# CHANGE IN THE WAY AMERICANS INTERPRET THE PAST



### **DOWNTOWN MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT**By Barry Cassidy

Change is random. One might say that one random event leads to another. Recently something happened that gave me pause, as the Philadelphia Flyers removed the statue of Kate Smith as part of an effort to respond

to people outraged that she sang a song in 1931 which had racist lyrics.

Kate Smith was a big part of my childhood. I remember every time someone said, "God Bless America," I would always chime in "and Kate Smith." My World War II Disabled Veteran Uncle Frank taught me to say that when I was very young. He also taught me how to hit a baseball to right field where the worst kid always plays. So, to see her banned was a little too close for me not to experience some level of outrage.

My Uncle would tell me stories of her raising money by selling war bonds. She sold \$600 million in war bonds during a series of marathon broadcasts. She was given the Medal of Freedom by President Reagan. The President said, "The voice of Kate Smith is known and loved by millions of Americans, young and old. In war and peace, it has been an inspiration. Those simple but deeply moving words, 'God bless America,' have taken on added meaning for all of us because of the way Kate Smith sang them."

Drake University honored her for "outstanding contributions to radio and the people." She became a member of the Radio Hall of Fame in 1999. A Kate Smith U.S. commemorative stamp was issued based on a photograph of Smith taken in

the 1960s. She led a full life and was adored by the masses as a symbol of what was good and right about our country.

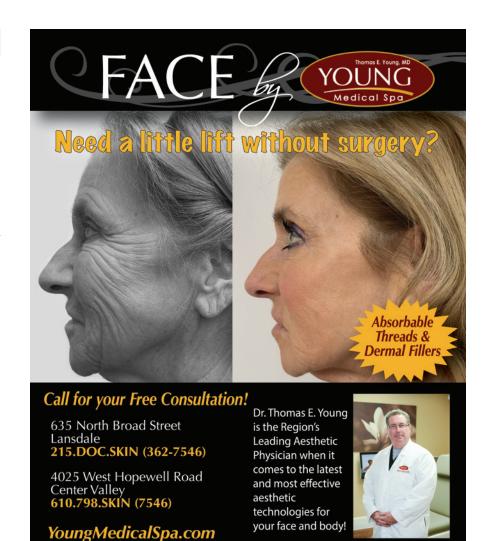
She did her part for the Flyers singing at the home opener in 1973, and by the time game 6 of the Stanley Cup Finals came about she had a 36-3-1 "Smith's Flyer Record" and she delivered on that night in May of 1974. In 1975 she delivered again by singing before a 4-1 game 7 victory. She ended up 100 – 29. So good that, 10 years later they gave her a statue.

My outrage turned quickly to questions on why this happened. Who could be behind something like this? I always think back to the fall of the Soviet Union and how they removed statues of people because they were no longer in power. There has been no revolution in America, but there has been a change in the lexicon. The politically correct way to speak and act.

I believe this is where political correctness runs afoul of my sensibilities. We are imposing a standard on a past era that likely is impossible for many to meet if you looked hard into someone's past.

(Continued on page 56)











#### **DOWNTOWN MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT**

(Continued from page 55)

Here is an incident of one of the most beloved figures of my time sang a song that was racially insensitive. Another one of my historical role models, Paul Robson also sang the same song. I don't see anyone trying to remove his statues. It was satire. Satire from one era becomes egregious racism in another.

Is this just about words or is this more of a systematic attempt to undermine America? One way to defeat the greatest republic and functioning democracy in the world is to attack the leaders. The first wave of "statue banning" was the civil war images in the South. It gets a little crazy when you look at that avenue because many of those statues were erected to remind people of the history of the area. If you apply it across a wide scale of the populous at that time you will find the many of the leaders of the time at one point owned slaves or were interpreted to be racist in some manner.

So, when those statues started coming down, I immediately started to wonder who would be next? We could get a big eraser out and ban many of the signers of the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. At the time slavery was legal, and was not even banned internationally until 1808.

As I mulled this over in my mind, I thought again about how did the banning of Kate Smith happen? The Flyers followed suit on what the New York Yankees had done. Eliminated Kate Smith from memory. They responded to complaints. Think about this... you have an obscure song that was done as a satire in the 1930s sung by Ms. Smith that bis suddenly a cause celeb.

(Continued on page 58)



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(Continued from page 56)

This does not happen normally. I believe it is an attack on America as an institution and as a country by those trying to reinterpret our democracy.

So, I researched who was the group complaining? As a public sports team you rely on ALL fans and try to avoid controversy, so no one boycotts your team or some similar action. Here there does not seem to be an antagonist visible... just a shadow. Am I alone in this? Am I seeing something here that simply does not add up logically?

In the wars of culture and politics you always find a group that will take credit for some action. In the hills of Afghanistan when they kill or kidnap an evil member of the oligarch or a random tourist, usually there is notice to who effectuated the action. In this instance no one seems to have taken credit for this action. That does not fit the profile. What that would mean is that many people unconnected to each other, researched an obscure song and complained to a sports team in New York. Not only is that scenario highly unlikely, it adds credence to my thinking.

The Yankees have been notified of a boycott in favor of Ms. Smith. I plan on advocating for Kate Smith in the future when someone says something bad about her, not only for my own wellbeing, but the memory of my Uncle Frank who made me a hitting star in little league and for America. God Bless America, and Kate Smith, RIP Uncle Frank I got your back.

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JUNE 2019