

# Cultural counterrevolution: Funds cut from humanities grants to go toward Trump's fascistic "National Garden of American Heroes"

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According to various media reports this week, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), at the direction of the Trump administration, plans to re-direct funding in part toward building a "National Garden of American Heroes," one of the president's pet projects.

In early April, the new administration announced plans to terminate financing for 85 percent of NEH grants. The endowment is the largest federal government source of funding for museums, libraries, colleges and universities, historical sites, cultural research projects and individual scholars.

Recipients of grants already announced, including numerous documentary filmmakers, received emails canceling their funding. According to *Deadline*:

"Your grant no longer effectuates the agency's needs and priorities... [T]he NEH is repurposing its funding allocations in a new direction in furtherance of the President's agenda," the letter said. "The termination of your grant represents an urgent priority of the administration..."

The letter was signed by Michael McDonald, the NEH's acting chairman. The previous head of the endowment, Shelley Lowe, was pushed out by Trump officials in mid-March.

At a meeting this Wednesday, according to three participants who spoke to the *New York Times* on condition of anonymity, McDonald told the NEH's 24-member advisory council that the endowment "would pivot to supporting the White House's agenda" and in particular "would support Mr. Trump's planned patriotic sculpture garden and the broader celebration of the 250th anniversary of American independence on July 4, 2026."

Mr. McDonald said that about \$17 million from the National Endowment for the Humanities and about \$17 million from the National Endowment for the Arts would be directed to the Garden of Heroes. The hypothetical cost of each statue, described as somewhere between \$100,000 and \$200,000, was also discussed, attendees said. ...

The advisory council includes a mix of scholars and educators appointed by Presidents Obama, Trump and Biden. Three attendees described the group's reaction to the news about the sculpture garden as one of stunned silence, though at least one

member expressed excitement that it would become a reality.

Trump first broached the issue of a patriotic sculpture garden in July 2020, using the attacks on various monuments by participants in demonstrations against police violence as his pretext. The protesters legitimately demanded the removal of statues of Confederate leaders who waged war to defend slavery during the Civil War. However, thanks to the influence of identity politics, and such reactionary efforts as the *Times'* own 1619 Project, there were also attempts to destroy or remove statues of Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Ulysses S. Grant and Abraham Lincoln, leaders of the two American revolutions.

Trump proceeded to posture as the defender of the "great figures of America's history." Our nation, the billionaire thief and ignoramus proclaimed, "is witnessing a merciless campaign to wipe out our history, defame our heroes, erase our values and indoctrinate our children." He signed an executive order, "Building and Rebuilding Monuments to American Heroes," instructing the appropriate government bodies "to establish a statuary park named the National Garden of American Heroes." The order named some 30 or so figures whose statues were to be included, among them, aside from fairly predictable Founding Fathers, civil rights leaders and such, preacher Billy Graham, former president Ronald Reagan, generals Douglas MacArthur and George S. Patton, Jr. and far right Supreme Court justice Antonin Scalia.

Two days before leaving office, and 12 days after having attempted to overthrow the US government in a coup, on January 18, 2021, Trump issued another order, "Executive Order on Building the National Garden of American Heroes." It read in part:

The chronicles of our history show that America is a land of heroes. As I announced during my address at Mount Rushmore, the gates of a beautiful new garden will soon open to the public where the legends of America's past will be remembered. The National Garden will be built to reflect the awesome splendor of our country's timeless exceptionalism.

Now, the list of notables to be honored was extended to 250, ostensibly to jibe with the 250th anniversary on July 4, 2026 of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, by which time the garden project was supposed to have been completed.

The group of honorees is a bizarre, right-wing provocation. Innumerable

military officials, obscure and otherwise, make the list, along with out-and-out scoundrels such as stool pigeons Whittaker Chambers and Elia Kazan, arch-reactionary William F. Buckley, economic advisor to the Chilean military torture regime Milton Friedman and former Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater. Pop culture figures such as Elvis Presley and Shirley Temple make the grade, as well as right-wing actors John Wayne and Charlton Heston. Athletes and football coaches, writers and performers, inventors and scientists, astronauts, business people of different sorts and descriptions and more round out the list.

Plans for the grandiose garden were revoked by President Joe Biden in 2021, but now have been renewed by Trump.

There is a ridiculous and even derisory aspect to the “Garden of Heroes” project, but it has a definite political and ideological purpose. Trump and his gang of fascists are taking their cue on cultural matters directly from Hitler and the Nazis. On July 18, 1937, at the opening of the “Great German Art Exhibition,” Hitler declared that “from now on, we will wage a Relentless War of purification against the last elements of our Cultural decay!”

As we have argued, the current cultural counterrevolution is intended to bring into being a US version of the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*, or “people’s” or “national community.” This mythological creation is designed to cover over massive social inequality—incarnated by the Trump regime of, by and for the oligarchs—and the class struggle, and misdirect the population into chauvinist and purely “national” channels.

(Along those lines, reflecting the extreme nervousness about any indication that the working class might have its own independent interests, it is revealing that the list of “Heroes” includes only one labor leader, the epitome of class collaboration, Samuel Gompers. The garden includes “rebels” of various stripes, including Woody Guthrie, Catholic Worker leader Dorothy Day and socialist Helen Keller, as well as Native American figures identified with resistance to European settlement, bohemian jazz musicians and artists, but the organizers could not find it in themselves to include even the likes of John L. Lewis, Walter Reuther or George Meany!)

The idea of a “people’s community” is directed against the socialist understanding that society is composed of classes in conflict. The Nazis claimed to be uniting people across class divides to achieve a national purpose, and that national unity would, in the words of a historian, “obliterate all conflicts—between employers and employees, town and countryside, producers and consumers, industry and craft.”

The attack on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), for example, is the thin end of the wedge. The aim ultimately is to eradicate or hinder the serious study of American society and its contradictions, the history of the class struggle above all, the murder of the Native people, slavery and the real issues in the Civil War, the crimes and character of modern global capitalism, imperialism.

Project 2025, the right-wing blueprint, urged that the

next conservative President must make the institutions of American civil society hard targets for woke culture warriors. This starts with deleting the terms sexual orientation and gender identity, diversity, equity, and inclusion, gender, gender equality, gender equity, gender awareness, gender-sensitive, abortion, reproductive health, reproductive rights, and any other term used to deprive Americans of their First Amendment rights.

“Capitalism,” “class” and “class contradictions” are not included yet, in a sense do not have to be, as the authors take this for granted, but these concepts are among the ultimate targets.

The proposal to direct NEH funds toward the Garden of Heroes is the

latest in a series of sinister actions taken by Trump and his cohorts, including the following:

- The January 29 executive order, “Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling,” asserted that parents expected US schools “to instill a patriotic admiration for our incredible Nation and the values for which we stand.” This was to be coordinated with the Department of Defense.

- In an unhinged social media rant in February, Trump purged the board of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, installing himself as the chair, while extolling his “Vision for a GOLDEN AGE of American Arts and Culture.” He barked: “NO MORE DRAG SHOWS, OR OTHER ANTI-AMERICAN PROPAGANDA — ONLY THE BEST.”

- Before taking power, Trump asserted he was hoping to make Hollywood “stronger than ever before” by naming Sylvester Stallone, Mel Gibson and Jon Voight as “special ambassadors,” whose goal would be to bring back business lost to “foreign countries.” These “three very talented people will be my eyes and ears, and I will get done what they suggest. It will again be, like The United States of America itself, The Golden Age of Hollywood!”

- Trump issued an executive order dismantling the President’s Committee on Arts and Humanities (PCAH), which was established to cultivate arts education by Ronald Reagan. Presumably, Trump will try to defund the National Endowment for the Arts, the NEH and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, meaning the end, among other things, of funding for PBS. The NEA budget, the federal contribution to thousands of arts groups in the country, receives 0.004 percent of the total federal budget, less than 1/2 of one hundredth of one percent.

- An executive order issued by the Trump administration on March 14 called for the elimination of the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the nation’s only federal agency for America’s libraries. In the words of the American Library Association, by eliminating “the only federal agency dedicated to funding library services, the Trump administration’s executive order is cutting off at the knees the most beloved and trusted of American institutions and the staff and services they offer.”

- In a March 27 executive order, “Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History,” Trump targeted major federally funded museums and cultural institutions—the Smithsonian Institution in particular—for their “concerted and widespread effort to rewrite our Nation’s history, replacing objective facts with a distorted narrative driven by ideology rather than truth.”



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