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# Art, Artifact, Anthropology: The Display and Interpretation of Native American Material Culture in North American Museums

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**Art, Artifact, Anthropology:  
The Display and Interpretation of Native American Material  
Culture in North American Museums**

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**Advised by Dr. Charlotte Nichols, Ph.D.**

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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**Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ**

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## **Abstract**

Native American material culture appears in a wide variety of museum contexts across the United States. Historically, these artifacts have been misinterpreted, misrepresented, and ultimately disrespected. Today, many museums are making strides to reorganize and rejuvenate their American Indian collections, and these attempts are manifested differently in each museum genre.

In this paper, I discuss the history of the display of Indian objects in different types of museums, the ways in which these methods of display have evolved over time, and how these early conventions still influence current museum practices. I analyze the theory and works of Franz Boas and relate his early methods to modern museum practices. Finally, I present a series of case studies on various museums that actively collect and exhibit Indian cultural material, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, The American and Field Museums of Natural History, the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, and the Navajo Nation Museum. I will consider how each of these museums adheres to or strays away from Franz Boas' practices, which revolve around the theory of cultural relativism. Through these case studies, I will attempt to describe in which museum settings Indian cultures are best interpreted and how others err by adhering to outdated methodologies and the Western-centric hegemony. I analyze the current practices in each museum and juxtapose them to reveal in which areas the most change is needed in the display of Native American cultural material.

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## Introduction

There is an increasing desire among American museum professionals for equality in the representation of western and non-western cultures. American Indians<sup>i</sup> have had a fair degree of representation in museums ever since the first large institutions of natural history and science were opened in North America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, the hegemony of western museological practice has, in many cases, relegated Indian art to departments in natural history museums that treat the works as artifacts indistinguishable from insect and rock specimens or to small corners of art museums where the cultural significance of the work is often left unexplained to visitors. Anthropology museums are continuing to evolve along with the science of anthropology, but these institutions have remained subject to the same Western hegemony that classified Indian cultures as primitive and dismissed them to the periphery.

In this paper, I discuss the history of the display of Indian objects in different types of museums, the ways in which these methods of display have evolved over time, and how these early conventions still influence current museum practices. I analyze the theory and works of Franz Boas and relate his early methods to modern museum practices. Finally, I present a series of case studies on various museums that actively collect and exhibit Indian cultural material, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art,

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<sup>i</sup> Terminology is an issue that anthropologists are continually struggling with, and it is one that is in a constant state of flux. The term "Indian" was first applied erroneously to the people that Christopher Columbus encountered in the Caribbean and for many years anthropologists labored to replace it with the term "Native American." Today, the vast majority of indigenous Americans have appropriated the cultural title of Indian and prefer it over Native American, which could refer to any person born in America. This paper uses both of these terms interchangeably, as both are considered to be acceptable by Indians and anthropologists alike. Currently, it is considered the best practice to try and refer to people by the name of their nation, i.e. Hopi, Ute, Seneca, etc.

The word "tribe," according to its anthropological definition, refers to a group of people who are bound by kinship rather than customs, traditions, social structure, etc. The use of the word tribe to describe American Indian cultures has been mostly abolished among anthropologists and has been replaced with that of the term "nation," which is what is used in this paper.

The American and Field Museums of Natural History, the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, and the Navajo Nation Museum. I will consider how each of these museums adheres to or strays away from Franz Boas' practices, which revolve around the theory of cultural relativism, a theory that Boas first developed in the 1880s and continued to develop and teach well into the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Through these case studies, I will attempt to describe in which museum settings Indian cultures are best interpreted and how others err by adhering to outdated methodologies and the Western-centric hegemony. It is not my intention to define the perfect formula for successfully interpreting Indian artifacts, nor will I rank the museums that I study in terms of their success or lack thereof. Rather, I will analyze the current practices in each museum and juxtapose them to reveal in which areas the most change is needed in the display of Native American cultural material. As the missions of different types of museums vary greatly, it is impossible to create a set of universal principles and guidelines that will properly apply, for example, both to a fine art museum and to an anthropology museum. My goal is to use research conducted on and in museums combined with anthropological theory to formulate and present a series of guidelines for each of the genres of museums – art, natural history, anthropology – to utilize so that they may adhere to their missions while still interpreting Indian material culture in a way that promotes cultural relativity and encourages visitors to be open minded to diverse perspectives.

American Indians play an extremely significant role in American history, and their cultures are unique to this country. For centuries, Indians have been oppressed and forced to acculturate into American society. Today, many tribes have vanished or are in

serious jeopardy of becoming extinct. In many cases, centuries-old traditions are dying with the elders that uphold them. Museums have the ability to collect the physical remnants of these traditions and the stories that accompany them. It is the duty of museums to protect this material culture and to properly interpret it for visitors in such a way that it is more than just spectacle or mere collections of objects; museums can educate visitors about cultures that are important to American history yet still exist on the periphery today.

# **Part I: The Development of American Anthropology in Museums and its Impact on the Display of Native American Cultural Material**

## **Introduction**

The history of anthropology in the United States differs significantly from that of the same science in Europe. One of the great instigators of the creation of an American anthropological science was an academic inability to find the middle ground between natural science and art. Nowhere was this inability more apparent than in American museums. That American anthropology evolved from an object-based science is evidence of its early ties not only with natural history, but with American archaeology and paleontology. The chapters in Part I of this paper will discuss the environment in which American anthropology emerged around the turn of the twentieth century and the ways in which that environment helped to shape the science and was applied to Native American material culture. The last chapters focus on the impact that anthropologist Franz Boas had on museum anthropology in America and how his methods can be applied to contemporary museums.

In the past, Native American objects had been collected alongside other natural artifacts that were excavated from sites all over the country. As far back as the 1820s it was not uncommon for museum paleontologists to unearth prehistoric Native American pottery, textiles, and technology while searching for dinosaur fossils and those of other megafauna that existed on the land. Relegated to storage or to displays of so called primitive man, these Indian artifacts were of very little importance to museums other than as evidence of Native Americans as primitive people who had lived in North



America for millennia. By the middle of the 19th century, anthropologists and museum curators began to realize that some of the artifacts in their museums were not so different from those that contemporary Indians were creating. Instead of interpreting this as evidence of cultures that were deeply rooted in traditional practices, it was commonly translated as meaning that these aboriginal Americans had not evolved for hundreds of years and were therefore hundreds of years behind Europeans on the path to civilization.<sup>ii</sup>

For most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Native American artifacts were only displayed in natural history museums because the curators from these museums were the ones who were obtaining the objects on various expeditions. In museums such as the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, these objects were combined with others from Africa, the Pacific Islands, and South American aboriginal peoples regardless of their cultural differences, and they were displayed alongside fossils and geological specimens. In a natural history museum context such as this, objects that are evidence of human civilizations are reduced to specimens of no greater cultural importance or anthropological significance than rocks or insects. In contrast, German scientists were able to conceptualize an intellectual median between the history of history and the history of civilization. The German word for this field of study is *Kulturgeschichte*, "the natural history of civilization, of men and his ideas and achievements."<sup>2</sup> The Germans used the term to apply specifically to the cultural history of Germany, but George Brown Goode, assistant secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, appropriated the term in 1888

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<sup>ii</sup> [www.ourcivilization.com/whatis/levels.htm](http://www.ourcivilization.com/whatis/levels.htm) American ethnographer Lewis Henry Morgan elaborated on the progression of the evolution of humans from Savagery to Barbarism to Civilization.

in a speech the American Historical Association to help describe his ideals about how the science of anthropology should be made manifest in museums.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of Goode's efforts, American anthropologists and museum professionals remained unable to separate intellectually anthropology from natural history. As a result of decades of working within the conventions of natural history, anthropologists were forced to think linearly. Similarly to how natural historians would plot fossils and the creatures that they represented on the world timeline, so, too, would anthropologists plot the cultures that their objects represented on the timeline of civilization. This latter timeline was often translated as a progression from primitivism, represented by cultures such as Native Americans, to high civilization, exemplified by European society. It seemed logical to compare the progression of human societies to the evolution of natural species. Using this frame of reference allowed for anthropologists to work with an embedded sense of ethnocentrism that forced them to view all other cultures in relation to their own.

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were a series of events and revelations in the museum world that brought about a change in the way that American museums dealt with anthropology and its artifacts. Around 1875, French anthropologist Louis Agassiz helped to establish the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He was also the museum's first director. In George Brown Goode's 1888 speech to the American Historical Association, he addressed the obsolescence of science and art museums to properly handle topics of anthropology. He identified a need for a hybrid museum that would combine science and art museum missions, while at the same time being an

entity completely separate from the two. Two years prior to Goode's address, Daniel Brinton had been appointed Professor of Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania and was the first American to have achieved such a status in this country. Brinton would become one of the most important figures in the development of American anthropology. William Pepper, provost at the University of Pennsylvania, first proposed the establishment of a university museum of anthropology in 1889, and a decade later that museum would make its final move into its permanent quarters. Finally, in 1893, the World's Columbian Exposition was held in Chicago and became the first forum in which many people from around the world would see the practical application of anthropology.<sup>4</sup>

## **Chapter 1 – The Rise of Museum Anthropology in Chicago**

### *The World's Columbian Exposition and the Introduction of Applied Public Anthropology in the United States*

The World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 altered the way that Americans regarded the aboriginal peoples of their country forever. When Frederic Ward Putnam, a student of Louis Agassiz and the director of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, took leadership of the anthropology section of the World's Columbian Exposition, he had no idea of the impact that his exhibits and, later, the museum that he proposed would have on the way that Native American cultures were displayed and interpreted for museum visitors. Anthropology as a science was growing slowly prior to the opening of the Columbian Exposition, and it had always been an object-based science. Naturally, as museums were the institutions that housed these objects, it only made sense that the roots of anthropology in America all grew from museum practices. Putnam, upon accepting the role of director of the anthropology section of the Exposition, based the majority of his planning on the assumption that all of the objects presented in the exhibition would later become the basis for a great museum of anthropology to be built in the city of Chicago. He hoped that such an institution would stand as the foremost venue for current anthropological study and display.

Putnam and his assistant Franz Boas – whose ideas would reform the study of anthropology as discussed below – had grand ideas for the anthropological displays at the Columbian Exposition and the educational potential that such exhibits possessed.

The original proposal that Putnam presented to the Committee of Liberal Arts in Chicago stated that:

...the ethnological exhibit, which will prove of the greatest popular interest and at the same time be regarded as an essential and appropriate display, will be the out-of-doors exhibit of the native peoples of America, in their own houses, dressed in their own native costumes and surrounded by their own utensils implements, weapons, and the results of their own handiwork.<sup>5</sup>

It is clear that Putnam's intent was to provide visitors to the Exposition with a peek into the daily lives of the native peoples of America, although by today's standards his method could be considered exploitative and even cruel on some levels. In an attempt to give visitors a new perspective on American Indian cultures, it is possible that Putnam may have reinforced the feeling of ethnocentrism that most western people at the time felt.

The Native American village exhibits were originally proposed to be situated away from the industrial exhibits and the hustle and bustle of the main exposition thoroughfare. Putnam envisioned them on their own little wooded island so that Exposition visitors could view them from afar. If such a method had been utilized, spectators could have better comprehended the extent to which these cultures had developed into complicated societies in spite of their isolation from the West. The exhibits were executed in a much different manner from what Putnam had originally conceived, however. The investors in the Columbian Exposition were familiar with the

popularity of exhibits that created spectacles of so called "primitive" cultures at previous international expositions, and they wanted the Native Americans to be on display right on the Midway Plaisance so that visitors could not help but see them.<sup>6</sup>

The practice of collecting human beings to put on display was becoming rather common by the late 1800s and was manifested in two different ways. The first was in the form of a touring troupe of indigenous people, usually a family group of Native Americans that was taken to Europe to be shown off in various cities. This was a very profitable enterprise, but its ethnological merit was limited to what spectators could glean from the various dances that the troupe performed and the few anthropological artifacts that accompanied them.<sup>7</sup> The second version of human display was made widely popular by P.T. Barnum when he bought the American Museum in New York City in 1841 to turn the institution into a vehicle for profit. Barnum's collections included both animal and human oddities including "midgets, dwarfs, giants, bearded ladies, fat boys, rope dancers, jugglers, performing American Indians, a tattooed man, gypsy girls, albinos, and a group of industrious fleas."<sup>8</sup> It is telling of Barnum's intentions that he would consider Indian performers to be on a level with other common freak show participants, but as a man interested strictly in financial gain, he had little interest in anthropological education. The idea of Native American as spectacle has a deep rooted history in such enterprises, and, even in modern museums, curators sometimes rely on spectacle to draw in visitors.

This early exposure to what can only loosely be described as public anthropology formed the American public's perception of the indigenous peoples of their country and how they expected to see them portrayed in other public forums. While not all

museums were like P.T. Barnum's commercial enterprise, they all did (and still do) rely a great deal on the patronage of the general public. Even Franz Boas admitted in 1907, shortly after leaving the American Museum of Natural History, that one of the main functions of a museum was to provide an entertaining experience for its visitors, in fact, "as much as ninety percent 'do not want anything beyond entertainment.'"<sup>9</sup> The ethnology exhibits at the Columbian Exposition were, indeed, entertaining and played a role in piquing the public interest in Native American cultures; however, the method of exhibition did not exactly cultivate any sort of deeper understanding of the cultures on display. The Exposition also set a precedent for ethnological exhibits to be rather spectacular and dynamic: a precedent that was difficult to follow in a museum setting.

### *The Field Museum of Natural History as a Forum for American Anthropology*

Frederic Ward Putnam first began his attempts to incite interest in a new museum in 1891, long before the World's Columbian Exposition opened. The museum as Putnam conceived it was meant to display objects from a wide range of fields, including anthropology, taken from a collection that would comprise the plethora of new artifacts entering the city for the Exposition. Although the anthropological collections were the most extensive ones left over from the Exposition, when it came time to break new ground in 1894, the museum actually did very little in the way of making strides in museum anthropological practices. The Field Museum instead became a sort of repository for the leftovers from all different sections of the World's Columbian Exposition including ephemera from the event and a wide array of statues of Columbus. The Fine Arts Building, the only one intended to become a permanent fixture in the city

after the close of the Exposition, became the home of the new collection. Putnam was granted use of the building after agreeing to enshrine memorabilia from the Exposition along with his carefully selected anthropology and natural history collections. Even though the material presented within the building was completely different from fine arts that were displayed there during the Exposition, the structure itself would be a proud and constant reminder of the city's shining moment in world history.<sup>10</sup> Putnam was equipped with the raw materials from the exhibits of the Exposition to create the first great and distinctive museum of anthropology. Unfortunately, in the final product, the anthropology collections still seemed to be playing second fiddle to the natural history and historic artifacts with which they were forced to cohabitate in order to better appease the people of Chicago. The collections of natural history or anthropology objects were, however, the most extensive of any museum to date, and their strong presence in the Field Museum helped to cement anthropology in its incorrect place as a subsection of natural history alongside botany, zoology, and geology.<sup>11</sup>

Although it might be safe to say that, quantitatively, the Field Museum had become one of the greatest venues for anthropological artifacts, qualitatively, the museum was rather lacking. Franz Boas, at the time the assistant of Putnam, was one of the first to point out the shortfalls of the objects within the anthropology collection, and he was also one of the first to stress the issue that not all anthropological objects are created equal when it comes to their metonymic values. As was often the practice with natural history collections and displays, anthropology exhibits similarly relied on the power of the object to relate information to visitors about a much broader topic. While it seemed logical and practical for a natural history display to utilize a fossilized mammoth



skeleton to represent the entirety of Pleistocene megafauna, when it came to a specific culture, certain artifacts were more appropriate than others to be used as representatives of that culture.<sup>iii</sup> Boas' ideas did not seem to go over well with the upper management of the museum, and he soon moved on to his next endeavor in New York City, where he became Assistant Curator of Ethnology and Somatology at the American Museum of Natural History in 1896. Three years later, he would also be offered a professorship at Columbia University in the Anthropology Department.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>iii</sup> See page 20 of this paper for an example.

## Chapter 2 – Philadelphia’s Role in the Development of Anthropology Museums

The University of Pennsylvania made great strides in the display of anthropological material when its museum opened in 1899. With the help of such figures as university provost William Pepper and anthropology professor Daniel Brinton, the University Museum was the most successful thus far in separating anthropology from natural history, both ideologically and physically. Originally conceived by Pepper as a partnership with the Academy of Natural Sciences, the University Museum had to test its luck as an independent entity when the Academy rejected Pepper’s plan in 1889 claiming that the partnership would not be equal. As it turned out, the University of Pennsylvania did not need the Academy of Natural Sciences in order to be a success; they were able to independently find their place in that idealistic niche that George Brown Good had described as *Kulturgeschichte*.<sup>13</sup>

When it first opened, the University of Pennsylvania’s Museum consisted of the Department of Archaeology and Paleontology and the University Archaeological Association. It is telling of anthropology’s strong link with natural history that there was no department of anthropology. This is also evident in the combination of archaeology and paleontology into a single department at the University. It did not take long for these two fields to grow apart completely within the context of the museum, and soon after, a break was finally made between the study of fossils and the study of human beings. This break was an historic moment for anthropology museums, and it was the University Museum that led the way in the separation of natural history and anthropology.<sup>14</sup>

The field of natural history had, for a long time, included the study of human prehistory in the United States, and this well established practice proved to be difficult to alter. The University Museum under Brinton, no longer dealt with the artifacts of natural history, however the director still tended to appropriate certain natural history methodologies and erroneously apply them to the museum's anthropological collections. The tendency toward creating linear timelines that rules the practices of natural history was evident even in the very architecture of the newly opened University Museum. Upon entering the building, visitors were immediately required to make a choice between upstairs or down. Ascending to the upper level of the museum would reward visitors with ancient sculptural masterpieces of the Mediterranean world as well as the objects from the museum's famous expeditions in the Near East. If visitors chose to descend to the lower level of the museum, their experience was quite different. Here was where the Native American objects were kept, alongside a rather jumbled collection of artifacts from Asia and South America.<sup>15</sup> This separation of the more "primitive" objects from those associated with early Mediterranean and Near Eastern civilizations only reinforced the natural historical timeline and the corresponding idea of the linear progression of civilizations. In this museum model, borrowed from natural history museums, Native American objects would never be viewed on the same plane as European objects.

The University of Pennsylvania's Museum eventually began to expand its holding of Native American objects throughout the first decades of the twentieth century with the help of George Byron Gordon. Gordon joined the museum staff in 1903 as Assistant curator in the Section of General Ethnology, and he later became Museum Director in

1910. For years, Gordon had been conducting expeditions, and his experience in the field and voracious appetite for collecting led to a period of rapid and widespread growth of the University Museum's ethnographic collections.<sup>16</sup> During his tenure at the museum, Gordon planned and implemented a series of collection programs to broaden the scope of the museum's anthropological holdings and to create greater museum cohesiveness. The new programs would augment the museum's collections in the areas of North American cultural material, historical anthropological objects, and artifacts from the Western world. Most indigenous cultures in North and South America by this time had become almost entirely acculturated or had died out completely. Many museums were realizing the necessity for the creation of immediate and extensive collection strategies. In 1913 Gordon wrote to the board president of the University Museum concerning the impending erasure of cultural traditions at the hand of Western expansion:

The more progressive part of the human race has not launched itself upon the whole world, with the result that the more backward peoples, even those with a relatively high civilization, are receiving, whether they wish it or not, the uniform stamp of modern culture. The immediate effect of this impact is the obliteration of many ancient landmarks preserved in the customs of savage folk and of people who ... are exchanging their native culture for foreign customs.<sup>17</sup>

The first part of Gordon's plan was to gather the "handiwork"<sup>18</sup> of various peoples before the traditional methods were lost. This initiative led to the assemblage of the museum's great collections of historical photographs of the Northwest Coast Indians, Southwest basketry and pottery, and other artifacts, both North American and foreign. Such an emphasis on collection coincided with the current trend in anthropology, sometimes referred to as salvage anthropology. It was not until this time that anthropologists began to realize the value and importance of indigenous American cultures, and they also realized that these cultures were disappearing quickly. The idea of "extinction" is one that is commonly used in natural history, and anthropologists once again took a page from the natural history book when they used the term to describe the gradual loss of Native American traditions because of acculturation.<sup>19</sup>

The second part of the plan was to retroactively collect historic and prehistoric artifacts from around the world going back to the earliest humans. Although a noble attempt at expanding the collection, this part of the plan tread dangerously on the line between natural history and anthropology that the University Museum had worked so hard to establish. The University Museum, along with many others, had bought into the practice of using prehistoric artifacts to create a universalizing portrayal of humankind. The thought process behind this method of display was to cultivate respect for primitive people by illustrating that all humanity was once in a primitive state. While their intentions were good, this practice still placed Native Americans below Europeans, nearer to the 'primitive' end, in the hierarchy of civilization that was still dominating anthropology.<sup>20</sup>

In keeping with notions of Western superiority, the final part of Gordon's plan entailed a strategy for making the museum's historical collections more relevant to museum visitors. This strategy involved the extensive collection of artifacts from Western civilizations such as Egypt, Greece, Rome, and other so called "high" civilizations to which, Gordon stated, Americans are most directly indebted for their own culture and achievements. Gordon's plan, in its entirety, made two things very clear: first, that anthropologists were finally beginning to acknowledge the importance of preserving their indigenous cultural heritage, and, second, that there was still a great deal of work to be done in granting those cultures equal standing within the museum's hierarchy of peoples.<sup>21</sup>

## **Chapter 3 – Franz Boas' Influence on American Museum Anthropology**

### *Reorganizing Anthropology Collections*

No single man had a greater impact on American anthropology and museum anthropology than Franz Boas. The "Father of American Anthropology," as many anthropologists today refer to him, was born in Germany in 1858 and received his PhD in physics and geography at the University of Kiel in 1881. It wasn't until 1883 that Boas first came to North America on a scientific expedition to Baffin Island, the largest island in the Canadian Arctic Archipelago north of mainland Canada. His experiences with the Nunavut people there convinced him to devote his life to the study of ethnology. Another expedition to the Pacific Northwest in 1886 ended with a trip to New York City, where Boas decided to stay, thus beginning his American career.<sup>22</sup>

During his tenures at such institutions as The Field Museum, The American Museum of Natural History, and Columbia University, Boas had little idea that he would shape the future of American anthropology on his shoulders. Boas left Chicago shortly after the opening of The Field Museum and came to New York City to work in the ethnology department of the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) and was soon also granted a professorship at Columbia in 1899. It was at AMNH that Boas made his biggest contributions to museum anthropology, and evidence of his influence is still visible at the museum even today.

Franz Boas is best remembered for his theories of cultural relativism which greatly altered the way that people thought about the concept of race worldwide, not just regarding Native Americans with whom he worked the closest. Until this point in history, humanity was studied according to its place on the natural historical timeline of social evolution from primitivism to civilization. It seemed to be engrained in the minds of Europeans to compare all other non-western people with themselves, since they viewed European civilization standard against which all other cultures were measured. The difference between the way in which Boas studied other cultures versus what was common practice was essentially an issue of perspective. According to Boas' model, it was inaccurate to compare one culture with another; the most effective way to analyze a people was according to their own terms. Boas described the natural mindset of most westerners and how, by altering this mindset, people could achieve greater cultural understanding and tolerance:

It is somewhat difficult for us to recognize that the value  
which we attribute to our own civilization is due to the fact

that we participate in this civilization, and that it has been controlling all our actions since the time of our birth; but it is certainly conceivable that there may be other civilizations, based perhaps on different traditions and on a different equilibrium of emotion and reason, which are of no less value than ours ... The general theory of valuation of human activities, as developed by anthropological research, teaches us a higher tolerance than the one which we now profess.<sup>23</sup>

The term cultural relativism thus refers to the approach that Boas believes anthropologist should take when studying cultures differing from their own. The theory revolutionized the way that anthropologists went about their work and the way that museums presented it. It was Boas' work at AMNH that became the epitome of culturally relative exhibition and would become the model for ethnology displays around the world. Boas stated that, "the main object of ethnological collections should be the dissemination of the fact that civilization is not something absolute, but that it is relative, and that our ideas and conceptions are true only so far as our civilization goes."<sup>24</sup>

Up until this time, museums had typically grouped all of the "primitive" peoples into a single exhibit space, with very little separation even among the continents. One of Boas' innovations was to introduce the concept of identifying multiple cultures and cultural groups. Labeling all non-western people as primitive and westerners as civilized was no longer a sufficient means of categorization because it was necessary now not only to differentiate cultures from Europeans, but also from each other. The first step in achieving this was to create continental categories. People were then



divided into cultural areas, which were generally defined geographically and then further sub-divided into individual cultures.<sup>25</sup> By organizing humanity in such a way, Boas created a model for museums to follow that would enable them to more effectively illustrate differences and similarities among geographical groups and deemphasize the social evolution timeline that had been prevalent in museums for so long.

### *The Boasian Model for Exhibiting Native American Material Culture*

The Northwest Coast Hall at the American Museum of Natural History embodies the very essence of Boas' theory of cultural relativism and marks a turning point in the way that museums displayed and interpreted their Native American collections. The Hall has changed very little since it was first opened by Boas in 1900 and thus survives as a testament to its success both as a didactic tool and as an engaging and ultimately entertaining exhibit.

The title of the Northwest Coast Hall is a direct result of Boas' methodology of organizing people by culture area, in this case, the Northwest Coast. Today, it is common practice within museums and educational organizations to divide indigenous American cultures into regional groups that share similar languages, technologies, and customs. Within the Hall, the culture area was yet again divided into smaller groups with each one being assigned its own alcove along the main corridor of the Hall. Each nation is represented by a series of cultural items ranging from ceremonial artifacts to utilitarian objects, all of which are arranged in such a way as to tell a story about the particular culture that they represent. Boas combined the use of objects and text in order to best explain the key concepts of each individual group. He emphasized their

relationships to other cultures within the culture area and encouraged visitors to make comparisons among the Northwest Coast peoples instead of comparing the Native Americans to themselves. In this way, Boas imposed his cultural relativist theories on museum visitors without seeming forceful or pedantic.<sup>26</sup>

Museums today can still benefit from this Boasian model when creating exhibits about American Indian cultures. There are a few basic guidelines to follow in order to avoid committing some of the errors that Boas worked so hard at AMNH to correct. The guidelines include exercising caution when organizing collections for display, avoiding oversimplification of a culture by choosing a single representative object, and being aware of ethnological allegories.

Museum professionals should take caution when arranging the various cultures that are represented by their collections to be sure that the proper geographic divisions are in place. The objects from each individual culture should also be ordered according to their cultural significance, regardless of aesthetic qualities. Oftentimes, the system of organization in museums was put in place early in the museum's history and has not changed much or at all over the years. These are the instances in which a museum will become entrenched in the out-dated systems of separating "primitive" cultures from civilized ones. Even if this idea is not voiced or alluded to in any other context within the museum, the mere fact that, for example, Native American objects may share a wing with those from Africa or the South Pacific implies to the visitor that these cultures all have something in common that makes them different from and inferior to objects from the Western world. Museum professionals are often so steeped in their own expertise that they forget how greatly even their small decisions might impact the experience of

the visitor and what message they may be delivering about the collection without intention. Indigenous peoples of the Americas should have their own section in a museum that is apparently distinct from other regions. Within this section, an effort should be made to divide Native American cultures into the culture areas that were originally described by Boas, and these culture areas should be subdivided into nations.

Many small museums with limited collections of Native American ethnographic material tend to shy away from making tribal subdivisions, and their curators will instead opt to use categories that they believe to be inter-cultural. Separating objects from multiple cultures into categories such as woodwork or musical instruments creates false connections among tribes whose cultures are actually quite different. Boas emphasized the curatorial imperative to explore the meaning and use of an object, instead of merely its exterior form because, "unlike causes could produce like effects."<sup>27</sup> He describes the example of a rattle in greater detail:

The rattle, for instance, is not merely the outcome of the ideal of making noise, and of the technical methods applied to reach this end: it is, besides this, the outcome of the religious conceptions, as any noise may be applied to invoke or drive away spirits; or it may be the outcome of the pleasure children have in noise of any kind; and its form may be characteristic of the art of the people.<sup>28</sup>

In the instance described above, the given object, a rattle, could belong in any number of categories from children's games to ceremonial objects depending on which culture created the object.

Of course many museums might be limited in this type of organizational effort by such factors as the size of their facility, the scope of their collections, or financial restrictions. However, even small changes such as avoiding overgeneralization in non-Western wings and making an effort to separate culture groups both intellectually and physically within museum displays can have a great impact on how the visitor interprets the objects within these sections.

Another mistake that museums often make when dealing with non-western art is to over simplify a culture by using a single object to represent the entirety of that culture. Franz Boas was a great critic of this practice as it was overused at the Field Museum. While certain objects do have a greater metonymic value than others and are better suited to represent an aspect of a culture (but almost never a whole culture), museums often use artifacts that are the most aesthetically pleasing and widely recognizable as the embodiment of an entire society. A frequent example of this is the use of a totem pole to represent the entire Northwest Coast culture area. Totem poles have become a symbol of the Pacific Northwest in an almost romantic way; however, as a representative for the many different nations populating that area, the totem pole falls short. They may be illustrative of the woodcarving traditions of many of the tribes in the area as well as of the design style that the people within the culture area have in common, but there are many other aspects of Northwest Coastal societies that can in no way be demonstrated by a single totem pole such as Potlatch ceremonies, transportation technologies, or architecture. In Boas' Northwest Coast Hall at AMNH, he was sure to include a variety of objects from each culture that created a more holistic view of each individual nation.

Once again, however, there is a pitfall of which to beware when choosing these objects and deciding how to organize and interpret them: the issue of what types of categories to use for organization of ethnographic exhibits. The theory of cultural relativism dictates that in order to most fully comprehend another culture, it must be viewed and analyzed according to its own categories and perspectives. If a museum professional should use categories that are familiar in his or her own culture, then he or she is at risk of creating an ethnographic allegory. David W. Penny describes the phenomenon of ethnographic allegories in his essay "The Poetics of Museum Representations: Tropes of Recent American Indian Art Exhibitions" written in 2000. These allegories are often unwittingly created by organizing American Indian objects into such categories as art, religion, or economy. While these are tropes that are widely accepted in America as well as most western cultures, they often do not carry the same importance in Native American cultures. A single object might be able to fit into many of the above categories, however, museums place it in a context that will make that object understandable to a western museum visitor.<sup>29</sup> How, then, can museum professionals avoid this fallacy? The first solution would be simply to avoid using such concrete methods of organization and to refrain from using the ethnological allegorical language. Instead, objects can be grouped together according to shared functions within a given tribal culture and accompanying texts can describe how these objects relate to each other and the various aspects of life in which they are used. It is also important to mention that artifacts can have multiple uses and are not necessarily restricted to either ceremonial or domestic use exclusively.

An exhibition in 2009 at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian at the George Gustav Heye Center in New York City, entitled *Identity by Design*, illustrated that a museum can organize objects in an exhibit using culturally relative terms. The exhibition displayed garments that were all made by natives from the Plains region of the United States, including such tribes, for example, as the Lakota, Crow, and Blackfeet. Although the exhibition comprised objects from multiple nations, as parts of a culture area, the nations of the Great Plains all have similar customs and means of dress. As a result, there was cohesiveness to the objects that were on display. The exhibition was organized according to various methodologies. The first, overarching method was to order the objects chronologically. This is not always an option when planning exhibits, and it is also a method that is often used when displaying western art. Chronological organization worked in this case because of the linear layout of the exhibition space (having only a door at either end of a corridor-like space), which allowed visitors to see the changes that occurred, as well as the things that remained the same, in Plains Indians' textiles over time beginning with pre-Columbian pieces and continuing into the present day.

The second methodology was organization into the different functions of the clothing. Within the chronology of shirts, dresses, and moccasins, the different garments were subdivided into smaller groupings according to how the outfits would be worn in their respective tribal societies. Towards the beginning of the linear timeline there were a series of war shirts. The middle sections of the exhibition displayed a variety of everyday clothing evidencing the introduction of traded goods from Europe such as copper bells and glass beads. The last garments in the exhibition were modern

dresses that had been hand made by Plains women for wearing to powwows. These garments were accompanied by a video that allowed viewers to see the women who made the dresses wearing them in various dance competitions.

*Identity by Design* was widely successful with museum visitors both because it was visually interesting, and because it was easy for visitors to follow the natural flow of the exhibition as it traveled through time and they were exposed to aspects of Plains Indian cultures with which they were previously unfamiliar. Had the exhibit instead been organized according to western categories such as casual wear, work wear, and dress wear, visitors would have undoubtedly been confused as to why certain garments appeared in the categories that they did. It might make little sense to see a red felt dress that is covered from top to bottom in elk teeth situated in the casual wear section of the exhibit. By placing such a garment alongside other ornately decorated ones and providing a text panel explaining that objects such as elk teeth were a symbol of prestige and that women whose husbands or fathers were skilled hunters would wear such dresses daily to demarcate their affluence, the curators of the exhibit made clear a subject that could have been confusing to visitors had they tried to understand it according to their own cultural perspective.

When Boas left the American Museum of Natural History in 1905, he left his museum anthropology legacy there and unwittingly caused a break between museum and university anthropology. He continued to teach his theories to anthropologists at Columbia who applied the knowledge to their field work and academic research, but anthropology in museums was left to stagnate where Boas left it.<sup>30</sup>

## **Part II: Contemporary Case Studies on Native American Exhibits in North American Museums**

### **Introduction**

It would be unfair to simply compare different museums to each other with regard to how they handle the task of displaying and interpreting Native American cultural material. Different genres of museums vary greatly in their missions and directives. The following case studies cover a variety of museum genres including art, natural history, ethnology, and one museum devoted entirely to American Indian culture. None of these museums are perfect, nor is any devoid of positive aspects; it is the genre of the museum that both defines its strong points and brings about its issues. Each museum had to be analyzed independently and according to its own mission in order to achieve a fair and accurate analysis, but the process of displaying and interpreting Native American material does have a few universal guidelines which can be gleaned from the following case studies.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art is the only non-scientific museum discussed in this paper. With a mission statement that precludes the necessity to educate visitors about anything other than artists and aesthetics, the curators' challenge becomes the process of decontextualizing material culture and recontextualizing it as art. The case study draws upon the theories of David W. Penny and Svetlana Alpers to determine how the visitors' experience of these objects is altered by the art museum and whether or not the Met's methods are acceptable for the display of material culture.



When discussing the Metropolitan's across-the-park neighbor, the American Museum of Natural History, the major issues involve maintaining a chronological cohesion and the challenge of presenting American Indians both as prehistoric peoples and contemporary cultures. Museum staff members must also struggle to uphold precedents that were put into place over a century ago by Franz Boas when he worked at the museum and brought it to the forefront of museum anthropology. The Field Museum of Natural History shares in AMNH's trouble with the portrayal of Native American cultures, being a museum that relies very heavily on dioramas, or life groups, for the display of Native American cultures. This kind of ethnographic display can be very misleading to visitors, and depending on the scene that is staged it can give them an inaccurate perception of the daily life of contemporary indigenous people.

The Navajo Nation Museum is one of the largest tribal museums in the country, but, like many other tribal museums, their staff is lacking in highly trained museum professionals. When attempting to form a museum staff that comprises mainly Native American employees, the pool from which to draw qualified people is greatly diminished, and many highly qualified, non-native applicants are overlooked. The Museum of Indian Arts and Culture in Santa Fe, New Mexico is devoted solely to Native American peoples. It is not only an ethnographic museum, but a venue for the display of contemporary Native American art. This museum has reconciled the separate needs for both an indigenous perspective and professional staff by taking advantage of collaboration whenever possible.

## Chapter 4 – The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Turning Artifact into Artwork

The Metropolitan Museum is one of the biggest and, many would argue, best museums in the world for the exhibition and interpretation of fine arts. How does this great museum measure up in its displays of ethnographic materials? The Met has committed the error of combining all non-Western material into a single, albeit very large, gallery space that has been named the wing of “African, Oceanic, and Native American Art.” Although it is a stunning exhibit with a wide variety of beautiful, and in many cases quite large, objects, The majority of prime display space is filled with monumental wooden figures from Africa and New Guinea. It would seem that the section devoted to Native American material is an afterthought in this gallery; in fact, the Gallery for the Art of Native North America was only recently remodeled and devoted exclusively to Indian art in 2007.<sup>31</sup>

This relatively small exhibit comprises slightly fewer than one hundred objects that are organized, rather surprisingly, according to culture areas. Although most of the gallery is dominated by objects from Northwest Coast cultures, there are a great deal of Plains objects as well as some from the Eastern Woodlands and even the Arctic. The gallery is basically divided into two sections: one for Northwest Coast and one for Plains items. The remaining cultural items seem to be strewn about where there was room to fit them in amongst the carved wooden masks of British Columbia and the large painted hides from the Great Plains. While it is a valiant effort on the part of the curators of the exhibit at effective categorization of Native American cultures, the method of organization is not explained to visitors anywhere in the gallery, and with many of the

object labels only listing the name of the nation in which the object was created, complete comprehension of the museum's organizational scheme is granted solely to visitors entering the museum with prior knowledge of Native American cultures.

Failing to include tribal regions is not the only place where the text panels in the Native American exhibit fall short. In fact, they fail to include a great deal of information. The error seems to be that the curators created fine art labels for objects that require a great deal more explanation in order for their ethnological value to be fully understood by museum visitors. Perhaps for a French painting, a visitor need only know the title, artist, date, and medium in order to understand its meaning (although most paintings at the Met have an explanatory paragraph on the label). The majority of the objects in the Native American gallery have no title other than a short description and, because of early collection techniques,<sup>iv</sup> the artist of most of the objects is unknown. Without this information, the label is notes only the approximate date that the object was made and the medium. It is probably safe to say that all of the objects in this section were created with the intention of using them for some activity, whether it be ceremonial or utilitarian, and using such oversimplified labels completely removes the objects from their cultural contexts and strips them of whatever significance they may have had, at least to the visitors' eyes.

Oftentimes, the oversimplification that occurs in art museum texts for ethnological objects comes along with the process of assigning the objects to the realm of art. To cite David W. Penny again, to label most Indian artifacts as 'art' is to create an allegory in order to allow museum visitors to better place the objects into their own cultural

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<sup>iv</sup> Before proper legal and ethical policies for ethnographic collecting were put into place, anthropologists and amateurs alike would collect objects en masse without regard to individual artists or to the ceremonial significance of many of the artifacts.

categories. Visitors can see an object, recognize that it is aesthetically pleasing, and thus understand it as art regardless of what the creator's intention was for that particular object. Most Indian cultures in North America have no concept of the division between art object and utilitarian object: a division that is quite prominent in western cultures. It has only been within the past century with the development of the market for Native American art that Indians have begun creating works that could be defined as true fine art in both their decorative purposes and commercial value. Most of the Native American objects that are in museums were created by tribe members for use in ceremonies or as utilitarian objects. To take artifacts such as these and rename them "art" is to remove them from their original cultural context and to strip them of the meaning that was bestowed upon them by their makers.<sup>32</sup> Art museums have a history of being vehicles for the decontextualization of the objects within them. Even Western art has suffered to some extent such as when altarpieces and segments of murals and mosaics were removed from their religious contexts and placed in museum galleries. Unfortunately for the case of non-Western objects, most museum visitors are not familiar with the customs in place that necessitated the creation of the artifacts as they are with the religious traditions behind such artworks as altarpieces.

Indian artifacts that appear in art museum collections are the most susceptible to this "Museum Effect," as it is called by Svetlana Alpers.<sup>33</sup> Art museum curators choose objects for display based on their aesthetic values. Once an object is placed on display in an art museum, it automatically becomes a work of art in the minds of the visitors to that museum. Alpers offers an alternative means of interpretation for ethnological objects in art museums, and states that, via the "Museum Effect," visitors are forced to

study the formal qualities of these objects more closely and to appreciate the craftsmanship behind them, rather than focus on the cultural significance. It is not that Alpers denies the importance of diverse peoples and their material cultures, it is that she admits that art museums are not the proper venue for educating the public on the complexities of these peoples. As "cultures are not the sum of their materials,"<sup>34</sup> it is difficult for an art museum to provide an educational exhibit about Native American cultures while at the same time attempting to show visitors only the most beautiful of objects.

Even objects that were clearly used as tools by their makers become things of beauty when put on display at the Metropolitan Museum. The Native American Gallery boasts of a collection of, "the beautifully shaped and finished stone tools known as bannerstones,"<sup>35</sup> which are, essentially ancient paperweights, but even these become sights to behold by the way that they are placed on pedestals in glass vitrines and dramatically lit from all angles. The visitor will be hard pressed to learn what these oddly shaped stones were ever used for, or even who made them, but they will be able to appreciate their form.

So where, then, should the line be drawn? It may be true that the missions of most art museums do not include a clause stating that the museum will do its best to educate the public about the complexities of the various cultures that are represented by the works on display.<sup>v</sup> However, is it acceptable for museums to ignore these

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<sup>v</sup> *The mission of The Metropolitan Museum of Art is to collect, preserve, study, exhibit, and stimulate appreciation for and advance knowledge of works of art that collectively represent the broadest spectrum of human achievement at the highest level of quality, all in the service of the public and in accordance with the highest professional standards.* Quoted from <http://www.metmuseum.org/about/>

complexities in favor of recontextualizing all of the objects as works of art to be admired strictly for their physical attraction?

It is Svetlana Alpers' opinion that art museums are actually doing a service to ethnographic materials by providing an alternate perspective with which visitors can view and appreciate their physical appearance, something that might not be emphasized in an anthropology museum.<sup>36</sup> It might occur that the more a visitor is informed of an object's cultural significance and intended function, the more effort they will put into attempting to mentally contextualize the object, and the less effort they will put into simply looking at the object. If this is indeed the case, it would be acceptable for art museums to omit certain cultural facts about the material that is on display in favor of allowing it to become art for art's sake.

Unfortunately, in the case of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alpers' theories are not being fully or even intentionally realized. The curator who oversaw the development and installation of the new Native American Gallery was Julie Jones, Andrall E. Pearson Curator in Charge, Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas. Jones specializes in ancient South American material culture and is no stranger to the field of anthropology. Her language, however, betrays the fact that she has chosen objects for display which have aesthetic as well as cultural value. In a video created in 2007 to introduce the new gallery, Jones describes the aforementioned bannerstones as, "wonderfully shaped stone tools that are also beautiful to look at."<sup>37</sup> The curator's emphasis on the appearance of the objects and failure to mention their cultural uses is evidence of her reason for choosing the bannerstones for display. Although the curator may not have meant to create a place where objects transcend their cultural function in

order to become true works of art, she has inadvertently forced visitors to experience them visually and apart from their cultural context.

A visitor must only step into the adjacent African and Oceanic galleries to see a great contrast in the interpretation of the objects. Nearly a third of the gallery space is occupied by artifacts donated by Nelson A. Rockefeller that once made up the collection of his Museum of Primitive Art, a museum that displayed objects from Africa, the Americas, Oceania, and Asia. A large number of the objects in this collection were gathered by his son, Michael C. Rockefeller, after whom the wing is named, during his personal expeditions in Papua New Guinea. Julie Jones was employed by the Museum of Primitive art prior to her position at the Met, and it is difficult to comprehend why so much more emphasis was put on the cultural significance of the objects in the Oceanic and African sections than the ones housed in the Native American Gallery next door, as Jones is in charge of all of these departments.<sup>38</sup> Most of the objects in the African and Oceanic sections are accompanied by multiple and descriptive text panels describing details about the culture and the ceremonies in which the objects were used. Many even have photographs of the objects in use, thus contextualizing them for the visitors and allowing them to better grasp each item's cultural significance. It is clear that in this gallery, the curator had every intention of educating visitors about the people who made the objects and the social environments in which they were created, in contrast to the Native American Gallery, which is bereft of cultural context.

Aside from cultural data, there are still other facts that the museum could provide in order to enhance visitors' appreciation of an object's formal appearance. For example, the location of a tribe could shed light on the importance of the medium:

whether or not it is abundant in that location or if it had to be imported. A brief description of the means of creation, including the tools used, could help visitors better comprehend the process and craftsmanship behind the object.



## Chapter 5 – The American Museum of Natural History: Keeping Up to Date

It has been over a century since Franz Boas left the American Museum of Natural History in New York in 1905; however, his influence is still present in most of the museum's current ethnological exhibits. Naturally, one would have very high expectations for such a museum, as it has been one of the centers of museum anthropology since the nineteenth century and was once home to the "Father of American Anthropology" himself. Unfortunately, there are aspects in which the exhibits seem to have fallen below the standards and precedents that Boas established during his tenure there. The main reason for disappointment is that it seems the museum has not evolved its practices with regard to exhibitions and interpretation at all since the time that Boas was employed there.

Visitors to the ethnology department at AMNH must first battle the massive crowds that accumulate within the halls of the museum; they are then faced with the challenge of attempting to locate what it is that they are looking for. After navigating the labyrinth of dioramas and display cases in the various exhibits of wildlife and African cultures, the Native American halls feel relatively empty. It is obvious that these spaces have not been updated in quite some time, and they appear rather dark and dusty when compared to the bright, newly painted green walls of the African halls. Once here, the visitor is guided through exhibits that are still organized into the regional categories that Boas established at the museum over a century ago.<sup>vi</sup> The exceptions to this rule

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<sup>vi</sup> The culture areas in North America that Boas established include: Plains, Northwest Coast, Southwest, Eastern Woodlands, Southeast, and Arctic Peoples.

include the clumping together of the culturally diverse Eastern Woodlands and Plains Indians and the outright exclusion of Southwest cultures.

Another flaw in the American Museum's presentation of Native American cultures is the lack of cohesion in the chronological organization of the Native American halls. The biggest issue is the museum's failure to differentiate between prehistoric peoples and contemporary ones. There is nothing to let the visitors know that, as they are walking through the Mexico and Central America Hall, they are looking at an almost entirely prehistoric, archaeological collection. Nor is there any evidence, when they step into the Northwest Coast Hall, that they are now surrounded by objects created by tribes that are still very active in their traditional practices. Even more confusing is the diorama at the entrance to the Northwest Coast Hall that comprises men in loincloths stooped in a dark, interior space that seems to be an ancient domestic scene. The text panels that accompany the cases are laden with jargon and much too long to hold the attention of the average museum goer, which is seldom more than forty-five seconds per pane.<sup>39</sup> Undoubtedly the museum feels the need to preserve the legacy of Franz Boas that is made manifest by the hall, even though certain improvements and updates are necessary in both the methods of display and the language used in the text panels.

It may be because of financial restrictions that the American Museum has not refurbished the Native American halls, but it is more likely a matter of curatorial priorities. It makes sense that a natural history museum would put greater emphasis on its zoological, paleontological, and geological collections, but the ethnological collections should never be neglected to the point where they become outdated and no longer convey an accurate representation of the cultures that they portray. It is very likely that

an overwhelming percentage of visitors to AMNH are there to see the dinosaur fossils and stuffed animals that the museum is famous for, and so the majority of care and effort is put into maintaining and updating these exhibits at the expense of the ethnology collections.

The exclusion of the Southwest collections from public exhibition at the American Museum is one of the greatest tragedies resulting from the low priority status of ethnography at the museum. It is surprising that of all their holdings, the museum would exclude this particular collection because of the great deal of cultural material from both prehistoric and historic southwest peoples that is housed in the museum. The museum is also currently carrying out research and conducting expeditions to the Southwest to study contemporary Pueblo and Hopi culture. It is disappointing that none of this past or present research is being conveyed to museum visitors.

One of the most difficult challenges that all genres of museums face when representing American Indian peoples is finding a way to interpret them simultaneously as historic cultures with deep rooted traditions and as contemporary people. Many museums, including AMNH, seem to have opted to overlook the latter role of Native Americans in favor of representing them as the historical spectacles of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Just as the American Indian exhibits brought in visitors to the World Expositions, so, too, does the American Museum rely on exhibits that are more entertaining than accurate in order to appease visitors.

In areas such as New York City and much of the eastern United States, the presence of contemporary tribes is much less apparent than in places such as the Southwest or Pacific Northwest. Inhabitants of these areas may only experience Indian

cultures in museum contexts, so it is very important that these institutions provide visitors with as accurate a representation of these people as possible. In a survey conducted among children in New York City between the ages of ten and thirteen, the results showed that a shocking number of the children believed that Indians were extinct, or that they still lived in teepees with no electricity or modern technology.<sup>40</sup> Museums in urban communities such as AMNH certainly have a great obstacle to overcome, and it will take a great deal of time and effort to alter the public's knowledge of Native Americans.

What steps can natural history museums such as the American Museum of Natural History take in order to properly portray contemporary indigenous cultures such as American Indians? Aside from rearranging curatorial priorities and allocating more time and money to update their Native American collections, there are three aspects of display and interpretation in which curators can take action in order to assure that visitors are getting the correct message: texts, technology, and objects.

Text panels are always a relatively simple and inexpensive way to alter the interpretation of an exhibit. The information that is excluded from an interpretive text can often have just as much of an impact on visitors as what is written. As mentioned above, in art museums the text panels that accompany American Indian objects often convey rather vague information regarding the nation from where the artifact originates and a very general date of creation. Natural history museums take a similar approach when describing their zoological and geological specimens, as the main areas of interest regarding these objects are categorization and dating. When a natural history museum exhibits Native American material culture, it needs to do so using the

perspective of an anthropology museum in order to avoid oversimplification and inadequate interpretation. Text panels should include as much information about the object, its maker, and its intended function as possible. In the case of historic artifacts, it is important to mention if and how similar objects are being used by contemporary Indians. Space permitting, modern color photographs of the objects in use can be included as long as the museum is given permission by the tribe to show such a scene.<sup>vii</sup> Bilingual texts in English and a Native American language can also demonstrate to visitors that there are still people who speak these languages and that they are still used among American Indians today.

As museums enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century, an increasing number of them are turning to new technologies in order to more effectively interpret their collections for visitors. Audio and video components can greatly enhance an exhibit and can allow curators to convey information about how objects on display are meant to be used that would otherwise be impossible for visitors to understand. Video screens are an effective way to show modern Indian dances. Powwows are a particularly useful cultural phenomenon to include in exhibits because they are a strictly modern invention and they show how Native Americans are incorporating traditional dances and ceremonies into contemporary cultural practices. The term powwow comes from the Algonquin word *pau-wau*, a term that originally referred to gatherings of medicine men or other spiritual leaders. Europeans were the first to widely adopt the word to describe any gathering of Indians, and soon the Native Americans appropriated the term themselves. The first large, public powwows were held at the beginning of the twentieth century as

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<sup>vii</sup> In some cases, certain tribal ceremonies are considered to be sacred to the tribe and cannot be seen by non-members.

Independence Day celebrations. Under the Bureau of Indian Affairs, traditional Indian dances were prohibited, but many nations circumvented these laws by publicizing their powwows and holding them on an American national holiday. Today, modern powwows serve as an effective vehicle for educating the public about American Indian cultures.<sup>41</sup>

Audio clips of native songs or narrations can allow visitors to hear Indians speaking in their native tongues, which has an effect similar to bilingual texts in illustrating that Native American languages are still in use today. The Denver Museum of Nature and Science uses a video at the opening of their hall of North American Indian Cultures to introduce visitors to the various tribes that are represented by the exhibits. The video shows members from each tribe introducing themselves, saying a typical greeting, and pronouncing the name of the nation (which is almost always different from the English word for the people). Technology today is so ubiquitous that it seems natural for it to appear in museums as well, and it can be a simple and inexpensive way for curators to show a contemporary aspect of Native American Cultures.

A majority of the Native American collections in most natural history museums are often historic or even prehistoric artifacts that were collected as a result of the salvage anthropology of the nineteenth century, or they were donations from amateur explorer/collectors.<sup>viii</sup> The Native American collections at the American Museum of Natural history include a great deal of objects that were collected by Boas, some that were gathered during expeditions before Boas' tenure at the museum, and some very impressive archaeological collections from the early twentieth century. Although it is not uncommon for natural history museums to hold ethnographic collections, it is not often a

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<sup>viii</sup> George Gustav Heye is an example of this. His collections created the basis for the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian.

priority to continue to expand these collections or to acquire contemporary Native American cultural objects. By only displaying historic objects in American Indian exhibits, museums can inadvertently lead visitors to believe that these are all that remain of Native American cultures, or that Indians no longer practice traditional crafts. It is certainly not plausible to expect all natural history museums to begin extensive collection campaigns to increase their holdings of contemporary Native American cultural material, but there are some more practical solutions. Object loans and traveling exhibitions are not always inexpensive, but could be viable options for larger museums such as AMNH.

Guest speakers and other events can also supplement collections. Museums are great venues for holding powwows and other dance ceremonies. The American Museum held a very successful recreation of a Kwakiutl (Kwakwaka'wakw) potlatch celebration in conjunction with an exhibition entitled *Chiefly Feasts: The Enduring Kwakiutl Potlatch* in 1991-92.<sup>42</sup> The event was planned in collaboration with the Kwakwaka'wakw people of the Pacific Northwest and was not only extremely entertaining to watch, but it was a valuable teaching tool. Museum visitors were given a rare opportunity to witness a ceremony that usually only occurred on the opposite side of the continent and even then was restricted to tribal members only. Holding such an event at the American Museum was a step in the right direction toward effective interpretation of Native American cultures. However, it has been over a decade since a similar event has been held and other collaborative efforts have been almost nonexistent.

## **Chapter 6 – The Field Museum of Natural History and the Case Against Dioramas**

The Field Museum of Natural History, like the American Museum of Natural History, holds a prominent position in the history of museum anthropology. Ever since it opened in 1894, the Field could boast of one of the greatest ethnographic collections in the world – a great deal of this collection having been taken from the objects and artifacts gathered during the World's Columbian Exposition the previous year. Unlike many other natural history museums, the Field has gone to great lengths throughout the years to preserve, expand, and exhibit their anthropology collections. The museum is, however, guilty of being overly selective about which cultures receive the most attention, and Native American cultures are, once again, pushed to the periphery.

One of the most impressive exhibits at the Field Museum is the ethnographic exhibit on African cultures. Africa has frequented the front pages of many newspapers over the past decade and the museum's decision to upgrade this particular exhibit was undoubtedly influenced by the continent's recent popularity in current events. The entrance to the exhibit is situated right off of the main entrance hallway: prime real estate in museums and a position of which even the dinosaurs cannot boast. The exhibit consists of a recreation of modern Dakar, Senegal, complete with videos of living inhabitants describing daily activities as well as special celebrations. As visitors progress through the exhibit, they travel around the continent presented in a series of displays representing different cultural groups such as the Bamum from Cameroon and the nomadic Tuareg tribe of the greater Sahara.



The African culture exhibits at the Field Museum are successful in many ways. First, they follow Boas' model by separating the continent into cultural groups. These groups are represented not only by artifacts, but by drawings, videos, and replicas of living structures that portray the most characteristic and unique aspects of each culture. Most importantly, the curators of the exhibit have depicted the people of Africa in a contemporary context, rather than as historical or primitive people. Naturally, visitors would expect to have a similar experience in all of the ethnology exhibits at the Field Museum; however, it soon becomes clear that not all anthropology departments are created equal at the Field.

A red flag is raised instantly when entering the *Eskimos and Northwest Coast Indians* exhibit upon seeing use of the term "Eskimo;" a practice that has long since been replaced in favor of using more specific and culturally correct tribe names such as Inuit, Aleut, and Yupik.<sup>ix</sup> As visitors enter the exhibit, they are immediately confronted by an alarming series of dioramas and life models whose ages are betrayed by the dust within the cases as well as by the fact that they are still being used at all. The use of dioramas in ethnological exhibits has greatly diminished over the second half of the twentieth century, this is especially so in the case of American Indian exhibits. The main reason for this is that the majority of Indians today live in circumstances not unlike those of the average museum visitor, and a diorama of such a scene would be largely uninteresting. Life groups that still exist in museums such as the Field and AMNH are often quite old and present a snapshot of Native American life that is even older and largely inaccurate.

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<sup>ix</sup> The term "Eskimo" is still frequently used in Alaska to refer collectively to the Inupiat and Aleut people who live within the state and to differentiate them from the Inuit, Yupik and other cultures that live elsewhere in the Arctic Circle.

Franz Boas was a strong advocate for life groups both at the Field Museum while he was employed there in the early 1890s and a few years later at the American Museum of Natural History. Boas' use of life groups, however, was always as a means to an end, and never as an exhibit on their own. Although a considerable amount of time and money was put into creating the plaster figures and dressing them and providing them with the necessary accoutrements, Boas' dioramas were merely meant to capture the attention of visitors and to direct them to the more informative artifact cases and text panels. Boas observed his intentions being fulfilled by visitors to the Field museum:

I have taken notice that on Saturdays when the Public leaves the Lecture Hall, they invariably look at the group and then turn to the adjoining case and I find by their remarks that I succeeded in reaching the end that I had in view in this arrangement. The visitors discuss the uses of the implements comparing them to those they see in the group and stop to read the labels.<sup>43</sup>

It is clear that the life groups were not meant by Boas to be the main attraction of the exhibit. Instead they serve the same purpose that video screens do in modern museums. Boas believed in the importance of illustrating an artifact's intended context and traditional uses,<sup>44</sup> a methodology that is most commonly accomplished today by photographs, sound recordings, or videos. During Boas' tenure at the Field Museum, as well as that at the American Museum, these technologies, aside from photography, were not readily available for museums. Photographs were, occasionally, displayed

alongside artifact cases, but they were more frequently used as references for the creation of dioramas.

Dioramas, or life groups, were relatively new in the museum world during the time in which Boas was working. The first museum dioramas were created in 1889 by naturalist Carl Akeley, who built a series of habitat dioramas for the American Museum of Natural History.<sup>45</sup> The idea quickly caught on in natural history museums and soon evolved to include groups of sculpted human forms in fabricated settings as well as taxidermied animals in contrived ecosystems. What was so striking about these glimpses into the lives of American Indians was their difference from the lives of Euro-American people. It was not until later in the twentieth century that Indians began to fully acculturate into Western society, so at the time of these first dioramas, the scenes portrayed were accurate depictions of the traditional homes. Today, similar dioramas continue to be used to the end of attracting visitors' attentions and captivating them within the exhibit, however they are largely inaccurate depictions of modern Indian life.

A life group captures a single moment in time and freezes it for eternity for the purpose of educating museum visitors about a particular culture and their style of dress, types of housing, and use of traditional objects. Most dioramas extant in museums today have frozen a moment that occurred over a century ago in a setting that has long since evolved into something quite different. The Field Museum in Chicago is not the only museum guilty of reinforcing the misconception that American Indians are primitive or uncivilized. In fact, many natural history museums still use dioramas as a primary vehicle for conveying ethnographic information because they are so visually stimulating. The Denver Museum of Nature and Science is one of the few museums that have

discontinued their use of life groups in favor of more contemporary three dimensional models. A few of the many diverse tribal exhibits at the museum include replicas of modern Indian dwellings such as a Navajo hogan. These replicas do not feature human forms, but are instead interactive and visitors are allowed to enter the space. The building techniques are traditional, but their interiors are furnished with modern items such as tablecloths and reclining chairs, and are ultimately much more realistic than life group settings. The Field Museum does boast of a life sized replica of a Pawnee earth lodge, however there is no indication that such a dwelling is an historical one and that such structures are no longer used as domiciles among the Pawnee Nation.

The Field Museum's heavy reliance on dioramas to disseminate ethnographic information about the tribes of the Northwest Coast becomes an even more obvious fallacy when this exhibit is compared to others in the North American Indian section of the museum. The Plains Indians exhibit has been recently updated to include video recordings of oral histories. The Ancient Americas exhibit is also newly redesigned complete with interactive computer games. In contrast to these engaging and modern exhibits, the Northwest Coast and Arctic Peoples exhibit appears out dated and out of place at the Field Museum. The condition of the exhibit also reflects negatively on its content.

## **Chapter 7 – The Navajo Nation Museum and the Plight of Tribal Museums**

Tribal museums have been in existence since the early twentieth century. The first tribal museum was opened in Uncasville, Connecticut, in 1931 by the Tantaquidgeon family of the Mohegan (Mohican) tribe. In order for a museum to be

considered a tribal museum, it must be built and operated using funds from that particular tribe. The Tantaquidgeon Museum is run entirely by its namesake family, all members of which were prominent figures in the Mohegan tribe.<sup>46</sup> At present, a majority of tribes have established at least a small museum or cultural center. These institutions are generally visited by tribal members and used as a resource for teaching young members about their cultural traditions, customs, and language.

Some tribal museums are large enough to become tourist attractions in their own rights. One of the largest and most active tribal museums is the Navajo Nation Museum located in Window Rock, Arizona, the capital of the Navajo Nation. The museum was founded by the tribe in 1961 as a repository for cultural artifacts, a resource for people of the Navajo tribe, and as a facility for tribal ceremonies and gatherings. Today, the museum is in its third location and is housed in a state of the art building that is also the site of the Navajo Nation Research Library; a series of conference halls and amphitheatres; and the headquarters of Miss Navajo Nation. It is clear that this museum is meant to be a resource for tribal members, but its size and the scope of its exhibitions have made it a destination for Southwest and Native American enthusiasts from around the world.

Unlike many other museums that display and interpret American Indian ethnographic materials, tribal museums often have the luxury of being able to hire members of the tribe to staff the museum. The exhibitions put on by the Navajo Nation Museum benefit considerably from the museum's Native preference when hiring. The twelve full time staff members are all well versed in Navajo culture and are fully aware of all precautions that should be taken when working with Navajo cultural material and

all exhibits and related print materials are bilingual in English and Diné.<sup>x</sup> The curatorial voice becomes one with the Navajo voice: a phenomenon that public museums often strive to achieve, yet fail. Incorporating the native voice into exhibitions is advantageous to both Navajo and Anglo visitors alike.

In 2002 the Navajo Nation Museum hosted an exhibition entitled *Woven Chants: Images from Navajo Sandpaintings*. The exhibit comprised a series of woven Navajo blankets depicting scenes that were typically illustrated in the form of sandpaintings during highly sacred ceremonies. The sandpaintings themselves are always destroyed at the closing of the ceremony, but occasionally the illustrations are made permanent in the form of a woven blanket. While a great deal of research was performed to ensure that the images in the blankets were not exact replicas of the sandpaintings, which would be culturally unacceptable for display, a disclaimer was placed at the entrance to the exhibition warning Navajo visitors of its content. The disclaimer stated that young, pregnant women should not enter the exhibit because coming into contact with the sacred images created by ancestors could be harmful to their unborn children.<sup>47</sup> Providing information such as this fulfills cultural requirements for the Navajo people, but it also gives non-native visitors an opportunity to see an aspect of Navajo culture that they would not typically experience in a non-tribal museum.

There is a sacrifice that is made when deciding to hire only Indians as staff members at tribal museums: a candidate's tribal affiliation becomes more important than his or her qualifications. Holding a position that would require a PhD at most public museums, Clarenda Begay works as the museum curator at the Navajo Nation Museum

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<sup>x</sup> Diné is the name of the Navajo language. It is also the term with which the Navajo people refer to themselves.

with an Associate's degree from an Indian junior college. While Begay has experience in cultural interpretation, having spent nine years working for the National Parks Service, a lack of formal museum training is evident in certain aspects of the museum's exhibition management. A current exhibition at the museum displays a series of Navajo blankets from the most established weaving families of the Navajo Reservation. An interactive component of this exhibit provides visitors with a pair of wool cards used for making yarn. These cards are placed on a table directly in front of one of the larger blankets, an error that a trained registrar would most likely never commit. As a result, the beautiful and priceless blanket appears to have been raked into a frayed mess by the well meaning hands of visitors seeking an interactive experience.

Aside from collections management issues, the exhibits themselves lack the professionalism of public museums and the information is not presented as clearly as it possible. The most common error is that the curators assume that all visitors have a wide cultural and historic knowledge base. They do not appear to account for the non-native visitors, or for those who are unfamiliar with Southwest history and the history of the Navajo tribe. It is clear even through casual observation that the majority of visitors are only glancing at the texts and spending more time perusing the artifacts. In their attempts to present highly academic exhibits, the staff has alienated many visitors and robbed them a full museum experience in favor of one that is object heavy.

Not all tribal museums hire strictly within their nations. The Southern Ute Cultural Center and Museum in Ignacio, Colorado currently has an Anglo director, and less than half of the people on staff are Southern Ute members. When community leaders first decided to open the museum, they chose to hire highly qualified museum professionals

over capable Southern Ute members. As a result, the museum has flourished as a tourist destination as well as a resource and is currently being moved into a brand new multi-million dollar facility. Because not all staff members are Southern Utes, they must instead rely on intensive consultation and collaboration with the Board and with other community members.

The Navajo Nation Museum is indeed an invaluable cultural resource for anyone who is interested in learning about Navajo culture. However, in order to be an exemplary museum there is a lot of work that needs to be done. Just as public museums ought to seek the aid of American Indian consultants, so should tribal museums with strictly native personnel seek advice from skilled museum professionals.



## Chapter 8 – The Museum of Indian Arts and Culture and the Importance of Collaboration

The Museum of Indian Arts and Culture in Santa Fe, New Mexico is part of the Museum of New Mexico system of institutions. Founded in 1909, the Museum of New Mexico began as a repository for all objects pertaining to the state's history or to the cultures of the people that resided there. As the collections grew, they were divided by subject and the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture was born. Being a state museum, there was no obligation to hire only candidates with Native American backgrounds. Since it is located in an area that has one of the highest Native population concentrations in the United States, those who were hired to govern the museum understood the importance of not alienating the Navajo, Ute, Apache, Hopi, or Pueblo peoples.

The director of the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, Bruce Bernstein, holds a PhD in anthropology and was also the curator of the museum's feature exhibit *Here, Now and Always*. Dr. Bernstein did not work alone; he had the help of fourteen collaborators including representatives from ten different nations, an archaeologist, and another anthropologist. Apart from these major collaborators, there were nearly fifty different voices included in the exhibition.<sup>48</sup> By merging these many different perspectives, the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture has created one of the most successful Native American exhibits in the country. *Here, Now and Always* combines the precision and didactic approach of Western museums with the narrative and spiritual qualities often associated with American Indian exhibitions.

As visitors enter the exhibit, they pass by three sets of headphones; each plays a recording of the same message in three different languages: Tewa,<sup>xi</sup> Diné, and English. The message was similar to the disclaimer at the Navajo Nation Museum's *Woven Chants* exhibit. It stated that the following exhibit contained objects that were associated with their ancestors and that young, pregnant women should not enter. This section was separate from the bulk of the exhibition so that it could be easily avoided if necessary. The exhibit is divided into the following eight sections: ancestors; cycles; architecture; language and song; plants and animals; exchange; survival; and arts. Each of these sections can be experienced independently or as part of the larger exhibit. The terms used to describe each segment of the exhibition are general enough to be relevant to each of the various tribes that are represented in the exhibition. Each section of the exhibition incorporates an interactive or a sensory component. The Architecture section comprises a series of replicas of modern living structures including a Navajo hogan, an Apache wickiup, and a Pueblo kitchen. Many sections feature video screens of oral histories, narratives, or ceremonies and those without video are complimented by an aural backdrop of native songs or people speaking in the various languages of the Pueblo and Hopi people. While *Here, Now and Always* nears the threshold of sensory overload, the use of soundproof walls and acoustic panels helps to contain sounds in their rightful sections, and the placement of screens is such that only one is visible at a time from any given point within the exhibit. This exhibit owes its success to the collaboration of highly skilled exhibition designers and curators with cultural specialists from the area who were able to provide them with knowledge and instruction on the proper way to interpret their material culture.

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<sup>xi</sup> Tewa is a language spoken among the majority of the Pueblo peoples.

Creating a culturally sensitive exhibition cannot be accomplished without making certain sacrifices in the area of museum anthropological practices, however. Contrary to Boas' practices, the different cultures are not separated within the exhibit. Each section incorporates information about a variety of nations, some of which have very different cultures such as the Hopi and the Apache. This choice is justified and explained in the brochure that is available to all visitors upon their entrance into the exhibition space. The brochure states that the numerous tribes of the Southwest view themselves as a single people regardless of cultural and linguistic boundaries. To separate the artifacts by tribe in the exhibition would therefore create physical barriers where there were none among the Indian peoples. Although this proved to be confusing at times, and even contradictory in some aspects, the importance of the real life relationships among the cultures outweighed the need to follow museum conventions.

Although the exhibits at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture stand very well on their own, the curatorial staff has gone to substantial lengths to create and make available a series of accompanying brochures for each of the exhibits. As mentioned above, the brochure for *Here, Now and Always* contains culturally significant information not provided in the exhibit itself. This brochure also features a map of the exhibition with suggested routes marked and tips for getting the most out of each of the individual segments. The text provided in the brochure combines a brief description of each section followed by a quote from one of the native collaborators. These quotes are rather poetic in language, but they are valuable nuggets of information for non-native visitors so that they may get an alternate perspective on certain aspects of the

exhibition. One such quote, by Tony Chavarria of Santa Clara Pueblo, describes the importance and spirituality of dancing:

When one is dancing all the sound vibrates within you. Your body becomes one instrument among others, a part of the whole. Through this do we become joined to creation, to those who have gone before and to those who are yet to be.<sup>49</sup>

On its own, such a quote may not be overly informative for museum visitors. But its presence within the exhibition space among various musical instruments, examples of dance regalia, and videos of various dance ceremonies, the words of Chavarria work well to emphasize the cultural importance of dance to the Indians of the Southwest.

Unlike the curation and registration departments, the education department at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture is staffed entirely by American Indians from the various Southwest tribes. Some of these employees are also collaborators, but their most important contribution is visitor engagement. Free tours are offered to all visitors by native cultural interpreters who are willing to answer all questions and to clarify matters that might be confusing to Anglo visitors. Additionally, the majority of the security staff is also native and they are able and quite willing to answer any questions about the galleries or to direct visitors to the appropriate print materials or interpreters if necessary. With the interaction of these culturally knowledgeable and very engaging individuals, a visit to the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture becomes more than a mere walk through a museum, but a holistic learning experience about the peoples of the Southwest.

The Museum of Indian Arts and Culture may have an advantage over many ethnology museums because of their location in Santa Fe near the heart of what is known as Indian Country. The resources that are available to curators at the museum are numerous and invaluable. Collaboration with American Indians might be more difficult for museums that are situated in more urban areas where Indian reservations are few and far between and Native populations have become far more acculturated than in the Southwest. It is the responsibility of these museums to seek out cultural resources and to utilize them to create a portrayal of Native American cultures that is accurate and up to date. All recognized nations in the United States have cultural representatives whose job it is to provide institutions with information about their culture and to answer questions about what is appropriate or taboo for display. It is safe to say that many of the representatives are grossly underutilized because museums are not taking advantage of these valuable resources.

## Conclusion

The many difficulties associated with the display and interpretation of Native American material culture in North American museums result from the unique position of Indians in American society. In many aspects, the cultures are truly ancient with traditions that have been in place for more than a thousand years. Conversely, the people practicing these traditions are also modern people living in America. Indian cultures were first brought into museums because they were considered primitive and fascinating because of their difference from what was familiar. People were curious to learn about these strange people with whom they shared their country, and museums took full advantage of that curiosity.

Some of the gravest of errors that are committed when dealing with cultural material are made when trying to contextualize objects in a museum setting. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, is an example of art being used as an allegory in order to allow visitors to appreciate its aesthetic value. By appropriating visually attractive artifacts, even those that most likely had utilitarian uses within the culture that created them, and turning them into art objects these cultural artifacts are completely decontextualized. At the American Museum of Natural History, material culture is decontextualized in a different way. Here, it is stripped of cultural importance and placed alongside natural specimens such as rocks and fossils, creating the implication that the people that created these objects are no more than ancient primates who ought to be only categorized and sorted and not studied as unique cultures.

Ethnological objects need to be displayed and interpreted in museums in a context that closely reflects that of the culture from which they were taken. Boas

originally attempted to do this using life groups or dioramas in which the objects were shown as they would have been used by indigenous people. Although the Field Museum continues to include dioramas in its exhibits today, other museums are attempting to use different technologies to bridge the gap between museum display and actual context. The Museum of Indian Arts and Culture uses a variety of audio and visual aids to allow museum visitors to better experience the context in which Native American objects would be created and used. This museum also takes full advantage of the benefits of collaboration with Indian representatives from various nations. By introducing multiple perspectives into the creation of an exhibit, visitors are able to understand the objects on display more completely, rather than simply as museum artifacts.

Although the presence of a Native voice is a pivotal factor in successfully interpreting Indian material culture, this perspective can not always stand alone in a museum. At the Navajo Nation Museum, the entire staff can claim Navajo affiliation. Even though they are the best authorities on the proper protocol for displaying and interpreting their cultural material, especially in sensitive situations, they lack the extensive training in exhibition design and curation that museum professionals possess. A balance must be reached between the formal, Western curatorial voice and the Native American one in order for an ethnological exhibit to be a successful teaching tool. The staff members of the Navajo Nation Museum are relying on their cultural connections to the objects in their museums to help create exhibits that are informative, but not always fully accessible for non-native museum visitors, who may not understand specific cultural references or jargon.

Ever since Native American material culture first appeared in museums, the emphasis has always been on the people's differences from Euro-Americans. As Native people acculturated into modern American society, their material culture remained in museums, but its interpretation did not evolve with the people. Museums today are faced with the challenge of reinterpreting their collections to reflect the changes that American Indian cultures have experienced through time, and of continuing to update their Native American ethnographic exhibits. Curatorial emphasis should no longer be on how Indians are different, but how they are the same as many Americans, and how they have evolved to become a part of American society while still holding on their rich cultural heritage.



## Endnotes:

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- <sup>1</sup> Boas 612
- <sup>2</sup> George Brown Goode 1888 quoted in Conn 76
- <sup>3</sup> Conn 76
- <sup>4</sup> Conn 77
- <sup>5</sup> Frederic Ward Putnam 1891 quoted in Karp and Lavine 347
- <sup>6</sup> Karp and Lavine 348
- <sup>7</sup> Karp and Lavine 345
- <sup>8</sup> Ames 26
- <sup>9</sup> Boas 1907 as quoted in Jacknis 86
- <sup>10</sup> Conn 78
- <sup>11</sup> Conn 79
- <sup>12</sup> Conn 80
- <sup>13</sup> Conn 83-4
- <sup>14</sup> Conn 85
- <sup>15</sup> Conn 85
- <sup>16</sup> [http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/ead/ead.html?id=EAD\\_upenn\\_museum\\_PUMu1100](http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/ead/ead.html?id=EAD_upenn_museum_PUMu1100)
- <sup>17</sup> Gordon 1913 as quoted in Conn 96
- <sup>18</sup> Conn 100
- <sup>19</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> <http://www.biography.com/articles/Franz-Boas-9216786>
- <sup>23</sup> Boas 1911 as quoted from *The Mind of Primitive Man* in Lewis 451
- <sup>24</sup> Boas 1887 as quoted in Whiteley 8
- <sup>25</sup> Whiteley 8
- <sup>26</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>27</sup> Boas 1887 as quoted in Stocking 77
- <sup>28</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup> National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution 49
- <sup>30</sup> Jacknis 106
- <sup>31</sup> [http://www.metmuseum.org/special/new\\_gallery/native\\_north\\_america\\_more.asp](http://www.metmuseum.org/special/new_gallery/native_north_america_more.asp)
- <sup>32</sup> National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution 51
- <sup>33</sup> Alpers 1991 as quoted from *The Museum as a Way of Seeming* in Karp and Lavine 27
- <sup>34</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>35</sup> [http://www.metmuseum.org/special/new\\_gallery/native\\_north\\_america\\_more.asp](http://www.metmuseum.org/special/new_gallery/native_north_america_more.asp)
- <sup>36</sup> *The Museum as a Way of Seeming* in Karp and Lavine 31
- <sup>37</sup> Jones 2007 as quoted in Curatorial Perspective from Julie Jones...
- <sup>38</sup> [http://www.metmuseum.org/special/new\\_gallery/native\\_north\\_america\\_more.asp](http://www.metmuseum.org/special/new_gallery/native_north_america_more.asp)
- <sup>39</sup> Davey 18
- <sup>40</sup> Doty 11
- <sup>41</sup> Schultz
- <sup>42</sup> [www.research.amnh.org/anthropology/database/exhibition\\_1990\\_1995](http://www.research.amnh.org/anthropology/database/exhibition_1990_1995)
- <sup>43</sup> Boas 1896 as quoted in Stocking 100
- <sup>44</sup> Stocking 97
- <sup>45</sup> Quinn 35
- <sup>46</sup> <http://www.mohegan.nsn.us/pressroom/ViewPressRelease.aspx?articleID=97>
- <sup>47</sup> Begay
- <sup>48</sup> <http://www.miacalab.org/current&eventID=40>
- <sup>49</sup> Tony Chavarria as quoted in *Here, Now & Always*

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