

What does wokism say about the state of democracy?

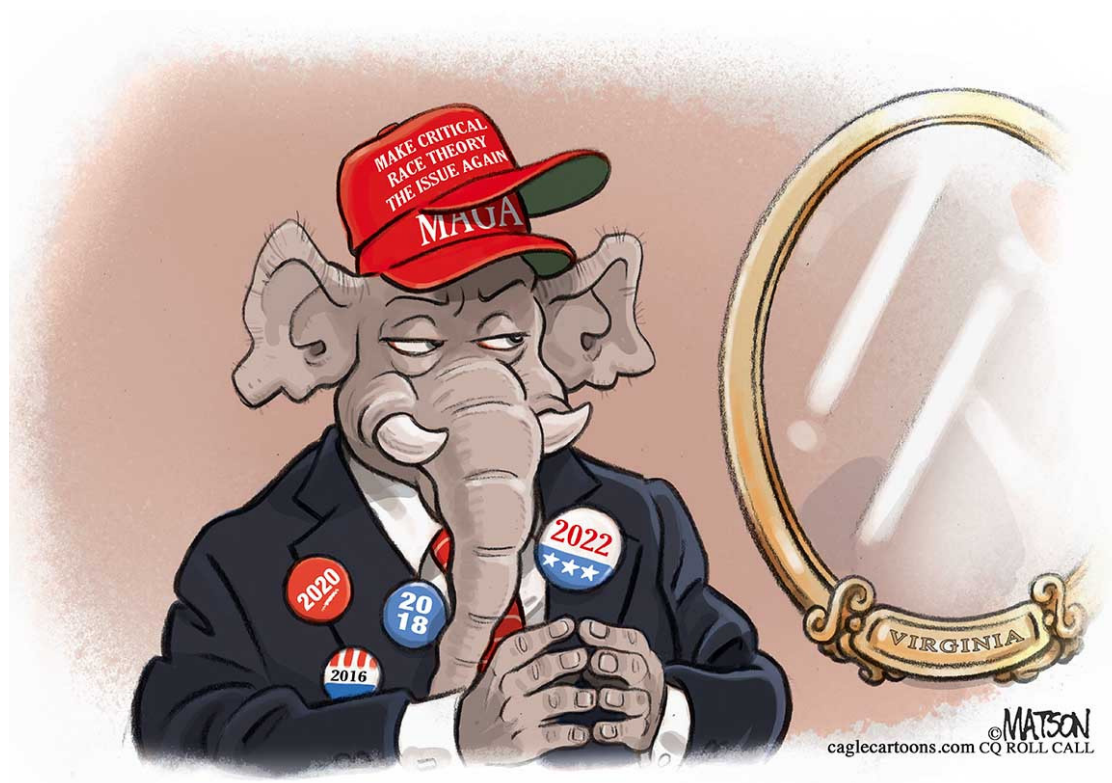
Document 1

Do you know the name that's given to the well-meaning people who, in a misguided attempt to be tolerant and respectful, promote the authoritarian and censorious ambitions of the woke movement?

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Document 2



Document 3 - School censorship is not democratic. Speaking up is the solution.

The Philadelphia Inquirer, by Jonathan Zimmerman, May 20, 2023

Some organizations have framed our schools as captives of a “woke mob” that is menacing democracy. In fact, these groups are suppressing the critical discussion that democracy demands.

In 2015, I went to China to teach a course about schools and history. The first thing I learned was that the schools didn’t really teach history — at least not the way I understood it.

They taught a sanitized, state-approved version, purged of anything remotely critical or controversial. [...] In China, when I asked a prominent professor about these topics, he told me they were “sensitive” — meaning, people kept quiet about them. But surely all nations suppress or discourage information that makes them look bad, he added. Did schools in my country address African American slavery, he asked, or the genocide of Native Americans?

Yes, I replied. And not always, I admitted, or with less depth than we should. But we discussed them. The mark of a democracy is its ability to critique itself, I said. And that requires us to explore the dark and sad parts of our past, not just the bright and happy ones. [...]

I still believe that, of course. But if I was asked the same question about America today, I’d give a very different answer.

Across the country, our elected officials are trying to suppress history. And that reminds us that democracies can censor themselves every bit as much as autocracies can.

Witness the flurry of new state bills, all designed to restrict what schools can teach about America. Dozens of legislatures have introduced legislation to prohibit instruction on “divisive” concepts, especially racism and sexism. Echoing Florida’s so-called “Don’t Say Gay” law, other states have tried to bar discussions of gender identity. Even if some of these bills don’t pass, they have created a chilling effect on classrooms across the country.

None of these measures was imposed by a dictatorial regime, as in China. They were pressed by citizen groups like Moms for Liberty and signed into law by politicians like Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis. They are democratic attacks on democratic education. [...]

... Conservative organizations in the United States, (...) have framed our schools as captives of a “woke mob” that is menacing democracy. In fact, these groups are suppressing the critical discussion that democracy demands. But they will continue to win the day until other people step up to challenge them.

Thankfully, some of that is already happening. Around the country, groups like Red Wine and Blue (that’s really its name) have challenged school board candidates sponsored by Moms for Liberty. Most of all, it has rallied parents to support history — and to fight censorship — in our schools.

That’s the democratic way. The wrong answer to right-wing pressure groups is to tell them to butt out of school politics, which is what Terry McAuliffe said during his failed gubernatorial bid in Virginia. The correct answer — indeed, the only answer — is for other citizens to butt in. [...]

Document 4- What does 'woke' mean and why are some conservatives using it?

ABC News, by Kiara Alfonseca, January 20, 2023

The definition of "woke" changes depending on who you ask.

The term has recently been used by some conservatives as an insult against progressive values.

The term, however, was originally coined by progressive Black Americans and used in racial justice movements in the early to mid-1900s.

To be "woke" politically in the Black community means that someone is informed, educated and conscious of social injustice and racial inequality, Merriam-Webster Dictionary states. [...]

The term, in one of its contemporary meanings, began to gain more popularity at the start of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2014, according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary. [...]

The term has since been co-opted by some Republicans as a pejorative term this midterm election cycle to signify the identity-based social justice issues that some Democrats and progressives push for, representatives from the Democratic Governors Association and Working Families Party tell ABC News. [...]

"We reject woke ideology," DeSantis said in his election night speech. "We will never ever surrender to the woke agenda. People have come here because of our policies."

The pressure against "woke"-ness in Florida has already led to the apparent erasure of race-related content in education, including the rejection of an AP African American history course in state high schools and vows from college presidents against including some race-related content that covers "intersectionality, or the idea that systems of oppression should be the primary lens through which teaching and learning are analyzed and/or improved upon."

Identity has been at the heart of the so-called culture wars being seen across the country, as Democrats and Republicans go head-to-head on issues such as LGBTQ+ rights, racial education in schools, and more.

For example, DeSantis himself has implemented policies in schools that have been criticized for limiting discussion and curriculum on race, systemic oppression, gender and sexual orientation with the Parental Rights in Education Law and the now-blocked Stop W.O.K.E Act. He argues these laws give parents more say in what their kids learn in schools.

"What you see now with the rise of this woke ideology is an attempt to really delegitimize our history and to delegitimize our institutions, and I view the wokeness as a form of cultural Marxism," DeSantis said in a December 2021 speech. "They really want to tear at the fabric of our society."

Across the country, hundreds of similar conservative-led legislative efforts have targeted LGBTQ+ identities and race in education.

Some conservatives have been critical of those using the phrase.

Maurice Mitchell, the national director of the Working Families Party and the Social Movement Strategist with Movement 4 Black Lives, calls conservative use of "woke" a "dog whistle."

"Because 'woke' is associated with Black people, it's been a useful club for those who want to beat those seeking justice over the head with white grievance politics to win elections without deploying explicitly racist terms," Mitchell said. [...]

Document 5- Why the ideologies behind 'Woke' and Cancel Culture are putting our democracy in jeopardy

Euronews.com, by Thierry Vissol, September 15, 2021

For many years in the United States, then Canada, the United Kingdom and now in the rest of Europe, censorship, ostracism, anathemas, threats, destruction or vandalism of works of art, attempts at linguistic and historical revision, and media lynching campaigns on social networks have been spreading, carried out by activists or associations of gender or racialised minorities.

Based on the awareness of the unresolved, very real, social and racial injustices, discrimination and violence suffered by minorities in the Western world, this new self-righteous culture, referred to as Woke or Cancel Culture, promotes a moral imperative to fight against them, by all means. Diversity is reduced to skin colour, religion, gender or sexual orientation. [...]

For example, in a paper published in the January 2021 issue of the *School Library Journal*, Amanda MacGregor, a Minnesota-based librarian, bookseller and freelance journalist, affirms that "Shakespeare's works are full of problematic, outdated ideas, with plenty of misogyny, racism, homophobia, classism, anti-Semitism and misogynoir" and should be banned in schools. As the *Journal* reports, many other teachers in the US refuse to teach Shakespeare questioning the 'whiteness' of his plays. [...]

In Canada, the Public radio, Radio-Canada, revealed, at the beginning of September 2021 that the Providence Catholic Scholar Council, which manages around 30 schools in Ontario, resorted in 2019 to an auto-da-fé (public burning) of 5,000 books for young people, including some Asterix or Lucky Luke comics, “to bury the ashes of racism, discrimination and stereotyping”, of which these books were accused. [...]

Destruction or vandalisation of statues considered as symbols of the Atlantic slave trade, slavery, colonialism and post-colonialism are frequent, like in those of Christopher Columbus, Theodor Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln, Cervantes in the US; of Edward Colston, Cecil Rhodes or Winston Churchill in the UK [...].

Language, history, art, music, literature and education should be cleansed of all offences, real or not, present or past, against members of these racial or gender 'minority communities'. New words, euphemisms, periphrases, appear to replace those now deemed offensive. As in George Orwell's “1984”, the idea is to prevent the expression of critical ideas by changing the vocabulary. The word "woman" should be replaced by "menstruating person", "mother" by "parent who gives birth", etc. [...]

Many are those who actively contribute to the propagation of Woke's moral conformity: in universities, in the cultural sector where artists and their productions facilitate the propagation of their ideas, taboos and anathemas. Without scruples, many Western media and social media contribute to their popularisation.

And, recently, politics has become involved, with hints of the Orwellian Big Brother. For Humza Yousaf, Scotland's Minister('s) "Hate Crime and Public Order (Scottish) Bill", which aims to defend victims of hate crime based on disability, race, religion, sexual orientation or transgender identity was adopted by a large majority on 21 April 2021. While it abolishes the offence of blasphemy, it does not ensure a balance between freedom of expression and protection against hatred, introducing great insecurity in its application. [...]

However, the end can never justify the means. Especially when, through coordinated actions, through denunciations amplified by the wide resonance offered by social networks, these forms of 'fatwa' make it possible to censor, boycott or publicly humiliate

individuals - past or present - whose opinions or behaviour are deemed offensive, embarrassing or judged to be divergent from this new intolerant and belligerent ideology of social-justice; when the weaponisation of social media leads to undermining dissenting voices' careers or reputations, as hundreds of current cases demonstrate. [...] [It] contributes to radicalising public debates, endangering our already fragile democracies, fueling an increasingly violent social climate. This is the opposite of what Woke culture and the aim of living peacefully together in diversity should lead to [...].

The basic approach:

- 1) Wokism is the epitome of a democracy that works and where citizens can challenge what is wrong about a society that needs to become more inclusive and give a voice to every citizen
- 2) Wokism is the sign of a democracy that has gone too far and is stifling the fundamental right necessary for a democratic society: free speech
- 3) Wokism shows how our democratic systems have become polarized around identity politics and culture wars

The more complex approach:

- 1) A concept which is at the core of identity politics and shows how polarized our democracies have become
- 2) A concepts that shows how in our democracies free speech is threatened, both by its proponents and its opponents
- 3) In the end, it does reveal the best attributes and the biggest threats that loom in our democracies: