

# TELL ME HOW YOU REALLY FEEL

EDITOR'S LETTER by Parker Yamasaki



Hi Reader,

What does it mean to be canceled? The dictionary definition of "canceled" is hahhahahaha just kidding, there's no dictionary definition of getting canceled, at least not one that sufficiently encompasses the ways it gets used in media, morality, culture, politics, everyday life, celebrity gossip, school curriculum, social media, Marxist economics, and library diplomacy. Anyway, if there was a dictionary entry, would we put someone's photo next to it, and then redact that?

The point of this issue is not to define cancel culture for you — in fact, it's the exact opposite. The point of this issue is to explode it into the myriad ways that canceling is being used in culture today. It's being used for good. It's being

used for evil. It's being used on the political right and the political left. It's not political; it's entirely political. It's overused. It's about goddamn time. It's victimization. It's a voice for victims. It's a feeling. It's a fear.

We should not overlook the way that power balances have shifted within industries dominated by the few, like Hollywood and the U.S. Government, for instance. Much of this has to do with the voice that people have as a collective on social media — the hashtag #MeToo being a critical example — to cancel someone.

is this word frivolous?

Other times, cancellations seem frivolous and more about the thrill of the cancel than the behavior of the person themselves. What happens, for instance, when the shitty dating etiquette of one man makes him the target of every woman who ever had a shitty date with a man? See Priyanka Kumar's article on pg. 8 for more on that. We also look at examples of institutional cancellations ("Dread Scott" on pg. 5), first-hand accounts of being canceled (pg. 14), and a form of cancellation that has been going on for centuries under a different label, banning books (pg. 16-17).

RISKY

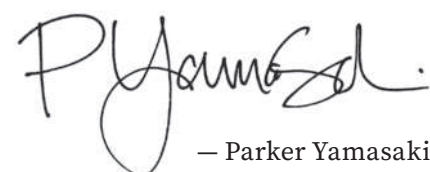
Even if most of the cancellations you hear about are more fit for People Magazine than the New York Times, the concept is still worth thinking about for a couple of reasons. One is that there are real world consequences when "cancel culture" gets wielded by political figures, as it increasingly has. As Representative Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez told New Yorker editor David Remnick, "You look at the capture of power in the right wing, the ascent of white nationalism, the concentration of wealth. You cannot really animate or concentrate a movement like that — you can't coalesce it into functional political power — without a sense of persecution or victimhood. And that's the role of this concept of cancel culture."

Putin's recent invasion of Ukraine is cancellation in its extreme. In a speech preempting the invasion, President Putin claimed Ukraine as "an inalienable part of our own history, culture, and spiritual space." He used a nationalistic trope that falsely denied Ukraine's sovereignty and, in doing so, attempted to justify his war. He was essentially attempting to cancel a country.

We also need to talk about what we're not talking about. For every comment dissected into problematic bits and pieces, how many things are going unsaid altogether? Something we learned with the 2016 election is that not voicing a feeling doesn't mean the feeling doesn't exist. (Given the events of the past six years, it's hard to remember that there was a time when media outlets, many still in a state of shock, called Trump supporters "the silent majority.") Fear of recourse can be paralyzing.

I'm not saying we should lay it all out there without consequence. But for a country which eschews authoritarian countries for their abusive censorship laws, we're pretty good at keeping ourselves shut up. Even writing this letter right now I'm wondering if I'm saying the right thing, if I can support myself if challenged — if I really believe everything I'm typing.

As you make your way through these pages, I hope you think deeply about cancel culture in all of its forms. What do we gain? What do we lose? Is it really worth it? Keep asking yourself these questions, even if you keep it to yourself.

  
— Parker Yamasaki

OED: to dismiss, reject, or get rid of...  
NO MORAL SLANT?  
MW: practice or tendency of engaging in mass canceling as a way of expressing disapproval  
that's generous  
NO

"fake news"