

The War on Christmas

October 26



New York, NY—In 2005, the Children's Museum of Manhattan honored holidays for Hispanics, Jews, Muslims and African Americans, but not for Christians. In October the museum featured Hispanic Heritage Month, as well as a Ramadan in New York City Festival; the latter event meant that children were read stories about Islamic traditions. There were no Columbus Day events for the city's Italian Catholic community. In November, there was an Eid in New York City Festival for Muslims, but Christians got nothing for Thanksgiving. Jewish and African-American holidays were celebrated in December when the museum honored Hanukkah and Kwanzaa, respectively, but there was nothing for Christians at Christmas, save for a "Fruity Fondue" event.

November 3

San Diego, CA—The regional director of the Anti-Defamation League announced his distain for "Christmas programs" and his support for "winter programs." Morris S. Casuto explained his reasoning by saying, "School and public events should be designed to enable diverse communities to participate without feeling left out or marginalized."

November 3

Huntington, WV—Marshall University instituted a decoration contest emphasizing non-Christmas symbols. "The main idea in our contest is to enrich [the] campus according to the winter tradition," explained Christina Burgueno, associate professor of modern languages and a member of the contest committee. "There is such an amount of diversity now at our campus. We want to celebrate the traditions of other people, people from other places."

November 9

The Catholic League started a boycott against Wal-Mart, citing

discrimination against Christians. Two days later, Wal-Mart folded, yielding to the league's three demands. Ergo, we called off our boycott.

Our troubles with Wal-Mart began when a woman e-mailed the company complaining about its policy of encouraging its employees to say "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas." The response she got, from a Customer Service employee called Kirby, was astounding. Here's what Kirby said (we are reproducing his statement exactly as it was sent, errors and all):

Walmart is a world wide organization and must remain conscious of this. The majority of the world still has different practices other than 'christmas' which is an ancient tradition that has its roots in Siberain shamanism. The colors associated with 'christmas' red and white are actually a representation of the aminita mascera mushroom. Santa is also borrowed from the Caucuses, mistletoe from the Celts, yule log from the Goths, the time from the Visigoth and the tree from the worship of Baal. It is a wide wide world.

The woman then e-mailed Kirby's statement to us. Our first reaction was that this was obviously the work of some underling. Wal-Mart, being a behemoth of an organization, could not possibly police everyone in every department. But we decided that Wal-Mart's top public relations person should know about this; we were curious to see what he or she might say. So we e-mailed Kirby's remark to Dan Fogleman, Wal-Mart's senior manager in public relations. To our surprise, Fogleman not did not disagree with Kirby, and even proceeded to give us a lecture on diversity. Here is part of what he told us (again, we are not correcting the errors):

As a retailer, we recognize some of our customers may be shopping for Chanukah or Kwanza gifts during this time of year and we certainly want these customers in our stores and to feel welcome, just as we do those buying for Christmas. As an

employer, we recognize the significance of the Christmas holiday among our family of associates...and close our stores in observance, the only day during the year that we are closed.

After being insulted again, we decided to do one more thing: to see how Wal-Mart treats Hanukkah, Kwanzaa and Christmas. What we found was revealing. By typing Hanukkah into the search engine of its website, 200 items appeared. Typing Kwanzaa yielded 77 items. But when Christmas was entered, here's what appeared on the screen: "We've brought you to our 'Holiday' page based on your search."

That was it. On November 9, we issued a news release titled, "Wal-Mart Bans Christmas; Boycott Launched." In it, we said that when we initially read Kirby's statement, we assumed "he might be drunk." We also said, "It's nice to know that Wal-Mart is closed on a federal holiday." We immediately contacted 126 religious groups spanning seven faith communities asking them to join with us in the boycott.

On November 10, Worldnetdaily.com flagged this story on its website as the lead news story. This led to a string of interviews on talk radio around the nation. In every case, listeners were livid: they felt betrayed that the "family-friendly" retailer would do this. So they e-mailed Fogleman to let him know what they thought. Bill Donohue e-mailed Fogleman his own missive: "Now that Wal-Mart is standing by its position, I hope you're ready for our next move. Don't forget, we have the next six weeks to pull out all the stops, and we will."

Meanwhile, Wal-Mart spokeswoman Jolanda Steward told the press that the store was just trying to help its customers "celebrate their individual needs and wants." To which Donohue said, "I thought Wal-Mart was a department store—not a Wellness Center." Then Donohue got hold of the e-mail address of a senior Wal-Mart official, Ryan Loken, and sent him the following note:

Wal-Mart has made a huge mistake taking us on just at the start of the Christmas buying season. Why you are keeping Fogleman on as your PR man is mind-boggling. Have you seen worldnetdaily.com? Are you aware that our staff has been doing one radio talk show interview after another all day, with many more scheduled? Ask Fogleman how many e-mails he has received and what people are saying.

The Left has unfairly attacked Wal-Mart for years. But now you've angered your base—conservative Christians.

To put an end to our boycott, read the news release I wrote today. I'm not asking for the moon. But I will tell you this much: we have the money, time and determination necessary to keep this up for the next six weeks. In other words, the ball is in your court.

The November 10 news release listed three demands: "We want a) an apology for insulting Christians by effectively banning Christmas b) a withdrawal of its insane statement regarding the origins of Christmas and c) a revision on its website."

When Donohue got to work early on November 11, news reports were carrying the Wal-Mart apology, saying that Kirby had been fired. Then Donohue checked Wal-Mart's website and found that by typing Christmas in its search engine, customers were taken to the Christmas site. We thus declared victory and an end to the boycott.

November 28

Olympia, WA—Public school teachers in three districts (North Thurston, Olympia and Tumwater) were no longer permitted to engage in activities that promote any particular religious holiday. Instead, students were encouraged to participate in "change of season" activities. "We can't promote one belief over the other," said Paula Quinn, principal at Lydia Hawk Elementary in Lacey. "At Lydia Hawk, we have a very, very, diverse population, and I try to be very sensitive to that."

November 29

Wellington, FL—A Wellington Village Council member withdrew his request to include a nativity scene in the annual holiday display after getting little support from village and business officials. The holiday display included a Christmas tree and a menorah.

November 29

Jefferson, GA—The Jackson County School System sent a letter to teachers prohibiting them from wearing “any pins, angels, crosses, clothing” with any religious connotation or affiliation, and from referring to any party as a “Christmas” party. Christmas songs with religious wording were removed from the winter concert.

November 29

After a public outcry, Lowe’s home-improvement stores were forced to change banners that referred to Christmas trees as “Holiday Trees” in English and “Christmas Trees” in Spanish. The store decided to call all Christmas trees by their proper name.

December 1

The Catholic League contacted Lands’ End clothing store about the use of “holidays” instead of Christmas in its catalog. Printed below is part of the reply we received from Merlin W. Gorsline in the Customer Relations Department:

We find ourselves in a difficult position with this issue. As a result, we have adopted the “holiday” terminology as a way to comply with one of the basic freedoms granted to all Americans: freedom of religion. We recognize that Christmas is a Christian holiday, and one of the foremost teachings of the Christian faith is a love for one’s fellowman—no matter what [sic] his race, religion or creed. If we knew which customers feel as you do, we would be delighted to send them catalogs with “Merry Christmas” splashed throughout the pages. However,

we don't.

After fielding our complaint, Jackie Schutty, an executive from Lands' End, told us on December 7 that "the information that was recently shared by one of our Lands' End representatives does not accurately reflect our company's position." She also said, "We apologize for any confusion and appreciate the opportunity to clarify our position."

December 1

Auburn, AL—Auburn University's Student Government Association renamed the university's annual Christmas tree a "Holiday tree" in a press release announcing the tree-lighting event.

December 1

South Florida—Florida Atlantic University called an "EMERGENCY" meeting about the controversy surrounding the school's "Finals Week" tree. For the past six years, the "Finals Week" tree—adorned with lollipops, Fritos, etc. (courtesy of the faculty)—had been on display at the end of each semester. Mark Tunick, a professor and interim dean, made the mistake of e-mailing 57 employees encouraging them to support "the traditional finals week Christmas tree with snack." Professor Martin J. Sweet said religious symbols don't belong on campus. Student government officials and faculty members pledged to hold "multiple meetings" to deal with this issue.

The Catholic League could not resist noting that the same university made headlines following Hurricane Katrina: condoms were promiscuously distributed to students. This is the same school that caught our attention in 2001 when it hosted the anti-Catholic play, "Corpus Christi."

December 3

Chula Vista, CA—Six girls were barred from performing their hip-hop dance routine at the city's "Holiday Festival" show because they wore "Jesus Christ Dancers" shirts at the event.

A city official prevented them from performing because of the message on their shirts and the Christian music that accompanied the routine. An attorney for the American Family Association stated that “The city allowed a Hawaiian prayer dance, a belly dancer and other ‘holiday’ performers, and there was a tree-lighting ceremony afterward where a rabbi lighted a menorah.”

December 6

Glendale, WI—The Glendale-River Hills School District had a written policy stating that songs with “dogmatic religious statements” were banned from concerts. But this didn’t stop the school’s concert from including Hanukkah songs.

December 7

Shawnee, KS—Deputy City Manager Carol Gonzalez barred Joseph and Mary actors from the town’s annual Christmas celebration because she felt it crossed the line between the separation of church and state.

December 7

Federal Way, WA—A nutrition services employee mistakenly placed the words “Merry Christmas” on lunch menus for all 23 elementary school. In response, the district recalled and reprinted them with the greeting “Happy Holidays.” A school spokeswoman for the district said “Merry Christmas” on the menus violated the school system’s policies because “it has a religious connotation for some people.”

December 7

Medina, WA—Medina Elementary School removed a “Giving Tree” with mittens labeled with gift ideas for the poor after a parent complained that it had religious connotations.

December 7

Bartlett, TN—The Memphis Library system erected a nativity scene that included just three farm animals and a shepherd boy. The presence of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, along with the

Three Wise Men, were deemed “inappropriate” by school officials.

December 8

Manhasset, NY—At a Christmas tree lighting celebration, Town of North Hempstead supervisor Jon Kaiman became frustrated when the Rev. Nick Zientarski gave a traditional Catholic blessing. In the midst of the blessing, Kaiman was overheard saying, “This is nonsense,” “We’re not doing this next year,” and “I can’t believe this.” When Rev. Zientarski finished his blessing, Kaiman immediately took the microphone and told the crowd, “I just want to make it clear that this is in no way a religious ceremony. We’re here to celebrate the holiday tree lighting. This is no place for a religious ceremony.” After public outrage, Kaiman apologized to Fr. Zientarski and the people of North Hempstead for his behavior.

December 12

Sacramento, CA—Patricia Sonntag, director of the Office of Services to Students with Disabilities at California State University, Sacramento, banned 4th of July celebrations, along with Christmas, from her office. Here is her directive:

With the new year, we will now celebrate the seasons and holiday without decorations in the public areas and hallways. This is a secular university and we are a public service area that has a diverse employee and student populations [sic] even in our private offices. In order to avoid offending someone else, we will not display celebratory reminders. This specifically includes Christmas, Thanksgiving, Halloween, Valentines, 4th of July, St. Patrick’s Day and Easter, off the top of the list. I, for one, am the worst offender and celebrant. Time has come to recognize that religious discrimination, as well as ethnic insensitivity to certain holidays, is forbidden. I am sorry if this offends anyone, but it is time to start the new year differently.

December 13

New York, NY—Condo board members at Donald Trump's luxury 220 Riverside Blvd. building refused to allow a tenant to put a nativity scene in the lobby of the building, even though they displayed a menorah.

December 14

Chicago, IL—The Theatre Building Chicago hosted the play, "The Eight: Reindeer Monologues," by Jeff Goode. The play is about sexual harassment by Santa and an abused reindeer.

December 19

Mine Hill, NJ—An elementary school changed the title and lyrics to the Christmas carol "Silent Night, Winter Night" at its "X-mas Files" concert. Children were also banned from writing "Merry Christmas" in class but were allowed to write Feliz Navidad. For the concert, students were encouraged to bring in musical selections but were told not to bring any religious songs.

December 19

Centennial, CO—Heritage Elementary School officials banned a student from bringing a nativity scene to school and telling the story of Christmas. The school also barred candy canes that contained a story about their religious symbolism, and cookies shaped like traditional Christmas symbols.

December 19

Texas public school teachers were told that they could not mention the word "Christmas" or tell the nativity story.

December 29

Holliston, MA—The Central Street fire station was forced to remove an illuminated cross and menorah after a resident complained it violated a new town policy.

Politically Correct Trees:

The following venues replaced Christmas trees with "Holiday Trees": Hagerstown, Maryland; Duffy Square in Times Square,

New York; Overland Park, Kansas; Roanoke, Virginia; Bangor, Maine; Westminster, Maryland; and Auburn University (a vote by the Student Senate to change the name to 'Christmas tree' lost 22-4). In lieu of a Christmas tree, the following venues had a "Giving Tree": the Naval Academy; Louisiana State University; University of New Mexico; Madison, Wisconsin; and West Hollywood.

In place of a Christmas tree, there was a "Grand Tree" in Atlanta; a "Union Tree" at Purdue University; a "Peace Tree" in Washington Park, Illinois; and a "Friendship Tree" was found in Hoffman Estates, Illinois and Manchester, Massachusetts.

The display of secular "Holiday Trees," alongside the Jewish religious symbol, the menorah, was commonplace, ranging from places like San Diego Hospice & Palliative Care to Langley Air Force Base in Virginia to the Village Hall in Gurnee, Illinois.

Christmas Vandalism:

From nativity scenes to secular Christmas displays, vandals hit the following places: Birmingham, AL; Homewood, AL; Montgomery, AL; Bella Vista, AR; Eureka Springs, AR; Little Rock, AR; Van Buren, AR; Campbell, CA; Covina, CA; Fremont, CA; Glendale, CA; Martinez, CA; Newport Beach, CA; Fresno, CA; Los Angeles, CA; Walnut Creek, CA; Westminster, CO; Cape Coral, FL; Delray Beach, FL; Longboat Key, FL; Miami Springs, FL; Medley, FL; Port Saint Lucie, FL; St. Lucie West, FL; St. Petersburg, FL; Belleville, IL; Galesburg, IL; West Frankfort, IL; Olathe, KS; Marrero, LA; Brockton, MA; Cohasset, MA; Londonderry, MA; Quincy, MA; Glen Burnie, MD; Greenbelt, MD; Severn, MD; Port Huron, MI; Waltz, MI; Bay Port, MN; Marquis Point, MN; West St. Paul, MN; Woodbury, MN; Asbury Park, NJ; Branchville, NJ; Hamilton, NJ; Howell, NJ; Old Bridge, NJ; Prospect Park, NJ; Sayreville, NJ (police found 27 baby Jesus statues in the car of a suspected thief); Trenton, NJ;

Holbrook, NY; Larchmont, NY; Pearl River, NY; Troy, NY; Hilton Head, NC; Wilmington, NC; Cheviot, OH; Dayton, OH; Fremont, OH; Hamilton, OH; Whitaker Park, OK; Medford, OR; New Kensington, PA; Watsonstown, PA; Wilkes-Barre, PA; South Kingstown, RI; Lexington, SC; Allen, TX; Grapevine, TX; Houston, TX; Killeen, TX; Murfreesboro, TN; Draper, UT; Logan, UT; Fredricksburg, VA; Eatonville, WA; Seattle, WA; Madison, WI; New Berlin, WI; Oak Hill, WV.

A large blindfolded Santa was found hanging from a tree in Miami Beach, FL; in Boston, vandals decapitated Santa; Santa's throat was cut in Lincoln, NE; a dead Santa turned up in Oklahoma City, OK; a bloody Santa holding a severed head was displayed in New York City (this was done intentionally by the homeowners); and in Orlando, FL, a bloody Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer was found swinging from a tree.