

March 31, 2025

Historians Defend the Smithsonian

The Executive Order “[Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History](#),” issued on March 27 by the White House, egregiously misrepresents the work of the Smithsonian Institution. The Smithsonian is among the premier research institutions in the world, widely known for the integrity of its scholarship, which is careful and based on historical and scientific evidence. The Institution ardently pursues the purpose for which it was established more than 175 years ago: “the increase and diffusion of knowledge.” The accusation in the White House [fact sheet](#) accompanying the executive order claims that Smithsonian museums are displaying “improper, divisive, or anti-American ideology.” This is simply untrue; it misrepresents the work of those museums and the public’s engagement with their collections and exhibits. It also completely misconstrues the nature of historical work.

Historians explore the past to understand how our nation has evolved. We draw on a wide range of sources, which helps us to understand history from different angles of vision. Our 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.

The stories that have shaped our past include not only elements that make us proud but also aspects that make us acutely aware of tragedies in our nation’s history. No person, no nation, is perfect, and we should all—as individuals and as nations—learn from our imperfections.

The Smithsonian’s museums collect and preserve the past of all Americans and encompass the entirety of our nation’s history. Visitors explore exhibitions and collections in which they can find themselves, their families, their communities, and their nation represented. They encounter both our achievements and the painful moments of our rich and complicated past.

Patriotic history celebrates our nation’s many great achievements. It also helps us grapple with the less grand and more painful parts of our history. Both are part of a shared past that is fundamentally American. We learn from the past to inform how we can best shape our future. By providing a history with the integrity necessary to enable all Americans to be all they can possibly be, the Smithsonian is fulfilling its duty to all of us.