



National Museum
of American History

Strategic Plan
2013–2018



Love History.
Use History.
Make History.



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Looking Ahead

The National Museum of American History, with more than three million artifacts and documents, is our nation's largest institution devoted to American history. Almost five million people come here annually, and many millions more visit us online. How do we best share an understanding of what makes America ... America?

"America" is far more than a geographic location. It is also an idea and an experiment that has reverberated through the centuries—grounded in freedom, possibility, and opportunity, tempered by conflict, and strengthened by dissent and difference. Much of the enduring power of "America" lies in the continuous testing of its ideals. At the National Museum of American History, we draw our inspiration from this majestic idea.

Over the next decade, we will use our unparalleled collections to tell an inclusive, respectful, and compassionate story of all the peoples in America who were here, who came here, and who were brought here. We will tell an overarching American story—interweaving multiple stories of perseverance, triumph, and optimism with those of struggle. We will present our history as substantial and challenging, inviting and accessible, inspiring and wonderfully human. Together with the American people, we will wrestle with the hardest issues that we have faced and do so in an inspirational manner, aiming to make a difference in the life of the nation.

John L. Gray
Elizabeth MacMillan Director
National Museum of American History



Mission

Through incomparable collections, rigorous research, and dynamic public outreach, we explore the infinite richness and complexity of American history. We help people understand the past in order to make sense of the present and shape a more humane future.



Our Strengths

- World-class Collections
- Dedicated Staff
- American History Expertise
- Location on the National Mall in Washington, DC
- National and International Reach

Our collections are unmatched. Our staff includes curators, historians, educators, archivists, artists, archivists, designers, collections managers, conservators, exhibit fabricators, editors, new media and communications experts, project managers, fund-raisers, procurement officers, interns, and volunteers. We deepen our proficiencies and broaden our outreach with partners and collaborators. This depth of knowledge, applied intellectual rigor, and cumulative experience sustain an expertise built over the 165-plus years of the Smithsonian's existence and marshaled on behalf of our many publics. These strengths allow us to reach visitors at diverse locations who have a multiplicity of interests, learning styles, and skills.

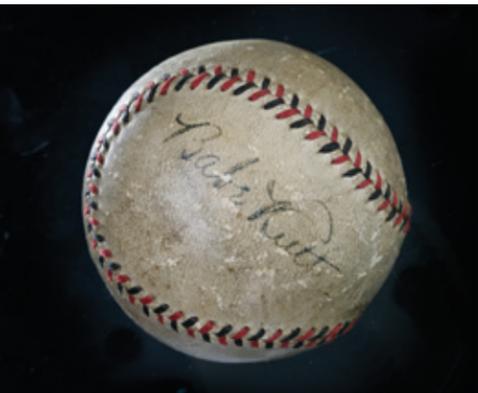


Our Values

- **Stewardship**
Respecting and caring for our historic collections and believing in the importance of interpreting history through objects
- **Critical Thinking**
Using the skills of historical analysis to study the past and understand the present
- **Inclusion**
Recognizing the impact of all Americans
- **Curiosity**
Activating a lifetime of learning American history
- **Collaboration**
Embracing interdisciplinary partnerships, both internal and external
- **Risk-taking**
Supporting experimentation—with its possibility of failure—with the aim of better interpreting the American Experience
- **Ethics**
Demonstrating honesty, generosity, and belief in equality

Moving Forward

1 Priority: Lead the nation in understanding the American Experience.



Strategy: Invigorate and update our scholarship, developing a comprehensive program that celebrates and supports research across the Museum. Increase research staff and research output and include rigorous peer review.

Strategy: Portray social, cultural, economic, political, scientific, and technological themes in historical and chronological context, covering significant eras and seminal events in American history.

Strategy: Experiment with challenging ways to think about and present American history as an encompassing, multifaceted story drawing on many strands, illuminating a multitude of people, ideas, and experiences.

Strategy: Collaborate with multidisciplinary partners to expand our reach and impact.

Strategy: Sponsor conversations about topical issues acknowledging the complexities of American history. Inspire an active, forward-looking citizenry by encouraging probing questions and respecting differing points of view.





2

Priority: Expand, strengthen, and share our collections.



Strategy: Increase and diversify our collections to properly reflect all American peoples.

Strategy: Increase digital access to artifacts and programs to proficiently serve off-site audiences, making our collections and research relevant across the nation and around the world.

Strategy: Preserve our collections for future generations by ensuring that they are stable and respectfully stored.

Strategy: Establish a collections accountability program supported by ethical practice and responsible stewardship.

3

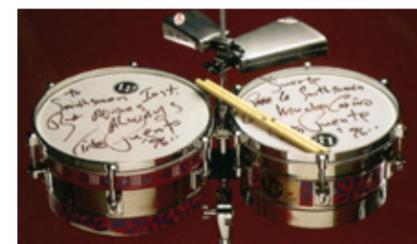
Priority: Engage diverse national and international audiences.



Strategy: Engage people on-site and online, encouraging them to explore history through objects as well as ideas. Present ways to understand American history through the highly accessible portals of theater, music, and food.

Strategy: Serve our base audience, while building important new constituencies.

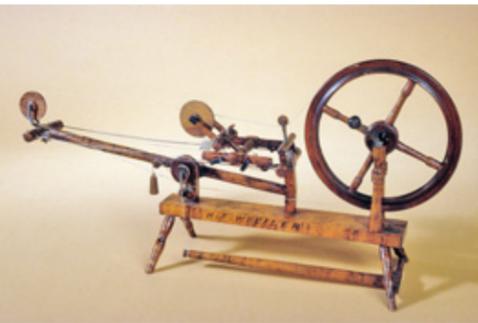
Strategy: Become an everyday web destination and social media hub. Foster an active online community that encourages people to share and assess their own stories, ideas, and opinions. Capitalize on the advantages and powerful impact of print, radio, television, and film.



Strategy: Make the Museum the go-to place for American history by creating educational opportunities that spark curiosity and build skills for thinking about history. Energize history teaching nationwide by offering object-centered resources and professional development training to teachers.

4

Priority: Revitalize and expand our staff and facilities.



Strategy: Create a streamlined organizational structure that ensures realization of the Museum's Strategic Plan, with an internal culture that rewards inclusion, civility, and collaboration, and that fosters transparent and effective internal communications.

Strategy: Assess the loss of 45 percent of curatorial, collections, and administrative federal staff in the past twenty-one years. Address the fact that 81 of our 160 permanent federal staff are eligible for immediate retirement. Develop and implement long-range staffing and succession plans.

Strategy: Expand and strengthen our financial base; make funding and budget decisions transparent to staff; develop a more knowledgeable workforce in the area of fund-raising and grant writing.

Strategy: Encourage and build relationships with other Smithsonian units and seek partnerships with outside organizations to increase interdisciplinary exploration and open new revenue streams.

Strategy: Revitalize our building, making it accessible, sustainable, visually stunning, and inviting. Complete the West Wing renovation and finalize planning for the East Wing renovation.



Funding the Plan

Fulfilling our aspirations guarantees that future generations will benefit from everything the Museum has to offer. As we continue to transform our physical spaces into dynamic new exhibitions, engaging program areas, and beautiful new performance venues, we will also be expanding the intellectual life of the Museum through new research and educational programs, and increasing the size of our professional and curatorial staff. We will expand our fund-raising outreach to individuals, corporations, and foundations under the auspices of the Smithsonian's first-ever national fund-raising campaign.

Over the next decade, the federal government is making a considerable investment in our Museum—more than \$100 million in capital improvements—to help revitalize both the west and east exhibition wings. Since the Smithsonian is based on a public-private partnership, the Museum has set a simultaneous goal of raising \$120 million in private funding over the next six years. Achieving all the goals of the Strategic Plan in subsequent years will require additional monies.

Federal funds make our platform solid; private funds support the programming that fills the seats, populates the galleries, nourishes minds, and creates unique “Smithsonian moments” of learning and wonder.





Coda

The world is constantly changing. America is changing. Our Museum must keep changing as well. In what ways will the National Museum of American History be a leader in the 21st century?

Several historical precedents helped us shape our plan for the coming years: the *Smithsonian Strategic Plan's* grand challenges and priorities; the Smithsonian's new communications and branding initiative; national history and educational standards; and the 2002 *Blue Ribbon Commission Report*, written as a blueprint for the future of this Museum.

Part of the important physical renovation has been accomplished in the Museum's core. We now tackle the reconstruction of the West Wing and the planning for the renovation of the East Wing. Most importantly, we turn our attention to an ever more dynamic intellectual life. Our greatest focus will be on exhibitions, programs, and research, as we work to strengthen our presentation of American history and communicate adeptly to both our loyal base audience and growing new constituencies. This Strategic Plan radiates with confidence because the Museum's staff brought it to life. The mix of people—across function and ranks in the Museum—revitalized our mission and laid out specific milestones for the coming years.

The National Museum of American History already plays a pivotal role in education and is seen as a leader in best museum practices among American history museums. We will redouble our efforts on both fronts because we recognize that our Museum must stand out to the public and be different than any other in its scope.

In collaboration with other museums at the Smithsonian, we take on the goal of illuminating the American Experience with and for a global public. The National Museum of the American Indian, National Museum of African American History and Culture, Smithsonian Latino Center, and Asian Pacific American Center will present specific stories about specific groups of people. We will all focus on the *Unum* that embraces the *Pluribus*.

Our Museum sits in a place of prominence in the middle of our capital, Washington, DC, in the center of the National Mall. It carries the name the **National Museum of American History**. People from everywhere, whether American or not, look to it as a kind of hearth—a core place to come to experience and feel what makes America ... America, to see the tangible objects and witness the stories. We will invite them to appreciate the possibilities and consider the challenges. Together we will build a deeper understanding of the evolving American Experience, and inspire all to shape a more humane future.

A Tagline to Remember

Love History. Use History. Make History.

Love: Spark in everyone a passion for history enlivened by objects.

Use: Understand the present by actively exploring the past.

Make: Make a difference by working together to shape the future.



Milestones

2013

- Complete design and development of the major new exhibitions and programs in the West Wing that explore the American Experience, based on first-rate scholarship and interpretive planning that encourages dialog and collaboration on-site and online:
 - American Enterprise (Business and Innovation)
 - The Value of Money (Numismatics)
 - Education Center (Object Project, Under Five)
 - Lemelson Center (Places of Invention, Spark!Lab)
 - Routes/Roots (Immigration and Migration)
 - Democracy in America
 - American Culture and Entertainment
 - Hall of Music and Music Collection Galleries
 - Changing Galleries for floors 2 and 3.
- Increase scholarly outputs and research quality through a coordinated research program.
- Develop appropriate new partnerships for collecting, research projects, film series, and Museum education programs.
- Develop the Smithsonian-mandated Unit Digitization Plan that outlines the Museum's digitization strategy and program. Develop the Smithsonian-mandated Digital Asset Management Plan for the Museum.
- Develop life-cycle plans and secure resources to keep on-site and online technology up-to-date and reliable. Become a leader in the effective use of museum technology, both for visitors and for internal operations.
- Establish an integrated marketing and communications plan to energetically promote the goals of the Strategic Plan and the Museum's work.
- Harness the energy and considerable talents of the Museum Board; bring members into contact with staff on a regular basis and give them more access to and knowledge about the Museum's work.
- Create a plan to develop staff skills across functional units to achieve the Museum's priorities, goals, and objectives. Foster a proficient and flexible workforce through training and mentoring opportunities.
- Start rebuilding the staff by hiring three new curators: Numismatics, Home and Community Life, and Military History/Political History, the latter two with expertise in Latino Studies. Hire personnel across functional units in accordance with staffing and succession plans.
- Evaluate campaign fund-raising goals and priorities and develop additional sources of support. Streamline financial procedures.





2014

- Celebrate the Museum's fiftieth anniversary with special events, new History Highlight cases, Document Gallery exhibitions, Artifact Wall cases, educational programs, and re-installation of Alexander Calder's *Gwenfritz*.
- Institute a rigorous evaluation process for exhibitions and public programs that emphasizes scholarly and peer review. Use visitor input to ensure continuous improvement in our products.
- Fund new research tools, such as library databases (MUSE), and participation in scholarly meetings to increase research output and quality.
- Increase support for comprehensive collections inventory and collections maintenance programs; create appropriate space for on-site and off-site storage, processing, and conservation of collections.
- Expand and fund outreach technology—web, social media, and digitization—and pursue cross-platform content development to foster lively worldwide conversation about the American Experience.
- Expand and fund visitor services for full seven-day-a-week coverage to optimize the "total" visit experience.
- Follow on the successful pilot of the Excellence in History Teaching Program by extending the program and raising long-term financial support.
- Continue rebuilding the staff by hiring a minimum of two new curators and other personnel across functional units in accordance with staffing and succession plans.
- Continue campaign fund-raising, adjust goals as necessary, and develop additional sources of support for the Museum's priorities and goals.

2015

- Grand Opening of West Wing first-floor exhibitions and companion programs:
 - *American Enterprise*
 - *The Value of Money*
 - New Education Center (*Object Project, Under Five*)
 - New Lemelson Center (*Places of Invention, Spark!Lab*)
 - Performance Plaza and Conference Hub.
- Increase support for scholarly research and publications through new funding and other resources.
- Continue rebuilding the staff by hiring a minimum of two new curators and other personnel across functional units in accordance with staffing and succession plans.
- Plan the East Wing renovation, including the deinstallation of exhibits, moving collections to new storage facilities, and launching exhibit development teams.
- Complete the West Wing construction and renovation in a manner consistent with LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) standards and obtain a Silver Level Certification.
- Continue campaign fund-raising and develop additional sources of support for the Museum's priorities and goals.
- Initiate an update of the 2006 Master Plan for the Museum.

2016

- Grand Opening of West Wing second- and third-floor exhibitions and companion programs:
 - *Democracy in America*
 - *Routes/Roots*
 - Liberty Square
 - *American Culture and Entertainment*
 - *Hall of Music and Music Collection Galleries*
 - Galleries for "rotating" exhibits (recent acquisitions, anniversaries, and current events).
- Establish a mentoring process between senior and junior researchers and authors for scholarly publications and other work.
- Plan all new East Wing exhibitions and programs and develop fund-raising packages. Begin to move collections from East Wing to new sites in preparation for East Wing construction.
- Rebuild the staff by a minimum of two new curators and personnel across functional units in accordance with staffing and succession plans.
- Continue campaign fund-raising and develop additional sources of support for the Museum's priorities and goals.
- Initiate architectural design and complete high-level exhibit strategy for the East Wing.
- Complete update of 2006 Master Plan for improving and maintaining public and office spaces and the landscape "surround" of the Museum.

2017

- Foster writing and publication collaborations for Smithsonian Consortia.
- Complete deinstallation of exhibits and move all collections from East Wing to new sites in preparation for construction.
- Continue design development of exhibits for the East Wing.
- Rebuild the staff by hiring a minimum of two new curators and personnel across functional units in accordance with staffing and succession plans.
- Continue campaign fund-raising and develop additional sources of support for the Museum's priorities and goals.

2018

- Complete 100 percent design for East Wing exhibitions.
- Promote our scholarship online and in traditional media; support staff participation and presentations at professional conferences.
- Continue rebuilding the staff by hiring a minimum of two new curators and personnel across functional units in accordance with staffing and succession plans.
- Begin East Wing construction in FY 2018 to be completed in 2020 in a manner consistent with LEED and obtain a Gold Level Certification.
- Achieve the Museum's campaign minimum fund-raising goal of \$120 million.





These are a few of our favorite things: Visitors and Artifacts

Covers

O Say Can You See everyone enjoying our Star-Spangled Banner flag-folding program?

Inside Front Cover

George Washington's uniform, 1789—1799

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Evel Knievel's Harley-Davidson XR-750, 1972

Presentation vase by Tiffany & Co., 1894

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Museum director John Gray donned a chef's hat to celebrate Julia Child's 100th birthday

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Retablo del Santo Niño de Atocha by Rafael Aragón, 1840—1850

3-D images bring history up close with our stereographic viewers

Page 4

Museum staff behind the scenes in the Armed Forces History collections

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For Kermit the Frog (1970), it may not be easy being green, but it is easy being loved

Page 6

Baseball autographed by Babe Ruth, 1926

Drawing by a Cheyenne, about 1894

Louis Armstrong's cornet, about 1914

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Where do their lunches fit into the food pyramids of *FOOD: Transforming the American Table 1950—2000?*

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Thousands of visitors enjoy learning about the Star-Spangled Banner with "Mary Pickersgill"

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Microphone used for Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Fireside Chats," 1930s

Abraham Lincoln's top hat, mid-19th century

Tito Puente's timbales, 1990—1996

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Bible quilt by Harriet Powers, 1885—1886

Spinning-wheel patent model by Hiram Wheeler, 1838

Aluminum tumbler set, 1960s

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The Smithsonian Chamber Music Society director with *Servais* cello made by Antonio Stradivari, 1701

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Southern Railway steam locomotive No. 1401, 1926

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Curator and conservator behind the scenes with the puppetry collection

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All aboard Chicago Transit Authority rapid transit rail car 6719, 1959, inside the *America on the Move* exhibition

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Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra swinging in Giza, Egypt, 2008

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Elvis Presley album, 1956

U.S. ten-dollar proof, 1848

Joseph Priestley's matrass flask, 18th century

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U.S. Model 1855 Harpers Ferry rifle, 1861

Michael Jordan's Chicago Bulls jersey, 1996

Teddy bear inspired by Theodore Roosevelt, about 1903

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Dorothy's Ruby Slippers from the 1939 movie *The Wizard of Oz*, 1938

John Deere plow, 1838

Democratic National Convention, Wisconsin delegate's cheesehead hat, 1996

Gilbreth stopwatch, 1910—1920

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Helen Taft's inaugural ball gown, 1909

Credits

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NMAH Strategic Plan Committee Chairs: Richard Barden, Nancy Bercaw, Erin Blasco, Ann Burrola, Nancy Davis, Laura Duff, Omar Eaton-Martínez, Janice S. Ellis, Kari Fantasia, Andrew Heymann, Valeska Hilbig, Michael Johnson, Jennifer L. Jones, Elisabeth Kilday, Beth Kline, Carrie Kotcho, Peter Liebhold, Maggie Limehouse, Matthew MacArthur, Jackie Reimann, Robert Robertson, Kathy Sklar, Monica Smith, Carlene Stephens, Kate Wiley, Christopher Wilson, Helena Wright, and Omar Wynn. NMAH Photographic Services Division, and Alicia Cutler, Collections Documentation Services.

NMAH Strategic Plan Steering Committee: Program Group, Jeffrey Brodie and Bonnie Lilienfeld; Management Group, Erika Mack and Amy Bartow-Melia; Presentation Group, Nigel Briggs and Pedro Colón; Writers, Howard Morrison and Katherine Ott; Editor, Joan Mentzer; Graphic Designer, Anne Hitchins; Interns, Caitlin Benedetto and Daniel Holm; and Director of Strategic Planning, Lee Woodman.



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