



From the Desk of the Director

By Eduardo Díaz, director Smithsonian Latino Center
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Esteemed Supporter of the Smithsonian Latino Center:

This is my first message to inform you on developments at the center, and to stimulate dialogue that informs our ongoing efforts.

Mission. After five years of featuring particular countries, Argentina being the last, the center will now focus its attention on the U.S. Latino experience. We will continue to explore developments in select countries of origin, but will really focus on communities of U.S. residence. This is the most productive way to ensure meaningful Latino presence and participation at the Smithsonian. For example, given the degree of movement and exchange, it is difficult to fully understand the Dominican American experience outside of an island-based context. Recently, a collective of 12 Dominican artists in New York produced *Manifestaciones*, a series of prints manifesting their experience as “Dominican-Yorks.” The center, together with the Dominican Studies Institute at City College New York, the U.S. Embassy in Santo Domingo and Centro León in Santiago, is helping organize exhibitions, workshops and talks there to stimulate dialogue on the Dominican diaspora and community formation here.

Research. We will focus on research to develop future exhibitions and correlative public and educational programs. For example, the Central American Ceramics Research Project will assess the 12,000-piece regional archeological ceramics collection at the National Museum of the American Indian, an effort which targets one of the largest, emerging Latino populations in the U.S., *los centroamericanos*, inviting them (and all of us) to discover their patrimony within the walls of the nation’s museum. We will build towards an exhibition in 2013.

Exhibitions. In addition to Central American Ceramics, we are developing:

Latino DC History Project. A documentation of Latino presence in the DC metro area, telling the unheard stories of Latinos in the institutions, culture, economy and daily life of the nation’s capital region. These diverse stories, which include the experiences of Salvadoran refugees, Aymara-speaking Bolivians and Puerto Rican federal workers, to name a few, offer opportunities for understanding the connections between local and global history and respond to the urgent need to develop Latino content for school curricula. An exhibition, planned for 2015, will link with the National Museum of American History’s current *American Journeys* project, which explores patterns of immigration and migration in the building of this country.

Taíno Legacy. An exploration of the culture and history of this foundational Native group of the Caribbean islands, the first to “encounter” Columbus and the first to bear the decimating brunt of the Spanish conquest. This project provides perspectives on Taíno civilization prior to European contact using the Smithsonian’s first-rate (yet rarely studied or displayed) archeological collections, and demonstrates the enduring Taíno presence on the islands—from domestic architecture, agriculture and spirituality to art, language and biology. Among many Puerto Rican, Dominican and Cuban Americans, *Conciencia de Taíno* (Taíno Consciousness) continues to inspire explorations of Native identity. An exhibition is planned for 2014 at the George Gustav Heye Center/National Museum of the American Indian in New York, targeting the region’s prodigious Caribbean-originated population.

Public and Educational Programs. Correlative to and contemporaneously with research and exhibition development, the center will produce public programs designed to raise awareness and engage dialogue. These will include talks, webcasts, content and interactive programs on our Latino Virtual Museum, scholarly conferences, Hispanic Heritage Month family day celebrations, among others, occurring at the Smithsonian and in community venues. The Latino Virtual Museum will continue its experimental work in 3D environments, including our annual virtual *Día de Muertos Festival*, development of new learning objects and student-teacher training on educational applications of virtual content.

Online Presence and Social Media. Accompanying these projects, we will work to improve our website and ensure relevance and impact on the Latino Virtual Museum, while also expanding the utilization of social media, including Facebook and Twitter.

Mil gracias por su atención. In coming months, I will share more details on these and other center developments, and comment on strengthening Latino presence at the Smithsonian. I invite you to also share your thoughts with me.