

Cancel Culture Eliminates the Free Flow of Information

by [G. Tod Slone](#) (June 2023)



Courtroom, Philip Guston, 1970

The network [i.e., Fox News] made over 500 scaremongering statements about my role, my views, and my personal life over the next nine months—an entirely disproportionate disinformation and smear campaign against a person who simply took a job to serve her country within her area of expertise [i.e., disinformation].—Nina Jankowicz, Former head of the Disinformation Governance Board at the Department of Homeland Security ([Help Nina Hold Fox News Accountable for Its Lies](#))

Can information ethics even exist in a system where it is okay to cancel some information, no matter how truthful? In an

Orwellian world, all contradictions are of course possible, as in “war is peace.” Those who favor censorship never seem to understand or want to understand or are capable of understanding the core problem—subjective determination—with terms they use to justify censorship. As Juvenal wrote hundreds and hundreds of years ago, “*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*” In essence, judges are needed to determine what and what not to censor, and Juvenal asks who will be the judges judging those judges?

Ernest Owens, a writer for *Rolling Stone* and author of *The Case for Cancel Culture: How This Democratic Tool Works to Liberate Us All*, is quite simply a proponent of censorship, certainly not of the First Amendment. The very title of his book is mind-boggling, a veritable challenge to reason itself. In Orwellian terms, “all” means “some.” Progressives and ideologues in general tend to be censorship proponents, that is, against the free flow of information. “Right now, bigots are protected under the First Amendment to fuel disgusting rhetoric without state-sanctioned consequence,” writes Owens in the segment of the book published in [Rolling Stone](#), “Why Cancel Culture Is Good For Democracy.” “Bigots” and “disgusting rhetoric” are, of course, highly subjective terms, thus intrinsically problematic.

Cancel culture is a form of censorship. Autocrats cannot survive without the latter. How not to think of Mao’s cultural revolution of mass butchery (millions murdered)? How can one call that democracy? The heckler’s veto is a form of cancel culture. Its illegality or legality can be a bit complex (see, for example, [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). As a simple example, it is not legal for a state university to eliminate a speech because of fear that speech might provoke violence, even though it does not call for violence (One might think of Trump’s pre-J6 speech). It is also not legal for such a public institution to allow hecklers to the point where the heckling renders the speech no longer possible. Just the same, Emeritus Professor

George R. La Noue (University of Maryland) in his [article](#), “Courts versus Campuses: The Struggle to Protect Free Speech,” states that “The old concurrence of academic leadership and the judiciary about protecting speech has broken down. Some campuses ignore or do not sanction incidences of speech suppression for invited speakers and few sponsor lively debates or forums where public policy issues are openly debated.” For several recent examples of unsanctioned heckler’s vetos (and there are many more), see [here](#) and [here](#).

Owens stipulates that “The America that tolerated white supremacy in their [sic] policies and laws is the same country that wants to remind us how such forms of hate are still legal via free speech.” The term “hate” is egregiously subjective, which is why such speech is constitutionally protected. Examine the numerous examples of government officials, who seem utterly unaware of that fact, as [cited](#) by constitutional law professor Jonathan Turley in “Yes, Hate Speech Is Protected Under the First Amendment.”

As for “white supremacy,” the term seems to be purposefully left undefined and vague. What precise laws and policies exist today that favor white Americans? Owens fails to mention any at all! If anything, the reality has become the opposite. Affirmative Action, Diversity-Equity-Inclusion policies, Twitter and Facebook algorithms (the banning of the president of the United States), as well as government attempts to censor so-called disinformation and misinformation (e.g., Biden’s Disinformation Governance Board) serve as cogent examples.

Owens states that “straight white men and other people with power aren’t used to getting pushback for the ways they conduct themselves—and cancel culture has reset the ways society can react. Those who fear cancel culture may claim they fear suppression of speech, but it’s accountability that they want to avoid.” And yet cancel culture constitutes the very cancelling and suppression of speech. How does

“accountability” even alter that simple, precise fact? If speech is not allowed, how can one even hold it accountable? How can one possibly with fact and reason prove information that has been canceled to be false, as in misinformation or disinformation? Owens fails to cite [examples](#) of “other people,” including former president Obama, Gen. Lloyd Austin, Kamala Harris and many other highly privileged people of color.

The strength of an ideology depends on unchallenged disinformation (i.e., propaganda) and the suppression of facts and reason that counter it. Ideologies depend on cancel culture because of their intrinsic faults! The free flow of information does not benefit ideologies at all, which is precisely why Owens and those like him are against it. The perversion of terms like “democracy” and “free speech” forms part of their modus operandi.

“Cancel culture is a way for a new generation of people to practice free speech,” argues Owens with unsurprising irrationality, if not downright unintelligence. To argue that restricted speech is somehow free speech is nothing short of Orwellian nonsense, as in “ignorance is strength.”

The failure of Owens to present any cogent arguments is disturbing. He notes, “It’s not the fault of the general public that society’s more progressive than in previous decades. In fact, that should be the goal of a democracy.” Yet the reality is that progressivism runs counter to democracy and its basic tenets of freedom of speech and vigorous debate. “Powerful people are trying to suggest that they are being suppressed by the new ways that everyday people are reacting to their behavior,” argues Owens. Again, he presents gross generalizations. The reality is not simply what Owens wishes to perceive. In fact, some “everyday people” are themselves being canceled by “powerful people.” Think of Pelosi’s January 6 hearings and the murder of Ashli Babbitt. Think of Big Tech’s shadow-banning.

“Once those in power got a hand of the term cancel culture, they attempted to redefine it as a pejorative phrase, stripping away its craftiness and mischaracterizing its intention,” states Owens. Yet its “intention” is egregiously simple and entirely embedded in the very term itself. And how can one possibly characterize as “crafty” the heckler’s veto?

Contrary to Owens, though likely in full agreement with him, Thomas J. Froehlich argues in “American Democracy Under Siege” (in the *Journal of Information Ethics*) that cancel culture stems “primarily from the right and alt-right.” He lists a handful of the purported culprits, including Fox News, Newsmax, Breitbart, and Trump Republicans and focuses on the movement to [ban books](#) from school libraries. Unfortunately, he does not mention the shadow-banning reality of libraries, in general, which might very well reflect a higher degree of left-wing banning than right-wing [banning](#). Interestingly, purported canceler Newsmax itself was [canceled](#) due to its right-wing bias.

“They [right-wing cancelers] tend to suffer the Dunning-Kruger bias, in which they are unable to be critical of their own beliefs or to understand that others who have contrary views have legitimate grounds for their beliefs,” states Froehlich. In essence, that statement can easily be applied to any ardent adherent of an ideology, including left-wing socialist and communist. Froehlich, in length, criticizes Fox News, which has been severely demonized by those like him on the left. To be fair, however, CNN has been severely demonized by the right. And thus the culture wars.

Froehlich states “There’s what experts call a ‘media ecosystem’ out there, where people take nonsense uttered on Fox News, then share it on Twitter, on Facebook with their neighbor.” Does that “nonsense” include the Hunter Biden laptop as Russian disinformation, the Wuhan lab leak conspiracy theory, the ‘border is secure’ theory, and the disinformation propagator expert in disinformation Jankowicz?

Oh, that was “nonsense uttered” on left-wing CNN. Again, terms like “nonsense” are highly subjective and often serve to demonize truth. Again, that Wuhan lab-leak theory serves as a cogent example, presented on Fox News, while proclaimed to be “nonsense” by the left-wing media and censored by left-wing Big Tech, and yet today it is [no longer](#) “nonsense” at all. And why did the left not want to release the January 6 files? Why was it in an uproar when Speaker McCarthy gave the files to Fox News’ Tucker Carlson? How does secrecy jive with transparency and the free flow of information?

As far as the “experts,” Froehlich cites Eric Wemple of the highly partisan left-wing *Washington Post* and argues that “In fact, the general rage in American politics can be traced to Fox News.” Yet what about the massive BLM/Antifa riots during the summer of 2020, not to mention the many speech-cancelations of right-wing pundits from [Ann Coulter](#) to [Gavin McInnes](#) and [more](#).

Why are such examples simply ignored by those like Froehlich? Well, according to Nathan Cofnas, a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow in the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Cambridge, “Because wokeism is based on demonstrable lies, it can only survive if people are prevented [canceled] from telling the truth. It is inherently incompatible with open inquiry. Wherever there is wokeism—and it is metastasizing to every major institution in our society—there is censorship, intimidation, and groupthink.” In his [article](#), “Four Reasons Why Heterodox Academy Failed,” Cofnas presents examples of successful left-wing canceling, including the firing of Noah Carl from his postdoc at University of Cambridge, the forced resignation of Jason Richwine from Heritage Foundation (yes, a purportedly conservative organization), the firing of Bo Winegard from Marietta College, and the barring of University of Pennsylvania law professor Amy Wax from teaching required courses. Cofnas rightfully blames the success of cancel culture on “an epidemic of cowardice among opponents of

wokeism, and not only in academia.”

In conclusion, it is truly astonishing that many highly intelligent people use their intelligence not to present reasoned factual information, but rather disinformation (propaganda) itself. Sadly, it is likely not possible to convince those like Owens and Froehlich that what they declare to be “nonsense” is sometimes truth. Those, who are of the opinion that only their speech and that of those who share their ideologically-restricted viewpoints, are NOT proponents of freedom of speech and democracy.

The above essay was sent to Rolling Stone magazine, which chose not to respond.

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G. Tod Slone, PhD, lives on Cape Cod, where he was permanently banned in 2012 without warning or due process from Sturgis Library, one of the very oldest in the country. His civil rights are being denied today because he is not permitted to attend any cultural or political events held at his neighborhood library. The only stated reason for the banning was “for the safety of the staff and public.” He has no criminal record at all and has never made a threat. His real crime was that he challenged, in writing, the library’s “collection development” mission that stated “libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view.” His point of view was somehow not part of “all points of view.” He is a dissident poet/writer/cartoonist and editor of [The American Dissident](#).

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