Dear Friends,

A visit to the National Museum of American History offers moments of discovery — discovery of stories and objects that inspire and challenge the public to break barriers, seek just paths and dig deeper. In 2023, we presented exhibitions, displays and programs examining the many sounds and voices that shape the American experience through music, news, entertainment and even architecture. We did this as part of our commitment to being inclusive and elevating stories not often given the attention they merit.

From blues to classical music, the sounds of our nation are beautiful, varied and often deeply moving. In the exhibition Treasures and Trouble: Looking Inside a Legendary Blues Archive / Tesoros y tropiezos: Una mirada al interior de un legendario archivo de blues, we were drawn to the remarkable and complicated music archive of folklorist Robert “Mack” McCormick. It took visitors inside the lives of 20th-century blues artists and examined troubling revelations, sparking questions about how history has been told. A month before this opening, we welcomed cellist Yo-Yo Ma, to whom we presented a Great Americans Medal. He awed us as he joined our own Kenneth Slowik, D.M.A., artistic director of the Smithsonian Chamber Music Society, and three young cellists to perform several pieces.

Our exhibitions also represented the country’s many voices. ¡De última hora! Latinas Report Breaking News showed us how highly accomplished Latina journalists have helped a large segment of the American public to be heard and advocate for Spanish-speaking communities.

With Mirror, Mirror: Reflections of America in Disney Parks / Espejito, espejito: Reflejos de Estados Unidos en los parques de Disney, we looked at how Disney and the public are in conversation to create the national narrative of today and the future. And through Reconstructing “Weatherbreak”: Geodesic Domes in an Age of Extreme Weather / Reconstrucción del “Weatherbreak”: Los domos geodésicos en una era de condiciones climáticas extremas, we heard the call to consider the challenges of affordable and sustainable housing in a time of climate change and increasingly intense weather. What a pleasure to collaborate with The Catholic University of America to reassemble this historic large dome inside the Museum!

Finally, we were delighted to reopen the Warner Bros. Theater, currently boasting exceptional technology upgrades. Generous project support provided by the Dolby family and Dolby Laboratories Inc. has made ours the first museum theater in the Washington metropolitan region to feature Dolby Vision and Dolby Atmos, ultimately transforming our public screenings and programs.

We are grateful to all our supporters and visitors who made 2023 a success. As we now look to shaping our commemoration of the nation’s 250th anniversary in 2026, we are guided by our dedication to telling the full history of the United States. The path toward becoming a more united country includes acknowledging the nation’s rich and complicated past while being more active participants in the democratic process to shape the next 250 years. We hope you will join us in this momentous effort!

Anthea M. Hartig, Ph.D.
Elizabeth MacMillan Director

Enrique Segura, Ph.D.
Board Chairman
The Museum honored Yo-Yo Ma with a Great Americans Medal during an evening that included remarks by Elizabeth MacMillan Director Anthea M. Hartig, Ph.D.; a recitation of Paul Laurence Dunbar’s poem “We Wear the Mask” by Smithsonian Secretary Lonnie G. Bunch III; and an interview of Ma by Smithsonian Regent Emeritus David M. Rubenstein.

He began with the Bach piece, after which we played, on the Museum’s two Strad cellos, a short duo by Carlo Antonio Campioni, the most frequently represented composer in Jefferson’s extensive music library. Acting, as Ma said, like two gentleman amateurs, we illustrated the “delightful recreation,” as Jefferson put it, of music-making in that age before recording, when music was at its most ephemeral, and thus, perhaps, was most highly valued. As Ma stressed, until Thomas Edison invented his “talking machine” in 1877, you could only experience music if you yourself played or sang it or if someone else did so live in your presence.

We then collaborated on another cornerstone of the cello repertoire, Franz Schubert’s Arpeggione Sonata of 1824. Yo-Yo observed that this was written just a year before the opening of the Erie Canal and less than a decade before the John Bull locomotive, on display at the Museum, began the transportation revolution that would soon render canals obsolete for fast movement of freight. We continued with Joachim Raff’s “Cavatina,” a favorite piece of violinist Joseph Henry Douglass, whose career included a performance at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition, where his famous abolitionist grandfather gave an address.

For the moving conclusion of his well-curated program, Ma invited three younger cellists — Kamila Dotta, Francesca McNeeley and Nathaniel Taylor, all playing Stradivarius and Amati instruments from the Museum’s collection — to join him in arrangements of the spirituals “Goin’ Home” and “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen,” plus a rousing rendition of Scott Joplin’s rag “The Entertainer.” The evening proved to be both entertaining and thought-provoking and a reflection of why Ma is indeed a Great American.
IN 2019, the National Museum of American History acquired perhaps the most consequential as well as legendary blues archive in the country, that of Robert “Mack” McCormick, a self-trained white folklorist from Houston. McCormick’s daughter, Susannah Nix, donated her father’s materials after several meetings with a team from the Museum and Smithsonian Folkways. His archives formed the basis of our 2023 jewel box exhibit Treasures and Trouble: Looking Inside a Legendary Blues Archive / Tesoros y tropiezos: Una mirada al interior de un legendario archivo de blues.

McCormick was a prolific researcher and talented writer who studied musical and folk traditions from his teens in the late 1940s through his death in 2015. During a remarkably fruitful period from the late 1950s through the mid-1970s, he conducted hundreds of interviews in Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi and elsewhere with elder and younger Black blues musicians and their families and friends. For several years beginning in 1968, he was also contracted to wrangle talent for the Smithsonian’s annual Folklife Festival. He amassed a trove of interview and research notes, correspondence, original published and unpublished writings, recordings, photographs and other ephemera, amounting to 90 linear feet of manuscript materials and over 4,000 photographs extraordinarily organized by the Museum's Archives Center.

The collection allowed us to create rich media and a display of instruments, documents and photographs for the exhibit. Treasures and Trouble places in conversation the stories and craft of early- to mid-20th-century blues artists such as Bernice Edwards and Sam “Lightnin’” Hopkins, complemented by McCormick’s writings, examples of his dogged research practices, and some troubling discoveries in the archive. While McCormick never gained financial success from his work, the exhibit illuminates his notable role in shaping our national blues narratives and exposing remarkable local/regional artists to national acclaim.

Treasures and Trouble also asks visitors to ponder the power dynamics of McCormick’s encounters with Black musicians and their families in the Jim Crow South. The exhibit concludes with a panel on the Museum’s ongoing efforts to return some family heirloom portraits to the descendants of those who lent them to McCormick and expected their return, casting new light not only on blues history but also on the practices and ethics of his collecting and archiving. It is a powerful way to leave visitors to consider what reparative work should look like in imagining a future for the blues steeped in equity and justice.

Learn more in Robert “Mack” McCormick’s Biography of a Phantom: A Robert Johnson Blues Odyssey (Smithsonian Books, 2023), edited by John Troutman, Ph.D. Listen to music from McCormick’s field recordings in the Grammy-nominated box set Playing for the Man at the Door (Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 2023), with liner notes co-produced by Troutman.

This exhibition was co-curated with the Archives Center’s Vanessa Broussard Simmons and generously made possible by Ted and Marian Cramer.
EACH PERSON’S VOICE is as unique as a fingerprint or signature. In broadcast journalism, a news anchor’s voice — distinct in tone, pitch, pattern and emotional expression — is often honed by years of work to enunciate and engage audiences. Voice is as distinct as image and can even transcend visual identity in the realm of TV news. An audible beacon, it guides viewers through waves of news, anchoring their trust and recognition. In times of a national crisis, a broadcaster’s voice is a reassuring presence.

In creating the exhibition ¡De última hora! Latinas Reporting Breaking News at the National Museum of American History, the team embarked on a mission to breathe life into the Spanish-language anchors and reporters depicted on the gallery walls through an immersive multimedia experience. A crucial decision was selecting the “voice” of the exhibition. The choice was “obvio,” or obvious: It should be narrated by former Univision anchor María Elena Salinas, whose voice resonated in American homes for three decades. Her voice would set the tone for what would become a remarkable visual journey of storytelling.

With studio time set up in Miami to professionally record Salinas, curators and a video production team logged on virtually for the narration session. Salinas had annotated her script and peppered us with questions on word choice, tone, inflection and emphasis. In 30 minutes, the track was done. Today, visitors to the exhibition are greeted by her unmistakable voice.

As Salinas entered the gallery for the September press preview, she immediately asked, “How is it tracking?” She was checking to see how her voice complemented and kept pace with visual elements of the story. Her commitment to maintaining the integrity of her voice demonstrates the significance of broadcasting as an audible medium, able to convey the urgency of breaking news and compelling storytelling in Spanish-language television.

During a panel discussion to mark the opening of the exhibition, Salinas described how people in a crowd can readily recognize her voice, following it to say hello, a testament to the profound connection between a storyteller and her audience. Salinas, who grew up bilingual in California, spoke of the meticulous effort she put into honing her Spanish vocabulary and accent. Her voice, like the voices of the other featured broadcasters in the exhibition, is more than a medium for conveying information; it is a source of trust and comfort that transcends language and culture.

The ¡De última hora! team was led by project director Kathleen Franz, Ph.D., in collaboration with co-curators Mireya Loza, Ph.D., Melinda Machado and Mayela Caro. The exhibition in the Nicholas F. and Eugenia Taubman Gallery was generously supported by George L. Pla; Guillermo Nicolas, in honor of Irma and Emilio Nicolas Sr.; and Ambassador Nicholas F. Taubman and Mrs. Eugenia L. Taubman; with federal support from the Latino Initiatives Pool, administered by the National Museum of the American Latino / con apoyo federal del Fondo de Iniciativas Latinas, administrado por el Museo Nacional del Latino Estadounidense.
Conserving World War I History

Above: Recently cleaned foreign decorations awarded to Gen. John Pershing, including (L–R) the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor, France; Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath, Great Britain; Grand Cross of the Order of the Redeemer, Greece; and the Grand Cross of the Order of Prince Danilo I, Montenegro. Right: Cher Ami, a homing pigeon that delivered critical battlefield messages during World War I, cleaned and restored.

2023 Inside the Museum

56.6B
Potential audience opportunities through earned print, television, radio/podcasts and digital outlets

79M+
Social media impressions related to Entertainment Nation since its opening

12.8M+
Online visits + on-site visitors

8M+
Page views of the Museum's educational resources

1.3M+
Views of the Museum's YouTube videos

308K
Instagram followers

282K
Facebook followers

268K+
Twitter/X followers

46%
Website visits from mobile platforms, a record high for the Museum

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RECONSTRUCTING ‘WEATHERBREAK’

DURING JULY 2023, North America’s oldest geodesic dome, also the world’s first geodesic dome home, was reassembled in front of visitors inside the National Museum of American History’s Flag Hall. A team of architecture students and faculty from The Catholic University of America and Washington University in St. Louis collaborated with myself and Museum colleagues to reconstruct “Weatherbreak” almost exactly as architect Jeffrey Lindsay, a Buckminster Fuller protégé, had originally done near Montreal in 1950. Doing so reimagined and propelled an object from the past into current conversations about climate change adaptation. The exhibition, titled Reconstructing “Weatherbreak”: Geodesic Domes in an Age of Extreme Weather / Reconstrucción del “Weatherbreak”: Los domos geodésicos en una era de condiciones climáticas extremas, illustrated how historical artifacts can inform our search for sustainable shelters during a time of increasingly intense weather.

“Weatherbreak” evokes the global quest for a future with nature. The visually striking dome is one of Fuller’s most important achievements and illuminates how innovators and visionaries have long sought to balance climate extremes with design advances and new technologies. It offers hope for continued human existence and flourishing in the face of a changing planet. Geodesic domes can withstand winds of up to 200 miles per hour. Thus, Museum volunteers, talk-back boards and informational labels engaged the public in considering the role of such resilient structures in meeting the challenges of severe weather. The connection between history, technology and sustainability struck a resonant chord with not just visitors but also the nation as news of our project aired on CBS and The Weather Channel and ran in The New York Times, among other publications.

The project began as a theoretical inquiry into whether it was possible to reconstruct a historic geodesic dome out of a stack of 1,000 unmarked aluminum tubes with no instructions from the original architects. Three years of work, countless brainstorming sessions, numerous test builds, the fabrication of missing parts, and the discovery of a critical handwritten note at an archive in Calgary — mere months before the final build — culminated in over 60 staff and volunteers coming together for a three-day “live build.” We erected one of the 20th century’s most significant architectural innovations, one aluminum tube at a time, without ever having built the entirety of the dome before. Reconstructing “Weatherbreak” was an experiment, something of a historical enactment and a vision of hope for the future.

The Museum and The Catholic University of America gratefully acknowledge Architectural Systems, Inc.; Norsk Hydro; and DSI Spaceframes, whose generosity made this exhibition possible.

American Enterprise’s updated Consumer Era section featured recently acquired objects from multicultural-advertising innovator Byron Lewis and multimillion-dollar catalog businesswoman Lillian Vernon, who escaped the Holocaust as a girl. Leadership support for American Enterprise in the Mars Hall of American Business was provided by Mars, Incorporated; the Wallace H. Coulter Foundation; and SE Johnson.

El último horario. Breaking News (Nicholas F. and Eugenia Taubman Gallery) showcased the work of seven Latina journalists and ways Spanish-language television gave voice and visibility to a large segment of the American public.

One year after opening (re)Framing Conversations: Photographs by Richard Avedon 1946–1965 / (re)Enmarcando diálogos: Fotografías de Richard Avedon, 1946–1965, a new rotation of 20 stunning portraits was installed. This exhibition in the Marcia and Frank Carlucci Hall of Culture and the Arts was made possible by generous support from Judy and Leonard Lauder, with additional funding from Marcia and Frank Carlucci and the William Talbott Hillman Foundation. New acquisition cases in the Culture Wing featured the following objects:

American May Wong’s makeup box, cigarette case and calling card. Wong became a film star and style icon of her era, despite anti-Asian prejudice that limited her Hollywood opportunities.

Chloe Kim’s outerwear, including goggles, from her second Olympic gold medal win (halfpipe event) at the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. Kim became snowboarding’s youngest female gold medalist in 2018.

1 See a time-lapse of the build: https://s.si.edu/weatherbreak

3 ▶ New acquisition cases in the Culture Wing featured the following objects:

4 1. American Enterprise’s updated Consumer Era section featured recently acquired objects from multicultural-advertising innovator Byron Lewis and multimillion-dollar catalog businesswoman Lillian Vernon, who escaped the Holocaust as a girl. Leadership support for American Enterprise in the Mars Hall of American Business was provided by Mars, Incorporated; the Wallace H. Coulter Foundation; and SE Johnson.

2. The Price of Freedom: Americans at War (Kenneth E. Behring Hall of Military History) commemorated the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War’s official ending. Objects included Rep. Samuel Johnson’s toothpaste while an airman held prisoner of war. Price of Freedom was made possible by Kenneth E. Behring, with additional support from The History Channel.

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Prioritizing Accessibility Every Day

Dedicated to becoming the most accessible museum in the nation, the National Museum of American History implemented and enhanced the following in 2023 to benefit visitors with disabilities:

- Expanded visual descriptions available through QR codes.
- In Entertainment Nation, an assistive listening loop system, touchscreens with universal keypads and headphone jacks, and more.
- Easy-to-read labels.
- Select ASL-interpreted programs.
- Increased accessibility features within the Museum’s digital offerings.
- Participation in Access Smithsonian programs See Me, a virtual interactive program for adults with dementia and their care partners, and Morning at the Museum, sensory-friendly events for families of children with disabilities. In 2023, the latter program broke attendance records with 421 participants.

△ “Journeys Toward Giving” in the Giving in America exhibit showcased how life journeys shape the philanthropy of individuals — especially for immigrants to the United States such as Jorge M. Pérez. This new case was made possible with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and David M. Rubenstein, with additional federal support from the Latino Initiatives Pool, administered by the National Museum of the American Latino.

▼ Commemorating the 60th anniversary of the U.S. Department of State’s Office of Art in Embassies, artist Jenny Holzer’s projection The People Is the National Mall with quotations extolling democracy’s beauty.

A More Perfect Union: American Artists and the Currents of Our Time, Art in Embassies’ traveling exhibition, featured works focused on founding principles of the nation, including equality and freedom.

Entertainment Nation / Nación del espectáculo (Ray and Dagmar Dolby Hall of American Culture) offered a new rotation including Tony Hawk’s first skateboard, Lin-Manuel Miranda’s Hamilton costume, Miss Piggy, Cookie Monster and a trophy won by Jim Thorpe. The exhibition was made possible in part by the generous leadership support of the Ray and Dagmar Dolby Family, Tom and Karen Rutledge, The History Channel, Dr. Stephanie Bennett-Smith, American Cruise Lines, an anonymous friend, Linda and Mike Curb, Golden Slake Foundation, and Barry and Wendy Meyer. The Museum cares for the Henson collection with generous support from the Jane Henson Foundation.

Treasures and Trouble: Looking Inside a Legendary Blues Archive / Tesoros y tropiezos: Una mirada al interior de un legendario archivo de blues delves into Robert “Mack” McCormick’s work with blues artists and unequal exercises of power.

THE MOST rewarding part of bringing the exhibition Mirror, Mirror: Reflections of America in Disney Parks / Espejito, espejito: Reflejos de Estados Unidos en los parques de Disney to the floor has been the wealth of public engagement generated. It was designed to focus on the public from the start: In 2022, the National Museum of American History released a call for photos and stories of Disney park experiences to both guide our thinking and build into the exhibition. We received over 6,000 emails and 30,000 photographs. Mirror, Mirror incorporated these to show the Disney parks’ relationship to stories of American history and demonstrate how they adapt, alongside the public, to new understandings of American society and culture, at times even complicating the historical narrative.

With the exhibition’s opening, we are constantly engaging with photo submitters, Disney fans and nonfans, academics, and other members of the public who found this topic deeply resonant with their own American — and Disney — experiences. On any given day, take a walk through the gallery and you will undoubtedly hear someone say, “We have a picture just like this!” In August, visitor @ndreier tweeted, “Thank you for bringing such a wonderful exhibit. We just left it and it felt like being ‘home.’ We have several ... similar photos to those displayed.” Later that month, I watched a guest tap a label and say, “I’ve never thought of it that way before!” To me, these interactions indicate the exhibition is doing exactly what the development team hoped — encouraging visitors to see themselves within the show while helping them to see new angles to familiar stories.

Read more about Mirror, Mirror (Albert H. Small Documents Gallery) and the Funakoshi family, pictured above and spotlighted as youth in the exhibition, by reading Bethanee Bemis’ Museum blog post on the family’s Disney memories at https://s.si.edu/423vudd.
EducaTion is at the center of all activities at the National Museum of American History. A better understanding of the past leads to a stronger democracy and a just and compassionate future. While federal funds support the Museum's mission, it is through the generosity of donors that the Museum is able to have a wider reach, ultimately benefiting millions of visitors both on-site and online annually.

In 2023, alumni board member Elizabeth MacMillan committed one of the largest gifts ever received by the Museum, which will build a stronger foundation for the organization’s leadership structure and public education and outreach. MacMillan, co-founder of the former WEM Foundation, joined the Museum’s board in 2001 and became an alumni board member in 2007. Together, she and her late husband, Whitney, quietly supported projects such as an alumni board member in 2007. Together, she and her late husband, Whitney, quietly supported projects such as The American Presidency exhibit, an endowment for the director’s position, and the redesign of the Museum’s central core with a new gallery for the Star-Spangled Banner.

MacMillan’s gift is transformational, expanding the impact of the Museum. It bolsters the director’s endowment fund, improves cataloging to make collections more accessible online, and aids the work of Museum educators. This provides access to greater knowledge and the unprecedented support necessary to explore new options to promote civic engagement. Her leadership paves the way toward becoming the nation’s most accessible, inclusive, relevant and sustainable history museum.

For such extraordinary generosity, particularly her recent contribution to the Museum and two other units, the Smithsonian honored MacMillan with the prestigious Order of James Smithson Medal in December 2023. She is the 12th recipient since the order, named for Smithsonian founding donor James Smithson, was established in 1983 to celebrate donors of transformative contributions. At an intimate ceremony in the Museum, Elizabeth MacMillan Director Anthea M. Hartig, Ph.D., spoke before MacMillan’s friends and family.

“All of us who know and love Betty, and who knew and loved Whitney, recognize and admire the true spirit of philanthropy with which they made their gifts,” said Hartig. “While I know that you eschew vociferously any type of fuss, there truly is no one more deserving of the [Order of] James Smithson Medal than you. You’ve served this Museum, you’ve served the Institution with remarkable dedication.”

In collaboration with BMI, the Museum hosted a performance by Babyface (Warner Bros. Theater) in addition to a conversation with the Grammy-award-winning artist.

The Great Americans Medal presentation to Yo-Yo Ma for his influence as a musician, cultural ambassador and philanthropist included Ma’s performance and interview with Smithsonian Regent Emeritus David M. Rubenstein.

The Smithsonian Chamber Music Society’s third annual Haydn Quartet Academy welcomed five faculty members and 12 scholarship students for a week’s study of 12 Joseph Haydn quartets. This program was made possible by an anonymous friend.

The Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra’s Charlie Young and Ken Kimery worked with LAUSD All City Jazz Band youth. The band and Young later performed at Hollywood Bowl Jazz Festival. This education outreach effort was generously supported by the Ray and Vera Conniff Foundation.

The Roots to Pop series welcomed Grammy-winning musician Rhiannon Giddens (Nicholas F. and Eugenia Taubman Hall of Music) for a performance and conversation about the American musical past and how it might affect the American musical present. This series was made possible in collaboration with Americana Music Foundation.

The Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation’s Innovative Lives featured Beverly Wood, whose experience as an analytical chemist led to award-winning contributions in motion picture color technologies.

Members of Congress and congressional staff visited the new exhibitions and displays in the recently completed Culture Wing during a Congressional Open House hosted by the Museum.

A National EMS Week event featured historical EMS objects in the Museum, an ambulance with a D.C. paramedic crew answering questions, and a book talk/signing with author Kevin Hazzard.
As a member of the Made By Us coalition of history organizations, the Museum participated in Civil Season with the following events to civically engage youth:

On Flag Day, a special citizenship ceremony occurred for 25 children, in partnership with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. Students from National History Day activities witnessed the ceremony. This event was made possible through generous support from Paul Neely.

During National History Day, middle and high school students from across the country presented table-top displays reflecting the theme “Frontiers in History: People, Places, Ideas.”

The Museum’s PK12 team published deliberation guides and videos for secondary students as part of Becoming US curriculum. Guides help examine and discuss complexities, choices and tensions of momentous events. Becoming US was supported with grants from the Smithsonian’s Understanding the American Experience Consortium, Youth Access Grants, Smithsonian-University of Maryland Seed Research Grants, the National Park Service, the Kettering Foundation and the Segal Family Foundation.

**The Power of Giving was made possible by David M. Rubenstein. His generous support and a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation enable the Philanthropy Initiative’s work.**

Support for the Center for Restorative History was generously provided by the Henry Luce Foundation, Dr. and Mrs. Enrique Segura, and Acton Family Giving, with federal support from the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center Initiatives Pool, administered by the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center.

**The National Youth Summit asked, “How do the stories we tell about our past shape our democracy?” Case studies and objects centered on people who have widened our historical narrative. The summit was made possible by the A. James and Alice B. Clark Foundation and the Patrick F. Taylor Foundation K-12 Learning Endowment.**

On the Day of Remembrance acknowledging the incarceration of Americans of Japanese ancestry following Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor, the Museum presented “120,000 Stories: Nobuko Miyamoto on the Social Power of Music.” Generous support was provided by the National Japanese American Memorial Foundation, Japanese American Citizens League (national and D.C. chapters) and The Asian American Foundation. Support of the Museum’s efforts to document and share the history of the Japanese American experience was also made possible by its Japanese American History Endowment. Leadership support for the endowment and the Museum’s activities was provided by SF Gasco Trust, Terasaki Family Foundation, Advanced Fresh Concepts, Hawaii Air Cargo Inc., Ronald Yoshino, Patti Hirahara and Terry K. Takeda, Mary Hirahara, Tom Hashiyama and Dr. Himes Yumaan.

“Women’s Business: From Kitchen Table to C-Suite,” explored diverse women changing how Americans do business. Guests included moderator Symone D. Sanders Townsend, Delta Bighair-Stump (Designs by Delta), Lilo Allen and Tiffany Miller (Bronnize Collective). Special thanks to supporters of American Enterprise as well as David and Fred P. Hochberg and Byron and Sylvia Lewis.

The Julia Child Foundation for Gastronomy and the Culinary Arts presented the 2023 Julia Child Award to Indigenous chef/advocate Sean Sherman during a gala benefiting the Museum’s American Food History Project. The gala was made possible by The Julia Child Foundation for Gastronomy and the Culinary Arts, Nordic Ware and the Minneapolis Foundation.

“Last Call: American Beer in a Changing Climate” explored beer’s vulnerability to a changing climate and welcomed industry women seeking sustainability. The evening included beer samples and recent acquisitions.

Cooking Up History featured conversations and cooking demonstrations such as “Foodways and Waterways With Lowcountry Chef Sallie Ann Robinson,” which examined the culinary traditions of the Gullah Geechee people. Cooking Up History was made possible by Dr. Stephanie Bennett-Smith, with additional support from Wegmans Food Markets.

“Samples of the many programs that took place on the Wallace H. Coulter Performance Plaza and at the Julia Child Foundation for Gastronomy and the Culinary Arts, Nordic Ware and the Minneapolis Foundation.

American Sounds & Voice • Highlights Report 2023
Each year, the Museum’s staff shares its talents and knowledge across many platforms and venues. Here’s a sampling.

**STAFF ACTIVITIES**

### Publications, Podcasts & Interviews

Kathleen Franz, Ph.D., Division of Work and Industry, quoted in "Lillian Vernon’s Legacy of Kitchen Table Entrepreneurs” Celebrated at Smithsonian,” Ms.

Jon Grinspan, Ph.D., Division of Political History, quoted in “Trump Has Been Indicted Before. Historians Say This Time Is Different.” The Washington Post

Anthea M. Hartig, Ph.D., Elizabeth MacMillan Director, quoted in “Insurrectionabilia at the Smithsonian,” The New Yorker

1. **Eric Jentsch** and **RyanLintelman**, Division of Culture and the Arts, quoted in “Superheroes Are American History at the Smithsonian,” Forbes

Claire Jerry, Ph.D., Division of Political History, interviewed on “Judy Woodruff Presents: America at a Crossroads,” PBS Newshour

Paula Johnson, Division of Work and Industry, guest podcast host of “Holly Brause on Water Scarcity and the Terroir of New Mexico Chile” and editor for special issue on water, Gastronomica

Jennifer Jones, Division of Military History, interviewed on CBS Mornings and quoted online in “The Story Behind the Flag That Inspired ‘The Star-Spangled Banner,’” CBS News


Roger Sherman, Division of Medicine and Science, and Lilla Vekerdy, Dibner Library of the History of Science and Technology, interviewed on “So Much Sitting, Looking at Screens. Can We Combat Our Sedentary Lives?” NPR’s Body Electric


### Presentations, Lectures & Panels

Jeffrey L. Brodie, Ph.D., Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation, participated in a discussion of the upcoming exhibition Change YOUR Game / Cambio Tu juego held by the New England Museum Association’s Sports Community of Practice.

Modupe Labode, Ph.D., Division of Home and Community Life / Division of Political History, virtually presented “One Book, One Beaveron: Encounters With Confederate Flags & Memorials” for the Beaveron City Library (OIR).

3. **Jane Rogers,** Division of Culture and the Arts, and Betty Gordon, National Museum of the American Indian, spoke during the program "Beyond Four Wheels and a Board: The Skateboard Collection at the Smithsonian Institution" at The Stokes Sessions conference at San Diego State University.

Margaret Salazar-Porcio, Ph.D., Division of Home and Community Life, delivered a lecture about Latinas/as and baseball at the Long Island Museum, a Smithsonian Affiliate.

Harold Wallace, Ph.D., Division of Work and Industry, participated in the discussion “Snatching Lightning — Benjamin Franklin” for the National Association of Scholars’ American Innovation Webinar Series.

### The Secret Behind Lincoln’s Crooked Tie

When presidential historian Jon Meacham met with curator emeritus Harry Rubenstein to view items once belonging to President Abraham Lincoln, one stood out to Meacham — Lincoln’s bow tie. It often looked crooked on the president when photographed, but why? “The explanation … was not what we anticipated. As our conservators discovered, the answer is in the tie’s construction,” wrote Rubenstein in the post “Pre-tied Yet Crooked: What’s Up with Abraham Lincoln’s Tie?” Read the whole story on the Museum’s blog: https://s.si.edu/lincoln-tie.

Selena Quintanilla posted about the exhibition on social media for their extensive followers.

Several other new exhibitions received national media attention, including Reconstructing “Weatherbreak”: Geodesic Domes in an Age of Extreme Weather / Reconstrucción del “Weatherbreak”: Los domos geodésicos en una era de condiciones climáticas extremas and ¡In the last hour! Latinas Report Breaking News, which helped the Museum reach Spanish-speaking audiences. Overall in 2023, the Museum enjoyed approximately 56.6 billion potential audience opportunities through earned print, television, radio/podcasts and digital outlets.

The following is just a sample of coverage during the year:

Associated Press
Axsio
BBC News
CBS Evening News
CNN Travel
The Dallas Morning News
The Epoch Times
Forbes
Fox News
The Guam Daily Post
The Guardian
Los Angeles Times
Ms.
NBC Sports
The New York Times
The New Yorker
NPR
Rolling Stone
The San Diego Union-Tribune
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TWO WEEKS after a mob attacked the Capitol, determined to overthrow the presidential election, Dr. Jill Biden stood on the steps of the building’s West Front holding the Bible on which her husband would swear to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. She wore a dress and coat designed by Markarian founder and designer Alexandra O’Neill, in a blue color selected to evoke trust, confidence and stability. It was the one moment for which she removed the matching blue mask she wore to conform to COVID-19 safety protocols during the pandemic’s height. For the first time since World War II ended, there were no inaugural balls that evening. To watch the nationally televised inaugural concert and fireworks display, the first lady wore an ivory dress and matching coat and mask designed by Gabriela Hearst, all embroidered with the federal flowers of every state, territory and the District of Columbia to symbolize unity.

Biden’s 2023 presentation of her inaugural ensembles to the National Museum of American History, a tradition observed since Lady Bird Johnson, was different — a ceremony given new interpretations and emotions to reflect the event it commemorated. During the presentation, first ladies reflect on the honor of serving America and having their items join the Smithsonian collection. Biden did that too. But she gave special attention to the symbolism of clothes and the ensembles that, as she said, “were a voice for me (on) one of the most important days of my life.” They helped her do her part to bring the country back together and be a first lady for all Americans. She recognized that the masks “represent the enormity of what we all faced at the time — a pandemic that has changed our world forever.”

Clothes represent the creativity and labor of the people who create them, but they are also uniforms that we wear to do our jobs. That uniform may be a judicial robe, scrubs or a flight suit. Or it may be the dresses and masks you wear while leading the country in not giving in to fear or despair and not letting democracy die on your watch. I am proud to have that role of the first lady added to The First Ladies exhibition and the national narrative.

This donation event was made possible by the Charles T. and Kathleen K. Manatt family.
1 The Museum acquired Justine Siegal’s Oakland A’s jersey worn as an instructional league coach for the franchise, a position making her the first female coach employed by Major League Baseball.

2 Staff collected significant archives and objects days before the historic Anchor Brewing Co. — considered the nation’s original microbrewery — ceased operations. The collections reflect the brewery’s long history in San Francisco. Brewing history activities at the Museum were made possible by Ken Grossman and Katie Gonser as well as Kim Jordan and the Mighty Arrow Family Foundation.

3 Barbara Eden donated a 14-inch-tall bottle used as a prop on the sitcom I Dream of Jeannie, on which she played “Jeannie” for its first 8 years, donated his 1964 Navy aviation jacket.

4 The Museum acquired the jacket, rucksack and mountain climbing equipment used in 1958 by George Whitmore in the first successful ascent of Yosemite’s El Capitan.

5 Spanning from about the 1890s to 2010s, 475 objects and approximately 7.5 cubic feet of archival materials from the Museum of Menstruation and Women’s Health joined the Museum’s collections.

6 The Button-Down shirt worn by President John F. Kennedy’s 1963 words were transformed to “We are all, all, all Ukrainians.”

7 The Museum acquired a jacket worn by Ruth Cowan Nash, one of the first women correspondents reporting overseas during World War II, at that time with the Associated Press.

8 The Museum received a discarded banner following a Berlin demonstration protesting Russia’s war on Ukraine. On it, President Kennedy’s 1963 words were transformed to “We are all, all, all Ukrainians.”

1 In collaboration with Library of Congress conservators and the Smithsonian’s Museum Conservation Institute conservators and scientists, the Museum studied and preserved early daguerreotypes, including one of the nation’s first purported self-portraits, taken by Henry Fitz Jr. (above, seen under a microscope).

2 Specialists from the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and Library of Congress worked with the Museum to recover sound from early recordings by Alexander Graham Bell. With a noncontact tool called IRENE, they began scanning and analyzing content on Bell discs. Hearing History was made possible with public-private funding through an initial grant from the Save America’s Treasures program and matching support by Linda and Mike Curb and Seal Storage Technology. Additional support was provided by SEDiV Inc. and the Alexander and Mabel Bell Legacy Foundation.

The Museum extensively cleaned 16 foreign decorations (pg. 8) once belonging to U.S. Army Gen. John Pershing, World War I commander of the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe. In 1918, Congress authorized military personnel to accept decorations from allies.

The Museum thoroughly cleaned and partially restored Cher Ami, (pg. 8), who delivered critical battlefield messages during World War I, despite severe wounds. Some believe he delivered a message that saved the Americans’ Lost Battalion. The homing pigeon appeared in November 1918: The Great War and the Great Gatsby at Carnegie Hall (2023). Conservation was supported by John Morsky.

More than 50 Medals of Honor were rehoused and photographed for an upcoming collections page on the Museum’s website. Preservation of the Medals of Honor and related digitization efforts were made possible by Robert and Lynne Uhler.

The homing pigeon appeared in November 1918: The Great War and the Great Gatsby at Carnegie Hall (2023). Conservation was supported by John Morsky.
What’s Next at the Museum?

The National Museum of American History is working on new exhibitions that demonstrate the Museum’s commitment to sharing diverse voices and experiences.

Change YOUR Game / Cambia TU juego (2024) showcases stories of diverse athletes, scientists, engineers, designers and health professionals who created new technologies that change how games are played.

Forensic Science on Trial / La ciencia forense a prueba (2024) explores critical cases in the history of forensic science and the way people determine the power of scientific data through its collection, communication and interpretation.

The Center for the Understanding of Religion in American History (2025) will use research, an exhibition and programs to explore how religion brings us together and sometimes pulls us apart.

*Corazón y vida: Lowriding Culture in the United States (2025)* immerses visitors in the legacy and impact of lowriding and its pivotal role in the creation of Mexican American communities.

Do No Harm / No hacer daño (2025) offers a historical understanding of medical advances and remaining inequalities, despite advances. It seeks to chart a healthier, more inclusive path forward.

Voices of the Southern Lowcountry (2025) examines how generations of African Americans in the South have preserved some of the nation’s most distinctive cultural traditions, including handmade seagrass baskets.

The Dolby Hall of American Culture, two floors above the Warner Bros. Theater, is home to the new exhibition *Entertainment Nation* in the Culture Wing. Theater programming expands upon exhibition themes, further exploring the power of entertainment to shape the nation.

The first program marking the theater’s reopening was a special pre-release screening of Netflix’s *Maestro*, directed and produced by Bradley Cooper, who co-wrote the script with Josh Singer and played Leonard Bernstein in the film. A panel discussion about the production followed the screening and included, from *Maestro*, Singer, editor Michelle Tesoro and costume designer Mark Bridges.

Museum visitors in 2024 will also get to enjoy a special display in the theater’s Samuel J. and Ethel LeFrak Lobby of Ray Dolby’s rack of audio equipment used in the 1980s to develop early generations of technology, such as Dolby Spectral Recording. On loan from the Dolby family, the equipment further tells the history of entertainment and Ray Dolby’s enduring legacy.

Visit americanhistory.si.edu to learn about upcoming programming in the Warner Bros. Theater. Dolby is the exclusive audio sponsor for *Entertainment Nation.*

Above: Warner Bros. Theater, display of Ray Dolby’s rack of audio equipment flanked by Glenn Kiser, Josh Singer, Dagmar Dolby, Michelle Tesoro, Natasha Dolby, Mark Bridges, David Dolby and Elizabeth MacMillan Director Anthea M. Hartig, Ph.D., Kiser, Bridges, Tesoro and Singer on stage.
HISTORY MATTERS! A public that understands its past and is engaged in its democracy can better advance equality and liberty — ideals asserted in the Declaration of Independence, which celebrates its 250th anniversary in 2026. To prepare for the moment, the National Museum of American History is launching a far-reaching campaign to spark dialogue about the legacies of the declaration across 250 years and its power to shape the country’s future. The nation’s semiquincentennial is a critical moment to demonstrate that history is vital and relevant to our daily lives. But understanding the past — our strengths and weaknesses — and the importance of civic participation will determine the direction we take as a country at the crossroads this anniversary presents. Sharing this message through marketing, public relations, exhibitions, public programs and education outreach at a time when audiences will be most receptive requires a full-on effort to ensure success.

The Museum will promote the role, value and vitality of history in our democracy by encouraging the public to contemplate “Revolutionary Questions” — the 2026 theme — about what brings us together and what pulls us apart. These bold questions will be incorporated into vibrant new displays, existing exhibitions, programs and educational resources that explore our country’s restless and uneven pursuit of its highest ideals. Experiences will reflect on our understanding of the past and where we are headed, in an effort to both spark a national conversation facilitated by a trusted institution and to inspire action.

AN IMPORTANT PART of the National Museum of American History’s commemoration of the country’s 250th anniversary in 2026 will be the gunboat Philadelphia. Under Brig. Gen. Benedict Arnold’s leadership, the vessel and her sister ships were quickly organized into what is considered the first American Navy. Although the Philadelphia played a critical role in securing the nation’s independence, few know the story of the only surviving gunboat recovered from the Revolutionary War.

Age has caught up with the gunboat, already badly damaged from the war. Numerous assessments show risk of continued deterioration, jeopardizing its ability to remain displayed unless funds are raised to ensure this officially designated National Historic Landmark is available for generations to come. A $750,000 Save America’s Treasures grant from the Historic Preservation Fund administered by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior, was recently matched by Americana Corner with a gift of $1 million, bringing the Museum closer to its project goal of, at minimum, $2.85 million in 2024. While conservation is underway, the Museum hopes to create an environment where visitors can be a part of the effort by making the work visible and creating an accompanying mini-exhibition with objects from the ship.

The Need to Preserve the Gunboat Philadelphia

To learn more about this critical project, watch a three-minute video at s.si.edu/gunboat-philadelphia.

Or contact us: Michael Johnson JohnsonM2@si.edu

The Museum also acknowledges other generous donors whose support made preservation of the gunboat Philadelphia possible, including Robert and Lynne Uhler and the Museum’s board in honor of former Elizabeth MacMillan Director John L. Gray.
The Museum gratefully acknowledges members whose unrestricted contributions of $1,000 or more in 2023 support a variety of critical needs.

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The Museum gratefully acknowledges the supporters of the National Numismatic Collection in 2023.

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Donor Spotlight

American Numismatic Collection

25-cent coin countermarked with “Black Lives Matter,” among recent acquisitions of countermarked coins and embossed banknotes with political statements created by British artist Paul Embleton.

Director’s Fund

The Museum thanks donors of $500 or above to the Director’s Fund for Annual Giving for their support throughout 2023.

Mr. and Mrs. Phil Ratliff
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Above: Friends of the National Numismatic Collection Lawrence S. Brown Jr. and Thomas J. Uram

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American Sounds & Voices • Highlights Report 2023 29

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Smithsonian Council for American History

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American Numismatic Collection

When the National Museum of American History sought to match a Save America’s Treasures grant to preserve the deteriorating gunboat Philadelphia, Americana Corner stepped forward with a gift of $1 million. The vessel was sunk by the British during the Revolutionary War and recovered in 1935 from the bottom of Lake Champlain. Already badly damaged from the war, it is showing increased signs of wear, requiring immediate attention. Americana Corner’s match brings the Museum closer to its preservation budget goal of, at minimum, $2.85 million.

Americana Corner, founded in 2020, seeks to rekindle patriotism among Americans. Preserving America Grants support organizations focused on telling the American story from its founding through its first century. Tom and Char Hand, president and vice president, are also members of the Museum’s Star-Spangled Banner Society (legacy giving). Tom is the author of An American Triumph: America’s Founding Era Through the Lives of Ben Franklin, George Washington and John Adams. Char reviews Tom’s work before publication and manages the organization’s finances as they work to preserve the nation’s inspirational past.
The Smithsonian extends its gratitude to the individuals, companies and foundations that made possible numerous activities of the National Museum of American History through major gifts of $25,000 or more in 2023.

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NIKE, Inc.

In 2023, NIKE, Inc., made a generous gift of $1 million toward Change YOUR Game / Cambia TU juego, opening in 2024. The exhibition, created by the Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation, will showcase stories of diverse athletes, scientists, engineers, designers and health professionals who created new technologies that change how games are played. Located in the National Museum of American History’s Jerome and Dorothy Lemelson Hall of Invention and Innovation within the Innovation Wing, Change YOUR Game will challenge stereotypes of who can be an inventor and encourage visitors, especially youth, to recognize their own inventive abilities in their everyday lives.

Founded in 1964 and later renamed NIKE, Inc., in 1971, the organization is comprised of the NIKE, Jordan and Converse brands. Together they are dedicated to strengthening communities, seeking innovative and sustainable solutions, developing inclusive play-and-sport-based programs, and expanding opportunities for girls. NIKE, Inc., seeks to move the world forward through the power of sport and meaningful change.

Named in honor of the Museum’s most well-known and beloved artifact, the Star-Spangled Banner Society recognizes legacy gifts to the National Museum of American History.

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