

CANCEL CULTURE:

accountability with a cost

Elizabeth Barton
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Jillian Russell
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Kanye West is canceled. James Charles is canceled. Taylor Swift is canceled. Logan Paul is canceled. Starbucks is canceled. H&M is canceled. 2019 is canceled. Your mom left your cosmic brownie out of your lunch box? She is canceled. What isn't canceled these days?

The term cancel culture was coined to describe the modern internet phenomenon where groups of people online band together to collectively expel the subject from influence, fame, or business as a result of controversial comments or actions. Having the full story, facts, or an explanation isn't necessary. All it takes to cancel someone is to say they're canceled.

It is unknown when exactly the cancel culture era began, other than it originated sometime after the advent of social media. The more social media platforms and profiting off of follower bases grew, the more looking

at celebrities under a microscope expanded. "It's mostly people whose careers are fed from the attention economy that are susceptible to cancel culture," said Matthew Yin (11). "I think it originated with famous people under fire for sexual assault allegations like Kevin Spacey and Bill Cosby, but now it can apply to anything. Gucci was 'canceled' for some sort of blackface. Nike is canceled. You can literally cancel anything, and that can be overwhelming," said Reggie Black (12). Social media has created an avenue for people to become more influential, which would never be possible otherwise. This is why cancel culture is particularly hard-hitting to those who would not have a career without the attention of their followers. When one's own followers turn against them, the livelihood of their brand is in jeopardy.

Cancel culture is intended to hold those in fame or power accountable. It is no longer acceptable for influencers to not think before they speak or post. Cancel culture allows for the "consumers" or "viewers" to have a voice in whether or not a person can profit off of them. It allows people to take matters into their own hands rather than being dependent on companies to do it. Social media

has allowed cancel culture to perpetuate. "It's absolutely comes from people wanting to bandwagon," said Black. "When Kanye West voiced his support for President Trump, a lot of black people got #notinvitedtothecookout trending, saying he's not invited to their cookout. Well, he wasn't going to come to your cookout anyway!"

The very word "cancel" generally refers to the immediate transactions and subscriptions that have come to dominate the modern world. Obviously, one cannot actually "cancel" another human. The process of "canceling" speaks to transactions, as one would cancel a Netflix subscription or their yoga class, which is, in part, where the irony of the situation stems from. "Cancel culture is a social plague. It's inhumane, and it's toxic because it calls for people to divide against each other based on their personal beliefs," said Black. By canceling someone you are effectively withdrawing your investment in that person. People do this because it makes them feel like they are part of a "internet community" that they would otherwise not be a part of. "It's definitely a trend and it's popular, so that's why people do it. People don't just think of this stuff out of nowhere. It really speaks to a culture of bandwag-

oning through social media," said Yin.

The end result of the canceling process yields social media mobs demanding an apology, which typically yields a PR blanket statement. Apologies put out by individuals or businesses are seen as "cover ups" for their actions and aren't viewed as genuine. "I think it's just gotten to the point where every time they are 'exposed', they are expected to release an apology, so people don't really think it's meaningful. This is just what we're waiting for; it's part of the routine. I've gotten to the point where I don't even bother watching their videos because every single one seems to say the same thing," said Caroline Corkern (10). "Sometimes people have really good apologies, but deep down I feel like it was just a really good publicist who wrote them. A lot of times, I can tell the person apologizing wouldn't feel sorry if he/she hadn't been called out for what they did wrong," said Van Lake. In the aftermath of someone getting "canceled" there is still a lack of consequences. This begs the question, "Is canceling really worth it?" The heat a business gets only lasts a couple of days or weeks, and then the mobs move on to

the next victim. Sometimes canceling brings more attention and fame to the subject rather than taking it away from them. "They're going to get attention either way, and I think from their perspective, even negative attention is good because it's still attention. My mom had never heard of James Charles until he was 'canceled,' so clearly his scandal was actually helpful in getting his name out," said Van Lake. After Logan Paul's stunt, he gained 100,000 subscribers. Kanye's album still topped the charts. "Cancel culture really just makes people more popular because it's free publicity," says Black. "I don't think it's effective at all in terms of actually cancelling people." Cancel culture speaks to the divisions within our society that are exacerbated by social media. Although it does bring accountability, it also perpetuates a cycle of abuse. In the end, the result does not justify the process. The effects of cancel culture may not always be long-lasting, but the negative ideology behind cancel culture appears to only be growing.

