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# The Age of Intolerance: Cancel Culture's War on Free Speech

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*"Political correctness is fascism pretending to be manners."—George Carlin*

*Cancel culture—political correctness amped up on steroids, the self-righteousness of a narcissistic age, and a mass-marketed pseudo-morality that is little more than fascism disguised as tolerance—has shifted us into an Age of Intolerance, policed by techno-censors, social media bullies, and government watchdogs.*

Everything is now fair game for censorship if it can be construed as hateful, hurtful, bigoted or offensive provided that it runs counter to the established viewpoint.

In this way, the most controversial issues of our day—race, religion, sex, sexuality, politics, science, health, government corruption, police brutality, etc.—have become battlegrounds for those who claim to believe in freedom of speech but only when it favors the views and positions they support.

"Free speech for me but not for thee" is how my good friend and free speech purist Nat Hentoff used to sum up this double standard.

This tendency to censor, silence, delete, label as "hateful," and demonize viewpoints that run counter to the cultural elite is being embraced with a near-fanatical zealotry by a cult-like establishment that values conformity and group-think over individuality.

For instance, are you skeptical about the efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccines? Do you have concerns about the outcome of the 2020 presidential election? Do you subscribe to religious beliefs that shape your views on sexuality, marriage and gender? Do you, deliberately or inadvertently, engage in misgendering (identifying a person's gender incorrectly) or deadnaming (using the wrong pronouns or birth name for a transgender person)?

Say yes to any of those questions and then dare to voice those views in anything louder than a whisper and you might find yourself suspended on Twitter, shut out of Facebook, and

banned across various social media platforms.

This authoritarian intolerance masquerading as tolerance, civility and love (what comedian George Carlin referred to as "fascism pretending to be manners") is the end result of a politically correct culture that has become radicalized, institutionalized and tyrannical.

In the past few years, for example, prominent social media voices have been censored, silenced and made to disappear from Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram for voicing ideas that were deemed politically incorrect, hateful, dangerous or conspiratorial.

Most recently, Twitter suspended conservative podcaster Matt Walsh for violating its hate speech policy by sharing his views about transgendered individuals. "The greatest female Jeopardy champion of all time is a man. The top female college swimmer is a man. The first female four star admiral in the Public Health Service is a man. Men have dominated female high school track and the female MMA circuit. The patriarchy wins in the end," Walsh tweeted on Dec. 30, 2021.

J.K. Rowling, author of the popular *Harry Potter* series, has found herself denounced as transphobic and widely shunned for daring to criticize efforts by transgender activists to erode the legal definition of sex and replace it with gender. Rowling's essay explaining her views is a powerful, articulate, well-researched piece that not only stresses the importance of free speech and women's rights while denouncing efforts by trans activists to demonize those who subscribe to "wrongthink," but also recognizes that while the struggle over gender dysmorphia is real, concerns about safeguarding natal women and girls from abuse are also legitimate.

Ironically enough, Rowling's shunning included literal book burning. Yet as Ray Bradbury once warned, "There is more than one way to burn a book. And the world is full of people running about with lit matches."

Indeed, the First Amendment is going up in flames before our eyes, but those first sparks were lit long ago and have been fed by intolerance all along the political spectrum.

Consider some of the kinds of speech being targeted for censorship or outright elimination.

**Offensive, politically incorrect and "unsafe" speech**: Political correctness has resulted in the chilling of free speech and a growing hostility to those who exercise their rights to speak freely. Where this has become painfully evident is on college campuses, which have become hotbeds of student-led censorship, trigger warnings, microaggressions, and "red light" speech policies targeting anything that might cause someone to feel uncomfortable, unsafe or offended.

**Bullying, intimidating speech**: Warning that "school bullies become tomorrow's hate crimes defendants," the Justice Department has led the way in urging schools to curtail bullying, going so far as to classify "teasing" as a form of "bullying," and "rude" or "hurtful" "text messages" as "cyberbullying."

**Hateful speech**: Hate speech—speech that attacks a person or group on the basis of attributes such as gender, ethnic origin, religion, race, disability, or sexual orientation—is the primary candidate for online censorship. Corporate internet giants Google, Twitter and Facebook continue to re-define what kinds of speech will be permitted online and what will

be deleted.

**Dangerous, anti-government speech**: As part of its ongoing war on "extremism," the government has partnered with the tech industry to counter online "propaganda" by terrorists hoping to recruit support or plan attacks. In this way, anyone who criticizes the government online can be considered an extremist and will have their content reported to government agencies for further investigation or deleted. In fact, the Justice Department is planning to form a new domestic terrorism unit to ferret out individuals "who seek to commit violent criminal acts in furtherance of domestic social or political goals." What this will mean is more surveillance, more pre-crime programs, and more targeting of individuals whose speech may qualify as "dangerous."

The upshot of all of this editing, parsing, banning and silencing is the emergence of a new language, what George Orwell referred to as Newspeak, which places the power to control language in the hands of the totalitarian state.

Under such a system, language becomes a weapon to change the way people think by changing the words they use.

The end result is mind control and a sleepwalking populace.

In totalitarian regimes—a.k.a. police states—where conformity and compliance are enforced at the end of a loaded gun, the government dictates what words can and cannot be used.

In countries where the police state hides behind a benevolent mask and disguises itself as tolerance, the citizens censor themselves, policing their words and thoughts to conform to the dictates of the mass mind lest they find themselves ostracized or placed under surveillance.

Even when the motives behind this rigidly calibrated reorientation of societal language appear well-intentioned—discouraging racism, condemning violence, denouncing discrimination and hatred—inevitably, the end result is the same: intolerance, indoctrination and infantilism.

The social shunning favored by activists and corporations borrows heavily from the mind control tactics used by authoritarian cults as a means of controlling its members. As Dr. Steven Hassan writes in *Psychology Today*: "By ordering members to be cut off, they can no longer participate. Information and sharing of thoughts, feelings, and experiences are stifled. Thought-stopping and use of loaded terms keep a person constrained into a black-and-white, all-or-nothing world. This controls members through fear and guilt."

This mind control can take many forms, but the end result is an enslaved, compliant populace incapable of challenging tyranny.

As Rod Serling, creator of *The Twilight Zone*, once observed, "We're developing a new citizenry, one that will be very selective about cereals and automobiles, but won't be able to think."

The problem as I see it is that we've allowed ourselves to be persuaded that we need someone else to think and speak for us. And we've bought into the idea that we need the government and its corporate partners to shield us from that which is ugly or upsetting or mean. The result is a society in which we've stopped debating among ourselves, stopped

thinking for ourselves, and stopped believing that we can fix our own problems and resolve our own differences.

In short, we have reduced ourselves to a largely silent, passive, polarized populace incapable of working through our own problems and reliant on the government to protect us from our fears.

As Nat Hentoff, that inveterate champion of the First Amendment, once observed, "The quintessential difference between a free nation, as we profess to be, and a totalitarian state, is that here everyone, including a foe of democracy, has the right to speak his mind."

What this means is opening the door to more speech not less, even if that speech is offensive to some.

Understanding that freedom for those in the unpopular minority constitutes the ultimate tolerance in a free society, James Madison, the author of the Bill of Rights, fought for a First Amendment that protected the "minority" against the majority, ensuring that even in the face of overwhelming pressure, a minority of one—even one who espouses distasteful viewpoints—would still have the right to speak freely, pray freely, assemble freely, challenge the government freely, and broadcast his views in the press freely.

We haven't done ourselves—or the nation—any favors by becoming so fearfully polite, careful to avoid offense, and largely unwilling to be labeled intolerant, hateful or closed-minded that we've eliminated words, phrases and symbols from public discourse.

We have allowed our fears—fear for our safety, fear of each other, fear of being labeled racist or hateful or prejudiced, etc.—to trump our freedom of speech and muzzle us far more effectively than any government edict could.

Ultimately the war on free speech—and that's exactly what it is: a war being waged by Americans against other Americans—is a war that is driven by fear.

By bottling up dissent, we have created a pressure cooker of stifled misery and discontent that is now bubbling over and fomenting even more hate, distrust and paranoia among portions of the populace.

By muzzling free speech, we are contributing to a growing underclass of Americans who are being told that they can't take part in American public life unless they "fit in."

The First Amendment is a steam valve. It allows people to speak their minds, air their grievances and contribute to a larger dialogue that hopefully results in a more just world. When there is no steam valve to release the pressure, frustration builds, anger grows, and people become more volatile and desperate to force a conversation.

Be warned: whatever we tolerate now—whatever we turn a blind eye to—whatever we rationalize when it is inflicted on others will eventually come back to imprison us, one and all.

Eventually, "we the people" will be the ones in the crosshairs.

At some point or another, depending on how the government and its corporate allies define what constitutes "hate" or "extremism, "we the people" might *all* be considered guilty of

some thought crime or other.

When that time comes, there may be no one left to speak out or speak up in our defense.

After all, it's a slippery slope from censoring so-called illegitimate ideas to silencing truth. Eventually, as George Orwell predicted, telling the truth will become a revolutionary act.

We are on a fast-moving trajectory.

In other words, whatever powers you allow the government and its corporate operatives to claim now, for the sake of the greater good or because you like or trust those in charge, will eventually be abused and used against you by tyrants of your own making.

This is the tyranny of the majority against the minority marching in lockstep with technofascism.

If Americans don't vociferously defend the right of a minority of one to subscribe to, let alone voice, ideas and opinions that may be offensive, hateful, intolerant or merely different, then we're going to soon find that we have no rights whatsoever (to speak, assemble, agree, disagree, protest, opt in, opt out, or forge our own paths as individuals).

No matter what our numbers might be, no matter what our views might be, no matter what party we might belong to, it will not be long before "we the people" constitute a powerless minority in the eyes of a power-fueled fascist state driven to maintain its power at all costs.

We are almost at that point now.

Free speech is no longer free.

On paper—at least according to the U.S. Constitution—we are technically free to speak.

In reality, however, we are only as free to speak as a government official—or corporate entities such as Facebook, Google or YouTube—may allow.

The steady, pervasive censorship creep that is being inflicted on us by corporate tech giants with the blessing of the powers-that-be threatens to bring about a restructuring of reality straight out of Orwell's *1984*, where the Ministry of Truth polices speech and ensures that facts conform to whatever version of reality the government propagandists embrace.

Orwell intended *1984* as a warning. Instead, as I make clear in my book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People* and in its fictional counterpart *The Erik Blair Diaries*, it is being used as a dystopian instruction manual for socially engineering a populace that is compliant, conformist and obedient to Big Brother.

The police state could not ask for a better citizenry than one that carries out its own censorship, spying and policing.

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