

School Replaces Mother Teresa With Obama and Oprah in 'Hall of Heroes'

For years, boys and girls at South Arbor Charter Academy have been inspired by Heroes Hall – a corridor featuring murals that honored the Space Shuttle Columbia astronauts, Mother Teresa, Betsy Ross and Albert Einstein.

But many parents are furious after the principal had the murals replaced with paintings.

"This is no longer a hall of heroes," parent Craig Bergman told me. "Now we have a hall of celebrities."

The original mural had been a part of the Michigan charter school for years. It included a diverse group of national and global "heroes" – from Gandhi to the astronauts who were killed when the Space Shuttle Columbia exploded over Texas.

Those images were replaced with President Obama, Oprah, Maya Angelou, "Harry Potter" author J.K. Rowling and Walt Disney.

Parent Todd Holliday told me the new mural sends the wrong message to children in the K-8 school.

"My biggest concern is my kid seeing these murals for the next four years – thinking they represent what a hero is," Holliday told me. "They might be successful business people but they aren't really heroes."

Bergman said the school's new mural really transforms the concept of what makes a person a hero.

"The mere fact that you have talent doesn't mean you are a hero," he said. "I want someone who made a life investment – perhaps they even sacrificed their life – so that our society

and so our world could be a better place.”

So what the heck is going on here? Why did the South Arbor Charter Academy remove a mural memorializing the fallen Columbia astronauts and replace it with one honoring President Obama?

School spokesperson Jennifer Hoff said it was part of an intentional shift from “historical heroes” to “modern-day heroes.”

“Heroes Hall has been a part of the school’s fabric for years,” she said. “In fact, the old mural had been on the wall for at least 11 years. As with all things over time, it was showing its age from the activities of being an active school and needed some repair.”

So why not just hire an artist and touch up Mother Teresa? Why paint over her entire face? And who made that decision?

Bergman told me the principal appointed a blue-ribbon panel of four staffers to select who the new heroes should be.

“There was no parental involvement,” he said. “The principal of the school hand-picked and self-appointed (the group). Once they gave her their final decisions, she solely approved the list.”

And judging from who they selected – it’s pretty clear the new and improved Heroes Hall is not – ahem – fair and balanced.

“Previously, it was very well-balanced and respected a lot of different thoughts,” Bergman said. “Instead, it’s become more of a political issue. There’s definitely a certain genre of pictures here.”

Hoff said Heroes Hall is a “tangible way for students to see that despite circumstances in life, you can achieve great things through hard work, dedication, and the moral focus virtues.”

What, pray tell, are “moral focus virtues”?

According to Hoff, the school culture is built on virtues that emphasize “wisdom, respect, gratitude, self-control, perseverance, courage, encouragement, compassion and integrity.”

And the new heroes, she said, embody those virtues.

She said Rowling shows the children wisdom, Steve Jobs shows the children integrity, Oprah represents compassion, Disney represents courage, and Maya Angelou shows the children perseverance.

As for President Obama – well he shows the children encouragement, Hoff said.

“Our goal all along is to encourage our students to believe in themselves, work hard and be brave enough to dream,” she said.

But that’s just not sitting well with folks like Mr. Bergman.

“They may be some of the most influential people in American history, but they are not heroes,” he said.

For the record, the children are not required to sing praise songs or genuflect in the presence of the president’s mural.

At the end of the day – the school is going to do what the school is going to do. But it’s really a shame the principal didn’t ask the public for their recommendations.

How about the Navy SEALs who got Usama bin Laden? What about the firefighters and police officers who died on 9/11 or those who defended our consulate in Benghazi?

Those are true American heroes.

Todd Starnes is host of Fox News & Commentary, heard on hundreds of radio stations. Sign up for his American Dispatch newsletter, be sure to join his Facebook page, and follow him

on Twitter. His latest book is God Less America.