Documents for group work: prepare a summary of your document that you will present to the class

Document 1 ★

Video: Who is Zohran Mamdani, and what are his plans for NYC?

Document 2 ★★

Video: Epstein files explained

Document 3: video + article ★★

Trump signs executive order rebranding Pentagon as Department of War

Joseph Gedeon , *The Guardian,* Fri 5 Sep 2025

Donald Trump signed an executive order on Friday to rebrand the Department of Defense as the Department of War, a callback to the department's original name used from 1789 to 1947.

The directive will make Department of War the secondary title, and is a way to get around the need for congressional approval to formally rename a federal agency, an administration official said.

"We won the first world war, we won the second world war, we won everything before that and in between," Trump said at the signing. "And then we decided to go woke and we changed the name to the Department of Defense."

The administration has already begun implementing the symbolic changes: visitors to the Pentagon's defense.gov website are now automatically redirected to war.gov.

The move comes days after a deadly US navy airstrike killed 11 people on a small boat in international waters, which the military said involved a drug vessel operated by the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua. Some legal experts questioned whether the strike was lawful under international law.

The combination of aggressive military action and symbolic rebranding goes in contrast with Trump's repeated claims to be "the anti-war president" who campaigned on promises to end conflicts and avoid new wars. Trump said during the signing of the order that his focus on strength and trade has improved America's position in the world.

Trump has argued the original name better reflects military victories and honestly represents what the department does. The rebrand would reverse the 1947 name change made as part of postwar reforms that emphasized defense over warfare.

Seven US warships and one nuclear-powered fast-attack submarine were reported to be heading for the Caribbean following Monday's strike, another layer in the measures Trump has taken to combat what he claims is the threat from Tren de Aragua.

Congressional approval would ultimately be required for any permanent name change, though the House member Greg Steube from Florida and the senator Mike Lee from Utah, both Republicans, introduced legislation to make the switch official.

"We're going to go on offense, not just on defense. Maximum lethality, not tepid legality. Violent effect, not politically correct," the secretary of defense, Pete Hegseth, said in the Oval Office. "We're going to raise up warriors, not just defenders. So this war department, Mr President, just like America is back."

Document 4 ★★★

Demolishing the White House East Wing to build a ballroom embodies Trump's heritage politics

R. Grant Gilmore III, *The Conversation*, Oct. 23, 2025

From ancient Egypt to Washington, D.C., rulers have long used architecture and associated stories to project power, control memory and shape national identity. As 17th-century French statesman Jean-Baptiste Colbert observed:

"In the absence of brilliant deeds of war, nothing proclaims the greatness and spirit of princes more than building works."

Today, the Trump administration is mobilizing heritage and architecture as tools of ideology and control. In U.S. historic preservation, "heritage" is the shared, living inheritance of places, objects, practices and stories – often plural and contested – that communities value and preserve. America's architectural heritage is as diverse as the people who created, inhabited and continue to care for it.

As an archaeologist with three decades of practice, I read environments designed by humans. Enduring modifications to these places, especially to buildings and monuments, carry power and speak across generations.

In his first term as president, and even more so today, Donald Trump has pushed to an extreme legacy-building through architecture and heritage policy. He is remaking the White House physically and metaphorically in his image, consistent with his long record of putting his name on buildings as a developer.

In December 2020, Trump issued an executive order declaring classical and traditional architectural styles the "preferred" design for new federal buildings. The order derided Brutalist and modernist structures as inconsistent with national values.

Now, Trump is seeking to roll back inclusive historical narratives at U.S. parks and monuments. And he is reviving sanitized myths about America's history of slavery, misogyny and Manifest Destiny, for use in museums, textbooks and public schools.

Yet artifacts don't lie. And it is the archaeologist's task to recover these legacies as truthfully as possible, since how the past is remembered shapes the choices a nation makes about its future.

Architecture as political power and legacy

Dictators, tyrants and kings build monumental architecture to buttress their own egos, which is called authoritarian monumentalism. They also seek to build the national ego – another word for nationalism.

Social psychologists have found that the awe we experience when we encounter something vast diminishes the "individual self," making viewers feel respect and attachment to creators of awesome architecture. Authoritarian monumentalism often exploits this phenomenon. For example, in France, King Louis XIV expanded the Palace of Versailles and renovated its gardens in the mid-1600s to evoke perceptions of royal grandeur and territorial power in visitors.

Many leaders throughout history have built "temples to power" while erasing or overshadowing the memory of their predecessors – a practice known as *damnatio memoriae*, or condemnation to oblivion.

In the ancient world, the Sumerians, Babylonians, Egyptians, Romans, Chinese dynasties, Mayans and Incas all left behind architecture that still commands awe in the form of monuments to gods, rulers and communities. These monuments conveyed power and often served as instruments of physical and psychological control.

In the 19th century, Napoleon fused conquest with heritage. Expeditions to Egypt and Rome, and the building of Parisian monuments – the Arc de Triomphe and the Vendôme Column, both modeled on Roman precedents – reinforced his legitimacy.

Albert Speer's and Hermann Giesler's monumental neoclassical designs in Nazi Germany, such as the party rally grounds in Nuremberg, were intended to overwhelm the individual and glorify the regime. And Josef Stalin's Soviet Union suppressed avant-garde experimentation in favor of monumental "socialist realist" architecture, projecting permanence and centralized power.

Now, Trump has proposed building his own triumphal arch in Arlington, Virginia, just across the Potomac River from the Lincoln Memorial, as a symbol to mark the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

An American alternative

Born of Enlightenment ideals of John Locke, Voltaire and Adam Smith, the American Revolution rejected the European idea of monarchs as semidivine rulers. Instead, leaders were expected to serve the citizenry.

That philosophy took architectural form in the Federal style, which was dominant from about 1785 to 1830. This clear, democratic architectural language was distinct from Europe's ornate traditions, and recognizably American.

Its key features were Palladian proportions – measurements rooted in classical Roman architecture – and an emphasis on balance, simplicity and patriotic motifs.

James Hoban's White House and Thomas Jefferson's Monticello embodied this style. Interiors featured lighter construction, symmetrical lines, and motifs such as eagles, urns and bellflowers. They rejected the opulent rococo styles associated with monarchy.

Americans also recognized preservation's political force. In 1816, the city of Philadelphia bought Independence Hall, which was constructed in 1753 and was where the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were debated and signed, to keep it from being demolished. Today the building is a U.S. National Park and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Early preservationists saved George Washington's home, Mount Vernon, Jefferson's Monticello, and other landmarks, tying democracy's endurance to the built environment.

Architecture, memory and Trump

In remaking the White House and prescribing the style and content of many federal sites, Trump is targeting not just buildings but the stories they tell.

By challenging narratives that depart from white, Anglo-Saxon origin myths, Trump is using his power to roll back decades of work toward creating a more inclusive national history.

These actions ignore the fact that America's strength lies in its identity as a nation of immigrants. The Trump administration has singled out the Smithsonian Institution – the world's largest museum, founded "for the increase and diffusion of knowledge – for ideological reshaping. Trump also is pushing to restore recently removed Confederate monuments, helping to revive "Lost Cause" mythology about the Civil War.

Trump's 2020 order declaring classical and traditional architectural styles the preferred design for government buildings echoed authoritarian leaders like Adolf Hitler and Stalin, whose governments sought to dictate aesthetics as expressions of ideology. The American Institute of Architects publicly opposed the order, warning that it imposed ideological restrictions on design.

Trump's second administration has advanced this agenda by adopting many recommendations in the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 blueprint. Notably, Project 2025 calls for repealing the 1906 Antiquities Act – which empowers presidents to quickly designate national monuments on federal land – and for shrinking many existing monuments. Such rollbacks would undercut the framework that has safeguarded places like Devils Tower in Wyoming and Muir Woods in California for over a century.

Trump's new ballroom is a distinct departure from the core values embodied in the White House's Federal style. Although many commentators have described it as rococo, it is more aligned with the overwrought and opulent styles of the Gilded Age – a time in American history, from about 1875 through 1895, with many parallels to the present.

In ordering its construction, Trump has ignored long-standing consultation and review procedures that are central to historic preservation. The demolition of the East Wing may have ignored processes required by law at one of the most important U.S. historic

sites. It's the latest illustration of his unilateral and unaccountable methods for getting what he wants.

Instruments of memory and identity

When leaders push selective histories and undercut inclusive ones, they turn heritage into a tool for controlling public memory. This collective understanding and interpretation of the past underpins a healthy democracy. It sustains a shared civic identity, ensures accountability for past wrongs and supports rights and participation.

Heritage politics in the Trump era seeks to redefine America's story and determine who gets to speak. Attacks on so-called "woke" history seek to erase complex truths about slavery, inequality and exclusion that are essential to democratic accountability.

Architecture and heritage are never just bricks and mortar. They are instruments of memory, identity and power.

Document 5 ★★

Corporation for Public Broadcasting, funder of NPR and PBS, says it will end operations within months after federal budget cuts

By Kerry Breen, CBS, August 1, 2025

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting said Friday it would begin winding down its operations after its funding was eliminated by the Trump administration and Congress.

The CPB is a private nonprofit founded in 1967 that serves as a steward of funding for public media. It provides funds to 1,500 local public radio and television stations as well as PBS and NPR. It employs about 100 people.

President Trump signed an executive order in May instructing the organization to cease federal funding for PBS and NPR. In June, the House approved a White House request to claw back $1.1 billion in already appointed federal funds from the CPB. The Senate Appropriations Committee's 2026 appropriations bill eliminated funding for the CPB for the first time in over 50 years.

"Despite the extraordinary efforts of millions of Americans who called, wrote, and petitioned Congress to preserve federal funding for CPB, we now face the difficult reality of closing our operations," said CPB President and CEO Patricia Harrison in a statement. "CPB remains committed to fulfilling its fiduciary responsibilities and supporting our partners through this transition with transparency and care."

The organization said in a statement it told employees that a majority of staff positions will "conclude" when the fiscal year ends on Sept. 30, 2025. The CPB did not say exactly how many positions that was. A "small transition team will remain through January 2026 to ensure a responsible and orderly closeout of operations," the organization said.

Mr. Trump also fired three members of the CPB's five-person board in April. In response, the CPB sued, arguing the president was exceeding his authority, but that case was dropped on Friday.

Both PBS and NPR, the most high-profile public media organizations, have long been the target of Republican criticism and have been preparing for the possibility of cuts since Mr. Trump's reelection. The broadcasters receive roughly half a billion dollars in public funding through the CPB. In March, PBS CEO Paula Kerger and NPR President and CEO Katherine Maher defended their organizations from accusations of bias in testimony before a House subcommittee.

Maher warned that defunding public radio poses "a real risk to the public safety of the country." She said some NPR stations receive "more than 50% of their budget" from federal funding and may face layoffs and station closures.

Rural areas would feel the largest impacts, Maher said. Local stations also provide vital alerts in emergencies like storms, floods and wildfires.

"Public media, public radio, public television, are a critical part of the emergency response plans of nearly half of the states in this nation," Maher said in an interview with CBS News on July 17. "If these types of emergency alerting go away, you will have fewer outlets to be able to respond in real time" to future natural disasters.

Document 6 ★★★

How Trump is using the courts to get what he wants - and changing the shape of presidential power

Gary O'Donoghue, BBC, 22 July 2025

[…] Three major Supreme Court judgments – one giving presidents and former presidents broad immunity from prosecution; a second dismissing the ruling that Trump's attempts to overturn the 2020 election results disqualified him from running for office again; and a third, just last month, curbing district judges' abilities to stall the president's agenda – have all emboldened this president who, having reshaped the Supreme Court with a solid conservative majority, now has the lower courts in his sights.

Those federal district judges – who had often made rulings on immigration policy that they said applied nationwide – are now facing a full-frontal onslaught from an administration that has questioned their legitimacy, and some say flouted their very authority.

The question is, should they fight back to reassert their authority – and if so, how can they? And will this all permanently reshape the balance of powers in the US, even after Donald Trump's term ends?

'The gravest assault on democracy'

Several judges – both active and retired – have told me that the scale of the "attack" is like nothing seen before.

John E Jones III, a former judge in Pennsylvania, appointed by a Republican president, and now president of Dickinson College, said: "I think it's fair to say that in particular, the US district courts... [are] under attack by the administration in a way that is unprecedented."

As well as his colourful remarks to me on the phone during our recent interview, the US President has variously called judges "crooked", "monsters", "deranged", "lunatics", "USA hating", and "radical left".

He has also called for the impeachment of those he disagrees with. And there have been threats to sue judges too.

His deputy chief of staff for policy, Stephen Miller, has been even more forthright, declaring that the country is living under a judicial tyranny.

"Each day, they change the foreign policy, economic, staffing, and national security policies of the administration," he posted on the social media site X in March. "It is madness. It is lunacy. It is pure lawlessness.

"It is the gravest assault on democracy. It must and will end."

From death threats to doxxing

Judges have faced growing hostility, and in some cases threats of violence from the public.

"[They] are facing threats that they never have faced before," says Nancy Gertner, a former federal judge who now teaches at Harvard Law School. She was appointed by President Bill Clinton and spent 17 years on the federal bench in Massachusetts.

"There's no question that the kind of opprobrium that the administration heaps on judges with whom they disagree is unlike any other time."

Judge Gertner says she knows of serving judges who have received death threats this year that are understood to have been prompted by their blocking or delaying some of the president's executive orders.

There is no suggestion that Trump had any knowledge of the threats.

Figures compiled by the US Marshals Service, which is tasked with protecting the judiciary, show that, to mid-June, there were more than 400 threats against almost 300 judges – surpassing the totals for the entire year of 2022.

Some of the threats involve doxxing – the publication of personal information about the person or their family, which risks opening them up to attack.

Other forms of intimidation this year have been more sinister still.

[…] Many supporters of the current administration including Jeff Anderson, one of the architects of the Project 2025 program (which many saw as a blueprint for Trump's second term), reject the idea that presidential rhetoric is to blame for raising the temperature.

Mr Anderson argues that the left is more to blame for hostility towards judges: "The most high-profile threat to anyone on the federal courts was when someone tried to assassinate [the conservative] Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh.

"There's this tendency to try to characterise the Trump administration as being what has facilitated this. I think a lot of the more radical revolutionary notions that we need to take law in our own hands and the ends justify the means… tend to [be] from the left in America."

A blizzard of executive orders

While other presidents have clashed with the courts, Trump's confrontations are unquestionably unique in their scale and fury, and they were perhaps inevitable, given that he arrived in the White House with a blizzard of executive orders aimed at getting what he wanted quickly.

On day one alone, 26 were signed.

There have been another 140 to the beginning of July – more than President Joe Biden signed during his four-year term, and only around 100 fewer than President Barack Obama in his eight years in the White House.

Trump could have asked Congress to enact laws to implement these policies; after all, Republicans currently control both chambers. But that process takes time, and Congress has been preoccupied with the president's flagship domestic legislation – the so-called "Big Beautiful Bill" – meaning that there has been no time or political capital for other priorities.

Of course, executive orders are perfectly within the president's prerogative. The power to make executive orders comes directly from Article II of the US Constitution, so Trump is not defying or bypassing the constitution – he's pulling the levers of government in a way he's allowed to do, provided the orders cite legislative authority; and those orders do have the force of law.

What the president can't do, with the sweep of his pen, is make new laws, or do things that go contrary to the Constitution.

And if Congress doesn't step in, then the only option for those who want to challenge the orders is to go to court.

The sweeping nature of the orders he has signed, many touching on constitutional issues such as the right of everyone born in the US to citizenship, has led to dozens of nationwide injunctions pending the outcome on the merits of the individual cases.

That is why Trump's Supreme Court victory at the end of June, curbing such nationwide injunctions, is so significant.

"These district court judges have been totally out of line and out of control," argues Jeff Anderson.

Are judges blocking 'electorate desires'?

The administration has deployed various arguments. The judiciary has been accused of "overreach" and judges themselves accused of being "activists". But perhaps the most fundamental – and most philosophical – criticism is that they are standing in the way of the will of the people.

As Stephen Miller has put it, "out of control Marxist judges" are standing in the way of the "desires of the electorate".

It's an argument that, according to many judges, misunderstands the constitution in a fundamental way.

"We're a nation of laws, not men," explains judge John E Jones III. "A mandate to the president of the United States does not mean a mandate to disregard the law. That's evident, but this is papering over a fundamental disregard of the law and the constitution."

There are signs that some individuals in the administration, despite its assertions to the contrary, could well be toying with flouting the authority of the courts.

The president's border tsar, Tom Homan, went on television over a court's attempts to prevent the deportation of several hundred Venezuelans and said: "I'm proud to be a part of this administration. We're not stopping. ... I don't care what the judges think."

But, in his interview with me last week, the President denied he was defying the judiciary, pointing out that when rulings have gone against him, he has sought remedy through the court process.

"I have too much respect for it to defy it. I have great respect for the judiciary. And you can see that," he told me, adding: "That's why I'm winning on appeal."

'The US faces a catastrophic situation'

Some vocal critics of the president go further and claim he's tearing up the whole system of checks and balances in which the three equal branches of government (the presidency, congress and the judiciary) each act as a brake on the others.

"This is a huge turning point for the country," says Professor Laurence Tribe, one of the nation's foremost constitutional experts, who has become a forthright critic of the president.

He argues that Congress has ceased to perform its oversight function and fears "the United States is facing a catastrophic situation".

"The idea of three branches... was hatched at our founding - before the rise of political parties and before the rise of demagogues as effective and charismatic as Trump," he told me. "The whole system is completely out of balance."

That balance that Professor Tribe talks about has long been debated and the shift in power towards the presidency is not a new complaint.

After the Watergate scandal in the 1970s, which saw President Richard Nixon flout many of the norms followed by previous presidents, a whole slew of legislation was passed to curb the executive and make it more accountable.

But some of the changes involved merely adopting new norms such as publication of presidential tax returns and avoiding financial conflicts of interest – and this president has showed little concern to be seen to follow those norms.

The judiciary is fighting back

When it comes to the relationship between the presidency and the courts, though, even Nixon stopped short of defying their authority, eventually handing over the infamous Watergate tapes, after months of refusing to do so, once the Supreme Court unanimously ordered it.

Trump has come close to defiance. In one instance, after being ordered to facilitate the return of a man wrongly deported to El Salvador, Kilmar Ábrego García, the administration was accused of slow-walking the process of complying with the Supreme Court's decision.

Even Trump's Attorney General, Pam Bondi, said: "He's not coming back to our country."

It took two months for the administration to follow the court's order. That was seen by the president's critics as a taste of what could follow.

After all, there are only two ways a president can be truly held to account – one is by removal at an election; the second is by impeachment in Congress, and Trump has already survived two of those.

But if there truly is a plan to defy or neuter the courts, the judiciary is not giving in without a fight.

Even after the Supreme Court ruled to curb those nationwide injunctions at the end of June (incidentally, presidents of both parties have complained about such injunctions in the past), another judge slapped one on Trump's asylum policy.

Earlier this month, a US district judge issued a fresh nationwide block on Trump's executive order restricting the automatic right to citizenship for babies born to undocumented migrants or foreign visitors, drawing more furious words from the White House.

This battle is enjoined, but it's far from over – and its consequences for this president and future presidents are unpredictable.