

WILLFUL NEGLECT:
The Smithsonian Institution and U.S. Latinos
Report of the
Smithsonian Institution Task Force on Latino Issues

Raul Yzaguirre, Chair

Mari Carmen Aponte, Esq., Vice Chair

Prepared for

Robert McC. Adams, Secretary

and

Constance Berry Newman, Under Secretary

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Conclusions and Recommendations

A. Overview

The previous section presented findings, implications, and recommendations regarding the Smithsonian Institution and Latinos within five specific issue areas. This section presents the Task Force's broader conclusions and recommendations, with emphasis on those which cut across issue areas and organizational boundaries.

The Task Force was established at the request of the Secretary and Under Secretary of the Smithsonian. This report is, therefore, specifically addressed to the top management of the Smithsonian and to its Board of Regents. It is also designed to inform the U.S. Congress, which established the Smithsonian, appropriates the majority of its funding, and is responsible for overseeing it. Ultimately, however, the report is designed to benefit all the people of the United States. Throughout its year-long effort, the Task Force was sensitive to the needs of the American population as a whole. The recommendations contained in this report should be addressed within this broad context. They were developed not simply to address the concerns of a single population group, but to help the Smithsonian become truly representative and inclusive of all the diverse people and population groups of this nation.

The entire report, and especially these conclusions and recommendations, are submitted with the hope that they will be adopted and implemented with deliberate speed by the Smithsonian Institution through its

governing bodies, top management, central administration, museums, and other components. The Task Force also hopes that the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, national and local Hispanic organizations, the Latino Working Committee at the Smithsonian, and other Latino and multicultural groups will inherit this report, adopt its recommendations as their own, and help assure that they are promptly, efficiently, and permanently implemented.

B. Conclusions

The Smithsonian Institution, the largest museum complex in the world, displays a pattern of willful neglect towards the estimated 25 million Latinos in the United States. Because of both indigenous roots and Spanish heritage, Latinos predate the British in the Americas. They have contributed significantly to every phase and aspect of American history and culture. Yet the Institution almost entirely excludes and ignores Latinos in nearly every aspect of its operations. This is glaringly obvious in the very small number of Latino staff, and the minimal number in curatorial or managerial positions; the almost total lack of Latino representation in the governance structure; the lack of a single museum facility focusing on Latino or Latin American art, culture, or history; and the near-absence of permanent Latino exhibitions or programming. Many Smithsonian officials project the impression that Latino history and culture are somehow not a legitimate part of the American experience. It is difficult for the Task Force to understand how such a consistent pattern of Latino exclusion from the work of the Smithsonian could have occurred by chance.

The Task Force could not identify a single area of Smithsonian operations in which Latinos are appropriately represented. Latinos are absent from positions of power and authority within the Institution which helps to perpetuate the exclusion of Latino history and culture from the museums collections, exhibitions, and programs. Latinos are the second largest minority group in the United States, and will be officially recognized as the largest by 2010; they represent at least 9% of the U.S. population. Yet on the eve of the Smithsonian's 150th anniversary, only 2.7% of its work force and only 2.1% of museum staff are Latinos;* no Latino runs a museum or serves in a top management position within the central administration, and only two hold curatorial positions. Of 274 men and women appointed, since 1846, to serve on the Institution's prestigious and powerful Board of Regents, as of April 1994 not one has been Hispanic.* Consistent with this lack of influence within the decision-making structure, no Smithsonian facility focuses on Latino history and culture, and only one recently-inaugurated permanent exhibition *American Encounters* at the National Museum of American History minimally addresses the achievements of Hispanics in the United States. U.S. Hispanics are the only major contributor to American civilization still uncelebrated by any specific, systematic, permanent effort in this country's major cultural institution.

As the premier cultural institution in the United States, the Smithsonian plays a fundamental role in determining the parameters of our cultural identity, yet it fails to reflect a recognition or appreciation of multiculturalism. Many Smithsonian officials project the impression that Latino history and culture are somehow not a legitimate part of the American experience. A full century before the landing at Plymouth Rock, the Spanish were the first non-native group to interact with the native people of what is now the United States. The seminal role of Hispanics in furthering what we now call American culture can be glimpsed by the horseback-riding figure standing in front of the National Museum of American Art, correctly named, not Cowboy, but Vaquero. Yet the Task Force found within the Smithsonian a fundamental lack of knowledge about Latino heritage and culture. Scientific expeditions to Latin America and the presence of works by major artists from Spain in Smithsonian collections were given as proof of interest and commitment to the concerns and achievements of the U.S. Hispanic community. At the same time, the Task Force was presented with the argument that quality is the guiding light in the amassing of the collections, as if this somehow precludes including anything produced by someone with a Latino background. The first assumption reveals a confusion about who is a Latino; the second falls into that dangerous zone where unexamined cultural postulations border on discriminatory, racist practices.

The Quincentenary Commemoration represents a major missed opportunity for launching permanent Latino programming within the Smithsonian. A sample of the rich possibilities of Latino initiatives was briefly enjoyed by all those who benefited from the many Quincentenary exhibitions, lectures, educational programs, and other activities. The 18-month long series of programs highlighted diverse aspects of Hispanic art and culture. Few were explicitly concerned with the U.S. Latino population as a distinct entity, separate from the transatlantic and hemispheric axes of the observances. However, some reached scholarly distinction and a very

wide audience. While by no means complete, these activities could, and should, have become the foundation for a comprehensive, permanent Smithsonian Latino initiative. In fact, the Smithsonian's Quincentenary program came with an institutional promise of being transformed into a permanent and sustained Latino presence at the Institution. However, resources which had been specifically appropriated for the Quincentenary were redirected, and the nascent programs allowed to wither and die. No permanent, effective Hispanic programming emerged.

The Quincentenary Commemoration offers two critical lessons for future Latino initiatives: the model it generated of a true consultative process and the message it demonstrated of *Mestizaje* and multiculturalism. In preparing the Quincentenary programs, the Secretary demonstrated a model of internal and external cooperation and consultation by opening up the Institution to outside experts and community scholars in an unprecedented way. A few key Latinos within the Smithsonian served as catalysts for the Quincentenary programs. This model could become the foundation for a broad-based and inclusive Latino initiative. The Quincentenary programs were also unique in being truly multicultural. Their message of *Mestizaje* reflected the Spanish, African, Asian, and indigenous roots of the Americas, a model of multiculturalism which accurately reflects the American heritage and population and is important to all residents of this multicultural society.

Hispanics' virtual lack of representation within the Smithsonian is the result of many interrelated factors, which have resulted in a kind of vicious cycle. There are very few Latino employees or Latinos within the governance structure, especially in the kinds of positions involved in decision-making about programs and collections, which contributes to the continuing tradition of ignoring and excluding Latinos when museum or Institution-wide initiatives are being planned. The lack of Latino initiatives, in turn, helps to discourage Latinos from visiting the Smithsonian, seeking employment there, or becoming involved as volunteers. Moreover, because there are so few Latino-focused efforts, Smithsonian staff without an appreciation of Latino history and culture are unlikely to gain the new information needed to change their views; thus they remain unlikely to support or initiate Latino programming.

Budget limitations are not an acceptable reason for failure to increase the Latino presence within the Smithsonian. The Smithsonian failed to include Latinos for nearly 150 years, including in times of great budget and personnel expansion. It should not now claim budget constraints as an excuse for continuing this exclusion. Such a position is impossible to accept in an institution that was created to benefit the public good, functions as a public trust, and receives about 70% of its funding directly from tax dollars — including tax dollars paid by Hispanic Americans. Moreover, if started with core funding, Hispanic initiatives would be able to obtain significant outside support.

A lack of accountability throughout the Smithsonian makes systematic, positive change difficult. The Smithsonian operates on a decentralized, collegial basis, with limited oversight and accountability, particularly on such matters as enforcement of non-discrimination. At the same time, the hiring of very senior personnel is done by a few top administrators, who appear to be able to hire individuals without regard for the need for diversity, and to be able to ignore qualifications lists which put minorities at the top based on objective assessment.

The failure of the Smithsonian to reflect and represent Hispanic contributions is twice damaging. It denies Latinos their right to feel recognized and valued as part of their country's heritage. At the same time, it perpetuates among the general population the inaccurate belief that Latinos contributed little to our country's development or culture, rather than reflecting the multicultural history and accomplishments of the United States. Some 111 years ago, addressing a group of civic leaders in New Mexico, the quintessential American poet Walt Whitman deplored this very tendency. "We Americans have yet to really learn our own antecedents," he wrote; we eschew the splendor and sterling value of Hispanic culture. Thus far, impressed by New England writers and schoolmasters, we tacitly abandon ourselves to the notion that our United States have been fashioned from the British islands only ... which is a very great mistake."* It is no less a mistake, and a far less understandable one, today.

The Latino community is now putting pressure on the Smithsonian, which, like many large institutions, resists change. Only with outside pressure are minority professionals hired in policy-making positions, permanent budget allocations made, representative collections enriched, and relevant programs established. The African

American community, until recently in a position similar to that of Latinos with regard to the Smithsonian, has made significant progress in substantive representation. This has occurred largely because of the effective pressure brought to bear by outside entities, notably the Congressional Black Caucus. This situation has begun to occur with Native Americans as well. The Smithsonian runs a National Museum of African Art and an African-American-focused Anacostia Museum, and plans to build a National African American Museum. It is building a National Museum of the American Indian. Similarly effective pressure has not until now been brought to bear on behalf of Latinos.

C. Recommendations

The Smithsonian must commit itself to making Latino initiatives a permanent part of the Smithsonian budget, and Latino experts in sciences, art, history, and technology a permanent presence at the campus on the National Mall and throughout the Institution's international complex of facilities and programs.

Significant changes will be required in the Smithsonian in order for Latinos to gain equitable and appropriate inclusion. Many recommendations which focus on a single component were provided in the previous section. The Task Force strongly recommends the following critical actions:

1. The Smithsonian must seek out Latinos for governance and advisory bodies, and in identifying individuals to serve in such positions must adopt the American Association of Museums commitment to broad inclusion of all segments of the populations served by the museums. This will require:

- Changes in the traditions which allow retiring regents or board members to recommend their successors, with no serious outreach to identify other candidates.
- Broad and open searches for individuals, with the recognition that many qualified people may not be known personally to the current leadership of the Institution, and therefore must be sought out in a systematic fashion.

2. The Smithsonian must commit itself to employing, retaining, and promoting a critical mass of Latinos throughout the Institution. Changes in job definition, recruitment, selection, mobility, and retention processes will be required in order to accomplish this.

- Latinos must be equitably represented in high-level program and management areas, including positions on the Secretary's senior management staff, the Council of Bureau Directors, and the Council of Information and Education Directors.
- Latinos must be hired for senior positions throughout the Institution, not just to run Latino initiatives. Latinos must be hired for positions that contain the authority to manage large program, administrative, budgetary, and employment functions of the Institution.
- Emphasis must be placed on increasing the number of Latino curators, because of their critical role in determining Smithsonian priorities in research, collections, and exhibitions.
- The Smithsonian must consistently use open and broad recruitment policies, and targeted recruitment must continue until Latinos and other minorities are equitably represented at every level of the institution, based on their percent in the total civilian labor force.

3. Two new positions and a new office must be established within the Smithsonian to assure significant action to implement the Task Force's recommendations and ensure that the Smithsonian becomes representative of the diversity of the population of the United States:

- A Special Assistant reporting directly to the Secretary should be appointed immediately, to take responsibility for Latino initiatives. The Special Assistant should serve as liaison to the Task Force in implementing the report's recommendations, and should help assure that the Secretary is kept

informed of the progress being made throughout the Smithsonian on Latino initiatives.

- The Smithsonian should create, and adequately fund, an Office of the Assistant Secretary for Special and Multicultural Initiatives. This office should have responsibility for supporting and developing new minority and multicultural initiatives needed to assure that the Smithsonian becomes truly inclusive of the diverse population of the United States. The office should incorporate Institution-wide programming and staffing initiatives (such as the Americas Endeavor), set up a central fund for start-up support activities to offices and bureaus, and devise a long-term plan of action for specific multicultural and special initiatives, including Latino initiatives.

4. The Smithsonian should begin immediately to do the groundwork needed to assure the establishment of one or more museums portraying the historical, cultural, and artistic achievements of U.S. Hispanics. The form and focus of these museums should be determined in consultation with Latino scholars and with representatives of the Latino community.

5. The Smithsonian must take steps to assure a permanent Latino presence in the collections and programs of the Institution. To accomplish this, the Smithsonian should:

- Conduct an Institution-wide study, or index project, on Latino collections, exhibitions, acquisitions, and research. The study should be carried out through the Office of Museum Programs, and its results used to help coordinate, guide, and assure Latino efforts throughout the Institution.
- Develop an Hispanic American History Division at the National Museum of American History, with the staffing, budget, and responsibility to carry out efforts related to collections, research, and education.
- Develop and implement education programs under the Council of Education and Information Directors, in the museums and in Smithsonian units. The programs should make use of internal and external Latino expertise, through the involvement of writers, educators, curators, folklorists, community scholars, and performers.
- Conduct outreach programs designed specifically for Latino audiences, within school systems and at the community level.
- Develop and implement national internship and fellowship programs in the arts, humanities, and sciences and in Latino Studies, to guarantee long-term training opportunities for U.S. Latinos and increase the number of Latino scholars at the Smithsonian. These fellowships should be funded within the major offices and museums.

6. The Smithsonian must engage in budget review and development efforts required to assure adequate core funding for Latino initiatives, including both new and existing efforts. This will require active participation by the Assistant Secretaries.

- The few existing Latino-related programs currently in place at the Smithsonian must receive the funding and staffing needed to develop to their fullest. The Smithsonian should implement the recommendations made to the Task Force by the individuals who developed the Latino Graduate Training Seminar, Man and the Biosphere, and the Cultures in the Americas Program. The Americas Endeavor should also be fully funded, and its director given the flexibility and authority to move ahead without interference.
- To ensure that all components of the Smithsonian address Latino issues, optimal use should be made of the 1994-2000 mission statements, situational analyses, and budget goals and objectives included in the budget packages prepared by every Smithsonian component.
- The Smithsonian must hire Latino development officers in the Office of Development and in the

various units, and educate all development staff about the importance of obtaining funding resources for Latino initiatives.

7. Accountability must be established and enforced at all levels, especially at the top including Assistant Secretaries and Deputy Assistant Secretaries.

- Key officials must clearly communicate the requirements for Latino initiatives and inclusion, assure that they become a part of the priorities and budgets of all museums and components, and enforce their implementation.
- Cultural competence training for key personnel in both management and governance is essential, to develop an appreciation and understanding of many cultures, including that of Latinos, at all levels within the Institution. To develop an inclusive Institution requires changing the whole climate within the Smithsonian. Moreover, such change will make more Latinos want to come to the Smithsonian, and should help those who come to stay and progress within the system.

8. Latino contributions must become an integral part of the Smithsonian's general collections, for the benefit of the entire country. The Task Force does not advocate the recognition or inclusion of Hispanic artifacts or contributions simply because they represent Latinos. On the contrary, the Task Force is convinced that the social, artistic, and scientific achievements by Hispanics will be given the recognition they deserve once they are measured by the same standards as all others, with equal scrutiny from curators, historians, and researchers. Nothing less is acceptable. Moreover, top management of the Smithsonian must work to create an understanding throughout the Institution that Latinos must become an ongoing and permanent part of Smithsonian because:

- As a significant part of the history and culture of this country, Latinos deserve to be recognized and included in every aspect of the Smithsonian's work, and to feel an integral part of U.S. heritage.
- Inclusion of Latinos will benefit the entire population by providing accurate public education about the multicultural contributions to this country.

9. The full picture of Latino participation in the programs and components of the Smithsonian is not yet understood; additional review and analyses are required to obtain additional information about a variety of issues. The Task Force believes that the best way to obtain these studies would be for a study by the General Accounting Office to be requested by a member of Congress. The Task Force recommends that this study include:

- A thorough review of those aspects and components which did not receive focus in the work of the Task Force, such as procurement, development, the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES), The Smithsonian Associates, the Smithsonian Institution Press, and Smithsonian Magazine;
- A study of Latino programming and funding over the past decade; and
- An analysis of projected programs and budgets and the extent to which they include Latino programming.

10. There must be a commitment to full inclusion of Latinos, and a firm plan for accomplishing certain specified objectives within the next year. Responsive processes and action steps must be adopted by the governing bodies of the Smithsonian: the Regents, Congress, and senior management to:

- Adopt Task Force recommendations and set Latino issue and program priorities;
- Develop timetables and assign responsibilities for implementation;

- Consult regularly with the restructured Task Force;
- Work with Congress; and
- Produce significant results within one year.

If significant progress is not forthcoming within one year, then the logical conclusion may be that the only way to accomplish real change is through direct Congressional action.

D. Implementation Oversight

From its inception, the Smithsonian Task Force on Latino Issues has had within its mandate not only the development of recommendations to increase and improve Hispanic inclusion throughout the Institution, but also the oversight of the implementation of those recommendations throughout the many museums, offices, and bureaus of the Smithsonian.

The Task Force believes that this oversight should be done by a new, smaller body that includes seven members from outside the Smithsonian: three current Task Force members, three new Hispanic members, and a representative from the Congressional Hispanic Caucus; and two Smithsonian representatives: the new Latino regent and the individual the Task Force recommends be hired as Special Assistant to the Secretary for Latino Affairs. One full-time Smithsonian staff member should be detailed to provide staff support for the oversight group, and the Chair of the Latino Working Committee should be a permanent observer.

This small, high-level and high-profile group of professionals, able to address diverse issues and overcome varied barriers, should be established with at least a two-year mandate. Together with the top levels of administration at the Smithsonian, this group should:

- Examine and prioritize all the recommendations from the Task Force;
- Determine and assign responsibility for their implementation;
- Determine a timetable for their implementation;
- Establish mechanisms to ensure accountability, and help to guarantee the permanent implementation of the Task Force's recommendations;
- Have the power to call upon different heads of museums and central offices at the Smithsonian, both to be informed as to the pace of change and to inquire about problems or shortcomings in the implementation of the recommendations;
- Meet regularly with the Institution's top management;
- Send periodic reports to the Board of Regents, the Secretary and Under Secretary, and appropriate outside groups, such as the Hispanic Congressional Caucus and major national Latino organizations; and
- Produce a final report at the end of two years, listing all the changes put in place and evaluating their effects on both the Latino and the non-Latino constituency of the Smithsonian Institution.

Through such activities, the restructured Task Force can complete the original mandate from the Secretary and Under Secretary, and contribute to the implementation of the recommendations contained in this report.