



# Cancel Culture's War on History, Heritage, and the Freedom to Think for Yourself



John Whitehead

“All the time—such is the tragi-comedy of our situation—we continue to clamour for those very qualities we are rendering impossible... In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. [We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise.](#) We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.”—C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*

There will come a time in the not-so-distant future when the very act of thinking for ourselves is not just outlawed but unthinkable.

We are being shunted down the road to that dystopian future right now, propelled along by politically correct forces that, while they *may* have started out with the best of intentions, have fallen prey to the authoritarian siren song of the Nanny State, which has promised to save the populace from evils that only a select few are wise enough to recognize as such.

As a result, we are being infantilized ad nauseam, dictated to incessantly, and forcefully insulated from “dangerous” sights and sounds and ideas that we are supposedly too fragile, too vulnerable, too susceptible, or too ignorant to be exposed to without protection from the so-called elite.

Having concluded that “we the people” cannot be trusted to think for ourselves, the powers-that-be have taken it upon themselves to re-order our world into one in which they do the thinking for us, and all we have to do is fall in line.

Those who do not fall in line with this government-sanctioned group-think—who resist, who dare to think for themselves, who dare to adopt views that are different, or possibly wrong or hateful—are branded as extremists, belligerents, and deplorables, and shunned, censored and silenced.

The fallout is as one would expect.

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



Written by [John and Nisha Whitehead](#) on November 26, 2022

---

believe in freedom (of religion, speech, assembly, press, redress, privacy, bodily integrity, etc.), but only when it favors the views and positions they support.

The latest victim of this rigid re-ordering of the world into one in which vestiges of past mistakes are scrubbed from existence comes from the New York Department of Education, which has [ordered schools to stop using Native American references in mascots, team names and logos](#) by the end of the current school year or face penalties including a loss of state aid.

Citing concerns about racism and a [need to comply with the state's Dignity for All Students Act](#), which requires schools to create environments free of harassment or discrimination, New York officials are telling communities—many of which are named after Native American tribes—that longstanding cultural associations with their towns' Indian namesakes are [offensive](#) and shameful.

More than 100 schools in 60 school districts across New York State have nicknames or mascots that reference Native Americans. The cost to divest their communities of such branded names and images will be significant. One school district estimates that the cost to remove its Indian imagery from the gym floor alone will be [upwards of \\$60,000](#).

This drive to sanitize New York schools of “offensive” Native American logos and imagery comes on the heels of iconoclastic campaigns to rid the country of anything and anyone that may offend modern-day sensibilities.

Monuments have been [torn down](#), schools and streets have been [renamed](#), and the names of benefactors [stripped](#) from prominent signage in the quest for a more enlightened age.

These are not new tactics.

Since the days of the Byzantine Empire, when “Emperor Leo III [ordered the destruction of all Christian images](#) on the grounds that they represented idolatry and were heretical,” political movements have resorted to destroying monuments, statues and imagery of the day as a visual means of exerting their power and vanquishing their enemies.

We have been caught in this intolerant, self-righteous, destructive, [mob-driven cycle of book-burning, statue-toppling, history-erasing iconoclasm](#) ever since.

As art critic Alexander Adams [explains](#):

Iconoclasm is an activity evenly distributed between both left and right of the political spectrum, mainly at the extreme ends.... The intolerant ideology, which refuses to accept the co-existence of alternative views, takes the stance that ... the ideals within the art are no longer utterable or supportable: they are actually injurious and dangerous to the vulnerable.... The political activist reserves to himself the right to retrospectively edit our history for his satisfaction by removing monuments, those fixtures of civic life, embedded in the memories of generations.... Iconoclasm is an expression of domination and a demonstration of willingness to act—illegally and unethically—to impose the will of one group over an entire population. It asserts control over all aspects of society.... The campaigner argues that public art, accumulated piecemeal over 1,000 years of history, must reflect our society and values today — even if that means altering or erasing stories of the values our past society expressed via its monuments, or suppressing evidence of how we arrived at our current situation.... The iconoclast believes that it is only the values of today that count — that it is only *her* values that count. She takes it upon herself to *correct* history



Written by [John and Nisha Whitehead](#) on November 26, 2022

---

through monstrous acts of egotism. That *correction*, when it involves destruction, permanently alters the cultural legacy. It shrinks the breadth of human experience available to the generations which follow ours.

In such a world, there can be no debate, no journey to understanding, no chance to learn from one's mistakes or even make mistakes that are uniquely your own; there is only obedience and compliance to the government, its corporate overlords and the prevailing mob mindset.

Censorship, cancel culture, political correctness, woke-ism, hate speech, intolerance: whatever label you assign to this overzealous drive to sanitize the culture of anything that might be deemed offensive or disturbing or challenging, be assured they are sign posts on a one-way road to graver dangers marked by "[suppression, persecution, expulsion and the massacring of people.](#)"

Whether those smashing monuments and erasing history are doing so for noble purposes or more diabolical reasons, [the end results are the same](#): criminalization, confiscation, imprisonment, exile and genocide.

"Look at mobs which gather to smash monuments," says Adams. "These monuments may be the statues of deposed dictators who terrorized populations, causing untold death and suffering. They may be monuments to fallen soldiers who died defending causes that are no longer fashionable. The mob's anger is the same. The viciousness and triumphant celebrations are the same. Only the causes differ in seriousness, topicality and justification."

Adams continues:

The Civil War statue destroyers think they are assaulting the posterity of slave owners, but [they themselves are in the grip of ideological fervor](#). They are unaware that they are running a biological code, hardwired in their brains by evolution and activated by political extremists. The activists of today heedlessly erase history they haven't yet learned to read. They act as the hammer that extremists use to deface the cathedrals and museums our ancestors built.

What's different about this present age, however, is the use of technology to censor, silence, delete, label as "hateful," demonize and destroy those whose viewpoints run counter to the cultural elite.

"In the last few years," writes Nina Power for *Art Review*, "what is understood to be contentious has become increasingly broadly defined.... [The range of what counts as acceptable gets smaller and smaller](#).... [W]e thus find ourselves.... in the midst of a new culture war in which the freedom to think, feel and express ourselves comes at the risk of economic impoverishment, social ostracism and mob justice."

Where this leads is the stuff of dystopian nightmares: societies that value conformity and group-think over individuality; a populace so adept at self-censorship and compliance that they are capable only of obeying the government's dictates without the ability to parse out whether those dictates should be obeyed; and a language limited to government-speak.

This is what happens when the voices of the majority are allowed to eliminate those in the minority, and it is exactly why 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,



Written by [John and Nisha Whitehead](#) on November 26, 2022

---

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.

Freedom for those in the unpopular minority constitutes the ultimate tolerance in a free society.

The alternative, as depicted in Ayn Rand’s novella *Anthem*, is a world in which individuality and the ability to think for oneself independent of the government and the populace are eradicated, where even the word “I” has been eliminated from the vocabulary, [replaced by the collective “we.”](#)

As *Anthem*’s narrator Equality 7-2521 explains, “It is a sin to think words no others think and to put them down upon a paper no others are to see.... And well we know that there is no transgression blacker than to do or think alone.”

As I make clear in [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#) and in its fictional counterpart [The Erik Blair Diaries](#), we are not merely losing the *ability* to think critically for ourselves and, in turn, to govern our inner and outer worlds, we are also in danger of losing the *right* to do so.

The government’s war on thought crimes and truth-tellers is just the beginning.

#### ABOUT JOHN & NISHA WHITEHEAD:

*Constitutional attorney and author John W. Whitehead is founder and president of The Rutherford Institute. His latest books [The Erik Blair Diaries](#) and [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#) are available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). Whitehead can be contacted at [johnw@rutherford.org](mailto:johnw@rutherford.org). Nisha Whitehead is the Executive Director of The Rutherford Institute. Information about The Rutherford Institute is available at [www.rutherford.org](http://www.rutherford.org).*



## Subscribe to the New American

Get exclusive digital access to the most informative, non-partisan truthful news source for patriotic Americans!

Discover a refreshing blend of time-honored values, principles and insightful perspectives within the pages of "The New American" magazine. Delve into a world where tradition is the foundation, and exploration knows no bounds.

From politics and finance to foreign affairs, environment, culture, and technology, we bring you an unparalleled array of topics that matter most.



[Subscribe](#)

### What's Included?

- 24 Issues Per Year
- Optional Print Edition
- Digital Edition Access
- Exclusive Subscriber Content
- Audio provided for all articles
- Unlimited access to past issues
- Coming Soon! Ad FREE
- 60-Day money back guarantee!
- Cancel anytime.