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American Studies

U.S. History

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Is America Currently Living up to its Core Values?

The Constitution and the Declaration of Independence are integral parts of the foundation of America's core values. These documents help guarantee American citizens such rights as the freedom of speech. The first president and father of our country, George Washington once said, "If freedom of speech is taken away, then dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter." Unfortunately, America may soon be led to "slaughter" as the right to the freedom of speech is currently threatened by the existing "cancel culture" and social media censorship.

A new trend, cancel culture has become a big issue in freedom of speech. Urban dictionary defines cancel culture as, "rejecting an individual or idea." (Urban Dictionary) People get "canceled" if others disagree with them or do not support their beliefs. Cancel culture is taking away people's rights to speak confidently without fear of being vilified. For example, in March of 2020, Kim Kardashian West posted pictures of herself wearing braids and quickly reserved hateful backlash. Although Kim tried explaining herself and saying she understands the culture of the braids, her fans put that aside and "canceled" her for cultural appropriation. One fan had even commented, "You are not black." (Independent) This trend has become such an issue that even people with good intentions are getting cancelled, leaving people fearful of sharing or posting because they do not want their good intentions to be misinterpreted. Thus,

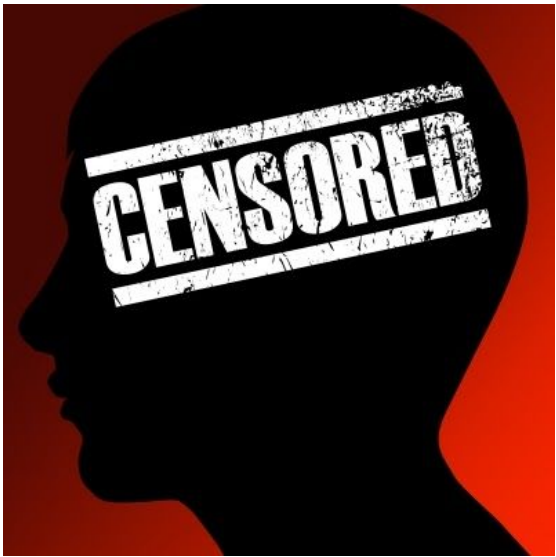
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“cancel culture” is inhibiting many Americans from speaking freely and taking advantage of their first amendment right of free speech.

Censorship on social media is another example of how freedom of speech is currently threatened. Currently, social media giant Facebook says that they will take down posts that violate their community standards regarding promotion or encouragement of drug use. However, not all posts regarding drug use are not treated the same way. For example, a medicinal marijuana company in Denver, Colorado called Mary’s Medicinals had a popular Facebook page with over 20,000 followers and reviews of many of Mary’s Medicinal products. Without warning, facebook terminated the page, saying that it violated their guidelines around promotion of drug use. Yet, Facebook allows other drug companies to promote their products. For example, “Merck Pharmaceuticals (with 36k followers) and Pfizer Pharmaceuticals (with 196k followers), among other drug companies, seem to be immune to... Facebook’s interpretive idea of ‘promotion or encouragement of drug use.’” (Huffpost) Facebook is actively censoring what content people can see, even when the content is not breaking the law or harming anyone. Mary’s Medicinals freedom of speech is being taken away because she is being grouped in with people who are aggressively putting out inappropriate content.

Clearly, American’s right to freedom of speech is being limited by social media platforms and “cancel culture.” Cancel culture has people feeling fearful of opening up about their beliefs and opinions while social media platforms unevenly censor people and companies. In recent years, Facebook has been looking at ways to make their platform more friendly towards various beliefs (fighting against cancel culture) and providing a forum for people to appeal Facebook’s

decisions regarding taking down posts. Their action provided hope that eventually America can live up to its full potential for freedom of speech.



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