WHY IS THE SMITHSONIAN ARGUING ABOUT HOW AMERICAN HISTORY SHOULD BE TOLD?

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

The Smithsonian's outgoing secretary, Lonnie Bunch, has defended the institution after criticism from President Donald Trump and his administration. Speaking at the National Museum of African American History and Culture, Bunch rejected claims that the Smithsonian is unpatriotic because its museums discuss slavery, racism and other difficult parts of American history. He argued that the United States cannot be properly understood without examining both achievements and injustice. The dispute comes as the White House reviews Smithsonian museums before the 250th anniversary of American independence in 2026. Trump has called for more emphasis on national heroes and has criticised what he describes as negative interpretations of the country's past. The argument raises a central historical question: should museums mainly celebrate a nation, or should they present its successes and its wrongdoing together?

WHY IS THIS INTERESTING?

This story connects directly to slavery, the Civil Rights Movement and the question of who controls national history. It is useful for teaching historical interpretation because students can compare different ideas about patriotism, evidence and museum displays. It also shows that debates about the past can become political arguments in the present.

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN

"Should a museum show a country's achievements and wrongdoings together?"

Source: The Guardian

https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/sep/26/lets-tell-the-truth-smithsonian-head-given-standing-ovation-as-he-hits-back-at-trump-attacks