



The Fall of Woke?

The Teacher Unions Create a Safe Space for a Beleaguered Ideology

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Introduction

“Woke” is under siege. Activists who once gleefully discriminated in schools and the workplace in the name of racial equity and social justice; promoted gender theory over sex equality in sports, locker rooms, and bathrooms; and soaked young minds in an anti-Western, anti-Semitic, and race-obsessed mindset have collided with unfavorable public opinion and a hostile legal and policy environment. The “shock and awe” tactics of the second Trump administration in aggressively implementing anti-discrimination law have stemmed the tide of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) bureaucracies, gender theory exercises, and other hallmarks of woke infrastructure, which only recently were considered to be irresistible forces in corporations, schools, colleges, and universities.

Despite these obstacles, Randi Weingarten and Becky Pringle—the heads of the nation’s two largest teacher unions, respectively the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA)—soldier on in their pursuit of radical policies that are increasingly anathema to the public. Egged on by the Mamdani wing of the Left, these union leaders continue to offer a vision of society that stymies educational opportunities, abandons women’s equality in sports and education programs, and divvies up opportunities and benefits on the basis of race rather than merit.

This report examines how the leaders of the NEA, the AFT, and their affiliates, at the peril of their rank-and-file member teachers, keep peddling discriminatory policies and behaviors within educational institutions despite the growing unpopularity of “woke” policies and practices. The unions are cannily playing the long game, betting that activist zeal can outlast public opinion and the aggressive enforcement efforts of the current administration. Their strategy is to bide their time and weather the siege. They may yet indoctrinate the young into dismantling “structurally racist,” “white supremacist,” and “patriarchal” Western institutions. Although “woke” is on the run, the movement is not defeated, and the teacher unions maintain the well-financed infrastructure to sustain it. The fight is not over.

If It’s Woke, Fix It

Voters swept President Trump into office on a platform [pledging](#) equal treatment under the law and the end of federal funding for programs that promote CRT and gender ideology. True to these promises, the president issued a deluge of executive orders within the first months of his second term. To name a few:

- [Executive Order 14149](#) prohibits federal agencies and officers from interfering with any American’s freedom of speech;
- [Executive Order 14151](#) orders the end of DEI programs in the federal government;
- Executive Orders [14159](#) and [14165](#) direct immediate and extensive action to enforce America’s laws prohibiting illegal immigration;
- [Executive Order 14168](#) requires federal agencies to define “sex” and related terms used in federal law according to their binary, biological meaning;
- [Executive Order 14173](#) instructs officials to end illegal DEI programs in the private sector;
- [Executive Order 14183](#) dispatches gender ideology from policies of the armed forces;



Scenes of the reinstated Gaza Solidarity Encampment at Columbia University on its fourth day.

Abbad Diraneyya. (2024, April 21). Columbia reinstated Gaza Solidarity Encampment Palestinian flags [Photograph]. Wikimedia Commons.

- [Executive Order 14187](#) directs officials to defund institutions that perform sex-rejecting procedures on minors;
- [Executive Order 14188](#) requires from agency heads recommendations on combatting anti-Semitism in schools, colleges, and universities;
- [Executive Order 14190](#) orders officials to defund K–12 schools that illegally discriminate by indoctrinating students in CRT and gender ideology;
- [Executive Order 14191](#) requires officials to take measures to expand education freedom for families;
- [Executive Order 14201](#) directs agency officials to defund education programs that require women and girls to compete against males in sports designated for females;
- [Executive Order 14242](#) requires the Secretary of Education to facilitate the closure of the Department of Education and to terminate illegal discrimination obscured under the label “diversity, equity, and inclusion” or promoting gender ideology.

The Trump administration has taken swift action to carry out these executive orders. It has found multiple universities—including [Harvard](#), [Columbia](#), and [George Mason](#)—in violation of federal civil rights law and is investigating others for failing to take action to address the harassment of Jewish students on campus and for employing racially discriminatory practices contrary to the Supreme Court’s 2023 decision in [Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard](#). The Department of Education and, in many cases, the Department of Health and Human Services have taken action against numerous state and local education agencies for violating Title IX by requiring female athletes to compete against and change clothes in front of boys and men, including in [California](#), [Colorado](#), [Maine](#), [Minnesota](#), and [Northern Virginia](#). The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has [entered](#) into a settlement agreement with four of the largest global law firms requiring them effectively to dismantle their discriminatory DEI programs. These initial actions by the administration and many others have sent a clear message to schools and workplaces across the country: abandon unlawful DEI and gender-ideology practices that violate federal anti-discrimination law, or risk investigations and the potential loss of federal funding and contracts.

Surveys show that the administration enjoys increasing support from the public. As the 2025–26 school year began, new data pointed to a rising tide of anti-woke sentiment among young adults. For instance, many Americans are growing tired of being forced to live under DEI policies: An [NBC News poll](#) found that 43% of registered voters “have negative feelings” about DEI, while the opposite is true for only 39% of those surveyed.

Long-range survey data [shows](#) that Generation Z attends church at a higher rate than any other cohort of adults, followed closely by Millennials. Church leaders [report](#) that more members of Generation Alpha are attending weekly services, especially in the wake of the assassination of Charlie Kirk.

At the same time, the number of 18- to 22-year-olds identifying as “transgender” has [dropped](#) by half since 2022, according to findings from San Diego State University Professor Jean Twenge.

Youth opposition to progressivism has been brewing for some time: Last year, Trump, who presented himself as the unapologetically anti-woke candidate in the presidential election, [won](#) 47% of the youth vote (voters ages 18–29). No other Republican presidential ticket had cracked 40% with voters under 30 [since](#) 2004.

Some institutions are taking this public pressure seriously. Law firms have [warned](#) of the expanding legal risks related to maintaining DEI policies. Institutions of higher education have [shut down](#) their DEI initiatives or renamed their DEI offices to deflect this legal risk. But teacher unions remain enclaves of radical progressivism, despite the rising tide of anti-woke sentiment. Even as public opinion shifts against their radical agenda, union activists have doubled down on their efforts to indoctrinate students, often without their parents’ knowledge or consent, in critical race and gender theory. Incredibly, they pursue these efforts at a time when the failings of America’s crumbling, union-controlled public education system are on full display. As the new school year began, the Nation’s Report Card [revealed](#) that only 35% of 2024 high school seniors were proficient readers, and 32% were “below basic” readers. The mathematics [results](#) were even worse, with a whopping 45% of students “below basic,” and only 22% of them proficient. While academic achievement in public schools craters, union leaders and activists cling to their perennial policy “bunkie blankets”—mindless opposition to the Trump administration and slavish devotion to fringe politics.

Teacher Unions as Safe Harbors for Woke

A. Undermining the Trump Administration

Perhaps nothing symbolizes better the fanatical opposition of the teacher unions to the administration than the NEA’s adoption of a misspelled resolution at its summer meeting [decrying](#) “facism [sic]” in the second Trump administration. The resolution’s overwrought language, linking its opposition to President Trump to “the survival of civilization itself,” illustrates the takeover of the NEA by the radical Left, which stands far outside the mainstream opinions of the American public, a majority of which voted for this “facist” regime.

Underscoring their unjustified outrage against the administration, the NEA and AFT mobilized their teacher members to participate in the “No Kings Day” protests in June. The AFT [leveraged](#) the anti-Trump rally to advocate for expanding government control over education and other major sectors of the economy while decrying the so-called “militarization” of major U.S. cities. NEA president Becky Pringle [spoke](#) to a massive crowd on the National Mall on the first No Kings Day in June, and, in a reminder of the union’s devotion to the Democratic Party, [traveled](#) to Georgia to rally with ACLU members, Senator Rafael Warnock, and Stacey Abrams during the October rallies.

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B. Countering Immigration Enforcement

Union leaders have routinely attacked the legitimacy of the administration’s immigration enforcement actions.

NEA President Becky Pringle kicked off the summer by mobilizing teacher members for a May Day march in Washington, DC. She [joined](#) protesters carrying signs in support of immigration and against enforcement of our immigration laws. At the conclusion of the march, Pringle and her followers gathered across from the White House to hear from legislators, including U.S. Representatives Ilhan Omar and Pramila Jayapal, both of whom have called for the abolition of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The pro-illegal immigration, anti-law enforcement activism reached new heights on June 9, when Pringle and Weingarten rallied outside the U.S. Department of Justice to demand the release of [David Huerta](#), a Service Employees International Union leader arrested for allegedly interfering with an ICE raid in Los Angeles. At the rally, Pringle [said](#), “Enough of the ICE raids. Enough of the cruelty and hate. . . . We will not scapegoat immigrants. We will not stand by and let you do that.” Weingarten led attendees in a pro-immigration chant and later [added](#), “Fix the G-d d*mn immigration laws! Don’t arrest workers!”

None of these activities has anything to do with teaching and learning, but Weingarten and Pringle still saw fit to attend, speak, and encourage their union members to participate in mass protests. Pringle even dedicated her August [newsletter](#) to discussing these protests and encouraging member teachers to undercut enforcement of immigration laws. In her “Journal of Joy, Justice, and Excellence,” Pringle featured a photo of herself marching with May Day protesters wearing shirts from CASA (formerly the Central American Solidarity Association of Maryland), a group that [supports](#) abolishing ICE and making it harder for officials to deport illegal immigrants.

Not to be outdone, Weingarten made her anti-ICE position known on the AFT’s biggest stage. At the AFT’s annual TEACH Conference, she cranked up the fearmongering in her keynote address: “Masked agents are disappearing people—yes, disappearing them—people just trying to do an honest day’s

work.” This smearing of an entire federal law enforcement agency and its employees begs the important question where Weingarten was when President Obama’s administration [engaged](#) in record-level deportations of illegal immigrants just over a decade ago. Perhaps ICE is “facist” only when it is run by the AFT’s political opponents.

At the local level, union leaders opposed the president’s deployment of the National Guard in their cities while ignoring the rampant crime harming their members and students. Chicago Teachers Union President Stacy Davis Gates [decried](#) the deployment of the National Guard in a *USA Today* op-ed, alleging “the President declared war on the people of our city.” Davis Gates claimed that the “militarized invasion” was “demoralizing and heartbreaking,” but she ignored how heightened rampant violence in Chicago has devastated countless families. She failed to grapple with the fact that, just a few months prior, in May 2025, three shootings wounded five Chicago Public Schools students outside their school buildings. Between 2019 and 2024, more than 100 kids were [shot](#) within one-tenth of a mile of a public school in Chicago, during daylight hours and on school days. Twenty of them lost their lives to the violence. Given the highest duty of a school is to protect the children in its care, Davis Gates’ criticism of the president’s move rings profoundly hollow in light of her and the school district’s failure to protect the children attending CPS schools.

C. Perpetuating Wokeness in the Media

The teacher unions realize they are losing public opinion, making them even more desperate to control the media narrative about education. Because federally funded media has been a reliable vehicle for spreading union propaganda, recent efforts to defund so-called public media have drawn the special ire of union leaders.

When the president suggested cutting taxpayer funding to National Public Radio (NPR) and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), Weingarten reacted in a panic. In July, education freedom advocate Corey DeAngelis uncovered a [video](#) of Weingarten asking, “If we don’t have NPR . . . how do people have enough factual basis so that they know what’s going on in the world?”

Surely, Weingarten is aware of other media outlets that are unsupported by taxpayer subsidies yet still manage to cover events around the clock for seven days a week. Still, she claimed, “As



you're actually retracting on knowledge and retracting on information, what you're doing is creating this bigger and bigger enforcement that is essentially a police state." Weingarten continued, "That's the backsliding of democracy."

How NPR is funded (or whether it exists) has no connection to policing or individual freedoms, so it is extremely difficult to follow Weingarten's logic in connecting the withdrawal of public support for NPR and PBS with snuffing out individual freedoms. Certainly, history is replete with examples of police states that have forced taxpayers to fund biased or propagandistic media outlets, but a closer look at NPR's education coverage reveals why Weingarten is so intent on its preservation: for many years, NPR has reliably spouted the anti-school choice talking points favored by the teacher unions.

In May, NPR published several pieces slanted sharply against the Federal K–12 Scholarship Tax Credit (FSTC) in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act signed into law by President Trump on July 4, 2025. One piece inaccurately [described](#) the credit as a "private school voucher" program, when in reality, the FSTC is a tax credit, not a spending program, which encourages federal taxpayers to donate funds to scholarship organizations (SGOs) that in turn award funds to families in public, charter, or private schools. Families can use the scholarships to cover tuition, tutoring, specialized therapies, transportation to a school, and other education-related expenses. All of this would have been obvious to any reporter who read the law or had talked to one of the many advocates for educational freedom across the country. It proves a deeply biased reporting of the issue.

Another NPR story wrongly [implied](#) that the FSTC could harm students with disabilities, when in fact it would expand their options for specialized services beyond government-run schools that often fail to meet their unique needs.

The AFT's passionate defense of public media included signing on to a coalition [letter](#) begging members of Congress to vote against the proposed budget cuts. The letter referred to the funding cuts as a "slash-and-burn approach" rather than a recognition that so-called "public" media is increasingly beholden to leftwing interests, including those of the country's most powerful teacher unions.

D. When Union Bosses Get Caught

Despite the congressionally chartered organization's attempts to conceal the true extent of its radical activism behind closed doors at its annual meetings, the horrendous behavior of the NEA's nationwide leaders still tends to leak and shock the public. This year's revelations of rampant misconduct and extremist rhetoric were no different. At the union's annual Representative Assembly in July, Jewish delegates to the nation's largest labor union [reported](#) being intimidated, scorned, and harassed throughout the proceedings to the extent that some were shaking, felt uncomfortable sitting with certain delegations, and had [panic attacks](#). Delegates to that meeting also [approved](#) a resolution cutting NEA support for Holocaust and anti-Semitism curricular resources offered by the Anti-Defamation League—a decision eventually [walked back](#) by NEA leadership after it produced a firestorm of public criticism against the union.

The NEA's missteps did not end with that public-relations catastrophe. After school choice advocate Corey DeAngelis [leaked](#) online the NEA's 2025 Handbook, which provides information on the union and sets out strategic priorities for the year, observers quickly recognized that the NEA had deleted any mention of Jews as the primary victims of the Holocaust. The union [tried](#) to scrub the Handbook from the internet, but it was too late:

public opinion swung so hard against their radical move that the union ultimately [rewrote](#) its New Business Item on Holocaust Remembrance Day to mention "the systemic persecution and murder of six million Jews."

This was not the only time the NEA would veer frighteningly into anti-Semitic rhetoric. On October 8, 2025, the union [sent](#) its 3 million members an [email](#) that linked its "Resources for Teaching about Indigenous Peoples" page to a map that erased Israel and labeled its land as Palestine. The linked resources also [included](#) [PalestineRemembered.com](#), which spreads the false, anti-Semitic theory that Hitler was "trying to avoid the genocide option" and "was eager to 'save Jews' by shipping them anywhere, even on luxury liners." Again, public outrage against these hateful lies was so strong that the union [condemned](#) the content and quickly removed the link from the NEA website.

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The AFT, too, has fostered its share of radical messaging. In March, the AFT's higher education affiliate, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), hosted a webinar entitled "Scholasticide in Palestine." The webinar demonized Israel and ignored concerns from Jewish union members. This raised eyebrows on Capitol Hill, especially since the president of the AAUP, Todd Wilson, is also an AFT vice president.

In October, U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy, chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, sent a [letter](#) to Weingarten seeking any information about the AFT's plans to rein in the AAUP. Senator Cassidy's letter alleged that Wolfson, acting on behalf of the union, had laid the blame for anti-Semitic rhetoric at the feet of those who defend Israel's right to exist as the Jewish ancestral and religious homeland. The AFT's response did nothing to satisfy Senator Cassidy's concerns about anti-Semitism inside union ranks.

To the contrary, Dr. Wolfson [characterized](#) the letter as "undermin[ing] his constitutional rights" because AAUP "dared to hold a webinar." His flippant response offers no hope that the AFT or the



AFT President Randi Weingarten

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AAUP is serious about investigating growing anti-Semitism—masked as anti-Zionism—within their ranks.

Similarly, in the wake of Charlie Kirk’s assassination, a troubling number of public school teachers took to social media to celebrate the vicious killing. Weingarten [attempted](#) damage control, condemning the violence but insisting that the cheerleading teachers were the real victims. She responded to the alleged “targeting of educators” by accusing outraged citizens of “weaponizing this moment.” She asserted that “using this tragedy to encourage the doxxing, censorship and firing of people for their opinions—including educators’ private opinions shared during their personal time—is wrong.”

Weingarten is no stranger to violent and accusatory rhetoric. During the summer of 2025, she [accused](#) President Trump and his allies in Congress of “going for the jugular,” simply by expanding opportunities for parents to choose their children’s schools. She also released a book titled *Why Fascists Fear Teachers*, accusing her political opponents of being autocrats-in-waiting. In case the irresponsible metaphor linking Republicans to Nazis was lost on anyone, she [appeared](#) on MSNBC wearing a paperclip, a symbol of anti-Nazi resistance first used by Norwegian teachers, co-opted by Weingarten to show her opposition to the president.

More broadly, teacher unions across the country have a major anti-Semitism problem, as outlined in a recent DFI report that [reviews](#) how the American labor movement has betrayed its historical solidarity with Israel and their Jewish members and encouraged anti-Semitic and anti-Western lessons in schools and supported violent, intimidatory rhetoric and harassment against K–12 teachers and students. The California Teachers Association (CTA) recently placed this radical activism on full display by [opposing](#) AB 715, legislation adopted without dissent and signed by Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom. The law addresses ballooning anti-Semitism in California public schools through various measures, including the appointment of an Antisemitism Prevention Coordinator. CTA’s opposition to AB 715, as well as its recent objection to [removing content](#) from an “ethnic studies” curriculum that characterized Jews in Israel as white colonialist oppressors, underscores its tolerance and approval of anti-Semitism in public education.

E. Transactivist Radicalism

Despite broad public opposition to preserving single-sex spaces, particularly girls' sports and intimate facilities, the teacher unions have only strengthened their efforts to weaken Title IX protections and indoctrinate their classrooms with “transgender” propaganda, often in secret and away from parental observation.

When the Supreme Court ruled in *Mahmoud v. Taylor* that parents have the right to opt their children out of age-inappropriate curricula, the teacher unions were quick to condemn the ruling. The NEA had [filed](#) an amicus brief with the Supreme Court, urging it to allow schools to block parents from pulling their kids out of lessons involving sexually explicit or gender-ideology-infused books. Pringle [called](#) the ruling “a direct attack on our democracy.” In contrast, Weingarten [posted](#) on X, “We have to respect all children and families. . . . Parents must have a say about their own kids, they are our partners in education.”

Despite Weingarten's unusually restrained rhetoric regarding *Mahmoud*, her union is moving full speed ahead on a radical “transgender” agenda. The AFT passed a [resolution](#) declaring its support for “[e]quitable access to facilities that match gender identities” and “[p]olicies that allow transgender athletes to compete in the sports teams that they identify with.” Such policies not only violate Title IX but also undermine student safety, fairness, and privacy. The same resolution also declares the AFT's support for what it calls “gender-affirming care”—experimental and often irreversible medical interventions—and its belief that health insurance should cover the cost of such harmful, biology-rejecting procedures. The resolution offered unqualified support for such “care” and failed to distinguish between adult and child patients.

Not to be outdone, the NEA voted at its annual convention to oppose the *Mahmoud* decision by helping teacher members skirt the law. Its [New Business Item 84](#), ratified at its Representative Assembly, budgeted more than \$200,000 to “assist educators in avoiding possible disciplinary action when teaching about LGBTQ+ history, materials, resources, books, etc., while at school/work.”

The NEA budgeted more than \$200,000 to help educators skirt the law and avoid disciplinary action when teaching LGBTQ+ materials.

F. Conference Speeches

The NEA and AFT each hold large gatherings over the summer, and union leadership uses the time in the limelight to lay out goals for the union members—goals that have little to do with helping students or teachers. Pringle and Weingarten each outlined radical, leftist visions for the future.

In her [prepared remarks](#), Weingarten mentioned the president no less than 17 times. She decried the One Big Beautiful Bill Act's FSTC:

It's an unprecedented and uncapped tax credit that will hurt students in public schools, and, get this, could cost taxpayers more than \$50 billion a year. . . . They are literally taking money away from our most vulnerable students for a tax credit for the rich to use on vouchers.

Similarly, at the NEA's 104th Representative Assembly, Pringle accused "Donald Trump and his billionaire buddies" of "want[ing] to dismantle, defund, privatize, and voucherize public education," harming those in need the most.

Of course, these characterizations of the tax credit are false; the FSTC is smart policy that helps put students and families in the driver's seat of their own education. The FSTC does not take a penny away from public schools and does not cost taxpayers any money that they would not otherwise pay in federal taxes. Instead, the tax credit allows taxpayers to receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit on donations to SGOs of up to \$1,700 per year. As with existing school-choice initiatives, this tax credit and the SGOs funded by it will serve students by allowing families to choose whether to attend a public, charter, or private school. Money will flow toward families who currently have no option other than their government-assigned school.

Each speech also neglected to mention that the tax credit does not require anyone to leave their public school. If unionized districts were serving families well, Pringle and Weingarten would have nothing to fear from students having other options. Their panic over the FSTC belies an unspoken understanding that unionized school districts are not delivering the quality education that parents want for their children.

Weingarten even railed against "the straitjacket of standardized tests," making clear her opposition to objective measures of student learning.

Pringle also led the audience in a bizarre chant of "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion," begging them, "Say the words, NEA! Say the words!" If only reciting activist jargon again and again made it so, Pringle and her fellow NEA supporters might have been able to stop the decline and fall of woke education.

Conclusion

Despite the falling popularity of "woke," the activists who run the NEA, AFT, and their affiliates have not toned down their rhetoric. Why are they so willfully blind to the unpopularity of these ideas to most Americans, including their rank-and-file members?

For one, the far Left has captured the leadership of these unions and turned them into instrumentalities of a broader rabidly woke, anti-school choice, anti-parent movement. They no longer wish to make a play for the American middle and have

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thrown in their lot with those who despise democratic capitalism, the West, Israel, and traditional American values, such as faith and hard work. They view students as future “social justice” warriors and community organizers fighting for environmental and “anti-racist” causes. When faced with the worst excesses of the movement (such as downplaying the significance of the murder of 6 million Jews in the Holocaust), Weingarten and Pringle at times equivocate and put their emergency public-relations teams into action to take attention away from these heinous views. But no one should confuse these temporary measures with changes in policy. The NEA and AFT fully embrace the Mamdani Left.

Unlike corporations, postsecondary institutions, and K–12 school districts, the NEA and AFT have made the cynical calculation that they can afford to disregard the views of their rank-and-file members and continue to collect hundreds of millions of dollars in membership dues to fund their radical program. As the exclusive negotiators for their bargaining units in each school district, local union affiliates have special access to unique privileges granted by the government, such as automatic deduction of dues from paychecks, access to mailboxes and meeting rooms, and paid leave for school district employees to perform union activities. These subsidies trickle up to state and national affiliates, allowing the well-funded machinery of the NEA and AFT to ignore presidential administrations as they come and go while nurturing an unpopular ideology that they will hope will survive to fight another day.

This situation will persist only for as long as rank-and-file union members allow it. With “woke” under duress, supporters of public schools can hope that everyday teachers stand up and voice their objections to the radical program of their leaders. As more teachers realize that their dues are going to fund the pet projects of union leadership—DEI, gender ideology, anti-Israel propaganda, open borders—while ignoring the academic needs of students, they should take a simple but highly impactful step: resign their union memberships, take their dues with them, and starve the union radicals of their money, members, and organizational support. Only then will anti-woke forces be able to declare victory.

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