

Key terms and Definitions

Culture wars

Identity politics

Woke – wokism

Cancel culture

The anti-woke backlash

“the illiberal left” (*The Economist*)

CRT – Critical Race Theory

...

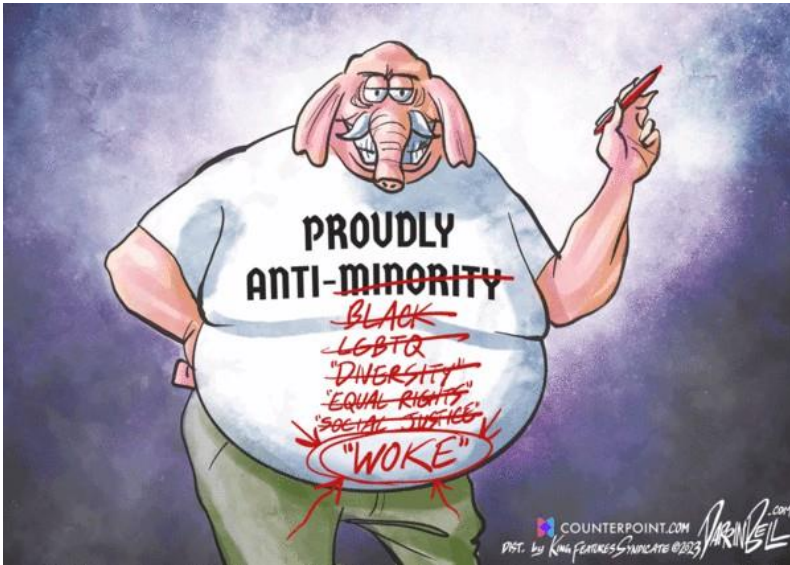
“systemic racism” / “unconscious bias” / “internalised racism”

NAACP

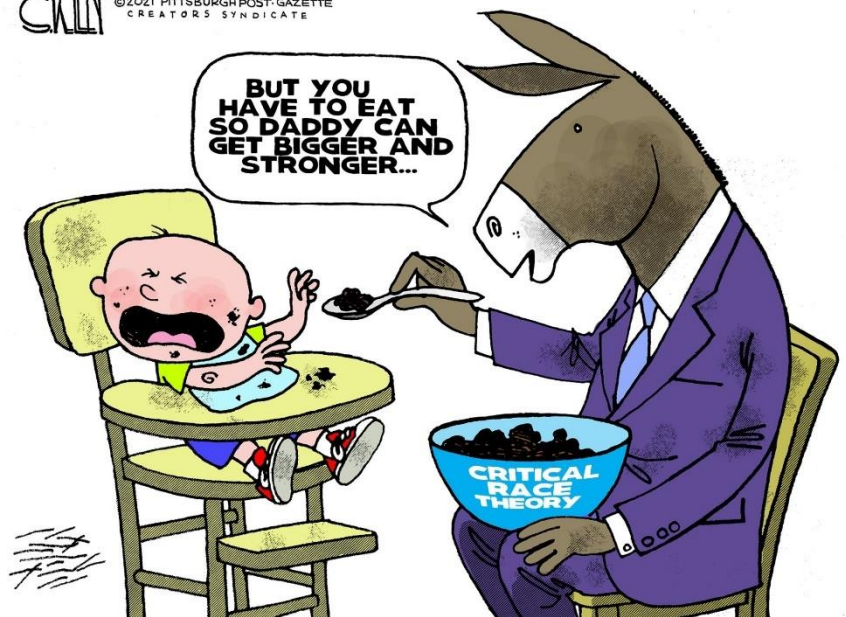
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Moms for Liberty



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The Daily Breeze, Editorial Cartoon, June 16 2021

Why Democrats Are Losing the Culture War

The booming right-wing influencer ecosystem helped reelect Donald Trump—and the other side may not have an answer.

By [Spencer Kornhaber](#) *The Atlantic*, November 7, 2024



Illustration by The Atlantic. Sources: Mario Tama / Getty; catchlights_sg / Getty.

After the last time Donald Trump won the presidency, in 2016, *The New York Times* confronted its readers with a vivid illustration of how out of touch most of them were with their fellow Americans. In a series of [maps](#), the newspaper color-coded the United States by TV-viewing preferences, highlighting which parts of the country preferred *Game of Thrones* (cities) and which ones preferred *American Dad!* (rural areas). The starkest factoid: Trumpland’s favorite TV show was *Duck Dynasty*, a hunting-themed reality series that many liberals had never seen one second of.

The *Times* feature was just one of many pieces of media meant to serve as a wake-up call to blue America, bemoaning how the nation had split into silos. Pundits agreed that restoring unity—and curbing Trump-era extremism—would require voters to get out of their comfort zones in order to understand, connect with, and persuade the other side.

Eight years later, with Trump taking the White House in part by bringing young people to the right, it may seem that those calls were simply never heeded: that liberal America instead drew itself further inward and is now facing the fallout. But that’s not *quite* right. Trump’s first term was marked by concerted cultural efforts that spread “resistance” ideology into conservative enclaves. Hollywood’s endorsement of the

#MeToo movement rippled into everyday workplaces; calls for racial justice were turned into prime-time football spectacles; enormously popular children’s movies and blockbusters made the case for multiculturalism. These were attempts on the left to do what it knew how to do best—influence whatever remained of “the mainstream.” But the very shape of culture was changing, and it’s now quite clear that only one side knows what to do about that.

Arguably the key architect of this ongoing political era was Andrew Breitbart, the conservative pundit—and compatriot of Trumpism’s most cunning culture warrior, Steve Bannon—who founded a series of online publications in the 2000s and died in 2012. The so-called Breitbart Doctrine stated that “politics is downstream from culture”—that is, the ideas conveyed by popular entertainment shapes consumers’ worldviews. This proposition called for conservatives to build a shadow Hollywood that tells conservative stories and raises up conservative stars (*Duck Dynasty*’s un-P.C. patriarch, Phil Robertson, won an award named for Breitbart in 2015). In the long run, though, the doctrine’s biggest impact has been encouraging the right to get creative with online culture.

Social media’s role in the 2016 election—helping bundle a variety of grievances into one exciting,

factually pliant narrative of elites oppressing regular Americans—has been highly publicized. What's less talked about is that it triggered a strangely regressive counteroffensive. Democrats, of course, made memes and organized online during Trump's first term, but they also channeled energy into reforming social media through content moderation and regulatory efforts. These efforts were prudent, and notionally bipartisan. But while Democrats seemed to yearn to bring back a less anarchic paradigm, Republicans railed against perceived liberal bias in tech—meaning they wanted, in effect, an even better mouthpiece. As media theorists such as Marshall McLuhan have long argued, new communication formats change the way a society thinks of—and speaks to—itsself. By all rights, an effective political movement should prioritize harnessing such changes, not reversing them.

In the 2020s, as many Democratic voters and politicians stepped back a bit from partisan warfare, the gears of culture were being refitted yet again. The old social-media platforms had been somewhat defanged, but action was happening on emerging platforms like TikTok, livestreams, and podcasts. These hypnotizing microforms—which captured most of young America, but also cut inroads across demographics—made old cultural fault lines, such as A&E versus HBO, look quaint. Conservative ideas popped up in a flurry of new fads and scenes: the manosphere, the tradwives, anti-woke comedians playing to cryptocurrency conferences. Livestreamers saw an influx of money from right-leaning interests (and, in some cases, Russian ones). When it came time for Trump to mount his comeback campaign, he could plug into a booming world of sympathetic influencers with enormous followings.

By contrast, Joe Biden's signature effort in regard to TikTok was his administration's support for banning it. When Kamala Harris became the nominee, she did unleash a wave of coconut-themed memes that, more than anything, excited fans of the pop stars whose songs were in the background. Late in her brief campaign, she and her surrogates also made some forays into popular podcasts. But in any analysis, these were marginal efforts compared with the old-school influence methods her campaign relied on: ad campaigns, door-knocking, and rallies headlined by mainstream celebs.

Now that she has lost, one of the many what-ifs to argue over is this: What if Harris had tried to court the millions of subscribers to Joe Rogan's bro-beloved podcast? Trump and J. D. Vance each did their own three-hour conversation with Rogan. The host wanted to talk with

Harris, but he and the campaign couldn't agree on the logistical details: Harris's camp had wanted Rogan to travel to her from his Austin studio, and to chat for only an hour. These were reasonable requests when judged by the standards of a traditional politician at the height of campaign season, but they were also a sign of the Harris side's inability or unwillingness to play by the rules of the new media. The refusal may have also been a strategic move to avoid the possibility of making a gaffe on mic—but given who ended up winning the election, this, too, seems like an antiquated concern.

After all, the hottest commodity of today's online cultural ecosystem is open conflict. Chitchat on podcasts and livestreams is transfixing because it's unruly, argumentative, and unafraid of causing offense. (Note how videos of dozens of voters engaged in free-for-all debates, produced by the media company Jubilee, took off this election cycle). Theoretically, it's not hard to infiltrate the new conservative information environment: Rogan *tried* to talk to Harris, and the similarly influential podcaster Theo Von booked Bernie Sanders. But most Democratic surrogates seem stuck on a 20th-century performance style, defined by slick sound bites or soaring, cinematic monologues. They seem reluctant to do what these new formats require, which is *fight*.

One example came when Rogan recently interviewed John Fetterman, the senator from Pennsylvania whose entire brand is allegedly being no-nonsense. Rogan presented him with the conspiracy theory that Democrats were importing undocumented immigrants to swing states, and planning to give them amnesty, in order to expand their voter pool. Fetterman could have debunked that idea in any number of ways, and forcefully. Instead he did what politicians have long been trained to do in contentious interviews: find a point of agreement—“you know, immigration is always going to be a tough issue in this nation”—and change the subject. Rogan, and probably many of his listeners, took this gauziness as evidence that the conspiracy theory was right. The day before Rogan endorsed Trump, the podcaster posted the clip of the exchange with the note “I think everyone should understand exactly what is happening.”

Harris wouldn't have won just by going on a few more podcasts—but if more Democrats had spent more of the past four years in the mix, figuring out how to spar, complicating the right's narratives about inflation and immigration, finding ways to redirect attention toward their own agenda, who knows? This new ecosystem is now so visible—and so obviously connected to the

rightward shift among young people that helped reelect Trump—that to label it *alternative* seems ridiculous. Still, the temptation to ignore it, for people who are less than enchanted with Trumpism, will only grow under the new administration. Calls to disengage from X, now that Elon Musk has turned it into a white-supremacist haven, certainly have a moral appeal. But if this election showed how difficult it is to meaningfully “deplatform”

speakers you disagree with, it also demonstrated the danger of ignoring the platforms where they speak. Unfortunately, the only way to change what’s happening in an echo chamber may be to add your own noise.

Introduction

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=90KFHgx-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 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 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 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 personifié par le woke des admirateurs de Black Panther, réalisé par Ryan 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 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 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 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 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 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 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. 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 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, 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 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.

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 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 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 deux, 75 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 Sonny Rollins (né en 1930) à Miles Davis (1926-1991), de 80 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 américaine ». L'esprit de rébellion d'après-guerre avait trouvé sa matrice, et le soft 85 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 persister. « Barack Obama, un personnage calme et élégant, était cool, ajoute Joel Dinerstein. On peut même 90 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 aujourd'hui renoué avec quelque chose qui ressemble beaucoup au nationalisme blanc. »

95 Sentiment de révolte

Le woke pourrait donc être la traduction culturelle d'un basculement politique du monde. Non qu'il soit l'expression du ressentiment qui anime les électeurs du président milliardaire. Mais il pourrait plutôt se rapprocher 100 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, 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 105 protection des minorités.

Cet ordre s'effondre, certes, sous le poids de ses propres paradoxes, mais les injustices trop longtemps laissées à l'arrière-plan suscitent aujourd'hui un sentiment de révolte d'autant plus grand que la Maison Blanche de Donald 110 Trump est accusée de vouloir repeindre les Etats-Unis à sa couleur. « Sous Obama, les militants de Black Lives Matter disaient en substance : “Un 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, 115 ouvertement hostile aux minorités, le woke est désormais plus un appel à lutter contre le pouvoir qu'une manière de 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 120 Dinerstein va plus loin : « Maintenant que Trump est

président, l'esprit woke est devenu important auprès 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 125 artistique. C'est la chanteuse américaine Erykah Badu qui lance le mouvement en employant, 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 fera son apparition à la faveur 130 du mouvement Black Lives Matter, un an plus tard, au point de devenir le credo du 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 135 d'ailleurs entendre un discours politique absent des morceaux du rappeur star 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 140 cette musique, gêné par les valeurs machistes 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).

145 De ce moment de sa vie, il a gardé une certaine méfiance 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 150 vertu. Cette prise de conscience ne se traduit 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. »

155 Dans le monde de Trump et des réseaux sociaux, il est 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 160 américaine, remarque Thomas Chatterton Williams. Elle transparait 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 l'illusion créée par 165 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 “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 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 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. 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 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, 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 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, “Afropessimism 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 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 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 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 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

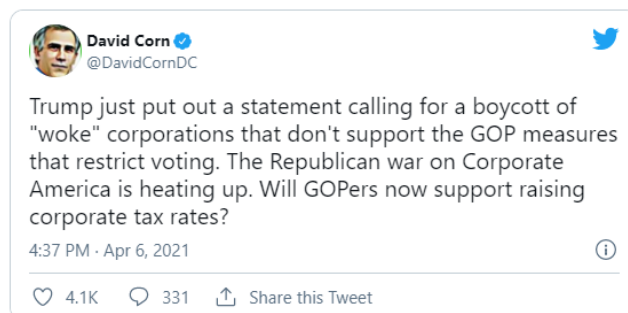
On both sides of the pond, the “woke” wars are raging. The long tail of the racial justice demonstrations last summer is still winding its way through American and British politics after both countries experienced a societal jolt. Statues of enslavers, imperialists and white supremacists were knocked 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 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 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 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.

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 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 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.) 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.

“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 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 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 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 — 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 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 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 “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” 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



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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.”

50 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.

60 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.**

90 “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.

145 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".

160 **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.

170 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.

190 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

255 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.

275 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.

290 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 5 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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.

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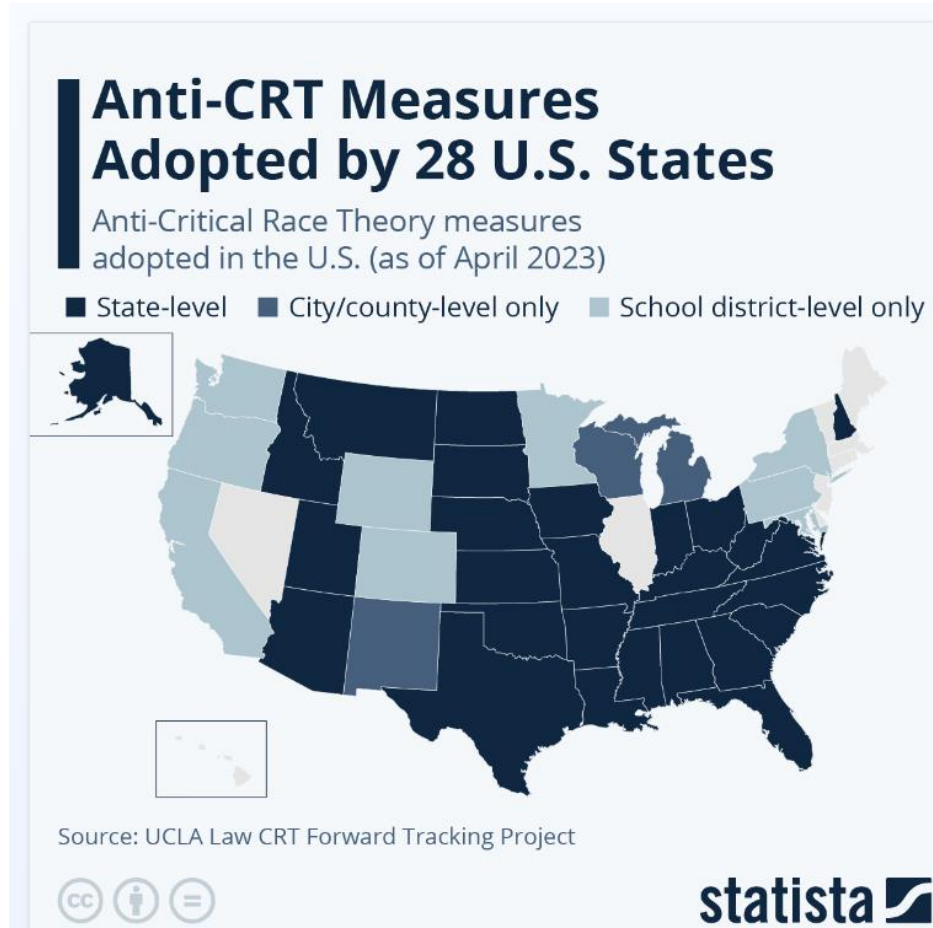
Document 9 -Map: Anti-CRT Measures Adopted by 28 U.S. States

Statista, Apr 19, 2023

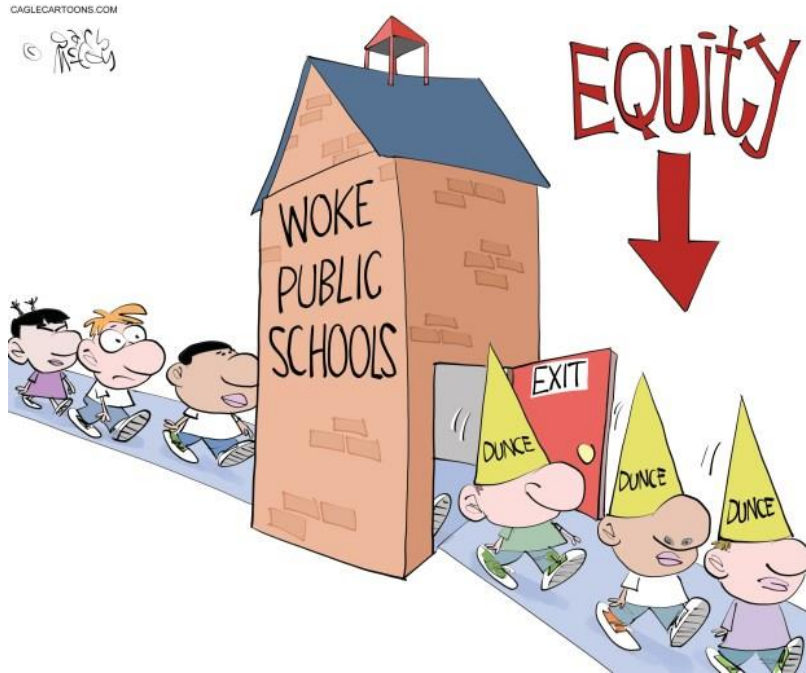
More than half of U.S. states have passed measures against the teaching of critical race theory - for example in schools or government employee trainings. Another dozen have seen successful initiatives on a smaller scale, with single cities, counties or school districts (or both) establishing such laws 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 they play out. Conservative groups in particular, fueled by social media, are now pushing the challenges into statehouses, law enforcement and political races.

20 **“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 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

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 5 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.

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 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 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 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 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.

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.

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 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 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 50 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."



More Links and Resources

● More ON BOOK BANS

- (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>

● Podcast- Why is America becoming less “woke”? *The Economist*, Sep 27th 2024

<https://www.economist.com/podcasts/2024/09/27/why-is-america-becoming-less-woke>

Our weekly podcast on democracy in America. This week, what the passing of “peak woke” means for American politics
Over the past decade a form of wokeness arose on the illiberal left, characterised by extreme pessimism about America and its capacity to make progress. Analysis by The Economist of how influential these ideas are today finds that wokeness peaked in 2021-22 and has since receded. Why is America becoming less “woke”?

John Prideaux hosts with Charlotte Howard and Idrees Kahloon. They’re joined by The Economist’s Ainslie Johnstone and Sacha Nauta, and Professor Musa al-Gharbi of Stony Brook University.

● Podcast, The Left eating itself

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

● 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_ejqpr1uM&ab_channel=NBCNews

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

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIRaY0qqXk&ab_channel=WashingtonPost