## **U.S. HISTORY » ANALYSIS**

# Smithsonian reveals American genius and cruelty

## Trump is pressing for change at its D.C. museums

By Calvin Woodward Associated Press

washington » In an afternoon's walk through ground zero of Americana — the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History - objects around every corner invite one question: What could possibly be more American than this?

There's the enormous Star-Spangled Banner in all its timeworn glory, Dorothy's ruby slippers from "The Wizard of Oz" and totems of achievement throughout.

There are also testaments to pain and cruelty. What could be more American than a reckoning with the nation's sins, as illustrated by shackles representing slavery and photos of Japanese Americans confined to detention camps in World War II?

In myriad ways, the museum explores "the complexity of our past," in accord with its mission statement. President Donald Trump wants a simpler tale told. He wants this and the other Smithsonian museums to mirror American pride, power and accomplishment without all the darkness, and he threatens to hold back money if they don't get with that program.

### American genius and ugliness are on display

On social media, Trump complained that at the Smithsonian museums, which are free to visit and get most of their money from the government, "everything discussed is how horrible our Country is, how bad Slavery was, and how unaccomplished the downtrodden have been -Nothing about Success, nothing about Brightness, nothing

seum reflects bountiful suc-



This wall in the "Great Debate" section of a democracy exhibit at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in Washington, pictured last month, reflects some of the issues the nation grapples with. President Donald Trump is seeking changes in the stories the Smithsonian museums tell about America. He wants U.S. history cast in a more positive light.

field, from the kitchens and freed his own. factories of food pioneers, on the musical stage, in the movies or on other fronts of creativity and industriousness. The American Enterprise ex- artifacts and documents of hibit, for one, has a wall filled with the stories of successful Americans.

On this wandering tour you can see navigational implements used by Blackbeard, the terrifying pirate, from his early 1700s raids on the Atlantic coast. You see the hat Abraham Lincoln wore to Ford's Theatre the night of his assassination, George Washington's ceremonial uniform, Warren Harding's fine red silk pajamas from the early 1900s, the first car to travel across the country, and a \$100,000 bill.

light bulbs of the Ameri-In fact, the history mu- a gifted inventor and a slave countered. owner who publicly came to

cesses, whether on the battle-denounce slavery yet never justice," the exploitation of hero," the text says Washing-

Those nuances and ambiguities may not be long for this world. Still on display at the history museum are American ingenuity, subjugation, generosity, racism, grit, dishonor, verve, playfulness, corruption, heroism, and cultural appropriation.

Like most museums, the focus is not on the future.

### There are many provocations

Even so, there is plenty to provoke the Republican pres-

In the "Great Debate" of an American democracy exhibition, a wall is emblazoned with large words such You can see the original as "Privilege" and "Slavery." The museum presents fulcan genius, Thomas Edison. some tributes to the contri-A much earlier genius, the butions of immigrants and founding father Benjamin narratives about the rac-Franklin, is presented both as ist landscape that many en-

Exhibits address "food

Filipinos after the United ton's image "is still used for States annexed their land and the network of oppressive Native American boarding schools from which Jim for many as a symbolic 'fa-Thorpe emerged and became ther' of the country." one of the greatest athletes of all time.

Hawaii's last sovereign before its annexation by the U..S. in the 1890s, Queen Liand become a COLONIZER?"

A ukulele on display was made around 1890 by a sugar gunboat Philadelphia, part of laborer who worked on the a small fleet that engaged the kingdom's American plantations before a U.S.-backed coup overthrew the monarchy. plain in 1776, delaying Brit-Museum visitors are told the new instrument was held up England colonies and buyby the monarchs as a symbol ing time for the Continental of anti-colonial independence.

"Ukuleles are both a prod-sive victory at Saratoga. uct of U.S. imperialism and a potent symbol of Native Haaccompanying text.

At the Greek-godlike statue



Protest signs from a selection of historic demonstrations are displayed at the National Museum of American History, representing the causes of anti-war and civil rights activists, the tea party, farmers and other populist movements.

of George Washington, the director. "This boat's fragile text hints at his complexities and stops short of the total reverence that totalitarian leaders get.

Noting that "modern scholarship focuses on the fallible man rather than the marble inspiration, patriotism and commercial gain" and that "he continues to hold a place

### The American spirit is celebrated, too

On this visit, conservators li'uokalani, is quoted on a behind a big window are seen banner as asking: "Is the sweeping tiny brushes on an-AMERICAN REPUBLIC of cient wooden pieces. Their STATES to DEGENERATE patriotic work proceeds at a snail's pace.

The team is restoring the British navy at the Battle of Valcour Island in Lake Chamain's effort to cut off the New Army to prepare for its deci-

The commander of the gunboats in the Valcour batwaiian resistance," says the tle later became America's greatest traitor, Benedict Arnold. The British damaged the Philadelphia so badly it sank an hour after the battle, then lay underwater for 160 years. It's being restored for next year's celebrations of America's 250th year.

'The Philadelphia is a symbol of how citizens of a newly formed nation came together, despite overwhelming odds against their success," said

condition is symbolic of our democracy; it requires the nation's attention and vigilance to preserve it for future generations."

## It's not telling you what to think, but what to think about

Democracy's fragility is considered in a section of the museum about the limits of presidential power. That's where references to Trump's two impeachments were removed in July for updating, and were restored this

"On December 18, 2019, the House impeached Donald Trump for abuse of power and obstruction of Congress," one label now states. "On January 13, 2021, Donald Trump became the first president to be impeached twice," says another. "The charge was incitement of insurrection based on his challenge of the 2020 election results and on his speech on January 6." His Senate acquittals are duly noted.

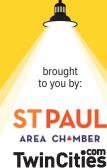
It's a just-the-facts take on a matter that has driven the country so deeply apart. The history museum doesn't offer answers for that predicament. Instead, it asks questions throughout its halls on the fundamentals of Americanism.

"How should Americans remember their Revolution and the founding of the na-

"What does patriotism look like?"

"How diverse should the citizenry be?"

"Do we need to share a Jennifer Jones, the project's common national story?



# spotlight on business

# **OPEN ARMS OF MINNESOTA**

Open Arms is a nonprofit organization that prepares and delivers medically tailored meals at no cost to critically ill Minnesotans and their loved ones. Our registered dietitians and in-house chefs create delicious, medically tailored menus and our team prepares over a million meals per year in our two kitchens, delivering and shipping them to the homes of our clients. With the help of a committed community of more than 6500 volunteers, we grow produce at 5 urban farm locations, and support clients with nutrition education and therapy. At

the forefront of the food as medicine movement, Open Arms is the sole organization in the Upper Midwest dedicated to preparing and delivering medically tailored meals to critically ill individuals.



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## • HOW DID YOUR ORGANIZATION BEGIN AND DEVELOP?

 $oldsymbol{igwedge}_ullet$  Open Arms of Minnesota began as a single act of kindness in 1986 — Bill Rowe, our founder, cooking food in his apartment and delivering it to a handful of neighbors living with AIDS who were alone and very ill. Over 40 years, Open Arms has grown into a \$13M organization with facilities in Minneapolis and St. Paul, providing meals to people living with a variety of critical illnesses.

## WHAT GUIDES YOU AS YOU ADAPT IN THESE YEARS OF CHALLENGE AND FAST CHANGE?

The clients, caregivers, and families that Open Arms serves remain central and at the forefront of every decision we make. Leading with our values of community, abundance, innovation, and hope, Open Arms strives to create an inclusive and joyful community. We believe that all people who are ill — no matter their economic status — should have access to appropriate nutrition.

## $oldsymbol{Q}_ullet$ what have been some hard lessons along the way?

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## $oldsymbol{Q}_ullet$ WHAT'S THE BEST ADVICE YOU'VE EVER GOTTEN, AND WHO DID IT COME FROM?

 $igwedge _ullet$  The best advice always comes from the people you serve and the community you live in. We listen to our stakeholders, gathering feedback in real time, through our client advisory committee, surveys and other ways. Right now, hearing from our clients provides strength and hope for all of us as we face the current challenges!

## $oldsymbol{Q}_ullet$ what does the future look like to you?

🔼 Open Arms envisions a world where medically tailored meals are integrated into standard care for all people facing serious illness — not just in Minnesota, but across the Midwest and the country. As we do our best to grow our funding, expand our services, deepen our community roots, and advocate for policy change, we remain committed to nourishing our clients and building a joyful community of kindness through food.