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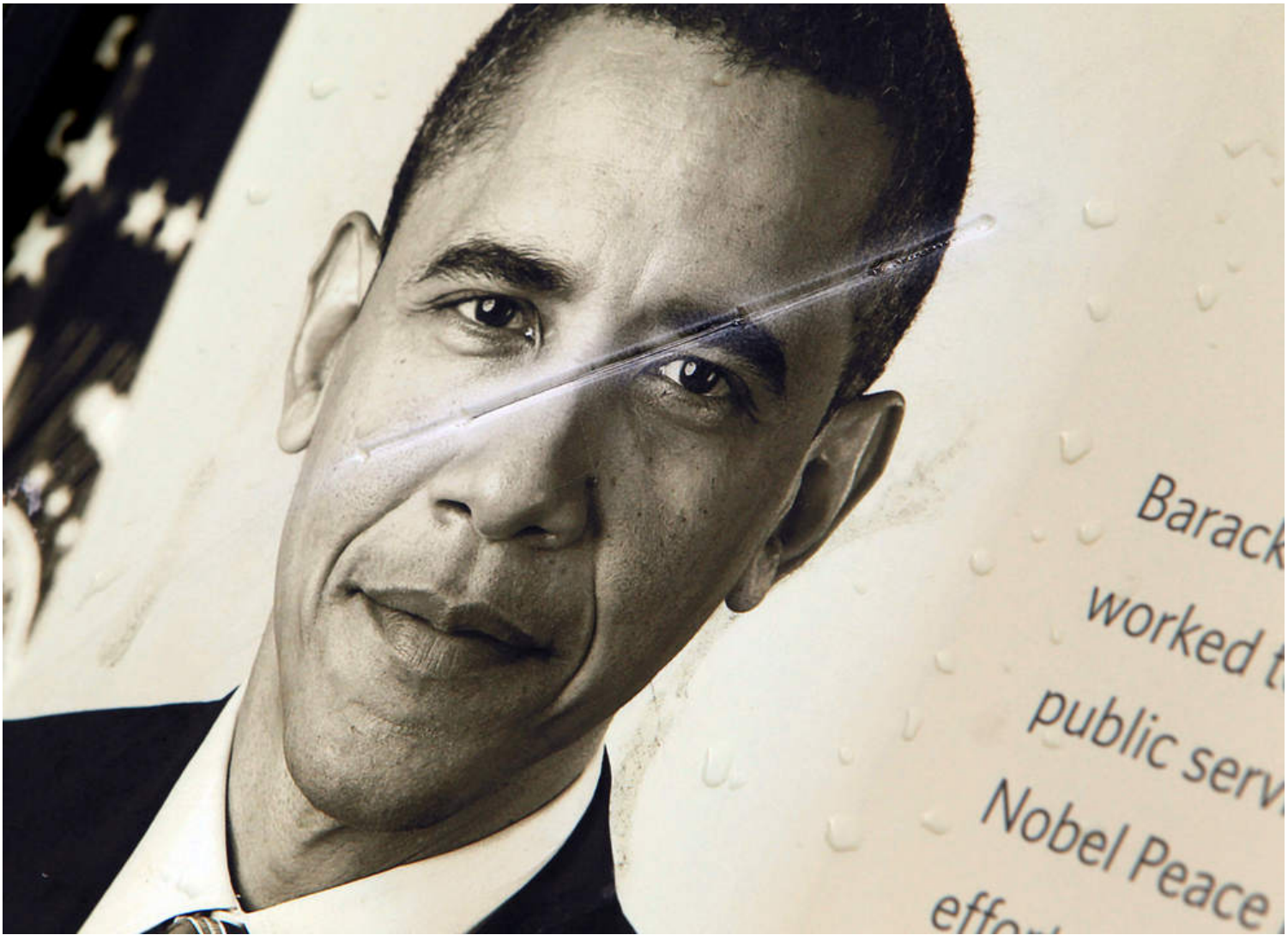
LOCAL NEWS

EUGENE

Vandalism forces removal of Obama plaque

MULTIMEDIA

PHOTOS



The temporary plaque of Barack Obama, seen in this May 2013 file photo, was vandalized several times. (Brian Davies/The Register-Guard)

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The Register-Guard

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Keeping the peace is no easy task at Eugene’s Nobel Peace Park.

The 24 plaques at the park that feature the American Nobel laureates have attracted attention from visitors and vandals alike since it opened in Alton Baker Park last spring, and the plaque representing the nation's most recent laureate, President Obama, has been a prime target.

"It got vandalized, I'd say, five, six, seven times," said Roger Durant, the project's development director, of the Obama plaque. Nearly "every two or three weeks, there was a new mark that we had to try to take off and rub out," he added.

Many of these markings — including a racial slur — were easily cleaned off, said Durant, but last month he and his team were forced to remove Obama's plaque after finding it carved with profanity.

"It's kind of a slap in the face of the organization," Durant said. "It's taking donors' money out of what it's meant to be used for."

After a meeting with Mayor Kitty Piercy Thursday afternoon, Durant said the replacement plaque will be housed in a prominent and secure place — likely in the Eugene Public Library — at least until the end of Obama's presidency.

"It's not the way I would prefer it" said Piercy, who called the vandalism "intolerable."

"I feel sad that we have to do this, but I think lots of times when things don't go the way that you wish they were going, you can use them as a learning opportunity," she added. "If we can learn something as a community from what is going on with that and still educate people and share, then I guess that's a good thing."

The park, a more than \$225,000 project funded by donations, is the first monument in the country to honor winners of the peace prize. Each plaque and stand cost \$5,000, and Durant said the high-pressure laminate plaques — where vandals have carved words and other markings — costs \$800 to replace.

The laminated material, chosen by the city, is particularly resistant to graffiti, said city parks and open space landscape architect Philip Richardson. Most pens and permanent paints will wipe off, and the surface is difficult to scratch. Still, Richardson said, "we've got

some pretty determined vandals out there.”

The group put in temporary plaques — without the laminate coating — during the park’s first few months and only recently added the more permanent material in September.

“In our experience, this is the easiest to repair and the strongest material,” Richardson added, but it’s still no match for “when someone takes a hammer to something.”

Three other plaques at the site — those of diplomat Henry Kissinger, Oregon native Linus Pauling and former President Woodrow Wilson — have received minor markings since last spring, but none required replacing.

Durant said he hopes that Obama’s plaque is being vandalized by the same person, but he said posting security cameras to find out would be too costly.

He expects the replacement plaque to go on display in about six weeks and is optimistic that the solution will raise awareness about the park from other areas of the city.

“The mission was not just to build the park, it’s to bring together other groups,” Durant said, adding that his team hopes to arrange school field trips to the site when funds are available.

“We’re all here to hopefully inspire future peace makers, just like them.”

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