politics, and other subjects, in various languages,
15 remain untouched.

Quelle surprise.

For the uninitiated: The College Board has for decades offered AP courses and exams in a variety of subjects for high-schoolers. The course material is
20 supposed to be more intensive and to mimic what would be offered at a college level. To high school students who do well enough on their AP exams, many colleges and universities offer first-year course credits.

This day and age, it ought to be no question that
25 African American studies deserves AP treatment. It's crucial for all students to have access to this history and this knowledge and for scholars in the field to have an opportunity to reach younger generations.

The availability of this course would also be hugely
30 meaningful for Black students. Study after study has shown that Black students are likely to be more engaged and perform better in school when their identities and histories are affirmed — and in a way that goes beyond fetishizing Black trauma. I was an AP student myself,
35 scoring well enough on the European and American history tests to gain college credit. But I will never forget how humiliating it was to ask my teacher why we weren't learning about Africa and Black people when so many other groups' histories were considered
40 essential.

The AP African American studies course isn't even formalized yet; it's in a pilot phase. For a decade, a group of African American scholars has been working to develop the program. Only 60 schools across the
45 nation are testing it for the 2022-2023 academic year, though the College Board is hoping to roll it out nationally by the 2024-2025 school year.

DeSantis's move, therefore, can be seen as a preemptive strike — on the continuum with all his
50 recent attempts to cut off efforts to teach tomorrow's adults about Black Americans and their place in history.

This would be a slap in the face at any time. But DeSantis's latest escalation comes during the same month as the centennial of the infamous Rosewood
55 massacre, when White residents destroyed the all-Black town of Rosewood, Fla. It's more like stabbing the backs of Black Floridians with a hot knife.

And surely Florida is a testing ground. Most likely, it's only a matter of time before conservative groups in
60 other states use their institutional power to attack AP African American studies as well.

The history of the African American experience in the United States can't ever be eliminated. But the bastions of white power in this country are doing their
65 damndest to eradicate it. In 2020, the whole world watched a White police officer eradicate George Floyd on camera. Diversity and inclusion programs are being eradicated from schools and corporations. Now, a state is using its power to eradicate the (elective!) inclusion
70 of the African American experience in education.

What can be done?

First, more colleges and universities should band together to say they will recognize AP African American studies and give incoming freshmen course
75 credit for the AP exam. With those incentives, it stands to reason that more students and educators will want to see the course offered in high schools.

Second, colleges should continue expanding their offerings of Black history and Black studies, including
80 majors, minors and graduate degrees.

There are also legal challenges in the works. Janai S. Nelson, president of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, told my colleague Jennifer Rubin: "AP courses are college-level courses that, by extension, are
85 protected under the First Amendment, and the specific targeting of African American Studies is evidence of unlawful racial discrimination."

But allow me to zoom out. I'd be remiss not to note that this should be a learning moment for all of us — for
90 White people especially — about the failure to rein in the post-Black Lives Matter normalization of anti-Blackness.

As soon as the panic about "wokeness" in schools and the supposed teaching of critical race theory hit the
95 mainstream, many Black journalists could smell what

was coming. The laws against critical race theory and legislation such as Florida’s Stop Woke Act (another DeSantis special that has faced legal challenges) were always about anti-Blackness.

100 I have tried making this point over and over in my writing and in chats with well-meaning people who wanted to understand what the right was fussing about. I would hear people insist that if we just explained what

critical race theory was, we could win by making fools
105 of the conservatives who were banning nonexistent critical race theory courses. Those folks were wrong.

Instead, by singling out AP African American studies, Florida is showing us what the end game was always about: making institutional anti-Blackness
110 lawful again.

Document 8 B - DeSantis Is Right on African-American Studies

By RICH LOWRY, THE NATIONAL REVIEW,
January 24, 2023

With the state of American historical and civic knowledge in near collapse, who thinks high-school students need to be brushing up on ‘Black Queer Studies’?

FLORIDA governor Ron DeSantis stands accused of a long parade of horrors to which has now been added a new count — allegedly opposing the teaching of
10 African-American history.

Florida rejected the College Board’s pilot Advanced Placement African American Studies course, and the decision has been treated in progressive quarters like the curricular equivalent of George Wallace standing in the
15 schoolhouse door.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre called the state’s decision “incomprehensible.” DeSantis wants to “block,” according to Jean-Pierre, “the study of Black Americans.” She noted, ominously,
20 “These types of actions aren’t new, especially from what we’re seeing from Florida, sadly.”

Florida state senator Shevrin Jones, a Democrat, said the rejection of the course amounts to a “whitewash” of American history. Jones maintains that “we’re back at
25 square one, seeing that we once again have to defend ourselves to be legitimate in America.”

Never mind that there’s obviously a difference between objecting to the ideological content of a pilot course that hasn’t yet been adopted and erasing the
30 history of African Americans as such.

This is the typical game of pretending that the only way to teach the history of African Americans is through the tendentious political lens favored by the Left.

35 When red states push back against critical race theory, its proponents make it sound as if students will, as a consequence, never learn about the Transatlantic slave trade, the 13th Amendment, or Frederick Douglass.

40 This is preposterous. No reasonable person opposes teaching American history fully and truthfully. (In Florida, the controversial “Stop WOKE Act” itself stipulates that instructors should teach the history of African peoples, the Middle Passage, the experience of
45 slavery, abolition, and the effects of segregation and other forms of discrimination.)

The problem is when the curriculum is used as an ideological weapon to inculcate a distorted, one-sided worldview, and here, Florida has the College Board
50 dead to rights.

The College Board hasn’t released the pilot curriculum publicly, but, as conservative writer Stanley Kurtz and a publication called the Florida Standard have documented, it really goes off the rails
55 when it addresses contemporary issues. The curriculum presents the Black Lives Matter and reparations movements favorably and recommends the writings of a clutch of writers on the left, from Robin D. G. Kelley to Michelle Alexander, without rejoinder.

60 Bias aside, with the state of American historical and civic knowledge in near collapse, who thinks high-school students need to be brushing up on “Black Queer Studies”? The curriculum explains that this topic “explores the concept of queer color critique, grounded
65 in Black feminism and intersectionality, as a Black studies lens that shifts sexuality studies towards racial analysis.”

Surely, if anyone wants to marinate in this dreck, he or she can wait to do it in college, which specializes in
70 wasting the time of students and spreading ridiculous cant and lies.

This is the more fundamental point. Such “studies” programs — African-American, women’s, queer, etc. — are intellectually corrupt and inherently biased at the
75 university level and should be kept far away from the realm of K–12 public education.

It shouldn’t be a surprise that an AP curriculum developed with the input of practitioners of African-

American studies at the university level would contain
80 all the same perversities and warped ideas.

Florida should be commended for saying “no,” and
other states that care about sound education should do
the same.

African-American history is American history. It
85 should be taught — and has been — as an inherent part
of the American story. Only when we are confident that
all students know that story should we be willing to
entertain further specialization, and never if it is the
poisoned fruit of “identitarian” courses at universities

90 that take it as a given that their students should be
encouraged to thoughtlessly adopt progressive attitudes
and beliefs.

This fight isn’t about blocking history or erasing the
country’s sins but drawing a line between hifalutin
95 political advocacy and thorough, truthful instruction in
the American past.

RICH LOWRY is the editor in chief of NATIONAL
REVIEW.

Document 8 C - What more education on racial issues taught me

By Perry Bacon Jr., *The Washington Post*, January 20,
2023

You shouldn’t have to live in a blue state to learn or
5 teach America’s racial history in an honest way. But
that’s where America seems to be heading — a
particularly terrible outcome if, like me, you live in a
red state.

It was bad enough when essentially
10 every Republican-dominated state passed laws
restricting how racial issues were discussed at the K-12
level. (There has been a separate and equally
problematic series of restrictions on books about
LGBTQ issues.) Books written by or about luminaries
15 such as Toni Morrison and Rosa Parks are being kept
out of school libraries, either because conservative
parents objected or officials are worried that they will.
Teachers in red states are now leery of saying anything
about racial issues that conservatives don’t like — and a
20 few have been removed from their jobs.

Now, Republican officials, particularly in Florida,
are going further, seeking to limit colleges from
teaching critical race theory and other ideas on race that
conservatives oppose. The University of Central
25 Florida, wary of offending the state’s Republican
leaders, isn’t offering any courses that primarily focus
on racial issues in its sociology department this
semester, according to ProPublica. Looking to appease
those same Republicans, the presidents of some of
30 Florida’s public colleges have announced a policy
barring classes that “compel” beliefs in ideas such as
critical race theory. (It’s unlikely any current course
mandates that students agree with certain ideas, but this
policy is likely to make professors nervous about even
35 discussing them.)

This is a serious escalation. Colleges are supposed to
be the places in our society where ideas are allowed to
be discussed and debated, even if they are controversial.
(Liberals sometimes try to get the speeches of
40 conservatives canceled at universities. They should stop
doing that.)

I am worried about the future of education in red
states such as Florida and Kentucky, where I live. If
GOP officials ban any teaching at public schools or
45 universities on race that conservatives don’t agree with,
they will prevent people like me (I occasionally attend
classes at one of the local universities in Louisville) and
my daughter from getting a complete education on these
issues. Excellent educators who don’t want to abide by
50 such limitations will leave for other states and/or never
come here in the first place.

That would be a terrible outcome, because the racial
ideas that have become more mainstream in the past
decade have truly improved my life — and I suspect
55 those of other Americans, too.

I am 42, so my formative years were almost three
decades after overt discrimination against Black people
was outlawed. But it wasn’t as if I lived in a society
where race was not a factor. The richest neighborhoods
60 in Louisville, where I grew up and live now, were nearly
all-White. So were the honors classes I took in high
school. In professional circles in my 20s and 30s, I was
often one of the few Black men — and there were even
fewer Black women.

65 In the 1990s and particularly the 2000s, the
mainstream conversation in America on race was that
the country was moving decidedly in a positive
direction, particularly in terms of increasing
opportunities for Black people. I don’t recall having
70 many conversations about, say, systemic racism.

Conservatives argue our present-day focus on ideas such as systemic racism make White people feel guilt or shame. I suspect that's true. But for much of my life, the absence of such ideas left me feeling pretty terrible. We all observed the racial dynamics around us, but we didn't really know what explained them.

So people adopted explanations that made sense to them. In private conversations, I heard (even sometimes from fellow Black people) that Black people didn't value education and achievement or were more biologically suited for sports than academics. Some of these ideas were published in newspapers, magazines and books. I had to endure conversations about how I was "one of the good ones," implying my Black relatives, friends and classmates were not. Organizations, I often heard or read, would love to hire more Black people, but couldn't find qualified ones. By 2008, the country was said to be "post-racial": If Barack Obama could be elected president, was anything really holding Black people back?

The emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement pushed me to think more deeply about racial issues. It also provided more opportunities to do so. News outlets started covering these issues much more. I became more educated about two important concepts in particular: Past racial discrimination still deeply affects Black people today, particularly in explaining their low levels of wealth; and some of the United States' policy structures and systems still result in negative outcomes for Black people even though overt discrimination is outlawed.

The biggest overall lesson was this: There is nothing wrong with Black people as a group. Our reduced levels of wealth and income are the result of U.S. policies. Internalizing these ideas was incredibly reassuring and empowering for me.

I want everyone in America to learn what I did in my 30s much earlier. I often meet White people who have recently learned about, for example, the enduring effects of redlining who say, "Why didn't they teach us this in school?"

In a society like ours where racial divides are so clear, the choice isn't between talking about race or not talking about it. The choice is whether to have formal, evidence-based education on racial issues or to leave race out of education settings so that people are left to come to conclusions on their own.

There is certainly room for debate about exactly what that evidence-based education should look like. But there is disagreement among experts on ideas in math, science and history, too — and different views on how

those subjects should be taught. We should figure out the best way to teach America's racial history honestly — not rush to ban anything that offends conservatives.

I don't think such education will ever be limited in Boston or Los Angeles. It shouldn't be limited in places like Louisville, either.

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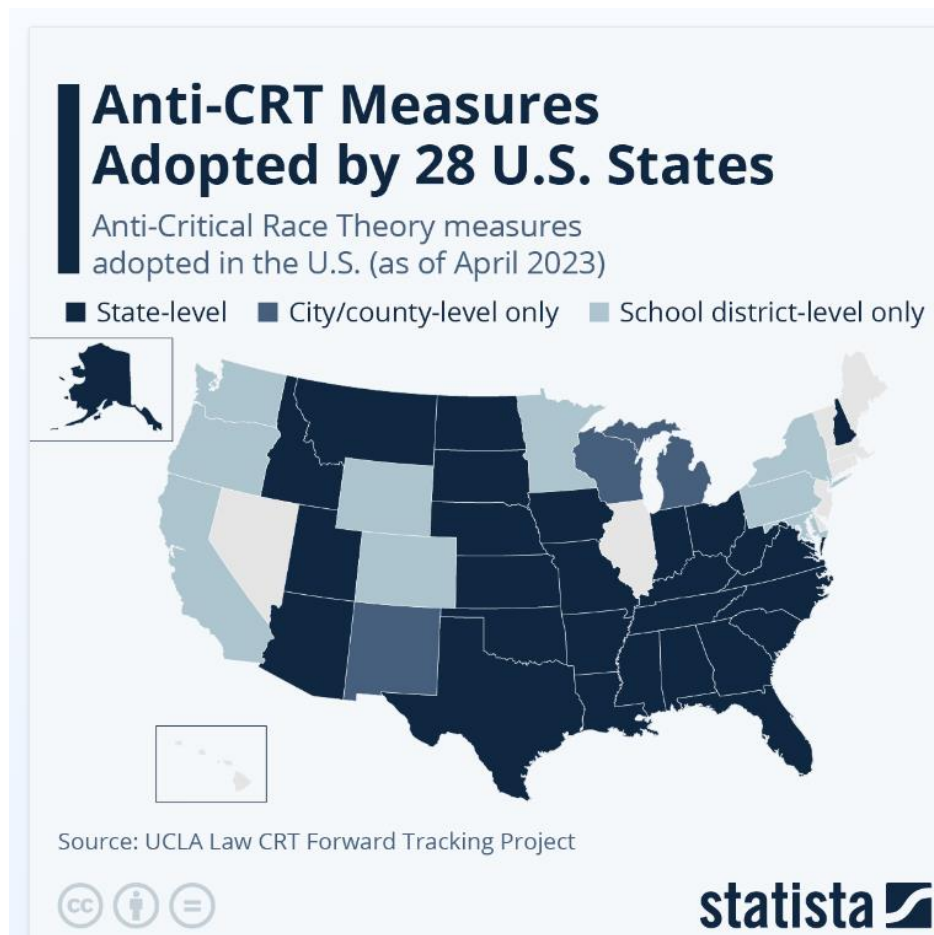
Document 9 -Map: Anti-CRT Measures Adopted by 28 U.S. States

Statista, Apr 19, 2023

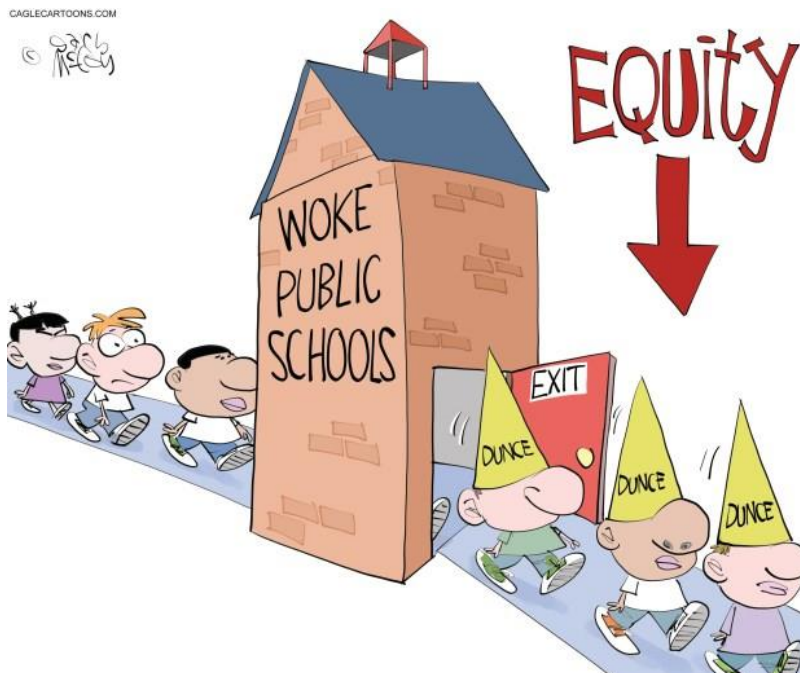
More than half of U.S. states have passed measures against the teaching of critical race theory - for example in schools or government employee trainings. Another dozen have seen successful initiatives on a smaller scale, with single cities, counties or school districts (or both) establishing such laws and directives. This is according to a tracking project at the University of California Los Angeles law school.

Almost all states that haven't yet passed any such measures have seen them proposed on the state level, the exceptions being California, Vermont and Delaware. In California, however, several school districts have already decided to prohibit or limit the teaching of critical race theory, including in Orange county and Paso Robles. A few states with no finalized laws or directives on any level remain: They are Illinois, Nevada, Vermont, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey and Hawaii.

The newly released report State of Black America by the National Urban League identifies 567 anti-CRT laws introduced in the U.S. In the opinion of the report, the limitation on CRT are limiting the civil rights of Americans, including Black Americans. Critical Race Theory is a framework that sees race not mainly as a biological factor, but as a social construct and sees racism not only as an individual's biases but as embedded in society.



Flashpoint 2 – School boards and book bans



Document 10 - Book Ban Efforts Spread Across the U.S.

Challenges to books about sexual and racial identity are nothing new in American schools, but the tactics and politicization are.

By Elizabeth A. Harris and Alexandra Alter, *The New York Times*, Jan. 30, 2022

In Wyoming, a county prosecutor's office considered charges against library employees for stocking books like "Sex Is a Funny Word" and "This Book Is Gay." In Oklahoma, a bill was introduced in the State Senate that would prohibit public school libraries from keeping books on hand that focus on sexual activity, sexual identity or gender identity. In Tennessee, the McMinn County Board of Education voted to remove the Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel "Maus" from an eighth-grade module on the Holocaust because of nudity and curse words.

Parents, activists, school board officials and lawmakers around the country are challenging books at a pace not seen in decades. The American Library Association said in a preliminary report that it received an "unprecedented" 330 reports of book challenges, each of which can include multiple books, last fall.

10 "It's a pretty startling phenomenon here in the United States to see book bans back in style, to see efforts to press criminal charges against school librarians," said Suzanne Nossel, the chief executive of the free-speech organization PEN America, even if efforts to press charges have so far failed.

Such challenges have long been a staple of school board meetings, but it isn't just their frequency that has changed, according to educators, librarians and free-speech advocates — it is also the tactics behind them and the venues where 15 they play out. Conservative groups in particular, fueled by social media, are now pushing the challenges into statehouses, law enforcement and political races.

"The politicalization of the topic is what's different than what I've seen in the past," said Britten Follett, the chief executive of content at Follett School Solutions, one of the country's largest providers of books to K-12 schools. "It's being driven by legislation, it's being driven by politicians aligning with one side or the other. And in the end, the 20 librarian, teacher or educator is getting caught in the middle."

Among the most frequent targets are books about race, gender and sexuality, like George M. Johnson's "All Boys Aren't Blue," Jonathan Evison's "Lawn Boy," Maia Kobabe's "Gender Queer" and Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye."

Several books are drawing fire repeatedly in different parts of the country — “All Boys Aren’t Blue” has been targeted for removal in at least 14 states — in part because objections that have surfaced in recent months often originate online. Many parents have seen Google docs or spreadsheets of contentious titles posted on Facebook by local chapters of organizations such as Moms for Liberty. From there, librarians say, parents ask their schools if those 5 books are available to their children.

The Push to Ban Books Across America

Parents, activists, school board officials and lawmakers are increasingly contesting children’s access to books.

10 **Nationwide Efforts:** Amid growing polarization, books exploring racial and social issues are drawing fire in different parts of the United States.

Most Targeted Books: Maia Kobabe’s graphic memoir “Gender Queer” was the most banned book in the country in 2021. Here are the other most challenged titles.

Texas: A state representative’s list of books that might elicit “discomfort, guilt, anguish” in students has left teachers and school boards uneasy.

15 **Tennessee:** A school board voted to ban the Holocaust novel “Maus” from its classrooms because it contains material deemed inappropriate.

Pennsylvania: Students in one county rose up against an effort to restrict their access to books that focused on ideas like white privilege.

20 The advocacy group No Left Turn in Education maintains lists of books it says are “used to spread radical and racist ideologies to students,” including Howard Zinn’s “A People’s History of the United States” and Margaret Atwood’s “The Handmaid’s Tale.” Those who are demanding certain books be removed insist this is an issue of parental rights and choice, that all parents should be free to direct the upbringing of their own children.

Others say prohibiting these titles altogether violates the rights of other parents and the rights of children who 25 believe access to these books is important. Many school libraries already have mechanisms in place to stop individual students from checking out books of which their parents disapprove. (...)

In Texas, Governor Greg Abbott demanded that the state’s education agency “investigate any criminal activity in our public schools involving the availability of pornography,” a move that librarians in the state fear could make them targets of criminal complaints. The governor of South Carolina asked the state’s superintendent of education and its 30 law enforcement division to investigate the presence of “obscene and pornographic” materials in its public schools, offering “Gender Queer” as an example. (...)

George M. Johnson, the author of “All Boys Aren’t Blue,” a memoir about growing up Black and queer, was stunned in November to learn that a school board member in Flagler County, Fla., had filed a complaint with the sheriff’s department against the book. Written for readers aged 14 and older, it includes scenes that depict oral and anal sex 35 and sexual assault. “I didn’t know that was something you could do, file a criminal complaint against a book,” Johnson said in an interview. (...)

Jack Petocz, a 17-year-old student at Flagler Palm Coast High School who organized the protest against the book ban, said that removing books about L.G.B.T.Q. characters and books about racism was discriminatory, and harmful to students who may already feel that they are in the minority and that their experiences are rarely represented in 40 literature. “As a gay student myself, those books are so critical for youth, for feeling there are resources for them,” he said, noting that books that portray heterosexual romances are rarely challenged. “I felt it was very discriminatory.”

Librarians say that just the threat of having to defend against charges is enough to get many educators to censor themselves by not stocking the books to begin with. Even just the public spectacle of an accusation can be enough.

Document 11 - Anti-woke activists are winning the culture war in America

They are losing school-board battles, but that does not mean they are in retreat

The Economist, Dec 9th 2023|Washington, DC

Two years ago it seemed that a conservative movement against “wokeness” was taking over America’s schools. Seen by many on the right as an insidious liberal outlook emphasising race, gender and sexuality, wokeness has many guises: among them critical race theory (CRT), gender theory and queer theory. According to its opponents, it all amounts to the same thing, it is thriving in schools and it has to go.

- 5 Activists set out to uproot it, and quickly made their mark. Moms for Liberty, a conservative group founded in 2021 that opposes CRT and other supposedly progressive policies in schools, says that in 2022 over half its candidates won their school-board elections. Other anti-woke groups claimed success, too. But is their momentum waning? Tiffany Justice, co-founder of Moms for Liberty, says that its candidates won 43% of its elections this year. News outlets reported that the movement was losing steam.
- 10 The reality is not so simple. An analysis by the *Wall Street Journal* of the November 2023 school-board elections found that the group exaggerated its success, winning about one-third of its elections. The Moms also seem to have been weakening before last month’s elections. A separate analysis by *The Economist* shows that less than one-third of the group’s endorsed candidates won their elections in spring 2023.

- To Randi Weingarten, head of the American Federation of Teachers, the country’s second-largest teachers union, the 15 recent elections show that families are siding with educators. “I know people look at this as R[epublican] versus D[emocrat], but I think this is deeper than that,” she says. “People who believe in children and the humanity of everyone...won out over those who are trying to divide and demonise.”

- Ms Justice disagrees. “They’re liars,” she insisted, referring to those who say the anti-woke cause is struggling. “The unions have run the ground game on these elections for 50 years...and they’ve been completely uncontested normally, 20 so they’re freaking out.”

- Although her movement’s election success is debatable, its impact is not. Teachers have lost their jobs for being too woke. A teacher in Florida was recently dismissed for using “Mx”, a gender-neutral version of Ms or Mr. Another, in Georgia, was fired for reading a book about a gender non-binary child called “My Shadow is Purple” to her pupils. A librarian in Colorado lost her job (and won a \$250,000 lawsuit) for promoting anti-racism and LGBT workshops for 25 teenagers.

- Two Advanced Placement courses (which give high-schoolers college credits) in African-American studies and psychology by the College Board, the maker of the SAT, have been banned from high schools in Florida. (Arkansas dropped the African-American-studies programme, too.) Florida also changed its history standards to require pupils to be taught about the supposed benefits of slavery, such as teaching skills to African-Americans, to ensure a balanced 30 view of human bondage.

Broader education policy is yielding to similar pressure. According to *Education Week*, 44 states have introduced bills or taken other steps to restrict CRT since January 2021; 18 have imposed bans or limits. Conservative activists may have lost most of their school-board battles, but in many ways they are winning the war. ■

Document 12 - Book Curation Is Not Censorship



Two books of the graphic novel *Maus* by American cartoonist Art Spiegelman are pictured in this illustration, in Pasadena, Calif., January 27, 2022. (Mario Anzuoni/Illustration/Reuters)

By [Daniel Buck](#), *The National Review*, April 2, 2023

It is totally appropriate for schools to decide what books students read — and it’s not banning them.

The American Library Association (ALA) recently lamented a record number of “book bans” in 2022, framing this development as a growing trend of censorship across the country. Of the 1,269 demands made, 58 percent were directed at school libraries. The report goes on to characterize the many parental-rights organizations behind these demands as mere “censorship groups,” infringing upon our rights to read what we want. Countless news organizations picked up the story and ran with the ALA’s framing.

Of course, lurking behind all of this hyperventilation over supposed book banning, there’s a simple truth that needs to be said: None of these books have been banned, none of them have been censored. It smacks of the ironic hilarity of Barnes & Nobles boldly throwing together a “banned book section” for approximately \$19.95 a pop — showcasing books so banned that the store receives media praise for broadcasting their sales.

10 In reality, there’s a drastic difference between government censors black-bagging dissidents for distributing samizdat materials, large corporations like Amazon or Target deplatforming a book, school libraries taking a text off their shelves, and a school replacing one book on their curriculum with another. Lumping all of these together under the term “censorship” — or, at the most panicked, associating them with Nazi book burnings — inhibits our ability to discuss the real, consequential, and ancient debate in question here: What should our

15 kids read?

As early as Plato’s *Republic*, we see Socrates and his interlocutors quibbling over what stories ought to be central in the education of children. The heroes a society chooses to valorize will encourage in children either bravery or rashness, contemplation or cynicism, activity or sloth. A school that teaches Shakespeare and Homer will foster a very different education than one that places *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* or smut on its

20 curriculum. In both cases, children will learn lessons and develop values, but they may not be the lessons and values we want to instill.

Socrates knew that literature forms the mind, shapes the soul, and crafts our worldview. One student of mine after finishing *Romeo and Juliet* confessed that he finally saw the need to curtail his own anger.

Beyond the individual level, it forms a nation, too. When nearly every citizen has read our founding

25 documents and looks to Martin Luther King Jr.’s speeches with near reverence, it creates a collective civic agreement on certain values and a healthy love of our own nation’s literature. The consequential decisions over curricular reading lists are no flippant matter, and calling any exclusion of a book “censorship” or a “ban” stunts a necessary debate.

Analyzing perhaps the most controversial “book ban” from last year may prove illustrative. A district in

30 Tennessee “banned” the Pulitzer Prize–winning graphic novel about the Holocaust, *Maus* — or so the media

said. However, if anyone cared to read the actual transcript of the school-board meeting in which this decision was made, they'd see that the school didn't "ban" this book on the premise that it dealt with uncomfortable history. Rather, school officials merely took it off the curriculum because some deemed it too vulgar for eighth-graders and were planning to replace it with another book from the same era at a later meeting.

35 Were I a member of that board, perhaps I would have voted to keep the book on the curriculum, simply because there was no clear alternative put forth. However, were school officials to recommend Anne Frank's diary or Elie Wiesel's *Night* in its stead, the conversation would quickly change. Like vegetables on a plate, there's only so much space for books on a curriculum. Eat broccoli or carrots, replace one book with another of equal value, and nothing is lost.

40 There are countless reasons to choose one or another book for instruction: aesthetic value, difficulty, breadth of topics, genre variety, age-appropriateness, and historical significance. Even in the case of *Maus*, it would be entirely reasonable for a school to remove it from a reading list if students had already read another Holocaust book in a prior grade but hadn't yet read a slave narrative.

In my own teaching, I have to make curricular decisions all the time. The inclusion of one book necessitates
45 the exclusion of another. I've taught every grade from fifth through twelfth. I never taught *Romeo and Juliet* to fifth-graders because of its difficulty, violence, and sexual themes, but I taught it in high school. There's a near-infinite number of books that I never taught, but at no point does this mean I banned any of them.

Ultimately, there's no expert consensus on what book is perfectly suited for which age. Rather, we must make decisions. Some want to call this censorship. We used to call it prudence and curation, and someone
50 must make these decisions. Our public schools are just that: public institutions. Neither teachers nor parents, administrations, or publishers ought to have the final say on what books should appear in libraries and in classrooms. Our only recourse is debate, discussion, and compromise. Casting off one side as censors or even fascists is not only counter-productive, but ignorant and cruel.

Doc 14 Florida's Governor Just Signed the 'Stop Woke Act.' Here's What It Means for Schools

BY KATIE REILLY , **TIME**, APRIL 22, 2022

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed legislation on Friday that aims to regulate how schools and businesses address race and gender, the state's latest effort to restrict education about those topics.

The law, which has become known as the "Stop WOKE Act," prohibits workplace training or school instruction that teaches that individuals are "inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously"; that people are privileged or oppressed based on race, gender, or national origin; or that a person "bears personal responsibility for and must feel guilt, anguish, or other forms of psychological distress" over actions committed in the past by members of the same race, gender, or national origin. The law says such trainings or lessons amount to discrimination.

The Republican-led legislation passed the Florida House in February by a vote of 74-41 and the Florida Senate in March by a vote of 24-15, along partisan lines.

"No one should be instructed to feel as if they are not equal or shamed because of their race," DeSantis said in a statement on Friday. "In Florida, we will not let the far-left woke agenda take over our schools and workplaces. There is no place for indoctrination or discrimination in Florida."

DeSantis, a Republican, proposed the legislation in December under the name Stop the Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees (WOKE) Act, saying he aimed to "take on both corporate wokeness and critical race theory."

"We won't allow Florida tax dollars to be spent teaching kids to hate our country or to hate each other," he said at the time, while calling critical race theory "state-sanctioned racism."

Critical race theory is a graduate-level academic framework that explores how institutions perpetuate racism. School districts across the country have emphasized that it is not being taught at the K-12 level. But the topic has become a catch-all target of conservative critics, who argue that lessons or trainings addressing systemic racism will divide children and make white students uncomfortable.

Florida's new law has been criticized by civil rights groups and free-speech advocates, who warn that it will have a chilling effect on educators.

"This dangerous law is part of a nationwide trend to whitewash history and chill free speech in classrooms and workplaces," Amy Turkel, interim executive director of the ACLU of Florida, said in a statement. "It will infringe on teachers' and employers' First Amendment rights and chill their ability to use concepts like systemic racism and gender discrimination to teach about and discuss important American history."

The law allows teachers to address "how the individual freedoms of persons have been infringed by slavery, racial oppression, racial segregation, and racial discrimination" and how laws enforced racial discrimination, but also says the lessons may include "how recognition of individual freedoms overturned these unjust laws" and "may not be used to indoctrinate or persuade students to a particular point of view."



See also

- (Sujet ENS 2023) <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/dec/24/us-book-bans-streak-of-extremism>
- Banning the bible! <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/jun/07/book-bans-are-sweeping-us-schools-a-surprising-new-victim-the-bible>
- "Tennessee Pastor Leads Burning of Harry Potter and Twilight Novels"
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/jun/07/book-bans-are-sweeping-us-schools-a-surprising-new-victim-the-bible>

• The Long Read + Audio

In the digital version of the file, you will find a long report for the New York Times by Elizabeth Williamson, published on Feb 3, 2024. She also introduced and read her piece herself. The audio version is on Cahier de prépa.

Cast as Criminals, America's Librarians Rally to Their Own Defense

As libraries become battlegrounds in the nation's culture wars, their allies are fighting to preserve access to their collections and keep themselves out of jail, or worse.

The New York Times
The Morning

January 26, 2023

Good morning. “The 1619 Project” continues to provoke national debate about race and history.

A lasting impact

Three and a half years ago, The New York Times Magazine [published The 1619 Project](#). It argued that 1619, the year the first slave ship is widely believed to have arrived in what is now the U.S., was as foundational to America as the year 1776, and that the legacy of chattel slavery still shapes our society. Essays from historians, scholars and others covered issues including capitalism, criminal justice and music, and sparked a national debate about race and history that is still raging.

Today, “The 1619 Project” premieres as a documentary series on Hulu. I spoke to The 1619 Project’s creator, Nikole Hannah-Jones, about what went into making the documentary and how the events of the past few years like the pandemic and racial justice protests shaped it.

German: American slavery ended generations ago, but one of the project’s arguments was that slavery’s legacy is still very much with us. Where do you see that most clearly?

Nikole: Every episode in the documentary is about modern America. It is following and it’s taking on some institution or aspect of modern American life and then showing how slavery has shaped that institution.

There’s a theme throughout the series: Black people suffer the most from the legacy of slavery, but most Americans suffer from it to some degree.

In one episode, we talk about how capitalism in the United States was shaped largely by chattel slavery and the exploitation of labor, even when workers are paid. And it hurts all of us because we have accepted inequalities in the United States, particularly among workers, no matter their race. We follow the effort to unionize Amazon facilities on Staten Island and in Alabama, where workers are organizing to address those disparities.

One way I’ve heard experts describe this is that politicians and other elites have used racist language and policies to divide white working-class and Black working class people who would otherwise share a common cause. Is that what you’re speaking to?

Yes. An expert, historian Robin D.G. Kelley, talks in the capitalism episode about how the modern ideology around race was created to divide white laborers — like indentured servants — from enslaved Black people and Black people overall. The white, landed elite was exploiting all of these people.

By creating race and giving white people this honorary status and certain legal and societal rights, that was an effective way to divide those who were being exploited from one another.

That has effects today. We know Black people are more likely to be unemployed and more likely to live in poverty. But the American worker overall, no matter their race, is generally doing worse than those in other Western industrialized countries.

Who’s the most interesting person you interviewed for this?

One who stuck out is MacArthur Cotton, who was a member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, or S.N.C.C., a student-led civil rights organization in the 1960s. He dropped out of college to fight to democratize America. He goes to prison for trying to register voters, where he was tortured — strung up by his wrists until he defecated on himself. He said the only thing that saved his life was that there was a group visiting the prison that day. I got emotional hearing that story and said, “I’m sorry that you had to go through that.” And he was like, “Don’t be sorry. This is what we had to do.”

Though The 1619 Project got a positive reception when The Times published it, it also became a political flash point. Conservative politicians have

criticized it, and some states have banned it from curriculums. Why do you think that is?

The reason The 1619 Project needed to exist in the first place is because we have not, as a nation, wanted to grapple with this issue. For those who believe in American exceptionalism, they saw The 1619 Project as a direct challenge to that. Telling histories this way — centering slavery, centering marginalized people — has always been contested.

I think that is because it is very hard to buy into the notion of American exceptionalism and then deal with the history of Black people in this country.

Beyond that response, a lot has happened since The 1619 Project came out — Covid, the 2020 protests about police brutality and the Jan. 6 riot, to name a few events. Have they changed your thinking about the project?

A lot of it has confirmed and affirmed the thesis. We are still struggling with this founding paradox and which type of country we are going to be and who has the right to be part of “we the people” and determine our self-governance.

● **See also: The Left eating itself, podcast**

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/26/opinion/the-left-purity-politics.html?showTranscript=1>

Many Americans want to understand: How does George Floyd happen? How does the Jan. 6 insurrection happen in this country? They feel they have not been equipped with the history they need to grapple with the through line in all these events. That is why this project exists.

What was different about doing this project for TV versus doing it for a magazine or book?

Well, I spent my entire life in print. It was my collaborators — Roger Ross Williams, who’s an executive producer; Shoshana Guy, the showrunner; and all the other producers who worked with me to map out how to translate this to television. The essays are dense.

I can take as long as I want to read a complicated passage when I’m reading something. But on TV, you have to take it in all at once. So there was a lot of figuring out: How do we translate all of this to a visual medium? Where do we film? How much voice-over? How much action?

I didn’t go into it with the hubris that I knew how to do this. I knew I had to rely on the experts in making television.

Les bonbons M&M’s, ligne de front dérisoire dans la guerre culturelle aux Etats-Unis

Les « spokescandies », mascottes du fabricant de confiseries, sont accusés de promouvoir le wokisme par le présentateur vedette de la chaîne Fox News.

Le Monde, Par Piotr Smolar (Washington, correspondant)

« *Amérique, parlons.* » C’est par cette invitation que débute le communiqué de presse de M&M’s, le fabricant de confiseries. Parlons de quoi ? Des « spokescandies ». Ces petites mascottes en forme de bonbons au chocolat, dont l’entreprise avait légèrement modifié l’apparence en 2022. « *On n’était même pas sûr que quelqu’un le remarquerait. Et on ne pensait certainement pas que cela allait faire le buzz sur Internet. Mais on comprend, à présent : même les chaussures d’un bonbon peuvent être polarisantes.* » On croit à une plaisanterie, à du second degré, à une publicité déguisée. Ou est-ce de la gestion de crise ?

Le 23 janvier, M&M’s a annoncé que les « spokescandies » étaient placés en « *pause indéfinie* ». A leur place est nommée une nouvelle ambassadrice,

Maya Rudolph, comédienne célèbre et intervenante régulière dans l’émission « Saturday Night Live ». Elle devra promouvoir les bonbons à l’occasion du moment publicitaire phare de l’année, le Super Bowl, le 12 février. La finale de la NFL, le championnat de football américain, est regardée en moyenne par 100 millions d’Américains, et les annonceurs rivalisent d’ingéniosité pour se faire remarquer lors de ce rendez-vous familial et sportif. L’affaire M&M’s s’inscrit aussi dans cette compétition, même si l’on ignore dans quelle mesure le scandale actuel peut servir le groupe Mars, la maison mère.

Mais revenons aux chaussures, l’objet du délit. Les petites mascottes, qui apparaissent dans les publicités de la marque, étaient six il y a un an, avant que Purple (violet) ne se joigne à elles. Chacune de couleur différente, elles avaient été révisées en janvier 2022 dans un esprit plus « *inclusif* ». Plus précisément, deux personnages féminins devaient être moins stéréotypés. Le bonbon vert s’est retrouvé en baskets, au lieu de porter des bottes à talon élevé, tandis que sa camarade

marron abandonnait ses talons aiguilles. Dire que le fabricant espérait l'indifférence est évidemment absurde. Le groupe Mars avait communiqué sur ces modifications. Mais il ne s'attendait peut-être pas à être visé par une campagne de dénigrement, orchestrée notamment par le présentateur vedette de la chaîne Fox News, Tucker Carlson.

« Plus de bottes sexy »

Parmi les obsessions de ce tribun télévisé, à l'influence redoutable au sein de la droite américaine, figurent l'évanouissement de la masculinité et la culture dite woke, ce mot-valise dans lequel tout est mélangé : la question des genres et celle de l'esclavage, les lectures scolaires et les débats politiques sur les campus, la lutte contre les discriminations et le « grand remplacement », cette théorie raciste supposant une arrivée massive de migrants, orchestrée par les démocrates, au détriment des Blancs américains délaissés.

« M&M's ne sera pas satisfait tant que chaque personnage de dessin animé ne sera pas profondément repoussant et androgyne, jusqu'au point où l'on ne voudrait pas boire un verre avec l'un d'entre eux », s'émouvait déjà Tucker Carlson il y a un an, au moment de la modification des mascottes. « Plus de bottes sexy » : la fin de la civilisation. L'idée que la vedette de Fox News fantasme au sujet d'un verre partagé avec une confiserie au chocolat avait beaucoup inspiré la communauté de ses suiveurs sarcastiques sur les réseaux sociaux. Mais la télévision identitaire qu'il incarne ne recherche pas la crédibilité. Elle se nourrit de chaque scandale ou les fabrique. Elle distille une vision apocalyptique de la société américaine et du monde en général. Elle nécessite des ennemis, par sexe, couleur de peau, origine ou profil politique. Elle confond les enjeux

essentiels et les anecdotes futiles. Elle ressemble à un combat de catch sans fin, truqué mais entretenant une culture d'intolérance et de stigmatisation.

Un jeu de rôle

Le 11 janvier, Tucker Carlson est reparti à l'assaut. « Les M&M's woke sont de retour », avertissait-il, se moquant de l'« obèse » Purple, la dernière venue des mascottes, qu'il considère être « lesbienne ». « On va couvrir ça, évidemment, parce que c'est ce que nous faisons », promettait-il, avec un manque d'entrain trahissant une sorte d'exercice imposé. Mais imposé par qui ? Chacun se retrouve dans un jeu de rôle, se complaisant dans sa propre caricature, le présentateur extrémiste comme le fabricant de bonbons, qui aurait pu simplement répondre avec humour et envoyer un gros colis de ses confiseries à Tucker Carlson, pour le convaincre de leurs qualités.

Mais la marque M&M's semblait presque rechercher la polémique avec le camp conservateur, en lançant une nouvelle campagne en ligne, le 5 janvier, avec un paquet de bonbons violet comportant seulement des personnages féminins. La compagnie appelait les amateurs à lui suggérer des noms de femmes « qui ont renversé le statu quo », afin de leur assurer un financement de 10 000 dollars. Le fait même, qu'à présent, nous écrivions cet article, assure de la publicité à la fois aux bonbons M&M's et à Tucker Carlson, dont les extraits de vidéos sur le sujet ont été repris par tous les sites d'information. La guerre culturelle aux Etats-Unis est comme toutes les guerres : elle a ses profiteurs.

« Aux Etats-Unis, la guerre culturelle n'est guère favorable aux entreprises »

Chronique

Arnaud Leparmentier, New York, correspondant,
Le Monde 14 juin 2023

En raison des débats sur les questions de genre et d'environnement, les entreprises américaines sont écartelées entre les progressistes et ceux qui dénoncent le capitalisme woke, raconte Arnaud Leparmentier, correspondant du « Monde » à New York, dans sa chronique.

Vingt milliards de dollars la canette de bière : c'est ce qu'a coûté à Budweiser, le roi des brasseurs de Saint-Louis

(Missouri), une unique boîte métallique de Bud Lite. Cette dernière avait été décorée à l'effigie d'une influenceuse transgenre, qui s'est empressée d'en faire la promotion sur Instagram.

Quarante-cinq secondes de clip plus tard, la catastrophe était déclenchée. Révolte autour des barbecues : dans le Midwest, l'Amérique profonde a cessé d'acheter la célèbre bière légère, dont les ventes ont chuté de 20 %. Panique à Wall Street, où la capitalisation de l'entreprise a perdu 20 milliards de dollars (18,6 milliards d'euros). Un séisme jamais vu, qui, loin d'être anecdotique, reflète l'état du débat aux Etats-Unis.

Le réchauffement climatique menace la planète, la Russie attaque l'Ukraine, le conflit gronde avec la Chine, mais le sujet qui obsède l'Amérique, c'est le sort des personnes transgenres, point d'orgue de la bataille culturelle qui oppose conservateurs et woke.

Quel changement en huit ans, quand Donald Trump faisait campagne pour défendre les ouvriers blancs des régions désindustrialisées de la Rust Belt, la « ceinture de la rouille » ! Aujourd'hui, les Etats-Unis sont engagés dans un nouvel isolationnisme pour promouvoir « America first ». Le combat se concentre sur la guerre culturelle, dont le chantre est le gouverneur de Floride, Ron DeSantis, prétendant à l'investiture républicaine pour 2024.

Bien sûr, cette réaction n'est pas un gage de succès. La décision de la Cour suprême, qui a supprimé le droit fédéral à l'avortement à l'été 2022, est une victoire à la Pyrrhus, qui a entraîné la mobilisation des femmes et la défaite relative des républicains aux élections de mi-mandat. A force d'aller trop loin, Ron DeSantis est en difficulté face à Donald Trump.

Il n'empêche : c'est le sujet dominant, et les entreprises n'en peuvent plus d'être sommées de prendre position sur tous les sujets sociétaux. Le point culminant avait été atteint, à juste titre, lors du meurtre de l'Afro-Américain George Floyd par un policier blanc de Minneapolis, en mai 2020. L'Amérique médusée a fait son examen de conscience collectif.

Valeur négative

Le reflux a d'abord concerné l'environnement. Après avoir eu une valeur négative sur les marchés au pire de la pandémie de Covid-19, le pétrole a rebondi, contribuant à l'inflation. La petite musique républicaine venue des Etats pétroliers du Sud et du Midwest était triple : désinvestir, c'est accroître la dépendance américaine, c'est faire envoler le prix du gallon d'essence, qui a un temps dépassé les 5 dollars, c'est avoir une performance boursière minorée des fonds de pension. Ces Etats ont adopté des lois bannissant les investissements publics des critères environnementaux, sociaux et de gouvernance (ESG), et l'idée de « désinvestir » les énergies carbonées a reflué dans un monde complexe : peut-on traiter pareillement des entreprises qui promettent d'utiliser la manne carbone pour réinvestir dans les renouvelables et celles qui promettent vaguement de capturer le carbone ?

Dans ce débat, les entreprises sont prises en étau entre les progressistes et ceux qui dénoncent le capitalisme woke. Les initiatives anti-ESG fleurissent en assemblée générale : soixante-huit résolutions cette année, contre quarante-cinq en 2022 et autour d'une vingtaine les années précédentes, selon le site Axios. Comme le révèle le *Financial Times*, une dizaine de grandes sociétés financières américaines, dont BlackRock, Blackstone ou KKR, ont expliqué dans leur rapport annuel que des « *opinions divergentes* » ou des « *exigences concurrentes* » sur les critères ESG pourraient affecter leur performance financière.

Ce débat affecte l'image des entreprises. Selon le classement 2023 de la réputation des cent premières marques américaines, publié en mai par Axios, Twitter est depuis longtemps détesté, et la prise de contrôle d'Elon Musk n'y a pas fait grand-chose (97^e du classement, juste devant Meta-Facebook). En revanche, les prises de position politiques incessantes de son patron ont fortement affecté Tesla, qui chute de la 12^e à la 62^e place.

A gauche, Disney ne sort pas complètement indemne de son bras de fer contre Ron DeSantis avec les polémiques sur ses personnages, puisqu'elle perd douze places au classement et se retrouve 77^e. Clairement, la guerre culturelle n'est guère favorable aux entreprises.

More Links and Resources

Critical race theory - Experts break down what it actually means

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svj_6w0EUz4&ab_channel=WashingtonPost

More on CRT

- From ABC news

<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/map-anti-critical-race-theory-efforts-reached/story?id=83619715>

More Resources on a few examples

- From *The Guardian*

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/25/critical-race-theory-us-history-1619-project>

More on Florida's anti-woke war

- Ron DeSantis's latest anti-woke stunt

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/19/us/desantis-florida-ap-african-american-studies.html>

- Here are a couple of interesting videos about the 3Don't Say Gay" bill in Florida

> Florida's so-called 'don't say gay' bill explained

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AMFO71_kO-s&ab_channel=TampaBayTimes

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_ejiqpr1uM&ab_channel=NBCNews

> Fighting against the Bill , The Washington Post, April 21, 2022

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRaY0qoqXk&ab_channel=WashingtonPost

The 1619 Project

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YaegpMi-pJE&ab_channel=PBSNewsHour

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HXmaEJ3Yd_l&ab_channel=DemocracyNow%21

The 1619 Project is an ongoing initiative from The New York Times Magazine that began in August 2019, the 400th anniversary of the beginning of American slavery. It aims to reframe the country's history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of our national narrative.

Cast as Criminals, America's Librarians Rally to Their Own Defense

As libraries become battlegrounds in the nation's culture wars, their allies are fighting to preserve access to their collections and keep themselves out of jail, or worse.



By [Elizabeth Williamson](#)

Reporting from Post Falls, Idaho, and Pella, Iowa

The New York Times, Published Feb. 3, 202

[Listen to This Article introduced and read by the writer. It has been uploaded onto Cahier de Prépa KH](#)

During 12 years as a youth librarian in northern Idaho, Denise Neujahr read to and befriended children of many backgrounds. Devout or atheist, gay or straight, all were welcome until a November evening in 2021, when about two dozen teens arriving at the Post Falls library for a meeting of the “Rainbow Squad” encountered a commotion at the entrance.

Members of a local church waved signs with images of hellfire and used a bullhorn to shout Bible verses and accusations about sin and pedophile “groomers” in the library. Parents had to escort the teens inside that night, and the library beefed up security. But the next month [police arrested a protester](#) outside the doors who was carrying a knife and a loaded gun.

In May, religious conservatives won a majority on the library board and named as its chair a member who had called [the Rainbow Squad a “sex club.”](#) Ms. Neujahr, who created the group as a program of crafts, snacks and conversation for L.G.B.T.Q. youth and their parents, said she was told the group's funding was in danger. But she refused to disband it.

“They’re really good kids,” Ms. Neujahr said. “It just makes me so sad that they have to go through all this hate. This is not what libraries stand for.”



Image

“This is a rough time for any teenager to grow up and experience life, no matter what their identity is,” said Denise Neujahr. Credit...Margaret Albaugh for The New York Times

As America’s libraries have become noisy and sometimes dangerous new battlegrounds in the nation’s culture wars, librarians like Ms. Neujahr and their allies have moved from the stacks to the front lines. People who normally preside over hushed sanctuaries are now battling groups that demand the mass removal of books and seek to control library governance. Last year, [more than 150 bills](#) in 35 states aimed to restrict access to library materials, and to punish library workers who do not comply.

“We’re no longer seeing a parent have a conversation with a teacher or librarian about a book their child is reading,” said Deborah Caldwell-Stone, the director of the American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom. “We’re seeing partisan groups demand the removal of books that they’re told are bad books, that they are not even reading, because they don’t meet the political or moral agenda.”

Activists say they are protecting children from sexually explicit material and exploitation, while conservative politicians seek to harden the bans into policy. Project 2025, the Heritage Foundation’s 900-page ideological blueprint for a potential second Trump administration, [declares in its opening pages](#) that “pornography, manifested today in the omnipresent propagation of transgender ideology and sexualization of children,” should be stripped of First Amendment protection and outlawed.

“The people who produce and distribute it should be imprisoned. Educators and public librarians who purvey it should be classed as registered sex offenders,” the document says.

The battles are being waged in places like Clinton, Tenn., where a reluctant library ally, the local sheriff, spoke out against censorship. In Pella, Iowa, two women organized a successful campaign against a proposal to force the town library under city control. And in Idaho, after Ms. Neujahr received an award for her work with the Rainbow Squad, people threatened her life and posted her family members’ personal information online.

Image



Local officials asked a sheriff in Clinton, Tenn., to determine whether two books violated Tennessee’s obscenity laws. Credit...Shawn Poynter for The New York Times

‘What is explicit is subjective’

Sheriff Russell Barker had a problem. As the chief law enforcement officer for Anderson County in the mountains of eastern Tennessee, he had handled narcotics, assault and other criminal investigations — not the review of children’s books about sex and gender identity.

But this past year, after residents found what they said were more than a dozen pornographic titles in the county’s four libraries, local officials asked the sheriff to determine whether two of the targeted titles violated Tennessee’s obscenity law. If so, librarians, staff or board members — the sheriff told officials he didn’t know who — might be subject to arrest.

Every one of the books appeared on lists posted by BookLooks.org, a Florida-based organization that reviews books for descriptions of sex, violence or other content it deems unacceptable for children. Its conclusions have become a resource for people challenging books in public schools and libraries. Ms. Caldwell-Stone calls BookLooks part of “a well-coordinated, well-funded campaign.” Emily Maikisch, the Florida parent who founded BookLooks, said it is a volunteer group that accepts no outside money.

“Ultimately our ratings are our opinions,” she wrote in an email. “We encourage folks using our material to make their own determination.”

The two books given the sheriff for review were “Let’s Talk About It: A Teen’s Guide to Sex, Relationships and Being a Human” by Erika Moen and Matthew Nolan, and “Gender Queer,” a 2019 graphic-novel-style memoir by Maia Kobabe that [is the most-banned book in the United States](#). The author, who is nonbinary, explores puberty and sexual identity in the book, which includes some drawings of nudity and sexual scenarios.

“These books were brought to the county commission, and we had an obligation to act,” a county commissioner, Denise Palmer, said in a [commission meeting](#) last spring in the county seat, Clinton, a town of 10,000 about 15 miles from Knoxville. “I felt like that they may teeter on the law.”

Controversy was not new to Clinton, the site of the [first high school in the South to be integrated by court order](#), in 1956, in compliance with the Supreme Court’s decision two years earlier in [Brown v. Board of Education](#). In 1958, up to 100 sticks of dynamite planted in the high school reduced it to rubble. No one was injured. No one was ever arrested.

While Anderson County is still mostly white, residents say it is different now, with liberal transplants attracted by a growing tech sector encompassing the former Manhattan Project site of Oak Ridge. But change has again brought backlash, including from some Christian conservatives.

In late March, more than 250 people packed the Clinton Community Center for a charged public meeting, [recorded on video](#). It happened to be on the same day that [three children and three adults died in a mass shooting](#) at the Covenant School in Nashville. Police said the shooter identified as transgender. Some who spoke at the meeting were further upset by the tragedy.

“We just had a young man who has fooled himself to believing he was a woman kill six people and himself was killed today,” Jill Brown, a county resident, said when she came to the microphone. “If that is not a testimony of how messed up this whole transgender strategy is, agenda is, then I don’t know what is.”

Jack Mansfield, a retired Oak Ridge police officer, shook his finger in fury at four county librarians at the front of the room. “You librarians, you’re providing this material, you can be arrested too!” he shouted. (Children under 11 cannot visit Anderson County libraries without an adult, and those under 18 need parental permission to get a library card.)

Miria Webb, the Clinton library director, felt under siege. “I’ve served this community for more than a decade, and I was born and raised in East Tennessee,” she said in an interview. “Those words hurt. They kind of strike to your core.”

Image



Miria Webb, the Clinton library director, said the library system still receives several challenges a month, but most are turned away by a library committee. Credit...Shawn Poynter for The New York Times

Three weeks later, the county commissioners met to hear Sheriff Barker's findings. Tommy Mariner, a retired Navy pilot and former schoolteacher who serves on the library board, spoke first.

"What is happening today, the threats being made toward people's liberty, toward people's jobs, is wrong," he said. "We saw in 1958 how simmering hatreds within the community blew up the high school across the street. This is not something that *might* just happen here. This is something that *has* happened here."

Then it was Sheriff Barker's turn. He told the commissioners that he planned to follow library policy and file a request that the library restrict children's access to the two books he had reviewed. He said that some of their content personally offended him, but neither violated state or federal law.

"For me, again, this is about freedom in the United States," he added. "My caution would be if we start removing those books, we could start an avalanche of everyone questioning anything that they disagree with. And we get into some censorship issues that would be really outside the bounds of what our country is about."

A county commissioner, Anthony Allen, disagreed. "When we try to segregate books that are so explicit that we want them segregated, they should not be in the library," he told the sheriff. "Can you address that?"

“That’s a fair argument,” the sheriff replied. But, he said, “what is explicit is subjective,” and “it is not government’s call to decide.”

Afterward, the library board moved the two books that offended the sheriff behind the circulation desk, dismaying Ms. Webb as well as conservatives who wanted the books out of the library entirely. In a recent interview, Ms. Webb said the library system still receives several challenges a month, but most are turned away by a library review committee. The library system has also fended off challenges to its acquisition plans, budget and independence.

“So far, we’re doing OK,” and the library has more supporters than detractors, Ms. Webb said.

The battle blew up, she noted, several months after she came out as a lesbian. She sometimes wonders: Was it about books, or people?

“I try to tell myself that people are afraid of change,” she said. “Because part of me is afraid it’s hate, and that is the part of me that wants to leave here.”

Image



The book “Gender Queer” has been the focus of fights to ban books.Credit...Maansi Srivastava/The New York Times

A two-year battle over a book

The controversy in Pella, Iowa, began in the summer of 2021 when a youth identifying as male arrived at the aquatic center in trunks and a small covering over his torso, described as a chest binder by some and Band-Aids by others. A rumor spread that the teen was swimming topless around children, stirring local alarm and angry posts to a Facebook page.

Two women stunned by the vitriol stepped in.

Anne Petrie, a retired music professor at Central College in Pella, and her neighbor Anne McCullough Kelly, a local mental health counselor, formed a Facebook group called “Coalition for an Inclusive Pella” as a countermessage. The two women were heavily outnumbered at City Council meetings, including one in which Michael Shover, the pastor of Christ the Redeemer Church in Pella, said that “the corrupting effects of sexual immorality are now descending upon our town.”

The fracas spawned a new group, Protect My Innocence, which in late 2021 began objecting to about 100 books from the municipal public library that it said contained pornographic and sexually explicit content, including “Gender Queer.” In Pella, the book is shelved in the library’s adult section.

Image



Anne Petrie has fought censorship efforts involving her local library in Iowa. Credit...Maansi Srivastava/The New York Times

In 2022, the library board denied Protect My Innocence’s request to remove “Gender Queer” from the adult section and make it available only if patrons asked for it. The group complained to the City Council, then turned to collecting signatures for a 2023 ballot referendum to place the library under the control of the City Council. That prompted Ms. Petrie and Ms. McCullough Kelly to create Vote NO to Save Our Library, a political action committee, with the help of EveryLibrary, a national advocacy group that fights censorship.

Heading into the Nov. 7 election, the competing groups published dueling opinion columns in local papers. Each side accused the other of pursuing a political agenda and of influence by outside interests. Vote NO spent several thousand dollars on yard signs, direct mail, and online and newspaper advertisements. It drew plenty of insults on social media, “My favorite was ‘Satanist, pervert, peddler of porn,’” Ms. McCullough Kelly said. Protect My Innocence urged residents to “vote for the virtuous.”

On Nov. 7, the vote to strip the Pella Public Library of its independence was 1,954 in favor, and 2,041 against. [Just 87 voters defeated](#) the resolution, ending a two-year battle over a book.

“Would I have liked the margin to be a little bigger? Yeah,” Ms. Petrie said. “But I was really, really gratified that the people of Pella said, ‘No, we don’t need this.’”

Image



The Post Falls library in Post Falls, Idaho. Ms. Neujahr’s youth “Rainbow Squad” now meets elsewhere. Credit...Margaret Albaugh for The New York Times

‘I just want them to get through high school’

For her work on behalf of the Rainbow Squad, last March Denise Neujahr [won the American Library Association’s](#) Lemony Snicket Prize for Noble Librarians Faced with Adversity. The prize included a trip to Chicago to receive a \$10,000 prize from Daniel Handler, a.k.a. Lemony Snicket, author of the popular “A Series of Unfortunate Events” children’s books.

The award, publicized in the local media, made Ms. Neujahr a target. The Idaho Tribune, an outlet that describes itself as “*conservative* journalism that supports and defends the Christian values that Idaho loves and cherishes,” called the prize a “groomer award.”

Personal contacts for Ms. Neujahr’s family members appeared on websites attacking her. One online commenter threatened “to gut me like a fish,” she recalled. She offered to buy a security system for her in-laws.

In May, after two religious conservatives who had sought to remove books from the libraries won seats on the library board, its members began overhauling the library’s policies on collections. A draft, viewed by The New York Times, seeks to ban materials containing “any description, exhibition, presentation or representation, in whatever form, of nudity, sexual conduct, sexual excitement or sadomasochistic abuse,” including “buttocks with less than a fully opaque covering.” The language echoes the BookLooks rating system.

In January, the new library chairwoman, Rachelle Ottosen, traveled to Boise to testify in favor of a proposed state bill that would empower parents to collect \$250 in damages from a school or public library if their child gains access to materials “harmful to minors.” But more people testified against the bill, and a previous version of it was vetoed by the governor last year. Ms. Ottosen declined to be interviewed, or to answer emailed questions.

Ms. Neujahr left the Community Library Network in Idaho in the fall, and now leads youth services for the library system in Spokane, Wash., a half-hour drive away. The job is a promotion, but she acknowledges her disappointment with Ms. Ottosen, who made clear that the Rainbow Squad was no longer welcome at the library. She still runs the group, but it now meets at Calvary Lutheran Church in Post Falls. The congregation invited the teens to meet there, and has given them snacks and art supplies.

“This is a rough time for any teenager to grow up and experience life, no matter what their identity is,” Ms. Neujahr said. “I just want them to get through high school, and know that things will be better.”

“Once they can vote, they can make a difference,” she added. “I’m excited to see that kind of world.”

Audio produced by Sarah Diamond.

[Elizabeth Williamson](#) is a feature writer for The Times, based in Washington. She has been a journalist for three decades, on three continents. [More about Elizabeth Williamson](#)