

# NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST CENSORSHIP

## **Executive Order Reduces Smithsonian Institutions and National Park Service to Platforms for Nationalist Propaganda**

As an organization committed to protecting the freedom of thought, inquiry, and expression, the National Coalition Against Censorship condemns the president's most recent Executive Order, titled "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History." This Executive Order, if unchallenged, represents the establishment of control and censorship over what knowledge is pursued and presented at federal institutions. The order aims to establish a federally-sanctioned American history that is uncritical, nationalist, and pro-State, and represents a blatant instruction to censor nuanced and critical views of the nation's past.

Under the order, the Smithsonian Institution's programs and exhibitions are prohibited from diverging from the administration's view of "American Greatness." This threatens the Institution's ability to support research, exhibitions, displays, or programs that frankly discuss histories of racism, and trans identity, among other subjects. The order also requires that the Institution's offerings ideologically "comply with Federal law and policy," a clause that ensures the government's ability to censor any content that this presidential administration does not like. To enforce these orders, the Executive Order asks the Vice President, who is one of the Institution's governing regents, to oversee programming and work with Congress and ensure that federal funds are not spent on any programs or exhibitions that "degrade shared American values."

Another section of the order directs the Department of the Interior to review and eliminate changes to National Park Service monuments, memorials, and materials, which were made after 2020 and that contribute to what the order describes as a "false reconstruction of American history." This measure is designed specifically to undo the work undertaken by many institutions and Americans to account for the realities and extended impact of institutionalized racism.

The Executive Order betrays the founding principles and established practice of both the Smithsonian Institution and the National Park System. The Smithsonian Institution was founded in 1846 "for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men." Since its founding, the Institution has grown to include an array of celebrated cultural institutions known for their historical rigor and academic excellence. The National Park Service, founded in 1916, was initiated to prioritize the preservation of the country's natural landscapes for the "benefit and enjoyment of the people." In the decades since its founding, it has grown to include historical sites and monuments, and adopted a role as a guardian of "diverse cultural and recreational resources."

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[REDACTED] CENSORSHIP**

The order represents a shameful attempt to impose ideological control over these two venerable institutions, and denigrates the expertise and care of the historians and scholars whose work has informed countless displays, exhibitions, and programs. Such work is rigorous, relying on primary historical documents and established works of scholarship. Rather than promote “diffusion of knowledge” under this order, the Smithsonian Institution will ensure its erasure. Rather than tend to the “benefit and enjoyment of the people,” this order will force the National Park Service to indoctrinate visitors with nationalist propaganda.

While it claims to safeguard “American values,” this new Executive Order tramples on these very values, which include the freedoms of speech, thought, and inquiry, including the freedom to hold and access views that are critical of official narratives of any federal administration. This government-instituted propaganda is not only a threat to historical knowledge, it is a threat to our democracy.

In the face of these blatant efforts to render the Smithsonian Institution and the National Park Service as platforms for nationalist propaganda, NCAC calls upon the Smithsonian Institution’s governing Board of Regents—which has the power to resist this order—to uphold the American value of free expression, which includes the freedom to criticize the government, is a fundamental component of American democracy.