

Minnesota Latino Museum



Presentation to the MN House Legacy Finance Committee — Impact of “Metro Surge” — 03-11-2025

Agenda Items



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Fridays at 7 p.m.

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MINNESOTA LATINO MUSEUM'S ALEBRIJES EXHIBIT + DOCUMENTARY

ED Aaron Johnson-Ortiz talks exhibit + plans for a future brick-and-mortar museum.

1. **INTRODUCTION** — Aaron Johnson-Ortiz, ED
2. **KEY DATA** — Mexicans and Latinos in Minnesota
3. **CONTEXT** — MN Latino Museum, Recent Work, Cultural Impact
4. **ICE / METRO SURGE** — Impact on Community, Artists, and Organization
5. **GRACIAS** — Thank you

1.

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, Chairs Vang and McDonald, and Esteemed Members of the Legacy Finance Committee,

My name is Aaron Johnson-Ortiz, and I am the Executive Director and Founder of *(Neo)Muralismos de México*, a Minnesota NonProfit organization.

We use the DBA (“doing business as”) of **Minnesota Latino Museum**. You can learn more about our work at:

- Our webpage: mnlatinomuseum.org
- Our instagram: [@mn.latino.museum](https://www.instagram.com/mn.latino.museum)
- A recent TPT / PBS documentary about our work: <https://www.tpt.org/make-minnesotas-first-latino-museum/>
- Last year’s MPR story about our work: <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2025/01/22/after-nearly-100-years-of-waiting-a-latino-museum-is-proposed-for-st-paul>

Today, I would like to cover the following items:

1. INTRODUCTION — Aaron Johnson-Ortiz, ED
2. KEY DATA — Mexicans and Latinos in Minnesota
3. CONTEXT — MN Latino Museum, Recent Work, Cultural Impact
4. 2026 GOALS — Planned Programs & Exhibits
5. METRO SURGE — Impact on Community, Artists, and Organization
6. GRACIAS — Thank you for your time and attention

A little background about me — I was born in Coon Rapids, Minnesota, and I spent my childhood growing up between Minnesota as well as Mexico and Guatemala.

In Minnesota, I grew up between Saint Paul and my family’s farm in Lincoln County near Ivanhoe, Minnesota.

My father is a fourth-generation Minnesota,

with Scandinavian roots. My mother was born in Mexico City and arrived in Minnesota as a young woman in 1969.

My background is in community organizing, union organizing, muralism and public art, as well as arts administration.

During the Obama administration, I worked for several years as an immigrant-rights community organizer. During this time, I witnessed first-hand the impacts of our broken immigration system on children, parents, and families in my community.

From my perspective, this problem has gotten worse every year since the 1990s.

In my view, this is a bipartisan failure — both Republican and Democratic administrations share responsibility for the the harm and trauma that has been caused in our community.

I would like to share some key data and context with you today, and I hope this information will guide you in policy-making that is supportive, rather than harmful, to immigrant communities in Minnesota.



2.

KEY DATA:

Mexicans are the largest nonwhite cultural community in Minnesota.

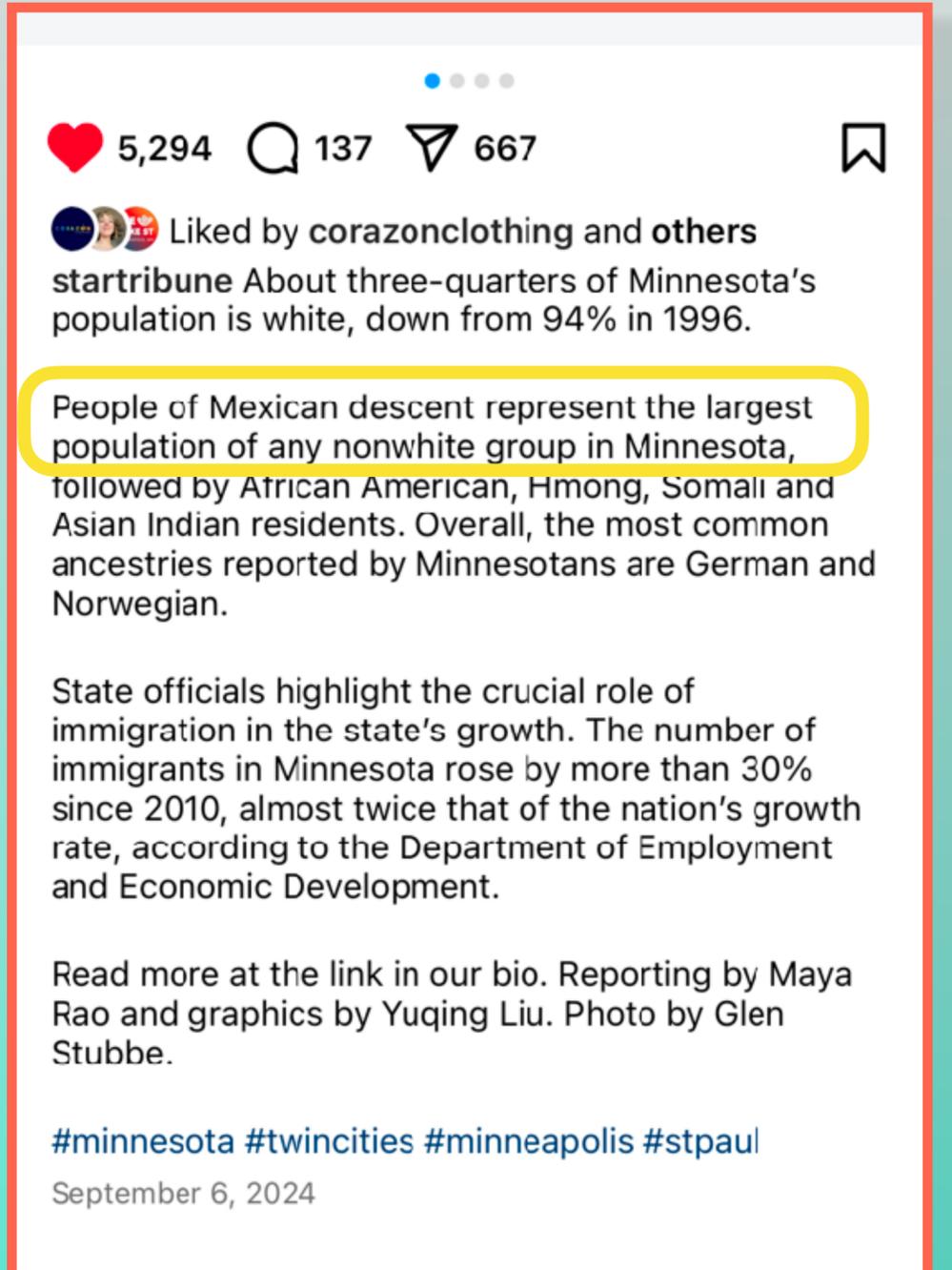
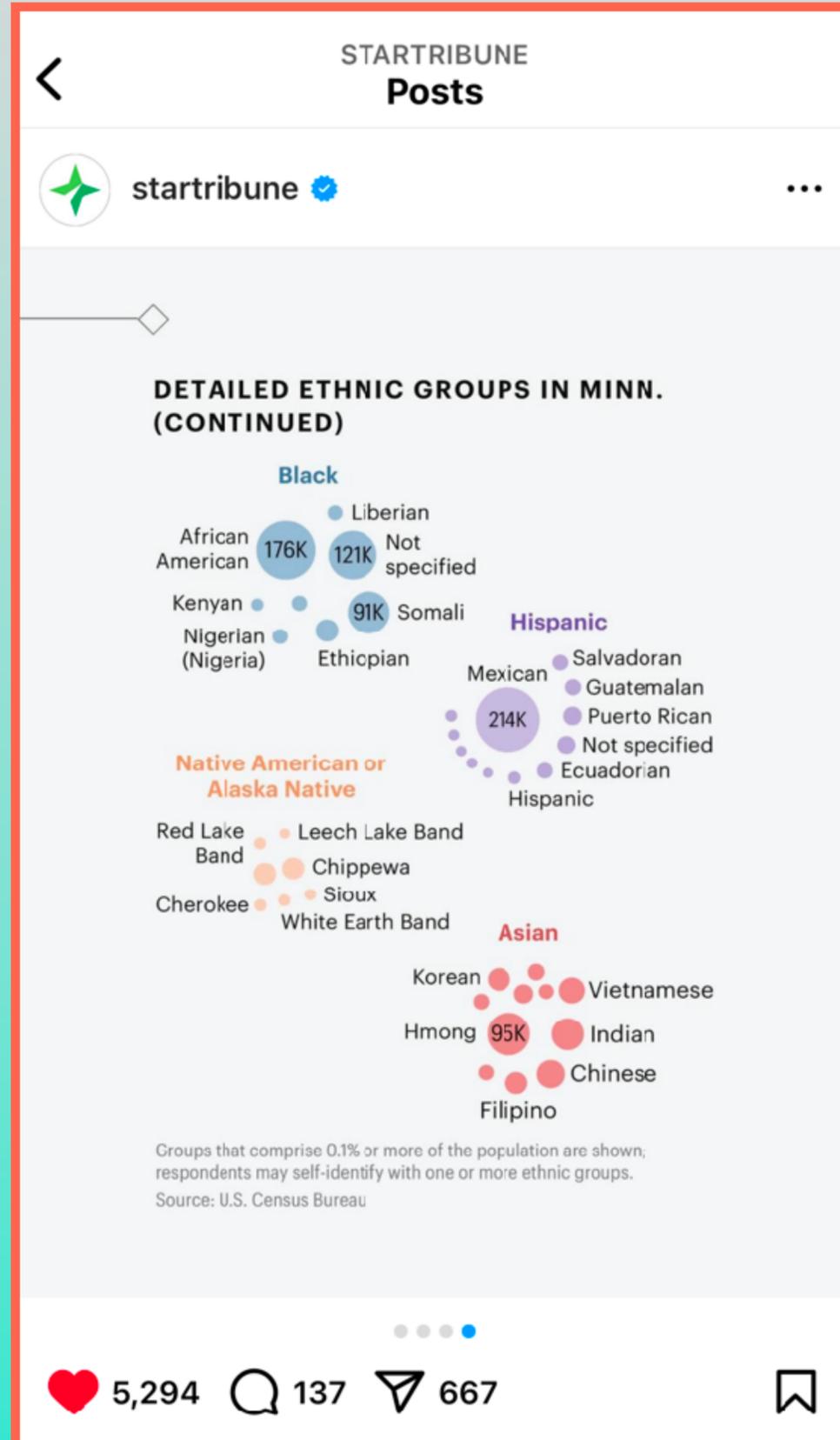
Mexicans are also the oldest immigrant community of color in Minnesota.

Around 400,000 Latinos call Minnesota home; about two-thirds of whom are of Mexican descent.

Since at least 1886, Mexicans and Latinos have worked, lived, and made community and culture in Minnesota. There are even some historical records records that suggest that Mexicans have lived in Minnesota since before we became incorporated into the United States.

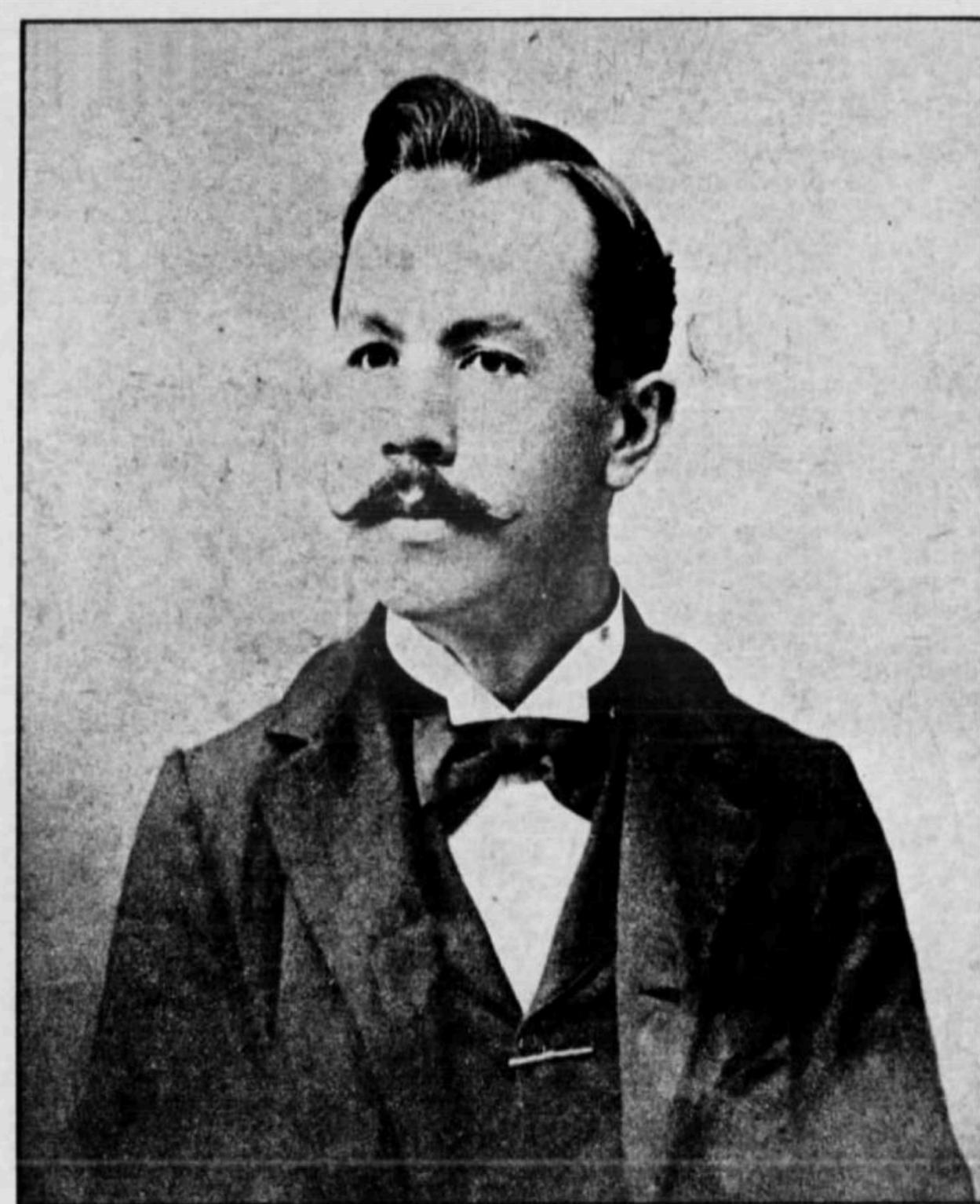
In short, Mexicans are a cornerstone demographic of Minnesota.

About 10% of Minnesota children are Latino.



Images to the left and above: Screenshots of an Instagram post on September 6, 2024 by the Minneapolis Star Tribune, with an infographic about nonwhite populations in Minnesota, based on data from the 2020 US Census

140 Years of Mexican & Latino Arts in Minnesota



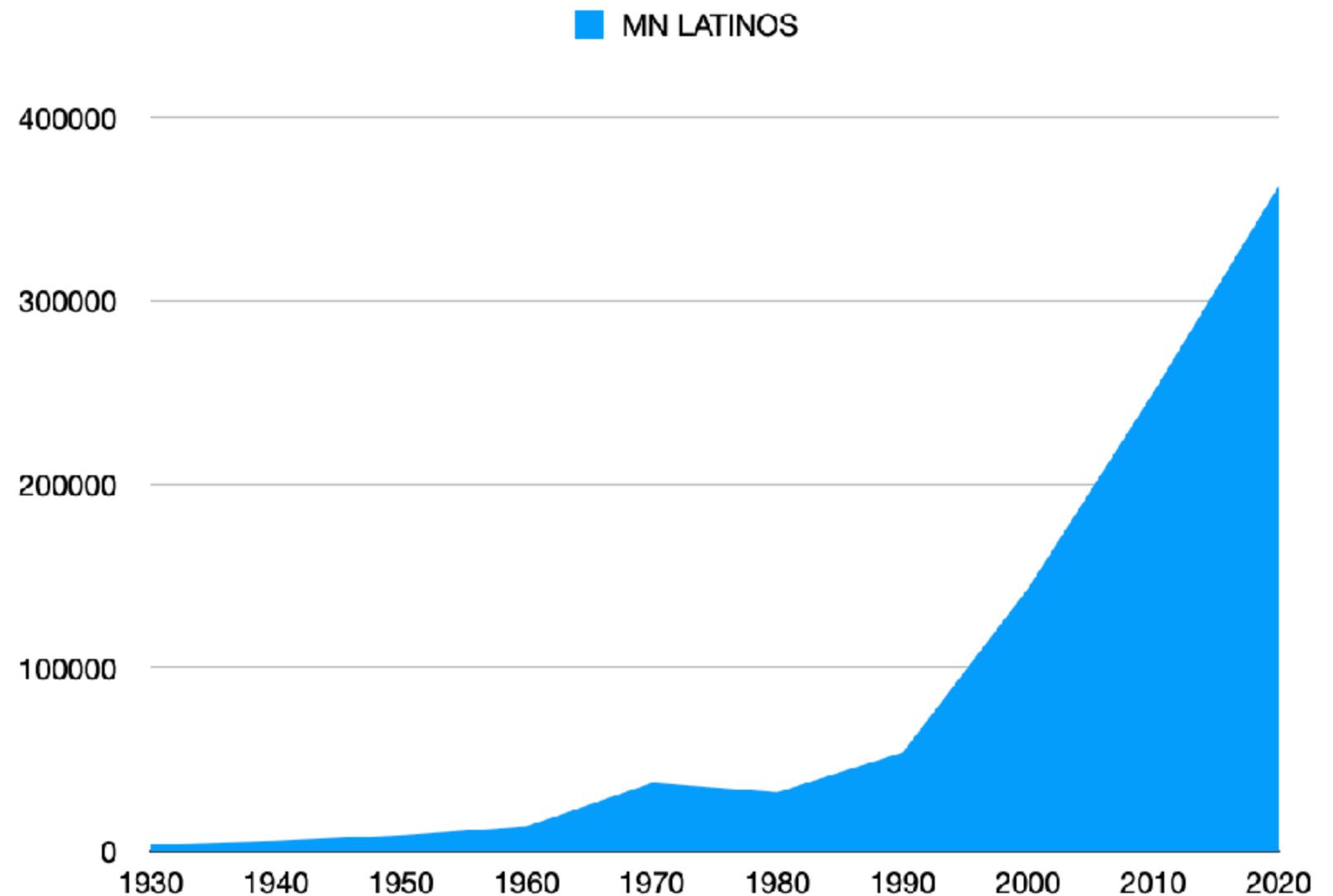
Luis G. Garzon, photographed in 1895, possibly the first Mexican to settle in Minnesota.

Mexican & Latino Population Growth in MN

Key Data:

- 400,000 Latinos live in MN
- Two-thirds have Mexican heritage
- Since 2000, our community has grown almost 3x (278%)
- 10% of MN children are Latino

Over the past 100 years, the Latino population in Minnesota has grown by more than 100x (10,000%). By comparison, the state's population overall has grown by a little more than two-fold (239%) over the same period.





3.

CONTEXT:

Latinos generally are significantly under-represented in arts funding, as well as elected political positions in Minnesota.

Mexicans specifically have the lowest levels of arts funding and elected representation in Minnesota.

Our small nonprofit organization, “(Neo)Muralismos de México,” is the largest non-profit organization in Minnesota focused on the local Mexican community.

We are also the largest Latino arts organization in Minnesota.

Nevertheless, we are relatively small — our total expenses last year were \$326,000.

Across the US, Latinos generally have some of the lowest levels of arts and cultural representation.

For example, the Institute of Museum & Library Services estimates that there are around 35,000 museums in the US.

Of those, we estimate that there are only 30-35 museums focused on Latinos in the entire country.

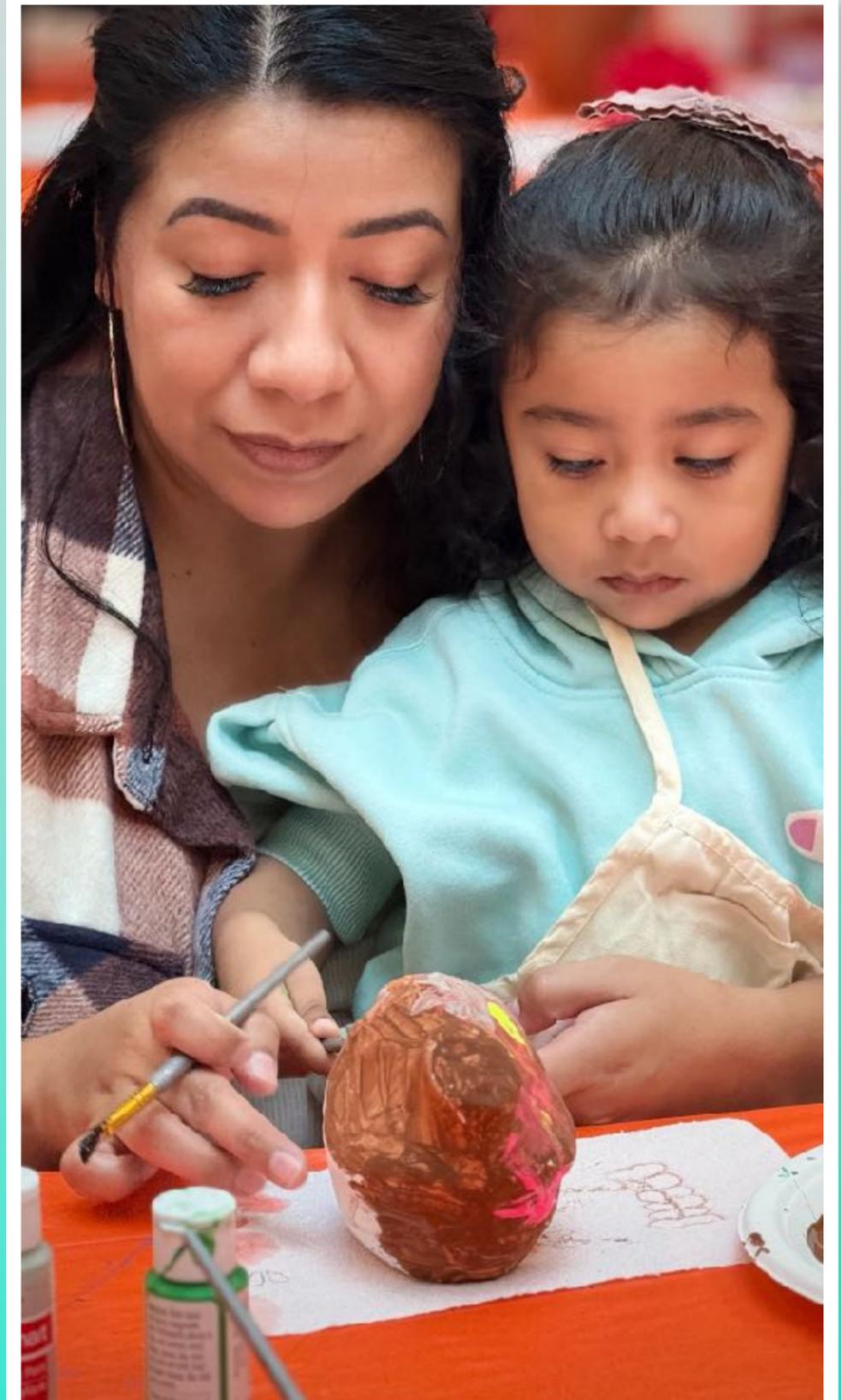
That is around 1 in a 1,000, or about 0.1%.

For context, Latinos are about 20% of the US population.

As a nonprofit, we are based primarily in the Twin Cities, and we work in South Minneapolis as well as the West Side of Saint Paul, and across the Metro Twin Cities area.

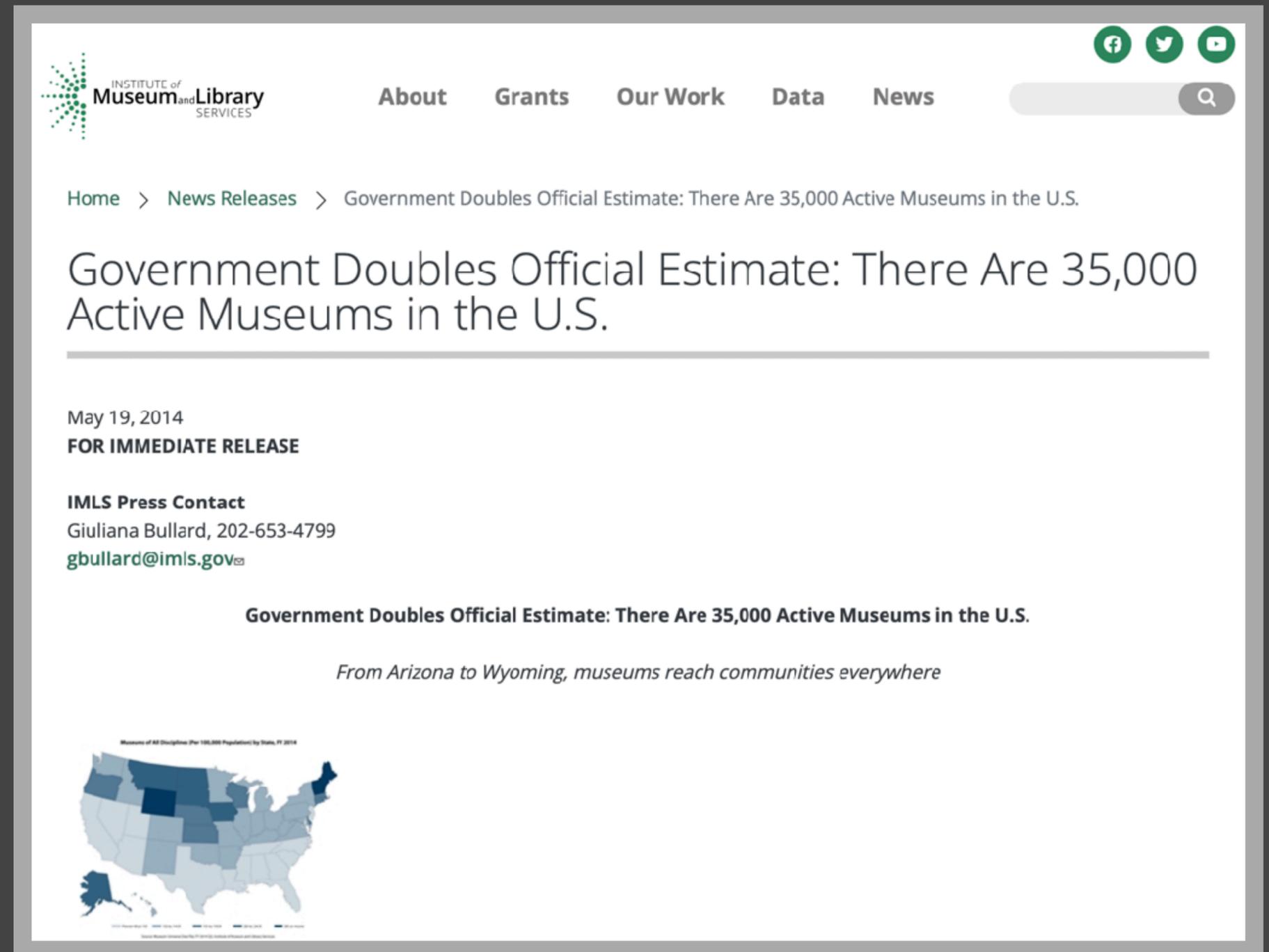
Our long-term vision of the Minnesota Latino Museum is proposed for the West Side Flats neighborhood, the oldest Mexican and Latino *barrio* in the State of Minnesota.

We are working with the City of Saint Paul to develop this community cultural museum at Harriet Island Regional Park, on the banks of the Mississippi River in Saint Paul.



Representation of Latino Museums – US

- IMLS estimates more than 35,000 museums in the USA
- Only around 30-35 US Latino museums exist — only 1 in 1,000
- The **Minnesota Latino Museum** will be the only Latino-focused museum in the Upper Midwest (MN, SD, ND, IA, WI, MI)



INSTITUTE of Museum and Library SERVICES

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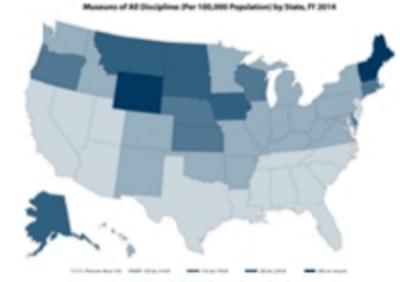
May 19, 2014
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Government Doubles Official Estimate: There Are 35,000 Active Museums in the U.S.

From Arizona to Wyoming, museums reach communities everywhere

Museums of All Disciplines (Per 100,000 Population) by State, FY 2014





MPRnews

After 100 years of waiting, a Latino Museum is proposed for St. Paul's West Side Flats

The museum hopes to open by 2029 and will celebrate and preserve Latino arts, heritage and community.

2,507 24 196



"He created a store that functioned as a community center. People came to not only purchase dulces or ingredients they couldn't find anywhere else," Lopez said, "But they also came for convivencia, to feel connected, to coexist with others after a long day on the railroad or working in the fields or cleaning houses. Garzón's space, due to the people who interacted with it, became a space for arts and culture."



Jessica Lopez Lyman, a University of Minnesota assistant professor of Chicano and Latino Studies, spoke about the proposed Minnesota Latino Museum

EXISTING CONDITIONS

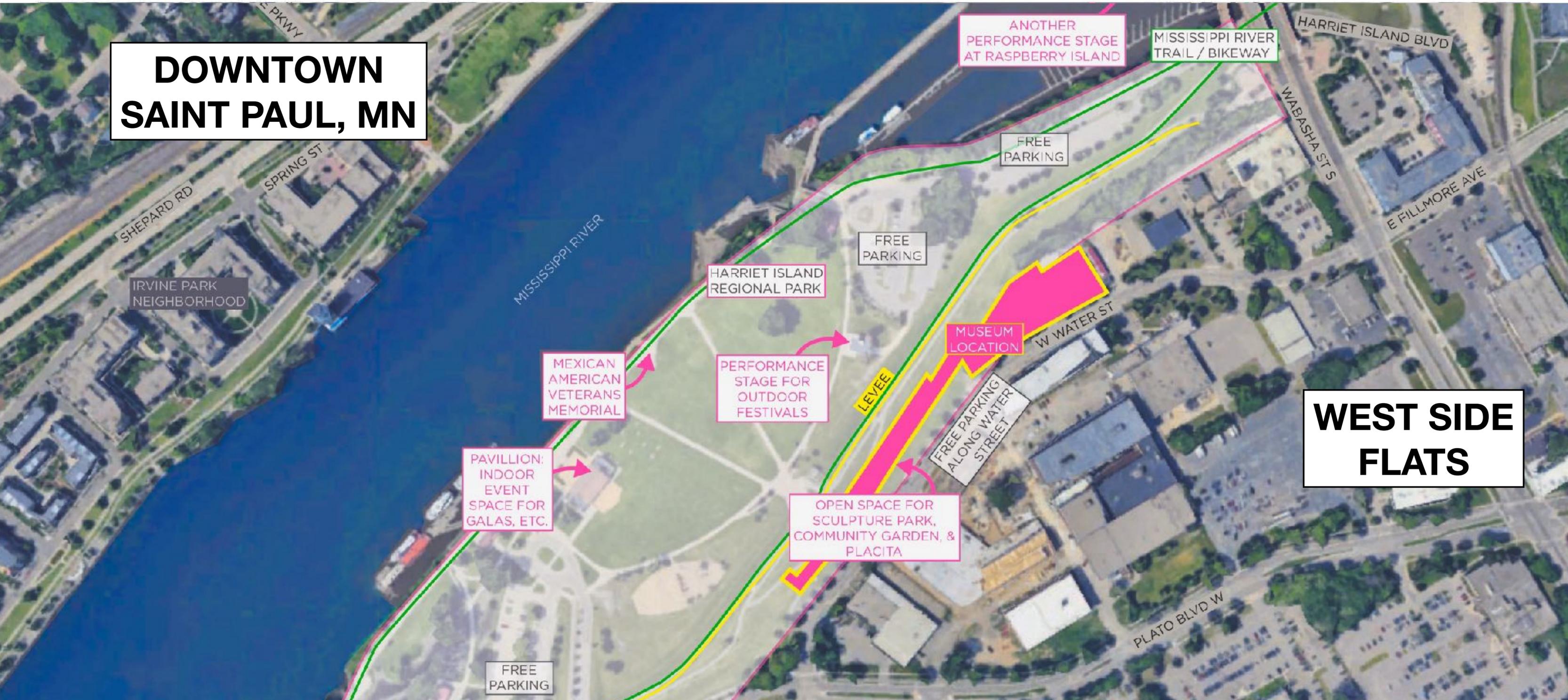


4RM+ULA

LOCATION

The proposed site sits along W Water St, which is accessible by Wabasha St S. Adjacent to the project site is a levee for the Mississippi River. This levee is crowned with a pedestrian and cyclist path, which run through Harriet Island Regional Park. These trails have the potential to connect to a Museum entrance. Also in close proximity to the project site are apartments, industrial and commercial spaces, and a public charter high school.

**DOWNTOWN
SAINT PAUL, MN**



**WEST SIDE
FLATS**

Additionally, we work on pop-up exhibits and arts workshops across the State of Minnesota.

Project locations in Greater Minnesota include:

- Austin, MN
- Red Wing, MN
- Duluth, MN
- Worthington, MN

In recent years, we have had a number of accomplishments:

— In 2022, we organized the first Day of the Dead Altar at the Minnesota State Capital. Governor Tim Walz issued a State Proclamation recognizing our work, as well as Day of the Dead in Minnesota. Through our work, Minnesota became the first state in the country to officially recognize Day of the Dead.

— In 2023, we launched the campaign to develop the Minnesota Latino Museum, which will be the first Latino museum in the Upper Midwest.

— In 2024, we organized a 3-day weekend of art activities for Days of the Dead at the Mall of America. With 60,000 viewers and visitors, as well as 7,000 hands-on workshop participants, this arts festival became the largest event in 2024 organized by a Latino nonprofit in Minnesota.

— In 2025, we organized the groundbreaking exhibit, “Alebrijes: Keepers of the Island” on Raspberry Island on the Mississippi River in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Some important impact data about this exhibit includes:

- ✓ At 308,000 visitors, it was one of the highest-attended art exhibits in Minnesota history, possibly the highest;
- ✓ 1.23 million views on our Instagram;
- ✓ Highest earned-media coverage of any 2025 art exhibit;
- ✓ 16,000 Instagram followers, higher than established Saint Paul arts nonprofits;
- ✓ Sector-leading highest cost-efficiency for Minnesota arts organization.

— In 2026, we had planned to celebrate 140 years of Mexican music in Minnesota, but we will likely pivot due to challenges resulting from Metro Surge in Minnesota.





OUTREACH PROJECTS:

- **St Paul** — West Side cultural activities; Day of the Dead at MN Capitol
- **Minneapolis** — Lake Street, Alebrijes workshops
- **Bloomington** — Day of the Dead at Mall of America
- **Red Wing** — Artist residencies, festivals
- **Austin** — Murals, workshops, residencies
- **Duluth** — Public Art, residency
- **Worthington** — Festivals & public art





STATE of MINNESOTA

Proclamation

WHEREAS: Día de los Muertos, known in English as Day of the Dead, is a holiday with indigenous Mesoamerican origins and is among the oldest holidays in the Americas that has been continually celebrated; and

WHEREAS: Día de los Muertos serves as a memorial celebration to recognize and honor loved ones who have passed away to ensure that they are never forgotten; and

WHEREAS: Día de los Muertos is shrouded in duality, from painting half of one's face, symbolizing the quick passage from life to death, to the eye-catching marigold flowers that guide the spirits to their altars through their vibrant colors and scent; and

WHEREAS: An Altar de Muertos is a traditional cultural expression, a spiritual and religious offering, and folk-art form that is practiced by many Mexican and Latine communities in Minnesota and around the world to honor, remember, and celebrate the lives of friends, kin, and community members who have passed away; and

WHEREAS: This year, in partnership with Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs and (Neo) Muralismos de Mexico, artists Mónica Vega and Flor Soto will create and install the first ever Altar de Muertos, or Community Altar, for Days of the Dead at the Minnesota State Capitol. The altar will be on display from November 1-13, 2022; and

WHEREAS: The altar will serve to highlight and represent the cultural traditions of Mexican and Latine communities in Minnesota, create a space for remembrance of loved ones, and offer a space for community healing; and

WHEREAS: Minnesota residents, businesses, and employees are encouraged to take the opportunity to learn about the tradition of Día de los Muertos and celebrate with loved ones both past and present.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, TIM WALZ, Governor of Minnesota, do hereby proclaim Tuesday, November 1, 2022, as:

DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS

in the State of Minnesota.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State of Minnesota to be affixed at the State Capitol this 27th day of October.


GOVERNOR




SECRETARY OF STATE

MALL OF AMERICA – Days of the Dead 2024



- ✓ 4 days of art (1 day installation, 3 days activities)
- ✓ 7,000 workshops participants
- ✓ 60,000 in-person viewers and visitors
- ✓ 150,000 - 200,000 social media and earned media viewers
- ✓ 10 arts workshops; 15 public art objects; 20 artists presenting

ALEBRIJES: Keepers of the Island

- 2025 Proof-of-Concept exhibit — a “*Museum Without Walls*”.
- Local, state, national, and international partnerships.
- *Alebrijes* are a Mexican folk art of colorful and fantastical creatures.
- 17 Monumental papier-mâché sculptures at Raspberry Island — on the Mississippi River in Saint Paul.



80+ art workshops,
exhibit tours,
& outreach activities



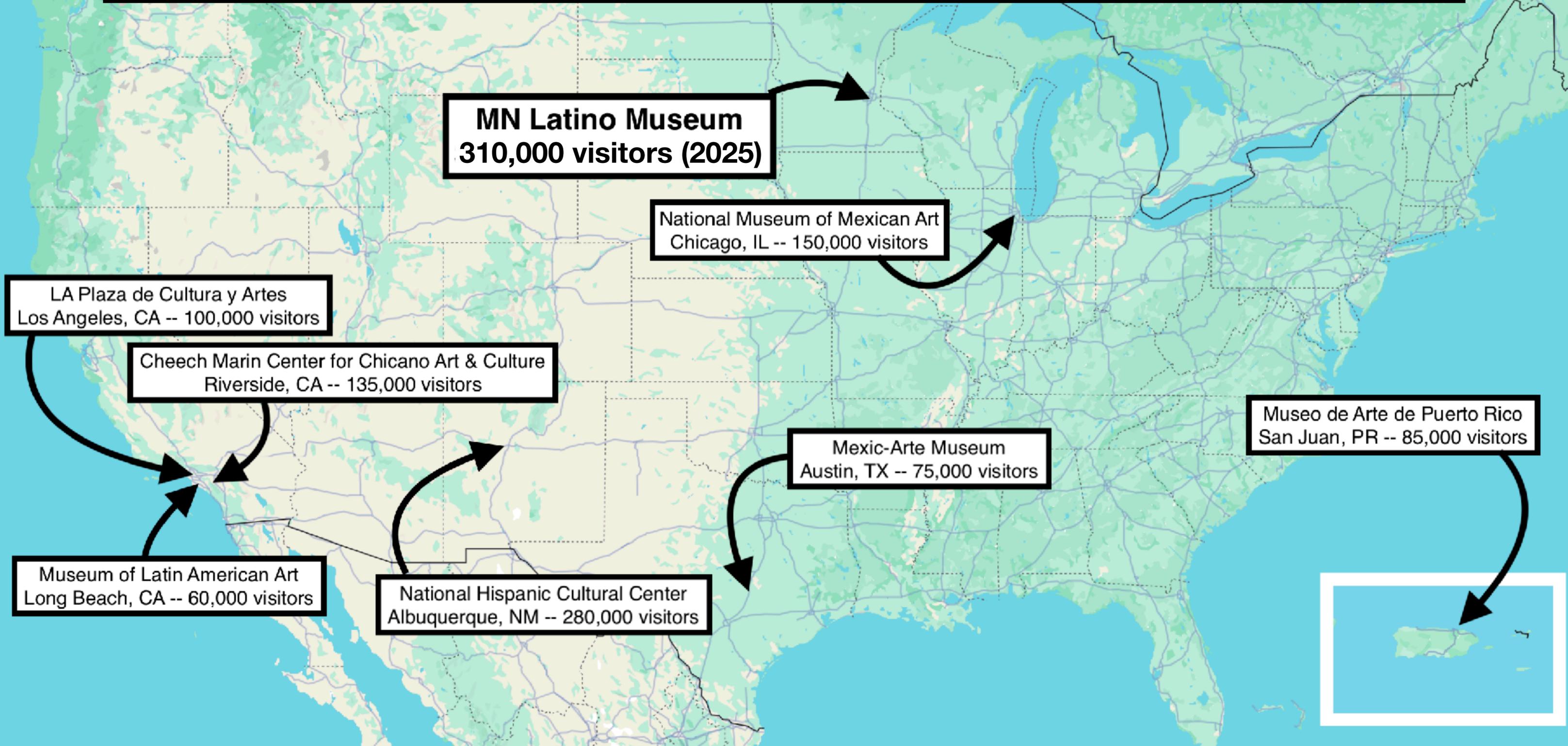
MN Latino Museum — Budget vs Impact

- ▶ **MN Large Art Museum** — 530k annual visitors, \$47M expenses (2023) — about \$90 / visitor
- ▶ **Mid-sized MN cultural institution** — \$6M budget, 45k participants (2022) — about \$130 / visitor
- ▶ **Small MN art museum** — 25k visitors, \$1.5M expenses (2023) — about \$60 / visitor
- ▶ **MN Latino Museum** — \$336k expenses, 310k attendance (2025) — \$1.08 per visit

(50x - 120x more cost-efficient than established MN art museums)



“Museum Without Walls” – 2025 Visitors



MN Latino Museum
310,000 visitors (2025)

National Museum of Mexican Art
Chicago, IL -- 150,000 visitors

LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes
Los Angeles, CA -- 100,000 visitors

Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art & Culture
Riverside, CA -- 135,000 visitors

Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico
San Juan, PR -- 85,000 visitors

Mexic-Arte Museum
Austin, TX -- 75,000 visitors

Museum of Latin American Art
Long Beach, CA -- 60,000 visitors

National Hispanic Cultural Center
Albuquerque, NM -- 280,000 visitors





5.

ICE / METRO SURGE

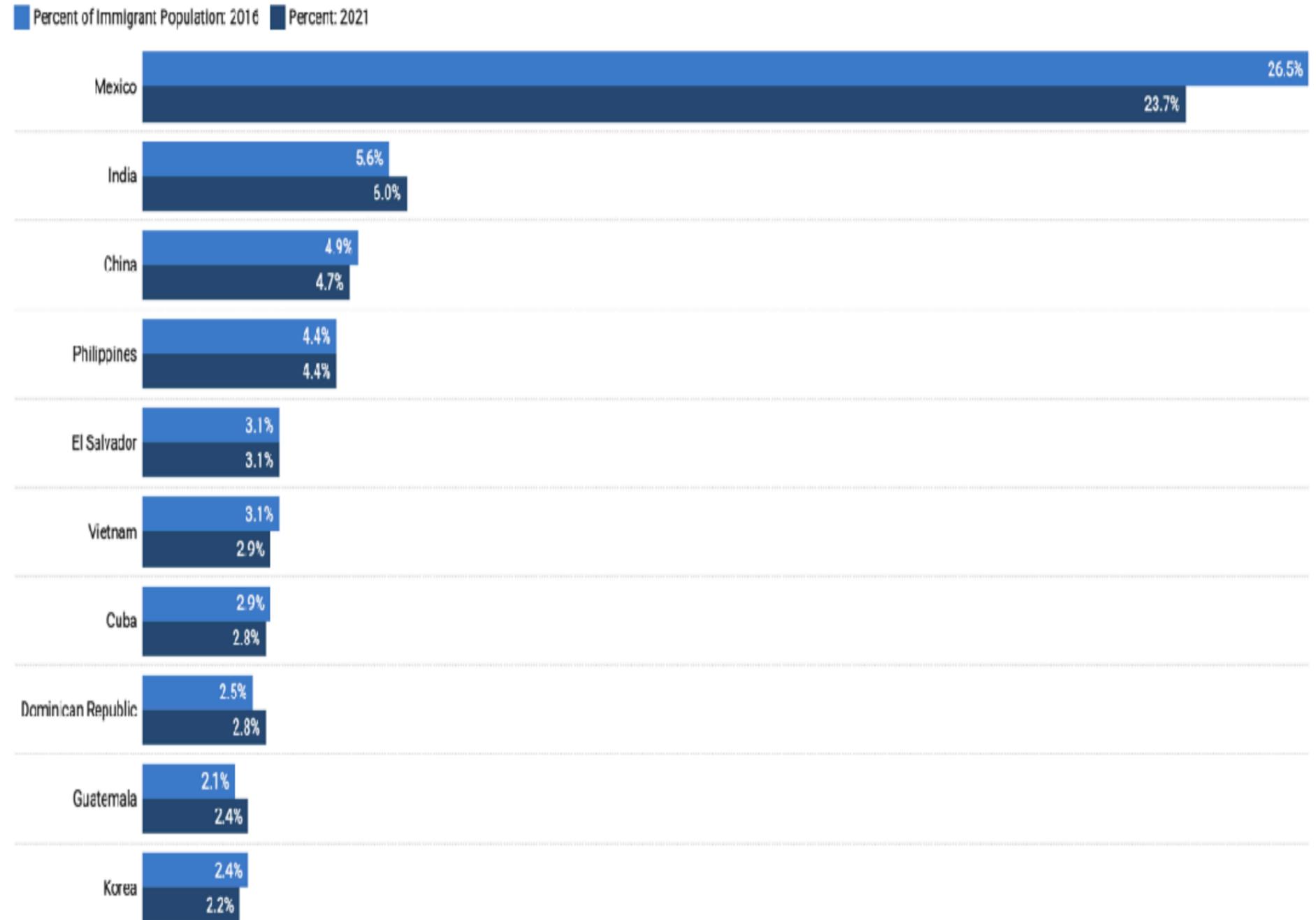
Mexicans have been the primary targets of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) since it was established in 2003. Central Americans, and in a more general sense, immigrants from Latin American, have been increasing targets of ICE in recent years.

Under the Trump administration, ICE has expanded its focus to target individuals with various immigration statuses, including US citizens. We do not currently have access to any data about deportations under Metro Surge specifically.

Based on news stories and testimonies, ICE under Metro Surge in Minnesota have targeted US citizens, as well as documented and undocumented immigrants.

Metro Surge has deeply impacted our work and our community — attendance at our events have dropped precipitously, and many of the artists and community partners with whom we work stayed at home.

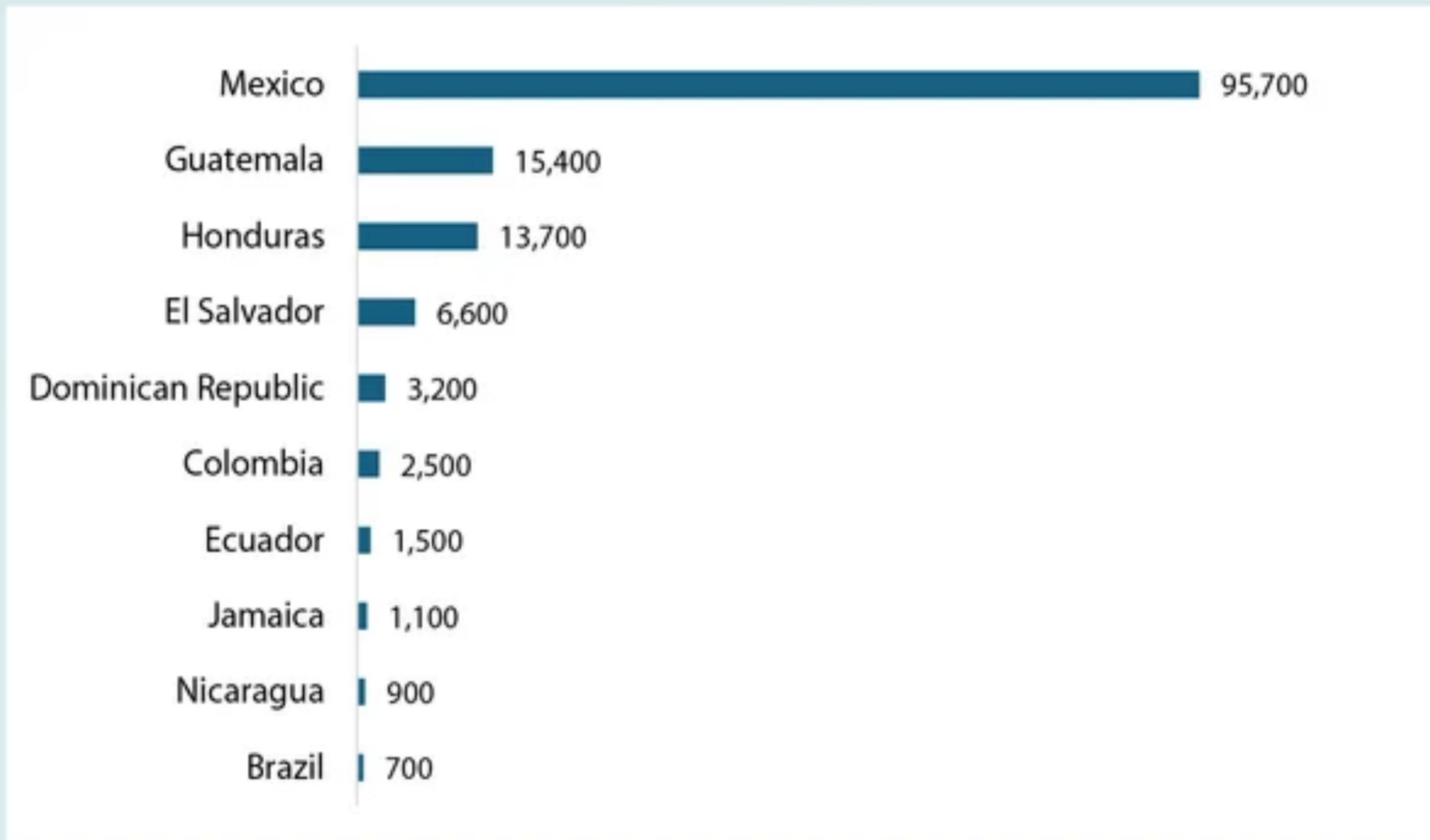
Top Countries of Origin Among Immigrants in the United States



Source: Council analysis of 2021 American Community Survey Microdata · Created with Datawrapper

ICE Deportations, FY 2021-24

ICE Deportations Resulting from an Interior Arrest, by Top Countries of Citizenship, FY 2021-24



Source:

Migration Policy Institute,
February 2025

[https://
www.migrationpolicy.org/
content/ice-arrests-
deportations-interior](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/content/ice-arrests-deportations-interior)

ICE Deportation Flights, 2025

Most ICE Deportation Flights Are to Central America

ICE removal flights between Jan. 20 and Jul. 31, 2025, by country/region of destination



Source: Witness at the Border



“The Trump administration has overseen more than 1,100 deportation flights since the start of [2025], according to data collected and analysed by Thomas Cartwright for Witness at the Border, an immigrant advocacy group.

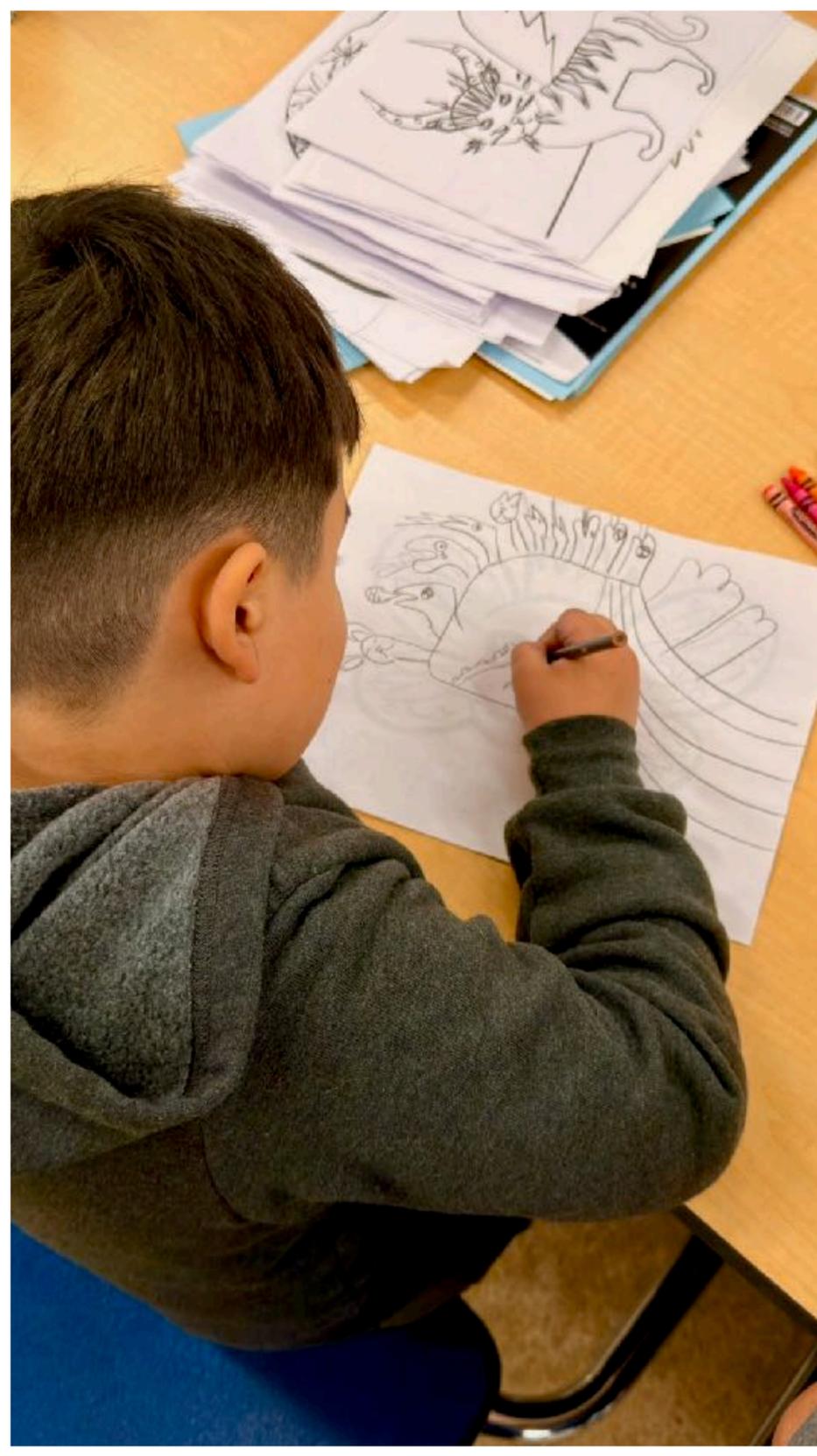
The vast majority of these have been destined for countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

As of the end of July [2025], 955 ICE removal flights were reported as going to the region this year, including 247 flights to Guatemala, 208 flights to Honduras, 136 flights to Mexico, 103 to El Salvador and 47 to Ecuador.”

Source:

Statista,
Sep 8, 2025

<https://www.statista.com/chart/35094/ice-removal-flights-by-country-region-of-destination/?srsId=AfmBOoqaMn8N9hHt38KjlnK2ZBIIHbLYHyiMpLNmFmqDSKskh1-XmFF0>



6.

GRACIAS:

Thank you, Chairs Vang and McDonald, and members of the Legacy Finance Committee, for your time and attention.

Mil Gracias (one-thousand thank-you's) to our funders:

- Minnesota Clean Water, Land, & Legacy Amendment;
- Minnesota Humanities Center;
- Minnesota State Arts Board;
- Metropolitan Regional Arts Council;
- National Endowment for the Arts;
- Institute for Museum & Library Services;
- City of Saint Paul Cultural STAR Program;
- McKnight Foundation;
- Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation;
- Mellon Foundation;
- Ford Foundation;
- Bigelow Foundation;
- Many others.





¡GRACIAS!

Aaron Johnson-Ortiz

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(Neo)Muralismos de México
Minnesota Latino Museum

Website: mnlatinomuseum.org

Instagram: @mn.latino.museum