Administration changes slavery panels at Washington's Philadelphia home

Kanishka Singh
REUTERS

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's administration put up new information panels on slavery at George Washington's Philadelphia home on July 15, following a federal appeals court ruling that opened the way to changing how slavery is portrayed at the national historical site.

While the Department of the Interior said the new panels had historical context, Philadelphia's mayor said the Democratic-led city intends to seek a rehearing of legal issues in the case. The Republican president has sought to reshape historical institutions and the portrayal of U.S. history.

"Overnight, under the cover of darkness, the federal government removed panels at the President's House that told a thorough history of Philadelphia," Philadelphia Mayor Cherelle Parker said in a statement.

In June, an appeals court overturned a judge's ruling that prevented the Trump administration from replacing a slavery exhibit at Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia.

The new panels, while retaining references to slavery and those enslaved by Washington, removed some headlines in the earlier panels, such as "The Dirty Business of Slavery."The new panels instead read: "Celebrating Independence Throughout the Years." They also exclude a map of slave trade routes.

"These new panels are full of historical context and highlight the momentous events that took place in the President's House and the other sites at Independence National Historical Park," the Department of the Interior said in a statement.

The department said the new panels "acknowledge the evils of slavery."

The change concerned Alan Spears, senior director for cultural resources at the National Parks Conservation Association.

"This appears to be an effort to soften or sanitize the way the history of slavery is interpreted at Independence National Historical Park," Spears said.

"And I have grave concerns about how this impacts the ability of our national parks to fulfill their role as honest brokers of our shared national narrative."



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