

LET'S GO FURTHER • CASE-STUDY WEBQUEST

WHOSE HISTORY HAS BEEN LEFT OUT?

America's 250th anniversary and the battle over the national story

YOUR MISSION

Historical sites, museums and official celebrations were expected to present a shared national story. In your assigned group, investigate one case in which part of the past may have been omitted, softened or rewritten.

Use both QR-code sources. Compare the official or institutional narrative with the criticism. Do not assume that the accusation is automatically justified.

CASE STUDY 1 • GEORGE WASHINGTON AND SLAVERY

The President's House Site, Philadelphia

CONTEXT — The original exhibition foregrounded the lives of nine people enslaved by George Washington. Its removal and replacement raised accusations that the violence and contradictions of slavery had been softened.

CENTRAL ISSUE — Can Washington be celebrated as a Founding Father without foregrounding his involvement in slavery?



AP • The revised slavery exhibition



NPS • The President's House

CASE STUDY 2 • TRUMP'S PLACE IN PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY

National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC

CONTEXT — References to Donald Trump's two impeachments disappeared from the text accompanying his presidential portrait while Smithsonian exhibitions were being reviewed for the anniversary.

CENTRAL ISSUE — Who should decide which failures belong in an official presidential biography?



AP • The altered portrait display



PBS • Smithsonian under pressure

CASE STUDY 3 • BROKEN TREATIES AND INDIGENOUS DISPOSSESSION

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

CONTEXT — Interpretive texts referring to the search for land and gold, broken promises to Native peoples and the violence of Indigenous boarding schools were selected for revision.

CENTRAL ISSUE — Does presenting westward expansion as national progress conceal broken treaties and cultural destruction?



Washington Post • The revisions



NPS • Little Bighorn Battlefield

CASE STUDY 4 • THE VIOLENCE BEHIND WESTWARD EXPANSION

Grand Teton National Park

CONTEXT — A panel identifying explorer Gustavus Cheyney Doane as a participant in the Marias Massacre of Piegan Blackfeet people was reportedly flagged and removed.

CENTRAL ISSUE — How does removing the massacre from Doane’s biography change the meaning of exploration?



CAP • Public-land history review



NPS • Grand Teton National Park

CASE STUDY 5 • WHO BELONGS IN THE STORY OF STONEWALL?

Stonewall National Monument, New York

CONTEXT — References to transgender and queer people were removed from National Park Service material, and the Pride flag was temporarily taken down in 2026.

CENTRAL ISSUE — Can Stonewall be commemorated accurately if some of the communities involved are no longer named?



The Guardian • Stonewall controversy



NPS • Stonewall National Monument

CASE STUDY 6 • MOUNT RUSHMORE AND THE BLACK HILLS

Anniversary celebrations at Mount Rushmore

CONTEXT — The anniversary narrative celebrated national greatness at a monument built on land sacred to the Lakota and taken after the United States violated the Treaty of Fort Laramie.

CENTRAL ISSUE — Can Mount Rushmore embody a shared national story when the history of the land remains contested?



The Guardian • Anniversary speech



NPS • Native peoples and the Black Hills

ANALYTICAL LENS — CHOOSE YOUR TERM CAREFULLY

SELECTION — Some material must be chosen, but the omitted material is not necessarily denied.

SIMPLIFICATION — Complexity is reduced to make the story easier to understand or communicate.

SANITISATION — Painful or damaging facts are softened to protect a positive national image.

HISTORICAL REWRITING — Facts, emphasis or causal relationships are altered to support a preferred narrative.

EVIDENCE CARD — COMPLETE FOR YOUR CASE STUDY

ELEMENT	YOUR NOTES
THE OFFICIAL STORY	<i>What achievement, person or national value is foregrounded?</i>
THE MISSING HISTORY	<i>Which event, group or contradiction may have been omitted or softened?</i>
THE CHANGE	<i>What was removed, rewritten, replaced or left unmentioned?</i>
THE JUSTIFICATION	<i>How did the authorities explain or defend the decision?</i>
THE CRITICISM	<i>Why did historians, communities or activists object?</i>
YOUR VERDICT	<i>Is this selection, simplification, sanitisation or historical rewriting? Why?</i>
NECESSARY NUANCE	<i>What evidence might complicate the accusation?</i>

ONE-MINUTE ORAL REPORT

Every group member must be able to deliver the report. Explain what was presented, what may have been omitted, the official justification, the criticism and your group's qualified verdict.

Our case concerns...
 The official narrative foregrounded...
 However, it omitted / softened / removed...
 The authorities justified this by arguing that...
 Critics responded that...
 We would describe this as... because...

QUESTION TO BRING TO THE DEBATE

If every commemoration selects certain stories, when does selection become historical rewriting?