

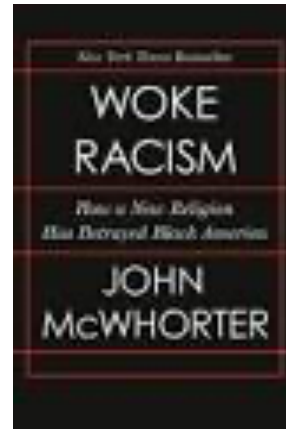
Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America

By: John McWhorter

2021, Portfolio / Penguin

224 pages

ISBN-13: 978-0593423066



How many of us have engaged in a discussion – either online or in person – only to remove yourself shortly after due to the other person’s disparaging or dismissive attitude? We might expect this when disagreements revolve around ideological differences, but what about when these situations occur between individuals who generally AGREE about the core issues of a problem? This is an underlying perception in John McWhorter’s 2021 book, *Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America*. However, while his central theme insists that today’s sense of wokeness has become a new religious practice, McWhorter argues that this mindset fails to advance racial equality and effectively stymies black Americans.

The brunt of *Woke Racism*’s ire is directed at a group he repeatedly refers to as “the Elect.” To McWhorter, the Elect are those who appear to lead the way for racial justice, all while viewing themselves as “bearers of a wisdom” and “understanding something most do not” (p. 19). Yet, according to McWhorter, while they talk of dismantling structures and “doing the work,” any change produced by the woke mob is more pretentious than all else. His contention is that while the Elect believe they are forging progress, society is not changing out of consensus



or enlightenment. Rather, change is being created *out of fear*. What does McWhorter mean by this: the more hostile adherents to Elect philosophy have essentially quietened others since their “increasing numbers and intimidating buzzwords have the effect of silencing those who see Elect philosophy as flawed but aren’t up for being mauled” (p. 21). Thus, one of the primary parallels McWhorter presents – the banishment of heresy – proves to be the most relevant to his overall narrative, asserting that the Elect “consider it imperative to not only critique those who disagree with their creed, but to seek their punishment and elimination to whatever degree real-life conditions can accommodate” (p. 42). Hence, to apply McWhorter’s theme, this form of religious exclusion exists in the form of what we more commonly refer to as “cancel culture.”

Among the main sources of criticism toward the book is its disregard to offer effective countermeasures to the woke/Elect mentality. While McWhorter argues that the Elect are more interested in converting others to their viewpoint over any form of constructive discussion, he clearly prefers to ignore them due to being “largely unreachable” (p. 1). With this approach, it seems McWhorter appeals more to readers’ inherent bias than promoting a discussion on how to truly create change based on consensus. Therefore, the book may come across as a narrative based on tantrum rather than resolve. Even his three suggested items for reversing racism (end the war on drugs, improve reading instruction by focusing on phonics, and pivot the collegiate narrative toward vocational training) ring hollow and have the feel of being included simply because it seems obligatory to offer a list of action points.



While *Woke Racism* discusses topics such as college enrollment policies and applying today's standards to historical figures, McWhorter's more provocative comments relate to the genuineness of today's victimhood claims (see his example from the University of Southern California). Clearly, *Woke Racism* will not appeal to all readers. McWhorter acknowledges as such and recognizes the pushback he's likely to receive from those who will call him a traitor to his race or allege he's "not black enough" to author this book. While it will certainly fail to satisfy the needs of those who want to promote equality by woke means, McWhorter's work is more likely to allure those who feel pushed out of the conversation (or feel intimidated to ever enter it) by our modern cancel-driven society.

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January 2022