

# Cancel Culture: Time to Get Your Big Boy Pants On

It's cool to cancel. At least, that's the message sent via the ever-escalating number of individuals ostracized for expressing opinions contrary to political correctness, no matter how factual those opinions appear to be.

Concern over this cancelling preference, however, is no longer the sole domain of those on the right of the political aisle. Prominent individuals with more liberal leanings are also speaking out, as evidenced by a [recent letter published in Harper's Magazine](#). Signatories include Margaret Atwood, David Brooks, Gloria Steinem, and J.K. Rowling, who cite concern over "editors [who] are fired for running controversial pieces; books [which] are withdrawn for alleged inauthenticity; journalists [who] are barred from writing on certain topics... [and] a researcher... fired for circulating a peer-reviewed academic study..."

That last point is particularly poignant in light of a *Wall Street Journal* [op-ed written by Heather Mac Donald](#). Mac Donald, a prominent author and a fellow at the Manhattan Institute, tells the story of how her stamp of approval magically turned a credible piece of scholarly research into a political hot potato.

Testifying before Congress in the fall of 2019, Mac Donald referred to a peer-reviewed academic paper by psychologists Joseph Cesario and David Johnson. The paper studied whether race "predicted fatal police shootings." The authors determined that it did not.

Mac Donald's reference to the same paper in a June article "set off a firestorm," causing the firing of "physicist Steve Hsu, who had approved funding" for the original study. Now it

has caused the study's authors to distance themselves from it. Mac Donald writes about Cesario and Johnson:

On Monday they retracted their paper. They say they stand behind its conclusion and statistical approach but complain about its 'misuse,' specifically mentioning my op-eds.

The authors don't say how I misused their work. Instead, they attribute to me a position I have never taken: that the 'probability of being shot by police did not differ between Black and White Americans.' To the contrary, I have, like them, stressed that racial disparities in policing reflect differences in violent crime rates. The only thing wrong with their article, and my citation of it, is that its conclusion is unacceptable in our current political climate.

Why is it that such research suddenly must be cancelled once someone who holds non-politically correct opinions cites it? Surely it does not invalidate the research. If it does, then pretty much everything in the world must be disassociated from or disavowed because someone, somewhere, at some time used it while holding deplorable positions. When we head down such a path, we're left with almost nothing.

This echoes a thought put forth by British journalist [Malcolm Muggeridge in a 1958 article for \*Esquire\*](#). Writing primarily about humor – or the lack thereof – Muggeridge got to the heart of many of the other problems we face in today's cancel culture:

As I see it, the only pleasure of living is that every joke should be made, **every thought expressed, every line of investigation, irrespective of its direction, pursued to the uttermost limit that human ingenuity, courage and understanding can take it.** The moment that limits are set (other, of course, than those that are inherent in the human situation itself), then the flavor is gone. It is tonic without gin, it is prayers without faith, it is calories

without taste or substance. [Emphasis added.]

If we want to make life a dull, blank slate, devoid of any flavor, excitement, or intrigue, then by all means, keep the cancel culture going. But if we want a flavorful life to return – one in which we ponder ideas, challenging or rejecting them or coming up with creative alternatives – then we need to pull our big boy pants on and stop shutting out any ideas that offend us.

–

Image Credit:

Flickr-delta407, CC BY-SA 2.0