

How citizens can fight MAGA cancel culture

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Jimmy Kimmel attends the 2024 Media Access Awards at AVALON Hollywood on October 29, 2024 in Los Angeles, California. (Photo by Kevin Winter/Getty Images)



By [Will Marshall](#)

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The outbreak of political and corporate cowardice in America since Donald Trump's return to the White House is reaching epic proportions.

[ABC's short-lived suspension of "Jimmy Kimmel Live!"](#) is just the latest example. With some honorable exceptions — I never thought I'd be [cheering for Harvard](#) — almost every public or private entity seems to be caving in to Trump's dictates.

The president is engaging in a kind of Godfather cosplay, turning the executive branch into a Mafia-style extortion racket. Nice little network you've got there; it'd be a shame if something bad were to happen to it.

His consiglieri in this case was FCC Chairman Brendan Carr, who threatened to yank the broadcast licenses of ABC's affiliates that carry the Kimmel show. "We can do this the easy way or the hard way" he warned them.

Carr knows better. In 2019 he declared: "The FCC does not have a roving mandate to police speech in the name of the 'public interest' " He was right then, and his willingness now to act as Trump's censor is craven hypocrisy.

I never thought I'd be cheering for Sen. Ted Cruz either, but he's one of the few Republicans to call out Carr's "incredibly dangerous" threat to [muzzle media organs](#) that offend rightwing populists.

Kimmel was taken off the air last week for saying what's glaringly obvious to anyone following the news or scrolling social media: Trump and his minions are trying to exploit the heinous assassination of MAGA activist Charlie Kirk for political gain.

It's part of a well-established pattern. Trump routinely abuses the powers of his office to threaten anyone — reporters, judges, college administrators, law firms, museums and federal employees — with losing federal funding, contracts or jobs if they decline to do his bidding.

After Kirk's death, before police had arrested a suspect, Trump lacked the self-control to wait a decent interval before politicizing the tragedy and howling for vengeance. "This is a dark moment in America," he said in a White House [video](#), then proceeded to make it darker by blaming "radical left" rhetoric for the "terrorism we're seeing in our country today," while failing to condemn [instances](#) of right-wing political violence.

Despite the faux outrage gushing forth from MAGA media, Kimmel in no way expressed disrespect to Kirk or his family. The comedian's real offense was making fun of Trump's characteristically self-absorbed reaction to a reporter's question about Kirk's death: Talking about the new ballroom he's building in the White House.

Said Kimmel: "This is not how an adult grieves the murder of someone he called a friend. This is how a 4-year-old mourns a goldfish."

To me, that's a fair shot at our sociopathic president. Maybe you don't find it funny; I don't care. Comedy that satirizes powerful political figures is a venerable American custom and it's protected by the First Amendment.

I've publicly castigated gutless college administrators who allow leftwing activists to cancel speeches, disrupt classes and otherwise try to enforce conformity of thought and speech on U.S. campuses.

Now Trump and his accomplices are uncaging the MAGA thought police — a far more insidious threat to Americans' civil liberties because they have the power of a malicious and unscrupulous president behind them.

Don't look to Congress to stand up for Americans' First Amendment right to free speech. It's supposed to be a separate branch of government, but Republicans, who control both the House and Senate, have prostrated themselves before Trump and turned the legislative branch into a contemptible rubber-stamp body like Russia's Duma.

The pusillanimity of today's congressional Republicans will go down in history as the great enabler of Trump's systematic usurpation of their constitutional powers, whether it's spending public money, setting trade and foreign policy or protecting civil liberties.

What can Americans outside the Trump cult do to rein in MAGA cancel culture? We can protest and hope for honest judges to do their duty. We can recruit midterm election candidates dedicated to defending our basic rights as citizens.

And we can shun companies that succumb to White House bullying. No one has to watch ABC, or the confections of Disney, its corporate overlord. Tesla sales are down as Americans recoil from Elon Musk's MAGA antics. Consumers should also boycott companies that acquiesce to White House pressure.

Citizens are not powerless to act as Trump tries to turn America — which our national anthem hails as the "home of the brave" — into a chicken coop. They can defend their basic rights and freedoms, starting by holding companies like Disney accountable when they buckle under to a would-be emperor.

Marshall is president and founder of the [Progressive Policy Institute](#).