The enemy of culture Trump at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts: Boos, cheers, suggestions of blacklisting actors who refused to perform

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Donald Trump, the purveyor-in-chief of ignorance and reaction, attended a performance of the musical *Les Misérables* Wednesday night at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C. Fellow fascists Vice President J.D. Vance and Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. also attended. If Trump hasn't used the Nazi-like phrase, "When I hear the word culture, I reach for my gun," it is not on his part for any lack of sympathy with the notion.

Trump was met Wednesday with loud boos, as well as cheers, from what presumably was an audience stacked with his supporters. His intended appearance at the performance had been well-advertised.

According to Josephine Harvey and the *Daily Beast:*

> Loud boos could be heard from the audience as Trump waved from the presidential box, there were also cheers and a chant of "USA! USA!" There was applause earlier for several drag queens as they arrived at the event. A group of drag performers attended in protest after some attendees gave up their tickets following Trump's shakeup.

In May, CNN reported that at least "10 to 12 performers" were "planning to sit out the show on June 11."

> The cast was given the option to not perform the night Trump will be in the audience, and both major cast members and members of the ensemble are among those sitting out, according to the sources.

In the spirit of Trump's relentless attack on democratic rights and free speech, his lackey and interim director at the Kennedy Center, Richard Grenell, urged that those actors boycotting Trump be exposed publicly and blacklisted.

Grenell asserted that any performer who wasn't "professional enough" to perform in front of "patrons of all backgrounds, regardless of political affiliation, won't be welcomed."

> In fact [he told CNN], we think it would be important to out those vapid and intolerant artists *to ensure producers know who they shouldn't hire*—and that the public knows which shows have political litmus tests to sit in the audience. [Emphasis added.]

In response to the jeering that greeted Trump, Grenell commented to WUSA9,

> We all need to be tolerant. … But [!] we don't want to see people booing. We don't want to see people cancelling people that they don't agree with. What we want to do here is have big shows, be financially responsible, and really celebrate the arts in America.

Grenell, now in charge of a major center for the performing arts, comes by his anti-democratic and threatening views "naturally," as a former spy chief and supporter of European fascism. He served as acting director of National Intelligence in the first Trump administration in 2020! Prior to that, as Trump's ambassador to Germany (2018-2020), Grenell—reported the *Independent*—"was likened to a 'far-right colonial officer' and said he wanted to 'empower' Europe's right-wing [i.e., neo-Nazis] while serving as an ambassador."

In February, Trump fired numerous members of the federal government's Kennedy Center board of trustees and named himself chairman. He sent out this message at the time:

> At my direction, we are going to make the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., GREAT AGAIN. I have decided to immediately terminate multiple individuals from the Board of Trustees, including the Chairman, who do not share our Vision for a Golden Age in Arts and Culture. We will soon announce a new Board, with an amazing Chairman, DONALD J. TRUMP!

Following the Hitler playbook, Trump and his accomplices have attempted to whip up backwardness and prejudice by denouncing their version of "degenerate art." The president claimed that the Kennedy Center had to be overhauled because it had "Drag Shows specifically targeting our youth."

As the WSWS argued at the time:

> By a "golden age," Trump is campaigning for a patriotic,

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national art, one that pays tribute to the greatness of American capitalism and its supposed achievements. Such an art is dishonest and insincere by definition, and, in fact, no art at all.

It is intended to help create an American version of the Nazi "*Volksgemeinschaft*," or "people's" or "national community," a mythological creation designed to cover over the class struggle and misdirect the population into chauvinist and nationalist channels.

Artists including Issa Rae, Shonda Rhimes and Ben Folds have resigned from their leadership roles or canceled events at the Kennedy Center in response to the changes.

Actress Rae cancelled a sold-out performance after Trump became chairman of the Kennedy Center. She explained:

> Unfortunately, due to what I believe to be an infringement on the values of an institution that has faithfully celebrated artists of all backgrounds through all mediums, I've decided to cancel my appearance at this venue.

Musician Ben Folds, who served as the artistic advisor to the National Symphony Orchestra, announced February 12 that "given developments at the Kennedy Center," he was resigning from his position. "Not for me," he explained on Instagram.

The *Daily Beast* reports that revenue from subscriptions at the Kennedy Center for the upcoming season is down 36 percent from 2024 and single-ticket sales also dropped 50 percent in April and May, compared with the same months last year.

> Revenue from theater performances, which Trump vowed to make "non-woke," took the hardest hit, dropping 82 percent in the first two weeks of the subscription campaign compared to last year.
>
> More than a dozen acts canceled their planned runs in the wake of Trump's takeover, including the wildly popular musical *Hamilton*—with creator Lin-Manuel Miranda stating, "The Kennedy Center was not created in this spirit, and we're not going to be a part of it while it is the Trump Kennedy Center."

Trump has targeted, among other bodies and agencies, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Institute of Museum and Library Services for destruction.

In a March 27 executive order, "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History," Trump took aim at major federally funded museums and cultural institutions—the Smithsonian Institution, in particular—for their "concerted and widespread effort to rewrite our Nation's history, replacing objective facts with a distorted narrative driven by ideology rather than truth."

On May 30, the president announced he had fired Kim Sajet, the director of the National Portrait Gallery, part of the Smithsonian Institution. Sajet has refused to accept the dismissal and stayed at her post, showing more guts than various university administrations and the entire Democratic Party. On June 9, the Smithsonian Board of Regents declared in a public statement, following an emergency meeting,

> All personnel decisions are made by and subject to the direction of the Secretary, with oversight by the Board.

Funds cut from the NEA and NEH, according to media reports, are to be re-directed in part toward building a "National Garden of American Heroes," one of the president's pet projects.

In April, the NEH advisory council was informed by Acting Chairman Michael McDonald that

> the endowment "would pivot to supporting the White House's agenda" and in particular "would support Mr. Trump's planned patriotic sculpture garden and the broader celebration of the 250th anniversary of American independence on July 4, 2026."

This is the Trump cultural counterrevolution. The attack on "woke" theater productions and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in general is the thin end of the wedge. The aim ultimately is to eradicate or hinder the serious study of American society and its contradictions, above all, the history of the class struggle, along with the murder of the Native people, slavery and the real issues in the Civil War, the crimes and character of modern global capitalism and imperialism.

There is some irony in the fact that Trump, Vance and Kennedy were attending a performance of *Les Misérables*. The musical, banal as it may be, traces its ultimate origins to Victor Hugo's epic 1862 novel of the same title about poverty, police cruelty, inequality and insurrection.

> The *AP* reported that the show that tackles themes of protest, power, injustice and poverty featured the sounds of explosions and gunfire, with civilians clashing with soldiers on stage at the very same time that Los Angeles was put under curfew after protesters battled with police over immigration raids by ICE for a sixth day following Trump's call-up of Marines and National Guard troops to quell the protests.

In any event, Vance indicated on social media ahead of time he had no idea what the musical was about, while Trump proved equally ignorant. When asked by a journalist whether he identified with Jean Valjean (sent to prison for stealing bread in the Hugo novel) or Javert (the policeman who relentlessly persecutes Valjean), the president replied:

> That's tough. I don't know

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