

# NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST CENSORSHIP

## Leading U.S. Cultural and Historical Associations Condemn Executive Overreach

The [White House's letter](#) demanding a review of activities at the Smithsonian Institution in the lead-up to the 250th anniversary of the United States' founding, followed by its publishing a [list](#) of specific Smithsonian content to which the administration objects, makes clear the Administration's intent to censor viewpoints it disagrees with, and impose its own perspective of U.S. history and society as the ultimate indisputable truth.

The letter has been met with alarm and condemnation from the leading national associations of historians and museums, as well as from membership organizations dedicated to free expression, such as the National Coalition Against Censorship's participating organization, [PEN America](#).

The letter, which proposes to ensure alignment with the President's directive to celebrate American exceptionalism in accordance with Executive Order 14253, *Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History*, marks a watershed moment in the administration's systemic and illegitimate ideological takeover of the country's most cherished conglomerate of cultural institutions.

As the Organization of American Historians (OAH), the largest scholarly organization devoted to the history of the United States, [declares](#), "No president has the legitimate authority to impose such a review. Established by Congress in 1846 as a unique and independent agency, the Smithsonian Institution is not, and has never been, under the authority of the Executive Branch. It is an independent statutory agency, led by the Secretary and governed by a bipartisan Board of Regents as established by law. This legal structure is ignored by the letter [...]."

Along with other national alliances, like the [Association of Art Museum Directors](#), OAH insists on the necessary autonomy of the Smithsonian Institution and considers the "White House's effort to assert control over the Smithsonian's staff, archives, donors, public-facing content, curatorial processes, exhibition planning, and collection" an "alarming infringement" on its "autonomy and integrity."

OAH and The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) both object to weaponization of history in the service of political imperatives and indoctrination. As AASLH [asserts](#), "Censoring and manipulating content to fit a predetermined, triumphalist narrative is the antithesis of historical practice and a disservice to us all."

The American Alliance of Museums, a national organization representing the entire scope of the U.S. museum field, issued a broader [statement](#) not specifically mentioning the Smithsonian, but noting the existence of "increasing external pressures to modify, remove, or limit exhibitions and programs," that which "can create a chilling effect across the entire museum sector."

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Americans disagree on many issues, including immigration, gender roles, and the role of slavery in the nation's history, yet one of the foundational tenets of a democracy is that people should be free to think for themselves. Cultural institutions offer heavily researched programs, and help educate citizens so they can be better informed when establishing and arguing their positions. No president, Republican or Democrat, should have the power to impose their views on the nation's cultural institutions by decree and stifle all other viewpoints. No president should have the power to decide what Americans are allowed to think.

Leading cultural institutions across the U.S. have spoken clearly. This is not a partisan issue; it concerns the integrity and autonomy of the country's entire cultural sphere. The current executive overreach sets an ominous precedent and puts into question the very mandate of historical and cultural institutions to serve the American people rather than an elected official. Yet, we have not heard from Congress aside from an [objection](#) to the *Restoring Truth* Executive Order by members of the Black Congressional Caucus.

The National Coalition Against Censorship urges the Smithsonian to stay true to its mission, and urges Congress, which controls a large part of the Institution's funding, to make clear their support of the Institution's independence from the power grab of the executive branch.

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## About the National Coalition Against Censorship

Founded in 1974, the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) is a first responder in protecting freedom of expression, a fundamental human right and a keystone of democracy. Representing over 60 national non-profit education, civil rights, publishing, and arts organizations, NCAC provides direct support and resources to people experiencing censorship, including students, artists, teachers, curators, librarians, and leaders of cultural institutions. The Coalition engages in public education, legal advocacy, and youth programming in the service of free expression and to fight censorship in all its forms.