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HOW MUSEUMS SHAPE DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

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INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 1986 I spent three months in Rochester, Minnesota, at the Mayo Clinic while my daughter, Elizabeth, recovered from open-heart surgery. Though I spent many hours with Elizabeth, I also took time for myself. I often walked to the supermarket through a slightly run down neighborhood where I saw many Asian children playing in front yards. Rochester is an upper middle class small city comprised of doctors from Mayo and IBM executives. I was puzzled as to why Asians were in Rochester.

During the long hours I spent in the hospital, I became friendly with the nursing staff, and we often discussed events other than Elizabeth's health issues. I inquired about the Asian children and was told that church groups had sponsored Vietnamese families to be brought to Minnesota. I was astounded! Little did I realize what the living conditions were like in Southeast Asia. On the other hand, how would they earn a living? How would they adjust to the cold climate? Who was helping these people learn a new language and teaching them about daily life? Why were so many living in one house? How would they succeed in this new environment?

After I left Rochester with Elizabeth I often thought about the Asians I had observed. Later I learned that church groups located in the Northern Plains states sponsored ethnic Asians in order to give them a new start in life. They found housing for them and assisted them with their job search. School-aged children were sent to summer school to be taught English and how to handle the chores of daily life. It was not until I

went to Michigan State University in 1999 to work at the Kresge Art Museum that I met a Hmong student and learned about her family's immigration to the United States after the Vietnam War. Later, while doing my research for a thesis topic, I read an interesting article about an exhibition called *Bridging A Cultural Gap* at the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Museum in Wausau, Wisconsin. Then I began to fully understand how such a large Asian population had come to be in the Northern Plains states.

Historically, the United States of America was founded on the principle that all men are created equal. Our forefathers came to this country seeking religious freedom and during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many immigrants came to the United States from all parts of Europe and Russia seeking their own religious freedom and economic opportunity. During this period of massive immigration the term "Melting Pot" described the large cities throughout the United States. Many different cultures represented these immigrants and being Caucasian made it easier for them to assimilate into the population. Another reason for the mass immigration was a European Victorian "belief in the natural inequity of human beings, and a readiness to generalize freely about the character of racial and ethnic groups."¹ No scientific proof suggested that one ethnic group was superior to another. However, since the Italian Renaissance physical attributes of various ethnic groups were scrutinized and found to be inferior. These prejudices were ingrained in subsequent generations and a form of racism developed. The immigrants sought freedom from these prejudices along with a better way of life.

In order to overcome prejudices, the immigrants of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries learned the language, dressed in American fashions and embraced

¹ F. Graeme Chalmers, *Celebrating Pluralism: Art, Education and Cultural Diversity* (Los Angeles, California: The Getty Institute for the Arts, 1996) 19.

American culture. While doing so they gave up some of their native identity. As time went on it became more acceptable for them to be open with their cultural traditions or rituals. Again, this led to misunderstandings and prejudices. American citizens who had lived in the United States for generations objected to these cultural traditions being openly observed. Why did it matter? Were these Americans insecure with their own heritage? Were they intimidated by these differences and afraid to learn about something new? No matter what the reasons, the cultural differences began to create unrest. At the same time the African American population demanded to be heard. As we all know their ancestors were brought to the fledging United States under great distress. Somehow the early African Americans passed on their African traditions to later generations and now wanted to practice them openly without being condemned.

African Americans struggled through the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century attempting to gain the rights they had been promised by the Emancipation Proclamation. Finally, the Civil Rights Movement took a strong hold during the 1960s. Over the next decade laws were passed to give the black population their equal rights after the country witnessed many devastating riots in major cities.

I will begin the thesis by exploring *Harlem on My Mind*. It was one of the first blockbusters conceived, and it was to be inclusive of African Americans in New York City. This exhibition is an anti-model, and it demonstrates how naïve and oblivious the museum world was during this period and the country as a whole by extension.

By the late 1980s New York City institutions had made great strides in their relations with African Americans. Then in August 1991 several unintentional events

took place in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn that unraveled all the goodwill. A Hasidic Jew hit and killed a young Caribbean American child in an automobile accident. These events brought tremendous unrest to the neighborhood where riots broke out, which led to the death of a Jewish scholar. Three institutions in Brooklyn came to the rescue. The Brooklyn Children's Museum, the Brooklyn Historical Society and the Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant renewed their discussion about a history project collaboration that culminated into *The Crown Heights History Project*. This time the institutions learned their lessons from *Harlem on My Mind* and included the residents in the preparation for this successful exhibition.

After the Vietnam War many ethnic Asian people wished to immigrate to the United States. Many were left homeless or in detainer camps and church groups throughout the United States sponsored these families and brought them to various locations in America. Many relocated to the Northern Plains states and my second case study features the Hmong, mountain people from Laos, sponsored by church organizations in Wausau, Wisconsin, where they settled in 1976. By 1990 their population had increased dramatically, and the Hmong represented 11 percent of the 38,000 residents of Wausau. The rapid growth placed a burden on the school system while long time residents resented the resettlement program.² The atmosphere in this small city became tense. Fortunately, the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Museum intervened by developing an interactive exhibition, *Bridging A Cultural Gap*, while incorporating the help of Hmong citizens and thus creating tolerance throughout the entire community.

² Georgia Lang, telephone interview, 26 Feb. 2001.

In addition to Asian emigration, other ethnic groups migrated to the United States in the past several decades. Both The Arizona Republic and The New York Times recently carried articles reporting the findings of the 2000 census. Presently, Hispanics outnumber non-Hispanic blacks while there is also an explosion in population of Asians and Native Americans.³ The Hispanic population grew 58 percent in one decade. In Florida and California Hispanics outnumber non-Hispanic black population and in California Hispanics make up one third of the population.⁴ Traditionally, minorities have felt out of the loop and misunderstood by the so-called white majority. However, now Hispanics and African-Americans can join forces and share political and socioeconomic issues, such as improving education and urban development.⁵ They together form a majority over Whites. With this in mind one can see the importance of developing multicultural exhibitions to help diverse populations understand each other's differences and also see the similarities within each culture. It is also necessary for European Americans to understand the diversity and rid themselves of the prejudices that have been passed down for generations. In so doing, it makes our nation a stronger country both politically and socially.

The growth of the Hispanic population leads me to my third case study. The Bowers Museum of Cultural Art in Santa Ana, California, hosted an exhibition about the Virgin of Guadalupe. The exhibition was a perfect match for both the Museum and the community since Santa Ana is made up of 80 percent Hispanics. It also helped the mainstream American community better understand why the devotion to the Virgin of

³Genaro C. Armas, "Racial Diversity Grows in U.S.: Latinos gaining fast on Blacks," Arizona Republic 13 Mar. 2001: A4.

⁴Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Now More Diverse, Ethnically and Racially," New York Times 1 Apr. 2001: 20.

⁵Armas, A4.

Guadalupe is highly regarded amongst Mexican-Americans. Another positive aspect of this exhibition was the collaboration with community organizations during the development of the exhibition. When diverse groups come together for a common goal an *esprit d'accord* occurs, and it can be the glue that holds a community together during difficult times.

My intent throughout this thesis is to discuss the role museums play in interpreting cultural differences and uniting communities. Often cultural differences are misunderstood and create suspicion, which leads to racial and ethnic tensions. I will aim to illustrate how a third party with nothing at stake can help ease these tensions. Museums can be that third party, and the experiences encountered by visitors within museum walls are enlightening. Museum visitors, no matter what their age, come with their own set of life experiences. For instance, children are learning about countries throughout the world in their social studies and history classes. Students benefit tremendously from seeing artifacts and the ways, in which they are used in various cultural and historical contexts. Viewing objects such as armor used during the Crusades, artifacts utilized as Vikings invade foreign lands, or clothing worn by royalty, brings the historical events alive.

Ancient civilizations can not be experienced first hand because they have passed. However, students may indirectly re-experience different civilizations when they encounter objects that had been created and used in that given period of history. For instance, Greek vase painting teaches students about life in ancient Greece. Objects buried in Egyptian tombs depict everyday scenes as lived by the deceased ruler. Such supplemental programs give in depth views of life in different historical periods. This

experience broadens students' understanding of past civilizations and gives them a foundation for the world in which they live. In many cases, museums are the only local institution that can provide these tools for in depth study.

In light of the learning benefits of the museum experience, my three case studies will also demonstrate the advantage they have in resolving conflicts and tensions within a community. They illustrate how the conceptualization of the exhibitions, the actual shows, and their educational programs along with the involvement of the various ethnic groups bring better appreciation of cultural differences. In fact, the worlds of the various ethnic and racial groups described in these exhibitions come alive, giving museum visitors one more block on which to build their museum experiences.

I will begin the thesis using *Harlem on My Mind* as an anti-model to prove what goes wrong when ethnic or racial groups are excluded from the conceptualization and the development of an exhibition. It is my contention that museums can make a significant difference within communities when there is unrest between different cultural groups. Exhibitions bring a greater comprehension of different cultures and ethnic groups and provide harmony to the community. The world is becoming smaller due to transportation and technology. We in the museum field have at our disposal teaching tools in our collections to utilize in helping one another gain a better knowledge about these cultures.

HARLEM ON MY MIND: the anti-model

Harlem on My Mind, an exhibition presented by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in January 1969 was a provocative exhibition that launched a phenomenon we now know as the blockbuster. It had all the trappings, of what was then considered the latest in technology. Photographs were enlarged to fill the walls of the exhibition. Slides flashed on other walls while the audio system blared out the sounds of street noises, voices of Harlem residents and music from the clubs and ballrooms. Yet, the questions remained what did these exhibits have to do with art? Why did the Metropolitan Museum of Art host a cultural exhibition? What was the relation between art history and the sociological history of Harlem?

It was a time of change. The Civil Rights movement of the sixties was wrought with racial violence. Crackdowns on unions of public employees due to strikes and slowdowns were common. Tension filled the air and times were ripe for protests. Combining new ways of displaying social phenomena with traditional depictions of art, the show portrayed politically and socially charged issues in an aesthetic fashion. The critics of the day found this exhibition to be unacceptable and kept asking where the art was. In their eyes, the show's alleged display of social issues failed to satisfy the aesthetic expectations of an exhibition.

Let us start by examining the key players of this exhibition. Thomas P. F. Hoving became director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1967, after serving as Commissioner of Parks for New York City. He had jazzed up the parks with cutting edge events and was now onto the Met to do the same. Allon Schoener, Visual Art Director of

the New York State Council on the Arts was the head curator for the show. At the Jewish Museum he produced an interesting exhibition exploring the Lower East Side and Jewish immigrants who resided there, using a similar format that he then adapted for *Harlem on My Mind*. The only two African Americans involved with the planning of the exhibition were Donald Harper, an audio engineer and Reginald McGhee, a photographer.⁶

Hoving intended to produce a cultural overview of Harlem from the beginning of the twentieth century to 1968, while Schoener's goal was to incorporate the latest technology and visual aids into the exhibition. When the announcement of the exhibition came, the Harlem community assumed the focus of the exhibition would be on the artistic achievements of African Americans. Hence, leaders in Harlem wanted to participate in the planning stages of the exhibition.⁷ The original intent was to exhibit paintings, prints and drawings of black American artists. Schoener denied ever having those intentions, and he claimed never to have approved the press release that so stated it. As time went on the black artist community of Harlem spoke out against the exhibition. Benny Andrew, a painter and activist, formed the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition to demonstrate against the exhibition. Ed Taylor who headed up the Harlem Cultural Council requested a position on the exhibition staff, yet he was rebuffed by Scheoner. Two months before the opening of the exhibition the Council publicly withdrew their support.⁸ Romare Bearden and Henri Ghent, leaders of the black artist community, expressed their anger over the lack of artwork to be in the exhibition. Scheoner believed that artwork would negate the interactive atmosphere of the exhibition that he strongly

⁶ "Harlem Experiment," *Time* 24 Jan. 1969: 44+.

⁷ Steven C. Dubin, *Displays of Power: Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1999) 25.

⁸ Dubin, 29.

desired.⁹ He also felt that paintings were no longer the valid means of expression for the twentieth century.¹⁰ When black artists continued to protest, the Met promised them to host an independent exhibition, which never materialized.¹¹

During the preliminary research Reginald McGhee discovered a multitude of old photographs by a well-known photographer in Harlem, James Van DerZee.¹² Schoener was enthralled by the photographs and designed the exhibition around them.

Photography is an art form but two questions come to mind when we look at this exhibition. Were these pictures more journalistic rather than artistic? Secondly, by enlarging the photographs to larger than life proportion, does that lessen their artistic value?

Many critics of the day blasted the museum for not displaying the artwork of African American artists. John Canaday in his non-review since there was no art to review said, the Met "is making its debut this Saturday as a museum of sociological documentation."¹³ Katherine Kuh chimed in by saying she "deplored the Madison Avenue techniques" and questioned "why photographs should decorate ceilings and leap off of columns."¹⁴ A. D. Coleman, a scathing left-wing writer for the *Village Voice* declared "on purely aesthetic and technical grounds, 'Harlem On My Mind' rapes photography repeatedly without even bringing that medium anywhere near orgasm. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art is a bad lay.)"¹⁵ Even in 1969, more than 100 years after

⁹ Thomas Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance* (New York and London: Simon and Schuster, 1993) 167.

¹⁰ Dubin, 27.

¹¹ Dubin, 43.

¹² Dubin, 41.

¹³ John Canaday, "Getting Harlem Off My Mind," *New York Times* 12 Jan. 1969: D25.

¹⁴ Katherine Kuh, "What's an Art Museum for?" *Saturday Review* 26 Jan. 1969: 58-9.

¹⁵ Dubin, 47.

the beginning of photography, it was still considered an "upstart form of expression."¹⁶ By only having enlarged photographs as the art medium made the exhibition innovative, but not to include works of art by African Americans was deplorable. As was stated earlier, it was a time of change and the techniques used in this exhibition pushed the envelope. This horrified most art critics.

The exhibition catalogue caused the Met to face another dilemma. Allon Schoener met Candace Van Ellison when she worked for the New York Council on the Arts through the auspices of Ghetto Arts Corps. He learned about a term paper she wrote in 1967, her senior year at Theodore Roosevelt High School in the Bronx,¹⁷ that gave a new and fresh voice to the hardships that those in Harlem had suffered under the discrimination of other ethnic groups. He decided to use it as the introductory essay for the catalogue. One of the themes of the paper focused on the negative experiences African Americans had with Jews both as shopkeepers and as employers. However, the Jewish population took serious offense to the essay and demanded the withdrawal of the catalogue. It was deemed racist and anti-Semitic by many Jewish groups and politicians of New York. The term paper, it was later discovered, relied heavily on a book written by Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan called Beyond the Melting Pot. Schoener had Van Ellison remove all the quotation marks and footnotes to make the reading easier.¹⁸ This incident jeopardized Schoener's credibility, but the catalogue episode was only a sideshow compared to the exhibition.

¹⁶ Dubin, 53.

¹⁷ Thomas P.F. Hoving, letter, Harlem On My Mind Catalogue, ed. Allon Schoener (New York: Random House, 1969).

¹⁸ Dubin, 34.

Despite the harsh critical reviews in magazines and newspapers, the exhibition was a sellout. By today's standards, it was a success. What did the museum world learn from this exhibition? Part of the failure lay in the exclusion of the black community. Their leaders expected to have an active role in the preparation of the exhibition, but they were never included. The curator of the exhibition, Allon Schoener, is Jewish and good at cutting edge technology for the sixties, but he lacked expertise in African American culture. The museum remained under the domain of the white male. Curators and museum administrators were not ready to collaborate with outsiders especially those without advanced degrees. They had their own elite group, thinking only they knew how to organize an exhibition. Schoener needed to be more flexible in sharing his ideas and getting input about the cultural life in Harlem, in order to avoid the chaos. However, museums were not ready to relinquish this authority.

The museum also failed to show the artistic achievements of African Americans in the twentieth century. The photographs used lost their aesthetic dimension when enlarged. Schoener did not use foresight and display paintings, prints, and drawings of the most accomplished African American artists of each decade. The artistic tradition was the component needed to give depth to the exhibition. However, photographer James Van DerZee indirectly benefited from the exhibition. He gained notoriety because he received more business and won many awards.

The idea of social issues being used as an exhibition within an art museum was also radical. It was a commonly held belief among all the critics who wrote articles at this time that an art museum was not a place to hold an exhibition exploring the "current

issues" and "contemporary affairs" of the day.¹⁹ Schoener wanted audience interaction because it is the most effective way of communication. This show began the process of making the break from the traditional visit to an art museum to an interactive event. The old guard found it difficult to tolerate this revolutionary exhibition, but in time these new ideas were assimilated. The preparation of the catalogue also created havoc. Schoener showed little regard for his own ethnicity when he published an essay that sounded racist and another from Hoving that sounded elitist. However, in the late sixties those in power were insensitive to social issues.

All of these events culminated in protests and support being withdrawn from the exhibition. Instead of helping race relations, *Harlem on My Mind* alienated New York City's African Americans. Over the years exhibition techniques have improved. Social issues are handled in a more tactful way and without sacrificing the aesthetic dimension of the phenomena. Minority groups, being featured in an exhibition, take an active role in the interpretation of an exhibition. Many interactive educational activities are developed to promote lively discussions. Public programming expands on the information learned in an exhibition and other exhibitions evolve from the initial one. Collaborations and partnerships develop within the community to support an exhibition. All of this leads to a well-rounded exhibition, which unites a community rather than dividing it.

In the following pages three case studies are explored. Each examines the notion that racial and ethnic groups inspire exhibition teams and provide substance to the exhibitions. The first case study, *The Crown Heights History Project*, illustrates how racial and ethnic groups are treated by New York City institutions today.

¹⁹ Neil Harris, "Exhibiting Controversy," *Museum News* Sept.-Oct. 1995: 39.

CROWN HEIGHTS HISTORY PROJECT

The events of August 19, 1991, in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, brought race relations to a head. A Hasidic Jew named Yosel Lifsh hit and killed Gavin Cato, a Caribbean child, in an automobile accident. In turn, during an emotional upheaval, Lemerick Nelson, Jr., a black youth, fatally stabbed an innocent Jewish scholar, Yankel Rosenbaum who was from Australia. These events brought tremendous unrest to the neighborhood that was not quieted for days. In the months to follow three institutions within the community renewed their discussion about a history project collaboration to ease racial tensions. Crown Heights is a diverse neighborhood with many ethnic groups living in close proximity to one another, including the three major groups - Lubavitch Hasidic Jews, African Americans, and Caribbean Americans.

It was the Brooklyn Historical Society, the Brooklyn Children's Museum and the Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant History who joined forces in developing *The Crown Heights History Project*. The combination of exhibitions and education programs produced by these institutions created a better understanding of the various cultures in the neighborhood.

The Brooklyn Children's Museum assembled Jews and blacks, the two main conflicting groups immediately following the August 1991 incidents. The museum proved to be a safe haven for both groups to meet and discuss their differences outside of the glare of the media. Eventually, a Community Advisory Committee was established in order to develop a working relation with leaders in the various ethnic communities. With the collaboration of Historical Societies and the Museum, they enacted the Mission for

the exhibition. They stated a "belief that education about our own and other people's history and culture is essential to the process of building trust among different groups." It also "seeks to bring new awareness about this complex neighborhood to the city at large."²⁰ In fostering these beliefs the three institutions developed a continuing commitment to the city at large in acknowledging the changing population while also serving their local communities.

Following the completion of the Mission statement, the institutions selected co-directors. Jill Vexler, a cultural anthropologist and Craig Wilder, an African American urban history professor developed exhibitions, public events, and educational programs to benefit the community at large. First, the project directors who themselves have multicultural backgrounds gathered oral histories and traditions directly from the neighborhood residents. They insisted on this first hand information because they wanted residents to feel that they could shape the perception of their community through the representation of these histories. Oral histories of residents revealed their backgrounds, daily lives, celebrations and rituals. In this way they could dispel the media reporting about the tragedies in Crown Heights. It was also a way for the community to interact with one another and participate in the process of developing an exhibition. Crown Heights' residents realized that when the media interviewed their black youths, they portrayed them as typical angry black teenagers. Vexler and Wilder convinced the Crown Heights population that these Brooklyn institutions wanted to depict them accurately.²¹

²⁰ The Crown Heights History Project (1994).

Mindy Duitz, "Anchor in a Troubled Community," Museum Director's Journal Mar.-Apr. 1992: 80.

²¹ Susannah Cassidy O'Donnell, "Making Peace in Crown Heights," Museum News July-Aug. 1994:13.

Jill Vexler, reared in an observant Jewish household, founded Cultural Crossroads, Inc., a not-for-profit corporation that develops intercultural recognition programs. Craig Wilder grew up in the inner city but with hard work and education, he became a professor of urban history and today teaches at Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts.²² During the compilation of the oral histories, the co-directors collected information from each other's ethnic/racial group. It was difficult at first, but they gained confidence and trust of the people they interviewed. In doing so, they showed that this was another way to ease the tensions within the community especially when the residents saw the end results in the exhibitions.

Trust was an important factor to establish at the beginning of the project. With the creation of the Community Advisory Committee representatives from various ethnic neighborhoods organized forums, which served as a place to exchange ideas and share traditions. From these grassroots interest groups workshops developed in which ethnic groups participated. The workshops promoted better understanding of their cultures through education. Puppets are used by both the Lubavitch Jew and African American cultures to tell folk stories while music is another common bond shared by Jews and Caribbean Americans. Jews sang their Israeli songs while Caribbean Americans played their percussion. These common threads are just a few examples of what they learned when they shared their cultures with one another.²³

²² "Spotlight on Crown Heights," BCM News May, June, July, Aug. 1993: 2.

²³ O'Donnell, 13.

The appearance of Hasidic Jews is quite different from African and Caribbean Americans, which causes suspicion. Jewish men wear pray shawls underneath their dark suits along with a form of head covering, such as a fedora or yarmulke. They grow long beards and have side curls. On the other hand, African Americans and Caribbean Americans wear clothes of contemporary American culture with some African or the Caribbean influences, such as colorful shirts or head wrappings. And yet, the similarities of folk stories told through puppets and the enjoyment of music whether sung or played on percussion awakens an appreciation for one another's culture since it is an understood commodity. This creates a common bond. They have transcended their differences and the three institutions achieved their goal to promote peace and understanding amongst the residents of Crown Heights.

Originally, the History Project was called *Bridging Eastern Parkway*, but it soon became known as *The Crown Heights History Project* with each institution having their own title for their specific exhibition. Within an eight-month period, preparations for the exhibitions began, using oral histories, photographs, and objects they had collected.²⁴

The theme uniting the three exhibitions was "Insider versus the Outsider." The Brooklyn Children's Museum exhibition, *Crown Heights: The Inside Scoop*, presented the children's point of view by having them explore neighborhoods, locate significant public sites and look at homes of different ethnic groups through interactive exhibitions. Community residents then shared with the children why they came to live in Crown Heights, what was important to them about their community, and the meaning of their

²⁴ BCM News, 1.

ritual objects and cultural traditions. The children followed by talking about their neighborhoods and why their parents chose to live there. Surprisingly, the children focused on what they liked best about their neighborhoods rather than the violence and hate of recent years. They also talked about daily life citing simple pleasures of childhood like their favorite toys.²⁵

The Brooklyn Historical Society exhibition, *Crown Heights: Perceptions and Realities*, continued with the common thread of "Insider vs. the Outsider." It concentrated on stereotypes and beliefs that outsiders have of Crown Heights and compared them to the inside perspective of what life in Crown Heights is actually like. The visitor's understanding increased about why prejudices, such as racism and anti-Semitism, are divisive. Since Jews and blacks have different skin color, different religions, and dress differently, they view one another with wariness and rancor. Through these discussions the museum visitor and residents of Crown Heights realized it is the perception that is portrayed through the media, but in reality they have many similarities, such as the love of music and telling of folk tales. To rise above this perception and to understand one another's culture overcomes the divisiveness that will avoid the reoccurrence of events similar to those of August 19, 1991. Another way to better comprehend these groups is to explore how they came to live in Crown Heights. By using photographs of the Crown Heights neighborhoods, people, and objects portraying cultural traditions, the Brooklyn Historical Society exhibition traced their settlement.²⁶

²⁵ O'Donnell, 63.

²⁶ History Project.

The Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant History is an African American historical society located in the New York City landmark, Hunterfly Road Houses. These houses are remnants of nineteenth century homes of free African Americans located in Weeksville. Their exhibition, *Crown Heights: The African Diaspora*, followed the migration of the African people from the fourteenth century to the present. A storyboard used as an interactive exhibit traced the profiles of four individuals who came to Crown Heights from Jamaica (1930), South Carolina (1940), Haiti (1970), and Nigeria (1980). Through these sketches the viewer hears about their successes and failures. The visitor also observed that the many traditions brought from Africa have evolved,²⁷ such as the use of fetishes. The Haitians summoned spirits through the use of fetishes in order to perform a good or evil deed. After the Spanish conquered islands in the Caribbean and imposed the Roman Catholic faith on the natives, the Haitians kept their fetish traditions and incorporated them into the ritual of the church service.

Again the question arises, is a museum the place to solve social issues? All of these activities opened the eyes of the minority groups, and they realized that many traditions within each culture are similar. The common bond is there, and they should be more trusting of one another. The project directors and the museum heads are hopeful that residents will view their neighborhoods in a new light in order to create a better understanding through the exhibition information and open the lines of communication for further discussion.²⁸

The exhibitions at these three institutions disseminated information through interactive displays, maps, photographs, and other pictures, and they are historical in

²⁷ History Project.

²⁸ O'Donnell, 63.

nature. A historical exhibition is based on facts; therefore when there is an interpretation of a historical exhibition, one must return to the facts. However, an art exhibition is comprised of various artworks painted by artists. They interpret an event or scene not only founded on their feelings but how they perceive to represent it at a given moment in time. The next chapter discusses an exhibition that combined factual information juxtaposed with artworks painted specifically as a propaganda tool to support the French government for colonizing Indochina.

BRIDGING A CULTURAL GAP

Can art museums serve to solve cultural differences? As discussed in the first chapter, *Harlem on My Mind*, a community can be further divided if an exhibition is not developed correctly. *Harlem on My Mind* proved it, and it stands as an anti-model in this thesis. In the development of *Harlem* the exclusion of the residents of Harlem inflamed relations between the Harlem community and elite institutions of New York City, like the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The blockbuster concept did not exist in the late 1960s, but with the opening of *Harlem on My Mind* the phenomenon exploded onto the museum scene. *Harlem* had all the ingredients for an interesting exhibition but for one – the actual involvement of the black community. The museum world was still very much of a white man's arena, and they did not understand how to successfully include minorities in the development of an exhibition. Because of this lack of inclusiveness the exhibition lost the respect of all racial and ethnic groups. Over the past 25 years cultural exhibitions improved upon *Harlem's* initial ideas and *Bridging a Cultural Gap* at the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Museum in Wausau, Wisconsin, demonstrates this effectively.

Wausau, Wisconsin, is home to the Hmong, an ethnic Asian group of people from Laos. Many of these people were left homeless or in detainer camps after the United States deserted Vietnam. Church groups throughout the United States worked with the Immigration and Naturalization Service to bring them to the United States. The Hmong, who were agrarian mountain people from Laos, became involved as CIA informants during the Vietnam War. Once the CIA withdrew, the Hmong became targets for the Communists who now retaliated for their cooperation with the American forces.

The Hmong involvement with the CIA began in late 1960. A CIA agent named "Colonel Billy" recruited a young, successful Hmong military leader and struck a deal that promised aid if the Hmong pushed back the Communists from northern Laos. If they were not successful, the CIA said they would "find a new place for them."²⁹ Throughout the Vietnam War, the Hmong assisted American troops behind the scenes by fighting as ground troops in northeastern Laos and defending the Ho Chi Minh Trail against the North Vietnamese Communists. They paid dearly for their tremendous mettle with large numbers of casualties both military and civilian. The CIA closed their headquarters in 1973, but one CIA agent dedicated to the Hmong military leaders remained as long as he could. When given his orders to leave, he offered to evacuate the military leaders, but they would not leave their troops. Eventually some Hmong were evacuated to Thailand and placed in refugee camps. The ones left behind went into the jungle to hide or set out on foot toward Thailand. Hmong endured harsh living conditions and starvation in the refugee camps. Though the United States admitted Vietnamese into our country in April 1975, Hmong waited until December of that same year to gain entry as refugees.³⁰

Among the first wave of Hmong to travel to the United States, some relocated in Wausau, Wisconsin. Wausau is a small town in north central Wisconsin and at that time was considered to be one of the most "lily white areas" of its size in the United States. By 1990 the population of Wausau was 38,000 and 11 percent were Hmong.³¹ The rapid

²⁹ Sucheng Chan, *Hmong Means Free* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001) 18-19, 15 Oct. 2001 <<http://www.hmongnet.org/publications/hmf-intro.html>>.

³⁰ Chan, 29-30.

³¹ Georgia C. Lang, "Bridging a Cultural Gap: A Museum Creates Access," *Curator* Mar. 1997: 15. Raymond Sokolov, "Critique: Hmong Friends," *Wall Street Journal* 30 Jan. 1991, Leisure & Arts.

growth placed a burden on the school system and Wausau residents resented the resettlement program.³² The atmosphere in this small city became tense.

The Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum wanted to ease the tension filled atmosphere of the city. While researching ideas, an exhibition team member discovered a collection of paintings and drawings by French artist, Jean Despujols who had gone to French Indochina in the 1930s at the behest of the French government. The paintings served as propaganda tools to convince the French people why France should continue to colonize that area of Southeast Asia. Despujols painted his adventures (see fig. 1), but the exhibition never took place because of the outbreak of World War II. Despujols retrieved the paintings after the war and gave them to Centenary College in Shreveport, Louisiana, where he settled. They loaned the Woodson sixty paintings and drawings, which became the focal point for the exhibition held from November 4 – December 31, 1995.

The goal of the exhibition enabled the Wausau native residents to view the homeland of the Hmong through a familiar medium. They also wanted the Hmong to take pride in their homeland and to act as storytellers for the behind the scenes understanding of the artwork. The Hmong responded and became instrumental in the interpretation of their culture by helping with docent training and the didactics of the

³² Georgia Lang, telephone interview.

exhibition.³³ The dressed mannequins served as an example of how cultural knowledge was communicated. While they dressed the mannequins in their native fabrics, the Hmong women explained why the material was draped in a particular fashion. This knowledge was more meaningful when explained first hand.

Once again we see how effective it is to have racial and ethnic groups share their culture. The Hmong used story telling as a way to teach docents about their culture. *The Crown Heights History Project* used oral histories to relate stories about Crown Heights and its residents. Jews, African and Caribbean Americans share their storytelling tradition through the use of puppets, which showed the similarities within these cultures. The Hmong women dressed the mannequin and explained why it is draped in a certain fashion. Though Americans do not have what is considered traditional dress, the ancestors of Wisconsin natives came from European cultures that did. Today our top-fashion designers use many of the ethnic styles for their designs. Here we have a common ground that promotes understanding of various cultures.

At the same time another group within the community planned a project to support the Hmong. The Wausau Daily Herald sent a photographer and reporter to seek out Hmong refugees left behind in Laos and Thailand. The museum staff realized immediately that this was an excellent opportunity to have a supplementary exhibition, showing the present day situation in Southeast Asia. Therefore, on November 4, two contemporaneous exhibitions opened – *Jean Despujols: Indochina Odyssey* and *Photos of Home: Laos and Thailand Revisited*.³⁴ The Hmong were enthusiastic about the

³³ Lang, 16.

³⁴ Lang, 20.

journalistic exhibition since it enabled them to see relatives with whom they had lost contact. The juxtaposition of the two exhibitions demonstrated the vast difference between the idealized paintings that were to be used as propaganda and the harsh reality of what it is like for the Hmong to live in Thailand today.

The educational programming helped to measure the success of the exhibition. Several public programs added depth to the exhibition and increased the learning process. The lecture topics included the Angkor temples in Cambodia, textile demonstrations describing folklore traditions, and storytelling and puppet shows for the children. These family activities generated the most meaningful educational tools for the exhibition.

A theme driven "Point of View" activity included five universal themes such as Cultural Variety (see fig. 2), Folk Stories, The Buddhist Way, Artistic Elements, and Costuming. Each point of view broke down these themes into various topics. Visitors chose a thematic journey relating to different viewpoints and yet maintaining a common thread as they looked at the Despujols paintings.³⁵ Another exercise asked school children to find their favorite painting and interpret it by using their experiences, memories, feelings and senses. They observed the painting for 20 minutes, wrote about how it made them feel and then posed questions to ask. This response-based activity used students' critical thinking abilities and produced many exciting discussions, which promoted a deeper understanding of Southeast Asian culture.³⁶ The native Wisconsin students gained insight through these lively discussions since many of their classmates were Hmong who had stories to tell about their homeland.

³⁵ Lang, 24.

³⁶ Lang, 26.

The Hmong developed a new self-confidence as they participated in the development and public relations of the exhibition. The townspeople derived a meaningful understanding of Southeast Asian culture from these experiences; and other programs evolved, such as the encouragement of English as a second language students to attend the museum's public programming free of charge. The Hmong also realized that they needed to start their own museum in order to preserve their ancestral artifacts. The exhibitions at the Woodson Museum enabled these events to take place.

Similar results occurred in both the Crown Heights and the Woodson exhibitions. Through the oral histories the Crown Heights residents shaped the outsider's viewpoint and removed the negative perception the media applied to them. At the Woodson the lively discussions between the Hmong students and their classmates stimulated the curiosity of the Wisconsin natives to learn more about the Hmong culture and the Hmong developed pride. The education programs from both exhibitions acted as a catalyst to encourage students to look beyond the stereotype and gain a deeper appreciation for another culture.

Let us ask again, "Is an art museum a place to develop a multicultural exhibition?" The answer is "Yes." Other exhibitions have evolved about Southeast Asia, such as a ceramic exhibition held at the end of 2000. Asian students learned to express themselves by using their memories and feelings as they worked with clay like their ancestors. Once again the native residents of Wausau learned from the Hmong, and the Hmong gained another step toward self-confidence. As time goes on the acceptance of this new foreign culture grows. Even while the second generation Hmong become more westernized, they still retain their heritage by sharing it with their new friends.

A museum is a neutral environment for sharing cultures. We saw in *The Crown Heights History Project* and *Bridging A Cultural Gap* how involved the featured racial/ethnic groups became in the preparation of these exhibitions. *Visions of Guadalupe*, an exhibition held at the Bowers Museum of Cultural Art in Santa Ana, California, demonstrates how an entire community united to bring a significant exhibition to their city. A collaboration of many corporations offered an opportunity for Mexican-Americans to see the artifacts dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe while others learned why the devotion to the Virgin is a significant element in the lives of Hispanics.

VISIONS OF GUADALUPE

The Bowers Museum of Cultural Art in Santa Ana, California, presented the exhibition *Visions of Guadalupe: Selections from the Museum of the Basilica de Guadalupe* in the fall of 1995. Peter Keller, the museum director of the Bowers, learned that the Museum of the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City was about to undergo renovations and wanted to tour part of their collection. This collection is comprised of 400 years of devotional art donated to the Basilica in remembrance of the apparition of the Virgin. Mexicans derived their patriotic conscience based upon the appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe and all the devotional art that followed in the years since has supported this philosophy.³⁷ The Bowers realized how the significance of this exhibition would impact the Hispanic population of Orange County, which constitutes 72 percent of the population of Santa Ana. Non-Hispanic residents benefited as well for they gained a better understanding why the devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe is an important element in the lives of all Mexican-Americans. After all, she is the patron saint of both Mexico and Orange County where Santa Ana is located.³⁸

Why is the Virgin of Guadalupe such a significant presence in the lives of most Hispanics? As the legend is told, a dark-skinned Virgin Mary appeared to Juan Diego in 1531 and requested that a church be built in her honor. She wished to hear the prayers of all her people in Mexico in order to intervene on their behalf. Knowing that no one would believe this request she performed several miracles. When the bishop recognized

³⁷ Agustin Gurza, "Mexican Religious treasures to visit Bowers," Orange County Register 1 December 1994.

³⁸ Brian Langston, "Bowers Museum of Cultural Art," Museum News May-June, 1997: 39-40.

the importance of these miracles a Basilica was built and the Virgin became the patron saint of Mexico.

How does such a simple story line develop into a powerful influence over all religious believers in Mexico, especially those who are poor and oppressed? As history tells us, the Spanish explorers conquered Mexico in 1518 and shortly afterward the Roman Catholic Church sent their priests to convert the indigenous people. Juan Diego was one of these indigenous people and a common laborer. Early on the morning of December 9, 1531, he was climbing the steep hill Tepeyac, which was the site of many pagan pilgrimages to an Aztec temple honoring Tonantzin, the mother of Indian gods. He was on his way to mass and thinking of a sick uncle when before him appeared a dark-skinned Virgin, illuminated by the sun standing on a crescent moon, crown with gold, wearing a white dress and a blue cloak encrusted with stars. She made a simple request to have a temple built for her and Diego was to be her messenger.³⁹ In order to prove that the apparition was real, the Virgin had him pick roses from the barren land and take them to the bishop. Upon telling the bishop of the Virgin's appearance, Diego opened his cloak to show him the roses and the bishop saw to his amazement the image of the Virgin imposed on the inside of Diego's cloak. The Basilica was built and completed in 1709 near the location where the Virgin appeared. Those indigenous people who had not yet been converted knew this was an important event because of their ancestral pilgrimages to that location.⁴⁰

³⁹ *Visions of Guadalupe: Selections from the Museum of the Basilica de Guadalupe*, exhibition invitation, Sept. 1995.

"Vision of Guadalupe: Selections from the Museum of the Basilica de Guadalupe," Bowers Museum of Cultural Art Membership Newsletter Fall 1995: 1.

⁴⁰ Jaime Cuadriello, "Visions from Patmos-Tenochtitlan: Eagle Woman," Artes de Mexico 29 (1995): 66.

It was not until Miguel Sanchez (1594-1674), a gifted theologian and *crillo*, a person born on American soil but of pure Spanish blood, through his interpretations turned the vision and miracles of the Virgin into a cult. He united the vision on Tepeyac to a passage in the Book of Revelation (Revelations 12), making the Virgin the same woman St. John saw in his revelation on the island of Patamos and the one Diego saw on the hill. Sanchez also used the iconography of Eagle woman, the avian figure of Mexico's national emblem, and connected it to the Virgin. In doing so, he intertwined symbols of the indigenous people to those of the Catholic Church. The Vatican recognized the apparition in 1754, and thus the Virgin became the Patroness of Mexico.⁴¹ By using symbols from the native heritage and interpreting them into the Christian faith, it is understandable why the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe became ingrained in the lives of Mexicans and formed the Mexican conscience.⁴²

Peter Keller asked Fernando Niebla, a Bowers' board member with many contacts in Mexico, to speak to Jorge Guadarrama, museum director at the Museum of the Basilica of Guadalupe, about the Bowers interest in hosting the exhibition in the United States. The exhibition's presentation was to be in a non-doctrinal and art historical perspective, posing no problems of separation of church and museum. The composition of the exhibition included 79 images of the Virgin of Guadalupe and Juan Diego, in the form of paintings, votives – objects used to intercede when one expresses a wish or desire during pray, engravings, statues, textiles and vestments (see fig.3,4,5). The exhibition was

⁴¹ Bowers Museum Membership Newsletter, 1.

⁴² Alberto Ray-Sanchez Lacy, "The Cult to the Virgin of Guadalupe Transcends Borders," Artes-de-Mexico 29 (1995): 65.
Cuadriello, 67.

chronologically displayed showing the cultural traditions of the Virgin as well as how the iconography of the Virgin evolved over the generations.⁴³

With the agreement for the loan of the exhibition in place, the sponsorship of the exhibition needed to be addressed. The Mexican-American Arts Council, an organization within the museum, helped to establish relationships among local corporations, service groups, and political organizations. Several businesses in the area, such as Kraft Foods, the Los Angeles Times, and Robinson-May department Store formed new alliances. However, the most important collaboration originated when St. Joseph Health System agreed to become a major partner.

St. Joseph Health System is a lay organization that helps carry out the ministry of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange. They operate several hospitals in Orange County, California, and in fact one is near the Bowers Museum. When they were approached about a partnership, it was evident to them that they could benefit from the publicity. But most importantly, they knew that the exhibition suited their image and mission, and overall, the community would benefit. Through this collaboration hospital employees became new members of the museum, and the Catholic parishes connected to the hospital helped with mailings. But the greatest gift the hospital provided was the free transportation to the museum. It enabled many families to visit the exhibition that would otherwise not have come.

The hospital became aware that understanding cultural diversity made for better health care. They established programs at the hospital, using the museum's lectures, films, and exhibitions as teaching tools. The museum reached the entire community with their publicity by translating their ads into Spanish for the local Hispanic newspapers and

⁴³ Bowers Museum Membership Newsletter, 1.

Ricardo Montalbaum, a popular Hispanic movie and television actor (*Fantasy Island*), taped public service announcements in Spanish.

Regularly scheduled educational events offered a variety of lectures, symposia, films, and festivals throughout the exhibition. Two lectures revolved around Latino music, including the history and etiquette of Argentine Tango and a lecture and demonstration of the harp. The film series featured three movies exploring Mexican history, its people, the attitudes brought to the New World, and the effects they had on the indigenous people.⁴⁴

The Gallery Store hosted a three-day *Family Festival: Mexican Street Market*, which featured everything from folk art, jewelry, and cooking to demonstrations, talks plus food and music. The festival offered something for all age groups and made the cultural event more meaningful.⁴⁵ Another festival hosted around Halloween was the *Day of the Dead*, a whimsical Hispanic holiday where costumed skeletons (*calaveras*) could be seen along with the offerings (*ofrendas*) made to the dearly departed. The event also included a poetry contest as well as music, dance, and food.⁴⁶

Symposium: Vision of Guadalupe explored the many ways the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe impacted the history of Mexico and the Mexican-American community of today. The afternoon event included three lectures along with a viewing of the exhibition.⁴⁷ By taking advantage of these lectures and then viewing the exhibition, the participants better understood the rituals of the Virgin.

⁴⁴ Bowers Museum Newsletter, 5.

⁴⁵ Joyzelle Davis, "Bowers takes culture to the streets," Orange County Register 10 Nov. 1995: show 32.

⁴⁶ Bowers Museum Newsletter, 5.

⁴⁷ Bowers Museum Newsletter, 5.

Reaction to the exhibition for both Hispanics and non-Hispanics was overwhelming. Fernando Niebla who had worked closely with the Basilica Museum to organize the exhibition loan was overcome with joy. He commented that his mother took him to the Basilica as a baby and while growing up the Virgin of Guadalupe was a central presence in his home. He said his whole family prays to her.⁴⁸ Eddie Grijalva is a school custodian and resident of Santa Ana who was fortunate to be included in a sneak preview of the exhibition. He felt as though he was walking on sacred ground as he strolled through the galleries with ancient choral music played from above. He was so moved by the exhibition that he passed out flyers to the students in his school encouraging them to bring their parents and see the magnificent display of devotional art. He felt that this exhibition opened the door to the Latino community making them feel welcomed at the museum.⁴⁹ The viewers came from all over the Los Angeles area. The attendance doubled its norm during both weekdays and weekends. The advertising campaign of \$500,000 was an enormous boost, but many also learned about the exhibition by word of mouth.⁵⁰

The successful exhibition with sixty thousand in attendance attributed its accomplishments to the hardworking volunteers, board of governors and all who underwrote the exhibition.⁵¹ One is able to see that when an entire community of

⁴⁸ Ann Conway, "Revering the Virgin of Guadalupe," Los Angeles Times 10 Sept. 1995.

⁴⁹ Agustin Gurza, "Mexican religious art shown in Santa Ana," Orange County Register 10 Sept. 1995.

⁵⁰ Jeff Kass, "Thousands See 'Visions': Bowers Exhibit of Religious Art Drawing Record Crowds," Los Angeles Times 24 Sept. 1995: B5.

⁵¹ Langston, 41.

different cultures works toward a common goal, it can only help relations. Strangers worked together, and they learned to know one another, which in turn created a greater appreciation for each other. Once this happens it does not make a difference what their race or ethnic group is, it is the person who matters. Partnerships formed will continue and this will strengthen their commitment to one another. My three case studies prove how successful a museum can be in culturally diverse communities.

EXHIBITING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES: HOW MUSEUMS PROMOTE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING

In examining four exhibitions concerning diversity and multiculturalism, I discovered that in three out of four exhibitions the audiences came away with a greater appreciation for the culture being explored. How do museums achieve such a feat? Are they the most qualified to lead a community through a difficult period?

Harlem on My Mind, held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, is the anti-model for multicultural exhibitions. Its goal was to welcome the African Americans of Harlem to the pleasures of an art institution, but they did not succeed. Responsibility for the failure of this goal lay in the exclusion of the black community. The curator of the exhibition, Allon Schoener, is Jewish and good at cutting edge technology for the sixties but he lacked expertise in African American culture; and by not consulting with the leaders in Harlem, he struck a note of discord that followed him throughout all stages of the exhibition. The artistic accomplishments of African Americans in the twentieth century failed to be shown. The photographs used lost their aesthetic dimension when enlarged. Schoener showed little regard for his own ethnicity when preparing the catalogue. He allowed an essay to be published that was racist. All of these events culminated in protests and support being withdrawn from the exhibition. Instead of helping race relations, *Harlem on My Mind* alienated New York City's African Americans.

Misunderstanding of and between various cultures is the common thread that runs through the exhibition case studies that I discussed. Each exhibition demonstrates

different cultures (African American, Jewish, Asian, and Hispanic) in a unique way, by showing their many traditions and rituals. These exhibitions are explored on common ground without showing favoritism to any one group. How is this accomplished?

First, it is important to include the minority group(s) featured in the exhibitions. In the Hmong exhibition at the Woodson Art Museum, the Hmong contributed an integral part to the interpretation of the exhibition. Mannequins displayed the various ways clothing was worn by this Asian population. The Hmong women who dressed the mannequins helped with the success of the display. As they performed the task, they related stories about why they draped the fabrics in a particular way. The knowledge became more meaningful when passed on first hand.

The same holds true for the Crown Heights exhibitions. The project directors, who have multicultural backgrounds, gathered oral histories from local residents and felt it important to hear them first hand. These primary cultural resources give credibility to the exhibitions. The racial/ethnic groups develop pride in their culture along with self-esteem. It is also a meaningful training tool as shown in the Hmong exhibition.

The educational activities are another common thread running through my case studies. Throughout the Crown Heights exhibition children learned about customs and traditions of various cultures through shared puppet shows and storytelling. Music from Caribbean Americans and Jewish people came in the form of dances and songs. Crown Heights elementary students had a writing project promoting the positives of living in their Crown Heights neighborhoods and removed the focus from the negative events that had occurred. The Woodson Art Museum also had a storytelling segment, along with music and dance. The Bowers Museum incorporated music, food, and native crafts into a

street festival to give visitors a sense of a Mexican village. All of these activities show traditions within various cultures that bind all societies together. The music and food may be different but still all societies possess them. The museums have resources to bring these events and people together and that is why they are well suited to help heal misunderstandings.

Where does art fit into multicultural exhibitions? As I pointed out *Harlem* neglected to include the artistic accomplishments of African Americans throughout the twentieth century. Van DerZee's enlarged photographs rendered the art to be mere illustrations of social phenomena. However, the focus on the Depujols paintings signified the main objective of the Hmong exhibition. The documentary nature of these paintings showed life in French Indochina during the 1930s. The French government hoped to continue colonization in that area and planned to use them as a marketing tool. Many of the educational activities included these paintings as a resource for their activities. They proved to be both helpful to the Wausau residents for a better understanding of the Hmong culture and gave pride to the Hmong.

Once again at the Bowers art became the focal point of the exhibition. The religious nature of the artifacts gave Hispanics and Catholics an overview of the importance of the Virgin of Guadalupe and an understanding as to why she is revered. The Crown Heights exhibition centered on cultural activities such as storytelling, puppet shows, and ethnic songs and dances. When different cultures share their artwork with a community it gives the audience another perspective of that particular culture. It gives another layer of understanding.

Collaborations with community organizations, agencies, and industry lend themselves to grassroots ventures that bind the entire community together. An example of this is the exhibition *Visions of Guadalupe* that enabled residents of Santa Ana and environs to begin to experience the program offerings of the Bowers Museum. When St. Joseph Health System along with churches and various food and clothing industries joined forces, it enabled the museum to host the magical exhibition on the Virgin of Guadalupe.

During the preparation of *The Crown Heights History Project*, a Community Advisory Committee helped establish an interest within various neighborhoods that opened doors for the project directors to comfortably gather oral histories and artifacts. The Woodson Museum in Wausau, Wisconsin, learned to know the leaders within the Hmong community. In doing so, when the idea for *Bridging A Cultural Gap* emerged, the museum knew whom to contact in the Hmong community to help with the interpretation of Hmong culture.

My point is that there is a need for collaborations. The more people involved in a project the more enthusiasm is generated. Along with this enthusiasm comes a better understanding and learning about a "given" culture. When this happens, certain dynamics occur that unifies a community.

All of my case studies set out and accomplished a better feeling toward various ethnic groups. In contrast, *Harlem on My Mind* appeared more interested in the latest technology rather than to assemble a unifying exhibition. By participating in the educational activities and by including the pertinent ethnic groups in the planning stages of the exhibitions, communities began to work together to overcome their hostilities.

Unifying the community this way invalidates the myths of different cultures and makes for greater understanding. No one is being exploited or taken advantage of and lasting effects are continued by word of mouth as good will spreads throughout the community.

Little did I realize when I became interested in using art for educational purposes that museums are the perfect venue for cultural exhibitions and education. As a volunteer, I developed and presented an art slide program "The Spirit of American Art" to students, supplementing their social studies and history courses. It was an excellent program, in which students encountered artworks, which, in turn, represented life throughout the history of the United States. Students not only developed an appreciation for art but they also realized how life was led throughout our history. Through my courses at Seton Hall University I realized that art museums could do more than just teach history. Having a minority group involved with a multicultural exhibition, in which first hand information is exchanged, can be beneficial to entire communities. While in high school, I was an exchange student in Germany, and I came to a first hand understanding of how people's lives in other cultures differed from or compared to the lives of Americans. Since that is not possible for most people, learning from someone who immigrated to the United States from another country is an excellent way to learn about a new culture.

The uniqueness of America culture stems from the number of cultures that live freely within our borders, and many of these traditions and rituals are absorbed into, and have enriched, our lifestyle. Museums have connected with minority populations and developed exhibitions around them. This has created a new constituency and added another layer of understanding of these cultures. Museums are transformed by these

exhibitions with the use of artifacts and first hand knowledge paving the way for learning. If we are to gain tolerance of minority groups, museums must continue these kinds of exhibitions.

The United States is a more diverse country than ever. American population, for the most part, is more sophisticated in its outlook on the world, and Americans tolerate differences better than 30 years ago. Museums aided this better understanding toward different ethnic and racial groups through their diversified exhibitions and attitudes changed. A new way of looking at people emerged and our nation begins to reach a common ground through museum exhibitions and education. Given the events of September 11, 2001, it is even more important for museums to strive toward encompassing all cultures. The Muslim and Arab worlds are subjected to more scrutiny than ever, and museums have resources to shed light on their beliefs and traditions. It is important for the American public to become educated about all cultures in order to make the world secure.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig. 1. *The Artist's Pirogue.* Entering the 6,000-foot gorge of the Nam-Te below Lai-chau, Despujols' pirogue had to traverse 40 rapids to get to Cho-bo. (Courtesy of the Meadows Museum of Art)

Go to: *Tiger Drinking in a Brook*
"DANGER"

There are many dangers that exist in every location where people live. In the jungle area where Cambodian and Lao families live, tigers roamed free. If angered they could maul and kill people.

- What dangers existed where you lived?
- What rules did your parents enforce to keep you safe?
- What are some of the dangers we face today?



Tiger Drinking in a Brook. (Courtesy of the Meadows Museum of Art.)

Fig. 2



Fig. 3. Anonymous Artist New Spain. *Virgin of Guadalupe*. 18th century.
Stature in polychromatic and quilted, 100.5 x 59 x 23 cm.



Fig. 4. Francisco Carden. *Juan Diego Arrodillado*. 1777.
Oil on canvas. 105 x 65 cm.



Fig. 5. Anonymous Artist Spaniard. *Religious Vestment Worn by Catholic Deacon*. Early 17th century. Embroidered with threads of silk.
119.5 x 142.5 cm.

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