

What Does Woke, Cancel Culture Mean for American Jews?

“Woke” and “cancel culture” both refer to an awareness of issues related to social and racial justice; both have encouraged varieties of interpretations. The result has been increased social disparities and distancing, leading to a social divide and lack of trust among citizens.

The word “woke” and the phrase “stay woke” appeared as early as the 1940s and gained popularity in 2008 when singer Erykah Badu used it in her song titled “Master Teacher.” Woke transformed into a byword of social awareness the same year.

In 2014, woke and stay woke gained considerable traction in the United States; woke became a word of action in the Black Lives Matter movement. In 2016, MTV News designated woke a word teenagers should know, and the American Dialect Society voted woke the slang word of the year.

By 2020, woke had evolved into a word summary of leftist ideology. It had become a pejorative term and was often viewed as a detriment to social programs. Woke now serves as an adjective among woke people, but the broader use of the word remains in flux.

As woke lost popularity and gained a reputation as a fashionable identity among politically liberal groups, the concept of cancel culture came to the forefront.

The practice has divided the United States citizenry into two major groups: individuals who believe in and promote the cancellation of individuals and groups they feel have insulted or opposed them and citizens who totally disagree with the cancellation of individuals or organizations over unpopular

comments or actions.

Liberals tend to view cancel culture as a means of accountability while conservatives consider the concept a form of harassment and an attempt to silence anyone who fails to adhere to liberal guidelines.

It appears that most American Jews have not been subjected to strict cancel culture applications; the American Jewish community is not yet widely divided because of cancel culture. Judaism cherishes minority opinions and accepts a range of views. But Jonathan S. Tobin, editor-in-chief of the *Jewish News*, feels cancel culture threatens the organized Jewish world. He fears the application may destroy the core of Jewish institutions if liberal, rather than conservative, Jews fail to speak out against the practice.

Not only have the woke and cancel culture movements seemingly not affected American Jews very much, neither movement has had much negative effect on relations.

In a May 1, 2002 article for the liberal Institute for Policy Studies publication titled "Why the U.S. Supports Israel," Stephen Zunes stated that the relationship between the U.S. and Israel "has been one of the most salient features in U.S. foreign policy for nearly three and a half decades."

Mr. Zunes points out that the U.S. has backed successive Israeli governments. The U.S. has continued to support Israel no matter which political party was in power, but the left-wing members of the Biden Administration who tend to endorse the woke concept and cancel culture are demanding the president stand up for the Palestinians.

Full support of Israel could be in jeopardy; any support of the Palestinians over the Israelis would reflect, at least to an extent, the increased influence of the woke-cancel-culture U.S. constituency. {eo}

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