



Eye on Culture



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Christmas Clashes 2007

Christmas Spirit Spreading, but Grinches Getting Grinchier

By Kristen Fyfe

There's good news and bad news this Christmas.

First, the good. Americans are pushing back more than ever against the generic "holiday" tide (see Santa's Helpers list below). As part of that effort, CMI is unveiling the Grinch-o-Meter, which rates those who are Christmas-challenged.

But here's the bad: Some of the Grinches seem to be scaling new heights of peevishness and absurdity. And although the national news media are largely ignoring the cultural battle underway, local news sources have been rich with detail.

Here is a roundup of some of the more interesting people, institutions and media stories in this season's Christmas culture clash, with their Grinch-o-Meter ratings. The Grinch-o-Meter is CMI's new tool for measuring the Grinchiness of those seeking to secularize, diminish or tarnish the celebration of Christmas in America. People who actively seek to wreck Christmas for others (for example, ACLU lawsuits regarding nativity scenes), or do something profoundly petty, get a 10. Others who start off Grinchy and then correct themselves receive a middling score. People who embrace and promote Christmas without having their arms twisted get a zero on the Grinch-o-Meter.

Grinch-o-Meter Ratings 2007

- **TOP Grinch-o-Meter Award:** The 17 congressmen who [supported a resolution recognizing](#) Islam and Ramadan but voted “no” or “present” (that is, there but wouldn’t vote) on a similar resolution introduced by Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa) recognizing Christianity and Christmas. Lawmakers who voted “no” for Christianity and “yes” for Islam are: Reps. Gary Ackerman (D-NY), Yvette Clarke (D-NY), Diana DeGette (D-CO), Alcee Hastings (D-FL), Jim McDermott (D-WA), Bobby Scott (D-VA), Fortney Stark (D-CA) and Lynn Woolsey (D-CA). Those who voted “present” on Christianity and “yes” on Islam include: Reps. John Conyers (D-MI), Barney Frank (D-MA), Rush Holt (D-NJ), Donald Payne (D-NJ), Janice Schakowsky (D-IL), Allyson Schwartz (D-PA), Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL), Peter Welch (D-VT) and John Yarmuth (D-KY). **[Grinch-o-Meter: 10-Plus]**
- **Ft. Collins, Colorado** – The city created a Holiday Display Task Force, which recommended banning red and green lights and using only white ones and only secular symbols. A local ACLU representative was on the task force. Fox’s Bill O’Reilly reported on November 27 that the task force’s recommendations were “rebuffed.” The Council voted 6-1 to keep their Christmas decorations. **[Task Force gets a Grinch-o-Meter 10; Council scores a 2]**
- **Ridgeland Schools** – The Oak Lawn, Illinois district was going to do away with Christmas parties. But parents raised a fuss, so the school board decided that rather than take Christmas parties off the agenda, they would include celebrations of Ramadan and other Muslim holidays. **[Grinch-o-Meter initially registered a 10, but dialed back to a 5]**
- **Companies that operate government-assisted housing for senior citizens** – In Plant City, Florida and Troy, Pennsylvania, residents were told they cannot decorate common areas in their buildings with religious symbols at Christmas. After being contacted by Liberty Counsel these companies reversed their decisions. **[Grinch-o-Meter initially registered a 10, but dialed back to a 2]**
- **Spokane, Washington** – The Associated Press reported that the Spokane Public Schools sent home a calendar for elementary school students with “important dates” for December. Hanukkah, Human Rights Day, winter break, first day of winter, Kwanzaa and the Islamic holy day of Eid-al-Adha were on the list, but one rather significant

holiday beginning with a “C” didn’t make the cut. A school spokesperson said, “In our efforts to be inclusive we missed the obvious.” The school corrected the omission in the online calendar. **[Grinch-o-Meter registered 10 initially but dialed back to 2]**

- **Barbara Walters** – During the December 13 episode of ABC’s *The View*, Walters whined about the White House Christmas card because it quotes the Bible’s book of Nehemiah. “Don’t you think it’s a little interesting that the president of all the people is sending out a religious Christmas card?” she asked her co-hosts. **[Grinch-o-Meter: 9]**
- **New York City officials** – gave the Christian Defense Coalition a Scrooge-like two-hour window to display a small nativity scene in midtown Manhattan. The display is part of “The Nativity Project,” a nationwide campaign to set up nativity scenes in well-traveled public areas. **[Grinch-o-Meter: 9]**
- **Seattle-Tacoma International Airport** – The airport made major headlines last Christmas when it removed all of the Christmas trees on display throughout the airport after being threatened with a lawsuit if a menorah was not also included in the display. This year, the airport convened a “holiday decorations advisory committee” which determined that the airport would not use any decorations with religious connotations. The *Seattle Post Intelligencer* reports this year’s décor is a “grove of luminous birches up to 30 feet high and hung with crystals and mirrors to reflect colored, low-energy lights.” Above the trees will be a “spiraling flock of migrating birds cut out of foam.” Wind chimes will occasionally ring as well. **[Grinch-o-Meter: 9]**
- **Chattanooga, Tennessee officials** – For years the city has included a live nativity scene in its public festivities. This year, after receiving a complaint, the city decided to do away with the nativity scene. A public backlash resulted in the nativity scene being moved to a local church. **[Grinch-o-Meter: 9]**
- **Hollywood, California** – For 75 years the city has sponsored a Hollywood Christmas Parade, but it refused to sponsor the parade this year. The Los Angeles City Council has taken over, and is changing the name to the Hollywood Santa Parade. **[Grinch-o-Meter: 8]**
- **The [Texas Gas Transmission Company](#)** – The company ended a four-decade-long tradition in Owensburg, Kentucky of displaying a large, lighted cross. The company’s president, H. Dean Jones II, said

the cross was a religious symbol and the company didn't want to alienate people of other faiths. **[Grinch-o-Meter: 8]**

- **Missouri State University** – The college took down a Christmas tree from an atrium in a campus building after a Jewish faculty member said it “showed a lack of sensitivity” to people of other religions. After the local press reported the story, the administration reconsidered and put the tree back up. **[Grinch-o-Meter registered 8 initially but dialed back to 2]**
- **Oberlin, Ohio artist Keith McGuckin** – Last year it was gingerbread Nazis with Swastika-labeled candles. This year, McGuckin has created a murderous snow woman and a drug smuggling elf. His art is on display at the Oberlin Public Library and a local crafts store, according to WEWS in Cleveland. **[Grinch-o-Meter: 7]**
- **The Ohio Department of Natural Resources** – Bureaucrats initially ordered all state parks to remove Nativity scenes because of one complaint. After being contacted by Liberty Counsel, a Christian legal defense organization, the ODNR changed its stance and decided to continue “prior holiday traditions.” **[Grinch-o-Meter: 6]**
- **New Hyde Park, New York school officials** – The district drew the ire of more than 250 residents when it considered changing the name of school Christmas Concerts to Holiday or Winter Concerts. *The New York Times* reported the large crowd came out in August to demand to keep “Christmas” in the Christmas concerts. The district reportedly was considering the change based on a single complaint. **[Grinch-o-Meter: 5]**

Overall, the Grinches seem to be losing ground to common sense and tradition. During the Nov. 27 broadcast of *The O'Reilly Factor*, conservative talk radio host Mike Gallagher said he believed that the rise of conservative voices in the media, especially on talk radio and on Fox News Channel, has helped shift the tide in the War on Christmas.

No doubt the clashes will continue. The ACLU **[Grinch-o-Meter: 10-plus]** typically only has to threaten a lawsuit against a town or school, and administrators will buckle. On top of that, advertisers and retailers continue to hype the generic “Holiday” at the expense of Christmas. The “Duh, Duh, Duh, Duh” ads by carmaker Hyundai come to mind. **[Grinch-o-Meter: 8]** Retailers like Banana Republic, The Gap (also owns Old Navy), Eddie Bauer

and Petco [**collective Grinch-o-Meter: 8**] spend massive amounts of advertising dollars and use only the word “Holiday.” Some companies go to ridiculous lengths not to mention Christmas. Circuit City and CVS [**Grinch-o-Meter: 8**] have ads for “Free Shipping” or a “Holiday Shipping Schedule” for delivery by December 24. That would be *Christmas* Eve.

Other retailers have been more responsive. Lowe’s, the home improvement chain, came under fire in November when one of its circulars carried the banner “Family Trees” over pictures of Christmas trees. Lowe’s issued a public apology and said it would be advertising them as Christmas trees this year. [**Grinch-o-Meter: 3**] Home Depot still calls the conifers (both fake and live) “Holiday Trees.” [**Grinch-o-Meter: 9**]

For updated lists of retailers who are Christmas friendly, check [Focus on the Family](#) and [Liberty Counsel](#), which regularly update their information.

And then there are television networks. Again, the push/pull of the Christmas clash is evident. Every year, different networks air classic Christmas movies or TV shows like *Charlie Brown’s Christmas*, in which Linus recites the Biblical account of Jesus’ birth. It is always the top-rated show across multiple demographics when it airs. [**ABC aired the program this year. Grinch-o-Meter: 0**] In contrast, two-thirds of the publicly owned PBS stations refused to air the program [“The Birth of Christ,”](#) the CD of which is currently No. 4 on the Billboard charts. [**For those 200+ stations, Grinch-o-Meter: 10**].


There is little doubt that the culture clash surrounding Christmas will not end any time soon. In a *Chicago Tribune* article about the Oak Lawn schools’ Christmas-Ramadan brouhaha, Bernard Beck, a sociology professor emeritus at Northwestern University, said demographic shifts often create such conflicts. He added that religious tolerance in America is constantly being renegotiated.

Despite the continuing liberal efforts to sanitize the religious aspects of Christmas and make it just another holiday, renegotiation is, in fact, happening. The Christmas Spirit is spreading, as attested by the activities of people like those who made our Santa’s Helper List.

Santa's Helpers 2007

Many organizations have taken a stand for Christmas. Among them are Focus on the Family, American Family Association, Concerned Women for America, Liberty Counsel and the Alliance Defense Fund. Standout media Christmas defenders include Bill O'Reilly and John Gibson at Fox News and conservative talk radio host Mike Gallagher.

But there are others, less well known, who are also making a difference. Below is a list of some unsung heroes who have received limited, if any, media attention in their efforts to fight for Christmas this year.

- **Chad Fradette**, president of the [Green Bay, Wisconsin city council](#), paid for a nativity scene at City Hall after learning of an anti-religion group's protest of a nativity in a smaller town 40 miles away. "So now the Freedom From Religion Foundation can pick on somebody a little larger," Fradette said.
 - [Worcester Wreath Co. of Harrington](#), Maine, donates 10,000 wreaths every year to place on the graves of soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery. The owner also covers the expenses for trucking the wreaths from Maine to Virginia. In 2006, the program was expanded to provide wreaths to 200 state and national veteran's cemeteries. This year, the company will also send wreaths to 24 veteran's cemeteries on foreign soil.
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- **The Wisconsin State Assembly** voted to call the balsam fir in the Capitol a "Christmas tree." The tree had been called a Christmas tree from 1916 to 1985, according to Rep. Marlin Schneider (D), but had been downgraded in recent years. In an interview with Fox News he said, "Political correctness took over and then we decided it would become a holiday tree. But what it really is, is a Christmas tree, and there's nothing really wrong with that."
 - **The U.S. Marines Toys for Tots** program is doing yeoman's work again, this year sifting through donated toys to make sure children don't receive any toys recalled due to lead contamination.

- **Ashley Tarter** of James City County, Virginia, created a line of buttons that say “Wish Me a Merry Christmas.” Tarter was so fed up with store employees who would only say “Happy Holidays” that she launched the button business in July. Her Website is www.wmamc.com
- **Jim Ward** of Westminster, Maryland, operates Operation Christmas Tree. The program seeks to send Christmas trees to troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Operation Christmas Tree has shipped 5,000 trees this season. Ward was inspired by his daughter, an Army medic who was deployed last Christmas. www.operationchristmastree.com
- Thousands of individuals, like **Linda Harvey** of Mission: America, take the time to write to companies to express her disgust when they omit the word “Christmas” in their advertising. Harvey, based in Columbus, Ohio, wrote to several, saying, “I will not be buying from you this year. Your latest e-mail advertisement fails to mention the actual name of the actual holiday for which we’re all supposed to spend so much money. Until you actually mention Christmas, I can’t find any reason for which to spend money with you.”
- **Finally, we salute the anonymous author** of the poem CMI received last week:

*’Twas the month before Christmas when all through our land,
Not a Christian was praying, nor taking a stand.
Why the P.C. Policemen were taking away
The reason for Christmas - no one could say.*

*The children were told by their schools not to sing
About Shepherds and Wise Men and Angels and things.
It might hurt someone’s feelings, the teachers would say
December 25th is just a “Holiday.”*

*And shoppers were ready with cash, checks and credit
Pushing folks down to the floor just to get It!
CDs from Madonna, an X BOX, an I-pod.
Something was changing, something was quite odd!*

*Retailers promoted Ramadan and Kwanzaa
In hopes to sell books by Franken and Fonda.
As Best Buy was busy promoting their “WOW”
At Home Depot “Christmas” trees couldn’t be found.*

*At K-Mart and Staples and Penny's and Sears
The hallowed word "Christmas" will ne'er grace your ears.
Inclusive, sensitive, Di-ver-si-ty
The terms that were used to intimidate me.*

*Now Edwards, Pelosi, Now Sharpton, Wolf Blitzen
On Boxer, on Barack , on Kerry, on Clinton !*

*At the top of the Senate, there arose such a clatter
To eliminate Christmas, in all public matter.*

*And we spoke not a word, as they muzzled our faith
Forbade us to speak of salvation and grace.
The true Gift of Christmas exchanged and discarded
The reason for the season, stopped before it started.*

*So as you celebrate "Winter Break" under your "Dream Tree"
Sipping your Starbucks, listen to me.
Choose your words carefully, choose what you say
Shout "MERRY CHRISTMAS," not "Happy Holiday."*

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the Media Research Center.*