

Trump seeks to impose fascist version of US history on Smithsonian museum

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The Trump administration released a 162-page diatribe, “Saving America’s Story,” on July 4, excoriating the leadership of the National Museum of American History (NMAH) in Washington, D.C., one of the flagship components of the Smithsonian Institution, the network of federally sponsored museums. The document was written as a critique of the NMAH’s exhibitions and materials, and upholds an ultra-nationalist and anti-scientific version of American history.

Compiled by the Domestic Policy Council under the direction of former Trump speechwriter Vince Haley and fascist policy adviser Stephen Miller, the document represents another salvo in the administration’s campaign to reshape the curation of national history at the Smithsonian Institution.

The document was published during a week in which the fascist president “celebrated” the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia by overseeing the roundup of 10,000 immigrant workers, as well as several ICE killings, including that of Lorenzo Salgado Araujo in Houston on Tuesday. Such “commemorations” of the document that stated “all men are created equal” were foreshadowed by the draconian sentences imposed on the left-wing Prairieland protesters in Texas, as a warning to all opponents of the administration.

Trump’s official speech on the holiday at Mount Rushmore, reaching new depths of hysteria and anticommunism, amounted, as the WSWWS noted, “to an official proclamation that the principles embodied” in the Declaration of Independence “are, for the ruling class, a dead letter.”

The goal of this document is the same: to suppress anything that resembles left-wing thought and dissent in cultural institutions and to replace it with a conformist set of far-right myths about American history. It is much the same process that the Trump has sought to implement at the universities, including threats to cut off funding for those that do not crack down on student protesters, and eliminate whole departments that they find objectionable.

The White House has also sought to defund federal institutions that support smaller museums around the country, to suffocate artistic freedom, notably at the Kennedy Center, and above all to dismantle the Department of Education, to starve public education of sorely needed resources.

The Smithsonian has been under attack since March 2025, when Trump issued an executive order, “Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History,” which described a “revisionist movement” across the country that “seeks to undermine the remarkable achievements of the United States by casting its founding principles and historical milestones in a negative light.”

The White House announced in August 2025 that it would review current and planned exhibitions at eight of the Smithsonian’s 21 museums, including the NMAH, although it does not have direct oversight over the museums.

Although the White House lacks direct legal authority to fire museum staff or directly censor exhibit content, it has sought to assert its authority through fiscal pressure. Using the budget office, the administration has threatened the Smithsonian’s annual \$1.08 billion in federal funding unless the institution complies with upcoming “content corrections.”

In “Saving America’s Story,” the Trump administration has targeted everything from exhibitions to signage to learning materials prepared for teachers. It seeks to conduct a witch-hunt against the Director of the NMAH, Anthea M. Hartig.

While Dr. Hartig has not responded publicly to the report, her immediate superior, the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, Lonnie G. Bunch III, wrote a letter this week to staff that was reported widely in the media. He characterized the document as “not a fair characterization of the work and totality of the National Museum of American History,” and that “our work is driven by scholarship, accuracy, and an uncompromising commitment to tell the fullness of America’s story.”

The Organization of American Historians also came to the defense of the museum. In a statement published on its website on Monday it noted:

The question this report forces us to confront is simple: who has the authority to determine how American history is told? The President, or the historians, archivists, educators, curators, and museum professionals whose training and evidence-based methods have always governed that work? The answer,

as a matter of law and professional practice, has never been the former.

The method of the report is to override historical scholarship and intellectual freedom, but its content is to reshape US history along far-right, xenophobic, nationalist and Christian fundamentalist lines. It is a thoroughly dishonest and sinister document.

One of the most odious features of “Saving America’s Story” is its repeated attempts to dehumanize immigrant workers. It refers to “illegal aliens” at least 45 times and virtually sees as a crime, for example, the fact that the NMAH has produced material for teachers that “seeks to build empathy for illegal aliens,” a truly filthy remark considering ICE brutality.

“The Museum’s programming,” the document continues, “repeatedly lionizes illegal aliens, presenting them as courageous agents of social change ...” It accuses the museum of the basic democratic sentiment of “promoting citizenship for millions of illegal aliens.”

The document, unsurprisingly, is rife with nationalism and xenophobia. It unfavorably quotes the NMAH for writing in curricular materials to “get out of the ‘America First’ mentality” and focus on “the entirety of the Americas, not just our part of North America,” as an example of the manner in which the museum is actively working to dismantle a sense of unique national identity among students and visitors.

It cites Dr. Hartig’s comments on a sign personally welcoming visitors to the museum on the 250th anniversary of the founding, which read: “You’ll see how Americans have worked since that time to realize the ideals written into this groundbreaking document.” But the administration’s screed manages to conclude tendentiously and absurdly, “The Museum refuses to substantively address the Declaration of Independence and Revolutionary War because it does not want visitors thinking about America’s Founders or Founding at all.”

The document makes much of the fact that the museum’s materials “support the *New York Times*’ 1619 Project” which, “in the words of the *Times*, set out to ‘reframe the country’s history, understanding 1619 as our true founding.’”

While the 1619 Project and racial and identity politics in general has some influence in the museum’s materials and exhibitions, the goal of the “Saving America’s Story” is to expunge any mention of the struggles for equality throughout American history, not to provide an legitimate critique of the shortcomings of the 1619 Project.

The document must operate with a high level of intellectual dishonesty to accomplish this. One example of many should suffice. The document cites material prepared by the museum for educators that shows that black girls are suspended from school at six times the rate of white girls.

“Saving America’s Story” comments: “After all, to Director

Hartig, there could be no other reason why a student in America today could be suspended from school apart from their race. This conclusion, however, ignores a substantial body of research finding that disparities in school discipline are influenced by numerous factors beyond race alone, including lack of parental guidance or support, trauma, mental health issues, gang involvement, drug use, social media, socioeconomic status, school climate, and wide variation in disciplinary policies across districts and states—none of which Hartig acknowledges or attempts to address.”

While by itself this may be a legitimate criticism of the use of this data, the “Saving America’s Story” statement comes from an administration that is systemically dismantling the Department of Education and the support it gives, however inadequate, for student trauma and mental health, including the very ability of researchers to develop this body of knowledge.

Predictably, anything critical of a narrative that highlights Christianity above all other religions, and indeed conceptions, in the foundation of America (and conveniently omitting the Deist beliefs of many of the Founders) is to be forbidden, including, for example, an exhibition which seeks to “demonstrate that not every passenger aboard the Mayflower was fleeing religious persecution,” which is now simply a truism in studies of the Puritan colonization of Massachusetts.

The document refers to the “divine source” of the inalienable rights outlined in the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution, arguing that the museum selectively mutes these religious claims.

American history must be defended, and to do so, the freedom of scholarship must be upheld as a critical component of democratic rights. The decision of the Trump administration to publish this document on July 4 is not accidental. It is meant not only to tarnish but suppress the understanding of the American Revolution to millions of people.

The stakes for incorporating an understanding of the American Revolution in the struggles of the working class against war, fascism and economic disaster are high.

On June 25, the World Socialist Web Site held a critical online seminar on the American Revolution with several leading historians. The purpose of this event was to highlight the needs of millions for historical knowledge, particularly about the great revolutionary struggles in the United States. In that sense, it was a response before the fact to the reactionary mythmaking of “Saving America’s Story.”



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