

¡PRESENTE!

A Latino History of the United States



The Latino Museum in Pictures

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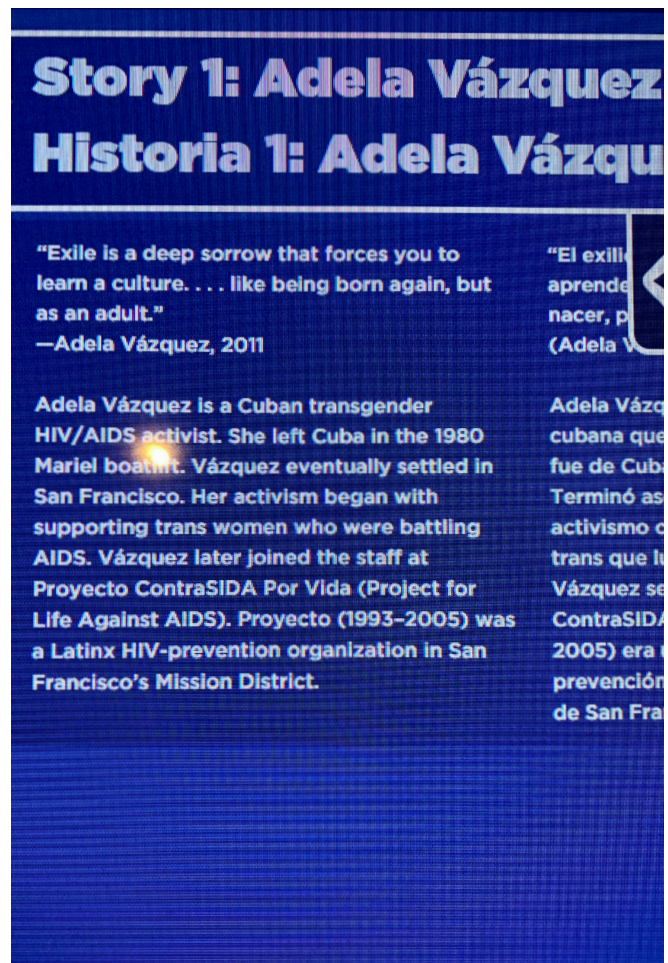
As these displays and panels from the first exhibition by the National Museum of the American Latino, ¡Presente!, make clear, the Museum's leaders have chosen to contravene the legislation that authorized the Latino Museum, whose opening lines read, "The United States is a symbol of democracy, freedom, and economic opportunity around the world, and the legacy of Latinos is deeply rooted in the very fabric of the history, democracy, freedom, and economic opportunity of the United States."

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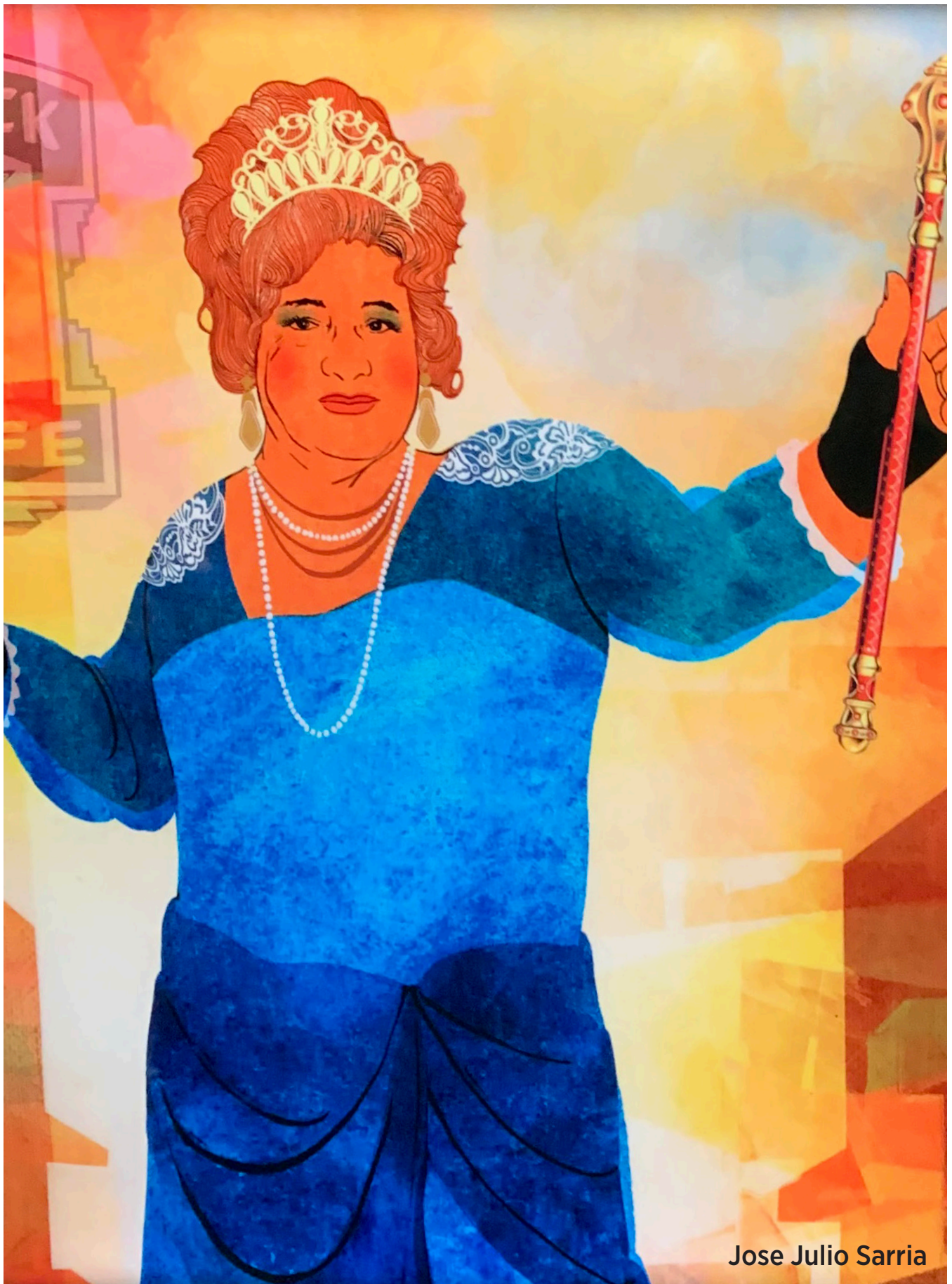
Drag Queens, Queer Theory, and Transgender Activists

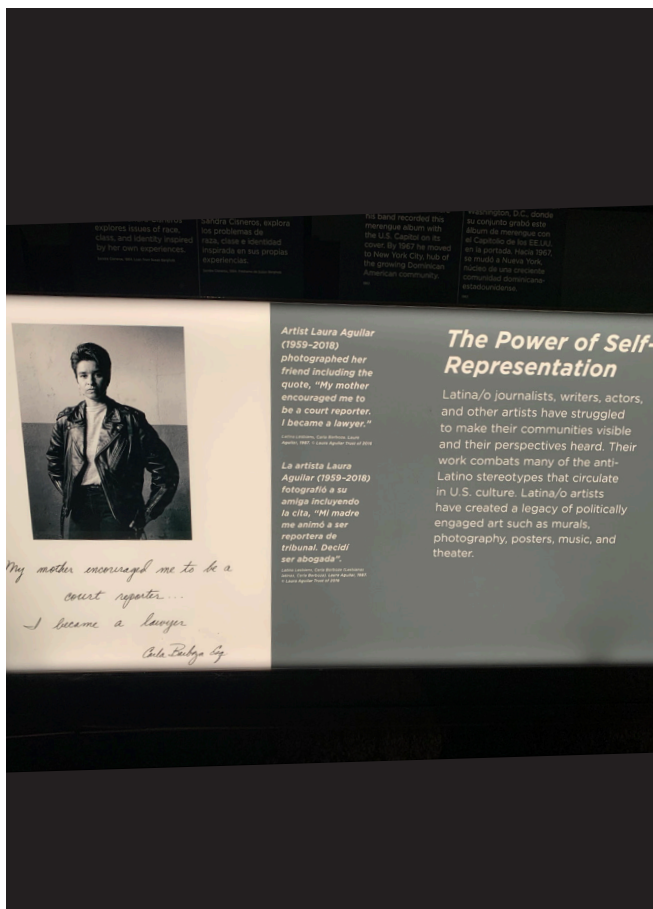
The five panels in this section reveal a strange fascination with drag queens, transgender activists, lesbians, and gender non-conformists on the part of the Smithsonian's Latino Museum. In these cases, some of these individuals were at the same time also Chicano organizers, socialists, or anarchists. The exhibition not only oddly presents them as somehow representative of Americans with Hispanic ancestry—which the data doesn't back up—but also as artists who fought to represent this supposedly unified Latino perspective in the face of “the anti-Latino stereotypes that circulate in U.S. culture.”



José Julio Sarria: Drag and Politics

A native of San Francisco, California, José Julio Sarria (1922–2013) was a legendary drag performer. He was the first openly gay person to run for public office in U.S. history. Though he lost the race for San Francisco Supervisor in 1961, he paved the way for the next generation of LGBT leaders like Harvey Milk.





Luisa Capetillo

Read More ^

Luisa Capetillo (1879-1922) was a Puerto Rican of European descent. Before Luisa turned twenty, the United States took control of Puerto Rico after Spain lost the Spanish-American War.

Capetillo was an organizer and feminist, she worked with the Free Federation of Workers. This important Puerto Rican labor organization was founded in 1899. Capetillo connected with workers by reading in tobacco factories. During the early 1900s, she rejected gender norms and supported labor strikes. Capetillo also published books and edited the magazine *La mujer* (The Woman).

Rafael López, 2021



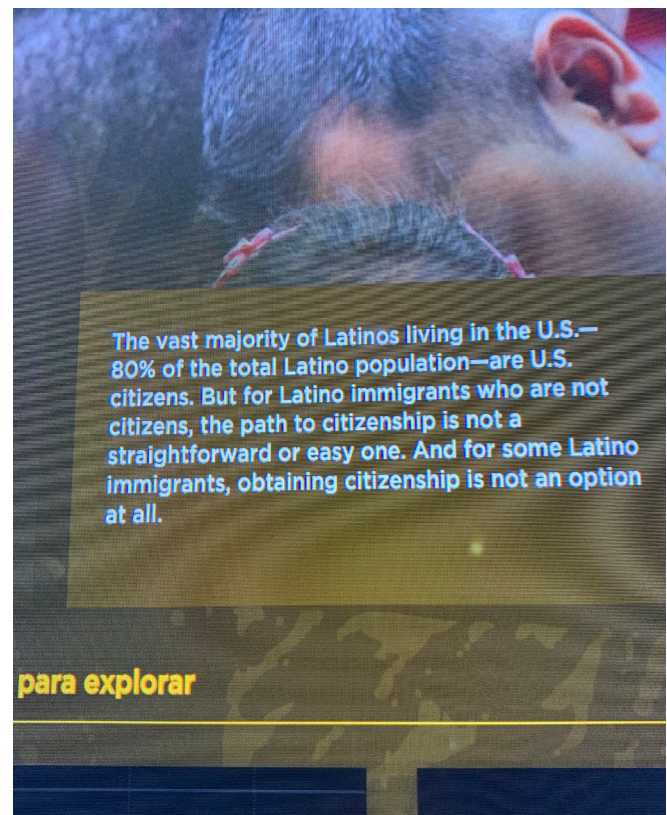
Judy Baca: Public Artist

Judy Baca envisions community murals as public spaces for retelling history and including everybody's stories. In 1976, she founded the Social and Public Art Resources Center (SPARC). SPARC's first project involved young people as co-creators of one of the largest murals in the United States—The Great Wall of Los Angeles.

Judy Baca, Rafael López, 2021.

Open Borders

These exhibits continue a pattern observed with the existing Smithsonian museums: support for open borders by either dispelling legitimate concerns about illegal immigration or making an emotional case for those who “have put down roots.” The first has a quote by Judy Baca that “we didn’t cross the border; the border crossed us.” This cliché is intended to wave away concerns while at the same time disparage westward expansion. It is also factually wrong: There were fewer than 100,000 Mexicans in the West who decided to stay after the 1848 Mexican War. In no way can they account for today’s population of self-identified Hispanics, who are closing in on 70 million. The math doesn’t add up.



The vast majority of Latinos living in the U.S.—80% of the total Latino population—are U.S. citizens. But for Latino immigrants who are not citizens, the path to citizenship is not a straightforward or easy one. And for some Latino immigrants, obtaining citizenship is not an option at all.

para explorar

“We didn’t cross the border; the border crossed us.”

—Judy Baca, 2021

“No cruzamos la frontera; la frontera nos cruzó a nosotros”
(Judy Baca, 2021).

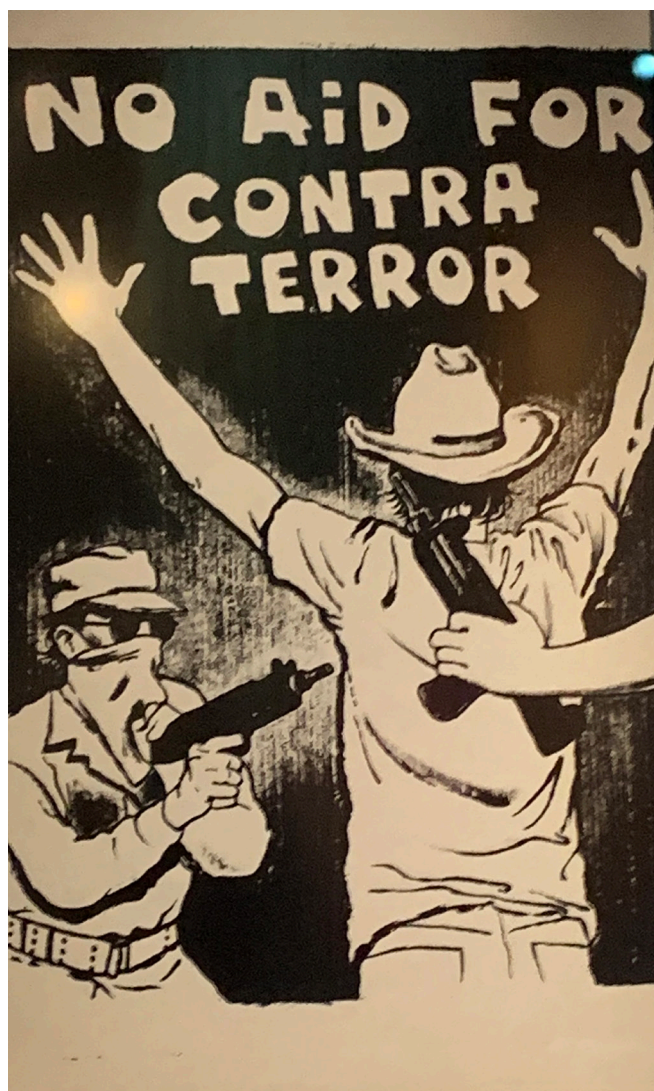
Who Gets to Belong?

In 2020 there were almost 8 million undocumented Latinas/os in the United States. They play a major role in the U.S. economy, including food production, construction, childcare, and other industries. The majority arrived with a visa. Others took the chance of entering the country illegally. For most, living in the United States is their best and safest option. Many undocumented people put down roots in the United States, but still fear deportation and family separation.

¿Quién tiene el derecho de

Blame America First

This section presents “U.S. interventions in Latin America, 1900–2000” as causes for the societal ills that made people want to immigrate to the United States. It features a poster criticizing U.S. support for the Nicaraguan Contras in the 1980s, calling them terrorists. This one has particularly aged badly, as the dictator the Contras were fighting then, the Sandinista President Daniel Ortega, is not only still in power, but has just announced Nicaragua will no longer hold elections. Another exhibit attacks the Monroe Doctrine, which today inspires our regional policy, for being “used to justify future U.S. military invasions.” Finally, yet another display criticizes the U.S. for backing Cuba’s Fulgencio Batista, who was dictator 70 years ago, without mentioning the communist dictatorship that has destroyed Cuba for the past 67 years.





Here, Uncle Sam stands over North and South America holding a policeman's club that says, “Monroe Doctrine.”

Uncle Sam with a Big Stick Political Cartoon. Louis Dalrymple, around 1905. Courtesy of Bettmann / Getty Images

Aquí, el Tío Sam se encuentra de pie sobre Norteamérica y Sudamérica sosteniendo un garrote que dice “doctrina Monroe”.

Caricatura del Tío Sam con un garrote. Louis Dalrymple, alrededor de 1905. Cortesía de Bettmann / Getty Images

The Monroe Doctrine

President James Monroe (1758–1831) saw many of Spain’s former colonies, such as Mexico, fight wars of independence. In an 1823 speech, Monroe warned Europe to stay out—the United States would police the Americas from now on. This idea, called the Monroe Doctrine, was used to justify future U.S. military invasions.

Democracy and Safety

Civil wars, oppressive governments, and natural disasters pushed millions of people to migrate from Latin America and the Caribbean to the United States.

Throughout the 1900s, the United States supported foreign governments that favored U.S. businesses and fought communism. Sometimes U.S. foreign policy contributed to the violence and corruption driving people to migrate. The United States backed numerous dictators, including Cuba's Fulgencio Batista and the Dominican Republic's Rafael Trujillo. Cuban, Dominican, and many other Latino communities still feel the effects of war and revolution. Their stories reveal the human cost of immigration and the contradictions of U.S. foreign policy.

En busca de democracia y seguridad

Las guerras civiles, los gobiernos

Inmigración

U.S. Interventions in Latin America, 1900–2000

Intervenciones de EE. UU. en Latinoamérica, 1900–2000



In this drawing, migrants look at 4th of July fireworks through an opening in the U.S.-Mexico border wall.

4th of July from the south border. For an
drawing, look in *Porque Gritamos* / *Porque*

En este dibujo, unos migrantes observan los fuegos artificiales en celebración del 4 de Julio por una apertura en el muro fronterizo que separa México de Estados Unidos.

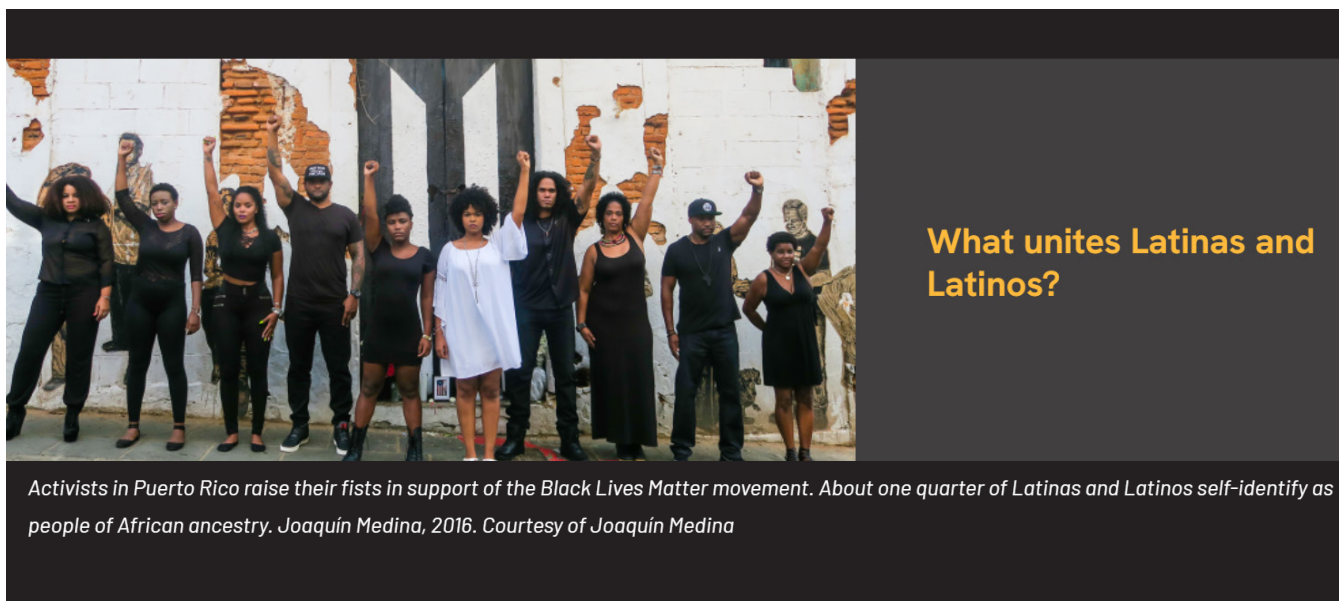
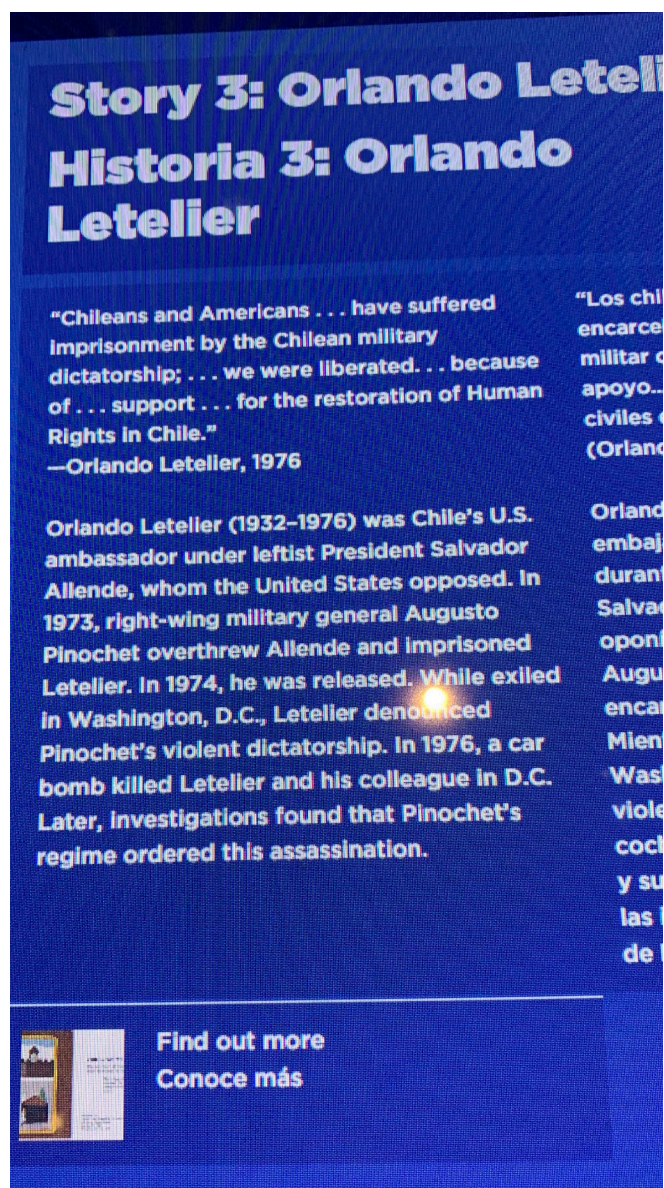
4th of July from the south border. For an
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Fear and Prejudice

Many U.S. politicians, as early as Benjamin Franklin, have feared non-White immigration. Instead of being recognized as community builders, Latin American immigrants are sometimes described as "invaders." Many have risked their lives to immigrate because they believe in U.S. ideals such as democracy, equality, and opportunity.

Marxist Messaging

These displays shed light on the Marxist leanings of the men and women who put together these exhibitions. One is dedicated to Orlando Letelier, a Marxist-Leninist member of Salvador Allende's government in Chile. He became a cause célèbre for the hard left 50 years ago after he was gunned down in 1976, but who has no special meaning today and certainly no connection to the American experience, and should thus not be in a self-avowed "National Museum." Another display shows a video by Gustavo Torres, who left his native Colombia to support the Sandinista cause in Nicaragua and then emigrated here to found the open-borders CASA de Maryland, a powerhouse in Maryland politics which he led for 34 years. A third exhibit is an interview with an Aztec activist who espouses green causes. Other panels are dedicated to exploring race-based attacks on Western Civilization.



Gustavo Torres's Immigration Story



Gustavo Torres. Foro Storyteller, 2021. National Museum of the American Latino

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Xiuhtezcatl Martínez. Somos, 2021. National Museum of the American Latino

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Resistance and Uprisings

African, Indigenous, and mixed-race peoples remade their societies, despite the inhumanities of colonization.

They adapted their traditions, mastered new environments and ways of life, and built communities. These survivors also protested the abuses of European colonizers. They fought injustice in different ways. Some burned and escaped plantations and missions. Others made their cases in court. Many also participated in their nations' wars of independence from Spain.

The objects and images here focus on diverse stories of resistance like Indigenous rebellions in Puerto Rico, New Mexico, and California; the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804); and the daily endurance of enslaved Puerto Ricans.

Complexities of Skin Color La complejidad del color de piel

Complexities of Skin Color La complejidad del color de piel

Colorism is a form of prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a darker skin tone, either by members of the same ethnic or racial group or by outsiders. This form of discrimination is prevalent in the Latino community.

El colorismo es una forma de prejuicio o discriminación contra individuos de piel más oscura, ya sea por miembros del mismo grupo racial o étnico o por personas ajenas a ellos. Esta forma de discriminación está muy extendida en la comunidad latina.

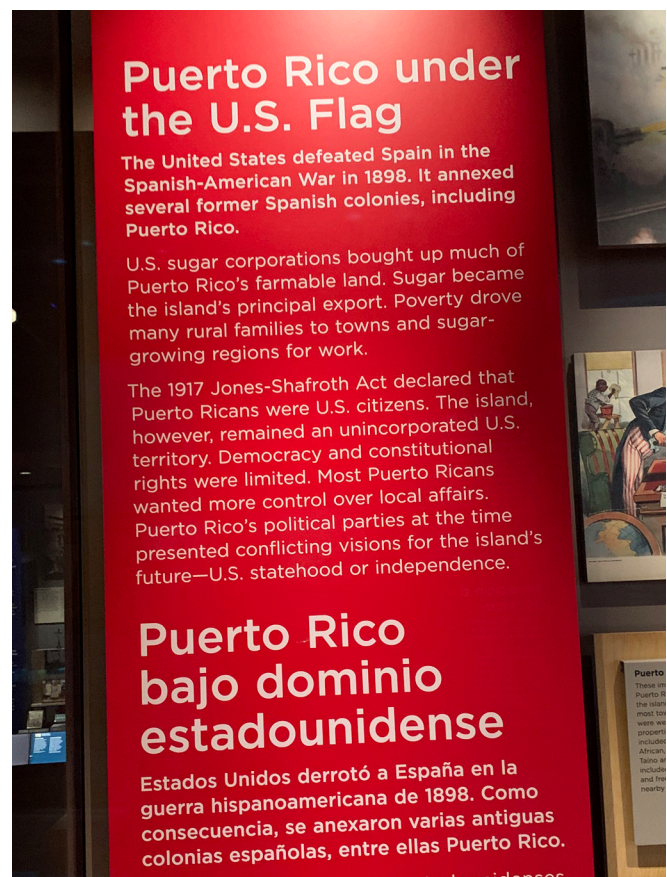


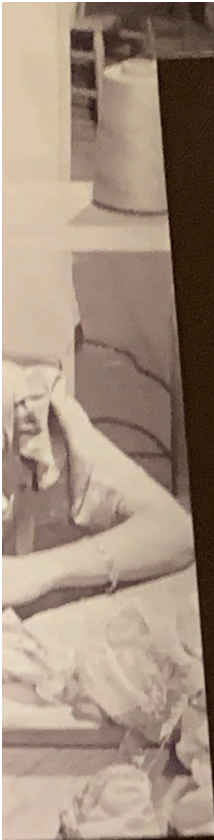
Toypurina: Freedom Fighter

Toypurina (?-1799) was a Tongva medicine woman who was forced to live in Mission San Gabriel, outside present-day Los Angeles. In 1785, she joined a failed plot to destroy the mission. Toypurina's punishment was separation from her community. Today, many consider her a hero for helping California's Indigenous peoples to rebel.

Puerto Rico

This section is dedicated to presenting the United States as a colonial power in Puerto Rico, and promoting the voices of independence advocates. On the island itself, support for independence is paltry, a luxury belief indulged mostly by the upper classes. In the first six referenda that Puerto Rico has held on its status, support for independence hovered between 0.6% in 1967 and 5.5% in 2012. In the latest referendum, held in 2024, support for independence reached 11.82%, the highest ever—while 59% of Puerto Ricans voted for statehood and 30% for the continuation of the status quo.





Negotiating Nationhood

In 1948, the United States finally allowed Puerto Ricans to elect their first governor, Luis Muñoz Marín. He presented a plan to industrialize the island. In 1952, Muñoz Marín created a new status for Puerto Rico—the commonwealth, or as it is awkwardly called in Spanish “an associated free state.” Puerto Rico was not independent, nor was it a state. The island had more local control but kept its economic and military ties to the United States.

La negociación de la soberanía

En 1948, Estados Unidos

a textil

Primera Guerra
puertorriqueñas
a bordar en casa
textil estadounidense
ada de 1930, la
ctil empleaba casi
idad de personas
azucarera. Cuando
seños comenzaron
portunidades en Esta
pecialmente en la
Nueva York, mucha
ncontraron trabajo
talleres textiles.

s), Puerto Rico. En una fábrica de bordado
sta de la Biblioteca del Congreso [LC-USZ62-10861]

Cesta de costura

Fines del siglo XIX. Museo Nacional de Historia

Plancha textil

Museo Nacional de Historia Americana

Cuba

This section, perhaps the most perverse of all, presents Cuba as a victim of American interventionism prior to the Revolution. The sad reality is that Cuba has been rendered in its present prostrate state by 67 years of communism, and during that time Cubans have found a haven in the United States. Often escaping in makeshift rafts that exposed them to storms and sharks, they sought the liberty and prosperity that America offers and that the Smithsonian scoffs at.



This political cartoon depicts the newly independent nation of Cuba as a young girl trying to negotiate with Uncle Sam.

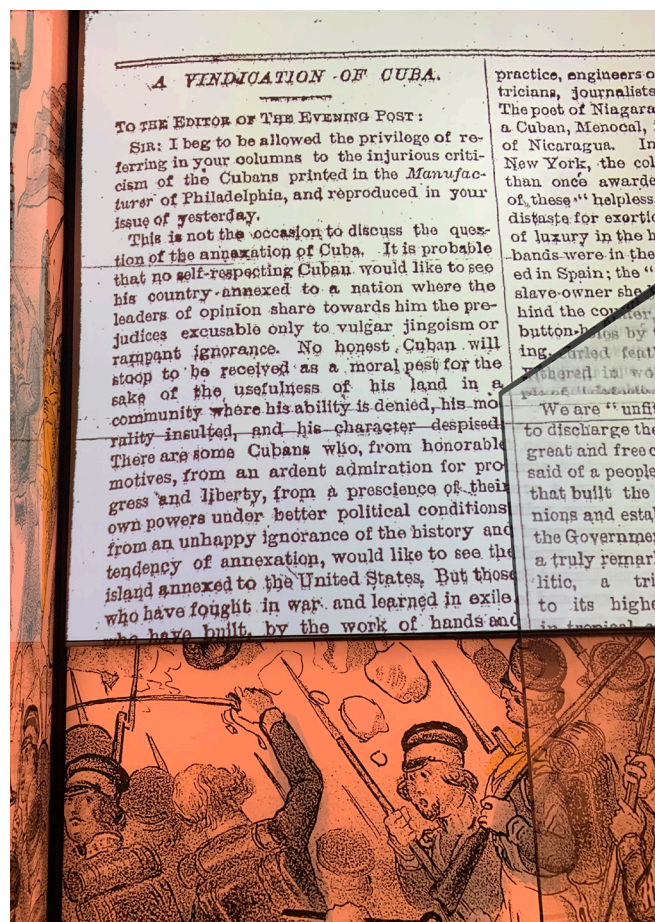
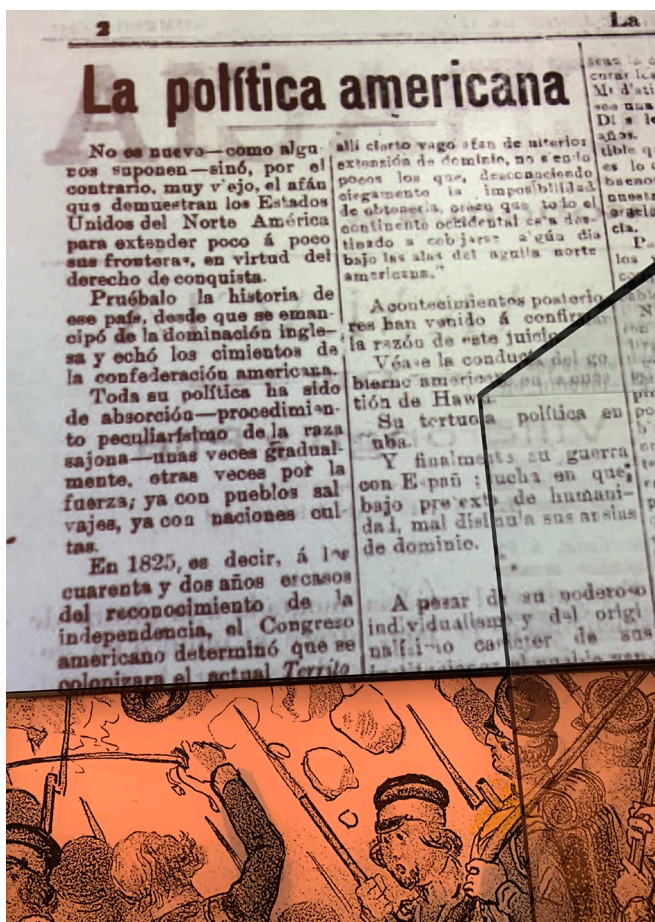
Cuba addressing Uncle Sam: "I come to buy, not to beg, sir," a 1903 cartoon. William Allen Rogers, 1903. Courtesy of North Wind Picture Archive [SOC12A+00039]

Esta caricatura política representa a la recientemente independizada nación cubana como una niña pequeña intentando negociar con el Tío Sam.

Cuba dirigiéndose al Tío Sam: "Vine a comprar, no a rogarle, señor," una caricatura de 1903. William Allen Rogers, 1903. Cortesía del Archivo North Wind Picture [SOC12A+00039]

Cuba's Conditional Independence

Cuba was the only Spanish colony to achieve independence shortly after the war. The United States pressured Cuba to accept the Platt Amendment as a condition for its independence. This agreement allowed the United States to intervene in Cuban affairs. It also established a trade relationship favoring Cuban sugar and U.S. business interests.



country and ... preventing ... the United States from extending into the Antilles and our American lands."

—José Martí, 1895

José Martí (1853–1895) was a Cuban political writer and poet of Spanish descent. Exiled as a teenager, Martí spent years living abroad. For over a decade, he promoted Cuban independence while living in New York City. In 1892, Martí founded the Cuban Revolutionary Party which organized for Cuban and Puerto Rican self-rule. He died fighting in Cuba's War of Independence from Spain (1895–1898). Martí's later writing warned of U.S. imperialism in Latin America.

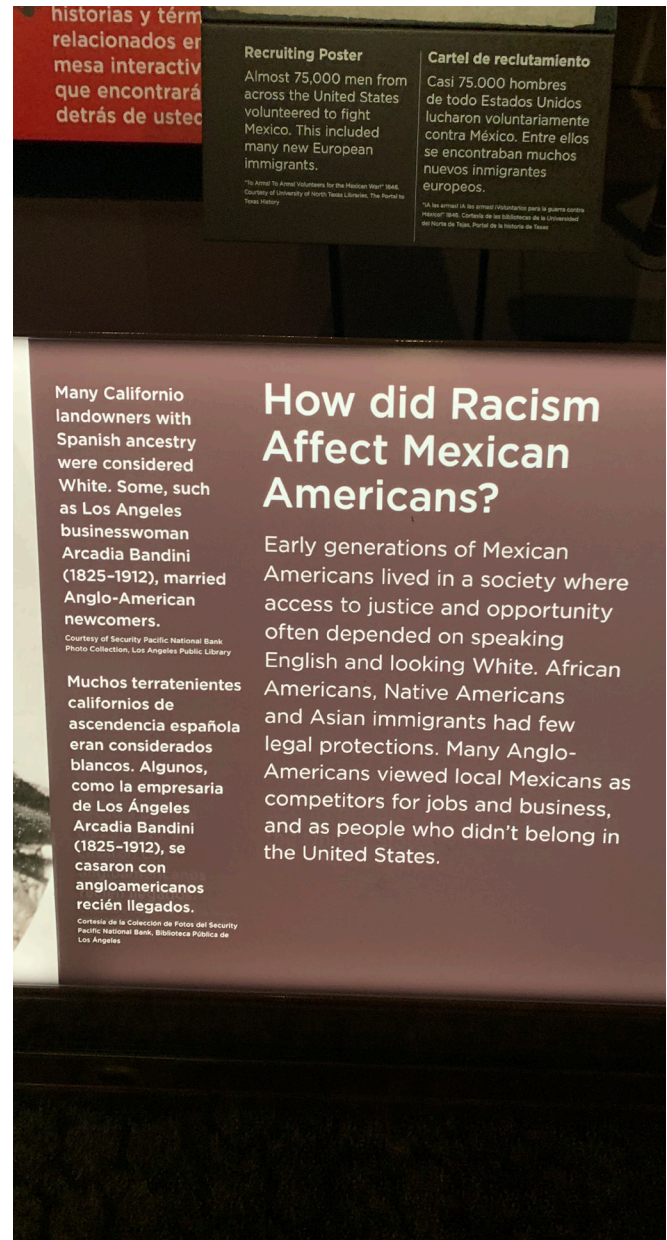
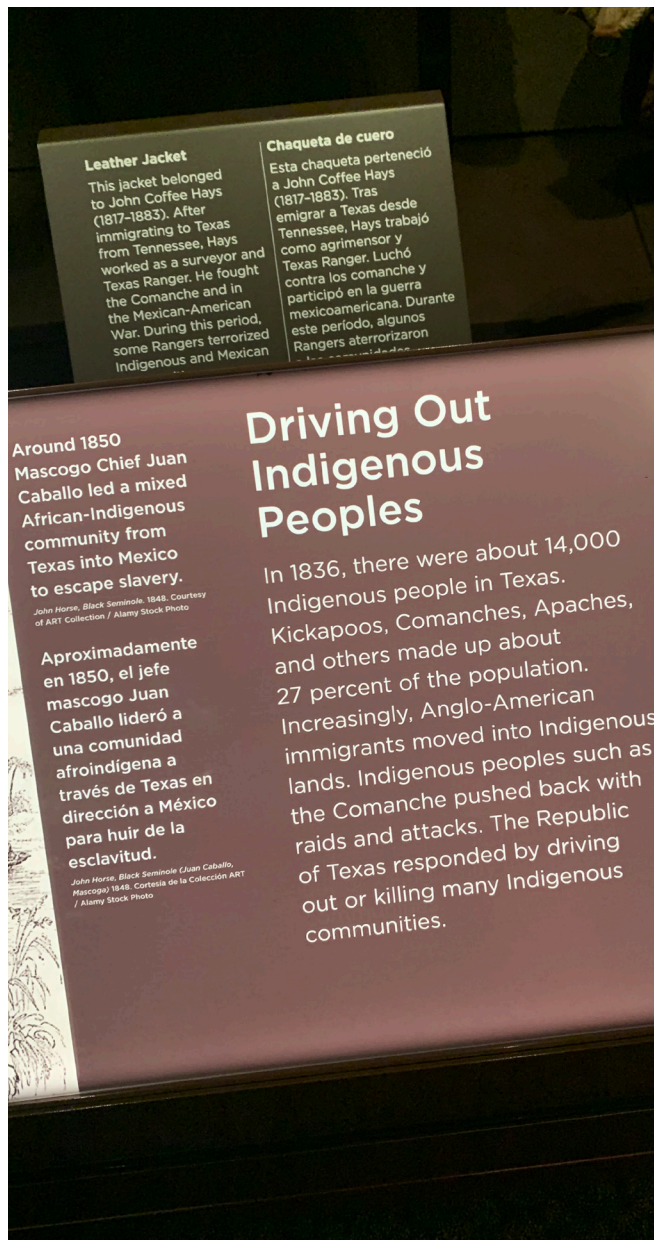
Refugee Boat

In 1994 over 30,000 Cubans risked death traveling to Florida in homemade boats or rafts. This boat was used by two young refugees who were escaping Cuba's economic crisis. They were part of an ongoing migration of Cubans. The greatest numbers arrived after the 1959 Cuban Revolution. However, Cubans have been migrating to the United States since the early 1800s.

Raft used by Cuban balseros. Around 1992. Loan from Anacostia Community Museum, Gift of Humberto Sanchez

Mexico

In this section's telling, Mexico is portrayed as another victim of U.S. aggression. When the U.S. or the Republic of Texas were not invading Mexico or slaughtering Indians, they were subjecting Mexicans on the U.S. side of the border to rank American racism.



Invading Mexico

The Mexican-American War changed the lives and identities of Mexican communities in the United States.

After annexing Texas in 1845, the United States set its sights on Mexico's northern territories. From 1846 to 1848, the United States invaded Mexico and occupied its major cities. After winning the war, the United States gained about half of Mexico's territory under the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo.

The estimated 115,000 Mexicans living in present-day California, Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico became U.S. citizens. In the following decades, many lost their land and political representation to Anglo-American and European newcomers.

Invasión de México

The Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Latino: Chronology

How the Left Marches Through the Institutions

- 1994** President Clinton sets up Smithsonian Institution Task Force on Latino Issues, headed by La Raza founder Raul Yzaguirre and Board Member Mari Carmen Aponte. Their report calls for creation of a Latino Museum.
- 2004** La Raza's lobbyist The Raben Group starts to work Congress on the Museum. Raben also lobbies for the pro-abortion group NARAL (*renamed Reproductive Freedom for All*) and the Southern Poverty Law Center.
- 2008** Congress creates a commission to study the Museum. La Raza retains influence.
- 2011** Commission recommends Museum be created.
- 2020** The amendment creating the Museum is tucked into the December 2020 Omnibus Bill, which Trump called a "monstrosity" but had to sign.
- 2022** The Latino Museum opens its first exhibit, ¡Presente!, in the National Museum of American History, which is met with strong criticism. The Museum cancels a planned second exhibit, glorifying gangs from the 1960s and denouncing capitalism.
- 2023** House Appropriations Committee passes the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies bill defunding the Museum.
- 2023** Committee restores funding for FY 2024.
- 2025** In his 2026 budget request to Congress in May, President Trump requests that funding for the Latino Museum be zeroed out and replaced with the Smithsonian Latino Center (SLC) promoting exhibits across the Smithsonian Institution.
- 2026** Smithsonian tries to avert congressional debate by offering to house the Museum in the Smithsonian's Arts and Industries Building.

Building
an America
where freedom,
opportunity,
prosperity,
and civil society
flourish.



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