

File 18- Reappraising the past - Museums – Cultural Institutions

GLOSSARY AND REFERENCES

- **The Smithsonian** > <https://www.si.edu/>

The Smithsonian in their own words (see <https://www.si.edu/about>)

About the Smithsonian The Smithsonian Institution is the world’s largest museum, education, and research complex, with 21 museums, 14 education and research centers, and the National Zoo—shaping the future by preserving heritage, discovering new knowledge, and sharing our resources with the world.

The Institution was founded in 1846 with funds from the Englishman James Smithson (1765–1829) according to his wishes “under the name of the Smithsonian Institution, an establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge.” We continue to honor this mission and invite you to join us in our quest.

- **The Kennedy Center** (see at the end of the document)

See also

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/feb/08/trump-kennedy-center-washington-dc>

- **The National Park Service** > <https://www.britannica.com/topic/National-Park-Service>

National Park Service (NPS), agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior that manages and maintains several hundred national parks, monuments, historical sites, and other designated properties of the federal government. It was established in 1916 by an act of the U.S. Congress that was signed into law by U.S. Pres. Woodrow Wilson. The law stipulated that the new service was to “conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and...leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

- **The semiquincentennial**

- **Toppling of statues during the BLM protests**

- **Key acts and executive orders referred to in the file**

- ▶ **[NAGPRA](#) - Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act**

The 2023 final rule:

<https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-announces-final-rule-implementation-native-american-graves>

- ▶ Executive order “**Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History**,” March 27 2026

A good introduction by Le Monde

- ☛ **Guerre culturelle : comment Trump essaye d’imposer un récit mensonger de l’histoire**

Une série de décrets présidentiels impose désormais aux musées, universités et écoles d’adopter un récit conforme à une vision conservatrice et « patriotique » de l’histoire américaine.

Par [Léa Bello](#) Publié le 20 avril 2025 ☛ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUFoYih9et4>

- ▶ Executive Order 14151—**[Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing](#)** January 20, 2025

- ▶ Executive Order 14190 - **[Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling](#)**, January 29, 2025

- **The list of words (and concepts) that have been marked by the federal administration**

These Words Are Disappearing in the New Trump Administration [HERE](#)

As President Trump seeks to purge the federal government of “woke” initiatives, agencies have flagged hundreds of words to limit or avoid, according to a compilation of government documents.

HISTORY IN THE CULTURE WARS

Text 1 - The Long Read - The Smithsonian could be the beginning of Trump's plan to edit history. Or the end.

The president may not like how the museum and research institution tells the American story — but Americans do.
The Washington Post, April 10, 2025

Read the article with illustrated by a series of photographs <https://wapo.st/4e6syVn>

Column by [Philip Kennicott](#) (The WP's critic on Art, Architecture and the Performing Arts)

A native American family visiting the Smithsonian Institution in the middle of the last century would have found its story told alongside rocks and fossils at the National Museum of Natural History, where the original Americans were an object of anthropological study, not subjects or actors with a culture, a past, and a unique understanding of the promise and hypocrisy of the larger story of America.

Then, in 1964, the Smithsonian opened a new franchise — the Museum of History and Technology, which eventually became the National Museum of American History — and welcomed a new leader, S. Dillon Ripley, whose 20-year tenure as secretary was transformative.

“Ripley comes in, and he immediately sees the problem,” says Professor William Walker of the Cooperstown Graduate Program at the State University of New York at Oneonta. The Smithsonian was celebrating American accomplishment in a designated museum of American history, yet the other stories of America — darker stories of exclusion, enslavement, betrayal and dispossession — were either footnotes to that history or not told at all. Walker, who has written about the history of the Smithsonian, credits Ripley with beginning a conversation that would change the institution and how American history is understood throughout the country.

That soul-searching ultimately led to the opening, decades later, of the National Museum of the American Indian in 2004 and the National Museum of African American History and Culture in 2016. The conversation continues today, with plans for the Smithsonian American Women's History Museum and the National Museum of the American Latino.

The need for these museums — the urgent need to undo profound acts of erasure — helped shape public history throughout the country. And now it has precipitated a very public clash with the Trump administration, which has launched a systematic campaign to undermine or remake institutions that are fundamental to the arts and humanities infrastructure of America.

On March 27, President Donald Trump issued the executive order “Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History”**, which accused the Smithsonian of “replacing objective facts with a distorted narrative driven by ideology rather than truth.” A close reading of the executive order, however, suggests the goal isn't just editing or censoring specific exhibitions or content. Wrapped up with the assault on the Smithsonian is a call for restoring or replacing monuments and memorials, including those taken down after the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter protests. And that is key to understanding the administration's larger, more destructive agenda.

Simply put, Trump would like the actual practice of history — a complex process of research, interpretation and ongoing revision — to resemble the much more limited, and often distorted, sense of history offered by statues, monuments and memorials.

And that sets up an existential crisis for the Smithsonian and the most explicit test so far of whether American cultural institutions will succumb to authoritarian oversight. The idea that American history is polyphonic and unflinching, a warts-and-all story relevant to *all* Americans, is so deeply embedded in the Smithsonian that it is hard to imagine how it could comply with Trump's demands. So, while the crisis is grave and the pressure extraordinary, this may also mark a turning point in the Trump culture wars.

James Gardner, a former associate director and senior scholar at the National Museum of American History, has seen the confusion between history and monuments. In the weeks and months after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, he heard calls from the public to create some kind of memorial on or near the museum on the National Mall.

“Our response was that we don't do memorials because they don't tell the stories that a museum does,” he says. “It is those stories that are critical. The objects don't speak for themselves.”

That is a pithy summary of the kind of history, sometimes called the new social history, that has taken root at the Smithsonian in the past half-century. Social

history prioritizes the lives and experiences of ordinary people over political or military figures and uses narrative and oral history to give texture to the past. It led to some of the most admired exhibitions in the institution's history, including the landmark 1987 survey "[Field to Factory: Afro-American Migration, 1915-1940](#)," organized by Spencer Crew, now a professor of U.S. history at George Mason University. Conservative intellectuals and activists — including William Bennett, who served as education secretary under President Ronald Reagan — pushed back against the new social history. Their arguments often resembled those used in the more recent debate about monuments and memorials: Social history decentered heroic figures, usually men, who were the focal point of history as it was commonly taught in primary and secondary schools; it invited revisionism, novel interpretations and the empowerment of voices previously deemed marginal; and it elevated narratives of hardship and struggle that stoked grievance.

James Grossman, executive director of the [American Historical Association](#), sees the origins of Trump's attack in the last of these, the ongoing controversy over the more painful chapters in American history.

"This matters because it is a part of a national attack on the way in which we think about the nation's history that has been going on roughly three to four years and started in the state legislatures with **the 'divisive concepts' legislation***," Grossman says. **Divisive concepts bills*** and executive orders seek to limit discussion of historical narratives that might cause students to feel awkward or implicated in historical conflicts over race, religion, class and gender issues.

Yet social history, which takes on these questions forthrightly, has mostly triumphed in the museum world and beyond. And it was central to the development of the Smithsonian museums devoted to Native Americans and African Americans, which have proved popular with visitors.

But even as the social history approach remade American museums, most Americans cling to an understanding of history that prioritizes the very things the social historians criticized. According to a [2021 survey of attitudes to history](#), conducted by researchers at Fairleigh Dickinson University and the American Historical Association, the vast majority of Americans view history fundamentally differently than historians do. History, for about 70 percent of Americans, is simply what we remember about the past, especially names, dates and other facts. It isn't, as most professional historians believe, the interpretation of those facts that constitutes history.

"We were always trying to get people to think, 'What is history?'" Gardner says. "The goal was to think about meaning and perspectives."

So, there is a **paradox**: Americans consume and enjoy social history on a daily basis, in museums, books and documentaries, but if asked to define history, they would give an account that sounds more like the rote lessons and recitations of fact that their grandparents and great-grandparents found tedious and boring decades ago.

Which may be why monuments and memorials have been swept up into the executive order about the Smithsonian. Even as museums were transformed, the monumental landscape of America remains largely unchanged, with thousands of sculptures and other works honoring generals, presidents and, in many cases, leaders of the Confederacy.

"There is at some level this imagination that monuments equal history, when we know that a monument is not a set of facts on a pedestal," says Paul Farber, director of [Monument Lab](#), a nonprofit public art organization that has compiled a comprehensive catalogue of American monuments and memorials. Museums, including the Smithsonian, he says, have become places of "multi-vocality where multiple people's voices coexist together, as a chorus, not a zero-sum game." Meanwhile, the memorial landscape stands as a kind of last, rearguard battle of the old history, the history made by men on horses and colonizers who travel by land and sea, where monuments are "facts on the ground" that need no particular interpretation.

Will the Trump administration be able to remake the Smithsonian such that its exhibits resemble the old history, the celebration of great leaders and epic battles, without the troubling chorus of voices that speak to conflict, oppression and struggle?

It won't be easy. In a March 28 memo sent to Smithsonian staff, Secretary Lonnie G. Bunch III recommitted the institution to its core values: "As always, our work will be shaped by the best scholarship, free of partisanship, to help the American public better understand our nation's history, challenges, and triumphs." **For now, with many of the board of regents appointed by Congress, the Smithsonian is also somewhat better insulated against a direct takeover, as Trump engineered at the Kennedy Center**.**

Trump has also picked a fight with a beloved institution, with approval ratings consistently near 70 percent, according to a [YouGov poll](#), which reflects the institution's own [consumer satisfaction surveys](#). That figure reflects a broader faith in museums nationally.

“Apart from family and friends, museums and libraries are, in fact, the most trusted sources of information in this country,” Marilyn Jackson, president and CEO of the American Alliance of Museums, said in a statement to The Washington Post.

The Fairleigh Dickinson survey of attitudes toward history also points to another fact: that the majority of Americans don’t want their museums to stick just to happy narratives of American triumph and unity. Overwhelmingly, and with little deviation by age, gender or political party, Americans said it is “acceptable to teach history about harm done to others even if it causes discomfort.” And fully 90 percent said these subjects need more, rather than less, investigation. So, Trump’s attack on the Smithsonian might not just fail. It could be a turning point in his larger attack on cultural infrastructure, including the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities, the Kennedy Center, the National Gallery of Art, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Although Bunch quickly complied with an earlier Trump executive order aimed at eliminating diversity, equity and inclusion programs, he has name recognition and gravitas that eclipse the leaders of some of these other groups, and while the Smithsonian has caved in the past to congressional pressure, its name brand is still stellar with the general public.

None of the current or former Smithsonian leaders interviewed for this article would hazard a prediction about what comes next. But the coming clash, especially one that involves direct censorship of Smithsonian content or budget cuts that impact exhibitions or opening hours, could set up a classic crisis of conscience for the American people,

reminiscent of key historical moments like the resistance to McCarthyism in the 1950s or the widespread disgust over brutal police tactics during the civil rights protests of the 1960s. Even if Americans don’t understand the nuts and bolts of social history, they are in deep sympathy with the basic ideas behind it: Talk to people, listen, dig deeper, consult new voices, include differing perspectives, acknowledge criticism, synthesize competing viewpoints. These are the pragmatics of basic decency that help people navigate a complex world.

And so, one can imagine various scenarios. Perhaps the administration compels some locality to reerect a statue to a Confederate leader, a nauseating spectacle that forces people to ask the questions they should have asked when most of these monuments were created, during the height of the Jim Crow era. Why are we honoring this man, this enslaver, this traitor?

Perhaps the public will encounter Smithsonian exhibitions that make the president’s effort to censor obvious, with empty display cases or blacked-out wall texts, pointing explicitly to damning silences, omissions and elisions. And they will have questions.

Or perhaps the Smithsonian will, as Bunch has indicated, simply keep to the path it has been on for decades, introducing the American people to themselves and the world, with museums and exhibitions that reflect the broad consensus that American history is complex, fraught and often full of pain. That has proved an enormously successful strategy so far, and it may be one that helps turn the tide in the ongoing battle between democratic curiosity and authoritarian certainty.

Lots of interesting articles about art and architecture by Philip Kennicott [HERE](#)

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/people/philip-kennicott/>

Text 2 - Les 250 ans des Etats-Unis en 2026, l’occasion pour Trump de célébrer une histoire expurgée de ses aspects « négatifs »

Une gigantesque foire dans le centre de Washington, une compétition d’arts martiaux mixtes à la Maison Blanche, un monument à la gloire des héros nationaux : le président américain entend donner aux célébrations un tour résolument patriotique, en passant sous silence les épisodes sombres de l’histoire du pays.

Par [Corine Lesnes](#) (San Francisco, correspondante) , *Le Monde*, 07 juillet 2025

Le compte à rebours du 250^e anniversaire des Etats-Unis est lancé. A un an de la célébration de la déclaration d’indépendance du 4 juillet 1776, Donald Trump a annoncé le programme des festivités. Parmi les idées du 47^e président des Etats-Unis : une « *grande foire américaine* », à Washington, une confrontation télévisée, appelée « *Patriot games* », entre jeunes athlètes des 50 Etats, sous l’égide du

ministre de la santé, Robert F. Kennedy Jr, et une compétition – à la Maison Blanche – de l’UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship), l’organisation américaine de la très violente discipline d’arts martiaux mixtes (MMA). « *On a beaucoup de terrain, on va construire un peu* », a expliqué Donald Trump en envisageant un spectacle pour « *20 000 à 25 000 personnes* » dans le lieu habité par tous les

présidents depuis John Adams (1797-1801), le successeur de George Washington (1789-1797).

Dans un discours prononcé le 3 juillet à la foire annuelle de l'Iowa, Donald Trump a confirmé qu'il entendait faire de l'histoire américaine une « *histoire patriotique* » et qu'il n'allait pas manquer l'occasion fournie par le 250^e anniversaire de la fondation du pays pour en remonter aux « *gauchistes radicaux* » et à tous ceux qui présentent « *les remarquables réalisations* » des Etats-Unis « *sous un jour négatif* ».

En mars, par un premier décret visant à « *restaurer la vérité et la raison dans l'histoire américaine* », il avait lancé une purge idéologique dans les institutions culturelles. En avril, il s'en est pris à la vénérable Smithsonian Institution, qui regroupe les 21 musées nationaux, l'accusant de promouvoir « *une idéologie de division centrée sur la race* ».

Des institutions mises au pas

Dans la foulée, son administration a entrepris de minimiser la contribution des minorités dans la mémoire nationale et d'éliminer les références au racisme et au genre. Les bases militaires, débaptisées sous Joe Biden, ont retrouvé le nom des officiers confédérés qu'elles portaient initialement. Le nom de Harvey Milk, l'un des premiers élus ouvertement homosexuels du pays, assassiné en 1978 à San Francisco, a été retiré d'un vaisseau de la Navy. Accusées de creuser les divisions en présentant les valeurs américaines comme « *intrinsèquement nuisibles et oppressives* », les institutions s'intéressant aux épisodes sombres de la ségrégation ont perdu – ou sont menacées de perdre – leurs financements publics.

En 2016, Barack Obama avait établi une commission bipartisane, America 250, chargée d'organiser les festivités du 250^e anniversaire, sous l'égide du congrès. Trump a profité des problèmes de management de l'organisation pour la reprendre en mains. Il y a nommé plusieurs alliés, venus de son ancien état-major de campagne ou de Fox News, comme Ariel Abergel, un ancien producteur de la chaîne conservatrice âgé de 25 ans. Désigné directeur exécutif de la commission America 250, Abergel va travailler à la narration patriotique en liaison avec PragerU, une plateforme de droite connue pour ses vidéos « *éducatives* » défendant les accomplissements de la civilisation occidentale et judéo-chrétienne « *de Moïse à Trump* ».

Le milliardaire a aussi établi à la Maison Blanche une commission parallèle, dite « *Salute to America 250* », chargée des partenariats avec le secteur privé. Pour le site de la présidence, celle-ci a commandé une série historique au Hillsdale College, un établissement chrétien conservateur du Michigan. Nul doute que le président va « *donner un tour "MAGA" à la fête* », a estimé le *Wall Street Journal*, en référence au slogan Make America Great Again des fidèles du milliardaire. « *Le président Trump est le roi du patriotisme. Et quand il s'agit de célébrer l'Amérique, personne ne fait les choses en plus grand*, a assuré Ariel Abergel. *Quelques grincheux ne nous empêcheront pas de faire d'America 250 la célébration la plus patriotique de l'histoire américaine.* »

Champions olympiques et astronautes

Une enveloppe de 250 millions de dollars (213 millions d'euros) a été débloquée dans la « *grande et belle loi* » budgétaire promulguée le 4 juillet, notamment pour financer le monument national dont Donald Trump a annoncé la création en avril : un « *jardin des héros américains* », composé des statues de 250 figures historiques, dont le choix devra recevoir son imprimatur.

Selon une communication officielle aux responsables des festivités dans les 50 Etats, la foire-exposition « *la plus patriote* » du pays sera mise à l'honneur sur le Mall, le parc du centre de Washington où sera également déployé « *le plus grand drapeau américain de l'histoire* », porté par 500 champions olympiques, astronautes, lauréats de la médaille présidentielle... Dans son discours de lancement de la commémoration, prononcé alors qu'il venait de décréter que les visiteurs étrangers devront désormais payer plus cher l'entrée dans les parcs nationaux que les Américains, Donald Trump a affirmé que le « *monde entier* » se bousculerait à Washington en 2026 pour célébrer la grandeur du pays. A un an des festivités, ses compatriotes ne sont pas tous d'humeur triomphaliste. Selon un sondage Gallup, 58 % des adultes se déclarent « *extrêmement* » ou « *très* » fiers d'être américains, soit 9 points de moins qu'en 2024, et le niveau le plus bas depuis que l'institut a commencé à poser la question en 2001. Une chute qui s'explique par l'effondrement de la fierté nationale chez les démocrates (36 %) et les indépendants (53 %). Les républicains, en revanche, restent, pour 92 % d'entre eux, fiers d'être américains.

SEE ALSO

<https://www.lefigaro.fr/culture/et-maintenant-les-musees-quand-donald-trump-bouleverse-la-culture-20250406>

Document 3 🗣️ - Trump's restoration of Confederate statues

CGTN America, 15 Nov 2025

CGTN is the English-language news channel of state-run China Global Television Network, based in Beijing, China. It is one of several channels provided by China Global Television Network, the international division of Chinese state broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV), under the control of the Central Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party. CCTV-9 was launched on 25 September 2000, rebranded as CCTV News on 26 April 2010.

CGTN currently has four studios: Beijing (headquarters), Nairobi, Washington and London as well as 70 bureaus around the world.

MUSEUMS IN THE CULTURE WARS

Text 4 - Amid anti-DEI push, National Park Service rewrites history of Underground Railroad

Since Trump took office, the park service — an agency charged with preserving American history — has changed how its website describes key moments from slavery to Jim Crow.

The Washington Post, April 6, 2025



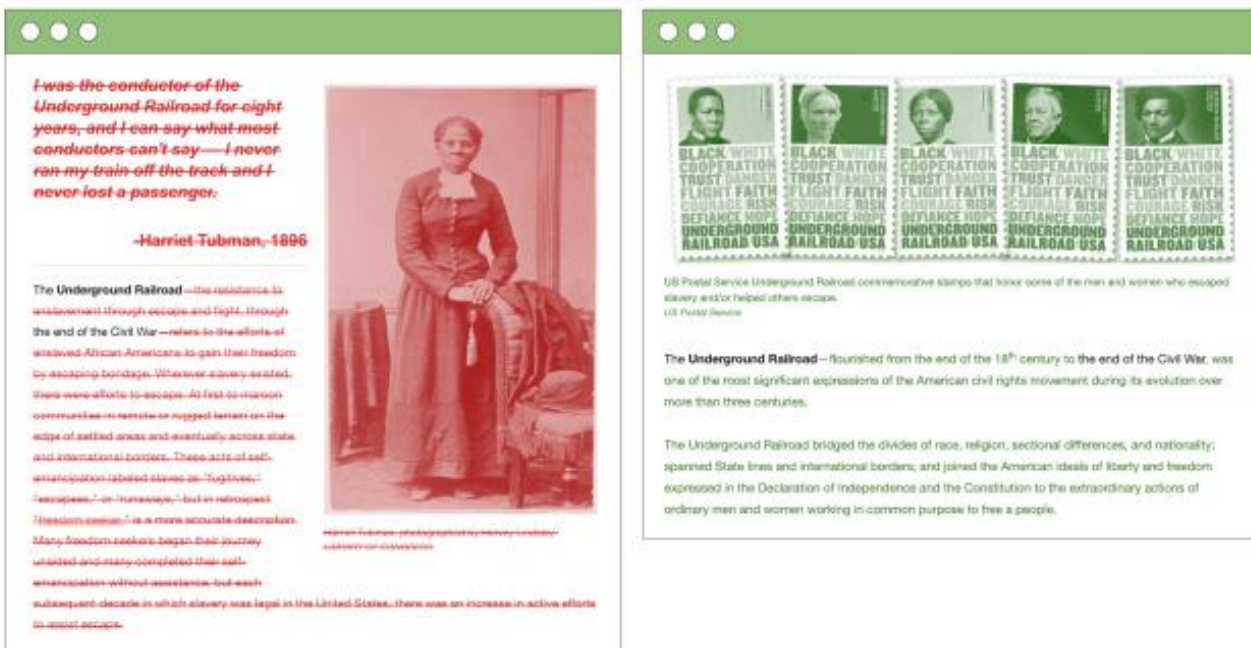
(Illustration by Lucy Naland/The Washington Post; Library of Congress; National Park Service; iStock)

By [Jon Swaine](#) and [Jeremy B. Merrill](#)

For years, a National Park Service [webpage](#) introduced the Underground Railroad with a large photograph of its most famous “conductor,” Harriet Tubman. “The Underground Railroad — the resistance to enslavement through escape and flight, through the end of the Civil War — refers to the efforts of enslaved African Americans to gain their freedom by escaping bondage,” the page began.

5 Tubman’s photograph is now gone. In its place are images of Postal Service stamps that highlight “Black/White cooperation” in the secret network and that feature Tubman among abolitionists of both races.

The introductory sentence is gone, too. It has been replaced by a line that makes no mention of slavery and that describes the Underground Railroad as “one of the most significant expressions of the American civil rights movement.” The effort “bridged the divides of race,” the page now says.



A National Park Service webpage titled ‘What is the Underground Railroad?’ changed substantially after Trump took office. The text and photograph in red were deleted, and the portions in green were added. (NPS.org/Internet Archive)

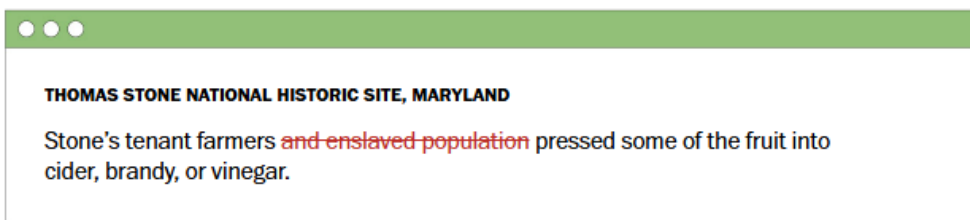
A National Park Service webpage titled ‘What is the Underground Railroad?’ changed substantially after Trump took office. The text and photograph in red were deleted, and the portions in green were added. (NPS.org/Internet Archive)

The executive order that President Donald Trump issued late last month directing the Smithsonian Institution to eliminate “divisive narratives” stirred fears that the president aimed to whitewash the stories the nation tells about itself. But a Washington Post review of websites operated by the National Park Service — among the key agencies charged with the preservation of American history — found that edits on dozens of pages since Trump’s inauguration have already softened descriptions of some of the most shameful moments of the nation’s past.

Some were edited to remove references to slavery. On other pages, statements on the historic struggle of Black Americans for their rights were cut or softened, as were references to present-day echoes of racial division. The Post compared webpages as of late March to earlier versions preserved online by the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine.

Changes in images, descriptions and even individual words have subtly reshaped the meaning of notable moments and key figures dating to the nation’s founding — abolitionist John Brown’s doomed raid, the battle at Appomattox and school integration by the Little Rock Nine.

An educational page on Benjamin Franklin, which examined his views on slavery and his ownership of enslaved people, was taken offline last month, the review found. Mentions of Thomas Stone, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, owning enslaved people were removed from several pages on the website of the Stone National Historic site in Southern Maryland. A reference to other “enslaved African Americans” in that region was changed to “enslaved workers.”



After Trump took office, the words in red were deleted from a Thomas Stone National Historic Site webpage. (NPS.org/Internet Archive)

Trump has pursued broad executive orders and other measures aimed at dismantling “diversity, equity and inclusion” programs across the public and private sectors. His Inauguration Day order targeting DEI programs in government did not explicitly call for websites to be edited. But it has been interpreted aggressively by some officials, most notably at the Defense Department, which purged many pages that celebrated notable minority veterans. After an outcry, some were later restored.

At the Interior Department, which oversees the Park Service, political appointees directed senior career officials to identify webpages that might need to be changed, according to two Park Service employees, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they feared retribution.

The senior career officials asked staff members to compile lists of potentially problematic pages, the employees said. Those lists were sent up the management chain for consideration. The employees did not know whether the changes identified by The Post were made as a result of this process, but one said that some staff members were expansive in selecting pages for edits. The employee said staff members received only vague guidance and that the selections were made amid a “frenzy of fear,” at a time when thousands of federal workers were losing their jobs.

“You draw as broad a brush as possible, because the consequences of missing something are a lot more severe than the consequences of doing too much,” the employee said.

A third NPS employee, also speaking on the condition of anonymity, said that some webpage changes resulted not from demands from above, but from lower-level employees seeking to comply with what they believed Trump wanted.

An Interior spokesperson did not respond to a request for comment on the employees’ accounts.

A statement about the legacy of John Brown, who hoped to start a revolt by enslaved people in the run-up to the Civil War, was removed from a page on the website of Harpers Ferry National Historical Park in West Virginia.

“John Brown’s complex legacy remains a powerful symbol in America’s ongoing dialogue on race, justice, and the fight against oppression,” the line said.

Extensive changes were made to multiple Park Service pages about the Underground Railroad, and a landing page directing children to educational materials about it has been offline since last month. Since 1998, the Park Service has been required by federal law to recognize the Underground Railroad and to produce educational materials about it.

Andrew Diemer, a professor at Towson University and author of a book on one of the network’s founders, said that while some White abolitionists supported the Underground Railroad, changes identified by The Post minimized the “legal and political forces” arrayed at the time against enslaved African Americans.

“Overall, the revisions seek to emphasize ‘harmony’ and ‘unity’ and to de-emphasize conflict in a way that is out of step with how historians have written about the Underground Railroad in recent decades,” Diemer said.

60 Other changes appear on the website of Appomattox Court House National Historical Park in Virginia, where Robert E. Lee surrendered to Union forces in April 1865, leading to the Civil War’s end.

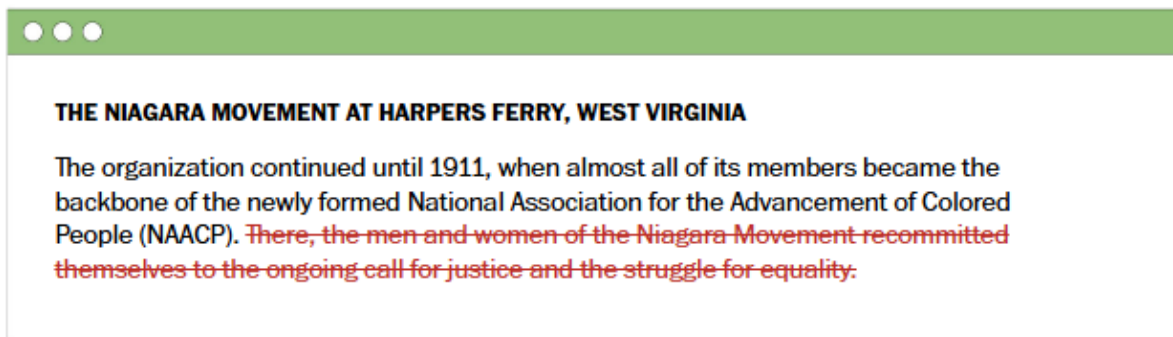
One page, about the surrounding town, was rewritten in a way that incorporated two new mentions of slavery in the years before the war.

But on other pages about the battle and the subsequent emancipation of local enslaved people, all references to President
65 Abraham Lincoln’s views of the war were removed, as were some references to Union Army commander Gen. Ulysses S. Grant’s views. Some mentions of slavery were cut, along with details of how White hostility in the area thwarted the efforts of freed Black people to enter their society.

Greg Downs of the University of California at Davis, a specialist in Civil War history who has written several Park Service publications, said the changes warped history. “A country that cannot tell the truth about itself cannot assess what has led it
70 to moments of greatness in the past and what could lead it again to greatness,” he said.

Alterations were also made to Park Service content about major figures and events in the Civil Rights movement during the 20th Century.

A page about the Niagara Movement, a group founded in 1905 by the African American civil rights leader W.E.B. Du Bois, was changed to remove two references to the struggle for “equality.” For example, a description of the group’s “renewed sense
75 of resolve in the struggle for freedom and equality” became simply its “renewed sense of resolve.”



The sentence in red was deleted from a Niagara Movement webpage after Trump took office. (NPS.org/Internet Archive)
Shawn Leigh Alexander, a Du Bois biographer and professor at the University of Kansas, described the alterations as “subtle yet profound” in suggesting that racism no longer required confrontation in the United States at the time.

80 “Although these changes may appear inconsequential to some, they collectively contribute to the erasure of the historical narrative of Black struggle for civil, political, and economic rights, which continues to this day,” he said.

Similar amendments were made to the website of the Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site in Arkansas, which marks the place where nine young African American students braved a racist mob and military resistance from state authorities to integrate a previously White-only school in 1957.



85 Students at Little Rock's Central High School shout insults at Elizabeth Eckford as she calmly walks toward a line of National Guard troops. (Will Counts/Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/AP)

Proclamations that the students “opened doors” for others pursuing “equality and education around the world” were edited on at least six pages to remove the word “equality.”

90 One of the surviving members of the Little Rock Nine, Elizabeth Eckford, told The Post that the edits masked the fact that the group had explicitly fought for equality of opportunity.

“They’re trying to rewrite history,” Eckford said. “We can never have true racial reconciliation until we honestly acknowledge our painful but shared past.”

► **More about the Underground Railroad (from Britannica)**

Underground Railroad, in the United States, a system existing in the Northern states before the Civil War by which escaped slaves from the South were secretly helped by sympathetic Northerners, in defiance of the Fugitive Slave Acts, to reach places of safety in the North or in Canada. Though neither underground nor a railroad, it was thus named because its activities had to be carried out in secret, using darkness or disguise, and because railway terms were used in reference to the conduct of the system. Various routes were lines, stopping places were called stations, those who aided along the way were conductors, and their charges were known as packages or freight. The network of routes extended in all directions throughout 14 Northern states and “the promised land” of Canada, which was beyond the reach of fugitive-slave hunters. Those who most actively assisted slaves to escape by way of the “railroad” were members of the free black community (including such former slaves as Harriet Tubman), Northern abolitionists, philanthropists, and such church leaders as Quaker Thomas Garrett. Harriet Beecher Stowe, famous for her novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, gained firsthand knowledge of fugitive slaves through her contact with the Underground Railroad in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Estimates of the number of black people who reached freedom vary greatly, from 40,000 to 100,000. Although only a small minority of Northerners participated in the Underground Railroad, its existence did much to arouse Northern sympathy for the lot of the slave in the antebellum period, at the same time convincing many Southerners that the North as a whole would never peaceably allow the institution of slavery to remain unchallenged.

Text 5- This receipt shows why Trump can’t whitewash America’s history

A president who thinks he’s a king targets African American Museum and “divisive narratives.”

The Washington Post, March 31, 2025

With an angry executive order that targets the Smithsonian Institution — specifically taking aim at the National Museum of African American History and Culture — President Donald Trump is brazenly trying to obscure and
5 whitewash the past. He will fail.

This document, essentially a bill of sale, from the year of our nation’s founding shows why.

10 *“Know all men by these presents that Benj. Weight of South Kingstown in the County of Kings County and Colony of Rhode Island, practitioner of physick, for and in consideration of the sum of one hundred Dollars, to me in hand well and truly paid by Beriah Brown Junr. of Exeter ... do hereby acknowledge and myself therewith fully satisfied and paid, for one
15 negro girl named Roose and her child named Cesar.”*

Trump objects to what he sees as “divisive narratives” that cast chapters of our historical record “in a negative light.” The executive order, issued Thursday, claims that “the Smithsonian Institution has, in recent years, come under
20 the influence of a divisive, race-centered ideology” that subjects visitors to “ideological indoctrination.”

What might have happened at the Smithsonian “in recent years” to provoke such ire? The biggest development, by far, was the opening of the African American Museum in
25 2016. With its richly comprehensive exhibits, its striking modern architecture and its iconic location on the National Mall, the Smithsonian’s newest major museum quickly

became one of its most popular, with 1.6 million visitors last year.

30 Go there and you will see a crowd that looks like America — Black people, White people, Hispanics, Asian Americans, schoolchildren on a field trip, senior citizens on an outing from their retirement home. They appreciate, as Trump does not, that Black history is simply American
35 history — put another way, that there could be no American history without African American history.

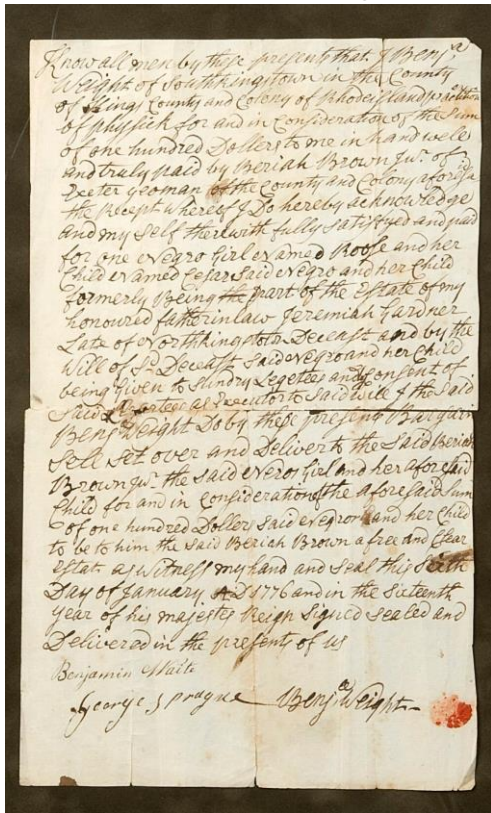
And yes, that history of nationhood begins with the majestic words of the Declaration of Independence — but also with the indelible stain of slavery. Trump objects to
40 exhibits that might provoke “a sense of national shame.”

What does he expect any decent human being to feel?

45 *“Said negro and her child formerly being the part of the estate of my honoured father-in-law Jeremiah Gardner, late of North Kingstown, Deceas’d, and by the Will of said Deceast, said negro & child being given to sundry legatees ... ”*

My late wife Avis was a collector of African American historical artifacts and documents. She feared that too much of our history was being lost, and she was
50 determined to save whatever she could. She scoured the catalogues of online auctions and the back rooms of antiques stores, looking for treasures that told parts of the American story that standard history books had long overlooked.

55 She found this record of the sale of the “negro girl” — whose name, given the vagaries of spellings in 18th-century documents, was almost surely Rose, not “Roose” — among a sheaf of miscellaneous documents being deaccessioned by some historical society. The fragile sheet
60 of paper caught her eye because of what it told about the nation at the time of its founding.



A document records the sale of “a negro girl” named Rose and her son Cesar in Rhode Island in January 1776, for
65 \$100. (Photo by Jay Baker)

This sale of an enslaved woman and her son took place in Rhode Island, not in Virginia or South Carolina. At the time of the American Revolution, slavery was legal and widely practiced in all 13 of the original colonies.
70 Pennsylvania became the first to outlaw human bondage, in 1780.

Rose and Cesar were considered property — human chattel. They had been bequeathed in a will and were being sold by the will’s executor, as if they were pieces of
75 furniture or prized livestock. Cesar had inherited that status. His mother was enslaved; therefore he, too, from the moment of his birth, was also enslaved.

Six months after this woman and her child changed hands, Thomas Jefferson wrote that “all men are created equal.”
80 Perhaps he meant this philosophically, or even as a distant aspiration. But Jefferson, famously, was himself a major enslaver. The Declaration of Independence was meant to set him and other White colonists free from British rule, but to offer no freedom at all to Americans such as Rose and Cesar.

There is nothing ideological about any of this. It is a simple truth, and it will remain true no matter how much Trump may fulminate. He can try to rewrite history, but we have the receipts. And as the Smithsonian’s exhibits
90 magnificently illustrate, African Americans have survived — and overcome — much worse than the frothings of a puffed-up president who fancies himself a king.

I plan to give this document, along with other artifacts and papers, to the great African American Museum on the Mall
95 someday. Our nation’s full history will be preserved and studied long after the Trump years are an unpleasant memory.

“Said negro and her child to be to him the said Beriah Brown a free and clear estate as witness my hand and seal
100 this Sixth day of January A.D. 1776, and in the sixteenth year of His Majesty’s Reign. Signed, sealed and delivered.”



By [Eugene Robinson](#) Eugene Robinson was a Post Opinions columnist. He retired from The Post in
105 2025.

Text 6 - Erasing this indelible image of slavery is a terrifying idea

The Trump administration’s reported effort to censor one of the iconic images of American history is a five-alarm fire.

The Washington Post, September 17, 2025

Column by [Philip Kennicott](#)

In the two centuries since the medium was invented, few photographs have had a more powerful impact on the American conscience than a series of images made in 1863
5 of a formerly enslaved man known by at least two names, Gordon and Peter. Early in 1863, he escaped the hell of enslavement and found safety among Union forces in Louisiana, thus becoming contraband, to use the solecism common at the time.

10 Peter was photographed shirtless, in the presence of a doctor, exposing to the camera and the world a thick web

of welts and scars, the living memory of the whip that once scourged his naked back.

The image shocked even those who knew the brutality and
15 horrors of slavery through close observation and passive or active participation in its violence. It quickly circulated, via newspapers and cartes de visite — small, easily reproduced, palm-sized prints on card stock that could be carried, exchanged and sent through the mail. Along with
20 Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1852 abolitionist novel, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” and the first two autobiographies and oratory of Frederick Douglass, the image known as “The

Scourged Back” is among the most significant spurs to moral outrage in the history of the United States. In the larger history of photography, it is near the top of any list of the most influential images since Joseph Nicéphore Niépce trained his camera on some nondescript rooftops visible from his window in Burgundy, France, in the mid-1820s.

Citing two sources familiar with the situation at one historical site, The Washington Post reported Monday that the Trump administration will remove a display of the photograph from a Park Service unit that deals with slavery and the Civil War, as part of its campaign against what it deems “corrosive ideology.” (The sources did not identify the park in question for fear of reprisals.) An Interior Department spokeswoman disputed that account Tuesday, saying that parks had received no such order. The New York Times subsequently reported, based on emails and other sources, that the order was issued to staff at the Fort Pulaski National Monument in Georgia, a Confederate fort captured by the Union and later used as a prisoner-of-war camp. A copy of the photo was on view at the fort, and numerous versions of the image by different photography studios are in the collections of the United States’ major museums, including the National Gallery of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the National Portrait Gallery.

“The Washington Post continues to rely on anonymous sources and unverified claims to drive a false narrative,” wrote Elizabeth Peace, senior public affairs specialist at the Office of the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, when asked which parks might be affected and the administration’s rationale for removing the image. “In accordance with Secretary’s Order No. 3431, Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History, all interpretive signage in national parks is under review.”

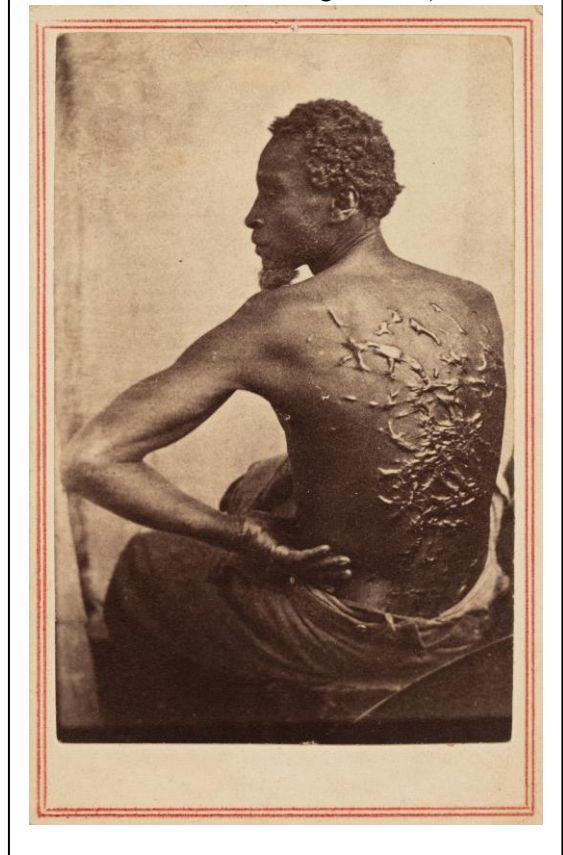
The confusion, if it’s confusion, is similar to an effort (quickly reversed) to remove a video about the legendary Black pilots unit known as the Tuskegee Airmen from Air Force training curriculums during the first weeks of the administration. Broad executive orders targeting diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives have created enormous anxiety and fear among the trained historians, curators and interpreters at the Smithsonian, the Park Service and other organizations. The pattern, a maximal gesture in the direction of censorship followed by confusion and a range of voluntary efforts at compliance, is familiar enough that it can be read as intentional.

But whoever floated the idea of removing the 1863 image is right: Few photographs are more corrosive. For Americans who may have wavered in their opposition to slavery during some of the darkest days of the Civil War, “The Scourged Back” scoured away complacency, apathy and fatigue. It reminded the world of what it already knew,

that the slave regime of the South could be maintained only by paroxysms of violence.

Some icons are beloved; others are held in awe. “The Scourged Back,” in which the man is seen in profile, revealing his wounds as if they belong not to his essential self but to everyone who has violated his dignity, inspires first silence, then a rising nausea and an urgent need to be sure that it is seen, understood, processed. The day after the battle of Gettysburg, the image appeared in Harper’s Weekly, part of a trio of pictures documenting the escape, scars and enlistment in the Union army of the man the publication referred to as Gordon. Several images of the same man were made after his escape, but the one that seems to have circulated most widely is also the most artfully constructed, with Gordon (a.k.a. Peter) seen in full profile and thus with more individuality than some other prints.

A “Scourged Back” image is on display at the National Portrait Gallery. (Tom Brenner/For The Washington Post)



The sense of urgency in the image was felt almost from the moment it appeared. An early critic, writing of its potential impact on public feeling, wrote: “This Card Photograph should be multiplied by 100,000, and scattered over the States.” He went on to suggest that it would be superior to Stowe’s novel in its impact on the antislavery sentiment. The photograph also inspired visceral reactions from those who resisted the truth of American slavery. While riding on a train, one passenger saw another looking at the image and asked to purchase it from the man. After taking

possession of the photograph, the new owner angrily tore it to shreds, according to an anecdote that appeared in the
105 abolitionist newspaper the *Liberator*.

That the idea of suppressing such a historically and culturally important image could circulate, even for a moment, within the Park Service is appalling and terrifying. The supposedly neutral content reviews at the
110 Park Service, Smithsonian and other organizations have already targeted basic truths of American history and touchstones of the American conscience.

It is increasingly clear that these initiatives are driven by a bizarre mix of audacity and ignorance. Only the willfully
115 ignorant would target an image as indelible, as fundamental a symbol of ineffaceable truth, as the image of Peter/Gordon's back. Not only did hundreds of thousands of reproductions of the image circulate in the 19th century, but the image became an essential reference
120 point during the civil rights struggle, and for artists and authors into the current century. When Sethe, the traumatized former enslaved woman who is the central character in Toni Morrison's 1987 novel "Beloved," speaks of a "tree on my back," she is probably referencing
125 the excruciating foliage of wounds in this photo. When Lincoln, in his second inaugural address, said that "every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword," he may have had this image in mind.

130 It can't be extricated from history, so censorship would seem folly. Throughout the history of this image, one basic reading is that scars are a kind of writing that can never be erased. But the image, which appeared during the Civil War, didn't just goad the conscience; it also terrified those
135 who looked ahead to a new age, after the war, after liberation. Would the scars of America's primal crime be permanent? How could people who bore this truth in and on their bodies be incorporated into a newly reconstructed society? What miraculous extremes of forgiveness would
140 be necessary for reconciliation?

Another recurring motif of criticism focuses on the dignity of the man, the violation of his body not just by the lash but the camera, and by generations of White people who needed such raw evidence to understand the truth of
145 slavery. That may be the reason someone chose this image as expendable, as evidence of the supposedly corrosive thinking the administration would banish. When he became a symbol, he also became an object, and objects aren't people.

150 The only way to negate the power of this image is to negate the man's humanity. And why not go big? Swing for the fences when it comes to rewriting history. If you can erase "The Scourged Back," if you can erase Peter, or Gordon, or any one of the millions of enslaved people who suffered
155 similar torments or worse, then you can erase anything, and nothing will trouble the American conscience ever again.

IN THE U.K. – A FEW ONGOING DEBATES

Text 7 - Free museum entry is the mark of a civilised city — and one of the best things about London

These are some of Britain's last truly public spaces — charging overseas visitors is an erosion of that ideal



The Cast Courts of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London © Jeremie Souteyrat/eyevine
Edwin Heathcote

The Financial Times, MAR 31 2026

About 20 years ago, I was having treatment at the Royal Marsden in Kensington. It consisted of two infusions with a couple of hours between. Almost every time during those two dead hours, over the course of a few months, I'd pop into the V&A, a short walk away. I'd go and see one small department, maybe even just one exhibit or cluster: the Raphael
5 Cartoons, Korean pots, a Bernini, medieval plate armour, rococo wrought iron, early modernist metalwork — it almost didn't matter. I just tried to lose myself in small things. It worked. For those few moments, I forgot the nausea, the
boredom, the anxiety. I felt I was being in the world, not only in my own body.

If I'd had to pay for entry, I would never have done it, not for those few minutes. Free museums did not save my life, but they definitely made one of its bleakest periods more tolerable. Enjoyable even. Museums — and the knowledge of continuity, that our artefacts outlive us — are life affirming.

10 Free museum entry is, for me, a marker of a civilised city, and indisputably one of the best things about living in London.

The government's proposal that foreign tourists should be made to pay for entry to England's museums might sound reasonable at first. After all, more than 40 per cent of visitors to major British museums and galleries are from overseas, and those museums are often rammed. (A visit to a museum behind hordes of ambling, aimless, tour groups filming themselves can be infuriating.) Might it not help? British taxpayers support these institutions, foreign visitors do not and yet foreign governments make us pay when we travel to their museums — even more after Brits lost their EU privileges, which often offer discounts.

But for museums to introduce charges for certain visitors feels very much like an erosion. And erosion, over time, leads to collapse.

20 There are a number of reasons, it seems to me, that despite some obvious upsides, this is an idea doomed to fail. The first is identification. Most countries have some kind of ID card or digital ID. The UK does not and, despite repeated attempts, seems to struggle with the idea, whether ideologically or technically. So how does a visitor prove their nationality? Passports? Driving licences? Will British citizens need to then drag these around, in case we feel like spontaneously popping into a museum (which I do, quite often).

25 Then there is the case for why we have museums. Big institutions such as the V&A and, more specifically, the British Museum, have always made that case on the basis of universality. The Parthenon Marbles are here, sure, but anyone from anywhere is free to see them, if they are in London, gratis (ironically, the Acropolis Museum in Athens, which was built to house them, but still does not, has an entry fee, even for Greeks). The mounting tsunami of claims on museum artefacts — arising from issues around looting, violence and colonialism — demands a solid defence. The argument that these collections are held for the world to see, for free, is one of the few threads left justifying their retention.

There is another problem: funding. The government sets aside money (about £480mn a year) to keep the museums free. England's national museums have been free to enter since 2001. The policy, one of New Labour's signature successes, brought huge rises in attendance in museums that had previously charged, up 150 per cent in some cases within the first decade.

35 Museums do plenty of their own fundraising, of course, but to remain free they must be centrally funded. If a fountain of money suddenly flows from tourists, politicians will point to its success and begin to suggest reducing the existing subsidies, which the director of the V&A (and former Labour MP) Tristram Hunt has warned of — a rare figure who has seen the issue from both sides.

Among major world cities, London is almost alone in its free museums. I can think only of Washington DC's Smithsonian institutions which have anything similar at this scale and spread (though the Prado in Madrid offers free entry in the evenings). Of the UK's top five most visited tourist attractions, four are London museums. Across the channel is the Louvre, for which entry is €32 (New York's Metropolitan Museum and MoMA are both \$30). None of this seems to detract at all from their visitor numbers — price is clearly not a deterrent. But just because you can charge, does that mean you should?

45 I think it is a question of interpretation. What are museums for? I'd suggest that in an era of declining public facilities and atomising communities, free museums are one of the last truly public spaces and they need to be nurtured as genuine citadels of culture for the people. Town halls have been sold off, youth clubs shut down, our infrastructure left denuded and crumbling. Museums are a refuge from all that: surviving pieces of public grandeur. Even the intimation of charges can be a deterrent, the kind of thing that might put off those who we most need to encourage to use our museums.

50 If we think of museums as public piazzas for a nation with bad weather and a strained and shifting relationship with its own history, we can begin to see them as civic spaces(...)

Museums should be freely accessible to all because they are not palaces. They belong to us.

Text 8 - In defence of museum charges

Digby Warde-Aldam, *The Spectator*, April 18, 2026

It occurs to me only now that I might have spent far too much time in France. Indeed, so familiar with Paris did I claim to be that, in 2023, I was contacted by an agency in need of someone who could conduct specialised 'art tours' for small groups of foreigners. Most of these clients were Americans, largely from the Midwest, but there was also a number of

well-to-do Chinese and the odd Indian. They wanted much the same thing: they'd seen the Eiffel Tower and been ripped off on the Left Bank; they'd eaten at Lipp and some had even bussed out to grottier *banlieues* to get a real-life taste of *La Haine*. What they really wanted, however, was someone to hold their hand around the museums. They paid well and bought spurious 'VIP' packages to the Louvre and Versailles, priced over the odds by several degrees of plausibility. At the former, they ignored Géricault's 'Le Radeau de la Méduse' and Delacroix's great history paintings, instead demanding to see the 'Mona Lisa' and settling for a distant, blurry selfie taken from the fringe of the room. At the last, they'd start early on the champagne, and the wives, three sheets to the wind, would strike poses and get me to take their picture by the Petit Trianon. Then it would end: they'd get bored and we'd go for lunch. I liked all of these people – and not only for the stupendous tips they left me. None of them seemed staggeringly wealthy, but the kind of money they were dropping on museum entrance fees beggared belief. I don't know how much the institutional con of a surcharge set them back, but the Louvre in those days charged €22 for entry to its permanent collection – a collection to which, for all my insistence, nobody paid much attention.

There are three morals to this story: the first is that tourists, however uninterested they may be, won't stint on a city's flagship museums; the second is that competent handling of cultural tourism, as exercised by the French, is a guaranteed money-spinner; and, finally, that Britain's cash-strapped museums could do well to learn from this. Margaret Hodge, who has led an independent review into the affairs of Arts Council England, seems to agree: the report recommended that visitors from overseas be charged a fee to visit the treasures of our national collection, and the government, inauspiciously, believes that the proposal could 'provide significant benefits'.

This country takes a weird stance when it comes to museums. The current regime, under which anyone is free to visit the permanent collections of our great culture palaces, dates back to 2001, when the coffers were flush and the Blair government was seeking to turn Britain into a nation of graduates. The policy has since weathered no end of criticism, most of which posits that free museum entry is a 'middle-class luxury' offering no benefit to 'working people'. This argument is as stupid as it is insulting, presupposing that anyone born working class will be too thick, too incurious, to appreciate the world-class art collection we have in this country. It's a revolting line, but thankfully, it's not the one we have to hand.

The proposition advanced by Hodge's report seems, to me at least, almost entirely unobjectionable. You live in this country and pay your dues here, you reserve the right to see the 'Arnolfini Portrait', the 'Seagram Murals' or 'Rain, Steam, and Speed' free of charge. It's a good deal, quite unlike anything offered anywhere else: it's egalitarian in all the right senses and it should be preserved. Someone, however, has to pay for it, and with culture funding likely to dry up yet further, it seems only fair that the burden should fall on those who don't already contribute to the collection's upkeep.

The charge needn't be steep. I'm envisioning something along the lines of the mysterious 'tourist tax' one is forced to pay on arrival, in cash, in various of Italy's more attractive cities: something in the region of £7 – nothing like the Louvre's ticket price, or the \$25 New York's Metropolitan Museum has been demanding since it dropped its 'suggested donation' entry policy in 2018. Most tourists, oblivious to the fact that anything so civilised as the previous policy ever existed, would happily cough up to eyeball the Rokeby Venus's resplendent bum.

Think of what our museums could do with all that extra cash: fix their toilets, bring in loans and, hell, maybe even make some new acquisitions. These ambitions, however, assume that some level of subsidy will continue to flow from the public coffers, a condition that seems at best unlikely. The tourist charge is a popular idea – according to one survey, supported by 72 per cent of the public – just not within the culture sector itself. The loudest counter-argument so far advanced by museum world critics is that it will make our institutions look 'unwelcoming'. But weighing heavier on their minds, I'd wager, is the very reasonable suspicion that any such move will be a smokescreen for deep funding cuts.

It's a justifiable fear: the Department for Culture, Media and Sport could well cite the extra revenue stream as justification for turning off the taps. This, however, is purely speculative. What isn't is the question of implementation: the scheme would demand a digital ID system, probably requiring the domestic user to upload proof of identity and address. This would be prohibitively expensive to develop and would doubtless be handed over to a private-sector contractor: just remember how well IT-related PPPs have worked out in the past here; and imagine all the fun the hackers would have with it.

But things have changed since 2001, and the counter-arguments no longer hold the balance. There's little money to go around and what's left is unlikely to be directed towards the arts: somewhere, something has to give. The fact is that our museums are a major draw for tourists. They come to this country to see 'The Hay Wain', 'Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion', possibly even, though I know not why, 'Monarch of the Glen'. Making them pay will not put them off. You need only look at the Met's consistently high visitor figures to see this.

If the government really is serious about charging non-residents, I venture a word of advice: suffer the expense of a new ticketing system, and don't award the contract to friends or cronies. Things will go wrong, embarrassingly and publicly – when is that not the case? – but that doesn't make the proposition any less sound. I'll admit that a two-tier system doesn't seem attractive on a utopian level, but that isn't a plane of luxury we can afford to support any more; and this is the least-

worst means of maintaining an egalitarian policy on our own terms. And should tourists steer clear, so much the better for us: we'd at least be rid of the selfie sticks, guided tours and general overcrowding that plague our most popular galleries. All this 60 considered and qualified, I pose a genuine question: what, ultimately, is not to like?

Text 9 - Why British Museum has ended 15-year Japan Tobacco deal – and what it means for future partnerships

Allen Gallagher, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Department of Health, University of Bath

Duncan Thomas, Policy and Knowledge Exchange Lead, Department for Health, University of Bath

Sophie Braznell, Research Associate, Department for Health, University of Bath

The Conversation, December 2, 2025

The British Museum has ended its controversial 15-year sponsorship with Japan Tobacco International (JTI).

The sponsorship has attracted a lot of criticism in that time. In 2016, 1,000 public health experts wrote an open letter calling for London's cultural institutions, including the British Museum, to end "morally unacceptable" sponsorship from tobacco sponsors.

Despite this, as reported in both 2023 and 2025 by our Tobacco Control Research Group at the University of Bath, the British Museum had continued to have a close relationship with JTI.

It is therefore welcome news that the UK government has finally intervened to end the partnership. It comes following a freedom of information request from the research and campaign organisation Culture Unstained. This revealed that the Department for Health had raised concerns about the partnership earlier this year to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, the government department that funds the British Museum. As a result, the museum's trustees decided not to continue the partnership upon its expiration in September.

This is long overdue. Many other cultural institutions in the UK have already ceased entering into agreements with such companies, given the immense damage tobacco products do to public health.

Tate, for example, stopped accepting all sponsorship from tobacco companies in 1991. The National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery and Victoria and Albert Museum each gradually did the same, leaving The British Museum as the only major UK national art museum still accepting money from a tobacco company.

The British Museum's director, Nicholas Cullinan, previously argued there needed to be "very good, clear reasons for turning down money that would help keep the British Museum free to the public".

Ties to a harmful industry

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) became a popular concept in the 1950s. It was originally interpreted as a positive development whereby companies committed resources to further societal gain instead of company profit. By the 1960s, however, more critical interpretations had emerged.

CSR began to be seen as "fundamentally subversive" by business researchers, and now it is commonly interpreted as a mechanism for large corporations to legitimise and consolidate power. For health-harming industries such as tobacco, CSR campaigns can help them "clean" their image by claiming to be investing in society, while simultaneously causing extensive public health harms.

Indeed, sponsoring cultural institutions is a well-documented tobacco industry tactic. Among public health practitioners and researchers, it's widely seen as part of the industry's efforts to improve its public image and achieve policy influence.

Viewed in this light, the British Museum's sponsorship from JTI could be viewed as a deliberate effort by a harmful company to improve its own reputation by exploiting the reputation of a UK cultural institution.

Government funding of the British Museum during its tobacco sponsorship contradicts the world's first public health treaty. The World Health Organization framework convention on tobacco control was adopted in 2003 and has been signed by over 182 countries and the EU as of 2025.

It aims to protect populations from the harms of tobacco through various measures to reduce tobacco consumption, such as preventing people from starting the habit and protecting them from the harm of secondhand smoke.

Article 5.3 of the treaty aims to protect policymaking from the vested interests of the tobacco industry, given the "fundamental and irreconcilable" conflict between the industry's commercial interests and public health.

This article and its implementation guidelines stipulate that parties should aim to limit interactions with the tobacco industry. This includes rejecting all partnerships with tobacco companies and curbing their CSR activities.

The government's financial support of the British Museum, while the museum received JTI sponsorship, was therefore problematic.

The future of sponsorship

Unfortunately, despite the welcome British Museum developments, the tobacco industry continues its connections to other UK cultural institutions. Both the London Philharmonic Orchestra and the Royal Academy of Arts continue to accept JTI sponsorship. Hopefully, the British Museum case will draw the attention of other institutions, encouraging them to follow suit.

Tobacco industry sponsorship of the British Museum has hopefully now become a thing of the past. However, it should be noted that the museum continues to accept sponsorship from other health-harming industries. Its ten-year partnership with oil producer BP, for example, has also come under scrutiny. As with the JTI sponsorship, the British Museum appears behind the curve. Other institutions like the Royal Opera House, National Portrait Gallery and Tate galleries have already cut ties with BP.

Time will tell whether the end of the JTI sponsorship will encourage other cultural institutions to reject tobacco industry sponsorship. We need to remain alert and vigilant regarding current and future partnerships entered into by the British Museum and other UK cultural institutions.

RESTITUTION & REPATRIATION OF ARTEFACTS

Document 10 - France Culture – La Série Documentaire LSD - Musées, la réinvention permanente

Septembre 2025

<https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/serie-musees-la-reinvention-permanente#about>

Par Kristel Le Pollotec. LSD visite les musées. Récit d'une énième révolution dans la longue histoire des musées. Où comment les austères musées aux parquets impeccablement cirés sont devenus des lieux hautement instagrammables... Réalisation : Agnès Cathou

Devenir toujours plus désirable pour attirer de nouveaux publics, répondre aux questionnements actuels de la société, de la décolonisation au Care, voici les défis auxquels doivent faire face les musées, tout en continuant à assurer les missions de conservation et de transmission, avec des budgets cruellement en baisse. Pour financer ces mutations, il a fallu augmenter le prix des entrées, privatiser, organiser des défilés de mode sous les yeux des tableaux de maîtres du XVIIIe siècle, développer sa marque, multiplier les boutiques et les cafés, bref, trouver toujours plus de ressources, tout en tentant de garder son âme...

Une série documentaire de **Kristel Le Pollotec**, réalisée par **Agnès Cathou**

Text 11 - 🎧 The restitution of cultural heritage will race ahead in 2025

Britain could end up losing its marbles



Photograph: Alamy

The Economist, Nov 19th 2024], By Max Norman, Culture correspondent

The Parthenon Marbles have not budged from the literal and figurative centre of the British Museum in London

since they were purchased from Lord Elgin in 1816. The sculptures—about half of the marbles that survive from the

temple in Athens—have also been at the centre of the world’s most famous dispute over cultural property since Greece formally demanded their return in 1983.

But in 2025, the marbles may finally be on the move—or, at least, negotiations about their status might take a big step forward. Many arguments against returning them have been toppled. The idea that the British Museum is the only competent custodian for the marbles has always seemed slightly spurious, even more so after one of its staff was accused of pilfering almost 2,000 antiquities and selling them on eBay. Just as powerful is a shift in public sentiment: a YouGov poll conducted in 2023 found that 49% of Britons were in favour of handing them back, and just 15% believed they should remain.

The British Museum itself, and the government, also seem ready. A law from 1963 prohibits the museum from giving away its treasures, and the government is not likely to revise it. But both the museum’s chair, George Osborne, and its reform-minded new boss, Nicholas Cullinan, support a long-term loan of the marbles, perhaps borrowing other antiquities from Greece in return. The prime minister, Sir Keir Starmer, has indicated that he would not stand in the way.

Greece has publicly rejected anything less than full ownership, but a swap of some kind remains the most realistic outcome. That could offer a model for how the museum might manage the 99% of its stock that sits in storage. Dame Mary Beard, a trustee, has suggested the museum could become a “lending library” for the world. Loans would let it share its sometimes contested collection while burnishing its image. (In 2022 a museum in Sicily loaned Greece a fragment of the marbles in exchange for another sculpture.)

A deal with Greece would also represent the crest of a wave of restitutions that have occurred in the marbles’ shadow. Museums are “less hamstrung” by politics on less high-profile items, notes Alexander Herman, the author of a book on the dispute. In the past few years, restitution has become a regular event.

About the Elgin Marbles “controversy” see here <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/67552622>

And if you are really interested in this topic, **[you can turn to the older file on museums which I’ll put as a complement on Cahier de Prépa.](#)**

TEXT 13 - Why Indigenous Artifacts Should Be Returned to Indigenous Communities

By [Kathleen DuVal](#), TIME, Apr 10, 2024

Kathleen DuVal is a professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the author of [Native Nations: A Millennium in North America](#)

In January 2024, the American Museum of Natural History in New York closed its Hall of the Great Plains and Hall of Eastern Woodlands, and visitors to the Field Museum in Chicago and other museums across the country are seeing covered display cases and signs

A generational shift in leadership has changed attitudes. Many items have gone back to Mediterranean countries from which they were taken, such as Italy and Turkey. Campaigners in Cambodia have also convinced the Metropolitan Museum in New York, among others, to return stolen sculptures. In Africa, Nigeria has led the way, securing dozens of bronzes—looted by the British from the Kingdom of Benin in 1897—from German, American and some British institutions.

Objects are also beginning to flow back to Cameroon, Indonesia and Nepal. And Belgium recently gave the Democratic Republic of Congo a catalogue of 80,000 items in its African Museum, an apparent prelude to returns. Bénédicte Savoy, a historian who has advised President Emmanuel Macron of France on the restitution of items to African countries, predicts that China, India and Vietnam will begin to make more vocal requests.

Legal action has helped drive restitution in America. In New York, the Manhattan district attorney’s Antiquities Trafficking Unit has wielded state law to return improperly exported objects. (Unusually, two museums in the Midwest and a private collector in Los Angeles are suing to block the unit’s seizures; court rulings may curtail its authority outside New York state.) The 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act has resulted in the return of thousands of human remains to Native American tribes, though many are still in museums. Most restitutions, however, will remain voluntary. Public awareness of the issue is growing both in the art-rich West and in the countries asking for objects back. There has also been a “generational shift” in leadership, notes Dan Hicks, author of “The British Museums”, a book on the repatriation debate. Due diligence on provenance is now essential, and restitution is no longer a dirty word. Previous efforts have faltered. But, Mr Hicks says, the idea of the museum as “a prison cell, where objects go to die” is now itself a historical relic. ■

explaining that these exhibits “have been covered in consideration of ongoing legal and ethical reviews.” These closures are overdue corrections by museums that have long misrepresented and misused Indigenous history. But more than a subtraction, they are a sign of

an important shift in where and how Americans learn Native American history.

It's easy to see covered cases and closed exhibits as a loss, even if an understandable one. Most of the news coverage has explained the shift as an unavoidable sacrifice for Native rights and sensibilities, a zero-sum game in which museum-goers and school field trips are the necessary losers. Headlines proclaim closures and removals and show pictures of empty cases or the final rush of visitors before the items were taken from public view. Stories quote disappointed visitors who interpret the closures as keeping them from learning about Native Americans.

Yet this focus misses the fact that there has never been an easier time to learn about Native American histories and cultures and to see Native American art and artifacts. A field trip that may be diminished by the closures at the American Museum of Natural History can simply head to lower Manhattan to visit the NYC branch of the National Museum of the American Indian. It's time to stop expecting Native history at museums of "natural history" and start learning it from museums and cultural centers that are run by any of the hundreds of Native nations in the United States or with their collaboration. And it's time to start learning the quite different stories that they tell.

Until recently, exhibits about Native Americans were in museums of "natural history" because white Americans saw them as part of archaeology and anthropology rather than history. At its opening in the 1960s, the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History had nothing about Native Americans, who instead were in the National Museum of Natural History alongside early primates and dinosaurs. The message was clear: Native Americans—perceived of as a monolithic culture—were primitive and destined for disappearance, fitting more with displays of animals than with the American History Museum's message of technology and progress. In the early 20th century, the Yahi man known as Ishi was displayed as a living exhibit at the University of California Museum of Anthropology following the genocide of his people. In 1968, a group of Miwoks (Yosemites) visited the National Museum of Natural History and read in one of the exhibits that their tribe had gone "extinct" in the 19th century. And until the closures that happened in January, visitors at the American Museum of Natural History could see generic mannequins of Native men and women stoically conveying timeless primitiveness.

The latest changes are responding to new federal rules on the implementation of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) regarding the rights of Native nations over sacred and funerary objects of their ancestors. The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington, D.C., founded as part of implementing NAGPRA, was a way to responsibly deal with the large collection of Native American skeletal remains and sacred burial objects held by the Smithsonian. But the NMAI has become far more than that. Its Indigenous designers, curators, and administrators, in part with funding from Native nations, have built a public space with locations in D.C. and Manhattan where everyone can learn about Native peoples—in all their diversity—as continuing nations with living cultures, as real human beings in the past, present, and future.



Visitors of the Denver Art Museum look at an item, called Drum (Gaaw) on display behind glass in the Northwest Coast and Alaska Native Art Galleries on March 27, 2024. The people of the Alaska's native tribe Tlingit report the tribe has been trying to reclaim that cultural item from the Denver Art Museum for more than 20 years. *RJ Sangosti—MediaNews Group/The Denver Post/ Getty Images*

The return of objects, funds from casinos and other tribal businesses, and an ongoing renaissance in tribal politics and culture have enabled Native nations across the country to build and renovate their own museums and cultural centers. In spite of their fraught histories with museums, some Native nations have embraced and changed museology. As Native scholar and founding director of the Chickasaw Cultural Center, Amanda Cobb-Greetham, explained to me , Native peoples have "turned an instrument of colonization and dispossession . . . into an instrument of self-definition and cultural continuance." They portray their own specific peoples as a living history. Executive Director of the Museum of the Cherokee People Shana Bushyhead Condill explains of her museum, "We preserve and perpetuate the history, stories and enduring culture of the Cherokee people."

There are hundreds of examples, including the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center in Mashantucket, Connecticut; the Osage Nation Museum in Pawhuska, Oklahoma; and the Himdang Ki: Tohono

O’odham Nation Cultural Center and Museum in Sells, Arizona. These museums all teach the diverse histories of their peoples, from the distant past to the present, to Native and non-Native visitors. As Mohawk scholar Scott Manning Stevens puts it, in these Indigenous cultural centers, “living cultures are as much a part of the fabric of the institution as the artifacts still displayed in exhibits.” Many have research centers too, where tribal and non-tribal scholars can work on a more respectful and accurate study of the past.

Beyond tribal museums, other museums are being built or creating exhibits with participation by Native Americans. Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas, has become a leader in incorporating Native artists and curators into its definition of “American Art.” The Penn Museum at the University of Pennsylvania does not need to cover artifacts in its “Native American Voices: The People — Here and Now” exhibit because tribal representatives helped to create it. At the First Americans Museum in

Oklahoma City, funded by the Chickasaw Nation in addition to Oklahoma City and the state of Oklahoma, Native nations collaborated on the architectural design, the exhibits, and the programming. And wherever you are, you can access online exhibits and teaching resources created by hundreds of Native nations on their own past and present.

Some of the items that have now been taken out of view may come back once they have gone through the NAGPRA consultation process, but much more important is the shift away from anthropological museums being the place to see Native American historical artifacts. Native American histories are not being lost or papered over, but the location as well as the style of their presentation is shifting to a more human, forward-looking one. This is a gain for everyone. Ideally, the covered cases and closed halls will prompt visits to new places and spark new understandings of the long and continuing history—and future—of Native America.

Text 14 - Restitution des œuvres d’art : « Il est urgent de réinventer une nouvelle forme de gouvernance culturelle »

Tribune

François Blanc, Fondateur de l’agence Communic’Art, conseil en stratégies culturelles

Jean-Jacques Neuer, Avocat, conseil en droit de l’art et du patrimoine

Restitution ou conservation ? Les musées qui abritent les œuvres issues des spoliations coloniales pourraient devenir des ambassadeurs du patrimoine mondial, en impliquant les pays d’origine dans les décisions concernant ces trésors culturels, proposent le conseil en stratégies culturelles François Blanc et l’avocat international Jean-Jacques Neuer.

Le Monde, 28 septembre 2024

Le débat sur la restitution des œuvres d’art, cristallisé par le **rapport Sarr-Savoy en 2018***, reste marqué par des positions extrêmes : d’un côté, la revendication de restitutions massives au nom des spoliations coloniales ; de l’autre, la défense rigide des collections occidentales comme trésors universels. Face à cette impasse, il est urgent de réinventer une nouvelle forme de gouvernance culturelle, fondée sur le partage et la coopération internationale.

Le dilemme est complexe. D’un côté, la demande de restitution repose sur des arguments éthiques et historiques indéniables. Les objets d’art pillés ou acquis dans des conditions douteuses sont les témoins d’un passé de domination coloniale qui, pour beaucoup de pays, représente encore une plaie ouverte. Cela a conduit à la restitution, en 2020, de vingt-six objets d’art au Bénin et d’un sabre historique au Sénégal, première étape d’un mouvement plus large.

Mais, d’un autre côté, le maintien de certaines œuvres dans les grandes institutions occidentales a permis une mise en lumière de cultures souvent méconnues. Les musées occidentaux, comme le British Museum, à Londres, ou le Musée du quai Branly, à Paris, ont offert à ces objets une visibilité mondiale, permettant ainsi de tisser des liens entre les cultures et de sensibiliser des millions de visiteurs à l’héritage culturel des peuples colonisés.

Face à ce dilemme, faut-il choisir entre restituer toutes les œuvres ou les conserver au nom de l’universalité de l’art ? Nous croyons qu’une solution alternative existe : celle de musées devenant des ambassadeurs du patrimoine mondial.

Une gouvernance mondiale

Plutôt que de déplacer les objets, l’idée serait de mondialiser la gouvernance des musées qui les abritent. Sous l’égide d’organisations comme l’Organisation des Nations unies pour l’éducation, la science et la culture (Unesco), une gestion internationale des œuvres d’art pourrait voir le jour, impliquant les pays d’origine dans les décisions concernant ces trésors culturels. Les musées deviendraient ainsi des ambassadeurs non plus d’un patrimoine national, mais d’un patrimoine mondial partagé par tous.

Lire aussi l'entretien : Article réservé à nos abonnés Bénédicte Savoy, historienne de l'art : « Restituer les œuvres d'art africaines, c'est réparer le passé »

Lire plus tard

Cette idée n'est pas totalement nouvelle. Depuis 1972, la notion de « patrimoine mondial de l'humanité » a été consacrée par l'Unesco, qui gère un vaste réseau de biens culturels et naturels inscrits au Patrimoine mondial. L'enjeu, aujourd'hui, serait d'étendre cette gouvernance à des objets d'art conservés dans des collections publiques internationales.

Le débat sur les spoliations n'est pas nouveau. Dès l'Antiquité, les pillages de biens culturels étaient courants, des Wisigoths aux Romains en passant par Napoléon, qui s'appropriait de nombreuses œuvres d'art lors de ses conquêtes. Plus récemment, l'ambition démesurée d'Adolf Hitler de créer un musée à sa botte fit de l'Europe un terrain de chasse aux œuvres d'art. Ce débat ne se limite donc pas aux seules spoliations coloniales, mais s'inscrit dans une longue histoire de transferts forcés de patrimoine. Pourtant, toutes les revendications ne sont pas égales. Faut-il restituer chaque œuvre réclamée ? Quid des pays autrefois colonisés par l'Empire ottoman ou l'Empire chinois ? Une approche radicale de la restitution risquerait de fragmenter les collections mondiales et de limiter l'accès à des trésors universels qui appartiennent à l'humanité dans son ensemble. Le danger est de réduire les musées à des vitrines nationales, où ne seraient exposées que des œuvres strictement locales, excluant toute vision d'universalité.

Un humanisme partagé

Face à ces questions complexes, il est possible de trouver une voie médiane. Les musées, au lieu de devenir des champs de bataille idéologiques, pourraient devenir des espaces de partage et de coopération internationale. Une gouvernance partagée permettrait de sanctuariser les collections, en reconnaissant leur importance culturelle pour les pays d'origine tout en les inscrivant dans un réseau mondial.

Les musées seraient ainsi dirigés par des équipes internationales, en collaboration avec les pays d'origine, et gérés comme un patrimoine commun. Ils pourraient prêter régulièrement des œuvres aux pays demandeurs pour des expositions temporaires, ou encore organiser des résidences artistiques, des programmes éducatifs et des échanges culturels autour de ces objets.

Cette approche permettrait de préserver l'intégrité des collections tout en répondant aux revendications légitimes de réappropriation culturelle. Ainsi, les musées seraient non plus des vitrines d'un passé colonial, mais des acteurs d'un dialogue global et d'un humanisme partagé.

Une humanité unie dans sa diversité

Dans un monde de plus en plus polarisé, il est impératif de bâtir des ponts plutôt que des murs. La restitution ne doit pas être vue comme un geste de réparation ponctuel, mais comme une opportunité d'inventer un nouveau modèle de coopération internationale. Les trésors culturels du monde entier doivent être protégés, partagés et célébrés non seulement pour leur valeur artistique, mais pour ce qu'ils représentent dans la construction d'une humanité unie dans sa diversité.

Les musées, en tant qu'ambassadeurs de ce patrimoine mondial, ont un rôle crucial à jouer. En adoptant ce modèle, nous pourrions enfin dépasser le dilemme des restitutions et construire une véritable diplomatie culturelle, axée sur l'unité et la solidarité.

L'heure est venue de repenser le rôle des musées et des institutions culturelles dans notre monde globalisé. En transformant ces lieux de conservation en acteurs d'un dialogue mondial, nous pourrions surmonter les divisions du passé et construire un avenir fondé sur le partage et la coopération. Il est encore temps d'agir pour que ce patrimoine, qui appartient à toute l'humanité, continue à être une source de dialogue et d'inspiration pour les générations futures.

Nos tribunes et entretiens sur les restitutions d'œuvres d'art africaines

- « Restituer des œuvres d'art pour changer le rapport à l'autre », par les auteurs du rapport remis à Emmanuel Macron, Felwine Sarr et Bénédicte Savoy
 - « Les Béninois vont retrouver leur dignité et reconstruire leur identité », par l'historien de l'art béninois Didier Marcel Houénoudé
 - « Les non-dits du débat sur la restitution du patrimoine africain », par la maîtresse de conférences en histoire des arts de l'Afrique Maureen Murphy
 - « La restitution doit être un point de départ », par l'historienne de l'art africain Sarah Van Beurden.
- Et aussi :
- « La restitution des œuvres est l'occasion pour la France de réparer et de réinventer sa relation avec l'Afrique », entretien avec l'historien et politologue Achille Mbembe
 - « La restitution annoncée de 26 objets au Bénin s'inscrit dans un processus de revendication aussi exemplaire que nécessaire », tribune de l'avocate Corinne Hershkovitch
 - « Au nom de la repentance coloniale, des musées pourraient se retrouver vidés », entretien avec l'historien d'art Julien Volper et l'avocat Yves-Bernard Debie
 - « La France accuse un retard inacceptable dans le domaine de l'histoire de l'art africain », tribune d'Eric de Chassey, directeur de l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art.

Dans la foulée de la Conférence internationale sur les crimes coloniaux à Alger fin 2025, l'Union africaine a déclaré que la décennie 2026-2036 serait celle "des réparations". Ces démarches mémorielles sont de plus en plus nombreuses et encadrées par des instances multilatérales et collectives

<https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/selection-reparations-coloniales-une-quete-mondiale#about>

◆ Episode 4 is of particular interest to us : **Caraïbe/Royaume-Uni, la dette non soldée de l'esclavage**

<https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/cultures-monde/caraibe-royaume-uni-la-dette-non-soldee-de-l-esclavage-1325232>

En octobre 2024, sous la pression des Etats caribéens, l'Etat britannique a jugé qu'il était temps d'aborder la justice réparatrice liée à la période de l'esclavage. Pourtant cette décision est jugée trop tardive et sans ambition puisqu'elle refuse tout dédommagement monétaire

Here are a few examples of museums notable for their efforts on repatriation or the recontextualization and enhancement of their collections

IN CANADA

► The History Museum <https://www.historymuseum.ca/>

It was in the news very recently following the repatriation of indigenous artifacts from the Vatican to the First Nation tribes

VIDEO - Retour historique d'artefacts autochtones au Canada

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdI5dF4T13s>

And in English now from City News

Historic unveiling of Indigenous artifacts

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_aXyLWZOaKU

IN THE US (see document 13)

► The National Park Service explaining its missions in accordance with NAGPRA

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nagpra/index.htm>

IN AUSTRALIA

► [Queensland museum](#)

<https://www.museum.qld.gov.au/learn-and-discover/first-nations/artefacts-as-markers-in-museums/>

IN FRANCE

► Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac

See in particular <https://www.quaibrantly.fr/fr/collections/vie-des-collections/actualites/restitution-de-26-oeuvres-a-la-republique-du-benin/>

At the time, it was argued that France (together with Germany) was astute at navigating the tricky issue of repatriation and at wielding cultural diplomacy (which the UK may have failed to do in the Elgin Marbles Saga)

[Culture](#) | Art of the steal

Text 16 - The lessons from the brazen heist at the Louvre

Museum thefts are surprisingly common

The Economist, Oct 21st 2025|PARIS|

It took two masked thieves just seven minutes to slip through the window of the Galerie d'Apollon, pierce the security glass of two display cabinets using disc-cutters, and make off with nine items of Napoleonic and royal jewellery. At 9.30am on October 19th the pair used a truck-

mounted ladder to break in to the Louvre; they left the same way, before escaping on scooters with two accomplices. In their haste they dropped one looted piece. The raid strikes at the heart of the French state—and of the art world. With nearly 9m visitors in 2024, the Louvre is

the most popular museum anywhere. A former royal palace in the historic centre of Paris, it is made up of over 400 galleries, displaying 35,000 works of art. Spanning civilisations from Mesopotamia to Europe, the collection also links France’s royal and imperial past with its republican present. President Emmanuel Macron called the heist an attack on “our history”.

The eight items seized, worth €88m (\$102m) according to French officials, were part of the national collection of crown jewels. Kept in the museum’s most sumptuous gallery, they include the emerald-studded necklace and earrings given by Napoleon to Marie-Louise on their wedding in 1810, and a tiara made up of 212 pearls, 1,998 diamonds and 992 rose-cut diamonds belonging to the Empress Eugénie, Napoleon III’s wife. The thieves bagged an earring, necklace and tiara from the sapphire collection.

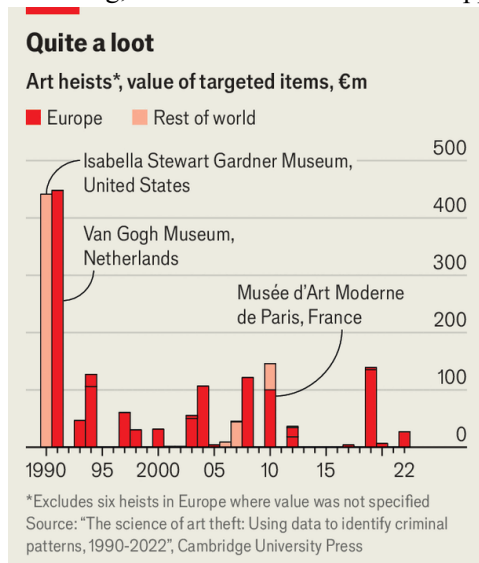


Chart: The Economist

The Louvre has been targeted before—most famously in 1911, when the “Mona Lisa” was stolen—but not on this scale. Arthur Brand, a Dutch specialist in art theft, compares the heist to the snatching of 13 works of art, including Vermeer’s “The Concert” and Rembrandt’s “Christ in the Storm on the Sea of Galilee”, from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston in 1990. The following year an even more audacious attempt was made in Amsterdam. Criminals made off with 20 paintings,

About museums, see also

► **How museums can help rebuild trust in a divided America**

The Conversation, Jan 5, 2026 by [Devon Akmon](#), Director of the MSU Museum and CoLab Studio, Michigan State University

<https://theconversation.com/how-museums-can-help-rebuild-trust-in-a-divided-america-268466>

including Van Gogh’s “The Potato Eaters”, though the artworks were soon recovered. But “The Louvre is the ultimate heist,” says Mr Brand. “Nobody thought anybody would dare to steal from the Louvre.” The brazenness is worthy of a Hollywood script. Indeed in “Lupin”, a hit French crime series, the protagonist pinches from the museum a diamond necklace once owned by Marie Antoinette.

In reality, museum theft is surprisingly common. France has seen a number of recent heists from smaller museums. An analysis of 40 cases between 1990 and 2022 by Sandra Clopés and Marc Balcells, published in April, classifies five main types of raid. The most common, accounting for 15 of the heists, is a stealth raid: thieves make off with artworks without alerting security agents. “Smash-and-grab” raids are the second-most common, accounting for 11 of those analysed. Over half the items taken are paintings; only 4% are jewellery. Less than half are recovered. The Louvre thieves, says an art valuer in Paris, will try to dismantle the pieces, sell the gold and recut the precious stones. There is no market, he says, for the items themselves.

In Paris, minds are now focusing on what went wrong and how to stop it happening again. Gérald Darmanin, the justice minister, said the raid had given France “a dreadful image”. That a truck could be parked outside the Louvre on a busy street on a Sunday morning without raising suspicion is worrying enough; that the thieves could decamp with crown jewels despite setting off alarms poses serious questions about the museum’s security.

The “trick is to slow thieves down”, says Mr Brand. In most cases, note Ms Clopés and Mr Balcells, “Thieves were faster stealing the pieces than the sensors alerting security forces.” In a leaked report, France’s national auditor points to “persistent” delays in deploying modern security equipment in the Louvre. Laurence des Cars, the museum’s director, raised the problem when she took over in 2021. But, as in all public museums, budgets are tight. Rachida Dati, France’s culture minister, talked this week of “40 years of neglect”. Nobody wants to accept responsibility, but the political pressure is rising for a head to roll.

Text 17 - The new Obama museum promises to revitalise Chicago's South Side

But reversing decades of disinvestment is not without its challenges

Opinion Outlook by Patti Waldmeir (a contributing columnist), *The Financial Times*, March 30, 2026



Many hope the Obama Presidential Center in Chicago's Jackson Park will provide a boost to the local economy when it opens this summer © The Obama Foundation

Michelle Obama grew up on the South Side of Chicago and Barack Obama cut his political teeth there. Now, the former president and first lady are trying to do their bit for the largely economically depressed and crime-burdened area so close to their hearts by opening the 19.3-acre, \$850mn Obama Presidential Center.

After years of delays, the centre will open on Juneteenth, the public holiday commemorating the end of slavery in the US. It is part presidential museum, complete with a full-scale Oval Office replica; part athletic and community centre including an NBA-sized basketball court; and part incubator for civic activism.

Located in historic Jackson Park, which was designed by renowned 19th-century landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, the Obama campus will be Chicago's newest tourist attraction. The Obama Foundation, which paid for and manages the centre, estimates it will attract 600,000 visitors a year, its spokesperson Emily Bittner tells me.

Many hope this will mark a watershed for the local economy. "A new business changes a neighbourhood's horizon, telling local entrepreneurs and families that this is a place to thrive," says Jared Evans, who manages the Chase community centre nearby. Bittner predicts a 10-year economic impact of \$3.1bn on local Cook County businesses.

For the Obamas, "it was really important to . . . put a marker on reversing decades of disinvestment in the community that raised her [Michelle] and that helped him [Barack] to discover his purpose", Bittner tells me. "We are making a major bet on the South Side and [its] people."

But with only weeks to go until opening, the challenge of revitalising the area is plain to see. Some 41.3 per cent of households in Woodlawn, where the centre is located, earn less than \$25,000 a year; per capita income is just over half that of Chicago overall; the unemployment rate of 15.6 per cent is nearly twice that of Chicago overall; and more than a third of households have no vehicle available to them.

Stony Island Avenue, a commercial thoroughfare, boasts only fast food outlets to feed tourists. And when I visited last week, local radio reported two stabbings on the nearest subway. A recent Chicago Tribune investigation found assaults on public transport passengers were up to five times higher in Chicago than in other big US cities. Widespread perceptions of Chicago — and particularly the South Side — as unsafe could hurt tourism, local residents fear. But they note the Obama centre is very close to the popular Griffin Museum of Science and Industry and the relatively affluent University of Chicago campus. While real estate sources say properties are being snapped up for renovation to high-end residences, activists worry that gentrification will push out longtime residents who can no longer afford to live there. The Chicago city council has recently passed measures aimed at protecting low-income residents.

Bittner admits the Obamas can't solve the area's problems alone: "I don't think any one entity can erase decades of disinvestment." Steven Durlauf, an expert on poverty, inequality and economic growth at the University of Chicago, tells me that "the remedies for breaking the perfect storm of disadvantage [in the area] require something more than 'trickle down'" benefits from the Obama centre.

But he concedes that “it will have some marginal effect”. Alyssa Sylvester, barista at a nearby high-end coffee shop, thinks “anything that showcases the neighbourhood is good for us”. For my money, South Side headlines on Chicago’s newest museum are preferable to those obsessing over crime and poverty.

The Obamas’ vote of confidence in the South Side is engraved into the granite face of the 225-foot museum tower. The inscription at the top of the tower is from the former president’s speech marking the 50th anniversary of the Selma civil rights marches. “You are America. Unconstrained by habit and convention. Unencumbered by what is, ready to seize what ought to be ... The single most powerful word in our democracy is the word ‘We.’ ‘We The People.’ ‘We Shall Overcome.’ ‘Yes We Can.’”

► **Le Musée National de l’Histoire du Québec (MNHQ)** is due to open in 2026 . Here is an article highlighting the stakes around such history museums: <https://globalnews.ca/news/10491401/historians-first-nations-question-quebec-history-museum/>

► **About the plans for Donald J. Trump Presidential Library in Miami, a critical view**
<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2026/apr/03/donald-trump-presidential-library-gaudy-monstrosity-architecture-bling>

► **The six most anticipated museum openings of 2026**
<https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20260219-the-six-most-anticipated-museum-openings-of-2026>

► **One of them is the new LACMA (Los Angeles County Museum of Art)**
<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2026-02-05/lacma-david-geffen-galleries-opening-date>



A drone view of the David Geffen Galleries on March 31, 2026 in Los Angeles. Photographer: Eric Thayer/Los Angeles Times via Getty Images

Here are three reviews

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2026-04-24/peter-zumthor-s-los-angeles-county-museum-mirrors-la>

<https://www.ft.com/content/3ac8128e-56e9-4ca4-9fb8-12cb2b985eb6?syn-25a6b1a6=1>

<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2026-04-22/lacmas-david-geffen-galleries-inaugural-exhibition-art-critic-review>

► **Brian T. Allen** is the National Review very prolific art critic (the self-described conservative magazine see below). He writes a very detailed review of a museum twice a week! (see here <https://www.nationalreview.com/author/brian-t-allen/>) Which is not surprising since there are over 2,000 museums in the U.S. and 200 considered as “major museums” (<https://whichmuseum.com/place/united-states-2682/art>)

He regularly expresses very critical views about a museum’s attempt at retelling / recontextualising / decolonising. (A viewpoint similar to that of some columnists at *The Spectator* or *The Telegraph* in the UK)

For instance, here are extracts from his review of the Milwaukee Art Museum



Exterior view of the Milwaukee Art Museum. (Photo by Front Room Studios courtesy of the Milwaukee Art Museum)

<https://www.nationalreview.com/2025/08/a-visit-to-the-milwaukee-art-museum/>

Document 18 - A Visit to the Milwaukee Art Museum - August 23, 2025

Fabulous building, good art, and an idiotic hit job on American treasures over slavery, equality, and Columbus

Milwaukee has mostly done very good exhibitions. It did a bracing show on Scandinavian modern design in America. It also took the Hispanic Society's treasures show, *The Glory of Spain*, and a Gertrude Abercrombie retrospective is in the works as well as a survey show on Shaker art. There's no exhibition scheduled for the Semiquincentennial. Museums seem to be going blank on this celebration, so far.

Judging from *Troubled Like the Restless Sea*, an impressionistic, free-floating, idiotic exhibition of very good furniture and ceramics, mostly Federal-era, the Milwaukee museum does indeed have a blind spot. The show is inspired by Frederick Douglass's observation that "luxury household furnishings render visible the immorality and corruption of enslavers" and draws randomly from Douglass's three autobiographies. The museum did the show with the Chipstone Foundation, the esteemed think tank near Milwaukee with a superb, mostly antebellum American decorative arts collection. Chipstone often works with the museum on projects.

In his reminiscences of his time as a slave at a plantation on Maryland's Eastern Shore — a short year when he was seven or eight — Douglass "boldly recasts his enslavers' lavish lifestyles and ornate furnishings as nothing more than symptoms of the moral disease of slavery." A gorgeous Baltimore-made desk and bookcase from around 1800 is said to promote ignorance: It's "purposefully designed to conceal knowledge" because it has drawers that lock and curtained glass panes to hide the books inside, all protecting the rich since, as Douglass wrote "knowledge is the pathway to freedom." A center table from 1825 has a marble top that "creates a sense of order." Beneath it are "wild and organic" carved foliage and paw feet. The table, I read, expressed a stratified society, cultured and fashionable on top, unrefined below. A fancy pitcher made in 1992 in England to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Columbus's 1492 voyage is the launch point for — guess what — a barb about Columbian genocide by the Potawatomi writer Simon Pokagon, who's peeved because the pitcher displays the signing of the Treaty of Chicago in 1833, which, he says, displaced his tribe. A pineapple-shaped teapot is a trophy of empire. A Federal-era chair painted with roses was owned by a man who also owned slaves. There are a few objects with abolitionist themes, too.

Granted, this installation dates to 2021, a time of peak hysteria and hypnosis over race and reckonings. Aside from its expiration dates, the art is a collective victim of a drive-by shooting. It's treated like a prop. The Baltimore desk and bookcase are lovely, as works of art, but they're presented as inane symbols of events that are irrelevant to its existence in the aesthetic world. And who knew that rich buyers of sumptuous art ever, somehow or somewhere, exploited others? "Only in America," we're led to believe. Never among the emperors, pharaohs, popes, emirs, tsars, and despots, especially among those with good taste in art.

The video is an abortion of reality and high culture since it equates inequality with evil. What is the point of this? The enslavers, the profligates, the exploiters, and the leisure lovers who bought these objects are long dead. If it's to make people today feel guilty, resentful, and ashamed, it's an abuse of art. And, as scholarship goes, it's shoddy. It's not creative. It's formulaic. The curator, Tiffany Wade Momon, developed her rote talking points from **the 1619 Project**** and then cherry-picked the art.

Get rid of this abomination. It's both awful and trite. I don't know how an institution committed to preserving heritage at its best could have waded into this cesspool. Nearly everything in the museum was, when it was made, a luxury good, or is now. Are we going to interrogate the prevailing ethics of every owner, every maker, and every patron?(...)

The museum had around 250,000 visitors in 2023, according to its last annual report. Financially, it relies heavily on earned income since only 18 percent of its money comes from its endowment. It's looking for a new director. I hope whoever it is will ditch *Troubled Like the Restless Sea* and plans some decent programs for America's 250th birthday. A salute to Layton, a founding father for Milwaukee high culture and an American hero, would be a good idea.

A.I. & History

Text 19 - A.I. Is Poised to Rewrite History. Literally. [HERE](#)

The technology's ability to read and summarize text is already making it a useful tool for scholarship. How will it change the stories we tell about the past?

Text 20:

[Science & technology](#) | Deus ex machina - Fragmentary Latin inscriptions can be completed with AI


 A new model is finding connections spanning the Roman world



Illustration: The Metropolitan Museum of Art/The Economist

The Economist, Jul 23rd 2025

History depends on the written word. But how can a historian interpret a text if its authorship or age are uncertain, and indeed some of those words are missing? The problem is not a new one. But where human experts have struggled, historians are turning to artificial-intelligence (AI) models for suggestions, with impressive results.

Over the past five years or so, the predictive abilities of artificial neural networks have increasingly been applied to reconstructing the past. In that time they have assisted with everything from piecing together smashed Babylonian tablets to deciphering the characters inscribed on ancient Chinese turtle shells. The most prominent example has involved AI enthusiasts using high-quality scans to digitally unfurl unopenable papyrus scrolls that were carbonised during the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79AD.

Now scientists will be able to use AI models to suggest likely dates and geographical origins for samples of Latin inscriptions, and even predict missing bits of text. Yannis Assael, a researcher at Google DeepMind in London, and Thea Sommerschild, a historian at the University of Nottingham, described their model, Aeneas (named for the mythological ancestor of the Romans), in a paper published this week in *Nature*. Aeneas can process images of Latin text as well as transcribed inscriptions, and is an iteration of an earlier model that focused on Greek inscriptions.

Aeneas represents the latest step towards the researchers' goal of using AI models to do more than read individual texts. Drs Assael and Sommerschild hope to use large models, trained on tens of thousands of written sources, to glean unseen connections about ancient lives. Aeneas was trained on over 175,000 inscriptions, dating

from the 7th century BC to the 8th century AD, and spanning Roman provinces from Britain to Mesopotamia.

The model can be extremely accurate: in tests, it dated unseen texts to within 13 years of the accepted figure. Crucially, it can also suggest other sources that may be connected. With an estimated 1,500 new Latin inscriptions discovered every year, from slaves' epitaphs to emperors' decrees, identifying relevant parallels is one of historians' most important—and challenging—tasks. Human experts, even those with particularly impressive memories, have intimate knowledge of only specialist areas, while automated searches across the wider corpus are generally limited to strings of characters. Aeneas, by contrast, can search for thematic links across millennia, and the entire Roman world. Aeneas “helps us do things faster, and better”, says Dr Sommerschild, but also goes “beyond what we could do already”.

The researchers also tried out their model on contested inscriptions such as *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, an account of the life of Rome's first emperor, Augustus, carved into a temple wall in Ankara, Turkey; and a third-century AD altar text from Mainz in modern-day Germany. Aeneas far outstripped existing computer searches, they concluded, identifying “subtle and meaningful historical connections beyond literal matches, in ways that mirror expert-level reasoning”. Aeneas found other texts composed decades apart that bore similarities to the altar text, for example, stretching from the German city of Bonn to Bulgaria, following the movements of the Roman army. Drs Assael and Sommerschild say it is essentially modelling how the Roman Empire was connected, through the movement of people, beliefs and ideas.

It is Aeneas's ability to suggest missing text for gaps of uncertain length, however, that has some historians most excited. Many surviving Latin inscriptions are badly damaged, which means such a tool could generate new insights from existing material. For now, Aeneas's gap-filling chops are less impressive than its dating ones. When presented with deliberately obscured text, the correct segments (up to 20 characters in length) featured among Aeneas's top 20 predictions 46.5% of the time. When the length of the segment is unknown, this drops to 32.7%. All the same, says Charlotte Tupman, who lectures in classics

and digital humanities at the University of Exeter, this represents a major leap forward. Most useful may be Aeneas's ability to explain its reasoning, providing "saliency maps" that highlight which parts of the source influenced its predictions.

Working together

To test how their AI model augments human abilities, the team asked 23 historians to analyse and restore a list of texts that had identifying data removed. They found that, overall, historians working together with AI gave more accurate results than either on their own. That provides a "compelling case" for Aeneas to be incorporated into historians' workflows, says Dr Tupman. The volunteers reported that the context provided by Aeneas was useful

90% of the time, and improved their confidence in key tasks by 44%. One said the similar texts Aeneas retrieved "completely changed my perception" of an inscription; another that they achieved in 15 minutes what would normally take a couple of days.

Drs Assael and Sommerschild suggest specialised tools like Aeneas could soon be integrated into chatbots, enabling historians to interrogate data as part of a more natural conversation. And they hope similar techniques will be applied to other languages and other types of texts, from tablets to papyri, perhaps even connecting archives of different civilisations. "The more data we have," says Dr Assael, "the more interesting patterns we can extract." ■

About AI and history see also

► **Histor(AI): Doing History in an AI World**

Bhadrajee Hewage , Sept 9, 2025

From the blog On History, News, articles & research from the Institute of Historical Research (<https://www.history.ac.uk/>)

The Kennedy Centre

What to Know About the Kennedy Center and Trump's Campaign to Remake It

The center, which opened in 1971, is one of America's top cultural institutions. President Trump says he plans to transform the center to create a "new and spectacular" entertainment complex.



A view of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in January. Credit...Caroline Gutman for The New York Times

By Qasim Nauman, *The New York Times*, Feb. 2, 2026

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts is set to close this summer for an extensive two-year renovation, the latest step in President Trump's campaign to remake one of America's top cultural institutions in his image.

For more than half a century, the Kennedy Center has been Washington's premier venue for music, dance, theater and opera. It has hosted performances by Aretha Franklin, Leonard Bernstein and many other celebrated artists.

But Mr. Trump has said that he believes the center's programming is too "woke" and anti-American, and that its physical infrastructure lies in a state of disrepair he considers unacceptable.

In his second term, Mr. Trump has purged the center's board and made himself its chairman. On Sunday, he announced a plan to close the building on July 4 to build a "new and spectacular" entertainment complex over the next two years.

Here's what to know about the Kennedy Center and Mr. Trump's plans to remake it:

Construction of the center was delayed for years.

The center was imagined as a grand performing arts hub in the capital, and Congress designated it as the National Cultural Center in 1958. But construction was delayed for years, partly because some lawmakers in Washington were reluctant to fund it.

In 1962, President John F. Kennedy and the first lady, Jacqueline Kennedy, led a fund-raising drive for the center. The next year, he signed legislation extending the fund-raising deadline.

Kennedy was assassinated in November 1963. Within months, Congress voted to turn the center into a living memorial for the slain president. In December 1964, work finally began on the complex, renamed the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

The center opened in 1971 with a performance of Bernstein's "Mass," a piece that Kennedy's widow commissioned for the occasion. A New York Times article from the opening night called the center "the first proper opera house ever built in the capital of the richest nation on earth."

The center received millions of visitors a year.

The Kennedy Center, designed by the architect Edward Durell Stone and perched on the banks of the Potomac, was one of Washington's busiest landmarks.

Until last year, it received around two million annual visitors. It has featured performances by the Washington National Opera and the National Symphony Orchestra, and its current exhibits include one on Kennedy's legacy and another on the history of hip hop.

It also hosts the annual Kennedy Center Honors, which are awarded for outstanding cultural contributions. Past honorees have included the actors Fred Astaire and Cary Grant; the musicians Ray Charles and Dave Brubeck; and the members of the rock band Led Zeppelin.

Trump has thrown the center into turmoil.

Within weeks of returning to the Oval Office, Mr. Trump made it clear that he intended to significantly reshape the Kennedy Center. He dismissed the board and installed himself as its chairman, naming a loyalist, Richard Grenell, as the interim president.

Mr. Trump also said that the center was in a state of disrepair and criticized what he described as ideologically driven programming. Mr. Grenell also said that the center's finances were in disarray, though prior leaders have disputed claims of financial mismanagement.

After those moves, ticket sales fell, and there were boycotts by performers and contributors.

The backlash intensified in December after the board voted to change the center's name to the Trump-Kennedy Center. Democrats challenged the change and said it disrespects Kennedy's legacy. Some have argued that only Congress has the authority to change the center's name.

More organizations and artists, including the acclaimed composer Philip Glass, canceled events at the center. And the Washington National Opera decided last month to find another home, abandoning the hall where it had played since 1971.

Mr. Trump has offered few details about what will happen to the center. "I'm not ripping it down," he told reporters on Monday. "I'll be using the steel. So we're using the structure, we're using some of the marble, and some of the marble comes down."