

Many Voices, One Nation

Americans are a very diverse group of people. They represent many different points of origin—practically every corner of the world. Our unique backgrounds and perspectives contribute to an ever-developing sense of what it means to be American.

Many Voices, One Nation explores the concepts that animate the country’s Great Seal and national ideal: *E pluribus unum*, “Out of many, one.” One core question of the exhibition is: “How did we become us?” Adapted from an original exhibition at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History (NMAH), this exhibition explores the great diversity of people who were here already, those who came by force, and those who came seeking new beginnings. The legacy of these many voices contributed and continue to shape the nation and our communities. The exhibition also examines “places of negotiation” —areas in society where different voices and points of view merge, blend, and evolve to create new ways of thinking about American identity. Places of negotiation can reveal important moments of time impacting freedom, inclusion, and equality.



What stories are in your community? How have diverse people come together to make change?

All History is Local

Many Voices, One Nation will be a Museum on Main Street (MoMS) Starter Kit exhibition offered to communities through our state partners. Participating hosts will enhance the Smithsonian content of this exhibition with their own local stories, images, and objects. Venues will receive three key elements: 1) Ready-to-build structure for two independent sections requiring roughly 200 sq ft.; 2) Print-ready digital files of Smithsonian curated text panels and image panels that will cover roughly 100 running feet; and 3) Digital, templated panels that will allow local venues to curate and insert stories, integrated directly into the exhibition. Venues can decide materials and presentation methods for these printed pieces based on their own resources and budgets.

Collaboration with State Partners

MoMS will work with our state partners as they select host organizations and provide the complete exhibition kit to each of them. From 2026 to 2029, MoMS will license content to up to 30 host organizations annually—around 5 per state—and work with state humanities councils to provide guidance, as host organizations add their local content. MoMS will lead a series of virtual workshops and one in-person planning meeting that brings all the communities together in each state. With so many communities in multiple states focused on this content simultaneously, there are wonderful opportunities for shared public program initiatives and virtual programs that feature curators, authors, and scholars among participating states. The fee for the licensed content is \$2,000 per community and a participation fee of \$1,000 per community for MoMS to lead the training workshops and provide guidance for host communities.

Curators

Museum on Main Street will work with a team of curators from the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History (NMAH) to develop this project, including Steve Velasquez, Curator, Cultural and Community Life, and Margaret Salazar-Porzio, Chair and Curator, Division of Home and Community Life.

Content

This exhibition allows hosts to create inclusive local exhibitions that resonate with the present. Smithsonian-curated content will frame and complement local content. Venues can utilize local collections of images and artifacts from cultural organizations for local components. The exhibition would also create a positive space for convening community conversations and programming. The exhibition will explore historic events and pose questions for today by exploring the following areas:

◆ How Did We Become US?

The exhibit explores a great swath of American history and allows local hosts to tell who has settled, interacted, and come together in their communities. Stories of immigration, slavery, migration, forced relocation, and multiculturalism are central here. These panels roughly follow these historical eras: "Unsettling History" (1492 to 1776), "Peopling an Expanding Nation" (1776 to 1900), and "New Americans, Continuing Debates" (1900 to 2020).

◆ Places of Negotiation

Throughout our history, there have been places of negotiation where people "work out" new ideals on freedom, equality, and inclusion. These places include:

- **Education:** Public schools often contributed to assimilating people into American society. They often share a culture and common language with patriotic imagery, symbols, recitations, and pageantry. Some families embraced this assimilation, while others resisted to maintain their religion, languages, and customs through private schooling.
- **Military Service:** In war and in peace, American military service has brought together people from across the nation. Service in the armed forces has bolstered demands for fair treatment in civilian life and since 1952 has provided a direct path to citizenship.



Hawaiian pineapple cannery workers at the Katakura & Company plant, November 1928. *National Archives, Records of the Women's Bureau*

- **Work:** Workplaces often bring people of different backgrounds together. Workplace issues and times of collective action have superseded ethnic loyalties and prejudices. Through work, diverse groups of people learn from one another and often demand better treatment and increased wages.

- **Sports:** Sports mirrored the challenges facing American society throughout the 20th century, but also reflects its promise. Sports bring together people from diverse cultures. The "All-American" game of baseball has reflected the nation's major issues and debates about race and ethnicity. Sports allow us to embody and challenge what it means to be American.

- **Religion:** Freedom of religion is an ideal that contributed to early cultural diversity in the United States. In recent decades, additional global religious groups

embraced the opportunity to worship freely here. Although religious beliefs can sometimes divide people, diverse peoples can come together in shared faith and values. Faith-based groups are often central to community life, providing support, and encouraging involvement.