

Salsa Music Icon Celia Cruz Will Be the 1st Afro-Latina Recognized on U.S. Currency



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According to the Census Bureau, Latinos and African Americans rank amongst the top two largest ethnic minorities in the United States of America. However, within those two communities lies an influential subgroup that is underrepresented and often dismissed as an unreal cultural dichotomy. Roughly 25% of Latinos living in the U.S. identify as '[Afro-Latino](#),' a distinction that most people outside of Black & Brown communities are unfamiliar with but Afro-Cubans, Afro-Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Belizeans, Afro-Panamanians, Afro-Chileans, Afro-Brazilians and several other Latin American peoples of African descent have been a foundational part of this country's growth for centuries.

The earliest wave of Afro-Latino migration is said to have occurred in the late 1700s when soldiers, farmers, and merchandisers from places like Mexico City and Puebla ventured up the Northern coast of their country (present-day California) to help Mexico institute a service road for supplies. In the 1800s, the Louisiana Purchase and the liberation of Caribbean nations such as Puerto Rico and Cuba contributed to over 100,000 migrants relocating to the United States of America. Since then, some of the most famous Afro-Latino neighborhoods in the U.S. have become Washington Heights in New York City, Union City (New Jersey), and Little Havana in Miami (Florida). The latter is home to a beautiful mural and a place among the 'Walk of Cuban Stars' in honor of the late Celia Cruz. Although Celia was born in Cuba, she frequented Mexico in the developmental stages of her music career before becoming a fixture in the U.S., especially in Florida, where approximately 70% of all Cuban Americans reside. The Billboard Music Hall of Famer is widely regarded as one of the most influential musicians of all time in Latin America.

Celia Cruz defected to the United States of America from Cuba in 1961, where she became a legal citizen, much to the chagrin of the late Fidel Castro. When the former President of Cuba learned of Celia's departure, he became so infuriated that he banned her from returning to the island. During her celebrated career, the "Quimbara" singer helped make Salsa music popular in the United States of America. She was also very instrumental in providing Afro-Latinos with a sense of pride and visibility, something that was very important to her. Nicknamed the "Queen of Salsa," some of Celia's praiseworthy achievements in America include being the recipient of the ASCAP Latin Heritage Award, receiving a star of the Hollywood Walk of Fame, and having a high school named after her in the Bronx. But, one of the grandest accolades in the posthumous career of Celia Cruz may come next year, when the consummate songstress will be recognized as the first Afro-Latina in the history of the United States to be featured on the national currency. The United States Mint (From the Department of the Treasury), recently announced that the five-time Grammy Award winner will be featured on the country's new quarter sometime in 2024. This revelation is a part of The Mint's American Women Quarter Program, and it comes nearly four months after the unveiling of [the first American Quarter to feature the likeness of an Asian-American \(Anna May Wong\)](#).

"All of the women being honored have lived remarkable and multi-faceted lives, and have made a significant impact on our Nation in their own unique way," said the Director of the United States Mint, Ventris C. Gibson. "The women pioneered change during their lifetimes, not yielding to the status quo imparted during their lives. By honoring these pioneering women, the Mint continues to connect America through coins which are like small works of art in your pocket."

Designs for the new quarter will be shared with the public later this year. The Mint will honor four other women with this prestigious distinction.