

Official Testimony To New York City Council Hearing
By Cid Wilson, Board Chairman of the Friends of the American Latino Museum and former
Commissioner of the National Museum of the American Latino Commission

NYC Council Resolution #405: Calling upon Congress to pass and the President to sign H.R. 1217 and S. 568 to establish the Smithsonian American Latino Museum and designate the Arts and Industries Building as its future location in Washington, D.C.

October 14, 2014

Good afternoon, honorable members of the New York City Council Cultural Affairs Committee. I thank you for this special invitation to testify on Resolution #405. My name is Cid Wilson, and I serve as the Board Chairman of the Friends of the American Latino Museum. I am also a former Commissioner Appointee of the President of the United States to the National Museum of the American Latino Study Commission.

I would like to thank New York City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito as well as Councilmembers Cohen, Chin, Cumbo, Dickens, Eugene, Koo, Palma, and Koslowitz for introducing this resolution.

I have been a part of the National Museum of the American Latino movement for the last eight years, of which two was as an appointed commissioner. In September 2009, President Barack Obama appointed me to join the 23-member study commission to prepare a feasibility report of the prospects of building a new Smithsonian American Latino Museum. As part of the bipartisan study commission, which included 13 Democrats and 10 Republicans, we toured the country, hosted forums and town hall meetings in 11 major cities, including New York City when we held an open forum at Hunter College on June 19, 2010.

After nearly two years of conducting the study, we presented our feasibility report directly to President Obama and to Congress on May 5, 2011. As part of the report, we indicated that the Smithsonian Arts & Industry Building would be the best site for a future Smithsonian American Latino Museum. We also conducted a fundraising strategy where we surveyed key funders to assess the capacity to raise the needed funds for the construction and operation of a new Smithsonian American Latino Museum including foundations, high net worth individuals, and corporations. Our fundraising study, available in our report demonstrates that the fundraising capacity exists to raise the private sector portion of the full budget needed to build a new Smithsonian American Latino Museum.

This project has overwhelming national support in the Latino community. We have the largest social media following of any major Latino organization in the country and we have more

followers than any other Smithsonian Institution despite the fact that our building is not yet realized.

Despite a public acknowledgement by President Obama that he would sign the bill if passed; despite the fact that for the last 20 years, there has been a clear omission of our Latino history and culture in a permanent capacity in the Smithsonian Institution as documented by the report Willful Neglect which documented the lack of Latino presence in the Smithsonian; despite the fact that the Smithsonian has successfully created a new National Museum of the American Indian and will soon complete construction of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in 2015, both on the National Mall; and despite the strong bipartisan support to build a new American Latino Museum on the National Mall at the Smithsonian Arts & Industry Building as demonstrated by the sponsors of the bill in the House and Senate, Congress has continued to stall on this bill.

By passing Resolution #405, the New York City Council will send a strong message to Congress; that this bill is a priority legislation that should be passed in this Congressional session. After all, this bill is calling on Congress to pass a bill that will illuminate an "American Story", the 500 years history of Latino influence in the United States.

Let me conclude by sharing a personal example of the importance of this museum. I was born in Washington Heights, NYC and my parents immigrated together to New York City from the Dominican Republic. While I grew up knowing about the recent migration of Dominicans to the U.S. over the last 50 years, it wasn't until 2012, through the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute at City College that I learned that the first Dominican to settle in New York City was Juan Rodriguez who migrated from Santo Domingo to New York in 1613. This is just one of thousands of examples of the many histories that would be told in a future Smithsonian American Latino Museum along with the rich histories of St. Augustine, FL; Santa Fe, NM, the early Mexican American settlers in the American West, the history of the early Puerto Ricans who came to New York City, Latinos who participated in American wars, including the Borinqueneers, Latino discoveries, Latino innovations, and historical accomplishments by American Latinos including our civil rights leaders and organizations.

By passing Resolution #405, the New York City Council is sending a message to Congress that our American history must be told in a permanent site so that all Americans of all backgrounds today and in future generations can benefit from learning the full American story . . . the history of the American Latino.

Thank you for your support and your time.

**New York City Council
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations
Hearing on Res 0405-2014 – Establishment of the Smithsonian American Latino
Museum**

Tuesday, October 14, 2014, 1:00pm – Council Chambers, City Hall
Testimony Presented by Jorge Daniel Veneciano, Executive Director, El Museo del Barrio

Good Afternoon Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, Chair Jimmy Van Bramer, and distinguished members of the committee.

I am Jorge Daniel Veneciano, Executive Director of EL Museo del Barrio in East Harlem.

As someone who directs the nation's first Latino American museum, El Museo del Barrio, established 45 years ago; and as someone who has directed an American art museum in the heartland of this nation, in Nebraska, I can speak with certain knowledge about museums and the service they provide this nation. Therefore I speak to the resolution before you regarding the Smithsonian Latino American Museum Act.

I am sometimes asked the question, Why the nation needs a Latino American Museum? Why American citizens would want an American Latino museum follows from an understanding of museums generally.

We know already that museums provide cultural education to children and adults, preserve our cultural treasures, and produce new scholarship and understanding of art and culture. These are social values in themselves.

Museums, however, don't simply matter *in* society, they matter *to* society.

They matter in society because they give citizens a public space, a touch point for cultural connection to other citizens. They connect diverse peoples to a social fabric. It is in this way that museums also matter *to* society. They help its citizenry cohere. They help societies reproduce themselves—that is, perpetuate a healthy society, a healthy body politic.

There is much talk of demographic shifts in justifying the need for a Latino American Museum. I am in agreement with this position. Citing demographic changes is one way to argue the need. Yet even if the demographics remain the same or even if they were reversed to levels two decades ago, the need would still persist. The historic presence of Latinos in the United States warrants an institution that preserves their contributions to our nation. The historical fact that the Western and Southwestern United States was once part of Mexico also makes clear the presence and history of Latinos in the United States.

The Smithsonian Institution, one of the great institutions of American democracy, has 19 museums to its credit, celebrating American art, culture, science, and industry, including museums dedicated to the American Indian and African American art and culture. A museum of Latino American art would therefore fall squarely within the mission and values of this great institution. Its Mission is to disseminate knowledge; its Vision is to preserve our heritage; and its Values include diversity, “Capitalizing on the richness inherent in differences”; its Priorities include “Understanding the American Experience.” A National Museum of the American Latino would help fulfill the cultural democratic promise this Institution holds for the nation. Furthermore, it is hard to imagine the fulfillment of its mission without such a museum.

“All in good time” is a phrase we use—we who manage budgets and allocate resources—when we see a worthy project that we will get to when resources permit. “Now is a good time” is a phrase we can use to designate this worthy project and request a study of the resources it will require to be realized. Now is a good time to pass Resolution 405 and call upon Congress to pass and the President to sign H.R. 1217 and S. 568 to establish the National Museum of the American Latino and designate the Smithsonian Arts and Industry Building its future home in Washington, D.C.

I thank Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, Chair Jimmy Van Bramer, committee members, and all of your colleagues at the City Council for bringing this resolution to a vote. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Testimony by Estuardo Rodriguez, Executive Director of the Friends of the American Latino Museum
New York City Council Hearing, Res No 405, October 14, 2014

Good afternoon esteemed members of the New York City Council. It is my honor to sit before the representatives of our nation's largest, most storied city, and I sincerely thank you all for the invitation.

I am especially grateful to Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito whose leadership and foresight on this issue was critical to creating this opportunity for our campaign.

My name is Estuardo Rodriguez, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Friends of the American Latino Museum. I am also an alumnus of St. John's University School of Law, Jamaica, Queens and the F Line. So, I am especially honored to be back in New York to be a part of this panel and provide testimony in support of a campaign I and my team have put our heart and soul into for more than eight years.

The Friends of the American Latino Museum is the *only* organization exclusively dedicated to the creation of a national Smithsonian American Latino Museum in our nation's capital. Over the last 8 years we have been working to push forth the campaign to build this museum with our through a national coalition, building communications and marketing techniques, advocacy work and fundraising plans.

We are the only current museum initiative that has presented a Commission Report on the feasibility of a museum to the President and Congress, we have a larger social media following (Facebook and Twitter) than any *existing* Smithsonian museum, and we have created a board of national leaders representing quintessential American companies like Facebook, Coca-Cola, JP Morgan Chase, and ExxonMobil as well as landmark civil rights and advocacy organizations like LULAC, AARP, and VotoLatino.

Working with our board of directors we have traveled across the U.S. to expand our network of support in major Hispanic markets as well as markets with new and growing Latino populations. To do this, we have activated local leaders in cities from Houston to Miami to Minneapolis and hosted town halls with premier institutions like Rice University and the University of Southern California. We have hosted panels and exhibits at major conferences such as the NCLR National Conference and South by Southwest in Austin, Texas.

Because we do not think we should have to wait any longer to highlight the many American Latino stories that built this nation, this year we launched the inaugural American Latino Influencer Awards. Held in Houston and Las Vegas with an upcoming event in Miami, this awards ceremony serves to commemorate and share the history and leadership of American Latinos in the arts, public service, and corporate sectors. Our honorees for these awards have included public servants Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and his Republican counterpart in Nevada, Senator Dean Heller, museum curators and more.

Through all of our events, we are not only conveying the campaign's urgency to give American Latinos a national platform where one does not currently exist, but we are also responding to the same urgency each community has expressed. Every city where we have shared our campaign has brought with it a sampling of the unique sacrifice and contributions of Latino families to our nation. Stories of service to the nation that date back to the First World War to the wars currently waged in the Middle East are just the beginning. Americans of every ethnicity, every corner of the country, and every economic background feel that this museum is long overdue.

In fact, the Smithsonian has known for at least 20 years that this museum is long overdue. This year we have the disappointing obligation to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Smithsonian's own report on Latino representation in the Smithsonian Institution. The report is entitled *Willful Neglect* because it found that Latinos are the most severely underrepresented group throughout the Smithsonian's programs and exhibits. So neglected were Latinos throughout the Smithsonian, that it almost seemed intentional.

Testimony by Estuardo Rodriguez, Executive Director of the Friends of the American Latino Museum
New York City Council Hearing, Res No 405, October 14, 2014

It is a disappointing obligation because after 20 years, much work remains to be done. The report specifically recommended the Smithsonian immediately begin the establishment of a Latino Museum, but 20 years later we are still fighting for it.

Which brings us to the next step in our campaign, the reason for today's proposed resolution, the need to pass the Smithsonian American Latino Museum Act.

This next piece of legislation does one very important thing: it give the museum a home and commissions a study to determine the costs associated with creating the museum. What this bill does is critical to our progress. The home it proposes for the museum is the Arts & Industries Building on the National Mall. The Arts and Industries Building is registered as a national historic site and has been vacant for some time after if it fell into disrepair.

Of greatest importance is the fact that the Arts & Industries Building is the **last** possible space for a museum on the National Mall, our nation's front yard. The National Mall is home to many of the Smithsonian's hallmark museums: American History, Natural History, American Indian, and soon African American History and Culture to name a few. The Smithsonian American Latino Museum belongs among them.

When busses of school children from all over the nation, tour groups from all over the world and college kids on their DC summer internships want to learn about our nation and its history, they go to the National Mall. The story of our nation's largest community of color, one that has been represented on this soil since even before the founding of Jamestown must have equal representation on the National Mall.

We will accept nothing less.

That is why this resolution is so important. That is why the support of New York City, a city without rivals in its diversity, grandeur, and prominence in American history, will get us closer to the passage of the Smithsonian American Latino Museum Act.

Thank you.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Dr. Mariju D GALVAZ (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 619 W 145th ST

I represent: Centro Civico Cultural Dominicano

Address: 619 W 145th ST - NY NY 10031

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in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: DR MARTA MORENO VEGA (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: CCC AT 71 - 1825 PARK AVE

I represent: Cuban Cultural Center

Address: above

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in favor in opposition

Date: 10/14/14

Name: Cod Wilson (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 1444 I St. NW # 850, Wash DC

I represent: Friends of American Latino Museum

Address: Washington, DC

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ESTUARDO V. RODRIGUEZ

Address: 1640 RHODE ISLAND AVE NW Ste 600

I represent: FRIENDS OF THE AMERICAN LATINO MUSEUM

Address: SAME

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Name: MILAGROS BAEZ O'TOUL

Address: 3215 Ontonagon Ave. 7C BX 12463

I represent: 100 Hispanic Women + Peoples Network

Address: NY, NY BX, NY

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Name: José E. Serrano, Congressman

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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Date: 10/14/14

Name: Deborah Schwartz (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 128 Pierrepont St, Brooklyn, NY

I represent: Brooklyn Historical Society

Address: _____

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in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: JUAN CARTAGENA (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 99 Hudson St NYC 10013

I represent: LATIN JUSTICE PRUDER

Address: _____

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Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 10/14/14

Name: Jorge Daniel Veneciano (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 1230 5th Ave

I represent: El Museo Del Barrio

Address: 11

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