

The Absurdity of the Backlash Against Joe Rogan



by Bruce Bawer

It can sometimes feel frustrating to be part of the resistance to the legacy media. Their numbers may be slipping, and more and more news consumers are wise to the extent and nature of their perfidy, but millions of clueless citizens still turn to them for the facts, not realizing that they've long since been approaching facts not as reporters but as ideologically motivated curators, imparting some facts, distorting others, and suppressing yet others. To try to counter the unscrupulous messaging of these dying but still influential behemoths can feel like tilting at windmills.

But then one looks at Joe Rogan, and one has hope.

No, Rogan, whose podcast on Spotify is purportedly the world's most popular, isn't entirely on our side. But he's not on their side, either. He's just an ordinary guy, a responsible-minded citizen interested in knowing what's what. The reason he's been so successful is that he asks his knowledgeable guests the same questions that any smart, curious amateur would ask. He thinks for himself. He doesn't necessarily trust every so-called expert who comes down the pike – he's learned better. He just cares about the truth. And that's why he's a threat to them and an asset to us.

And that's why they're so desperate to destroy him.

First they charged him with spreading misinformation about the origins of the COVID virus, the efficacy and safety of the vaccines, and the value of various lockdown measures. Of course, the orthodoxy on all of these questions has been shifting constantly over the last couple of years. Mainstream journalists should've seen it all along as part of their job not to parrot that orthodoxy but to give a hearing to scientists who disagree with it. They didn't do that job – not in the slightest. But [Rogan](#) did. And so, perversely, they tried to discredit him for behaving like a real journalist. If anybody spread misinformation, it was the toxic prevaricators at CNN and elsewhere who accused Rogan of taking horse medicine when in fact he'd been prescribed ivermectin, and who egged on old rockers like Neil Young and Joni Mitchell who tried to cancel Rogan by pulling their music from Spotify.

But that didn't work. So they concocted a new charge: racism. Does anybody really think Joe Rogan is a racist? Of course not. But because, in the thousands of podcast hours he's archived, he's used the N-word a few dozen times, he's a juicy target for the cancel-culture commandos. Never mind that he's used the word consistently in discussions of the word itself – discussions, that is, of *why it's a bad word*.

Yes, the N-word has a very fraught history in American culture. Joseph Conrad, one of the great novelists in English, used it in the title of one of his novels. Flannery O'Connor, perhaps the most distinguished American short-story writer of the 20th century, used it in the title of one of her best stories. The black comedian and activist Dick Gregory used the N-word as the title of his 1964 autobiography.

Soon enough, and for very good reasons, that sort of thing became a no-no. Still, in the classic NBC sitcom *Sanford and Son* (1972-77), Redd Foxx used the N-word as part of at least one hilarious gag that I still recall vividly half a century

later. Richard Pryor, one of the top comics of all time, put the word in the titles of no fewer than three of his comedy albums, in 1974, 1976, and 1982. As late as 1996, Chris Rock, another all-time great stand-up, used the word – or, rather, the form of it that ends with an “a” – as the centerpiece of a 12-minute monologue that is one of anyone’s funniest bits ever. Other brilliant stand-ups, not all of them black, have used the N-word to terrific comedic effect.

But Rogan isn’t even being accused of doing that. The video compilation posted by online this weekend by India Arie, an R&B singer whom I’d never heard of, consisted of 23 clips, no more than a second or two long apiece, of Rogan saying the N-word. The word itself is bleeped every time. The contexts are not all clear, although in several cases you can hear enough of the conversation to recognize that he’s discussing the word *as a word*. Arie seems to acknowledge this. She doesn’t care. That’s not good enough. “Don’t even say the word, under any context,” she demands. “Don’t say it.”

She’s not alone in taking that extreme view. In the year 2022, all but a few of our major cultural institutions are under the thumb of a powerful religious fundamentalism. The name of that religion is wokism, and it has certain dogmas that are not to be questioned – among them, for example, the dogma that, unless we take drastic worldwide action immediately, man-made climate change will destroy humanity within the next few years.

But the most important woke dogma of all is that American society is divided into oppressive whites and subservient blacks. (The role of Asians and others in this dichotomy has not yet been fully adjudicated.) According to the woke creed, even the poorest Appalachian hick is an oppressor and even the Obamas and Oprah are victims of his oppression. This system of belief has no connection to reality, of course. But its adherents are beyond number. And central to their faith is the sacralization of the N-word.

In their view, there's no acceptable way for a white person to use the N-word. It's as if its very utterance by a white person, with even the most benign possible intent, causes something noxious, something evil, to be released into the atmosphere. Meanwhile, the same cultural gatekeepers who deplore even the most innocuous imaginable use of the N-word by someone like Joe Rogan give awards to rappers like Kendrick Lamar – winner of the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for Music, no less – one of whose lyrics includes the following lines:

"Where you from, [N-word]?"

*"F*** who you know, where you from, my [N-word]?"*

"Where your grandma stay, huh, my [N-word]?"

"This m.A.a.d city I run, my [N-word]"

The absurdity of the current dispensation was underscored in 2018, when Lamar, performing at a music festival in Alabama, invited some audience members up to the stage to sing along with him the song that contains the above lines. When a young white woman crooned the lyric as written, he "became visibly angry," according to a [report](#) in *Variety*, and booted her unceremoniously from the stage.

For my part, I feel a visceral revulsion whenever I hear the N-word in a hip-hop song. To me, the sound of the N-word in a hip-hop lyric is the sound of a destructive cultural pathology being passed from generation to generation. When you hear the N-word in such a lyric, it's a good bet that a reference to killing cops or abusing women or selling drugs to kids is right around the corner. Lyrics containing the N-word are as coarsening and dehumanizing to the minds of young black people (and other young people of every color, all over the world, who listen to hip-hop) as other cultural products – Shakespeare, say – are enriching and ennobling.

But to the woke commissars, hip-hop lyrics packed with the N-word are okay. Yet when Joe Rogan, in a serious conversation about cultural matters, uses the word with only the most constructive possible intent, he's got to be canceled. Now!

To be sure, there are bizarre exceptions to the woke rule. Nobody seems to go after Eminem, who's as pale as it gets, when he uses the N-word in one of his songs. Quentin Tarantino fills his movie scripts with the N-word, and nobody appears to mind. Wikipedia, the Bible of the woke left, doesn't hesitate to use the N-word in precisely the same way that Rogan does: see, for example, its entries on Gregory and Pryor.

But these aren't the truly outrageous inconsistencies here. Consider the following.

In 1984, Jesse Jackson – who at the time was the most prominent black leader in the U.S., considered the natural successor to Martin Luther King, Jr. – referred to New York City as “Hymietown,” *hymie* being a now rather quaint-sounding anti-Semitic slur. But after a brief kerfuffle, the media dropped the incident down the memory hole and resumed treating him like a respectable man of God. During the Clinton administration, Jesse and Bill were close as pages in a book.

Then there's Al Sharpton, some of whose outrages Glenn Loury [enumerated](#) in a 2019 *New York Times* article. In 1991, when a black Brooklyn boy was accidentally killed by a rabbi's motorcade, Sharpton blamed the death on “the diamond merchants ... in Crown Heights”; in a 1995 protest against a black storeowner's eviction, Sharpton called Jews “bloodsuckers.” (The landlord, as it happens, was a black church.) Yet Barack Obama lauded Sharpton as a civil-rights hero; he got a show on MSNBC; he visited the Obama White House 61 times; and, when rightly slammed by Donald Trump as a “con man,” he was glowingly defended by leading Democrats, including Joe Biden, who called him “a champion in the fight for civil rights,” and Bill de Blasio, who praised him as a successor to Martin

Luther King, Jr.

And finally, there's New York's eloquent new mayor, former police officer Eric Adams, who, in a video from 2019 that surfaced last weekend, could be heard describing his white NYPD colleagues as "crackers."

These remarks about whites and Jews by these three black leaders aren't remotely in the same category as Joe Rogan's harmless use of the N-word. Jesse, Al, and Eric may or may not be bigots; I strongly suspect they are. But one thing is absolutely clear: all three of them are cynical operators who are more than willing to exploit the prejudices of others for their own advancement. In short, they're vile creatures.

But in the world of woke, they're sheep and Joe Rogan is the goat.

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