

Trump announces creation of the “Trump Kennedy Center” in latest assault on democracy and culture

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In the latest lawless and dictatorial act organized by the Trump administration, the board of trustees of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C., owned and operated by the federal government, voted Thursday to change the venue’s name to the “Donald J. Trump and John F. Kennedy Memorial Center for the Performing Arts.”

Trump, after returning to office earlier this year, fired David Rubenstein as chairman of the Kennedy Center board, Center president Deborah F. Rutter, as well as all 18 Biden-appointed members. After stacking the board with loyalists, Trump was voted in as the center’s new chairman.

Any institution or building with the words “Trump” and “arts” included in its name is burdened with an oxymoron, and a ludicrous one at that. Trump, a fascist, stands for the extirpation of culture, the plunging of humanity into barbarism. As we noted recently, “the real ‘garbage’ is in the White House. Trump, a real estate swindler and racist demagogue ... is the embodiment of the rot of American capitalism.”

The decision on the name change at the Kennedy Center was reported to be unanimous, courtesy of Trump’s handpicked board of stooges and know-nothings. According to the *Washington Post*, several prominent Democrats serving as *ex officio* board members, including Senate and House leaders Chuck Schumer and Hakeem Jeffries, as well as Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, Sen. Mark Warner, Rep. Rick Larsen and Rep. Joyce Beatty, “denounced the change” and described it as Trump’s trying to attach his name to a public institution “without legal authority.”

Beatty of Ohio allegedly attempted on several occasions to protest the vote, only to be muted. On social media, Beatty explained she was “muted on the call and was not allowed to ‘speak or voice my opposition to this move.’”

Trump, who is both the chairman and a member of the board, laughably claimed the vote was a “surprise,” despite months of referring to the institution as his own “Trump Kennedy Center.” Before day’s end Thursday, the

institution’s website had been updated to reflect the change and, by Friday afternoon, the building itself had been rebranded to carry Trump’s name.

The move garnered widespread criticism from legal experts and members of the Kennedy family alike.

The central issue is congressional authority. In 1958, President Dwight Eisenhower commissioned the building of a cultural establishment, known as the National Cultural Center Act. In 1964, Congress voted to change the name to The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts two months after Kennedy’s assassination. The center officially opened in September of 1971 with a gala to honor the slain president.

Legal experts told NBC News “that the Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson administration-era statutes governing the creation of the Kennedy Center had enshrined the original name in legislation. They added that a new law passed by both chambers of Congress and signed by the president would be needed to change the name.”

Commentators noted the administration’s brazen indifference to the law. David Super, a law professor at Georgetown University, told CNN, “There is absolutely no way they can do this legally,” but noted that “the administration is not concerning itself with laws.” Emily Sexton, a former lawyer for the Center, stated the regime’s moves were “arguably ... a direct contravention ... But that prohibition is only as good as having someone to enforce it, and it’s not clear who would do that.”

The change of name sparked a response in the general public, with a protest held Saturday morning. Demonstrators declared that the renaming has “made it an unwelcome space” for many in the community. Protesters denounce the move as an illegal overreach and an insult to a memorial for an assassinated president.

Absurdly attempting to justify the name change, Trump’s advocates on the Center’s board resorted to lies and fantasies about the president’s intervention in the arts. For

her part, Karoline Leavitt, Trump's press secretary, suggested the decision had been made "because of the unbelievable work President Trump has done over the last year in saving the building."

In fact, under Trump, more than 100 employees at the Center have resigned or been dismissed, including nearly every major head of programming and much of the social impact team. According to the *Post*, subscriptions at the Center are "down by about \$1.6 million, or roughly 36 percent, compared with 2024." Ticket sales have collapsed: in September and October, the Kennedy Center saw fewer admissions than in any year since 2018, aside from 2020, the first year of the pandemic. Low attendance has not become a thorough-going public embarrassment apparently because of the widespread handing out of free tickets.

Cancellations at the Kennedy Center include productions and artists such as the Broadway musical *Hamilton*, actress and producer Issa Rae and Grammy Award-winning artist Rhiannon Giddens, among others. Television producer Shonda Rhimes resigned from her position as board treasurer. No artist with any self-respect will have anything to do with the Trump-run center.

In place of the acts that have been banned or have boycotted Trump's reign of cultural terror, a plethora of far-right and Christian fundamentalist programming has become a mainstay. This includes: a red-carpet premiere for Christian Broadcasting Network's documentary "The Revival Generation"; a "Christian Persecution Summit" tied to the Conservative Political Action Committee (CPAC); a prayer wall created with the Museum of the Bible for guests at screenings of "King of Kings"; and a prayer vigil for slain fascist activist Charlie Kirk this past September. CPAC was able to rent one of the Kennedy Center's halls at a 50 percent discounted rate in October, paying only about \$20,000 out of an original fee of more than \$40,000.

Trump is echoing Adolf Hitler's crusade against modernism and the "Jewish-Bolshevik mockery of art," as he seeks to construct a patriotic, national art that glorifies American capitalism and erases all traces of class struggle. The administration is consciously imitating the Nazi policy of Gleichschaltung—deliberate action to bring the entire cultural sphere under state subordination to fascist aims.

It is not accidental that the Nazis, immediately after their seizure of power in 1933, began renaming squares, avenues, stadiums, bridges and buildings to honor the new chancellor, Hitler.

Hundred of streets were named after the Nazi chief, "a practice ... common in dictatorships to project an image of omnipresent leadership," in the words of one commentator. The Führerbau ("Leader's Building") was constructed in Munich between 1933 and 1937 and included offices for

Hitler when he was in the city. Reichskanzlerplatz in Berlin was renamed Adolf-Hitler-Platz

The cultural counter-revolution continues. On Friday, the *Post* reported the Trump White House sent threatening emails to the Smithsonian, warning it would withhold funding if the institution did not submit extensive documentation of the museum complex's "current exhibition descriptions, comprehensive America 250 programming files, draft plans for upcoming shows and internal guidelines used in exhibition development." This is part of the administration's crusade to rid America's museums of what it calls "improper ideology" and "degenerate art." The museum system has until January 13 to comply.

Again, Leavitt inadvertently wandered this week into the territory of the fascist-surreal by posting on X: "Congratulations to President Donald J. Trump, and likewise, congratulations to President Kennedy, because this will be a truly great team long into the future. The building will no doubt attain new levels of success and grandeur."

A post by the center exclaimed, "Our board recognizes that our Chairman, President Donald J. Trump, has not only saved this historic building but also created a truly bipartisan place to celebrate the arts."

Trump himself declared, "We're saving the building. We saved the building. The building was in very bad shape, both physically, financially, and in every other way. And now it's solid, very strong," despite slumping ticket sales.

All of this is of course utter nonsense, without a single syllable of truth. Trump is attempting to create an institution in the image of the oligarchy, the bearer of everything foul in American society—religious bigotry, money-grubbing, militarism, flag-waving chauvinism, pig ignorance.

The ideological content of the Trump administration policy is deeply hostile to genuine artistry, in fact, it is its opposite—the latter by its very nature strives to reveal the truth about social life and inevitably contains the element of protest against existing conditions.



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