



Episode 1,506: Dave Smith on “Cancel Culture” and the Thought Controllers

Guest: Dave Smith

WOODS: I hate this dumb term, “cancel culture.” Whoever invented it should be executed. But the topic itself, though, is worthy of discussion. You did an episode of *Part of the Problem* on it, and I think we can go beyond the recent particular example, namely the Shane Gillis example, But we should start there. Talk about what in the world just happened, and then I want to talk about something that kind of happened to you in recent days. But let's start there.

SMITH: Sure. Well, Shane Gillis is a good friend of mine. He's a hilarious comedian. He was getting a lot of heat within the comedy world, not so much in the mainstream world, but in the comedy world, people were like, *A lot of people are looking at this kid. He's really funny. He's doing a great job.* And then out of nowhere, he auditioned for *Saturday Night Live* and got it, and he was announced as the next cast member on the show. And then a bunch of these just horrible people, who live for nothing but to try to ruin other people, dug up clips of his on various podcasts, where he was saying the wrong thing, joking about the wrong subject, making jokes, if you can believe it or not, about the topic of race, which is just completely off limits now. Which is just so funny, because literally, I mean, you could make jokes about dead kids on Comedy Central, and no one would care about it, but if you make jokes about race, all of a sudden, this is the big issue. And they started a big campaign, and it worked, and they got him they got him fired before he ever got on one episode. It's really terrible what they did to him. And Shane's a hilarious guy. He'll be fine. But it was just the latest example in this just despicable culture of tattle tales. And it's everything that liberals used to complain about, about the religious right trying to censor hip-hop music, except far worse.

WOODS: Oh, geez. Now, what was the reaction among most comedians to this?

SMITH: Most comedians rallied behind Shane, and most of the *good* comedians rallied behind Shane. And not just in like the local scene, but like Norm Macdonald and Bill Burr and a lot of really great comedians really rallied behind him. And then some of them, some of the LA comics, threw him under the bus, because they're so concerned with getting some type of virtue signaling points from this crazy left-wing mob, and it was really disappointing to see. And what was particularly crazy was some comedians, who it's like, these guys have all said pretty wild, offensive stuff before, and then they're trying to throw some guy under the bus who hasn't made it to one episode yet, hasn't gotten his first paycheck yet, and they're trying to ruin this guy.

And I don't know how to express how much contempt I have for those people, but it's — look, I'll just say it like this: there are some really, really great comedians, who I really, really love, who aren't offensive. I mean, like I think Brian Regan is incredible. I think Jerry Seinfeld's incredible. I think Jim Gaffigan's incredible. There's a lot of clean comedians out there who are very, very funny. But the standard that they have set up today, I mean, Richard Pryor, George Carlin, Eddie Murphy, Chris Rock, Dave Chappelle, none of these guys could pass that test. And so it's just like, really? You want to change the rules to the game, where all these greats aren't going to be allowed in? Seems like you might be ruining the game.

WOODS: Yeah, no kidding. So you're right that, in this particular case, you have a person who's probably going to bounce back. But surely there's some kind of backlash brewing. You know, then you find out all these people who are all upset about blackface, half of them are doing blackface.

SMITH: Yeah, very strange.

WOODS: You know, it's like half of these people who are condemning him, I am quite sure if we dug around, we would find stuff there. There's got to be a backlash.

SMITH: Yeah, do you remember this video — I was thinking about this video recently; Bob Murphy put out this video years ago, where it was like "Robert Murphy's Message to the Elite." Do you remember what I'm talking about?

WOODS: Oh, vaguely.

SMITH: Yeah, okay, so he was basically like: hey, here's my message to the elite. He's like, hey, you guys have been doing a great job. Really just spectacular. I mean, you've got complete control of the economy. You've controlled the media. You control the central bank, like all these things. But here's the problem: you've got this internet thing now, and now all of a sudden, people are getting news from all these different alternative sources. And so this was years ago, so I'm not doing this justice, but it was a really great video that Robert Murphy put out.

And it's really true. There's more and more people who are getting information from podcasts like yours or mine, from even people who we may not always agree with, but like the Dave Rubens of the world, the Joe Rogans, of course, of the world, like all these guys — Adam Carolla — all these people who have huge audiences, who are completely outside of this mainstream thing. And my suspicion is that what's going on is that there is almost like this group that's been in control and power forever that is losing power, and they're freaking out. And the internet, I think, a lot of the people are just useful idiots. I don't mean to say everyone who's involved in cancel culture is the ruling elite. But this almost seems to be a tactic to attempt to kind of rein in anybody who doesn't fit the program.

And you might see an example like Shane Gillis and go, well, what was he really doing? I mean, he wasn't somebody who was challenging government power. But in a way, he kind of was, because if you don't play this rule of this kind of third rail of, like, you're not allowed to joke about this thing, this political correct thing — and I think most libertarians are hip to this — goes hand in hand with big government. They're all kind of related. And then you certainly see where people like Alex Jones are getting silenced, Daniel McAdams, Scott Horton, all

those guys get kicked off, and lots of other people have been de-platformed. I think this is almost like a desperate tactic to maintain control, which I don't think is going to work.

WOODS: I'd like to believe that's what it is, and I guess there has to be some of that, given, did you see the – I guess it was at – what's that Tomatoes – that website where they –

SMITH: Rotten Tomatoes.

WOODS: Rotten Tomatoes, yeah, yeah. When they did the Dave Chappelle special on there, and overwhelmingly the public loves it, and the elites all hate it. I mean, they have to see that the public is on a different wavelength from them. I suppose you're right.

SMITH: Yeah, no, I mean, that was incredible thing and an incredible visual to see the, like, 26% of the approved people say it was a good special, 99% of regular people. So I'm sorry, this is undeniably a well-received comedy special, no matter what the Young Turks tell us.

WOODS: Yeah, without a doubt. And as you and I noted on the episode we did about it, there's nothing wrong with it. And by the way, being offensive and whatever – "offensive" is such a stupid word. But even that is not a problem. There's nothing I could – I was thinking to myself, *What on earth must he have said to get them this upset?* And I sat there and I waited for it, and I waited, and I waited, and it never came.

SMITH: Yeah, well, it's really funny too, because the trajectory, for guys like me and you, I feel like up until recently, like the trajectory our whole life was that more and more edgy comedy was accepted. Like you would see things on like *The Simpsons* in the '90s, and you'd be like, *Oh, man, they never would have gotten away with this 10 years ago.* And then you'd see things on *South Park*, and you'd be like, *Man, The Simpsons never would have gotten away with this.* And now it's like completely gone the other direction, where you're like, *Oh, I miss 10 years ago, 15 years ago, when you could get away with this stuff.* Which is very strange to me.

WOODS: Yeah, that is very strange. Tell us about the article that came out not too long ago now, I guess on *Slate*, and it was about a certain podcast you have something to do with, and it's not *Part of the Problem*.

SMITH: [laughing] Yes, that's right. Well, it was an article by this guy who's just – I mean, this guy, Seth, who's like such a loser. He's just kind of like a wannabe comedian who's never gotten anything going in his comedy career and is painfully unfunny. And so the only thing he's known for is that he writes these blogs attacking other comedians. And he wrote a whole thing about how conservative comedy has risen up, and this is what led to the Shane Gillis problem, and that we have to make it clear that these racist people aren't welcome in polite society. And I mean, it really was quite funny to see him refer to *Legion of Skanks* as conservative, which is –

WOODS: Oh, my gosh, just listen to the name of it [laughing].

SMITH: I mean, come on, man. It's like, how do you even respond to some of this stuff? And again, I really don't know what else to say, other than it's really, really stupid. The whole

argument is very, very dumb, and I have to believe that some people are going to start to see through this. Certainly, I hope so.

WOODS: Yeah. So when an article like that gets written, though, there's no way that hurts you. There's absolutely no way. It just gives you publicity.

SMITH: Well, especially for somebody like me, like I kind of – I've talked about this before, but I remember when I first got shows at Fox News, and I was getting on there, and I remember – listen, nobody ever said anything to me. It's not like an experience like that. But with all of these cable news gigs, no one really has to sit you down and tell you, if you say this, we're going to like it more than if you say this. But it's pretty clear. You just kind of pick up on this thing. And I remember there were a lot of people at Fox News that were talking to me about like, oh, they might make you a contributor. They like you, this and that, like, there's these opportunities here.

And I remember being very aware of the fact that if I, let's say, toned down the foreign policy stuff, if I went in more of a neocon Republican direction, I was pretty certain some doors were going to open up for me there. And I was still at a point in my career where I was like, you know, I don't know what I'm going to be able to make of my career, and it would be nice to have a big paycheck coming in. It would be nice to get something. And I just kind of decided then, and I knew – I mean, it wasn't me, anyway. It wouldn't have worked. But I just decided then, and I was like, look, I'm just going to say what I believe, and we'll let the chips fall where they may.

And I've made that same decision in my comedy career. It's like, okay, I'm not going to think about every little joke I do and go, *Oh, man, could this maybe cost me some network gig down the road*, or something like that. I've just kind of accepted, I'm going to say what I think is funny. I'm going to do the type of comedy I want to do. I'm going to have the type of politics I want to have, and the chips will fall where they may. And once I got to a level where it's like, oh, I'm already like making decent money and I have a decent audience, it's like, oh, okay, I don't really want a network gig. I'd much rather be a Joe Rogan than be Jimmy Kimmel. Like, *much* rather. So I'm happier to go for that career, anyway.

And once you realize that, and we were able to work out a situation where we're like, you know, Luis owns GaS Digital, it's like, we're our own bosses in this thing. So there's nothing they can take away from me. So it's an unbelievable amount of freedom that we have, so I'm not worried about any of the stuff I've ever said hurting me in the future. It's just the publicity.

So it's like, keep on writing them. I've been begging them to write this stuff for years. Keep on writing them. Their arguments are so stupid. You can say like, oh, people are making jokes about these things that we decided you're not allowed to make jokes about. It's like, yeah, most of the time, when people like to listen to dark humor, it's some way of them dealing with reality, adjusting to the difficult things in life. It's a coping mechanism. And these people on the left, they love to talk about privilege so much. Anyone who is this concerned over feelings being hurt has led a very privileged life, I promise you that.

WOODS: Yeah. That couldn't be clearer. But at the same time, you say their arguments are stupid, and I get it, but what they would say is: look, people like Dave Smith like to talk about freedom and free speech and whatever, but let's cut through it. What he's really saying

is: the freedom to be a racist and misogynist. Like, that's what they would say. So what do you say to that?

SMITH: Well, it's like, what do the terms even mean? I mean, it's like racist and misogynist what exactly does that mean? Now, the problem is that they refuse to have one standard, because like I've said before, the term "racist" to me seems to be this broad umbrella that covers these horrific atrocities, and then all the way on the other side of the spectrum, covers a joke that we don't like, or if you said "blacks" instead of "African Americans." So on the other end of the spectrum, will I make a joke you don't like or maybe use politically incorrect language? Okay, sure. But if you say "racism" as like this power-plus-privilege thing, then you get to like — I don't know.

My point that I'm making is just that if you actually want to judge racism or sexism, all these people complaining are far more racist and sexist than any of us are at all. I mean, go listen to their articles lecturing white people, read their articles lecturing men. These guys are the racists and sexists. They're more identitarian than Richard Spencer is. Their whole philosophy is built around intersectionality and breaking people up by their race and gender and all of this stuff.

What I do with really with my politics and my comedy is push back against their philosophy, which I don't think they can defend. So, fine. It's like they say they're against hierarchy. Their whole system is built off this hierarchy where straight white men have to be at the bottom, and I reject that. So I don't know. If that makes me a racist, okay, fine.

WOODS: I just read this story about something going on in Iowa. I don't know if you've heard about Carson King? Does that ring a bell?

SMITH: Yeah.

WOODS: Okay, so let me tell the story. This is a guy who's just a just a local guy, holding a sign at a football game, soliciting beer money. And the video goes viral.

SMITH: Yeah, so he had like his Venmo on the sign, and he was like, "Venmo me money so I can get some beer," just like a stupid funny sign.

WOODS: Right, yeah. So when all is said and done, he basically is able to use his newfound fame to basically wind up helping to donate a million dollars to a local children's Hospital. I mean, it's just an amazing thing.

SMITH: Yeah, so a bunch of people watching thought it was hilarious, so they all sort of Venmoing him money. And he was just doing it as a goof. And then he started getting all this money, and he goes, ho, you know what? And I forget, I think it was Busch? Was that the beer company?

WOODS: Anheuser-Busch, yeah.

SMITH: Anheuser-Busch. So he goes, you know what, man? This is incredible. I'm just going to donate all this money to a children's hospital. So then Anheuser-Busch goes, you know what?

Whatever you donate, we'll match in terms of that. And then I think someone else matched. And he ended up raising a ton of money for children's hospitals.

WOODS: Okay, so you think, well, that's a nice, heartwarming story.

SMITH: Yes, any normal human being looks at that and goes: what a beautiful, cool thing there.

WOODS: Yeah, right. But we're not dealing with normal people. We're dealing with people who say: *when he was a teenager, boy, look at his social media posts*. I'm not kidding. That's what happened. There was a reporter who went through and said that when this guy was a teenager, he had some rough tweets, or who even knows, on social media. But the interesting thing is that winds up backfiring, because the reporter himself had tweets just like that, and the reporter himself winds up getting fired [laughing].

SMITH: I mean, and that is somebody who actually deserves to get canceled, if we'll use their term.

WOODS: Yeah, yeah.

SMITH: And the crazy thing was, the tweets were seven years old, eight years old, something like that. And they went back to this kid being a teenager, and what he was tweeting were quotes. They were jokes from Tosh, the show on Comedy Central – Comedy Central, a network which Anheuser-Busch is a sponsor of. So then Anheuser-Busch, feeling the pressure, disavows him, and they get they're like, *Oh, we're not going to do this thing with him anymore*.

And that's the thing about this. It's all so phony. I really hate the corporations who get on board with this. It's really so disgusting. It's like when Walmart gets rid of all their bullets for AK-47s. Oh, and then by the way, they sold them. They didn't even destroy them. They just sold them, so someone else is going to sell them. They're not saving any lives. They're still going to get out there into the world. And it's like you're just trying to get these virtue points.

But anyway, like you said, it was pretty great that then that guy ended up getting brought down himself. Maybe that's what it's going to take, is that those people, the Justin Trudeau blackface things, and then they go like, *Okay, well, if you play by these rules, it's going to take you down too*.

WOODS: What do you think, though, about when people say, if we mainstream, if we allow people to get away with saying things like this, this will have negative – I can't even say it. I can't even make the argument. Forget it. Forget that. I don't even want to go down that – forget it. This is just stupid. But they give us this term, "cancel culture," that I think just emerged recently. But the phenomenon didn't emerge just yesterday –

SMITH: Yeah, well, let me just say, I actually do want to answer that question that you couldn't get out.

WOODS: Okay, yeah, that I couldn't bring myself to pose it.

SMITH: Yeah, here's what my response to that would be. I would say that, actually, I think what is going on with cancel culture, with social justice warriors, and all of this nonsense, is way more of a threat than any dark joke has ever been. And I don't just mean that it's a threat in the way that most people think it's a threat. Like the kind of generic conservative response is that, "Well, this is a threat to free speech. This is a threat to" — yeah, yeah. And that, all of that is true. I'm not denying that. There is a valid point there.

But I think that libertarians might see a whole different angle on this that we can appreciate that a lot of others can't. And what I think, is that outrage is a finite resource. Like, there's only 24 hours in a day, you only have so much energy in your body, and you can only be outraged at so much. And there are things that the left wing in America should be outraged about that go completely unnoticed. I mean, very small percentages of them even care or ever talk about the fact that we're in the longest wars in American history, that there's a borderline genocide going on in Yemen right now, and that Donald Trump is basically helping the Saudis conduct it. There are these things that are major, major problems. Hey, look, even just the fact that look at what's going on with the Federal Reserve. It's basically another banker bailout. We could use the left to be outraged about these issues.

The war on drugs. There's lots of things. I mean, the war on drugs legitimately ruins people's lives. It's ruined tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of people's lives. And I'm not just talking about like the left-wing talking points that have been kind of disproven. Like I'm not just saying that everyone who's sitting in jail is a really good person. But how many people have just lost custody of their kids, lost their jobs, got something on their track record where their economic productivity is damaged for the rest of their lives?

There are really horrible things going on that the left should be outraged about. And I don't think it's really too crazy to argue — I think, in fact, it's pretty obvious and undeniable — that this phony outrage over nonsense has sucked all of the oxygen out of the room of the issues that left-leaning people care about. I mean, I've made this joke and I tweeted this years ago, but I stand by it. Donald Trump could drop a bomb on a third world country tomorrow, and then tweet something insensitive towards transgender people, and what do you think there'd be more outrage about? It's not even like 10 to 1. It'd be 100,000 to 1 about the transgender issue. That's a problem. So I actually think people getting outraged over a joke here is a way bigger problem than the joke.

WOODS: Wow, that is good stuff. I could not have said that better myself.

SMITH: Well, thanks.

WOODS: Okay, well, my pleasure. All right, actually, I don't think there's anything further to say on this subject. I think that is it. That definitively settles it. It's kind of like your Soho Forum debate. Now that you've done that and your follow-up podcast episode, we don't need to talk about this is [laughing]. So all right, but I'm glad we did hit on it, because people have been talking about it. And at some point, this kind of — I don't even know if it is an equilibrium — that we have between the elites and basically every normal person, at some point that, has to tip some way. At some point.

SMITH: Well, it's kind of like this thing that the elites love and they love to push, and they have these useful idiots that they put out there. But more than ever before, what I've really noticed — and I'm sure you've noticed it too, and it's really kind of disgusting, because a lot of

us could have an impulse to just kind of hate social justice warriors, but more and more if you look into them, these are like mentally ill people. I mean, that's really who they're kind of pushing out in front to lead the charge. If you look at like a Jordan Peterson speech and look at the people who are screaming in his face, these are not well balanced people. And we've had a lot of problems, there's stuff that conservatives and right-libertarians have been talking about for decades in this country, like the decimation of the family unit, kids being on prescription drugs, all these real problems in the culture, and I think there's a lot of really valid points in all of that. And I think in a lot of ways, we're seeing that culminate, and now, a lot of these kids who are really damaged are being kind of used to be the foot soldiers in this like statist system. And it's really, really horrible, like a really profoundly awful thing to do to people who I think need help, quite often.

WOODS: Yeah, I don't know how else to account for these people, honest to goodness. I mean, I'm not even joking at this point. Something is wrong upstairs. All right, *Part of the Problem* is Dave's podcast. You can listen to it on your favorite podcasting app. Also check out GaSDigitalNetwork.com, which features Dave, as well as TomWoods.com/1506, where I'll have all these links in one convenient place. All right, Dave, we're going to wrap up Dave Smith Week tomorrow with listener questions, so I look forward to talking to you again then. Thanks so much.

SMITH: Thank you, Tom. As always, it's an honor.