



TOP STORIES

RACHEL MADDOW

MORNING JOE

INSIDE WITH JEN PSAKI

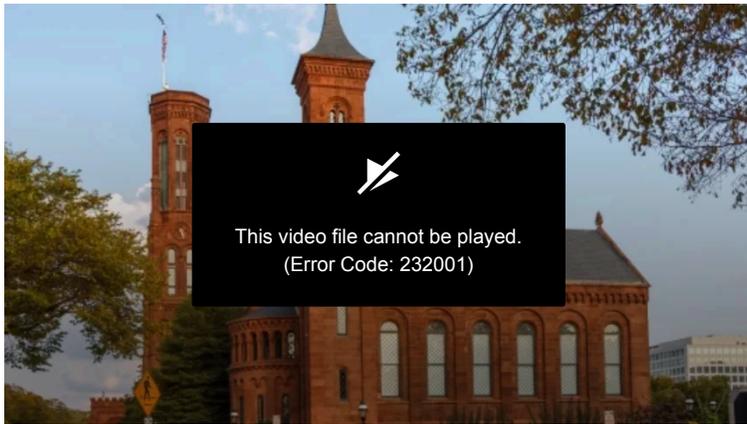


TOP STORIES

News, analysis and opinion from the day's top stories.

LATEST

NEWSLETTER



Trump's attacks on museums and libraries echo the Nazi playbook

The administration's move to defund the Institute of Museum and Library Services is reminiscent of what Hitler did to German libraries and museums.



April 2, 2025, 10:18 PM UTC

By [Ja'han Jones](#)

The [Trump administration](#) is slashing funds for museums and libraries, as a way to coerce these and other liberal arts institutions to bend to his movement's will in a fashion reminiscent of Nazi Germany.

Writing for MSNBC, sociologist Robyn Autry [summed up the racism at play](#) in a recent Trump recent executive order that targets the Smithsonian and expresses particular angst over an

exhibit at the National Museum of African American History and Culture that educated visitors about racist pseudoscience.

Autry wrote:

One of the things that has Trump angry is ‘The Shape of Power: Stories of Race and American Sculpture,’ an exhibit at the American Art Museum that innovatively positions nearly 100 sculptures alongside statements about scientific racism. That’s the discredited belief that there are biologically distinct races of people, with some more superior than others. The exhibition examines how artists and art objects have assisted, reflected or challenged such racist thinking since the 18th century, but Trump, in his executive order, expresses disappointment that the show ‘promotes the view that race is not a biological reality but a social construct.’

Now is as good a time as any to read [my previous reporting](#) on Trump’s promotion of racist pseudoscience. His attack on the National Museum of African American History and Culture is one way the Trump administration is trying to enforce a racial hierarchy based on bigoted myths. Politico recently reported on another way Trump is trying to bring humanities-focused institutions to heel. In mid-March Trump signed an executive order that gutted the Institute of Museum and Library Services, which funds museums and libraries around the country.

[According to Politico:](#)

An agency responsible for funding museums and libraries across the nation is the latest to be shrunk by President Donald Trump’s cuts to the federal government, with its entire staff apparently put on administrative leave Monday. The Institute of Museum and Library Services, which provides grants to ‘advance, support, and empower’ museums, libraries and similar institutions in the U.S. according to its website, was named in an executive order this month along with several other agencies. Trump’s order directed the Institute of Museum and Library Services ‘be eliminated to the maximum extent consistent with applicable law,’ shrinking it down to its statutory minimum.

A Trump official reportedly told Politico that the cuts to the institute are necessary to “ensure hard-earned tax dollars are

not diverted to discriminatory DEI initiatives or divisive, anti-American programming in our cultural institutions.”

In a letter seeking a meeting with the institute’s acting director, the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies said that money from IMLS accounts for “an average of one-third to over one-half of each State Library Agency’s annual budget.” And there’s been no suggestion from the Trump administration as to where else these libraries ought to get funding to account for the cuts the administration is making.

What Trump appears to be after with his crackdowns on libraries and museums has some parallel in the way Hitler and the Nazi regime attacked similar institutions in Germany in the 1930s. What the Nazis accomplished with brute force, Trump and MAGA are attempting to do with economic and financial coercion.

What the Nazis accomplished with brute force, Trump and MAGA are attempting to do with economic and financial coercion.

Beginning in 1933, Nazis [raided libraries for supposedly “un-German” books](#), some of which were publicly

burned and derided as inappropriate for German consumption due to their content. Much like with the MAGA movement’s [book-banning efforts](#), some of the books targeted by Nazis were written by minority groups, like Jews, or about the LGBTQ experience. (Back in 2023, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum hosted [an eye-opening discussion about this](#) with Debra Caldwell-Stone, the director of the American Library Association’s Office of Intellectual Freedom.)

In 1937, the Nazis raided museums and seized artworks to place them in what they billed as a “[degenerate](#)” art exhibition, a propaganda effort meant to show the public that the Nazis would tolerate only the art that aligned with the party’s views. Defending this effort to suppress the arts, Joseph Goebbels, the minister of propaganda, [claimed](#), “German art of the next decade will be heroic, it will be like steel, it will be romantic, non-sentimental, factual; it will be national with great pathos, and at once obligatory and binding, or it will be nothing.” Hitler himself [denounced](#) “degenerate” art pieces as those which “insult German feeling, or destroy or confuse natural form or simply reveal an absence of adequate manual and artistic skill.”

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum also explored the Nazis' "degenerate art" exhibit in the short video below, noting that the point was for Hitler to wield power over non-governmental institutions to ensure they promoted "traditional German values" and the purported superiority of the "Aryan race."

While the methods may be different, the purpose of the Nazi attacks on libraries and museums was no different than Trump's now. Such institutions are known as sites of free thought, imagination and innovation. At best, their content and collections encourages visitors to understand the world around them and the perspectives that shape it – forces like racist and anti-LGBTQ bigotry – and to envision ways to build a better world. And these things are a threat to regimes intent on policing thought and ensuring the masses comply with their revanchist, bigoted agenda.



Ja'han Jones



Ja'han Jones is an MSNBC opinion blogger. He previously wrote The ReidOut Blog. He is a futurist and multimedia producer focused on culture and politics. His previous projects include "Black Hair Defined" and the "Black Obituary Project."

[< PREVIOUS POST](#)

[LATEST POST >](#)

Joe Rogan and Ann Coulter break with Trump over 'horrific' deportation enforcement

Trump's TikTok idea highlights his incoherent talk on tariffs



[ABOUT](#)

[AD CHOICES](#)

[MSNBC SITEMAP](#)

[CONTACT](#)

[PRIVACY POLICY](#)

[CLOSED CAPTIONING](#)

[HELP](#)

[DO NOT SELL MY PERSONAL INFORMATION](#)

[ADVERTISE](#)

[CAREERS](#)

[CA NOTICE](#)

[JOIN THE MSNBC COMMUNITY](#)

[MSNBC STORE](#)

[TERMS OF SERVICE \(UPDATED JULY 7, 2023\)](#)

© 2025 MSNBC Cable, L.L.C.