

How Chick-fil-A Became Ground Zero for Culture War

Chick-fil-A didn't invent the marriage controversy.

But they did invent the chicken sandwich.

And on Aug. 1—the day former Gov. **Mike Huckabee** called for Americans to stand up to support Chick-fil-A's Dan Cathy and the biblical definition of marriage—even that harmless original-chicken-sandwich-turned spicy. To some, every bite was a symbolic stake in the ground of what you believe.

Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day turned into a defining moment for those sick and tired of watching an eroding American culture. For better or worse (and with Chick-fil-A sauce, it's always better), eating a chicken sandwich, or drinking a peach shake on this day was not just a tangible way to put your money where your mouth is.

It was an opportunity to put your mouth where your morals are.

And after **Chick-fil-A** sales beat previous records by as much as 50 percent, the message rang clear.

“(Marriage) is between a man and a woman,” said David Wiltsie, 53, of Van Wyck, S.C., visiting a south Charlotte Chick-fil-A just after the lunch rush. “It's a representation of what you believe.”

Across the country, photos have surfaced of lines out the door, wrapping around the building. In Boone, N.C., there were reports of cars backed up a half-mile waiting to show their support. Many stores ran out of chicken before closing time.

“Marriage is sacred,” said Delcie, a thoughtful 17-year-old from Charlotte, N.C. who came out with her mom, Julie, and 12-year-old sister Kenan. “I don't think marriage should be

redefined. It's between a man and a woman.

"I don't think (gay people) should be discriminated against. But it's not marriage. Call it something else."

Huckabee was calling it something else. In fact, a stunning 21 million people visited his Chick-fil-A Facebook page, with more than 650,000 RSVP'ing to the event. Huckabee himself had a chicken biscuit at the Destin, Fla., Chick-fil-A.

"It was beyond anyone's imagination," Huckabee told BGEA's *Decision* magazine of the turnout. "It's a very lonely place to be when you're getting hammered. I didn't want Dan Cathy to look around and think he was the only one standing there, that nobody would stand up with him."

Taking a Biblical Stand

How Chick-fil-A restaurants got here is perhaps a direct reflection of the society we live in, where quotes can be inflated out of context and social media can mount an army of nearly instantaneous support.

Dan Cathy, the company's president, chief operating officer and son of founder Truett Cathy, simply answered a question about his beliefs on marriage.

"We are very much supportive of the family—the biblical definition of the family unit," Cathy told the *Baptist Press* on July 16. "We are a family-owned business, a family-led business, and we are married to our first wives. ... We want to do anything we possibly can to strengthen families."

Cue gay marriage firestorm—the new hot-button issue for the presidential 2012 election.

The mainstream media grabbed ahold of this statement and turned it into an anti-gay, line-in-the-sand corporate stance. Cathy didn't say anything negative against gay people, nor was this representative of any Chick-fil-A corporate policy.

But the chicken had left the coop and mayors from some of our largest cities apparently had their feathers sufficiently ruffled.

Rahm Emanuel in Chicago: "Chick-fil-A's values are not Chicago's values."

Ed Lee in San Francisco: "Closest Chick-fil-A is 40 miles away and I strongly recommend they not try to come any closer. Very disappointed."

Thomas Menino in Boston: "I urge you to back out of your plans to locate in Boston."

Huckabee saw it as more than just an attack on **traditional marriage**. "I certainly think that there is open season on Christian beliefs that does not exist for people of other beliefs," he said.

Franklin Graham, BGEA's CEO and president, along with his father, Billy Graham, felt the attack as well and both released statements supporting Cathy's biblical stance.

"I applaud the courage of Cathy and Chick-fil-A to take a bold stand for the biblical definition of marriage," Franklin Graham said.

"I've known their family for many years and have watched them grow Chick-fil-A into one of the best businesses in America while never compromising their values," Billy Graham said.

"He's a God-fearing man, if ever there was one," Wiltsie said of Billy Graham, who had a Chick-fil-A lunch delivered to his home in Montreat. "If Billy Graham can support it, then I can too."

What's the Real Issue?

Two days later, "National Same-Sex Kiss Day" was held as a direct opposition to the Aug. 1 Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day.

As the name clearly states, it's to promote the gay agenda with a protest whose turnout is comparatively miniscule compared with those supporting traditional marriage, regardless of the news coverage.

But while many in the social network hemisphere have turned this into a simple battle between traditional and gay marriage, others invested their hard-earned \$6 on a chicken combo meal to voice other concerns.

Take John, a Lincoln County resident (just northwest of Charlotte), who summed up his activism in two words.

"Free speech," the 53-year-old said.

A small business owner in the Lake Norman area, John is more than a little concerned about the direction of our country, when expressing your personal opinion generates this much attack.

He's terrified.

"I support Dan Cathy and I voted against the Marriage Amendment Act," said John, as he waited patiently for his combo meal. "It's about government intrusion. You're going to lose more of your freedoms. Plain and simple. Cut and dried."

Wiltsie, meanwhile, is letting his waffles frie get cold. He's got plenty to say on the matter and while he strongly believes in the biblical definition of marriage, he sees this culture war as something even bigger.

To this heating/cooling mechanic, the morality of our country is hanging in the balance. It's been degraded so fast, many Americans don't even recognize it when you point it out.

"I don't think it's so much the marriage issue," Wiltsie said. "There's people who want to stand up against Christians and against the Bible and this is the way they can do it."

Exhibit A, as Wiltsie pointed out, was the music playing overhead that day, if you could hear it above all the commotion.

Earlier in the year, Chick-fil-A was pressured to remove contemporary Christian music from their stores, replacing it with instrumental tracts. They had received complaints about non-Christians feeling unwelcomed when they heard the name of Jesus in the lyrics of songs.

This, from a company that has given up millions over the years by being closed on Sundays to support any of their workers who want to attend a **worship** service. Chick-fil-A even kept their doors locked on Sundays during the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, costing untold profits.

"You can go to (other restaurants) and you can hear cussing in songs or music that promotes immoral values," Wiltsie said. "But you come to Chick-fil-A and it's instrumental because people don't like hearing the name of Jesus Christ.

"Is that what our society has come to?"

Wiltsie, too fired up now to even think about which dipping sauce to use for his strips, makes a strong case.

So much of this argument has been rooted in what people have blanketed as Dan Cathy's "intolerance," how he's serving "hate chicken" at his restaurant, dipped in more hate.

And then you experience Chick-fil-A for yourself and are treated with more love and respect than you get at any other fast-food chain and you wonder where all that "hate chicken" is being stored.

"It's Christian values that are being bombarded," Wiltsie said. "It seems they are giving more freedom of speech to those against moral values than those who are for moral values."

Maybe it's best to let the Scriptures have the last word on this one. What does the Bible say about standing up for what is right? Regardless of societal pressures or social chicken sandwich wars that may cloud the issue?

This verse from Romans 12:2 gets right to the point: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

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