

Goliath Lost

TENEKA WILLIAMS

This land is first and foremost
his handiwork.
It was he who brought order
Out of primeval wilderness . . .
Wherever one looks in this land,
whatever one sees that is the work of man,
was erected by the toiling
straining bodies of blacks.
(Cohn 1935)

The Presidential Action of Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History (Exec. Order No.14563 2025) emphasizes presenting American history accurately and with pride, highlighting the nation's progress and ingenuity. The White House states that the goal is to revitalize cultural institutions and reverse the spread of divisive ideology. This initiative aims to ensure alignment with the president's directive to celebrate American exceptionalism and remove divisive or partisan narratives. The basis of this movement is rooted in Christian nationalism and detailed in Project 2025. The advocates of this doctrine seek to align American culture with a brand of Christianity steeped in adulation of the white man.

However, the current state of America and the world show us that the world is held up by Black and Brown bodies. France's economy is on the verge of collapse without the gold collateral housed in Burkina Faso. Our leading technologies are sustained by minerals forcefully removed from Africa. The violence and constant war between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda is financed by foreign entities that depend on its natural resources for their wealth. Cacao beans do not grow in Belgium or Switzerland. American farmers are on the verge of bankruptcy with no migrant labor to harvest their crops and no foreign markets to buy them. Make no mistake that what is happening in America is representative of an effort to uplift and maintain whiteness as the global standard.

Our museums and cultural institutions are not exempt. In fact, they are invaluable in the quest to establish a new narrative—one that absolves accountability through erasure and omission. Be mindful that European museums would be empty were it not for the remnants of African culture that fill their galleries. Similarly, without the inclusion of Black and Brown contributions and perspectives, America's history falls short of exceptional.

Someone once said to me that the people in general cannot bear
very much reality. He meant by this that they prefer fantasy to a
truthful re-creation of their experience.
(Baldwin 2017)

This Executive Order (Exec. Order No.14563 2025) posits that differing perspectives prevent unity and present the story of America in a negative light. This attempt to sanitize American history seeks to satiate opponents of acknowledgment and truth. They claim it burdens the current generation with an unnecessary debt of conscience. In a multicultural society, all perspectives should be encouraged. It is the removal of alternate views that challenge and contradict that is divisive and perpetuates a narrative that cannot be substantiated by the historical record. The directives for the Smithsonian and other museums to focus less on “ideological indoctrination or divisive narratives that distort our shared history” (Exec. Order No.14563, 2025) and seek to amplify the sanitized voice of an ethical, moral, white Christian society. As much as the ordinance seeks to minimize contributions of Black and Brown people, it also seeks to remove references to white cruelty, attempting to purport white benevolence through revision and nationalistic rhetoric.

Deemed to be representative of corrosive ideology, an order of removal of “The Scourged Back,” a portrait of an enslaved man whose back was significantly scarred from whippings he endured on a Louisiana plantation, was given to all national parks (Groetzinger et al., 2025). Meanwhile, PBS (Sy & Fritz, 2025) recently aired a cartoon by PraegerU, a nonprofit conservative media organization that produces “pro-American” content, in which Christopher Columbus admonishes that being taken as a slave is better than being killed. *For whom?* This new version of history omits the perspective of the enslaved. Historical negationism is harmful and benefits those who seek to create a narrative that fits an existing ideology. To put forth a narrative that the enslaved and the slaver share the same story will exacerbate the cognitive dissonance that ails white Americans. Undoubtedly, the rise of alt right and white nationalist groups are the result of internalized cognitive dissonance. The participants have been sold an idea of greatness and are disillusioned in a world that shows others attaining what that has been promised to them.

So go ahead and revise history, tell a story in which America is great only through ingenuity and superiority of white men. Tell a story that does not show the world the way it is, that it is different from what our eyes can see. To attempt to tell the story of America through one lens only harms us as it denies an opportunity to reconcile our shared history. The story of America did not begin when English peasants determined to escape religious persecution risked life and limb crossing the Atlantic Ocean. The first winter in the colonies of Jamestown and Plymouth is not the origin stories of heroes.

For had it not been for the Native Americans sharing food and shelter, the tale of the white immigrants would have ended less than a year after it began. In return, the Native Americans received diseased blankets and murderous raids and were ultimately removed from the land on which they had lived. It was the labor of chattel slaves picking cotton that afforded the philosophical texts read by John Quincy Adams, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and others in their quest to craft a document of inalienable rights. The forefathers worked on a constitution that would exclude those whose bodies and labor were forced to build that White House that sits at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

As we navigate an environment that is threatened by efforts to be diverse and inclusive due to the Executive Orders set forth by this current administration, Black and Brown people are told that our contributions are so minimal, they can be removed. This current administration is bothered by the racial chasms illustrated by the Trail of Tears, slavery, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, Black Codes, redlining, and countless other examples that show the sin of skin in America. The current political and social environment is the result of an insidious current of dishonesty and hypocrisy. An elevation of these actions to infiltrate our cultural institutions

and museums will only harm future generations. Those who do not know their history are doomed to repeat it. Alas, one would think this was the plot of a Shakespearean comedy if it were not being witnessed in real time.

That the Negro American has survived at all is extraordinary—a
lesser people might have simply died out, as indeed others have.
(Moynihan 1965)

Quite simply, we do not need to ask for a seat at the table our ancestors built.

Black history is American history, for there is no story more unequivocally American than that of Black Americans. Arriving in this country as enslaved property. Learning to read and write in a language that is not your own. Being told you were lazy while working the land sunrise to sunset. Cooking and cleaning for those who say you are an animal. Responsible for nursing and raising the children of those who call you uncivilized. Surviving for four hundred years in bondage and attaining our physical freedom and civic rights through primarily non-violent protests and persistence.

For as long as we have been in this land, we have fought to exist. Perhaps it is time for us to stop fighting to be recognized, stop asking to be included. We are more than capable of creating community with tables long enough for all to be seated. History reveals that thriving communities were created in Tulsa, Oscarville, Rosewood, and many more settlements for us by us—only to be dragged back by murderous raids, land theft, and political savagery by those who claim we have no impact.

The inclination to blur the past of America juxtaposed with what is presently happening encapsulates the supremacy in leadership. Our military members are housed on installations named after treasonous men who lost in battle, yet are expected to exhibit a warrior ethos. Yesterday's injustices are happening today. The authoritarian policies that are designed to elicit conformity and compliance by erasure and deletion have been used to silence us before. They do not want a story for all but a myth for some.

President Trump recently made a speech championing his theme of America First. He talked about the invention of the light bulb, telegram, television, telephone, computer chip, smartphone, GPS, the integrated circuit, and even the Internet. Each one of the innovations was the product of Black labor and thought. Good luck trying to opine American exceptionalism without Black excellence.

Remember, remember always, that all of us, and you and I especially,
are descended from immigrants and revolutionists.
(Roosevelt 1938)

Our great grandfathers were hung from trees because they believed they were men who deserved the right to vote. Our great grandmothers bore and raised children sired from legalized rape. We carry the instincts of those who could chart a map to freedom through braided cornrows. Humanity survives without acknowledgment. We know these stories not because they are written but because they are us. Our voices cannot be silenced, because our presence screams resistance and survival. We are the descendants of those who made a home in a place that was not a home to them.

For all the archivists, curators, librarians, and any ally who is moved by the story of the oppressed: If you are humbled by the pain written in the scars of “The Scourged Back” and

understand the value of its voice, continue to work within professional boundaries. Changes to exhibits, additions, and removals, as well as tracking of historical artifacts, should be documented. Take as many photographs as possible and write daily about the activities that are happening in your workspaces. As guardians of history, these are the times when the love of the culture will preserve the culture. Our culture is based in the art of storytelling, from the traditions of African griots to today's top hip hop artists. Our profession dictates the amalgamation of memory and heart. Be vigilant in observation and teach preservation to everyone around you. We are now all responsible for our stories, and your ethos is needed as guidance in and beyond the walls of your institutions.

We are here and the revolution begins now.

References

- Baldwin, James, and Raoul Peck. 2017. *I Am Not Your Negro: A Companion Edition to the Documentary Film Directed by Raoul Peck / by James Baldwin Compiled and Introduced by Raoul Peck*. New York, Vintage Books.
- Cohn, D.L. 1935. *God Shakes Creation*. Harper and Brothers.
- U.S. Executive Order No. 14253, *Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History*, 90 Fed. Reg. 14563; 80 Fed. Reg. 18131 (March 27, 2025).
- Groetzing, K., Ho, L. and Coutant, L. 2025. "Erasing History, Silencing Science." *National Parks Conservation Association*, October 1. <https://www.npca.org/articles/10871-erasing-history-silencing-science>.
- Moynihan, Daniel P. 1965. *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. U.S. Department of Labor. <https://www.dol.gov/general/aboutdol/history/webid-moynihan>.
- Ratcliffe, Susan. 2016. *Oxford Essential Quotations*. 4th ed., Oxford University Press, www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191826719.001.0001/acref-978019182671
- Roosevelt, F.D. "Speech at the Daughters of the American Revolution Convention, Washington, D.C.," April 21, 1938.
- Sy, S., and Fritz, M. 2025. "Why Critics are Alarmed About the Influence of PragerU's Educational Videos." *PBS*, September 15. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/why-critics-are-alarmed-about-the-influence-of-prageru-educational-videos>.

Author

Teneka Williams' 15 years of service in Accessibility is a key component inclusive librarianship. As a professional Librarian, the years spent, working with marginalized communities has given her keen insight for what many organizations miss. The goal of encouraging, elevating and celebrating the diverse voices has to be valued by organizations. Currently, Ms. Williams works for Fulton County Library Systems and operates a boutique flower shop, Royal Petals ATL.