

# “Museo Latino” in Washington DC: a missed opportunity

*Discovery of the Mississippi*, by William H. Power, 1847.  
Painting displayed in the Capitol Rotunda.

## REPORT XXIII



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## 1. Introduction

Over the past two decades a major movement has emerged within US civil society advocating for the creation of a federal-level museum that would celebrate the more than 500 years of Hispanic history and the cultural and economic legacy of a community of more than 60 million people that today represents nearly one-fifth of the US population.

In 2020, a historic consensus was reached between the Republican and Democratic parties to build a National Museum, under the auspices of the *Smithsonian Institution*, to honor the contributions of the Hispanic world to the history of the United States, even before the United States became an independent republic.

However, a concerted effort by leftist elites—amidst a context of “decolonizing” upheaval—has hijacked the museum’s structures and instrumentalized the history of Hispanic heritage (“Hispanidad” in Spanish) to promote an agenda rooted in the precepts of cultural Marxism, thus denying

Spain’s evident contributions to the construction of the United States as a nation.

The anti-Hispanic path that the Museum has adopted calls into question not only Spain’s contributions to the US nation, but also the American—and Western—values, symbols and traditions that Hispanics have helped to forge. In this respect, prominent voices within the Hispanic community in the United States have denounced this drift and today demand that the federal government stop funding this project.

In this report we provide an analysis of the context in which the proposal for a “Latino Museum” was approved in Washington, we explain the woke drift that Spain’s detractors have instigated to divert the project from its original purpose, and we provide an exhaustive account of the undoubted contributions that Hispanics have made to the cultural, historical and economic heritage of the United States of America.

Smithsonian Institution. 1967



## 2. The Museum in Its Context

In December 2020, the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate adopted Bill H.R.2420, establishing the *National Museum of the American Latino* (Museo Latino) within the Smithsonian Institution, the “world’s largest museum, education and research complex”.

This congressional initiative, originally introduced in April 2019 by New York State Democratic Congressman José E. Serrano, describes in its explanatory memorandum that there was no forum in the United States “devoted to documenting and explaining Latino life, art, history and culture”.

The creation of the Latino Museum on the *National Mall* in the US capital was intended to fill this void and advance the Smithsonian’s mission to “increase awareness and knowledge” regarding the historical and cultural contributions of Hispanics, who today represent nearly 20% of the total US population.

The 2020 Act included specific Latino contributions for the Museum to highlight, including:

1. The “early history” of what today comprises the USA “and its territories”.
2. The military services of the US States “from the earliest days of the American Revolution”.

3. The economy, the sciences and the arts.
4. Values relating to “the liberty, welfare and economic prosperity of all the people of the United States”.

These contributions, according to the legislative text, were intended primarily to “illuminate the story of the United States for the benefit of all by featuring Latino contributions”. H.R.2420 would also establish scholarships and educational programs in line with the Museum’s mission.

The Museum would “serve as a gateway for visitors to view other Latino exhibitions, collections, and programming at other Smithsonian Institution facilities and museums throughout the United States”.

The Act established a framework for the procurement of materials and objects for the Museum’s collections, as well as for different governance bodies, including the establishment of a Board of Trustees, outlining its administrative and technical responsibilities.

The initiative enjoyed broad support across the US parliamentary spectrum. More than 40 Senators (including then Vice President-elect Kamala Harris) from both the Democratic and Republican parties supported the adoption of H.R.2420.

After President Donald J. Trump signed the bill into law, Senator John Cornyn, the Republican representative for Texas, noted that “Texans have always advocated for greater representation of the stories of Latino Americans in the nation’s capital (...) Thanks to this bill, new generations visiting Washington will be able to learn about the incredible Latinos who helped build this country”.

For his part, Senator Robert Menéndez, a Cuban-American and Democrat from New Jersey, added that the passage of the bill “is the culmination of decades of hard work (...) With this vote, the United States Congress is finally valuing the stories, struggles and impact of Latinos and Latinas in our nation”.

## THE ROAD TRAVELLED SO FAR

Within a political environment marked by constant polarization, the Museum represented a point of consensus between the main political forces. Both parties validated the significance of the Latino cultural and historical legacy, a legacy that had been ignored by US cultural institutions, as acknowledged by the Smithsonian itself in a 1994 report by the Smithsonian Institution’s Task Force on Latino Issues, led by career diplomats Raúl Yzaguirre, former US Ambassador to the Dominican Republic, and Mari Carmen Aponte, current US Ambassador to Panama.

That report noted that “the Smithsonian Institution displays a pattern of willful neglect towards the estimated 25 million Latinos in the United States.” Today that number exceeds 65 million.

“Because of both indigenous roots and Spanish heritage, Latinos pre-date the British in the Americas (...) Many Smithsonian officials project the impression that Latino history and culture are somehow not a legitimate part of the American experience,” the report said.

With these findings in mind, and following the activism of the Friends of the National American Latino Museum, in 2008, during the George W. Bush Administration, the United States Congress authorized the creation of a 23-member Commission “to study the potential creation of a National Museum of the American Latino.”

This Commission was mandated to develop a fundraising plan for the creation and maintenance of the eventual institution, the elaboration of a community outreach strategy for the development and design of the museum, as well as the definition of its governance and organizational structure.

In 2011 the Commission concluded in another report that a National Museum focused on the history of Latinos in the

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United States was not only viable but “essential” to the interests of the country. The Commission’s report noted that there was a “clear and pressing” need for a museum, which should be part of the Smithsonian Institution and located on the National Mall (where a number of other Smithsonian galleries and museums, including the Museum of African American History and Culture, are now located.)

In the same year, senators from both parties introduced a congressional initiative to designate the Smithsonian Arts and Industries Building as the future home of the Latino Museum, but this bill failed.

However, another bill was needed to allocate funds for the design and construction of the Museum.

The legislation adopted in 2020 provided resources as part of an omnibus spending package, under which the Federal Government would be responsible for funding half of the museum’s construction—according to various estimates, the total construction cost would be \$800 million.

### THE MUSEUM TODAY

Following the adoption of the 2020 Act, the Friends of the National American Latino Museum focused their efforts on “building the Museum on the *National Mall* and raising \$350 million to open its doors”. This

foundation is chaired by Estuardo Rodríguez and made up of Hispanic community leaders from different professional sectors and political positions.

It is made up of a Board of 15 members, which includes Lili Gil Valetta, Yvette Peña, Jorge Plasencia, John Leguizamo, Antonio Argibay, Claudia Romo Edelman and Mario Rodríguez. It also features an Advisory Board of 20 members, including Héctor Barreto, Luis Fortuño, Dan Garza, Irma Aguirre, Alejandra Castillo and Nelson Albareda.

As for the Museum itself, its Governing Board is headed by Jorge Zamanillo (former Head of the Miami History Museum) and is made up of 19 members as of the end of 2021, including chef José Andrés, actresses Sofía Vergara and Eva Longoria, Bank of America President Raúl Anaya, and Lonnie G. Bunch III, *ex-officio* Secretary of the Smithsonian.



Sofía Vergara and Eva Longoria.



Although the Museum is not yet built, a first exhibition on “Latino contributions to the United States” called *¡Presente! A Latino History of the United States*, and located in the Molina Family Gallery within the National Museum of American History, has already been held.

## “DECOLONIZING” HISTORY

However, the *¡Presente!* exhibition has revealed a serious problem that undermines not only the cultural and historical contributions of Hispanics in the United States, but also the very essence of the American values of freedom, free enterprise and democracy that the Hispanic community supports.

The exhibition focuses on the “historical legacies of slavery, colonization and war” that, according to its authors, “continue to shape American and Latino history today.”

*¡Presente!* has shown that the Museum is intended to be used not as a legitimate projection of Hispanic culture and legacies, but as a political tool in the service of progressive sectors and causes that seek to “decolonize” history.

These pretensions are part of a trend that gained momentum between 2010 and 2020 with the campaigns and recommendations of activist groups, both inside and outside the United States.

According to the Museum Association, the decolonization of museums “is not just the relocation of a statue or an object, it is a long-term process that seeks to recognize the role of imperialism.” The decolonization of museums “requires a re-evaluation of institutions and their history and an effort to address colonial structures and approaches in all areas of museum work.”

As a precedent, in 2018 the Brooklyn Museum was subject to demonstrations calling for a “Decolonization Commission” that would “diversify the museum’s curatorial and administrative team” and address efforts to “de-gentrify” the neighborhood where it is located.

Naturally, these “decolonization” initiatives aim to advance political agendas that are alien to the outreach and research purposes of museums.

This “decolonizing” approach hijacks the contents of museums in order to put forward a revisionist version of history that undermines any historical, cultural and artistic exaltation in favor of racial and ethnic debates that are largely outdated in Western countries.

The anti-cultural impact of the “decolonization” movement was exacerbated in 2020, in the midst of the global COVID-19 crisis, following

the death of George Floyd at the hands of a police officer in Minnesota. Following the incident, activist groups, including Black Lives Matter, launched an iconoclastic campaign against symbols, objects and statues of what they considered to be “colonizers.”

In June 2020, they tore down the statue of Friar Junipero Serra—an advocate for the indigenous peoples of California—and assaulted the statue of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra in the city of San Francisco.

A number of cities succumbed to the demands of these groups of vandals and announced the removal of at least 35 statues of Christopher Columbus across the United States.

These attacks had international repercussions. In the UK, some 70 memorials to historical figures were removed or renamed. In 2021, Claudia Sheinbaum, the head of the Mexico City government—and presidential candidate for the June 2024 federal elections for the leftist MORENA party—announced the replacement of the Columbus statue on the main boulevard of the Mexican capital “with a pre-colonial indigenous figure, specifically a woman.”

“Decolonization” is, in short, little more than the sum of endeavors to revise or eliminate parts of history in order to satisfy groups that are

“aggravated” by “colonial” institutions and structures, which, they insist, endure and threaten the lives and well-being of ethnic, racial or religious minorities.

## AN ATTACK ON HISPANIC VALUES

The motivations and curatorial approach of *¡Presente!* are deliberately rooted within the framework of “decolonization”. Professors Johanna Fernández and Felipe Hinojosa, academics whose view are sympathetic to left-wing ideas, have pointed out that the controversy surrounding the Museum revolves around the “control of Latino history.”

Fernández has advocated for the release of members of the Black Panther terrorist group, convicted of murdering members of the police. For his part, Hinojosa defends “Latin American Liberation Theology”, a doctrine that understands the Church as an instrument of mobilization against traditional power structures in society.

Specifically, *¡Presente!* aims, in the words of its curator Ranald Woodman, “to show that colonization was not really a benign process, but was in principle about the exploitation of natural and human resources.”

In addition to focusing on the alleged “colonization and enslavement” of the Hispanic community in the United



The statue of Fray Junípero Serra, located in San Francisco, torn down by BLM activists. Photo by Joe Rivano Barras.

States, the exhibition insists on describing US Hispanics as a whole with the term “Latinx”, a label widely rejected by this group.

The *¡Presente!* exhibition denies that Cuban immigrants escaped Cuba because of Castro’s Communism; it alleges that the Texas Revolution defended slave systems; and it claims that the United States stole one third of Mexico in 1848.

A publication by *The Heritage Foundation* explains that the funds allocated in the 2020 Act are not being used to celebrate Hispanic culture and history in the United States, but to project “grievances and resentments” against the country. The think tank warns that the aim of this exhibition is to “divide the United States”.

As a result, some conservative Hispanic groups have denounced that “the Museum is being used to advance an

ideologically biased narrative about the Hispanic experience in the United States.” The *¡Presente!* exhibit is a “disgrace that offers a blatantly Marxist representation of history, religion and economics”.

For example, *¡Presente!* does not show any of the Hispanic contributions to the American Revolution—one of the Museum’s goals—but it does accuse the United States of “supporting oppression in the region” through its support of anti-Communist leaders during the Cold War.

The President of the Latino Partnership for Conservative Principles, Alfonso Aguilar, pointed out that “this Museum does not celebrate the culture or contributions of Hispanic Americans.” In this respect, Aguilar has made several petitions to Republican congressmen and senators to eliminate funding for the construction of the museum.

In an opinion piece published in *The Hill*, Aguilar, along with other Hispanic leaders such as Mike Gonzalez—Senior Fellow at The Heritage Foundation—and Joshua Treviño—Chief of Intelligence and Research at the Texas Public Policy Foundation—, denounced the “instrumentalization of Hispanics to promote an ideology that undermines the great diversity of ideas and political views that exist in the Hispanic community.” The signatories also claimed that those responsible for the exhibition “ignore and denigrate the Spanish heritage and Christian roots” that broadly define Hispanic Americans.

In other words, the exhibition “erases the Hispanic majority” through a narrative of social confrontation based on the principles of cultural Marxism. *¡Presente!* reduces the identity and history of Hispanics in the United States - a group that is gradually shifting to the right on the ideological spectrum - to a mere “struggle for justice” centered on issues traditionally associated with progressive causes such as justice system reforms and LGBTQ+ rights.

The reaction was not limited to the United States. In Spain, the newspaper *ABC* gathered the testimonies of the main figures in charge of the Museum to find out why the decision was made to omit the Spanish history of North America. In one of its publications, the newspaper denounced distortions regarding the true relationship between

the Spanish Crown and the indigenous population, the suppression of Spain’s role in the birth of the United States as a nation, the identification of Puerto Ricans as “immigrants” and the projection of Catholicism as an imposition on the part of Spain.

*ABC* noted that, according to woke ideology, “the Hispanic is just another intruder, brought to the country by an imperialism that is supposedly as racist as the rest.”

## AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

What began as a bipartisan project based on a broad consensus has been hijacked and quietly perverted for the promotion of a monolithic idea of the Hispanic American. This revised version of history drives the agenda of “decolonizing” movements and so-called “Critical Race Theory”, which seeks to describe the United States—and the nations of Western civilization—as structurally oppressive and irredeemable regimes.

This idea denies the reality of the vast majority of Hispanics, a group characterized in the United States by their work ethic, their entrepreneurial vocation—today there are almost five million Hispanic-owned businesses—and their devotion to the values of family and freedom.

Following a backlash from several Hispanic groups, as well as several

members of Congress, Jorge Zamanillo has put “on hold” a new exhibition at the Molina Family Gallery that Professors Fernández and Hinojosa were working on about the “role of Latinos in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s”, which was to be launched in 2025. “We know that the stories [of *¡Presente!*] are important and need to be told, but we also know that we want to reach broader audiences,” Zamanillo explained to justify his decision.

This reportedly led to tensions between Zamanillo and Professors Fernández and Hinojosa. According to US media reports, the professors no longer work for the Museum.

However, there is no roadmap or consensus regarding the themes, contents and tone of the Museum from this point onwards. In fact, the damage done by *¡Presente!* has made the project less popular within the Hispanic community itself. On September 29, 2023, some 23 community leaders and activists sent a letter to the Appropriations Committee in Congress calling for the elimination

of funding for the construction of the Museum.

The signatories “strongly believe that it is too risky to proceed with this project at a time when there is a concerted effort by leftist cultural elites in academia and other educational institutions— including museums—to push an extreme and biased narrative of American history.”

The letter continues: “Hispanics do not want a museum on the National Mall that presents a distorted version of who they are... Pausing funding for the Museum of the American Latino will not be perceived as a slight to Hispanics, but as a defense of their identity.”

The future of the Museum is uncertain. However, it is crystal clear that the tone and content set by *¡Presente!* has generated a resounding repudiation and does not represent, according to Hispanics in the United States themselves, their history, their culture and their legacy, starting with the very concept implied in the Museum’s name: “Latino.”



!Presente! exhibition in the Molina Family Gallery at the National Museum of American History.

### 3. The Hispanic Footprint in the United States

On the labyrinthine chessboard of identities that makes up the United States, it is paradoxical that Latino actually means the opposite of what it means in Europe. Most people who identify themselves as Latino in the United States do not do so thinking of the Italian Lazio region that gives meaning to the word, or of the Italian, Portuguese, French and, above all, Spanish influence that shaped the current American continent. The term “Latino” refers, at a popular level, to the indigenous past of the American populations, to the cultural resistance to European influence.

The *Museo Latino*, whose politicized agenda, permeable to the clichés of the anti-Spanish black legend, has turned each of its advances into an obstacle-strewn path, is infected by the same anti-historical and anti-Spanish spirit of the Spanish past in America. This markedly anti-Spanish vision has opened up a debate, one that is still unresolved, but one that has called for other points of view on the Spanish presence on the American Continent. This representation would highlight everything that Spain has contributed to the United States.

#### ADDING, NOT SUBTRACTING

The first misconception is that the United States needs to incorporate

Hispanic heritage into its national essence in order to accommodate its new demographic reality, as represented by 60 million Hispanics. We need only look into its recent past to rediscover that the foundations of America are already firmly Spanish, and this was the case before they were French or British. The country’s geography is full of Spanish names, whilst many State emblems, such as the flags of Alabama, Arizona, Montana, New Mexico, Florida and Arkansas, are full of references to the empire that once explored most of the territory that today makes up the United States. Neither should we overlook the many crucial figures in the history of the country who have Spanish origins, such as the man who laid the first stone of the White House or the cartographer Bernardo de Miera y Pacheco, who illuminated many regions uncharted in the maps of his time.

At the moment of this empire’s greatest extent, some three quarters of North America came under the control of the Spanish Monarchy, and all of its peripheral areas were penetrated by Spanish explorers in one form or another. The first entry point into the unexplored regions of North America was Florida Island, a territory that now extends over the two Carolinas, part of Alabama and all of Georgia. Ponce de León discovered



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it in 1513 and it was named “Tierra Florida”, due to the fact that he discovered the region on one of the days of Pascua Florida (there is no shortage of those who claim that the name comes from the exuberance of the natural landscape). However, he died on his second expedition there because of the wounds inflicted by the Indians. In the American imagination, Ponce de León’s adventure was linked to the search for the fountain of eternal youth, which has inspired an infinite number of novels and films that attest to this national fable.

In the 1530’s Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, the survivor of another failed expedition through Florida, became the first European to cross the American Continent from east to west, traveling 6,200 miles on foot, departing from Tampa Bay in Florida and completing his journey at San Miguel de Culiacán in Mexico. These routes were full of adversities, and he lived alongside the Seminoles, the Sioux and the Pueblos, learned half a dozen languages and collected details about the customs, animal-life and plant-life that he encountered along the way.

Vázquez de Ayllón, in turn, sailed along the east coast to South Carolina, where he died in October 1526 after contracting malaria. On his American journey he founded San Miguel de Gualdape (sometimes referred to as Guadalupe), which is considered

to be the first formal European settlement in what is now the United States. Likewise, Hernando de Soto, a veteran of the conquest of Peru, followed in the footsteps of former adventurers and explored a large part of the American territory over a period of three years. He died in 1542 on the banks of the Mississippi, a river he discovered, without having been able to establish a lasting settlement during his explorations. Despite this failure, recurrent references to this Extremaduran *conquistador* have been made throughout US history, including a painting in the Rotunda of the Capitol in Washington, an iconic car model that received his name and the presence of his face on 10 dollar bills (1860) and 500 dollar bills (1918).

In 1559 Tristán de Luna y Arellano led a fleet of eleven ships with 1,500 troops from Veracruz to Pensacola, in the northwest of Florida. There he founded the town of Santa Maria, which survived the hurricanes until 1561, this being the first long-lasting European settlement in the country. But it was not until the arrival of Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, sent by Philip II to drive the French away from the region, that seven forts were raised on the coasts of Florida that were destined to survive the local storms: San Agustín; San Mateo; Santa Elena and San Carlos, in Charlotte Harbor Bay; Tocobaga, to the north of Tampa Bay; Tequesta, in present-day Miami, and Ays, on the East Coast. The first



Expedition of Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca. Source: Wikipedia.

of these, San Agustín de la Florida (founded in August 1565), continues to this day as the oldest city in the present-day United States and one of the historic centers of the Spanish past on the American Continent. Furthermore, on September 8, 1565 Menéndez de Avilés held a great banquet and a Thanksgiving Mass with the natives of the region, an event that preceded the celebration of Thanksgiving by the English pilgrims and the native Wampanoag Indians at Plymouth Rock (current Massachusetts) by some fifty-six years. Florida was part of Spain for more than 300 years, except for a brief period in the 18th century when it was in British hands.

The other point of access to North America was the Viceroyalty of New Spain, which came to include the current States of California, Nevada, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, Oregon, Washington, Florida and parts of Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Kansas, Oklahoma and Louisiana. The conquest of Mexico

by Hernán Cortes preceded an endless list of forays to the north, among them the one that enabled Francisco Vázquez de Coronado to discover a rugged “barranca” in 1540 that complicated his progress, that is, the Canyon of Colorado. Around the same time, the sailor Hernando de Alarcón returned by boat along a stretch of the Colorado River, which he called “La Buena Guía” (“The Good Guide”). However, many decades passed until outposts were established in a territory called the “Great Chichimeca” by the Aztecs and other sedentary peoples, who saw themselves as civilized compared to those who lived there. That self-imposed frontier collapsed in the 17th century.

Juan de Onate, a Spaniard born in Mexico, took on the task of establishing permanent settlements for the first time and securing alliances with local people in Arizona and New Mexico. In addition, the city of Santa Fe, the nerve center of these territories, was founded by the conquistador Pedro de Peralta in 1610 and



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features several architectural landmarks in the history of the country, as is the case of the Palace of the Governors, the oldest public building in the United States. Nevertheless, the entire southwest of the country is influenced by this architectural design, which is known as the Pueblo Revival Style, which combines elements imported by the Spanish with others taken from the culture of the Indian people. The use of adobe, white lime for the façades, pine for the beams, the roofs, the red tiles (typical of California) make many towns and buildings from America's Spanish past a carbon copy of those that can be found in many rural regions of the Iberian Peninsula. The harmonious combination of Moorish, Iberian and Native American elements makes up one of the most original and, one would think, impossible mixes that can be found throughout the world.

In the face of rumors of a French presence in the north, Alonso de León led a series of explorations further north, which ended in 1690 with the foundation by the Franciscan monk, Damian Massanet, of the mission of San Francisco de los Tejas, a word borrowed from the natives that meant "friends." The mission soon perished, but the Texas name has remained over time to designate the Lone Star State. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, another Franciscan, Antonio de Olivares, founded the mission of San Antonio de Valero,

the beginning of the current city of San Antonio, which treasures more than three centuries of history. Since its founding, the Texan city has become a reference point for the cattle trade and a crossroads for different cultural influences throughout the country. Texas is one of the three centers of the U.S. Hispanic community, together with Florida and California.



Statue of Thomas Jefferson being removed from New York City Hall. Photo by Gregory P. Mango.

The west coast deserves a chapter of its own in the epic of European exploration. Already in the time of Hernán Cortes, the Spanish sent a ship called Concepción from Mexico to explore the South Seas (the Pacific Ocean), where they found a very long island in

front of the current Mexican states of Sonora and Sinaloa that was, in fact, the Peninsula of Baja California. The name “California” was, like so many things in the so-called Conquest of America, extracted directly from the realm of literature, specifically from a novel about chivalry called “Las Sergas de Esplandián.” Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo was the first to sail the waters off the coast of the current US State of California in 1542, discovering the Bay of San Diego and crossing 38° North.

After the coastal explorations took place, José de Gálvez, an Inspector General of New Spain, organized what was known as the ‘Santa Expedición’ to definitively occupy Alta California (“Upper California”).

This expedition brought to California a key figure in the history of this State, namely Majorcan Franciscan monk, Junipero Serra, who founded nine of Spain’s 21 missions in this region and established settlements in such emblematic places today as San Diego, San Antonio, San Buenaventura, San Carlos, San Francisco de Asis, San Gabriel, San Juan Capistrano, San Luis Obispo and Santa Clara. These missions, the kernel of the present-day cities, allowed the native population of California to remain at stable levels during the Spanish and then Mexican presence. In short, it safeguarded their cultures from the juggernaut of modernity. That is why

the Franciscan is represented in the National Statue Hall on Capitol Hill in Washington.

The other jewel of California, the city of Los Angeles, was also founded by a Spaniard, but in this case he was not religious, but a man of military tradition. On September 4, 1781, Felipe de Neve laid the foundations for this city, originally populated with 14 families and today occupied by four million people. The city was named after “El Pueblo de la Reina de Los Ángeles.” Streets, squares, buildings, shops and statues bear the name or exhibit the effigy of Neve in recognition of his contribution to the United States.

And now we pass from the most populated area to the least. Another important Spanish contribution to the history of the United States consisted of the exploration and possession of Alaska, bearing in mind the uncontrollable nature and wildness of the region. In the last few decades of the eighteenth century, Spanish sailors from California thoroughly explored and took possession of those distant coasts in fear that Russia would jump over to the American Continent. The expeditions of Bruno de Heceta and Alejandro Malaspina left some toponyms in the region, such as the Malaspina Glacier and the cities of Valdez and Cordova. In 1819, Spain withdrew from the North Pacific and transferred its claims in the region to the

United States through the Adams-Onís Treaty.

## SPANISH SYMBOLS OF SPANISH ORIGIN

*El Camino español de Tierra adentro*, also known as *Camino de la Plata* (Silver Road), was, for four centuries, the main cultural, economic and social thoroughfare that radiated Hispanic influences throughout all these distant American territories. This was a veritable logistical feat of its time, stretching for 1,500 miles from Central Mexico to New Mexico, where domestic animals (pigs, cows, sheep, horses), plants (cereals, citrus fruits, legumes, new fruit trees), architecture, religion and European culture all flooded in. Although the Mexican side is recognized by UNESCO for “witnessing an important exchange of human values over a period of time or within a cultural area of the world, in the development of architecture or technology, monumental arts, urban planning or landscape design” and has five World Heritage cities related

to the route, the American side of this Road still lacks local and international recognition of its importance in some sections.

In this sense, the historic commercial route that connected Santa Fe, the final point of the Spanish Trail, with Los Angeles, in California, is known in the United States as the *Viejo Sendero Español* (Old Spanish Trail). Featuring a distance of approximately 1,200 miles, this road crossed areas of high mountains, arid deserts and deep canyons to take explorers and missionaries to the west coast. The route was open intermittently as of the 19th century, but did not feature a secure network of cities and commercial trading posts. It was in 1829 that Antonio Armijo, a merchant from Santa Fe, established a stable connection between New Mexico and California, thanks to the discovery of a shortcut in the Mojave Desert. Armijo’s group came across a green valley full of springs that contrasted with the most arid areas of the desert, hence the name of Las Vegas,



Antonio Armijo route.

which is where the city of that name is located today.

Both culture and money passed along these routes. Another of the country's emblematic symbols that is linked to its Spanish past is the dollar, specifically the piece of eight (*real de a ocho*), which was the first universal currency present in Europe, America and Asia. The most widely accepted theory about the origin of the '\$' symbol, supported by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing of the United States, is that it is an evolution of the Spanish abbreviation 'Ps', which was employed to shorten the name of the weights, piastres or pieces of eight (the Spanish silver *real*) used during the 18th and 19th centuries in the American territories. This was because the use of the piece of eight, known as the 'Spanish dollar', was widespread across the North American markets when the dollar symbol was adopted in 1785, so that for Americans it was an inevitable point of reference for the creation of their own currency. Not surprisingly, another interpretation claims that the symbol of the '\$' is a stylization of the Columns of Hercules that appeared on the Spanish coins minted at the Ceca of Mexico (Mexican Bureau of Engraving and Printing) and spread throughout the Continent. The vertical bars would be the columns and the 'S' would be the band featuring the legend 'Plus Ultra' that enveloped them.

The lack of currency that caused the War of Independence drove the use of the *real* among the majority of the population, even when the dollar was already widespread. The parity of the American dollar and the Spanish currency was total for several decades of coexistence in the new Republic. Given that the face value of both currencies was identical, citizens normally preferred the Spanish *duros* (Spanish pieces of eight) to the new American dollars because the Spanish coins had more physical silver content. The Spanish currency was valid in the United States until its use was prohibited in 1857.

Spain's legal heritage is also very much present in American laws. An embossed portrait of Spanish King Alfonso X the Wise is included among the 23 marble-embossed portraits distributed along the doors of the Capitol House Gallery in recognition of the influence of the *Siete Partidas* ("Seven-Part Code") in the country's legislation. A multitude of sentences can be found in US courts citing this compendium of Medieval laws, including the Supreme Courts of Louisiana, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and California. The same is true of the influence of the *Leyes de Indias* ("Laws of the Indies"), which have been wielded by many lawyers for more than a century to defend the right of their clients, mostly natives, to the lands of their ancestors, lands that were expropriated with the change of sovereignty.

Spaniards were the forerunners of the Wild West, which gives shape to the most genuine image of the United States. The feats of Custer and Buffalo Bill were not unknown to the troop of elite horsemen that emerged from the need to defend a border stretching hundreds of thousands of square miles with only a handful of riders. The horses abandoned by the Spaniards on the prairies of the *Camino Real* gave rise to the so-called *mesteña* breed, known in the United States as “mustangs”—small-winged and rugged horses—and that turned the Great Plains into a place famous for its epics, shootings and feuds among cowboys. Through theft and barter, horse culture spread quickly among the tribes. By 1630 there were no native peoples who did not ride on horseback. The new equine culture was accompanied by a series of characteristic items that originated in the marshes of the Guadalquivir River in Spain, among them wide-brimmed hats, spurs, saddles, rodeos and the handling of livestock, all of which have been used there for centuries. The leading example of this early Far West and this way of dressing consisted of the Spanish “*Dragones de Cuera*” (“Leather-Jacket Soldiers”), a border corps (1,006 men) that included officers and soldiers, spread over 18 areas, and tasked with monitoring thousands of miles of border.

Despite its scarce military personnel, Spain remained the hegemonic power

in the region at the outbreak of the American War of Independence. The conflict that led to the independence of the Thirteen Colonies inevitably involved the Spanish King Carlos III in a global fight against England, one in which Spain first restricted itself to supplying arms and credit to the rebels, but in the end intervened *manu militari* from Louisiana, Nueva España and Cuba. Spain stood up to England both in the Mediterranean (Gibraltar and Menorca), in the Caribbean (Honduras) and in the Gulf of Mexico, Florida and the final stretch of the Mississippi, where the English had become strong at Natchez, Pensacola and Mobile since 1763. The spartan resistance of the city of St. Louis, in Louisiana, led by Ceuta’s Fernando de Leyba in May 1780, and a subsequent expedition of some 140 Spanish soldiers who raised the Spanish flag at the distant British fort at Saint Joseph, on the shores of Lake Michigan, in the heart of winter, forged the Spanish Empire’s belligerent reputation.

The following year, Governor Bernardo de Gálvez stormed the stronghold of Pensacola, whose occupation brought Florida under his control. And with his maneuvers he kept the British troops occupied when they needed every man and every gram of gunpowder in the decisive battle of Yorktown, which sealed the British defeat in the War. In addition, General Juan Manuel Cagigal conquered the Island of New Providence, which was

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considered to be a key position for the British at the gates of the Thirteen Colonies, in May 1782.

All of these Spanish actions contributed decisively to US independence, although it took several centuries for the Americans to recognize their debt to their former brother in arms. Only a few decades later, the influential American historian, George Bancroft, with his work 'History of the United States of America', completely erased the contribution that Spain, a monarchist and Catholic nation, had made to the independence of a Republican and Protestant-rooted country. He even demonized Spain's actions. The brother in arms, who was Catholic, monarchist and loyal, was turned into Cain. Recent decades have seen the historic vindication of these ties between Spain and the United States, links that are at least as valuable as those that were made with France in that same War. In 2014, President Barack Obama

signed a Congressional Joint Resolution to confer honorary nationality on Gálvez, the highest honor the country grants to a foreign citizen, and today his portrait is honorably hung in the US Congress.

Spain's Juan de Miralles, a personal friend of Washington, also played a significant role in the conflict with his diplomatic and commercial services in favor of the rebels. Cuban historian Salvador Larrúa Guedes relates in his recent biography *Juan de Miralles: biografía de un padre de los Estados Unidos (Juan de Miralles: A Biography of a Founding Father of*

*the United States)* that when the Washington camp ran out of funds to pay the salaries of its army of volunteer patriots, Alicante's Miralles, along with other merchants, gathered together gold worth 300 million dollars today and sent it by ship to support the cause. In that same period, Navarre's Pedro de Casanave, a businessman, property agent and real estate



Juan de Miralles.

investor based in this region who was probably related to Miralles, also rendered service to the United States. He ultimately became Mayor of Georgetown, by then one of the largest cities in Maryland. On October 12, 1792, this Spanish citizen was chosen to place the first stone of the White House, due to his rising prestige and the coincidence of that date with the arrival of the first Spaniards in America three centuries before.

Washington D.C., a city founded in 1790 to the east of the existing Georgetown, is located precisely in the district of Columbia, which is named after the discoverer of America, Christopher Columbus. In honor of this explorer sent by Castile in Spain there are currently 149 monuments in the United States, a number only surpassed by major figures such as Abraham Lincoln or George Washington. And there were more. Since 2008, at least forty statues of the discoverer of America have been destroyed or removed, according to data gathered by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The figure of Christopher Columbus had become popular since the War of Independence, as a representative of the entrepreneurial spirit of the Americans, a free spirit, a hero of modernity who, like them, opposed the monarchy. The man who gave Spain an empire where the sun never sets, was also, in his own way, a founding father of the American Empire.

## SPANISH, A NATIVE LANGUAGE OF THE UNITED STATES

It would seem contradictory or, at least, redundant to incorporate Hispanic identity into a country already built on Hispanic roots, and the same applies when referring to the normalization of the Spanish language in a country where Spanish was a native language much earlier than English. When the peninsular Spaniards left what would later become Mexico, the northern neighbor took just a few years to assert its military superiority over the south. The annexation of what, today, makes up the entire States of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Nevada and Utah and parts of Colorado, Wyoming, Kansas and Oklahoma into the United States in 1848 through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, led to hundreds of thousands of Hispanic Americans suddenly living on American soil.

Mestizo lands like the ones in New Mexico became the ideal breeding ground for a cultural exchange that even influenced figures such as “Billy the Kid”. “Billy el Niño” — Mexican songs added the Spanish translation of his nickname—spoke an archaic Spanish and was a friend of many descendants of Spaniards, had several Hispanic girlfriends and, according to Alfonso Domingo (author of the book *La balada del Billy el Niño (The Ballad of Billy the Kid)*), read at



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least one book in Spanish, *La conquista de México por Hernán Cortés* (*The Conquest of Mexico by Hernán Cortés*), which was lent to him by his friend, the teacher and Justice of the Peace, José Córdoba. The iconic Indian leader, Gerónimo, had the same Hispanic imprint, as he was born in Arizpe (located today in the Mexican State of Sonora), spoke perfect Spanish and was baptized as a Catholic.

English, Spanish and indigenous words were hybridized in Florida, New Mexico and Texas to give birth to a genuine language of the frontier, an area that even today still uses Spanish terms and expressions from another age. The result of this mixture is not only felt in the language, literature, cuisine or religion (Catholicism remains the majority faith in the Latino community) of these former Spanish regions, but in such immaterial things as music, traditions and people's own psychology. The people here are imbued with a strong sense of family, a taste for festivities in any place and the characteristic vitality of the Mediterranean peoples.

Just as successive waves of Irish, Scandinavian, German and Italian immigrants, among others, carved out the land of opportunity as a place adapted to all kinds of cultures, a silent mass of Spaniards made its contribution to the history of the United States in the 20th century. Between 1880 and 1930, the number of Spanish

immigrants in the United States grew from 5,000 to 57,000 people, due to economic and political instability on the Peninsula and the enormous number of opportunities available on the other side of the Atlantic. So we can mention Basques working as shepherds on the West Coast of the United States, Cantabrians digging in marble and granite quarries in Vermont and Maine, Andalusians and Extremadurans working in the sugar fields of Hawaii and Asturians crafting cigars in Florida factories ... Workers from all over Spain have left their mark and created small communities that kept the food, folklore and traditions of their homelands alive in a place where, like other minorities, they have suffered episodes of discrimination. They have endured the best and the worst of America.

Spain's Civil War (1936-1939) led many thousands of Spaniards to flee to America, among them exiles as well-known as the following: the writers Tomás Segovia, Emilio Prado, Max Aub, José Bergamín and Ramón J. Sender; the famous Doctor Severo Ochoa, who was awarded a Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1959; the philologists Américo Castro and Tomás Navarro Tomás; the politician Fernando de los Ríos; and the family of Federico García Lorca (his father and two of his siblings). Another illustrious Spanish Nobel laureate, Juan Ramón Jiménez, also spent periods of his exile in Washington and then Miami.



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Spaniards who were already settled there helped the newcomers, as they resigned themselves to the fact that the new context on the Peninsula threatened to turn their American immigration into something definitive. That first and second generation of Spanish citizens would be joined decades later by Cuban immigrants, who were proud that their parents or grandparents were descendants of Spaniards from Galicia and Asturias.

These long historical ties and the growing Hispanic population, based on the successive arrival of immigrants, are reflected in presidential efforts to vindicate this shared past and attract votes in the Hispanic community. In the late sixties, President Lyndon B. Johnson established Hispanic Heritage Week as a form of recognition of the growing importance of this community. During Ronald Reagan's tenure, the Week became a month of celebrations, with social and cultural activities designed to vindicate the Hispanic identity and its contribution to the country's development. "The feat of the Discovery was only the first of

Spain's many cultural and economic contributions to the New World," the President declared on October 16, 1984.

Reagan, who had also been Governor of California, repeated this message in support of Hispanic Heritage in September 1987 for the visit of King Juan Carlos to the White House:

" Today we recognize the ancestors of many Americans of Hispanic origin, since it was the United States that came to them and not the other way around. It happened in Puerto Rico, and all over the southwest. We Californians have a great appreciation for the advanced Hispanic culture, which already existed in our state

before we were part of the United States. As well as in other southwestern states that had booming Hispanic cities, with governance, ranches, and businesses. There was also a great system of missions, built by the extraordinary Franciscan Father Junípero Serra. Today, with this proclamation, we remind our fellow citizens that our Hispanic heritage should make all Americans proud."



Fray Junípero Serra.

## 4. Conclusions

1. The “decolonization” of history is a toxic trend driven by America’s academic elites to remove fundamental parts of its history.
2. Favoring perspectives centered on false narratives of slavery and oppression, based on the Black Legend, promotes a distorted image of the vast contributions that Spain has made to the United States (a country that was Hispanic before it was Anglo-Saxon), and of a legacy that has survived more than 500 years, despite coordinated efforts to make it disappear.
3. The nefarious intentions of these progressive groups are evident in their endeavors to kidnap and pervert the Latino Museum. As the *¡Presente!* exhibition showed, the absence of the key contributions made by important figures such as Friar Junípero Serra, Felipe de Neve and Bernardo de Gálvez, facilitates the promotion of a monolithic idea about Hispanics as an oppressed minority ethnic group whose main purpose is to join a “struggle” for a version of “social justice” (also perverted) and for demands that are alien to the traditions and customs of Hispanics.
4. However, the Hispanic community in the United States has shown its capacity for organization, its resilience and its commitment to the founding values of the United States, which are the values of Western civilization. The main value is freedom.
5. The Hispanic community’s demands to acknowledge its natural ties with Spain have exposed the anti-Hispanic drift that groups defending Marxist revisionism have sought to taint the Museum project with. The original consensus-based initiative, one that went beyond political posturing, has been gradually destroyed by the desire of the *woke* elites to perpetrate their cultural domination.
6. Following the requests of prominent figures from the Hispanic community in the United States and the growing political tide against the Museum’s drift, the prospects for sustained public funding and the construction of a building on the National Mall for a museum are seriously endangered. However, this has led to a serious debate, based on the truth and the facts about Spain’s influence in the United States, facts that must be disseminated and impressed upon all American citizens.

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