

## Woke Ironies: Achieving the Opposite of Stated Goals

Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson  
Edan Tasca

This article may be cited thusly:

Robertson, L. H., & Tasca, E. (2024, May 31). Woke ironies: Achieving the opposite of its stated goals. *Humanistically Speaking*. <https://www.humanisticallyspeaking.org/post/woke-ironies-achieving-the-opposite-of-its-stated-goals>

“Beware that, when fighting monsters, you yourself do not become a monster... for when you gaze long into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you.”—Friedrich Nietzsche.

In 1993, two decades before most people had heard of Wokism, one of the authors of this article (ET) was taking a high school introduction to anthropology, sociology, and psychology. One unit was about race relations. The definition students were given for racism by the teacher seemed odd, or incomplete, or confusing. We were told — nay, we were *taught* — that racism was a white-only phenomenon.

Some students asked how racism could be committed only by whites. Surely we weren't ignoring racism between minority groups, between countless non-white groups around the globe, and against whites wherever it might be found. For example, when the second author (LHR) was Director of Health and Social Development for the Saskatchewan Federation of Indian Nations in the 1980s, his boss ordered the dismissal of a researcher on learning that he was black. “What would the other chiefs think if we kept him on?” he asked rhetorically. Was not this racism within an aboriginal group?

Correct, we weren't ignoring any such instances, our high school class was told; however, those instances were not racism but something different. We were taught that these phenomena were understandable reactions to the white power structure. Eventually the questions died out. We studied the unit under the supposition that only white people were racist. When non-whites were racist, they weren't racist. This confusion seemed bizarre in the early '90s, but ideas like this are now commonplace and they are threatening to undo much progress.

Racism consists of assigning characteristics to make out-groups groups inferior, or to make one's own group superior. What an irony, then, that the assertion that only whites can be racist is itself a racist assertion. Whites, in this paradigm, are believed to be morally inferior. Further, the notion that other races are incapable of racism gives those races a “free pass” to discriminate and hate not just whites, but, as seen in the example from the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, other races as well.

Racism has decreased in North America during the past century. For example, in 1958 only 4% of people in the United States approved of inter-racial marriages, but by 2013, that figure increased to 87% (Kronen, 2021). After citing a series of studies showing world literacy and education has increased substantially, Stephen Pinker (2018) suggests that well-educated people are more enlightened and less racist, sexist, xenophobic, homophobic, and authoritarian. Those who cling to the notion that racism is the operating principal of society deny this progress. They claim that “not seeing colour” and refusing to

take race into account in our interactions are inherently racist positions (Moss, 2021; Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020).

The idea that a) there is an invisible form of racism that operates even among people who are “colour blind” providing they are of a particular race, b) a person with all the physical characteristics of a man may be a woman, c) science and reason are “white male ways of knowing” and must be dismantled, and d) Enlightenment humanism is racist are pillars of a secular religion which in this article we call “Wokism.”

Early in this century academic, mainly white believers would ask “Are you Woke?” to identify other adherents. In doing this, they were appropriating a U.S. black slang term from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. But there is no evidence the blacks of that era were referencing this postmodernist, neo-Marxist secular religion. Other names commonly used to describe the evolving faith include “cancel culture,” “transgenderism,” “political correctness,” “identity politics,” and “the Identitarian Left,” but each of these terms captures only part of the phenomenon. As with many religions, Woke adherents are promised a better life after some cataclysmic event, but in this article we bring attention to the ways in which Wokism creates the opposite of what it purports to fulfill. Often, the ways in which it communicates a desire to ameliorate instead causes harm<sup>1</sup>.

Wokism has become a major force in Western culture. Words are imbued with magical powers, and some words are so evil they cannot be repeated in any context. For example, former Canadian Broadcasting Corporation reporter Wendy Mesley was fired after naming the title of the book *White Niggers of America* at a staff meeting where she suggested they do a story on the author. University professor Francis Widdowson experienced an online mobbing that eventually led to her dismissal after defending Mesley!<sup>2</sup>

Pronouns have become powerful words too. B.C. lawyer Shahdin Farsai wrote an article arguing that forced pronoun usage in court could prejudice some legal cases and “out” people who did not want their gender expression known. It was accepted for publication in two legal journals. Both articles were cancelled following a Woke backlash (Farsai, 2021)<sup>3</sup>. Apparently lawyers are not allowed to challenge Woke mandated word usage in courts.

Firings and cancellations over words is a manifestation of political correctness. The underlying worldview has led to Black Lives Matter, transgenderism, critical race theory, fabricated histories, school boards that devalue children’s education, nervous professors, and, as we shall see, the occasional bizarre Smithsonian exhibit. Contradictions within Wokism create the opposite results of those that are intended. We examine five such ironies.

---

<sup>1</sup> Wokism represents a political/religious anti-Enlightenment movement that includes Critical Race Theory, Gender Ideology and Queer Theory grounded in selected aspects of Postmodernism, Marxism, Fascism, and Feminism. For more information on this movement read: Robertson, L. H. (2021). Year of the virus: Understanding the contagion effects of wokism. In-sight, 26(B). Retrieved March 1, from <https://in-sightjournal.com/2021/02/22/wokism/>

<sup>2</sup> Articles and podcasts about the firing of Dr. Widdowson can be found [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> Ms. Farsai’s submission was accepted for publication by *The B.C. Advocate*, but this was reversed after the journal was threatened with financial sanctions. Her article subsequently appeared in print in *The Canadian Lawyer* before a Woke lobby forced its removal. An interview with Ms. Shahdin about her experience can be found [here](#)

## **Irony #1: Races Without Race.**

Racism has been in decline at least until the advent of Wokism, but the Woke reply that the most serious forms of racism are “systemic” and not accounted for in the statistics. The word’s meaning has been manipulated. In 2020, Commissioner Brenda Lucki announced that she had reviewed the policies and procedures of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and found no evidence of systemic racism. Her boss, the Prime Minister, forced her to recant and apologize (Wilson, 2020). Lucki had been using the original definition of the term that if there were systems in place to discriminate against a minority, those systems could be identified and corrected. The Woke, on the other hand, believe as an article of faith that society is organized on the basis of oppression and that by definition the institutions of society must be racist. Races, in this way of thinking, are defined by their oppression, with “whites” being the oppressor race. Since non-whites cannot be racist, they are not subject to the same rules.

Islam is said to be one such oppressed group. Professor and author Yasmine Mohammed was called a racist for her attempts to free Muslim women of the veil. She had been raised Muslim in Canada, and was beaten across the soles of her feet until they bled when she missed a word of her readings in the Quran. She was an abused child but when her case came before a Canadian judge she was told that this was her culture, and culture superseded child protection. While the judge recognized her suffering, there was nothing he would do to protect her from further abuse. Later, she was forced to marry a senior member of al-Qaida (Mohammed, 2019).

Like 98 percent of Somali Muslim girls, Ayaan Hirsi Ali was subjected to female genital mutilation and forced marriage (Ali, 2014). She fled to the Netherlands where she was granted asylum and then citizenship, and she eventually became an elected member of the Dutch parliament. She raised awareness about violence against women, including honor killings and female genital mutilation, but received death threats from Islamic extremists. In the spirit of cancel culture, Ali was forced to resign from parliament when the Dutch minister for immigration revoked her citizenship. As an apostate who has argued for equal rights for women, she is an ongoing target and lives with around-the-clock security.

Despite examples of Muslim women like Mohammed and Ali, a co-founder of the Women’s March and leading feminist Muslim, [Linda Sarsour](#), maintains that the hijab is a symbol of freedom, and that Sharia law under which people are mutilated and killed, often by stoning, is reasonable. Sarsour said that women like Ali who speak out about their oppression deserve “an ass whipping” (Mavaro-Stoller, 2017 para. 9). People who criticize Islam are accused of “Islamophobia.” Although the Woke want a better life for oppressed people, by defining Muslims as such they allow — indeed, aid and abet — oppression within Islam by shielding it from criticism. In one particularly egregious example of this effect, immediately following the 2020 Islamist beheading of a French school teacher who had shown cartoons of the prophet Mohammed, the Canadian Prime Minister told reporters, “Well, you know, freedom of expression is not without limits” (Selley, 2020).

Historically, no people have suffered from oppression, discrimination, and genocide to a greater extent than have the Jews who remain largely homeless politically. On the extreme right of the political spectrum, they are not white enough; yet on the Woke left, they’re too white. Since Jews have done well academically and financially, they are said to be “white” and part of the [oppressor class](#). Since Wokism declares that only whites can be racist, the declaration that Jews are part of this oppressor class is setting them up for more of the racism that they have historically endured.

Nichole Levitt was a Philadelphia lawyer employed with a firm that accepted the Woke's diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) program. Employees were segregated by race and Levitt was told she would have to attend meetings designated for whites even though she is Jewish. She reported as that, as a Jew, "The last thing I wanted to do was to be separated by race" (Levitt, 2022). In keeping with the firm's anti-racism policy, she requested that an article on anti-Semitism be included with documents defending blacks and Islam but was told the firm had made a decision "a while back" not to include such material. As an assigned white, she was required to agree to a "Full Value Contract" that included a clause that she had to "own that all white people are racist and that I am not the exception."

The erasure and demonization of Jews creates another contradiction for Wokism because it recognizes Hispanics as an oppressed race. The historic roots of Hispanics are European (i.e., white), whereas the historic roots of Jews are Middle-Eastern. In yet another contradiction, Asian-Americans, who also have greater achievement both academically and financially as compared to whites, are often reflexively referred to as "[white adjacent](#)," and they have experienced increased discrimination, particularly in [academia](#) (Gerstmann, 2019).

Despite their frequent use of the term "people of color," the Woke define races not primarily on the basis of physical characteristics but on the basis of oppression. People with relatively poor socio-economic outcomes as compared to whites are presumed to have suffered from racism. Personal characteristics such as motivation, worldview, dependability, and timeliness that may contribute to such outcomes are ignored.

## **Irony #2: The Return of Segregation**

Using the original definition of social justice, civil liberties organizations of the mid-twentieth century ended racial segregation in the United States after many hard-fought battles. In the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision (*Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education*), the "separate but equal" doctrine allowing for separate schools for white and black students was unanimously struck down — even in cases where the quality of education was demonstrably equal. Now, nearly seven decades later, racial segregation in schools has been reintroduced by people who claim to believe in social justice.

The Mary Lin Elementary School in Atlanta, Georgia, was investigated in by the U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Office in 2021 for [segregating](#) grade one to five students into separate classrooms designated as either "white" or "black" (Hurley, 2021). The principal was black. A mother who was also black claimed her daughter was denied access to a teacher in a designated "white" classroom. Special programming for black students could lead to the appearance of such segregation.

For example, In Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Education offered 17 summer enrichment classes in 2021 including debating, mathematics, theatre, photography, cinematography, and computer coding. The father of one student who attempted to register for this program but was turned down because he is not black raised [a petition](#) calling on the province to allow all races access to its programs. The Ontario Ministry of Education replied that it is [offering](#) blacks an affirmative action program. The ministry failed to share any studies showing why racially specific affirmative action was needed in such subject areas as cinematography.

If racial integration was previously desirable, it is curious to see modern university campuses self-segregating along racial lines. At New York University (NYU) and other campuses, for example, you can be told you're in the wrong room based on your skin color. A report on neo-segregationist policies at [Yale University](#) (Pierre & Wood, 2019) included a National Association of Scholars database showing that across all 50 states, 43 percent of the schools had residential segregation, 46 percent had segregated orientation programs, and 72 percent had segregated graduation ceremonies.

At NYU, a group of black students petitioned the school to create what it called an [Exploration Floor](#), reserved for black students and based on black culture. The group's petition [explained](#) their reasoning.

Black students should not be forced to do the labor of explaining cultural touchstones (like hair rituals) and advocating for their humanity within their own homes. There is not one space on campus entirely dedicated to Black student life. Black Lives Matter cannot be reduced to a slogan sent in university-wide emails. Now is the time for NYU to create tangible change to support its Black students. We are hoping that Black Living communities can spark a new effort towards comprehensive Black inclusion across NYU. (Sadler, 2021)

Contrary to historical segregation policies, here it is whites who are told to avoid or vacate certain areas in favor of non-whites. The impetus and design of this neo-segregationist movement — including the definition of what makes one “white” — comes from a group who purport to be anti-racists. If they're fighting for a better world, how do the Woke rationalize campus segregation?

They don't like to think of such ideas as racist or as segregation. They prefer to describe the phenomenon as the maintenance of safe spaces where students of color can feel welcome and away from the potential of white racism. If one were to assume that racism is always happening, then there would be some logic to this. But couldn't white-only areas in, say, the 1940s be seen as nothing more than safe spaces for whites? Would we accept white-only spaces today? Do we not all agree that, as naive as it might sound, the system for everyone will work better when we're all in it together?

Some might argue that this comparison to traditional segregation is flawed. Despite the newly race-based divisions on some areas of campuses — and despite the popularity of racially separate graduation ceremonies — designated minorities are granted the same access to resources as white students; however, as we saw in *Brown vs. the Topica Board of Education*, the “separate but equal” doctrine was ruled unconstitutional in the United States.

Equality of resources on campuses is better than inequality, but we're still witnessing the reversal of the goal of the civil liberties movements: complete racial integration, no racial discrimination, no racial *anything*. Our highest aspiration was to *end* racism, not to rehabilitate it. As Martin Luther King hoped, “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” When people in our society aren't allowed to go somewhere because of their skin color, we have failed Dr. King's dream.

### **Irony #3: Assumptions about “Leftism” and “Rightism”**

The Woke frequently describe themselves as “progressive” or “left-wing” but their identity politics often resembles that of people they describe as “alt-right” who are, presumably, at the opposite end of the political spectrum. For example, the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture came under fire for a supposedly progressive [exhibit](#) entitled Aspects and Assumptions of Whiteness and White Culture. The exhibit presented behaviors like hard work, self-reliance, delayed gratification, following rigid time schedules, and valuing the nuclear two-parent family, as “whiteness” (Koop, 2020).

While such traits were valued in Western Europe following the Enlightenment, they augur well for individual success regardless of skin colour. In fact, attributing skin colors to values and behavior is blatant racism. Ironically, some Woke-inspired diversity trainers have argued that employers who expect their employees to show up for work on time and work hard are being racist; but when the Smithsonian or the Woke define white people by these traits, they sound like the white supremacists they are supposedly opposing.

Why are we being encouraged to assume that being late is something that “people of color” are more likely to do because of their racial category? The same question could be asked with respect to “broken families” — this, we’re told, is a non-white phenomenon. Nuclear minority families and broken white ones seem to not be taken into account. Again, in so far as these outcomes are assumed to be linked to a skin color — this is outright racism. We're simply meant to not notice.

### **Irony #4: Protecting the Vulnerable, or Not**

In June of 2020, author J.K. Rowling published her concerns about transwomen as they intersect with feminism. For suggesting that women should continue to have safe spaces in change rooms that are forbidden to biological males, Rowling was called a TERF, or “trans exclusionary radical feminist” and she received death threats. One of the reactions to her essay was a rash of videos of people [burning copies](#) of Rowling’s fictional works (Nolan, 2020). Have the people who burn books ever been on the right side of history?

The rationale for this outpouring of anger was that the Woke were protecting the most vulnerable, but Rowling’s concern that people with male bodies in places reserved for women can lead to harm is apt. In a [video](#) that went viral in October of 2021, a Virginia father is seen tackled by police and hauled off from a school board meeting in Virginia. His crime was to demand accountability for the sexual assault of his 15-year-old daughter on school grounds, in the female bathroom, by a transgender youth who was described by the victim’s father as a “boy wearing a skirt.” Repeating a Woke mantra, school district superintendent, Scott Zeigler, had [explained](#) to parents at the meeting, “We’ve heard it several times tonight from our public speakers but the predator transgender student or person simply does not exist,” (Devine, 2021). It turns out that such assaults [aren’t always reported](#), and that the Virginia County is guilty of “errors in our state reporting regarding disciplinary incidents in schools,” adding that it “inadvertently omitted some information in the past” (Steiber, 2021). Like the Catholic Church moving pedophilic priests to new parishes, the school board moved the alleged attacker to another school, where he [assaulted another female student](#) (Wilder, 2021).

The experience of Loudon County illustrates Rowling's concern that some people identifying as transwomen could be a threat to women and girls. Rowling also earned the ire of people speaking for the transgender communities by stating that women should not lose their jobs for stating that sex is real. In addition to having her works of fiction burned, and threats on her life, Rowling experienced the humiliation of being [disinvited](#) from attending the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary special of the Harry Potter film series. Cast members who made their careers as a result of Rowling's writing reportedly "turned their backs" on the author (Emmons, 2021).

Even trans people are not immune from the censorship of the Woke who are presumably acting on their behalf. In 2020, the [attached article](#) by a transwoman was posted on an open humanist discussion forum in Canada. A moderator from Humanist Canada deleted it as "hate speech" (Robertson, 2022b). The offending article was highly critical of J.K. Rowling but conceded she had "a point" about the risk to biological women, and recommended a dialogue between trans and feminist communities to find ways of mitigating the risk. We are left to conclude that calls for dialogue — even when made by members of the communities the Woke claim to protect — are "hate speech."

### **Irony #5: Tolerance vs Hate**

The Woke claim to act from a spirit of compassion but have produced a toxic environment of retributive "justice" and "cancel culture." Ann Applebaum (2021) interviewed 12 academics who reported they have [lost everything](#) — jobs, money, friends, colleagues — after violating no laws or commonly understood workplace rules. Instead, they are accused of having broken social codes having to do with race, sex, personal behavior, or even acceptable humor." She found a pattern:

The first thing that happens once you have been accused of breaking a social code, when you find yourself at the center of a social-media storm because of something you said or purportedly said. The phone stops ringing. People stop talking to you. You become toxic. "I have in my department dozens of colleagues—I think I have spoken to zero of them in the past year," one academic told me. "One of my colleagues I had lunch with at least once a week for more than a decade—he just refused to speak to me anymore, without asking questions." Another reckoned that, of the 20-odd members in his department, "there are two, one of whom has no power and another of whom is about to retire, who will now speak to me."

All of the professors Applebaum interviewed were liberal or left of centre. All of them had reasonably successful careers but their experiences resulted in social isolation, career opportunities drying up, campus lectures cancelled, and firings. At least one [considered suicide and another killed himself](#).

Those targeted for Woke cancelling are not just denied academic jobs; they are denied any job. Biologist Colin Wright gave up an academic career because, [in his words](#), "I was tired of researching science in a subculture where gatekeepers demanded that I repudiate basic scientific facts about human beings" (Wright, 2022). He was expected to repudiate that there are two sexes — male and female — so he left academia and became a science writer supplementing his income through donations on Paypal and marketing "Reality's Last Stand" (his [SubStack](#) program) by selling products through Etsy, an online marketplace. Both companies cancelled him without explanation.

Etsy had previously banned another marketer after calling “I love J.K. Rowling” mugs “hate speech” while allowing items to be sold that said “Fuck J.K. Rowling.” Like computer technologist James Damore who was [fired by Google in 2017](#) after suggesting psychological characteristics helped explain the low rate of female participation in computer technology, Wright was punished for his political beliefs. The Woke claim to be anti-fascist, but when corporations start enforcing political ideology, is that not similar to what happened in fascist Germany, Italy, and Spain?

Compassion includes the ability to forgive. We can forgive Germany, Italy, Spain, and Japan for their horrors of WWII; they can forgive us ours. What manner of compassion are the Woke offering when they [refuse to forgive](#) comparatively non-existent trespasses? The answer is none.

### **The Ultimate Irony: The Dance of Frenemies**

When former U.S. president Donald Trump promised to “make America great again,” he was appealing to a supposed former utopia. Fundamentalist Christians, who made up a significant part of his political base, overlooked his sexual and other moral transgressions on the belief that he would establish a Christian nation. Trump’s vilification of opponents and frequent lies justifying his behaviours can be seen as performances to his base. His assertion that he lost the 2020 U.S. federal election due to voter fraud would be an example of “must be so” thinking. The task of believers who are awakened to this voter fraud is to accept this “reality” and find the proof. Public adherence to this belief by many Republicans is performative for the purpose of identifying true believers. It seems perhaps the most tragic irony that many otherwise sensible and kind people were forged into “Trumpers” amidst the heat and hammering of woke absurdities.

As with right-wing populism, Wokism promises a utopia, but one based on “diversity, inclusion, and equity.” Attacks on individuals, cancellations, and forced conformity to Woke orthodoxy are justified on the grounds that the Woke mean well in building a better society. The Woke revised definition of systemic racism supports “must be so” thinking that oppression based on race and gender is endemic in society. Believers are charged with finding “proof” of this thesis in the alleged motivations and actions of non-woke. Public declarations using the language of the Woke are required to demonstrate “true” belief and shield oneself from such witch hunts.

To us observers north of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel, the Woke and the supporters of Donald Trump are locked in a symbiotic relationship. They feed off each other. The Woke don’t realize — or refuse to accept — that what they do inspires reciprocal behaviors from rightwing populists. Donald Trump’s supporters excuse the moral failings of their leader because he is fighting an enemy that, in their understanding, is far worse. They forgive him because his goal is to “make America great again.” This, of course, can drive moderates who fear Trump is a threat to democracy into the Woke camp since they are perceived to be the alternative.

Woke thinking parallels that of the Trumpists. When challenged on a) the ethics of ruining peoples’ reputations and cancelling their careers without due process, b) the logic of denying the individual rights and racializing people on the basis of identity politics, or c) the ethics of denying women’s safety or falsifying history to promote a particular narrative (Robertson, 2022a), supporters forgive the Woke because their goal is to fight systemic racism. This, of course, drives moderates who fear the Woke are undermining Enlightenment values into the camp of the right-wing.

As we have seen, racism, in Wokese, no longer means an ideology used to justify group discrimination but has to do with outcome differences the Woke have declared to be significant regardless of the real or objective reasons for those differences. In fact, the Woke have even declared science and reason to be a “white, male way of knowing” (Strong, 2002). Both the Trumpists and the Woke rely on the postmodern notion that there is no such thing as objective reality and that what we take as reality is socially constructed. The Woke are engaging in “must be so” thinking when they declare that society functions on the basis of racism; therefore, any discrepancies between groups must be because of this racism. The Trumpists are also engaged in “must be so” thinking when they say their candidate won the 2020 U.S. presidential election; therefore, the results must be due to voter fraud.

Despite their stated enemy, the Trumpists save their most vicious attacks on fellow Republicans who do not support the Trump narrative. Similarly, the Woke save their most vicious attacks for progressives and humanists like Richard Dawkins, Steven Pinker, Sam Harris, Kurt Vonnegut, Christopher Hitchens, and Dan Dennett. We examine attacks on the first two as exemplars.

In 1976, Richard Dawkins coined the word “meme” to represent an elemental self-replicating unit of culture. He used this concept to explore ways that non-rational ideas spread. His books include *The Selfish Gene* (1976), *The Blind Watchmaker* (1986) and *The God Delusion* (2006). He is the founder of the Dawkins Foundation for Science and Reason. He was named Humanist of the Year by the American Humanist Association.

In 1998, Dawkins earned the ire of people who would come to be known as the “Woke” when he said postmodernists obscure language to hide their lack of meaningful content. He adopted a Socratic style of asking questions that require thinking. In 2021 he tweeted:

In 2015, Rachel Dolezal, a white chapter president of NAACP [The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], was vilified for identifying as Black. Some men choose to identify as women, and some women choose to identify as men. You will be vilified if you deny that they literally are what they identify as. Discuss.” [\[1\]](#) (Dawkins, 2022)

Apparently, some discussions and some questions are not allowed. The American Humanist Society revoked the Humanist of the Year Award Dawkins had been given 25 years previously. This action is more than symbolic — Dawkins’ writing has been refused in their publications. To the extent that they are able, they are attempting to “cancel” Dawkins in the humanist community.

Steven Pinker is famous for his studies of consciousness and language. But in *The Blank Slate* (Pinker, 2002), he debunked the myths that a) the mind is completely shaped by culture, b) that humans were corrupted from an original pure state by civilization, and c) that there is an immaterial essence within us that determines who we are. A year later he said these “blank slate,” “noble savage,” and “ghost in the machine” myths were the basis of an as-yet-unnamed quasi-religion (Pinker, 2003). Wokism is that quasi-religion.

Wokism is predicated on a pessimistic worldview that only a dismantling of society can bring about justice. Pinker (2012, 2018) meticulously documented evidence that the lives of most people have improved dramatically since the Enlightenment with respect to life expectancy, poverty rates, literacy,

crime, upward mobility, homicide rates, racism, and gender equality. He has argued that based on our experience, the most likely way of resolving looming problems such as climate change and epidemics is through the use of science and reason. Hence he has been vilified.

Some participants in an open humanist discussion forum in 2019 (Robertson, 2022b) repeated a rumor that Pinker condoned pedophilia. The basis of this campaign was that he had agreed to provide expert testimony as a linguist for a trial of an alleged pedophile. In 2018, a petition was raised demanding his cancelation as a distinguished fellow of Linguistic Society of America. Perhaps not surprisingly, the Woke pictured his statistically based disagreement with their belief that the world is getting worse to be “racism” and “sexism.” The petition also accused him of “cultural appropriation” for citing a black author. Had he not cited any black authors that could have garnered the charge of racism as well. But the anti-Pinker campaign reached Canada well before this petition.

In 2016, philosopher and previous Humanist of the Year (Canada) award winner, Chris DiCarlo, nominated Steven Pinker for the award. Nominees were approved by the Humanist Canada board, and it was clear that Pinker had the support of the majority over other named candidates. A board member who later became the organization’s president made an impassioned argument that the award process should be made “transparent” with membership participation. He volunteered to head a committee to develop such a process. After three months he told the board his committee had still not drafted its final report. After two years, the committee had still not reported to the board. In effect, Humanist Canada stopped giving the Humanist of the Year Award to keep the world’s leading advocate of science, reason, and progress from receiving it.

Like Trumpists, the Woke save their most personal attacks to those closest to them on the political spectrum. Moderate or liberal Leftists, like Pinker and Dawkins, believe in change to make peoples’ lives better and reduce inequality, and they also believe that science and reason are the tools to build this progressively better society. They can proudly wear the label “progressive.” Moderate conservatives also recognize the power of science and reason, including the value of free speech to exercise that reason, but they believe that it is better to conserve our accomplishments rather than take risks that could cause increased suffering. Perhaps the Identitarian Left should not be viewed as “Left.” Like the Identitarian Right, the Woke believe people are defined by their group membership and both are authoritarian. Perhaps the more meaningful political spectrum has those who embrace Enlightenment values on one side, and the authoritarians on the other.

How did the Woke get so combative? One of the authors (Robertson, 2021) has argued that while it draws on aspects of postmodernism, Marxism, and civil rights, it is not true to any of these movements — acting more like an evolved [mind virus](#). As a virus, it is not on the political spectrum and is governed by its own rules not necessarily tied to logic. Thus it can support reactionary, rightwing medieval religious theocracies and ideas, like the blatantly intolerant Islamism, while labeling as “racist” progressives working for a truly secular world with equal rights.

Wokism functions as a secular religion in that those who do not espouse its tenets are viewed as being either ignorant and in need of conversion, or as evil. Believers are identified by language use with old words like “racism” and “violence” taking on new meanings, and new words, that not everyone understands in the new and “properly” Woke way, like “cisgender” and “microaggression.” Since the Woke consider “problematic” words to be a form of violence, disagreement is felt to be an existential

attack. “Safe spaces,” then, are not thought to reference places where people can have meaningful discussions, but places that are free from diversity of thought. True believers raised in such environments are not required to weigh evidence for diverse viewpoints. As McGill professor Gad Saad (2020) has noticed, "So many university graduates today are unable to debate because they have never been exposed to opposing viewpoints, and they consider opposing viewpoints simply as heresies to be met with protest and hysterical fits" (p. 96).

The Woke remedy promoted — discrimination against races defined as being in the oppressor class — is seen as “good” racism to replace the bad version that is presumed to still operate. How can people calling themselves anti-racist believe in the absurd concept of “good” racism? One notion that seems to fuel the acceptance of “good” racism is thinking of it as necessary to “even the score.” Discriminating against whites today — as in segregated courses and campuses, as well as [diversity hiring](#) — is acceptable, to make up for what traditionally happened to victimized minorities. It seems that two wrongs don’t make a right if you’re a child, but they do if you’re a social justice warrior. Such behaviours should never be associated with a racial category in an essentialist way. Music has no skin colors. Hip hop can be created and enjoyed by everyone — rock, country, classical too. The Woke seem to have lost the rhythm and the beat.

If it truly wants to achieve its stated goals, Wokism needs to pull an about face. If it truly sees itself as progressive, Wokism needs to stop being regressive. If it truly wants racism to end, Wokism needs to drop its racist activities, like segregation and racial essentialism. If it truly wants to protect vulnerable members of society, Wokism must strive to protect *everyone* who is vulnerable, regardless of oppression status. If it wants a compassionate society, Wokism needs to forgive mistakes. Of course, as an ideology, religion, or mind virus, Wokism is incapable of wanting anything. It just is. Human beings are capable of forgiveness, compassion, and critical thinking and they can change ideologies. Those who have been tempted to embrace Wokism have the opportunity to reflect on how it has evolved.

## Collaborating Authors

Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson is a Registered Doctoral Psychologist and author of the book, *The Evolved Self: Mapping an Understanding of Who We Are*. He is president of the New Enlightenment Project: A Humanist Initiative.

Edan Tasca is a registered psychotherapist. He is a director and the Mental Health Chair for the Centre for Inquiry Canada.

## References

- Ali, A. H. (2014, April 12). *Lifting the veil of "Islamophobia:" A Conversation with Ayaan Hirsi Ali* [Interview]. Sam Harris. <https://www.samharris.org/blog/lifting-the-veil-of-islamophobia>
- Applebaum, A. (2021, Aug. 31). The New Puritans. *The Atlantic*.
- Dawkins, R. (1976). *The selfish gene*. Oxford University Press.
- Dawkins, R. (1986). *The blind watchmaker*. Penguin Books.
- Dawkins, R. (2006). *The god delusion*. Houghton Mifflin.

- Dawkins, R. (2022, May 1). Race is a spectrum. Sex is pretty damn binary. *Areo*.
- Devine, M. (2021, Oct. 13). Virginia dad vilified for defending daughter shows rot at heart of system: Devine. *New York Post*.
- Emmons, L. (2021, Nov. 17). JK Rowling excluded from Harry Potter 20th reunion special. *Post Millennial*.
- Farsai, S. (2021, May 24). Compelled Speech Comes to B.C.'s Courts. *C2C Journal*.  
<https://c2cjournal.ca/2021/05/compelled-speech-comes-to-b-c-s-courts/>
- Gerstmann, E. (2019, Oct. 1). Why The Asian American Students Lost Their Case Against Harvard (But Should Have Won). *Forbes*.
- Hurley, B. (2021, Aug. 11). Atlanta elementary school accused of segregating Black and white students. *The Independent*.
- Koop, C. (2020, July 17). Smithsonian museum apologizes for saying hard work, rational thought is 'white culture'. *Miami Herald*. <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/national/article244309587.html#storylink=cpy>
- Kronen, S. (2021). Black Lives Matter and the Psychology of Progressive Fatalism. *Quillette*(May 28). Retrieved May 28, from <https://quillette.com/2021/05/28/black-lives-matter-and-the-psychology-of-progressive-fatalism/>
- Levitt, N. (2022, October 2). 'I Was Asked To Agree to a "White People Are Racist" Contract at Work'. *Newsweek*.
- Mavaro-Stoller, J. (2017). The whitewashing of Linda Sarsour. *tower Magazine*( June 2).  
<http://www.thetower.org/5031-the-whitewashing-of-linda-sarsour/>
- Mohammed, Y. (2019). *Unveiled: How Western Liberals Empower Radical Islam*. Hearts and Minds.
- Moss, D. (2021). On Having Whiteness. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 69(2), 355-371.
- Nolan, E. (2020, Sept. 16). J.K. Rowling Book Burning Videos Are Spreading Like Wildfire Across TikTok. *Newsweek*.
- Pierre, D. J., & Wood, P. W. (2019). *Neo-segregation at Yale* (Separate but Equal, Again: Neo-segregation in American higher education, Issue April).  
[https://www.nas.org/storage/app/media/Reports/NeoSeg%20at%20Yale/NeoSegregation\\_at\\_Yale.pdf](https://www.nas.org/storage/app/media/Reports/NeoSeg%20at%20Yale/NeoSegregation_at_Yale.pdf)
- Pinker, S. (2002). *The blank slate: The modern denial of human nature*. Penguin.
- Pinker, S. (2003). A biological understanding of human nature. In J. Brockman (Ed.), *The new humanists: Science at the edge* (pp. 33-52). Barnes & Nobel.
- Pinker, S. (2012). *The better angels of our nature: Why violence has declined*. Penguin.
- Pinker, S. (2018). *Enlightenment now: The case for reason, science, humanism, and progress*. Penguin.
- Pluckrose, H., & Lindsay, J. (2020). *Cynical Theories: How activist scholarship made everything about race, gender, and identity and why this harms everybody*. Pitchstone Publishing.
- Robertson, L. H. (2021). Year of the virus: Understanding the contagion effects of wokism. *In-sight*, 26(B). Retrieved March 1, from <https://in-sightjournal.com/2021/02/22/wokism/>
- Robertson, L. H. (2022a). Did the Canadian government build schools to murder children? . *Humanist Perspectives*, (219).
- Robertson, L. H. (2022b). Requiem for a Discussion Page. *Humanist Freedoms*.
- Saad, G. (2020). *The parasitic mind: How infectious ideas are killing common sense*. Regnery.
- Sadler, K. (2021, March 16). Universities like Columbia encourage racial segregation. *Washington Times*.

- Selley, C. (2020). Trudeau's 'watch your tongues' advice is offensive on many levels: A teacher has been beheaded because of cartoons. This is not complicated. *National Post*.  
<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/chris-selley-trudeaus-watch-your-tongues-advice-is-offensive-on-many-levels>
- Steiber, Z. (2021, Oct. 16). Loudoun County Superintendent Appears to Admit District Violated State Law by Not Reporting Sexual Assault. *Epoch Times*.
- Strong, T. (2002). Collaborative 'expertise' after the discursive turn. *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 12(2), 218-232.
- Wilder, D. (2021, Oct. 16). Teen Accused of Sexual Assaults in 2 Virginia High Schools. *National Broadcasting Corporation News 4 Washington*.
- Wilson, M. (2020, June 30). Policing in the anomie era. *Quillette*, June.
- Wright, C. (2022, June 23). I Got Thrown Off Etsy and PayPal for Expressing My Belief in Biological Reality. *Quillette*. <https://quillette.com/2022/06/23/i-got-thrown-off-etsy-and-paypal>