

The most important museum that doesn't exist . . . YET!

Coalition for the National Museum of the
AMERICAN PEOPLE

February 1, 2018

**Smithsonian Urged to Study Establishing
National Museum of the American People**

Dear: David M. Rubenstein, Chair, Smithsonian Board of Regents
Steve Case, Vice Chair, Smithsonian Board of Regents
Risa J. Lavizzo-Mourey, Member, Smithsonian Regents Executive Committee
David J. Skorton, Secretary of the Smithsonian

On behalf of the Coalition for the National Museum of the American People, I urge the Smithsonian Institution to study the feasibility of establishing the **National Museum of the American People** (NMAP) to convey the history of the making of the American people.

The Coalition for the NMAP is composed of 239 American ethnic, nationality and minority organizations incorporating more than 72 ethnic groups that support creation of this Museum to tell their stories about becoming Americans.

Our Constitution begins: "*We the people*." But what does it mean to be an American when *every* American, except Native Americans, has someone in their ancestry who came here from somewhere else in the last 500 years, most in the last 150 years? The story about the making of the American people, of different peoples coming from every corner of Earth, crossing oceans and continents and starting new lives, is one of the great epic sagas in human history. We need a museum where we can experience, learn and share this unique human story. The American story.

Now more than ever we need a Smithsonian museum, near the heart of our nation's capital, to tell the story of *all* of us starting with the first humans in the Western Hemisphere and progressing through waves of migration and immigration to today. The Museum's history, starting some 20,000 years ago, would be told in the manner of our nation's greatest story-telling museums: The National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Walking through the NMAP exhibition will be like walking through a dynamic documentary of the history depicted. The Smithsonian's NMAP study could be modeled on the report that led to the creation of the NMAAHC and would be presented to Congress and the President.

The National Museum of the American People will celebrate those who came from every nation, race and religion and moved across our land. The American people are a special mosaic where

90 percent of us still recognize the distinct ethnicities of our heritage, whether from Europe, Africa, Asia, Pacific Islands or the Americas. Being an American is not based on being part of any particular racial, ethnic or religious group. The Museum will show how all of these people shaped the United States economically, militarily, scientifically, agriculturally and culturally, creating our extraordinary nation.

The Museum will demonstrate and underscore how Americans are the embodiment of the ideals expressed in our central founding documents – the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States – and how those documents shaped the American character and our nation and how we are still working to perfect those ideals.

The NMAP would highlight how our founders sought to place power in the hands of the people to form a representative government, would reveal how a diverse people united to form a democracy based on precepts of pluralism, liberty and equality, and how our nation's founding principles and values continue to sustain us today.

The National Museum of the American People will be the only museum in our nation's capital to tell the story of every ethnic and minority group, celebrating their immigration and migration stories, their patriotism, their contributions and achievements. In doing so it will help foster a sense of belonging, contribute to our national identity and help unify our country as it embodies our original national motto: *E Pluribus Unum*.

The Museum's story will be scholarly-driven as it focuses on the mosaic of people that contribute to our national identity. Eminent scholars will provide the Museum's intellectual bedrock. The Museum will take full advantage of emerging technologies and display poignant, sometimes ancient, artifacts of cultural, religious and historical importance to provide visitors with an engaging and eloquent narrative experience. I would expect the Museum to draw upon and add to the Smithsonian's unparalleled collection.

The National Museum of the American People will become an eternal legacy for our nation, for the Smithsonian Institution and for all of those engaged in its founding. All Americans will be able to come and learn about their own group's stories and have the opportunity to learn about the stories of all the others. It will stimulate learning nationwide. Foreign leaders and visitors will come away from it with a better understanding of our diverse pluralistic nation.

Part of the Museum's mission would be to encourage and assist communities throughout the nation to develop cultural institutions that tell the stories of all the people who founded and built their cities, counties, states and regions.

The NMAP study undertaken by the Smithsonian should be paid for by special gifts to the Smithsonian to cover its costs as well as subsequent actions by the Smithsonian required to obtain passage of legislation creating the Museum. The Coalition for the NMAP is committed to working with the Smithsonian in seeking out and obtaining such gifts. Further, I believe that the NMAP can actually stimulate Smithsonian-wide fundraising.

The Smithsonian's NMAP feasibility study would explore and report on:

- The story the Museum will tell along with an outline of that story
- Sites in Washington
- The mission of the Museum

- Audiences
- Costs
- The fund-raising plan
- How the Museum will support state, local and ethnic museums
- The Museum's governance, as part of the Smithsonian Institution
- Components of the Museum
- The plan to create the Museum
- Draft legislation to create an entity to build the Museum and raise all of the funds required to plan, build and operate the Museum

We also ask you to request that the Banneker Overlook site in Washington be transferred from the National Park Service to the Smithsonian Institution as a future museum site.

We understand the mountain of current commitments facing the Smithsonian, including NMAAHC and the National Air and Space Museum as well as other significant facilities maintenance projects. And we're aware of the pressure to build Smithsonian museums dedicated to women's history and to the American Latino. NMAP's story includes women of every background and incorporates the centuries of Hispanic and Latino history and contributions. No museum can claim to have the impact that the NMAP will have on the future of our nation.

That impact will begin when the Smithsonian approves the NMAP feasibility study. If that action takes place in 2018, the Museum could open as soon as 2026.

The National Museum of the American People should become the next great jewel in the Smithsonian's family of museums. It will be a memorial for all of our predecessors and a guidepost for our descendants in this century and those to follow. We believe that it will be one of the greatest and most compelling storytelling museums in the world as it breathes new life into the first words of our Constitution: "*We the People.*"

Best regards,



Sam Eskenazi

Director, Coalition for the National Museum of the American People

202-744-1868

www.buildnmap.com

239 organizations in these 72 ethnic groups support National Museum of the American People

African American•Albanian American• American Indian•Arab American•Armenian American•Asian Pacific American•Azerbaijani American•Baltic American•Basque American•Belarusan American•Bolivian American•Bosnian American•Bulgarian American•Caribbean American•Carpatho Rusyn American•Chinese American•Creole American•Cuban American•Czech American•Danish American•Dominican American•Dutch American•Early European American•English American•Filipino American•Finnish American•French American•Georgian American•German American•Greek American•Hispanic American•Hmong American•Hungarian American•Indian American•Iranian American•Irish American•Italian American•Japanese American•Jewish American•Korean American•Laotian American•Latino American•Latvian American• Liberian American•Lithuanian American•Macedonian American•Mexican American•Moroccan American•Native Hawaiian• Norwegian American•Polish American•Puerto Rican•Portuguese American•Russian American•Salvadoran American•Scandinavian American•Scotch Irish American•Scottish American•Sikh American•Slovak American•South Asian American•Swedish American•Swiss American•Taiwanese American•Thai American•Tunisian American•Turkish American•Ugandan American•Ukrainian American•Vietnamese American•Welsh American