

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

FAUX CANCEL CULTURE OUTRAGE MASKS REAL CONCERNS

Not surprisingly, the 2020 Merriam-Webster word or phrase of the year was “pandemic.” And now, just three months into 2021, we already have an odds-on favorite for this year: “cancel culture.”

There seems to be a lot of that going around, and it angers both liberals and conservatives depending on who or what gets canceled.

Cancel culture — and the idea of “canceling” someone or something — happens when a celebrity or other public figure does or says something that others consider offensive. It often results in the withdrawal of support — a public shaming fueled by social media that aims to be career ending.

Cancel culture expects perfection. There is the rub: Each of us is fallible, sometimes even more so than the person we’re canceling. Oftentimes, “canceling” someone accomplishes nothing more than making us feel good.

One person who probably isn’t feeling very good right now is embattled New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

Facing a growing number of

allegations of sexual harassment, and at least one that would qualify as sexual assault, Cuomo has jumped onboard the train of those who decry cancel culture.

With mounting pressure from members of his own party to resign, Cuomo expressed confidence that the citizens of New York would not want him to leave office before the end of his term.

“People know the difference between playing politics, bowing to cancel culture and the truth,” he said.

Frankly, if the allegations against Cuomo are proved, it’s hard to argue against his cancellation.

Then there’s another so-called victim of cancel culture: Dr. Seuss, whose beloved books have recently received a lot of attention on conservative media and by Republicans in Congress.

No, Dr. Seuss (aka the late Theodor Seuss Geisel, a longtime La Jolla resident) is not really being canceled. His estate *voluntarily* decided to stop printing six of his books because of racist imagery. There was no left-wing

mob demanding their demise.

If he were alive today, Geisel himself may have decided to do the very same thing. During World War II, Geisel published anti-Japanese cartoons and supported concentration camps for Japanese Americans. But he later apologized for his actions. In fact, Geisel wrote a book that reflected his changed views, *Horton Hears a Who!* That book, and the rest of the Dr. Seuss catalogue, will remain untouched.

The outrage and controversy did nothing more than boost book sales.

Akin Olla is a strategist, political organizer and the host of the podcast “This is the Revolution.” The Nigerian American recently wrote in *The Guardian* about the real cancel culture era in the United States, recalling the Red Scares in the 1940s and 1950s where actors, directors and musicians were spied on and black-listed by production companies and studios after they were accused of being communists. It was a wave of cancellation that ruined lives and damaged organizations

like the NAACP that were involved in the civil rights movement.

Amid the cacophony around modern-day cancel culture, there is one place where concerns are legitimate: college campuses.

At the National Conflict Resolution Center, we have been working on the issue of freedom of expression at colleges and universities for nearly a decade.

The work began as an outgrowth of concerns expressed by school administrators. Often, students arriving on diverse campuses were ill-prepared to successfully interact with others who looked or thought differently. Their solution was to self-segregate, creating a culture that administrators considered unhealthy.

Of course, when diverse backgrounds and opinions do converge, conflict and polarization are inevitable. But armed with effective communication skills, students can build understanding and respect. What starts as conflict may become a catalyst for growth.

Still, free expression is complicated. And students will no doubt hear words and ideas that cause them discomfort. We are equally obliged to teach them how to live in a world full of offenses that they cannot control — aka the real world.

Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, co-authors of “The Coddling of the American Mind,” worry about the “intellectual homogeneity” on campuses where students are shielded from diverse viewpoints in overly safe spaces.

In the five years prior to the publication of their book, there were as many as 240 different campaigns to cancel commencement speakers because of something the speaker had said, written or done.

It’s that kind of narrow-minded thinking that needs to be canceled.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC’s programming, visit ncronline.com

POWWOWS

FROM B1
year-old tots to women in their 20s and 30s.

But as the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the world, The Gathering of Nations and other powwows were canceled one by one.

“It was devastating, especially to a lot of my young girls because they have never been and it was something that was always talked about within our group,” Berrios said.

It has now been a whole year without any powwows or social gatherings, and without any planned events on the horizon, it has left many Indigenous people yearning to return to the dance circle and the community’s heartbeat: the drum, which carries the prayers of dancers and singers.

People from all walks of life

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to devastate and the gathering of cultures and nations throughout Indian Country has come to a halt. With a yearlong cancellation of powwows comes a huge hit to the economic, health and cultural well-being to many who travel the powwow circuit.

Although many Indigenous nations claim to have held the first powwow, the predecessor to the modern-day, intertribal celebration is commonly thought to have started in the Great Plains during the late 1800s. As tribes were forcibly removed from their traditional homelands and confined onto reservations, various nations came to meet or live closer to one another, and the inter-tribal gatherings became more prevalent.

Powwows rapidly grew in popularity after the American Indian Religious Freedom Act was enacted in 1978, which allowed Indigenous people to once again openly practice cultural, religious and spiritual traditions.

“(Powwows) come from the government’s outlawing of displaying Native American religion, and so all of these cultural practices weren’t allowed to happen openly and publicly,” said Chris Medellin, who is from the Tule River Yokuts Nation. Medellin is the director of the Native Resource Center at San Diego State University and helps organize its annual spring powwow.

Today, Indigenous people gather for powwows throughout North America to connect with other nations; sell handmade crafts, crafting materials and traditional foods; sing and dance; and pass cultural practices from one generation to the next.

In San Diego, the celebrations draw members of the region’s 17 local tribes, those hailing from tribes in distant parts of the continent, non-native community members, and people living in both urban and



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Annalisa Berrios, founder of Fancy Moccasins Dance Organization, practices on Feb. 27 on the Pechanga Reservation.

rural or reservation settings.

“Modern powwows are a way to bring the entire community together,” Medellin said. “We socialize, celebrate and just basically show that our culture isn’t gone.”

The powwow trail economy

There are many people who travel the powwow circuit from spring through late fall to earn money to care for their family’s needs. Many powwow vendors, dancers and singers travel around the country throughout the summer, using their earnings from selling their wares, playing traditional music or winning dance competitions to fund the drive to the next event.

Having a year without powwows due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic also means that people who depend on the powwow circuit to sustain their livelihoods have taken a major economic hit. Chris Tracy and her daughter Svea Komori-Ang, owners of Dancing Bear Indian Trader in Escondido, have regularly traveled to powwows.

Although she was not born into an Indigenous family, Tracy started attending powwows with her friends in the 1990s and was adopted into the Cheyenne tribe by an elder in 2001.

Before the pandemic, Tracy and Komori-Ang would set up their booth at powwows to sell beads and regalia supplies every weekend in the fall and at least two powwows a month throughout the rest of the year.

It has now been more than a year since their last event in January 2020.

“Everything shut down and all the powwows fell down like a house of cards,” she said. “It was pretty scary for us because we have our store income, but it isn’t that big. We do have a website, and it all kind of adds in, but the powwows are a big part of our income, so that was a big blow.”

Others also have felt a financial loss: dancers, singers and drum groups who either compete or perform at powwows.

The Gathering of Nations attracted nearly 3,000 dancers and 91,000 spectators from around North America in 2019 and had an estimated economic impact of \$22 million for Albuquerque, according to the AP News. Powwow organizers expected to award more than \$200,000 awarded to competitors in a variety of dance styles and age groups last year before the event was canceled. This year, it will be held virtually.

Training builds healthy habits

Training for and dancing at powwows is just one way that Indigenous youth learn about and connect with their culture. Not only does this help traditional knowledge to thrive and spread throughout communities, but it can build healthy habits such as maintaining fitness and avoiding the use of drugs and alcohol.

In 2015, researchers from the University of Washington and Alli-

ant International University studied ways to prevent substance abuse in Native American youth populations. Through their research, they found some intervention methods were successful when they included traditional tribal activities and ceremonies, especially when those programs targeted an entire community rather than individuals.

“Most authors agree that whether a curriculum is intended to serve primarily individuals or larger groups, community support for the intervention is vital to the success of any treatment or prevention program,” the paper reads, in part.

That’s exactly what Berrios aimed to do when she launched Fancy Moccasins Dance Organization in 2009, where most of the female dancers practice the fancy shawl dance.

The contemporary style was developed on the Lakota reservations of South Dakota around World War II and is primarily danced by women throughout the Indigenous, inter-tribal community, according to Tara Browner’s “Heartbeat of the People” book on powwow music and dances. Women who dance this fast-paced, high-energy style often wear brightly colored regalia with various cultural symbols or images found in nature, and wear a shawl around their back adorned with long ribbon fringe on the sides and bottom.

Fancy Moccasins was created as an extracurricular activity for Indigenous youth to stay on the traditional “red road” and avoid getting involved with drugs and alcohol. Berrios and her fellow dance instructor Kale Flores would typically meet with students twice a week, who range in age from 6 into their 20s. Most of the girls and women in the group dance fancy shawl, while most of the boys and men dance a style called northern traditional.

When the group met up on Feb. 27 to be photographed by The San Diego Union-Tribune, it was the first time they had all been together in a year.

“We need each other to grow, and I think not being able to get together and do that has been very hard,” Berrios said. “I’ve tried to virtual meet with my group, and it’s just not the same. We miss that energy that we receive from one another, that hope and that good medicine feeling.”

Although many of the students have continued to avoid drug and alcohol use during the pandemic, some of them have started using substances to deal with the depression and loneliness caused by continued isolation. For other students, Berrios said they have been derailed at school due to the stress and boredom of distance learning.

‘Another form of prayer’

In many aspects, gathering,

dancing and singing together with other Indigenous community members is a spiritual medium for prayer or a step toward healing from a traumatic event.

Dancer Ashley Jensen-Hedegaard from the Payómkawichum and Cupeño Nations did not grow up dancing at powwows. But when her cousin was murdered in 2014, she learned to dance fancy shawl as a way to honor her memory and raise awareness for murdered and missing Indigenous women.

“My family went through a tragedy and we got together and we prayed,” she said. “I love going to church, I love praying, and to know that dancing is another form of prayer, it’s something I wanted to surround myself with.” According to a 2018 report from the Urban Indian Health Institute, murder is the third-leading cause of death for Indigenous women, and the average age for victims is 29, as reflected in the limited data collected by the Department of Justice. In 2016, California had the sixth-highest number of cases for missing and murdered Indigenous women.

Like many dancers wishing to honor victims of such crimes, 29-year-old Jensen-Hedegaard’s regalia or traditional clothing is made from red cloth. Her younger cousins also joined in to learn how to dance, and together it has helped them to heal. Although it has been a difficult process to live without powwows and other gatherings over the past year, she said connecting with and watching other dancers online has helped to ease the isolation caused by the pandemic.

“Seeing other TikTok dancers and influencers helps with having a positive feed on my social media, and I still surround myself with prayer, dance and native wellness conferences via Zoom,” Jensen-Hedegaard said.

Dance can also bridge generations to one another, and as a way to pass down and preserve traditional knowledge.

When Fancy Moccasins dance instructor Flores, a 27-year-old northern traditional dancer from the Payómkawichum Nation, dances, he wears a regalia and beadwork passed down from his uncle, which all together weighs about 80 pounds. Around his neck is a beaded medallion necklace adorned with a Pechanga symbol with the nation’s sacred mountains and acorns.

When his son — who is due to be born any day now — is older, he hopes to teach him to dance and pass his uncle’s regalia down to him — along with the virtues that dance supports.

“The values of a northern traditional dancer are being a good person, having integrity, caring about your fellow native and helping when you can,” Flores said.

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SMOLENS City struggles for solutions on homeless

FROM B1
inexpensive, single-occupancy hotel rooms over decades of redevelopment stands out. Nearly 10,000 SROs were demolished, converted or otherwise removed from the housing stock from 2010 to 2016, according to a 2018 investigation by The San Diego Union-Tribune.

Laws were in place essentially requiring such low-cost housing to be replaced, but through waivers and other actions, a lot of them weren’t.

Many of those SROs were rundown and in disrepair, but they were often viewed as the lowest rung of housing that kept people from falling into homelessness. They were often replaced by office buildings,

boutique hotels and other more-profitable ventures.

Current Mayor Todd Gloria, a Democrat, was on the City Council during much of that time and his predecessor, Republican Kevin Faulconer, was either on the council or in the Mayor’s Office for all of it. Both have since made combating homelessness a cornerstone of their policy platforms. Faulconer is currently running for governor.

During that period, then-Gov. Jerry Brown in 2011 successfully pushed to shutter redevelopment agencies, which had funded efforts to revitalize urban areas and create housing across the state. He claimed the money was being widely misused and needed the cash to help offset a huge state budget deficit.

The city’s seasonal winter shelter program provided big tents for homeless people to stay in over the course of four months. Upon his election in 2012, Mayor Bob Filner sought to keep the shelters open year-

round. That lasted about 19 months and ended after scandal forced him from office in 2013.

In 2015, the city ended its winter tent shelter program, which had existed for decades. Most of the people were transferred to a shelter in a building at St. Vincent de Paul, which was under contract with the city to operate it.

That was essentially a wash in terms of the number of beds provided. A 2019 report said overall the city needed up to 500 more shelter beds.

The city and homeless service agencies used to provide overnight, inclement-weather shelter for more than 150 people. But as Gary Warth of the Union-Tribune pointed out, those shelters closed in the early-morning hours, sending people back outside. He noted those facilities would not have been open at 9 a.m., when the driver plowed into people hunkering down under the B Street bridge on Monday.

After the crash, advo-

cates for the homeless criticized the county for not allowing people without shelter to use empty hotel rooms that were secured for people at high risk for contracting COVID-19.

Gloria also has been pressed about why he just recently sought hotel reimbursements for the homeless that have been available since January through the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

In addition to a shortage of shelter beds, some homeless people simply don’t want to commit to staying in them — for various reasons — even if space is available. But everybody wants to get out of the rain — hence the popularity of bridges — suggesting bad-weather shelters might be viewed differently.

Political momentum shifted from temporary shelters toward more permanent housing after Faulconer became mayor in 2014. Gloria has long advocated the “housing first” approach to homelessness.

Faulconer quickly

changed direction following the hepatitis A outbreak that peaked in 2017 and eventually killed 20 people and sickened nearly 600. Homeless San Diegans were hit hard and officials said unsanitary conditions related to people living on the street contributed to the problem.

Pressed by civic leaders, Faulconer agreed to set up temporary homeless tent shelters — largely funded through the efforts of Padres Chairman Peter Seidler and restaurant chain operator Dan Shea. The shelters were operated by nonprofit agencies under contract with the city.

Another outbreak — the coronavirus pandemic — forced the closure of the tightly packed tents and Faulconer opened up the spacious convention center to serve as a temporary shelter. With the pandemic seemingly winding down, the homeless inhabitants soon will be moved back to reconfigured tent shelters.

As he geared up to run for governor, Faulconer

publicly derided the “housing first” approach to addressing homelessness. Gloria has made clear the city will embrace that concept under his administration.

Whether the B Street crash results in sweeping new action is unclear. The hepatitis outbreak and B Street tragedy were very different situations — an infectious disease that threatened the entire region versus a freak incident that killed and injured several unfortunate people.

But the consequences of both stemmed from homelessness. Meanwhile, San Diego continues struggling to find a long-term solution.

Tweet of the week

Goes to Chris Megerian (@ChrisMegerian) of the Los Angeles Times quoting President Joe Biden. “This is a time for optimism, but it’s not a time for relaxation.”

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