



Oppose the Obama Administration's War on US Antique Collectors ~ It Won't Save a Single Elephant in Africa!

By David S. White
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Last week, in a stunning suspension of logic and good sense, the Obama Administration declared war on law-abiding [US antique collectors](#), maybe on you.

In essence, the administration is seeking to ban the sale of all ivory products even if legally purchased decades ago.

Thursday morning in the Washington Post, Doug Bandow, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, former special assistant to President Reagan, and a member of the Chess Collector's Society, [wrote](#) the proper response to this next example of misguided Nanny State government:

In a nutshell, if you have not been following this one, elephants in Africa are increasingly being slaughtered for their tusks, 70% of which go directly to China to satisfy their insatiable demand for ivory, both a status symbol for their newly wealthy, and a material with supposed medicinal properties. *Do not mistake my point here – I love elephants.* I love my dog. But, take a deep breath fellow animal lovers, and please explain to me how the new Obama Policy to criminalize Americans who own antique elephant ivory, will help save the life of even a single African elephant roaming the plains of the Serengeti.

You can't because it won't.

Millions of Americans own antique elephant ivory, obtained many years ago in a much simpler world, and most importantly, obtained legally. In the 1970's and 1980's the slaughter of African elephants was stepped up and it resulted in the treaty called by its acronym, CITES, (Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species) enacted in 1989, and purporting to control the traffic in endangered animal parts, and in particular for our purposes here, elephant ivory.

There are actually two kinds of elephant ivory, one from African elephants and one from Asian elephants. Do not confuse this with Mammoth or Mastodon tusks, an animal which went extinct in the last 10,000 years, and the tusks from which are scattered all over the melting permafrost in Siberia – those are and always have been legal because there are no living ones left.

CITES has not succeeded in protecting African elephants from slaughter, and frankly, CITES rules are a confused mess which even lawyers have trouble understanding and which our regulators have trouble enforcing, and forget about enforcing these rules fairly – that has not been the case. Far from it.

I am an antique netsuke collector, and I am the Chair of the Los Angeles Chapter of the International Netsuke Society – you know, those miniature carvings which you can see in the Bushell Collection at Los Angeles County Museum of Art, one of the finest ever assembled, a showcase of this amazing art form which tells stories of Old Japan, a world and culture now vanished. Our members, 500 of them located all over the world, are now threatened by the new Obama Policy, as is every American antique collector and owner of antiques, some of which may be inherited.

Many of our members have been collecting and writing scholarly articles in this well-studied field for decades – one of our members has collected for 50 years and his world's finest collection has been exhibited at Yale and other museums, and at Disney's Epcot Center in Florida. These people own principally antique (over 100 years old) netsuke – the ones which are comprised of elephant ivory contain the tusks from elephants who last walked this earth when Lincoln or Washington was President, or even earlier.

Owning these beautiful sculptures threatens no living elephant. Destroying these breathtaking works of fine art, or rendering them valueless because the Obama Policy would seem to envision that, is right up there on the same level of Kafka-esque madness of the Taliban destroying Buddhist artwork, or book burnings by countless totalitarian regimes.

Most outrageous of all, the Obama Policy actually includes provisions for being able to hunt and take sport trophies, all the while criminalizing a whole entirely innocent segment of our population for presuming to own, perfectly legally acquired, fine art carved in the form of netsuke, an art form which has truly enchanted millions since Japan opened its doors to the world back in the 1850's!

Heaven forbid if you still own Aunt Mildred's old piano – you know, the one with the ivory keys? You should look around your church or other place of worship and note how many antique ivory pieces are used in regular services. How about that old musical instrument you inherited from Grandpa Harry? It has ivory inlays. I could go on and on and on . . . You would be amazed how much antique ivory is owned and loved by Americans.

Ivory has been worked and carved for thousands of years. It has a rightful place as fine art in our culture and in our world. Elephants should not be slaughtered for their tusks – recent polls in China found that many Chinese citizens believe that tusks grow back like your fingernails – they don't, and it costs the elephant its life.

Ivory trades at \$1500 per pound in China, and yet, since last Summer, we have witnessed public Ivory Crushes by the regulators, where they destroy tons and tons of confiscated elephant ivory. This is pure insanity. Why destroy valuable property that cost elephants their lives? Yet, each country now is lining up to have their own public Ivory Crush – the UK's, backed by a few

of the Royals – including Prince William, who made the astoundingly stupid statement that he would like to destroy the thousands of ivory fine art antiques in Buckingham Palace – was last week along with a Seminar on Wildlife Trafficking.

The Obama Policy is being driven by extreme animal rights factions. They have abandoned all reason and logic with this one. We need to respond strongly and definitively to this latest example of horrendously bad government and stupendous irrationality. Nobody can explain the connection between declaring war on collectors of antique ivory in the US and stopping the modern slaughter of African elephants, ***because there is no connection in logic or reason.*** We are addicted to prohibiting things, but all our experiments in prohibition end the same way – in failure.

Let's not keep doing stupid things. Oppose the Obama Policy of declaring war on law abiding US collectors of antique ivory – it won't save 21st century African elephant lives, it is probably unconstitutional, and it is frankly an absurd reaction.