

“WAR ON CHRISTMAS” DOESN’T LACK FOR EVIDENCE

The “War on Christmas” began in the 1980s with legal challenges to nativity scenes on public property, and then morphed into a multicultural rage in the 1990s. It peaked around 2005-2008, and then subsided.

The anti-Christmas forces are still out there, most notably on college campuses. One thing never changes: the anti-Christmas activists continue to make spurious legal and ideological arguments to justify their hostility to the holiday. But they do not speak for most Americans.

As a recent Pew Research Center survey showed, 90 percent of Americans celebrate Christmas. The majority still celebrate Christmas as a religious holiday, though somewhat less than a few years ago. The majority also note that the religious roots of Christmas are less emphasized now than in the past, however only a third say they are bothered by it.

Some observers conclude that since most Americans are not bothered by the diminishing religious role of Christmas that that is evidence of how contrived the “War on Christmas” is. Wrong.

The attacking and neutering of Christmas has had the cooperation of elites from many segments of society: the courts; the universities; the elementary and secondary schools; the media; the entertainment industry; and activist secular organizations. All have played a pivotal role. So it would be astonishing if the survey data were different.

It is important to note that the elites did not take their cues from the people: there was no push by the public to accomplish this end.

Americans are a practical people. Their primary interests are both micro and local: they put their family and community first. In general, they tend to accommodate themselves to the prevailing winds of the culture, even if they would prefer different conditions. This includes the transformation of Christmas.

Instead of asking respondents whether they are “bothered” by the decline in the religious elements of Christmas, Pew researchers should have asked if they are “happy” with this outcome. No doubt that would have elicited a different response.

Most Americans are not cultural warriors, so when they note changes in the culture that they dislike, they tend to shrug, saying such things as, “it is what it is.” That should not be read as an endorsement: it is a way of practically adjusting to new norms and values.

Similarly, if the American people had been asked some 30 years ago, when the “War on Christmas” began, whether they would prefer to preserve the religious roots of Christmas, or adopt a more secular approach, it is a sure bet they would have opted for the former. But the elites never asked—they never do—they simply imposed.

Anyone who thinks the “War on Christmas” is not real should go to the Catholic League website and check out our Annual Reports; there are hundreds of examples available online. Below follows a short list of some of our favorites.

THE DATA

2017

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority—Banned a D.C. bus ad by the Archdiocese of Washington because it featured the words, “Find the Perfect Gift.” It neither mentioned nor depicted Christ.

University of Minnesota—Santa Claus, Christmas trees and the colors red and green are examples of inappropriate “religious iconography” during the holiday season, according to a paper distributed during a “Respecting Religious Diversity” event. “Jewish Hanukkah” is targeted, too, with menorahs and the colors blue and white also described as being “not appropriate.”

2015

University of Tennessee—The Office of Diversity and Inclusion at UT issued guidelines indicating which kinds of “holiday” celebrations would be tolerated, and which would not be. Best of all was their admonition not to hold “a Christmas party in disguise.”

December 2

Marlborough, NH—The school superintendent banned use of the word “Christmas” from all Christmas events, including celebrations at the local American Legion post. He said he was constitutionally obligated to censor Christmas. Bill Donohue suggested that he contact the United States Congress and demand that it rescind Christmas as a national holiday.

December 15

Johnson County, KY—The superintendent of schools censored all references to religion in this year’s Christmas celebrations. Specifically, he banned a presentation of “A Charlie Brown Christmas” at one school.

2014

December 15

Orono, ME—An administrator at the University of Maine, emailed other employees advising them not to display any “decoration that could be perceived as religious” including “xmas trees, wreaths, xmas presents, candy canes, etc.”

2013

November 15

West Columbia, SC—The American Humanist Association threatened to sue the East Point Academy charter school over its annual Christmas toy drive “because the purpose and effect of Operation Christmas Child is to induce impoverished children to convert to Christianity.”

December 5

Frisco, TX—Students who attended Nichols Elementary School’s “Winter Party” were banned from talking about Christmas or any other religious holiday.

December 5

Nashville, TN—Two shoppers were asked to leave the Opry Mills Mall because they were dressed in Christmas costumes and wishing people a Merry Christmas.

December 12

Kings Park, NY—Officials at the Ralph J. Osgood Intermediate School decreed that the version of “Silent Night” performed during the school’s concert would delete all religious references. Thus “Silent Night” was sung with lyrics such as “Holy infant,” “Christ the Savior,” and “Jesus Lord at thy birth” omitted.

2011

November 3

The Air Force apologized after being accused of religious intolerance by the Military Religious Freedom Foundation for promoting Operation Christmas Child. Sponsored by Samaritan’s Purse, a Christian group, it sends Christmas gifts to impoverished children worldwide.

2009

December 1-4

Chelmsford, MA—The Byam Elementary School asked parents to donate holiday gifts to the school’s holiday gift shop. Shopping guidelines specified “No Christmas, Chanukah, or religious items,” and “No Santa, candy canes or stockings.”

December 14

Slatington, PA—Santa was banned from his gift-giver role in the Northern Lehigh Valley School District in Pennsylvania; instead the district mascot, the Bulldog, got the job.

December 18-19

Benton, AR—A children's play "Christmas Hang-Ups" included a hula girl. The woman in charge of the play announced that the hula girl represented the reason for the season: "The meaning of Christmas is to not judge each other."

2007

December

During a "Winter Concert" at a public elementary school in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, D.C., "The Twelve Days of Christmas" was performed, but the word "Christmas" was replaced throughout the song with the word "winter."

2006

Penn State's Associate Professor of Diversity Education issued guidelines for holiday parties "neutral" decorations—"flowers, balloons, candles and snowflakes."

2005

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.

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

2004

Sacramento, CA—Three first-grade teachers were ordered by a superior not to let the word "Christmas" slip from their lips.

2001

Rochester, MN—Two 13-year-old middle school students were disciplined following a holiday skit. Their offense was wearing red and green scarves and ending the skit by saying, "We hope you all have a merry Christmas."

Plymouth, IL—A second-grade teacher was warned by the principal not to read a book about Christmas to her students. The book was available in the school library.

Kensington, MD—The town of Kensington officially banned Santa Claus at its annual Christmas tree lighting ceremony.

Northdale, FL—Government officials banned icicle lights that some residents wanted put up on public property as part of the Christmas season.

1997

Hillsborough, NJ—The school board decided to change the name of the Christmas holiday to the "December season" in order to avoid "religious overtones." Classroom gift-giving was also banned as a religious activity.

1996

Sacramento, CA—In a public school a ban was placed on celebrating Christmas because school officials held that Christianity "was not a world religion."