

By chickening out & running from 'anti-LGBTQ' pressure, Chick-Fil-A has dealt a blow to rights of expression

by Michael Rectenwald



Chick-Fil-A committed a grave error by ending donations to Christian groups dubbed “anti-LGBTQ” – not because the LGBTQ community “wins,” but because religious and other expression effectively loses.

Chick-Fil-A announced on Monday that it would reconfigure their donations beginning in 2020, leaving out three Christian charities: the Salvation Army, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and Paul Anderson Youth Home. All three have been dubbed “*anti-LGTBQ*” for their opposition to same-sex marriage, and Chick-Fil-A has faced intense pressure from activists over its support of them.

By abandoning charitable donations to organizations of their choice, and by giving in to the political pressure of LGBTQ activists and [media scrutiny](#), the chicken company hasn't merely "[caved](#)" politically. Far more importantly, they've allowed public pressure to effectively limit the rights of free speech and religious expression in the US.

Unsurprisingly, Chick-Fil-A's announcement has failed to appease LGBTQ activists. In fact, their [response](#) to the news has been to demand more concessions. *"If Chick-Fil-A is serious about their pledge to stop holding hands with divisive anti-LGBTQ activists, then further transparency is needed regarding their deep ties to organizations like Focus on the Family, which exist purely to harm LGBTQ people and families,"* said [Drew Anderson](#), GLAAD's director of news & rapid response. [Beck Bailey](#), the HRC Foundation director of equity, [expressed](#) similar dissatisfaction with Chick-Fil-A, this time for the company's lack of *"explicit sexual orientation and gender identity nondiscrimination protections"* in workplace policies.

The problem with Chick-Fil-A's surrender, however, is not that the chicken crossed the road – that the identity-politics left has won another battle in the culture wars. The real blow is more fundamental. Chickening out in the face of activists only emboldens those who demand control over religious and other expression. It emboldens those who aim to police all speech and religious expression, including that of individuals. This policing erects an echo-chamber furnished by authoritarians.

As we saw when the NBA reprimanded Houston Rockets General Manager Daryl Morey for a seven-word tweet in support of Hong Kong protesters, the policing of corporate expression – in this case China's rebuke of the NBA – can effectively lead to the censorship of individuals. Facing political pressure, individuals are cowed into silence or forced to issue apologies for expressing their views. As such, authoritarians end up determining what can and can't be said.

In his book 'On Liberty,' John Stuart Mill argued that it is not only governments that threaten individual liberty – so too does the “*social tyranny*” of public opinion. Mill suggested that society’s mandates were even “*more formidable*” than those of states. Likewise, he argued for social protection from social tyranny. “*There needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling; against the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them.*”

The only defense against such social tyranny is for those who hold differing opinions to stand their ground in the face of public pressure. Such dissenters do a public service. Their views may not gain acceptance, but that’s not the fundamental point. The point is that expressing differing views guards against an effective ban against them, and likewise, against other “*unacceptable*” views.

By being chicken, Chick-Fil-A has done more than yielded ground to LGBTQ activists. The company has allowed social tyranny to score a partial victory against personal liberty.

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