

Culture, History,
and Political
Correctness 10.14

Kate Smith and The National Anthem

- Kate Smith introduced “God Bless America” in 1939. She was the original singer and to this day her’s is the most popular rendition
- In April 2019, the New York Yankees and Philadelphia Flyers stopped playing a recording of Kate Smith singing “God Bless America” because it emerged that Smith recorded a song called “That’s Why Darkies Were Born” in 1931, when she was 24
- The Flyers also removed a statue of her from the stadium





Kate Smith and The National Anthem

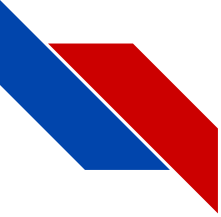
“But it is also a fact that listening to Smith’s rendition of Irving Berlin’s “God Bless America” has been an experience of pure patriotic exhilaration for millions of people, most of whom by now have never heard of Kate Smith, whose life and career were stellar in every respect beyond two songs. Criticize the condescending songs she recorded in the 1930s—and move on.” -Daniel Henninger Opinion piece from the Wall Street Journal



Chief Wahoo and the Cleveland Indians



Stop at
3:15



Colin Kaepernick and Nike's Betsy Ross Shoes

- Days before the planned July 4th release of the special edition shoe “Air Max 1,” Nike pulled the product, recalling it from retail outlets where, in some cases, it had already been distributed
- The last minute pull was over concerns from Colin Kaepernick, the former NFL player and flag kneeling Nike spokesman, who said the flag came from a period of slavery and the symbol has been appropriated by white nationalist groups
- "Nike made the decision to halt distribution [of the shoe] based on concerns that it could unintentionally offend and detract from the nation's patriotic holiday." -Nike press release
- On Twitter, Ted Cruz commented “It’s a good thing Nike only wants to sell shoes to people who hate the American flag”
- In reaction to the pull, Republican Arizona governor has retracted over \$1 million in financial incentives for Nike’s planned new factory in the state
 - "We don't need to suck up to companies that consciously denigrate our nation's history"

Colin Kaepernick and Nike's Betsy Ross Shoes

- [Wahooing Betsy Ross](#)
 - This opinion article mentions all three of the cited controversies



A screenshot of a web browser displaying a WSJ Opinion article. The browser's address bar shows 'wsj.com'. The page header includes 'WSJ | OPINION' and navigation links for 'Home', 'World', 'U.S.', 'Politics', 'Economy', 'Business', 'Tech', 'Markets', 'Opinion', 'Life & Arts', and 'Real Estate'. The article title is 'Wahooing Betsy Ross' by Daniel Henninger, dated July 10, 2019. The article's lead sentence is 'What's striking about Colin Kaepernick's Nike sneaker ban is how easy it was.' There is an advertisement for IBM LinuxONE at the top of the article content, and a video player at the bottom showing a '0:11' duration and 'ADVERTISEMENT' text.



Questions

1. How far is too far? Which, if any, of these examples are appropriate and which are overreactions?
2. Does regulating culture hurt freedom of speech or are they all necessary steps to come to terms with our past?
3. What effect does removing these symbols have on our political discourse? Does it push people to be more progressive minded or does it push those who silently see these things as inoffensive to vote in a man who is the antithesis of it?
 - a. Long term and short term effects might be important to distinguish here
4. In the case of Kate Smith and the national anthem, are there certain things that once a person does makes him/her unable to contribute to culture? Does the time period that those things were done matter?
5. If some or all of these examples are appropriate cultural corrections, how should Americans embrace our past culturally?
 - a. Or is culturally embracing our past even important? Should we look only to the future?



Columbus murals: Fr. Jenkins' message to the University

Dear Members of the Notre Dame Community,

As we celebrate the feast of Fr. Basil Moreau, C.S.C., founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, and as we prepare to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Walk the Walk Week at Notre Dame, I write to let you know of a recent decision.

The **murals** by Luigi Gregori that adorn the ceremonial entrance to Notre Dame's Main Building depict the life and exploration of Christopher **Columbus**. Painted in 1882-84, not long after a devastating fire and reconstruction of the Main Building, they reflect the attitudes of the time and were intended as a didactic presentation, responding to cultural challenges for the school's largely immigrant, Catholic population. In recent years, however, many have come to see the **murals** as at best blind to the consequences of **Columbus**'s voyage for the indigenous peoples who inhabited this "new" world and at worst demeaning toward them.



Columbus murals: Fr. Jenkins' message to the University

Gregori painted the murals directly on to the plaster of the walls, and so any attempt to move them would damage and likely destroy the works. Since the 1990s, a brochure has been provided that explains to viewers the context of the murals' composition and some of the historical reality of the events depicted. However, because the second-floor hall of the Main Building is a busy thoroughway for visitors and members of the University community, it is not well suited for a thoughtful consideration of these paintings and the context of their composition. We will, therefore, create a permanent display for high-quality, high-resolution images of the murals in a campus setting to be determined that will be conducive to such an informed and careful consideration. The murals on the walls of the Main Building will themselves be covered by woven material consistent with the décor of the space, though it will be possible to display the murals on occasion. I will establish a committee to decide on the place to display the images of the murals and the appropriate communication around the display. We will begin soon the making of covers for the murals.



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Our goal in making this change is to respect both Gregori's murals, understood in their historical context, and the reality and experience of Native Americans in the aftermath of Columbus's arrival. We wish to preserve artistic works originally intended to celebrate immigrant Catholics who were marginalized at the time in society, but do so in a way that avoids unintentionally marginalizing others. The course described above, we believe, honors the University's heritage, of which we are justly proud, and better respects the heritage of native peoples, who have known great adversity since the arrival of Europeans.

Remembering the legacy of Dr. King and asking in prayer for the intercession of Fr. Moreau, let us renew in our minds and hearts our commitment to respect the dignity of all individuals, their communities, and their cultures, with particular concern for the most vulnerable.

Respectfully,

Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C.
President

Fr. John Jenkins, liberal (?)





“When will the Columbus murals actually be covered?” 10.8.2019

But so far, there’s been no word on when the murals will be covered. When I asked University President Fr. John Jenkins’s spokesman, Dennis Brown, what the deal was, I was instead referred to the Jenkins’ Sept. 17 [annual address](#) to the faculty.

In his speech, Jenkins announced the University will act on the recommendations of the ad-hoc committee created in the wake of the decision, which published its [report](#) in July. None of these recommendations give a specific date for the covering to take place, however.



Questions

6. Do you think Notre Dame's solution to cover the Columbus murals in the main building was the right call? If so, why? If not, what should be done differently?
7. Do you think the conversation about Christopher Columbus being either a good or bad person by today's standards is relevant to the conversation about covering up the murals?
8. What do you think about the phrase "erasing history"?