**SAA Statement: NARA Exhibit on 2017 Women’s March in Washington, DC**

A January 17, 2020, article in the *Washington Post*, “National Archives exhibit blurs images critical of President Trump,” raises serious concerns for the Society of American Archivists about falsification of the historical record, politicization of the National Archives and its public exhibitions, and professional obligations for objectivity and honesty.

Archivists are professionals who are bound by a [Code of Ethics](https://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-core-values-statement-and-code-of-ethics#code_of_ethics) that includes the following statement about authenticity: “Archivists ensure the authenticity and continuing usability of records in their care. They document and protect the unique archival characteristics of records and strive to protect the records’ intellectual and physical integrity from tampering or corruption. Archivists may not willfully alter, manipulate, or destroy data or records to conceal facts or distort evidence. They thoroughly document any actions that may cause changes to the records in their care or raise questions about the records’ authenticity.”

The doctored photograph is an enlarged image of a massive demonstration in support of women’s rights—the Women’s March on January 21, 2017, in Washington, DC. Staff of the National Archives deliberately blurred or altered at least four of the protest signs shown in the photograph. Not only does this violate the archivist's responsibility to be objective (and to follow professional values and best practices), but this alteration is fraudulent and deceptive. It purports to prevent young people from seeing "disturbing" words and to avoid partisan statements. But this is the entire purpose of public demonstrations.

At a time when the honesty and integrity of government agencies and public officials has been called into question by many Americans, the National Archives must set an example of accurate representation of the nation’s history.

In a January 18 statement, the National Archives apologized for its action:

“We made a mistake.

“As the National Archives of the United States, we are and have always been completely committed to preserving our archival holdings, without alteration.

“In a promotional display in this spot, we obscured some words on protest signs in a photo of the 2017 Women’s March. This photo is not an archival record held by the National Archives, but one we licensed to use as a promotional graphic.

“Nonetheless, we were wrong to alter the image.

“We have removed the display and will replace it as soon as possible with one that uses the unaltered image.

“We apologize, and will immediately start a thorough review of our exhibit policies and procedures so that this does not happen again.”

SAA encourages completion of the policy and procedure review as soon as possible as a signal of NARA’s ongoing commitment to defending accuracy and respect for historical documentation.