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Representations of Native American Women in Museums

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in Anthropology with Honors

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Abstract

For centuries, Native American women have been presented in a variety of stereotypical manners, from the “squaw–drudge” workhorse to the “Indian princess.” From literature to film, they have been presented often in less-than-dignified ways and usually in subservience to their fellow men. Another way in which these perceptions may have infiltrated the minds of the average American adult or child is through the tours and displays of the many museums offering exhibits on Native Americans across the country.

This thesis focuses on the representations of Native American women in a selection of such museums. With the aim of experiencing the museums as a regular guest, I analyzed how Native women are presented in exhibits based on the images and descriptions on display. The choices that go into the production of a museum exhibit often reflect the mindsets of its creators. Attention was focused therefore on who create the displays and how the exhibits are designed.

My study is limited to seven museums in order to focus data on one region. The list of museums visited includes: the Seneca-Iroquois National Museum in Salamanca, New York, which houses daily demonstrations of Iroquois craft making; the Iroquois Indian Museum in Howes Cave, New York, highlighting the Iroquois people’s contemporary and historical creative arts; the Mashantucket Pequot Museum in Ledyard, Connecticut, the largest Native American museum in the country; the New York State Museum in Albany, which exhibits a life size Iroquois longhouse and a multitude of dioramas; the George Gustav Heye Museum in New York City, predecessor to the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in the nation’s capital; the NMAI itself, as the newest museum on the National Mall; and the Canadian Museum of Civilization near Ottawa, in Quebec, which has an extensive collection in their First Peoples exhibits.

This selection of museums allows me to compare the similarities and differences between museums focused on specific tribes or diverse societies, between the different Iroquois museums, and between those sponsored and operated by whites or those by Native Americans. The copious notes that I compiled on exhibit details showed me that the museums either broadly reflected, or attempted to mitigate, popular stereotypes. My data reveals the necessity of collaborative efforts between Native populations and museum curators to establish responsible representations of Native American women.

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Preface

As the bus rounded the corner onto Independence Avenue, a wide boulevard running the length of the National Mall in Washington, D.C., I glanced out the window and couldn't believe what I saw. Huge temporary walls enclosed the area next to the Smithsonian's Air & Space Museum, each printed with large graphics of Native Americans dressed in traditional and contemporary clothing. Amidst these pictures, words in huge type proclaimed this space to be the new home of the National Museum of the American Indian. I could not help but lean further toward the window, trying to peer beyond the walls to see how far along construction was. I was both excited about the prospects of a new museum to visit in the future and frustrated at the thought that it took this long for a museum about this land's indigenous people to appear in the heart of our nation's capital.

I first became interested in Native American studies as a young girl, although my hometown was nowhere near a reservation and Native American families were never a major part of my community. My parents are not of Native descent, either. But my childhood interests did not confound me then as they do now. During summer vacations, my parents would take my brother and me to rustic towns outside of the Smoky Mountains in Tennessee or in the backwoods of Maine. My father was an avid camper since his youth; he enjoyed the outdoors and Western films. My mother was less interested in camping but had a penchant for handmade crafts and

Indian jewelry. These camping trips would inevitably include an educational trip to a local museum and frequent stops in “Western”-themed trade shops. My brother and I would always leave with a toy or two – a tomahawk for him and toy horse or Indian doll for me. When we got older, our parents would take us to local powwows where we would walk from table to table, checking out the handicrafts, sampling food, and watching the rhythmic steps of fancydancers clad in feathers and beads. We were awestruck. Native life seemed so vibrant and alive at these festivals. We had never been to anything similar that celebrated our Italian, Irish, or Dutch heritage.

Our home in upstate New York was soon filled with baskets and wall hangings that my mother purchased at such events. Our video shelf was lined with films like *Squanto: An American Warrior*, *The Indian in the Cupboard*, Disney’s *Pocahontas*, *Jeremiah Johnson*, and *Dances With Wolves*. In my spare time I would read books such as Scott O’Dell’s *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, *Sing Down the Moon*, and Lois Lenski’s *Indian Captive: The Story of Mary Jemison*. At the time I did not find any problem with such texts and did not understand them as fiction. The stories were real to me – tales of brave indigenous girls at the moment of their tribes’ encounter with Europeans. The novels were sympathetic to the plight of Native peoples against the influx of foreign colonists who pushed them from their homes.

My experience at elementary school supported the conclusions I drew from these books. We read accounts of Pocahontas’ meeting with John Smith, the Pilgrims’ First Thanksgiving, and how Andrew Jackson drove the Cherokees off their land, beginning the Trail of Tears. We didn’t learn much about reservations or the contemporary lives of indigenous people. We assumed they had died off or had been

absorbed into American culture as our non-Native ancestors had. Every year we had our own Thanksgiving celebration, during which children in our third-grade class wore Indian costumes to school and performed skits in the woods for other students. Each group of children represented a different tribal group from around the country and they informed us of their tribal traditions, their gender roles, and what food they ate. I don't think that anyone in the class had American Indian heritage, but after we were taught to "play Indian,"¹ we all wished that we could be one.

These preconceived images of Native peoples were still in my mind when I entered college. After deciding to major in anthropology at the end of my freshman year, I also elected to minor in Native American Studies. I began to take courses that gave me the opportunity to deconstruct stereotypical notions of other cultures. At the time that I was choosing a thesis topic, the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) was opening its doors in Washington, D.C.. The creation of a museum for Native Americans on the National Mall signified an important new direction for museums, a movement in which I was eager to take part. I also wanted to pursue an interest in women's studies that I had just begun to incorporate into my busy undergraduate curriculum. To my advantage, an increasing amount of work has begun over the past decade into the study of indigenous women's lives and histories which, according to Devon Mihesuah "illustrate sensitivity to their positions as interpreters of the lives, cultures, and histories of Others."²

¹ "Playing Indian" is a phrase used by many Native American scholars to describe the fantasies non-Native Americans act out "to experience national, modern, and personal identities." See Green 1988; Deloria 1998; Mechling, J. (1980). *Playing Indian and the search for authenticity in modern white America. Prospects, 5, 7-33.*

² 2003: 3.

As a European-American student of anthropology and Native American studies, I have often come across serious issues that have at times made me contemplate changing my course. I would like one day to hold an educational position, whether in a museum, a grammar school, or a university, but who am I to teach others about groups I am not a part of? Who am I to be learning about other cultures in the first place? Where does my interest stem from and how do I use the knowledge I have gained for its best purposes?

These questions extend from a recognition that the discipline of anthropology resulted from centuries of colonialism and imperialism on the part of Western people, who wanted to “get inside” the indigenous mind. Early research was both reductive and exclusionary of indigenous opinions and often unreflective of the anthropologist’s own intent. Such works give off an air of superiority that does nothing to dismantle stereotypes and breakdown popular misconceptions.

Despite the challenge presented by a controversial history, anthropology can also be a useful tool that exposes people to the diversity and value of human culture. Rather than cutting certain groups off from researching others, it is more effectively used to incorporate as many voices as possible into the complex dialogue of human existence. Furthermore, instead of creating partial histories, more effort should be given to work collaboratively and incorporate societies in the margins into the discourse. For example, there is a great need for indigenous terminology and interpretation to come forward against the claims of non-Natives that have been propagated for years. If Native Americans are concerned with outsider myth-making, the best reaction is for them to counteract by declaring their own perceptions.

As a non-Native, I can only add my voice to the academic discourse. My interpretations and observations can only reflect my personal position, achieved through my research. I admire the work of Sally Roesch Wagner, who stresses in her work that it is *her* voice she is revealing, while also recognizing the implications and effects that may have. In her book *Sisters in Spirit*, She writes, “Filled with centuries of justifications for genocide, popular as well as academic stereotypes that mask the truth, and a cultural belief that I have the right to tell someone else’s story my way, I am dangerous.” Furthermore, she adds, “If I wish to create accurate, inclusive history I must first open my ears to hear, my eyes to see, and my mind to absorb the story before me.”³

This thesis project has enabled me to research the exhibits in six museums scattered across the northeastern United States and one in Canada. I do not attempt to make a complete study of Native American museums, only a comparison between a rather small selection of tribally- and federally-operated institutions. A substantial grant from the Renée Crown University Honors Program assisted in paying for my admission fee and travel expenses to the Seneca-Iroquois National Museum, the Iroquois Indian Museum, the New York State Museum, the Mashantucket Pequot Museum, the George Gustav Heye Center, the National Museum of the American Indian, and the Canadian Museum of Civilization. If I had had more time and financial resources from the beginning of this project, I may have incorporated museums in other regions of the United States and conducted a comparative study between the multiple regions. Perhaps that is where I can focus future research.

³ 2001: 13.

It is also important to note that in several cases I viewed exhibits that were temporary installations for a particular museum, yet I had to draw conclusions based on what I had seen. It is inappropriate to base an analysis of an entire museum on a mere snapshot of its collection, but it is important nevertheless to analyze what is on display. The majority of museums on average have only a tenth of their collection on display. While smaller museums may rarely rotate their collections, larger, federally-funded museums have wider capabilities and better access to traveling exhibitions and storage facilities.

In any case, what follows is a production two years in the making. In Part I: *Women in the Native American World*, I discuss how Native American women have been stereotyped by non-Native people since the moment of their encounter. This section demonstrates the modes of misinterpretation that I was looking for during my museum visits and that guided my observations. In Part II: *Behind the Glass – A Look at the History of Native Americans in Museums*, I briefly chronicle the precedents established by indigenous museum exhibits this country and abroad, in order to recognize the challenges that museums have faced in the past and continue to encounter today. Part III: *A Look at the Museums Visited*, is a record of my observations of the seven museums where I conducted research. The final section, Part IV: *Female Identity in Native American Museums*, analyzes my research through the lens of gendered constructions within individual exhibits.

Advice for future thesis students

Students preparing to write a thesis should choose a topic about which they are passionate, so that they can conduct successful research and analysis during their final years of college. Though it may be difficult to stay on task while surrounded by the “distractions” of university life, managing one’s time and sticking to a schedule are crucial for completing a thesis. Remember that writing is process; you need to start early so that you have plenty of time to write drafts and make corrections. New ideas may develop over time. Research material that has already been done in your discipline and be sure to acquire a copy of the appropriate style manual. As you write up your analysis, make sure to frequently backup your work and make lots of copies – you do not want to lose all your hard work! I would also recommend taking advantage of funding opportunities within the university and the Honors Department. Finally, and most importantly, develop a working relationship with your advisors and readers, and include them along every step of the way. They can be a great help in assisting you with your writing and helping you to solve any problems that come up during your project.

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Part I: Images of Women in the Native American World

“Representative of this bountiful land, the image of the Indian Queen was large and voluptuous. Usually shown holding or surrounded by pineapples and other fruits, she was dark skinned and bare breasted...She wore a crown of upright feathers and a skirt of leaves...Surrounded by warriors, she carried a spear and often placed her foot on the head of an alligator to show her strength and dominance over all things.”

– Rayna Green, (Cherokee)⁴

Early images of America were synonymous with European feminine ideals for over two centuries after explorers first encountered the “New World.” Artists rendered the new-found land as unspoiled, utopian, innocent, and inhabited by majestic peoples in their etchings and drawings. Native women were transposed into these pictures, personifying the fertile land and inviting Europeans to conquer her.⁵ She was depicted as a powerful figure and often took on the same classical imagery that has been associated with the Grecian goddesses Pallas Athena and Artemis. The Indian Queen also had androgynous attributes. She appeared as a leader and a warrior, carrying several types of weaponry and was often immodestly unaware of her barely-clothed supple body. She was presented in the foreground of these images, dominating the scene and presiding over leagues of males fighting or laboring in the background. These early portrayals exhibited a more European than indigenous persona; sometimes appearing cloaked in white fabric and helmeted with wild fineries. Such images therefore, can tell us much more about their European artists than the actual behavior and lifeways of Native peoples.

⁴ Green 1992: 13.

⁵ Deloria 1998: 29.

Most of these early depictions were produced by foreign men who had their own biases and agendas in producing such work. They knew little information about the actual cultural organization of the indigenous peoples they had so recently encountered. They interpreted traditions and gender roles through the lens of their own patriarchal societies; a reasonable perception considering only a limited amount of people actually had direct contact with the indigenous nations. Even the men who had crossed the ocean in search of this land had limited interaction with the clanswomen of the tribes.

As Rayna Green remarks, invasion certainly affected women differently than it affected men.⁶ Power traditionally belonged in the hands of men in European society. When encountering a Native community, European explorers sought out male leaders to conduct business and territorial negotiations. Many Native people also found it odd that European women were not present with the foreign men since their women contributed a great deal to the political process.⁷

While the diplomatic proceedings, such as treaty-making, were being managed by men, colonialism had another impact on the women of Native American nations. Although much of the new technology that Europeans were bringing into the Native communities was widely accepted and adapted by the population, Native people, and predominantly Native women, continued to produce their traditional crafts. When these items became desired trade goods, many women would venture out into the European settlements to sell their wares.

⁶ Green 1992: 33.

⁷ Green recounts one story from the 1700s where “Outacitty (also known as Ostenaco) led a Cherokee delegation to meet British representatives. His first words upon meeting the British were ‘Where are your women?’” (1992: 34).

As they were being displaced from their traditional roles in agriculture and politics, these women were still able to maintain a vestige of economic power. The preservation of these skills have also enabled Native women to become the cultural reproducers of their traditional values.⁸

Although indigenous men and women occupied different roles in the community, neither of the gendered roles was considered superior to the other. Balanced reciprocity between the sexes and an understanding that the separate roles equally benefit society are notably common themes in Native cultures.⁹ Native women, regardless of their status in the community, were often seen by European men as objects for sexual consumption and marriage. Several accounts from the eighteenth century even indicate instances of Native women suffering rape and attacks at the hands of the Europeans.¹⁰

The contradictory depictions of Native Americans by Europeans also reveal a gendered dichotomy. The female Native was often portrayed as one of two extremes: primeval and oversexed, or virtuous and hardworking. The first designation epitomizes the image of the Indian princess: “gentle, noble, non-threateningly erotic...tied to the native soil of America.”¹¹ Rayna Green argues that the early iconography of colonial America, “was distinctly tied to Indians through the symbol of the Indian Queen, later to become the Princess, who loses her Indian-ness as she transmogrifies into the Anglo-European and neo-classical

⁸ Shoemaker 1995: 7-11.

⁹ Klein and Ackerman 1995: 14.

¹⁰ Green 1992: 35.

¹¹ Bird 2001: 79.

Miss Liberty.”¹² The Indian princess, modified with “the more chaste demeanor of European female icons,” became a figure of nobility for the rebelling colonist aiming at independence from Britain.¹³ She became the image of American nationalism, personified through the lives of Pocahontas and Sacajawea.¹⁴ According to Kim Anderson, “Racism dictates that the women of these celebrated liaisons are elevated above the ordinary Indigenous female status; they must be some kind of royalty. The ultimate ‘reward’ for the Indian princess is marriage to a white man, providing her the ability to transcend into his world.”¹⁵

The second designation, frequently and problematically refer to Native women as “squaw–drudges,” and also objectifies them. It often portrays them as subservient to their husbands, doing hard labor for their families on a regular basis. Undoubtedly abused and without a voice in the community a squaw–drudge was dirty, vulgar, licentious and without morality. This image also demonstrated “the superiority of European womanhood and femininity,” and eventually “justified the deplorable treatment of Aboriginal peoples.”¹⁶

According to S. Elizabeth Bird, “The inescapable fact about this dual imagery of Indian women is that the imagery is entirely white defined. From early contact, white observers...defined the role of the Indian woman in ways that bore little relationship to reality....No actual Indian culture saw women in these limited terms; in fact, the range of Indian cultures offered a variety of roles for

¹² 1988: 31.

¹³ Deloria 1998: 30.

¹⁴ Perdue 4.

¹⁵ Anderson 2000: 102.

¹⁶ Anderson 2000: 102-105.

women, many of them holding a great deal of honor and prestige.”¹⁷ Even today, the vast majority of works on Native Americans, “are written by whites who analyze their subjects using Eurocentric standards of interpretation and by omitting Natives’ version of their cultures and histories. Because whites are usually the ones speaking about women outside their group, as well as the ones gathering information, creating theories, and benefiting from all this writing, Natives’ images are often at the mercy of author bias, power positions, and personal agendas of university scholars and authors of popular literature.”¹⁸ These portrayals are also equally demeaning to Native men, because it depicts them as lazy and without crucial sociopolitical and economic roles. They also do little to counteract other stereotypes of Native men as bloodthirsty savages or, conversely, as brave and noble warriors.

Despite increasing outrage over these stereotypes for the past century, popular media continue to reinforce misrepresented images of Native Americans. Western films produced since the mid-twentieth century have continually used these images for Native female characters. Recent films, such as Disney’s *Pocahontas* and *The New World* perpetuate these ideas with their appeal to younger audiences. Mainstream media also relegate Native people to the past completely. Contemporary images of Native life are not visible to or even desired by the dominant culture. Portrayals of Native people that are sympathetic or romanticized versions of the past are much more preferred forms of entertainment.

¹⁷ Bird 2001: 81.

¹⁸ Mihesuah 2003: 5.

A third representation of the indigenous woman is often admired by non-Natives and even extolled by some Native people. The image of “Mother Earth” is a powerful symbol of the female’s relationship to the land and the life-producing forces that a woman has. Many Native people contend that their cultures have always featured women in this prominent position. The Native woman as “goddess,” however, may be another cultural construction that was projected onto Native people by Europeans.¹⁹ As a positive image, it has been an accepted characterization since the 1960s, giving the counterculture another image of the “ecological Indian” to follow.²⁰ Regardless of its origin, it is celebrated today by insiders and outsiders alike and even emulated by New Age practitioners. For them she is often a medicine woman or healer. As powerful an image as it may be, this illustration of Native womanhood idealizes her in similar ways to the Indian princess stereotype. She is esoteric, unapproachable and perfectly beautiful. It is an identity difficult to obtain and it results in stifling the real Native American women that may not be able to live up to it.

The sexualized and demeaning stereotypes of Native women personally and often traumatically, affect their lives. Native women are forced to identify with these images on a regular basis, accosting them as logos on products in stores or characters in films. The images also become a part of the internal consciousness of the community. Lee Maracle remarks, “It is nearly impossible for Native men to cherish the femininity of Native women. They have grown up

¹⁹ See Gill, Sam D. (1987) *Mother Earth: An American Story*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

²⁰ Krech 1999: 22.

in a world in which there is no such thing as dark-skinned femininity. There is only dark-skinned sexuality.”²¹

These stereotypes prevent social change from being realized both inside and outside Native communities. According to Anderson, “If Native women are constructed as ‘easy squaws’ and are locked into this imagery through the behavior of individuals, they will continue to be rendered worthless in public institutions such as courtrooms or hospitals. If we treat Native women as easy or drunken squaws in the court system, we feed negative stereotypes that will further enable individuals to abuse Native females....Negative Native female images are part of a vicious cycle that deeply influences the lives of contemporary Native women. We need to get rid of the images, the systems that support them and the abusive practices carried out by individuals.”²²

Native women need to be seen outside of the roles that only present them in relation to men and as sexual figures. They must be visualized as mothers and daughters in their own right. Today they are established in every occupation there is, including doctors, writers, lawyers, and teachers, not to mention community leaders, activists, and artists. There is no single identity that expresses the range of roles that they occupy; “rather, there exists a spectrum of multi-heritage women in between ‘traditional’ and ‘progressive,’ possessing a multitude of opinions about what it means to be a Native female.”²³ The time has come for the rest of the world to understand this diversity as well.

²¹ 1996: 56.

²² 2000: 112.

²³ Mihesuah 2003: 7

Part II: Behind the Glass – A Look at the History of Native Americans in Museums

“Buffalo Bill opens up a pawn shop on the reservation right across the border from the liquor store and he stays open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and the Indians come running in with jewelry, television sets, a VCR, a full-length beaded buckskin outfit it took Inez Muse 12 years to finish. Buffalo Bill takes everything the Indians have to offer, keeps it all catalogued and filled in a storage room. The Indians pawn their hands, saving the thumbs for last, they pawn their skeletons, falling endlessly from the skin and when the last Indian has pawned everything but his heart, Buffalo Bill takes that for twenty bucks closes up the pawn shop, paints a new sign over the old calls his venture THE MUSEUM OF NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURES charges the Indians five bucks a head to enter.” – Sherman Alexie (Spokane, Coeur d'Alene)²⁴

Early History

Museum exhibitions have been a primary source of information for the wide non-Native public about indigenous people for the past several hundred years. In seventeenth century Europe, “cabinets of curiosities” were commonly constructed by private individuals to display their diverse collections of natural materials and oddities from around the world. The most alluring pieces of these collections often had their origins in the “New World,” such as animal-skin clothing, bows and arrows, spears, and Inuit kayaks. It was this material culture that fascinated European viewers, who could use their imaginations to dream up the exotic peoples that the museum pieces embodied.

Native American objects and materials were acquired in many different ways. Foreign fur traders, diplomats, explorers, and missionaries obtained souvenirs during their quests on the new-found continent, and often they exchanged their own goods for these prized novelties. Many of them expected large revenues from the sale of the

²⁴ 1992: 48.

objects. Others expected only the prestige that possession of the item would bring them.²⁵

During the eighteenth century, many of these collections were donated to burgeoning museums where they drew a wider audience. At the outset, however, museum curators had difficulty classifying indigenous objects alongside the archaeological remains of other civilizations such as the Greeks and Romans. In her article on indigenous artifacts and national identity in Mexico, Sophia C. Vackimes writes that these objects had been associated with idolatry and did not appear “worthy of academic study.”²⁶ At that time indigenous cultures were interpreted as savage or barbaric, in keeping with the cultural evolution theory of Lewis Henry Morgan. Indigenous people and objects were seen as a source of entertainment; their lives were staged before Europeans and Americans in extravagant theatrical demonstrations like P.T. Barnum’s circuses and Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West Show.

During the nineteenth century, when large international fairs were being held in European capital cities, there was also a surge in popular interest of the Native American. At first, the focus was still on visual aspects of foreign culture. The 1867 Paris Universal Exposition, for example, incorporated a replica of the temple pyramids of Xochicalco from Mexico as well as additional artifacts taken during the

²⁵ Cole 1985:2

²⁶ Furthermore, such artifacts could be seen as inappropriate for the public viewing. Often they were removed after a short period on display. An Aztec sculpture of Coatlicue, the goddess of water, was reburied after a brief showing at the Universidad Real Pontificia in Mexico City. Professors did not want to incite interest in Aztec religion or stimulate the independence movement against Spain (2001: 21).

French occupation of the country.²⁷ The Paris Exposition of 1889 went a step further and incorporated live shows of “exotic” peoples conducting daily activities.²⁸

The 1893 Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition was held in the United States to celebrate the landing of Christopher Columbus and exhibit the progresses of civilization. This exposition included a broader Native American showcase that occupied space in over a dozen buildings to contrast the achievements of European culture. Amidst the tables scattered with beadwork, pottery, and other artworks created by Native American men and women were life-sized recreations of villages from the Inuit North to the Pueblo Southwest. A boarding school was also featured as part of the Bureau of Indian Affairs exhibit. Beneath the gaze of interested European-Americans, Native American boys and girls went about their tasks as part of the display, showing the outsiders how they were being educated (and subsequently assimilated into the dominant population) on a daily basis. Native adults were likewise included in the exhibition, serving as guides throughout the villages, demonstrating traditional craft-making techniques and wearing generic buckskin clothing. Franz Boas, a founding father of anthropology in America, was also involved in the reproduction of Kwakiutl dance performances at the exposition, to entertain the public and enable him to record vanishing practices.²⁹ When the exposition closed, the physical objects were placed in museums for preservation and display; the majority of which sent to the Chicago Field Museum of Natural History.³⁰

²⁷ Vackimes 2001: 23.

²⁸ Hinsley 1991: 346.

²⁹ Hinsley 1991: 349-350.

³⁰ Maurer 2000: 20-23.

This intensified interest in Native American objects grew out of the realization that the indigenous people producing these cultural artifacts were facing the destruction of their ways of life. As explained by uni-linear cultural theorists, the sociopolitical and technological forces of “civilization” were overrunning the “primitive” populations. Once Native people became acclimated to European modes of life or were killed off in quasi-genocidal campaigns, the materials that they had used for survival would also become scarce. It was therefore in the best interest of the collectors, acting as “salvage ethnographers,” to obtain as much material as they could to protect and exhibit.

Furthermore, as these materials were growing scarce, their market value was increasing, making it harder for museums to desperately pursue new acquisitions.³¹ The objects that museums obtained were therefore affixed with a monetary value as well as an understanding that such materials would imbue the scholar with much information on the culture of its creator. Although still considered “exotic,” artifacts were also seen as sources of enlightenment on the history of Western Man holding clues about his own existence and how far he had come.³²

The Issue of Classification: Is it Art or Artifact?

In the search for authentic relics of the past, growing collections both destroyed and preserved what they were trying to replicate. They also defined what was to be considered the quintessence of the traditional in Native American creations,

³¹ Cole 1985:51.

³² Clifford 1988: 228.

leaving curators to ignore the contemporary designs being produced.³³ Curators also sought items that were expressive of the collective group rather than the work of individual artists, thus limiting their compilations to a set of precise artifacts. This theme has been termed the “denial of coevalness” by Johannes Fabian, noting the tendency of anthropologists to conduct their ethnography of the Other as life experienced in the past, rather than life being lived at the same temporal moment as the ethnographer’s present.³⁴

In the twentieth century, Native American objects could be found in many different kinds of institutions for public viewing. Their appearance in art galleries marked another transition in how utilitarian objects were viewed.³⁵ Curators who sought art could choose from an array of traditional artifacts made by both Native men and women from before and after European contact. The question of what is art versus what is artifact was contingent upon European systems of classification that control the definitions of fine art without regard to the possibilities of indigenous perception on this debate.³⁶

An early art exhibit curated by Stuart Culin at the Brooklyn Museum in 1910, “tried to present American Indians in a full sense by looking at as many aspects of their traditional lives as possible...the effect was to depict Indian people in a frozen,

³³ Berlo 1992: 3-5.

³⁴ Fabian 1983: 31.

³⁵ As noted in *Native Arts of North America*, heretofore, “no useful object, no artifact, would be classed as fine art, nor could any subject that was unacceptable to the political, economic, and religious interests of the art patrons...If useful and efficient Euroamerican artifacts of common materials could not be classified as fine art, and might not even be considered decorative art, it was hardly likely that artifacts of similar quality from societies conquered, colonized, or though to be inferior could be so classified. Nor could objects from those societies be classified as fine art if their form or subject matter were perceived as incomprehensible, or subversive of Euroamerican religious or social values. The highest status they could achieve was that of “artificial curiosity” (Feest 1980: 9-19).

³⁶ Brody 1990: 21.

timeless past without any reference to their present lives or to their struggles with the growing disruptions and influences of Euro-American society.”³⁷ By 1925, Culin attempted to create a thorough exhibition of societies throughout the world (including a “hall of primitive races”), where he represented the various populations with a range of colors in the museum’s “Rainbow House.” Despite the fact the Culin did not collaborate with members of the represented groups, the objects within the rooms for him, “symbolized not only the peoples of the world but also their spirituality.”³⁸

In 1941, two curators, Frederic Douglas and René D’Harnoncourt, organized what is often considered to be “the first comprehensive American Indian art exhibition” for the New York Museum of Modern Art (MOMA). Their exhibit, titled “Indian Art of the United States,” created a “history of Indian art along geographic lines, which they called ‘art areas’ ...[resulting in] the marvelous diversity of these arts and the unique qualities of individual peoples [becoming] smothered under the uniform umbrella of a deceptive and indescribable ‘Indian-ness’.”³⁹ The credibility of MOMA and the support of Indian craft production by the United States government under President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier enabled the exhibition to obtain funding and support.⁴⁰

Many museums in later decades followed these regional or all-inclusive models of constructing Native art exhibits, most recently including the George Gustav Heye Center, discussed in a later section of this paper. As these materials became more accepted as “art,” they also facilitated a new discourse on what was considered

³⁷ Maurer 2000: 24.

³⁸ Maurer 24.

³⁹ Brody 22.

⁴⁰ Rushing 1992: 193-194.

to be “culture.” Such exhibitions signified the official recognition that indigenous cultural values were of equal importance to those of Western cultures.⁴¹ They also established the competency of Native American craftspeople, including the techniques and composition of women’s domestic arts.

By analyzing these past portrayals of Native Americans, we can gain insight about the motives that led non-Natives to promote either romanticized or ignoble images. When we look at past exhibitions today, we are able to learn just as much, if not more, information about the people responsible for their creation than about the subjects themselves. Native Americans had few chances to take part in the creation of the earliest museum installations and little opportunity to respond to them once they were on view. This one-sided depiction of native groups led to an unbalanced presentation of multiple cultures, reinforcing a European worldview that influenced and progressed into the modern American museum.

In natural history museums, the ancestral skulls of Native peoples were on display for decades in rooms adjacent to installations of the flora and fauna of regional North America.⁴² In ethnological museums, large-scale dioramas filled the space to show visitors how the indigenous “truly” lived. In the art gallery, their functional materials were displayed next to cards noting the dimensions, medium used, its origins, and the creator’s name, if known. These galleries were historically created by outsiders, and manipulated the public’s perception of Native America. It distorted their traditional lives and forced them to be viewed

⁴¹ Clifford 1988: 235.

⁴² This is known as the “natural history paradigm” whereby “significant lessons could be taught by placing altogether the ‘natural history’ of a particular idea from its earliest manifestations among primitive peoples to its fullest flowering among the advanced industrialized nations of the world” (Hinsley 1981: 94).

as past, vanishing races. The exhibits have contributed to the mystification and “Othering” of these cultures, presenting them as a singular exotic amalgamate species that can be studied and viewed behind glass.

These former modes of exhibition obscure the identity of the individual as well as the collective community. Heretofore, Native American bodies were exhumed and studied without regard to their descendants’ interests and their cultural properties displayed without their personal significance attached. The Native person was relegated to exist as an object for popular consumption along with his possessions. The historical information often stops at the reservation period, offering little hope that their lifeways are continuing. In denying Native American peoples a voice in how they are portrayed, such exhibits not only controlled their histories, but also played a vital role in how they are perceived in the American present.

The Struggle for Awareness

The twentieth century saw a great transformation take place in Indian country. By the 1960s, the Red Power movement created activists within reservation communities and urban centers across America. Native Americans united across a broad social spectrum, recognizing that key problems with the United States government had affected them all in similar ways. At the height of the civil rights era, they claimed their own media attention to show the American public that they had the ability to organize and take a stand on issues related to their tribal sovereignties.

Although factional disputes erupted over how to achieve different goals, Red Power activists agreed that their ways of life had been shattered after centuries of living under broken treaties. Ceded land had been forfeited and natural resources were stolen from reservation land, displacing those who lived there. Blood quantum controls had forced them to deny tribal status to individuals who do not meet the requirements instituted, diluting the identities of America's indigenous people. Forced assimilation and the termination of tribal status in previous decades had resulted in a "colonized mind," whereby thousands of Native children grew up in American schools "learning that their people are not worthy and thus they individually are not worthy."⁴³ Everyday, Native Americans were living in an environment that subjugated them and prevented their cultural renewal. It was time for reform, if not revolution, in Indian policy.

Restoring Culture Through Repatriation

After decades of protest and large-scale demonstrations, including several dramatic takeovers of politically, historically or spiritually important sites, Native Americans had achieved the important objective of creating awareness for pan-Indian problems. The sense of pride in Indian culture that the movement promoted within Native communities was one of its most important effects. Increased national awareness also resulted in the establishment of many organizations that lobby for Native American rights. The work of community leaders and activists has influenced

⁴³ Warrior 1967: 19.

several pieces of important legislation pertaining to museums in the past three decades.

The Archaeological Resources Protection Act, passed in October of 1979, paved the way for future laws. The act prevented unauthorized excavation and looting of Native American historical sites and graves. It marked: “an important step towards shifting the moral ground upon which museums and their collections stood.”⁴⁴ However, it was not until the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was passed in November 1990, that a system was set in place to encourage the return of Native American remains and objects from museums to the communities in which they belonged.

The NAGPRA legislation created a storm of controversy that pitted many non-Native academics against Native communities. On one side of the debate, anthropologists, archaeologists and medical scientists felt they had a right to study and preserve cultural resources using the best technological and methodological skills at their disposal. However, the history of misappropriation and destruction of indigenous cultural artifacts prevented many Native people from seeing scientific research in a positive light. According to Devon Mihesuah, “the fact that Indians exist allows these people – as well as historians – to secure jobs, tenure, promotion, merit increases, fellowships, notoriety, and scholarly identity – all without giving anything back to Indian communities.”⁴⁵ The repatriation of artifacts that threatened their jobs would, in turn, promote cultural and spiritual renewal for Native peoples. Mihesuah explains: “The conflict arises because many archaeologists assume that

⁴⁴ Josephy 1999: 211.

⁴⁵ Mihesuah 2000: 97.

they are the caretakers and owners of the past, not respecting the fact that Indians have oral traditions. Among traditional Indians, it is the responsibility of the present generation to remember stories for future generations. Despite what archaeologists think, Indians do not believe that tribal histories are created by archaeologists' findings."⁴⁶ To solve this crisis, she believes that it may be possible to develop programs of study that represent indigenous issues and respect their cultural lifeways if archaeologists work in collaboration with the Native Americans they study.

⁴⁶ Mihesuah 98.

Part III: A Look at the Museums Visited

Tribally-Controlled Museums

Seneca-Iroquois National Museum, Salamanca, New York

The Seneca-Iroquois National Museum, located on the Allegany Seneca Indian Reservation, first opened its doors on August 1, 1977. It was designed to look like a longhouse, although it is constructed in a Tudor style. Tribal workmen were hired under Seneca contractor Lloyd Barnwell to erect the edifice while artist Carson Waterman designed the exterior ornamentation.⁴⁷ The images on the outer brick walls are based on Iroquois wampum belts. On each of the four sides the George Washington Covenant Belt, the Hiawatha Belt, the Seneca Women's Nomination Belt, and the Tree of Peace are located. The decision to utilize these images in the exterior design was influenced by a desire to promote understanding of historical political interaction with the United States government and the political structure of the Haudenosaunee.⁴⁸ The belts also serve to highlight Native symbolism and the roles of women within the clans.

The Museum had its origins early in the twentieth century when Seneca people began to feel that they were losing vast amounts of their material culture to non-Native collectors.⁴⁹ By the 1960s, the community began working on a multimillion dollar project that would counteract further cultural destruction after the construction of the Kinzua Dam removed many Seneca families from their

⁴⁷ Krinsky 1996: 57.

⁴⁸ Haudenosaunee is the used by the people commonly referred to as Iroquois. It means "People of the Longhouse."

⁴⁹ Abrams 1981: 4.

land. The “Iroquoia” project proposed building a marina, hotel, amphitheater, and a tribal museum to exhibit their history and culture in a “Williamsburg-like re-creation of Iroquois settlements of the past.”⁵⁰ Although this project never came to fruition, the Seneca Nation later applied to the Economic Development Administration in 1976 for funding to build a tribal museum. Today, the Museum is governed by Seneca and non-Seneca members on the Board of Trustees and is funded by the Tribal Council of the Seneca Nation as well as other sources, including the New York State Council on the Arts.

The interior of the Museum consists of seven exhibition rooms in addition to a gift shop. Several paintings by Carson Waterman hang on the walls, each depicting the portraits of former Allegany clan mothers from the Wolf, Turtle, Hawk, and Snipe Clans. In the first few rooms, displays educate the visitor on traditional practices. Within a partially-reconstructed longhouse, life-size male mannequins sit by an open fire while female models are cooking and preparing food with mortars and pestles. Several stuffed or replicated animals are located in the next larger room to illustrate the clans of the Seneca. Here visitors can learn all about matrilineage and the practice of clan exogamy. In this case, a member of the bird side (Deer, Heron, Snipe, Hawk clans) can marry a member of the animal side (Turtle, Bear, Beaver, Wolf clans) and their children will inherit their mother’s clan.

The traditional crafts of beadwork, quilling, and splint basketry are exhibited in this room as well. While both men and women can take part in these activities, the displays in this museum predominantly portray them in the

⁵⁰ Josephy 1968.

women's domain. Basketry and beading are passed down from grandmother to granddaughter and kept alive through tradition. A touch-and-feel "Children's Fun Room" area allows visiting children to pick up and examine traditional Haudenosaunee toys, including corn husk dolls, snowsnake sticks, rattles, a water drum, a lacrosse stick, and pots and baskets.

Smaller rooms off of the main galleries include information on the history of the Seneca peoples. Here the focus is on life after European contact where Seneca men appear to play a more dominant role. Display boards discuss the lives and influence of Ely S. Parker, Lewis Bennett (Deerfoot), and Red Jacket. There are smaller displays featuring the use of wampum belts, the creation of treaties, and the silver trade during the years of early colonization. The "Contact to Contemporary" period is illustrated with a reconstructed log cabin from the Cattaraugus Reservation. Within the building, a model of an old woman sits, making a corn husk doll while a younger woman model uses a mortar and pestle outside. A model of a man practicing with a spear is also displayed. All of the figures are wearing their long black hair in braids and are clothed in European-styled garments.

Clothing and beadwork displays make up a large section of this museum. In one room two female mannequins and one male child mannequin wear "traditional" post-contact clothing. The women are clothed in pink and purple calico dresses while the child wears a red shirt and black pants. Each figure also has a pair of moccasins and their garments are ornamented with beads and embroidery. Their facial features are rendered with Native American attributes

and their wigs are all black and braided with feathers placed in them. These styles were influenced by the designs of Europeans as well as other Native nations, including a popular Plains Indian Western design reinvented by the Seneca with their own patterns. This form of clothing represents a connection to the past and an expression of identity today. According to the display boards, it is still worn for special occasions and longhouse ceremonies.

Another large room continues in this thread. In 2002, the W. K. Kellogg Foundations and the Ontario Arts Council sponsored a post-colonial garment project designed by Samuel Thomas. The results of their collaborative effort, titled “We Are of One Mind,” is housed in this museum. Two standard mannequins of male and female torsos are clothed in red, white, and blue cotton calico fabrics. The tunics, yokes, pants, skirt, moccasins, and accessories are all finely beaded and embroidered and the male’s costume includes a feathered headdress.

The exhibit also features information on traditional Haudenosaunee beadwork including some examples collected by Lewis Henry Morgan in the mid-nineteenth century. Often inspired by nature with flowers, birds, animals and leaves appearing frequently in the designs, the beadwork became a very fashionable commodity for Victorian consumers. The beaded “objet d’art” creations were, according to one display, “perfectly suited to Victorian flavour...For the Victorians, the significance of lost innocence and exotic conquest associated with both the female and the Native were connected in the Indian souvenir.” The years between 1860 and 1920 were the peak period of

production of beadwork by Native women for the tourist market. The use of this art for traditional purposes, however, has not declined. Its persistence in Haudenosaunee (and many other Native nations) contributes to the ongoing preservation of identity and is clear evidence of how women are reproducers of culture.

According to Lewis Henry Morgan in his 1851 book, *League of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee, or Iroquois*, as mentioned in one display, “Embroidered, beaded, or carved on personal object, the images of flowers and berries can carry the power of a spiritual revelation.” He is correct in noting the religious power of the beadwork, which includes rich color symbolism and often illustrates cosmological events like creation stories. A three-dimensional work of art on display here shows a “skydome” motif, representing the story wherein Skywoman fell on the back of a snapping turtle from the spirit world and began human life on earth.

The format of the Museum is very basic in structure. The exhibits overall emphasize post-contact life using pictures and photographs to illustrate written label copy. Despite the presence of a new children’s display and the availability of take-home data sheets, there is very little interactive media to engage visitors. On busy days, the only audio that one will hear emanates from one centrally-located television that plays the film “Lands of Our Ancestors.” This film, made between 1964 to 1965, was written and directed by Allan Forbes Jr. and narrated by George D. Heron. It focuses on the destruction caused by the Kinzua Dam project that flooded Seneca land. With its construction, the dam project broke the Treaty of 1794 and stirred up a lot of controversy in the early 1960s. Seneca men,

women, and non-Native supporters brought suits all the way up to the Supreme Court without success. The film highlights the destruction with noisy images of machines knocking down buildings and uprooting trees and underbrush. These images appear in stark contrast to scenes of Seneca men and women conducting their daily lives while traditional flute music plays in the background. The film is a compelling work of activism and the most powerful exhibition in the entire Museum. Staff members shows the film at the end of your visit so that one leaves with knowledge of the unjust role and influence of governmental policy. Visitors are left with a memorable image of how the lives of indigenous people have been and continue to be forever changed.

Iroquois Indian Museum, Howes Cave, New York

The Iroquois Indian Museum is an impressive example of a museum designed and managed by non-Native architects and scholars but controlled by Iroquois trustees and staff.⁵¹ The Museum first opened in 1992 to introduce visitors to Haudenosaunee culture through traditional and contemporary artwork and performance. The edifice is shaped like a giant longhouse, with porches open on each end to represent the possibility of building additions, which frequently occurred in historical longhouses.⁵² Exhibits, including archaeological research displays and a children's museum are located on two floors inside running in the counter-clockwise direction customary to traditional longhouse life. A nature park and garden and two nineteenth century log cabins from Six Nations Reserve, Ontario are located on the Museum's property. The Museum's mission statement is clearly displayed near the entrance, informing guests of its dual focus on the creative and the anthropological.

Most of the materials on display have been donated by artists and collectors. Many archaeological materials, including pottery shards and spear points from the local sites of Nahrwold and Westheimer, are on display in the first section, with modern sculptures at their side to show the continuity of tradition and design. The exhibit explains that although clay making was lost to Iroquois people in the 1700s, there was a great resurgence of work in this medium after the 1960s and that "pottery styles and decorations show as much stability in the

⁵¹ An introduction display inside the museum proudly states that one out of the two anthropologists, three out of the five trustees, one member of the advertising board, and multiple interns have Iroquois heritage.

⁵² Krinsky 1996: 90.

women's world as points do in the men's world." Two video monitors near this exhibit show the work of archaeologists in recovering such information.

Although the exhibits mention the shift towards use of European material culture after contact, the actual displays defy the notion that traditional culture has vanished completely and show women to be the most visible purveyors of it.

Several smaller displays focus on changes in Iroquois life after contact. One briefly outlines the tragic results of colonialism, including conversion to Christianity and participation in European wars. The portraits of Brant, Red Jacket, and Governor Blacksnake are nearby. Another display discusses prophet Handsome Lake's code of conduct including guidelines against divorce, abortion, and the meddling of mothers-in-law in their children's lives. Religious and political ceremonies are mentioned succinctly: visitors learn that ceremonies still continue in the longhouse to give thanks and that the Council House established on the Onondaga Reservation in 1939 allows men and women to occupy different halves of the building and enter from opposite sides. Another display draws attention to the tourist trade stretching from the Victorian era and the stereotyping of Native people by non-Natives as logos and toys. The exhibit notes that these images are created "from malice" and support non-Native capitalistic needs.

The majority of the exhibits about the pre-contact era focus on the separate spheres in which Iroquois men and women live and work. These displays appear to represent the classic culture-nature divide between the gendered roles. In the "Men's World in the Forest" display visitors can learn about the Iroquois male's role as a diplomat, farmer, lumberman, and voyager in the nineteenth century, and

as an ironworker in the twentieth century. Political and ritual roles are highlighted with a display of a condolence cane, a 1930s Gus-Tow-Weh headdress, and rattles. Another example of the man's position is the pipe, designed with animal and human motifs and made specifically for its owner. It is stressed that although men become the chiefs, this position is chosen and monitored by clans-women. Objects utilized in training young boys, such as lacrosse sticks, snowsnake sticks, and javelins are on display along with war and hunting regalia.

Across from this display is one titled, the "Women's World in the Clearing." This exhibit highlights a woman's role in childrearing, food production, craft production, home ownership, land proprietorship, religious support, and political supervision. Matrilineal society is described and supported with information on the women's strong position within the confederacy. Their relation to the production of food, including the "three sisters" of corn, beans, and squash, implement their participation in the political and spiritual domain.

Several utilitarian and artistic objects – baskets, stirring paddles, cradleboards, rattles, clothing – created by men and women are on display in the glass case alongside a sculpture by Tammy Tarbell. Her 1990 work in clay, titled "Mrs. Joseph Brant," shows an Iroquois woman dressed in a tunic, skirt, leggings, shawl, and moccasins.⁵³ Women's clothing was made from turkey calico cloth in

⁵³ The display notes that this work was based on a description of Mrs. Brant by P. Campbell, 1791-1792: "Her blanket was made up of silk, and the finest English cloth, bordered with a narrow stripe of embroidered lace, her sort of jacket and scanty petticoat of the same stuff, which came down only to her knees; her gaiters or leggans of the finest scarlet, fitted close as a stocking, which showed to advantage her stout but remarkably well formed limbs; her mogazines [sic] ornamented with silk ribbons and beads. Her person about five foot nice or ten inches high, as straight and proportionate as can be, but inclined to be jolly or lusty."

vibrant colors and then decorated with beads during the eighteenth century.

Today this clothing is still worn, but only for special occasions such as marriages or dance festivals. Children's corn husk dolls also reflect early Iroquois fashion and present a positive image for young girls; they are "faceless as a reminder that no face is more beautiful than another and allow the child to use their imaginations."

The practical and creative craftwork done by women traditionally sustained life both in the home and fields and allowed women to remain close to the children. Today, the creation of art such as the displayed materials "augments social security benefits and increases spending money" for the artists. Geometric and curvilinear patterns represent "verbal images of the Creation story" for artisans past and present. However, as one seventeenth-century example suggests, "A Mohawk potter apparently expressed, not her individuality in art; but her pride in creating a Mohawk design that anyone could recognize."

Several modern works of art also illustrate the importance of women in Haudenosaunee life and belief. Two of Carson Waterman's paintings were on display during the time of my visit, "Three Sisters" (1990) and "Clans Mothers" (N.d.). These paintings are located near the open stairwell where the Sky Woman Creation story is recreated. Artistic renditions of geese hang above the stairwell, while at its base on the lower floor a large three-dimensional turtle floats in a pond representing Turtle Island/Earth. Also on display is Bill Powless's 1983 pen and ink work "Woman Pounding Corn" and Pete Jones's 1985 sculpture "Woman."

The rest of the first floor houses a collection of basketry created by men and women from the eighteenth to twenty-first centuries, information on the revival of pottery, and the “Hands Across Time: Creative Iroquois Families” project. This latter collection features the artistic traditions of contemporary Iroquois families that connect them to their ancestors. On the lower level, the Children’s Museum includes several small exhibits that aim to teach youths about Iroquois pottery, corn husk dolls, beading, storytelling, and clans. There is also information on Native entertainers and a beading table where visitors can create their own beaded jewelry for a small fee. At the end of the visit, the gift shop welcomes guests to buy artwork, jewelry, and music created by Native artists. There are also several books available, ranging from children’s illustrated books to those of a more scholarly interest. To my surprise, the shop also includes stereotypical items such as dream catchers and toy tomahawks.

Mashantucket Pequot Museum, Ledyard, Connecticut

The Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center opened in August 1998, after over a decade of planning and raising money through the community and the local tribally-owned Foxwoods Casino. State of the art technology was used in creating this 308,000 square foot complex; built for the cost of nearly two hundred million dollars and designed by tribal members and non-Native consultants.⁵⁴ The exhibits within the Museum incorporate a variety of life-size dioramas, interactive computer screens, films, and text panels to inform and entertain the thousands of visitors expected each year.

Upon entering the Museum, visitors encounter a spacious lobby area flooded in sunlight coming in through the broad glass walls. In this “Gathering Space,” two seventeenth-century canoes are set at the perimeter of this space, manned by full-scale mannequin men and women. Everyone’s faces are painted as if they are ready for war. The women sit topless as the men guide them to the shores of Long Island where they hope to find safety from the approaching Europeans.

Historical scenes throughout the Museum employ full-scale models to show life as it really was, only in still-frame against a painted background. Interactive computer monitors are interspersed in front of the life-size dioramas for visitors who want to obtain a more in-depth look into what the displays are showing. Studio EIS, a 3D design company located in Brooklyn, New York, created one hundred and eleven life-size models for this museum based on the features of hundreds of tribal people throughout the United States. Many well-

⁵⁴ Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center 2001.

known Native American people participated in the project, and their faces can be recognized by conscientious visitors walking through the exhibitions.

The majority of the models can be found in the Pequot Village in the center of the Museum. Aroma technology and landscapes of sound have also been utilized to allow visitors to feel as if they are really in a sixteenth century Pequot village. The constructed village is based on a site discovered by archaeologists. An audio tour allows visitors to walk through the exhibit at their own pace and obtain information as they desire. Although this is useful in providing layers of information suited to particular interests, this format also distances the visitor from the subject and creates “a safer, more sanitized encounter in which technology overshadows face-to-face exchange.”⁵⁵

In the Pequot Village, visitors get a sense of the daily roles of men and women in a Native community hundreds of years ago. There are scenes of women laboring in the fields and at the hearths, maintaining the food supply and making crafts. Men are shown hunting, fishing and conducting ritual and leisure activities. Children are present, playing, helping their elders, and learning important skills. There is even a model of a sachem and his wigwam with a sweat lodge nearby, to show how politics and religion are inseparable entities. Galleries off to the sides of the village explain Algonquian languages, further illustrate life in the 1500s, and discuss the results of the encounter with Europeans.

The exhibits of this museum, as a whole, appear to struggle between presenting the Mashantucket Pequot as people of the past or a community of the present. The curators tried to rectify this by bringing the modern community into

⁵⁵ Nash 2000.

the Museum in the first and last exhibits that visitors see. The first gallery presents a large model of the modern reservation in the center of the room, surrounded by photographs of the people and objects of importance to the tribe today. The last gallery, "A Tribal Portrait," presents dozens of tribal members in large black and white photographs. Voiceovers speak throughout both exhibits, describing contemporary life on the reservation.

The question is whether or not this material allows regular visitors to see the Mashantucket Pequot outside of the romanticized past presented in the heart of the Museum. The problems with representation are multiplied if the visitor notices that much of the information presented about life before contact with Europeans is derived from general references focused on other Native peoples. In the "Life in a Cold Climate" gallery, for example, visitors can hear the Passamaquoddy language spoken instead of the Pequot language, which has not survived. In "The Arrival of the People" exhibit, creation stories from several tribes are explained, yet not one of them specifically represents an Algonquin point of view. Similarly, the galleries titled "The Glacial Crevasse," "A World of Ice," and "The Changing Environment" are very informative about on how the region looked over the past several thousand years but give little specific information on the Mashantucket Pequot.

It is not until the end of the Pequot village gallery that we get a sense of how their lives were changed with the arrival of foreign people. The last few scenes in the village are enclosed behind a palisade wall. Here men and women are using European items they received in trade and incorporated into their lives.

Some men are shown repairing the palisade to increase defense while others are making trade beads to sell to the foreigners. The next two galleries, “Prelude to War” and “The Pequot War,” describe the seventeenth-century conflict with Europeans in great detail, including a screening of a half-hour film *The Witness*.

Details of the past three centuries are included in the gallery titled “Life on the Reservation,” which includes everything from displays and models of King Philip’s War to a 1970s mobile home. The gallery explains how the Mashantucket Pequot adopted European agricultural methods and religious practices. In addition, a reconstructed late eighteenth-century farmhouse offers a stark contrast to the models seen in the Pequot Village.

Smaller displays briefly discuss the effect that the pan-Indian movement of the 1960s had on the reservation and the resurgence of Pequot basketry. Jane Wheeler and Martha Hoxie are noted for using their skills and passing them on to their daughters. This exhibit also honors Elizabeth George, Martha Langevin, and Alice Brend, three half-sisters who remained on reservation land after everyone else had left in search of better economic opportunities. Their stories are included in the film *Bringing the People Home*, which highlights their determination to keep their land and help others return to it.

In addition to the permanent installations, this museum also featured a temporary exhibit on Northeastern Native American Fine Arts which included paintings, textiles, and sculptures made by contemporary Native people. Two acres of landscaped land are situated behind the Museum and a 185-foot tower provides panoramic views of the area. The facility also included a restaurant and

large museum shop selling books and handmade Native crafts. A large research center is adjacent to the Museum included a library that is open to the public.

State and National Museums

The New York State Museum, Albany, New York

The mission of the New York State Museum began in 1836 when it existed as the State Geological and Natural History Survey. The Museum prides itself on being “a major research and an educational institution dedicated to preserving New York's rich artistic, social, historical, and environmental legacies” by promoting “inquiry and advance knowledge in the fields of geology, biology, anthropology, and history through the investigation of material evidence germane to New York State's past, present and future.”⁵⁶ As such, it is not primarily a museum featuring exhibits on Native Americans. Nevertheless, it includes several galleries on Iroquois and Algonquin people that feature archaeological and ethnographic research produced in the state since the eighteenth century. The exhibits are managed by non-Native people who consult with tribes and scholars on displaying information.

A small part of the Museum that describes the growth and development of the New York Metropolis is focused on the early people who lived on Long Island. This display includes a model of a seventeenth-century wigwam with a female figure cooking inside as well as several artifacts from the nineteenth century. This is the only place in the Museum that describes interaction with Europeans. It does this, however, from the Europeans' perspective on what

⁵⁶ New York State Museum.

indigenous life was like.⁵⁷ A brief sketch of reservation life is made with the example given of Harriet Quinney of the Munsee Tribe of Mohican Indians who was “relocated” from the Hudson Valley, New York to Wisconsin. Another display remarks that, “By 1700, European diseases and colonial wars decimated the population. Today the Montauks, Shinnecocks, and Poospatucks occupy reservations on Long Island.”

The largest of the galleries on this subject is titled, “Native Peoples of New York.” It begins with a discussion of the terminology used by the curators (i.e. “Native Peoples” and “Haudenosaunee”) and an explanation that the information shown is based on European record since “prehistoric Native People did not directly preserve” their histories. Ironically, the first diorama in this section shows a stuffed replica of a mastodon and explains the environmental characteristics of the region thousands of years ago.

The next life-size diorama, “Ice Age Hunters – New York’s First People,” shows a family working together after a hunt. Children are shown learning from their parents how to use specific tools. Each model has long black hair and is fully clothed in fur garments, although the display mentions that the archaeological record lacks evidence of materials other than stone tools. The older men represented in this diorama even wear feathered headpieces. Information on the animals and plants that existed in this early era is also included.

⁵⁷ An example of this is a quote from Dutchman Adrien Van der Donk in 1655: “It is not with them as it is here in Holland, where the greatest, noblest, and richest live more luxuriously than the common man, but with them meat and drink are sufficient, or the same for all.”

The “Forest Foragers” diorama is based on an archaeological site that was in use 4500 years ago. The scene depicts daily life outside of a longhouse and replicates the roles of men, women, and children obtaining and preparing food. The next diorama, titled “Three Sisters,” highlights the women’s domain in the fields during the 1600s. Several women are shown cultivating corn, beans, and squash, while children aid in scaring birds away from the harvest. One female model is breastfeeding, while the others tend crops wearing simple buckskin wrap-skirts and jewelry. Their long black hair is pulled back to let them work. An elderly man is shown working alongside the women. Several of the models also feature tattoos, which an interactive monitor says are based on portraits of Native women produced in England.

The last large-scale diorama, “The Iroquois Longhouse,” shows a young man working on the structure outside while other villagers enjoy storytelling within. Visitors can walk into this diorama and get an up-close view of the clothing and toys of the models inside. A placard explains that the museum staff built the entire exhibit based on archaeological research, Iroquois oral history, and European record. This display also mentions that men become a part of their wives’ extended families when they marry and move in with them.

Just outside the longhouse are smaller displays that include Haudenosaunee artifacts from the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries. The items and tools shown here depict the women’s creation and usage of clay pottery and the men’s custom of pipe manufacture. Another display includes decorated cradleboards and other objects from Lewis Henry Morgan’s collection of

nineteenth century artifacts. On the walls near this display, two versions of the Haudenosaunee creation story are presented. Both of them describe Skywoman descending to Turtle Island and beginning human life.

A small-scale model depicts life in a large Mohawk village of the 1600s, based on archaeological research near Fonda, New York. Tiny human figures are shown obtaining food and preparing to move after “the soils became exhausted and the encampment pest-infested.” An interactive game allows children to look for certain scenes in the model and learn about daily life. Drawings by François-Joseph Bressani, an Italian Jesuit missionary, are also on display to embellish the scene.

To complete the gallery, a fifteen minute film, *Seasons of the Mohawk: Traditional Iroquois Village Life* (1992), discusses the seasonal tasks and rites of traditional life. In the film, Ron LaFrance, director of the American Indian Program at Cornell University at the time of production, Delia Cook, and Aubrey Marshall explain how the land was used by the Native people centuries ago. This is the only piece in the entire museum that shows Native people in contemporary dress and yet the topic is still firmly focused on the past.

In the next room lies the Governor’s Collection of Contemporary Native American Crafts. The gallery consists of several objects handmade in New York from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although the Museum has not actively collected in the area for the past sixty years, an exhibition is scheduled to open in the future that highlights more contemporary creative projects. For now, the gallery shows examples of beaded clothing and accessories, basketry, pottery,

sculpture, wood carving, corn husk dolls, and silver jewelry. The collection reflects the broad range of artwork from Native artists, from the functional to the unique and decorative, and from the traditional to the more modern in style and technique. Currently, the work of Toni Benedict and Carson Waterman are on display, with that of Tammy Tarbell-Boehning, Peter Jones, and Rosemary Hill to appear in future exhibitions. Only the artists' work is on display and the gallery lacks an in-depth discussion of indigenous art. Hopefully the collaborative project begun in 1996 and set to appear in the Museum will soon rectify this issue.

The remainder of the Museum focuses on the natural environment and the regions of New York State. Week-long workshops in archaeology and Iroquois history are held for grammar school teachers during the summer and there are many gallery talks open to the public. The gift shop does not have a large selection of items for the visitor interested in Native studies but does have a variety of texts on local archaeological sites and several "Native American" toys for children.

The George Gustav Center, New York, New York

The George Gustav Heye Center was created by a non-Native electrical engineer with a penchant for collecting Native American artifacts.⁵⁸ After serendipitously receiving a Navajo deerskin shirt while working in Arizona on a railroad project, Heye, the museum's namesake, spent forty-five years amassing over one-million tribal objects. The collection was first housed in Heye's Madison Avenue apartment before moving to the Heye Foundation's Museum of the American Indian at 155th Street and Broadway.⁵⁹ Its current incarnation was opened in 1994 by the Smithsonian Institution in the Alexander Hamilton U.S. Custom House in lower Manhattan. When the Smithsonian acquired this museum, its collection became the foundation of the future National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington, D.C. The Manhattan center remains as one of the permanent exhibition and education facilities of the NMAI.

Today the building houses temporary collections of Native American art and performance to engage the casual visitor. A resource center located on the second floor is geared towards assisting academic clientele in research ventures. There are also two gift shops; one sells general museum merchandise and books and the second sells handmade Native American crafts and more expensive gifts.

During my visit in the summer of 2005, one gallery was hosting an exhibit titled "First American Art: The Charles and Valerie Diker Collection of American Indian Art."⁶⁰ This collection consists of tribal objects from across the United States that had an aesthetic value for their collectors. The exhibition is the result

⁵⁸ Sweeney 2004: 16-17.

⁵⁹ National Museum of the American Indian 2004.

⁶⁰ This exhibit is on display from April 24, 2004 to May 29, 2006.

of a 2003 collaborative project on Native aesthetics that incorporated the ideas of Native and non-Native artists and scholars.⁶¹ The results of their effort are organized under seven artistic principles rather than by origins, medium, or purpose. These principles are: idea, emotion, intimacy, movement, integrity, vocabulary, and composition.

The majority of objects in this art exhibit are traditional items from the Northwestern and Western United States and many others are utilitarian items with European influences. Every one of them is encased in glass with a description plate nearby specifying its name, an approximate date of creation, the materials used, and an explanatory remark from the project's committee. Although many of the artists of these pieces are unknown, the objects are given life through the words of the scholars and artists that examined them. Many of the objects on display underscore the woman's role in Native life. Several examples of cradleboards, female clothing, baskets, and pottery are presented to exhibit the creativity of tribal women and their connection to fertility and food production.

The traveling exhibition "George Catlin and his Indian Gallery" was also on display when I visited the Center.⁶² The paintings, created by Catlin in the mid-nineteenth century, chronicle the encounter between two cultures. The artist believed that the Native cultures would soon vanish, yet hoped that "phoenix-like,

⁶¹ The people who participated in the exhibition included Tom Hill (*Seneca*), Donald Kuspit, Mary Jane Lenz, Truman Lowe (*Ho-Chunk*), Peter Macnair, Gerald McMaster (*Plains Cree and member of the Siksika Nation*), Ann McMullen, Arthur Amiotte (*Lakota*), Janet Berlo, Bruce Bernstein, J. J. Brody, Robert Davidson (*Haida*), Margaret Dubin, Frank Ettawageshik (*Odawa*), Harry Fonseca (*Maidu*), Emil Her Many Horses (*Lakota*), and Kathleen Ash-Milby.

⁶² This exhibit was on display from February 26 to August 7, 2005.

they may rise from the 'stain on a painter's palette,' and live again upon canvass, and stand forth for centuries to come, the living monuments of a noble race."⁶³

The majority of his work focuses on the male leaders of "untouched Plains cultures" that he met during his travels. Other subjects include hunting scenes, war dances, sports scenes, and landscapes. The exhibit curators noted the artistic liberties that were most likely taken in rendering the details of each person in the paintings; Catlin may have chosen to focus on the facial features and tattoos of his subjects, while assistant artists filled in the bodies and costumes in an urban studio. A video on Catlin in a nearby room praises the collection for its "tremendous value" and "authentic visual artifacts" which "preserve Native American history and custom through paintings."

The final exhibition appearing at the museum at this time was part of the series *New Tribe New York: The Urban Vision Quest*. This gallery features the work of Native artists based in New York City who have maintained "a sense of tribal or cultural identity while drawing inspiration from the phenomena and energies of contemporary, urban culture."⁶⁴ From May to September 2005 the work of Spiderwoman Theater was presented, highlighting the careers of three Kuna-Rappahannock sisters from Brooklyn. Videos of their performances are projected onto screens throughout the exhibit. Their powerful "story weavings" combine words with movement in skits that enlighten viewers on indigenous themes of feminism, spirituality, and oppression.

During the month of July 2005, several performances designed and

⁶³ Catlin is quoted in the exhibition's brochure from his 1841 book *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs and Condition of the North American Indians*.

⁶⁴ Exhibition brochure.

choreographed by Tom Pearson are presented in the rotunda of the Customs House to “reconcile the irony” of housing a Native American museum within the walls of a former government building built in the Beaux Arts style. Above the performers the dome of the rotunda is illustrated with portraits of early European leaders including Christopher Columbus. The dancers’ movement replicates tribal rites of initiation and marriage before they wend their way through blue ribbon. This last image recalls the sky of an outdoor environment, symbolizing the performers’ release from under the eyes of their conquerors and ability to reclaim the building under their own sense of identity and heritage.

The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), Washington, D.C.

An elegant and curvilinear wonder, the NMAI stands four floors above the pavement that links it to the other Smithsonian museums in the nation's capital. The walkways at its exterior are lined with natural features native to the Chesapeake Bay region, including areas designed to resemble woodlands, marshes, and fields. The immediate interior space of the Museum has undoubtedly taken many a visitor's breath away. The "Potomac Dome," as it is called, connects the building to the sky and represents traditional Native American homes⁶⁵. At the center of the dome, a round window lets light into the space, alluding to the smoke hole found in many Native dwellings. At the center of the floor in the Potomac rotunda is a large round circle of red Seneca sandstone, emphasizing the Native connection with the earth and their land. Further connecting the building to the environment, windows and prisms inside align daily to create rainbows across the floor when the sun rises in the sky at noon and during solstices. The masonry and colored markings that constitute the structure all have significance and were designed to be representative of the multiple Native cultures residing in the Americas.

The space indeed evokes a more feminine quality; its curvilinear forms are contradictory to the rectangular space often utilized in museum buildings. According to the Museum's architects and Native designers, the wavy lines created by the outdoor façade represent natural forms such as rocks "carved by

⁶⁵ Estoque 2004: 3.

wind and water.” The overhang that shelters the entrance door facing the east also represents femininity and protection.⁶⁶

Environmental motifs are featured throughout the Museum, from the elevator doors adorned with symbols of the sun to the phases of the moon sconces that line the walls of the Museum’s main theater. The film, *Who We Are*, shown in the Lelawi Theater as an introduction to the Museum, continues this theme. Images of nature – forests, animals, the sky, and the ocean – appear on the panoramic screen, juxtaposed with scenes of native people working with wood, making baskets, fishing and conducting other productive tasks. Voiceovers recount how the earth is feminine, providing sustenance to nurture those who live upon it. A Lakota man on the screen uses the appellation “Mother Earth” and discusses the sanctity of many places for native people. The production stresses its desire that the Museum dispels myths of the Native, yet it is interesting to see how many of these myths are also reinforced.

Many themes are introduced during this production. The word “Lelawi” means “in the middle” in the Lenape (Delaware) language.⁶⁷ The space is a theater-in-the-round, further invoking a quality of femininity. The room was inspired by the architecture of many Native people, as it is reminiscent of a kiva, earth lodge, or wigwam. Four cloth screens hung above a glowing rock in the center, representing indigenous textile crafts. The female guide that led us into the room remarked on the complexity of indigenous identity, stating that although she must carry a card that indicates her “Indian heritage,” she is without

⁶⁶ Estoque 2004: 1

⁶⁷ Singer 2005: 466.

documentation that declares her as half-white. The film that followed endeavored to give the audience a sense of the diversity of Native American lifeways.

Thirteen communities in total were filmed for this production, including peoples from the Northwest, the Southwest, the East, the Midwest, Alaska, as well as Canada, Mexico, and South America. Scenes not only portray their connection to the land, but also how they relate in their forms of government, spirituality, and traditional roles. As we watch, the sound of a rattle reverberates throughout the theater and various traditional objects encased in glass light up. Men and women appear drumming and dancing on the screen before the scene changes to provide us with a historical perspective of life after contact with foreign invaders. As flags of many nations wave overhead we hear that, “Native people were forced to leave their lands.” The production does not dwell in this tragic past however, and soon we see images of Native children using the internet and Native men and women working in a pharmacy. The film tells us that, “All tribes in the United States would like to be self-sufficient;” creating an interesting juxtaposition with the next scene where a Native army veteran stands in uniform at a powwow. The film closes with images of a rain dance, modern athletes competing, and scenes of men and women working regular jobs as the song “This is Indian Country” blares from the speakers.

As a member of the project team that created this presentation, Beverly R. Singer summarizes the experience the producers wanted to convey: “*Who We Are* is a feeling of hope and celebration that Indigenous America is not dead but very much alive in the land. Her people, in spite of all attempts to denude us of our

ways of living, are fully sentient beings with a purpose to pass on the ways of our ancestors and live out our days protecting what remains of our older belief and knowledge systems.”⁶⁸ It is easy to see that this is also the message that the NMAI as a whole wanted to express – the American continents remain as Indian Country, their people are many and diverse.

Two permanent installations are housed on the fourth floor with the Lelawi Theater. This floor is also dedicated to the Oneida Nation, in honor of the financial support they bestowed on the Museum. An Oneida woman, Polly Cooper, is here immortalized with a bronze created by Edward Hlavka titled “Allies in War, Partners in Peace,” commemorating her heroic endeavors during George Washington’s disastrous winter at Valley Forge. A third permanent exhibit located on the third floor shares space with an art gallery that rotates works of well-known guest artists. Large gift shop spaces are situated on both the first and second floors, ensuring that no guest exits the building without first having the chance to buy museum memorabilia or Native American handicrafts. Also on the first floor, visitors can experience a myriad of indigenous culinary treats at the Mitsitam Café or enjoy a special daily performance featuring visiting storytellers or dancing troupes.

During a visit to Syracuse University, Jolene Rickard presented “Indian Representation and the NMAI” to an assembly of students and faculty in the Panasci Lounge in the Schine Student Center. As a Native American and guest curator for several exhibits currently on display, she was able to fulfill a double role in guaranteeing that the negotiated design schemes satisfied the Museum’s

⁶⁸ Singer 2005: 467.

objectives. For her, installation art is a form of activism. The position she held as a curator gave her the opportunity to participate in the dialogue of current issues with which Native Americans daily contend. She saw her role as a way of focusing on the re-empowerment of Native communities, and especially women. The Museum could act as a way to “repatriate knowledge” to Native peoples, if the exhibits are handled correctly, and allow the communities privileged access to the artifacts appropriated. To obtain ultimate collaboration with Native American populations, each of the exhibitions within the larger installations were curated by members of the tribe represented, often including political and spiritual leaders.⁶⁹

While it is admirable to see curatorial exploits as activism, it is interesting to see that the Museum as a whole may not have effectively transformed how visitors perceive Native American histories and contemporary realities. What inevitably grabs the viewer of these exhibits is the fact that Native Americans do exist today and in very large numbers, at that. Within the “Our Universes” exhibit, eight diverse Native American cultures⁷⁰ are focused on, presenting important aspects of their spiritual lives in relation to their perception of the environment in which they live. Their cosmological viewpoints expose the viewer to the multiple ways in which Native Americans have traditionally conceived their lives. Museumgoers are invited to compare and contrast the

⁶⁹ Rickard 2004.

⁷⁰ The communities selected to participate in this gallery are: the Pueblo of Santa Clara (Española, New Mexico), Anishinaabe (Hollow Water and Sagkeeng Bands, Manitoba, Canada), Lakota (Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota), Quechua (Comunidad de Phaqchanta, Cusco, Peru), Hupa (Hoopa Valley, California), Q'eq'chi' Maya (Cobán, Guatemala), Mapuche (Temuco, Chile), and Yup'ik (Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, Alaska).

multiple evaluations of existence as they wind through a hall celebrating the passage of the seasons and the phases of our solar year.

The majority of the curators in this exhibit were men and a gender bias can be noted throughout the different displays. The tribal exhibitions with more female curators are careful to show the roles of women within their tribe, while the remainder focuses on the collective group as a whole. Although the entire installation was curated by Emil Her Many Horses, the exhibition as a whole lacks a cohesive format for interpreting the objectives of this section of the Museum. About half of the individual tribal displays focus on religious ritual and the spiritual aspects of their nations, while the other half explains how their cosmology is reflected in the responsibilities of the people, based on gender or age. Between these tribal galleries are smaller displays focusing on American Indian Dance, the North American Indigenous Games, powwows, veterans, and religious celebrations like the Day of the Dead.

The remaining permanent installations explore Native American identity in a similar way. Eight tribes are exhibited within each space; the first of which focuses on the history of indigenous nations and the second highlighting contemporary lifeways. The former, titled “Our Peoples”⁷¹ presents viewers with “the colonizing machine,”⁷² incorporating displays of Bibles, guns, and the destruction of disease, between the individual tribal galleries.⁷³ This installation,

⁷¹ The curators of this exhibition are Paul Chaat Smith and Dr. Ann McMullen.

⁷² Rickard 2004.

⁷³ Presented in this installation are the Seminole Tribe of Florida, Tapirapé (Mato Grosso, Brazil), Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma, Tohono O'odham Nation (Arizona), Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation (North Carolina), Nahua (Guerrero, Mexico), Ka'apor (Maranhão, Brazil), and Wixaritari (or Huichol, Durango, Mexico)

titled “The Storm,” changes color, drawing attention to different artifacts one at a time, illustrating the enormous impact on Native territory after the Europeans invaded. Another major highlight of this installation is the display of pre-Columbian gold medallions and figurines, which mark the resources used by indigenous peoples before the encounter and what they were exploited for afterwards. Rickard, who had a major influence in conceiving the whole installation, believes that the random display, disassociated with a conventional timeline, counteracts what is normally shown in ethnographic exhibits. For Native Americans, she argued, this form of display shows “what our people understand – that our ancestors are still with us, that our population continues, and that we are many....When you stand in front of these two installations, you feel the power of the hemisphere.”

The third gallery, “Our Lives,”⁷⁴ exhibits contemporary existences within the framework that there are multiple conceptions of identity. When you enter the space, mirrors reflect your image on both sides of the threshold and a media composite projected onto the walls gives the appearance to viewers that they are walking in with Native American individuals of the past and present. In her lecture, Rickard noted that these images are “counter-narratives to the stoic photographs of the nineteenth century” of Native Americans. The display also emphasizes the complexity of Native identity as prescribed by the American government, stated by Rickard as, “We must frame ourselves as one-half, one-eighth, one-sixteenth. Pretty soon, you disappear.” This first impression presents

⁷⁴ The curators of this exhibit are Jolene Rickard, Gabrielle Tayac. The supervising curators of the community exhibits are Cynthia L. Chaves and Dr. Ann McMullen.

us with an artistic rendition of the real impact of counting blood quantum, but one has to wonder how many common visitors to the Museum realize the installation's intent.

As with the preceding two exhibits, individual tribes were selected to highlight their contemporary experiences.⁷⁵ The central portion of this gallery is also abstract. The focus is not merely on self-identification, as Rickard suggests, but also about the common choices Native peoples need to make to persevere in community life. Displays in this area discuss the problems with blood quotas, the hard choices faced when establishing casinos, the disparate methods of creating modern art, and the prevalence of cultural classes to re-teach Native traditions and languages to the newer generation.

These galleries juxtapose images of Native peoples in both contemporary and traditional dress and show traditional practices and objects being used and made in innovative and modern ways. Here visitors can see a basket woven out of photographic film or Converse[®] sneakers beaded in a traditional stitch. One display expresses the conflicts that Native peoples have had with scientists and anthropologists with artistic works. Luis Gonzalez Palma's 1998 photograph "The Critical Gaze" depicts a Native American man with a tape measure wrapped around his head, as if his skull was being measured to detect genetic and cultural heredity. A photograph of James Luna's 1987 performance "Artifact Piece" criticizes the objectification of the Native in historical museum exhibitions.

⁷⁵ The communities that are included in this exhibit are: the Campo Band of Kumeyaay Indians (California), the urban Indian community of Chicago (Illinois), Yakama Nation (Washington State), Igloodik (Nunavut, Canada), Kahnawake (Quebec, Canada), Saint-Laurent Metis (Manitoba, Canada), Kalinago (Carib Territory, Dominica), and the Pamunkey Tribe (Virginia).

While the Museum is an astounding achievement in the execution of a collaborative effort, it has been argued that museumgoers will leave with very little concrete information on the cultural heritage of Native American communities. The exhibits exude positivity; visitors are inundated with powerful images of community and thriving traditions. In an effort to avoid stirring up controversy, however, the exhibits offer less on the tragic incidences of their pasts, such as enforced stays in boarding schools or struggles over land rights and religion.⁷⁶

Opinions of the press have been less than kind in evaluating its merit. According to one article, “Edward Rothstein of the *New York Times* scorned [the Museum’s] ‘self-celebratory romance.’ Paul Richard of the *Washington Post* lamented, ‘The museum doesn’t nourish thought.’ *Post* city columnist Marc Fisher was blunter, calling the Museum ‘an exercise in intellectual timidity and a sorry abrogation of the Smithsonian’s obligation to explore America’s history and culture.’⁷⁷ Yet it may be argued that this is exactly the goal that museum curators wanted to reach. Traditional methods of educating the public in museum spaces do not apply when it comes to Native American studies. Part of the creation of this museum was to present Native realities in celebration of their existence, and

⁷⁶ Singer notes that even in the introductory film “Who We Are,” there was a desire to remain uncontroversial: “The initial discussion and pitch for a segment about the return to whaling among the Makahs in Washington State is a good example of the kind of avoidance stance taken by NMAI with regard to overly controversial or contested issues involving Indigenous communities” (2005: 468). The crew chose to film whaling practices in Barrow, Alaska to prevent disputes.

⁷⁷ Noah 2004.

this is achieved through the substantial incorporation of their voices into the project.

According to W. Richard West, Director of the NMAI, his four-floor colossus is “more a hemispheric institution of living cultures than...a museum in the traditional sense, because our view of Native cultures is as prospective as it is retrospective; it is as focused on a cultural present and future as it is on a cultural past.” Rather than seeing these cultures as static and therefore dead, he suggests they are “dynamic and changing” and “often brilliantly adaptive.” For West and the rest of the NMAI team it is the multiplicity of voices that provide the “invaluable, essential, and authentic component of interpreting the past, present, and future cultural experience” of Native Americans. He even goes as far as to say that there isn’t “inherent conflict between our use of the Native voice and the standards of traditional scholarship.”⁷⁸ Suzanne Fields both celebrated and criticized the NMAI’s inclusive endeavor in her editorial in *The Washington Times*. While noting that the creators of the Museum “enabled the Indians to speak for themselves, rather than impose the traditional anthropological interpretation of the white man,” she remarks that the Museum “has a problem of subjective superficiality. There’s a whiff of emotional payoff, of recognition as reparations....We’re thrust into a hodgepodge of personal stories lacking a binding historical perspective...[and] we crave more.”⁷⁹

If the NMAI was to portray the same trite historical timeline of events that has been present in white-dominated ethnographic collections since the dawn of

⁷⁸ West 2000: 8.

⁷⁹ Fields 2004.

their inception, nothing new would be achieved or demonstrated in this museum. Moreover, the curators would be conceding to a Western assessment of time and existence that does not necessarily resonate within Native American communities. The Museum would be a failure. By no longer freezing indigenous peoples in the past and allowing their voices to be raised, the NMAI presents an opportunity for more museum exhibits to be held accountable for what they display. The NMAI presents partial success in achieving the goals that Native activists have been advocating for the past several decades. While no part of the exhibits focus on the roles of women or men, the community exhibits create a forum for pan-Indian ideas to be expressed and challenges the ethnographic exhibits on display in the nearby National Museum of Natural History.

The Canadian Museum of Civilization, Gatineau, Quebec, Canada

The new Canadian Museum of Civilization opened its doors in 1989 in Gatineau, Quebec, near Ottawa. Two years later, Dr. George MacDonald, the Museum's former President and CEO, dedicated an area to exhibitions that would reflect the voices of the First Peoples. Today, Grand Hall and Canada Hall are two other permanent galleries featuring information on Canada's indigenous people in addition to First Peoples Hall. An exhibit titled, "From Time Immemorial: Tsimshian Prehistory," has also been on display for over a decade. The rest of the four-floor museum features an IMAX theater, the Canadian Postal Museum, the Canadian Children's Museum, and temporary galleries for special exhibitions. The Museum also has a restaurant and cafeteria, two boutiques, a small library, and several salons to cater to visitors.

The first gallery that visitors encounter is Grand Hall, featuring the façades of six housing styles from the Native people of the Northwest Coast: Tsimshian, Haida, Nuxalk (Bella Coola), Central Coast (Kwakwaka'wakw, Heiltsuk, Owikeno and Haisla people), Nuuchah-Nulth (Nootka), and Coast Salish. Each "house" display presents a view of traditional life on the exterior using reconstructed buildings made for the exhibit or donated by Native communities. Within their interiors, Native people were consulted to assist with displays on contemporary issues. The gallery stresses the desire to collaborate with Native communities and make provisions for repatriation when possible. In addition to the façades, two contemporary artworks are also featured in this hall:

Charlotte Lindgren's 1965 sculpture "Bride" and Bill Reid's 1989 bronze cast titled "Spirit of Haida Gwaii."

In the houses where these exhibits have yet to be developed, the Museum has featured relevant selections of its vast collection of First Peoples artifacts. The Nuu-Chah-Nulth house, for instance, had an exhibit titled "Encounters at Friendly Cove" which displayed reproductions of eighteenth-century prints made by the Spanish near Yuquot, British Columbia.⁸⁰ Landscape pictures depicted semi-nude men and women conducting daily life. Portraits featured the ethnic jewelry and dress of specific people; women with household tools and men holding weaponry. A 1792 account by Jose Mariano Moziño on display describes the often polygamous ritual life of the people of Nootka Sound.

A contemporary model of a Tsonoqua feast dish lies outside the wooden house representing the Coast Salish people. The exhibit inside discusses the histories and mythologies of this broad group of people and focuses on their craft-making skills and tools. One part of the display features a quote from the "XWENAL MEWX (Coast Salish) Declaration of 1988": "We know the Creator put us here. We know our Creator gave us laws that: govern all our relationships to live in harmony with nature and mankind; define our rights and responsibilities. We have the right to govern ourselves and the right to self-determination. Our rights and responsibilities cannot be altered or taken away by any other nation. We have our spiritual beliefs, our languages, our culture, and a place on Mother Earth which provides us with all our needs. We have maintained our freedom, our language and our traditions from time immemorial."

⁸⁰ This gallery is on display from December 10, 2004 to December 31, 2006.

The sentiments of the declaration are echoed in the Central Coast exhibit nearby. This gallery focuses on the ritual potlatch which was outlawed by the Canadian government in the 1930s. Traditional masks, “kept out of direct view when not worn by dancers” are on display behind a screen, and a Wakas Totem Pole in front of the house represent supernatural beings. A short video projected onto a large screen in the center of the house describes how the potlatch originated with the Cannibal, a supernatural spirit. It also discusses the laws imposed on the people by the Europeans and how the ritual has come to symbolize reclamation of indigenous identity.

Two more totem poles have been erected outside the Nuxalk house, a building of mixed European and indigenous architecture which commemorates Chief Clellamin’s life. Inside, the creation story is presented and masks and headdresses are on display, connecting the present people with their ancestral past. The Clellamin family and Nuxalk community contributed greatly to the gallery, realizing it as a “Gathering Place” to represent the culture and history of all their people.

The next gallery is the Haida House, featuring a wooden façade with four totem poles outside. On the interior, over two hundred contemporary and artifact argillite carvings are on display. Statements by living artists explain how many of them reflect the storytelling tradition or record history. Other ornaments, including women’s labrets and button blankets are also presented here. Three Haida photographers, Tom Greene, Jr., Richard Wilson, and Barbara J. Wilson, are featured in this gallery as well.

The last façade in this hall, the Tsimshian House, represents four groups of people under one roof: the Nisga'a of the Nass River and the adjacent coast; the Gitksan of the upper Skeena River and its tributaries; the Coast Tsimshian of Port Simpson and the coastal waterways to the south; and the Southern Tsimshian. Three totem poles stand outside representing the Nisga'a people. The interior of the gallery represents the Tsimshian belief that the world is "a box of souls." The rectangular room displays cultural artifacts and contemporary artworks together on each wall; video monitors are available to describe the individual items. The gallery also focuses on the educational and health programs that the communities are currently running and the treaty they are trying to establish with the government.

The gallery behind the Grand Hall exhibits "From Time Immemorial: Tsimshian Prehistory," and attempts to weave together scientific knowledge with indigenous oral history. Throughout the room, mannequins present the roles of individuals in the Native village and hundreds of tools are displayed in banks of pull-out drawers located around the perimeter. A reproduction of an archaeological excavation from 1966 to 1978 allows visitors to see how artifact materials are found. At the end of this gallery is a reconstructed Tlingit House that includes original posts from 1820. These posts became part of the Museum's collection in 1961. A display inside the small house recounts a Tlingit legend, "The Raven Who Stole the Sun."

First Peoples Hall, which opened in 2003, is also located on this floor. The large gallery is divided into four zones with the themes "We are still here,"

“We contribute,” “We are diverse,” and “We have an ancient relationship with the land.” The first zone, “An Aboriginal Presence,” begins with an orientation to the aboriginal people of Canada. A video includes interviews with Native people from all across the country, exposing visitors to the many different groups of people. Hundreds of artifacts are on display showing the continuity of indigenous traditions. Across from this presentation, the lives of famous individuals and traditional craftspeople are encapsulated in short descriptions of their work. Inuit filmmaker Zacharias Kunuk, Cree musician Buffy Sainte-Marie, Mi’kmaq poet Rita Joe, and Métis leader Louis Riel are a few of the people mentioned here.

In the next zone, “Our Origins,” the oral history and creation stories of several groups are presented. The contemporary artwork of Norval Morrisseau enriches the ethnographic material on display by showing the relationship of the spiritual energies of animals and humans. Archaeological evidence is also used to establish a cultural record in this exhibit, with mention of the controversial Bering Strait theory and excavation at Bluefish Caves, Debart, Grant Lake, and Kettle Lake. The original names for regions and cities in Canada are also discussed here.

The third zone, “An Ancient Bond with the Land,” begins with a video on boulder configurations used by Inuit people to mark the land for thousands of years. The sound of birds echoes in the air near the maritime exhibit which describes both the ancient fishing culture and the problems encountered by traditional fishermen today. Two more scenes similarly depict the lives of communal hunters and whalers in the Arctic, showing how interaction with the

Canadian government has historically altered traditions. The “People of the Longhouse” display focuses specifically on the Haudenosaunee presence in Canada. Here visitors can read in-depth descriptions on traditional matrilineal society or watch a video on the 1990 crisis at Oka. A final display features information on trade fairs and powwows, examples of how the people come together to celebrate and exchange goods and stories.

The last zone of this gallery is titled, “Arrival of Strangers.” It explores “the shockwave” of events in the past five hundred years of the First Nations’ history, when several communities were wiped out by war and disease and the people that survived faced culture destruction. There is a thorough amount of reading in this area describing everything from the early European fur trade, to the development of the concept of an “Indian,” to the birth of the Métis people from the lineages of European and indigenous ancestry. In addition, the gallery explores the impact of Christian missions on traditional religious beliefs and the modern political relationships between Aboriginal governments and the national Canadian government. Displays on modern indigenous art, “Indian humor,” and political activism conclude this highly-detailed exhibition in a positive note.

Just outside First Peoples Hall, a temporary gallery highlights twentieth century artwork. One of the displays focuses on Haudenosaunee beadwork and fancydancing regalia. Another features fourteen Inuit grey stone carvings that present the archetypal roles of men and women in the community: “The Family,” “The Parent,” “The Beautiful Woman,” “Male Rivals,” “The Keeper of the Home and Hearth,” “The Midwife,” “The Seamstress,” “The Nurturer,” and “Marriage.”

The display mentions that although these roles are considered to be traditional and nearly universal in cultures throughout the world, the female roles are especially important because they have continued through today.

The last permanent exhibition that features indigenous people is located in Canada Hall. The majority of the galleries present life-size streetscapes to recreate history from the arrival of Europeans to the present. Any mention of Native people is from the perception of the Europeans they encountered. This serves to balance out the perspectives presented in the Museum as a whole. However, it also marginalizes the Native population by presenting them only in a historical context and limiting their roles to merchants or people to be conquered.

One display recounts a French woodsman's interaction with a Haudenosaunee tribe. He describes Native traders as "tight-fisted" and needing to be "won over." Europeans also must "submit to the custom of smoking the pipe and exchanging wampum in order to maintain the fur trade." The generalizations presented here completely contrast the information on view in the previous galleries.

Two temporary exhibitions counteract these messages on the top floor. "Wolastoqiyik: Portrait of a People"⁸¹ and "The Inuit Way in Canada's Arctic"⁸² present profiles of indigenous life through artifacts and artwork. The first gallery shows how the traditional life of New Brunswick's Maliseet First Nation have been maintained through the generations. Several traditional tools are on display here. One Maliseet woman described her grandmother's baking skills: "She used

⁸¹ This exhibition was on display from December 18, 2003 until October 30, 2005.

⁸² This exhibition was on display from May 29, 2003 until October 30, 2005.

to make Lahkulet, Indian bread...and she didn't have a measuring cup, she measures from her hand. Soda, baking powder, she used her hand." Another woman describes how her grandmother used to sell handmade baskets from her sled and a young man recounts the healing knowledge of his female relative, which saved a dying friend.

The second gallery shows how the Inuit people of Canada have documented "their ancient way of life through art" since the 1950s. Victoria Mamnguqsualuk's 1974 print "Composition of People" features images of women carrying their children in their parkas and working beneath a bright sun. Kananginak Pootoogook's 1978 and 1992 paintings, titled "The First Tourist," mock the early arrivals of Europeans. Information describing the creation of the Nunavut territory in 1999 is also on display in this gallery.

The Canadian Museum of Civilization, overall, gives a very entertaining and thoroughly researched look into the lives of the country's indigenous people. In working closely with the populations the exhibits document, the Museum is working to build a more trusting relationship with Native communities. A training program for Native people interested in museum studies was established in 1993, and it has been accepting interns annually ever since. The collections on display give the impression of an active relationship between modern indigenous communities and the Canadian government, a positive image reflecting the Museum's close proximity to the nation's capital.

Part IV: Female Identity in Native American Museums

“...I am not a docile forest creature
a quaint curio
I am a burning flame
not yet uhuru
not yet woman
but very much alive.” – *Fishwife*, Lee Maracle (Stoh:lo)⁸³

The museum exhibits that I encountered primarily emphasized the women’s role in the Native community. Many displays focused on the achievements of individual people, but even these triumphs were portrayed as beneficial for the collective. With the exception of several displays in the Iroquois museums, women were frequently omitted from diplomatic and political roles. Power, however, was restored to Native women in exhibits that focused on cosmology, social structure, family life, and handicrafts. Other exhibits also featured women as major economic contributors. These established roles both celebrated and stereotyped women’s tribal influences in the museums.

Physical Appearances, Vestiges of the Indian Princess

The models and photographs depicting Native women predominately featured them as youthful, with perfect supple bodies and no signs of aging, matching up well with the features of the Indian Princess. In the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and the New York State Museum most of the female figures were half-nude, innocently displaying their perfectly round breasts. Even the clothed figures in the Seneca-Iroquois Museum were idealized. The male figures in these galleries also appear to be in their best form.

⁸³ Maracle 1996: 16.

The George Catlin exhibition in the George Gustav Heye Center continues this imagery. Although he only made a handful of paintings with female subjects, the women that Catlin chose to depict and on view in this collection are either wives or daughters of chiefs or have exotic appearances. The 1834 painting of “Káh-kée-tsee, Thighs, a Wichita Woman” shows a maiden with bared shoulders, straight black hair worn long and loose, and wearing lots of jewelry and face paint, not to mention a collarbone tattoo. Another painting from 1832 titled “Eeh-nís-kim, Crystal Stone, Wife of the Chief” carries the description: “youngest wife of Blackfoot Chief Buffalo Bull’s Backfat, the ‘apple of his eye’ and ‘exempted...from the drudgeries of the camp’.” Catlin adds, “her countenance is rather pleasing, which is an uncommon thing amongst the Blackfeet.” Yet another painting from the same year, “Pshán-shaw, Sweet-Scented Grass, Twelve Year Old Daughter of Bloody Hand” includes the explanation: “Catlin painted fewer women than men, a fact explained by their relatively subsidiary place in Indian society. As the young daughter of an Ankara chief, however, Sweet-Scented Grass possessed a status in the tribe and the means to dress in ‘a robe of the young buffalo’s skin, tastefully and elaborately embroidered in northern Plains style.” She is shown standing whereas all of the other women have been painted sitting. Her hair is parted and she is wearing jewelry, a cape, and beaded sandals. A landscape of huts and working men in loincloths are depicted behind her.

The *Spiderwoman Theater* exhibit in the George Gustav Heye Center presented contrasts to these images. The costumes of Gloria Miguel, Muriel

Miguel, and Lisa Mayo do not so much conceal their aging bodies but exhibit their curves and feminine attributes with pleasure. A few costumes are made out of flashy metallic fabric and include bustles which accentuate their posteriors. Often they are shown wearing large braided wigs and mocking historical depictions of Native women as princesses or squaw–drudges.

In other museums, including the Iroquois Indian Museum, the NMAI, and the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the primary visual sources of women were photographs or illustrations. These images were more realistic and idealized to a lesser extent. Real images of women in some exhibits counteracted the stereotypes presented in others. They also placed women in contemporary lifestyles, and took them out of a historical past. It would serve other museums to follow suit and proudly display photographs of the tribal community, as the Mashantucket Pequot Museum has done, to emphasize the continued role of women in the community in an unromanticized fashion.

Stories of Creation

The important role of women is most frequently stressed in the museum exhibits centered around cosmological understandings and origins of the people. The tales described in these displays often depict a female being creating our planet or the bringing about the development of the human race. Rayna Green has noted, “Women in Indian creation stories and female spirits central to everyday life are viewed in a positive light. Contrary to Eve, who collaborates with a serpent to expose man to evil, woman is viewed as the source of life,

providing sustenance and protection as well as certain cultural values, such as truth.”⁸⁴

This image of woman is reiterated frequently in the museums visited. Examples of this figure are included in the Iroquois Skywoman stories, prominently featured in a majority of the galleries visited. Other stories describe a female spirit’s relationship with animals, who provided life-sustaining gifts to the people on Earth. This is illustrated at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, where Sedna is shown as the most powerful spiritual being for the Inuit in the “Ancient Bond with the Land” gallery in First Peoples Hall. The story illustrates that Sedna, once a beautiful, vain girl, ends up in the ocean, tormented with rage after her father abandoned her to the Raven. Although she does not drown, her fingers become seals, and other sea animals become her friends. It is explained that her anger against man creates rough seas and violent storms. The Inuit people, especially male hunters, must therefore treat her with respect. If she is angry, her hair is said to tangle all the sea creatures, preventing them from reaching the surface and being captured by waiting hunters. Shamans must enter into a trance to calm her down so that their people will not starve.

It is interesting to note that the constructed image of the Earth-mother is not as prominent in the museum displays as I may have expected. Female spirits were more often bestowed with respect in these galleries, rather than with worship and awe. They highlighted their power but also showed them to be capable of making mistakes. The spirits were given qualities more human-like and were rarely depicted as “goddesses.”

⁸⁴ 1992: 21.

In artwork, however, females that were spirits or humans were often given idealized features that blurred the lines between these two distinctions. When I made my visit to the NMAI in August of 2005, the temporary exhibit “Native Modernism – The Art of George Morrison and Allan Houser” was on display. Houser’s work was of particular interest to me in this section because of the abundance of sculptures he had made of women and children. Many of them sit gracefully, hugging their sons and daughters to their bodies. Each of the sculptures feature sweeping curved lines that highlight and yet simplify the female shape. The peaceful forms have the quality of appearing very realistic and yet very ethereal. They are symbolic of both the oral history and natural motherhood of Native women.

Traditional Roles, Continuing Roles

There were exhibits in every museum I visited that referenced what life was like for Native women in the past. Traditional roles were described in words, shown with models, and illustrated with pictures and photographs. Women were most often seen as tied to food production, cloth-making, and child-rearing. In the Mashantucket Pequot Museum, the New York State Museum, the Seneca-Iroquois Museum and the Canadian Museum of Civilization, large-scale models always portrayed women cooking or creating items for food production such as baskets or pottery. It is interesting to note that although the Mashantucket Pequot Museum has an entire display devoted to “Men’s Leisure Activities,” a

comparable one for women does not exist. They are always shown working in the domestic realm for the benefit of their kinsmen.

In the galleries featuring Iroquois peoples in the Seneca-Iroquois Museum, the Iroquois Indian Museum, the New York State Museum, and the Canadian Museum of Civilization, women were depicted as having an extremely important role in the fields, or “the clearing.” As they were planting or harvesting they would also take care of children. The imperative role they performed economically as food providers gave them political power in choosing leaders. Elder clanswomen who had watched children grow were in an excellent position to know who had the skills to become a great leader. The respect bestowed on these women also gave them the right to depose chiefs and required their counseling during times of war.

In the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and the New York State Museum smaller galleries also showed early prehistoric life in the subarctic, where men and women worked alongside each other during the hunt, driving animals in certain directions to be killed. The former museum even mentioned that women provided food by hunting small game, a practice that did continue through time.

Although many of the exhibits mention the political roles that women have the possibility of attaining, such as healer, shaman, or chief, none of them take this opportunity to present a female model instead of a male. At the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Mashantucket Pequot Museum, Shaman and Chief models were clearly male. Visitors would only find out that women were seen to be capable of these roles if they read a small-print note on

the display, or listened to a specific note on the audioguide. Text that is imbedded in this way often skips the eye of the regular visitor. The roles are so rigidly defined in the visual exhibits, that it makes it difficult for the casual viewer to come away with anything else. Men were hunters, chiefs, shamans or healers. Women had children and made the food. The general trend demonstrated that men belonged in the “cultural,” outside realm while women worked in the “natural” domain of domesticity.

In contemporary displays, the image of women was much more progressive. They were shown as activists, leaders in their communities, and craftspeople. At the Mashantucket Pequot Museum, they were the only people to remain on the land. Elizabeth George and her sisters taught their grandchildren the importance of land, its role in the history and identity of her people and encouraged the Pequot to live on tribal territory and reclaim their indigenous heritage.

At the NMAI and the Canadian Museum of Civilization, women were also featured taking important roles in the indigenous movements of the late twentieth century. The urban Chicago exhibit in the NMAI, showed women who were founding members of political groups. The Yakama exhibit portrayed their women as ambassadors, a role won through the Miss Yakama Nation Pageant during the Treaty Days Festival. A film at the latter museum focused on the key role that women played during the Oka Crisis of 1990. They participated strongly in the confrontation against the Quebecois police over the land extension of a nearby golf course across a community cemetery. According to the film, “A key

Iroquois precondition to any negotiations was the free movement of Clan Mothers between communities and the besieged Iroquois at Oka.” The women needed to be available to guide their people and negotiate with the Canadians.

Although many Native American scholars have argued that the roles of Indian men have been glorified while women’s roles are generally ignored in popular media, the same cannot be said for museums. While it may be true that more Native American men have been given fame or notoriety for their achievements or experiences in battle, many Native American women are also mentioned for their roles in shaping society and preserving their heritage. Other women are mentioned for the importance they served in the construction of early America. Regardless, individuals are being noted for their experiences in the newer museums. Hopefully this trend will not end any time soon.

Skilled Artisans and Cultural Reproduction

A majority of the traditional and contemporary displays featured women as very skilled craftspeople. These roles enabled them to produce products for their families and the community. Later, they were able to sell their goods to Europeans and Americans for profit. The exhibit “First American Art: The Charles and Valerie Diker Collection of American Indian Art” at the George Gustav Heye Center blurs the lines between material culture and art, but emphasizes the role of women in the creation of cultural properties. Exhibition curator and Assistant Director for Cultural Resources at the NMAI, Bruce Bernstein, commented on an 1880 Tewa Olla on display: “The designs symbolize

the relationship of Pueblo people to water and fertility.” A lidded jar, circa 1910 by Karuk woman Elizabeth Conrad Hickox also receives much praise from Bernstein: “Elizabeth Hickox was able to master her art with more skill than any other Karuk or other basket weaver from the northwestern California region. Her work perfectly embodies a combination of materials, technique, and design; even her stitches are sized to complement the elegant forms. She worked full-time as an artist, with her family serving as assistants by preparing her materials.” Exhibition curator Gerald McMaster made comments on an 1880 saddlebag: “Women were the abstract artists among the Sioux tribes...The bags both complimented and complemented the woman who rode on horseback. Their abstract designs provided careful balance with the world around.” A description of a 1910 bowl mentions that the “weaver has incorporated her innate understanding of her culture.”

The production of such artifacts is no longer necessary with the wide availability of manufactured goods sold in stores today. Exhibits in both the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and the Canadian Museum of Civilization, however, featured women who are reintroducing the arts of basketry and pottery to their people. At the latter museum a display shows Suzan Marie, a Dene woman working on spruceroor basketry in 1999. According to the display, mothers who went to classes passed on these new skills to their daughters, and daughters also taught their mothers, creating new generations of basket-makers for the future. The museums also featured a resurgence in beading over the past decade. Large-scale projects like the “Post-Colonial Garments” on display at the

Seneca-Iroquois Museum or small classes being taught to renew this art as featured in the NMAI are evidence of this.

Their work has always been appreciated by the community, but today the crafts are an important symbol of maintaining cultural heritage. Although most of the exhibits focused on the traditional production of beadwork, basketry, and pottery, others mentioned contemporary arts deriving from the dominant culture. At the Canadian Museum of Civilizations, a Musqueam woman commented on the importance of her work in making : “I am a communicator for these people; you see every time I make a blanket I don’t feel like it’s mine. I only feel like I was a part of it.” Another exhibit highlighting Barbara J. Wilson’s photographs recount how she uses her art to help teach children pride in their culture.

In the *Spiderwoman Theater* exhibit at the George Gustav Heye Center, visitors can view seven performance segments that the sisters have made. Many of them recollect stories from their childhoods about issues with identity, problems interacting in a white-dominated world, and dealing with sexuality. Muriel Miguel remarks: “It was a very exciting time when we started. We were really looking for a place where women could be anything they wanted and the sky was the limit. With this group of women, we were everything. We were short. We were fat. We were tall. We were gay. We were straight. We were married, divorced, single, mothers, and grandmothers. We could be blonde, brunette – anything. And that’s how we started Spiderwoman.” Lisa Mayo also commented on their career: “When we come together, the three of us, it is really strong, because we have a very powerful theme, a very political theme. It’s

spiritual as well. And when it comes together, it's a political shock for the audience." Gloria Miguel: "We do play the flute and power pipes, even though Kuna women usually don't. So the stories are related to recognizing our power and taking it."

Art can be used as a method of opening paradigms to other possibilities. As part of the resurgence of craftswomen, Native American women are reclaiming their roles in their communities. In some cases these efforts may reinforce preconceptions that outsiders have of the women as hard laborers, and yet the varied forms of creative expression also eliminate what is seen as stereotypical roles. As Native American women continue to work at preserving and renewing their cultural identities, their voices will hopefully replace notions of the past. Native art exhibits can play a role in breaking down the barriers, by exposing more people to the contemporary existences of these people.

Conclusion: A Hopeful Future for Native American Museum Exhibits

Native American women have frequently appeared in popular culture images as squaw–drudge workhorses, Indian princesses, and Mother Earth goddesses. As a result of colonialism, these misrepresentations were fabricated by Europeans and their descendants who conquered this land. The stereotypes have permeated mainstream media and have confiscated the identities of real indigenous women. In this paper, I explored whether or not these themes were still present in educational institutions of this country, our museums.

Over the past year I made several trips to museums in the northeast region of the United States including the Seneca-Iroquois National Museum in Salamanca, New York, the Iroquois Indian Museum in Howes Cave, New York, the Mashantucket Pequot Museum in Ledyard, Connecticut, the New York State Museum in Albany, the George Gustav Heye Museum in New York City, and the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C.. I made another visit to the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Gatineau, Quebec, so that I could experience how Native American women were portrayed in another country with a similar colonial history.

The results of this investigation were not necessarily what I expected to find. Blatant stereotypes were not on display in the exhibits I viewed. Instead, they were more imbedded into the delineations of cultural roles practiced by men and women through history. Women were traditionally portrayed as always working in the domestic sphere. Men, on the other hand, had more time for spiritual roles and leisure activities when not hunting game away from the home.

These roles personify the classic duality of culture and nature from feminist theory. The male gender is able to obtain a life outside the home while the female gender is tied to the earth; her roles revolve around giving life and being inside the home.

The squaw-drudge was therefore present in the museum galleries, though not alongside the racist imagery that she had been attributed with before. The Indian princesses were also there, bound up in the perky bodies of the female figures on display. Despite the presence of unnecessary nudity in some exhibits, women were not over-sexualized or even sexualized at all in the museums I visited. I also expected to see more expressions of the Mother Earth goddess than I did encounter. This label can only be applied to a certain extent on the exhibits that recounted stories of the Creation, and even then they were not overstated.

What I did discover in these exhibits was an overwhelming portrayal of women as the keepers of the traditions and the reproducers of cultural knowledge. From museum to museum, women were consistently cast in this favorable role as resources from which the communities could later draw on in their time of need. Traditional information passed down through generations of women helped Native nations eventually reclaim their identities. A prominent influence during the Red Power movements and subsequent activism, such women continue to revitalize their people through changing times.

By the year 2000, over one hundred fifty Native-run tribal museums and cultural centers had been established across the United States.⁸⁵ This new form of cultural institution aids in building relations in the larger community from the

⁸⁵ . Gulliford 2000: 41.

inside out. Slowly, indigenous peoples are becoming the custodians of their own cultural heritage and women are playing a major role. It is refreshing to see these Native voices emerging in the museum field, creating an experimental moment in the expression of Native American cultural materials.

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