Afro-Latinidad in the Smithsonian's African American Museum Spaces

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ABSTRACT: The nearly fifty-year gap between the establishment of Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum (ACM) and the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) created a difference in the museums' central narratives about Blackness and the inclusion of Afro-Latinidad. The Anacostia emerged in 1967 as part of the Black museum movement. It has historically framed Blackness as DC-based African Americanness with periodic inclusion of Afro-Latinidad. The first object in the collection of the NMAAHC is from Ecuador, signaling an inclusive representation of Black identities that foundationally includes Afro-Latinidad.

KEY WORDS: Afro-Latino, Latino, Museums, Black Identity, NMAAHC

How Blackness is understood, displayed, and experienced in African American museums has evolved over generations. Shifting notions of Blackness in the United States have increasingly included the African Diaspora generally and Afro-Latinidad specifically. In September 2017, the Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum celebrated fifty years of existence. At the same time, the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture celebrated its one-year anniversary. The almost fifty-year gap between the museums' founding suggests a noteworthy difference in how each engages Afro-Latinidad within narratives of Blackness. For the Anacostia Community Museum, Afro-Latinidad is nonessential to institutional definitions of Blackness and is thus ephemeral in museum display. For the National Museum of African American History and Culture, Afro-Latinidad is foundational. The first object in the Museum's collection is from Ecuador. Further, the Museum has curatorial positions dedicated to Diaspora and Latinx Studies, signaling a more inclusive representation of US Blackness in African American museum spaces.

Afro-Latinx

> "I think that the Black [American] community was very isolated . . . They didn't have an understanding that there are blacks all over the world. They

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> are in Latin America. They are in many places. We are part of an entire family of people that live everywhere. We speak differently. We have different languages. We have different cultures. We think differently, but we are blacks."
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> Arturo Griffiths (Afro-Panamanian), Washington, DC, 1993[1]

The dominant racial framework in the United States is Black and white. Latinxs are considered culturally distinct from both white Americans and African Americans. The United States Census Bureau uses the racial designations of white non-Hispanic and Black/African American non-Hispanic as a result of The Office of Management and Budget's requirement that federal agencies use at least two ethnicities: Hispanic or Latino and not Hispanic or Latino.[2] A question about Mexican origin appeared on the US census in 1930, then never again. In the 1970s, the Census Bureau began to demarcate "Spanish origin/Hispanic/Latino" as an increasing and countable category of people, and in 1980, the first US census explicitly asked whether a person considered themselves "Spanish origin/Hispanic/Latino." Around 2003, Latinxs numerically surpassed African Americans as the largest nonwhite group in the United States. Latinx is not race. Latinxs can be Black, white, Asian, indigenous, and any mixture thereof. The myth of Latin American *mestizaje* (miscegenation) suggests that Latinxs are some unclassifiable racial mixture of African, European, and indigenous. That is false. Some of us are categorically and unapologetically Black.

Albeit fraught with geographic ambiguity, Afro-Latinidad is a reclamation or affirmation of shared African and Latin American heritage by people in Latin America and the Caribbean and, by extension, people in the United States. This term has gained contemporary popularity, but the reality and experiences of Afro-Latinidad are historical.[3] Throughout the early 1900s, Afro-descendant consciousness, political activity, and cultural revolutions—including the United Negro Improvement Association, francophone Negritude, and the Harlem Renaissance—permeated globally. Intellectuals involved in Pan-Africanism likely used the term African Diaspora[4] around the mid-1950s in the efforts to raise consciousness, dispel notions that Black people lacked culture, history, or connection,[5] and create global solidarity among Black people.[6] In the 1960s through 1990s, global decolonization, independence movements in Africa and the Caribbean, and the related increase in Black immigration to the United States restructured Black agency worldwide and expanded awareness of Black ethnic populations in the United States, including Afro-Latinx. Distinct from non-Spanish-speaking Afro-Caribbeans or African immigrants, Afro-Latinidad as a human identity specifically advocates articulated—rather than suggested, marginalized, or ignored—acknowledgement of Latin American and Caribbean Blackness. The majority of the almost eleven million enslaved Africans that survived the Middle Passage to the "New World" did *not* go to (what is now) the United States. Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean continues to be both historical fact and contemporary reality. Afro-Latin Americans and US Afro-Latinxs are leading this multifaceted multinational movement for Black recognition. US-based Afro-Latinidad calls for Latinxs to claim their Blackness in the face of a mythical homogenous Latin American mestizo identity and white supremacy. In the United States, Afro-Latinidad asserts Blackness as diasporically connected to, but different from, an African American narrative.[7]

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[1] Arturo Griffiths, interview by Hector Corporán, *Black Mosaic*, Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution, December 23, 1993, reference number AV000770, transcript.

[2] Latinx is a gender-neutral term for a person of Latin American origin or ancestry. It is an alternative to Latino, Latina, and dual gendered Latin@. Latinxs is the plural form.

[3] Juan Flores and Miriam Jiménez Román, *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 11.

[4] "The African Diaspora" as used here refers to the forced migration of Africans to the Americas during the era of the transatlantic slave trade as well as the subsequent generations born from the legacy of enslavement and freedom.

[5] George Shepperson, "The African Diaspora- or the African Abroad," *African Forum* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1966): 76–93.

[6] Edmund T. Gordon and Mark Anderson, "The African Diaspora: Toward an Ethnography of Diasporic Identification," *The Journal of American Folklore* 112, No. 445, (Summer 1999): 282–296.

Imagined Black Communities

Communities are not distinguished by their falsity or genuineness, but rather by the style in which they are imagined.[8]

Museums are trusted sites of public education. However, before the 1950s, US-based museums, as a reflection of mainstream society, largely excluded Black contributions to global and US history and culture. Just as they created other Black-centered institutions, Black people created their own museums to tell accurate stories about our history, art, and culture, and our contributions to US society as a whole. Black museums have always held more profound roles for African-descendent people because they are self-created spaces for the public affirmation of and education about Black people. Although this article emphasizes the social role of museums in shaping public Black discourse, it is important to note that Black museums are also sites of professional training and practice for Black cultural workers.

Latinidad in ACM Exhibitions

The Black museum movement saw the emergence of museums in Cleveland (1953), Chicago (1961), Detroit (1965), and Washington, DC (1967) dedicated to the public display and affirmation of, and education about, African-descendant people in the United States, from both national and local standpoints. The newly created

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[7] Edmund T. Gordon and Mark Anderson, "The African Diaspora: Toward an Ethnography of Diasporic Identification," *The Journal of American Folklore* 112, No. 445, (Summer 1999): 284.

[8] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1985), 6.

National Museum of African American History and Culture is not the first African American-focused Smithsonian museum. Opened in 1967, the Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum (ACM) focused on African Americans both nationally and locally, with particular attention to the predominantly African American "east of the river" communities in Washington, DC, where it is located.[9]

ACM dabbled in Latinidad inclusion on several occasions in its storied fifty-year history. *Black Mosaic: Community, Race, and Ethnicity Among Black Immigrants in Washington, D.C.* (August 21, 1994–August 7, 1995) was the first and most significant exhibition at the Smithsonian to discuss "Black," loosely defined, immigrants mainly from Latin America and the Caribbean living in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. The US Census Bureau did not officially begin counting Latinxs nationally until 1980, and it continues to struggle to record both Latinx identity *and* racial identification. In the absence of concrete data about non-African American Black populations in the DC area, family collections and oral histories were fundamental to the exhibition's development.[10] A 1995 exhibition review entitled "Multiple Black Identities," called out the multilingual, multiethnic nature of Black identities represented in the "Chocolate City" of Washington, DC and in ACM's pioneering exhibit.[11]

Afro-Latinidad reemerged at ACM in 2009 when the Museum hosted the popular traveling exhibition *The African Presence in México: From Yanga to the Present* and its companion exhibit, *Who Are We Now? Roots, Resistance, and Recognition.* Organized by the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago, the exhibition used paintings, photographs, lithographs, and historical texts to examine the complexities of Mexican, Afro-Mexican, and African American identities in both Mexico and the United States.

Nevertheless, just as institutional decisions and curatorial choice have included Afro-Latinidad, they have also excluded it. To celebrate the 2008 opening of the Washington Nationals' baseball stadium, ACM organized *Separate and Unequaled: Black Baseball in the District of Columbia*, an exhibition focused on segregated baseball "when played by African Americans." The project omitted the experiences of Afro-Latin Americans recruited from Puerto Rico, Panama, and the Dominican Republic, among other Latin American nations. It also neglected to include the experiences of Afro-Latinxs, though they comprised about ten to fifteen percent of the Negro Leagues.[12] Afro-Latin Americans and Afro-Latinx players were decidedly Negro, which begs the question: When, if ever, is Afro-Latinx also African American?

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[9] According to US Census data, in 2010 Black non-Hispanics were 94% of the population in Ward 8, where the Anacostia Community Museum is located. The Hispanic/Latino population was less than 2%.

[10] For a more detailed accounting of the community-based exhibition development and public response to *Black Mosaic*, see Portia James, "Building a Community-based Identity at Anacostia Museum," *Curator* 39, no. 1 (March 1996): 19–44.

[11] Ella M Ray, "Multiple Black Identities," *American Anthropologist* 97 (1995): 774–776.

[12] Michael Simon Johnson and Daisy Rosario, "Latinos and Baseball's Color Line," *Latino USA*, NPR, July 14, 2015, podcast audio, http://latinousa.org/2015/07/14/latinos-baseball-and-the-color-line/.

After the legislation passed for a Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in 2003, ACM decentered it focus from African American history and expanded its mission to encompass urban communities. For four years (January 2013–January 2017), I served as the curator for Latino Studies under that mission.[13] As an urban anthropologist, I was particularly excited because the growth of the museum's mission reflects the ways in which urban communities, like Washington, DC, are changing in demographic composition. Latinxs are the largest nonwhite urban population in the country. Further, at the time of the 2014 American Community Survey, Washington, DC had the highest national percentage of foreign-born Latinxs, with Maryland in second place and Virginia in fourth.[14] Foreignness, Blackness, and Latinidad are important community elements. Building on a museum collection that already included the *Black Mosaic* collection as well as the Afro-Diasporic work of photographer Tony Gleaton, Cuban veteran and author Evelio Grillo, and Central American artist Derek Webster, I saw my position as an *extension of* rather than a *departure from* the Black community-centered work for which the museum is known. The Smithsonian does not have a museum space dedicated to Latinx history, art, or culture. As such, I eagerly anticipated increasing the presence of diverse Latinx identities in ACM.

The Outsider Inside

"Hi. I am Ariana, the new curator of Latino Studies."

An older African American colleague looked at me and said, "Ar— what?"

I patiently replied, "Ariana," never understanding why my name gave trouble to so many.

She stared at me inquisitively, and then asked, "What's that other one's name?"

Grateful that I had already met the rest of the staff, I thought for a second and wondered if she meant the curator from Brazil.

"Alcione?"

"Yes! Her!" She sighed, threw her hands up and said, "Ar—. Air— I don't know. I won't remember that. You people have such difficult names!" and walked away before I could respond.

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[13] The Smithsonian Institution does not have a museum dedicated to Latinx history, art and/or culture. The May 1994, Smithsonian-commissioned report *Willful Neglect: The Smithsonian Institution and U.S. Latinos* criticized the Institution for its poor record in hiring and promoting Latinxs. It also criticized the lack of recognition of Latinx contributions to American history, art, culture, and science within the institution's programming, exhibitions, and collections. What is now the Smithsonian Latino Center was created in 1997 as a result of the *Willful Neglect* report, and since 2010 the Latino Curatorial Initiative has help fund 10 positions for Latinx scholars in multiple spaces around the Smithsonian Institution.

[14] Renee Stepler and Mark Hugo Lopez, "U.S. Latino Population Growth and Dispersion Has Slowed Since Onset of the Great Recession," *Pew Research Center Hispanic Trends*, September 8, 2016, http://www.pewhispanic.org/2016/09/08/latino-population-growth-and-dispersion-has-slowed-since-the-onset-of-the-great-recession/ph_2016-09-08_geography-26/.

Initially I laughed. Being "Latina" had nothing to do with why my mom, who is African American, chose my name. She liked it, just as she liked the names Bryan, Derrick, and Johari for my older siblings. Depersonalizing the interaction and drawing on my policy background, I immediately thought of the classic and often-cited audit study, "Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination."[15] My colleague's anguish also reminded me of Bill Cosby's now infamous "Pound Cake Speech" at a 2004 NAACP event commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of *Brown v Board of Education* where, among other social commentary, Cosby lamented the ill-chosen naming patterns of African Americans.

The parallel conversations of racial and cultural assumptions based on naming were obvious to me. How she felt about "Latino names" is akin to the study, or complaint, about "African American" names. My unfamiliar name, however, was simply an audible representation of a preconstructed feeling of difference. She clearly said, "You people." When she thought about her community, I was not a member. Knowing only my job title, she cast me with our Brazilian co-worker in a literal nameless pair of Latino Others. I had assumed a belonging based on shared Blackness. In that exchange, I received a rejection of shared identity.

I know, personally and academically, that identity is shaped by our own ideas and beliefs about who we are, as well as others' communicated perceptions of us. Even still, I felt emotionally unprepared for the immediate friction between my self-identification and external identifications of me in this predominantly Black space. Juggling disappointment and offense with an academic understanding, I was glad this happened. It jolted me out of my naiveté about assumed allying phrases like "Black people," "people of color," and especially "Blacks and Latinos." It forced me to think earnestly about Blackness, context, and the limits of "we."

Despite the vast interdisciplinary body of work about the African Diaspora, Afro-Latin America, and a growing literature about US-based Afro-Latinx identity, the critical work of Latinx Studies in Black museum spaces is to close the distance between what we know academically to be true of a diverse Black experience and colloquial homogenizing interpretations of African American identity. ACM does not track visitor race or ethnicity; the assumed museum audience is African American. I decided that my first task as curator of Latino Studies was to reinterpret existing ACM collections to illustrate the diversity of "African American" within our own collection. My second task was to ensure the presence of Afro-Latinidad in all of my Latinx-centered work.

When I started at the museum in 2013, I assumed responsibility for the *Black Mosaic* collection and saw the upcoming twentieth anniversary (in 2014) as an opportunity to reengage issues of Blackness and immigration through the "Revisiting Our Black Mosaic" symposium. Why a conference? Because we needed to talk. Curatorial work often evokes exhibitions and collections, but this symposium was essential to my institutional integration. I felt I needed to model Latinx inclusivity in various *conversations* before any Latinx-centered *visual* products would resonate, not just with the "traditional museum audience" but also with my colleagues and senior leadership. The event was free of charge and open to the public. Each session—covering conversations such on topics as museum diversity, gentrification, and education—is available on YouTube and is part of ACM's archives. These conversations provided space for collaborative thinking, structured public discussion, and the increase and diffusion of knowledge from multiple sources.

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[15] Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan, "Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination," *The American Economic Review* 94, no. 4 (September 2004): 991–1013, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3592802. There are a number of subsequent audit studies that move beyond perceptions of Black-White names to include Spanish surnames and other perceived identity markers.

While curating or proposing exhibitions at ACM, I treated Afro-Latinidad as both Latinx and Black experiences. Denying Black foreignness or suppressing Black diversity limits the ways in which African-descendant visitors see themselves in museum products and as creators and participants of US-based Black culture. For example, the signature image of my bilingual exhibition *Bridging the Americas: Community and Belonging from Panama to Washington, D.C.* (April 13, 2015–June 11, 2018) shows Afro-Panamanians parading in downtown DC with a Panamanian flag. Additionally, a panel entitled "Black Panamanians in the Chocolate City" explicitly addresses the Blackness of Afro-Panamanians within an African American space. A key scholar on voluntary Black migrations and multiple Black identities, Panamanian sociologist Dr. Roy Bryce-Laporte led one of the United States' first African American studies departments at Yale University and was the founding director of the Smithsonian's now defunct Research Institute on Immigration and Ethnic Studies.[16] Living his last years of life in the DC area, he was academically and personally aware that Black immigrants and Blacks migrants, including Afro-Latinxs, intentionally settled in the predominately-Black DC metro area. As Roxanne Cox, a Panamanian from New York who now lives in Maryland with her family, stated, "I enjoy the fact that [in the DC metro area] there are a lot of prominent people that look like me. I really appreciate that." *Bridging the Americas* affirms Afro-Panamanians as Black DC-area residents and activists. This includes former DC Mayor Adrian Fenty, whose grandfather's immigration document from Panama to New York shares wall space with Dr. Bryce-Laporte's "Black Panamanians in the Chocolate City" panel.

The bilingual exhibition *The Backyard of Derek Webster's Imagination (*October 17, 2016–July 9, 2017) showcased the folk art of Honduran-born, Belize-raised, Chicago-based artist Derek Webster. Using materials discarded in the streets and alleys of Chicago, Webster created turtles, carnival figures, and dancers that evoke his Caribbean roots. These powerful layers of Afro-Diasporic identity, Black

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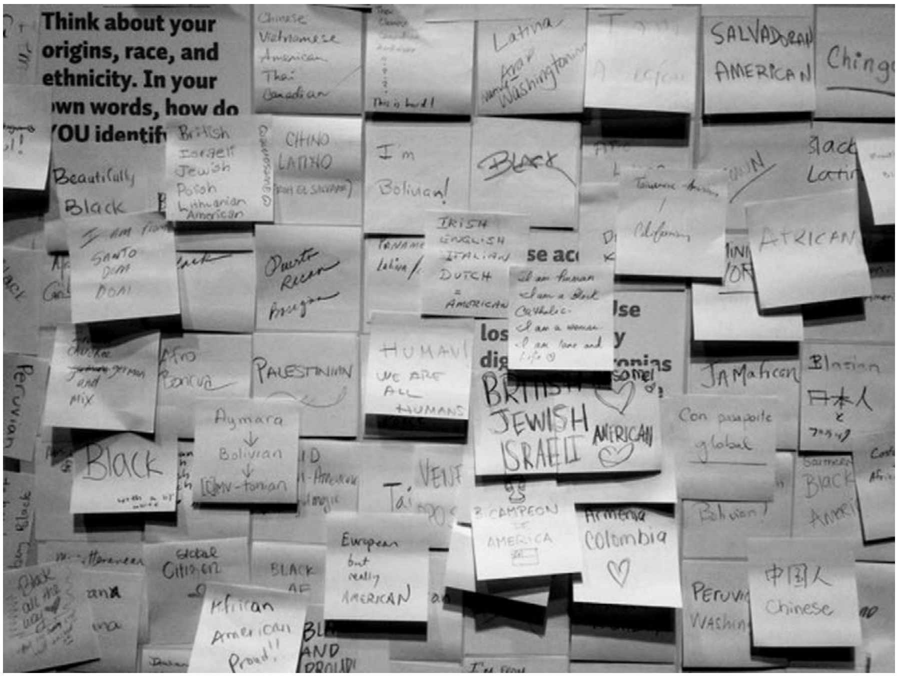
[16] Roy Simón Bryce-Laporte, "Voluntary Immigration and Continuing Encounters between Blacks: The Post-Quincentenary Challenge," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 530 (November 1993): 28–41. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1047675.

The signature image of the *Bridging the Americas* exhibit shows Afro-Panamanians parading with a Panamanian flag in Washington, DC. (Image courtesy of the Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution. Photo by Harold Dorwin)

migration, and creative expression are lost when Webster is labeled an "African American folk artist from Chicago." He undoubtedly encountered more turtles and carnivals in Central America than Illinois. Describing Webster as African American is not *incorrect*, but rather *incomplete*.

Gateways/Portales (December 5, 2016–January 7, 2018) is the first Latinx-focused exhibition at ACM and the first Smithsonian exhibition to use the term Latinx. *Black Mosaic* included Afro-Latinx populations, but also Afro-Caribbean and African immigrants. *The African Presence in México* straddled Afro-Mexican identities in both Mexico and the United States. *Bridging the Americas* discusses Panama, the Panama Canal, and Panamanian diversity before framing US experiences, and *The Backyard of Derek Webster's Imagination* necessarily framed Webster's art through his immigration from Central America (Honduras and Belize) to Chicago. *Gateways*, however, is entirely about US urban spaces. The bilingual exhibition is organized thematically. To reinforce that Afro-Latinxs are part of US communities, I displayed us as active participants in every section and every theme, just like any other community member. I also included a self-identification interactive wall so visitors would have the opportunity to articulate their own ideas about who they are, as well as see the articulations of others. The interactive wall not only gives visitors a chance to announce themselves in this space on their own terms, but also shows important racial and ethnic visitor data in a museum that does not ask visitor race or ethnicity. From a qualitative data perspective, I was able to read the wide-ranging self-identification responses of people who had passed through this Latinx-centered exhibit and loosely gauge whether or not Latinx audiences were visiting the show. They were. The responses also gave all museum visitors a glimpse into the diversity of the ACM museum audience, challenging the unsubstantiated presumption of an "African American museum audience."

To be candid, I did not convince all of my colleagues that Latinx inclusion was important to the museum's depictions of our community. One docent resisted *Gateways*, telling me he did not speak Spanish. I reminded everyone the exhibition texts also featured English. Months after the exhibition opened, the deputy director emailed me to ask how she could explain *Gateways* to the museum's "traditional audience." Change can be hard. However, during the time the museum received a funded Latinx curatorial position, every exhibit in the museum was bilingual and Latinx focused, replete with Afro-Latinidad.[17] This reality prompted tear-filled tours in which visitors expressed feeling represented rather than stereotyped, laudatory social media posts by Latinxs (Afro and non), and school groups of brown


Think about your origins, race, and ethnicity. In your own words, how do YOU identify
Chinese Vietnamese American Thai Canadian
Latina Washington
SALVADORAN AMERICAN
British Israeli Jewish Polish Lithuanian American
CHINO LATINO
I'm Bolivian!
Black
Beautifully Black
Puerto Rican
IRISH ENGLISH ITALIAN DUTCH = AMERICAN
AFRICAN
PALESTINIAN
HUMAN WE ARE ALL HUMANS
BRITISH JEWISH ISRAELI AMERICAN
JAMaican
Aymara ↓ Bolivian ↓ [illegible]-tonian
Black
Con pasaporte global
European but really AMERICAN
Colombia
Global Citizen
African American Proud!
Peruvian
中国人 Chinese
日本人

The self-identity wall in the *Gateways* exhibit at the Anacostia Community Museum. (Photo courtesy of Miriam Doutriaux)

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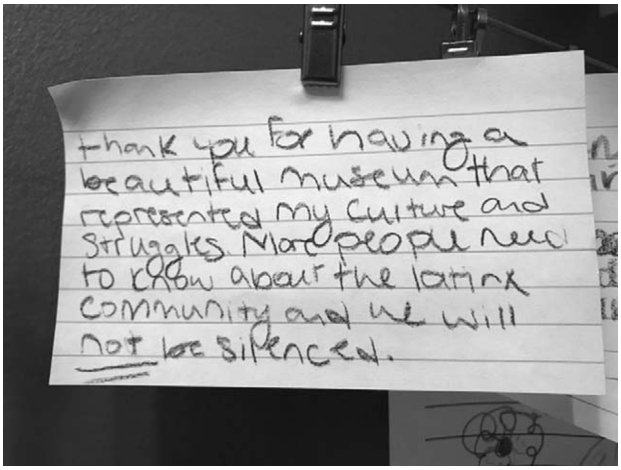
[17] The Latino Curatorial Initiative funded my four-year position at the Anacostia Community Museum as curator for Latino Studies.



thank you for having a beautiful museum that represented my culture and struggles. More people need to know about the latinx community and we will not be silenced.

Visitor response to Latinx-focused exhibits at the Anacostia Community Museum. (Photo courtesy of the author)

children of various hues and immigration statuses seeing themselves depicted as active contributors to their community's history by an Afro-Latina curator in the *Smithsonian*. Further, a few long-time docents newly articulated their own Afro-Latin American heritage. Albeit ephemeral, multiple bilingual representations of local Latinx diversity *and* Black diversity have adorned the walls of ACM. It was a reflection of the museum's urban community. All ACM exhibitions are temporary and since my departure, text panels of new exhibitions are only in English. Nevertheless, the Latinx collections acquired, the exhibition records, and the related archives will endure.

The National Museum of African American History and Culture

How do Black people become African Americans? Over generations, this video explores what it means to be African American through political identity, extended family, and cultural association.

Video introduction in the exhibition *A Changing America: 1968 and Beyond* at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture

How Black people become African American was not a foundational question of the 1960s Black museum movement. Rather than center on the elasticity of identity, the movement concentrated on the inclusion and accurate representation, education, and affirmation of US-based Black populations, predominately African Americans. However, almost sixty years later, multiple Black identities, Black inclusivity, and questions about who is African American are paramount in Black museum spaces.

The same waves of decolonization, African and Caribbean independence, and Black immigration in the '60s, '70s, and '80s that reshaped the lexicon of global Black identities also diversified the reality of Black ethnicities within the United

States. Political change in the 1960s led to the rapid increase in Caribbean immigration.[18] Starting with fewer than 200,000 Caribbean immigrants in 1960, by 2014, approximately four million Caribbean immigrants called the United States home.[19] Further, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 and the Refugee Act of 1980 enabled an increase in Black immigration and settlement. These immigrants, the subsequent first and second generations, and the communities they diversified expanded conventional identity labels and lived experiences of Black Americanness. As African-descendant people and organizations began proclaiming new vocabularies to self-identify, Black scholars, cultural workers, and, consequently, Black museums took notice.

A Seat at the Table

Late one evening in 2005, Afro-Ecuadorian scholar Juan García Salazar and his longtime collaborator and friend Chuck Kleymeyer met with founding director Dr. Lonnie Bunch in his DC office. They chatted for some time about the important cultural framework the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) would create and, if successful, what that could model for the integration of Black history in other museums and cultural centers across the world. After some time Juan said, "I want to give you a present," and pulled out a carved wooden seat. Deborah Azareno, an Afro-Ecuadorian descendant of maroons[20], rested on the concave center of that boat seat when traveling the rivers of Esmeraldas province in Ecuador. After carrying the seat from the canoe to her home, she sat on it indoors to tell stories to Juan, her grandson. Director Bunch remarked, "So I was sitting in Washington [DC] with someone from Ecuador who had just given me an artifact that had strong ties to Africa—a powerful reminder that we were telling not just a national story, but a global one as well."[21]

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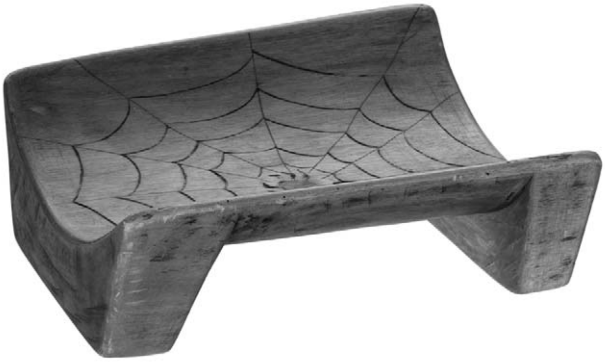
[18] The U.S. Census Bureau's definition of the Caribbean includes: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, the former country of Guadeloupe (including St. Barthélemy and Saint-Martin), Haiti, Jamaica, Martinique, Montserrat, the former country of the Netherlands Antilles (including Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, Sint Eustatius, and Sint Maarten), St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and Turks and Caicos Islands. It excludes Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. People born there are U.S. born.

[19] Jie Zong and Jeanne Batalova, "Caribbean Immigrants in the United States," *Migration Policy Institute*, September 14, 2016, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/caribbean-immigrants-united-states.

[20] Derived from the Spanish word cimmarón, the term maroon most commonly refers to Africans and African-descendent peoples in the Americas that self-emancipated from the institution of slavery. The terminology also applies for self-emancipated communities of African and indigenous peoples, such as Esmeraldas, Ecuador. Maroon societies ranged in size, ethnic composition, and duration. For more on maroonage in the Americas see: *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* edited by Richard Price (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

[21] Lonnie Bunch, "The Definitive Story of How the National Museum of African American History and Culture Came to Be," *Smithsonian Magazine*, September 2016, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/definitive-story-national-museum-african-american-history-culture-came-be-180960125/



Early twentieth-century wooden boat seat from Ecuador used by Deborah Azareno. (Image courtesy of the Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Gift of Juan Garcia Salazar)

This boat seat, received over a decade before NMAAHC opened to the public, was the first object donated to the museum's collection. As the curator for Latinx Studies, I recognize this boat seat as much more than a first in the museum's institutional history. The artisanship of the seat is extraordinary, as is the tangible and intangible cultural heritage it instructs. The wooden seat carries cultural continuities from Africa to the Americas through its existence in the Afro-Ecuadorian community of Esmeraldas, a community tied to both forced enslavement and self-emancipation. The wood is carved with African symbolism—a spider and web representing Anansi, a popular spirit in West African folklore. More than an object, it served as a medium for intergenerational storytelling. And it, like many African-descendants before it, found a home in the nation's capital.

The boat seat established the didactic tone for NMAAHC. Accepting it as the first object in the collection and exhibiting it in an inaugural exhibition is a clarion call to connect African American experiences of artisanship, survival, enslavement, freedom, oral traditions, and African heritage to the world and notably to the rest of the Americas. My assertion of Latinx identity has sometimes placed me outside of an imagined Black community. This boat seat, however, represents an embrace of Afro-Latinidad, and by extension other Black identities, into the physical and cultural space of the only national museum devoted exclusively to the documentation of African American life, history, and culture.

As part of the generations born during and after the influx of Black immigrants to the United States, educated in programs of Black and Diaspora Studies, and living in one of the most diverse Black urban spaces in the country, my curatorial colleagues have thoughtfully woven Black American ethnic diversity—including Afro-Latinx identities—into all of the inaugural exhibits.[22] For example, in *Slavery*

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[22] I joined the staff of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in January 2017, three months after the museum opened to the public. For more on my role at the museum, see: https://insider.si.edu/2017/08/latino-experience-focus-african-american-history-culture-museum.

and Freedom, visitors are greeted with a map of slave trade routes, detailing where and how many enslaved Africans arrived in the Americas and the consequent creation of an African Diaspora. The concentric circles of the *Cultural Expressions* gallery represent African Americanness in the outer ring and the African Diaspora in the inner ring. Through style, foodways, artistry, language, and gesture, the visually striking exhibition design welcomes the "we" among African Diasporic people. Flashes of Afro-Latinidad as both Afro-Latin America and US Afro-Latinx shine throughout the museum. Examples include the fallen 2nd Lt. Emily Perez in the military gallery *Double Victory*, recognition of Afro-Latin Americans in the Negro leagues in *Sports: Leveling the Playing Field*, the Poor People's Campaign movement represented in *A Changing America: 1968 and Beyond,* and Afro-Cuban musicians Celia Cruz and Chucho Valdez and Puerto Rican b-boy legend Richard Colón (aka Crazy Legs) in *Musical Crossroads*. Building on hip-hop, one of the ten US locations in *The Power of Place* highlights African American, Caribbean, and Latinx intersections at the birth of hip-hop in the Bronx.

The Black museum movement itself is part of NMAAHC's effort to tell "American history through an African American lens." In *A Changing America: 1968 and Beyond*, the story of the Black museum movement justly shares physical space with chronologically concurrent issues such as the growth of Black immigrant communities, the emergence of Afro-Latinx identities, and other Black political and social movements, that similarly sought greater public representation for people of African descent.

How do Black people become African American? When is Afro-Latinx history African American history? There is no single response. The answers to these questions can change over generations, historical moments, political contexts, and geographic locations, among other factors that influence self-identity and external identification. Nevertheless, Afro-Latinx history *is* African American history in the records of the Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum and on view all over the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture because these museums chose to recognize, celebrate, and include diverse Black experiences in the United States. By creating a Diasporic collection and including multiple Black experiences in the inaugural exhibits, the National Museum of African American History and Culture is expanding public understandings of what "Black American" actually means as a lived experience, and how the state of African American museums can and should shift with the populations they seek to represent.

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Ariana A. Curtis joined the National Museum of African American History and Culture in January 2017 as the first curator of Latinx Studies. In this role, she is responsible for interpreting topics and issues relating to U. S. Latinxs & Afro-Latinxs, African American & Latinx communities, African Americans in Latin America, and African

Diasporic communities in Latin America and the Caribbean. Previously, Curtis was the curator of Latino Studies at Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum. While there, in addition to conducting Latinx-centered public programming, she curated two bilingual exhibitions: *Bridging the Americas* and *Gateways/Portales*. She organized the 2014 *Revisiting Our Black Mosaic* symposium on race and immigration in Washington, D.C. and guest lectures at local colleges and universities. Curtis holds a doctorate in anthropology with a concentration in race, gender, and social justice from American University. She earned an MA in Public Anthropology also from American University and a BA from Duke University.