

Portland Tree Lighting Erases Christmas As Activists Take the Stage

Portland, Oregon sparked sharp backlash after its 41st annual holiday tree lighting once again avoided the word “Christmas,” even as activists waving a Palestinian flag took the stage. The city promoted the event only as a “tree-lighting ceremony,” despite the presence of a decorated evergreen, Santa Claus and traditional Christmas lights. The decision fueled criticism from residents who saw the omission as part of a broader trend of sidelining Christian traditions in public spaces.

Organizers labeled the gathering “Portland’s 41st Annual Tree Lighting Ceremony,” omitting any Christian reference in official materials. During the event, a woman draped in a Palestinian flag appeared onstage and led the crowd in a “Free Palestine” chant while tribal members performed an Indigenous song. The focus shifted away from a long-standing seasonal celebration to overt political messaging, a move that left many attendees frustrated and disappointed.

Critics cited in the coverage accused city leaders of intentionally distancing themselves from the Christmas holiday. Complaints ranged from allegations that Portland “despises Christians” to concerns that political activism is replacing traditional holiday festivities. Although some local media and officials referred to it as a Christmas tree lighting, the city’s official social media accounts avoided the term entirely, reinforcing claims of deliberate exclusion

and continued disregard for Christian heritage.

Supporters of the event's direction defended the framing, pointing out that the ceremony fell on Native American Heritage Day and featured speakers from the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. They argued that including Indigenous elements and activist voices reflected Portland's commitment to diversity. Still, for Christian families and conservative residents, the omission of "Christmas" felt intentional, unnecessary, and dismissive of a holiday deeply woven into American culture.

The controversy highlights growing national tensions over public acknowledgment of Christian traditions amid increasing political activism and cultural reinterpretation of long-standing holiday celebrations. For many in Portland, the tree may be lit – but the message behind the event appears increasingly contested and unclear.

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