



THE WHITE HOUSE CAMPAIGN TO SEIZE CONTROL OF THE SMITHSONIAN AND REWRITE AMERICAN HISTORY

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I. Introduction

In February 2017, President Donald Trump toured the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC). He praised its founding director, Lonnie Bunch, who is now the Secretary of the entire Smithsonian Institution. He honored Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Frederick Douglass, and he praised the museum for sharing "the great struggle for freedom and equality that prevailed against the sins of slavery and the injustice of discrimination."¹

Smithsonian museums did not change what they teach about slavery between 2017 and today; the President changed his position on whether they should be allowed to teach it. On August 19, 2025, announcing the review that would target eight Smithsonian museums with the National Museum of American History (NMAH) first among them, President Trump wrote:

The Smithsonian is OUT OF CONTROL, where everything discussed is how horrible our Country is, how bad Slavery was, and how unaccomplished the downtrodden have been — Nothing about Success, nothing about Brightness, nothing about the Future.²

The President, who now presumes to decide what constitutes true American history, is the same President who, in an official Independence Day address, declared that the Continental Army "took over the airports," a feat it would have found difficult to accomplish in 1776, 127 years before Orville and Wilbur Wright flew the first flight in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.³

He is the President who, in prepared remarks for Black History Month, introduced Frederick Douglass as "an example of somebody who's done an amazing job and is being recognized more and more," even though Douglass died in 1895.⁴

He is the President who, entrusted with temporary stewardship of the most historic residence in America, demolished the East Wing of the White House. He did so without completing the legally required review to clear ground for a private-donor ballroom.⁵

¹ Lalee Ibssa, *Trump Says Smithsonian Should Focus on America's 'Brightness,' Not 'How Bad Slavery Was,'* ABC News (Aug. 20, 2025), <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-smithsonian-portray-americas-brightness-bad-slavery/story?id=124788598>.

² Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Truth Social (Aug. 19, 2025); see also *Trump Amplifies Attacks on 'Out of Control' Smithsonian Museums*, PBS News (Aug. 19, 2025), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/trump-amplifies-attacks-on-out-of-control-smithsonian-museums-for-including-negative-parts-of-american-history>.

³ The White House, *Remarks by President Trump at the Salute to America* (Jul. 4, 2019) ("Our Army manned the air, it rammed the ramparts, it took over the airports . . ."), <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-salute-america/>.

⁴ Remarks by President Trump at African American History Month Listening Session (Feb. 1, 2017), <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-african-american-history-month-listening-session/>.

⁵ Steven Portnoy, *White House Ballroom: Judge Signals Skepticism of Trump Administration Arguments*, ABC News (Jan. 23, 2026), <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/white-house-ballroom-judge-signals-skepticism-trump-administration/story?id=129471562>; Darlene Superville, *The White House starts demolishing part of the East Wing to build Trump's ballroom*, AP News (Oct. 22, 2025), <https://apnews.com/article/trump-ballroom-white-house-east-wing-demolish-a3efb2973d4d4e45f98b02e55210c538>.

He is the President who installed an exhibit at the White House depicting his predecessor with an autopen rather than with a portrait, with wall text calling him “the worst President in American History”—text the White House Press Secretary said was often “written directly by the President himself.”⁶

He is the President who has repeatedly called the United States a “failing nation” and “in decline.”⁷

He is the President who seized the Nation’s 250th birthday celebration from the bipartisan commission Congress chartered to plan it, handed it to an entity he chairs, and turned the Republic’s anniversary into a sparsely attended celebration of himself.⁸

And he is the President who still cannot acknowledge the outcome of an election he lost nearly six years ago.⁹ Yet he now asks the American people to trust him as the Nation’s final arbiter of historical truth.

His record speaks for itself.

⁶ Sarah Dean, Garrett Haake et al., *White House Installs Plaques Mocking Former Presidents Obama and Biden*, NBC News (Dec. 17, 2025), <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/white-house-installs-plaques-mocking-former-presidents-barack-obama-jo-rcna249746>.

⁷ Chris Cilizza, *The 51 Most Outlandish Lines from Donald Trump’s Announcement Speech*, CNN (Nov. 16, 2022), <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/16/politics/trump-campaign-announcement-speech-2024/index.html>.

⁸ Adam Cancryn, Kristen Holmes, & Piper Blackburn, *Crowd Size Grips, State Fair Troubles: The Problems of an America 250 Celebration Tied to Trump*, CNN (Jul. 1, 2026), <https://www.cnn.com/2026/07/01/politics/america-250-trump-crowd-fair>.

⁹ See, e.g., Miranda Devine, Pod Force One (June 3, 2026) (“The election was rigged. The 2020 election was rigged, sure as you’re sitting there”), <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/donald-trump-unleashed-bibi-are-you-effing-crazy/id1818418128?i=1000770949067>.

II. Background

On July 4, 2026, the White House released a report, titled *Saving America's Story* (the Report), purporting to document “ideological capture” at NMAH.¹⁰ The Report is not a work of scholarship; it is a hyperpartisan political document. Many claims within it are belied by the Report itself.¹¹ And its criticisms often rely on quotations that have been clipped from fuller statements with materially different meanings.

The Report also concedes the dispositive legal point: “the Smithsonian ultimately reports to its Board and to Congress” and “is organizationally separate from the executive branch.”¹²

The revisionist history campaign the Report serves is an improper assertion of executive power over a Congressionally chartered independent trust instrumentality. And it is but one front in a government-wide effort to rewrite American history as an ill-informed, largely ignorant President sees fit.¹³

The target of this campaign is one of the most trusted institutions in American life. Museums regularly rank among the top three most trusted institutions in the country, trailing only friends and family.¹⁴ The White House asks the public to believe the institutions Americans trust most are the ones peddling radical ideology on the word of President Donald Trump. Once again, his record speaks for itself.

This report will:

- Demonstrate that the Report is a political document which misrepresents the facts;
- Show that the Report’s central “erasure” claims are contradicted by its own descriptions of the museum;
- Restore to context the quotations from Smithsonian leadership on which the Report’s case rests;
- Document that the Smithsonian’s governing bodies adopted a binding nonpartisanship and content-review policy and that the Report ignores it entirely;
- Explain that the Smithsonian answers to its Board of Regents and to Congress, not to the President; and
- Place the campaign against NMAH in the context of a coordinated, administration-wide effort to control the national historical record.

¹⁰ Domestic Policy Council, *Saving America's Story: How Ideological Capture at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History Erases Our Heritage* (Jul. 4, 2026), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/Smithsonian-Report-Saving-Americas-Story.pdf> [hereinafter White House Report]; see also Robin Pogrebin, *White House Report Assails Smithsonian's American History Museum*, N.Y. Times (Jul. 5, 2026), <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/07/05/arts/design/white-house-smithsonian-american-history-museum.html>.

¹¹ For example, the Report’s claim that the Founders have been erased from NMAH is belied by its concession that the desk on which Thomas Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence and George Washington’s uniform are on display; the Report complains only that they remain in their prior display cases. See White House Report at 114.

¹² White House Report at 10.

¹³ See discussion *infra*, Section “The Government-Wide Campaign to Rewrite History.”

¹⁴ *Museums and Trust*, Museum, May/June 2025, <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/museum-magazine/2025-may-june-preview/>; Devon Akmon, *How Museums Can Help Rebuild Trust in a Divided America*, Wash. Post (Jan. 6, 2026), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/ripple/2026/01/05/how-museums-can-help-rebuild-trust-in-a-divided-america/>.

III. The Report Is a Conclusion in Search of Facts

Saving America's Story was produced by the White House Domestic Policy Council — not by historians, museum professionals, or any entity with curatorial expertise or statutory responsibility for the Smithsonian.¹⁵ ¹⁶ As the American Historical Association and 36 allied scholarly organizations explained in response to Executive Order 14253,¹⁷ the premise of the White House effort “egregiously misrepresents the work of the Smithsonian Institution” and “completely misconstrues the nature of historical work,” whose goal is “neither criticism nor celebration; it is to understand — to increase our knowledge of — the past in ways that can help Americans to shape the future.”¹⁸

Notably, across 162 pages of accusations, the Report contains no recommendations. It proposes no specific reform or action. Its conclusion simply restates Executive Order 14253, which calls on the Vice President to “remove improper ideology,” and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to “prohibit expenditure on exhibits or programs that degrade shared American values, divide Americans based on race, or promote programs or ideologies inconsistent with Federal law and policy.”¹⁹

The Vice President has no power, outside of his status as one-seventeenth of the Board of Regents, to effectuate policy at the Smithsonian. Moreover, the Supreme Court of the United States has consistently held that the executive branch cannot withhold or impound funds that Congress has duly appropriated and directed to be spent based on policy disagreements.²⁰

Indeed, the only new “proposal”—apparently made in earnest—is that the Smithsonian place a warning sign at every entrance to NMAH reading: “Warning: the exhibits in this museum were prepared by people who don’t want you to love your country.”²¹ That is not the language of a serious organizational review.

¹⁵ White House Report, cover; *see also* Pogrebin, *supra* note 10.

¹⁶ The carelessness with which the Report was produced is apparent from its cover. Both the cover page and the title page describe the Report as following “President Trump’s March 27, 2026, Executive Order 14253.” The directive was issued on March 27, 2025. The White House misdated its own directive (twice) on the front of a report accusing professional historians of insufficient rigor.

¹⁷ While styled as an executive order, it is no such thing. The directive cannot bind the Smithsonian, which is not an executive-branch agency. *See* Cong. Rsch. Serv., IF12975, *Smithsonian Institution: Potential Effects of Executive Order 14253* (Apr. 2025), <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF12975>.

¹⁸ Am. Historical Ass’n, *AHA Statement Condemning Federal Censorship of American History* (Mar. 31, 2025) (joined by 36 scholarly organizations), <https://www.historians.org/news/historians-defend-the-smithsonian/>.

¹⁹ White House Report at 128.

²⁰ *Train v. City of New York*, 420 U.S. 35 (1975); *see also* 2 U.S.C. §§ 681–688; U.S. Gov’t Accountability Off., B-331564, *Office of Management and Budget—Withholding of Ukraine Security Assistance* (Jan. 16, 2020).

²¹ White House Report at 6.

IV. The Report Is Contradicted by Both the Exhibits and Itself

a. The Founders Are on Display

The Report's most referenced finding is that a visitor to NMAH "will find no major exhibit dedicated to America's Founding era, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, other Founding Fathers, the Continental Congress, the Pilgrims, the Puritans, or major moments of the American Revolution."²² The Report repudiates itself.

On page 114, describing NMAH's 250th-anniversary commemoration, *In Pursuit of Life, Liberty & Happiness*, the Report concedes that NMAH's collection on display includes "remarkable artifacts like the desk Thomas Jefferson used to draft the Declaration of Independence, George Washington's uniform, a ship of the early U.S. Navy, and, of course, the Star-Spangled Banner, the 1813 flag that inspired the National Anthem."²³

The Report's actual grievance is that "Jefferson's desk and Washington's uniform remain in the same display cases and exhibits that they were previously," and that the museum marked the commemoration with "small bilingual stickers" rather than relocating the objects.²⁴ The "erasure" of the Founders is effectively a complaint about display-case placement and sticker size. The desk on which the Declaration of Independence was written is prominently displayed. So is George Washington's uniform. The flag that inspired the National Anthem is encased in a special enclosure featuring a 35-foot floor-to-ceiling glass wall.

b. The 250th is Being Commemorated

The same self-contradiction undermines the Report's claim that NMAH failed to properly celebrate the Nation's 250th anniversary. Its executive summary announces that the museum has no genuine commemorative programming and seeks only to "problematize" the anniversary.²⁵ But the Report itself concedes that NMAH installed *In Pursuit of Life, Liberty & Happiness*, "highlight[ing] 250 objects from the museum's collections," and that the Smithsonian Castle opened an *American Aspirations* exhibit "referencing 'the ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence'" and including Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and John Adams.²⁶ *American Aspirations* was considered such an important exhibition that the Smithsonian opened its iconic Castle Building—which has been closed for years for renovations—to display the exhibition, which was co-curated by Secretary Lonnie Bunch himself.²⁷

The Report's complaint is not that commemoration is absent. It is that the exhibits present "the promise and aspirations of America" rather than "celebrating the Nation's Founders" in the manner the White House prefers.²⁸ Notably, alongside other objects associated with the Founders, *In Pursuit of Life, Liberty & Happiness* artifacts on display include a Trump campaign

²² *Id.* at 2.

²³ *Id.* at 114.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.* at 2–3, 13.

²⁶ *Id.* at 114, 123.

²⁷ Tamika Smith, *Smithsonian Secretary Lonnie Bunch on 'American Aspirations' Heading into America 250*, WAMU (Jul. 1, 2026), <https://wamu.org/story/26/07/01/smithsonian-secretary-lonnie-bunch-on-american-aspirations-heading-into-america-250/>.

²⁸ White House Report at 123.

MAGA hat,²⁹ a gun rights button,³⁰ a Ronald Reagan campaign tee shirt,³¹ and First Lady Melania Trump's inaugural ball gown.³²

c. Nonpartisan Fact Checkers Agree

These are not partisan observations. Nonpartisan fact checkers also disagree with the Report's premise. For example, when President Trump made the claim that the Smithsonian contains "nothing about Success, nothing about Brightness, nothing about the Future," PolitiFact visited Smithsonian museums and documented extensive exhibits of American achievement and rated the claim "Pants on Fire."³³

²⁹ Nat'l Museum of Am. Hist., *Make America Great Again Hat*, https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/object/nmah_2055426.

³⁰ Nat'l Museum of Am. Hist., *Gun Rights Button*, https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/object/nmah_1895776.

³¹ Nat'l Museum of Am. Hist., *Ronald Reagan Campaign T-Shirt*, https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/object/nmah_495855.

³² Nat'l Museum of Am. Hist., *Inaugural Gown of Melania Trump*, https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/object/nmah_2052856.

³³ Louis Jacobson, *We Went to the Smithsonian Museums. They Are Filled with 'Success' and 'Brightness,'* PolitiFact (Aug. 20, 2025), <https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2025/aug/20/donald-trump/smithsonian-museums-success-brightness-slavery/>.

V. The Report Is Undone by Its Own Bias

The Report complains that “[i]n early 2026, seventy-five percent of the advertising boards placed on sidewalks around the museum showcased exhibits dedicated to peoples and cultural traditions foreign to the United States.”³⁴ The corresponding endnote identifies the two offending exhibits: *Corazon y Vida: Lowriding Culture*, “highlighting Mexican-Americans,” and *How Can You Forget Me: Filipino American Stories*, “highlighting Filipino-Americans.”³⁵ Mexican-Americans and Filipino-Americans are, by definition, Americans. A Report that cannot recognize Americans (as Americans) has no business directing NMAH on who qualifies to be included in the American story.

The Report further faults NMAH because it allegedly “makes no meaningful effort to acknowledge the central and positive role Christianity played in the Founding and flourishing of America,” and complains that the museum casts the colonists’ arrival “as an intent to subjugate the New World, rather than flee life-threatening persecution, spread the good news of the Gospel, and share the love of Jesus Christ with those in this new land.”³⁶

Setting aside the fact that many historians dispute this characterization of the Founders’ relationship to Christianity,³⁷ a federal report demanding a federal museum affirm the “positive role” of one religion in the Nation’s founding is not a correction of ideology; it is the establishment of one.

Moreover, it ignores the many examples of exhibits and artifacts related to the role of religion in the formation of the United States. NMAH notably had an entire exhibition dedicated to the subject. That exhibit, titled *Religion in Early America*, included artifacts like George Washington’s christening robe from 1732, Thomas Jefferson’s *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth* (also known as “The Jefferson Bible”), and a chalice used by John Carroll, the first Roman Catholic bishop in the United States.³⁸

³⁴ White House Report at 11.

³⁵ *Id.* at 133 n.75.

³⁶ *Id.* at 109.

³⁷ Peter Smith, *Did the founders create a Christian nation? No, but religion did shape their thinking*, AP News, <https://apnews.com/article/founding-fathers-faith-america-250-f943e2df9ea8ca8e3f820c2d5b30f1dd>.

³⁸ Nat’l Museum of Am. Hist., *Religion in Early America*, <https://americanhistory.si.edu/explore/exhibitions/religion-early-america>.

VI. The Report Relies on Misleading, Out-of-Context Quotations

The White House, having apparently decided its Report requires a villain, selected one in NMAH Director Anthea Hartig. The Report includes more than a dozen images of her, mentions her name 229 times, and strings together a series of her quotations about the complexity of America's history and offers them as proof she is "an activist advancing an ideological agenda."³⁹

a. A Proposition as Old as the Republic

Read in full, most quotations are materially different from what the Report presents. But even if taken at face value, they reflect a proposition that has endured for more than 250 years: that acknowledging the Nation's flaws is not a betrayal of patriotism but an expression of it. Republican President George W. Bush put it plainly at the dedication of the National Museum of African American History and Culture:

"A great Nation does not hide its history; it faces its flaws and corrects them. This museum tells the truth: that a country founded on the promise of liberty held millions in chains... that the price of our Union was America's original sin."⁴⁰

What the Report disparages as radical ideology is an idea that Republican presidents have endorsed from Smithsonian podiums. Each of the quotations it cites is based on the same idea.

b. The Quotations, Restored

For example, the Report's executive summary criticizes Director Hartig for saying, "Loving America is very complicated."⁴¹ It omits that she said it in a discussion with the descendants of enslaved people. Indeed, it was a statement of empathy to that audience, and an expression of precisely the proposition President Bush articulated.

The executive summary further states that Director Hartig described "one of her roles as connecting 'research and scholarship to activism and advocacy.'"⁴² The full sentence, buried in the body of the Report, reads, "Throughout my career, one of my roles, as I now understand it, is to address the often lack of continuity and discourse between academic scholarship and research and public interpretation, commemoration, and not to mention connecting that research and scholarship to activism and advocacy."⁴³ The role she describes bridges the gap between academic scholarship and public interpretation and commemoration—the core function of a public history museum.

The executive summary also asserts that Director Hartig believes "the profession has 'to figure out' how 'we're going to' 'problematize' the '250th Anniversary of the signing of the

³⁹ See, e.g., White House Report at 1, 24, 26–27, 38–39, 79, 95, 112–13, 119.

⁴⁰ Remarks by President George W. Bush at the Dedication of the National Museum of African American History and Culture (Sept. 24, 2016), <https://www.bushcenter.org/newsroom/remarks-by-former-first-lady-laura-bush-and-president-george-w-bush-at-the-dedication-of-the-national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture>.

⁴¹ White House Report at 1.

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ *Id.* at 21.

Declaration of Independence in 2026.”⁴⁴ As the four disjointed quote fragments awkwardly stitched together make obvious, it omits the full sentence: “We have to figure out, all together, how we’re going to commemorate, problematize, remember, [and] celebrate the 250th Anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 2026.”⁴⁵ “Problematize” is one word in a list that begins with “commemorate” and ends with “celebrate”—a fact the Report deliberately conceals.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ *Id.* at 1.

⁴⁵ Anthea M. Hartig, Chancellor's Distinguished Lecture Series, Univ. of Cal., Riverside, YouTube (Nov. 16, 2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxKVJ1pYcEw&t=3811s>.

⁴⁶ *Id.*

VII. The Smithsonian Answers to Congress and the Board of Regents, Not the President

The Report declares that because of the Smithsonian’s “federal status” and the fact that it is partially funded by federal appropriations, “the President has a duty and obligation to seek reforms of the Smithsonian.”⁴⁷ This assertion has no basis in fact or law—a point acknowledged by the White House. Presidential bluster notwithstanding, the Report concedes that “the Smithsonian ultimately reports to its Board and to Congress, is organizationally separate from the executive branch, and is not subject to many laws designed strictly for executive branch agencies.”⁴⁸

a. The Structure Congress Built

Congress created the Smithsonian in 1846 as an independent trust instrumentality to carry out James Smithson’s bequest for “the increase and diffusion of knowledge.”⁴⁹ Congress also authorized a Board of Regents (Board) to govern the Institution.⁵⁰ The Board is composed of the Chief Justice of the United States, the Vice President, three Members of the House, three Senators, and nine citizen-members.⁵¹ Citizen-members are appointed by joint resolution of Congress.⁵² The executive branch holds just one seat of seventeen—the Vice President’s—and he holds it as a fiduciary of the Institution, not as a proxy for the President.

As the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service has explained,

“Efforts to revise Smithsonian operations with regard to any purported ideological stance of its exhibits or research would appear to be exclusively subject to the decisions of the entire Board of Regents pursuant to authorities granted to it by Congress (which allow for ‘no other’ restrictions other than those enacted in law) and bylaws adopted by the board pursuant to those authorities.”⁵³

The Report recommends nothing. That is no accident. To recommend an action, the Report would need to identify who is legally empowered to take it, and its own opening chapter concedes the President’s only power is to “urge.”⁵⁴ What it offers instead is a manufactured predicate for a so-called executive order signed fifteen months before the Report was written.

⁴⁷ White House Report at 10.

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ Act of Aug. 10, 1846, ch. 178, 9 Stat. 102 (codified as amended at 20 U.S.C. § 41 *et seq.*).

⁵⁰ 20 U.S.C. § 42.

⁵¹ 20 U.S.C. §§ 42–43.

⁵² 20 U.S.C. § 43.

⁵³ Cong. Rsch. Serv., IF12975, *supra* note 17.

⁵⁴ White House Report at 10.

b. *The System Already Acted*

Notably, on June 9, 2025, the Board publicly directed the Smithsonian Secretary to articulate content expectations to museum directors.⁵⁵ Soon after, the Smithsonian issued a revised Smithsonian Directive 603, its binding, system-wide content policy, which requires that all content “be grounded in scholarly knowledge, reflect a balance of perspectives,” and that “[c]ontent must be non-partisan.” There is no mention of this Directive in the Report.

⁵⁵ Smithsonian Inst., *Smithsonian Statement on Board of Regents and Secretary Governance* (June 9, 2025), <https://www.si.edu/newsdesk/releases/smithsonian-statement>; Smithsonian Directive 603, *Exhibition, Program Planning, Research, and Educational Content* (June 13, 2025).

VIII. The Government-Wide Campaign to Rewrite History

President Trump’s attack on the Smithsonian cannot be viewed in isolation. While the Report is presented as the product of a meticulous review of a single museum, the record says otherwise. The campaign against NMAH specifically and the Smithsonian broadly are part of a coordinated, government-wide effort to control and contort the historical record. This effort includes, but is not limited to, the following actions:

- **February 2025:** President Trump fired Dr. Colleen Shogan, the Archivist of the United States, by late-night email without stated cause.⁵⁶
- **February 2025:** President Trump dismissed 18 members of the Kennedy Center’s board, removed its longtime president, installed a political ally as interim president, had himself elected chairman of the board, and promised to reshape the institution’s cultural mission.⁵⁷
- **March 2025:** President Trump issued Executive Order 14253, directing the removal of “improper ideology” from the Smithsonian and directing the Interior Department to police content at national parks and monuments.⁵⁸
- **Spring 2025:** President Trump ordered purges of “DEI” content, sweeping up historical materials including content on the Tuskegee Airmen and the internment of Japanese-Americans, and scrubbed references to transgender Americans from the Stonewall National Monument page.⁵⁹
- **May 2025:** President Trump abruptly fired Librarian of Congress Dr. Carla Hayden via a two-sentence email from his staff. The White House cited concerns over inappropriate books in the Library of Congress for children even though the Library of Congress is not a lending library and does not lend books to children.⁶⁰
- **May—June 2025:** President Trump claimed to have terminated Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery Director Kim Sajet—authority he does not possess. While the Board

⁵⁶ Kathryn Watson, *Trump fires archivist of the United States, official who oversees government records*, CBS News (Feb. 7, 2025), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-fires-archivist-of-the-united-states-colleen-shogan/>.

⁵⁷ Shawn McCreesh, Maggie Haberman, and Javier C. Hernandez, *Trump Says He Will Dismiss Kennedy Center Board Members and Install Himself as Chair*, N.Y. Times (Feb. 7, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/07/us/politics/trump-kennedy-center.html>.

⁵⁸ Exec. Order No. 14,253 §§ 2, 4, 90 Fed. Reg. 14,563 (Apr. 3, 2025).

⁵⁹ Am. Historical Ass’n, *AHA Statements Responding to Federal Activities* (Apr. 2025), <https://www.historians.org/perspectives-article/aha-statements-responding-to-federal-activities/>.

⁶⁰ Geoff Bennett, Anne Davenport, & Daria Nastasia, *Carla Hayden on Her Time as a Pioneering Librarian of Congress and Getting Fired by Trump*, PBS News (Jun. 20, 2025), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/carla-hayden-on-her-time-as-a-pioneering-librarian-of-congress-and-getting-fired-by-trump>.

publicly reaffirmed that personnel decisions rest with the Smithsonian Secretary, Ms. Sajet ultimately resigned under pressure.⁶¹

- **August 2025:** President Trump demanded curatorial records and “content corrections” from eight Smithsonian museums and declared the Smithsonian “OUT OF CONTROL” for discussing “how bad Slavery was.”⁶²
- **October 2025:** Demolition crews flattened the East Wing of the White House to create a private donor ballroom without completing the legally required reviews.⁶³
- **December 2025:** President Trump created “Freedom 250,” an entity chaired by—and dedicated to—himself, sidelining the bipartisan Semiquincentennial Commission Congress chartered in 2016.⁶⁴
- **January 2026:** President Trump’s National Park Service removed artwork and displays referencing slavery from the President’s House Site at Independence National Historical Park, prompting the City of Philadelphia to sue the Department of the Interior in federal court.⁶⁵
- **March 2026:** At the apparent urging of the White House, Committee on House Administration Republicans adopted a party-line amendment to H.R. 1329, a bipartisan bill designed to locate the Smithsonian American Women’s History Museum on the National Mall. The amended bill would have provided President Trump ultimate decision-making power over the location and added a statutory content mandate targeting transgender women.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Smithsonian Inst., *supra* note 55; *Smithsonian Board Says Only Secretary Can Hire and Fire, After Trump Targets Staff*, Wash. Post (June 9, 2025),

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/art/2025/06/09/smithsonian-kim-sajet-national-portrait-gallery>.

⁶² Raquel Coronell Uribe and Yamiche Alcindor, *Trump Says the Smithsonian Focuses Too Much on ‘How Bad Slavery Was,’* NBC News (Aug. 19, 2025), <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/trump-smithsonian-how-bad-slavery-was-review-museums-rcna225964>; Letter from Vince Haley, Dir., Domestic Policy Council, Lindsey Halligan, Senior Assoc. Staff Sec’y, & Russell Vought, Dir., OMB, to Lonnie G. Bunch III, Sec’y, Smithsonian Inst. (Aug. 12, 2025), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Letter-Sec.-Bunch-Smithsonian-8.12.2025.pdf>.

⁶³ Tamara Keith and Saige Miller, *White House East Wing Demolished, Despite Concern*, NPR (Oct. 23, 2025), <https://www.npr.org/2025/10/23/nx-s1-5583959/white-house-east-wing-demolition-ballroom-trump>.

⁶⁴ Alexandra Marquez and Gary Grumbach, *One Birthday, Two Party Planners: Freedom 250 vs. America250, Explained*, NBC News (June 2, 2026), <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/trump-administration/trump-freedom-250-concert-america-250-difference-artists-cancel-rcna347573>; *Inside Trump’s Takeover of the America 250th Celebration*, MS NOW (Jul. 2, 2026), <https://www.ms.now/news/inside-trump-takeover-america-250-celebration>; Peter Charalambous, Laura Romero, et al., *Who Is Paying for America’s 250th Celebrations? It’s Complicated*, ABC News (Jul. 3, 2026), <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/paying-americas-250th-celebrations-complicated/story?id=134452800>.

⁶⁵ Joe Kottke and Phil Helsel, *Philadelphia Sues After Slavery Exhibits Were Taken Down from President’s House Site*, NBC News (Jan. 23, 2026), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/philadelphia-sues-slavery-exhibits-taken-presidents-house-site-rcna255535>.

⁶⁶ Markup of H.R. 1329 Before the H. Comm. on H. Admin., 119th Cong. (Mar. 18, 2026); *see also* Off. of Mgmt. & Budget, Exec. Off. of the President, *Statement of Administration Policy: H.R. 1329 – Smithsonian American Women’s History Museum Act* (May 20, 2026), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/SAP->

July 4, 2026: The White House released the Report, with contemporaneous public reporting indicating President Trump may attempt to install his own leadership team at the Smithsonian.⁶⁷

The manipulation of history to consolidate political power is a recognized feature of authoritarian governance, from early twentieth-century regimes like those in the Soviet Union⁶⁸ to present-day nations like China⁶⁹ and Hungary.⁷⁰ Those who seek unchecked power elevate the convenient facts and erase the inconvenient ones. The Report does precisely this.

HR1329.pdf (stating that the bill “prevents the museum from depicting males as women” and that these provisions “are essential to ensure the museum is not used to propagandize for corrosive ideologies.”).

⁶⁷ Steve Peoples, *White House report brands Smithsonian leadership as radical activists who can’t be trusted*, AP News (Jul. 5, 2026), <https://apnews.com/article/trump-smithsonian-leadership-activists-history-museum-cda2e8cff29f56a34e5a5d510bb45cda>.

⁶⁸ Richard Cohen, *Vladimir Putin's Rewriting of History Draws on a Long Tradition of Soviet Myth-Making*, Smithsonian Mag. (Mar. 18, 2022), <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/vladimir-putins-rewriting-of-history-draws-on-a-long-tradition-of-soviet-myth-making-180979724/>.

⁶⁹ Tiffany May, *A History Museum Shows How China Wants to Remake Hong Kong*, N.Y. Times (Aug. 23, 2024), <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/23/world/asia/hong-kong-history-museum.html>.

⁷⁰ Palko Karasz, *Theaters in Hungary Feel the Chill of Viktor Orban's Culture War*, N.Y. Times (Dec. 13, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/13/arts/hungary-theater-orban.html>.

IX. Conclusion

The Report asks the American people to surrender the independence of one of the world's preeminent historical institutions and receive, in exchange, a history guaranteed to be flattering by order of President Donald Trump. Nothing about the Report justifies the demand. It was written by political operatives rather than historians. Its central claims of erasure are refuted by its own descriptions of the museum, where Jefferson's desk, Washington's uniform, the Star-Spangled Banner, and other historical artifacts remain. Its case against the Museum Director relies on cherry-picked quotations that have been taken out of context. To the extent there is any legal theory underlying the Report, that theory collapses into a concession that the Smithsonian does not answer to the President. And its author is the same White House that wrote wall text denouncing the President's predecessor, demolished the East Wing without the legally required review, and turned the Nation's 250th birthday into a sparsely attended celebration of one man. For 180 years—and through the tenures of 33 presidents—Congress has kept true to James Smithson's original bequest and what the authorizing legislation provides: an establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge, not for the manufacture of a past more convenient than the one that occurred. Every president before this one understood the distinction.

The American story does not need saving from the historians who tell it—complexities and contradictions included. It needs saving from a President who lacks basic knowledge of American history, who routinely displays his ignorance through ill-advised ramblings and incoherent social media posts, and who cannot comprehend the difference between history and flattery. House Democrats will continue to defend that difference.