

Invisible No More No más invisibles

September 11, 2018

Study examines Latino representation at Smithsonian

#	Grade	Recommendation
1	FAIL	ENSURE LATINO REPRESENTATION IN INSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE & EXECUTIVE RANKS
2	INCOMPLETE	ENSURE LATINO REPRESENTATION IN TOTAL WORKFORCE
3	PASS	CREATE NEW OFFICE TO ADDRESS 1994 TASK FORCE'S RECOMMENDATIONS
4	FAIL	INITIATE PROCESS FOR NEW LATINO SMITHSONIAN MUSEUM
5	PASS	PERMANENT LATINO PRESENCE IN THE COLLECTION & PROGRAMS OF SMITHSONIAN
6	FAIL	ENSURE CORE FUNDING FOR NEW & EXISTING LATINO INITIATIVES
7	FAIL	ESTABLISH AND ENFORCE ACCOUNTABILITY TO LATINO INITIATIVES
9	FAIL	REQUEST GAO STUDY ON LATINO PARTICIPATION ACROSS SMITHSONIAN COMPONENTS
10	FAIL	DEVELOP FIRM PLAN FOR LATINO INCLUSION IN THE SMITHSONIAN

AAA Satisfactory Completion | AA Satisfactory Completion | A Satisfactory Completion | B Satisfactory Completion | C Satisfactory Completion | D Satisfactory Completion | E Satisfactory Completion | F Satisfactory Completion | G Satisfactory Completion | H Satisfactory Completion | I Satisfactory Completion | J Satisfactory Completion | K Satisfactory Completion | L Satisfactory Completion | M Satisfactory Completion | N Satisfactory Completion | O Satisfactory Completion | P Satisfactory Completion | Q Satisfactory Completion | R Satisfactory Completion | S Satisfactory Completion | T Satisfactory Completion | U Satisfactory Completion | V Satisfactory Completion | W Satisfactory Completion | X Satisfactory Completion | Y Satisfactory Completion | Z Satisfactory Completion

Basta.

So say a group of researchers and advocates who have completed a study analyzing Latino representation within the workforce, programming, collections, and exhibitions of the Smithsonian Institution, the world's largest museum and research complex – and say the organization has earned a failing grade.

Among its findings firm plan was that it had not executed on 7 out of 10 recommendations made in an earlier report on Latino

representation – and that there has been a decrease in federal funding for the Smithsonian Latino Center and a severe shortage of Latinos in leadership roles.

The study, conducted by the Latino Policy and Politics Initiative (LPPI) and the Chicano Studies Research Center (CSRC), both located at UCLA, was designed to evaluate the Smithsonian Institution's progress in implementing recommendations from the 1994 report, *Willful Neglect*.

Issued by the Smithsonian's Task Force on Latino Issues, the 1994 report found that the institution displayed "a pattern of willful neglect toward the estimated 25 million Latinos in the

United States” by hiring few Latinos and failing to represent Hispanic contributions to American art, culture, and science.

During a press call on September 10, CSRC Director Dr. Chon Noriega explained that the results of the new study – released almost a quarter of a century after *Willful Neglect* – were troubling.



“Little if any progress has been made,” said CSRC Director Dr. Chon Noriega.

Noriega noted that the Institution’s Latino workforce has grown from 2.7 percent in 1994 to 10.1 percent in 2018.

“However, when it comes to leadership and governance, little if any progress has been made,” said Noriega, who added that since 1994, only four Latinos have served in the Institution’s executive ranks, with no representation in the Office of the Secretary between 2008 and 2017.

Noriega said that no other entity in the world matched the Smithsonian’s impact on science, the arts, and humanities.

“But the Smithsonian is also a profoundly American institution dedicated to preserving and telling our nation’s story,” he said, noting that the Smithsonian’s current strategic plan makes clear its priority to represent all Americans ‘by accelerating the diversification of our constituents, boards, and workforces; and by diversifying our exhibitions and programs.’

“This study is a contribution toward that goal,” he said.

On the same press call, Grammy Award winning artist Emilio Estefan, who serves as member and Second Vice Chair on the Commission to Study the Potential Creation of a National Museum of the American Latino, made clear his affection for the Smithsonian Institution – which has paid tribute to his work.

In 2016, the Institution added new portraits of prominent Latino figures and artists to its permanent collection, including a portfolio of photographs of Cuban Americans which included both Gloria and Emilio Estefan.

But he said more needed to be done to amplify Latino representation.

“It’s so important to showcase the contributions of Latinos,” said Estefan. “Not just food, the arts, the fashion, but also we go to war and fight for this country. Latinos pay taxes, employ other people. We appreciate and love this country.”

The study found that the Smithsonian had improved its Latino representation within exhibits and collections. In a survey, 83 percent of respondents indicated that their institutional unit or museum acquired a major Latino-focused acquisition in the last five years.

The study also pointed out that a program in Latino History and Culture was created in 2004 within the National Museum of American History.

Since the publication of *Willful Neglect*, the Institution has created internships and fellowships specifically targeting Latinos. The Latino Museum Studies Program, established in 1994, has supported 292 graduate students and provided them opportunities to engage with Smithsonian professionals, scholars and leaders in the museum field.

Noriega said the study was conducted with publicly available information such as public records, Institution reports and digital records and called for increased transparency from the Smithsonian, as requests for workforce demographics and annual operating budget with respect to diversity were not always responded to.

“To some extent, this complicated the research project,” he said.

According to the researchers, the Smithsonian has not actively supported efforts to establish a National American Latino Museum on the National Mall, as advocacy groups and some Congressional leaders have called for repeatedly.

An extensive analysis of Smithsonian Institution annual reports from 1994 to 2017 showed no mention of a Latino museum. It appears that all efforts related to the advancement of a U.S. Latino museum have taken place outside of the Smithsonian, said Sonja Díaz, Executive Director of LPPI.

“There are still efforts very much alive from outside advocates,” she said. “We found no evidence that the Smithsonian was taking those steps.”

The researchers also called for increased funding for Latino initiatives at the Smithsonian, as the Smithsonian Latino Center receives \$1 million from the Institution each year. The Latino Center is not a physical museum, but an entity created in 1997 to ensure that Latino representation is included within the Institution's programming.

The Smithsonian Institution's overall annual budget is about \$1 billion and grew at an annual rate of almost 5 percent between 1995 and 2018.

Conversely, the Smithsonian Latino Center's budget experienced a 0 percent growth rate, the report said.

In response, Estuardo Rodríguez, Executive Director of the Friends of the American Latino Museum, released the following statement.

"The UCLA study has confirmed what we have argued for some time, the *Willful Neglect* report is a 24-year-old roadmap, and its most significant recommendations have been largely ignored. Chief among those recommendations is the need to create a Smithsonian American Latino Museum as the only way to truly address the gaps in our American history. At a time when misunderstandings and stereotypes about American Latinos and our contributions to the nation are harming our community, this report provides further inspiration for the critical work of the Friends of the American Latino Museum. We are hopeful the Smithsonian and Congress will heed these findings and move to more vigorously support our next critical piece of legislation, the National Museum of the American Latino Act, through to passage."