

# Why care about culture wars?



## Your Turn

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Guest columnist

Many free-market think tanks believe it is counter-productive for think tanks to engage in the culture wars. They think our time should be focused exclusively on policy research, legislative outreach, and legal action. And while those activities are important for limiting government and encouraging individual flourishing, we should also be engaged in the war taking place in our culture.

The reason culture wars are important is, while policy, political, and legal actions tend to be lagging indicators of what is happening in our society, culture is a leading indicator. Culture signals what people believe and what they value. Want to know where our world is headed? Don't look to the halls of Congress or the Mississippi Legislature. Politicians follow the lead of the masses. Instead, look to the most popular TV shows, movies, and sports stars. They are shaping how people think about what is morally right and fair.

Presently, the progressives (opponents of free markets and limited government) dominate discussion in the culture wars. If conservatives and liber-

tarians fail to engage on culture, we will lose when it comes to policymaking and litigation down the road. The fight begins in the culture.

Fighting progressives in the culture wars is akin to weeding your garden. If you want to grow a beautiful flower, you need to feed it sun, water, and nutrients, but you also need to remove weeds. If left unattended, invasive weeds can grow stronger. If not pulled early, they can take root in the soil and begin to compete with your flower. Over time, weeds can steal the water, sunlight, and nutrients. They can become bigger, taller, and stronger than your precious flower. While we focus on nurturing the fragile flower of liberty, we also must fight the weeds of collectivism, liberalism, and progressivism.

I'm encouraged by the culture debate that took place in NFL stadiums about national anthems last year. While progressives have infected the arts, higher education, Hollywood, and news, we still have a chance to keep sports inoculated from the disease. Until recently, sports have maintained their status as a great unifier of people from different backgrounds. No matter our race, color, sex, age, country of origin, or political interests, we share a love for our teams. As NFL owners, players, ESPN, and ESPN's parent company, Disney, learned the

hard way, sports consumers want their sports delivered free of social commentary and political opinion. If a consumer wants political analysis, there are plenty of other channels.

The NFL controversy was just a small skirmish in the larger culture war. There will continue to be social justice warriors who are constantly in search of a victim to protect. There will still be virtue signalers who want to show how compassionate they are but ignore the broader consequences of their actions. Folks will continue to do things like sit for a national anthem, for instance, even if it erodes a unifying, patriotic gesture that should be used to bring us together.

But the NFL skirmish showed those with traditional values could win.

There is a time and a place for rigorous debate about social policies. That time is not during the national anthem of our nation's sporting events. If nothing else, perhaps we preserved the joy of watching live sports delivered to our devices without political interruption. It remains to be seen how long the defense will hold, though. We must keep fighting.

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