Opinion
NCR Voices



U.S. President Donald Trump delivers remarks in the Roosevelt Room at the White House in Washington July 31, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Kent Nishimura)



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President Donald Trump has threatened to move next year's World Cup matches scheduled to be played in Boston to another city. Trump said he was worried Boston, and other cities run by Democrats who oppose his agenda, is "unsafe" because it is "run by radical left lunatics who don't know what they're doing."

When the NFL announced that Puerto Rican musical sensation Bad Bunny would headline next year's halftime show at the Superbowl, MAGA influencers went crazy, denouncing the decision because Bad Bunny does not sing in English and because his upcoming music tour will skip U.S. cities. The singer was worried the performances would attract ICE agents.

Earlier this year, the president placed his own team in charge of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and personally approved the list of those receiving the annual Kennedy Center Honors, ensuring no one too "woke" made the list. Trump also announced he was thinking of renaming the center after himself.



Then-President Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden attend the 47th Kennedy Center Honors, Dec. 8, 2024, at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington. (Official White House photo/Oliver Contreras)

The administration is also engaged in a virtually unprecedented effort to reshape higher education. In addition to seeking to end diversity, equity and inclusion programs, the administration also wants changes in curriculum.

Politics should be a part of a society's culture, a derivative of culture, downstream from art and philosophy. In our time, one of the chief symptoms of our societal sickness is the way politics is subsuming culture.

The issue here is not whether Trump is right or wrong on the merits of any particular cultural concern. If Boston really did have a problem with public safety, officials should be worried about having a major sports event there. Mayor Michelle Wu might not be correct to call Boston the "safest" city in America but crime data shows it is one of the safest. You may or may not like Bad Bunny's music. There really are

problems with the illiberal way some institutions pursue diversity, equity and inclusion programs. Changing the name of the Kennedy Center is absurd.

The issue is that the government should not be entrusted with too much power in the realm of culture. In classic liberal theory, limited government allows citizens to define and enflesh the culture they want in all its variety, largely free from government interference.

Trump and his acolytes are not the first politicians to seek to exercise a degree of control over culture. Remember when then-First Lady Hillary Clinton said we needed "a new politics of meaning" to confront what she discerned, mistakenly, as a void in the culture? Yuck. I agreed with the New Republic's literary editor Leon Wieseltier, who wrote: "The contemporary problem is not that people believe in too little, it is that they believe in too much. Too much of what too many people believe is too easily acquired and too thoughtlessly held. … Not the lack of meaning, but the glibness of meaning, is the trouble."

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Catholic social teaching differs from classical liberal theory. Catholic social teaching does believe politics should aspire to the common good, and that involves identifying values to be sought, responsibilities to be assigned, and liberties to be curtailed. We can support Social Security and funding for the arts and the Fair Housing Act, all of which entail government intrusion into the culture, moving beyond strictly political rights, on both liberal and Catholic grounds. And Catholic social teaching has its acute insistence on the dignity of the human person, the priority of the family in a whole range of cultural and social decisions, and the principle of solidarity to keep the government in check.

Trump's tendency to intrude into the cultural sphere is related to, but different from, his desire to concentrate political power in the executive branch. If Congress, or at least one chamber, were in the hands of the Democrats, the president might not be dreaming of renaming the Kennedy Center. Surrounded by sycophants who dare not say "no" to any idea that drops from the dear leader's lips, Trump is like a 5-year-old on a sugar high and his administration increasingly resembles 5-year-olds playing soccer.

Trump was not the first president to seek to aggrandize power in his own hands in ways that proved problematic. When Barack Obama created the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals by executive order in 2012 his action gave relief from fear of deportation to almost 750,000 individuals. It helped Obama win reelection but it remains to be seen if it helped those whom it protected in the long run. As Trump eyes repealing or gutting the program, those Dreamers may be even more exposed because they registered with the federal government to earn DACA protection.

The American people need to remember that when a politician you like grabs more power to enact a policy you like, that power will eventually be used for ill as well as for good. Limiting it entirely is generally speaking a good thing. But our culture will also need to stand up and insist on its freedom from governmental encroachments, from the left or the right. We needn't advocate a wall of separation, but at least recognize that culture and politics swim in different lanes.

For example, we should stop asking movie stars or rockstars their opinions on legislation. I love Meryl Streep; she made Julia Child and Miranda Priestly and so many others come to life on the screen. I don't give a hoot what she thinks about any particular public policy. Let artists contribute to and shape a culture that will, in turn and with time, affect and shape our politics. Stop turning them into lobbyists.

We live in a time that does not honor the one thing we all need most: self-restraint. And we are paying a dreadful price for that lack.

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. View the full series.