

ABSTRACT

Multiculturalism and the Museum: Three Case Studies

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With the rise of social history over the past several decades, educational institutions have increasingly been called upon to represent and showcase different cultural and minority groups within their walls. This has forced museums to reevaluate their exhibit spaces in order to create more inclusive, diverse interpretations. Basic museum practices have been challenged and the role of the museum has been called into question. Case studies of the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, the Oklahoma History Center, and the New Mexico History Museum showcase the different approaches museums today are taking within their exhibits to create as authentic and unbiased portrayals of different cultures past and present as possible.

Multiculturalism and the Museum: Three Case Studies

by

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“All representation is distortion; if no one version of the past is true, then the goal of creating a single representation of the past, no matter how inclusive, in a permanent museum display is doomed to failure,” wrote Misao Dean.¹ Though this perspective might seem overly gloomy, it does represent one of the critical challenges that museums face today. With the rise in recent decades of social history, museums and other educational institutions have been called upon to include a broader variety of cultural, racial, gender, and economic groups within their walls. This has forced museums to reassess their roles both in society at large and in their local communities in order to examine and explore how best to meet these new expectations. A number of social groups have sought and are seeking representation in a variety of museum settings, and change is clearly under way. This thesis will assess the success of three state history museums in including different racial/ethnic groups in their exhibits. To fully explore where history museums are today in terms of cultural inclusion, one must first look at where museums have come from and the roles often expected of them.

Many of the issues facing museums today have their roots in pre-nineteenth century attitudes surrounding culture and race, attitudes that were cemented in museum collections and displays. While the racist and prejudiced views held by mainstream Western society throughout history have been well documented and are generally well

¹ Misao Dean, “Managing Diversity in the Representation of BC History: Point Ellice House and ‘Chinatown’,” *BC Studies* no. 136 (2002/2003): 72, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 27, 2011).

known, it is important to note that these are the same views that influenced the direction taken by many a museum in the past. Initially, museums started as the private collections of elite and wealthy individuals, generally white men of European descent. Though these individuals often collected pieces from non-European, supposedly ‘primitive’ cultures, they would then interpret them in ways that romanticized their cultures while at the same time supposedly proving the minorities’ presumed inferiority. In this same manner, “museums [began to serve] not only as repositories of elite culture and national heritage, but also as spaces that categorized cultural differences along a hierarchy of race and class,” according to Anastasiz Loukaitou-Sideris and Carl Grodach.² There were instances however, where the display of ethnic and/or tribal objects in museums was rejected altogether. One well-known example revolves around George Brown Goode, a museum administrator with the Smithsonian in the late 1800s. He lamented the attention granted to the Smithsonian’s American Indian collection and believed that objects belonging to his own and what he presumed were America’s own Anglo ancestors were “of equal or greater importance” to the Native collections.³ Similarly, throughout the nineteenth century, many institutions chose to assert their power and that of the dominant, white culture through the exclusion of different peoples

² Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Carl Grodach, “Displaying and Celebrating the “Other”: A Study of the Mission, Scope, and the Roles of Ethnic Museums in Los Angeles,” *The Public Historian* 26, no. 4 (2004): 52, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/tpb.2004.26.4.49> (accessed July 27, 2011).

³ Gary Kulik, “Designing the Past: History-Museum Exhibitions from Peale to Present,” in *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*, ed. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989) 9.

from museum exhibit halls, exclusions that lent credence to the labeling of these sub-groups as “other and subordinate.”⁴

It was not until the American Civil Rights movement of the 1960s that these types of minority representations within museums began to be publicly questioned and criticized. The egalitarian ideal that emerged from the Civil Rights movement led to the idea that museum exhibits should also be integrated. Many suggested that different races, cultures, and ethnicities should not be displayed as separate entities but rather included as equal members in the overall museum story, portrayed next to and in the same manner as their Anglo counterparts. In 1970, a protest even erupted at the annual meeting of the American Association of Museums in New York with demonstrators who were angry at the lack of equal representation and at the perceived, and in many ways actual, oppression and racism openly on display in museum exhibits across the country.⁵

One dominant factor that has greatly affected the discussion of multiculturalism and diversity in museum exhibits has had to do with the different ideas various individuals have of what a museum should represent and what its purpose should be. When they were initially founded, museums were deemed to be temples of culture for the wealthy, white elite. They were also supposed to be places where individuals both of lesser means and from minority backgrounds were to come in order to be properly educated in the ways of the world. Most institutions of the day embraced these assumed roles and many continued to function as such until the rise of social history and the

⁴ Tony Bennett, “Museums and ‘the People’,” in *The Museum Time-Machine: Putting Cultures on Display*, ed. Robert Lumley (London: Routledge, 1990) 73.

⁵ James Oliver Horton and Spencer R. Crew, “Afro-Americans and Museums: Towards a Policy of Inclusion,” in *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*, ed. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989) 221.

public outcry mentioned above began to pressure these institutions to change. New ideas have since emerged over what a museum should be, what social role it should fill, and how it might best realize said role. For how some modern institutions function, Loukaitou-Sideris and Grodach write:

Although many museums retain their status as prestigious temples of art or science, many also aspire to serve as forums for the representation of diverse identities and points of view... They address issues, exhibit collections, and provide for communities once considered peripheral to the mainstream museum. Such museums have become vehicles to affirm and articulate new forms of identity and community, but also sites of conflict and contest, where different groups battle over appropriate definitions and representations.⁶

Nevertheless, the number of institutions that have fully embraced the roles noted by Loukaitou-Sideris and Grodach are still relatively few and far between. And the debate over the extent of a museum's responsibility to the public, particularly its responsibility concerning multiculturalism, remains open. However, no matter their presumed role or their assumed responsibility, today's museums are still expected to function in a way that satisfies nearly everyone and they are expected to do so through the presentation of accurate and valid exhibits.⁷ The problem is that what is considered accurate and valid is itself highly contestable. In many instances, institutions believe they are showcasing the facts when they are really telling but one story.⁸ For some, this is not necessarily a negative since this approach can open up dialogue for visitors to discuss the story thus allowing the forum function of museums to take center stage.

⁶ Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Carl Grodach, "Displaying and Celebrating the "Other": A Study of the Mission, Scope, and the Roles of Ethnic Museums in Los Angeles," *The Public Historian* 26, no. 4 (2004): 53, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/tph.2004.26.4.49> (accessed July 27, 2011).

⁷ David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 108.

⁸ Eric Gable, "Maintaining Boundaries, or 'Mainstreaming' Black History in a White Museum," in *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World*, ed. Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 191.

A central problem is that the object-based nature of museums and the overall museum experience tends to, as Henrietta Riegel notes, turn various people and cultures into objects “to be viewed and examined as exhibits.”⁹ As artifacts are crucial pieces for remembering different races and cultures, museum professionals spend a great deal of time focused on the technicalities of their display. “Representation and reality,” nevertheless, can often be found to be at odds in this scenario.¹⁰ The best way to exhibit an object does not always capture the reality of the object’s significance to its culture or persons. Still, the general populace views museums as authorities on culture. Inherent biases and places where information is excluded are often ignored. Visitors “look to museums for information” and yet, in many cases have found other cultures and races consigned “to an unspecified past, even when these groups exist in the present” writes Henrietta Riegel.¹¹ Given such misrepresentation, critics have taken issue with the ability of museums to “control, interpret, and impose classifications onto other peoples’ histories.”¹² Because of this, addressing biases in representation has become crucial for those who perceive the preservation of cultural diversity as central to the role of modern-day museums.¹³

History museums in particular have been embroiled in the debate over minority depictions in exhibits. These museums have the unique challenge of trying to accurately

⁹ Henrietta Riegel, “Into the Heart of Irony: Ethnographic Exhibitions and the Politics of Difference,” in *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World*, ed. Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 86.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 87-88.

¹² *Ibid.*, 89.

¹³ Edmund Barry Gaither, “‘Hey! That’s Mine’: Thoughts on Pluralism and American Museums,” in *Museums and Communities: the Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 58.

relate a country's, a state's, or a community's past to the public. The problem confronting history museums, however, is that history is subjective. Historical events can be and often are remembered differently by different groups of people. The overabundance of stories to tell and people to remember also tends to present a serious issue. Staffs must decide which stories and occurrences most warrant exhibit space in their museums. Because of this, Thomas Woods comments, "Museum historians have a tough job. They must constantly walk the thin line between their need to be popular with the public and their desire to make significant contributions to the popular audience's understanding of history."¹⁴ In the past, the general public has tended to prefer historical interpretations that celebrate a nation's or a state's accomplishments. Representations of conflict or controversial events have often been met with debate and even public condemnation, which has caused many an institution to gloss over historical facts and simply represent the past as patriotic and politically correct. The problem for minorities is that their history is often very much embedded in the controversial topics that history museums are afraid to broach. These groups therefore have either been entirely left out of museum interpretations or if they have been included, their history has been romanticized and idealized to fit the public's idea of the past.

History museums have often struggled to decide whether they should be representing heritage or history. Though many consider heritage and history to be one in the same, the difference between the two can greatly affect the direction a historical interpretation might take. Victoria Dickenson, discussing the work of David Lowenthal, makes the distinction that "while heritage can affirm and shape identity, it is in essence

¹⁴ Thomas A. Woods, "Getting Beyond the Criticism of History Museums: A Model for Interpretation," *The Public Historian* 12, no. 3 (1990): 77, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3378200> (accessed July 27, 2011).

exclusionary. One's heritage is particular and cannot readily be shared with someone outside one's particular group. Heritage lends itself to celebration, rather than examination."¹⁵ Susan Pearce has argued, "Heritage is about feeling good in the present," which has led Misao Dean to suggest that heritage is "not really about the past at all."¹⁶ History, on the other hand, should deal with the facts, good or bad. History, like heritage, can be viewed as celebratory. However, celebration and the stirring of patriotic fervor are not its goals. As the public tends to lean toward depictions of a nation's glories, history museums in the past have often allowed heritage to shape their interpretations. Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge point out that, "History becomes heritage in various ways. Artifacts become appropriated by particular historical agendas, by particular ideologies of preservation, by specific versions of public history, and by particular values about exhibition, design, and display."¹⁷ In many instances, this has left various races and cultures at odds with the mainstream public, and thus at odds with museums. Minority histories are often laced with tension and have been shaped by conflict. For some, these issues were seen as too provocative for the museum setting, particularly during the pre-1960s era of consensus history. In the past, not only was it thought that conflict unnecessarily provided visitors with unpleasant memories and shame, but serious scholars were of the belief that despite conflicts and

¹⁵ Victoria Dickenson, "History, Ethnicity and Citizenship: the Role of the History Museum in a Multi-Ethnic County," *Museum International* 58, no. 231 (2006): 28, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 27, 2011).

¹⁶ Susan Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections* (Washington: Smithsonian, 1992), 208, quoted in Misao Dean, "Managing Diversity in the Representation of BC History: Point Ellice House and 'Chinatown'," *BC Studies* no. 136 (2002/2003): 59, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 27, 2011).

¹⁷ Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge, "Museums are Good to Think: Heritage on View in India," in *Museums and Communities: the Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 36.

varied social and political disagreements, Americans all followed the same basic principles and lived according to the same ideology. This viewpoint accounted for many a museum interpretation where conflict was largely deemphasized or ignored, at least until the consensus history movement began to fade after the 1960s. Modern history museums, however, have been struggling to overcome and fix these exhibit issues as they relate to different cultures' histories.

Suffice it to say that there are many opinions relating to museums, historical display, and minority inclusion. From the basic progression of museum attitudes and content over time to varying ideas about public responsibility and the role of the museum to decisions made about what history to interpret and how, the recognition of museum deficiencies in terms of diversity and equality in exhibits is recent and the struggle for change is still highly contested. Nevertheless, no matter how one argues for inclusion or what ideas they have for increasing diversity in exhibits, today more than ever, history museums have the power with their interpretations to change public perceptions of the past and remove the rose-colored glasses often worn by society in relation to historical events. What is even more noteworthy is that they have the potential to do so in a manner that allows for all cultures to be presented together and celebrated while still recognizing the past struggles and injustices faced by particular groups of people. The question though is, have history museums taken advantage of this opportunity? What do their historical interpretations and exhibits look like today and how do these exhibits and interpretations relate to all cultures, minority and mainstream? To get an idea of the current exhibit practices of history museums in the United States, case studies were conducted of history museums at the state level in Texas, Oklahoma,

and New Mexico, and these will be discussed in the following chapters. First however, ideas surrounding culture and what it means must be defined, the progression and emergence of ethnic-specific exhibits over time needs to be laid out, and the problems, challenges, and potential future implications that museums face and have faced in their efforts to alter various cultural representations need to be highlighted in order for the case studies to prove impactful and insightful in discovering the current state of racial and cultural interpretations in American history museums.

CHAPTER TWO

Culture and Minority Inclusion

Before delving into the cultural and racial interpretations of today, we must consider what culture is and how it should be defined, both within a museum setting as well as outside of it. Defining culture and outlining the progress of racial and ethnic-specific museums and exhibits over time are necessary to assess the degree of progress in museums.

Though in many respects culture, race, and ethnicity can be viewed as distinct from one another, for the purposes of this examination, each of the three terms are used interchangeably. While they each have intricacies that make them unique, intricacies that can be used to differentiate between ideas about race, culture, and ethnicity, in terms of history museum displays, culture, race, and ethnicity are often presented in much the same way and include many of the same peoples. For this reason, the differentiating factors between the terms will not be highlighted. While the idea of race is widely understood, for culture and ethnicity, Edith W. King's definition outlines the idea best:

Ethnicity has been defined as a sense of peoplehood; a commonality derived from kinship patterns; a shared history; common experiences; common religious affiliations; a common language or linguistic commonalities; and shared values, attitudes, perceptions, modes of expression, and identity.¹

The idea of shared ideals has allowed for the creation of distinct groups of peoples, including different minorities often found to be at odds with the mainstream. For much of history, these minorities have been made into legends; they have been collected,

¹ Edith W. King, "Using Museums for More Effective Teaching of Ethnic Relations," *Teaching Sociology* 20, no. 2 (1992): 119, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1317393> (accessed September 10, 2011).

classified, toyed with, and counted for the sake of the majority.² Following this tradition, museums have been allowed to trivialize various cultures. Richard Handler defined this behavior as ‘cultural objectification,’ stating that the makeup of society is “a thing: a natural object or entity made up of objects and entities (‘traits’).”³ Sharon Macdonald goes further stating:

[Because of this, culture] gains its own reality and can be gazed at, learned from and fought for. Museums, which literally employ physical objects in their constitution of culture, are unusually capable among institutions of turning culture into an object: of materializing it. They have played a role not just in displaying the world, but in structuring a modern way of seeing and comprehending the world ‘as if it were an exhibit’.⁴

Though there are many problems with these presentations of and attitudes about culture and race, interpretations in museums have always been to some degree political.

Museums have historically catered to the mainstream population, framing stories to suit their ideas and beliefs, due in large part to the control of museums by the white elite.

While the controlling parties may have changed over time, though only slightly in many instances, the interpretations presented in museum exhibits can still largely follow the aforementioned political mindset. Even today, “decisions about how cultures are presented reflect deeper judgments of power and authority and can, indeed, resolve

² Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), 29.

³ Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 14, quoted in Sharon Macdonald, “Introduction,” in *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World*, ed. Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 7.

⁴ Sharon Macdonald, “Introduction,” in *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World*, ed. Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 7.

themselves into claims about what a nation is or ought to be as well as how citizens should relate to one another,” write Steven D. Lavine and Ivan Karp.⁵

These presentations then tend to separate cultures into distinct communities creating an “ours versus theirs,” “us versus them” mentality. Yet, as John Urry points out, “cultures do not exist in a pure state, hermetically sealed from each other and possessing a clear and distinct essence.”⁶ Races, cultures, and peoples intermix; traditions are often shared and people often influence one another. Interpretations, nevertheless, have regularly ignored this fact. For the purposes of exhibit, people of different cultures and race have become distinct and generally stand alone. Because of these presentations, Urry concludes, “all cultures are in a sense inauthentic and contrived. They all get remade as a result of the flows of people and images across national borders.”⁷ Unfortunately, this has meant that many an exhibit has come to embody the stereotypes surrounding different minorities. Individuals have been quick to content themselves with simple oppositions. Cultures and peoples have become either one thing or the other in such a manner that current commonalities among people are often ignored for the sake of past dissimilarities. In recent years however, museums have begun attempting to rectify the situation as an understanding has begun to circulate that minorities and cultures are not ideas to be placed in the past and viewed through historical lens. Rather, museums now have the opportunity both to show where different

⁵ Steven D. Lavine and Ivan Karp, “Introduction: Museums and Multiculturalism,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 2.

⁶ John Urry, “How Societies Remember the Past,” in *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World*, ed. Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 55.

⁷ *Ibid.*

peoples have been as well as to accentuate that, as Kalpana Nand emphasizes, “culture is a living, dynamic, ever-changing, and yet ever-constant thing – it is a story, a song, a dance performance, never a ‘dead thing’ to be represented in the form of an artefact to be looked at through glass.”⁸

For many years however, museums have aligned their interpretations with cultural and minority stereotypes, stereotypes with deep-rooted origins. Native Americans, for instance, have long battled typecasts. They have been called “noble and savage, princess and squaw, scout and vicious killer, profound artist and criminal, shaman and fraud, keeper of the forest and lazy good-for-nothing.”⁹ Using such imagery, groups like Native Americans, habitually deemed primitive by society, have then been displayed within museums in exhibits that have stressed and constructed their racial and evolutionary differences.¹⁰ For the most part, common practice has been for institutions to showcase minorities as exotic, allowing for the differences amongst peoples to take center stage. Objects familiar to visitors have been placed alongside ‘foreign’ or minority pieces in exhibits to alleviate uncertainty and allow for comparisons.¹¹ Some cultures and races have been romanticized and exhibited in

⁸ Kalpana Nand, “Fiji Museum in the Post-Colonial Era” (papers presented at the ICOM-CECA conference ‘Culture as Commodity’, Christchurch, New Zealand, 2000), quoted in Moira Simpson, “Museums and Restorative Justice: Heritage, Repatriation and Cultural Education,” *Museum International* 61, no. 1-2 (2009): 121, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 7, 2011).

⁹ Fath Davis Ruffins, “Culture Wars Won and Lost: Ethnic Museums on the Mall, Part I: The National Holocaust Museum and the National Museum of the American Indian,” *Radical History Review* 68 (1997): 91, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 27, 2011).

¹⁰ Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Carl Grodach, “Displaying and Celebrating the “Other”: A Study of the Mission, Scope, and the Roles of Ethnic Museums in Los Angeles,” *The Public Historian* 26, no. 4 (2004): 52, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/tph.2004.26.4.49> (accessed July 27, 2011).

¹¹ Patrick T. Houlihan, “The Poetic Image and Native American Art,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 207.

“picturesque”, yet severely regressive, displays.¹² For many a museum, this has meant covering up historical accuracies with stories and subjects believed to be better suited for visitors. Certain hardships or controversies faced by different cultures in the past are subjects not typically broached in museum interpretations. Exhibits were supposed to be, and generally are still thought to be, entertaining and non-threatening for museum audiences. Because of this, difficult periods from people’s pasts have been ignored or standardized. All of these practices have contributed to the exclusivity expressed by museums when faced with representing various minority cultures and races.

Recently, museums have begun to remedy past interpretive methods in response to an increased demand for more inclusive displays. However, fixing the biases that occurred toward cultures in past exhibits can result in creating new ones if museum professionals are not careful.¹³ According to Alice Wexler:

The taken-for-granted institutionalization of multiculturalism is in part perpetuated by the museum’s version of authenticity which easily replaces old stereotypes and assumptions about other cultures with new ones by introducing reworked buzz words and politically correct catch-phrases.¹⁴

Yet, calls for multiculturalism in museum exhibits have persisted. Though speaking of England in particular, Richard Sandell noted, “Museums are being asked to assume new roles and develop new ways of working – in general, to clarify and demonstrate their social purpose and more specifically to reinvent themselves as agents of social

¹² Tony Bennett, “Museums and ‘the People’,” in *The Museum Time-Machine: Putting Cultures on Display*, ed. Robert Lumley (London: Routledge, 1990) 64.

¹³ David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 83.

¹⁴ Alice Wexler, “Museum Culture and the Inequities of Display and Representation,” *Visual Arts Research* 33, no. 1 (2007): 26, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20715431> (accessed September 7, 2011).

inclusion.”¹⁵ Since the Civil Rights movement and the 1970 public protest of the American Association of Museums, those in power, both museums and the staff in charge of them, have been called into question. Outside pressure has been increasingly exerted in order to increase the level of inclusiveness within museum walls, particularly as minority groups are gradually beginning to make up the majority of the American population.¹⁶ Still, opponents charge that mainstream institutions have continued to ignore smaller cultural groups, while still showcasing them as either “primitive or exotic.”¹⁷ Nevertheless, this has not stopped the calls for change. While part of the increased pressure on museum interpretations has come from a growing feeling that representation in museums grants certain “recognition as a culture,” the overwhelming majority who encourage diversity in exhibit interpretations seem to hope for museums to “embrace cultural particularities” and “explore the ways cultural differences engage and alter one another.”¹⁸

As a reaction to the calls for more inclusive interpretations, numerous ethnic specific exhibitions and institutions have emerged across the museum landscape with the

¹⁵ Richard Sandell, “Museums as Agents of Social Inclusion,” *Museum Management and Curatorship* 17, no. 4 (1998): 401-418, quoted in Ien Ang, “The Predicament of Diversity: Multiculturalism in Practice at the Art Museum,” *Ethnicities* 5 (2005): 306, <http://etn.sagepub.com/content/5/3/305> (accessed July 27, 2011).

¹⁶ Steven D. Lavine, “Audience, Ownership, and Authority: Designing Relations between Museums and Communities,” in *Museums and Communities: the Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 138.

¹⁷ Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Carl Grodach, “Displaying and Celebrating the “Other”: A Study of the Mission, Scope, and the Roles of Ethnic Museums in Los Angeles,” *The Public Historian* 26, no. 4 (2004): 51, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/tph.2004.26.4.49> (accessed July 27, 2011).

¹⁸ Svetlana Alpers, “The Museum as a Way of Seeing,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 30; Steven D. Lavine, “Audience, Ownership, and Authority: Designing Relations between Museums and Communities,” in *Museums and Communities: the Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 146.

intent to reconcile past inaccuracies within museums exhibits. One strategy, particularly at art museums, has been to stress the formal and ignore the contextual. In 1984, the Museum of Modern Art in New York featured an exhibit entitled “‘Primitivism’ in 20th Century Art” in which the history of pieces was omitted from the discussion, and instead focus was placed on how each artifact related to one another. The culture from which an object stemmed became a moot point as pieces were assimilated together to showcase the object’s influence rather than that of its people.¹⁹ Many other institutions similarly followed suit in order to alter racial and ethnic representations, some doing so for the sake of specific local communities with others seeking to create a better understanding for the mainstream population. For specific examples, Claudine K. Brown points out:

The Brooklyn Historical Society in New York used an exhibition and programs in an attempt to broker dialogue between Caribbean American, Lubavitch, and African American communities. The Jewish Museum in New York brokered intergenerational conversations around Nazi imagery. The Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore afforded Fred Wilson an opportunity to recontextualize existing collections from the perspective of descendants of slaves, and the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania called into question the moral, legal, and sociological impacts of lynching in America.²⁰

These varied interpretations have allowed for different strategies to emerge regarding how properly and more cohesively to display the minority groups of the nation in museum settings. From the National Museum of American History’s approach whereby six distinct cultural perspectives were incorporated into their ‘After the Revolution’ exhibition to the attempts at Colonial Williamsburg to reveal stories about the lives of the ‘Other Half’ through tours and assorted interpretive structures, museums have begun

¹⁹ Ivan Karp, “How Museums Define Other Cultures,” *American Art* 5, no.1/2 (1991): 12, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3109026> (accessed September 7, 2011).

²⁰ Claudine K. Brown, “Museums and Funders Embracing New Constituencies,” *The Journal of Museum Education* 31, no. 1 (2006): 22-23, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40283903> (accessed September 10, 2011).

to utilize new devices for ethnic and racial displays in order to curb past criticisms of museum elitism and exclusivity.²¹

In addition to the rise of new exhibitions related to particular cultural groups' representations, ethnic-specific institutions have also begun to rise in prominence throughout the country. According to Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Carl Grodach, "the ethnic museum has been hailed by advocates as an alternative site of cultural production and exhibition and as a promoter of ethnic culture and identity."²² Many cultural institutions have been charged with showing more complex ways of life, often rebelling against the one-note representations presented in many mainstream museums.²³

Essentially, ethnic museums strive to enlighten and instruct the public about a specific culture and its history in order to interpret and foster an awareness about said culture for the general populace.²⁴ James Clifford differentiates between mainstream and tribal museums, and specifically their agendas. Clifford writes that while majority museums often express national culture, tribal institutions stress local traditions and kinship. Similarly, where mainstream museums differentiate between art, culture, and history and exhibit objects representative of people in a celebratory manner while seeing

²¹ Thomas A. Woods, "Getting Beyond the Criticism of History Museums: A Model for Interpretation," *The Public Historian* 12, no. 3 (1990): 88, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3378200> (accessed July 27, 2011); Warren Leon and Margaret Piatt, "Living-History Museums," in *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*, ed. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 77.

²² Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Carl Grodach, "Displaying and Celebrating the "Other": A Study of the Mission, Scope, and the Roles of Ethnic Museums in Los Angeles," *The Public Historian* 26, no. 4 (2004): 54, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/tph.2004.26.4.49> (accessed July 27, 2011).

²³ Brian Durrans, "The Future of the Other: Changing Cultures on Display in Ethnographic Museums," in *The Museum Time-Machine: Putting Cultures on Display*, ed. Robert Lumley (London: Routledge, 1990), 145.

²⁴ Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Carl Grodach, "Displaying and Celebrating the "Other": A Study of the Mission, Scope, and the Roles of Ethnic Museums in Los Angeles," *The Public Historian* 26, no. 4 (2004): 59, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/tph.2004.26.4.49> (accessed July 27, 2011).

these collections largely as public domain, ethnic museums find the distinction between art, culture, and history irrelevant and tend to showcase their objects, whose national patrimonies are unimportant, through oppositional interpretations reflecting both present and past struggles.²⁵ These insights may apply to other ethnic-specific institutions as well. Overall, and in some degree due to their differences from mainstream museums, many view culturally specific institutions as providing new locales for sparking dialogue between diverse peoples because of their distinct role in showcasing the significance and contributions of various minority groups.²⁶

Nevertheless, ethnic-specific representations are not without their own detractors. “Critics charge that the ethnic museum too often assumes an authoritative stance toward cultural authenticity that leaves no room for change,” write Loukaitou-Sideris and Grodach.²⁷ Others believe that ethnic-specific institutions overstate “identity politics” and fragment American history and culture.²⁸ Steven D. Lavine points out that “many museum officials and curators (along with others exerting cultural authority) have expressed reservations about what they see as both a disregard for objective truth and a movement toward cultural separatism implicit in African American, Asian American,

²⁵ James Clifford, “Four Northwest Coast Museums: Travel Reflections,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 225-26.

²⁶ Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Carl Grodach, “Displaying and Celebrating the “Other”: A Study of the Mission, Scope, and the Roles of Ethnic Museums in Los Angeles,” *The Public Historian* 26, no. 4 (2004): 54, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/tph.2004.26.4.49> (accessed July 27, 2011).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Fath Davis Ruffins, “Culture Wars Won and Lost: Ethnic Museums on the Mall, Part I: The National Holocaust Museum and the National Museum of the American Indian,” *Radical History Review* 68 (1997): 80, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 27, 2011).

and other ethnic-group-specific institutions.”²⁹ Some culturally specific museums have also been criticized for falling prey to the same practices as mainstream institutions. Museums dealing with specific groups have been charged with just as easily leaving out minority cultures they deem irrelevant as majority museums. The Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. tackled this obstacle and criticism when it was deciding whether to focus solely on the plight of Jews during World War II or whether to mention other persecuted ethnic groups within their exhibits as well.³⁰ Despite the outcries of critics, the Holocaust Museum satisfies what Fath Davis Ruffins believes is one of the principle tasks of an ethnic-specific institution, “it negates the negation.”³¹ Whatever criticism they may face, ethnic-specific museums provide the opportunity for new interpretations to be heard, interpretations that challenge long held stereotypes or negative viewpoints regarding minority peoples.

The shift in ideas regarding culture and the rise of ethnic-specific exhibitions and institutions has led to a comprehensive reexamination of mainstream museum interpretations. While this speaks to the direction in which society is headed, there are basic challenges and problems that have long been innate in how museums deal with changes, challenges and problems that society often ignores. The issues surrounding museum limitations as well as the often unrealistic expectations of the public regarding museums’ abilities will be addressed in the next chapter.

²⁹ Steven D. Lavine, “Audience, Ownership, and Authority: Designing Relations between Museums and Communities,” in *Museums and Communities: the Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 149-50.

³⁰ Fath Davis Ruffins, “Culture Wars Won and Lost: Ethnic Museums on the Mall, Part I: The National Holocaust Museum and the National Museum of the American Indian,” *Radical History Review* 68 (1997): 86, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 27, 2011).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

CHAPTER THREE

Challenges to Change

According to Fath Davis Ruffins, “All museums reify notions about the past and are generally seen by their publics as embodying an authentic past, presenting validated versions of cultural sensibilities and artistic expressions, and serving as a fitting repository or memorial of the national mythos.”¹ Doubtless, many museums are granted an authority by visitors that sometimes amounts to blind faith. However, when it comes to interpreting different cultures and minorities, museums consistently battle with internal and external challenges that hinder the reliable presentations expected by the general public.

At the very inception of all exhibitions and other interpretations, museums have to work from their existing collections, collections that do not necessarily have an equal number of objects from every culture or time period. In the past, not all ethnic groups’ objects were collected equally. In America, for instance, more Native American materials were kept than pieces that related to say, African American culture. Though some materials are now available for various groups across the country, depending on the institution, the materials might be considerably less than those from other cultural groups.² It then becomes more difficult to present diverse interpretations to the public without artifacts to complete the representations. Even when materials are found or have

¹ Fath Davis Ruffins, “Culture Wars Won and Lost: Ethnic Museums on the Mall, Part I: The National Holocaust Museum and the National Museum of the American Indian,” *Radical History Review* 68 (1997): 82, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 27, 2011).

² Fath Davis Ruffins, “Mythos, Memory, and History: African American Preservation Efforts, 1820-1990,” in *Museums and Communities: the Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 524.

been collected, some museums have hesitated to showcase them due to concerns over both repatriation and lack of provenance, particularly in regards to Native American collections. No institution wants to risk the legitimacy of its collections or open itself to more criticism through the creation of a new exhibit, if possible negligence may have been committed in the past with regards to the ethnic pieces on display.

In the same manner as cultural objects themselves, there are also numerous uncertainties surrounding documentation for various ethnic and racial groups. Not as much was recorded about certain groups in the past and of that which was, there are issues regarding both the materials' survival in the present as well as possible bias that may have been inserted by the original documents' authors.³ Knowledge about the past, specifically that of minorities, depends heavily on what information can still be found, therefore lack of materials and documentation often cause museums to struggle in their attempts to create equal and inclusive exhibits.⁴ At the same time, when documentation has existed, created by the specific groups themselves, it has commonly been met by the rest of the population with suspicion. According to Nancy Marie Mithlo, "Typically, Indigenous knowledge is perceived as subjective and restricted while Western knowledge is seen as scientific, objective, and free of restrictions."⁵ There has not necessarily been an agreement among historians or curators as to which records and

³ Eric Gable, "Maintaining Boundaries, or 'Mainstreaming' Black History in a White Museum," in *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World*, ed. Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 189.

⁴ Brian Durrans, "The Future of the Other: Changing Cultures on Display in Ethnographic Museums," in *The Museum Time-Machine: Putting Cultures on Display*, ed. Robert Lumley (London: Routledge, 1990), 145.

⁵ Nancy Marie Mithlo, "Red Man's Burden: The Politics of Inclusion in Museum Settings," *American Indian Quarterly* 28, no. 3/4 (2004): 743, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4138940> (accessed September 7, 2011).

whose knowledge is acceptable and appropriate for museums' to utilize. This has caused many instances where museums have exhibited cultures and still faced criticism due to cries of insufficient evidence and an overall lack of cultural thought.⁶

If an institution has collected materials and documentation, challenges still might arise from the objects themselves or visitors' reactions to them when placed in the final representation. Kenneth Ames writes, "Objects have not a single past but an unbroken sequence of past times leading backward from the present moment. Moreover, there is no ideal spot on the temporal continuum that inherently deserves emphasis... In elevating or admiring one piece of the past, we tend to ignore and devalue others. One reality lives at the expense of countless others."⁷ Interpretations in this way can be intrinsically misleading as museum exhibits tend to focus on but one aspect of an artifact's meaning. Though this applies to most cultural objects in a collection, the problem is often amplified when regarding minority pieces since museums already struggle in their attempts to represent racial and cultural groups in truthful and equal lights. Numerous artifacts can also raise various dilemmas when it comes to interpreting racial and ethnic pasts. If a piece is overtly racist, should a museum exhibit it? Should an object that has the potential to bring controversy be put on display, and if it is, how should a museum interpret it?⁸ In addition to the objects themselves, visitors also alter

⁶ *Ibid.*, 744.

⁷ Kenneth L. Ames, "Introduction," in *The Colonial Revival in America*, ed. Alan Axelrod (Wilmington: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1985), 7, quoted in Spencer R. Crew and James E. Sims, "Locating Authenticity: Fragments of a Dialogue," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 160.

⁸ Alan Rice, "Revealing Histories, Dialogising Collections: Museums and Galleries in North West England Commemorating the Abolition of the Slave Trade," *Slavery and Abolition* 30, no. 2 (2009): 298, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 27, 2011).

the nature of an exhibit and impact how a museum representation comes across.

Viewers bring in their own ideas and values about both their own cultures as well as the cultures of others, ideas and values that shape their perceptions of what an exhibit might be trying to portray.⁹ Additionally, museum visitors imagine themselves in exhibits, which affects how they believe others should be viewed or examined within the museum.¹⁰ Similarly, “visitors respond to different messages, so this must be taken into account in planning any exhibition designed to bring people closer to an understanding of how another culture operates.”¹¹

Nevertheless, the most crucial and impactful issues faced by museums when it comes to interpreting minorities stem from political pressures as well as museum resources, or rather a lack thereof. Annie E. Coombes notes:

On the one hand, the museum still perceives itself as both purveyor of ‘objective’ scientific knowledge and as a potential resource centre for a broad-based multicultural education. On the other hand, it is clearly hostage to and sometimes beneficiary of the vagaries of different state policies and political regimes, and aware of the necessity of being seen to perform some vital and visible public function to justify its maintenance, while fighting to preserve a measure of autonomy.¹²

Political and economic forces can often heavily influence museums; and these forces may or may not heavily influence institutional funding. Culture can then become a

⁹ Michael Baxandall, “Exhibiting Intention: Some Preconditions of the Visual Display of Culturally Purposeful Objects,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 34.

¹⁰ Henrietta Riegel, “Into the Heart of Irony: Ethnographic Exhibitions and the Politics of Difference,” in *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World*, ed. Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 86.

¹¹ Brian Durrans, “The Future of the Other: Changing Cultures on Display in Ethnographic Museums,” in *The Museum Time-Machine: Putting Cultures on Display*, ed. Robert Lumley (London: Routledge, 1990), 150.

¹² Annie E. Coombes, “Museums and the Formation of National and Cultural Identities,” *Oxford Art Journal* 11, no. 2 (1988): 66, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1360462> (accessed July 27, 2011).

commodity in museums, picked to emphasize what those in power wish of it. That is not to say that minorities cannot equally skew museum interpretations. Some communities apply pressure on museums so as to 'reclaim' their past and have it interpreted, as they deem proper.¹³ When museums are not careful, they "can be used by those in power to excuse past actions, or as repositories of knowledge that, once acknowledged, can be forgotten in popular memory," warns Tracy Jean Rosenberg.¹⁴ Independently, museums have to decide what to represent and how. They must deal with the tension created by political and economic pressures and choose which direction their institution will go.¹⁵ This can be particularly difficult if a museum is reliant on such support as government funds. All of the issues that cause museums to be reluctant to change in the first place make it that much more difficult to alter their representations of different cultures unless explicitly instructed to do so.

More important, however, is that many museum exhibits and representations have not been drastically updated much less diversified due to insufficient resources, whether money, staff, or time. Adding new exhibits or changing existing interpretations to be more ethnically inclusive can require months upon months of planning with the consultation of different departments surrounding everything from acquisitions to exhibit design and often requiring the restructuring of a department's or institution's overall

¹³ Stanislao Carbone, "The Dialogic Museum and Ethnocultural Diversity," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 37, no. 1 (2005), *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 27, 2011).

¹⁴ Tracy Jean Rosenberg, "History Museums and Social Cohesion: Building Identity, Bridging Communities, and Addressing Difficult Issues," *Peabody Journal of Education* 86, no. 2 (2011): 125, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2011.561171> (accessed July 27, 2011).

¹⁵ Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Carl Grodach, "Displaying and Celebrating the "Other": A Study of the Mission, Scope, and the Roles of Ethnic Museums in Los Angeles," *The Public Historian* 26, no. 4 (2004): 71, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/tph.2004.26.4.49> (accessed July 27, 2011).

budget.¹⁶ These factors are more than enough to cause many an institution to stick with the status quo. Many also make the case that all the time and money necessary to diversify the representation of a culture is better spent on future research and preservation as opposed to a new display and the accumulation of additional materials for future upkeep.¹⁷

Though many of the aforementioned challenges are largely problems either created in the past or outside of a museum's immediate control, there are a number of issues created by museums themselves when it comes to representing different cultures in today's world. Cultural biases continue to persist in modern society and thus continue to influence how different museum staffs interpret historical documents.¹⁸ In many cases, "bias is...built into the structure and funding of museum[s]...Museum collections tend to reflect the taste, wealth, and concerns of the upper classes," a factor common in most museums despite recent efforts at change.¹⁹ In addition to this bias, there is the fact that many continue to believe that exhibit spaces should be as non-threatening as possible and therefore, controversial ideas and pasts should not be included in the museum setting. The removal of controversial topics then turns objective presentations into subjective ones.²⁰ While the public generally criticizes museums for such timidity

¹⁶ Misao Dean, "Managing Diversity in the Representation of BC History: Point Ellice House and 'Chinatown'," *BC Studies* no. 136 (2002/2003): 58, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 27, 2011).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁸ David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 111.

¹⁹ Sue Kirby, "Policy and Politics: Charges, Sponsorship, and Bias," in *The Museum Time-Machine: Putting Cultures on Display*, ed. Robert Lumley (London: Routledge, 1990), 99.

²⁰ Annie E. Coombes, "Museums and the Formation of National and Cultural Identities," *Oxford Art Journal* 11, no. 2 (1988): 66, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1360462> (accessed July 27, 2011).

and such timidity can be caused by cultural misunderstandings, the addition of oppositional discourse into exhibits can also be exceedingly precarious. Some museums in this situation are at risk of alienating parts of their core audience.²¹

On a different note, some curators, whether knowingly or not, also “customarily use different language conventions to describe the ‘other’” within their exhibit spaces.²² New vocabulary then becomes necessary to ensure equality between different cultural interpretations.²³ Adrienne L. Kaeppler suggests that the romantic imagery of the past is likewise to blame. She mentions that “while knowing that such pristine ‘others’ do not really exist, museums seem to project a kind of academic escapism...Museums continue to delude their visitors of the separateness of objects, culture, history, and politics by focusing on outmoded ideas of the primacy of the uncontaminated ‘other’.”²⁴ Such romantic notions create inaccurate images of the past because they fail to address new modes of thought and the rationale behind more extensive minority representations.²⁵ Moreover, these portrayals can lead to the creation of all new stereotypes either on top of or in addition to the pre-existing ones that surround many a minority culture. There is tremendous pressure on museums when selecting artifacts and topics for display to be clear in their reasoning so as to ensure diverse and equal exhibits without the biases and

²¹ Claudine K. Brown, “Museums and Funders Embracing New Constituencies,” *The Journal of Museums Education* 31, no. 1 (2006): 23, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40283903> (accessed September 10, 2011).

²² Jane Peirson Jones, “The Colonial Legacy and the Community: The Gallery 33 Project,” in *Museums and Communities: the Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 238.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Adrienne L. Kaeppler, “Ali’I and Maka’ainana: The Representation of Hawaiians in Museums at Home and Abroad,” in *Museums and Communities: the Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 472.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 468.

typecasts of the past.²⁶ All of the above are persistent issues that have led some to wonder if museums are really the best places to educate the general public about different cultures and minorities.²⁷

Overall, ideas about museum practices are shifting both with the recognition of the problems that they face as well as without it. According to Steven D. Lavine:

The stance of benign neutrality has lost credibility... An ever-greater self-consciousness can be anticipated among museum practitioners as they go about their business in disciplines and institutions that rest on no settled grounds. It is to be hoped that pressures from the outside will merge with changed attitudes from within to produce a mutually tenable redefinition of museum practice.²⁸

With the information age, the stakes in terms of expressing different cultures and minorities properly are that much higher.²⁹ Still, those in control of museums are those with the power over the interpretations of all peoples, power that continues to include the ability to rank and recognize people and their cultures and pass it off as historical

²⁶ Jane Peirson Jones, "The Colonial Legacy and the Community: The Gallery 33 Project," in *Museums and Communities: the Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 238.

²⁷ Svetlana Alpers, "The Museum as a Way of Seeing," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 30.

²⁸ Steven D. Lavine, "Audience, Ownership, and Authority: Designing Relations between Museums and Communities," in *Museums and Communities: the Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 138.

²⁹ George F. Macdonald, "Change and Challenge: Museums in the Information Society," in *Museums and Communities: the Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 161.

‘truth’.³⁰ Yet in the public, “wide diversities of opinion exist about which story is the ‘truth’.”³¹ And so the dispute continues. Loukaitou-Sideris and Grodach maintain:

As museums have gained more prominence in the public eye, they have emerged as central battlegrounds in the “culture and history wars.” Questions of the appropriate representation of the past... have incited controversy and have generated debate over larger issues of national self-definition and group values.³²

This sentiment is the basis for the case studies of the next several chapters.

In order to further explore current practices regarding the representation of minority cultures, this study will examine the exhibit spaces and interpretations of the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin, Texas, the Oklahoma History Center in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and the New Mexico History Museum in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Each of these institutions acts as the primary history museum for its individual state, all are of similar size, each has been built and/or significantly updated within the last eleven years, and all represent states with significant minority populations with long standing and firmly entrenched histories. Looking at each will help to show where museum interpretations stand today and how they deal with the challenges they face. One can also learn how representations differ between populations and what, if anything, today’s exhibitions might tell about the direction of museum interpretations in the future.

³⁰ Carol Duncan, “Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 102.

³¹ Fath Davis Ruffins, “Culture Wars Won and Lost: Ethnic Museums on the Mall, Part I: The National Holocaust Museum and the National Museum of the American Indian,” *Radical History Review* 68 (1997): 82, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 27, 2011).

³² Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Carl Grodach, “Displaying and Celebrating the “Other”: A Study of the Mission, Scope, and the Roles of Ethnic Museums in Los Angeles,” *The Public Historian* 26, no. 4 (2004): 50, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/tph.2004.26.4.49> (accessed July 27, 2011).

CHAPTER FOUR

The Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum

The Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin, Texas opened its doors in April 2001. According to its mission statement, “The Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum engages the broadest possible audience to interpret the continually unfolding Story of Texas through meaningful educational experiences.”¹ Acting as a part of the State Preservation Board, one distinct feature of the museum is that it was founded as a non-collecting institution and thus relies on long and short-term loans from fellow institutions for all of the artifacts found in its exhibition halls. Even with this limitation, the museum showcases nearly seven hundred objects that span three floors and cover close to thirty-four thousand feet.² The exhibit spaces themselves are divided by floor with each taking on a different theme from the history of Texas.

The first floor of the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum centers on early life in Texas. Entitled “Encounters on the Land,” the exhibit space showcases everything from the early meetings between settlers and Native Americans to the establishment of Spanish missions to the expansion of settlement beyond West Texas. Though the exhibits mention that native peoples lived on the land for thousands of years, the timeline for the ‘Story of Texas’ begins around 1528 when the Spanish discovered what they believed to be the New World and ends just after 1900 when the last stretch of Texas was explored and mapped out. The sections of the first floor exhibits begin with

¹ Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, “About the Museum,” Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, <http://www.thestoryoftexas.com/> (accessed January 29, 2012).

² *Ibid.*

First Encounters then move into an area dedicated to the La Belle shipwreck before heading into Colonization, Immigration, and finally the section Moving West. Throughout the exhibit space, there are photomurals, interactive touch-screens, two theater areas, and countless artifacts displayed in spaces decorated to replicate various scenes from Texas's past.

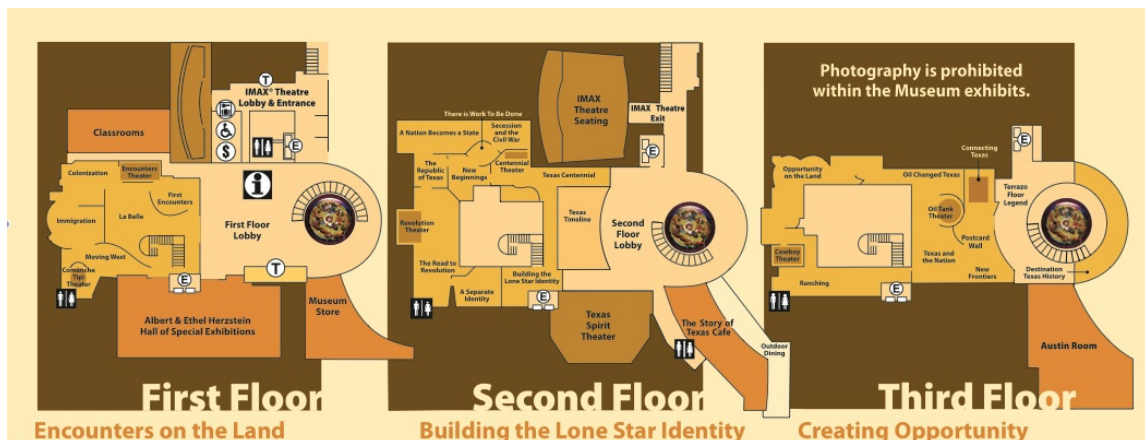


Figure 1. Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum Exhibit Floor Plan. *Source:* Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum Visitor's Guide.

The second floor exhibit space of the museum features the theme “Building the Lone Star Identity.” Here the rooms featured include Building the Lone Star Identity, A Separate Identity, the Road to Revolution, the Republic of Texas, A Nation Becomes a State, Secession and the Civil War, There is Work to be Done, New Beginnings, and the Texas Centennial. The exhibit ends with interactive screens that allow visitors to go through the complete timeline of Texas history. Overall, the second floor exhibits showcase the path from Steven F. Austin’s relations with Mexico beginning in the 1820s to the Texas Centennial celebration of 1936. In between, the exhibits feature various battles impacting Texas’s fight for independence, early Texas relations with the United States and Texas’s eventual statehood, and the impact of the American Civil War on

local peoples. The space is similar in design and makeup to the first floor featuring the same state of the art display methods and comparable recreated scenes for the décor.

Finally, the exhibits of the third floor focus on agricultural and technological advances throughout Texas's history. Entitled "Creating Opportunity," visitors to the floor are taken through sections dedicated to Ranching, Opportunity on the Land, Oil Changed Texas, Texas and the Nation, and New Frontiers. The space is meant to show Texans' perseverance over time, how they best adapted and utilized the diverse landscape, and the impact of Texas's discoveries on the rest of the world, discoveries varying from oil drilling to newfound military, medicinal, and space technologies. Though not necessarily included in the overarching theme of the third floor, the end of the exhibit area also includes contemporary Texas history ranging from World War II and the Civil Rights Movement to stories about modern day music and sports icons. As with the first two floors, the overall setup and display feature recreated backgrounds, interactive media, and sectioned off theater spaces.

In designing their exhibit areas, the Bob Bullock worked with the Planning, Research, and Design Group, Ltd. (PRD Group, Ltd.), BRC Imagination Arts, and Pyramid Studios.³ The PRD Group, Ltd. worked on the overall exhibit design for the three floor areas of the museum; BRC Imagination Arts helped with the Texas Spirit Theater, the museum's special effects and multimedia theater experience; and Pyramid Studios focused on the interactive, media driven portions within each exhibit space. As the PRD Group, Ltd. greatly influenced the exhibits seen today, their design philosophy

³ Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, "About the Museum: Background," Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, <http://www.thestoryoftexas.com/> (accessed January 29, 2012).

and take on working with the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum are of note here.

According to the Planning, Research, and Design Group, Ltd.:

The goal of the Texas State History Museum was to celebrate the rich and diverse history of the state by creating one central location that presents the “whole” story of Texas. PRD’s design team was directed to create a new kind of museum that would immerse Texas and visitors in an exciting learning experience. The design sought to bring visitors into contact with the people and places of the past – to look at history from the varied perspectives of the diverse people who made it – through the integration of objects, media, and environments.⁴

In terms of multiculturalism and minority representation, the first floor of the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum is by far the most inclusive. As the bulk of the first floor exhibits highlight early Texas encounters on the land, most of the exhibit interpretation is shared between Anglo settlers, Native Americans, and African Americans. Upon entering the exhibit gallery, the central display features Native peoples paddling in a canoe. The very first text panel, though not specific when mentioning Native history or different minority stories, notes that Natives existed on the land for thousands of years prior to Spanish and Anglo settlement. Visitors are told that the “story of Texas” to be revealed throughout the museum’s exhibits and through its interpretation is a story of many peoples. The initial text even ends with the quote that “The Texas we know today is the sum of all their encounters on the land.”⁵ Further exploring the interpretation, the museum highlights a few select Native American tribes, including the Caddo, the Comanche, Apache, and Coastal Indians, noting their locales, occupations, and initial reactions to early settlers. Native lifestyles are generalized as

⁴ PRD Group Ltd, “Portfolio: Texas State History Museum,” PRD Group Ltd, <http://www.theprdgroup.com/portfolio.htm> (accessed January 29, 2012).

⁵ All of the citations of text panels were transcribed by the author upon visiting the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum in December of 2011.

being principally based on hunting and gathering and the conflict between tribes is mentioned only briefly. The interpretation then shifts to slowly telling of Spanish and Anglo experiences with the Indians including their attempts to establish missions and settlements throughout the land, attempts met largely with confusion or disdain by their local Native counterparts. Here, the Encounters Theater features a video that showcases both Comanche and Spanish narratives. The narratives dictate each group's impression of their interactions with the other revealing both conflict as well as collaboration. The Pueblo Revolt of New Mexico is then interpreted in order to allow for the telling of various alliances between Native Peoples and Spanish settlers, alliances made for a multitude of reasons and resulting in the sharing of cultural traditions as well as known technologies.

From here, the exhibit interpretation shifts to early African American experiences on the Texas land, noting that while there were some free blacks, nearly all were brought to Texas as slaves. The prohibition of free blacks from Texas following 1836 is mentioned though glossed over by noting that many either sold themselves back into slavery or had Anglos petition the government for them to stay in the region. At this point, several slave-made pottery pieces are prominently featured following text detailing the different ways that blacks were brought to Texas. Alternately, and not quite so prominent, is a flipbook that reveals what happened to various Native tribes as Anglo society developed in Texas. Approximately ten tribes are featured with stories denoting how interactions with Anglos and Texans often diminished Native numbers or forced their movement to other lands.

Subsequently, Tejanos, Hispanics in Texas of Mexican ancestry, are mentioned for the first time within the museum's exhibits. The text notes that Tejanos quickly became a minority in Texas with the influx of settlers from the east, with the interpretation setting the stage for the second floor exhibits about the battle for Texas's independence. Nevertheless, the focus once again switches back to Native Americans, quickly mentioning various treaties made with tribes before highlighting the different aspects of the Comanche people in particular, dedicating to them a large space in the gallery and showing a video relating current Comanche people's views on their history in Texas, shown on the side of a recreated teepee. The first floor exhibit area ends with brief interpretations of the Buffalo Soldiers of the late 1860s, African American military units, as well as of the increasing conflict with Native peoples including the Anglo push for Natives to be moved onto reservations, their ensuing attempts to eliminate Native livelihoods in order to force the people out, and the resulting Red River War between the two groups in 1874.

The inclusion of minority histories on the second and third floors of the museum is slightly more sporadic. The second floor begins by interpreting the interactions between Mexicans and settlers in their struggle to control the Texas landscape, leading into the Texas Revolution and war for independence. The exhibit highlights the various viewpoints about the conflict, including text dedicated to the specific viewpoint of the Tejanos. As far as the interpretation of the war and the general division made between Mexicans and Texans in the fight, there are several mentions of Tejanos fighting on the side of the Anglos, with the Revolution Theater even featuring the narrative of Tejano captain Juan Seguin. The exhibit then moves into Texas's history as a republic

highlighting who could be citizens of the republic while mentioning the populations of each major minority group, Native Americans, African Americans, both enslaved and free, and Tejanos. The hardships endured by each group are also noted within the interpretation. The overall contempt felt by Anglos for the other groups is explicitly expressed. There is text dedicated to the Tejano struggle for land and citizenship, the Native peoples' relocation to reservations and Indian territories, the hardships and injustices felt by slaves under their white masters, and the free blacks' struggles to remain in Texas, as noted on the first floor yet re-mentioned, including specific, individual cases.

For much of the second floor, when minorities are mentioned, African Americans are the focus. The slave population is broken down as the exhibit notes Texas's entry into the Confederacy just before the Civil War. In a timeline and video narrative of Texans during the Civil War, four African American perspectives are revealed though each comes from unidentified sources. Following the Civil War focus, the exhibit shifts to the Reconstruction era, and though it mentions the struggles to achieve actual freedom, the segregation incurred, and all around discrimination still faced, much is glossed over as the museum highlights the attempts of Anglo teachers to educate blacks before telling the stories of three blacks voted into the legislature in 1870. Next showcased is the economy and the different opportunities afforded all Texans including minority peoples, though the focus still largely remains on African American efforts. More minorities are included in the interpretation detailing the years from 1876 through 1936, though each mention is not discussed with any great depth and many peoples' experiences are generalized as somewhat the same. Yet, the struggle experienced by

African Americans and Hispanics for equality in work and in life does continue to pop up in text panels as the second floor exhibits come to an end.

The third floor highlights minority histories the least, though one could argue that the interpretation's focus on agriculture and technology warrants the lack of separation between peoples. African Americans and Hispanics are included briefly within the section about opportunity on the land as their roles as tenant farmers and migrant workers are noted, though without any serious depth. The section on music summarizes how music in Texas has been influenced by the various traditions of many groups of peoples, including those of different races and ethnic cultures. And finally, albeit briefly, the museum interprets contemporary Texas history since 1945 and notes the segregation faced by many Americans, highlighting specifically, attempts by Mexican American veterans to gain access to benefits, African Americans' fight to be allowed higher education as well as their fight for equal salaries as teachers and the total integration of public facilities. Within the military section, the only mention of minorities comes with the recognition of two black Navy members as part of a series of recognized Texas individuals.

For the most part, the tone of the museum's interpretations is celebratory. Though hardships and struggles are definitely noted throughout, many are not discussed in significant detail and many periods that seemingly might evoke controversy, such as the lynching of African Americans over time, are greatly avoided. To a certain extent, the museum follows one strategy laid out by museums in the past, as it continues to romanticize portions of each minority's history within the larger interpretation of Texas's overall past. Though Native American, African American, and Tejano histories

are certainly included, as with many museums, there are still a great many instances where either Anglos are still credited with their successes or where much of the blame for conflict is placed solely on each minority's shoulders.

Reactions to the nature of the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum's minority interpretations have been varied. On one end of the spectrum is the critic Walter L. Buenger, who at one point writes, "Creators of the museum carefully included prominent Tejanos, blacks, and women. Yet their approach to the Texas past is just as much from the top down and just as simplistic and celebratory as fifty years ago. The consensus approach looks different on the surface because it includes minorities and women, but in key areas it remains the same."⁶ Buenger takes issue with what he believes to be the shortage of representation of Texas's "ugly" past, important periods of conflict that shaped Texas's progress and the uneven pace of change that realistically transpired over time.⁷ Anju Reejsinghani views the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum's interpretation and exhibits quite differently. Though he notes that, "The Bullock is best enjoyed as entertainment," he praises the direction of the interpretation in including minority groups and their histories.⁸ Reejsinghani writes, "It is a narrative that does not shy from detailing moments of shame and humiliation – slavery,

⁶ Walter L. Buenger, "The Story of Texas? The Texas State History Museum and Forgetting and Remembering the Past," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 105, no. 3 (2002): 485, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30239279> (accessed July 27, 2011).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 489.

⁸ Anju Reejsinghani, "Museums in Austin and San Antonio, Texas, of Interest to Ethnic Museums," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 28, no. 3 (2009): 76, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 27, 2011).

disenfranchisement of Tejanos, inequality for women – but that nonetheless ends with unity and triumph, even if that ending, of course, is still being written.”⁹

The different reactions highlight the controversy that will likely continue to surround historical interpretations no matter the direction museums choose to take in formatting exhibits. The Bob Bullock museum, nevertheless, does display the inclusive model for minority representation. However one might choose to interpret the minorities’ inclusion in the exhibit spaces, the point is that they are there and thus can be critiqued. The Bullock is likewise but one example of the different ways that museums are altering their exhibits to meet the increasing demand for multiculturalism and diversity throughout society.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Oklahoma History Center

In 2005, the Oklahoma History Center opened its doors in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The Oklahoma History Center is a division of the Oklahoma Historical Society and is an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution. According to its website, “In addition to participating in and fully supporting the overall mission of the [Oklahoma Historical Society] to preserve and perpetuate the history of Oklahoma and its people by collecting, interpreting and disseminating knowledge of Oklahoma and the Southwest, the museum collects, preserves and interprets the complete history of Oklahoma for everyone.”¹ Featuring five galleries that span two floors, the museum covers over fifty topics, showcased thematically rather than chronologically, while displaying nearly two thousand artifacts alongside over two hundred hands-on audio, video, and computer activities.²

The first floor of the Oklahoma History Center features the INASMUCH Gallery, the ONEOK, Inc. Gallery, and the E.L. & Thelma Gaylord Special Exhibit Gallery. The INASMUCH Gallery displays both the artistic achievements throughout Oklahoma’s past ranging from sports to music as well as the impact of various diverse populations upon the state and its development. The gallery is divided by section and includes such topics as Culture and the Arts, Diversity, Images of Oklahoma, Sports, Voice, Vision, and Vacuum Tubes, and Wild West Shows. When the Oklahoma History

¹ Oklahoma History Center, “About OHC,” Oklahoma History Center, <http://www.okhistorycenter.org/indexaef3.html> (accessed on January 29, 2012).

² *Ibid.*

Center was visited in July 2011, this gallery also included the temporary exhibit *Tierra De Mi Familia: Oklahoma*.

The ONEOK, Inc. Gallery focuses on the Native American populations of Oklahoma's past and present. Thirty-nine different tribes are represented in a way that showcases not only their distinct histories but also their contemporary lifestyles. Entitled "We Are Who We Were: American Indians in Oklahoma", the exhibit space includes sections for Dwellings, Indian Lives, Languages, Living Ways, Origins, Sovereignty, Spirituality, and Tribes. The area includes countless artifacts presented alongside numerous photographs and both audio and video narratives of oral history. Tribal music audio is likewise played throughout, with various presentations of Native American art featured in addition to the cultural objects on display.

The E.L. & Thelma Gaylord Special Exhibit Gallery features traveling and temporary exhibits generally established around prominent Oklahoma citizens or past glories, though in July of 2011, the exhibit space was entitled "Oklahoma Driven" and centered on Oklahoma's automobile history with specific reference to Route 66, the great highway connecting Chicago and Los Angeles, which ran through Oklahoma. Just outside the gallery, between it and the ONEOK, Inc. Gallery, the museum features an exhibit on Oklahomans and Space.

While the second floor consists of offices for the museum's staff as well as for the Historical Society and the state's Historic Preservation unit, the third floor consists of the Kerr McGee Gallery and the Sam Noble Gallery. The Kerr McGee Gallery ranges in topic from the initial Spanish explorations of Oklahoma land in the 1600s to Oklahoma oil and gas development to the impact of various military ventures and

conflicts on Oklahoma and its people. The sections of the gallery include African Americans, Business, Military Matters, Natural Resources, People and Pathways, and Transportation.

Lastly, the Sam Noble Gallery highlights the development of Oklahoma agriculturally, economically, socially, and politically. The section on Education leads into those of the Farm and Ranch, Fashions, Government and Politics, Kitchens, Land Run, Law and Order, Quilts, Urban Frontiers, and Weather.³

While much of the museum's exhibit space and interpretation can seem disjointed, the space was planned so that visitors experience Oklahoma's past through different themes and not through the typical chronological depiction of history. In designing and planning the exhibit space, the museum worked with Haley Sharpe Design. As concerns the Oklahoma History Center, Haley Sharpe Design stated:

We undertook conceptual development, master planning and exhibit design for this new-build flagship state museum. We helped the client team to develop the interpretive design brief, and took the design through to implementation. The Center's collections represent every aspect of Oklahoma's social, cultural, industrial and commercial histories, embracing everything from weather conditions to wild-west shows, riverboats and romance, crude oil and fine art; from sports and entertainment to media myths and misrepresentation. A wealth of audio, video and onscreen interaction has been integrated into the galleries to foster educational exploration and enquiry amongst visitors.

In the creation of significant new displays on both the African American and American Indian experience in Oklahoma, each stage of design development saw us working in close harmony with representatives from stakeholder communities on the client's Advisory Board.⁴

³ Oklahoma History Center, "Exhibits: Interior Exhibits," Oklahoma History Center, <http://www.okhistory.org/historycenter/interior?full> (accessed on January 29, 2012).

⁴ Haley Sharpe Design, "Projects: Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, USA," Haley Sharpe Design, <http://www.haleysharpe.com/projects/110> (accessed on January 29, 2012).

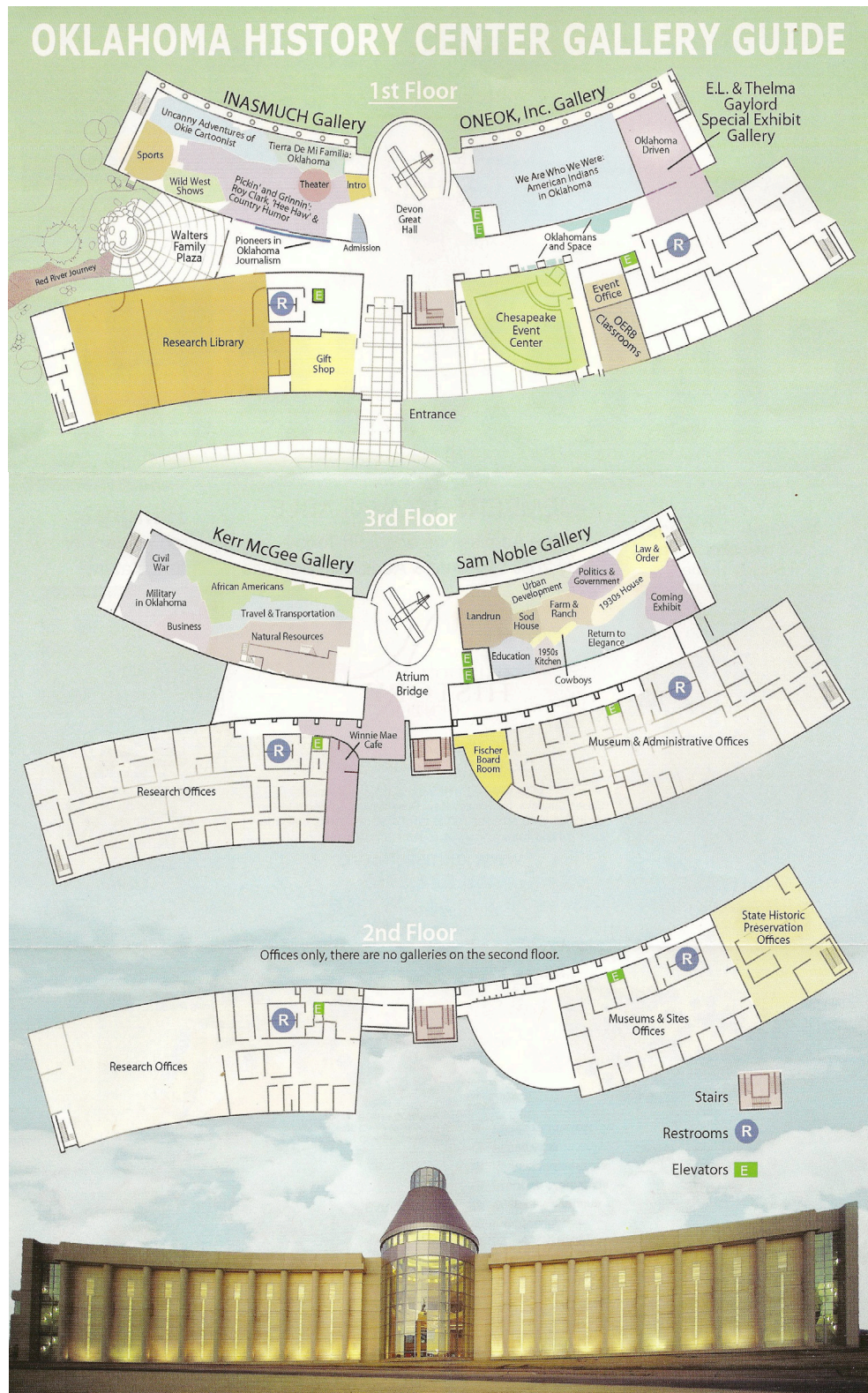


Figure 2. Oklahoma History Center Exhibit Floor Plan. *Source:* Oklahoma History Center Gallery Guide.

For the most part, cultural diversity and minority inclusion is found sporadically throughout the museum's mainstream themes, with the exception of one first floor gallery dedicated entirely to Native Americans, a third floor section devoted to African Americans, and the temporary exhibit centered largely on Hispanic and Latino traditions. The first glimpse of minority culture comes in the Wild West Shows section of the INASMUCH Gallery. The interpretation showcases how at a time when Indians were largely forced onto reservations, restricted, and urged to give up Native traditions, "Wild West shows" provided Native Americans with an alternative, a place where they could participate in local customs even if in stereotypical forms. The text panels note the inclusion and participation of several famous Native Americans in Wild West shows as well, including Geronimo and Sitting Bull. Within the next theme tackled in the exhibit gallery, that of sports, there are features of Prentice Gautt, the first African American to play football at the University of Oklahoma, and of the Cherokee, Andy Payne, who won a transcontinental foot race from California to New York. The last major inclusive interpretation within the gallery comes in the form of the temporary exhibit Tierra De Mi Familia: Oklahoma, which chronicles the Hispanic culture within Oklahoma history. The exhibit, featuring both English and Spanish text, interprets the impact different Latino immigrants have had on the state's mainstream society. Including peoples from Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America, the interpretation highlights various points of Latino culture and history, including media, language, holidays and festivals, their early arrivals to the land, the family and neighborhood, business, religion, food, and immigration and diversity.

Yet the most prominent display of multicultural inclusion and representation is found within the museum's next exhibit space, the ONEOK, Inc. Gallery. Here, the interpretation is dedicated solely to telling the story of Native Americans in Oklahoma. The space begins with panels displaying lists of the thirty-nine existing tribes, including their present and past locations. Moving past these panels, the origins of various tribes are interpreted with discussions of early trade with Anglo settlers from the east and the removal policies of the United States directed toward the Indians during the 1800s. The interpretation then ventures into different native ideas of spirituality, highlighting both conflict and collaboration experienced with Christian missionaries who were sent to convert the so-called native heathens. The topic of missionaries and Christianity leads into a discussion of various Indian languages and how they were used for everything from diplomacy to storytelling. Each exhibit section attempts to highlight not only each tribe's history but also their modern-day traditions and beliefs. Following this lead, there are sections dedicated to how Natives view everything from childhood and family to war. Intermixed within each are historical treaties and notes on various interactions with Anglos over time. Throughout, different tribes are distinguished from each other, with several sections dedicated specifically to certain tribes including the Caddo and the Potawatomi. The gallery concludes by referencing various tribal museums and cultural centers and by pointing out the different tribal governments that exist should a visitor wish for more information.

On the third floor, in the Kerr McGee Gallery, the first glimpse of minority inclusion comes with the mention of how various Indian technologies were utilized by Anglo traders and settlers in the development of Oklahoma's natural resources. Within

the military section, tribal conflicts and wars are featured, both between the tribes themselves as well as with Anglo settlers. Most are specifically referred to in terms of how the American military was involved. There is also mention of Buffalo Soldiers, otherwise known as African American military units, and frontier Indian units, much like those utilized throughout the Plains Wars. The gallery also features an entire section devoted to terrors experienced by Native Americans in Oklahoma during the Civil War, noting that such persecution came both at the hands of each other as well as Confederate and Union soldiers. Within the Civil War section, contributions made by African and Native Americans are noted, as are the various hardships endured by both groups because of the war.

Subsequently, there is a section devoted solely to telling the story of African Americans from the pre-territorial days to the present, a section that includes early African American newspapers, black migration dubbed the “African American Trail of Tears,” all-black towns, and the African American struggle for equal legal and political representation, education, and overall equality. The section also highlights the role of African Americans in the history of medicine both as doctors and nurses, the importance of various black business ventures and technological developments, the role of the NAACP in Oklahoma, and the impact felt by various prominent U.S. Supreme Court Cases. The 1921 Tulsa Race Riot is addressed as well, as is the 1958 Katz Drug Store sit-in, complete with a lunch counter and video footage. For more contemporary history regarding African Americans, there are sections devoted to African American music, sports, religion, and even the role of the barbershop and beauty parlor as a modern social institution.

Finally, within the Sam Noble Gallery, African American and Native American histories can be found in the Education, Law and Order, and Politics and Government sections of the exhibit space. Within education, the facet of “separate but equal” institutions is addressed leading into discussion about the desegregation of schools during the Civil Rights movement. Indian schools, though covered in less depth, are also noted in the interpretation. For law and order, there are separate text panels for both African American lawmen, acting as deputy marshals for the U.S. when Oklahoma was Indian Territory, as well as for both Indian outlaws and heroes. For Native Americans, the exhibit also highlights their progression from the Lighthorsemen quasi-police force of the early reservations to the contemporary Indian police now under the authority of the Bureau of Indian affairs. Lastly, within politics and government, the court system of the Five Civilized Tribes is addressed as are present day problems faced regarding vague tribal jurisdictions and misunderstandings.

For the most part, the exhibits of the Oklahoma History Center, though inclusive and in many cases well rounded in terms of mixing both the past and present, can cause visitors to lose information regarding the specific histories of various minority peoples as the exhibit spaces jump from one topic to another. Nevertheless, the museum attempts to neither romanticize each culture nor exoticize them but rather, by mentioning the different cultural practices experienced today, attempts to connect each culture not only to each other but also to the mainstream majority. Yet, despite the fact that conflict is included and romanticism avoided, the full extent of some of the conflict mentioned in the text is sometimes lost due to a lack of artifacts or video/audio footage to support the informational panels. For instance, while the museum mentions unprovoked attacks and

violence by whites against African Americans during the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921, the interpretation falls flat because it relies only on words.

Overall, the tone featured throughout the Oklahoma History Center is largely celebratory, though this could be attributed to the prominence the museum seems to place on where the different cultures are today because of and in spite of their pasts. The way different groups live today is featured more prominently in many cases than their history. This exhibit practice has recently become popular among museums wishing not only to attract wider audiences by relating to local minority communities but also for those wishing to stress various races and cultures, not as the outdated and exotic units previously on display in museums, but as current, living peoples to be found and related to within mainstream society. Because of this, the Oklahoma History Center's approach offers another example of the way in which museums are attempting to respond to criticism of their perceived exclusivity.

CHAPTER SIX

New Mexico History Museum

The New Mexico History Museum opened in May 2009 in Santa Fe, New Mexico as an addition to the already existing Palace of the Governors. The exhibition space of the museum spans nearly twenty-six thousand feet and covers three floors. The main exhibition, “Telling New Mexico: Stories from Then and Now,” is told chronologically and is broken up into six main areas, each utilizing artifacts, photographs, film and oral histories, and interactive media to help depict the five hundred years of New Mexico’s past.¹

The first section of the museum’s exhibit space is entitled “Beyond History’s Records.” This space is devoted entirely to revealing the lives of Native peoples living on the land prior to European contact. “The Far Northern Frontier,” the exhibit’s second area begins with the introduction of Spaniards to the New Mexico story. The area begins in the early 1500s with initial Spanish expeditions into the region and goes through the end of the century when a capital city was founded in the northern portion of the state. Here, sections are included for The Spanish Mission, the Pueblo Revolt, and Neighbors and Strangers.

Further into the museum’s exhibit is area three, labeled “Linking Nations.” “Linking Nations” is one of the largest of the exhibit spaces and features the sections Mexican Independence; Trials of a New Nation; the Santa Fe Trail; Trails, Traders, and

¹ New Mexico History Museum, “Telling New Mexico: Stories from Then and Now,” Museum of New Mexico Media Center, <http://media.museumofnewmexico.org/events.php?action=detail&eventID=214> (accessed January 29, 2012).

New Connections; and Trappers and Mountain Men. It also contains Shifting Boundaries, The Mexican American War, the Taos Rebellion, and Manifest Destiny. The story begins in 1821 with the establishment of the Republic of Mexico and ends around 1846 with the defeat of the Republic at the hands of the neighboring United States.

Area four, “Becoming the Southwest,” features within its exhibit space themes ranging from the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo to the hardships endured by New Mexicans in their attempts to acclimate to ever-abundant social, political, and technological shifts. The exhibit space itself is divided by topic, with the main topics including Indian Policy, Land and Water, The Coming of the Railroad, and Enchantment and “Exploitation”. Following closely is area five, entitled “Our Place in the Nation.” From Statehood at Last and the Great Depression to World War II, New Mexico’s Secret, and the Post-War Booms, this gallery chronicles the more recent chapters in New Mexico’s history and the various influences and impacts experienced by the state’s people at the hands of local, national, and international sources.

The exhibit of the New Mexico History Museum ends with the section “My New Mexico” in which the past is brought into the present for visitors through various photographic displays with the hope that the memories and traditions of yesterday and today will continue to live on in New Mexico’s future.²

² *Ibid.*

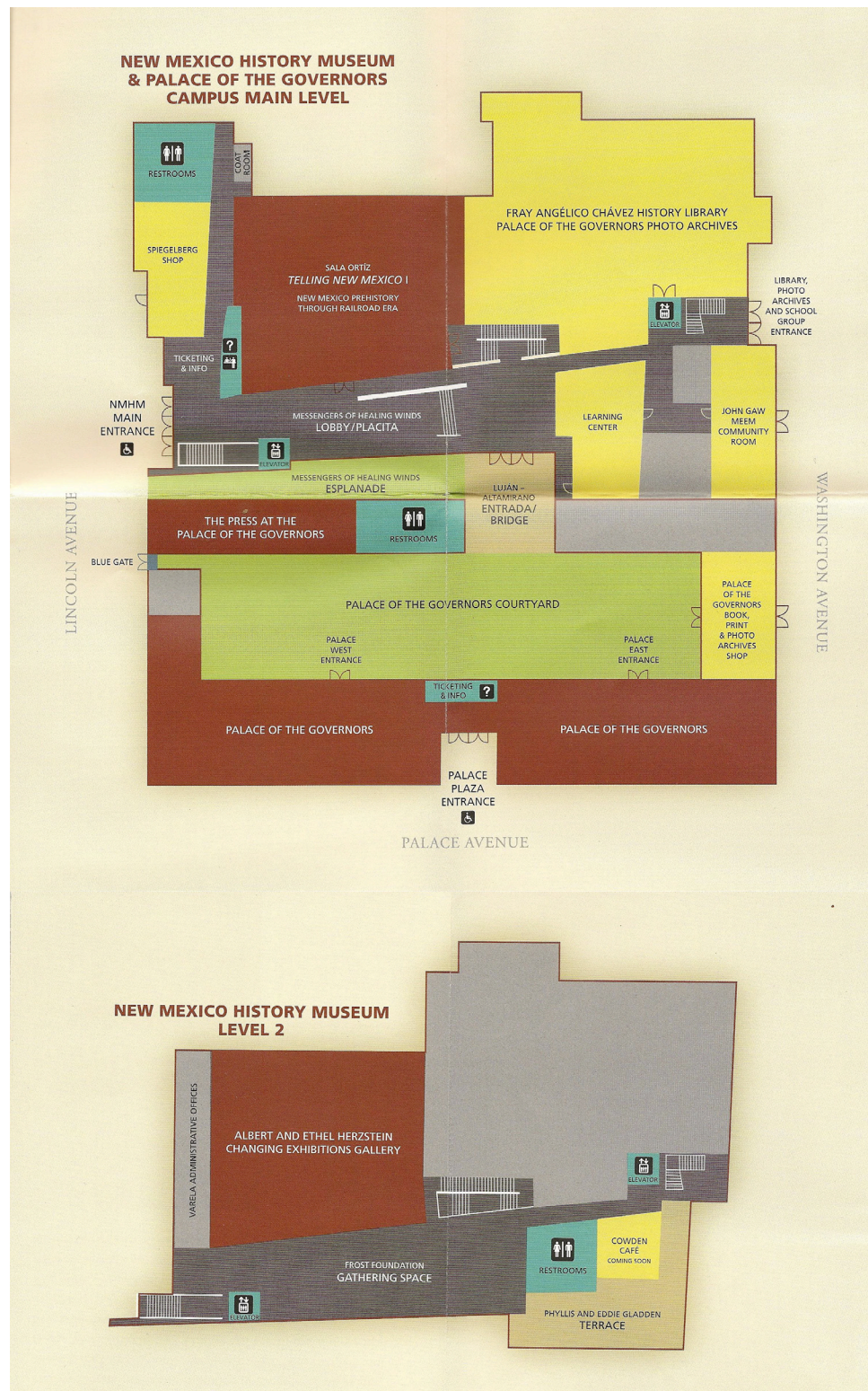


Figure 3. Main Level and Level Two Floor Plans of the New Mexico History Museum.
Source: New Mexico History Museum pamphlet.

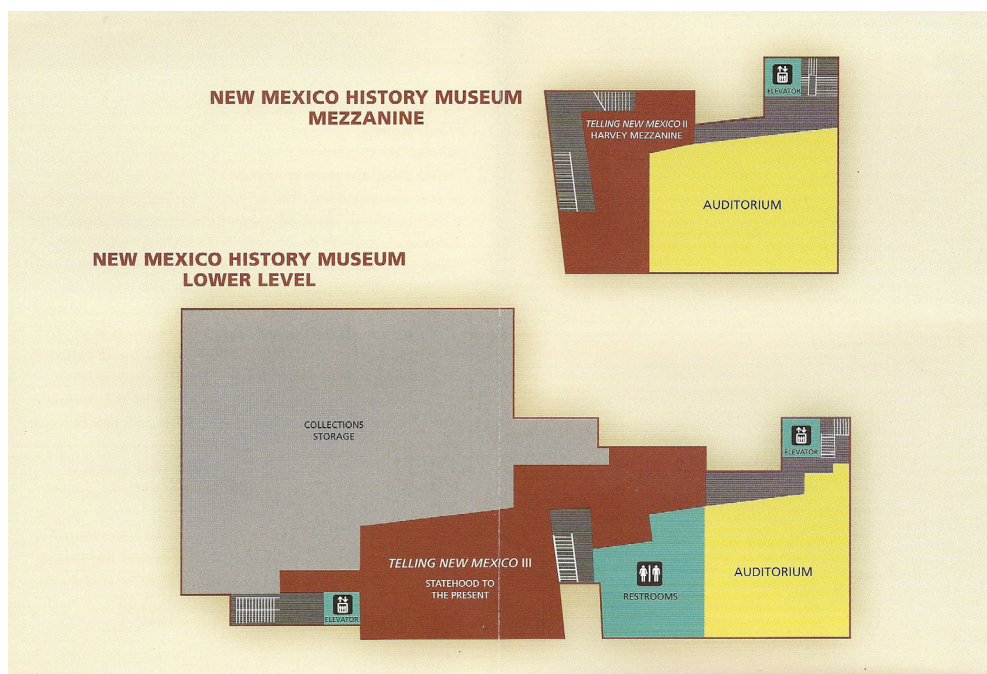


Figure 4. Mezzanine and Lower Level Floor Plans of the New Mexico History Museum. *Source:* New Mexico History Museum pamphlet.

To design the exhibits, the museum worked in conjunction with the firm Gallagher and Associates. When planning the space, the president of Gallagher and Associates, Patrick Gallagher, noted the importance of making sure the different minorities of the state's past were represented and featured within the exhibit's walls. In an article he wrote while the museum was being constructed, Gallagher made note that, "The confluence of cultures and individuals that settled New Mexico over the centuries has molded the social, political, economic, and spiritual nature of its communities. Through dynamic multimedia, this new history museum will give voice to these generations of New Mexicans."³ The director of the museum, Frances Levine, seconded Gallagher's thoughts on the importance of utilizing different interpretations in the

³ Patrick Gallagher, "The Making of a Modern History Museum," *El Palacio* (Summer 2006): 25, <http://www.elpalacio.org/placeseries/summ06intro.pdf> (accessed November 20, 2011).

exhibit space, interpretations to be included in as responsible a manner as possible.

According to Levine, written before the institution was opened to the public:

NMHM [The New Mexico History Museum] will be an opportunity to change the way that most Americans think about their national history by framing it within a broader cultural perspective that recognizes contributions by Spanish, Mexican, Pueblo, Navajo, and Apache peoples... The team believes that all programs and experiences must be based on well-researched history and contain authentic artifacts, and it will respect the diverse points of view that guide how stories are told, and whose stories are told, in the history museum's exhibits.⁴

For the most part, the ideas of those in charge of planning the museum's exhibit spaces as concerned multiculturalism came true. The nature of the main exhibit distinguishes between cultures, resulting in the overwhelming representation of various minorities throughout New Mexico's history. As soon as visitors enter the gallery, they are met with narratives of various native peoples living on the land prior to European settlement. Ancestral artifacts from each tribe's past are featured alongside oral stories from the Navajo and Apache tribes. The exhibit then expands into Native encounters with the Spaniards following the early Spanish expeditions of the 1500s. The interactions between the groups are revealed to have resulted in much conflict, whether over clashes of faith or clashes of customs. It is even noted in the text that during such struggles, individuals of each group could be "bitter and violent."⁵ Stories of conflict continue to be recited within the exhibit with the telling of the 1860 Pueblo revolt. Though the depiction appears to attempt to be unbiased, more text is devoted to, and thus more emphasis placed upon, statistics of Spaniards killed or impacted than is granted to

⁴ Frances Levine, "Creating a Place for Our Past: The New Mexico History Museum," *El Palacio* (Summer 2006): 24, <http://www.elpalacio.org/placeseries/summ06intro.pdf> (accessed November 20, 2011).

⁵ All of the citations of text panels were transcribed by the author upon visiting the New Mexico History Museum in June of 2011.

the rationale for the Pueblo people's discontent under Spanish rule. While both the Spanish and the Pueblo people continue to be the main focus of the interpretation, other tribes, including the Apache, Navajo, and Comanche, all cited as common enemies with the Spanish and Pueblo people, sporadically enter the narrative as well.

Following interpretations surrounding the formation of the Republic of Mexico in 1821, the Adams-Onís treaty, and the Santa Fe Trail, the museum begins to fuse different minority cultures and representations together. The exhibit increasingly starts referring to individuals of the past as New Mexicans instead of distinguishing them by their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Native Americans living outside of established settlements are the exception to this trend. They are continually referenced particularly in relation to their trade with Anglo and Hispanic settlers as well as in relation to various conflicts that continued to arise due to New Mexico's increasing population. A display on the Taos rebellion and the number of Pueblo people and Hispanics impacted and killed eventually leads into discussion surrounding who owned the New Mexican landscape and how Native Americans were adversely affected by centuries of overlapping Spanish and Mexican land claims. The interpretation then delves into Indian policies, both national and territorial, that were established to move Natives onto reservations in order to open land up for ranchers and farmers. Text regarding this, details how the resistance by Natives to such moves was often "more brutal and poignant" than most people realize, noting actions taken by the Apache in particular in fighting against New Mexican authorities. The resettlement of the Navajo and Mescalero Apache peoples receives the most recognition within this exhibit section, as the text notes that the number of individuals who died due to harsh conditions at the

Bosque Redondo reservations where they were taken is unknown but believed to be in the thousands. The exhibit continues to chronicle Native hardships, with mention of Native American education and how children were sent to boarding schools where they were often given new identities so as to eventually be able to assimilate them into society. Hispanics are briefly mentioned in regards to a secret society formed to protect against land speculators in the 1800s, just as they are briefly brought up alongside Indians as being one of the groups that anthropologists from the eastern United States began to 'study.'

Once the exhibit begins to delve into more contemporary history like the Great Depression and World War II, no noticeable ethnic divide is featured in the exhibit, with the exception of a brief note about conflict with Indians at Fort Wingate in the early 1900s. An example of the lack of cultural separateness would be the display of the Pueblo military uniform, which rather than being highlighted as distinct, is featured as one of many military uniforms from different servicemen and women. Eventually, the exhibit space ends with photographic collages representing various minorities and cultures alongside each other and on equal footing. One of the last text panels is perhaps the most telling in terms of the museum's view on multiculturalism within its interpretations. The panel states, "The mixture of traditions, cultures, beliefs, and people here make diversity the norm. There's more than one mainstream in New Mexico."

Throughout the exhibition space, there is no obvious tone surrounding the different interpretations of minority peoples though conflict is most obviously emphasized, more so than at the Bob Bullock Museum in Texas or the Oklahoma History Center in Oklahoma. The interpretation comes across as neither celebratory nor

reproachful, but rather is shown in a way that for the most part allows visitors to decide what they will of the past based on whatever personal inclinations they themselves might hold. Yet while the New Mexico History Museum was planned and set up to showcase diverse cultures and to represent all different peoples, there is one glaring omission that keeps the museum from being considered all-inclusive. African Americans are found nowhere in the interpretations of the main exhibit galleries, despite their most certainly having lived in New Mexico prior to the present day. In the summer of 2011, there was a small, temporary exhibit set up on the top floor of the institution dedicated to African Americans in New Mexico's history, talking about their migration to the land, the segregation they faced, and the contributions they made to the "social fabric of New Mexico history." The last text of this exhibit tells visitors it is one the museum hopes to eventually permanently incorporate within its walls revealing that, at the very least, the museum is aware of their omission and the inconsistency in their representation of people from all walks of life and of all different cultures.

Overall, the approach taken by the New Mexico History Museum in showcasing how various minorities ultimately intermixed and created what is now New Mexican culture is rather new and distinct. It provides but one example of how museums are attempting to incorporate the different communities living outside their walls as well as an alternate way to express the events of history in terms of the people living it as opposed to standard practice of highlighting the predominantly celebrated moments of peoples' pasts. That is not to say that the New Mexico museum necessarily detailed controversial topics in great depth. However, the increased mention of past conflict highlights the direction some museums are heading toward telling as 'authentic' a

history as allowed by the internal and external forces around them, though the question is now raised about how do museum professionals weigh whether to emphasize enchantment or exploitation within their museum's walls.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

While the interpretations and exhibits of the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, the Oklahoma History Center, and the New Mexico History Museum are each distinct in how they represent different cultures' histories, together they provide examples of ways the museum community is attempting, not only to reconcile past injustices, but also to respond to increasing public demand for fuller minority representations within museum displays. However, the exact degree of change needed as well as a prescribed method for how to change remain blurry and contested. Different institutions in different communities with different collections might all require different levels of diversity and multicultural representation within their walls. Yet, ideas surrounding ways to make exhibits and interpretations more racially and ethnically diverse are worth noting as the shift in the way museums present distinctive minorities will most certainly have implications for future institutions, their practices, and their audiences.

At present, pluralistic exhibit approaches range from those that assimilate different races into mainstream interpretations, similar to the end exhibits of the Bob Bullock museum, to those that exoticize cultures with the purpose of distinguishing them from one another, as with the early interpretations of the New Mexico History Museum. While both methods can be found in a multitude of institutions, the technique of

exoticizing minorities is currently more widespread in the museum community.¹

Nevertheless, museums have increasingly been attempting to find a balance between the two approaches in order to highlight the universal nature of peoples, a balance that ideally would show both similarities and differences side by side. There is a mounting sentiment among museum professionals, historians, and anthropologists that, as anthropologist Clifford Geertz writes, “Cultural facts could be interpreted against the background of noncultural facts without dissolving them into that background or dissolving that background into them.”² One institution, the Heritage Museum (Ethnic Heritage Learning Resource Center) in the Bronx, New York, has attempted this feat while granting various minorities within the museum’s community their own specific sections, such as “The African Area” and “The Puerto Rican Area,” within the larger exhibit space.³

Others have begun to focus not only on such equal representation in exhibit spaces but also the inclusion of sometimes controversial and conflicting minority storylines into the overall interpretation. In an attempt to include controversial topics of the past without offending visitors or being seen as glorifying historical injustices, the Whitworth Art Gallery at the University of Manchester in England produced an exhibit in which their text panels included the discussion that had taken place among curators and critics in terms of the provocative subjects broached in the museum. The hope was

¹ Ivan Karp, “Other Cultures in Museum Perspective,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 375-76.

² Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), 38.

³ David Julian Hodges, “Museums, Anthropology, and Minorities: In Search of a New Relevance for Old Artifacts,” *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (1978): 152, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3216196> (accessed September 10, 2011).

that this would spark dialogue and reveal that institutions are becoming increasingly willing to discuss with outsiders various controversial periods in minority histories.⁴ This particular example showcases not only the shift in how cultures are represented in museums but also the changing attitudes of museum professionals toward their interpretations. Thomas A. Woods heralds this trend, stating, “Curators...need to be aware that their interpretation is a perspectivistic one, and they should allow and even encourage alternative interpretations of the cultural significance of objects, events, and people. They need to acknowledge that artifacts and change have different meanings for different classes of people and for different individuals.”⁵

As with basic exhibit format, this idea has similarly resulted in a number of distinct techniques as to how to incorporate alternative interpretations both within exhibits themselves as well as within the development stages of various displays. Overwhelmingly, the favored techniques for diversifying representations and including various perspectives in museums has centered on museums increasingly involving their local communities in the planning of their interpretations. Alice Wexler endorsed this sentiment, stating:

The question of the equitable representation of heritage, culture, and identity might be solved by returning to the local communities where they arise. The intersection of land, history, culture, and politics in the community inform art from the point of view of participation rather than exclusion. Art as inseparable

⁴ Alan Rice, “Revealing Histories, Dialogising Collections: Museums and Galleries in North West England Commemorating the Abolition of the Slave Trade,” *Slavery and Abolition* 30, no. 2 (2009): 298, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 27, 2011).

⁵ Thomas A. Woods, “Getting Beyond the Criticism of History Museums: A Model for Interpretation,” *The Public Historian* 12, no. 3 (1990): 84, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3378200> (accessed July 27, 2011).

from its context takes on new meaning as narrative is written into place by its people.⁶

Though Wexler is explicitly referencing art and art institutions, this process can be found being utilized in widely varying museums across the country. Steven D. Lavine and Ivan Karp sum up the direction museums are and should be heading by stating that in the end, despite differences and debate, the basic needs for future minority interpretations center around:

(1) The strengthening of institutions that give populations a chance to exert control over the way they are presented in museums; (2) the expansion of the expertise of established museums in the presentation of non-Western cultures and minority cultures in the United States; and (3) experiments with exhibition design that will allow museums to offer multiple perspectives.⁷

No matter the approaches taken or techniques utilized by various institutions, new and altered minority interpretations have the potential to be far-reaching and impactful both for museums as well as for their audiences. Most seem to believe that more diverse displays will connect visitors with each other. Tracy Jean Rosenberg argues that museums can affect the social cohesion between local, national, and international communities, “by educating the majority about minority populations and creating understandings between and about people and their experiences.”⁸ She goes on to write that “seeing another group’s history accurately displayed in a museum can take away the sense of that group as a ‘stranger,’ thus cohering the viewers and the group

⁶ Alice Wexler, “Museum Culture and the Inequities of Display and Representation,” *Visual Arts Research* 33, no. 1 (2007): 31, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20715431> (accessed September 7, 2011).

⁷ Steven D. Lavine and Ivan Karp, “Introduction: Museums and Multiculturalism,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 6.

⁸ Tracy Jean Rosenberg, “History Museums and Social Cohesion: Building Identity, Bridging Communities, and Addressing Difficult Issues,” *Peabody Journal of Education* 86, no. 2 (2011): 116, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2011.561171> (accessed July 27, 2011).

whose history is displayed.”⁹ Minority histories would then ultimately be perceived as relevant in the modern world, as relatable to majority visitors’ own experiences.¹⁰ In the end, the purpose of the movement toward more diverse and inclusive exhibits centers around this idea. With museums having often been granted a certain authority by the public over different cultures and ideas, they are now in the position to educate and create new understandings for the general populace about different peoples within their communities, understandings that might foster better overall relationships between individuals from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Having laid out the general direction museums are taking toward diversifying their exhibits and shedding old stereotypes, it is worth noting that all representations are not relevant in every museum, so not every museum needs to focus on equally representing all peoples but rather focus on those that will most impact and reverberate with their particular audience and community.¹¹ There is also no way to ever guarantee public satisfaction with a museum’s interpretation of a certain group of people. Museums will likely always leave someone or other believing that the museum could have or should have done more with their exhibit space, therefore institutions must decide what interpretations they feel are most responsible and most within their power and purpose to present. Nevertheless, museums like the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, the Oklahoma History Center, and the New Mexico History Museum

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ John E. Fleming, “African-American Museums, History, and the American Ideal,” *The Journal of American History* 81, no. 3 (1994): 1021, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 5, 2012).

¹¹ Patrick T. Houlihan, “The Poetic Image and Native American Art,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 210.

have come a long way in opening their displays and interpretations to various races and cultures, no matter how one might view the current state of exhibits. Whether they are ideal yet or not, museums are rising to meet the demands of the diverse public around them with the hope that one day they might achieve within their exhibits unbiased and authentic portrayals as fitting all the various cultures past and present.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

A Note on the Sources

An examination of multiculturalism within museum exhibits, based largely on current exhibit appearances, relies heavily on secondary sources. Of particular note are *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991) and *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992). Both were edited by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, with *Museums and Communities* also featuring the editor Christine Mullen Kreamer, and both involve a series of articles discussing all of the different aspects of museum work and the degrees to which museums can work toward representing society in the most complete manner possible.

Two other important literary contributions to the discussion regarding the role of social history and multiculturalism in museums are *The Museum Time-Machine: Putting Cultures on Display*, edited by Robert Lumley (London: Routledge, 1990), and *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World*, edited by Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996). One crucial text devoted to examining historical institutions in particular, as well as their exhibits and their practices, is *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*, edited by Warren Leo and Roy Rosenzweig (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

For more detailed accounts of the challenges faced by specific institutions as well as information regarding approaches taken in individual exhibits, Victoria Dickenson's

“History, Ethnicity, and Citizenship: the Role of the History Museum in a Multi-Ethnic Country” (2006), Fath Davis Ruffins’s “Culture Wars Won and Lost: Ethnic Museums on the Mall, Part I” (1997), Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Carl Grodach’s “Displaying and Celebrating the ‘Other’: A Study of the Mission, Scope, and Roles of Ethnic Museums in Los Angeles” (2004), and Misao Dean’s “Managing Diversity in the Representation of BC History” (2002/2003) all provide excellent scholarship and insight.

Particularly helpful for general information about the state history museums studied here were the websites for the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, the Oklahoma History Center, and the New Mexico State History Museum. Each institution’s website along with the pamphlets and brochures that were acquired upon visiting each institution helped to round out the case study sections of the present work.

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