



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on August 16, 2011

## New Smithsonian “Race” Exhibit Smears Columbus, Thomas Jefferson

A new exhibit at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History reveals a bias against two icons of Americans: Christopher Columbus and Thomas Jefferson. The “Race: Are We So Different?” display — developed by the American Anthropological Association — takes what the museum’s website calls “an unprecedented look at race and racism in the United States.”



Visitors to the museum first encounter a five-minute video at the front of the hall, in which a number of controversial assertions are made: for example, that Christopher Columbus “colonized and conquered” the native Indians, and that Thomas Jefferson (as shown in the presentation, left) was merely a racist “slaveholder.”

The narrator of the video asserts:

Race is a powerful idea that was invented by society.

Many of the ideas we now associate with race originated during the European era of exploration. Europeans like Christopher Columbus traveled overseas and encountered and then colonized and conquered peoples in Africa, Asia and the Americas who looked, talked and acted much differently from them....

...By 1776 when “All men are created equal” was written into the Declaration of Independence by a slave holder named Thomas Jefferson, a democratic nation was born with a major contradiction about race at its core. As our new nation asserted its independence from European tyranny, blacks and American Indians were viewed as less than human and not deserving of the same liberties as whites.

In addition to the video, another component of the exhibit is a display featuring a historical timeline of slavery, wherein the entry for the year 1784 states, “Thomas Jefferson, future U.S. president and likely the father of at least one of the slaves he owned, publishes ‘Notes on the State of Virginia.’ ” The exhibit quotes some of Jefferson’s more controversial statements regarding blacks, but fails to mention any of his significant contributions to history, such as being the principal author of the Declaration of Independence or serving as the new American republic’s third President.

*The Blaze* notes the exhibit’s oversimplification of Jefferson’s views:

Jefferson did of course own slaves — hundreds throughout his lifetime. But his feelings on slavery were also much more complex than the exhibit suggests — in other writings he called it “an abominable crime” and “moral depravity.” He drafted Virginia’s 1778 law banning the importation



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of enslaved Africans and separately proposed slavery be outlawed in the new Northwest territories.

But “Race: Are We So Different?” does not cover any of that. None of the exhibit’s written displays examines these nuances; the only other details offered are on a looped video with a historian who says Jefferson knew it was “a massive contradiction” to ... own slaves while professing the “lofty ideals” of America — a brief distinction that is easy to miss.

Constitutionalists have noted at the Smithsonian exhibit the all-too-frequent scenario: the promulgation of a political agenda at a government-funded institution that utilizes taxpayer funds.

Kelly Carnes of the Natural History Museum’s press office refused to speak about the exhibit, explaining that its content was not created by the Smithsonian. And a spokesman for the American Anthropological Association has been unavailable for comment.

As [noted](#) by Lucas Morel, professor at Washington and Lee University in Virginia, on Fox News’ Glenn Beck program, it is necessary to continue to perpetuate the divide between blacks and the Founding Fathers, because anything to the contrary “goes against the traditional victim narrative.” He added, “For the longest time, we’ve adopted this victim narrative about blacks in the United States — that the only role they played was the victim to white majority oppression.”

According to Morel, however, the history of the founding of America also reveals the first true civil rights movement:

When we talk about King and the Civil Rights movement of the 50s and 60s, we need to call it the “Modern” Civil Rights movement because blacks from before the Revolution were prudently pressing for their rights. American history can be described as one long civil rights struggle. Our first Emancipation Proclamation was the Declaration of independence.

Morel indicated that creating a supposed “divide” between black Americans and the Founders and the founding principles undermines everything for which black heroes such as Frederick Douglass fought. Douglass once observed, “I know of no rights of color superior to the rights of humanity.”

Morel described the beliefs of Douglass:

He thought the worst thing that could happen to blacks after the Civil War was to treat them as exceptions in the law. And so today with the discursive log jam that we have over things like affirmative action and group rights and that the only thing you get from government is if you ally with others who look like you or are somehow characterized like you — that’s why they refuse to teach otherwise. It goes against the victim narrative.

A virtual tour of the Smithsonian Museum’s new exhibit reveals a number of other controversial features, including promoting the theory that racism has an impact on health. According to the display, “Numerous studies have linked the stress of racism on African Americans to high blood pressure” as well as increased rates of hypertension. Additionally, the exhibit addresses affirmative action in history, declaring, “The legacy of white privilege still runs far ahead of efforts to compensate for it.”

The exhibit states, “The rise of race science supported the common belief that people who were not white were biologically inferior,” but fails to mention that the ideology of “race science” was born out of progressive thought.

On his radio show, Glenn Beck addressed the selectiveness of the exhibit, noting that it was clearly intended to smear the Founding Fathers while steering clear of actual racists who were well-known



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progressives — such as President Woodrow Wilson, who screened the KKK's *Birth of a Nation* film in the White House; or Franklin D. Roosevelt, who interned Japanese Americans in camps during the war for alleged security purposes.



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