

ABSTRACT

Museums of Social Conscience: Interpreting a Troubled Past

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The development of museums of social conscience is a significant, yet under appreciated, contribution to the greater museum community. This is a comprehensive study on the origins of these institutions, the impact they have had on the greater museum community, as well as a critical look at their methodology. Research materials primarily consists of personal interviews and correspondence with key institutions such as the International Coalition for Historic Site Museums of Social Conscience, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, the Matilda Joselyn Gage House, the Museum of African American History of Boston, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. This thesis offers a current, wide-ranging perspective on these noteworthy organizations – their unique collections, innovative interpretative techniques, funding, and community responses.

Museums of Social Conscience: Interpreting a Troubled Past

by

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Change is the only true constant in society; yet somehow the museum community is often incorrectly viewed as a stagnant body. In reality, the United States museum industry has changed dramatically from its humble beginnings with the small cabinet-of-curiosity displays. Museums have made major strides in how they educate and operate in the last century. Counted among the recent changes in the museum industry is the establishment of a new museum genre, museums of social conscience. Museums of social conscience are institutions that interpret difficult, painful, or forgotten histories while inspiring action by connecting their unique histories to ongoing, current events and promoting humanitarian and democratic values. The formalized genre did not appear overnight, but slowly developed over the last fifty years.

The Civil Rights Movement transformed the American landscape in the 1960s. However, some fail to recognize the sweeping alterations that this movement made in the museum industry. Like many offices around the country, the faces of the staff members of museums began to change as employment opportunities opened to minorities. No longer were museums the bastion of old, rich white men; new voices brought new perspectives and a need for new interpretations. Libraries, archives, and museums rushed to collect the previously ignored history of minorities in this country. Major minority-based exhibits at museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the National Museum of American History illustrated the interest that led to the creation of scores of ethnically based institutions nationwide. Although far from utopian, the museum

community exists in a more diverse state today than anyone could have predicted when Martin Luther King Jr. was spurring the country forward towards his dream of Civil Rights.

The concept of museum education was not impervious to the changes occurring within the cultural fabric of the 1960s and 1970s. Although a constant element in the museum makeup, the realm of education has experienced several periods of transition. The first official school group entered museums and libraries in the 1880s thanks to the pioneering thoughts of Henry Watson Kent, and the often arrogant yet revolutionary Benjamin Ives Gilman introduced the concept of docents in 1907.¹ Children's Museums sprang up in cities across the country, though they have gone through periods of popularity and decline since their conception in 1899.² The early Cold War era instilled a fascination in scientific advancements to which the American museum was not immune. Science museums and planetariums opened around the country following the launch of the Soviet satellite, Sputnik, which encouraged unique scientific learning within the confines of the museum building. These exhibits featured scientific exploration, compelling visuals, and opportunities for hands-on exploration, making way for the next transition in museum education.³ The Exploratorium, created by ex-Manhattan Project scientist Frank Oppenheimer, utilized the learning by doing concept to "supplement"

¹ Majorie Schwarzer, *Riches, Rivals, & Radicals: 100 Years of Museums in America*, (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 2006), 9; Edward P. Alexander, *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Function of Museums*, 1st ed., (California: AltaMira Press, 1996), 36; and Nancy Berry and Susan Myer, eds., *Museum Education History, Theory, and Practice*, (Virginia: National Art Education, 1989), 137.

² Schwarzer, 9.

³ Ibid., 18-19.

classroom science curricula in the United States.⁴ Oppenheimer's museum paradigm was devoid of pretention and rigid structures. Visitors young and old were encouraged to discover their own answers to how and why machines function. He strongly believed that "nobody flunks museum."⁵ The energetic experience of the Exploratorium, and other science centers across America, rejuvenated the public's devotion to the museum and its educational offerings.

One of the most profound changes to museum education came about due to the general frustration of all museum directors over the perpetual battle for funding. The American Association of Museums (AAM) appointed a council to study the economic factors that weighed on the community and possible steps to alleviate some of this burden. The Belmont Report, the results of a study by an AAM counsel published in 1968, determined that the most beneficial resolution to the financial problems facing the museum industry was an escalation in federal funding. The Belmont Report asserted that "the Federal Government has an obligation, as yet unmet, to assist in persevering, maintaining, and widely utilizing the national treasure in museums on behalf of the American people."⁶

The Belmont Report sparked numerous changes in the museum industry after its publication, including a change in the federal tax code. The Tax Reform Act of 1969

⁴ The Exploratorium, "Dr. Frank Oppenheimer: A Brief History," The Exploratorium, <http://www.exploratorium.edu/frank/bio/bio.html> (accessed January 12, 2009).

⁵ Frank Oppenheimer, quoted in Howard Gardner, *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century*, (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 185.

⁶ Michael W. Robbins, ed., *America's Museums: The Belmont Report*, (Washington, D.C.: The American Association of Museums, 1968), vii.

officially classified museums as “educational institutions.”⁷ This was a major change in the laws regarding 501(c)(3) status, which prevented any non-profit cultural institution from claiming tax exempt status if it was not primarily focused on educational endeavors. One might argue that museums are by nature educational in purpose; however, museums at this point were largely the domain of curators. These masters of collections controlled the content of exhibitions at museums across the continent, acting as the gatekeepers to knowledge. With a tendency towards an intellectually elite audience, many curators struggled to communicate with broader American audiences.

Enter the educator. The role of the museum educator truly took shape in the 1970s and early 1980s as museums expanded educational programs at a rapid rate. Museums scrambled to create and fill freshly created positions and found their salvation in traditional classroom teachers who had no museum training of any kind. Instead of drawing from past experiences they were forced by necessity to act as trailblazers, making mistakes and initiating power shifts along the way. The dissatisfaction felt by museum educators by the lack of recognition within the community came to a breaking point in 1973. At the time, educators were often “treated like second-class citizens within their museums,” and the community at large.⁸ In fact, AAM failed to recognize members of the community who handled the public side of the museum; indeed, AAM had only limited resources for educators. On June 6, 1973 at the AAM annual conference museum educators banded together to create the Education Committee, also known as

⁷ American Association of Museums, *Museums for a New Century: A Report of the Commission for a New Century*, (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1984), 55.

⁸ Bonnie Pitman, “Introduction,” in *Presence of Mind: Museums and the Spirit of Learning*, ed. Bonnie Pitman, (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1999), 9.

EdCom. Through this collaboration, museum educators found their voice in the greater community and began to establish policy and procedures to improve their trade.

With the publication of *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums* in 1992 the field of museum education gained another victory in solidarity. This report called for a “fundamental change in how museums view their service to society.”⁹ Education, the council argued, is the primary tool to guarantee success in the mission of every museum to serve the public good. The education of the public must be the priority of museums, not a secondary function to the proverbial collections storehouses of the past. However, without the groundbreaking efforts of educators throughout the last fifty years publications like *Excellence in Equity* could not exist. Other advancements both affect and are affected by the ideological shift in the realm of museum education. New tools and concepts employed by educators across the country create dynamic, entertaining spaces within the walls of the museum for the benefit of the audience. The days of curator-controlled exhibits began to fall by the wayside in many institutions, opening the door to collaborative endeavors where curators, educators, and exhibit planners work together to insure a cohesive and effective exhibit for the benefit of the public.

Technological advances have been astronomical in the last half century from personal computers to PDAs. Museums now incorporate many of these advancements in their daily operations and exhibitions. According to a 2006 study done by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), eighty-eight percent of museums surveyed in the

⁹ American Association of Museums, *Excellence in Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums*, (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1992), 5.

United States had a website.¹⁰ This number illustrates a large jump from the 2002 IMLS study, where only sixty-two percent of surveyed museums had a website.¹¹ This vast growth provides a striking look into the ever expanding role of technologies in the museum industry.

The digitization of museum records, databases, and artifacts is one of the most common museum goals of the past decade. Whether these digitized items are for internal or external use, the technologies they require remain the same. Electronic museum databases, such as KE:Emu, Past Perfect, and Voyager, enable institutions to create searchable, user-friendly collections records as well as to convert archaic card catalogues. In the 2002 IMLS study, 30% of the institutions surveyed conducted digitization activities.¹² This number jumps significantly by the 2006 study, when 74.4% of institutions digitized between one and five-thousand artifacts.¹³ These electronic database softwares possess an additional benefit of allowing institutions to publish all, or part, of their collections onto the internet, thus reaching a broader audience. From this point, researchers have access to museum objects and exhibits curated specifically for online viewing.

Important changes in the museum field do not always come with fancy gadgets or even scores of publications to laud the new forms, methods, or types. Largely unheralded

¹⁰ Institute of Museum and Library Services, *Status of Technology and Digitization in the Nation's Museums and Libraries: January 2006*, (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2006), 14.

¹¹ Institute of Museum and Library Services, *Status of Technology and Digitization in the Nation's Museums and Libraries 2002 Report*, (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2002), 7.

¹² *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³ Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2006, 26.

by the mainstream museum community, a new genre has taken shape. For the last twenty years museums of social conscience, as they are labeled, developed in cities around the world, growing in number, variety, and impact. Focused on connecting the past to contemporary human rights issues, these institutions ask difficult questions, touch hearts, and alter perspectives. Changes brought about by the Civil Rights Movement and educational developments in the industry enabled this new museum ideology to exist and thrive in a competitive museum market.

Rationale and Methodology

Falk and Dierking assert that “the museum experience is a learning experience,” but what makes a museum so impactful to the visitors who come through the door is what sets them apart from other scholastic institutions, the experience itself.¹⁴ Great artists are created when a child walks in and gazes upon his first Picasso, a future historian views Civil War rifles, and a potential paleontologist stands before a towering Tyrannosaurus Rex skeleton. These are just some of the life changing experiences that occur within the walls of any given museum. Museums of social conscience strive to inspire these life changing experiences as well. However, these organizations articulate a message that hopes to inspire the viewer into world changing action.

This realization came to me on June 20, 2000 when I found myself at Auschwitz, the day that my fascination with museums of social conscience began. Walking through the infamous gate at the age of fifteen I was struck by the gravity of the site. Nothing can prepare a person for that first visit to a site where so much destruction occurred. Today,

¹⁴ Lynn D. Dierking and John H. Falk, *The Museum Experience*, (Washington, D.C.: Whalesback Books, 1992), xv.

the three camps of Auschwitz act as physical reminders of genocide and hate. The main camp was transformed with spaces for formal exhibitions, text panels, and dioramas intermingled with the original barracks and barbed wire fences. Written above the exhibit hall entrance is the famous quote from George Santayana's book The Life of Reason, boldly stating the true intention of the institution, "those who do not learn from the past are condemned to repeat it."¹⁵ I came to the camp due to a love of history and an interest in Holocaust studies; I left with a burning need to ensure the protection of human life against the hatred manifested on that land. There was not a label or a panel at the door explaining that it was a site of social conscience, in fact I would not encounter that term until my first year of graduate school, but the seeds planted by that experience led me to recognize this growing niche in the museum industry.

My next encounter with museums of social conscience occurred when I interned at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, USHMM, in the summer of 2008. This gave me the opportunity to contribute to the daily operations of an institution that transformed hearts. What I was exposed to at USHMM sparked my curiosity and I wanted to know if there were other organizations with the same mission. I would soon realize the old adage, "curiosity killed the cat," rang true for me. A quick Google search for social issues in museums led me to the International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, but few formal publications. In my inquisitive state, I tried to dig deeper.

The current state of knowledge regarding institutions of social conscience comes primarily from informal sources: websites, newsletters, and brochures. Formal publications are limited to articles, mostly written by employees or members of the

¹⁵ George Santayana, *The Life of Reason*, (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998), 284.

International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, and brief mentions in generally focused books. The last decade saw the publication of the majority of articles mentioning or focusing on museums of social conscience. The interest, however, is growing. In the spring of 2007 the *Museums and Social Issues* was created, which features articles pertinent to contemporary issues addressed in museums across the country. Even standard museum publications are beginning to identify this growing faction of the community. The creation of the Coalition was added as a historic moment in the most recent edition of *Museums in Motion*.¹⁶ Despite these recent acknowledgements, no comprehensive study of these organizations exists. Inspired by my own encounters with museums of social conscience, I sought to identify how these institutions functioned, educated, and innovated.

Feeling like a museocological Columbus, I set out into the vast sea of information with the hope of finding an undiscovered territory. Without a repository of published materials to draw from I was forced out of the library and into the museums. If experience is the key to learning in museums, then surely experience would lead me to answers. With the assistance of the Coalition and prior experiences I identified organizations around the country to contact. Armed with a solid array of questions and a digital voice recorder I traveled across the country to tour, discuss, and photograph. Institutions in this field research include: The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, the International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, The National Civil Rights Museum, The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, The Matilda Joslyn Gage House, The African American Museum in Boston, Ellis Island, The Sherwin-Miller

¹⁶ Edward P. Alexander and Mary Alexander, *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums*, 2nd ed, (California: AltaMira Press, 2007), 128.

Jewish Art Museum, The Minnesota Science Museum, and The St. Augustine Slave Galleries. The majority of my research came from first hand experiences as well as the limited amount of published and unpublished materials.

Museums of social conscience are an important development in the museum community in the last twenty years. The pioneering techniques and relevant messages of these institutions attract large, loyal audiences in the midst of national discussions on museum sustainability. What exactly are these organizations doing differently? How does the mission of these organizations influence collections care, fundraising, or interpretation? What future lies before these institutions individually and as a genre? By understanding how these institutions operate we can begin to harness their effective tools in order to apply them to the greater museum community. Genocide and internment are not requirements to utilizing the techniques employed by museums of social conscience.

CHAPTER TWO

A Brief History of Museums of Social Conscience

Since their conception, museums of social conscience have sought to motivate audiences and communities to not only learn lessons from the past but to utilize those lessons to affect the present and future. By connecting current issues to historic events these institutions illustrate that the world has not progressed terribly far from human rights atrocities of the not too distant past. These museums and sites range in topic, size, and geographic location, often having little connection in subject matter or audience; yet these organizations share the same mission, to “strengthen the case for human rights” internationally.¹ Curiosity and compassion inspire millions of visitors to frequent these institutions every year making social conscience museums an important feature in the landscape of museums.

Before discussing the future, or even the present, it is vital to understand the history of this emerging museum genre. Similar to other progressive movements in the last fifty years, the foundation of this ideology came from multiple sources of inspiration. From the Civil Rights Movement to the Ellis Island restoration, issues of social conscience became an irrevocable part of the museum conscious. However, the formalization of this mindset did not occur until the late 1990s. Museums in the United States, and internationally, began to ask tough questions and tell forgotten histories in an attempt to democratize the realm of the museum for every man. In doing this, museums

¹ Amanda Kraus, “The Collective Conscience,” *Museum News*, May/June 2005. 15

developed a keen ability to effect change. The road traveled by these institutions was never smooth yet despite protests the movement continues to grow.

The truth regarding the political pressures facing the modern museum would astound most people. Furthermore, the pervasiveness of these pressures throughout the last fifty years made a profound impact on the entire museum community. As cultural institutions, museums cannot fully escape social forces competing for influence in their exhibits, educational materials, and even in the scope of collections. Museums are seen as trustworthy institutions for the transmission of cultural and national truths. The numbers support the claim, with an expected visitation of more than six times greater than that of all major league sporting events in the United States.² Why? Students surveyed across the country described the history lessons taught in classrooms to be “dull” and “irrelevant.”³ Museums are viewed in a different light from the musty, old textbooks of formal education because museums have the ‘stuff.’ Due to that fact they are viewed as inherently trustworthy institutions because, one would hope, that the artifacts back up the story mounted on the walls and exhibit cases. National trust, however, acts as a double edged sword. Not only are museums the purveyors of culture, they also “define what is [cultural] reality.”⁴ Essentially, museum exhibits and educational materials can have definite physical endings but the repercussions of those exhibits perpetually affect the museum audience and the larger communities. Discussing

² Bob Mondello, “A History of Museums: ‘The Memory of Mankind’,” National Public Radio, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=97377145> (accessed December 18, 2008).

³ Roy Rosenzweig and David P. Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 179.

⁴ Timothy W. Luke, *Museum Politics*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xiii.

issues like the atomic bombs dropped in Japan or the conditions in turn-of-the-century sweatshops must be broached with caution.

The line interpreters must walk is very thin. Topics discussed within museums range from general, incontestable histories to controversial and borderline offensive material. However, the recognition of that line, by the community, has greatly improved from the initial naïve attempts at social integration. As acceptance levels within the community rise, more voices are added into the interpretative mix in museums around the country. Diverse cultures and opinions have altered museum dynamics and demonstrated the museum's ability to act as a catalyst for change in the local and national community. When a trusted entity, the museum, exhibits minority histories it illustrates to its community that these histories are important and valid. In previous decades the museum was considered a storehouse of artwork and relics with little relationship to the average man. Today, however, visitors "think of the museum as a *social*, educational experience."⁵ This alteration in public perception required the contribution of multiple organizations and individuals in order to come to fruition.

Ethnically Based Museums

Struggling amidst race riots and war protests, the museums in the 1960s faced a major dilemma – change or become irrelevant. The time had come to remodel the metaphorical "ivory tower" that the public perceived museums to be and begin to reach out into the local community.⁶ The transition, however, did not come about easily.

⁵ Jacqueline Trescott, "Natural History Trumpets Expansion," *Washington Post*, May 11, 1999, C1. Emphasis added.

⁶ Schwarzer, 20.

Hiccups, misunderstandings, and outright mistakes hindered the development of an inclusive voice in many museums across the country. Mistakes, however, enabled museums to learn from them and progress in knowledge and understanding to cultivate an environment where, hopefully, peoples of all races, creeds, and cultures feel welcomed and represented.

The collecting and exhibiting of minority voices in the United States, after the Civil Rights Movement, occurred in two ways. First, traditional museums incorporated minority histories, primarily African American initially, into the preexisting collections and exhibits.⁷ This incorporation inspired both positive and negative results. “Harlem on My Mind,” one of the most controversial exhibits of this period, opened its doors at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Met, in New York City in January of 1969.⁸ Through this display the director, Thomas Hoving, was attempting to illustrate the relevance of the Met to its community.⁹ Hoving confessed that he “looked upon ‘Harlem on My Mind’ as a turning point. It was going to justify [his] view of the museum as a moral, social, and educational force. Through Harlem the museum would pay its true cultural dues. It would chronicle the creativity of the downtrodden blacks and, at the same time, encourage them to come to the museum.”¹⁰ Unfortunately, the result was utter failure. Hoving, representing the Met and the museum community at large to the intended audience of the exhibition, further expanded the racial divide within the museum and,

⁷ Ibid., 107.

⁸ Ibid., 20.

⁹ Vincent J. Cannato, *The Ungovernable City: John Lindsay and his Struggle to Save New York*, (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 357.

¹⁰ Thomas Hoving, *Making Mummies Dance: Inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 164-165.

Vincent Cannato asserts, marked himself as a “bitter stereotype of guilty white[s]... who feared blacks from their secure Park Avenue apartments, but were attracted to the underside of Harlem life.”¹¹ “Harlem on My Mind” inadvertently highlighted the unfortunate lack of communication across the racial divide in the United States.¹² The African American population of New York City, outraged at the perceived affront, lashed out at the Met in alarming ways. Through the course of the exhibit ten paintings owned by the Met were defaced. Finding a small *h* scratched into the paint of Rembrandt’s *Christ with a Pilgrim’s Staff* left little doubt that the damage was inflicted in protest of the Harlem exhibit.¹³ Further, more radical, frustrations were expressed by African American poet, June Jordan.¹⁴ She defiantly stood before the audience at a Brooklyn seminar and proclaimed:

Take me into the museum and show me myself, show me my people, show me soul America. If you cannot show me myself, if you cannot teach my people what they need to know – and they need to know the truth, and they need to know that nothing is more important than human life – if you cannot show and teach these things, then why should not I attack the temples of America and blow them up?¹⁵

To say that racial tensions were high would certainly be an understatement. Most professionals faced with examples like “Harlem on My Mind” gave into the temptation to avoid exhibits and topics that might offend particular groups. Yet museums across the country refused to take “Harlem on My Mind” as outright failure.

¹¹ Cannato, 359.

¹² Schwarzer, 20.

¹³ Ibid., 360.

¹⁴ Alexander, 1st ed., 6.

¹⁵ Barry Schwartz, “Museums: Art for Who’s Sake?”, *Ramparts*, January 1972, 44.

Concerned by the results of exhibitions like “Harlem on My Mind,” many in the industry worried that traditional museums were too entrenched to truly reach out into new audiences. Some museums sought to branch out and establish branches in the heart of minority communities. The most prominent example of this is the Smithsonian’s Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, now named the Anacostia Community Museum, that was founded 1967 as the first federally funded “community-based museum” in the country.¹⁶ Located in a traditionally African American district of Washington, D.C. the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum effectively took the experience and exhibits out of the established Smithsonian setting and brought it to the people they were attempting to contact.¹⁷ Through Anacostia, the Smithsonian hoped to reach out to broader audiences by telling local histories in the communities where they happened. This process, they assumed, would restore trust in the larger parent institution and, in time, the museum community itself.

The second method of museum integration was the creation of ethnically based museums founded by prominent leaders within minority communities.¹⁸ These specialized museums were products of the Civil Rights Movement and the frustration with traditional museums that, many felt, managed to ignore minority histories. Why should the history of African Americans, Asian Americans, and other ethnic groups be left to traditional institutions that had largely ignored these histories for over one hundred years? “Should not African Americans[, and other minorities,] take charge of

¹⁶ Anacostia Community Museum, “Anacostia and Your Community’s History: A Public Institution,” Anacostia Community Museum, http://anacostia.si.edu/anacostia_history/public_institution.htm (accessed: January 10, 2009).

¹⁷ Schwarzer, 20.

¹⁸ Ibid., 107.

how their history was being collected and interpreted?”¹⁹ Take charge they did. All across the country minority community leaders took up the cause and created ethnically based museums and community centers. Institutions like the DuSable Museum of African American History, founded in 1961, “set out to correct the apparent institutionalized omission of black history and culture in” mainstream educational systems.²⁰ Though revolutionary in content and interpretation, the foundations of the DuSable Museum were shockingly similar to early American museums. The DuSable Museum began as a cabinet of curiosities. Margaret and Charles Burrows initiated the museum in their own living room showcasing their own personal collection. As word spread about their mission, objects started coming into their possession.²¹ The expanding collection eventually needed a more permanent home and the DuSable Museum of African American History was born. Lonnie Bunch, director of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History, claimed that Margaret Burrows and her contemporaries “recognized that what museums do, more than anything else, is they legitimize people’s culture and if you’re not there, you run the risk of being invisible.”²²

Similar cultural interest inspired countless institutions across the country.

Arkansas native, Sue Bailey Thurman, and her husband, Howard Thurman, traveled

¹⁹ Ibid., 109.

²⁰ DuSable Museum of African American History, “DuSable Museum of African American History – About DuSable Museum,” DuSable Museum of African American History, <http://www.dusablemuseum.org/g/about/> (accessed January 12, 2009).

²¹ Great Museums Television, *Riches, Rivals, & Radicals: 100 Years of Museums in America*, DVD, narrated by Susan Stamberg, (Great Museums Television, 2006).

²² Great Museums Television.

internationally to promote “interracial, intercultural and international understanding.”²³

As a member of the Pilgrimage of Friendship, a group of African Americans who traveled to black universities in India, Burma, and Ceylon, Thurman became the first African American woman to meet with human rights activist Mahatma Gandhi.²⁴

Focused on social activism, Sue Bailey Thurman founded the Museum of African American History, MAAHB, in Boston, MA in 1967 during the height of the “black power movement.”²⁵ Working with local activists and members of the African American community, Thurman identified the historically black community of Beacon Hill as the perfect spot to create this institution. The need for a historically relevant location led Thurman to a synagogue used by the Anshi Libovitz congregation since 1904.²⁶ The building was originally built in 1806 and was the center of African American culture Boston during the 19th century. In fact, research proved that this site was the oldest African Meeting House in the United States, which played host to notable figures such as Fredrick Douglas and William Lloyd Garrison.²⁷ Thurman purchased the property in 1972 and succeeded in getting the site listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976.²⁸ Successful capital campaigns enabled the MAAHB to return the Meeting

²³ Jet, “Sue Bailey, Pioneering Activist, Dies at 93,” *Jet*, January 20, 1997, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1355/is_n9_v91/ai_19069911 (accessed January 16, 2009).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Chandra Harrington and L’Merchie Frazier, interviewed by the author, Boston, MA, October 28, 2008.

²⁶ Museum of African American History Boston, *A Gathering Place*, (Boston: The Bay State Banner, 2006), 3.

²⁷ Museum of African American History Boston, “Museum of African American History, Boston – Black Heritage Trail Site 14,” Museum of African American History Boston, <http://www.afroammuseum.org/site14.htm> (accessed January 15, 2009).

²⁸ Museum of African American History Boston *A Gathering Place*, 3.

House to its 1855 appearance, allowing interpreters to discuss Boston's abolitionist history in an appropriate historical context. Overwhelming community support and a cooperative agreement with the National Park Service equipped MAAHB to expand their focus to include the Abiel Smith School in Boston as well as the African Meeting House and Higginbotham House in Nantucket. The Black History Trail established first in Boston, then implemented in Nantucket, brought the museum's mission outside of its physical walls and a partnership with the Boston Public Library further expanded MAAHB's audience. The pioneering spirit of individuals like Burrows and Thurman opened the door for many ethnically based institutions to exist in the United States; there are now over one-hundred twenty-five African American museums currently open to the public. However, African Americans are not the only minority group to experience major developments in museum presence.

The Civil Rights Movement and its subsequent effects on the museum community not only opened doors for the employment and expression of African Americans but spawned a wide array of exhibitions and institutions representing all cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Europeans, Native Americans, Asians, and Latinos all sought recognition in formal museum settings. Larger cities play host to multiple ethnically based institutions created in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement. Chicago alone boasts over a dozen institutions from the Irish American Heritage Center to Filipino American Historical Society all focusing on preserving and expressing their unique cultural ideals. Founded in 1966, the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture, also in Chicago, depicts the history, arts, and general cultural identity of Lithuanian immigrants to the United States. The intent of the Balzekas Museum is to "promot[e] the study and appreciation of

America's diverse ethnic cultural heritage, seeking to foster greater understanding among all people."²⁹ With 2.7 million dollars in public funds, the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture opened in Santa Fe, New Mexico in 1977.³⁰ A product of two preexisting institutions, the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture pursues scholarship and understanding of southwest native cultures.³¹ The creation of the Japanese American National Museum, JANM, in 1985 transformed a former Buddhist Temple in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo into the first American Museum dedicated to Japanese American culture.³² Community based initiatives and cultural exhibitions solidified the importance of JANM's role in Los Angeles and the larger museum society. Carlos Tortorello, along with a small staff of former school teachers, founded the National Museum of Mexican Art, NMMA, in Chicago in 1982.³³ The mission of NMMA not only includes educating the public and promoting the appreciation of Mexican art, but to also to inspire persons of Latino heritage to pursue art.³⁴ The formation of ethnically based museums remains a continuing trend on the national level. The Cambodian Association of Illinois Museum,

²⁹ The Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture, "The Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture: About Us," The Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture, http://www.balzekasmuseum.org/Pages/about_us.html (accessed January 14, 2009).

³⁰ Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, "History | Museum of Indian Arts & Culture | Sante Fe, New Mexico," Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, <http://www.indianartsandculture.org/history> (accessed January 15, 2009).

³¹ Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, "Mission and Vision | Museum of Indian Arts & Culture | Sante Fe, New Mexico," Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, <http://www.indianartsandculture.org/mission> (accessed January 15, 2009).

³² Japanese American National Museum, "Museum History | About | Japanese American National Museum," Japanese American National Museum, <http://www.janm.org/about/history/> (accessed January 15, 2009).

³³ National Museum of Mexican Art, "NMMA: Timeline," National Museum of Mexican Art, <http://www.nationalmuseumofmexicanart.org/timeline.html> (accessed January 15, 2009).

³⁴ National Museum of Mexican Art, "NMMA: Mission," National Museum of Mexican Art, <http://www.nationalmuseumofmexicanart.org/mission.html> (accessed January 15, 2009).

founded in 2004, recounts the horrifying Khmer Rouge genocide that led countless refugees to seek shelter on American soil.³⁵ These represent only a small portion of the museums made possible by the changes brought about by the Civil Rights Movement. These institutions span in age, scope, and geographic location but share one key focus, the promotion of cultural acceptance and tolerance.

Identifying both new audiences and the need to properly communicate with those audiences facilitated the development and sustainability of ethnically based museums. A key moment in this cultural cultivation occurred in 1972. At this time, the Director of the Wadsworth Athenaeum, James Elliot, and the Director of the Smithsonian's Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, John Kinard, brought together a forum to discuss the potential role of traditional museums in minority communities.³⁶ The results of this open discussion on racial relationships within the confines of the museum were published in a final report, *Museums: Their New Audience*. Through careful language, this report encouraged democratic endeavors by mainstream museums into inner city communities, specifically focused on African American and Puerto Rican audiences.³⁷ The publication of *Museums: Their New Audience* established a framework for existing and future museums to pursue a broad cultural focus in exhibits, collections, education, and community. The goal was to encourage museums to strive for inclusiveness over the perceived elitism of the past. Exhibitions gradually developed relevance by

³⁵ Cambodian Association of Illinois, "History & Purpose | Cambodian Association of Illinois," Cambodian Association of Illinois, <http://www.cambodian-association.org/?q=node/106> (accessed January 15, 2009).

³⁶ Gretchen Sullivan Sorin, "The Problem of the Twenty-first Century is Still the Color Line," *Museums & Social Issues*, 2, no. 1, (Spring 2007): 5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

communicating with members of the minority communities. These dialogues enabled curators and exhibit designers to view their collections, and therefore exhibits, through the lens of cultural sensitivity.

As more and more minorities found employment within the walls of museums the exhibits and collections on those minorities grew in size and accuracy. Recent exhibits have been lauded for ingenuity and truthfulness in dealing with the sensitive subject of race. The forces of “social activism and social history pushed museums to be more inclusive and more broadly representative.”³⁸ “From Field to Factory,” installed by the National Museum of American History, opened in 1987 to discuss the migration of African American workers from the rural South to the industrial North.³⁹ Utilizing audio recordings, expansive photographic prints, wax figures, as well as large scale fabricated models, including a train station entrance with two doors marked “Colored” and “White,” to supplement their limited collections, “From Field to Factory” managed to effectively interpret the subject matter in a culturally sensitive way.⁴⁰ This exhibition “represent[ed] a major effort by the Smithsonian Institution” and a shift in their interpretational focus.⁴¹ This was a vital exhibition not just because of the subject matter or even the federally funded setting. The exhibit was significant because it illustrated a major shift in “museological practice” that “dramatically changed the way museums communicate with

³⁸ Tracy L. Teslow, “A Troubled Legacy: Making and Unmaking Race in the Museum,” *Museums & Social Issues* 2, no. 1, 11-44, (Spring 2007): 20.

³⁹ Spencer Crew, *From Field to Factory: Afro-American Migration, 1915-1940*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), 17.

⁴⁰ M. L. S. Heininger, “A Trip Worth Taking: An Exhibition Review,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 23, no. 2/3 (Summer/Autumn 1988): 170-171.

⁴¹ James Borchert, “Museum Exhibition Reviews: ‘Field to Factory: Afro-American Migration, 1915-1940’,” *Journal of American History* 76, no. 1 (June 1989): 225.

the public.”⁴² An exhibit, no matter what the subject matter, did not have to rely on artifacts. The experience of the museum encompasses sights, sounds, textures, emotions, and, yes, artifacts. This exhibition explored how current scholarship and innovative exhibit design could create an immersive experience for the visitor.

Inclusion was not the only goal. Museums discovered that they could not begin to interpret these cultures without addressing the years of exclusion and the absence of knowledge caused by exclusion. This revelation sparked innovative exhibits in museums across the country. Fred Wilson’s *Mining the Museum* exhibit, opened in 1992, developed from a need to discuss minority history at the Maryland Historical Society with significant gaps in the material culture necessary to the history.⁴³ Wilson’s display focused on juxtaposition both in history and the realm of the museum. A delicate silver service next to a pair of “plantation era shackles” was placed under a straightforward title “Metalwork, 1723-1880,” or an ornate Victorian chair and whipping post entitled “Cabinetwork 1820-1860.”⁴⁴ The view of American life presented by Wilson forced viewers to recognize the lack of discussion of African American history in museum exhibits and collections while also raising public awareness to improve the future of cultural integration in museums.

Despite these advances, many are still disenchanted by the historic lack of inclusion by traditional museums. Unfortunately, the issue of sensitivity in exhibition is

⁴² Teslow, 21.

⁴³ Judith Stein, “Sins of Omission,” *Art in America* 80, no. 10 (October 1993): 110-116, <http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/itx/infomark.do?contentSet=IAC-Documents&docType=IAC&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=ITOF&docId=A14603011&userGroupName=txshracd2488&version=1.0&searchType=PublicationSearchForm&source=gale> (accessed January 19, 2009).

⁴⁴ Teslow, 20.

not a thing of the past, but rather something that museums today continuously grapple with. Museums constantly find themselves struggling to heal the wounds of the past, prevent future injustices, and compensate for over one-hundred years of collecting history that valued prominent white, males over minorities, women, and the common man. However, the development of ethnically based museums is not the only contributing force to the museums of social conscience genre.

United States Based Holocaust Museums

The development of Holocaust museums and memorials in North America was both widely accepted and questioned simultaneously. No Holocaust museum in the United States can boast a geographic connection to its historic focus. The Holocaust was a wholly European experience. Its effect on America lies primarily in the cultural memories of Jewish immigrants to the continent as well as a general humanistic outrage at the genocidal actions of the Third Reich. Despite the lack of direct connection, Holocaust memorials and museums sprang up around the country with at least four in Texas alone. Without a critical understanding of American trends and values, these institutions could have failed spectacularly. The success of these institutions lies within their message.

Holocaust museums across the United States draw in substantial crowds from diverse backgrounds; in fact, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, D.C. boasts that they receive more than twenty-five million visitors per year and more than ninety percent are non-Jewish.⁴⁵ Museums, at their heart, are viewed

⁴⁵ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "About the Museum," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <http://www.ushmm.org/museum/mission/> (accessed December 30, 2008).

by the American public as “eternal insurance polic[ies],” insuring that cultural history will not be forgotten in future generations and as a community museums strive to constantly fulfill this expectation.⁴⁶ Attempting to tap into this cultural insurance, Jewish immigrants, primarily survivors, began assembling private collections for furnishing museums and memorials starting as early as 1961.⁴⁷ Their work was preceded by the Nazi party itself who kept meticulous records of what it termed The Final Solution. The volume of these records combined with artifacts collected by individuals and European groups provided the basis for multiple Holocaust centered institutions internationally.

Concerned that his popularity among Jewish voters was slipping, President Jimmy Carter made the first move towards a national museum dedicated to the Holocaust in the 1970s.⁴⁸ However, like many other Holocaust museums had discovered, by the time USHMM was opened in 1993 the designers realized that limiting their discussion to the Jewish experience they would significantly limit their audience. As Nava Pickman asserts, “once there was to be a Holocaust museum on federally owned land on the National Mall... it meant that the memory of the Jewish Holocaust meant something not only to America’s Jews, but to all Americans.”⁴⁹ The solution was to expand the interpretive scope to cover all groups persecuted during the Holocaust including Gypsies, handicapped, blacks, physically/mentally handicapped, Communists, and Christian

⁴⁶ E. T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 63.

⁴⁷ Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust, “Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust: History,” <http://www.lamoth.org/history.html> (accessed January 1, 2008).

⁴⁸ Luke, 40.

⁴⁹ Nava S. Pickman, “The Living and Dying Cause: Holocaust museums’ preparedness for the passing of the survivor generation,” (master’s thesis, University of Judaism Los Angeles, 2007), 16.

resistors just to name a few. This move enabled Holocaust museums to reach out into various cultures in their communities and appeal to international and local audiences.

Interpretation in Holocaust museums has shifted within the last ten to fifteen years in a very powerful way. The topic of the Holocaust itself has become a symbol for genocide as a whole – past, present, and future. The heartfelt goal of these organizations is to educate new generations about the hate and destruction of genocide in order to prevent it from reoccurring against any group of people. These spaces have become more than horrifying memorabilia to educators of morality. The mission statements of Holocaust museums across the nation can best illustrate the intent of these institutions to inspire action. USHMM’s mission states:

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is America's national institution for the documentation, study, and interpretation of Holocaust history... The Museum's primary mission is to advance and disseminate knowledge about this unprecedented tragedy; to preserve the memory of those who suffered; and to encourage its visitors to reflect upon the moral and spiritual questions raised by the events of the Holocaust as well as their own responsibilities as citizens of a democracy.⁵⁰

USHMM also asserts that their goal is to “stimulate leaders and citizens to confront hatred, prevent genocide, promote human dignity, and strengthen democracy.”⁵¹ The Florida Holocaust Museum also portrays grand intentions in their mission statement:

The Florida Holocaust Museum honors the memory of millions of innocent men, women, and children who suffered or died in the Holocaust. The Museum is dedicated to teaching members of all races and cultures to recognize the inherent worth and dignity of human life in order to prevent future genocides.⁵²

⁵⁰ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Museum | Press Room | Press Kits”, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <http://www.ushmm.org/museum/press/kits/details.php?content=99-general&page=05-mission> (accessed January 7, 2009).

⁵¹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “About the Museum.”

⁵² Florida Holocaust Museum, “About the Museum,” Florida Holocaust Museum, <http://www.flhm2.org/VisitorInformation/AboutUs.cfm> (accessed January 7, 2009).

The Holocaust Museum of Houston also contributes to the social conscience focus:

Holocaust Museum Houston is dedicated to educating people about the Holocaust, remembering the 6 million Jews and other innocent victims and honoring the survivors' legacy. Using the lessons of the Holocaust and other genocides, we teach the dangers of hatred, prejudice and apathy... [to] turn **hate** into **hope** for future generations.⁵³

Each of these institutions emphasizes the devastation of the Holocaust, the inherent value of the survivor legacy, the atrocity of genocides and their ongoing effects, as well as the intent to prevent future genocides through educating the public. These statements assert the institutional belief that highlighting past and present genocides, and their significant consequences, will create a generation of socially aware individuals who will stand in opposition against future genocides. This forward thinking is present in nearly every Holocaust museum in the United States and it was this ideology that marks a transition into social conscience.

Formalization of the Genre

One of the most pivotal moments in the realm of social conscience museums was the creation of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York City. The Tenement Museum is dedicated to telling the story of the American immigrant after landing on Ellis Island – the good, the bad, and the ugly. When Ruth Abrams and Anita Jacobson founded the Tenement Museum in 1988 there were already several organizations devoted to the who's and how's of people immigrating to the United States. What made this museum different was that it was committed to the story of what happened after the immigration stations and discussed how immigrants cultivated an

⁵³ Holocaust Museum Houston, "Holocaust Museum Houston: About Us (Our Mission)," Holocaust Museum Houston, http://www.hmh.org/au_home.asp (accessed January 7, 2009).

existence on American soil.⁵⁴ At the time no one was telling the story of how people lived and worked in America and how these immigrants were both changed by the American experience and changers of the country's cultural make up.

The desire to build a museum dedicated to the lives of America's immigrants drove the founders into what felt like a fruitless search for a home. However, when inspecting a storefront for rent at 97 Orchard Street in New York City's Lower East Side Abrams and Jacobson stumbled upon a tenement goldmine. The story follows that Jacobson, searching for a bathroom, went down an unused hallway. A quick glance at the forgotten space revealed that the remainder of the building was virtually untouched since 1935 when a new housing law prompted the owners to evict the tenants of all twenty apartments rather than make costly renovations to meet new requirements.⁵⁵ Jacobson fondly remembers this crucial moment, she states "It was as though people had just picked up and left. It was a little time capsule... I called Ruth and said 'We have got to have this building.' It was perfect."⁵⁶ The objects left at 97 Orchard Street, combined with artifacts discovered during archaeological research on the site, shaped the interpretive narrative of the site and enabled them to better understand the history of the people who lived there. The United States is, at its heart, a nation of immigrants and tenement housing is an important and undisputable facet of that history.⁵⁷ The museum

⁵⁴ Erika Gee and Sarah Blannett Pharaon, interviewed by author, New York City, NY, July 24, 2008.

⁵⁵ The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, *A Tenement Story: The History of 97 Orchard Street and The Lower East Side Tenement Museum*, (New York: The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, 2004), 14.

⁵⁶ The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, "About the Tenement," The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, <http://www.tenement.org/about.html> (accessed January 4, 2009).

⁵⁷ The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, 11.

moved into the storefronts at 97 Orchard Street in March of 1988 with aspirations for the remainder of the building. Their doors opened to the public in November of the same year with an exhibit on “Depression-era tenement photography by Arnold Eagle” and a three million dollar fundraising campaign to purchase and restore the building.⁵⁸ While the storefront exhibitions brought in visitors, the Tenement Museum sought to better understand the building that they were attempting to purchase and those who resided within its walls. Research began with census records, voter records, and other documents associated with former residents. This did not satisfy the curious minds at the Tenement Museum and the public request for information brought in former residents and their descendents with powerful testimonies of life at 97 Orchard Street.⁵⁹ A self-study done in 1991, before preservation work began, “reinforced the decision to interpret the lives of real people and make the [Tenement] Museum’s mission ‘promoting tolerance, as well as historical perspective’.”⁶⁰ The initial funds raised at the conception of the Tenement Museum enabled them to purchase the property and restore two apartments, The Baldizzi and Gumpertz apartments, which opened to the public on October 3, 1994.⁶¹ Appearing as though the residents had just stepped out of the room, these apartments provided an avenue for interpreters to discuss living conditions, employment laws, and other struggles encountered by American immigrants – past, present, and future – in a safe environment. With an ideal location secured, exhibits in place, and lofty goals for future expansion the next step was to find funding for further restoration and exhibits.

⁵⁸ The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, 14.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 17.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Established in the midst of an ongoing national debate regarding cultural and religious assimilation, the Tenement Museum longed to enter the argument in order to illustrate that the abandonment of cultural and religious identities were not necessary to peaceful co-existence by using historical models. Unfortunately, getting the community and donors to understand this mission was easier said than done. The main problem was that “foundations [and visitors] accustomed to... traditional museums could not categorize the Tenement Museum.”⁶² People lived there, yet the Tenement Museum is not a traditional historic house museum. Historical issues are addressed, yet the museum is not strictly a history museum. The mission aims to promote social change, yet it is not a social service organization. Organizations that typically funded traditional museums could not understand the Tenement Museum’s emphasis on social awareness. At the same time, foundations that provided “financial support to people working on contemporary issues” involving immigration rejected the Tenement Museum because “they [saw] no connection between that work and history.”⁶³ The museum quickly developed into a museum that straddled the line between traditional museum and an institution aimed at “inspir[ing] social consciousness and action on contemporary problems.”⁶⁴ This, Abrams argues, goes directly against society’s opinions on the value of history. Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen conducted a detailed survey in 1998 regarding the relationship between modern Americans and their relationships with the past. Their study yielded clear-cut results. Rosenzweig and Thelen assert:

⁶² Ruth Abrams, “Harnessing the Power of History,” in *Museums, Society, Inequality*, edited by Richard Sandell, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 126.

⁶³ Ruth Abrams, “Tempest Tost,” *Museums & Social Issues* 3, no. 2, 197-210, (Fall 2008): 198.

⁶⁴ Kraus, 15.

Americans feel at home with the past; day to day, hour to hour, the past is present in their lives. Encountering the past, examining it, interpreting it, living and reliving it, they root themselves in families... and root their families in the world. As they thought about the kinds of people they wanted to be and the futures they wanted to carve for themselves, they turned to the past to frame their quests.⁶⁵

So the Tenement Museum exists in a “nation populated by people crying out for history, saying they use it to chart the course of their lives, and yet leaders in all aspects of American life virtually ignore its importance.”⁶⁶ The granting institutions and major donors could not understand the Tenement Museum’s mission; however, Abrams was confident that there were other museums that understood her plight.

Ruth Abrams recalls the frustration she endured trying to find allies in her cause with little success. The museum directors that Abrams encountered were more concerned with their bottom line than broadening museum horizons.⁶⁷ Her answer came when she expressed her concerns to the president of the Ford Foundation. Susan Beresford suggested that in order to find institutions with similar missions Abrams could not wait passively for them to approach her institution; she would have to find them herself.⁶⁸ As an emerging faction of the museum community, organizations with goals analogous to the Tenement Museum were few and far between, Beresford encouraged Abrams to expand her investigation to include both domestic and international institutions. Beresford’s inspired proposition instigated the formalization of social conscience museums as a legitimate genre within the museum community.

⁶⁵ Rosenzweig and Thelen, 36.

⁶⁶ Abrams, “Tempest Tost,” 199.

⁶⁸ Abrams, “Harnessing the Power of History,” 126.

Inspired by the advice of Ford Foundation President Susan Beresford, Ruth Abrams began a search for socially relevant museums that could relate to the unique ambitions and tribulations faced by the Lower East Side Tenement Museum. Inquisitive letters began to fly out of Abrams' office. Unfortunately the scores of letters sent by Abrams yielded diminutive returns. After corresponding with several institutions around the world, eight organizations expressed interest in Abrams' vision: District Six Museum in South Africa, Gulag Museum in Russia, Liberation War Museum in Bangladesh, Maison Des Esclaves in Senegal, The National Park Service in the United States specifically representing the Women's Rights National Historic Park in Seneca Falls, Memoria Abierta in Argentina, Terezín Memorial in the Czech Republic, and The Workhouse Museum in England.⁶⁹ These eight institutions would shape the future of a growing genre of museums and inspire an international community for the exchange of ideas and resources.

In December 1999, Ruth Abrams invited all interested parties to an informal conference held in Bellagio, Italy to discuss the unique nature of their organizations and the best course of action for these institutions, both individually and collectively.⁷⁰ By the end of the week's conference in Italy, these "misfit museums" recognized that in order to achieve their goals there must be a network of support.⁷¹ The International Coalition for Historic Site Museums of Conscience, formerly the International Coalition for Historic

⁶⁹ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, *A Brief History*, (New York: International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, 2008), 1.

⁷⁰ Abrams, "Harnessing the Power of History," 125.

⁷¹ University of Michigan Museum Studies Program, "UMMSP – Activating the Past Report," University of Michigan Museum Studies Program, http://www.umich.edu/~ummsp/events/hsc_report.htm (accessed January 7, 2009).

Sites and Museums of Social Conscience, was established in order to create that support system for these institutions to communicate and learn from one another in an uplifting environment.

The directors quickly discovered that not only did the institutions they represented defy the preconceived museum mold but the staffs themselves defied museum convention. Of the nine organizations present for this founding meeting only one director, Lee Ricks of The Workhouse Museum, came to his position from a museum background.⁷² The remaining directors all hailed from social service and activist organizations and believed that their “best contribution could be made through history and, specifically, through historic sites.”⁷³ These non-traditional directors brought fresh perspectives to their respective organizations as well as the newly formed Coalition due predominately to their human rights backgrounds.⁷⁴ The current staff of the Tenement Museum greatly resembles the Bellagio conference in its makeup, with only two confirmed staff members with formal museum experience while the remaining thirty-three full time staff members arrived at the Tenement through humanitarian backgrounds.⁷⁵ This variance is a major factor in the revolutionary nature of social conscience museums.

The Coalition, eager to make headway in the museum community and unify the nine organizations it represented immediately began defining itself as a unique,

⁷² Gee and Pharoan.

⁷³ Liz Ševčenko, *The Power of Place: How historic sites can engage citizens in human rights issues*, ed. By Liam Mahony (Minneapolis: The Center for Victims of Torture, 2004), 10.

⁷⁴ Gee and Pharoan.

⁷⁵ Ibid.; and Derya Golpınar, interviewed by author, New York City, NY, November 7, 2008.

groundbreaking body. The conference at Bellagio sparked several discussions dealing with the specific challenges facing each organization and the various methods of working together. At the conclusion of the week's events, the Coalition signed and released this statement:

We are historic site museums in many different parts of the World, at many stages of development, presenting and interpreting a wide variety of historic issues, events and people.

We hold in common the belief that it is the obligation of historic sites to assist the public in drawing connections between the history of our sites and its contemporary implications.

We view stimulating dialogue on pressing social issues and promoting humanitarian and democratic values as a primary function.

To advance this concept, we have formed an International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience to work with one another.⁷⁶

This resolute declaration not only defined the intentions and methods of the Coalition but also legitimized the entire growing genre to the international museum community. For a formalized group to exist, it stands to reason that a larger commonality exists within the museum profession. The nine museums represented at the Bellagio conference became the founding members of the Coalition and a model for the screening of future additions.

As founder, Ruth Abrams aspired to keep an intimate connection with the young organization. The other eight directors agreed that the Coalition should remain under her guidance and the headquarters was established in New York City. The fledgling Coalition benefited from its close affiliation to the Lower East Side Tenement Museum and its founder Ruth Abrams. In fact, the Coalition operated as a division of the Tenement Museum from 1999 to 2006, sharing offices, staff, and resources. In 2005 the

⁷⁶ Abrams, "Harnessing the Power of History," 125.

Coalition's Steering Committee determined that the Coalition's growth had exceeded the reach of the Tenement Museum alone. In June of 2006 the International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience was incorporated as a "non-government, non-profit organization in the State of New York."⁷⁷ Though the Coalition still shares office space with the Tenement Museum, their staff has expanded to include seven full time staff members from predominately humanitarian backgrounds.⁷⁸

Approaching their tenth anniversary, the International Coalition for Historic Site Museums of Social Conscience continues to unify and legitimize museums around the world that connect historical events to contemporary issues. Recognition and public acceptance of Coalition members has dramatically increased since Ruth Abrams first dreamed of a network of socially aware museum allies who longed to use their unique site histories in order to create a better global future. Developed requirements for new membership enabled the Coalition to exercise discretion when adding to its accredited sites. Yet, this selectivity can, and does, exclude valuable institutions. While the Coalition continues to broaden its activities and membership, non affiliated institutions pursue the same goals, often with less support. Social conscience institutions tend to bond into relevant groupings based on subject matter, intent, or geography. These organizations, Coalition affiliated or not, shape their own language and advance innovative educational techniques in order to convey complex ideas. Social conscience sub categories and terminology may not be a part of the average American vocabulary, yet; however, much like Gilman's invention of the docent or the first children's museum,

⁷⁷ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, *A Brief History*, 1.

⁷⁸ Gee and Pharoan

these social conscience museums and their programming will attain widespread acceptance.

CHAPTER THREE

Affiliated or Not: Categories and Definitions

The establishment of the International Coalition for Historic Site Museums of Conscience stands as a landmark event for an entire classification of museums. As an incorporated, independent organization promulgating the professional development of a specific museum type, the Coalition establishes that faction's legitimacy. Breaking down its membership into relevant categories, the Coalition effectively delineated the various focuses that identify with the social conscience title. However, stringent guidelines and requirements enforced by the Coalition have left some relevant organizations outside of the loop while still pursuing the same goals, pioneering similar techniques, and even utilizing the unique vocabulary of social conscience museums.

In its short history, interest in the Coalition and its mission escalated substantially. In fact, from its conception in 1999 the Coalition has grown from nine accredited sites to seventeen, with six sites located in the United States.¹ By 2001 the Coalition was inundated with institutions wanting to affiliate; however, not all of these institutions met all three main requirements set by the Coalition – “interpret history through a site; engage in programs that stimulate dialogue on pressing social issues and promote humanitarian and democratic values as a primary function; and share opportunities for public

¹ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, “Sites,” International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, <http://www.sitesofconscience.org/sites/en/> (accessed January 9, 2009).

involvement in issues raised at the site.”² The necessity for an established set of accreditation criteria could not be clearer.

Employees and members wanted to preserve the specific mission of the Coalition without completely denying the tools, support, and opportunities to organizations that did not quite meet Coalition site specifications. The answer to this dilemma was the creation of two levels of membership so that interested organizations can participate as a part of the larger network without detracting attention and resources from officially recognized sites.³ In 2001 the Coalition enacted the new accreditation system, which included two distinct levels: Accredited Sites of Conscience and Institutional Members.

Levels of Membership and Criteria

The highest level of membership attainable in the Coalition is the Accredited Site. The requirements for accreditation are ever evolving; however, at any point the definition can best be characterized as organizations that best meet the threefold mission of the Coalition and pass the current accreditation process in place. The original nine institutions that met at the Bellagio conference became the first Accredited Sites in the Coalition. Immediately following the Bellagio conference there were not accreditation standards, these developed with time and experience. The close relationship between the Coalition and the Tenement Museum has had a profound impact on the current accreditation standards. From the conception of the Coalition it has shared office space with the Tenement Museum and continues to maintain a close relationship with the organization. When the Tenement Museum began the AAM accreditation process in

² International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, *A Brief History*, 2.

³ Gee and Pharaon.

2002, the Coalition paid attention.⁴ According to Erika Gee, the Coalition's accreditation process has "become much more formalized" based on the AAM example.⁵ Despite the strong influence from AAM, the Coalition has yet to adopt a collections care component to its accreditation requirement. One of the main reasons, asserts Gee, is the nature of the Coalition itself. The Coalition focuses on "interpreting the history of sites for social dialogue to promote democracy, humanitarian values and promote action in their community. The collections [issue]...is so different depending on what particular history you are looking at. Some people don't have that information, and it's harder to find it."⁶ Furthermore, many of the international sites are small and often underfunded. Requiring them to take on the considerable cost of meeting collections management standards similar to AAM would detract from the institution's ability to focus on the Coalition's interpretational goals. With no future plans for the implementation of collections management standards, the Coalition focuses its accreditation process on interpretation. After observing the AAM example, the Coalition determined that in order to best meet each interpretational standards, institutions must approach the requirement in an engaging manner to the majority of the visitors on a daily basis. This is similar to the AAM requirements which state that an institution seeking accreditation must "use and interpret objects and/or a site for the public presentation of regularly scheduled programs and exhibits."⁷

⁴ Erika Gee, e-mail message to author, February 12, 2009.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Erika Gee, interviewed by author, New York City, NY, November 7, 2008.

⁷ American Association of Museum, "What is a Museum," American Association of Muesums, <http://www.aam-us.org/aboutmuseums/whatis.cfm> (accessed: February 11, 2009).

Currently, institutions hoping to achieve this recognition must first enter into a dialogue with a Program Director at the Coalition where the accreditation criteria are explained in detail.⁸ Designation standards presently in place require sites to “fully [meet] the standards for Sites of Conscience and [can] serve as a model for other initiatives.”⁹ To determine if a museum meets these requirements on of the Program Directors reviews the application submitted by the institution in question. If everything is in order and the institution’s board and staff are in agreement with joining the Coalition, the Program Director performs a site visit in order to determine if and how the museum fulfills the three main points of the Coalition’s mission.¹⁰ The Program Director employs a table with three categories – “good,” “better,” and “best” – for each of the three Coalition focuses in order to determine if the site will attain accreditation.¹¹

The first issue is assessing whether the institution, “interpret[s] history through a historic site.”¹² The Coalition endeavors to accept institutions that host “programs [and] activities” that are “fully open to the public and operational, not in the planning stages,” all visitors to the institutions “visit the [historically significant] site itself, rather than learning about the site from another location” but is not limited to a single facility or location; and that all “interpretation and activities should be rooted in the site itself.”¹³

⁸ Gee and Pharaon

⁹ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, *A Brief History*, 2.

¹⁰ Gee and Pharaon.

¹¹ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, “Intent to Apply for Sites of Conscience Accreditation,” International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, <http://www.sitesofconscience.org/wp-content/documents/intent-en.pdf> (accessed January 19, 2009): 6-8

¹² International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, “Sites.”

¹³ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, “Intent to Apply for Sites of Conscience Accreditation,” 6.

By meeting all three of these requirements, the museum will most likely fall within the “best” category as seen in Figure 3.1. In this arena, museums need to focus their programming and educational components to fit the unique history of their site, not just exist on a historically significant location. The physical location that played host to genocide, sweatshops, or enslaved peoples carries its own historic resonance that communicates with visitors in very intimate ways.

Good	Better	Best
The museum’s history exhibit or program is located at a site where some aspect of that history happened. The museum uses the site as a backdrop for its exhibits/programming, but this site is not the central feature of the experience for visitors.	The museum begins with the story of the site itself, and helps visitors understand the role that site played in the larger history the site wants to tell. The site is interpreted for its symbolic importance, because an important event took place there - the museum describes how the site “bore witness” to an event, but not how the site shaped or was shaped by this event. Visitors do not learn anything about social or human rights issues by looking at the site.	The museum uses the site - its location, structure, features, feeling - to help visitors “read” the issues the site represents. The museum explores the social or political forces that define how the site came to look as it does, and uses the physical shape of the site as a starting point for education and discussion of social or human rights issues.

Figure 3.1. Coalition accreditation guidelines for the category “Interpreting history through a historic site.” *Source:* International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, “Intent to Apply for Sites of Conscience Accreditation,” 6.

The Coalition strongly believes that this intimate communication that occurs between a site and the visitor “inspire[s] human connection to larger issues,” and can “move people to participate in addressing these issues.”¹⁴ The emphasis on pertinent interpretation of historical sites differentiates Accredited Sites from other Coalition affiliated and non-affiliated social conscience institutions.

¹⁴ Ibid.

The next stage in determining accreditation is assessing how the institution “engage[s] in programs that stimulate dialogue on pressing social issues.”¹⁵ It is not enough to highlight the history of a significant site and hope that the emotional connection created in the visitor will lead them to profound social truth. Accredited Sites must utilize the information to create open dialogue between visitors and staff that focuses on “pressing social issues” in an attempt to “promote humanitarian and democratic values.”¹⁶ Museums seeking accreditation must offer regular programming that “draw[s] explicit connections to contemporary issues” by either supplying information or asking questions “about where they see these issues manifested today;” “raise multiple perspectives on an issue” because no problem has a “single solution;” as well as “inspire and facilitate dialogue among diverse publics.”¹⁷ These conversational learning opportunities do not require formalized structures; instead, dialoguing opportunities should manifest themselves in every program and exhibit created at the historic site. As evident in Figure 3.2, the criteria determining “good,” “better,” and “best” span from occasional programs with little audience participation to daily programs, relying heavily on dialogue, available “at all times to every visitor to the museum.”¹⁸ Furthermore, in order to fall in the “best” category, these programs should already be operational and be a current part of the institutional makeup, not a planned future activity or goal. Institutions who apply in the midst of programming

¹⁵ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, “Sites.”

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, “Intent to Apply for Sites of Conscience Accreditation,” 7.

¹⁸ Ibid.

redevelopment generally do not receive Accredited Site status. Program Director at the Coalition, Erika Gee, revealed that institutions often apply for accreditation based on upcoming curriculum. A recent example, the Jane Adams Hull House in Chicago, petitioned for accreditation immediately before an exhibit and programming redesign, which would take approximately two years to complete.¹⁹

Good	Better	Best
<p>Programs draw explicit connections between the history of the site and related contemporary issues, either by providing information or by posing questions about those issues. Visitors are not asked to actively respond to the questions (for instance, questions appear on a text panel visitors may read).</p> <p>These programs are provided on a regular basis, but not every day (for instance, monthly). They are not experienced by a majority of at least one of the museum's audiences (e.g., school children).</p>	<p>Programs provide multiple perspectives on issues past and present, without questioning the historical facts of human rights struggles. Programs encourage visitors to consider their own perspectives, without promoting a single solution to any problem.</p> <p>Programs engage visitors in dialogue with one another while they are at the site, inspiring them to exchange experiences and perspectives on large contemporary issues.</p> <p>These programs are provided at all times for a majority of visitors from diverse museum audiences (e.g., school children and local adults and tourists).</p>	<p>The museum offers a wide variety of different opportunities for visitors from different backgrounds and learning styles to engage in dialogue with one another in different ways (e.g., through comment cards or bulletin boards, large public forums, small groups).</p> <p>Dialogues involve people involved in the issues the site raises on many different levels: for instance, victims, policy-makers, grass-roots groups, international visitors, educators, students.</p> <p>Stimulating dialogue on pressing social issues and promoting humanitarian and democratic values is part of the museum's mission statement or other institutional mandate. The museum defines and evaluates its own success on how well it stimulates dialogue on pressing social issues.</p> <p>These programs are provided at all times to every visitor to the museum</p>

Figure 3.2. Coalition accreditation guidelines for the category “Engage in programs that stimulate dialogue on pressing social issues and promote humanitarian and democratic values as primary functions.” *Source:* International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, “Intent to Apply for Sites of Conscience Accreditation,” 7.

¹⁹ Gee and Pharaon.

The application was put on hold until the completion of the redesign because the Coalition does not want to exclude them for not currently meeting requirements, yet at the same time cannot grant them accreditation until they do.

In the final category in the site evaluation, Program Directors determine how well the institution in question “share[s] opportunities for public involvement in the issues raised at its site;” a simple concept with far reaching effects.²⁰ A site cannot abandon the visitor once the program finishes. Connecting the lessons learned at an institution to modern outlets for social change solidifies the effectiveness of the historic site and its mission. Institutions hoping to gain accreditation should offer multiple opportunities for involvement to every visitor in order to fall within the “best” category on Figure 3.3.

Good	Better	Best
Information on how visitors can become involved in shaping issues raised at the site is available to visitors upon request.	Information on how visitors can become involved in shaping issues raised at the site is displayed in a prominent place and available for visitors to take with them.	The site provides every visitor with extensive resources from a wide variety of perspectives on how they can become involved in shaping the issues raised at the site in many different ways.

Figure 3.3. Coalition accreditation guidelines for the category “Share opportunities for public involvement in issues raised at its site.” *Source:* International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, “Intent to Apply for Sites of Conscience Accreditation,” 8.

By presenting a tangible outlet for social involvement to visitors on a regular basis, the Coalition believes that it will “protect their effectiveness as open forums.”²¹ Furthermore, it affirms social conscience sites as protected environment for discussion and growth.

²⁰ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, “Sites.”

²¹ Ibid.

Benefits and Obligations

Accreditation for a historic site comes with a combination of benefits and obligations. Members receive the *Matters of Conscience* e-newsletter, discounted admission to other Coalition sites, eligibility to attend Coalition sponsored conferences and learning exchanges, eligibility for nomination to the Steering Committee, authority to launch and lead a regional chapter, as well as Coalition support in fundraising endeavors.²² Other benefits include Coalition logo usage along with member recognition on the Coalition's website. Once a site achieves Accredited Site status it must reapply every five years. This accreditation review judges the historic site based on the most current accreditation standards. Furthermore, every year Accredited Sites are responsible for recruiting at least two Institutional Members, "mentor one accreditation application," and select one, or more, relevant institution "within regions targeted for diversity to apply for accreditation each year."²³ The Coalition also requires regular participation in newsletter content and distribution, promotional activities, as well as payment of annual membership fees.

The Coalition created a secondary membership level, Institutional Member, for interested organizations that could not meet the requirements associated with Accredited Sites. This level, officially defined by the Coalition, represents institutions with "initiatives that had not yet developed to the standards of Sites of Conscience."²⁴

Institutional Members retain access to many of the Coalition's resources as well as the

²² Ibid., 1.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Social Conscience, *A Brief History*, 2.

ability to voice concerns and opinions within the organization, but “receive less individualized and intensive attention.”²⁵ All sites seeking accreditation must first become an institutional member before submitting an *Intent to Apply for Sites of Conscience Accreditation* form.²⁶

Many Institutional Members attempt to gain Accredited Site status; however, some of these institutions will never meet accreditation requirements. For instance, the Arab American National Museum (AANM) in Dearborn, Michigan meets many accreditation standards. With vibrant enriching exhibits, dialogue based tours, and a “commitment to dispel misconceptions about Arab Americans and other minorities,” AANM would, in theory, make a strong contribution to the list of Coalition Accredited Sites.²⁷ Unfortunately they lack one key component, a historically significant site. Located in a converted furniture warehouse, AANM is actively engaged by the Coalition as an Institutional Member and participant in a Coalition network geared to Immigration Sites, but will not take on the “leadership role” associated with the Accredited Site position.²⁸ Currently, there are over one-hundred fifty Institutional Members associated with the Coalition and nearly two thousand institutions and individuals “subscribed to the Coalition’s communication network.”²⁹ Institutional Members participate fully in

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, “Intent to Apply for Sites of Conscience Accreditation,” 2.

²⁷ Arab American National Museum, “Arab American National Museum of Arab American History, Culture, & Art | About the Museum,” Arab American National Museum, <http://www.arabamericanmuseum.org/About-the-Museum.id.3.htm> (accessed January 25, 2009).

²⁸ Gee and Pharaon.

²⁹ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, *A Brief History*, 2.

Coalition programming and initiatives without leadership capability. This way the Coalition reaches a wider variety of sites without over extending their resources.

Growth

The guidelines set forth by the Coalition enabled their international Accredited Sites to grow from the original nine sites in 1999 to seventeen sites in 2009. Currently, there are affiliated institutions on five continents, as seen in Table 3.1. These Accredited Sites deal with issues such as poverty in Victorian London, women's suffrage, and the indignities of apartheid, just to name a few.

Table 3.1. Accredited Sites of the International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Social Conscience as of 2008

Institution	Year	Country
District Six Museum	1999	South Africa
Gulag Museum at Perm-36	1999	Russia
Liberation War Museum	1999	Bangladesh
Lower East Side Tenement Museum	1999	United States
Maison Des Esclaves	1999	Senegal
Memoria Abierta	1999	Argentina
Terezin Memorial	1999	Czech Republic
The Workhouse	1999	United Kingdom
Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site	2001	United States
Japanese American National Museum	2001	United States
Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site	2001	United States
National Civil Rights Museum	2001	United States
Women's Rights National Historic Park	2001	United States
Corporación	2005	Chile
Constitution Hill	2006	South Africa
Mednoe Memorial Complex	2006	Russia
Peace School Foundation of Monte Sole	2006	Italy

Source: Adapted from International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, *Accredited Member Sites*, (New York: International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Social Conscience, 2008).

The Coalition acquired Accredited Sites in countries around the world; however, after Bellagio, the first wave Accredited Sites came exclusively from the United States. This likely stems from a combination of factors, including proximity of these American sites to the Coalition offices and the difference between the United States museum community and the international museum community. In nations where political tensions are high, museums dealing with controversial issues like totalitarian governments and genocides are often strongly discouraged. More recent accreditations have expanded the Coalition's membership to provide a more even distribution of sites internationally; despite these additions, North America remains the most represented continent in the Coalition. For additional information regarding Accredited Sites and Institutional Members, please see the Appendix.

Regional and Thematic Networks

Covering a diverse set of issues and histories, spanning significant geographic distances, and communicating over multiple language barriers could have effectively prevented these organizations from working together. However, Accredited Sites effectively collaborate in order to fulfill the established goals of the Coalition. One of the reasons is that each organization added to the Coalition membership attempts to meld “social justice, human rights and the museum” in innovative ways.³⁰ These sites may not share common histories. Instead, they are united by a common goal, a mission, to promote democracy and insight public action in socially relevant ways. According to the Coalition, every addition contributes to the internal strength of the Coalition and solidified its position as a sanctioned facet of the international museum community.

³⁰ Gee.

Unfortunately, as a relatively young organization the Coalition is largely undervalued by the museum community at large. The majority of publications and discussions regarding Coalition activities and products are produced by individuals who are closely linked with the institution, primarily current and former employees. This means that most of the information about the current state of Coalition affairs is internal, with little outside critique.

At a minimum, the accreditation process takes one full year if everything is in proper order.³¹ Often institutions not quite meeting Coalition standards who diligently seek accreditation are assigned a mentor from among the Accredited Site.³² These mentoring institutions, known as Regional Coordinators, “lead collaborative projects among Institutional Members and other... initiatives addressing common themes.”³³ Furthermore, Regional Coordinators are responsible for pursuing new institutions, create and implement workshops for both Accredited Sites and Institutional Members in their area, create joint exhibitions for travel, as well as providing “needs assessments and consultations” for organizations interested in accreditation.³⁴ The Regional Coordinators guide prospective sites and Institutional Members to better meet requirements of accreditation while unifying organizations within geographic proximity.

The Coalition further supports collaboration between institutions within close geographic proximity through Regional Networks. These networks incorporate both

³¹ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, “Intent to Apply for Sites of Conscience Accreditation,” 2.

³² Gee and Pharaon.

³³ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, *A Brief History*, 2.

³⁴ Ibid.

Accredited Sites and Institutional Members within specific geographic parameters, typically within continents, in order to promote communication and collaboration.³⁵ Regional Coordinators are heavily involved in the management of Regional Networks primarily conducting assessments, “capacity building consultations,” programming workshops pertinent to the network, as well as organizing collaborative projects.³⁶ All of these activities apply to Accredited Sites and Institutional Members within the Regional Network; however, only Accredited Sites have the ability to act as a Regional Coordinator.

The primary goal of the Regional Networks is to reinforce the relationships between affiliated sites and establish their capability as centers for civic engagement.³⁷ The Coalition currently has four Regional Networks in operation, each with its own focus and goals relevant to the locations involved. The African Sites of Conscience network utilizes “historical models of citizen participation” in “post-colonial and post-conflict” nations in order to promote “dialogue” and “democratic change.”³⁸ The Asian Sites of Conscience network, led by the Liberation War Museum, focuses on the promotion of “peace and pluralism” among cultures and to “inspire” the next generation “to become actively engaged” in social issues following years “of ethnic and religious conflict.”³⁹

³⁵ Gee and Pharaon.

³⁶ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, *A Brief History*, 3.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, “African Sites of Conscience Network,” International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, <http://www.sitesofconscience.org/resources/networks/africa/en/> (accessed January 28, 2009).

³⁹ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, *A Brief History*, 3. and International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, “Asian Sites of Conscience Network,” International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, <http://www.sitesofconscience.org/resources/networks/asia/en/> (accessed January 28, 2009).

The Russian Sites of Conscience network, led by the Gulag Museum at Perm-36, utilizes historic sites to “raise public awareness of the history and consequences of totalitarianism,” build an “anti-totalitarian culture” on former Soviet Union soil, as well as insight its visitors to “address... threats to Russian democracy today.”⁴⁰ Finally, the South American Sites of Conscience network, led by Memoria Abierta in Argentina, focuses on issues of state terrorism by “promoting debate” and discussion regarding South America’s authoritarian regimes of the “recent past.”⁴¹ Initially centering its efforts on Argentina, Peru, and Chile, the South American Sites of Conscience network “preserves the memory” of the conditions during dictatorships and “the consequences of these dictatorships on their societies” while attempting to “influence [the current] political culture” of South America and inspiring youth to “prevent all forms of authoritarianism” in the future.⁴² These institutions produce effective programming, projects, and workshops that enable sites to flourish without direct input from Coalition staff.

Regional affiliation effectively links Coalition members across the globe; however, certain institutions do not share topics or focuses with other organizations just because of close geographic proximity. For many institutions, the nearest Coalition members often possess shockingly different histories and methods. This is particularly

⁴⁰ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, *A Brief History*, 3. and International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, “Russian Sites of Conscience Network,” International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, <http://www.sitesofconscience.org/resources/networks/russia/en/> (accessed January 28, 2009).

⁴¹ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, *A Brief History*, 3.

⁴² International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, “South American Sites of Conscience Network,” International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, <http://www.sitesofconscience.org/resources/networks/south-america/en/> (accessed January 28, 2009).

true in the United States and Europe, where the Coalition has been unable to establish regional networks. The Coalition continues to pursue North American and European Regional Networks, but the need to unite members in these areas is immediate.⁴³ The Coalition's solution was the creation of Thematic Networks. Unlike Regional Networks, Thematic Networks focus on a specific issue and can incorporate members from diverse geographic locations. The Immigration Sites of Conscience Network, piloted in August 2008, became the first Thematic Network developed by the Coalition.⁴⁴ Containing fourteen sites from the United States and Europe, the Immigration Sites of Conscience Network attempts to "open... new public dialogue on" historic and contemporary "immigration issues."⁴⁵ Institutions involved in this pilot group endeavors to tell the real story of immigration, both the good and the bad. These "immigration issues" incorporate the discussion of immigration laws and their results, the immigration process including immigration stations and the conditions at these locations, as well as the struggle immigrants faced living in a new, often intolerant country into a cohesive and enlightening narrative. The Coalition encourages the members of the Immigration Sites of Conscience Network to design engaging programming, which includes dialoguing opportunities, as well as seeking out opportunities to educate visitors regarding immigration reform policies and their impact on the community.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the Immigration Sites of Conscience Network actively "promote humanitarian and

⁴³ Gee and Pharaon.

⁴⁴ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Social Conscience, "Immigration Sites of Social Conscience," International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Social Conscience, <http://www.sitesofconscience.org/resources/networks/immigration/en/> (accessed January 29, 2009).

⁴⁵ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, *A Brief History*, 3.

⁴⁶ Gee and Pharaon.

democratic values” to diverse audiences in order to create awareness and inspire action.⁴⁷ From its conception this Thematic Network has grown to encompass fourteen individual sites in the United States and Europe, interested applicants contact the Coalition as knowledge of the network spreads. The successful implementation of the Immigration Sites of Social Conscience network inspired the development of other Thematic Networks.

The upcoming American Indian Sites of Conscience network brings together sites in Canada and the United States that interpret the history of American Indian boarding and residential schools.⁴⁸ The Program Directors at the Coalition debated over what facets of American Indian history to incorporate in the new network without ignoring major portions of several communities’ history. However, the Coalition strongly believes that there are simply too many potential issues to cover when dealing with a people group as diverse as American Indians. By focusing on one particular subject, the pilot network would attract institutions, scholars, and activists together with an established and concise goal.⁴⁹ If this project succeeds, then the Coalition will consider expanding interpretational focus to encompass broader topics in American Indian History.

Another potential North American Thematic Network being considered by the Coalition would deal with sites pertaining to the history of Japanese confinement in the United States during World War II.⁵⁰ Yet untitled, this network would include sites like

⁴⁷ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Social Conscience, “Immigration Sites of Social Conscience.”

⁴⁸ Gee and Pharaon.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Hope Mountain in Wyoming, the Japanese American National Museum, and even government holding sites in New Mexico. The recent success of the Immigration Sites of Conscience network, as well as the support for future networks, suggests that the Thematic Network project will continue to expand and develop along with the Coalition itself.

Issues of Conscience

Within the Coalition, as well as the greater museum community, institutions struggle to determine if they meet the requirements of being a social conscience institution based on the history they interpret. In an attempt to clarify the issues that it represents, the Coalition created a working list of social conscience categories to define affiliated sites. The currently nine categories as defined by the Coalition include: Children as Victims of War, Displacement, Genocide, Human Trafficking and Slavery, Poverty and Welfare, Racism, State Terrorism, Sweat Shops, as well as Totalitarianism.⁵¹ Gee asserts that these “issues” were not arbitrarily determined by the Coalition but rather developed from the nature of associated sites and their interpretational focuses.⁵² As the Coalition expands to incorporate a greater number of sites covering diverse issues, the issues must be altered to best represent the Coalition membership. However, affiliated sites do not always categorize themselves in the most probable manner. The Museum of Free Derry in Northern Ireland interprets the history of Sunday Bloody Sunday, a violent confrontation between civil rights demonstrators and police on January 30, 1972, which

⁵¹ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, “Issues,” International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, <http://www.sitesofconscience.org/issues/en/> (accessed January 30, 2009).

⁵² Gee and Pharaon.

left fourteen men, women, and children dead.⁵³ When this Institutional Member was questioned by a Coalition Program Director about what issues within the local community that the Museum of Free Derry wanted to address, the answer was surprisingly immigration.⁵⁴ Although not the issue that many would find pertinent to this particular museum or community, the Museum of the Free Derry self identifies as an immigration site dealing with Poverty and Welfare issues, developing its programs accordingly. By categorizing associated institutions the Coalition can unite related sites around the globe, promote communication, as well as organize pertinent conferences and programs. As important as the Coalition is in the development of social conscience institutions there are numerous “organizations out there that share [Coalition] beliefs whether they are members or not.”⁵⁵ Definition of this genre does not derive from Coalition membership, but from programming, community centered development, and message.

As the first professional organization to acknowledge and represent museums of social conscience, the Coalition inevitably sets the standards for identifying relevant institutions and measuring their community influence. Yet, the very nature of the International Coalition of Historic *Site* Museums of Conscience excludes many museums that interpret the same issues in non-historical spaces. Larger institutions such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum or the National Underground Railroad Museum are likely to avoid participation in an organization where they could not attain

⁵³ Museum of Free Derry, “History – Bloody Sunday – Events,” Museum of Free Derry, <http://www.museumoffreederry.org/history-bloody-events.html> (accessed January 30, 2009).

⁵⁴ Gee and Phraon.

⁵⁵ Gee.

full accreditation or leadership positions. At the same time, smaller social conscience museums around the country could be intimidated by an established professional organization based out of New York City, if they ever recognize their potential association with the Coalition. These institutions do not need to miss out on the tools and fellowship of the Coalition, even if they are never formally associated. The nine issues as defined by the Coalition easily apply to museums of social conscience across the country, both Coalition affiliated museums and non-affiliated museums. Holocaust museums around the country discuss the effects and indignities of genocide, while numerous African American museums tackle the difficult topic of slavery. However, these nine issues act as a working list for both the Coalition members and non members that can and should be expanded upon. For example, the Coalition identifies Displacement as well as Poverty and Welfare as pertinent social conscience issues, but not immigration. Museums across the country recognize the need to address immigration in their community, from local historical societies to specified institutions like the Tenement Museum and the Museum of Latin American Art in Long Beach, California. As museums continue to analyze the communities that they serve and how their unique histories can touch on current social issues, a larger number of social conscience categories will emerge.

Terminology to Define the Genre

The evolution of a new museum genre necessitates the development of terminology in order to define the unique functions and programs of the subgroup. As the realm of social conscience museums expands, the vocabulary follows. The majority of these concepts derive from progressive programming and social justice thought from

museums around the globe, before slowly integrating into the mainstream museum community. In the last few decades, museums across the country have “advanced the idea that museums should serve as centers for... ‘civic engagement’.”⁵⁶ The concept of civic engagement has become pivotal for institutions interpreting history in socially conscious ways. The National Park Service defines civic engagement as “a continuous, dynamic conversation with the public on many levels” with “a commitment to building and sustaining relationships with . . . communities of interest.”⁵⁷ Civic engagement in a museum setting often includes activities such as “relationship building,” “community collaboration,” facilitated public dialogue, as well as multiple perspective interpretation.⁵⁸ As an organization supporting museums that identify as social conscience institutions, the Coalition encourages museums to engage in multiple perspective interpretation. Multiple perspective is a complex concept in which exhibits, interpreters, and collections illuminate numerous, often heterogeneous, viewpoints and roles. Presenting these varied positions exposes visitors to diverse thought in both collaborative and non collaborative ways. Multiple perspectives strongly emphasizes the valuing of different experiences. This interpretation should occur not only in the public sphere of the museum but also internally in the museum.⁵⁹ Presenting multiple perspectives in formal and informal ways engages the museum audience by removing people from their own life experiences and introducing them to the diversity of human thought. Multiple perspective, if

⁵⁶ Liz Ševčenko and Maggie Russell-Ciardi, “Sites of Conscience: Opening Historic Sites for Civic Dialogue, Forward,” *The Public Historian* 30, no. 1 (2008): 10.

⁵⁷ Fran P. Mainella, *Director’s Order #75A: Civic Engagement and Public Involvement*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 2003), 1.

⁵⁸ Ševčenko and Russell-Ciardi, 11.

⁵⁹ Gee.

executed properly, paves the way for public morality. Enabling individuals to recognize the plight of their fellow man creates public morality. It is a community philosophy that centers on integration of ideas and peoples in a tolerant atmosphere. To insure that these two concepts can exist within the museum, it must approach its subject matter in an apolitical manner. According to Fiona Cameron, modern museums act “as sites of social transformation and social responsibility... instilling dominant moral codes of conduct, values and reforming behaviors.”⁶⁰ However, discussing hot button issues, no matter how socially relevant or how much community support a museum may have, can often lead to public backlash. When addressing potentially controversial or politically charged topics, museums must engage in apoliticality. Apoliticality “refers to museums as safe, physically protected, calm and civil spaces for people to interact” free from overbearing social tensions and judgmental attitudes.⁶¹ Institutions that interpret social conscience often struggle with “issues being debated in the political arena” in order to best serve their communities.⁶² By approaching potential troublesome topics in an apolitical manner, museums secure “institutional legitimacy and trust” as a “cultural authority.”⁶³ Elaine Gurian explains the concept of apoliticality best by observing that “museums are safe places for the exploration of unsafe ideas.”⁶⁴ The concept of safe space further expands on the apolitical atmosphere that social conscience museums should strive for.

⁶⁰ Fiona Cameron, “Moral Lessons and Reforming Agendas: History museums, science museums, contentious topics and contemporary societies.” In *Museum Revolutions: How museums change and are changed*, ed. Simon J. Knell, Suzanne MacLeod, and Sheila Watson, 330-342, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007): 330.

⁶¹ Ibid., 332.

⁶² Ševčenko and Russell-Ciardi, 11.

⁶³ Cameron, 331-332.

⁶⁴ Elaine Gurian, “A Blurring of the Boundaries,” *Curator* 38, no. 1 (1995): 33.

Safe space describes an environment in which visitors are comfortable discussing a variety of issues, controversial or not, without fear of reproach. Another key term utilized by museums that discuss social issues is facilitated discussion. “Humans are social animals,” and as such respond positively when directly engaged in a social context.⁶⁵ For many social conscience institutions facilitated discussion “is the primary instrument for the transference of knowledge.”⁶⁶ In facilitated discussion, interpreters engage the visitor with open ended questions designed to provoke thought and response. By creating exhibits and programs that emphasize “the connection between the past and the present” museums are able to create dialoguing opportunities, or facilitated discussions, with visitors regarding “their relationship to the contested histories interpreted at the site and to the contentious contemporary legacies of those histories” in a safe environment.⁶⁷ As the efforts of social conscience institutions expand, so too will the vocabulary necessary to describe the actions and programs of these unique institutions.

Despite its relatively brief history, the social conscience museum genre stands as a revolutionary force in the museum community. For the past ten years, the International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Social Conscience has acted as the first and only organization dedicated to uniting these institutions for professional development and support. The creation of the Coalition enabled the expansion of the genre on an

⁶⁵ Michael Spock, “Elegant Programs and Conversations.” In *Presence of Mind: Museums and the Spirit of Learning*, ed. Bonnie Pitman, 141-150, (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1999): 147.

⁶⁶ Ellen Rosenthal and Jane Blankman-Hetrick, “Conversations Across Time: Family Learning in a Living History Museum.” In *Learning Conversations in Museums*, ed. By Gaea Leinhardt, Kevin Crowley, and Karen Knutson, 305-329, (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002): 307.

⁶⁷ Ševčenko and Russell-Ciardi, 11.

international scale; however, it does not represent the entire social conscience community.

From local historical societies and science centers to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, institutions across America strive to address needs within the communities they serve, yet are unable to meet the accreditation requirements of the Coalition. Just because a museum's site fails to possess a pertinent social history does not negate its impact on the community. While the Coalition does offer resources and limited engagement to these institutions, the need for proper recognition and support for these sites remains strong. By analyzing the actions of prominent institutions in the social conscience genre today, museums aspiring to touch the hurts and issues prominent in their own communities can expand their own programming to enhance their effectiveness through their collections and interpretation.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Stuff and How It Is Interpreted

“If collections are the heart of museums what we have come to call education – the commitment to presenting objects and ideas in an informative and stimulating way – is the spirit.”¹ For any museum, the collecting of objects and the interpretation of them must work in harmony in order to best serve the community. A balance must exist between the acquisition and care of collections on the one hand and effective, thought-provoking interpretation on the other. Social conscience museums operate under the same principle of balance. However, the very nature of these revolutionary institutions forces them to utilize creative collecting practices and pioneer educational methods.

Collecting Conscience

In order to best understand the struggle many social conscience museums face when attempting to find relevant objects, it is important to understand the history of museum collecting. The foundation for modern museum collecting comes from two separate, yet related, concepts originating in the sixteenth century: the gallery and the cabinet.² The gallery was a term used to describe a large hallway, originally in private homes, which was used for the display of artwork. The cabinet was derived from the Italian term gabinetto and used to describe a designated space, ranging from a display

¹ American Association of Museums, *Museums for a New Century: A Report of the Commission for a New Century*, 55.

² Alexander, 1st ed., 8.

cabinet to an entire room, filled with a variety of collected objects.³ Both the gallery and the cabinet were reflections of the collectors' interest and inaccessible to the general public. For centuries museum collections have been created by wealthy collectors, transitioning from private displays of memorabilia into public institutions. The collections themselves bestowed power and notoriety to the collector, even more so when the collector donates "his life's work to a museum."⁴ By donating a collection towards the public good it ensures "the survival on earth of the collector's name inscribed over a museum door," a lasting public legacy.⁵ Collections reveal "something significant about the collector... and even the society at large."⁶ Unfortunately, this collector-centric process is both "intensely personal and haphazard in plan."⁷ Traditional museums are typically made up of collections that were assembled and donated in order to grant prestige to the creator. In the art world this may involve amassing a large collection of old masters or collecting up and coming contemporary artists. However, in the realm of history this manifests into the collection of objects that best represent the prominent achievements in popular history. As a result, many cultures, events, and perspectives experienced underwhelming representation by museums across the country, and in some extreme cases they were completely ignored.

In their mission to educate the public, social conscience museums constantly endeavor to locate objects and collections that properly convey their particular message.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 119.

⁵ Maurice Rheims, *The Strange Life of Objects*, (New York: Athenaeum Publishers, 1961), 43.

⁶ Schwartzer, 80.

⁷ Alexander, 1st ed., 9.

A majority of these museums focus on histories and people that have been neglected or misrepresented by traditional museums for over one hundred years. Museums of social conscience are often faced with a lack of physical evidence to support the histories that they present. Ethnically based museums fight against centuries of minority oppression and collections practices that honored old, rich white men. Similarly, museums focused on the history of immigration suffer from the same deficiency of collections. History museums have routinely bypassed more common items of daily life in favor of wedding dresses as well as other items owned or created by wealthy, important citizens. A public fascination with anthropological study in the 1890s sparked museums around the country to collect and preserve evidence of cultures that were thought to be disappearing. Anthropologists scoured the American countryside for “Native American household, ceremonial, and sacred objects” for museum displays.⁸ In order to obtain these objects, anthropologists would purchase items at often unfair prices, steal, or even desecrate graves and religious sites.⁹ Traditional museums acquired a vast array of Native American items through these means; however, the exhibits created with these artifacts were often offensive and inaccurate. Faced with a history of the rejection diverse cultural identities and lies, social conscience museums must overcome a tradition of incomplete collecting practices in order to properly tell their stories. What avenues do these museums have to create a strong collection?

Social conscience museums implement both traditional and inventive collecting techniques. Many ethnically based institutions like the DuSable Museum of African

⁸ Schwartzter, 87.

⁹ Ibid.

American History originated as cabinets of curiosity, started by amateur collectors operating out of private homes.¹⁰ Many social conscience museums were created in a similar fashion where an individual or a small group with a strong desire to interpret their specific history amassed a private collection of objects with the intent to display them to the public. The DuSable's collection expanded in a traditional way, through unsolicited donations. This passive form of collecting is practiced by museums nationwide, often leading to extensive, though often irrelevant, collections. The Museum of African American History in Boston (MAAHB) experienced an overwhelming surplus of incoming donation from their local community. The current Director of Collections and Exhibits for MAAHB, Chandra Harrington, notes that in its early days, the institution collected "almost anything and everything having to do with black history in Boston and sometimes not even Boston but the surrounding areas."¹¹

When the public comes forward with numerous unsolicited gifts, it is usually indicative of a combination of factors. First, public support for the organization's mission may be extremely high; the community believes in what the museum hopes to accomplish. Second, the public may be unintentionally ignorant of the nature of a museum's collection and the financial obligation required to properly care for the donated items in perpetuity. Finally, the excessive acceptance of unsolicited donations may be a sign that the social conscience institution is eager to salvage historic items, even if they could never display or possibly care for the objects.

¹⁰ Great Museums Television.

¹¹ Harrington and Frazier.

Inevitably, to protect their ability to provide proper care for the artifacts and to maintain historical focus, institutions are forced to create collections policies. These policies lay out guidelines that enable institutions to turn away irrelevant donations and begin the process of deaccessioning. As these museums develop and grow, so does their historical focus. The need to redefine the museum's mission statement and scope can significantly alter the direction of a collection created through passive means. When MAAHB adopted its current mission statement they recognized that a number of objects in their offsite collections facility were not relevant to the stated goals of the organization.¹² The next step in refining the collection was the implementation of a simple collections management policy that defined the scope of the collection:

The Museum of African American History collects artifacts and archival materials relating to African American cultural life and the pursuit of liberty and justice in New England, especially Boston, Nantucket, and Massachusetts.

- The primary focus is on the colonial period through the end of the 19th century.
- The secondary focus is on the 20th century¹³

This document created a framework for all incoming objects as well as a justification for deaccessioning pieces that do not benefit the interpretational goals of the museum.

MAAHB is currently in the final stages of collection consolidation, which is deaccessioning. As the museum traverses the path to American Association of Museums (AAM) accreditation, it is conducting an inventory of its over thirty-five hundred items. By inventorying the collection MAAHB staff hopes “to get to the point that [they] can go

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Museum of African American History Boston *Mission Statement and Collections Policy*, (Boston: Museum of African American History), 1.

in and deaccession in the right way” in order to make room for more relevant items.¹⁴

Deaccession is a painful step for any museum. When donations are made to a museum, the giver expects them to be held and maintained in perpetuity. However, as the mission of the museum is refined the collection must follow or valuable time and financial resources are wasted.

Social conscience museums frequently interpret cultures that were forgotten or ignored by mainstream historians. Because of this the material culture of these cultures were either destroyed or discarded long before the museums came to be. So what recourse do museums have to find objects that convey the unique history of their site or topic? Many social conscience institutions have rediscovered an invaluable method of expanded museum holdings, archaeology. Through archaeological research, historic site museums can better understand and exhibit their unique history. Though this is a particularly useful tool for social conscience institutions, its popularity has grown significantly among historic house museums, battlefields, and other historic sites.¹⁵ John H. Jameson, Jr. and Sherene Baugher confirm that “the last decade has witnessed numerous applications of public interpretation... and an increased interest in establishing partnerships between professional practitioners [of archaeology] in public interpretation and educational institutions such as museums and schools.”¹⁶ Archeological research enables museums to access fragmented and rejected objects and bring them into the public sphere for display and study. This method is particularly useful for ethnically

¹⁴ Harrington and Frazier.

¹⁵ John H. Jameson, Jr. and Sherene Baugher, “Public Interpretation, Outreach, and Partnering: An Introduction,” in *Past Meets Present: Archaeologists Partnering with Museums Curators, Teachers, and Community Groups*, ed. John H. Jameson, Jr. and Sherene Baugher, 3-18, (New York: Springer, 2007), 7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

based sites and immigration sites since lower classes and minorities have largely been ignored by mainstream collecting institutions. These museums would have little or no artifacts to display if not for items discovered through archaeological means. The Tenement Museum has used periods of reconstruction and preservation of 97 Orchard Street in order to conduct a series of archaeological studies of the site.¹⁷ The knowledge of daily life in the tenement house gleaned from the archaeological work at The Tenement Museum has impacted their collection, exhibitions, and interpretation. The still-developing Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation (MJGF) in Fayetteville, New York discusses issues pertaining to the early women's rights movement and abolitionism through the lens of the life of Matilda Joslyn Gage. MJGF expands their collection by bringing in Kim Christensen, a UC Berkley graduate student, every summer to lead community digs on the site.¹⁸ By conducting archaeological study, MJGF is actively pursuing their site's unique and diverse, yet often unrepresented, history. The museum uses the dig in order to help visitors understand the day-to-day history of the house, its traffic patterns, and even the landscaping history of the property.¹⁹ All of these things are of importance to Sally Roesch Wagner, director of MJGF, who is in the midst of preserving the site and designing MJGF's first publicly accessible exhibits and programs. Another example of archaeology at social conscience museums is the traffic study done at the Nantucket campus of MAAHB.²⁰ By using a combination of traditional

¹⁷ Golpinar.

¹⁸ Sally Roesch Wagner, interviewed by author, Fayetteville, NY, November 11, 2008.

¹⁹ The Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation, *Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation Strategic Plan: 2006-2010*, (Fayetteville: The Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation, 2006), 6.

²⁰ Harrington and Frazier.

archaeological techniques and innovative tools, like sonar scanning, MAAHB is able to analyze the flow of traffic between the Nantucket African Meeting House and the Higginbotham House, both key sites for black history in Massachusetts.²¹ This knowledge shapes their understanding of the two sites, their relationship, and importance to the community directly affecting MAAHB's interpretation of the sites. Archeology yields many rewards for the museums that choose to use it, ranging from physical objects to a better perspective of the site itself.

Firsthand experience also plays a significant role in the creation of social conscience museums and their collections. The experience and collections of survivors acted as the primary catalyst for Holocaust museums across the United States. In fact, the only Holocaust museum not founded by the direct influence of survivors is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. President Jimmy Carter initiated the concept for USHMM in an attempt win back "the Democratic party's Jewish supporters [who]... protest[ed] against his decision to sell advanced F-15 warplanes to Saudi Arabia."²² However, the proposal for a national Holocaust museum on federally owned land did not garner overwhelming support until Carter appointed Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor and best-selling author, to head the commission. Wiesel's influence as a survivor of the Holocaust, and thus a natural authority on the subject, granted legitimacy to the government's proposal and enabled it to come to fruition. Political forces were a considerable factor in the creation of Holocaust museums across the country.²³ Survivors

²¹ Ibid.

²² Luke, 40.

²³ Pickman, 29.

“often took the lead in memorial projects [and museums] at the local level... [yet] played no role in the initiation of the largest museums – in Washington, where plans were set in motion by the Carter White House; in New York, where local politicians and real estate developers were in the forefront; in Los Angeles, where the Simon Wiesenthal Center was constructed in competition with a smaller, survivor-based museum.”²⁴ However, the survivor, or group of survivors, acted as the genesis for collections and interpretational narrative for the majority of Holocaust museums in the United States. For example, the Children of Auschwitz Nazi Deadly Lab Experiments Survivors Holocaust Museum (CANDLES) was founded by Eva Mozes Kor in 1984 as a reflection of her experiences as a human guinea pig in Joseph Mengele’s experiments.²⁵ Similarly, the Holocaust Museum of Florida was founded by Holocaust survivor Walter P. Loebenberg and the Virginia Holocaust Museum by “Richmond’s youngest Holocaust Survivor,” Jay Ipson.²⁶ Often, institutions representing the recent past will publicly declare the need for objects from survivors and their descendants in the hope to expand their collections. The Tenement Museum and Holocaust museums across the country have particularly benefited from this technique, while other institutions struggle to find donors with relevant objects or information.

²⁴ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1999), 272.

²⁵ CANDLES Holocaust Museum, “CANDLES Holocaust Museum and Education Center – History of Organization – History of CANDLES,” CANDLES Holocaust Museum, <http://www.candlesholocaustmuseum.org/index.php?sid=22> (accessed February 10, 2009).

²⁶ Florida Holocaust Museum, “About the Museum”; and Virginia Holocaust Museum, “Virginia Holocaust Museum – Tolerance Through Education | About the Virginia Holocaust Museum,” Virginia Holocaust Museum, http://www.va-holocaust.com/about_the_museum/default.asp (accessed February 10, 2009).

Institutions that face an absence of physical evidence are forced to seek out creative alternatives. In cases where there are one or more individuals who experienced the event or lifestyle in question, a useful technique for museums is the use of oral histories. The value of personal experience is immeasurably beneficial for museums of social conscience, particularly those dealing with episodes of human oppression like slavery and genocide. Two particularly poignant series of oral histories that have had profound influence over research and exhibits are the slave narratives and Holocaust survivor testimonies.²⁷ The slave narratives were a collection of over “2,300 first-hand accounts and 500 black-and-white photographs of former slaves” collected by the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration during the 1930s.²⁸ The Museum of African Diaspora (MoAD) in San Francisco utilizes a selection of the slave narratives in an exhibition which they assert “reflect[s] only a fraction of the millions upon millions of stories that could have been told by people who had the misfortune to toil under the yoke of slavery.”²⁹ Furthermore, they remind their audience that “each of their stories is as unique and individual as a fingerprint, describing as they do, a different heartbreak and a different survival strategy.”³⁰ Even institutions that are not classified as social consciences museums are utilizing the slave narratives in exhibits. The Texas Capitol

²⁷ Jeannine DeLomard, “Adding Her Testimony: Harriet Jacobs’s Incidents as Testimonial Literature,” in *Multiculturalism: Roots and Realities*, ed. C. James Trotman, 30-48, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 31.

²⁸ The Library of Congress, “Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936-1938,” The Library of Congress, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html> (accessed February 12, 2009).

²⁹ Museum of African Diaspora, “Introduction | Slave Narratives | The MoAD Salon | MoAD – Museum of African Diaspora,” Museum of African Diaspora, http://www.moadsf.org/salon/exhibits/slave_narratives/index.html (accessed February 12, 2009).

³⁰ Ibid.

Visitors Center created a temporary exhibit, “Before Freedom: Texas Slave Narratives,” by utilizing a few precious artifacts and pairing them with relevant audio testimonies of “former Texas slaves.”³¹ The narratives may not be physical, three-dimensional artifacts but their truth and power as representations of slavery are irrefutable. Similarly, the first-hand accounts of Holocaust survivors can be counted among any Holocaust museum’s most valuable assets. Survivors, and their unique stories, play a pivotal role in the educational process in most Holocaust museums in the United States. Currently, it is estimated that thirty Holocaust survivors die each day, and unless there are diligent individuals to record the survivors’ stories they will be lost forever.³² For many institutions, there are no survivors to give voice to their history. That’s why it is important for museums with these living ties to make the best possible use of them.

In situations where objects cannot be found or a museum seeks to protect its limited collections, yet still maintain a proper display they can turn to two options, reproductions or first person interpretation. While local history museums may be blessed with an abundance of wagon wheels and firearms to illustrate the driving force of westward expansion that impacted their community, many museums of social conscience must interpret their story with a handful of remaining items. It is important to display these objects of conscience to the public as a physical reminder of the institution’s historical focus while at the same time preserving it to last in perpetuity. Accurate reproductions enable curators to complete the historic narrative of an exhibit while

³¹ The Texas Capitol Visitors Center, “New Exhibits at the Texas Capitol Visitors Center exhibit,” The Texas Capitol Visitors Center, http://www.tspb.state.tx.us/CVC/exhibits/slave_narratives.html (accessed February 12, 2009).

³² Associated Press, “Germans Living in Israel Plan to Make Amends,” MSNBC, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/18112064> (accessed February 12, 2009).

protecting the scarce originals. The Tenement Museum maintains three separate collections, one for archives and two for objects, the permanent and exhibition collections. The Tenement Museum's permanent collection consists of "objects discovered in 97 Orchard Street after the Museum moved into the building in 1988, as well as items donated by former residents, shopkeepers, owners, and their descendents."³³ Additions to the permanent collection must "have primary historical significance to 97 Orchard Street and any other properties that [the Tenement Museum] interprets."³⁴ A separate collection was created for the Tenement Museum's interpretation and public use. The exhibition collection contains "objects for use in public exhibitions and educational programs."³⁵ Objects in this collection are "similar in type of objects to the Museum's permanent collection, but the artifacts do not have primary historical significance to 97 Orchard Street or the Lower East Side."³⁶ By creating two separate but similar collections, the Tenement Museum is able to create an accurate, historical setting in their reconstructed apartments without risking their irreplaceable permanent collection.

For many ethnically based museums of social conscience, public interest in the distinctive history that they interpret is on a rise. Knowledge about such topics is constantly increasing and relevant publications and oral histories are readily available to aid curators and educators in communicating with the public. Even when the information is readily available, a physical manifestation of it may not be. This is where first person

³³ The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, *Collections Management Policy*, (New York: The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, 2001), 1.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

interpretation can significantly benefit a museum of social conscience. When Colonial Williamsburg (CW) first began to open its interpretation to incorporate the lives of early African Americans, it was met with some resistance.³⁷ As scholarly understanding of early African American life grew, the interpretation at CW solidified into an exploration of “black and white relations in the American colonies, the economic forces that encouraged the creation of the slave system and sustained it, the institutionalization of racism, daily slave life, African cultural backgrounds, the development of African American culture, and slavery's long-term effects.”³⁸ African American museums around the country are taking hold of this concept and applying it to their institutions. MAAHB regularly utilizes historic interpreters as storytellers for school groups and special events in order to make their history come alive.³⁹ Many Native American museums host events that prominently feature authentic tribal dances, foods, narratives, and dress. These programs and exhibits do not require authentic historic artifacts, yet convey powerful lessons to the public through reproductions, research, and the spoken word.

Interpreting Conscience

Freeman Tilden accurately described museum interpretation as “revelation based on information.”⁴⁰ While social conscience museums borrow techniques, like first person

³⁷ Tamara Jones, “Living History or Underlying Racism?,” *The Washington Post*, October 11, 1994.

³⁸ Colonial Williamsburg, “The Official Site of Colonial Williamsburg – Slave Quarter at Carter’s Grove,” Colonial Williamsburg, <http://www.history.org/Almanack/places/hb/hbslave.cfm> (accessed February 13, 2009).

³⁹ Harrington and Frazier.

⁴⁰ Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 18.

interpretation, from traditional institutions, their very nature forces them to create innovative methods in order to effect public revelation. These unique museums strive to create community awareness, solidify cultural identities, promote diversity, and encourage tolerance. The main avenue for achieving these goals, in a museum setting, is through exhibition and interpretation. A majority of museums focusing on issues of social conscience benefited from being created after the Tax Reform Act and the industry-wide shift from a collections-centric to an educational approach. While the industry has traditionally viewed education as a means of “transmit[ing] culture,” social conscience museums went beyond illustrating culture to promoting morality.⁴¹ Social conscience museums accomplish this through the personalization of specific histories to diverse audiences. By making woman’s suffrage relevant to a group of preteen boys or enabling the struggles of America’s immigrants, past and present, to speak to modern suburbia, these museums transcend simply exhibiting history.

Museums function as a portal into the past utilizing objects, first hand accounts, letters, and other research methods to exhibit a forgotten time. Museums, historical societies, historic houses, and national parks all attempt to “connect... the past and present” by “presenting history to mass publics.”⁴² Social conscience museums seek to challenge societal norms and promote public morality, yet they still operate as museums and depend on connecting history to diverse modern audiences. These institutions operate under the philosophy of Archbishop Olivier de Berranger: “Conscience is formed

⁴¹ American Association of Museums, *Museums for a New Century: A Report of the Commission for a New Century*, 57.

⁴² Michael Wallace, “The Future of History Museums,” in *Museum Provision and Professionalism*, ed. Gaynor Kavanagh, 69-78, (London, New York: Routledge, 1994), 72.

by memory; and no society can live in peace with itself on the basis of a false or repressed past, any more than an individual can.”⁴³ The difference between social conscience and many tradition museums is that the history they are interpreting is actively occurring somewhere in the world. They do not have to create vague comparisons to relate Victorian parlor culture to third graders; instead, they expand the audience’s knowledge of totalitarian governments by pointing to current, functioning regimes.

Holocaust museums act as the front line of defense against the escalation of anti-Semitism in their communities and a beacon of hope against current and future genocides. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. reminds its audience regularly that the Holocaust “is history’s most extreme example of antisemitism.”⁴⁴ Its impact on the world is immeasurable, yet a vast majority cannot fully comprehend the atrocities of the Holocaust. Even with such a shocking example of the physical manifestation of anti-Semitism, it is a continuous threat in many communities. USHMM and other Holocaust museums around the country link the Holocaust to the rise in modern anti-Semitic thought, both local and international. A rise in anti-Semitic thought and rhetoric appears in communities “across Europe and the Islamic world,” ranging from hate speech to targeted attacks against Jews.⁴⁵ Some, like Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, deny the Holocaust completely, claiming it is

⁴³ Roger Cohen, “French Church Issues Apology to Jews on War,” *New York Times*, October 1, 1997.

⁴⁴ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Antisemitism: A Continuing Threat*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2008), 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

simply “myth” created by the European Jewry.⁴⁶ By highlighting current examples of anti-Semitism, Holocaust museums show their audiences that the hatred that spawned the Holocaust, if unchecked, can reemerge in horrific ways. Even if a mass genocide of American Jews seems impossible, former Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan proclaimed “anti-Semitism has flourished even in communities where Jews have never lived, and it has been a harbinger of discrimination against others. The rise of anti-Semitism anywhere is a threat to people everywhere. Thus, in fighting anti-Semitism we fight for the future of all humanity.”⁴⁷

Modern genocide is the second connection made by Holocaust museums in the United States. The term genocide “did not exist before 1944” when it was introduced into the international vocabulary by Raphael Lemkin, “a Jewish refugee who fled Poland to the United States.”⁴⁸ The Holocaust remains one of the largest and most recognizable genocides in history, and museums interpreting this history believe that by educating future generations, future genocides can be prevented. Several larger institutions have begun to recognize that highlighting one historic human rights violation, no matter how extreme an example, does not always connect with all audiences or spur visitors to action. In order to honor “the memory of those who suffered in the Holocaust,” USHMM sought to “confront... genocide and threats of genocide today” by creating the Committee on

⁴⁶ Times Online and agencies, “Holocaust a Myth, Says Iran President,” Times Online, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article764440.ece (accessed February 17, 2009).

⁴⁷ United Nations, “Press Release: Throughout history anti-Semitism unique manifestation of hatred, intolerance, persecution says Secretary-General in remarks to headquarters seminar,” United Nations, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2004/sgsm9375.doc.htm> (accessed February 17, 2009).

⁴⁸ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Committee on Conscience | History | What is Genocide?,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <http://www.ushmm.org/conscience/history/> (accessed February 17, 2009); and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Genocide Emergency: Darfur, Sudan*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2008), 1.

Conscience (CoC).⁴⁹ Proposed by Leo Melamed, CoC was founded in 1995 to “alert the national conscience, influence policy makers, and stimulate worldwide action to confront and work to halt acts of genocide or related crimes against humanity.”⁵⁰ In order to accomplish this mission, USHMM designs exhibits, creates printed materials, and conducts educational programming centered on modern genocides and their relationship to the Holocaust. “Genocide Emergency – Darfur, Sudan: Who Will Survive Today?” is the current USHMM exhibit dealing with modern genocide. Visitors are exposed to visual images, audio commentary by visitors to these refugee camps, and video news reports on the current state of the Darfur crisis.⁵¹ Visitors to the museum and its website are encouraged to “confront genocide today” by joining the Committee on Conscience, contacting their local media to request coverage on Darfur, “communicate with decision makers” in their communities, engage their local community in discussions on the situation in Darfur, and monetarily support “education and relief efforts.”⁵² Resources for accomplishing these tasks are available to visitors on site and online as well as information on other current genocides, including the Sudan, Chechnya, the Democratic

⁴⁹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Genocide Emergency: Darfur, Sudan*, 1.

⁵⁰ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Committee on Conscience | About COC | Background,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <http://www.ushmm.org/conscience/about/> (accessed February 17, 2009); and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Committee on Conscience | About COC | Mandate,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <http://www.ushmm.org/conscience/about/mandate/> (accessed February 17, 2009).

⁵¹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Museum | Visit | Wexner Learning Center,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <http://www.ushmm.org/visit/whatinside/lc/> (accessed February 17, 2009).

⁵² United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Genocide Emergency: Darfur, Sudan*, 2.

Republic of Congo, Burundi, and Rwanda.⁵³ Not all programs are as extensive as those at USHMM; however, social conscience museums are regularly associating their historical significance to socially relevant issues in modern culture in order to insight action.

The most dynamic interpretational tool used by museums of social conscience is the concept of facilitated dialogue. As previously discussed, facilitated discussion is a dialogue process in which interpreters use open ended questions to inspire thought in the visitor. This is not a new concept. Freeman Tilden highlighted the need for discussion, not specifically facilitated, at museums and historic sites in his book *Interpreting our Heritage*. Tilden states that “history may be interpreted effectively (but of course not exclusively) by provoking the thought, ‘Under like conditions what would *you* have done?’”⁵⁴ Instead of just asking the visitor about what they would have done in the past, social conscience museums stimulate discussions on current human rights issues. The main focus of facilitated dialogue in social conscience museums is to “use... history to generate a dialogue on [current] social problems” in a safe space.⁵⁵ In a facilitated discussion setting, “visitors [are] helped to use the history of [the] subject as a basis for considering the present situation,” then come to a conclusion about potential actions to take.⁵⁶ Because the topics discussed in social conscience museums are frequently controversial or difficult to discuss, it is vitally important to create a safe space for

⁵³ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Committee on Conscience | Alert | Overview,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <http://www.ushmm.org/conscience/alert/> (accessed February 17, 2009).

⁵⁴ Tilden, 15.

⁵⁵ Abrams, “Harnessing the Power of History,” 138.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

participants. Facilitated discussion at social conscience museums began as a separate program that immediately followed formal tours. Now, these institutions are moving towards “develop[ing] different forms of dialogue,” including integrated dialogue during tours, built into exhibits, as well as through print and online media.⁵⁷ Due to the diversity of issues discussed by social conscience museums, there is no single way to approach facilitated dialogue. There are, however, several examples currently in place in museums of social conscience across the United States.

The Lower East Side Tenement Museum hosts the most successful, formal facilitated discussion program in the United States, “Kitchen Conversations.” Visitors to the Tenement Museum purchase tickets to one of four on site tours: “Getting By,” “Piecing it Together,” “The Moores: An Irish Family in America,” and “Confino Family,” which is a living history program.⁵⁸ Since its conception in 2004, visitors have the option to participate in “Kitchen Conversations” immediately following “Piecing it Together.”⁵⁹ This program extends the visitor’s experience by engaging them in a dynamic dialogue centered on the issues raised on tour. Participants gather around a table in the first floor kitchen, partake in tea and cookies, and discuss their experience in the museum. The groups that come to sit in the mis-matched chairs come from different ethnic, socio-economic, religious, and political backgrounds, and even from different countries.⁶⁰ Needless to say opinions differ regularly, especially on a controversial issue

⁵⁷ Ševčenko, 14.

⁵⁸ The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, “Guided Tours of the Tenement Museum,” The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, <http://www.tenement.org/tours.html> (accessed February 17, 2009).

⁵⁹ Ruth Abrams, “Kitchen Conversations: Democracy in Action at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum,” *The Public Historian* 29, no. 1, 59-76, (Winter 2007): 60.

⁶⁰ Gee and Pharaon.

like immigration, and all of them are welcome within the museum. Therefore, facilitators for this program are trained to encourage and stimulate structured dialogue among diverse groups while maintaining a safe space.⁶¹ The Tenement Museum has identified four key objectives for the “Kitchen Conversations” program:

1. Engage visitors in a dialogue using stories from the tour as a starting point for them to share their own related experiences and challenge their assumptions and beliefs about larger contemporary immigration issues;
2. Help participants gain new perspectives on contemporary questions by looking at how they were answered in the past, through stories of former residents of 97 Orchard;
3. Develop in visitors a heightened awareness of their own involvement with contemporary immigration issues;
4. Inspire visitors to become more active in learning about contemporary immigration issues.⁶²

This program is successful because it draws “on the visitors’ own experiences to encourage [an] examination of [their] opinions.”⁶³ “Kitchen Conversations” challenges participants without demeaning their views.

Many on the Tenement staff were skeptical when the program launched. They felt that visitors were “unaccustomed to having a discussion” within a museum setting and would be adverse, or even afraid, of the experience.⁶⁴ Many staff member had never experienced facilitated dialogue first hand, which largely influenced their skepticism.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, *Museum Mission and Kitchen Conversation Goals*, (New York: The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, 2007), 1.

⁶³ Abrams, “Tempest Tost,” 205.

⁶⁴ Abrams, “Kitchen Conversations: Democracy in Action at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum,” 65.

⁶⁵ Gee and Pharaon.

A professionally trained team conducted facilitated discussions during Tenement Museum meetings in order to familiarize the staff with the process. It was determined that participation in “Kitchen Conversations” would suffer if visitors had to purchase the program separately from tours, so all ticket prices were raised in order “to subsidize the added cost of the dialogue program.”⁶⁶ At first, the skeptic’s predictions were correct; visitors didn’t understand or were afraid of dialoging in a museum. The term “Kitchen Conversations” was developed to be a nonthreatening title that would encourage participation.⁶⁷ Most people have fond memories of sitting with loved ones around a kitchen table and having meaningful, comfortable conversations.

Slowly but surely, visitors overcame their fear of the unfamiliar and became comfortable speaking in these monitored groups.⁶⁸ Word began to spread and the table began to fill. Where it was once a struggle to convince one or two visitors to stay for the program, it is now common to find groups of seven or more, from a tour of fifteen, actively participating in “Kitchen Conversations.”⁶⁹ Like many aspects of museum education, the success rate of facilitated dialogues is difficult to measure through quantitative means. The qualitative rewards reaped from “Kitchen Conversations” has ensured its longevity and inspired similar programming.

“Kitchen Conversations” has become a vital instrument in The Lower East Side Tenement Museum’s mission to promote “tolerance and historical perspective... [on] the

⁶⁶ Abrams, “Kitchen Conversations: Democracy in Action at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum,” 66.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Gee and Pharaon.

⁶⁹ Abrams, “Kitchen Conversations: Democracy in Action at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum,” 66.

variety of immigrant and migrant experiences.”⁷⁰ It’s no surprise that other institutions have started to take notice. The Coalition was impressed by the success of “Kitchen Conversations” and wanted to encourage other sites to institute similar programs. The Project Support Fund, formerly titled Dialogues for Democracy, is a program founded by the Coalition that seeks to “provide... financial and technical support” for members seeking to create “innovative programs to engage citizens on the most pressing human rights issues in their communities.”⁷¹ Using the “Arc of Dialogue” created by the Tenement Museum for its facilitators, the Coalition works with institutions to create relevant dialogue programs.⁷² Institutions seeking assistance must submit a proposal to the Programming Directors for approval. One of the most recent applicants is The Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation. MJGF is in the midst of a capital campaign to raise the funds to preserve Matilda Joslyn Gage’s home, design and install exhibits, and open the house to the public. Currently, the house is open by appointment and for special events; however, they are already starting to design facilitated discussion programming.⁷³ The conceptual “Tea and Tours” program is based on the “Kitchen Conversations” model, and while facilitated by museum volunteers, these individuals have not been trained in proper facilitation practices nor have the “focused on exploring difficult contemporary

⁷⁰ The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, “About the Tenement.”

⁷¹ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, *Overview*, (New York: International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, 2008), 1.

⁷² The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, *Arc of Dialogue for Kitchen Conversations: (Revised Draft April, 2007)*, (New York: The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, 2007), 1.

⁷³ The Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation, *International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience Project Development Grant Proposal: Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation; Fayetteville, New York*, (Fayetteville: The Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation, 2008), 1, 4.

issues.”⁷⁴ In order to actualize these objectives, MJGF laid out a proposed one year timetable and budget for the funds and resources to allow their leadership to observe the Tenement Museum’s program first hand, connect MJGF with other sites engaged in facilitated discussion programs, assist in developing the program’s format, as well as hire a consultant to develop the facilitated discussion and properly train the docents. Their stated goal is to develop “a coherent program for the discussions, along with a coherent program for the volunteers who will facilitate the discussions.”⁷⁵ The site visit to the Tenement Museum was very informative for MJGF staff; seeing effective facilitated discussion on difficult social issues, was particularly encouraging.⁷⁶ As MJGF continues their capital campaign they are concurrently developing their facilitated discussion program, “Tea and Tour,” as well as incorporating dialoguing opportunities into their exhibit design.

Individually, these developments might seem excessively simple. If a museum cannot find items for their collection through traditional means, then an archeological study on the site may be a way to find objects. When an issue impacts the community the museum serves, address it by illustrating its historic roots and hosting dialogue opportunities. From alternative collecting techniques to facilitated discussions, the methods employed by museums of social conscience are rapidly reshaping audiences, perspectives, and the global museum community.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁷⁶ Wagner, interview.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Community Response to Conscience

Almost one hundred years ago, museum innovator John Cotton Dana stated that the museum's "one and obvious task [is to add] to the happiness, wisdom, and comfort of the members of its community."¹ Many modern museums struggle to make their institutions valuable to the communities that they serve. Museums of social conscience, as an emerging genre of the museum field, must prove their value on a daily basis. In an experience based industry these museums must not only draw in visitors, but assist them in connecting to the organizational mission. For social conscience museums, like the industry at large, there are no physical byproducts to illustrate a job well done. The closest quantitative measure of a museum's success is the volume of visitation; however, counting the number of visitors cannot accurately measure the effectiveness of the museum's message. Museums must turn to qualitative measures to judge the success of programs and exhibits. One of the best qualitative measures of a museum's performance and impact is to look at the response of the community. By actively connecting to the intended audience, museums ensure their longevity and impact. Movies, books, and even restaurants can be made or broken through word of mouth; it's the way of the experience economy. The same holds true for museums, especially the often controversial, developing social conscience museum genre.

¹ John Cotton Dana, quoted in Stephen E. Weil, "Five Meditations," *Museum News* (January/February 1993): 29.

Protests

Museums of social conscience discuss difficult topics from immigration to genocide. For many of these institutions, the issues raised at their museums are sources of conflict and debate within their local communities and even the nation. While a social conscience museum hopes that all members of the community respond to its message in a positive manner, there is often negative criticism. Audiences that are unused to controversial dialoguing within the walls of a museum shy away from institutions known for the technique. Likewise, individuals who are uncomfortable with topics like slavery, immigration, internment, or genocide will avoid facing these issues on exhibit. There are some instances where the personal beliefs of individuals or groups have caused issues, resolved and ongoing, for museums of social conscience.

Through rain and sleet and cold of night, Jacqueline Smith has spent the last twenty-one years camped out in front of the site of the National Civil Rights Museum (NCRM) in Memphis, Tennessee, as seen in Figure 5.1. Smith was the last resident of the Loraine Hotel before its conversion into a museum space.² Her protest began as a resident and employee of the hotel, remaining in the space despite many requests made by the authorities, even after the utilities were shut off.³ Smith was forcibly removed by the police in 1988 and took up residence on Mulberry Street directly in front of the museum.⁴ She claims that the “sacred ground [of the Loraine Hotel] is being exploited”

² Fulfillthedream.net, “Jacqueline Smith,” Fulfillthedream.net, <http://www.fulfillthedream.net/pages/mlk.jsmith1.html> (accessed February 20, 2009).

³ Fulfillthedream.net, “Jacqueline Smith 4,” Fulfillthedream.net, <http://www.fulfillthedream.net/pages/mlk.jsmith4.html> (accessed February 20, 2009).

⁴ Associated Press, “Protester is Removed from King Motel Site,” *New York Times*, July 17, 1990.

and that NCRM is a symbol of hate that is disgraceful to the memory of Martin Luther King Jr.⁵



Figure 5.1. Jacqueline Smith and her protest site on August 11, 2008. Photograph by Elizabeth Higgins.

Smith believes that the site would better honor the King legacy by serving the poor and hungry in the community instead of what she considers a “Disney-style tourist attraction” that glorifies the weapon used to assassinate King.⁶ The very exhibits, tools, and messages that distinguish NCRM as a social conscience institution are the motive for Smith’s protest. From her website, Smith proclaims:

Do we really want our children to gaze upon exhibits from the Ku Klux Klan, do we need our children to experience mock verbal abuse as they enter a replica bus depicting the Montgomery bus boycott. Do we have so little imagination, that we

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Fulfillthedream.net, “Why Boycott the Civil Rights Museum,” Fulfillthedream.net, <http://www.fulfillthedream.net/pages/mlk.boycott1.html> (accessed February 20, 2009).

need to spend thousands of taxpayers dollars recreating a fake Birmingham jail, to understand that Dr. King was incarcerated?⁷

Additionally, Smith claims that the acquisition of the Loraine Hotel for the establishment of NCRM was a part of a widespread “land grab” in Memphis during the 1980s leading to the gentrification of the area.⁸ Jacqueline Smith is armed with a lawn chair, tent, and various signs as she voices her concerns to just about anybody who is willing to listen.

The Holocaust Industry, written by Norman G. Finkelstein, presents a challenge to an entire faction of museums of social conscience; it is a direct protest against Holocaust museums around the world. Finkelstein claims that Holocaust museums “accrue” “considerable dividends... from this specious victimhood.”⁹ He continues his assault against these museums by expressing his opinion that the American Jewry exploits and exaggerates the Holocaust experience in order to gain political power and influence. *The Holocaust Industry* shocked many in the Jewish community; however, many Muslim and militant groups have expressed their support for Finkelstein and his work. Groups like Radio Islam, Light Upon Light Islam, and even Canadian Neo-Nazi Paul Fromm and other Holocaust Deniers who operate Neo-Nazi websites, like the Zundelsite, have all come out in support of *The Holocaust Industry*.¹⁰ The opinions of Finkelstein do not dissuade large audiences from visiting Holocaust museums in the

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Fulfillthedream.net, “Jacqueline Smith 2,” Fulfillthedream.net, <http://www.fulfillthedream.net/pages/mlk.jsmith2.html> (accessed February 20, 2009).

⁹ Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry*, 2nd ed, (New York: VERSO, 2003), 3.

¹⁰ Radio Islam, “Radio Islam: Quotes from Norman G. Finkelstein’s Book ‘The Holocaust Industry’,” Radio Islam, <http://www.radioislam.org/islam/english/revision/finkelsteinquotes.htm> (accessed February 21, 2009); Light Upon Light, “The Holocaust Industry,” Light Upon Light, <http://www.lightuponlight.com/islam/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=310> (accessed February 21, 2009); and Zundelsite, “Zundelsite ZGram – December 10, 2000,” Zundelsite, <http://www.zundelsite.org/english/zgrams/zg2000/zg0012/001210.html> (accessed February 21, 2009).

United States; however, this publication undermines the message and vision of these institutions.

The majority of social conscience museums do not experience a complete protest of their very nature on a daily basis. Instead, protests and criticism come to these museums sporadically and can be dealt with on a case by case basis. In 2006, the Museum of African American History in Boston (MAAHB) was the target of the North East White Pride (NEWP) organization.¹¹ NEWP, led by Pat O'Donovan, planned to disrupt MAAHB's annual program for Martin Luther King Jr. Day, which features the Boston Youth Orchestra.¹² The NEWP plan was to gather a large group to stand in protest in front of the MAAHB offices near the Boston Common. Approaching the site an hour after the announced beginning of the protest, NEWP was halted by officials and warned against protesting. A "restless and swelling crowd" of over two hundred "angry anti-racists" was waiting for the ten, tardy NEWP protesters.¹³ The overwhelming community support working in tandem with the institution and authorities was able to peaceably resolve the situation so that the event could continue as planned.

When the actions of the institution, not its interpretation or mission, conflict with members of the museum's community, protests can and do take place. The battle over 99 Orchard Street is a noteworthy example of this type of protest. The Holtzman family has lived, worked, and owned the building at 99 Orchard Street since 1918 when the family immigrated from Europe. When Ruth Abrams purchased the abandoned building next

¹¹ Susy Buchanan, "Hate Without Hassles: New England Neo-Nazis Avoid Squabbles," *Intelligence Report* 128, (Winter 2007), <http://www.splcenter.org/intel/intelreport/article.jsp?aid=868> (accessed February 21, 2009).

¹² Harrington and Frazier.

¹³ Buchanan.

door in 1988, Mimi and Lou Holtzman were excited for the addition and supportive of her efforts.¹⁴ Unfortunately, this good neighbor spirit dwindled and eventually died as Abrams began making offers on the Holtzmans' property even after they refused to sell.¹⁵ December 9, 2001, as New York City and the nation were still reeling from the September 11th attack, a notice appeared in the *New York Daily News* that the owners of 99 Orchard Street had to appear before a committee in order to plead their case to keep the property or else it would be given to the Tenement Museum under eminent domain.¹⁶ The Tenement Museum wanted 99 Orchard Street because it shared a wall with the museum and would easily be converted into additional collections, exhibit, and event spaces as well as allow for the addition of an elevator.¹⁷ Furthermore, Abrams claimed that acquiring 99 Orchard Street would bolster the local economy by:

Enabl[ing] the Museum to serve over 200,000 people, including local school children and residents, as well as clients and staff of area organizations. Those 200,000 plus people will come with money in their pockets. As has always been true of the Museum's visitors, they will shop at the small stores and eat at the restaurants that dot the Lower East Side, Chinatown, and Little Italy - so many of them owned by immigrants.¹⁸

¹⁴ Mimi Holtzman, phone interview by the author, New York, NY, February 22, 2009; and Ruth Abrams, letter to Louis Holtzman, June 14, 1988, copy available at http://www.tenementnauseum.com/99orchard/ruth_abram_letter.jpg.

¹⁵ Ruth Abrams, letter to Louis Holtzman, October, 1, 1999, copy of letter available at http://www.tenementnauseum.com/99orchard/Ruth_Mill_Offer.jpg.

¹⁶ Empire State Development Corporation, "Public Notice," *New York Daily News*, December 9, 2001.

¹⁷ Ruth Abrams, "Statement Regarding the Planned Acquisition of 99 Orchard | Tenement Museum," The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, <http://www.tenement.org/statement.html> (accessed February 22, 2009).

¹⁸ Ibid.

The Holtzman's refused to relinquish their family's history to be used for storage by an organization that they felt was run by a "bad apple."¹⁹ Their lawyer informed them that he could not win the case for them; they had a responsibility to call attention to the cause. The Holtzman's "plastered" their property with signs reading "The Museum Will Not Take My Home," and "Eminent Domain Abuse," and took up daily residence in front of their building to discuss their situation with anyone who passed by.²⁰ Mimi Holtzman confessed that they wanted to "show the press and the public that [the] were being railroaded out of [their] home."²¹ Their tactics worked. The press latched onto the story of 99 Orchard Street and gave the Holtzmans' amazing coverage. Their story was told to residents of New York City and to people across the country, the story was even picked up by the LA Times.²² The public was outraged at the actions of the Tenement Museum, and when the time came for the city to vote on the issue it was dropped in order to "save face."²³ In the end Lou and Mimi Holtzman kept the rights to their private property at the expense of their faith in the museum community.²⁴ They maintain ownership of the property but moved to a new apartment a few blocks away; they acknowledge that while

¹⁹ Holtzman.

²⁰ Brian Kates, "Immigrants Museum VS. Local Lower East Side Divided," *New York Daily News*, April 28, 2002.

²¹ Holtzman.

²² Josh Getlin, "The Nation; Museum Plan Hits Too Close to Home; Dispute: Space- hungry N.Y. tenement exhibit seeks to evict tenement neighbors. 'The irony just smacks you in the face,' opponent says," *Los Angeles Times*, April 18, 2002.

²³ Holtzman.

²⁴ Ibid.

they love their building, they are unable to live next door to an organization that caused them so much stress.²⁵

Positive Community Response

Negative criticism is important to consider for any institution, but it is equally important to accentuate the positive. Museums of social conscience have rapidly become beloved institutions in communities across America. Public support can come in several forms. The willingness of a museum's community to stand up against protestors and rally around the institution in times of need is not the only means for measuring community support.

The growth of the genre itself, as described in Chapter Two, illustrates its popularity among diverse audiences. The majority of these museums were established in the last fifteen years, including the Tenement Museum and countless ethnically based institutions. Holocaust museums are a product of this growth. Very few Holocaust museums were created, or even conceived, before 1990; in fact, three Holocaust museums and one memorial were established in Texas since 1993. The rapid growth does not just apply to the physical structures but to the visitation numbers as well. Holocaust museums from Washington D.C. to El Paso are receiving visitors in droves. The former Director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Ann Farrington, stated that the museum's staff was "astounded by the number of people who want to understand [the] history [of the Holocaust] in both an emotional and factual way."²⁶ The

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ann Farrington, quoted in Roberta Smith, "Holocaust Museum Adjusting to Relentless Flood of Visitors," *New York Times*, December 23, 1993.

creation and success of the International Coalition of Historic Site stands as a symbol of the expansion and acceptance of the genre. In order for the organization to exist and thrive it must be supported by the institutions it represents and the communities that it serves.

Support is illustrated in the words and actions of the museum's constituency. Word of mouth advertising is the primary method for raising visitation for many museums of social conscience as well as gaining new members for the Coalition. Thanks to the plethora of communication technologies and media outlets, positive reviews can come in many forms. Museums of social conscience follow in the long museum tradition of visitor logs to record the opinions of museum goers.²⁷ While this technique is very useful, these museums are turning to new technologies to accomplish the same task. By creating institutional accounts on popular social networking websites, social conscience museums are able to connect with their audience on an individual level. Blogging websites, Facebook, Myspace, and even Twitter play host to many social conscience museums. These sites track the community response to museum by counting the number of views a page receives, allowing visitors to subscribe or become a fan of the institution's page, and even enables visitors to post their own thoughts about their experiences at the museum. The Tenement Museum uses their blog to discuss the history of their site, items in their collection that are not on exhibit, and even other issues raised by other museums of social conscience, like Japanese internment.²⁸ Facebook pages for MAAHB, the Virginia and Florida Holocaust Museums, the Tenement Museum, and the

²⁷ Harrington and Frazier.

²⁸ The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, "Tenement Museum Blog," Blogspot, <http://tenement-museum.blogspot.com/> (accessed February 21, 2009).

Japanese American National Museum inform members about museum hours, current museum activities, and upcoming events while enabling them to interact with one another and share their opinions. USHMM and the Tenement Museum have entered the most recent trend by establishing Twitter pages, which enables a museum to deliver small, regular updates to their members “in the fashion they choose.”²⁹ However, visitor reviews, support, and criticism do not just exist on museum created websites. Personal blogs can contain information about a visitor’s experience at a museum of social conscience, and it is important for the institution to be aware of what its visitors are saying.

Museums of social conscience are strongly supported by the communities that they serve because although the issues raised at these institutions are difficult to discuss, they are universally important. This community support does not apply only to large, nationally recognized institutions like the Tenement Museum, USHMM, or even the National Museum of the American Indian. Small ethnically based museums, Holocaust museums, and other social conscience institutions in towns of every size are drawing in crowds and garnering support, even when they have not finished the preservation process or installed exhibits. The Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation began as a simple one room special exhibit created by the founder, Sally Roesch Wagner, and through the support of several women’s activist groups the Matilda Joslyn Gage house in Fayetteville, New York was purchased in 2002.³⁰ Since this time, the site has been open by appointment

²⁹ Leslie, “10 Lessons Museums Can Learn From Twitter,” Museum Blogging, entry posted on February 14, 2008, <http://museumblogging.com/2008/02/14/10-lessons-museums-can-learn-from-twitter/> (accessed February 21, 2009).

³⁰ Wagner, interview.

and for special tours as they continue to raise funds in a capitol campaign for preservation and interpretation.

Currently, a few poster board displays are scattered throughout the first floor rooms and the parlor is inhabited by two, simple display case housing a few three dimensional objects uncovered in the MJGF archaeological digs, seen in Figure 5.2. On top of having no regular schedule for visitors, the museum tells a complicated, and sometimes controversial, story. The MJGF interpretive narrative has been broken into five key components: early women's rights activism, the Underground Railroad and Abolitionists, the "Haudenosaunee values and Native sovereignty," Frank L. Baum and "Oz as a Feminist utopia," as well as the separation of church and state, which Gage wrote extensively about in her book *Women, Church and State*.³¹ The house and its history are unique in many ways. It is one of a select few Underground Railroad houses open to the public in New York, one of only three women's history sites open to the public in New York, and it is the only house open to the public where Frank L. Baum, author of *The Wizard of Oz*, spent any amount of time.³² In fact, a rare photograph taken by Baum of the Gage house's front parlor is the basis for future interpretation.³³ Despite the complicated story that has yet to be fully realized, the Fayetteville community is highly supportive of the fledgling museum. Why does a developing institution receive relatively unquestioned support from a small town community? It is because MJGF

³¹ The Matilda Joselyn Gage Foundation, *The Matilda Joselyn Gage Home: Crossroads of Social Justice History*, (Fayetteville: The Matilda Joselyn Gage Foundation, 2007], 1; and Wagner, interview.

³² The Matilda Joselyn Gage Foundation, "History of the Foundation," The Matilda Joselyn Gage Foundation, <http://www.matildajoslyngage.org/history.htm> (accessed February 22, 2009); and Wagner, interview.

³³ Wagner, interview.

makes it a priority to be a priority to Fayetteville. In the words of the Director, MJGF strives to “act locally while thinking globally.”³⁴



Figure 5.2. Matilda Joslyn Gage House parlor, November 11, 2008. Photographed by Elizabeth Higgins

In 2008 MJGF hosted the Wonderful Weekend of Oz, a conference for the International Wizard of Oz Club, which drew in crowds from across the country.³⁵ Guests to Fayetteville were “delighted with the warm welcome from the community,” which included Oz related window displays, film screenings, and the 7th Annual Gage

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Sally Roesch Wagner, “Opinion: Gage Foundation Grateful,” *Eagle Newspapers*, November 5, 2008.

Foundation Benefit Auction hosted at the local Willington House restaurant.³⁶ Café Milan, a local restaurant, created the Matilda Joslyn Gage sandwich in honor of Gage for the event and the Limestone Grille created a thematic Lollipop cocktail for the Baum guests.³⁷ By bringing in visitors to the museum MJGF brings tourists to their sleepy village, effectively making the museum an integral part of the local economy. MJGF would not have been able to handle the over fifteen hundred attendees for this event without the support of their local community and Fayetteville could not have received such a high influx of visitors without the museum.³⁸ Sponsoring events like the annual Matilda Joslyn Gage Essay Contest at the Fayetteville-Manlius High School and performances of plays written by local volunteers about Gage's legacy further endears MJGF to the community.³⁹

Thankfully, because of the efforts of Wagner and her volunteers, the people of Fayetteville are not fair weather friends of MJGF. It is the ongoing support of the village of Fayetteville that enables MJGF to continue its successful capitol campaign in the midst of an economic recession. It supplies the museum with a steady stream of willing volunteers and prevents a high volunteer turnover rate.⁴⁰ It inspires members of the

³⁶ Wagner, interview; Wagner, "Opinion: Gage Foundation Grateful"; and The Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation, "Join the Oz Fans in Fayetteville this October," *The Engager*, (Spring 2008): 1.

³⁷ Wagner, interview; and Sally Roesch Wagner, "Wonderful Weekend of Oz--Why Oz in Fayetteville?," *The City of Fayetteville, NY*, <http://www.fayettevilleny.gov/NewsDetail.aspx?id=88> (accessed February 21, 2009).

³⁸ Sally Roesch Wagner, "Wonderful Weekend of Oz a big success," *The Post-Standard*, November 6, 2008.

³⁹ The Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation, "2008 Essay Contest Winners," *The Engager*, (Spring 2008): 6.

⁴⁰ Wagner, interview.

village to volunteer their time to assist in the annual archaeological digs.⁴¹ Community acceptance of the museum manifests itself in the kind words of volunteers and visitors as well as the actions of local businesses. The Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce has stepped forward to partner with MJGF on all future Wonderful Weekend of Oz events.⁴² Local churches invite MJGF staff and volunteers to come talk to their congregations about Gage's views on religious freedom. Syracuse University hosts Sally Roesch Wagner for annual lectures to discuss the various issues interpreted at the museum. Syracuse Soap Works, a local specialty soap manufacturing company, approached Wagner to create signature soap for the museum.

Figure 5.3. Matilda's Rose Revival soap. Photograph by Elizabeth Higgins.

⁴² Ibid.

The end product, seen in Figure 5.3, features a flower known to be a part of Gage's garden and a favorite in her writings, the American Beauty rose.⁴³ Matilda's Rose Revival soap comes complete with a portrait of Gage on the front as well as a brief biography and information about the museum on the back.

Funding Conscience

The importance of cultivating a strong connection between a museum of social conscience and the community that it serves cannot be underestimated. This connection grants the institution relevance, encourages volunteering, aids in event coordination, and elicits another major byproduct of community support, financial donations. Fundraising is a continuous process for any museum, including social conscience museums. Ruth Abrams confesses that she was often frustrated trying to find donors for the unconventional Tenement Museum.⁴⁴ She recalls:

While anyone who must raise funds to sustain a museum will tell you that it is difficult, I, who came to the task with over twenty years of fundraising experience, realized that this was more daunting than other projects. The reason soon became clear. Foundations accustomed to funding traditional museums could not categorize the Tenement Museum... While I was actually delighted that the Tenement Museum might be confused with a social service for the immigrant poor, I knew that the question meant the foundation would not fund the Tenement Museum. [At the same time] foundations that funded social service and/or advocacy routinely rejected our proposals saying "We don't fund museums."⁴⁵

Countless social conscience museums have found themselves in similar no-win situations when trying to find financial support. Not all museums can be fortunate enough to

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Abrams, Ruth. "Harnessing the Power of History," 126.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 125-126.

receive a majority of their funding from the federal government, like USHMM. It was the lack of understanding among funding organizations and the museum community that prompted Abrams to create the International Coalition for Historic Site Museums of Conscience.

However, several organizations are beginning to understand the vision of social conscience museums and stepping up to support their efforts. The Tenement Museum and the Coalition have received significant funds from the Open Society Institute, the Rockefeller Foundation, Ford Foundation, the Oak Foundation, and the Henry M. Jackson Foundation. In fact, in 2006 the Ford Foundation granted “\$1.1 million” “to support the Coalition’s launch as an international organization.”⁴⁶ Other social conscience museums, like MJGF, find major funding sources through related affinity groups.⁴⁷ In the last decade, traditional museum centered granting organizations have begun to recognize and support museums of social conscience. The National Park Service supports several social conscience sites and museums including the Tenement Museum, the Coalition, MAAHB, and the National Women’s Rights Historic Park.⁴⁸ Additionally, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) has provided up to \$500,000 in grants to the Tenement Museum, the Coalition, MJGF, and MAAHB.⁴⁹ Through these organizational grants and corporate donations, the Coalition was able to

⁴⁶ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, *A Brief History*, 4.

⁴⁷ Wagner, interview.

⁴⁸ Gee, interview; and Museum of African American History Boston, “Museum of African American History – Our Supporters,” Museum of African American History, <http://www.afroammuseum.org/supporters.htm> (accessed February 23, 2009).

⁴⁹ Gee, interview; International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, *A Brief History*, 4; Museum of African American History Boston, *Beverly A. Morgan-Welch: Executive Director*, (Boston: Museum of African American History Boston, 2007), 1; and Wagner, interview.

raise over \$900,000 dollars in the 2008 fiscal year.⁵⁰ Institutions, including MJGF, are even seeking federal government grants for environmentally friendly preservation from the Environmental Protection Fund, which are limited to roughly a dozen grants per year per state.⁵¹ A few other significant granting institutions include The National Trust for Historic Preservation, Heritage New York, Bank of America, as well as many State and local governments, just to name a few.⁵² In an attempt to encourage relevant programming and support its membership, the Coalition has created a granting program for the development of interpretation and staff learning exchanges.⁵³ Unfortunately, no matter how generous the government, corporations, or major museum institutions can be towards museums of social conscience, these granting organizations cannot be the sole source of income for these museums.

In order to cover operating and interpretational cost, museums of social conscience are turning to creative funding methods. Museums of social conscience are not immune to the problems faced by more traditional museums; gift shop and ticket sales cannot support all of the diverse functions of a museum. Many social conscience museums, including the Tenement Museum, are responding to the current economic recession by cutting ticket costs to attract visitors.⁵⁴ By seeking out alternative avenues

⁵⁰ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, *A Brief History*, 4.

⁵¹ The Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation, *The Gage Foundation Receives an EPF Grant: July 31, 2006*, (Fayetteville: The Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation, 2006), 1.

⁵² Museum of African American History Boston, "Museum of African American History – Our Supporters,"; and The Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation, *The Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation Receives Grant Funding*, (Fayetteville: The Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation, 2007), 1.

⁵³ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, *Overview*, 1.

⁵⁴ Max van Balgooy, "Tenement Museum Offering Tours at a Discount << National Trust Historic Sites Weblog," National Trust Historic Sites Weblog, entry posted January 15, 2009,

for funding opportunities that take place outside of the museum structure, these institutions are hoping to ensure sustainability. Attempting to expand the realm of physical and online gift shop sales, social conscience museums are turning to popular alternatives like GoodSearch and Shopformuseums.com, including MJGF, African American Museum of Philadelphia, Holocaust Museum Houston, and the Japanese American National Museum.⁵⁵ GoodSearch is a Yahoo sponsored search engine geared for nonprofit fundraising. Museums link members to GoodSearch, which functions like any other search engine, where every search performed earns the institution approximately a penny and every purchase made through GoodSearch Mall returns roughly three percent of the total back to the participating museum.⁵⁶ Similarly, Shopformuseums.com functions on the principle of museum supporters using their normal shopping habits to benefit the institution. By accessing stores like Ebay, Amazon, iTunes and Avon through Shopformuseums.com, visitors are able to access special offers

<http://historicsites.wordpress.com/2009/01/15/tenement-museum-tours-discount/> (accessed February 22, 2009).

⁵⁵ Shop for Museums, "Shop for Museums :: MuseumInfo :: Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation," Shop for Museums, <http://www.shopformuseums.com/MuseumInfo.aspx?MuseumID=281&aId=&oId=&pId=> (accessed February 23, 2009); Shop for Museums, "Shop for Museums :: Museum Info :: African American Museum of Philadelphia," Shop for Museums, <http://www.shopformuseums.com/MuseumInfo.aspx?MuseumID=81&aId=&oId=&pId=> (accessed February 23, 2009); Shop for Museums, "Shop for Museums :: Museum Info :: Holocaust Museum Houston," Shop for Museums, <http://www.shopformuseums.com/MuseumInfo.aspx?MuseumID=1052&aId=&oId=&pId=> (accessed February 23, 2009); and Shop for Museums, "Shop for Museums :: MuseumInfo :: Japanese American National Museum," Shop for Museums, <http://www.shopformuseums.com/MuseumInfo.aspx?MuseumID=548&aId=&oId=&pId=> (accessed February 23, 2009).

⁵⁶ GoodSearch, "About GoodSearch : GoodSearch : Support your favorite charity or school," GoodSearch, <http://www.goodsearch.com/About.aspx> (accessed February 23, 2009).

while a portion of the sales benefits the selected museum.⁵⁷ Both services are completely free for the participating museums, earning revenue primarily from advertisers.⁵⁸ Museums interested in this type of fundraising should keep in mind that the key for this fundraising outlet is to properly inform the museum's membership of its existence. Simply placing a link to the museum's GoodSearch or Shopformuseums.com account is not utilizing this tool to its fullest potential.

Museums of social conscience that are connected to their local and conceptual communities can draw on those influences to create dynamic, relevant fundraisers. By combining forces with the Boston Public Library and the Boston Youth Orchestra, as well as numerous local businesses and vendors, MAAHB is able to host an annual celebration for Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday that not only educates and entertains the community but also brings in revenue to the organization.⁵⁹ MAAHB also initiated the "Black Heritage Trail" in both Boston and Nantucket, which bolsters ethnically based tourism, furthers the museum's mission and educational goals, as well as raises its earned income.⁶⁰ MJGF is now in the process of developing a similar "Trail" style program with the National Park Service entitled "National Women's Rights History Trail," which would include and benefit the Gage House, the Harriet Tubman House, and the Elizabeth Cady Stanton House.⁶¹ On top of their programs, conferences, and lectures MJGF also

⁵⁷ Shop For Museums, "Shop For Museums :: FAQ," Shop For Museums," <http://www.shopformuseums.com/faq.aspx> (accessed February 23, 2009).

⁵⁸ GoodSearch; and Shop For Museums, "Shop For Museums :: FAQ."

⁵⁹ Harrington and Frazier.

⁶⁰ Harrington and Frazier.

⁶¹ The Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation, "History of the Foundation."

fosters close relationships with various feminist and women's rights organizations. These connections create fundraising opportunities from new conferences and publications to special programs at the museum site. One significant example of conceptual supporters turning into fundraisers involves the famous women's rights activist, Gloria Steinem. Steinem has been a long time support of the mission of MJGF and even appeared in a short documentary about the site.⁶² For the 2008 Christmas season, Steinem composed a five page essay regarding Matilda Joslyn Gage and the relevance of her work in the modern society. This essay was given to MJGF exclusively to use for fundraising purposes. Interested parties including MJGF members, women's studies scholars, women's rights activists, and Steinem fans were given the opportunity to make a twenty six dollar donation in exchange for access to the article.⁶³ For a larger gift of two hundred dollars, donors received a hand signed copy of the Steinem essay in a commemorative case.⁶⁴ By cultivating connections, MJGF was able to offer a physical product that appealed to a broader audience than their own membership and visitors.

Every function of a museum is in some way influenced by the community's response to the institution; it is especially important to museums of social conscience whose mission, interpretation, and programming for sensitive subjects.⁶⁵ Positive community response brings in visitors, funding, and volunteers to all parts of the museum. Conversely, negative influences within the community can stop visitation,

⁶² The Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation, Great Plains Productions, LLC and MonaInk Films, Inc., *Looking For Matilda Joslyn Gage in the 21st Century*, (Fayetteville: The Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation, Great Plains Productions, LLC and MonaInk Films, Inc, 2006).

⁶³ Sally Roesch Wagner, email message to the author on December 11, 2008.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Abrams, "Harnessing the Power of History," 132.

funding, and volunteers. Museums of social conscience must strive to maintain strong connections within their local communities, press, and affinity groups. These relationships can make or break an institution during protests, economic downturns, or political conflicts. There are many ways to raise community esteem for a museum of social conscience. Become a vital figure in the local community. In order to make members of the community feel like they have a vested interest in the success of the institutions, museums must open up their doors and embrace the diversity of their audience. Creating opportunities to reach out into the community can range from MJGF fostering relationships with a local Girl Scout Troup to the Tenement Museum hosting English for Speakers of Other Languages classes.⁶⁶ MAAHB educator L'Merchie Frazier conducts lecture series in colleges, high schools, and even preschools in order to engage new audiences outside the physical walls of the museum.⁶⁷ Her efforts have helped to create an informed, active, and supportive community that assists MAAHB's mission, fundraising efforts, and even halting violent protestors. When a local bar keeper in Boston hung racist images during Black History Month, the community was appalled. When the authorities stepped in to diffuse the tense situation the bar keeper was required to donate funds to MAAHB to create a program that dealt with the "history of the relationship between Blacks and the Irish in Boston."⁶⁸ By addressing specific needs within the community and using the museum as an avenue to fulfill those needs, museums of social conscience will gain lifelong supporters.

⁶⁶ Wagner, interview. Abrams, "Harnessing the Power of History," 137-138.

⁶⁷ Harrington and Frazier.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

From a local ethnically based museum to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC, museums of social conscience share a common goal: employing history to create a socially aware public. These institutions are vibrant, contributing members of the greater museum community. There were several key institutions that aided the development of the genre. First, the Civil Rights Movement helped to diversify museum visitors and employees; furthermore, it inspired the creation of many ethnically based institutions across the United States. Second, the Tax Reform Act of 1969, along with other factors, propelled education to the forefront of the museums industry. Finally, the establishment of numerous Holocaust museums within the United States opened the door for transforming empathy into understanding. However, the museums of social conscience genre has truly taken shape in the last twenty years.

There are very few formal publications regarding these institutions. This does not mean that there is an absence of information. By utilizing primary sources including interviews, websites, and firsthand accounts, this study offers a comprehensive perspective on museums of social conscience from collections and interpretation to community response. Audience demand has ensured the growth of the genre, yet it will take the acceptance of the greater museum community to guarantee its prolonged success.

Museums of social conscience are forward thinking institutions, which could seem counterproductive to their roles as educators of history. By using innovative

educational methods and collecting techniques, these institutions are not just informing the public but creating activists. The opportunity for development is great for this emerging genre. So what can be expected for the future of these institutions? As the main representative body, the Coalition is striving to improve programming and capacity within associated sites around the world. While they do intend to expand their efforts, the Coalition wants to maintain a manageable membership level while building upon its regional and thematic networks in the coming years.¹ However, due to the limited nature of its scope the Coalition cannot remain the sole representative organization for this museum movement. Many institutions are excluded from accreditation in the Coalition because their site has no direct relationship to the history that they interpret. The creation of an umbrella organization that can embrace all museums of social conscience will help to legitimize the genre and encourage collaboration. The future is always uncertain; however, the innovative methods and compelling narratives will continue to attract crowds, which is why the greater museum community needs to take notice.

The topics and issues discussed within the walls of a social conscience museum are not exclusive. They can and should be represented at more traditional institutions around the country. The educational techniques employed by museums of social conscience are not exclusively effective for a specific brand of museum. Is there a historical society or local history museum in the south that cannot interpret the history of slavery in America? Is there a historic house museum in the nation that cannot discuss the role and influence of women? Is it impossible for an art museum to discuss issues like genocide, displacement, or immigration? The answer to all of these questions is no.

¹ Gee.

Whether directly or indirectly, issues of conscience touch all aspects of society; it is important to address them in safe, public spaces.

Effectively connecting the past to the present is pivotal for interpretation at any museum, no matter what the affiliation. The difference between the interpretation at a museum of social conscience and a typical traditional history museum is the focus of these connections, the contemporary manifestations of issues of conscience. Coalition Program Director, Erica Gee, acknowledges that “there are lots of museums out there that have the potential but they don’t want to go there because they are intimidated by the [possible] ramifications, they don’t want to contend with issues like the legacy of slavery.”² By avoiding the issues that affect their communities, traditional museums run the risk of becoming irrelevant. First, museums need to identify the needs of their community and determine whether or not those issues pertain to the issues of conscience. Is the city going through a period of racial tension? Does the community have a large population of recent immigrants? Next, turn to the institution’s collections. Finding historic examples of current issues facing a community is a perfect example of connecting the past to the present. Instead of creating tours featuring the ceremonial china of an elite figure in the community’s past, search the collection for examples of common daily life that would have been used by new immigrants to the area. If the community has suffered a recent attack against women’s rights, highlight female associated objects and archival materials to illustrate the shift in gender roles in the community over time. The list could go on and on because each community possesses unique needs, collections, and audiences.

² Ibid.

This concept is not restricted to history museums, societies, or houses. The Sherwin Miller Museum of Jewish Art (SMMJA) in Tulsa, Oklahoma was founded in 1966 “in order to bring the local Jewish community an understanding of its heritage through artifacts, as well as to serve as a resource center for non-Jews to learn about Jewish history and culture.”³ Their collections include religious items, decorative art, sculpture, paintings, and photographic materials. SMMJA is and was the only Jewish centered museum in the region, and the staff realized that not interpreting the Holocaust would be a disservice to their community. The Kasier Holocaust Collection was dedicated in 1995 and “contains hundreds of objects donated by Oklahoma veterans who took part in the liberation of German concentration camps.”⁴ On August 25, 2000 a skinhead group desecrated over 90 Jewish graves in a local Tulsa cemetery. Two days later, the community came out to support the Jewish community, including SMMJA, by hosting an event at the site of the crime.⁵ While SMMJA was overwhelmed by the community support, the staff was understandably concerned by an anti Semitic hate crime in their city. To address this serious issue within their community SMMJA created an archive of records pertaining to hate crimes in Oklahoma. This archive is easily accessible by the public for research and has become a major talking point for docents conducting tours of the Holocaust exhibit. In fact, the second artifact on display in the

³ The Sherwin Miller Museum of Jewish Art, “The Sherwin Miller Museum of Jewish Art – Our History,” The Sherwin Miller Museum of Jewish Art, <http://www.jewishmuseum.net/about/history.html> (accessed February 24, 2009).

⁴ The Sherwin Miller Museum of Jewish Art, “Collections – Kasier Holocaust Collection,” The Sherwin Miller Museum of Jewish Art, <http://www.jewishmuseum.net/collections/kaiser.html> (accessed February 25, 2008).

⁵ Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Anti-Semitic Incidents – August and September 2000,” Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Anti-Semitism+and+the+Holocaust/Antisemitism+Monitoring+Forum/Anti-Semitic+Incidents+-+August+and+September++200.htm> (accessed February 25, 2009).

Holocaust exhibit is a blood stained Ku Klux Klan robe owned by a Tulsa Klan member. Other items on display in this portion of the exhibit include a newspaper clipping from a lynching in Georgia, Henry Ford's "propagation of the racist tome" *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, as well as photographs from the 2000 cemetery desecration.⁶ These objects illustrate that even though the Holocaust is over, racially motivated hate is not.

Another way to integrate the techniques employed by social conscience museums is to implement a facilitated discussion program into the interpretational plan at traditional museums. Applying new programming can be stressful on staff and museum members. Therefore, it is important to include the community in the planning processes.⁷ Create a dialogue with members of the community regarding what issues they would like to see addressed at the museum and use that as a basis for future interpretations. No matter how amazing an exhibit is, if the audience is not interested they will not come to see it. If the proposed program has a high probability of success if it meets with the institutional mission, is properly represented by the museum's collections, and is supported by the community. Instituting a dialogue program that does not relate to the institutions mission or collections can spell disaster. Before a dialoguing program of any size can be incorporated into a museum's repertoire the topic must be properly vetted and docents must be trained to facilitate.⁸ Facilitated discussion is more than just asking a series of questions. It requires patience and skill to guide visitor discussion.

⁶ James D. Watts Jr., "The Art of Remembering: Jewish Art Museum Get New Home on Zarrow Campus," *Tulsa World*, August 26, 2004.

⁷ Gee.

⁸ Ibid.

Ambition can kill a good program before it ever has a chance to succeed. When implementing a dialogue program for the first time, it is important to start small. Begin by incorporating facilitated discussion into a preexisting exhibit or tour.⁹ This gives staff, docents, and visitors a chance to experience facilitated discussion in a safe space, respond with their thoughts, and allow for adjustments. If this is successful for the institution then future exhibit and interpretational plans can be based around this dialoging component.

For institutions interested in beginning dialogue programs, there is help. “Kitchen Conversations: Democracy in Action at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum,” an article by museum founder Ruth Abrams, details the development and implementation of the Tenement Museum’s facilitated discussion program.¹⁰ This is an excellent article for institutions that have never operated a dialogue program because it addresses challenges brought about by board members, employees, and the community. The Coalition offers several programs geared to assisting museums with establishing pertinent programming. The first resource is a series of “program models,” which highlight and detail successful, ongoing programs created by Coalition members like the Tenement Museum, the Japanese American National Museum, and even the Gulag Museum in Russia.¹¹ In addition to the “program models” the Coalition often connects with various museums to discuss dialoging potential for planned exhibits. For example, the Science Museum of Minnesota approached the Coalition when they planned to bring in the United States

⁹ Gee and Pharaon.

¹⁰ Abrams, “Kitchen Conversations: Democracy in Action at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum,” 59-76.

¹¹ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, “Programs & Evaluation Models,” International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, <http://www.sitesofconscience.org/resources/programs/en/> (accessed February 26, 2009).

Holocaust Memorial Museum's traveling exhibit, "Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race."¹² The Coalition also offers regular anecdotal advice through their e-newsletter, *Matters of Conscience*.¹³ One of the most significant resources provided by the Coalition is the "Project Support Fund." The "Project Support Fund" provides guidance and funds to museums that seek "to inspire innovative strategies to assist the public in drawing connections" between historic and contemporary issues.¹⁴ There are two avenues for pursuing funds from the "Project Support Fund." First, the Coalition sponsors and assists in the development of programming including "human rights education programs, public dialogues, new exhibit formats that use memory and history to invite conversation or action on contemporary issues."¹⁵ The second facet of the "Project Support Fund" is the "Staff Exchange" program. During a "Staff Exchange" "representatives from one site visit another site to learn from or advise that site on a specific project."¹⁶ The Coalition supplies up to ten thousand dollars for each institution participating in the "Project Support Fund," which makes this a significant form of assistance that includes both advice and financial backing.

¹² Science Museum of Minnesota, "Science Museum of Minnesota – Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race," Science Museum of Minnesota, <http://www.smm.org/deadlymedicine/> (accessed February 26, 2009); United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/deadlymedicine/> (accessed February 26, 2009); and Gee.

¹³ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, "E-Newsletters," International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, <http://www.sitesofconscience.org/resources/newsletters/en/> (accessed February 26, 2009).

¹⁴ International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, "Project Support Fund," International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, <http://www.sitesofconscience.org/resources/project-support-fund/en/> (accessed February 26, 2009).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Museums hoping to create dialogue programs, large or small, should make use of these valuable resources and ideas. Advancing the general knowledge regarding museums of social conscience will improve the industry as a whole. Social conscience museums have a history of revolutionary thought that influences communities around the world. Innovative collecting enables dynamic exhibits and innovative interpretive methods, like facilitated dialogue and relevant connections. The combination of these elements exponentially increases the positive response from local communities, which heightens the effectiveness of the museum's message.

Museums function in the real world. Because of this, there are various restrictions on their collections and interpretations. In a perfect world, all museums could discuss the difficult issues addressed by museums of social conscience; however, this is not a perfect world, and ambitious employees can find themselves in hot water if they pursue too much change too fast. Traditional boards desire to stick to traditional methods. Similarly, donors can avoid funding unfamiliar programs featuring uncomfortable topics. While many museums can realistically integrate these interpretive techniques with support from the staff, board, donors, and the local community, there are many that cannot. The innovations made by museums of social conscience are beneficial to the entire museum community, but discretion should be used before implementing them.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience List of Institutional Members As of February 20, 2009

Argentina

Biblioteca Popular: Casa por la Memoria y la Cultura Popular
Centro Cultural por la Memoria de Trelew
Comisión de Homenaje a las Víctimas de Vesubio y Proto Banco
Dirección de Derechos Humanos - Asociación Seré
Museo de la Memoria – Rosario

Australia

Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales

Bangladesh

Bangladesh National Museum
Gandhi Ashram Trust
International Council of Museums, Bangladesh Office
Jamalpur Gandhi Ashram

Belgium

Le Bois du Cazier

Bosnia and Herzegovina

University of Sarajevo, Human Rights Center

Canada

Glenbow Museum

Dominican Republic

Museo Memorial de la Resistencia Dominicana

Ecuador

Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales – FLACSO

Ghana

Elmina Castle Museum
Ghana Museums and Monuments Board
Gramophone Records Museum & Research Centre of Ghana
Ofoase Reverential Slave Cleansing River
Sacred Slave Cleansing River

India

Navayana
Netaji Research Bureau
Sabarmati Ashram Preservation and Memorial Trust

Ireland

Museum of Free Derry

Japan

Kyoto Museum for World Peace of Japan

Kosovo

Discovery Center

Liberia

Civic Initiative, Inc.
Liberia Media Center

Norway

Center for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities

Paraguay

Museo de las Memorias: Dictadura y Derechos Humanos

Peru

Asociacion Paz y Esperanza
Instituto de Dialogo y Propuestas
Movimiento Ciudadano "Para que no se Repita"

Philippines

Task Force Detainees of the Philippines

Russia

Kolyma Gulag Museum
Krasnoyarsk Museum Center
Museum of History of Political Repression Tomsk NKVD Prison
State Museum of the Political History of Russia

Serbia

B92 Fund

Sierra Leone

Campaign for Good Governance

South Africa

Hector Pieterse Memorial Site and Museum
Human Rights Media Centre
Johannesburg Heritage Trust
McGregor Museum
National Heritage Council
Sophiatown, Trevor Huddleston CR Memorial Centre
South End Museum
The Workers Museum
University of Western Cape

Spain

Gernika Peace Museum

Thailand

Nonviolence International - Southeast Asia

United Kingdom

19 Princelet St.

United States

Albanian American Foundation
Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation
Beecher House Center for the Study of Equal Rights
Bosque Redondo Memorial at Fort Sumner State Monument
Boston African American National Historic Site
Bowne House Museum
Cambodian American Heritage Museum
Chicago Cultural Alliance
Duke Human Rights Center
Embassy of the Republic of South Africa
Fort Apache Heritage Foundation, Inc.
Heart Mountain, Wyoming Foundation
Imagining America
Iolani Palace
Iraq Memory Foundation
Jane Addams Hull-House Museum
Laurel Hill Cemetery
Levine Museum of the South
Lowell National Historical Park
Miller Family Descendents
Museum of African American History
Museum of Education
New Americans Museum
Palace of the Governors/New Mexico History Museum
Preserve Pennhurst Alliance
Save Ellis Island
South Africa Consulate General
Statue of Liberty National Monument and Ellis Island
The Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation
The St. Augustine's Project, Inc.
TNOVSA, Visanska-Starks House
Tribute WTC Visitor Center
University of Michigan, Department of American Culture, English, Art & Design
University of Texas at El Paso
Wing Luke Asian Museum

Who We Are

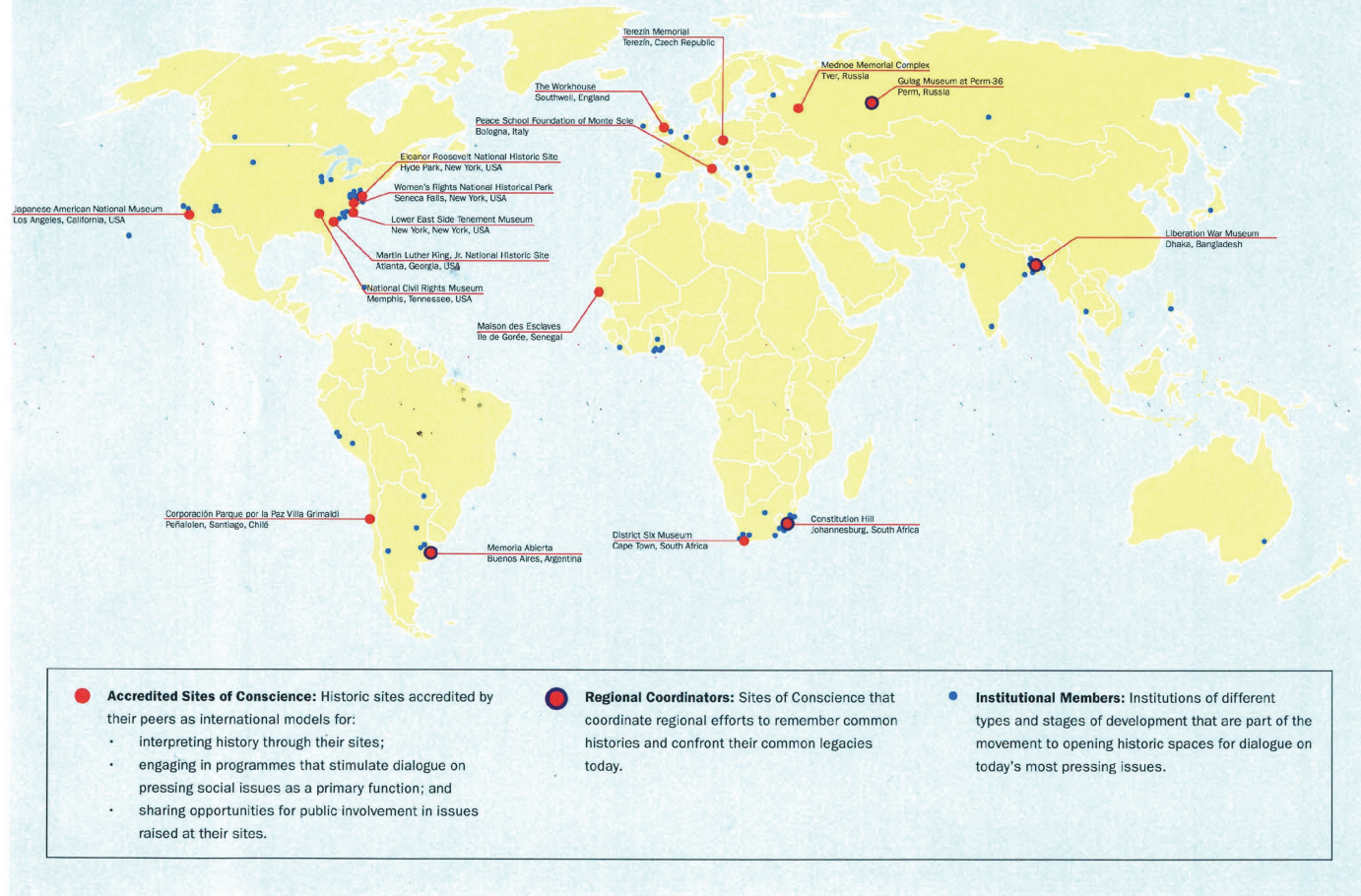


Figure A.1. Map of Coalition Sites. *Source:* International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience.

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