

President Trump's Criticism of Smithsonian Exhibits



By Kelleigh Nelson

July 9, 2025

I wouldn't be surprised if some day, they put the Simpsons in the Smithsonian. It's become part of our culture, those characters. –Joe Mantegna

To found at Washington, under the name of the Smithsonian Institution, an establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men. –James Smithson, Founder of the Smithsonian

President Donald Trump has expressed criticism towards Smithsonian exhibits, particularly in the context of what he and his administration perceive as promoting “improper, divisive or anti-American ideology”.

In March 2025, Trump issued an executive order directing the Smithsonian's Board of Regents to remove content he felt was inappropriate. He cited exhibits in the National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Smithsonian American Art Museum as examples. He claimed the Smithsonian was adopting a “revisionist movement” that negatively portrayed American founding principles and historical events.

Fox News [reported the following](#) regarding Mickey Mouse and the Lone Ranger:

The exhibit reframes iconic American characters through a critical, politically-charged lens. On The Lone Ranger, the

display states: "The White title character's relationship with Tonto resembled how the U.S. government imagined itself the world's Lone Ranger."

Mickey Mouse, a beloved American cultural icon, is not spared either. A display for the 1928 cartoon Steamboat Willie states, "Mickey challenged authority, but not everyone was in on the joke."

It continues: "Mickey Mouse debuted as the deckhand 'Steamboat Willie' in 1928, amidst a rising anxiety felt by many that modern living and city life were eroding family and community ties and loosening moral codes... But the new character's outsized facial features, white gloves, and trickster temperament were vestiges of longstanding traditions of blackface minstrelsy."

The Smithsonian has a rather questionable background, but I'd surmise President Trump doesn't know about it. Robert Dale Owen, a democrat congressman from Indiana, played a significant role in the establishment of the Smithsonian Institution. He introduced the bill in 1846 that founded the Institution. He served on the first Board of Regents and was instrumental in the design of the Smithsonian Institution Building, also known as the Castle. He chaired the Building Committee. Owen's advocacy for a national system of free secondary education also influenced the early vision of the Smithsonian.

Robert Dale Owen was the son of the first socialist, Robert Owen, who immigrated to America in 1824 and started a socialist school in New Harmony, Indiana. He was just as enamored of socialism/communism as his father but felt that his father really could have done better.

The father, Robert Owen, addressed the U.S. Congress on multiple occasions.

Key Details:

- When: He gave two speeches to the U.S. Congress in 1825, on February 25th and March 7th.
- What: He presented his vision for the utopian community at New Harmony, Indiana, and outlined his socialist beliefs.
- Audience: His addresses were delivered to the House of Representatives and other members of the government. The audience for his ideas included several key figures from the founding generation:
 - Three former presidents: John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison.
 - The outgoing President, James Monroe.
 - The President-elect, John Quincy Adams.

This indicates that Robert Owen did indeed interact with members of the founding generation during his visits and speeches to the U.S. Congress.

The President should know the Smithsonian's origins, but I'd bet no one in his cabinet has enlightened him. If anyone would know, it would be Stephen Miller!

President Trump's instincts are correct. His evaluation of the Smithsonian's "one-sided, divisive political narratives" is not surprising once the 1846 involvement in the Smithsonian's creation by socialist Robert Dale Owens is fully known.

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