



# Commentary: New York state's history is our story. We must be the ones to tell it.

As the Trump administration tries to control how museums present the past, it's more important than ever for the state to invest in its cultural institutions.

By Aaron Noble, For the *Times Union* | Sept. 12, 2025

On behalf of the more than 1,200 members of the Public Employees Federation at the state Department of Education whom I represent as an elected union leader, including those who work at the New York State Museum, Library, Archives and Office of Cultural Education, I strongly condemn efforts by the Trump administration to interfere in the operations of the Smithsonian Institution and the world-class museums that it operates.

The specious justifications for these moves — that they ensure an “accurate representation” of American history — conceal precisely the opposite goal. Censuring American history by removing references to challenging and difficult topics does not serve the educational needs of museum visitors. What makes a nation great is its ability to grapple with all aspects of its past — both celebratory and shameful — to learn lessons and guide us into the future.

The Trump administration has indicated its intention to move beyond the Smithsonian to museums and cultural organizations across the United States, including those here in New York. Already we have seen devastating funding cuts to projects at the Institute for Museum and Library Service and National Endowment for Humanities that do not comport with the president's vision of American history.

New York must push back.

We applaud Gov. Kathy Hochul's commitment to renovate the State Museum galleries. This renewed emphasis on showcasing our history will launch a new era of telling New York's diverse and powerful stories, leading to a broader understanding of our collective experience.

However, the loss of talented staff over the past several years means that these institutions no longer have the workforce to achieve these necessary objectives. The strength of the Museum, Library and Archives lies not in the collections or the buildings that hold them, but rather in the expert public servants who safeguard our history and make it available to New Yorkers across the state. By ensuring adequate funding for these cultural institutions, policymakers can demonstrate national leadership and help assure an accurate representation of history that can set the standard for embracing our past.

For decades, the state has neglected its responsibility to support the Office of Cultural Education. Given the ongoing threat to our cultural institutions and to the maintenance of our state's history, it is time to pass legislation to stabilize funding for the Office of Cultural Education by raising the Cultural Education Fee.

This fee, established in 2002 and not raised since then, is the primary source of funding for the State Museum, Library and Archives. The \$15 fee on property deed transfers no longer supports the operations of these institutions.

Providing sufficient, sustainable and secure funding for the Office of Cultural Education will ensure our history is not a political prop to be altered at the whims of individuals. The investment will send a message to President Trump to keep his hands off our history. And it will affirm that New York's past will be preserved for generations to come.

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