**PERSPECTIVE: Cancel culture can chill free speech; it’s also free speech in action**

**Lata Nott, Freedom Forum fellow for First Amendment, discusses cancel culture in this month’s edition of** [**First Five Express**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YpBjfOp5t8U)**.**

***What is cancel culture?***

Ultimately, it’s speech, responding to speech. Someone says something and other people respond by saying, “That was terrible. They should be fired.” Or, “That was terrible. We should stop buying their music or watching their show or whatever it is.”

People conflate holding people accountable with cancel culture, but I do think … like many terms, it’s the term that’s come to encompass a lot of things.

***Does cancel culture violate the First Amendment?***

Why people always bring up the First Amendment when they're talking about cancel culture is that anything that makes people hesitant to share their views is called the chilling effect, which cuts against free expression and the value of freely expressing yourself.

It’s not going to violate the First Amendment because that only applies to the government chilling your speech. The First Amendment doesn't apply to actions taken by private companies or private individuals. But, you know, it's still worth discussing in a space like this, because even if it’s not a First Amendment issue, it is something that impacts what the First Amendment is meant to do, which is free expression.

***Is cancel culture bad?***

If there’s value in cancel culture, it might be in causing institutions to change their policies and things like that. I don’t know if you can change a person by canceling them, except to make them angry at cancel culture.

What are you trying to accomplish with your speech? What are you trying to accomplish by canceling someone? You always hear a story about a professor who has made questionable remarks in the classroom. If you are calling for them to be fired, are you trying to take a stand against institutional racism in the academic system? Or are you just trying to ruin someone's life?

I think that’s the difference between employing this for the purpose of a movement versus just canceling someone. Are you furthering a cause or is this sort of personal?

I think that it can do some good things if it’s used in the right way, if it’s used as more of a boycott for a cause than just to ruin someone’s life. But the truth is, if people feel afraid to express their views because of cancel culture, if they just stop their ideas before they’ve even taken form, that’s a chilling effect. That’s bad. It’s bad for free speech. On the other hand, cancel culture is free speech.