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Critical Voices: Reinterpreting American History at the Eiteljorg

A Thesis

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Megan Marie True

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Critical Voices: Reinterpreting American History at the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art

Introduction

The Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art is a unique institution in Indiana. It stands out among the industrial and modern buildings of Indianapolis, with its richly colored stone that brings to mind images of the American Southwest. This museum that explores the art, history, and cultures of the American West feels far removed from its subject matter in the Midwest, but the Eiteljorg Museum is a vital part of the Indianapolis community; it serves as a cultural and educational resource for the region. The Eiteljorg Museum is also unique in that it is the only museum east of the Mississippi River to display both Native American and Western American art within the same space. The argument can be made that displaying these two seemingly conflicting types of art reinforces viewing American history through a colonial lens. However, the ways in which the Eiteljorg Museum presents its galleries work to fulfill the Museum's educational mission to create "an appreciation and understanding of the art, history, and cultures of the American West and the Indigenous peoples of North America" (Eiteljorg 2018). This study will analyze the Eiteljorg Museum galleries *Attitudes: The West in American Art* and *Mihtohseenionki: The Peoples Place*, examining the educational and design techniques utilized by the Museum in order to fulfill this mission.

History is an essential part of American education, but has not always been treated as such. However, largely due to new academic standards adopted by the Indiana State Board of Education in 2014, Indiana students are receiving more complete and inclusive instruction in history. Where history courses used to focus almost solely on the dominant narratives told from the white male perspective, with minimal and often stereotypical representations of women and minorities, they now must include lessons on subjects such as America pre-European contact and the affects of immigration. In the fourth grade, students are required to learn about Indiana history, and the new standards require lessons on the Native American cultures that inhabited the area before it became the state of Indiana, as well as the removal of Native peoples from the region by the American government in the 1830's (McCormick 2014, Grade 4, 4). However, there is no discussion of Native Americans following the 1830's until the eighth grade, where students learn about the expansion of the United States to the West. Even with the new history standards, museums like the Eiteljorg add more depth in the education of current students, but also provide new perspectives for those who received a more one-sided education in history.

The settling of the American West is a difficult subject in the American consciousness. While Indiana's educational standards mandate subjects like the relationship between settlers and Native Americans, the concept of Manifest Destiny, and the role of minorities that provide a more accurate view of the West, there is such a volume of inaccurate popular culture depicting the period that it is difficult to gain a clear understanding of the American West (McCormick 2014,

Grade 8, 5). The history of the American West has become distorted through the years, because it was perceived solely through a colonial lens (Limerick, 1987, 19). The Eiteljorg Museum challenges this view of American history through educational interpretation of the images that visitors are accustomed to seeing when they think about the American West. This is achieved through the integration of New Western History within their galleries. Reinterpreting American history this way in the Western American galleries gives a voice to the minority and female settlers, as well as increasing the effectiveness of the lessons expressed in the Native American galleries. In the Western American galleries on the first floor visitors are taught that their preconceptions of American history are not always completely accurate, preparing them to be more receptive of the Native American perspective presented in the Native American galleries on the second floor. Through collaboration, these galleries provide Native American perspectives directly from members of the Native American community. This allows them to not only provide their own history, but also demonstrate their cultures in the present. Combining these two collections and the educational techniques that the Eiteljorg Museum uses to present them allows visitors to gain new perspectives of the story of the American West, deepening and supporting the education that students receive in schools.

The Eiteljorg Museum, like many museums serves as an educational resource for subjects that are not explored in depth in schools. Museum education is important because it provides alternative methods for learning. It is also not mandatory learning, people can take in information at their own pace and discretion, as well as “make emotional decisions such as feeling connected to the

topic in some way” (Bingmann, Johnson 2017, chapter 1). The Eiteljorg Museum’s dedication to providing an engaging educational experience is demonstrated in its galleries and resources, and the Museum continues to move in an innovative direction in museum education. To better understand how the Eiteljorg Museum has evolved and continues to grow, it is important to examine the Museum’s own history.

History of the Eiteljorg Museum

The Eiteljorg Museum was a dream of Harrison Eiteljorg, an Indiana coal mogul and prominent art collector. His business took him to the Southwest, and he developed a passion for Western American art, which makes up the majority of his collection, along with a smaller assortment of Native American cultural artifacts. The idea of creating a museum for his collection became real when he decided to merge his collection with the collection of the Museum of Indian Heritage, closing due to the lack of suitable storage for its pieces. James H. Lawton, a white anthropologist who came from a family with interest in Native American culture, created the Museum of Indian Heritage to house his family’s collection of North American ethnological and archeological artifacts in 1967 (Vanausdall 2014, 61). Education was Lawton’s main objective in founding the Museum, his passion was teaching young students about Native American cultures. As the Museum of Indian Heritage came to the realization that their institution could no longer support the collection, Harrison Eiteljorg’s proposed plan for a new museum provided hope that the collection could be given new life (Schwantes 1987, C-2).

It is important to note that Eiteljorg was also a white collector, who was fascinated with both the cultures and landscapes of the American West, particularly the Southwest. As his collection grew, he wanted to share his passion with the public of Indiana. He explored the option of displaying it in several existing museums, such as the Indianapolis Museum of Art, where his pieces had previously been displayed in temporary exhibitions, but ultimately realized that the collection warranted its own museum (Hess, architect, pers. comm., 2017). It was decided that the Eiteljorg Museum would be one of the first projects to be built in the new White River State Park, located in central Indianapolis, and played a substantial role in the cultural awakening of the city. The Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art officially opened to the public in 1989. It was an instant success in the community, and due to collections growing as patrons and donors gained interest, the Museum soon needed to expand the building beyond the three original galleries to provide more exhibition space as well as more amenities for guests (Vanausdall 2014, 2).

Along with the expansion of the collections and the building came the expansion of the Museum's mission, starting as a museum solely focused on art, and evolving to become a museum of art, history, and culture. With this change, the Eiteljorg Museum also had to reconsider its audience; as a museum it must be able to adapt to the changing needs and desires of both the general public and the local communities that they serve. The Museum realized that in order to remain beneficial to the community, their educational programming needed to be more inclusive to the Native American community, as well as other minorities (Vanausdall 2014, xxv). The Eiteljorg Museum's mission to be an educational resource that

makes art, history, and culture accessible to a diverse audience was outlined in a formal diversity statement issued in 2004 by the Eiteljorg Board of Directors:

Cultural diversity enriches our world. The Eiteljorg Museum presents the art and heritage of the American West and the indigenous peoples of North America as a culturally diverse story of human accomplishment, adversity, and perseverance with respect and sensitivity to all cultures.

Diversity refers to race and ethnicity, but also includes gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic statuses, learning styles, and even thoughts and ideas.

The Eiteljorg strives for a culturally diverse staff, board, and volunteer base. The Museum seeks the best qualified candidates for its staff, board and volunteer positions from a diverse application pool. The museum wants its human resources to reflect the diversity of its communities and its subject matter.

The American West represents a multicultural story; therefore, the museum invites everyone to visit its facilities and participate in its programs (Eiteljorg Museum 2004).

This statement confirms the Museum's commitment to serving a diverse audience. The goal of the Museum is to teach the public an accurate version of the story of the American West, a story made possible through the contributions of many different people and cultures. With their substantial collection of Native American cultural objects and art, the Eiteljorg Museum recognizes that they have a responsibility to educate their visitors about Native American history and culture. In order to accomplish this, they built a relationship with the local Native American

nations, creating partnerships that are essential in their success in their educational mission. This strategy is aided by the use of new Western history to introduce multiple points of view in the Western American galleries.

Changing Perspectives of the American West

The Eiteljorg Museum's Western American galleries are located on the first floor of the Museum, and thus are typically the first galleries that guests visit. These guests often come with deeply ingrained preconceptions of the history of America that can be obstacles to their receptiveness to the perspectives that are presented in the Native American galleries on the second floor. Although academic standards are evolving, the dominant view of the discovery of America and westward expansion is one of victory and progress. In this telling of Western American history, only one voice is heard: the Euro-American white male. Native Americans are stereotypically portrayed as the villains of this story, while other minority groups are omitted altogether. These inaccurate and simplistic ideas are difficult to dispel because the exploration of the Western frontier is a "foundation myth" of America (Massip 2011, 13). This version of history has only recently begun to be challenged, as the concept of New Western History has gained acceptance in both academic and museum communities.

New Western History is a way of interpreting the history of the American West through a revisionist lens, by focusing on components such as gender, socio-economic class, and ethnicity (Dippie 2004, 496). This idea is first explored in Dr. Patricia Limerick's groundbreaking book *The Legacy of Conquest*, in which she

examines the history of the exploration and settling of the American West from multiple viewpoints. New Western History was at first vehemently rejected by the academic community because it urges acknowledging the bad as well as the good of the American story. American Western history is a subject that has been romanticized since the beginning, and a common argument was that New Western History was an attempt to rewrite events in order to fit an agenda of political correctness. Dr. Limerick has promoted the inclusion of multiple perspectives in the history of the American West in spite of the resistance, stating: "By questioning the Westerner's traditional stance as innocent victim, we do not debunk Western history, but enrich it" (Limerick 1987, 54). The inclusion of minority points of view strengthens the narrative of American Western history. While it is beneficial simply by providing more than a white male perspective, it also offers a more complex, and therefore more interesting, story that acknowledges failures alongside successes; and incorporates a spectrum of traits such as sympathy, evil, kindness, and resilience alongside the usual courage and danger (Limerick, Milner, and Rankin 1991, 6). A primary function of museums is to tell stories that people can both learn from and relate to, and including multiple perspectives allows for more people to connect with the material (Winchester 2009,79). This is why New Western History is an essential educational tool for museums like the Eiteljorg Museum.

The Eiteljorg Museum recently completely redesigned their Western American galleries, which officially reopened on November 10, 2018. This redesign took works and concepts from the two former galleries *The Art of the American West* and *Out of the West: The Gund Gallery of Western Art* and merged them into one

cohesive gallery called *Attitudes: The West in American Art*. The former galleries had also used New Western History as an educational tool, but in much subtler ways. James Nottage, for whom *Attitudes* was his final project as the Vice President, Chief Curatorial Officer, and Gund Curator of Western Art, History, and Culture, stated in his speech at the opening of *Attitudes* that the former galleries were an experience “that was wholly about aesthetics and you didn’t really explore the underlying meanings or basic history of the work itself” (Nottage 2018). This was a primary element that he wished to change, continuing to say “I hope that one of the things you’ll see in our new galleries is our efforts to give you resources to look a little deeper”, often using the diverse voices of New Western History within these resources to accomplish this goal (Nottage 2018). The opening celebration of *Attitudes* was a demonstration of the Eiteljorg’s commitment to the inclusion of diverse perspectives, the event included a Lion Dance performed by the Indiana Association of Chinese Americans to honor the inclusion of Chinese Americans in the exhibition, as well as to dispel bad luck and bring good luck to the exhibition and the Museum. This sets the tone for the gallery, as *Attitudes* uses New Western History to teach visitors that their preconceptions about American history often only represent one side of the story, and are based upon antiquated ideologies and harmful stereotypes. The Eiteljorg Museum has improved its use of New Western History, by expanding the perspectives to include more than just the Euro-American settlers and Native Americans, such as African Americans and Hispanic immigrants, making their presentation of the story of the American West one of increasing intricacy and accuracy.

Attitudes: The West in American Art

The images and ideas presented in the Western galleries are typically more familiar to the majority of visitors to the Museum, and often serve as the basis for their reinterpretation of American history because of this. Upon first glance, when visitors enter the gallery *Attitudes: The West in American Art*, they see the images and types of art that is expected in a museum that focuses on the art of the American West. This includes exciting scenes of cowboys in the Wild West, exotic depictions of Indians, and sublime landscapes of mountains and canyons. However, they quickly realize that this gallery is more complex than it appears. Although more diverse artists and subject matter has been incorporated into this newly redesigned gallery, the Museum still utilizes a “bait and switch” method of display that uses the characteristic imagery of the “Wild West” as a type of bait and then proceeds to present a more “complex and accurate story” once the visitor begins to fully engage with the gallery (Price 2009, 81). Through the integration of New Western History in the pieces selected for the exhibit, the labels and didactic signs, as well as interactive activities, the Eiteljorg Museum presents the complex and diverse reality of the American West. Dr. Martha Hill, the Vice President for Public Programs and the Beeler Family Director for Education, explained how everything that the education department implemented in the new gallery relates to the Eiteljorg Museum’s mission to foster understanding of art, history, and cultures of the West (Hill pers. comm. 2018).

The “big idea” behind the new gallery is “Art of the West shapes the American Story and expresses perceptions of places and people. It connects American experiences through art, history, and culture” (Nottage, pers. comm. 2017), and is expressed in three themes throughout the gallery: people, places, and aesthetics. The theme of people portrays diversity in art of the American West, showing that Western American art can represent the America’s diversity as well as addressing the issues that are often present in art of the American West. Places, as a theme, examines how the American West as a concept rather than a specific place or time, and explains how the American West has been defined in the past has been from a limited viewpoint. The theme of aesthetics analyzes the various modes of the expression of aesthetics in the art of the American West and examine the influences of the artists (Nottage pers. comm. 2017). Each of these themes deals with integration of diverse perspectives, particularly the viewpoints of minorities. This inclusivity is essential, as it not only provides the opportunity for white visitors to learn from other perspectives, but also because it allows minorities to better connect with their history, showing them that their “ancestors have a new place in the New Western History and [they] could be interested in how their cultures helped shape the present” (Walsh 2015, 144). In *Attitudes* these themes work together to assist visitors in gaining a more complete understanding of other cultures, art, and the story of the American West.

The most visual way that the Eiteljorg museum accomplishes this is through the artwork itself. In the former galleries, the vast majority of the pieces were by white male artists. This lack of diversity was one of the first elements that was

changed when the new galleries were conceptualized. As museums move forward, they not only need to be aware of their colonial pasts that only allowed the perspectives of white males, they must also be intentional about diversity (Ng, Ware, Greenberg 2017, 148-9). The Eiteljorg Museum has succeeded in displaying pieces that represent a number of perspectives: the artists represent African Americans, Chinese Americans, Native Americans, Latinx peoples, and female artists, among others. It is important to note that this representation is not perfect, white men still outnumber minority artists, but it is closer to becoming equal. Other groups remain underrepresented, particularly women of color.

Still, this combination of diverse artists is a step in the right direction. One piece that represents both a perspective and an event that are largely ignored by American history is *Heart Mountain, Wyoming* (figure 1), created by the Japanese American artist Jishiro Miyauchi in 1945. Miyauchi was an immigrant to America in the early twentieth century, and worked as an artist until the outbreak of the Second World War. He was among thousands of Japanese Americans that were forced to live in internment camps. This painting depicts the Heart Mountain Internment Camp in Wyoming where he was incarcerated. The internment and maltreatment of a great number of innocent people simply because of their ancestry is a shameful episode in American history that is rarely taught in depth or represented in art. *Heart Mountain, Wyoming* was painted while Miyauchi was imprisoned. The people at these camps were not allowed to bring many, if any, personal belongings with them, and Miyauchi had to create paint from various materials that he scavenged at the camp, including coal dust and rice paste. This piece demonstrates not only the

creativity and talent of an artist under dismal conditions, but also how diverse perspectives like Myauchi's can provide a more accurate picture of American history without omitting events that many do not like to acknowledge.



Figure 1: *Heart Mountain, Wyoming* 1945 by Jishiro Myauchi
Source: True 2018, Courtesy of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Indianapolis

Pieces like this that bluntly demonstrate perspectives that are too often erased from the narrative of America are essential to the understanding of the American story, but it is also important to analyze works that are considered to be typical of this type of art. For example, pieces like E.I. Couse's *The Wedding* (figure 2) seem harmless upon first viewing, but when the context for the work becomes clear represents quite a few of the issues surrounding Western American art. *The Wedding* appears to be simple: a young Native American couple wrapped in a blanket on their wedding day. While this image seems to portray the Native

Americans in an innocent, positive way, there are several layers of context that must be taken into consideration. Like many artists of the time, Couse was classically trained in painting in Europe and was inspired by the landscapes and cultures of the American West when his family moved there. He painted only in a studio with models and props that he carefully staged. Couse was interested in Native American culture and would use authentic cultural objects as props, but did not take any care to ensure that the props were accurate to the culture that he was supposedly depicting. This resulted in paintings that are extremely vague in terms of geography and culture. The label for this work acknowledges all of this and bluntly describes Couse's work as "heavily romanticized images of Native people that generalized Indigenous cultures and filtered them through Couse's white male perspective" (Eiteljorg Museum 2018). Another layer to this piece is its capitalist origins. Couse was hired by the Beacon Manufacturing Company, a textile company based in New England, to create painting to be used as promotional images for their blankets. The blanket in the image is similar to one mass-produced by Beacon. Couse modeled the forms on his classical training and used the exoticism surrounding Native Americans to appeal to a Euro-American audience that would be attracted to his work and purchase Beacon's blankets. This mass production of blankets and other textiles mimicking Native American design not only contributes to the exoticization of their cultures, but also puts them at an economic disadvantage by making it more difficult for them to sell authentic textiles. This piece by Couse demonstrates that although an image may look harmless and unassuming, knowing its context is essential to gaining anything more than a surface-view of Western American history.



Figure 2: *The Wedding* 1924 by E.I. Couse

Source: True 2018, Courtesy of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Indianapolis

The labels of the pieces in the show, as the labels for the two works discussed above demonstrate, are good for addressing issues on an individual basis, but it is important that they are also considered and applied broadly to the gallery. This is done through the use of didactic panels placed throughout the gallery, near works that they apply to most directly. In relation to issues present in *The Wedding*, there is also a panel titled “Images of the ‘Indian’” (figure 3) that addresses different Native American stereotypes that are present in many of the works in the gallery as well as how these stereotypes remain problems today. This didactic examines how

stereotypes of Native peoples have evolved in the American consciousness over time, beginning with referring to them as “merciless Indian savages” in the Declaration of Independence (US 1776). This view of Native Americans has changed over time, but that does not mean that stereotypes disappeared. People moved to seeing Native Americans as primitive peoples that were incapable of existing in modern America, and began to romanticize Native cultures, which is just as harmful as villainizing them. Finally, it addresses how the diverse Indigenous cultures of North America were generalized into the idea of the “Indian” that persists today, notably in Indianapolis’ own baseball team the Indianapolis Indians.

The panel “Images of the ‘Indian’” is one of the more specific didactics, addressing a problem that effects a particular group, but there are also panels such as “A Diverse West” (figure 4) that explain a more general concept that applies to the entire gallery. This educational panel encourages visitors to question the ideas that they have about the American West. It acknowledges, “The history of the West has been one of inclusion and exclusion” (Eiteljorg Museum 2018), which makes sure people are thinking as much about the perspectives that are not included as those that are. This is due to the fact that museums are “actively ‘noticing’ all segments of the American population” and acknowledging them in their exhibitions, and the Eiteljorg Museum must be aware of every perspective, whether they are physically present in the gallery or not (Wiggers 1993, 5). The panel ends with a call to action: “Look closer and explore further, because the art of the West tells more diverse stories than you may think” (Eiteljorg Museum 2018). This speaks directly

to the visitors, challenging them to think beyond their own preconceptions of the American West and to examine the art in *Attitudes* more critically.

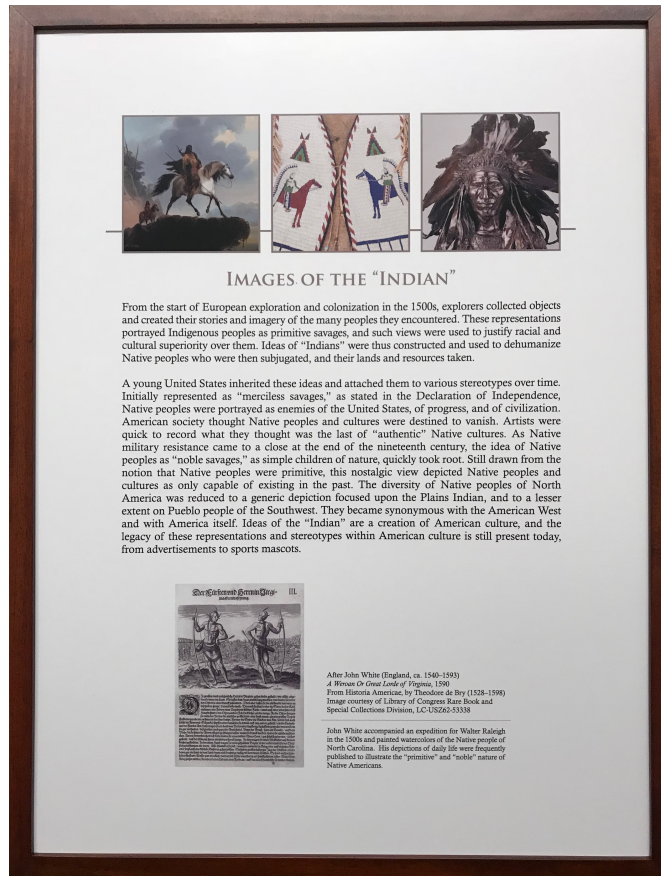


Figure 3: "Images of the 'Indian'"

Source: True 2018, Courtesy of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Indianapolis

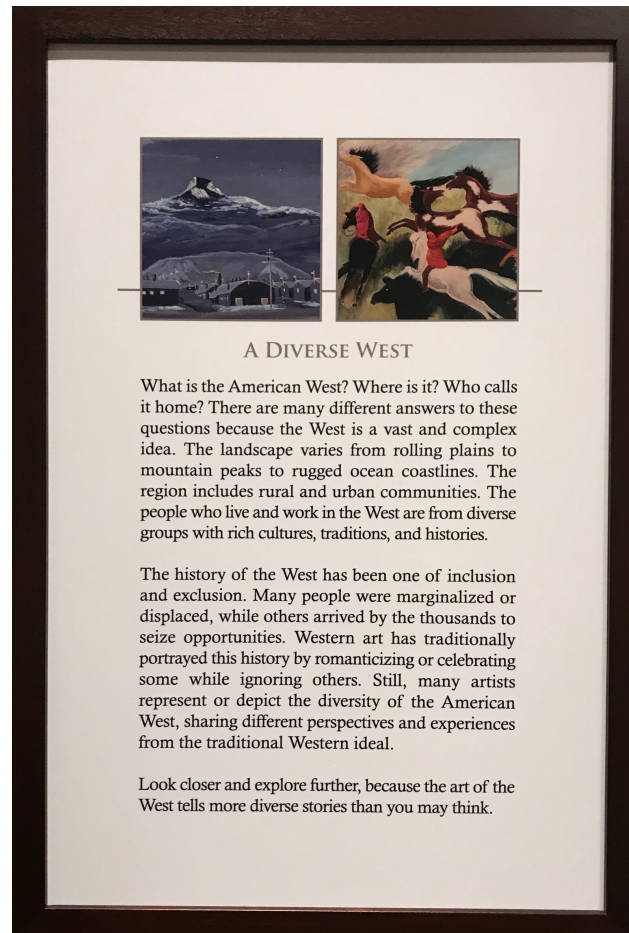


Figure 4: “A Diverse West”

Source: True 2018, Courtesy of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Indianapolis

The didactic panels are not the only sources of information in *Attitudes*, visitors also learn through interactive activities. Interactive elements are an important aspect of museum education, and are growing in popularity as museums search for new ways to engage their visitors. They also bring the concept of active learning into the galleries: “People who are actively learning are *involved* in the *process of discovery*. They are taking part in an *activity* that gets the mind or body engaged” (Bingmann, Cutler, Grove 2017, chapter 5). Active learning where visitors

are truly engaging with the material helps them learn more effectively. An interactive is an element of the exhibit that requires action from the visitor and is directly related to a learning outcome. The interactive activities in the *Attitudes* that provide the most educational information are the large touch screen tables, a cutting-edge innovation in museum education, particularly the table in front of the piece *The Americanization of California* by Dean Cornwell (figure 5). This interactive allows visitors to learn about a plethora of different subjects relating to this painting. Visitors can learn more about the context of the work, which is actually a model for one of four murals in the Los Angeles Central Library, including the process, the artistic elements, and the artist's biography. There is also a section where guests can learn about the perspectives that are missing from the work, such as the "African American Experience". This allows visitors to navigate through content such as photographs of African Americans in the West, read about African Americans in California, and to see how the African American experience is missing from this work. This interactive fits into the Eiteljorg Museum's educational mission by providing context for the work as well as demonstrating how it has omitted diverse perspectives.

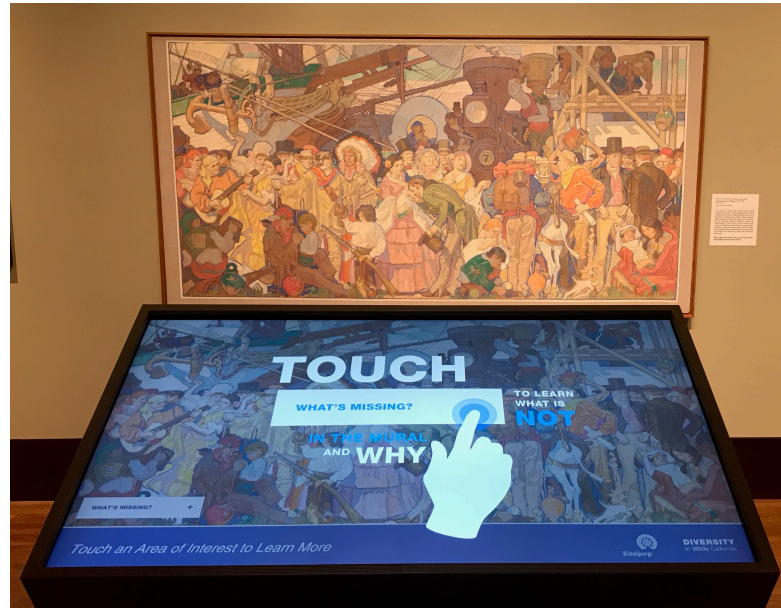


Figure 5: Interactive Touch Table and *The Americanization of California 1932* by Dean Cornwell

Source: True 2018, Courtesy of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Indianapolis

While technology-based interactives are currently popular in museums, there are also usually more hands-on activities as well. The audience for these activities is typically for children, but the Eiteljorg Museum's goal was to design the interactives so that they are accessible for children but can also be engaging for older visitors (Hill, pers. comm. 2018). These hands-on interactives focus on encouraging visitors to really connect with the artwork, and examine it closely. One example of this are the puzzles that are images of the pieces they are placed in front of, which urges visitors to really look at the piece, scrutinizing both the colors and forms (figure 6). There are also some interactives that are sensory-based, particularly touch. A common desire of museum visitors is to physically interact with the objects; there is a strong curiosity to know what they feel like. A solution to

this is to create facsimiles or samples of the materials that visitors can touch, as a “way of preserving collections while giving intellectual or emotional access to them” (Bingmann, Cutler, Grove 2017 chapter 5). There are several of these throughout the gallery, including a sample of the marble used to create Doug Hyde’s sculpture *Salmon Quest* (figure 7). This small interactive explains some of the artist’s process, and includes the prompt “What do you think it would be like to work with marble?” (Eiteljorg Museum 2018) in order to encourage guests to think more critically about the process of making art.



Figure 6: Puzzle in front of *Cow Country* 1938 by Maynard Dixon
 Source: True 2018, Courtesy of Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians And Western Art, Indianapolis



Figure 7: Touch interactive with *Salmon Quest* 2014 by Doug Hyde
 Source: True 2018, Courtesy of Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Indianapolis

The diverse artists and representations in the art, the didactic labels and panels, and the interactive activities each contribute to the educational objectives of the gallery *Attitudes*. They teach visitors about the art, history, and cultures of the American West, encouraging them to see past their preconceptions of American history by incorporating New Western History. This includes the use of multiple, diverse perspectives that provide a more accurate picture of the American West. The interactive activities contribute to this, allowing visitors to engage with the art; from these activities they are not only further educated on the issues of perception, inclusion and exclusion, but also about the aesthetics and processes of the artwork. These methods of education are successful in *Attitudes: The West in American Art*, providing a voice for all of the diverse perspectives that make up the American West.

Teaching Through Indigenous Voices

The methods employed in the *Attitudes: The West in American Art* are being analyzed for effectiveness, as a way to know what to include when the Native American galleries are redesigned in 2021. The two galleries are different in the messages that visitors are meant to learn, so there is some difference in methodology. In addition to the objects on display, didactic panels, and technology, the Native American galleries also utilize collaborative curating. Curators are not the only voices present in museum exhibitions today, particularly those focusing on minority groups, because collaborative curating is gaining popularity as a way of securing accurate representation. Museums now often work directly with

communities, which in turn allows them to better connect with audiences and for audiences to relate to the content and messages of the museum. In contemporary society's social and political climate, collaboration with communities can help museums to "work with similarities while acknowledging and respecting differences" (Golding, Modest 2013, 3). Through collaboration, museums can also gain "traditional community knowledge" that can offer deeper understanding of their collections, which is extremely beneficial (Onciul 2013, 90). Working directly with museums is important for Native American communities, because colonialism has manipulated and controlled their representations for so long. Throughout history, the majority of Native American representations have originated from non-Native perspectives. Even with the best of intentions, these representations can never be completely accurate. Native Americans have only recently become prevalent in the conversation of their own representations. Museums are institutions with colonialist and imperialist roots that have filtered information through the views of their nearly exclusively white staff, which has led to the perpetuation of stereotypes of minorities, including Native Americans. This makes allowing them to have a voice in museum exhibition all the more significant. In her book *Decolonizing Museums*, Amy Lonetree discusses this issue at length, connecting the involvement of Native Americans in the development of museum exhibitions that provide opportunities for them to control the representations of their cultures with "larger movements of self-determination and cultural sovereignty" (Lonetree 2012, 1). Native Americans have always been involved with the Eiteljorg Museum, but it was not until the development of the exhibit *Mihtohseenionki: The People's*

Place that there was real collaboration, with members of the Native American community playing an active role in shaping the exhibition.

Mihtohtseenionki: The People's Place

The relationship between the Eiteljorg Museum and the Native American communities has existed since the inception of the Museum, but was not one of equality until fairly recently. When the Eiteljorg Museum was founded, there was a Native American advisory council comprised of several local nations, but were very rarely consulted, and the creation of the group seemed more a formality than for partnership. The Miami Nation of Indians of Indiana and Oklahoma have had a long relationship with the Museum that had a rough beginning. In 1997, the Eiteljorg Museum opened a temporary exhibition titled *In the Presence of the Past: the Miami Indians of Indiana*, which was the first time the story of the Miami people was depicted by a major museum in the state. This exhibition was an important opportunity for the Miami Nation, primarily because they continue to be denied federal recognition as an official tribe and are relatively unknown even in their own region. *In the Presence of the Past* presented the opportunity to increase the awareness of their culture, history, and struggle. The community was also excited for the chance to see objects from their culture that are primarily held at the National Museum of the American Indian in the nation's capitol, far from their homeland. Despite the promise the exhibition held, the Eiteljorg Museum did not fulfill the wishes of the Miami community, because of the Museum's decisions for consultation of the project. Although an advisory board consisting of Miami leaders

with the authority to speak of their history and culture was formed, the Museum used Stuart Rafert, a white historian who had spent many years working with the Miami Nation as their primary consultant (Shoemaker, pers. comm. 2017). This action was not a complete shock, as it was what museums have been doing to indigenous communities for centuries, forming advisory groups to consult on the project as a mere formality, their voices drowned out by a white historian. The Museum's Native American advisory council eventually took a stand in 2002, arguing that it was the Museum's responsibility to tell Native stories from Native perspectives (Vanausdall 2014, 135-6). In part from this show of strength from the advisory council and in part from the success of *In the Presence of the Past*, the Eiteljorg Museum finally acknowledged they had to have a permanent gallery that told the stories of the Native Americans of Indiana. For so long, museums were only responsible for the care of the material culture of their collections, but now recognize a responsibility to also care "for the communities in which museums are situated" (Ng, Ware, Greenberg 2017, 149). As this basis for the missions of museums has shifted, so must museum practice, and the Eiteljorg Museum has been successful in evolving in response to engagement with the Native American community and demonstrating that they are willing to share power (Oncuil 2013, 3). The gallery *Mihtohtseenionki: The People's Place* was developed as a response to this, and this time the Miami people were able to control their own narrative.

In order for collaborative curating to be an effective educational tool, the voices of the Native American peoples represented must be strong. Museum professionals that hope to accomplish this must remember to step back and listen to

the Native communities rather than tell them what they want, and be careful not to monopolize the opportunities with their own views (Ng, Ware, Greenberg 2017, 145). There are many methods to evaluate the effectiveness of collaboration, but a particularly helpful approach, especially when working with minority groups, is through Sherry Arnstein's "A Ladder of Citizen Participation", a model that examines the different levels of power distribution in the inclusion of citizens in various projects. Arnstein divides citizen participation into three main categories, each with their own subgroups. These categories are "nonparticipation (manipulation, therapy)", "degrees of tokenism (informing, consultation, placation)", and "degrees of citizen power (partnership, delegated power, citizen control)" (Arnstein 1969, 217). The exhibition *In the Presence of the Past* engaged with a Native American advisory board, but only through surface level consultation, one of the types of tokenism. In the tokenism category, the citizen's ideas and opinions are gathered in case they prove useful, but they are overlooked as the project moves forward (Arnstein 1969, 219). The Native American advisory board's role in the development was simply to be the "token" Native Americans in order to make the process of the exhibit appear inclusive. Museums are finally learning that merely having Native American perspectives present does not make an exhibition accurately representative of the Native American experience (Mithlo 2004, 744). When *Mihtohseenionki* was conceived, the Museum recognized that if it wanted the gallery to be successful, they would need to improve the level of participation the Native American advisory groups had in the development. Although the Native communities were very involved in the formation of *Mihtohseenionki*, it was not

completely under their control and thus can still not be classified at the top of Arnstein's ladder. This exhibition can instead be categorized as partnership, which is when power is distributed as equally as possible between the citizens and professionals and both having control in most aspects of the project (Arnstein 1969, 221). The voices of the Miami, Delaware, and Potawatomi groups directly educate the visitors through the didactic panels, technology, and even some of the object selection. While the voice of the curator is still present in the gallery, it is balanced with those of the Native Americans represented. The Eiteljorg Museum has made substantial improvement in the inclusion of Indigenous voices through these elements, and this has aided them in their educational mission.

Mihtohseenionki focuses on the cultures and history of the Miami, the Potawatomi, and the Delaware peoples, three of the primary Native American nations that originated the region that is now Indiana, and has allowed these groups to control their representations in the gallery. The Eiteljorg Museum's curator of Native American Art, History, and Culture, Dr. Scott Shoemaker, who is also a member of the Miami Nation of Indians of Oklahoma, elaborated on how the creation of this permanent gallery has improved the relationship between his people and the Museum. He contributes this strengthened relationship to the opportunity that the exhibit has provided for Native Americans to influence their own narrative and demonstrate that they are active societies that maintain their cultures in contemporary society. Before he was a curator at the Eiteljorg Museum, Shoemaker served on the Miami Nation advisory board for *Mihtohseenionki*. He explained how while the curator had the final word on object selection and

placement for the exhibit, the advisory groups had a lot of influence about the story they would like the objects to tell about their cultures. Many of the objects on display are from the Eiteljorg Museum's collection or on loan from other museums such as the National Museum of the American Indian, but quite a few were also donated by members of the communities that are represented. Some of these are more antique objects handed down from generation to generation, and the donors are proud to display their family and cultural heritage in such a prominent space. Many of the objects donated by current members of the Native American communities promote the idea of "survivance", which is "an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuation of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent" (Vizenor 2008, 1). These objects, such as a Powwow jacket from 1997 (figure 8), demonstrate that Native American cultures are not relics of the past; their traditions have persisted in the face of historical and present oppression. Several of these objects are accompanied by quotations and even some photographs from the owners, which makes them more personal, easier for visitors to connect with.

Alongside pieces donated by members of the community, the Museum also commissioned Native American artisans to produce works to help represent their cultures for *Mihtohseenionki*. One of these pieces made specially for the exhibit is a pair of handmade beaded moccasins (figure 9) created by Shoemaker, who practices multiple Miami artistic traditions in addition to his scholarly work (Shoemaker, pers. comm. 2017). Personal and meaningful objects such as these are present in all three of the display cases that represent each nation, alongside objects and art that

span from contemporary works to artifacts from pre-European contact, visually showing the history that visitors learn more about through the didactic panels present throughout the gallery.



Figure 8: 1997 “The Year of the Miami” Powwow jacket
Source: True 2017, Courtesy of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Indianapolis



Figure 9: Moccasins 2002 created by Dr. Scott Shoemaker
Source: True 2017, Courtesy of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Indianapolis

The labels and panels situated both in the cases with these objects and around the perimeter of the gallery provide context that contribute to the visitors understanding of how the objects fit into their cultures. There are panels for each of the Miami, Potawatomi, and Delaware cases that were written by the advisory groups assembled for each culture. These panels allowed the groups to decide which aspects of their culture that they believe are most important to teach visitors about. The content for each nation is not uniform, showing that each group prioritizes teaching the public different aspects of their cultures. They all focus on different periods of their histories, but most place particular emphasis on the more recent past. This is demonstrated in the panel titled “Zhyéjek (They Move On, They Continue)” (figure 10) written by members of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi. This panel, along the cultural panels, includes a title in the Potawatomi’s indigenous language, Bode’wadmi, which raises awareness of the differences between the three groups and negates the American tendency to generalize Native American cultures. The advisory group decided to touch on several periods in their nation’s history, but consciously end with a more recent event with the reaffirmation of the Pokagon Band’s federal status as an official Native American nation in 1994. This is another example of the importance of conveying survivance in this gallery; the Potawatomi want to ensure that they are represented as a contemporary culture.

In addition to the cultural didactic signs, there are also panels around the perimeter of the gallery that tell the history of the Indiana region, but rather than telling the story from the typical Euro-American perspective, they depict a Native American point of view. The advisory groups did not write these panels; they were

written by a curator and approved by the advisors. The presence of both the curatorial and Indigenous voices is important because the mere presence of Native American voices does not ensure the agency of the panels. Curators have their own knowledge and skill sets that are important when creating exhibits that are not only accurate representations of minorities but also understandable for the average visitor, so shared authority is essential in developing exhibits like *Mihtohseenionki* (Hutchison 2013, 146). The way that American history is treated in these didactic signs does not glorify colonization. They focus instead on tackling difficult events that are often purposely removed from the narrative. This is demonstrated by the panel “Late 1700’s: Settlers Invade Mihtohseenionki” (figure 11). The language of these panels counter the colonial narrative, with words such as “invade” and “swarm” to describe white settlers coming to the Midwest provides a contrast to the positive terms of discovery and progress that are usually used when describing this period. This demonstrates that while the Westward expansion of America has been taught as a positive event, from the Native American perspective it was an invasion and forceful seizure of their ancestral lands. The didactic panels throughout this gallery tell a story, and the storyline approach to education in museums is effective, inviting visitors to engage with the material, connecting it to the objects and interactive activities, and encouraging reflection (Vallance 2004, 352). These historical signs provide a detailed look at the American narrative through a Native American perspective, educating visitors about obscure and prominent events in history as well as encouraging them to question the narrative that they have been previously taught.

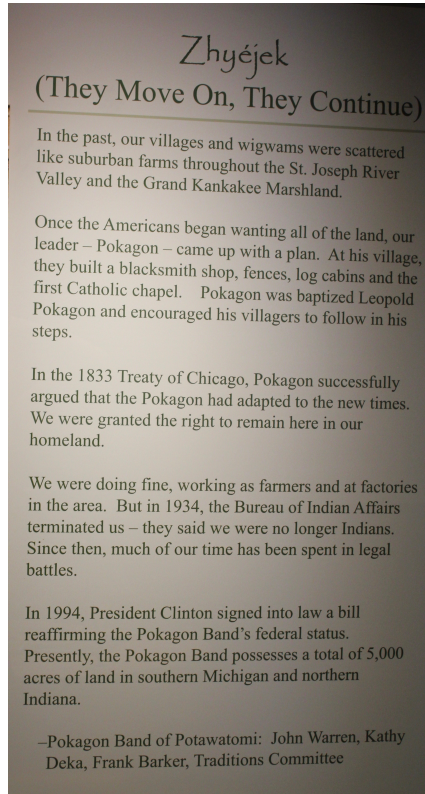


Figure 10: Educational panel “Zhyéjek (They Move On, They Continue)”
Source: True 2017, Courtesy of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Indianapolis



Figure 11: Educational panel “Late 1700’s: Settlers Invade Mihtohseenionki”
Source: True 2017, Courtesy of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Indianapolis

As with the Western American galleries, the interactive activities are an extension of the educational content present in the objects and the panels, but they allow visitors to connect more directly with the material. There are both technology based and hands-on activities present in the gallery. Technology is an integral element when collaborating with a community, as it provides a platform for their voices to be recognized (Golding 2013, 17). Most of the technology in *Mihtohtseenionki* is a little outdated, and therefore can limit how visitors engage with the material, but is overall effective as an educational tool. There are three computers that correspond to the display cases for the Miami, Potawatomi, and Delaware nations (figure 12), which display two videos and a gallery of photographs. The videos each show an artisan working in the artistic traditions of their cultures. They discuss how their practice was used by their people historically and how it has now been adapted to contemporary society. These artists use their art to connect with their ancestors and keep their history alive. These practices are demonstrated in the videos so that visitors get to see the process of creating some of the art that they can see in the display cases. These videos offer educational value not only because they provide insight into artistic processes, but also because they make the objects more engaging by introducing some of the Native artists behind the work. The photographs were submitted by members of each nation, and depict both past and present members. The combination of the photographs and the videos educate guests about Native American culture in an engaging way, as well as continues the primary educational message of survivance by showing that these

cultures not only still exist, but that their traditions have continued to flourish despite historical oppression.

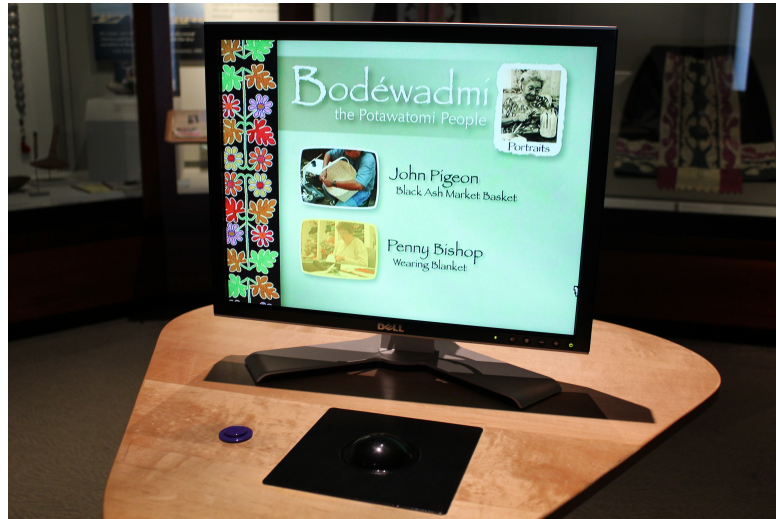


Figure 12: Interactive computer with Potawatomi artist videos and photographs

Source: True 2017, Courtesy of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Indianapolis

The hands-on activities in this gallery are connected to the artisan videos on the computers. They allow visitors to see how several Native American artistic practices are done, and they can try some of these practices themselves. For example, there is a section where visitors can try basket weaving in the Potawatomi tradition (figure 13). The Museum collaborated with John Pigeon, a member of the Potawatomi nation and artisan featured in one of the videos who has been practicing basket weaving for years. The interactive station provides photographs of Pigeon during various stages of his process, as well as step-by-step instructions for how to create a Potawatomi basket. The text is not only a learning experience because of the easy to understand instructions, but because it provides vocabulary

for the practice of basket weaving. There are foundations set up with strips of cloth to practice weaving through them, so that visitors can gain a deeper understanding of how several of the objects in the exhibition were created and the tradition behind them. These interactives allow visitors to engage in active learning. This especially important in the Native American galleries because it has been found that interactive activities “changed perceptions of the museum from ‘dry and dusty’ to a place that was ‘modern’ and explored ‘current issues’” (Bingmann, Cutler, Grove 2017, chapter 5). In some cases, displaying Native American cultural artifacts and art objects can be more harmful than beneficial because it can reinforce the idea that Native American cultures belong in the past. With these interactive activities, visitors participate in active learning in a way that confirms that Native Americans are alive and continuing their traditions today.



Figure 13: Interactive Potawatomi basket weaving activity
 Source: True 2017, Courtesy of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Indianapolis

The educational mission of the gallery *Mihtohseenionki: The People's Place* is to teach audiences about the art, history, and cultures of the Native American communities of the region of Indiana. The Eiteljorg Museum accomplishes this through the objects that are selected for the exhibit, the didactic panels providing the written information, and the interactive resources that encourage active learning. This gallery provides a foundation for learning about Native American cultures, and will be extremely beneficial as the Museum moves forward with their plans to redesign the Native American galleries that display the art and cultural objects of nations from across North and Central America. The combination of collaborative curating and the elements of object selection, didactic signs, and interactives in both *Attitudes* and *Mihtohseenionki* have been successful in advancing the Eiteljorg Museum's educational mission.

Conclusion

The Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art is aware that it has a responsibility to teach American history through their collections and resources in a way that is inclusive and accurate. From its opening in 1989 to the reopening of the Western American galleries in 2018, the Museum has been making progress as it has worked to include each of the diverse perspectives that make up the story of the American West. This is established in the two galleries *Attitudes: The West in American Art* and *Mihtohseenionki: The People's Place*. In *Attitudes*, the Western American gallery, the issue that the ways in which many Americans perceive the American West are through the lens of colonialism is addressed

through the incorporation of New Western History. This allows the Museum to teach about new perspectives that are either omitted from the dominant narrative or are represented stereotypically through the traditional art of the “Wild West”. The introduction of these diverse perspectives in the Western American galleries sets the foundation for visitors to be more accepting of the Indigenous perspective in the Native American galleries. These Native American points of view are represented directly through collaborative curating, allowing the communities to control their own narratives in the gallery. Through working directly with members of the Miami, Potawatomi, and Delaware nations, the Museum was able to create an accurate and engaging exhibit, as well as built strong relationships based upon trust, respect, and humility (Lonetree 2012, 170). The two methods of New Western History and collaborative curating are used to make the educational elements of the galleries more effective.

Both *Attitudes* and *Mihtoheenionki* utilize several didactic tools commonly employed by museums. Known primarily as a museum of art, the Eiteljorg curators give careful consideration to the objects that they choose for each exhibition, making sure that they support the story and educational message of the space. Art is often considered to be the domain of white men, but the Eiteljorg has worked to ensure that artists of color and female artists are well represented in their galleries. This representation is not perfect by any means, as there are groups that continue to be underrepresented or overlooked altogether, but it is a step in the right direction. The didactic panels provide essential context for these carefully selected objects. When written correctly, these panels and labels give visitors not only context about

the artist and the history of the piece, but also encourage them to question their biases and to think critically about the ways in which they have been taught American history. In the Native American gallery, these panels serve as a platform for the Indigenous communities represented to teach through their own voices. This method is quite effective in the Native American galleries, and it could be beneficial for the Museum to consider trying the same method of direct collaboration with minority groups for the Western American galleries. The interactive resources present in both galleries connect the elements of art and informational learning through actively engaging the visitors with the material. They make it easier for the guests to connect with the artwork that they are viewing, and can make complex issues of inclusion and exclusion easier for visitors to understand. Hands-on learning where the visitor is actively participating in an activity creates a more stimulating environment in which people enjoy to learn. The interactives in *Mihtohseenionki* were created first, and are slightly limiting because of their age, but are still effective and were used as models for the updated interactive resources in *Attitudes*. Combining each of these components allows for more than just the viewing of objects and ingesting of information, together they allow visitors to connect art, history, and other cultures to their own lives and experiences, which is an excellent way to foster learning and understanding.

History education is better than it once was in Indiana, but it still does not typically include more than one or two perspectives that differ from that of the white male. For children growing up today, museums like the Eiteljorg Museum can supplement their education and provide perspectives and ideas that are not

included in the new academic standards for history. They can learn how Chinese immigrants helped shape the American West or how the American government attempted to strip Native Americans of their identities in the late nineteenth century, two subjects that are not included in school curriculums. Learning is also encouraged in ways that are more informal and entertaining through technology and hands-on activities, reinforcing the idea that learning can be fun. Of course, the learning opportunities that the Eiteljorg Museum presents are not only for students. The experience of visitors is “the essence of museum education” (Bingmann, Johnson 2017, chapter 1), and the Museum strives to create an experience that is beneficial for all visitors. Through the various educational elements of the Museum, adults are encouraged to critically evaluate the ways in which they were taught American history, particularly the idealized and white-washed version of the settling of the American West that is present not only in education but in popular culture. The Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art fulfills its educational purpose to teach diverse perspectives by utilizing methods and exhibition elements that allow guests to reinterpret the history of America to include the voices of all of the diverse people that make up the American story.

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