

# Ethnic diversity or ethnic enclaves? Representing African American history in U.S. Museums

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## Abstract

Museums are among the most significant places to represent history in their communities and influence visitors, including various generations, classes, and ethnic groups. There are often unequal power relationships between mainstream and minority groups at museums in a diverse society. Minority groups have had the opportunity to present their own historic interpretation in museum exhibits and programs in the United States since the 1960s. This helped to shape public memory in their societies. Does this mean museums contribute to peoples' understanding of other cultures, enabling them to see from a different perspective? I fear that the result of this increased ethnic diversity may be that people will get into ethnic enclaves. Museum professional staffs have the difficult responsibility of creating exhibits and programs that will attract visitors from both mainstream and ethnic groups. When that happens, museums fail to serve as a forum promoting diversity. In fact, they may act to maintain the distance between ethnic enclaves. Museums must promote dialogues between ethnic groups in order to encourage museum visitors to accept diversity and learn about cultures other than their own.

**Keywords:** museum, historic representation, ethnic diversity, African Americans, European Americans, education, museum anthropology.

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# Diversidade étnica ou enclaves étnicos? A representação da história afro-americana nos museus dos Estados Unidos

## Resumo

Os museus ocupam significativo posto na representação da história das comunidades e na influência que exercem sobre os visitantes, incluindo várias gerações, classes e grupos étnicos. Frequentemente, nos museus, em uma sociedade diversificada, dá-se uma desigual relação de poder entre os grupos majoritários e os minoritários. Desde os anos 1960, os grupos minoritários têm tido a oportunidade de apresentar sua própria interpretação histórica nos Estados Unidos, o que ajudou a configurar a memória pública em suas sociedades. Será que isso significa que os museus contribuem para a compreensão de outras culturas, possibilitando uma visão a partir de uma perspectiva diferente? Temo que o resultado dessa crescente diversidade étnica possa ser que as pessoas se instalem em enclaves étnicos. Os profissionais dos museus têm a árdua responsabilidade de criar exposições e programas que atraiam visitantes tanto dos grupos majoritários como dos étnicos. Mas, quando isso acontece, o museu não realiza a missão de ser um foro de promoção de diversidade e, de fato, age no sentido de manter a distância entre os enclaves étnicos. O que os museus devem promover é o diálogo entre grupos étnicos, a fim de estimular os visitantes a aprender sobre outras culturas além da própria.

**Palavras-chave:** museu, representação histórica, diversidade étnica, afro-americanos, europeu-americanos, educação, antropologia museológica.

## Diversidad étnica o enclaves étnicos? La representación de la historia afro-americana en los museos de los Estados Unidos

## Resumen

Los museos juegan un rol importante en la representación de la historia de las comunidades y su influencia sobre los visitantes, incluyendo a varias generaciones, clases y etnias. A menudo,

en los museos, en una sociedad diversificada, hay una relación de poder desigual entre la mayoría y las minorías. Desde los años 1960, los grupos minoritarios han tenido la oportunidad de presentar su propia interpretación histórica en los Estados Unidos, lo que ayudó a configurar la memoria pública de sus sociedades. ¿Significa esto que los museos contribuyen a la comprensión de otras culturas, abriendo la posibilidad de una perspectiva diferente? Me temo que el resultado de esta diversidad étnica creciente pueda ser que las personas se instalen en enclaves étnicos. Los profesionales de los museos tienen la ardua responsabilidad de crear exposiciones y programas que atraen a los visitantes de los grupos mayoritarios así como de los grupos étnicos. Pero cuando esto sucede, el museo no realiza la tarea de ser un foro para la promoción de la diversidad y, de hecho, actúa para mantener la distancia entre los enclaves étnicos. Lo que los museos deben promover es el diálogo entre los grupos étnicos con el fin de animar a los visitantes a aprender sobre culturas diferentes a la de uno mismo.

**Palabras-clave:** museo, representación histórica, diversidad étnica, afro-americanos, europeos-americanos, educación, antropología museológica.

## Museums, Education, and Society

Ivan Karp and Stephen Lavine indicated that “Every museum exhibition, whatever its overt subject, inevitably draws on the cultural assumptions and resources of the people who make it” (KARP; LAVINE, 1991, p. 1). Museums represent their societies. Unlike a mirror, which provides an exact duplicate of the subject, museum exhibits present distorted images of societies. Those images are of confusion and conflict within those societies. Museum anthropology, like philosophical anthropology, describes how humans recognize their environment and traces their way of thinking.

Some museum anthropologists consider museums to be forums in their societies<sup>1</sup>. With increasing diversity in society, museums play an important social role as public institutions, by interpreting and presenting different cultures and their points

<sup>1</sup> Several anthropologists quote Duncan Cameron, encouraging museums to play the role of forum, rather than temple (CAMERON, 1972).

of view. However, my fieldwork data suggest that, somewhat ironically, museums tend to create ethnic enclaves rather than serving as forums. Why did the museum mission, contributing to understand other cultural groups, fail? From the perspective of philosophical anthropology, are museums adequate to generate appreciation of other cultural systems? Is it possible to develop a dialogue between different cultures? We are not concerned here with the critique of colonialism in museums. We deal here with the paradox of the museum mission.

Museums everywhere perform several roles: collection, storage, research, and education. However, U.S. museums focus on education, and they strive to work closely with their communities<sup>2</sup>. They have many public programs and classroom activities, including classes and workshops for students both on site and in the schools. The legacy of John Dewey, who frequently took students at the Chicago Laboratory School to museums, remains in U.S. education. That emphasis on education is also reflected in museum budgets: compared with museums in other countries, U.S. museums receive a relatively larger share of their budgets from user charges such as fees for admission, membership, and specific programs. In addition, museums in the United States appear to be more community-oriented than museums abroad.

Even though museums in the United States are close to the local community, the images presented are not always representative of the rich cultural diversity within society. Both the exhibits and the visitors are somewhat atypical of life in the research site. We see people from many ethnic groups every day on the street, but only a few in museums. How does this happen? Which people are closer than others to museums, and why? To answer these questions, first I will explain the character of U.S. museums by using recent anthropology and history literature about museums. Then I will investigate the ways in which museums are working increasingly with the African American community, which is the biggest ethnic group in my field.

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<sup>2</sup> Izumi Tagawa (Harris) 2009 "Education toward Cultural Diversity School, Family, and Community Support of U.S. Museums" (oral presentation) in Panel: Anthropology of Education — An Alternative Perspective. The 43rd Annual Meeting of the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology.

## Historic Presentation in U.S. Museums

Museums as forums mean that diverse people come together and can exchange their own views freely in a museum. I will consider those two issues in U.S. museums.

First, consider how diverse people see museums in their society. Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen (1998) investigate how ordinary people in the United States apply history in their everyday lives. Their survey shows that the general public rates museums quite highly as a source of historical information: 8.4 out of a possible 10 points. This is more faith than the public puts in information from any other source, including schools, books, or even grandparents. The breakdown of museum ratings by ethnic groups is also quite illuminating: 8.5 for white Americans, and 8.1 for African Americans (ROSENZWEIG; THELEN, 1998). African Americans trust their grandparents' and other relatives' stories more than they trust museums. The score for stories handed down within the family is 8.4 for African Americans, and 8.0 for white Americans. The irony is that while museums are working to show diverse culture and history, the minorities whose culture is being highlighted are less likely than the dominant group to trust museums. Why does that happen?

Colonial Williamsburg is one of the most famous outdoor museums in the United States. This living history museum presents the American Revolutionary war era in its exhibits and programs. It is actually a whole town reproduced as an exhibit. There are costumed interpreters in the "town" who role-play as residents. Williamsburg is the former capital of Virginia (1699-1780). After Williamsburg was neglected for many years, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. recognized its historical importance, excavated it, and created a museum in 1926. The outcome was museum exhibits and programs that were majority group-oriented.

Colonial Williamsburg did not present African Americans in their exhibits and programs until the 1960s (GABLE, 1997; LEON; PIATT, 1989). There is no record of African American characters in exhibits, even though half of Williamsburg's population was black slaves in the eighteenth century (LEON; PIATT, 1989).

This could be due at least in part to the fact that museums in the past were run by European Americans. Like European museums (HUDSON, 1988), U.S. museums were established by the upper class (GLASER; ZENETOU, 1996). People in the U.S. middle and upper classes were interested in their genealogy in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, so they began to preserve historic sites and establish outdoor museums (WALLACE, 1986). Historic exhibits in U.S. museums focused on mainstream culture and society for many decades.

The change of historic presentation at Colonial Williamsburg in the 1970s may be due largely to cultural changes occurring in the 1960s and 1970s — specifically, the ethnic revival that accompanied the Civil Rights Movement. Ebuchi Kazuhiro (1983) observed both cultural and political dimensions for ethnic revival. In museums, the cultural influence in diverse exhibits is obvious. The political influence of this revival was the driving force for change. Ethnic revival was a turning point in the relationship between museums and minorities in the United States.

Also, the 1992 American Association of Museums publication “Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums,” which was updated in 1998, promoted a campaign for museum diversity. The Association established committees to develop the campaign and published a brochure for distribution to member museums. The campaign promoted the view that museums should be open to everyone<sup>3</sup>.

These political dimensions helped museums to evolve. Historically, mainstream museums did not work very effectively for ethnic minorities; ethnic minorities could not find any exhibits related to their history and culture. This neglect is one reason that minorities still do not trust museums (ROSENZWEIG; THELEN, 1998). Another reason could be the differing interpretation of historic events between minorities and mainstream.

James Clifford raised the issue of “ethnographer’s authority.” Clifford (1986) criticized those who represent other cultures from the ethnographer’s perspective, with no opportunity for

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<sup>3</sup> The Campaign was based on a broad view of diversity, including not just ethnic minorities, but also the physically challenged, gays and lesbians, and the HIV positive.

the culture being studied to present its own self-interpretation. Similarly, museums also have the authority to present their own external interpretations of other cultures. Ethnic minorities are a part of the history of U.S. society, but minorities do not always feel that this is the case in history exhibits. Sometimes, minorities are actually absent from the exhibits, but in other instances, ethnic minorities interpret historic events differently. One goal of U.S. museums is to include diverse people. I will focus on ethnic diversity in museum exhibits and programs, and I will analyze this diversity within the context of the local community. Next will be an exploration of the extent to which diverse people can exchange their own views freely in museums. Museums are not mirrors of local communities, even though they are part of those communities. The difference between a mirror image and museum interpretation in the real world is striking.

## An Overview of the Field Research Site

My field research site is Indianapolis, Indiana, which is in the Midwestern United States. Indiana, the Hoosier State, covers an area of 36,185 square miles (94,328 square kilometers), which is the 38<sup>th</sup> largest in the nation. Indianapolis is a state capital, located in central Indiana. According to the 2000 census, the population is 781,870. Of these, 69.1% are white Americans, and 25.5% are African Americans. The high population of African Americans is characteristic of Indianapolis, even though this is atypical of the Midwest.

Although Indiana has had a reputation for racing and sports, it has also had a rich museum environment. In this paper I will describe the case of The Children's Museum of Indianapolis, which in terms of collections is one of the largest children's museums in the world. The museum opened in 1926 and moved to its current location in an African American neighborhood in 1946. It opened the first permanent exhibit about African American culture in 1995. Other museums also developed African American exhibits and programs in the 1990s, showing that by this time, museums had become quite interested in local minorities. This change in emphasis parallels the development

of multicultural education in classrooms: textbooks, guidelines, and special occasions such as black history month. There was also growing social pressure to be politically correct and open museums to minorities.

During my fieldwork, the museums' efforts seemed to have been successful, but today they are struggling, because a slow economy has limited their funding for planned new exhibits and programs. The museums need more support from the community. Indianapolis museums work very hard to cooperate with local communities, particularly in light of increased competition for visitors after the growth in the number of museums since the 1970s. Museums are designed to educate people, yet people tend to rely on museums for leisure rather than education. Edutainment—a combination of education and entertainment—is a key concept for developing museums. Museums encourage visitors to come back for repeat visits, as well as recruiting new visitors.

Similar to museums nationally, museums in the Indianapolis area were developed primarily by the upper and middle classes. In the 1930s, Eli Lilly, who is a successful business person in Indiana, traveled to Virginia's colonial capital, Williamsburg, to see the contribution to the city's preservation by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (COX, 1993). Lilly hoped to create a living history museum in Indiana; the eventual result was to be Conner Prairie. He contributed to other museums and cultural organizations and played a key role in historic preservation in Indianapolis. Historic preservation by members of the mainstream upper and middle classes was influenced by their interpretation of which history is worth passing down to the future and what represents "true" history.

This mainstream emphasis began to change in the 1990s with the appearance of increasing numbers of museum exhibits and programs about minority culture and history. Academic research and social pressure for diversity became increasingly influential in museum exhibits and programs throughout the nation. Museums also needed support financially and administratively from local ethnic communities.

I will describe how Indiana museums have increased diversity, followed by a discussion of the reason why it happened.



## Ethnic Diversity of Museum Exhibits and Programs

Museums in Indianapolis started showing minority history and culture in exhibits and programs in the 1990s. After discussing the incentives facing museum management, I will discuss how minorities brought their interpretation of history and culture into exhibits and programs.

As I mentioned before, the American Association of Museums conducted a campaign for museum diversity. The social pressure for political correctness was another major factor in increasing minority presentation in exhibits and programs. Along with these national movements for diversity of museums, this paper examines local museum issues in Indianapolis.

In 1985, the Children's Museum of Indianapolis began the Neighbor Program as an after-school program for elementary-age children living near the museum. The program includes special classes teaching singing, dancing, and African American history during school vacations. Although it is not specifically for African American children, almost all the participants were from African American neighborhoods. The museum started this program in order to promote a good relationship with the local neighborhood, which is largely African American. The museum also has a no-entrance-fee night (initially once a week, but now once a month). The result is significantly more African American visitors during that night than at other times.

The Children's Museum originally had no African American exhibits, but around 1990, the museum's upper management decided to make a new exhibit of African American culture. The museum was concerned that in spite of its location in an African American neighborhood, there were few African American visitors.

During the planning of the exhibits, there were several problems. The museum needed more support from the local community. Getting financial support and making collections are difficult. African Americans have few cultural and historical artifacts or heirlooms, because it was difficult for slaves to keep them. The few heirlooms that have survived are so rare that the owners do not want to part with them. They particularly dislike

sending them to mainstream museums. Although physical artifacts are scarce, African Americans have rich oral tradition in the form of storytelling, performing arts such as dancing, and music, often in the form of drumming. This made it natural for the museum to emphasize performing arts, rather than physical displays in exhibits.

In 1995, the Museum opened the Story Avenue exhibit, which was the first permanent exhibit about African American culture. The exhibit room is a recreation of a church, dining room, living room, car, and barber and beauty shops. All of them are typical places for African Americans to tell their stories. Often the stories are old tales or family histories, or perhaps just conversations among friends or rap music from radio.

Those tales were collected in the African American neighborhood around the museum. The barber in the exhibit is a real person in the neighborhood. To create the exhibit, museum staff interviewed and collected stories from African American families throughout the neighborhood. The staff worked well with the community. Staff members started their research interviews in those places where they already knew people, using those initial contacts to develop additional interviews through networking. A few of the staff members were even local, with family or other contacts in the neighborhood. Such tight connections with the community, often with involvement in the neighborhood association, added a local touch that helped to bring the exhibits to life.

Consider how people evaluated the Story Avenue exhibit. The museum had an opening reception for the exhibit. One staff member described her experience with an African American visitor who thought highly of the exhibit. The visitor expressed pride in the exhibit, because it was a proof that African Americans were part of this society. A European American visitor said that he was very happy to see the exhibit and that he learned a lot from it. The exhibit was covered initially by newspapers and television news, but the news media coverage later died down. Recently, following an internal museum report describing a decline in the number of visitors to the Story Avenue exhibit,

several staff members expressed fear that the exhibit would be shut down.

Museum staff would like to update the stories, but the limited budget prevents it. Another problem is that many visitors leave the exhibit room quickly. Two problems identified through a museum staff analysis are: 1) other exhibits are hands-on (you can touch exhibit artifacts) or interactive, so that children visiting Story Avenue need to adjust from interactive to passive listening, and 2) at least some of the dominant visitors —European American children— are not interested in African American culture.

The exhibit shows that storytelling is an important legacy carried over from the native African experience. African Americans share those stories as a legacy of their communities. The exhibit itself is a community including family, relatives, and friends in a neighborhood. This exhibit presents consistency and unity in the African American community. This could explain why European American children are not interested in the exhibit —they cannot find anything in the exhibit to which they can relate.

The museum needed to find new visitors, and the African American community became their focus group. The relationship developed between the museum and the local community was mutually beneficial. The museum gained visitors, and the community gained exhibits that reflected their interests. The museum worked together with the community to create the Story Avenue exhibit. The reason why the exhibit succeeded was that African Americans themselves were involved in its making. They brought their point of view to the exhibit and were able to influence its development. The Story Avenue exhibit represents the succession of their oral history from African ancestors, and it shows the solidity of the African American community. Showing the continuity from Africa through slavery to the present is the most important historic representation for them.

In the past, the information flow was always from the museum to the community, as the experts told the “true” story of history. Today, however, museums increasingly provide a forum for diverse groups in the local community to tell their own sto-

ries. Museums need to continue this development into arenas in which the image of local history is developed through various representations by people of different cultural backgrounds.

One of the reasons why museums need to work with ethnic communities is in their administration. The competition got tough between museums in Indianapolis, and museums found they needed to reach out to people who previously had not visited museums. This new target audience was primarily ethnic minorities. To appeal to those minorities, museums began to make new exhibits and programs about their own history and culture in the 1990s. That made it possible to bring to museums the point of view of ethnic minorities in local society. These changes were not without problems. Museum staff members who were involved in Story Avenue expressed concern about the viability the exhibit<sup>4</sup>.

In short, although the museum does not have hard demographic data on admission patterns per ethnic group, museum staff members believe that they have been successful in increasing diversity among their visitors at the same time that they have expanded their involvement in the local communities. Ethnic minorities have also had more opportunities to present their own historic interpretation in museums, although they cannot be sure that this trend will continue.

## Museum Experience for Creating Diversity

Making diverse exhibits in museums also increases diversity among museum visitors. Social pressure, museum administrator motivation, and local ethnic minorities all promote change. Museum staff members from ethnic minorities themselves also promote diversity. I will examine whether or not diversity of museum exhibits and programs, museum visitors, and staff help promote museums as forums for diverse groups.

Some African American museum staff members indicated that they had not been interested in history classes when they were in school, because there were no African Americans' stories other than slavery. Similarly, museum exhibits held little

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<sup>4</sup> The concern has become a reality. The Story Avenue exhibit was closed in 2012.

attraction for them, because there were no African Americans. Ironically, one staff member got a job at the same Museum where he had found nothing of interest as a child. Another staff member explained her childhood experience in the museum. Her memories are much more positive. She is a local resident who visited the museum frequently in her childhood. She essentially “grew up in the museum,” as did her children, who are actively involved in the Museum as both visitors and performers. Both staff members desired to teach African American history and culture to children. They also believe that it is very important for museums to contribute to local communities.

The museum staff that creates minority exhibits is becoming more diverse. When museums create minority exhibits and programs, they prefer to rely on minority staff. Further, ethnic minorities want to design such exhibits. It works well for the museum management, the ethnic minority staff, and the ethnic communities. Both Story Avenue exhibits and Neighborhood Program at the Children’s Museum are directed by African American staff. This creates a tight connection with the neighborhood community. Museum staff from an ethnic minority group is a bridge between the museum and the ethnic community. Stories in Story Avenue are performed by African American storytellers as professionals and semi-professionals in local society. Story Avenue sometimes provides special events at the exhibit room by local African American artists, including storytellers, living history players, and drum performers. The museum creates both exhibits and jobs for ethnic minorities. This has been very successful in expanding diversity in museums.

The Children’s Museum uses a team approach, including curators, educators, and designers, in planning new exhibits. In the case of Story Avenue, a primarily African American staff appointed the team. Although the museum already had professional designers, those designers were not African Americans, so the museum hired an African American designer from Chicago. Most team members were African Americans, but there were exceptions. A few European American staff members became involved when there were specific needs requiring their servi-

ces. One of them described her membership on the team as a wonderful opportunity to experience a reversal in the typical roles. She thought that it was a good learning experience for her to work together with African Americans in a situation in which she was the minority representative. She explained that there is little diversity among museum staff members<sup>5</sup>. You can see more minority staff in administration and security sections, but very small numbers among professionals like curators and educators. Even when museums hire professionals from minority groups, the museums expect staff to create specific exhibits and programs about their ethnicity, rather than mixing minority and mainstream staff members on each project. Consequently, museum staffing in the aggregate has been diverse since the 1980s, but ethnic groups are not mixed very much in each section. Therefore, is it possible to say that museums are truly diverse?

With the increasing development of museum exhibits and programs about African American history and culture, museum professionals have observed increased attendance by African American visitors. One outcome of having exhibits about ethnic minorities in museums is that such exhibits increase the numbers of visitors. In seeking expanded support from local society, museums found the next target audience — minority groups, particularly the middle class. There are exhibits and programs about African Americans, but there are very few about other minorities. The African American middle class is getting bigger, and museums recognize them as the next potential support group. Although social pressure to maintain political correctness should help to promote diversity of museum practice, the primary incentive that museums face is the internal pressure to meet the needs of its supporters, particularly the growing African American middle class. Museums realize that they need to change exhibits and programs for African American interests. Minorities have not overcome the politics involved in dealing with mainstreams in museums. For diversity in museums, the middle class is more of an issue than diverse minority groups.

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<sup>5</sup> She used a broad definition of diversity, including ethnicity, gender, and age, but my focus is on ethnic diversity.

Although museums used to present historic interpretation as truth, they are changing their approach. The effort to recruit diverse visitors, make diverse exhibits and programs, and to hire ethnic minority staff members has resulted in increasingly diverse historic interpretation in museum exhibits and programs. For many years, museums were much like “temples” providing a single truth. This truth was from the perspective of a particular group: middle and upper class European Americans eventually expanded to include the African American middle and upper classes. Have museums become more of a forum for diverse viewpoints, abandoning their traditional role as the unchallenged authority to represent history?

## Conclusion: Ethnic Diversity or Ethnic Enclaves?

This paper describes a tendency by museums to represent mainly mainstream history and culture, because this mainstream is the source of political, economic, and social power. However, the situation is changing. Ethnic minorities are getting involved professionally in museums, and this increasing minority representation is reflected in the changing pattern of museum exhibits. There are more opportunities to show ethnic minority culture and history in museums today, but does it show that people between different cultures are improving their understanding of each other? At the National Museum of American History, European American visitors evaluated the museum exhibits and asked, “Where is our history?” It should not be necessary for various groups to fight for a balanced presentation of their cultures. There is also the danger of creating another minority, when one ethnic group gains enough authority to control the culture to be presented. The role of museums is to provide a forum for the issues and encourage dialogue.

Museums in the United States are expanding their efforts to present diverse culture. Ethnic groups get the opportunity to express their own representation of culture and history. Visitors tend to go to see exhibits when they find what they want. Museums finally have received ethnic minorities’ attention. As discussed

earlier, African Americans trust more the story from grandparents and relatives than from museums (ROSENZWEIG; THELEN, 1998). Even in museums with diverse exhibits, people tend to cluster in ethnic enclaves and avoid exposure to other cultures.

As noted earlier, museums' staffs have not been truly diverse in the process of making and maintaining exhibits and programs. Even though museums hired minority staff members, they tended to assign them primarily to develop minority exhibits and programs, rather than mixing ethnic groups on each project. Further, museum staff have expressed fear that the dominant visitors —European American children— were not interested in African American culture at the Story Avenue exhibit. This means that diversity of exhibits also results in ethnic enclaves for visitors. As we have seen throughout this paper, we need diversity of exhibits and programs, but it is important to avoid the unintended side-effect of segregating visitors. When that happens, museums fail to serve as forums promoting diversity, and they may even act to maintain the distance between ethnic enclaves.

Even though visitors have clear ideas about what they want to see, museums have the responsibility for educating people. This is the one of the most important roles of museums. Museums are making serious efforts to reach out to ethnic minorities. The problem is that this tends to create ethnic enclaves, as museums become compartmentalized by ethnic groups. There is a need for more exhibits bridging different cultures, rather than always separating them. The next challenge is to encourage museum visitors to accept diversity and learn about cultures other than their own. Museums need to promote dialogues between ethnic groups. The basic theme is that museums should pursue diversity, rather than pursue various cultures separately.

Diversity does not necessarily mean multiple independent exhibits of different ethnic groups separated into enclaves. Rather, it means describing the same historical and cultural events simultaneously through a multicultural prism. Museums can help to promote an understanding that our interpretation of history depends on our cultural background. Historical events are perceived differently by people from different groups. In a global



society, diversity is valuable in enhancing our understanding of the world. People learn from each other; museums can play a vital role in promoting that learning.

Museums used to hold their authority because that they dictated the “true” story in museum exhibits, but that authority has evolved as museums have incorporated minority interpretations. As in the case of Smithsonian museum, European Americans may feel perplexed, even though African Americans are more positive regarding museum exhibits and programs. Presenting diverse historic interpretation does not mean that museums have lost the authority that they used to have. It only means that the context of that authority has changed along with U.S. society and culture. Museums are not expected to be “temples” but forums.

Museums are becoming more open to diverse people; they are working more closely with local ethnic communities. By experimenting with different ways of expressing diversity (not multiple cultures) in exhibits and programs, museum professionals can explore solutions to the problem of presenting multiple representations without ethnic barriers. As long as museums reflect societies’ values, it should be productive for them to exchange experiences. Such exchanges can help museums as educational establishments in their efforts to improve communication with their publics. Further research is needed for enriching museum exhibits and educational programs in order for them to explore social values in the society and reach out to diverse groups. Considering museums as places to create educational experiences and develop real images of diverse societies, Anthropology of Education will provide the way to involve various groups in museum experiences.

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