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SAVING PRIVATE RYAN, OR SERVING PRIVATE POWER? CORPORATE MONEY AND PUBLIC HISTORY AT THE SMITHSONIAN.

Yesterday the Director of the National Museum of Natural History, Robert Fri, announced his resignation, the latest sign of the discontent among researchers, curators and scholars with what some regard as the increasing corporatization of the most trusted museum in America.

Much of the controversy surrounds Lawrence Small, a former executive with Citibank and board member of Marriot International and Fannie Mae, who took over as Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution last year -the first non-academic to run the museums in 150 years.

One of his first acts was to cut short an exhibit on the folk singer and activist Woodie Guthrie in order to install one on the Presidency sponsored by Cisco Systems and Chevy Chase Bank in time for last year's election. In April Small attempted to close a branch of the National Zoo which conducts internationally renowned research into endangered species, then reversed his decision after widespread public criticism.

But it is the influx of corporate cash tied to specific projects that has upset many of the museum's scholars and curators. Perhaps the most controversial is a donation of \$38 million from businesswoman Catherine Reynolds for a "hall of achievement," which would honor "the power of the individual to shape American life and impact the course of history. Among the people Reynolds has proposed honoring are figure skater Dorothy Hamill and television news celebrity Sam Donaldson.

Last week a group of curators and scholars at the Museum of American History circulated a letter accusing Mr. Small of jeopardizing the integrity of the Smithsonian and ignoring the museum's decision making process. Some Smithsonian employees have even pasted stickers saying "dump Small" on their jackets, and on bulletin boards and elevators.

At stake, many say, is not just the integrity of the Smithsonian, but the very idea that public history should serve the public good.

Guests:

Barbara Smith, curator, National Museum of American History, specializing in Social History.

Dr. Barney Finn, curator National Museum of American History working in Electrical Collections.