

# PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

*Challenges of the National Museum of the American Indian*



**NATIONAL  
MUSEUM  
of the  
AMERICAN  
INDIAN**

PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE



NMAI EDITIONS



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*Challenges of the National Museum of the American Indian*

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In partnership with Native peoples and their allies, the National Museum of the American Indian fosters a richer shared human experience through a more informed understanding of Native peoples.

For information about the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian, visit the NMAI website at [www.AmericanIndian.si.edu](http://www.AmericanIndian.si.edu). To support the museum by becoming a member, call 1-800-242-NMAI (6624) or click on “Membership & Giving” on our website.

Title Page: Brian Jungen (Dunne-za First Nations/Swiss-Canadian, b. 1970), (left to right) 2010, 2000, 1990, 2007. Golf bags, cardboard tube, 149 x 29 x 32 in., 146 x 30 x 38 in., and 154 x 30 x 25 in. Photo by R. A. Whiteside.

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## FOREWORD

*“The National Museum of the American Indian is a vibrant, vital place that is wonderfully positioned and strong for the future in all relevant respects. . . . The conclusion of my own directorship, in truth, is not a conclusion at all, but instead the real commencement. I shall always be grateful for having had the blessing of this directorship and your friendship and support for the past almost 18 years.”*

—W. RICHARD WEST, JR., OCTOBER 10, 2007

In late 2007, I was appointed to succeed Founding Director W. Richard West, Jr., as director of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). Rick had retired from the museum after serving nearly 18 years. On October 10, 2007, I was in the audience of the museum’s Rasmuson Theater on the day of the symposium, “Past, Present, and Future Challenges of the National Museum of the American Indian.” Rick graciously welcomed the crowd. As he acknowledged me as the NMAI’s new director, he also said that I should be sitting up front, rather than in the back row of the theater.

I stayed where I was because this was Rick’s moment to be honored by his peers. “Past, Present, and Future Challenges” was a tribute to Rick’s tireless work to bring the NMAI to life, and a meaningful and celebratory discussion of the NMAI’s mission—past, present, and future.

Rick was director during a glorious time in the history of the NMAI. I and countless others across the Americas watched the museum's progress, beginning with the 1989 signing of the legislation that created it to the day the Mall Museum opened on September 21, 2004.

This day-long symposium was an opportunity for reflection by a group of some of the museum's most esteemed Native and non-Native advisors, founding trustees, and scholars. The symposium was organized, as Rick wished it to be, as "a combination of historical retrospective as well as looking to the future, which is perhaps even more important for the National Museum of the American Indian. The NMAI looking forward and backward really has the same set of challenges; they are both on the one hand intellectual and museological and on the other hand purely practical."

The remembrances and wisdom contained herein are the contributions of the symposium participants and contributors to this book. The illustrious group includes Duane Champagne (Turtle Mountain Chippewa), Catherine S. Fowler, Suzan Shown Harjo (Cheyenne & Hodulgee Muscogee), Frederick E. Hoxie, Gerald McMaster (Plains Cree/Siksika First Nation), David Hurst Thomas, and Rosita Worl (Tlingit). Their reflections are important additions to the ongoing documentation of the NMAI's history.

2011 is an equally important time in the NMAI's history. Now well into our first decade, the public's understanding and appreciation of the art, history, and cultures of this continent's original peoples has become even richer and more complete through exhibitions, public programs, and publications that reach audiences around the world, not only in our physical spaces but also through our ever-expanding web presence. The long-held idea that the Americas were a largely unpeopled wilderness before European contact has been upended, and this museum has contributed to the broader understanding of our ancestors as philosophers, physicians, inventors, scientists, engineers, and great thinkers. This museum's objective has always been to build a place that would enable the world to explore the past, present, and future through the perspective of Native peoples. We keep moving forward to realize that vision.

—Kevin Gover (Pawnee), Director



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## INTRODUCTION

“CANTED TOWARD SOME INTELLECTUAL EDGE,  
INSIGHT, HEFT, AND BONA FIDE SUBSTANCE . . .”

This volume evolved from a symposium entitled “Past, Present, and Future Challenges of the National Museum of the American Indian,” designed to commemorate the 18-year tenure and retirement of W. Richard West, Jr., as founding director.

As I was finishing out my second stint on the NMAI Board of Trustees, Rick West pulled me aside at our winter board meeting and asked if I’d be willing to organize a small, fairly private symposium. Over the next couple of weeks, while cobbling together some preliminary thoughts, I kept coming back to “the new inclusiveness,” a phrase coined by Rick to describe the mission of the NMAI.<sup>1</sup> That simple phrase morphed into my theme for the initial symposium proposal, which I sent to Rick for comment.

As always, Director West was forthcoming and thorough in his feedback. Beginning with “the small stuff,” he insisted that “this definitely is not the occasion for an award or presentation, at least not to me. . . .”<sup>2</sup> Rick also told me that the symposium had been elevated, and should be billed as a moderated public event with a panel and ample time for discussion and interaction with an audience.

Then, reacting more specifically to my draft, Rick insisted that “the focus should be less about ‘West’s unique vision and accomplishments’ and more about ‘still-unrealized potentials.’ We can talk about ‘remarkable achievements’ (or failures, for that matter), but primarily as backdrop for

the underlying issue for looking forward.” He suggested that the tone be “canted more toward some intellectual edge, insight, heft, and bona fide substance . . .” and urged that the symposium be revised into a publication. Director West concluded with one final point: “I do not think the panel should be comprised only of Indians, as you seem to have it (what’s ‘inclusive’ about that anyway?).”

So that is what we did. The symposium to honor the contributions of Founding Director W. Richard West, Jr., was held on October 10, 2007, in the NMAI’s Rasmuson Theater. The program spelled out the objectives and guidelines this way:

This symposium will examine the genesis of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian, with a nod to the past, but a solid emphasis on “still-unrealized potentials” and future challenges. This forum will have an intellectual edge, providing both personal insight and genuine substance. All the participants in this symposium are past, present, and/or future trustees of the National Museum of the American Indian.

Director West began the proceedings with a welcome and some comments. Dr. Henrietta Mann (Elder’s Council, NMAI Board of Trustees, and professor emeritus and special assistant to the president of Montana State University) offered the opening prayer. I then introduced the panel members and presented a “framing statement.” Rosita Worl, Gerald McMaster, Duane Champagne, and Fred Hoxie made formal presentations, followed by paper-by-paper discussions by Suzan Shown Harjo and Catherine S. Fowler. After several lively conversations between the audience and participants, then Chairman of the NMAI Board of Trustees Dwight Gourneau delivered closing comments and remarks. This volume follows that format almost precisely, except that NMAI Director Kevin Gover has added an introductory essay and Suzan Harjo’s discussion has been upgraded into a full-blown presentation.



Guest speakers examine the genesis and future potential of the NMAI during the Past, Present, and Future Challenges symposium, 2007. (Left to right) Frederick Hoxie, Gerald McMaster (Plains Cree and member of the Siksika Nation), Rosita Worl (Tlingit), and Duane Champagne (Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, North Dakota).

These essays address a hefty range of topics, from “the early days” (when the NMAI’s vision was just taking shape), to matters of exhibition policy and repatriation, to intellectual authority, multi-vocality, and Native voice. Let me thank each of the authors for crafting a stimulating set of chapters. True to Director West’s wishes, this symposium emphasized both accomplishments and challenges, with a refreshing willingness to accept multiple viewpoints.

I personally wish to express my admiration for Rick West’s courage and foresight in inviting this far-reaching self-critique from current and former trustees of the NMAI.

—David Hurst Thomas



DAVID HURST THOMAS

## RICK WEST'S VISION FOR THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN: THE 18-YEAR ODYSSEY<sup>1</sup>

*I would love to say I always knew what I think I know about the significance and lasting import of the National Museum of the American Indian. But that statement would represent a very false claim to prescience on my part.*

—W. Richard West, Jr.<sup>2</sup>

It's hard to think of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) without its founding director, W. Richard West, Jr. But the truth is, the NMAI was here before Rick arrived, and it will persist long after all of us depart. This symposium brings together several past, present, and future trustees of the NMAI, and each of us carries remembrances from earlier times. Here's my most vivid memory.

Even before the legislation creating the museum had taken effect, the founding trustees met several times “unofficially.” My most vivid memory of the pre-Rick Indian museum goes back to a blustery day in the winter of 1989. After a formal meeting in founding trustee David Rockefeller's board room at Rockefeller Center, we piled into taxis and headed downtown to the U.S. Custom House (then and still home of the Federal Bankruptcy Court). Folding metal chairs had been set up inside the oval rotunda, but there was no heat, and I remember people trying to speak with chattering teeth. The board was briefed about the new home of the Indian museum—but it was not to be at the head of the grand entry stair-

<sup>1</sup>The rotunda of the Alexander Hamilton Custom House in New York City, home to the George Gustav Heye Center.



Larry Yazzie (Meskwaki/Diné) and the Native Pride Dancers at the GGHC's 2010 Children's Festival, Horsin' Around the NMAI.

way surrounding the extraordinary Beaux Arts great room. That space, we were told, was “spoken for”; the new Indian museum would be downstairs, in the elliptical area on the ground floor, below the grand rotunda.

As various trustees voiced their displeasure over this unwelcome news, Senator Daniel Inouye, bundled into his bulky winter coat, rose to address the new (and still unofficial) board. The more he spoke, the more agitated he got. Finally—and I’ll never forget this—with eyes glistening, he pounded his fist on the railing, saying, “This just won’t do! We need *this* grand space for the new museum. I won’t stand for it! Indians have been in the basement too [gosh darn] long.”

Believe me, the senator did not say “gosh darn.”

This passionate episode touched off an intense round of lobbying involving Senators Inouye and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Congressman Charles B. Rangel, David Rockefeller, and even President Ronald Reagan. Almost overnight, the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) experienced a change of heart, and the new National Museum of the Ameri-

can Indian was awarded the coveted main-floor exhibit space surrounding the grand rotunda.<sup>3</sup>

W. Richard West, Jr., was appointed founding director of the National Museum of the American Indian in January 1990. Eight months later, he addressed the University of Oklahoma College of Law in a speech he termed a “connecting point” between one career and another.<sup>4</sup> Addressing his law school audience, Rick dissected the classic legal cases *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831) and *United States v. Sandoval* (1913), quoting the Supreme Court’s characterization of Indian people as “simple,” “inferior,” “uninformed,” “superstitious,” “crude,” and “primitive”—a characterization that was, as Rick put it, “simply racist.”

Summing up his transition from Indian lawyer to museum director, Rick told his audience, “I have given up, at least for the moment, on the Supreme Court. But I have not given up on the National Museum of the American Indian. Indeed, I have the highest hopes for the impact I believe it can have on the way all non-Indians view Indians and Indian culture.”<sup>5</sup>

What kind of “impact” did the founding director have in mind?

For the purposes of this symposium, I have tracked Rick West’s vision for the National Museum of the American Indian through several programmatic and very public speeches delivered during his 18-year odyssey. The message evolves and becomes more nuanced through time. But I think that three distinct, interrelated, and sequential themes emerge:

The National Museum of the American Indian is a “Museum Different”;  
 a museum of the Native voice; and  
 a wider social and civic space—a truly Native place.

To frame the rest of the symposium presentations, I will briefly explore the meaning of these three themes.

## A “Museum Different”

When he announced the birth of the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Secretary Robert McCormick Adams used the term “Museum Different,”<sup>6</sup> begging the obvious question, “Different from what?”



Rick West already knew the answer to that one. In a speech he delivered eight months after becoming founding director of the NMAI, he told this story:

I remember, as a small boy, visiting the American Museum of Natural History in New York City with my family. The museum has an excellent Indian collection and it has an equally excellent natural history collection. After we had spent several hours visiting both . . . I turned to my father and asked, “Why do they show Indians with all the mammoths and dinosaurs?” My father replied, in a comment that came as close to sardonicism as his usually gentle nature permitted, “I believe they must think we, too, are dead.”<sup>7</sup>

Raised in Indian Country, the founding director already knew that Indian people were not dead. And from his first day on his new job, he also knew that a “Museum Different” would not look anything like a natural history museum or a museum of anthropology.

In his early public presentations as director, West extolled the collection of 800,000 objects amassed by George Gustav Heye. He also repeated renowned anthropologist Alfred Kroeber’s pronouncement that “the last real California Indian had died in 1849.” Rick suggested that Heye’s museum was created, quite literally, as “a cultural salvage operation to collect the remnants of a dying people . . . Native communities [were seen] as culturally vestigial, frozen in time, and passing rapidly into the historical beyond.”<sup>8</sup>

Rick then suggested that, from a Native perspective, such museums became “the final ugly and unadorned edge of Manifest Destiny.” Already reduced by poverty and cultural destruction, decades of warfare, and federal policies of “explicit deculturalization, for Native peoples the *coup de grâce* was this ultimate act of colonialism, this final removal to far and foreign places of the material remnants, the cultural residuum of who they were.”<sup>9</sup>



Douglas Cardinal (Blackfoot), architect and conceptual designer of the NMAI Mall museum, presents design ideas to Founding Director Rick West, Jr. (front left), Smithsonian Secretary I. Michael Heyman (third from left), Senator Daniel Inouye (fifth from left), and other supporters, 2004.



(Left to right) Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell (Northern Cheyenne) and Rick West greet Carmelo Achangaray Puma (Quechua) at the museum groundbreaking, 2001.

Rick felt that the anthropological agenda displayed a “startling intellectual rigidity—indeed, wrongness—that brooked no quarter for the reality and dynamism of cultural response, adaptation, change, and evolution—a steadfast refusal to recognize and concede the continuum that was, and is, Native cultures.” He slammed anthropology’s “path of scientific objectivity that ultimately almost bankrupted the entire field and, in the process, often denigrated and de-humanized Native peoples,” portraying a “mindless descriptiveness that . . . put Native people into the category of a mere cultural object—and a rather sub-human one at that.”<sup>10</sup> The quest for scientific objectivity in anthropology—“physics envy”<sup>11</sup>—resulted in the collection of battlefield skulls as “specimens,” and “demonstrates compellingly why museums must change fundamentally the way they view the humanity of Natives.”<sup>12</sup>

Anthropology, in West’s view, “[fell] short of its full potential” to explicate and define Indian cultures because “it has not allowed Indians, in any systematic way, to tell their own story. The scholarly result is not so much wrong as it is incomplete.” He denounced the “complete vesting of intellectual authority regarding Native material culture”<sup>13</sup> in museum communities and the total exclusion of the Native community. West compared the anthropologist to photographer Edward Curtis, who posed Indian people in phony, hyper-romantic stage sets: they were similar because both “impose[d] [their] own perceptions of a reality on the subjects.”<sup>14</sup>

Two years after becoming founding director, Rick West expressed these views at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in San Francisco. In a speech entitled “Research and Scholarship at the National Museum of the American Indian: The New ‘Inclusiveness,’”<sup>15</sup> Rick acknowledged that no academic field has a “greater stake in this nascent Smithsonian museum than the field of anthropology. And we would be less than honest with one another if we did not concede at the outset that for several years now, the waters between the Indian and the anthropological community have been roiled, and the discourse between them often characterized by considerably more heat than light.”<sup>16</sup>

West also reiterated his highest personal respect for the “intent of anthropology” and the “altruism” that motivated many anthropologists “at a time when it appeared that we would disappear from the earth forever.” In his call for a “new inclusiveness,” Rick refused to impose a “reverse exclusivity to replace the old exclusivity... Quite to the contrary, our purpose is to expand the circle of research rather than to contract it.” Addressing a crowd of card-carrying “anthros” (as Vine Deloria, Jr.,<sup>17</sup> would doubtless have characterized them), Rick assured his audience that, “all of you in this room will continue to be welcome at the National Museum of the American Indian.”<sup>18</sup>

But he also warned: “The rules of the road have changed.”

### **The Native Voice**

In advocating a “new inclusiveness,” West resisted the temptation to “relitigate the past,” and instead took a “first seminal step” by specifically framing several principles that should guide “research” and “scholarship” at the NMAI.

As a first principle, the museum explicitly recognized Native Americans as fully contemporary peoples who draw upon timeless traditions stretching back thousands of years. West vowed that the NMAI would represent all elements of Indian Country without paternalism and without condescension, engaging Indian communities at all stages of the planning and implementation process. He acknowledged the responsibility of descendant communities and stressed that the museum is “certainly not about the dead and dying. It is about the here and now... The NMAI sees Native peoples and communities not as some ethnographic residuum, in an advanced state of dotage or risk, prepared to fall off the stage of history. To the contrary, Native America maintains a cultural present and will insist on a future, and hopefully a better one. The NMAI, thus, is very much an international institution of living Native cultures of the Americas.”<sup>19</sup>

Intending no disrespect to other systems of knowledge (including anthropology, archaeology, art history, and history), Rick insisted that the Native experience become a vital and valid component, crafting a governance policy stipulating that every exhibit be organized in direct consultation with Native communities. The NMAI “purports to *represent*, from its originating concepts to the selection of its objects to the set of educational products it generates for the public.”<sup>20</sup>

Citing anthropologist James Clifford on the destructive and inventive impacts of “progress” throughout Indian Country, West stressed the importance of change and survival in Indian America, emphasizing that “‘adaptation’ is not to be confused with ‘assimilation.’”<sup>21</sup> The NMAI would “put the lie, once and for all, to the notion of America as a ‘melting pot,’ [a concept which is] . . . not only historically inaccurate, [but] also wrong in principle. America should embrace and celebrate its cultural diversity for the richness and depth that this diversity brings to our cultural life. I have never been able to understand why some perceive as so attractive the reduction of our culture to some kind of common cultural gruel—tasteless and gray.”<sup>22</sup>

The “new inclusiveness” notwithstanding, West also emphasized that highest priority must always be assigned to the needs and interests of stakeholder Native communities, including the preservation of cultures at the community level. He also cited the new Collection Management Policy, enacted in the early 1990s by the NMAI’s trustees: “Public access to the collections for research, study, or viewing purposes may be restricted if such access offends religious or cultural practices or beliefs.”<sup>23</sup>

As a second principle, the NMAI affirmed and supported the importance of cultural continuity in Indian America. In a nod to a parallel of declining biodiversity around the world, West insisted that the NMAI must work closely with Native communities to “calculate and to remedy the cultural damage we suffer by permitting the further diminution of vital elements of our country’s cultural diversity,”<sup>24</sup> becoming as much a living institution as a “museum” in the narrowest sense of the word.

West also called for the “injection of the first-person Indian voice—not as an ‘informant’ but as a genuine participant in the scholarly process—into the work of anthropology, which can dramatically enhance and amplify its contributions to scholarship. And the National Museum of the American Indian intends to do precisely that.”<sup>25</sup>

### **The Anti-Museum: A Native Civic Space**

A final theme, unforeseen when Rick West began his tenure as “museum director novitiate,”<sup>26</sup> has emerged in more recent years. In his foreword to the exhibit *Identity by Design: Tradition, Change, and Celebration in Native Women’s Dresses*, he writes:

As Director of the National Museum of the American Indian, I have the somewhat ironic mission of stressing that our extraordinary collections of Native objects—some 800,000 works of astounding beauty and value—are secondary to the cultural significance these objects hold for Native people. . . . The objects we are privileged to care for are not ends in themselves, but ways for us to understand and appreciate the evolving identity of Native people and communities in all their multiple dimensions.<sup>27</sup>

West speaks here of his sense of the “curatorial liberation of psychic and intellectual space” in knowing that the museum is not defined by just beautiful and significant collections, but represents “a place and space of far broader civic and social dimension and interactivity, where collections become not ends in themselves, but departure points for ideas and themes writ large, wide, and deep across Native America, Indian Country, and the totality of the Native experience of the Americas . . . almost the ‘anti-museum’ to describe it another way.”<sup>28</sup>

The museum as civic and social space is, to be sure, a new and vital direction for the NMAI. But when West articulated this realization, he was

also quick to point out that the “anti-museum” was implicit in the thinking of Secretary Adams nearly two decades ago:

This is a national museum ... [that] takes the permanence ... the authenticity ... the vitality and the self-determination of Native American voices ... as the fundamental reality ... that it must represent. [W]e move decisively from the older image of the museum as a temple with its superior, self-governing priesthood to ... a forum ... committed not to the promulgation of received wisdom but to the encouragement of a multicultural dialogue.<sup>29</sup>

Consistent with Secretary Adams’s call for a “multicultural dialogue,” the NMAI has become a “place ... of self-representation and cultural self-determination.”<sup>30</sup> No longer merely a “palace of collectibles,” the museum has indeed become a full-blown “locus of living cultures,”<sup>31</sup> a gathering place for addressing matters of importance and relevance to the Native American community. From the widely celebrated opening ceremonies of the Mall Museum and the biennial National Powwow, to the countless less-public gatherings, the buildings and grounds of the NMAI have become a venue for Native peoples to gather, to pray, and, sometimes, to protest.

Anthropologist Claire Smith has applauded the progress made by the National Museum of the American Indian toward “decolonising the Museum,”<sup>32</sup> embracing a level of meaning available only from those directly involved in “living the heritage.”<sup>33</sup> More conventional critics have expressed discomfort and disappointment with this undergirding philosophy because it differs radically from the Western museological paradigm. But wouldn’t that seem, after all, to be the point of a “Museum Different”?

Suzan Shown Harjo (Cheyenne/Hodulgee Muscogee), a founding trustee of the NMAI, is the guest curator of an exhibition tentatively entitled *Treaties: Great Nations in Their Own Words*. This future exhibition will “explore the diplomacy, promises, and betrayals” involved in treaties negotiated between the United States and Native nations. It is a show about “nations, diplomacy, honor, promises, will, might, territory, optimism, and survivance. It is also an exhibit about people... People time has for-

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Ccanto (Quechua) perform traditional music and dance at the First Americans Festival during the grand opening celebration of the NMAI, 2004.

gotten. People who acted honorably or dishonorably when they and their nations were put to the test.”<sup>34</sup> This potentially controversial exhibition will use the NMAI as a forum to confront an often painful subject. As such, *Treaties* is entirely consistent with a programmatic principle articulated by West some eighteen years ago: confronting issues that are critical to the living history and sovereignty of Indian America. Ironically and appropriately, this exhibition will open, quite literally, on the doorsteps of the United States Capitol. *Treaties* also recalls Rick West’s quotation from museologist Stephen Weil, suggesting that the NMAI is a “safe place for unsafe ideas.”<sup>35</sup>

In conclusion, I believe the first eighteen years of the NMAI have embodied three progressive and interrelated themes.

The Museum of the American Indian began as a “Museum Different.” And it still is.

The NMAI quickly became a museum of the Native voice. And it still is. The NMAI then evolved into a Native civic space. And it still is.

The rest of this volume will articulate the perspectives of former, present, and future trustees of the National Museum of the American Indian.



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SUZAN SHOWN HARJO

## IT BEGAN WITH A VISION IN A SACRED PLACE

The National Museum of the American Indian began with a vision in a sacred place—an image born to Native people of venerable cultural continua who applied ancient wisdom, traditional knowledge, and modern experience to a disturbing problem. The wisdom is the legacy of the Tsistsistas (Cheyenne), Lakota (Sioux), and other Native peoples. The place and time: Bear Butte, June 1967.

The problem was daunting and vile. Stolen Indigenous bodies, sacred objects, and cultural property of this hemisphere were displayed, locked up, and otherwise desecrated and disrespected in collections around the world. In the United States, there were more Native American human remains in museums and other repositories than there were living American Indian people, who numbered little more than one-half million at that time. Indian skeletons and body parts were exhibited and warehoused in the finest American museums and universities, and sold to the highest bidder by the best antique shops and auction houses. Highway billboards hawked “Indian shrunken heads” in shoddy curio stands and roadside attractions. It was not unusual to see Indian scalps, skulls, fetuses, and genitalia on the desks and walls of offices and homes of otherwise decent Americans.

Sacred objects, which translate as Living Beings in many Native American languages, were presenting themselves to Native people. Some of these sacred objects had not been seen by any living Native person,

but they existed in collective memory, history, dance, and song. Honored places were kept for these absent Living Beings in their cultural context, ceremony, and prayer, much in the way that tribal, societal, and clan dancers danced the Buffalo Dance, imitating the movements and behaviors of buffalo even though they had not personally witnessed or lived near buffalo herds in their lifetimes and would not do so until Indian tribes brought back herds to their territory in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Despite the fact that many sacred objects had been stolen or confiscated a century or more prior to the 1967 gathering, there were traditional Native people who could draw and describe them in precise detail from oral history accounts, and who knew them when they saw them in collections. In some cases, the whereabouts of the Living Beings were known and documented, while others simply were missing. Many are missing still.

In the years leading up to 1967, Indian people were increasingly besieged by nightmares of beheadings and mass killings. Horrors of the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre disturbed the sleep of Cheyenne and Arapaho people. The 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre was revisited on Lakota people. Imprisoned ancestors appeared in dreams, asking the dreamers to help them. Atrocities invaded the minds and sleep of strong, clear-thinking people. In general American society, they would have been called crazy.

Our authority figures—Native elders, wisdomkeepers, and traditional leaders—wanted to understand why they and other Indian people were having nightmares about precious items being taken from dead bodies, shrines, burial grounds, and massacre sites, and why sacred places were being looted and destroyed in waking hours in broad daylight. Cheyenne people in Montana and Oklahoma experienced several scares in then-recent times involving rumors of Medicine Beings trapped on museum walls. People from other nations had their own reasons for being at Bear Butte, and I leave their histories to their own ways of relating them.

Traditional Native people at that time were a minority within the smallest minority in America, and were denigrated as pagans, heathens, and throwbacks by the majority of non-Indians in reservation border

towns, as well as by some of our own tribal leaders. The spirit of many Indian people had been broken in federal Indian boarding schools and mission schools. Some succumbed to dysfunction or disappeared into mainstream America, while others took it upon themselves to deculturalize their own tribal people. It was a period of slow genocide and self-oppression. One way Indian peoples resisted and survived was by gathering together to make a practical plan out of commonplace and mysterious experiences.

Traditional religious leaders decided to call people together after ceremonies at Bear Butte to think and pray about ways to address this set of problems. The Cheyenne Arrow Keeper, James Medicine Elk, sent the word out for people to be prepared to stay for “four days of talk,” as did Oglala Lakota Sun Dance leader and medicine man Pete Catches, Sr. There were many outstanding leaders and families who planned and organized the gathering. I was one of the fortunate people asked to go to Bear Butte, where Cheyenne people have gone for a very long time to give thanks for all life, to seek understanding, and to prepare for what may come.

Bear Butte is a power center, a volcano that pushed up over one thousand feet on the flat prairie but never erupted. North of the sacred Black Hills, it is in South Dakota near the Wyoming border. From its top on a clear day, another sacred place can be seen: Nahkohevee’e, or Bear (Medicine Lodge) Tipi, which non-Indians renamed Devil’s Tower.

Cheyenne people in the Tsistsistas language call Bear Butte Nowawus and Noahvose, or Holy Mountain. It is rich with pine trees and medicine flowers and plants, and is home to myriad animals, from buffalo at its base to eagles at its summit. It is sacred to scores of Native nations. June is an important ceremonial time at Holy Mountain—a period of extremes, from misty dawns and sunny days to raging lightning storms at night—so our relatives from other nations were there to hear Thunder talking, too. Those who happened upon our meetings were invited to join, because it seemed that they were meant to be a part of that circle.

Our “four days of talk” centered on problems and solutions that can be grouped into four main areas:

- 1) Protecting sacred places and ancestors, or “leave them alone”
- 2) Repatriation, or “give them back” and “put them back”
- 3) Museum reform/our cultural center, or “a new way” and “we can do it right”
- 4) Respect, or “stop treating us that way”

This fourth category was a recurring theme: the need for Native peoples to gain respect and respectful treatment in general society. Individuals related experiences with disrespectful epithets, caricatures, behaviors, and appropriations, from sports and product stereotypes to books, movies, and newspaper headlines mocking Native peoples, customs, and values. Vietnam combat veterans recounted their reactions to the U.S. military use of terms such as “roaming off the reservation” to mean deserting and “going into Indian country” to mean entering enemy territory. While Native peoples and our supporters have collectively made societal changes nationwide, consigning thousands of stereotypes and bad movies to history books, archives, and television, we still have a very long way to go.

Everyone at the gathering had at least one example of historic and present-day destruction, desecration, exploitation, or theft of Native sacred places and ancestral burial grounds. Holy Mountain and Bear Butte Lake were of immediate concern. Increasing tourism and local development were lowering the lake’s water level, depleting the natural springs, and diminishing the numbers of turtles, frogs, bass, rattlesnakes, snake doctors (dragonflies), butterflies, whitetail deer, small, furry creatures, and tall grasses in the nearby wetlands and surrounding prairies. Since that time, Bear Butte Lake has been so badly polluted that it is not safe to drink the water; the snow and spring runoff that refreshed it have fallen off, and the main artesian well that fed it and all life was plugged in 1987. Once, on a single climb up and down Holy Mountain, a person could see feathers dropped on the ground by red-tailed hawks, magpies, owls,

IMAGE NOT AVAILABLE

Bear Butte is still a sacred site to many Plains Native nations.

woodpeckers, songbirds, and hundreds of other birds that lived there or stopped on their way home. Now, the birds are down in both number and kind, and some irreverent tourists and collectors steal the prayer offerings left on the ground and tied to the trees by Native traditional practitioners.

We did not use the word “repatriation” in 1967. We used various terms to claim and secure our relatives who were on display and maltreated by collectors. We talked of freeing our dead relatives, protecting our ancestors, and bringing home our sacred Living Beings. We wanted to do what was culturally appropriate: to re-bury the ones who had been stolen from their graves and burial grounds; to bury for the first time the ones who were massacred, dismembered, or stored away in whole or part and never buried; or to return the ashes, cremation vessels, and surrogates to their relatives. We wanted to return the Living Beings to their proper place and function. We wanted to reclaim our cultural and historical property. We were talking with collectors about all of that, with some rare successes, but it would be more than ten years before we achieved the first federal “repatriation” policy for the return of “cultural patrimony” from the U.S. Department of Defense and Smithsonian Institution museums, under the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978

(AIRFA). It would be more than twenty years until “repatriation” would be codified to mean and compel the return of Native American human remains, sacred objects, and cultural patrimony from federal and federally assisted museums, agencies, and educational institutions.

At Bear Butte, we articulated a solution involving educating the public and convincing policymakers to force museums and other collectors to stop robbing Indian graves, displaying and experimenting on our dead relatives, lying about us, and mocking our ways. We already knew that we did not have enough people or time to solve these problems museum by museum, or even state by state, and that we would need a comprehensive policy to order these changes. We wanted to use as a positive example a museum that was doing a respectful job, but no one could think of one. We envisioned a cultural center that would stand in the face of Congress so that policymakers in the U.S. Capitol would have to look us in the eyes when they made decisions about our lives. We consecrated it on sacred ground, so it was as good as done, and it was left to those of us who were young and strong to carry it out. And we are not finished yet.

In 1978, we achieved a broad goal with the passing of AIRFA—which set the policy for repatriation, museums, and other follow-on laws—but it lacked a door to the courthouse, which we still need to adequately protect Native sacred places. In 1989 and 1990, after combining an invaluable Native collection with Native governance and a Native repatriation policy, we realized our vision in the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) Act and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). In 2004, those of us still alive could actually see what we had given birth to thirty-seven years earlier: the NMAI on the National Mall, facing east, with a clear, steady view of the U.S. Capitol.

It must be difficult for anyone under forty-years-old to imagine how things were in 1967. Unlike the white-gloved racism of today (where offenders try not to leave fingerprints, and at least pretend they do not intend to offend), the assaults in the past were physically and emotionally violent, with each and every blow meant and relished. Signs in public

IMAGE NOT AVAILABLE

A view of the Capitol from the south side of the NMAI.



places left nothing to the imagination: NO INDIANS OR DOGS ALLOWED. While they may well have been posted elsewhere, I saw those signs in Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and South Dakota. The last one I saw was in 1978, in the window of a diner in Sturgis, South Dakota, six miles from Bear Butte.

Then, as now in some cases, the path to certain sacred places was not smooth or dignified and often involved Native people digging a trench and crawling underneath barbed wire and signs that read NO TRESPASSING. We had to do this for many years to gain access to a certain part of Bear Butte until a kind owner, a non-Indian man, permitted full access for Cheyenne traditional religious practitioners to cross his land. He also let us camp there for our 1967 gathering. Eleven years later, with a developer's offer in hand for \$1,000 for each of his 120 acres, the owner gave the right of first refusal to the Cheyenne peoples in Montana and Oklahoma, who lived in dire economic straits, as was the condition of nearly all the American Indian nations at that time. In 1979, in furtherance of AIRFA, Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus purchased the land for the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma and all Native nations and tribes that traditionally use Bear Butte for cultural purposes. Today, the Lower Brule Sioux, Northern Cheyenne, and Rosebud Sioux tribes have purchased Bear Butte acreage.

In 1967, however, the Cheyenne societies' leaders and practitioners were outlaws at many traditional places. There was no AIRFA policy to preserve and protect Native American traditional religions. There were residual negative effects from the fifty-years-long Civilization Regulations, a formal plan implemented to destroy American Indian religions and ways of life. These federal rules, issued by Secretaries of the Interior in 1884, 1894, and 1904, were vigorously enforced by each one until the New Deal policies of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. In a *Circular* issued in 1934, Indian Commissioner John Collier signaled the upcoming policy change, warning Indian Service employees "against interfering with the religious liberties guaranteed by the Federal Constitution." The Civilization policies were withdrawn in 1935.

The Civilization Regulations grew out of the Civilization Fund, first appropriated by Congress at the start of the 1800s. The fund authorized monies to the Indian Office in the War Department to award, in effect, religious franchises of named Indian tribes to Christian denominations for the purpose of education and conversion to Euro-American ways. Congress did not itself authorize the Regulations, but it looked the other way during the late nineteenth century, when all traditional ceremonies and dancing were criminalized, as was “roaming away from the reservation” and interfering with children being taken away to boarding schools. The Regulations outlawed the Sun Dance “and all other similar dances and so-called religious ceremonies.” A subsequent *Circular* instructed all Indian agents to “undertake a careful propaganda against the Dance,” which meant to smear the names and reputations of any kind of ceremony and its participants.

The Civilization Regulations also banned the “usual practices” of a “so-called ‘medicine man’ [who] operates as a hindrance to the civilization of a tribe,” who “resorts to any artifice or device to keep the Indians under his influence,” who “shall adopt any means to prevent the attendance of children at the agency schools,” or who “shall use any of the arts of a conjurer to prevent the Indians from abandoning their heathenish rites and customs.” Indian people were subject to starvation and imprisonment sentences if convicted of Civilization “offenses” or “any other, in the opinion of the court, [Indian offenses] of an equally anti-progressive nature,” and were “confined in the agency guardhouse for a term not less than ten days, or until such time as he shall produce evidence satisfactory to the court, and approved by the agent, that he will forever abandon all practices styled Indian offenses under this rule.”

Giveaways and any ceremonies involving any exchange or dissemination of property were Civilization offenses, and had to be done in secret, if at all. Giveaways are part of most American Indian cultures and are celebratory or commemorative ceremonies to honor passages—birth, naming, emergence, marriage, death, return from battle, or confinement and re-entry into peaceful society—and to show appreciation to all those

who made a tribute possible. In some mourning traditions, all or the most prized possessions of the deceased are distributed by the family. The Regulations specified that the defense that “the party charged was at the time a ‘mourner,’ and thereby justified in taking or destroying the property in accordance with the customs or rites of the tribe” was not a “sufficient or satisfactory answer to any of the offenses.” Sacred objects, funerary items, and cultural property were confiscated under the color of law by military and civilian agents and given or sold to museums and other collectors. Those items included masks, totems, wampum belts, ledger books, cradleboards, and ceremonial clothing, shoes, jewelry, staffs, pipes, bags, sashes, and headwear.

The oppressive Civilization policies forced Native American religions and languages underground. Many of them never reemerged. The decades after their withdrawal were marked by wars in which Indian people served in high numbers, termination of federal-tribal relationships, relocation from Indian lands, scarce jobs, and widespread poverty. Fortunately, by the mid-1960s, America was changing a bit, and some of the people fighting for racial and gender equality were inclined to support what they knew or imagined of our struggle for justice. In most cases, Native people could not confide the nature of or strategies involved with our resistance. It was isolating work, and our treaty, civil, and human rights movements, which continue to this time, are all but invisible to most Americans.

In 1967, Native peoples were engaged in cultural reclamation work, trying to piece together our past, to understand what had happened to us, to come to terms with it all, and to be heard. The National Indian Youth Council was engaged in litigation for Native voting rights in the Southwest; the Indian Civil Rights Act was one year from enactment; the national Indian education investigative study, begun by Senator Robert F. Kennedy, was two years away; and both Kennedy and Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., were very much alive. Vine Deloria, Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux), had not started law school or written his best-selling book, *Custer Died for Your Sins*, and N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) had not published *House Made of Dawn* or won the Pulitzer Prize for it. Indian people in the Pacific



N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) reading from one of his works during the Vine Deloria, Jr., Native Writer Series, 2007.

Northwest were being beaten and arrested for treaty fishing. Alcatraz had not yet been occupied. We had no federal laws for healthcare, self-determination, child welfare, tribal colleges, heritage languages, or gaming. Only half of today's 565 federally recognized tribes had a formal relationship with the United States. The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI, our oldest national Indian organization) was a mere twenty-three years old, with fewer than fifty member tribes.

No one at the 1967 gathering lived in the vicinity of Capitol Hill, where laws are made. I was the closest, in New York City, and had no plans of moving to Washington. Seven years later, I was living and working in the District of Columbia, much to the surprise of everyone in my family, including me. For those seven years, our growing coalition would gather in D.C. and meet with anyone who would meet with us. We were well received on the Hill, where almost everyone used to have good manners, but in our meetings at the Department of the Interior and the Department of Justice, all we ever heard was "No."

In 1970, we made friends with President Richard M. Nixon's Bureau

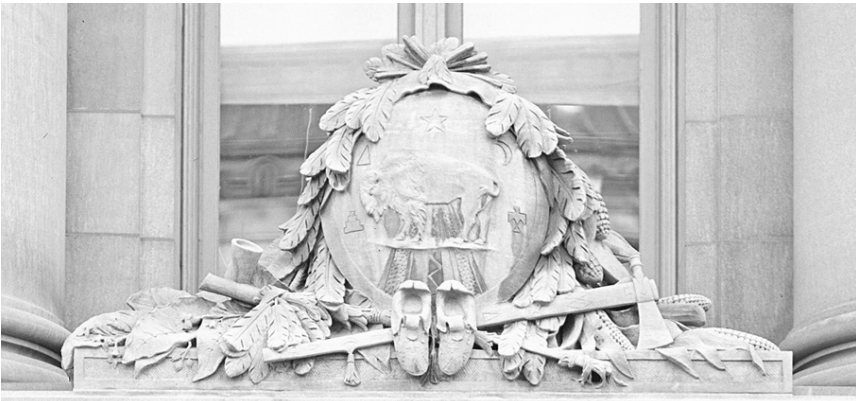
of Indian Affairs Commissioner Louis R. Bruce (Mohawk/Oglala Sioux) and his staff of Indian political appointees known as the Katzenjammer Kids. They were subsidizing the travel of tribal leaders and Indian journalists and activists, and we asked for help, too. They still refused our requests for help with laws or administrative actions for religious freedom, repatriation, and our cultural center in front of the Capitol, but they gave us books of government travel requisitions. One book was good for a year of heavy airline travel and enabled us to meet in more tribes' territories and to understand better the size and shape of the legal door we were trying to construct. So, even though they called our legislative ideas "veto bait," the Nixonites literally put us on the road to eventual success.

In 1967, however, we only had each other and precious few resources. By the end of our gathering at Holy Mountain, we knew what each other had experienced; we understood the nature of the problems; we agreed on a unified strategy; and we had a plan. Our first task was to go to our home territories in Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Wyoming, and invite others to join us and add to the effort. Later that summer and fall, we were invited to have discussions at the Pueblos of Zuni, Hopi, Santo Domingo, San Felipe, and Taos, and at Yakama Nation and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation.

In our travels, we learned that others were troubled, haunted, or traumatized, and that people in other nations wanted to do something about their situations. I did not have nightmares, but I did have an experience in 1965 that shaped and inspired my work to this day: my parents, Susie Rozetta Eades (Cheyenne & Pawnee) and Freeland Edward Douglas (Muscogee), visited my newborn baby and me in Greenwich Village, New York City, and Mom and I went to the Museum of the American Indian (MAI) in Upper Manhattan. The MAI was one of the large, grey buildings in Audubon Terrace, which was built in the early 1900s as a grand complex of museums and bronze statuary covering a city block. Etched in limestone on the MAI were names of Native nations, with those of European explorers on other buildings. A frieze of one of Columbus's ships was above



Museum of the American Indian/Heye Foundation, 155th and Broadway, NYC, showing the north entrance and Audubon Terrace, 1918. N05577



Detail of shield sculpture above the main entrance to the Museum of the American Indian/Heye Foundation, 1919. N05890

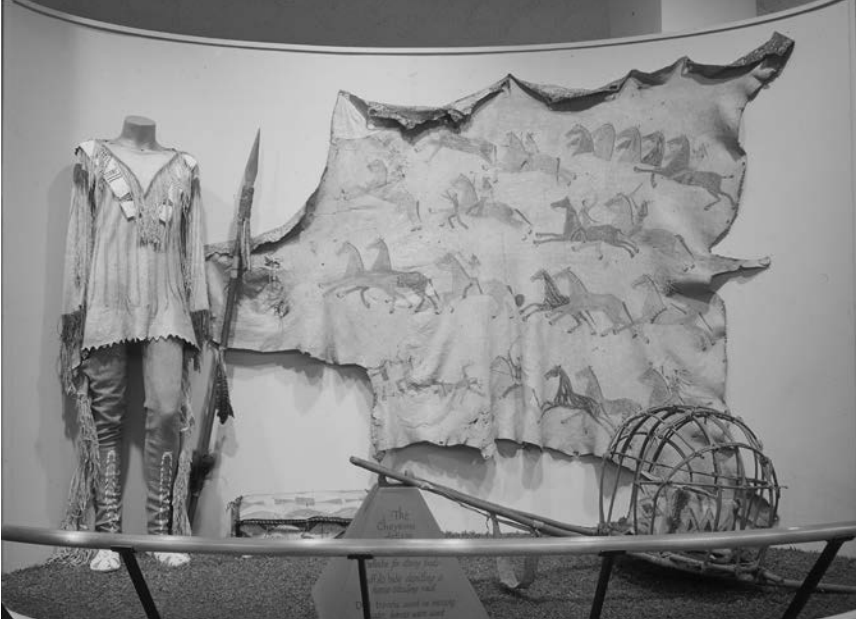
the entrance to the Hispanic Society; over the MAI doorway was a buffalo shield with feathers over an upturned pipe crossed with a downturned axe, on a bed of corn and tobacco, symbolizing peace and prosperity.

Inside MAI, we saw a mummy and shrunken heads and False Face masks with medicine bags. Mom saw what she thought was something that belonged to her grandfather. I saw a Cheyenne girl's buckskin dress, a bullethole and rust patterns where her belly had been. We almost fled

from the MAI. Once on the street, Mom said, "Those things do not belong there! You have to do something about that." Almost immediately, I started seeing a Cheyenne girl in my dreams. She was wearing the buckskin dress, when it was new and she was healthy. I always liked remembering that she had been on the edges of various dreams. Sometime after the NMAI and repatriation laws were enacted, I noticed that she had not been in my dreams for awhile. She was a gentle motivating force, and I miss her calm presence.

Shortly after that trip to the MAI, I sought out Vine Deloria, Jr., at the 1965 convention of the National Congress of American Indians in Scottsdale, Arizona. He was NCAI's executive director, and I thought he would have the answer I was looking for. I asked him how to go about recovering a sacred object from a museum. He said something I did not expect to hear from a politician: "I have no idea how to do that." He also gave me an empowering gift: "I'll help you think about how to get it done, and I'll back you up," a gift that proved more precious over each of our subsequent forty years of friendship. Deloria was not at Bear Butte, but he went to several of our meetings in New Mexico, California, Washington, and New York, and engaged some NCAI leaders in the cultural rights work. Our coalition had widened to a movement that focused broad national support on individual tribal efforts to protect sacred places and recover sacred objects.

Our effort got a big boost during the presidential campaign of candidate Jimmy Carter. In October 1976, I organized his meeting in Albuquerque with a small group of tribal leaders and scripted written questions and answers about his Indian rights platform, which included AIRFA and other legislation that the Nixon and Ford administrations would not support, such as child welfare, tribal colleges, land claims, and water settlements. Carter promised to support the measures and, in November, I got the green light to prepare the Indian legislative agenda for the Carter-Mondale transition. As soon as the transition work concluded on Inauguration Day, I joined the Native American Rights Fund (NARF) and began work on the agenda with NARF Director John Echohawk (Pawnee), first



Cheyenne artisan exhibit showing clothing, a painted hide, a travois, and a parfleche, Museum of the American Indian/Heye Foundation, ca. 1960.

settling the Bear Lake case with an administrative return to Taos Pueblo and then coordinating meetings to prepare for AIRFA hearings.

President Carter kept all the promises he made in our pre-election meeting and signed AIRFA into law on August 11, 1978, as P.L. 95-341. I had accepted a political appointment in the administration for Indian legislation and liaison, coordinating the fifty-plus federal agencies' one-year implementation of AIRFA and preparing the President's 1979 Report to Congress on American Indian Religious Freedom, both of which were required by AIRFA. The Bureau of Indian Affairs contracted with NARF and the American Indian Policy Center (AIPC) to consult with the agencies as they implemented AIRFA and to conduct a shadow study. NARF staff attorney Walter Echo-Hawk (Pawnee) and AIPC attorney Victoria A. Santana (Blackfeet) conducted the work for the organizations. I worked closely on the report with Deloria, Santana, and W. Roger Buffalohead (Ponca), an educator/historian who was responsible for the early repatriation policy of the Minnesota Historical Society. The AIRFA task



force held consultations with the people of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, Reno/Sparks Colony, and Zuni Pueblo, and in Alaska, Hawaii, Montana, and Oklahoma.

In the early 1980s, I joined the MAI board and became NCAI executive director, and would devote much of that decade to the campaign for repatriation, museum reform, and the new museum (the term had replaced “cultural center” by that time). Deloria was on the MAI reform board, which was trying to clean up the legal mess and physical ruin caused by years of corruption and neglect. He called to say he needed back-up and to ask if I could go to New York City because he was “blackmailing the trustees” to put me on the board or to be the subject of a press conference. I went to the MAI meeting as a trustee to join the effort to salvage its priceless collection and to attempt to convince others that the MAI would be better off if it returned the cultural items that some Native peoples were pleading for and others were demanding.

I had only been in the MAI twice—the first time in 1965 as my mother’s daughter and the second time in 1972 as a WBAI-FM radio producer recording a delegation of Haudenosaunee (People of the Longhouse, or Iroquois Confederacy) led by Tadadaho Leon Shenandoah, who was asking for return of their wampum belts. MAI’s then-director behaved rudely, ordering us out of his office and saying he had called the police and reported that an Indian takeover of the museum was in progress. The delegation left quickly, rather than attempt to counter his misrepresentation and risk further confrontation.

Within a year, that director was the subject of an investigation by New York State Attorney General Louis J. Lefkowitz (R-NY) into the handling of the MAI’s one-million-object collection, which was owned by the George Gustav Heye Foundation and governed as a New York trust. The director was removed, the trustees were replaced by a reform board, and the MAI remained under a type of state/city receivership until its collection was nationalized and the National Museum of the American Indian was established. In 1988, the MAI returned eleven wampum belts to the

Haudenosaunee under the expert guidance of MAI Chairman Barber B. Conable, Jr. (R-NY), a twenty-year veteran of Congress and the World Bank president, who was instrumental in gaining the support of President George H.W. Bush for the NMAI.

As NCAI executive director, I worked closely on our NMAI and repatriation policies with three NCAI presidents: Quinault Nation President Joseph B. DeLaCruz, Winnebago Chairman and Native American Church Roadman Reuben A. Snake, Jr., and San Ildefonso Gov. John F. Gonzales, as well as with the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, and Nez Perce Chairman Allen V. Pinkham, Sr., and other leaders. When the Smithsonian Institution selected Robert McCormick Adams to be its secretary in 1984, I asked him to begin discussions with NCAI regarding Smithsonian policies on care, treatment, storage, exhibition, and repatriation.

Our coalition had not been granted a meeting with the prior secretary, despite repeated requests from 1968 to 1983; we were told that no Smithsonian secretary ever met with Native people, with the exception of the rare Indian professional who worked there. The first Smithsonian secretary, Joseph Henry, had joined President Abraham Lincoln in a White House meeting in 1863 with my ancestor, Chief Lean Bear, who led the Cheyenne delegation and was one of two spokesmen for the southern Plains nations. The President requested that the Arapaho, Cheyenne, Comanche, and Kiowa Nations remain neutral in the U.S. Civil War, and they entered into an unwritten treaty to that effect.

Soon after NCAI began negotiating with the Smithsonian, the MAI also entered into discussions with the Institution, which wanted the MAI collection, as did the American Museum of Natural History, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Corning Museum of Glass, Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, and others. The MAI trustees entertained offers, but none met the minimal requirements of keeping the collection intact and making a space for it that would be visited by large numbers of people. Attendance at the MAI was at an all-time low and more than ninety-five percent of the collection was rapidly deteriorating in a leaky, pest-ridden warehouse in the Bronx. No one in New York or

Washington would help save the collection or relocate the MAI, and the Heye Foundation coffers were nearly depleted.

One evening after an MAI board meeting in early 1985, Deloria and I were commiserating with two other trustees, New York businessmen Charles Simon of Salomon Brothers and Peter Kriendler of the 2I Club. Simon came up with the brilliant turning-point idea: “What we need is a bidding war and I think I know how to start it. I hear H. Ross Perot wants a world-class museum in Dallas and isn’t particular about the class. We have a world-class collection.” We all agreed and Deloria said, “It can’t miss. Everyone on the East Coast will be afraid he’ll spill barbeque sauce on the beadwork.” Simon contacted the Texas billionaire and, when the press reported that Perot was offering \$75 million and land to move the collection to Dallas, the predicted bidding war erupted. New York politicians were adamant that the collection was “our heritage,” and would not be moved. Capitol Hill polls called it a “national treasure” that belongs in Washington.

The next brilliant idea came from U.S. Senator Daniel K. Inouye (D-HI), following his visit to the MAI and its storage facility, where he had witnessed water-damaged buckskin dresses and shields—an invaluable collection in a state of impending ruin. Thinking about where a national Indian museum could be located, he looked down the National Mall from the balcony of his Capitol hideaway office and asked his Indian Affairs Committee staff director, Alan R. Parker (Chippewa Cree): “What’s that blank space?” (referring to the area between the Botanical Gardens and the National Air and Space Museum). Congress had committed the space decades earlier to the Smithsonian and there was talk, but no plan, for a Museum of Man. Some Smithsonian anthropologists, archeologists, and historians were upset over what they perceived as “their” museum going to the Indians, and tried to start a fight by suggesting that the site should be for a combined Native and African American museum. African American leaders did not bite, and we held out for two museums, rather than half of one for each.

The Smithsonian was willing to give up the Museum of Man for a new Indian museum and the MAI collection, but it would not agree to

a repatriation policy. The New Yorkers agreed to a nationalized MAI collection, but wanted a permanent exhibition space in New York City, and they supported Native American efforts to achieve repatriation law. Banker David Rockefeller and U.S. Representative Charles B. Rangel (D-NY), whose district included the MAI, organized meetings of New Yorkers and stepped up efforts to secure the Alexander Hamilton U.S. Custom House at the tip of Manhattan as the NMAI New York presence.

While we at MAI were negotiating for locations and square footage, NCAI stepped up negotiations for repatriation. We had already gotten the Smithsonian to inventory its holdings of Native human remains and the resulting numbers were shocking: 18,500 Native American human remains, most of which were stored in green boxes in the National Museum of Natural History, and 4,500 skulls, mostly from the U.S. Army's Indian Crania Study. The Army Medical Museum (AMM), founded in 1862, initially "collected" Indian bodies for the study of infectious diseases. AMM curator George A. Otis issued *Circular #2* in 1867, urging field doctors to send "Indian specimens." In 1868, U.S. Army Surgeon General Joseph Barnes directed officers to "augment the collection of Indian crania." The AMM and Smithsonian advertised in newspapers for crania and agreed that the AMM would get the osteological remains and the Smithsonian would keep the burial and cultural items. They also shared collections with the Physiological Institute in Berlin and other museums in Europe, and the American Museum of Natural History in New York, the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, and the Peabody Museum at Harvard University in Cambridge, among others.

Under the Indian Crania Study, heads were "harvested" from caves, scaffolds, battlefields, massacre sites, forts, schools, guardhouses, and graves. Letters of transmittal accompanied the crania to D.C., and can be found in the Smithsonian National Anthropological Archives. One Army officer reported hiding and waiting "until cover of darkness" and the departure of "the grieving family" before "I exhumed the body and decapitated the skull which is transmitted forthwith." Another reported the murder and beheading of Apache chief Mangas Colorado (Red Sleeves) in 1863 by California Volunteers, who woke the 72-year-old chief by

torturing him with hot bayonets and then shot him. The officer reported that when the “dead body fell to the ground, I immediately decapitated the head, measured the skull and weighed the brains . . . while the skull were smaller, the brain were larger than that of Daniel Webster.”

The Smithsonian also had remains of children, women, and elders who were killed by the Colorado Volunteers during the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre. The Volunteers took Indian people’s genitalia, fetuses, and other body parts to Denver, where the souvenirs were strung across the stage of the opera house and given a standing ovation. Many were made into jewelry, dolls, and other trophies, and remain in public and private collections today. Among those massacred along the Sand Creek were Cheyenne Chiefs Standing Water and War Bonnet, who had met with Lincoln in the White House the previous year. A few months before the Sand Creek Massacre, the Volunteers murdered Lean Bear as he was wearing his peace medal and showing his letter of safe passage signed by Lincoln.

Each of the thousands of Native people involved with repatriation and collection matters were confronted with harrowing historical and modern-day experiences. We at NCAI were committed to gaining a Smithsonian repatriation agreement and our supporters on Capitol Hill held up the NMAI Act until we could achieve that final legislative piece. The Smithsonian and NCAI were jointly sponsoring a reception at the Wheelwright Museum in Santa Fe, New Mexico, during the Santa Fe Indian Market in August 1989 to celebrate the pending NMAI and spotlight contemporary Native artists. I was meeting a week earlier in Albuquerque, with the NCAI Cultural Concerns Committee, which had grown to more than 600 people. On the airplane from Washington, D.C., to New Mexico, I was fixated on the bills of lading (a document accompanying a shipment of goods) that an Army officer filled out for the freight travel of Sand Creek Massacre victims from Colorado to Washington, D.C. They were the same, except for the national identification: “one Cheyenne male crania,” “one Arapaho male crania,” “one Kiowa male crania.”

Adams and I were scheduled to have a telephone discussion about the repatriation policy draft that we had talked about for many months. I

called him at his home in Colorado and asked if he was aware that he was head of an institution that had remains from Sand Creek? No, he was not, but he had just started reading a book by George Bent, the son of a white trader and a Cheyenne woman who had witnessed and written about the massacre. Adams said he wanted to know about Cheyenne history because he was surrounded by Cheyennes, meaning three people: U.S. Representative Ben Nighthorse Campbell (D-CO), our choice for NMAI director, W. Richard West, Jr., and me. I said that the time for our repatriation discussions was up and we either would agree to have a policy or not; and, if not, then our side would prepare for court. Ever since the Smithsonian released its inventory of Native remains, tribal leaders and attorneys were champing at the bit to go to court, and a number of complaints were ready to be filed. Adams asked how long he had to think about it and I said, "One hour." I called Campbell and Echo-Hawk, warning that we might be headed to court.

Adams called back to say we had a deal. We agreed to give the story to a *New York Times* reporter and the *Albuquerque Journal* editorial board. He said we needed to commemorate the deal with a dinner. We agreed on a date and I called Echo-Hawk and Campbell to see if they could join us in Santa Fe at a place that Adams was selecting. We all were greatly relieved, although the idea of an orderly litigation process was almost welcome after the messiness of the political morass. Many forget or do not appreciate that the NMAI law involved pre-settlement of repatriation litigation that had not been filed against the Smithsonian, as well as settlement of the longstanding court oversight regarding MAI matters.

I also called Deloria, who could not join us, but who thought it was a good outcome and that our ancestors had reached through time to help us attain it. I met with our NMAI committee members and told them the good news, and that they had to keep it a secret until the newspaper article came out. Adams called back and said our dinner would be at the Coyote Cafe, and I laughed out loud. Coyote is a Trickster in many tribal traditions, or a culture hero who makes things happen in the way they are supposed to happen. Before we ordered from the menu at our commemo-

rative dinner, the *New York Times* article was filed: “Major Accord Likely on Indian Remains.” We were in accord, we were in the Coyote’s cafe and, for a moment, it became perfect.

Museums and collectors flooded Capitol Hill with panicked calls against the Smithsonian for accepting a repatriation process as the public policy price for the MAI collection. The Smithsonian and the other “majors” (the ten museums with the largest Indian collections) had been returning some few remains and cultural materials, and were urging Congress to make repatriation a mere suggestion on a museum-by-museum basis. Some were attempting to split the Native coalition by pitting those whose priority was sacred objects against those who emphasized human remains or cultural patrimony, and by publicizing those differing priorities as a splintering of our unified position. Native peoples who were negotiating repatriations were variously rewarded or punished by museum employees by slowing down or speeding up returns. Some opponents of repatriation sought specific exemptions for fingerbone necklaces and scalplock dolls. Others fought against tribal citizens having a set number of seats on the NMAI board. Congress disagreed, however, and the bill was enacted as negotiated with the MAI and NCAI.

The NMAI Act, with the historic repatriation provision, was signed into law as P.L. 101-185 by President George H.W. Bush on November 28, 1989. Eleven months later, Congress extended the repatriation policy nationwide to all federal and federally assisted museums, agencies, and educational institutions, and on November 16, 1990, Bush approved it as P.L. 101-601, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

Julie Johnson Kidd of the Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation in New York City chaired the MAI board in the period leading up to the NMAI law, adding her own precision and meticulous attention to detail to the final rounds of negotiations. She and I were given the task by the board of selecting the fifteen MAI picks for the new NMAI trustees. We chose ourselves; she chose the white folks; I chose the Indian folks; and we both chose Inouye. Her other picks were Barber B. Conable, Jr., of New York; Carnegie Foundation president Ernest Leroy Boyer of Prince-

ton, New Jersey; author Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., of Greenwich, Connecticut; author Curt Muser; philanthropy writer Waldemar A. Nielsen of New York City; and David Rockefeller of New York City, who was invaluable to the MAI negotiations with New York officials and hosted myriad dinners and meetings to woo legislators.

My picks for the NMAI board were W. Roger Buffalohead, Vine Deloria, Jr., and N. Scott Momaday; educators Norbert Hill (Oneida), of Boulder, Colorado, and Dr. Clara Sue Kidwell (Choctaw & Creek) of Berkeley, California; and Governor Thomas R. White (Pima/Maricopa) of the Gila River Indian Community, Sacaton, Arizona. The Smithsonian selected Robert McCormick Adams; Dr. Frederick E. Hoxie of the Newberry Library, Chicago; Dr. Jennie Joe (Navajo) from the University of Arizona, Tucson; Dr. Alfonso Ortiz (San Juan Pueblo), anthropologist and author from Albuquerque, New Mexico; Little Big Horn College president Janine Pease-Windy Boy (Crow) from Crow Agency, Montana; Dr. Helen M. Scheirbeck (Lumbee), an educator from Pembroke, North Carolina; Dr. David Hurst Thomas, Curator of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History, New York City; Dr. Arturo Warman, Mexico City, Mexico; and Rosita Worl (Tlingit), from the Sealaska Corporation, Juneau, Alaska. The Smithsonian Regents confirmed our appointments and announced the NMAI Board of Trustees on January 30, 1990.

The history of NMAI has many genuine heroes, but most of their names and essential contributions have been lost in the stipulated truth that is legislative history, in the revisionist history of both Smithsonian and NMAI, and in various uninformed accounts. I want to honor those who were indispensable by raising their names here, both as a way to conclude this history and to suggest that there were thousands of people who made the NMAI possible. Arrow Keepers James Medicine Elk, Joe Antelope, Edward Red Hat, and other Cheyennes who guided the efforts through the decades: Steve Brady, Laird Cometsevah, Susie Rozetta Eades Douglas, William Fletcher (Cheyenne/Arapaho), Lawrence Hart, Fred Hoffman, Bernard Red Cherries, Allen Rowland, Raymond Spang, John L. Sipes, George Sutton (Cheyenne/Arapaho), Joe Tall Bull, Sr., William Tallbull, and Austin Two Moons.



W. Richard West, Jr., a prominent lawyer with extensive Washington experience, was the son of our best-known Cheyenne artist, Dr. Walter Richard West, whose famous Sun Dance paintings were based on color illustrations, pen drawings, and accounts by my great-grandfather Richard Davis (Chief Thunderbird) for George A. Dorsey's *The Cheyenne Indians: Ceremonial Organization and The Sun Dance* (Field Columbian Museum, Chicago, 1905). West was recommended unanimously to run the new NMAI by a Smithsonian selection committee and the NMAI board of trustees, and chosen by the Smithsonian Regents as the NMAI director in 1990. He was entrusted and kept good faith with our vision, dreams, and hopes, and I will always think of the NMAI on the Mall as the "House that Rick Built."

Zuni Pueblo Governor Robert E. Lewis chaired the cultural committee meetings of the National Tribal Chairmen's Association (and later was its president) and hosted the first meeting for our coalition in 1967. A significant AIRFA consultation in 1979 was also hosted by Lewis, and was pivotal to the decades-long effort to recover all the Zuni War Gods from art museums and collections. Among the many Pueblo people who played key roles were Taos Pueblo interpreter Paul J. Bernal and former All Indian Pueblo Council leaders Frank Tenorio (San Felipe), Herman Agoyo (Ohkay Owingeh), Benny Atencio (Santo Domingo), and Gil Vigil (Tesuque).

Among the Haudenosaunee chiefs, clanmothers, faithkeepers, and repatriators who secured returns of wampum belts and other cultural patrimony and helped build the NMAI were Wallace Mad Bear Anderson (Tuscarora), Doug George-Kanentiio (Mohawk), Richard Hill, Sr. (Tuscarora), G. Peter Jemison (Seneca), Billy Lazore (Onondaga), Lee Lyons (Onondaga), Oren Lyons (Onondaga), John Mohawk (Seneca), Alice Papineau (Onondaga), Irving Powless, Sr., and Jr. (Onondaga), Tom Porter (Mohawk), Audrey Shenandoah (Onondaga), Jeanne Shenandoah (Onondaga), Leon Shenandoah (Onondaga), Jake Swamp (Mohawk), Jake Thomas (Cayuga), and Duffy Wilson (Tuscarora).

Key tribal and religious leaders and practitioners in the effort included Cecil Anton (Gila River Indian Community), Thomas Banyacya (Hopi),

Harding Big Bow (Kiowa), Nelson Big Bow (Kiowa), Gregg Bourland (Cheyenne River Sioux), Theresa “Maiselle” Bridges (Squaxin Island), Royal Bull Bear (Oglala Lakota), Sam Cagey (Lummi), Ola Cassadore Davis (San Carlos Apache), Mildred Cleghorn (Chiricahua Apache), Lucy Covington (Colville, Moses Band), Robert Cruz (Tohono O’odham), Billy Cypress (Miccosukee), Truman W. Dailey (Otoe-Missouria), Mike Davis (Choctaw), Phillip Deere (Muscogee), Freeland Edward Douglas (Hodulgee Muscogee), Sam Eagle Staff (Cheyenne River Sioux), Jerry Flute (Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux), Frank Fools Crow (Oglala Lakota and Cheyenne), Billy Frank, Jr. (Nisqually), Delbert Frank, Sr. (Warm Springs), Joel Frank (Seminole), gaiashkibos (Lac Courte Oreilles Chippewa), Martha Grass (Ponca), Frank Ray Harjo (Wotko Muscogee), Viola Hatch (Arapaho), Robert I. Holden (Choctaw/Chickasaw) and Allan Houser (Chiricahua Apache).

Other important tribal and religious leaders and practitioners in the effort included Robert Jim (Yakama), Roger Jim (Yakama), Russell Jim (Yakama), Weldon Johnson (Colorado River Indian Tribes), Flora Jones (Wintu), Leigh Kuwanwisiwma (Hopi), Newton Lamar (Wichita), John Fire Lame Deer (Oglala Lakota), Julian Lang (Karuk), Frank La Pena (Miwok), Walt Lara, Sr. (Yurok), Juanita Learned (Arapaho), Pat Lefthand (Kootenai), Will Mayo (Tanana), William A. Means (Oglala Lakota), Bessie Mikey (Hodulgee Muscogee), Bernice Mitchell (Warm Springs), David Monongye (Hopi), Barney Old Coyote (Crow), Lloyd Old Coyote (Crow), Maria Pearson (Yankton Sioux), Allen V. Pinkham, Sr. (Nez Perce), Gus Palmer, Sr. (Kiowa), Chris Peters (Karuk), Larry Red Shirt (Oglala Lakota), Katherine M. Saubel (Cahuilla), Jesse Jay Taken Alive (Standing Rock Sioux), Buffalo Tiger (Miccosukee), Leonard Tomaskin (Yakama), Curly Bear Wagner (Blackfeet), Clyde Warrior (Ponca), Della Warrior (Otoe-Missouria), Floyd Westerman (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate Dakota), Emmett S. White (Gila River Indian Community), Bernie Whitebear (Colville), Frances Wise (Waco/Caddo), William Yallup (Yakama), Pemina Yellow Bird (Mandan/Hidatsa/Arikara), and Buster Yellow Kidney (Blackfeet).

Among the Native professionals who dedicated themselves to the promotion of tribal culture and standing were anthropologist Beatrice Medicine (Sihhasapa Lakota); archaeologists Edmund J. Ladd (Zuni) and Joe E. Watkins (Choctaw); attorneys Eddie Ayau (Native Hawaiian), John E. Echohawk (Pawnee), Walter R. Echo-Hawk (Pawnee), Mario Gonzalez (Oglala Sioux), F. Browning Pipestem (Otoe-Missouria/Osage), Victoria A. Santana (Blackfeet), Woodrow B. Sneed (Cherokee), and Dean B. Suagee (Cherokee); educators Manley A. Begay, Jr. (Navajo), David Beaulieu (White Earth Chippewa), Rupert Costo (Cahuilla), P. Sam Deloria (Standing Rock Sioux), Henrietta Mann (Cheyenne), Lois J. Risling (Hoopa/Yurok/Karuk), and Gerald Vizenor (White Earth Chippewa); historians Roger C. Echo-Hawk (Pawnee), Dr. James Riding In (Pawnee), Robert W. Trepp (Creek/Cherokee) and Dr. Dave Warren (Santa Clara Pueblo); and sociologists Larry Meyers (Pomo) and Dr. Tessie Naranjo (Santa Clara Pueblo).

U.S. Senator Barry M. Goldwater (R-AZ) and U.S. Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA) were original sponsors of the AIRFA and the political bookends for all others who supported the policy. Among the hundreds of congressional champions of Native cultural rights or key aspects of policies that led to the AIRFA, repatriation laws, and the NMAI, the following stand out: U.S. Senators James Abourezk (D-SD), Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI), Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), Ben Nighthorse Campbell (R-CO), Pete V. Domenici (R-NM), Mike Gravel (D-AK), Fred R. Harris (D-OK), Mark O. Hatfield (R-OR), Hubert H. Humphrey (D-MN), Daniel K. Inouye (D-HI), Henry M. Jackson (D-WA), Spark M. Matsunaga (D-HI), John McCain (R-AZ), George McGovern (D-SD), Walter F. Mondale (D-MN), Daniel P. Moynihan (D-NY), Claiborne Pell (D-RI), and Ted Stevens (R-AK), and U.S. Representatives John Conyers, Jr. (D-MI), Norm Dicks (D-WA), Don Edwards (D-CA), Eni F.H. Faleomavaega (American Samoa), Tim Johnson (D-SD), Dale Kildee (D-MI), John Lewis (D-GA), Charles B. Rangel (D-NY), Bill Richardson (D-NM), Morris K. Udall (D-AZ), Bruce Vento (D-MN), Pat Williams (D-MT), Sidney R. Yates (D-IL), and Don Young (R-AK).

Alan R. Parker, Esq. (Chippewa Cree), worked for the American Indian Policy Review Committee and the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs (SCIA) in the 1970s and was the first staff director for the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, starting in the mid-1980s. Dr. Patricia Zell, Esq., was the SCIA chief counsel and succeeded Parker as staff director. They and many others worked on Capitol Hill to advance the AIRFA, NMAI, or NAGPRA, or all three laws, as Native American human and civil rights policy. Most notable among these were Pablita Abeyta (Navajo), Virginia W. Boylan, Esq., Judi Chapman, Kimberly Craven (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate), Ivy Davis, Esq., Franklin Ducheneaux, Esq. (Cheyenne River Sioux), Helen Gonzales, Esq., Marie Howard, Lurline McGregor (Native Hawaiian), Henry Old Coyote (Crow), Alex Skibine, Esq. (Osage), Clara Spotted Elk (Cheyenne), and Katherine Harris Tijerina, Esq. (Comanche).

While there were hundreds of Native and non-Native people who carried out individual repatriations and helped with companion efforts, the people listed here and their unnamed family supporters are among the greatest shapers of the cultural rights laws that led to the NMAI and repatriation laws. Together, we created a revolution in museology and improved museum practices regarding treatment of and relationships with Native American people. These laws and the NMAI are inspiring Indigenous peoples worldwide, and will provide a broad, solid foundation for the coming generations of visionaries and innovators.



ROSITA WORL

## THE REPATRIATION OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

I am obligated by my cultural protocols to introduce myself as a means of honoring my ancestors and expressing my love for my children, grandchildren, and future generations. This self-introduction represents an adaptation to modern times and settings in which we are not assured that a member from the opposite side will be present to properly introduce us. This self-introduction also sets the stage for my discussion about the National Museum of the American Indian.

*Yeidiklas'akw ka Kaa.báni yóo xát duwasáak*

*Cháak' naa áyá xát*

*Sbungukeidí naax xát sitee*

*Kaawdliyaayí Hit dáx áyá xát*

*Jilkaat kwáan áyá xát*

*Lukaax.ádi dachxán áyá xát*

My Tlingit name is *Yeidiklas'akw*. It is an ancient name whose meaning has been lost in antiquity.

My ceremonial name is *Kaa.báni*, which means “Woman Who Stands in the Place of a Man.” It was obtained during an historical event involving intertribal commerce, and it speaks to the status of women in our society.

I am an Eagle of the Thunderbird Clan and the House Lowered from the Sun from Klukwan in the Chilkat region.

I am a Child of the Sockeye Clan.

My clan membership and my relationship to my father's clan attest to our communal orientation in which we see ourselves as members of a group rather than as an individual. I carry the ancient history of our clan through our names and crests, and my special relationship with the spirit of the Eagle, Thunderbird, Sun, Killer Whale, Shark, White Bear, and the Sockeye Salmon embodies our religious ideologies.

In addition, our clan claims ownership rights to the U.S. Naval military uniform and to the name Lt. Schwatga, which speaks to our cultural encounter with Euro-Americans. We have transformed the name of Lt. Schwatga to *Ax Schwatgi* or "My Schwatga," because of an unpaid debt by Lt. Schwatga to my great-great-clan grandfather.

We share the naval uniform with the Deisheetaan clan, whose village of Angoon was bombarded and destroyed by the U.S. Navy in 1882. They await an apology from the navy even to this day.

As a member of the Thunderbird Clan, I have ownership rights to our clan's intellectual property represented by names, ceremonial objects, crests, songs, and stories, which are collectively referred to as *baa at.óowu*. Nearly every sacred object, and even traditional utilitarian objects, were covered with the symbols of our crests and spirits, which outsiders classify as Northwest Coast art. Our rights and cultural values are recognized and practiced through our ongoing ceremonies and cultural practices.

In addition, I serve on the Board of Directors of the Sealaska Corporation, which was created by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 to settle our aboriginal land claims with the federal government. It is a Native corporation responsible for promoting the economic and social welfare of our membership, as well as fulfilling cultural obligations. From an early age, I was trained with our philosophical construct of *Haa Shagóon*, to accept that I have obligations, not only to the living, but also to my ancestors and future generations, as well.

It is my hope that others outside of our society would come to know

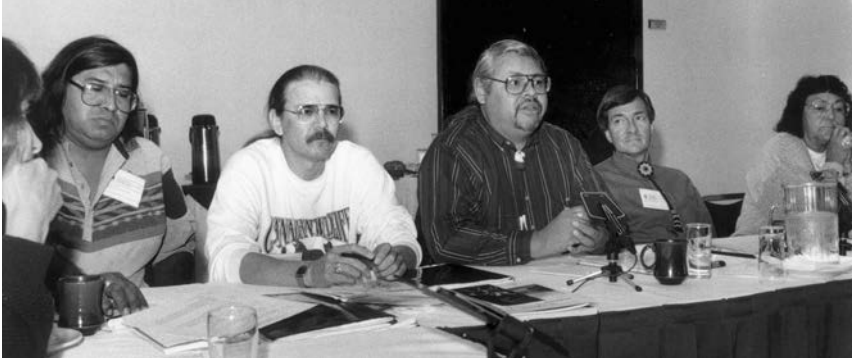
and perhaps understand Native rights, culture, worldview, and history such as I've briefly outlined above. I believe that we are much like other Native Americans, who have come to know that the broader public has considerable influence over the lives of Native peoples and communities. I viewed the NMAI as a major vehicle for the general public to learn about my ancient and recent history and culture, as well as those of other Native Americans.

I was privileged to serve on the search committee, which was charged with identifying and recommending a candidate to serve as the NMAI director to the Secretary of the Smithsonian. I recall that one of the committee members noted that the lead candidate didn't have any museum experience. I countered that I viewed this as a positive consideration and bolstered my argument by pointing to the Alaska Native Corporations. Many of the CEOs were hunters, fisherpersons, or whaling captains without formal business training. They transformed their traditional leadership skills and values into multi-million dollar annual profits, and today, one or two of the corporations have reached a billion dollars in annual revenues. But, more importantly, Native peoples continue to transform the standard profit-making corporation into an institution that reflects and embodies Native values. I had faith that Native peoples could achieve the same success with this new institution.

I think we will all agree that we made the right decision in recommending Rick West as our founding NMAI director. I recall Vine Deloria saying that the construction of the Indian museum on the last remaining real estate on the Mall would be the most significant achievement of the century by Native peoples. Certainly no one can deny that West provided the leadership to accomplish this feat.

The initial board of trustees and its new director believed that consultation, collaboration, and cooperation with Natives were key conditions to success and incorporated these objectives into its mission statement. West moved quickly to implement this directive, and in 1991 held a dozen consultations throughout the U.S. I always thought it was a brilliant move on West's part to hold these consultations with Native communities



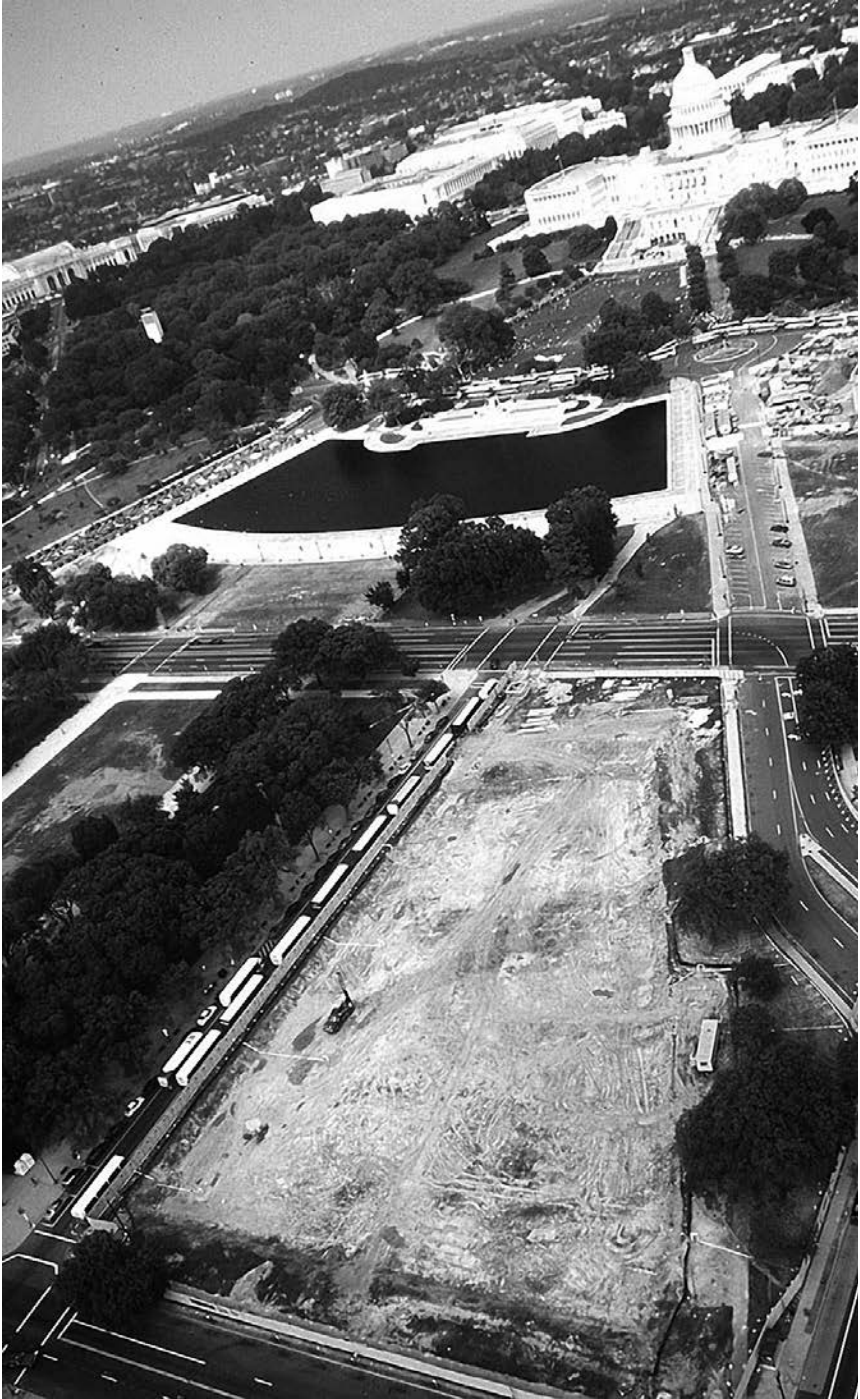


*The Way of the People* consultation, Billings, Montana, 1992. Dr. Alfred Young Man (Chippewa/Plains Cree), second to left, Richard W. Hill, Sr. (Tuscarora), third to left, and Rick West, Jr., second to right, with local Native community members.

all over the country. Within a single year, we heard tribal people outlining, and often with considerable passion, their hopes for the development of the museum. The consultations were also successful in that they conveyed to tribes a sense of ownership in the new museum.

The consultation resulted in a report entitled *The Way of the People*. Although the report itself largely focused on the design and construction of the NMAI, the tribal participants at these consultations outlined the philosophical underpinnings and framework of the new museum:

- They spoke to their dreams and aspirations of a new institution that would give voice to the Native point of view;
- They spoke to changing the misconceptions and stereotypes of Native Americans and their cultures;
- They spoke to recreating the image of Native Americans; and
- They spoke to educating the public about their accomplishments, their historical struggles and cultural encounters, the changes in their lifestyles, and their cultural survival. They were keenly aware that the greater number of visitors would be non-Natives.



“The last remaining real estate on the Mall” and future home of the NMAI Mall museum.

A few wise participants recommended that the very name of the new entity be changed from “museum.” They wanted to emphasize a different and broader mission of the NMAI beyond the usual functions of museums, which traditionally appropriated, exhibited, and interpreted the material culture of American Indians and others.

The initial mission statement adopted by the board of trustees also suggested an institutional shift with a focus on contemporary as well as historical cultures. It also included goals of activism or advocacy to support the development, maintenance, and perpetuation of Native cultures and communities.

It would seem to all observers that the NMAI had all the elements for recasting and broadening the meaning and scope of a traditional museum and for empowering Native peoples to control their own image. Its implementing legislation authorized the repatriation of certain cultural objects and human remains to culturally affiliated tribes. The legislation also assured that Native peoples would have a majority representation on the governance board and their influence would be all but assured with its authority to approve the annual budget. The board of trustees also encouraged Native hires. A director, who could walk equally and comfortably in both the Native and non-Native world, was appointed as its founding director. With these requisites in place, the museum was theoretically positioned to repatriate the museum to Indian peoples to allow them to interpret their own culture and history.

How were these articulated philosophies and messages heard in the consultations to be structured and conveyed? Could Indian peoples overcome the very foundation of museums and the very origin of the NMAI itself? Museum collections of Native material had their roots in the sometimes unsavory or unethical collection of objects which were viewed as curios, souvenirs, and even trophies, and which occurred at a time when Indians were viewed as savages, heathens, and a vanishing people. Missionaries everywhere condemned traditional cultures, but at the same time eagerly sought out the material culture of Native peoples. One of our

own clan leaders described the frenzied collection by missionaries: “They collected our sins!”

I recall visiting the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History in the early 1970s with members of my clan and my father’s clan. The curators, hopeful of giving us a treat, brought us to the storage area. As they pulled out drawer after drawer of our *at.óowu*, or ceremonial objects, we began to weep. The spirits of our captured ancestors were resting here in this strange land rather than in our homeland.

How could the NMAI overcome what has been described by others as our “ethnological fate,” whereby our sacred objects are treated and exhibited as artifacts? What, in fact, has been the reality of the NMAI’s success in deconstructing and reconstructing its institutional origins and portraying Native cultures within the constraints of glass boxes?

### **Contextualized Exhibits**

From my observation, the NMAI adopted at least three different interpretive approaches to the exhibition of Native arts and cultures. The first is the standard contextualized ethnographic exhibits of objects. NMAI, however, appeared to offer two additional dimensions to this approach.

Ethnographic exhibitions have generally attempted to convey the “Native point-of-view.” For the most part, Native views are interpreted by curators and anthropologists who have engaged in studies of the cultures they are attempting to portray. Many museums collaborated with tribal members in the development of exhibits prior to the presence of the NMAI, but in many cases, the professional curator generally retains control of the exhibition.

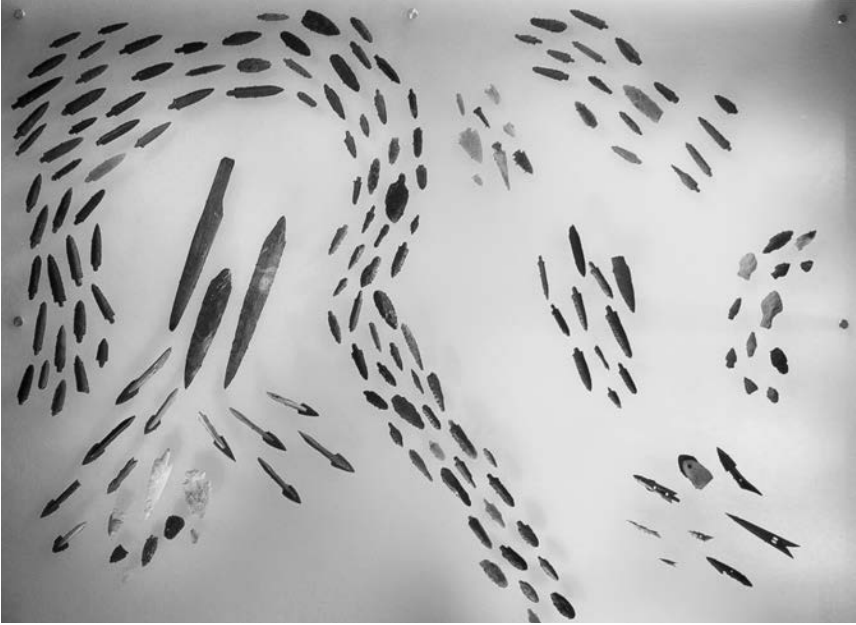
In an attempt to ensure that Native views were conveyed in its exhibits, the NMAI shifted the power relationship between curators and tribal consultants and gave significant control to “community curators.” The approach responded to the concerns that had been repeatedly made by Indian peoples.

The ultimate outcome was variable. In some instances, the power and beauty of the objects themselves carried the exhibition, but in others, the educational message and objective were unclear or lost. This may, in part, be due to the fact that the Native view is non-existent or is a stereotype itself. The other problem conceivably stemmed from the use of community curators who were not grounded in his or her tribal culture and history and did not have the necessary knowledge to accomplish this task.

From my perspective, this approach may be improved with the implementation of a process that ensures that the multiple and changing views of Native peoples are obtained. Secondly, a consultation process should be developed that ensures that those with the cultural expertise and analytical capabilities are retained to serve as community curators rather than individuals who are selected for popular or political considerations. The NMAI must overcome what has been reported as a reticence to apply scholarship or to use formally trained Native scholars and, specifically, tribal anthropologists in its work.

A common expression heard throughout Indian Country was that museums had frozen Native Americans in the past. Throughout the consultation process, Native peoples had consistently conveyed that they wanted the public to know about their cultural survival. The NMAI appears to have accepted this mandate and included modern-day life in its contextualized exhibits, despite the many challenges it posed. With the absence of modern-day material culture, the exhibits used photographs, film, and video clips to convey this message. Unfortunately, the outcome, in my observation, was a sense of disjuncture and the creation of further stereotypes of Native life. I believe that the NMAI cannot abandon its effort but must find ways to best portray the modern-day lives of Native peoples and their communities.

As I noted in my introduction, it was my hope that the public would come away from the NMAI with a greater understanding of the complexities of our ancient society and perhaps an acceptance of the differences between our cultural values and worldviews and their own. The contextualized exhibits coupled with the multiple and varied voices of



The points case, *Window on Collections*.

Native peoples offer this possibility. It also moves us away from the archaic natural history approach in which Indians are viewed as part of nature. However, I caution that the NMAI must take great care that Native peoples' relationship to the environment and wildlife is conveyed in our own terms and philosophies.

### **Cabinets of Curiosities**

I must admit that I do not fully understand the objectives of the second, or "cabinet of curiosities," approach used by the NMAI. From my perspective, the massive display of objects in a single case in the *Windows on Collections* exhibition harkens back to an earlier period or the formative stages of museums, in which cabinets were filled to capacity with varied tribal and exotic objects. I was startled when I first came upon what looked like "Ye Olde Curiosity Shoppe." As I reviewed it closer, I noted that rather than a collection of unsystematic objects, as in old curiosity cabinets, the two wall cases were filled with a collection of Indian masks and beaded



Box, 1992. David Boxley (Tsimshian [Metlakatla], b. 1952). Wood, paint; 26 cm x 26 cm x 33 cm. Formerly in the collection of Priscilla (Pam) M. King; donated to NMAI in 1998. 25/4744

objects. I must confess that I was at a loss to understand the objective or the message behind these two cases, other than “Indians made masks” or “Indians beaded objects.” Perhaps the collections were meant to emphasize similarities among the tribes or to convey a pan-Indianism or to demonstrate the possibilities of artistic storage. Perhaps the available computer technology at these collection stations would have given me a further clue, but I was unable to get to them due to the long waiting line. I left these cases especially disheartened by the sight of southeast Alaska Native tourist masks alongside sacred masks. I can also imagine that archaeologists had heartburn over what appeared to be a random selection of arrow points arranged in some sort of artistic design.

### Native Objects as Art

The third approach embodied a basic aesthetic or formalistic perspective evident throughout the exhibition of contemporary works by two acclaimed artists with Native heritage. The exhibition featuring the work of Allan Houser and George Morrison was certainly spectacular, and I have no argument with Native artists who produce fine arts. I had, however, come to accept the previously contested notion that creative works, including those made by Native American artists, are best featured in galleries or fine art museums. This could be my bias and, after all, the NMAI had proclaimed itself to be the “Museum Different,” and proceeded to break the traditional boundary between the formalists’ and contextualists’ exhibitions.

I recall one of the 1991 consultation meetings focusing on contemporary artists in which both contemporary and traditional Native art were discussed. It was actually my first exposure to a discussion of contemporary Native art. I recall silently aligning myself with those who were adamant that the NMAI’s primary focus should be on traditional arts and culture. At that point, I knew that I needed to learn more about contemporary Native art. Contemporary Native art, however, remains an issue of contention in many Native American communities, including my own.

In 2002, Sealaska Heritage Institute sponsored its first juried art show and competition. I had not anticipated the negative reaction to the inclusion of contemporary Native art. One of our well-known artists, who was serving on the selection committee, adamantly refused to allow any contemporary artwork in the competition, although he did accept pieces made of glass that used traditional Northwest Coast designs and forms. To overcome this automatic exclusion in our next juried art show, I added a contemporary category.

I believe that NMAI should consult further with Native peoples about the non-contextual exhibition of Native objects. Others have said that taking objects out of context and displaying them as art objects is another form of appropriation. I can appreciate that Native artists want to see their creative works exhibited on par with other art forms; however,



I believe we have a duty of care and responsibility to tribes whose sacred works may be used in an art exhibition. It may seem contradictory to my earlier stated proposition in that I want the larger public to learn about our cultures, but if an art exhibition were designed in such a way as to respect the traditional protocols of the culture from which the object emerged, I would consider promoting the use of our *at.óowu* in an art exhibition. I hold great pride in the creative achievements of different Native societies, and I would want the public to share and acknowledge these artistic achievements.

I also think that an intellectual and provocative pursuit for the NMAI would be an attempt to answer the question of whether aesthetic knowledge or appreciation are present in Native societies. I realize that the word “art” is absent from many Native languages, including my own, but this does not mean that an aesthetic appreciation is absent, and, unfortunately, I believe that this stereotype continues. In my own society, we recognized fine art and beauty, and we commissioned the best artists, even those who were outside of our society, such as the Tsimshian and Haida, to make our treasured *at.óowu*. We developed practices to ensure that we could use these artists in a way that met our cultural requirements.

My final observation relates to a discussion of contemporary issues that have an ongoing impact on the survival of Native communities and cultures. Throughout the consultations, Native peoples had insisted that they wanted the NMAI to address historical and contemporary issues. The Programming Committee discussed political issues, including sovereignty, the legal relationships tribes have with the federal government, and our tumultuous relationship with the United States government.

Even Senator Daniel Inouye conveyed to Indian peoples during his vigorous and successful fundraising efforts among the tribes that he thought the new NMAI would be an extraordinary and sustainable way for Native Americans to tell their story to the American public. From his vantage point as a policy-maker, he was keenly aware of the political burdens that tribes carried with the advent of high-profile Indian gaming and, today, with federal contracting with Indian tribes. Senator Inouye’s position

shouldn't be interpreted as political messaging, but, rather, a balanced presentation on Indians' issues that would be positive in the historical context.

The NMAI is a likely vehicle to bring educational messages to the American public that tribes by themselves cannot do. I believe we should not shy away from this task.

I have used my own cultural background and personal observations as a former trustee and visitor, together with the messages that arose from the 1991 consultations in Indian Country, to offer my view of the NMAI. I have focused on the exhibitions, since I believe they are the face of the NMAI to the public. I believe the museum made a significant and sincere effort to be responsive to the Indian community and to repatriate the NMAI as an institution to Indian peoples. The museum was bold in its effort to integrate new methodological approaches into a traditional exhibition model, to dismantle the boundaries between art and ethnographic museums, and to display Native objects as art. It had great successes, but we also must admit that the NMAI has some failings and room for improvement. The NMAI must now draw on the strength of our ancestors to assess the critical reviews that have been offered.

The Grand Opening of the NMAI was a spectacular moment for Indian peoples. Foremost, it was a proclamation of the cultural survival of Native peoples of the Americas. We owe a great debt to Rick West, the NMAI's founding director. We owe a great debt to Senators Inouye and Ben Nighthorse Campbell. We owe a great debt to the board of trustees and the multiple donors and tribes that supported this effort. We must acknowledge our ancestors, whose very beings are represented in the museum collection. Together, we have accomplished a great feat. Together, we will move forward to fulfill the mission of the NMAI.



DUANE CHAMPAGNE

## NATIVE VOICES AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN: REPRESENTATION AND RENEWAL

One of the most outstanding features of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) is its commitment to researching, understanding, and presenting Native voices. The capability and willingness to effectively and accurately present Native voices will determine whether the NMAI is truly a Native museum that lives up to its initial purpose and goals.

The promise of the NMAI is to build a forum for the presentation of Native cultures and histories throughout the Americas. It is a place for Native peoples to tell their stories and share their cultures from their own perspectives. Many Native peoples support the museum and its mission. An early focus for the NMAI concentrated on funding and getting the three physical buildings constructed or renovated. The “Fourth Museum” concept takes advantage of current and fast-improving digital technology that enables broad presentation of NMAI resources, exhibits, and philosophies.

Many of the base philosophies for developing the museum were discussed before the buildings were completed, and are represented in the architecture and landscape at the museum on the National Mall and at the Suitland, Maryland, site, where the Cultural Resources Center (CRC) is located. The innovative perspectives about how to manage and inform the museum with Native voices, as well as goals and overall direction, are generated by the board of trustees, museum leadership, and through consultation with Native community members and scholarly consultants. In many ways, the NMAI has become a leader in presenting Native voices,

engaging Native communities, and giving respect to Native goals and values in the museum world. A high standard of expectations has been set by Native peoples for the NMAI: Native peoples want and need a museum that represents their histories and interpretations of culture.

I want to congratulate founding director Rick West for leading us to this point in time. We have been in good hands, and the physical and philosophical foundations of the NMAI have been initiated and set in motion. The NMAI is one of the great recent achievements within the Indigenous world, and stands as witness to Rick's leadership and the dedication of the NMAI staff.

In the future, the NMAI will face many challenges: some of those are already afoot. Some think the museum should be dedicated to recounting and publicizing the holocaust of Indigenous peoples on the American continent. Many museums do not share the emphasis on Native voice when presenting Indigenous materials, instead opting to focus on other goals and philosophies for the presentation of Native materials and life-ways. There are several questions we need to address: Are the expectations and understandings of a largely non-Native audience considered appropriately? How can Native voices be defined and presented effectively? What is the role of the museum and what role does its presentation of Native voices play in a continually changing world?

The way in which the NMAI presents Native voices will be its defining feature; however, there are many ways of defining and representing Native voices. In the following sections, I comment on competing interpretations of Native voices, and characterize several complexities of representation, change, and renewal.

### **Defining Native Voices**

In the museum world, there are often two major methods for presenting Native artifacts: one presents the materials outside of their context, as art objects. The objects become things-in-themselves and are not placed within a holistic understanding of culture, but rather are presented as curios, or art forms. This method of presentation provides some back-



Visitors speak with basket-maker Jennie Brown (Pokagon Band of Potawatomi) during the NMAI's annual winter Art Market, 2010.

ground information about an object, but the object becomes “art” in the Western sense. The value of the object is determined by what a piece of art can gather on the market. This type of presentation of Native objects as art should not be the primary form of presentation for the NMAI.

An argument can be made for the presentation of contemporary Native artists' work, which may be influenced by modern or contemporary art forms and styles. Native artists make a living producing for the art market. The marketing of Native cultural features is one aspect of contemporary Native economy and art production. In the end, making Native art is what Native artists do. If we stay only with traditional art forms, then we deny Native artists the capability to evolve and create new forms of expression.

Many Native communities debate the cultural validity of marketable art; for instance, the appropriateness of the sale of Navajo sandpainting and some Pueblo pottery is still debated. Market-oriented artists say they produce art explicitly for the art market, and do not use spiritual methods to produce the work, therefore, they do not feel they are disrespecting tradition or engendering dangerous spiritual repercussions through their practices.

The marketing of Native art should be presented within the context of straddling Native and non-Native cultures and forms of distribution and production. The marketing of Native art is a contemporary feature of Native communities, and the Indian art market world is one form of expression of contemporary Native culture, one form of contemporary Native voice.

A second method for presenting Native cultural objects emphasizes history, place, and meaning within the Native community from whence the object comes. This is an ethnographic (the anthropological lens for scientifically examining culture), holistic approach based on scholarly interpretation, sometimes with consultation from Native community members. This way of presenting Native cultural objects has both scientific and educational value. Its purpose is to give an accurate presentation of Native cultures to a primarily non-Native audience. Most ethnographic exhibitions of Native cultures generally portray Native communities and cultures in a reconstructed past, before colonial contact. For example, the artistic Edward Curtis photographs represent Native subjects as if they are outside reservation contexts, and as if Indians are still living in some mythical past time, still free from colonial political domination or economic marginalization. Another example is the tendency of some major museums to show exhibits of Native peoples next to or on the same floor as exhibits of dinosaurs. The ethnographic approach provides more context and is often informed by knowledgeable tribal members; nevertheless, this presentation style does not always express a clear or informed Native voice.

So what is Native voice? How can the NMAI effectively represent Native voices? One of the lessons of the NMAI is there is no one Native voice. There are thousands of Native communities, and often within tribal nations there are contended understandings of Native culture, community, and identity: there is much diversity and many interpretations.

When we speak of voice or voices, we want to understand what a people has to say: what are their values, their hopes, goals, and interpretations of relationships? Here is where I believe we can find some grounding for interpretation, acknowledging both a common or useful message from the

Native voice, while also respecting the diversity of voices and multiplicity of interpretations.

The voice of a Native culture is what that culture or tradition wants to say to its people, and in the end to all peoples. The voices of a tradition give lessons or teachings about how to show respect, how to live properly as an individual and in a community, and the relationship one has to have with the powers and components of the universe.

A case in point might be the use of Native cosmology by environmentalists, who take up Native visions of a world where plants, animals, and peoples must live together and show mutual respect. The notion is that the earth is a gift, and one's sojourn through life requires everyone to respect and protect the earth, plants, animals, and other people.

Many cultures and traditions present worldviews about how to conduct moral and healthy lives. In creation stories among the Pueblos and Navajo, for example, life and community is a movement toward realizing greater moral understanding, and carrying out community and individual tasks resulting in common well-being. What the traditions teach help define the messages and goals of a people. Among the Iroquois, the message from Dekanawidah, the organizer of the Iroquois Confederacy, is peace among the nations. Many Native communities have a special message from a sacred source, and as individuals, communities, or nations, life and history is about carrying out the ceremonies, community obligations, and social and cultural exchanges between humans and the powers of the universe that fulfill the teachings. Each nation has messages and gifts given in their teachings or creation stories. We might recognize some gifts or tasks as consensual politics, respect for environmental issues, community organization, and respect for all beings. Some of the gifts of tradition form a moral code and a vision of how the world works—not necessarily in a scientific manner, but in a philosophical and spiritual manner. The teachings often provide a pathway for how each community is to conduct itself and ensure well-being and health not only for the people, but also for the entire universe. Many communities believe part of their sacred task is to carry their teachings and moral codes forward into the future and preserve them for future generations.



Who are we as peoples? Who are we in the contemporary world? Who will we be in the future? Questions like these arose recently in conferences at Harvard University held by the Honoring Nations program and at the NMAI. Some communities, such as the Hopi, have conducted contests to explore questions of traditional values and visions of the future. Some suggestions made during the conferences were very thoughtful and philosophical. Some said, as in the Haudenosaunee tradition, we are the peoples of the Great Peace. Others said we are the peoples responsible to the seventh generation. Some said we are the peoples who live in spiritual balance with the peoples and powers of the universe. Oren Lyons, Faithkeeper of the Onondaga Nation, said we are the people who bless the earth.

Translating these comments into philosophical language suggests that we are the peoples who bless being. Being is an expression of all that can be said to exist. We are the peoples who bless being or all of existence. By saying we give blessings means that we appreciate, understand, and respect the earth and the universe, both physically and spiritually. We give meaning to being, to the universe, by our self-conscious acts of ceremony, blessings, and respect. This viewpoint differs sharply from some Western philosophical positions known as materialism or nihilism, where the universe is believed to have no significant meaning or purpose for humans.

We can continue on this line of thought by saying we are the peoples who bless becoming. Becoming is the pattern of change and direction of the universe. Becoming is similar to what many Indigenous peoples understand as the Great Spirit. We are the peoples who believe there is a plan and purpose to the unfolding of the universe, or becoming. Individuals are part of the overall becoming of the universe and, therefore, individuals and nations play a role or purpose in the process of becoming.

We are peoples who recognize that being and becoming can be dangerous, out of balance, and in need of healing. Many Native peoples believe that becoming and being are influenced by great tricksters, whether they are the Raven, Coyote, Nanaboozoo, or other trickster characters common to many Native traditions. The antics of tricksters are often the cause of death, disease, and pain, but they also are often creators of hu-



*El conejo y el coyote* (*The Rabbit and the Coyote*), a chamber opera for children based on Zapotec stories and inspired by the artwork of Mexican painter, Francisco Toledo (Zapotec), 2009. Presented in collaboration with the Smithsonian's Discovery Theater for Children, the Smithsonian Latino Initiatives Pool, the Mexican Cultural Institute, and Government of the State of Oaxaca, Mexico.

mans, ceremonies, and social and cultural institutions. Tricksters are both creators and destroyers, and manifestations of social and cultural order and disorder. Trickster stories reflect the uncertainties of life and the future; they teach the folly of personal egotism and disrespect for social-cultural rules and the laws and relations of the universe. In this sense, what is Colonialism, if it is not a great Trickster? What is modernity, if it is not a great Trickster? Who is the God of the Old Testament, if he is not a great Trickster?

We are the peoples who seek to understand and overcome the Tricksters within ourselves, and seek to navigate through the Trickster character of being and becoming. We are the peoples who respect the laws of being and becoming in order to turn the uncertainties of life and the future, the Trickster character of being and becoming, into blessings and well-being. We are the peoples who bless and consecrate being and becoming through ceremony and thanksgiving, community moral order, and individual moral discipline.

An Indigenous museum must engage itself with more than ethnography and markets: it must include the voices and identities of Native peoples and communities. The cultural and moral tasks set forth through teachings and the resulting social and cultural order helps define a people or culture, and helps create understanding of the values and goals that inform both a culture and its social actions. Because culture, community, economy, and politics are closely interrelated in Indigenous communities, identity, values, and goals are often sacred and clearly defined.

A central issue for an international Indigenous museum is to help the world understand more clearly and deeply the diversity, complexity, and continuity of identity and community among Indigenous peoples. Why do many people hold onto Indigenous communities and identities? What are the goals and purposes of Indigenous cultures? How are Indigenous cultures different from non-Indigenous cultural, political, economic, and spiritual forms? Perhaps more importantly, what do Indigenous peoples have to contribute to the contemporary world; how will they accommodate the present world, and continue into the future? Indigenous peoples believe they are relevant to the contemporary world, but most members of the non-Native public probably do not share this view, and have little understanding of Native cultures and communities in contemporary context.

### **Changing Voices**

Mainstream museums often present a static view and understanding of Indigenous cultures and nations. However, such a view does not do justice to the changes and complexities that have taken place over the past five



Hawaiian dance group Hālau I Ka Wēkiu performs in front of the GGHC for the museum's annual Native Sounds Downtown, 2008.

centuries. Much of the change is of a forced character owing to market globalization, the emergence of nation-states, new and competing forms of religion, and worldviews like the scientific method. Like all human groups, Native peoples have responded to changing conditions and relationships. For most Indigenous communities, the conditions for pre-contact economy and society do not exist any more, but like any living culture, changes and adaptations are necessary and will be required in the future.

One of the greatest myths about Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas is that Native peoples do not exist any more. Conditions for preserving Native nations and cultures generally are and have been unsupportive. Nevertheless, many Indigenous communities live in the present, and while changed, maintain cultural, community, and political continuity.

The range of museum coverage for Indigenous peoples should not be restricted to the pre-contact period, or to the ethnographic present; the story must be given in its entirety ranging from time immemorial to the present.

The story of living Indigenous nations and continuing Native voice is the subject matter for a museum like the NMAI. The museum of living

cultures must itself be a living museum, if those terms are not an oxymoron. Many tribal cultures today prefer the term “cultural center” rather than museum, since they want to work in a space where they still tell stories, educate children, and uphold community.

Arguments that the NMAI should have been named the American Indian Holocaust Museum, I think, missed the point. Yes, there have been, and continue to be throughout the Americas, many terrible acts of suppression from colonial regimes. The story of oppression and Native victims, however, is largely the story of colonizing powers, portraying Indigenous peoples as the victims of non-Native history. The stories of Indigenous peoples should come from the peoples themselves—the stories of their struggles, and continuity. In the end, only Native peoples can play an active, central role in the presentation and renewal of their cultures and nations.

Native voices are, in part, the wisdom of the ancestors carried forward to the present. However, it is also the story of how Native peoples have endured and transcended the last 500 years. The story of living cultures and communities is the story the NMAI should tell. It means attending to the diversity of cultures, change under colonial conditions and, in particular, the renewal of Indigenous cultures and communities both nationally and internationally within the Americas. This diversity includes Native philosophies and teachings, as well as creative and culturally informed approaches to managing markets, nation-states, cultural diversity, and struggles to renew autonomy and tribal sovereignty.

The NMAI should see itself as part of the processes of expressing continuing and changing Native voices. This requires active engagement in the processes of cultural change, and construction and reconstruction of Native voices. The NMAI should not sit outside of the processes of cultural change, but must be actively engaged in its expression and continuity. This action might challenge the definition of museum, but in the Native context, such definitions should be broadened to include Native understandings, rather than disregarding them.

## Multiple Audiences

There are many voices in Native communities. A primary purpose of the NMAI is to engage and provide information and education about those voices to the general non-Native public. A message focusing on Native voice most likely will not be comprehensible, at least at first, by the general public. Most non-Natives have incomplete information about Native peoples, and also have beliefs and understandings that are not agreeable to Native understandings. Most visitors to the NMAI often hold stereotypical or Eurocentric understandings of Natives, their cultures, identities, and their present state. These visitors will have preconceptions about what they will see at the NMAI: they will not expect to hear both contemporary and historical expressions of Native voice, and many will reject or feel uncomfortable with the contemporary expression of Native voice. Few non-Natives have time to learn in-depth about Native cultures, and few have direct contact and experience. Most people learn about Native peoples through the media, which has been improving its portrayal and understanding of Native communities over the most recent decades, but can hardly be said to provide a complete understanding of Native issues, histories, or cultures.

I once heard a Native American film director talk about how to hook general public audiences into viewing a work. He said the director and writer must find some common ground with the mythologies, or understandings, that a general audience has about Native Americans. Once finding the common ground, the director can steer the audience toward the views he wants to express.

If, however, in the case of the NMAI, it expresses clear Native voices—ones unfamiliar to the general public—then the museum runs the risk of not sufficiently attracting the interest and attention of its general audiences. The general public may be looking for confirmation of their preconceptions, their own view of the “authentic” Native, and may not be prepared to confront an expression of diverse, changing voices and cultures that form the experiences—and necessarily the expression—of Native peoples.



Juanita Velasco (Ixil Maya) demonstrates how to grind cacao into chocolate for visitors at the NMAI's Power of Chocolate festival, 2009.



The George Leach Band and the Rez Bluez All-Starz, with special guests Corey Harris and the Carolina Chocolate Drops, perform during The Blues: Roots, Branches, and Beyond as part of the Indian Summer Showcase series, 2009.

The presentation of Native voices creates for the NMAI the dilemma of providing a complex and diverse perspective to an audience unprepared and perhaps not willing to listen, or change their understandings. Nevertheless, as much as Native issues are often not well understood, or marginalized, in nation-state cultures, it is exactly this chasm of misunderstanding and absence of consensual ground rules in culture and society that should provide one of the primary education issues for the museum. When presenting Native voices, the audience generally will not share the same historical or cultural understandings as Native peoples. Most museum visitors will choose their own subject matter, and perhaps at best will spend only an afternoon in the museum. In order to attract a steady audience, the exhibits and education must be accessible, entertaining, educational, and probe issues that may challenge the cultural and historical understandings of the visitors. Many people are comfortable with their worldviews, and do not necessarily like to have them challenged.

The problem with multiple audiences is they have multiple visions, goals, and preferred ways of doing things. Within the same organization, community, or nation, there may be multiple visions of the best or right way to proceed or to understand the past, or even to evaluate the goals or ground rules of the group. Often, discussion, voting, or leadership can ameliorate such differences; however, the issues of representing Native voices do not lend themselves to such straightforward solution. There are many Native voices, certainly thousands of communities in the Americas, and there are numerous non-Indigenous cultures and historical interpretations.

The diversity of Native cultures—one of the lessons of the NMAI—is one major issue; but the differences between Native cultures and Western cultures, or nation-state cultures rooted in Western understandings, present even more difficulties. Native voices include moral lifeways and understandings of human and non-human relations that do not conform to Western secular or religious views or understandings. The significant absence of common cultural ground and common social political rules sets the stage for significantly differing interpretations of history as well as future possibilities.



The NMAI occupies a place that is sanctioned by both the U.S. government and the population of the United States to bring the history and culture of Native peoples to the general public, and is meant to give respect to, and to honor Native peoples. At the same time, from the point of view of Indigenous peoples themselves, the value and success of the NMAI will depend on how well Native voices are understood, represented, and, if necessary, defended.

As a public institution created to serve the general good, the NMAI cannot solely advocate Native visions and understandings. Rather, the NMAI has the task of fostering the development of common ground and understanding between cultures and peoples who often do not understand each other very well. Unlike the movie or television industry, Native peoples should have significant influence over images and narratives told at the NMAI. Consequently, a path toward greater understanding about and respect for contemporary and historical Indigenous communities is more likely in an environment where Native voices can be heard, and where non-Indigenous peoples are respectfully invited to share some of the wisdom, knowledge, and history of Native peoples. The NMAI needs not only to assist in the renewal and representation of Native cultures and voices, but should also engage the non-Indigenous world and peoples in a dialogue leading to greater mutual understanding that builds ground rules for consensual relations that recognize Indigenous peoples as part of any long-term future.

The NMAI may have to resort to the techniques of mass media by finding some common ground to start, or perhaps to start on the ground that the audience understands about Natives and Native voices. Once starting at a place where there is at least some common understanding, or apparent understanding, then the techniques of storytelling can provide entertainment, as well as a journey of learning for the audience.

As in the movie industry, the audience wants to be entertained, perhaps educated, or even challenged, but on grounds that are both comfortable and enlightening. The techniques for teaching broad audiences must be familiar to that audience, at least at the start, and then the audience will

want to take a measured trip into the exotic. Perhaps this comment suggests a marriage of Disneyland and Native voices, but one that expresses the living cultures and voices of Native peoples. Disneyland often keys on Native issues, but mainly through the common stereotypes of Indigenous people as primitive and savage other. Unfortunately, Disneyland is very successful with this imagery, possibly because the general public shares it or is easily engaged in the imagery of Native as savage, or in some cases as Noble Savage. In the past, and perhaps still in the present, for most museums and Disneyland, the exotic quality is presented by the physical and normative strangeness of Indigenous cultures. However, the starting point is to gain access to the common understandings or mythologies of the audience, and, then, provide a pathway that provides greater understanding of Native voices, histories, and cultures, as well as an appreciation of contemporary Native life and future presence.

The NMAI is one major stage for the presentation of Indigenous voices in a challenging, entertaining, and educative manner that will express Native voices, but at the same time give greater understanding of Indigenous voices, cultures, and continuity to millions of visitors.

### **The NMAI as a Sacred Place**

The NMAI opened in 2004 to much celebration and ceremony. The building was blessed and initiated as a sacred place. However, sacred places are in need of periodic ceremonial renewal and should be honored with respect and given meaning through teachings to the peoples.

The NMAI is a place where Indigenous cultures and histories can be shown to many audiences. There are many aspects of the cultures and histories from North and South American Indigenous nations that will be shown. One shared theme among diverse Indigenous nations is the sacredness of life and teachings about how to live in and understand the world. The NMAI will help many Indigenous nations recover and renew their cultures, histories, and teachings. But the NMAI is not an institution only for Indigenous peoples; it will present exhibits to millions of non-Native visitors every year. Most visitors will visit the NMAI perhaps

only once and for a brief period. What can you teach a visitor, Native and non-Native, in such a short time?

If there is anything that we should teach people on their brief visits, it is the message of the sacred interpretation of the world. If the NMAI is a sacred place, it must be a living sacred place that continues to teach and uphold a sacred way of living and understanding. Teaching a sacred way of life is often done by example, through ceremony, and by teachings from community members, elders, and spiritual leaders. A sacred place must be honored and due respect given on a daily or cyclical basis.

If we are to teach something meaningful to non-Native visitors, we need to do that by example and by words of wisdom and through teachings that give advice and insight into the ways of the Native world. Many Indigenous philosophies suggest that individuals should take responsibility for their own lives, their family, community, and for giving thanks through ceremonies for the blessings of life.

The NMAI should be a sacred place for all peoples, not only for Indigenous peoples. If we are to teach a sacred way by example, then visitors and Indigenous peoples need to see the sacred vision through the activities and teachings within the NMAI. How can this be done in a meaningful way? There should be a regular cycle of ceremonies held at the NMAI. Tribal communities should be invited to give blessings at the NMAI on a regular basis. Every day, some ceremonies or blessings, such as smudging, should be performed at the NMAI and should be available to visitors at the NMAI. Perhaps only ceremonies that Indigenous communities are willing to share with the general public can be allowed for the public. Ceremonies of welcome and thanksgiving to visitors are appropriate in most Indigenous cultures. When a visitor arrives at a sacred place, the visitor is on a sacred pilgrimage. The meaning of the blessings should be explained to participants. Participating in a blessing ceremony is an unusual experience for most non-Natives, and will be a memorable and, hopefully, cherished memory. When non-Native visitors visit the NMAI we must treat them as guests who come to a sacred place to learn something about the wisdom and teachings of our Indigenous cultures. We must honor the guests, and share something of our sacred understanding of life. Visitors



The Mountain Spirit Dancers from Arizona's White Mountain Apache Reservation perform to honor trees brought from their home territory to Washington, D.C., for the Christmas holidays, 2009.

need to have an extraordinary experience, one that teaches them some of the philosophical beliefs and understandings of Native life, and a way to help to understand the exhibits in a deeper experiential way—in a way to help cross the differences of Indigenous and Western lifeways.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Presenting Native voices in a museum challenges the usual modes of museum presentation. Native voices are often not understood, or are marginalized within the presentation of Native cultures and communities by the museum world. The diversity of Native voices, the changing patterns of Native voices, the contemporary and future challenges to Native voices and cultures, as well as the general lack of understanding of Native peoples and voices in the general public, all combine to produce challenging issues.

The museum world may not highly value a central focus on Native voices, and devalue the Native voices project within the NMAI. However, for Native peoples, the NMAI's presentation of Native voices may be its most important and central feature. For Native peoples, the success of the NMAI may well be evaluated primarily on its effective presentation and facilitation of Native voices, not only about the past and present, but also to the extent that the NMAI participates in the processes that help shape Native voices and cultures well into the future.

IMAGE NOT AVAILABLE

GERALD McMASTER

## 2020: CREATING A NEW VISION FOR NATIVE VOICE

Following its celebrated opening on the National Mall in 2004, the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian also opened its doors to a variety of appraisals: some constructive, some brutally critical. Such points of debate included scholarship, viewpoint, art, history, anthropology, and stereotypes.

Critics had a field day.

Nobody appreciates criticism, especially institutions. Somehow we feel we're not holding up to particular standards or acceptable practices. Criticism can be devastating; yet it can provide unexpected and welcoming perspectives. When we think of criticism we most often confuse it with fault-finding, nit-picking, and judgmental remarks. Think of our parents and teachers, who labored long on correcting our behavior. We might find that we're usually quick to respond with equal aplomb that the critic just doesn't understand or gets it right. I'm going to suggest, however, that we acknowledge these criticisms but with some skepticism. I'm also going to ask that we view criticism as something that aims to getting far deeper into issues than the average museum-goers who might offer only superficial criticism. I want to treat many of these criticisms as earnest efforts by those trying to get at some deep-rooted idea.

Today, several years later, I would like to address issues surrounding the public face of the museum and the method of thinking behind the original approach. Let me first ask this question: Can the National Museum of the



American Indian take control of the discourse that throughout history has created sparing information, misinformation, or just plain untruths? I need not go into museological history to show you how museums have historically represented Native Americans. Instead, I want to argue that we need to continue working within and against the mainstream discourse while still holding fast to our original proposal. Therefore, I say the public face of the National Museum of the American Indian should focus its energy not on seeing itself as a site of resistance; rather, as a site of articulation. In other words, we should not shy away from criticism but take it on as a way to move to the next level.

Circling the wagons was never an Indian thing; rather, our position should continue to be, as it always was, of astuteness, resourcefulness, and creativity. The public face of the museum needs critical reviews no matter how positive or negative; if they're good, then we know we're on the right track or our messages are being understood; if they're negative, then we need to regroup to strengthen our strategies. No matter what the outcome, we must always question our output with a view to improvement.

## Voice

What was it that rankled critics? Collectively, they could not decide whether the museum was presenting art, history, or anthropology. All along, the National Museum of the American Indian said it was all of the above, and more, with none having an emphasis over the other. Too long anthropology has controlled the Native American voice in a kind of ventriloquistic fashion. Similarly, art historians treated Native American objects in formalist terms as art, silencing the Native American voice or rendering it silent. Even more profound is our contribution to history, which is always condemned to the first chapter of or prologue to mainstream American history and, thereafter, completely invisible.

I would argue, then, that *voice* was the lightning rod that came to the forefront. Critics quickly assumed the Native voice had completely supplanted the non-Native. It is the Native voice that goes to the core of the museum's public face.



As a reminder, the mandate of the National Museum of the American Indian reads: “to recognize and affirm the historical and contemporary cultural achievements of Natives of the Western Hemisphere by advancing knowledge and understanding of Native cultures, including art, history, and language.” Why are the disciplines of anthropology or archaeology absent? It is assumed they are so imbedded within the discursive framework that the NMAI needed to engender a major shift to a more multi-disciplinary dimension. In doing so, the NMAI has realized a need for a museological approach expressed *through the Native voice* as its contribution to this new articulation.

In 1994, *New York Times* critic Holland Cotter recognized the importance of Native voice in one of the NMAI’s inaugural exhibitions: “Fortunately, the often eloquent voices of American Indians are heard in the second exhibition, *All Roads Are Good*, which consisted of personal selections from the museum’s holdings by Native guest curators.” His adjective, “eloquent,” needs to be noted here. Then in 2004, Philip Jenkins, distinguished professor of history and religious studies at Pennsylvania State University said, “[We can] understand why the museum’s authorities have the particular concerns and enthusiasms they do—namely a categorical insistence on Indian authenticity, on the predominance of Indian voice.” Jenkins also saw the importance of the Native viewpoint taking control. He continued, “Throughout, the museum asserts that Native peoples wish to be seen as a vibrant living tradition, who have the ability to tell their own story in their own voices, who wish above all to celebrate their ‘survivance’ through a half-millennium of encounters with European civilization.”

What *is* this predominant or eloquent Native voice, also referred to as tribal, Indian, first-person voice? Discussions of Native art, history, and culture have been dominated for many years by non-Native people. But the emergence of a cadre of Native scholars and museum curators, coupled with a resurgence of pride and identity in Native communities, and increase in the interest in Native art markets, has transformed the intellectual landscape. Today, Indigenous peoples throughout the Ameri-



The Tapirapé of Brazil is one of eight communities featured in the *Our Peoples* exhibition.

cas are writing and speaking about the Native past, present, and future, offering new perspectives on the Native universe and all that is in it.

Native voice shaped the content, look, and feel of every NMAI opening exhibition. All galleries were planned and developed in collaboration with members of twenty-four Native communities from Alaska to Chile. It was Native community members who decided what stories would be told, what objects would be displayed, and how each exhibition would look. As a result, visitors encounter a plethora of perspectives—even conflicting voices from the same tribe. The criticism from the visitor and critic was that this approach was confusing and unsettling. We failed to think about the “less is more” approach, a tactic that’s even more critical in such a cramped space as the museum. We’re not alone in this, as most museums that present Native American objects tend to over-determine their approach to presentation.



Artist James Luna (Puyukitchum [Luisiño]) stands in front of a photo of his work *The Artifact Piece* in the *Our Lives* exhibition, 2005.

Despite these early flaws, how can the Native voice continue providing new perspectives on well-researched subjects such as art, history, anthropology, archaeology, and linguistics? The Native voice is embodied by seven ideas: *subject*, *multivocality*, *empowerment*, *authority*, *representation*, *perspective*, and *visuality*.

*Voice as subject*: For many years, Native peoples were seen as minors who had no voice of their own and no way to articulate subjective experience. This attitude pervaded museums, in which non-Native “experts” spoke for Native peoples. NMAI is committed to undoing this tradition, transforming Native peoples into active subjects who are fully capable of representing themselves.

I would like to note the American artist James Luna’s now well-quoted performance work called the *Artifact Piece*, performed at the San Diego Museum in Southern California in 1987–88, where he used his body as object. For me, his work did at least two things: First, he understood the

Indian body politic and how it was historically treated by museums (and galleries) up until then. Almost like the old Plains Indian Lakota Sundance rituals, Luna sacrificed his body. In some ways, this performance was akin to an earlier work by American performance artist Chris Burden, whose outrageous performances included one in which he crucified himself to the back of a Volkswagen. In Burden's and other performance artists' works, it seemed the threshold of physical pain was the objective; for James Luna, it was the emotional pain of hundreds of years of injustice and treatment to the Indian body politic. His wasn't done for an art audience—which much of contemporary art is intended—though it was a performance piece. His audience was everyday visitors to a science museum whose objects of study are non-Western cultures, including the plant and animal world.

Second, and just as important, this work has risen to an iconic level, in which it is perceived to have given voice to Native peoples. His simple yet emotional performance created an intellectual shift where Native peoples were to be subjected to objectification and spoken for or treated in third-person. Native peoples were now saying: "We're here; we've survived; and we've contributed." They were saying they were now to be treated on an equal basis as first persons or subjects. How did Luna's performance piece do this, you ask? Quite simply: he woke up, stepped out of the vitrine he was lying in, and walked out—much to the surprise of those who happened to be standing nearby absent-mindedly gazing, amnesiac-like, at a supposedly dead Indian body.

There were other moments during this time too numerous to point out for my purposes. The point I want to make is that a new era had arrived—at least in the museum world—where Native peoples had begun to be heard.

*Voice as multivocality.* Western-trained scholars have typically been the voices of authority in exhibitions about Native peoples. At the NMAI, we challenged the notion of a single, authoritative voice by empowering multiple voices. In this scenario, there are many voices, or consciousnesses, some competing, some similar—yet all distinctively Native.

In a country such as Canada, there are fifty-three different aboriginal languages spoken. As we know from studies on language, language is our access to the world. It is how we make sense and meaning of the world around us. Imagine, if you will, fifty-three different worlds and perhaps hundreds of more dialects in Canada alone; it is mind-boggling. Now, multiply this approximately 700 times and you'll see a far greater and complex picture of the Indigenous Americas, and what we had to confront at the NMAI as we embarked on a new type of museum practice—one in which we had to acknowledge and then break free from the lone authoritative museum voice that was usually the anthropologist. In many instances, the anthropological voice is still quite influential. For me, I have always advocated that anthropologists do not have a monopoly on the subject of Native art, history, or culture; rather, museums should look for experts in history, art, philosophy, Native studies, or other sciences.

Perhaps cacophonous, the most important aspect of foregrounding or advocating Native voice is that its speakers are able to make their objects come alive, to speak to them in a first-person voice, a dialogue that hasn't been heard in over a hundred years. While the scholarly voice is important and should not be denied, having aboriginal people speak through their language allows everyone access to an unimaginable world.

With twenty-four<sup>1</sup> different communities, we had twenty-four different perspectives, which to visitors may have sounded cacophonous, but it was a thing of beauty.

*Voice as empowerment:* In recent years, Indigenous people have claimed the right to articulate their own philosophies, histories, and identities. These voices do not displace older, non-Native voices of authority but offer creative—and sometimes disorienting—alternative perspectives on how we see the world. Empowering these multiple, complex voices is part of the NMAI's mission.

Take a look at Internet sites today and you'll see that aboriginal tribes and communities want to tell who they are in a very prideful way, but they're also saying that they are controlling the messages of who they are.



Portraits of contemporary Native people greet visitors as they enter the *Our Lives* gallery.

In the museum or gallery context, we can also see that with empowerment comes not only a healthy relationship, but also a better or truer articulation and understanding of those cultures than in previous times when Native peoples would have been perceived as stoic. Rather, they were more cautious in working with outsiders because of the perceptions that they were to blame for their predicament.

This scenario of empowerment allows all communities to take control of their messages; so, for example, if a community wanted to display sacred or sensitive objects, they did so, thereby nipping in the bud cries from outsiders (including museum folk) that sacrilege was being performed. As we saw it, it was their material and they had every right to do whatever they wanted. They had the authority. This leads me to the next point: voice as authority.

*Voice as authority:* The NMAI recognizes Native cultural authority and works with Native communities to ensure that the focus and content of its exhibitions are shaped by it. At its opening, the NMAI was at the forefront of this movement; historically, other institutions would regularly engage non-Native perspectives thereby filtering, synthesizing, and articulating Indigenous points of view.

A synonym for authority is “agency,” a more difficult concept, nevertheless, equally powerful in understanding that voice isn’t just given easily; rather, it is struggled over and gained through negotiation.

Surely, this is a contested subject. Let me tell you a story of one community that was threatening to pull out of the entire process. I cannot recall the details of the issues that led to this decision; for the museum, however, we sent the museum director, some staff, and me to try to influence them to change their position and return.

Part of the entire process was for the NMAI to rely on scholars (both Native and non-Native) to help us gain access to the communities. So, when we were meeting with this Latin American Native community, one of them said that they would have to check with the white scholar they had been working with; basically, they were seeking scholarly approval. At that point I jumped in and said they didn’t need to do this. They were quite surprised by my intervention as they had been used to seeking approval from the scholar or outside authority. I said to them their authority should never come from scholars, white or Native; rather, they already had authority that was given to them by their culture/community. A university gives a scholar’s authority to them. I said to them that they know their history and how to tell it, that they spoke the language, and that their tribal history was passed on to them; so, authority to tell stories has already been conferred upon them by their culture and their community.

All of a sudden, it was like watching a time-lapse photographic moment of a flower bloom. They reacted as if a terrible weight of control had been lifted from their shoulders. Everything changed. They returned to the project and created a powerful exhibition.

*Voice as representation:* Native voice speaks directly to the ways Indigenous

peoples are presented, depicted, and portrayed in institutional spaces, such as museums. Today, many tribes are taking ownership of how their people and their objects are presented. The NMAI provides a forum for Native self-representation, for new views and perspectives that challenge common stereotypes or displace the authoritative voice of the non-Indian expert. At the same time, the Museum distinguishes between self-representation and political posturing, embracing the former and rejecting the latter.

This idea works on many levels, however, let me use it in two ways: representation and re-representation.

The first instance addresses historical practice in that Native peoples were always the subjects of European or Euro-American discourse that controlled how Native peoples were to be represented to non-Natives. For example, Native peoples were either “savages,” “guardians of nature,” or “vanishing”; as well, we were always temporally located in some distant past, before the arrival of Europeans. Indeed, museums and galleries still do this where there’s a complete denial of 10,000 years of visual history: it’s as if the historical trajectory could only have begun in Europe and run via Canada, the U.S., New Zealand, or Australia over the last 500 years. So I ask: How can these countries claim an art history that’s only partial? My point is that a colonial country hasn’t fully matured until it recognizes or fully represents itself to others, its true past—warts and all.

The second instance of representation or re-representation is more about now, in which there’s a shift of looking at self in a mature manner. By this I mean that the playing field has been leveled out, where Native peoples need to be allowed to take baby steps in presenting new ideas and approaches. In this way, we will always be equal partners.

*Voice as perspective:* Voice is a point of view, a perspective. At the NMAI, empowering the Native voice means offering a different perspective, another facet in the ever-growing complexity of how we see the world. In many cases, the Indigenous voice reflects the lived experience of a people; in other cases, the Indigenous voice can facilitate a new reading or comparative view of the same subject. Such perspectives are not pre-rehearsed “lines” or doctrinaire beliefs, but are powerful and creative interpreta-



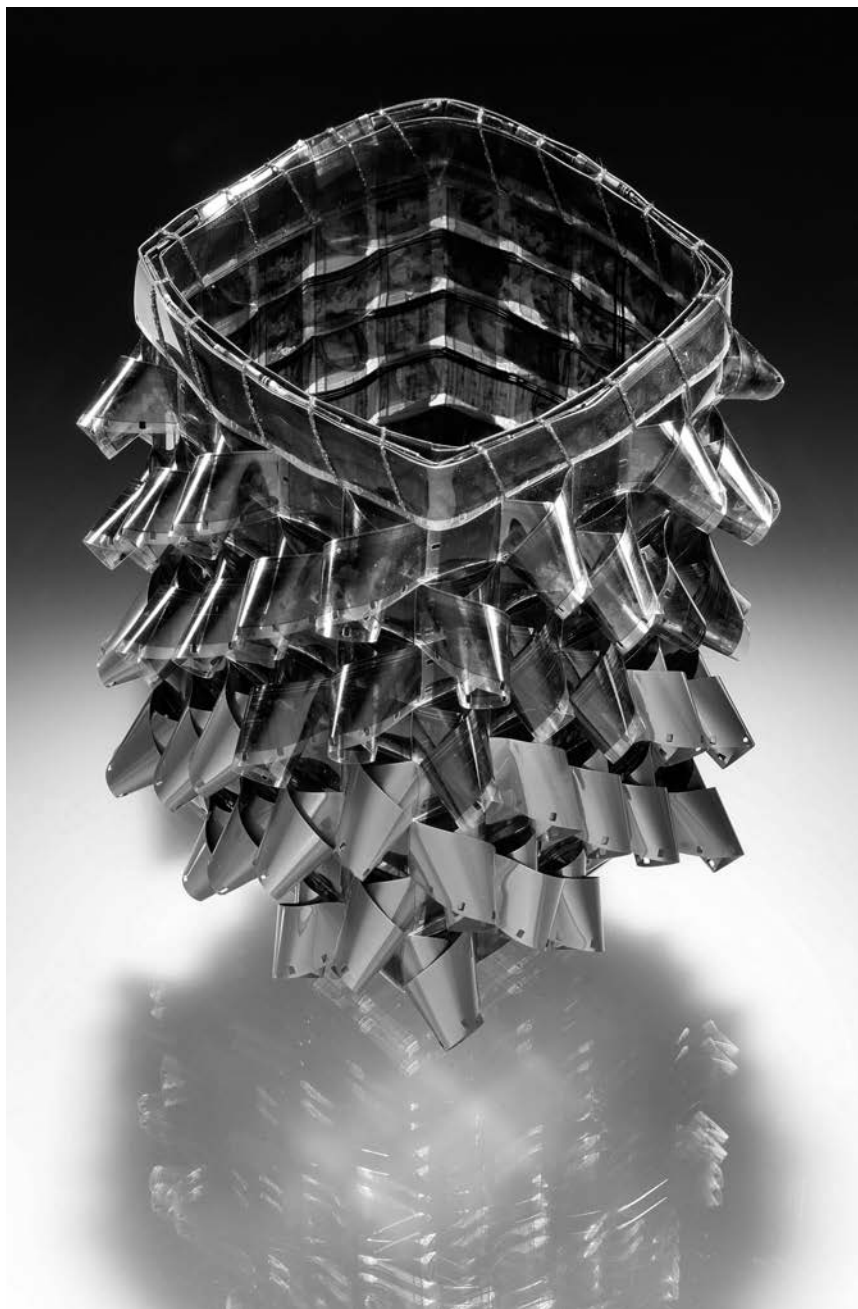
tions of Native philosophy, history, and identity. For example, traditional museums might present a Native object as a commodity, artifact, specimen, heirloom, *objet d'art*, treasured cultural heritage, or as a sacred emblem. At the NMAI, the perspective of the original owners or makers is privileged, emphasizing what such objects mean to them—and what it means to Native people today. That perspective sheds new light on the object, revealing how its meaning was constructed by Native peoples then reconstructed and transformed over time by non-Natives.

It was previously thought that aboriginal peoples would be presenting a revisionist view of history, thought, and art. This hasn't happened; instead, we have come to know a more articulate, if not, profound understanding of the complexities of the aboriginal mind. The scholarly or Western views and perspectives have not been displaced—maybe they've been severely critiqued—but never have aboriginal peoples asked they be done away with. Instead, they ask that all views be put into perspective, realizing that our own cultural lens conditions us all, none any better or worse, only different.

*Voice as visibility:* Finally, if perspective concerns abstract ideas, visibility is inextricably linked to the visible and tangible. By encouraging visitors to view each object as expressions of Native thinking, the NMAI will go a long way toward presenting new perspectives on the cultural meaning and presentation of our rich collections.

There is a story of a northern California basket-maker who was teaching a class of non-Native students how to make baskets. Over several days the students were subjected to singing songs—songs to place, songs for gathering, songs to certain spirits, and so on. The students were getting very bored and impatient with her tactics and asked her when they'd be making baskets. She responded by saying that not until they had learned all the songs, because, as she said, "baskets are songs made visible." One wonders if the students understood.

Why do I like this story? What happens when you lose the songs? You lose access to an intellectual tradition, the traditional knowledge and understanding of the complexities of creation. Remember my earlier argument of



Gail Tremblay (Onondaga/Mi'kmaq, b. 1945), *Strawberry and Chocolate*, 2000.  
16mm film and fullcoat, 22.9 cm. 25/7273

how aboriginal people turned objects into subjects, third person into first person? The same is true in this instance. For so long baskets and countless other cultural property have remained lifeless in museums around the world because the people were made to forget the songs, until what was left was only the object. This is the paradox that remains with those of us who work in museums of art where the object is paramount. In art museums, we ask an object only to remain ambiguous so that our audiences can interpret it any way they wish. There is still a long way to educating or transforming museum goers on how to view aboriginal visual culture.

One of the approaches developed by the NMAI in the complex five-stage process of working with communities was for them to design the exhibitions. Where this approach seemed to pay off was in the philosophy section because communities were able to base their visual frame of reference on their cosmology—of how they saw the world. Some saw the world in a circle or bowl, others in binary terms, and still others from the four directions or the home. In the history exhibitions, aboriginal histories were presented as either a chronology of events or in an ever-recurring pattern of events where the past is always present. The communities always argued that if their people were to come see the exhibitions, they should be able to immediately discern them.

The old Boasian contextual, taxonomic, or even purely aesthetic presentations are now history; in its place is a view of the world refreshing and totally unexpected, something I would say approaches a “tribal visuality.”

Now that I’ve laid down the complexity of voice, let me see if it can be tested against the criticisms, particularly the area of scholarship.

### **Criticism**

The most impassioned criticism was that the National Museum of the American Indian exhibitions lacked scholarship. Successive critics used code words to indicate that the Native voice may lack in-depth and historic scholarship, which leads me to ask: What is scholarship and who practices it? Generally, scholarship is defined as a body of principles and practices used by scholars to make their claims about the world as valid



The *Our Universes* gallery.

and trustworthy as possible, and to make them known to the scholarly public. At present, scholarship is largely the domain of professional specialists, most of whom work as academics in universities, research institutes, and museums; scholarship is knowledge gained through study and research. In the article “Scholarship in the 21st Century,” the authors argue scholars are those who “reflect on the subject of the scholarship to produce knowledge . . . [and a] scholar communicates the product of reflection to a broader community of peers.”<sup>2</sup>

If scholars trust the facts because they come from the original source, why do critics challenge the validity of the sources if the NMAI was careful in having tribal historians tell the stories? True, they weren’t at the original event when it happened, but often the tribal historians are tell-



An exhibition panel in *Our Lives* displays headdresses from various Latin American communities.

ing us what they have inherited, orally, from other tribal historians. The museum gave them the opportunity to present their history. If we needed their voice “mediated” by university trained Native or non-Native scholars, then we would’ve done so, but that was contrary to the mission of the museum we had pledged to and respected. The history of museums, especially anthropology museums, is that the Native voice has always been mediated, which gets at the crux of one issue of “authority.”

In the original opening exhibitions, indeed, we didn’t ask that their facts always be checked, which is a historian’s practice, although the museum staff worked closely with either the tribal historians or collaborating scholars. The tribal historians were not asked to come up with important generalizations about their historical views or the circumstances of their occurrences; this was the role of the NMAI curators, who did essentially just this in the central spines of the exhibitions. These spines operated to point out overarching ideas that affected most, if not all, Native peoples, while the tribal exhibitions focused on local history. In the estimation of the museum, we

never took the view that the tribal historians were interpreting the historical events, but rather telling them as they had been passed on to them. True, the tribal historians did not cite other tribal historians, nor did they point out if their views differed from other tribal views, but even in academia the recourse to cite others can bring into question the authority of the citation. We simply presented the viewpoint of a community representative, our particular chosen source of authority.

Scholars seek accepted historic truth. (Beyond dates, times, and language groups, what is truth but another historic view? Take as an example world maps of the 1400s, and even the 1800s, where the images of the Caribbean islands are larger than most states.) I don't think we isolated tribal scholars on their own historic view. Though truth seems to be the criticism leveled against the NMAI, it is not the first or the last institution where truth claims will be challenged. Every institution is constantly under watch and more often than not such a challenge is waged. So to say scholarship is lacking is almost to suggest that Native or tribal scholars are not to be trusted or the authority of Native voice is to be questioned. We can and should acknowledge that within tribal communities differences of opinion have always and continue to exist. How, then, does the museum ensure the public understands the contentious nature of voice even within Native communities? One way is to provide some sort of public forum to be able to dig deeper into various issues and ideas as a further dimension of multivocality. Whether debate or dialogue, I would argue that forum should be a principle of the museum. The museum as a Native place is recognized as a safe space, but we should also consider it as a place of truth-seeking.

Bias is another critical point that needs unpacking, in that the underlying assumption that Native voice is too biased and therefore any truth claims cannot be supported by others is somewhat bogus. Surely, if the tribal historians were found to be biased, would they be respected as tribal historians, or would they, like historians in mainstream society, be tossed out of their profession? It should be recognized that honesty is another principle to being a historian. Tribal historians recognized locally and/or

trained as tribal historians did not go over well with critics who view the authority of traditional Western scholarship as data collection, synthesis, analysis, and so on as the final arbiter.

*New York Times* critic Edward Rothstein references another show to get at his point: “The major question about Machu Picchu has not been who speaks for its past, but what that past actually was.” Rothstein does not want to see how present-day voices interpret the past; instead, he feels it is fine to insert oneself immediately into the past, to understand the historical moment, which is the general museological or historical approach. The NMAI thinking is that having contemporary voices reveals how important the past is to people in the present; as well, it shows not just an ancient past that is distant and far removed but that we can inhabit and give meaning to the objects on display. In other words, we know we cannot occupy a historical space so, instead, we ask what do these historical objects and ideas mean to you. The danger in only viewing the past is that one can run the risk of re-enactment, which can be entertaining but also misleading. Yet, for Rothstein and many others such as him, “It is not a matter of whose voice is heard. It is a matter of detail, qualification, nuance, and context. It is a matter of scholarship.”

Returning to Luna’s well-documented work, *The Artifact Piece* makes the point that contemporary artists have been forerunners in the counter critique. We recall him laying on his back on a bed of cool sand with eyes closed, listening to people around him, many of whom are talking about him in third person. He remains very still, not wanting to give away that he hears them. He doesn’t acknowledge them but, instead, continues to keep his eyes closed. He lies there for some time, pissed off at what some people say about him, yet he remains unresponsive. Finally, he wakes after having fallen asleep; his back aching, he opens his eyes. He decides to get up and move around. He surprises those who are near; they gasp; he shocks them; he leaves. This work represents the new type of Native artist using performance art and *Native voice* to challenge the representation, authority, perspective, and visibility of Native peoples in museums; as well, it puts up a mirror for us to look into and question these received ideas.

Clearly, Rothstein set up an ideological dichotomy of whose approach is better. But it must be acknowledged that the scholarships are different; we're not saying the NMAI's is any better, only different. Most critics argue the NMAI should fall in line with well-trodden approaches. If we had gone this route, we could not have asked the viewer—Native and non-Native—to understand that we all examine and interpret the past through the eyes of the present. To this end, we wanted to avoid the view that Native people live only in the past, often referred to as a discourse of the past.

Perhaps these intellectuals' shift in scholarly voice and the way the NMAI presents new ways of seeing the world has had new adherents. For example, New York Times art critic Holland Cotter speaking about the *Listening to our Ancestors: The Art of Native Life along the North Pacific Coast* exhibition said: "Many critics had complaints about the inaugural installations. I did. I was looking for an art museum, and what I found was something different. In its permanent home on the Mall, where it opened last year, the museum has sustained its rethought identity. And I have become more comfortable with that identity. I still have gripes, but my expectations have changed. For one thing, I've seen that when the revised model works, it really works, as it does in the Pacific Coast show."

Despite Cotter's revealing position, did the media's doubt impact the public face of the museum? This is difficult to say since attendance numbers for any Indian museum are, more often than not, very low; so to see NMAI visitorship registering over a million already says something about its potential. Comparatively speaking, we could look at other Smithsonian museums on the National Mall and say that the NMAI's numbers are way down. If we compare the NMAI's attendance to other similar types of museums, we might say the numbers are quite impressive. True, our projections before opening were overly optimistic, as they were usually based on numbers from Mall visitorship. So to say our numbers have decreased dramatically is perhaps misleading; but that our present numbers are more realistic.

Furthermore, should we view the success of any museum solely in terms of attendance? We are told the National Museum of the Ameri-





A student at the University of Azuay, Cuenca, Ecuador, collaborates with a Cañari community member to develop a touchscreen exhibit on Cañari culture, 2005.

can Indian is more than a museum. True, there is the “Fourth Museum” concept that delivers programs to communities all across the Americas. In this regard, we might do more than any other museum on the Mall or in the United States. Nevertheless, the public face of the museum continues to be a major factor.

Finally, this leads me to ask: Is it time for this museum to reconsider itself, and possibly move toward a new and refined iteration of Native voice? My answer is yes; however, it’s not wholly predicated on any of the criticisms that I outlined, but rather on the fact that the National Museum of the American Indian is a living museum, or as founding director Rick West often stated, “a Museum Different.” Think for a moment of the dusty dioramas at museums of natural history where Native American cultures have been captured and “cryogenized.” They still exist. It’s no wonder the average American continues to think Native Americans ex-

isted only in the past, living only in tipis and igloos, not in the three-piece suits of our founding director.

When I curated *First American Art: The Charles and Valerie Diker Collection of American Indian Art*, I wrote: “Our premise . . . is to strip away preconceived notions and previous work and return to the object—unfettered and unaltered—to the texts of its original making. . . . We have sought throughout the project . . . to re-establish or uncover existing systems, placing aside other understandings. If we can stand next to the artist and his or her original intent, then our appreciations grow exponentially. We will then have better and more complete insights into other cultures and their histories, identities, and philosophies. . . . The exhibition and catalogue should, therefore, be understood as part of a conversation with Native art and artists across time and space at the center of which is the issue of Indigenous intellectualism about aesthetics.”

To conclude, I remember back in 1992, just after I first met Rick West, I curated an exhibition called *Indigena: Contemporary Native Perspectives*, in which I brought together Native voices for the first time anywhere without the filter of others. We demanded such an approach and it was respected. At times, the voices were so strident that the mostly non-Native audience, who were already quite empathetic, were astonished. Yet, the point was made that Native artists and writers are able to represent themselves in an articulate and eloquent way; indeed, that exhibition continues to be studied in universities for what it represented. My point is this: in 2004 we presented the Native voice as a paradigm shift in museology.

The Native voice is an evolving idea—one that needs constant articulation until it is heard. The National Museum of the American Indian needs to move forward with flexibility and an open mind that appreciates the creative energy that can come from criticism. It must be open to seeing the synergy that can come from widening the multivocality of the Native voice; and, in order to maintain success, it must be ready to refine its message whenever possible so that visitors come to a clearer understanding of the significance of the Native voice in the twenty-first century.



FREDERICK E. HOXIE

## THE CONVICTION OF THINGS NOT SEEN: INTELLECTUAL AUTHORITY AND THE NMAI

My assignment today is to discuss the NMAI’s “intellectual authority.” This is a difficult task because it is probably not obvious to everyone what such an “authority” is and—more important—whether this “intellectual authority” is something the NMAI should aspire to in the first place. Leaving aside for the moment the question of the desirability of the NMAI exercising “intellectual authority,” let us focus first on some definitions.

The intellectual authority of an institution is the product of its intellectual work. Intellectual work produces intellectual authority. There are two aspects to the intellectual work of great institutions like the Smithsonian or the NMAI: participation in a process, and the establishment of a “place” where that process occurs.

First, process. Museums—like libraries, universities, and other cultural institutions don’t make “things;” they engage in activities that make “ideas.” New ideas contribute to public conversations, expand knowledge, and help create a civil society. These conversations involve discussion and debate; such exchanges expand awareness, distribute new information, generate new insights, and stimulate further discussion. Ideally, this *ongoing* process involves a combination of professional academics—professors, curators, researchers of various kinds—special constituencies—in our case, Native peoples or members of a particular tribe—and the general



Louise Thundercloud poses a question to panelists during the *IndiVisible: African-Native American Lives in the Americas* symposium, 2009.

public. In a perfect world, this process produces both intellectual energy and a general increase in a society's wisdom and collective mental health.

Second, place. Cultural institutions like this museum create spaces where serious and challenging conversations about ideas can occur. Creating those spaces requires a physical location, but it also requires a commitment to a set of core values that will sustain and protect conversations that generate criticism and resistance. Again, we are in the realm of the invisible, for a secure common ground—a place—requires a firm commitment to the intellectual enterprise. Among the values that will strengthen that commitment are a belief in literacy (verbal, visual, cultural), an open attitude to curiosity and unsettling questions, support for scholarly rigor, and a willingness to be inclusive.

The intellectual authority of this institution thus rests on work that is intangible, on work that has no easily measured outcome or easily defined characteristics. The two aspects of our intellectual work—the process and the place—are really created and sustained by an invisible force. There is no better name for that force than faith.



Guest panelists discuss the exhibition and book *IndiVisible: African-Native American Lives in the Americas*. (Left to right) Kevin Gover, Penny Gamble-Williams (Chappaquiddick Wampanoag), Robert Keith Collins (African and Choctaw descent), Tiya Miles, Angela Gonzales (Hopi), Judy Kertész and Rex M. Ellis, from the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Ultimately, our intellectual work rests on the faith that both the process of discussion and the protected space where that discussion occurs serve a vital public end and will save a society from hatred, division, and foolishness. St. Paul called faith “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews II:1). Paul’s words remind us that our largest intellectual goals lie beyond any single conversation or exhibit or symposium. We measure our intellectual authority by the work we do; and we measure the value of our work by assessing the extent to which it ennobles the society that sustains us. We exercise “authority,” then, by keeping—and spreading—a faith in our conversations and our ideas—in “things not seen.” Popular exhibits, beautiful publications, and entertaining programs will only bring the museum “intellectual authority” if they inspire meaningful conversations, expand the space for reflection and debate, and enrich the cultural life of the communities it serves.

My point here is a simple one: there is a difference between being popular and exercising intellectual authority.

Having spent many years in the academic world, I would be the first to admit that “experts” don’t always—or typically—engage in socially meaningful discussions. Self-interest and vanity regularly surface in our conversations and drive them off course. And of course all cultural institutions—especially this one—must face the job of saving themselves—fiscally and politically—while they also struggle to save the world. The model I have sketched is an ideal one and none of us lives in an ideal world.

Still, successful institutions—institutions that create conversations and make places that ennoble the societies around them—pick their way through the demands of the moment, overcome the failings of scholars, and create spaces where a new vision of the world is possible. That, in sum, is our faith. The question for today, then is, “How well are we keeping and spreading that faith?”

I propose to look first at what type of “faith”—belief in “things not seen”—this institution has exhibited thus far. Second, I will suggest some ways in which we might strengthen and extend that faith in the years to come.

Everyone has his or her own NMAI opening story; here is mine.

The day after the formal opening of the Mall Museum, I attended a meeting of an advisory committee charged with planning academic programs. What struck me more than the substance of our conversation that day—the first day of the building’s formal operation—was the setting and the tone of the gathering. Sitting in the conference room on the top floor, we brainstormed away about possible topics and speakers. I suddenly realized that something profound had taken place. Most—perhaps all—of the other participants in the session were Native American. And we were in an “Indian place.” We were sitting in the shadow of the U. S. Capitol, and there were probably 25,000 Indians outside, either on their way to the airport or wandering around the galleries of the museum, or walking the streets of D.C. The term “critical mass” came to mind. Indian people were here, they were eager to participate, and they were quite comfortable being in charge. They were not at the margins; they were at the center of the nation. I loved that moment.

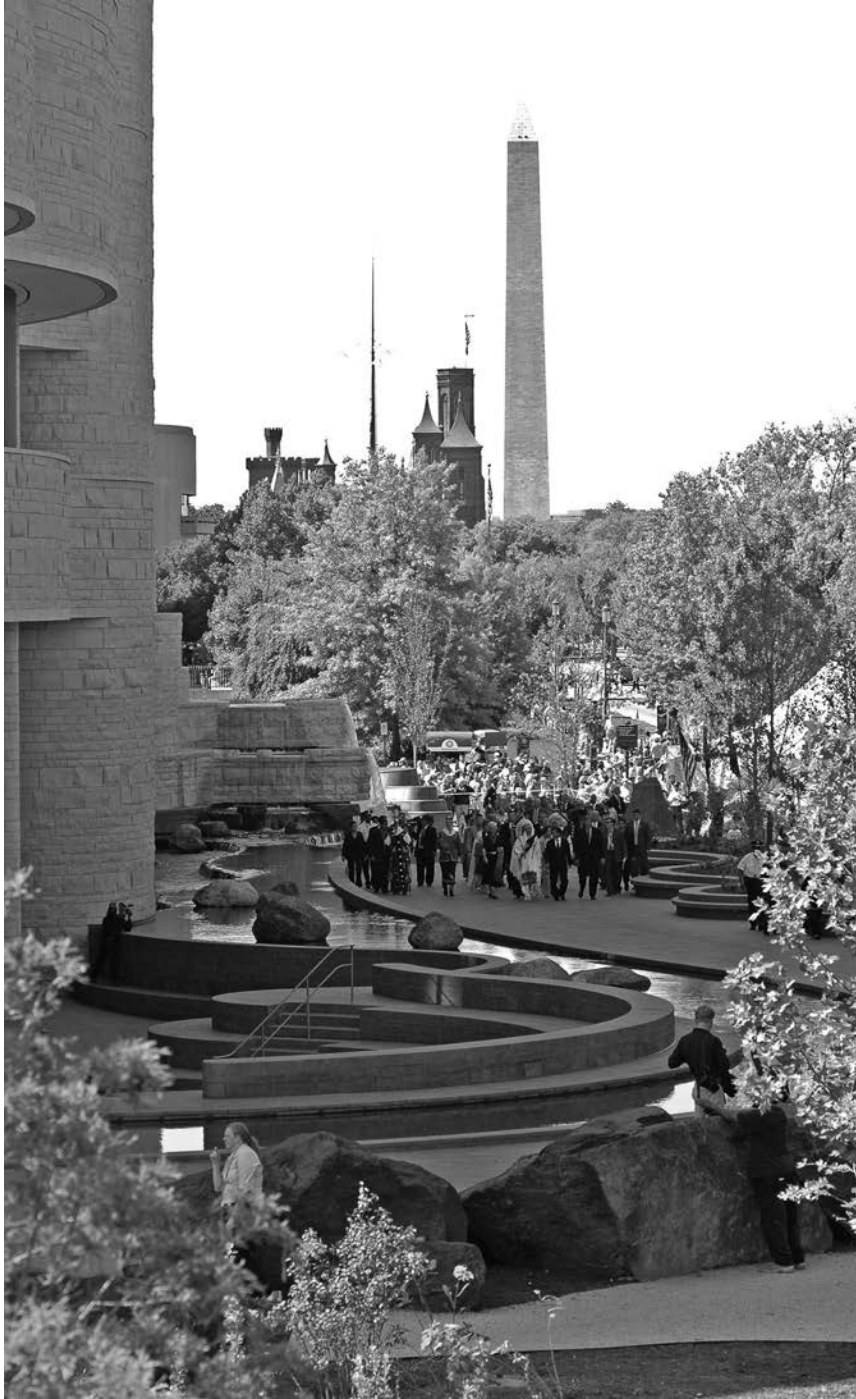
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Over 25,000 people took part in the Native Nations Procession to celebrate the National Museum of the American Indian's grand opening on September 21, 2004.

IMAGE NOT AVAILABLE

Tlingit and Haida tribal community members commemorate the grand opening of the museum with a song.





The Native Nations Procession passes the water feature on the north side of the NMAI as it approaches the museum entrance.

This memory tells me that one element of the museum's faith in things "not seen" was the idea that people cared enough about its potential to participate in planning its programs, to collaborate in the development of exhibits, and to invest themselves in its success. Given the history of museum exploitation of Indigenous peoples, none of that faith could be justified on the basis of past practice. Certainly museums like the Heard in Phoenix had collaborated with Native communities before, and there were examples—most notably at the Chicago Historical Society—of projects where curatorial power had been shared successfully with the community being represented in the galleries, but nothing had ever been attempted on this scale in Washington, D.C. The museum's faith that Native communities would respond to its initiatives began with the language of the founding legislation (language that mandates "consultation" and a significant role for Native Americans in museum governance), and was endorsed from day one by the institution's founding director, Rick West. Rick understood what he has called the "love/hate relationship between museums and Native communities"<sup>1</sup> but he knew, literally in his bones, that museums are repositories for cultural traditions and protectors of precious objects. Based on that knowledge, he believed Indian people would care. And they did. The museum has taken lots of criticism from many quarters over the past few years, but nowhere have I seen or heard anyone dismiss the presence of 25,000 Indian people in Washington to celebrate its opening. And, speaking as a historian, it is also interesting that none of these critics seemed to recognize that the museum opening in 2004 prompted the largest collection of Native peoples in Washington, D.C., in American history.

My memory of the opening also illustrates a second element of the museum's operational faith: collaboration would deliver meaningful programming. Our small symposium committee was given a modest task, but other groups used the collaborative approach for major aspects of the museum's program. The early consultation sessions have been well documented and frequently mentioned—deservedly so—but this openness to advice and input occurred at an almost comical rate. I can recall running



Native community members collaborate with NMAI staff to prepare the *Infinity of Nations* exhibition, 2007. (Left to right) Robert Davidson, Haida artist; Nora Dauenhauer, Tlingit scholar; and Cécile R. Ganteaume, NMAI associate curator.

into Rick or George Horse Capture or Jim Volkert in a number of unexpected venues through the 1990s: Cody, Wyoming; Norman, Oklahoma; Santa Fe; Seattle. And as the exhibit development teams began to fan out across the country, there was yet another array of airport meetings in Billings, Tucson, and elsewhere. Philip Deloria wrote a book a few years ago with a wonderful title—*Indians in Unexpected Places*.<sup>2</sup> The NMAI's commitment to collaboration produced a variation on that: "Smithsonian Bureaucrats in Unexpected Places." Phil's father, our beloved former trustee Vine Deloria, Jr., said at one early board meeting that either this museum was going to be a fabulous success or it would be a flop and we would have nothing to show for our efforts but a shoebox full of airline ticket stubs. He loved teasing Rick when our founding director was profiled in one of the airline's in-flight magazines. But behind the teasing—and the expense—of this process was a serious statement of faith: collaboration would guide programming at the NMAI.

The museum's faith in collaboration was prompted not only by the conviction of its leaders (shaped, to be sure, by the requirements of the

IMAGE NOT AVAILABLE

(Left to right) Founding Director W. Richard West, Jr., Senator Daniel Inouye, and Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell at the grand opening of the NMAI.

institution's founding legislation), but also by the historical moment that surrounded its initial organization. As several historically minded commentators have pointed out, the Native cultural resurgence and revitalization that stretched from the Red Power era to the explosion of interest in American Indian art, literature, and film carried this process forward. The same cosmic convergence that placed Ben Nighthorse Campbell and Daniel Inouye in the legislative body that passed the repatriation and NMAI bills also drove the museum's collaborations forward.<sup>3</sup>

A third article of faith was the optimistic idea that conversation and interactivity could define museum programming. Symbolized by the advent of computer-assisted teaching and touchscreen technology, both of which arrived on the scene at about the same time as the NMAI staff

began planning its programs, interactivity assumed that average people would be active learners in public museums and that “connecting” to people was more important than striking a pose of intellectual omniscience and instructing them. West has expressed a version of this faith when he declared that people coming to the NMAI should not “expect didactics.” He added, “don’t expect an imposed narrative. Think of an impressionist piece of art... The museum,” he stated, “is about conversations.”<sup>4</sup> He added in a recent speech that the NMAI “represents a place and space . . . where collections become not ends in themselves, but departure points for ideas and themes writ large, wide, and deep across Native America, Indian Country, and the totality of the Native experience of the Americas . . . almost the anti-museum.”<sup>5</sup>

I recall my first visit to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum soon after it opened (and while the NMAI planning was just getting underway). I realized as I made my way through that I wasn’t really learning anything new there or seeing anything in the institution’s collections that was, by itself, especially remarkable. But I was feeling something—many things—and I was inspired to have a variety of conversations—with myself, with the people who accompanied me to the museum, and with my friends and family after I returned home. I think of Elaine Gurian’s involvement with the NMAI in its very first years of planning and organization as emblematic of this aspect of the institution’s emerging set of principles.

So the museum rested on these three forms of faith:

Faith that Indian people cared enough to participate.

Faith in collaboration.

Faith in interactivity as the basis for museum learning.

The museum’s leaders preached these articles of faith to constituent groups, staff, colleagues in Indian communities, museum professionals around the country, and donors. They argued that these three elements would define the institution and accomplish its intellectual work: Indians would care, collaboration would produce successful programs, and interactivity would deliver the museum’s principal messages.



(Left to right) NMAI staff members Miranda Belarde-Lewis, Nicole Grabow, and Ellen Simmons explore the touchscreen interactives in front of the *Window on Collections* beadwork case, 2004.

This audience doesn't need a historian to explain why the NMAI's founding articles of faith were a brilliant response to the sorry story of Indians and museums and to the public's image of Native peoples generally. Going to Indian people and asking them to participate in planning a new institution was a seismic shift for the museum community which had frequently viewed living Native peoples as "less cultured" (and therefore less capable and less interesting) than their ancestors; people more qualified to provide entertaining dancing at an exhibit opening than to curate and interpret the objects on display. This was important work, best left to professionals—usually non-Indians. Assuming Indians would participate in planning and operating a new *national* museum also instantly redefined Indigenous peoples. This mission transformed people who had previously been ignored from objects of pity to competent, modern citizens with a responsibility to contribute to this new institution. Anyone who has seen the picture of a laughing Richard Nixon wearing a grey business suit and a warbonnet can feel how demeaning and insulting interactions between Indian people and the powerful bureaucracies of the federal government

were until the very recent past. And all of us who have stood passively before a mute diorama filled with mute plaster people draped in ill-fitting buckskin, can feel instinctively the significance of a museum that is about “conversations”—and Indian *voices*—rather than technical data and dispassionate, “objective” descriptions.

So these elements made sense. Did they work? Did the museum’s staff and supporters produce the new ideas that would justify their faith? Did collaboration produce insightful, challenging exhibits? Did the galleries become “departure points” for elegant conversation and reflection? Like most historical questions, this one is best answered with the standard professorial refrain, “Yes and no.” Despite our pride in the institution and our admiration for the Herculean labors that produced it, I think we can also agree that, while we are people of a certain kind of faith, we are not yet in the Promised Land. The museum has accomplished a great deal, but it does not exercise the intellectual authority its planners hoped for or that an institution of its size and stature should. Why? Where did planners, trustees, and staff miscalculate? And how have our failings affected the institution’s ability to exercise intellectual authority?

First, I think our basic institutional messages have too frequently missed or overshot the mark, leaving our audiences disappointed or confused. Jacki Thompson Rand, a former staff member, spoke for many when she wrote recently that the “museum represents a lost opportunity to integrate American Indians into the national consciousness.” The result, Rand wrote, is “a painless amusement for non-Natives, and a way for U.S. government politicians and bureaucrats to avoid the hard questions raised by the history of U.S. internal colonialism.”<sup>6</sup> Holland Cotter of *The New York Times* represented another version of this critique. “The museum,” he wrote last summer, “focuses on identity, not aesthetics,” and presents a “feel-good anti-intellectual take on culture. . . .”<sup>7</sup> There are serious points one could discuss with each critic, but what unites these two views, is the museum’s failure to explain its vision clearly to its visitors. The planners and staff of the institution wanted to overturn the standard—often demeaning—presentation of Indian peoples. Noble goal.



*Native Modernism: The Art of George Morrison and Allan Houser* was the NMAI's inaugural changing exhibition. The museum continues to highlight contemporary Native artists.

But there was more for the NMAI to overcome than bad manners. The museum failed to locate its exhibits and its overall program in the context of the past.

When they emerged in the nineteenth century, modern museums insisted on classifying Indian people as beings defined by culture. To their credit, the best of these museums taught their audiences that culture, not race, accounted for difference in the world. But from the perspective of Indian people, being confined to a static set of cultural categories was not much of an improvement over being classified as racially inferior. Indians had tribes, tribes belonged to culture areas, and culture areas produced similar tools and followed similar lifeways. From that perspective, plaster dioramas seemed a logical way to present “Indians.” I don’t see how one can move away from that old model in silence or by simply working to create a new version of cultural tourism. Inevitably, people will say we are “anti-intellectual” or surrendering cultural presentations to identity politics or other subjective pressures.





The gun and bible walls in the *Our Peoples* gallery highlight the devastating impact of guns and Christianity on Native peoples after Contact.



Examples of historical treaties made between the federal government and Native nations fill a display case in *Our Peoples*.

In an eloquent speech before the Association of Art Museum Directors in 1995, Director West declared that the NMAI's "highest obligation . . . is to represent and interpret for our publics the Native peoples and cultures of the Western Hemisphere, past present, and future."<sup>8</sup> Notice "peoples and cultures" in "past, present, and future." There is no call here for a historical narrative—to explain explicitly what that past involved—but instead a focus on cultural representation. To be fair, the museum recognized this absence and supported the work of Paul Chaat Smith, Ann McMullen, and others who recognized, in Smith's words, that "the story of Indians and the continent is . . . the elephant in the American living room."<sup>9</sup> The product of their labors was *Our Peoples*, a powerful statement that was, unfortunately, in Smith's words, "crammed into a space half the size of one of the museum's gift shops." The ship of cultural presentation had already left the dock and *Our Peoples* couldn't change the trajectory of the museum's programming. In the end, Smith writes, the message of *Our Peoples* "got lost."<sup>10</sup>

It is difficult to know how best to orient visitors to an "anti-museum" or a "Museum Different," but it would seem essential to begin by making a clear statement about the past and about museum treatment of Indigenous peoples. Moreover, that "something" should also include a clear presentation of how it is that perhaps half of the Smithsonian Institution's Native American materials are still housed in a building devoted to "Natural History" and which, at the time of this symposium, was featuring an exhibit called *Dragons, Unicorns, and Mermaids*. This juxtaposition seriously undermines the claim that the NMAI represents a fundamental departure. In short, it is essential to say something about that "love/hate relationship" Indians have had with museums and to explain where both the hate and the love come from.

Another kind of orientation that was missed here was some confrontation with the colossal ignorance about Native peoples that is a fundamental aspect of American identity—and indeed the identity of people in other places where settler nations occupy land seized from Indigenous peoples. Americans don't know about Indians because until quite recently

they haven't wanted to know. And those who today are curious are clearly in the minority. Most Americans tolerate the Washington Redskins, the disgraceful Cleveland Indians baseball caps, and the Atlanta Braves "tomahawk chop," and teach their children that "I is for Indian" because they don't want to face the reality that American democracy was animated by the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. It is far easier to deny that fact or to treat it as a joke. We can't simply ignore this aspect of our legacy as Americans and then expect people somehow to walk into this beautiful place and instantly "interact" with Native cultures. The beauty of Native art and the genius of Indian inventions are so impressive in part because of the colossal displacements that surround their creation. I would not underestimate the difficulty of the orientation task we must accomplish, but we must succeed. Otherwise we will continue to confuse people—including critics Cotter and Rand—because we will have failed to explain clearly why we are here, what we hope to accomplish, and why we have created this space in this way.

"Being explicit" is not the same thing as turning the NMAI into a genocide museum or casting Indian peoples as history's victims. Being explicit means locating this remarkable building and its remarkable holdings in time and place, and being honest about where we have come from as well as the amazing moment we now occupy.

Second, our vision of collaboration was too narrow. We forget—at our peril—that there has now been nearly a generation of American Indian peoples (students, parents, professional people, people in cities and suburbs as well as on reservations) who have come of age without having to endure dioramas and politicians in headdresses. Fifty years ago there were hundreds of American Indian college students; today there are hundreds of American Indian college *professors* and many thousands of Native college students. American Indian history and literature are routinely taught in high schools and colleges; Indian studies programs operate in every corner of the country; there are more than two dozen tribally-controlled colleges in the United States. Where are these students and scholars in our exhibits and programs? I don't want to be overly critical here—my



The urban Native community of Chicago is one of several communities featured in *Our Lives*.

second fondest memory of the opening was participating with my wife and old friends from Chicago in a small blessing ceremony at the Chicago portion of the opening exhibit—but the extent of the museum’s collaboration with “Indian Country” must be expanded. We should not be shy about demonstrating the extent to which Native Americans have become intertwined with every aspect of modern life across the hemisphere. “Indians” and “Indian Country” are no longer synonymous with isolation, backwardness, and the exotic.

Distinctive—and often remote—Indian communities are an absolutely essential element in our story, but our faith in consultation should lead us also to some of those “Indians in unexpected places” that Phil Deloria described in his book. Those people are in cities and suburbs, in the military, in churches, in state legislatures, in health professions, businesses—and in universities. The latter group is important. That group also contradicts a dichotomy that has been present—I would say too present—in the NMAI’s planning process from the start. That dichotomy is that the academy represents something completely alien from Indian peoples. In his 1995 address to the art museum directors, for example, Rick West declared that if the museum began using “a system of aesthetics that comes to us from Europe” it “would risk the imposition of an alien interpretive construct that ultimately prevents our appreciation of



The late Vine Deloria, Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) and moderator Suzan Shown Harjo discuss Deloria's works at the first NMAI Native Writers series event, 2004. The series was named in his honor the following year.

the object on the basis of the very cultural values and knowledge that give it meaning and significance.”<sup>11</sup> In an interview a decade later he made a similar point when he acknowledged that archaeology, anthropology, history, [and] art history “are valid” but that the NMAI should add to them “Native people themselves.” I think he was coming close to creating a false distinction: that “Native people” are not part of “archaeology, anthropology, history, and so on.”<sup>12</sup> Of course Native peoples didn’t invent these disciplines, but we live in a post-colonial world where global currents have dramatically transformed these disciplines. Academics have not found the Promised Land either, but to suggest that Native anthropologists, American Indian historians, and literary critics or Indigenous philosophy professors are not “Native people themselves” is to come very close to framing a false dichotomy.

All the major social science disciplines have shifted course dramatically over the past two or three generations to—among other things—accommodate and incorporate Indigenous peoples and their perspectives. And

simultaneously, American Indian Studies has emerged with its own academic traditions (including a promising new professional organization) and critical perspectives. Native intellectuals have been key drivers of much of this change. And their efforts have been applauded by Indigenous people in other countries across the globe as well as by supporters at home. The museum misses an opportunity whenever it suggests that these writers, thinkers, and teachers are somehow not a part of the contemporary Indian community.

From what I have seen, criticism of the museum's collaboration efforts have focused on the inaccessibility of the resulting exhibits (from a press corps that belittles or professes not to understand them) or dissatisfaction with how well the museum lived up to its rhetoric of shared authority over what was presented (from academic critics and some community members). I do not believe either of these criticisms is persuasive. We need to take sneering critics and unhappy collaborators seriously, but we should not confuse their unhappiness with a critique of collaboration. Their complaints—valid and worthy of concern—relate to the implementation of the collaboration initiative. I suggest we look at the initiative itself. Why do we collaborate? With whom do we collaborate? And what are the elements of a successful collaboration—is it a two-way partnership between “communities” and “the museum” or does it necessarily involve others?

My sense is that the collaboration process was too narrow, that it did not engage a wide enough range of Native people, and did not allow for Indians “in unexpected places” to tell enough “unexpected stories.” The assumption from the start was that the collaborations would produce a new and better presentation of “culture.” Decisions were made to focus on places where this “culture” could be effectively presented. But the larger theme here was presenting Indians as peoples of culture and thereby running the risk of confining them to the same timeless straightjacket in which museums have confined them for the past century. Exhibit planners sought out a homogeneous “Indian culture” and, in the process, fell short of truly collaborating with Native people.

Finally, we forgot at times that despite the fact that our institution is a place of quiet and reflection, intellectual work involves conflict. Conversations without differences of opinion are just chitchat. Beauty can only be appreciated if we can understand the struggle that produced it. And, no, Native America, the red continents that were home to millions of people in thousands of villages and towns over tens of thousands of years, was not a place of serenity and consensus. We need to locate and describe conflict in our stories, conflict in our processes, and conflicts that surround us today. Obviously, this is a difficult aspect of work but to avoid conflict and minimize debate is to retreat from our ambitions and to conform to old stereotypes. The lawyers here know better than I that John Collier's 1934 Indian Reorganization Act—the law that in many ways defined the modern political history of Native American communities—failed in large part because of its silent assumption that tribal governments could operate through a kind of mystical consensus and that tribal constitutions therefore did not need to provide for an independent judiciary or the separation of powers. This fact provides a vivid reminder of what can go wrong when seemingly benign models of Indianness get applied to the complex reality of modern Indigenous life. We run the same risks here.

I applaud the museum's focus on art and I am a total fan of multimedia orientation films and the emotional tugs of many exhibits. The museum need not be a visual seminar. But at the same time the NMAI must work to avoid sounding a note of caution or conveying a sense that certain topics are off the table: prehistory, intertribal violence, Indian entrepreneurs, sex, or Indian rock and roll. Avoiding a stance of caution doesn't necessarily mean that the museum should be confrontational. Difficult or controversial issues can be handled with humor, playfulness, or indirection. The important quality to keep in front of us is courage: we can't be afraid of any idea or topic.

So our faith needs strengthening if we are going to be provocative and participate in the generation of new ideas; and our place needs strengthening so that it can examine, debate, and communicate those ideas. Enlivening our discussions and raising the stakes of the exchanges taking place

IMAGE NOT AVAILABLE

Rock-and-roll pioneer Link Wray (Shawnee, 1929–2005) performing with his brothers Doug and Vernon in Washington, D.C. This was one of the rare photographs featured in the NMAI exhibition, *Up Where We Belong: Native Musicians in Popular Culture*. Courtesy Deke Dickerson Photo Archive.

in our institution will increase our intellectual authority across the board. But should we do this?

Acting with greater intellectual rigor and boldness could be dangerous. It could antagonize donors and our important political supporters. It could alienate our audiences and leave us talking to ourselves. It could, but I doubt it. In fact, I believe the opposite is true. Being clear about who we are and why we operate as we do, widening the circle of collaboration—particularly to the amazing new generation of Native American scholars in colleges, universities, and cultural institutions across the hemisphere—and demonstrating the courage to examine any question and explore any topic will earn the museum greater prominence, greater influence, and a much wider set of audiences among all of its constituents. This expansion will give us expanded authority and, with that authority, the ability to speak in ways that cannot be marginalized by academics, caricatured by the press, or ignored by the general public. Engaging in the cultural life of our time will inevitably bring us new audiences and new supporters. Acting on this faith will bring us all that is now unseen.



IMAGE NOT AVAILABLE

Suzan Shown Harjo and George Horse Capture (A'aninin), not pictured, followed by Mary Beth, Rick, Amy, and Ben West as they enter the museum during the grand opening, 2004.

CATHERINE S. FOWLER

## THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE SYMPOSIUM: DISCUSSION AND REVIEW



Founding Director W. Richard West, Jr.

First of all, I want to thank the organizers for extending me the privilege of being here to in turn honor a founding father, a soon-to-be elder of a great organization, and a person who has given eighteen years of his productive life (and more than a pound of flesh) to accomplish something remarkable. With his vision and wise counsel, and the help of his talented staff, his board, and many supporters, we are now in the Mall Museum of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), a “Museum Different,” but more than that, a truly “Native place.” As several of the speakers have noted, it is also located on a symbolically significant site on the National Mall—next to the U.S. Capitol—and in a very grand building. I also wish to honor all the other people who were important to the completion of this task, especially those who did not live to see the dream made reality. This is their place too.



Georgianna and Joe Hotch (Tlingit) at a ceremony honoring the repatriation of a Bear Clan hat, George Gustav Heye Center, New York City, 1999.

IMAGE NOT AVAILABLE

Taino elders Reina Mongo and Francisco (Panchito) Ramirez place an offering on a repository of repatriated human remains, Cuba, 2003.

Over the years, both Rick's and the NMAI's presence have worked to change the way a number of museums do business, whether it is in presenting exhibitions, publications and/or public programs, or interacting with their many publics. Both Rick and the NMAI have been significant catalysts for change—parts of an important “paradigm shift” in museology (to use Gerald McMaster's wording) that has been underway at least in the United States since the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), but one that is by no means complete. This museum and its founding director have given eloquent voice not only to the need for that shift, but what it might entail. But, as we know, the real shift is not always obvious “up front” or necessarily in exhibitions: what is really different about the “Museum Different” is what happens behind-the-scenes in the *process* of how this museum works and how it does business. Critics are rarely privy to that behind-the-scenes process; yet that is what can truly make an institution proud, in that it knows that it worked in the *right way* even if the end product is found lacking by some.

This set of papers documents Rick's and the NMAI's vision, some of the steps and a few missed steps along the way, and some of the aspirations for the future. While reflection and reevaluation are always good and especially helpful, I would also say, “Don't beat yourself up too badly over some things that did not work—just keep working to make them better.” The NMAI, including the Mall Museum, is up and running, getting increasingly good reviews, especially with exhibitions such as *Listening to Our Ancestors: The Art of Native Life along the North Pacific Coast* and *Identity by Design: Tradition, Change, and Celebration in Native Women's Dresses*, and continuing to generate a distinct pride of place in Native visitors and non-Native visitors alike.

Each of the presenters, all former or present trustees, looks at aspects of Rick's and the NMAI's story in his or her own way: Dave Thomas with the eye of an archaeologist to “back-sight” or talk about the museum's deep history and then set the stage with Rick's original and evolving vision of what it was to be; Rosita Worl, Native anthropologist,



The Paawats Family Activity Room in *Listening to Our Ancestors: The Art of Native Life Along the North Pacific Coast* (September 12, 2007–July 20, 2008) provided hands-on activities for children and families.

with her honoring of Rick and her unique take on repatriation: namely that the primary task of NMAI has been to repatriate to Native peoples not so much objects in its collections as *the museum as an institution*; Gerald McMaster, also a founding curator and artist and one intimately involved from inside the institution, and particularly with exhibitions and their critiques; Duane Champagne, Native sociologist, with a view of the role of Native voices (note the plural) and how they reflect in issues like defining contemporary identity; and Fred Hoxie, historian, who looks at the topic of intellectual authority, and how it has been and might be achieved at the NMAI. Each makes many important contributions beyond these brief summaries to the ongoing discourse on this institution as well as to museums in general.

Museums today, no matter what they are or where they are, face a similar set of priorities, perhaps the most important of which is *survival* in a



*Identity by Design: Tradition, Change, and Celebration in Native Women's Dresses* (March 24, 2007–August 3, 2008) explored Native women's identity through traditional dress and its contemporary evolution.



The Išnati Family Activity Room in the *Identity by Design* exhibition.

world that increasingly sees them as fossils of a distant past—places that display old, dead things and old, dead ideas in outdated contexts. Native peoples are not unique in this view, although none of us would deny that they have felt the brunt of the “old/dead” characterization more than most. But many young non-Native people feel this way about museums, as well. Here in the nation’s capital, museums are particularly popular, but if you look in many places in this country, they are struggling mightily to stay alive and capture a significant visitor share. Modern museums have tried various ways to move forward, to challenge visitors, to encourage them to spend more than 20–30 seconds in front of a display, to critically and creatively interact with exhibitions, and to enjoy the experience enough to tell their friends about it, come back, and perhaps even support the institution. Some ideas have worked and some haven’t, but those who care continue to try.

The NMAI has tried some new approaches flowing from its dual obligations to its Native as well as its non-Native publics. Overall, the presenters agree that most have been successful, although the need for continued refinement and some change remains. Most of the presenters focused on the Mall Museum, although the discussion could and should be broadened to include the other NMAI components: the Cultural Resources Center (CRC), the George Gustav Heye Center (GGHC), and the “Fourth Museum.”

I have organized my comments on the papers along lines similar to Dave Thomas: i.e., by taking some of Rick’s vision statements for this museum (and museums in general), and then reviewing what the authors have to say. I have chosen a set of four points from an address he gave when he became chair of the American Association of Museums in 1998.

The four points are as follows: 1) *The Museum should be a continuum to the present;* 2) *The Museum’s resources must be accessible;* 3) *The Museum must be willing to see a different reality;* and 4) *The Museum’s exhibitions/programs/scholarship must take primary direction from Native voice.* Of the four, Native voice is noted by all the presenters as the key component in creating the “Museum Different,” and we will look at it first.



The Pueblo of Santa Clara, New Mexico, is one of the community exhibitions in *Our Universes*.



I) *The Museum's exhibitions/programs/scholarship must take primary direction from Native voice.* Native voice has been central to all four components of the NMAI, but plays out most specifically in the exhibition programs at the GGHC and the Mall Museum and in the construction and operations of the CRC. Not only were Native peoples consulted, as in some museums in the past, but what they had to say was foregrounded and privileged. Thomas outlines some of Rick's thinking on the topic, but also notes his early commitment to including a wide range of participants in the NMAI's approaches. Worl points out that Native voice was a central topic in discussions with Native community members in exhibition planning, expressed in the hope that this museum would "give voice to the Native point of view," and through it, change misconceptions and stereotypes, recreate images of Native Americans, and educate people about Native accomplishments. McMaster systematizes Native voice as involving seven aspects: subject, multivocality, empowerment, authority, representation, perspective, and visibility, while also pointing out that critics of the Mall Museum's opening exhibitions often misunderstood its application and assumed that it completely supplanted non-Native interpretation. Both he and Champagne stress the reality of multivocality within Native communities on many things, and Worl also discusses some of the practical aspects of this issue when it comes to choosing who should be speaking for a community in matters of history and interpretation. Hoxie adds a call for a broader recognition of Native voices from all corners ("Indians in Unexpected Places"), and varied points of view to a more thorough public understanding of Native America today.

There is thus little doubt that Native voice, as we have already noted, is the guiding principle for the NMAI and a major defining feature in the "Museum Different." It pervades the three physical structures of the NMAI as Native Places although it may not always be visible as such. By its very nature, I am sure, it is also a key component in the Fourth Museum, especially in outreach and "in reach" efforts with Native artists and craftspeople, and also in efforts with the increasing number of tribal museums, and in educating the non-Native public. But it is certainly



A display of Latin American headdresses in the *Our Lives* exhibition.

the hardest to do well and explain to the public and critics. Much, but certainly not all, of the work with Native voice will remain a behind-the-scenes process, and the museum's satisfaction is in knowing that it followed Native guidance to the best of its ability. As McMaster concludes, Native voice as understood at the NMAI is "an evolving idea but one that needs constant articulation until it is heard."

2) *The Museum should be a continuum to the present.* All of the authors also take this point as a given, each defending it as a primary orientation for the NMAI's exhibitions and larger programs. Thomas traces Rick's thinking about this to an early question to his father about exhibitions in another institution, the American Museum of Natural History, and his father's response. Worl stresses the importance of a continuum in her review of the early community consultations for *The Way of the People*. Mc-

Master talks about the importance of exhibitions including people in the present, but also critics' views that the Mall Museum exhibitions are given too much to the contemporary at the expense of other topics with longer histories. Champagne also speaks of the importance of the contemporary, but stresses that the story "must be given in its entirety ranging back from time immemorial to the present" in order to "help the world understand more clearly and deeply the diversity, complexity, and continuity of identity and community among Indigenous peoples." And Hoxie speaks of a need for the Mall Museum to better contextualize the focus on the present as opposed to treating the full range of Native experience. He also notes that the Mall Museum needs to include more basic facts about Indian peoples both past and present to educate the non-Native public—and I would add other Indian peoples, as well, as many do not know very much about their neighbors.

But the question then becomes: How much of a continuum, given the other needs? Certainly everything cannot be done in this small space and all at once. And debates will continue as to how to balance the need for a full representation or full time scales. Criticism as to whether there is too much of an orientation to the contemporary, as reviewed by McMaster, and the question as to the role of exhibitions of contemporary art by Worl and Champagne versus the need for more historical and issue-oriented approaches will continue. These, I am sure, reflect also on the multivocality of the presenters, Native Americans in general, and the non-Native public. It is hard to achieve a balance in what is inherently a small space with certain limits imposed. The Mall Museum can't be everything to everyone, as we all realize, but it can and should strive to be as inclusive and responsive to ideas as possible.

3) *Museum's resources must be accessible.* This point is not addressed specifically under this title by most of the presenters, but is present in their discussions and is a significant attribute of the "Museum Different." Thomas notes Rick's comments on certain limits to accessibility if it offends religious or cultural practices or beliefs. On the other hand, accessibility is a major feature of Worl's call for the repatriation of the museum as an

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Culture/People: Tlingit  
Object name: Raven headdress  
Date created: 1860-1890  
Place: Fort Wrangell; Sealaska Native Corporation; Alaska; USA  
Media/Materials: Wood, ermine skin/fur, wool cloth, cotton cloth, sea lion whiskers, swan down, abalone/haliotis shell, paint  
Techniques: Carved, painted, inlaid  
Collection History/Provenance: Collected by Lieutenant George T. Emmons (1852-1945, US Navy 1881-1899); purchased by George Heye in 1906.  
Dimensions: 132 x 40 x 50 cm  
Catalog number: 9202

Click on the image or the magnifying glass to see a larger view; click again to close the pop-up window. Scroll through Other Images and Media to see other views of this item; click on any image to make it appear in the larger window. Catalog card scans are provided to illustrate the information that originally accompanied the objects. Please recognize that unacceptable or offensive terminology represents historic data and not NMAI's current usage.

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The NMAI's new online Collections Search database allows a two-way exchange between the public and NMAI staff by encouraging researchers to pose questions to curators and to share further information about specific objects.

institution to Native peoples. The museum must be open and responsive. Champagne speaks of the tremendous potential of the Fourth Museum in this electronic era to not only make the resources of the NMAI accessible to all, but also to educate all publics to interact with and learn more about Native America in truly innovative ways. Certainly, few could deny that the CRC has made great strides in making collections accessible to Native peoples, who have taken a new pride in the discovery of items of their own heritage that they did not know even existed. Other museums have also become more open in making their collections accessible and many Native patrons are demanding it and making use of the opportunities. I know that the NMAI's collections have been an inspiration to Native peoples from my area who have traveled here, been excited by what they have seen,

and begun to re-link themselves to material objects and recreate older items and patterns. The Fourth Museum will continue that process.

4) *The Museum must be willing to see a different reality.* Most of the presenters either alluded to or discussed this point as part of the “Museum Different.” Certainly Native voice can present a different reality. McMaster speaks, as well, of different realities embodied in Native vs. non-Native scholarships (multivocality again) and the need to avoid the view that Native peoples live for the past. Rather, they “interpret the past through the eyes of the present.” Worl also exemplifies the significant difference between Native and non-Native definitions of material objects and what they represent when she speaks of her tribal elders viewing items in museum storage as “spirits of our captured ancestors resting in a strange land.” She also speaks of exploring more the potentially different reality of Native aesthetics, being cautious not to impose a new stereotype that all Indigenous aesthetics are the same. And Champagne and Hoxie also stress the significance of the continued and rapid development of Native scholarship in promoting and giving voice to separate realities. In McMaster’s original presentation of this idea, he also gives a wonderful example of a California tribal basket-maker who continually taught her students songs rather than focusing on techniques because, as she said, “a basket is a song made visible.”

In summary, I congratulate the presenters in giving us perspectives on what it is that makes the NMAI the “Museum Different,” and something of Rick’s leadership role and vision as articulated through his staff, Native consultants, and supporters that has made it happen. The task of building the NMAI in all of its facets has been a daunting and complex one, but all, and especially Rick, should take great pride in the result. There is tremendous complexity to be represented in all of the NMAI’s venues and programs (urban/rural, reservation/non-reservation, “Indians in Unexpected Places”), let alone the hemispheric scope and the tremendous wealth of collections, but at the same time recognized to be not all that might be required or of use in telling complex stories. But at least some Native people do not really care so much about what is inside; they

care more about what the NMAI represents symbolically and where it is. They know that they feel at home in the Mall Museum, the GGHC, and the CRC, and that they are truly Native Places. Young Native people want to be in these spaces and to work in them. They will be the ones to develop yet a second paradigm shift to a truly Indigenous museology, and they are doing it now. It will doubtless retain as principles the significance of Native voices, an orientation to a continuum, accessibility, and the recognition of different realities as goals, but they may be articulated quite differently than understood today. They will be responsible for moving the NMAI yet closer to intellectual authority, which was certainly also a goal of Vine Deloria, Jr., a founding board member and vocal proponent of that goal. The NMAI may one day, in all its complexity resemble more a Native Civic Space, and Stephen Weil's "popular place for unpopular ideas," as noted by Thomas. But above all it is and will remain a wonderful achievement.

Rick shared a story with us at the dinner on the night of the Mall Museum's opening in 2004. His father had told him, "Don't leave town until the damned thing's built." Well, it is built and his mission is accomplished—and he seems about to leave town, but we hope not far or for long. He certainly has earned our combined admiration and congratulations as well as a bit of a rest—although we all know that whatever his next challenge, and we assume it will be a big one, he will perform it with strength, enthusiasm, and the ability to make it another strong success.

## ENDNOTES

### Introduction

- 1 W. Richard West, Jr., "The New Inclusiveness" *Anthropology Newsletter*, February, 1993: I, 39–40.
- 2 Email from W. Richard West, Jr., to David Hurst Thomas, February 17, 2007.

### David Hurst Thomas

- 1 I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Rick West, Alena Chalan, and John Haworth in preparing this manuscript. I also thank Helen Scheirbeck and Ceni Myles for their efforts in making this symposium a success.
- 2 W. Richard West, Jr., "The National Museum of the American Indian: Reflections on a Journey," speech delivered to AMAR, Brisbane, Australia, 2007.
- 3 The elliptical "basement" space actually exists on the ground floor. This area has been converted from storeroom space into the opulent new Diker Pavilion for Native Arts and Cultures.
- 4 W. Richard West, Jr., "From *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* to the National Museum of the American Indian: Images of Indian Culture," speech delivered September 10, 1990, Oklahoma College of Law, University of Oklahoma, Norman.

- 5 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 11–12.
- 8 W. Richard West, Jr., "Museums and Native America: The New Collaboration," speech delivered 2000, 3–4.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 4, 6–7.
- 11 David Hurst Thomas, *Skull Wars: Kennewick Man, Archaeology, and the Battle for Native American Identity*. (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 97.
- 12 W. Richard West, Jr., "The New Collaboration," 12.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 8.
- 14 W. Richard West, Jr., "The New Inclusiveness," *Anthropology Newsletter*, February 1993: I, 39–40.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 *Ibid.*, 39.
- 17 Vine Deloria, Jr., (1933–2005) was a founding trustee of the National Museum of the American Indian and a pivotal force in guiding the direction of the NMAI. The library in the Cultural Resources Center in Suitland, Maryland, is named in Vine's honor.

- 18 W. Richard West, Jr., "The New Inclusiveness," 39.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 15–16; W. Richard West, Jr., "Reflections," 5.
- 20 W. Richard West, Jr., "The New Inclusiveness," 14–15; "Long before programming of any kind became a reality in any of its new facilities, a long series of consultations held in the early 1990s, some twenty-five to thirty of them over a two-and-a-half to three-year period, established the important guiding aspirations stated in the Museum's mission statement," W. Richard West, "Reflections," 5.
- 21 James Clifford (1988), *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); W. Richard West, Jr., "The New Inclusiveness," 3.
- 22 W. Richard West, Jr., "Images," 14.
- 23 W. Richard West, Jr., "The New Inclusiveness," 39. Some may have bristled at this explicitly pro-tribal approach to collection management. But, in point of fact, six years after West addressed the American Anthropological Association (AAA), it approved a new code of ethics that precisely corresponds to the policy of the National Museum of the American Indian. This Code of Ethics, adopted by the AAA in June 1998, specifically states: "Anthropological researchers have primary ethical obligations to the people, species, and materials they study, and to the people with whom they work. These obligations can supersede the goal of seeking new knowledge and can lead to decisions not to undertake or to discontinue a research project when the primary obligation conflicts with other responsibilities," "Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association," approved June 1998. <http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethcode.htm>, 2. In this way, the politics and practices of the NMAI are helping to inform, even helping to shape, future directions in both the anthropological and museum communities. But that is a story for another time.
- 24 W. Richard West, Jr., "The New Collaboration," 39.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 39; "[The] presentation, interpretation, and representation of these peoples, cultures, and communities are premised on a consistent and systematic invocation of the first-person voice of Native peoples," W. Richard West, Jr., "Reflections," 5.
- 26 W. Richard West, Jr., "Reflections," 15.
- 27 W. Richard West, Jr., "Foreword: The Story a Dress Might Tell," in Emil Her Many Horses, ed., *Identity by Design: Tradition, Change, and Celebration in Native Women's Dresses*, (Washington, D.C.: The National Museum of the American Indian, 2007), 11–13, 4.
- 28 W. Richard West, Jr., "Reflections," 4.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 2.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 2–3, 14.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 32 C. Smith, "Decolonising the Museum: The National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C." *Antiquity* 79: 424–439 (2005).
- 33 W. Richard West, Jr., "Reflections," 9.
- 34 Suzan Shown Harjo, "Exhibit Narrative for *Treaties: Great Nations in Their Own Words*." Draft manuscript (July 2007), 1.
- 35 W. Richard West, Jr., "Reflections," 16; citing S. Weil in *Rethinking the Museums*. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution).

#### Gerald McMaster

- 1 The inaugural exhibitions featured twenty-four Indigenous communities from Arctic Canada to the Brazilian rainforest.
- 2 Daniel R. Sewell and Anna DeStefano, "Scholarship in the 21st Century: The



Growth of Distance-Free, Student-Centered, Adult-Learning Institutions and the Changing Context of Scholarship in Higher Education,” presented at the 42nd Annual Association for Institutional Research Forum, Exploring New Frontiers, Toronto, Ontario, June 1–5, 2002, 2–3.

### Frederick E. Hoxie

- 1 Amanda Cobb, “Interview with W. Richard West, Jr., Director, National Museum of the American Indian, *American Indian Quarterly* (Summer & Fall 2005): 519.
- 2 Philip Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004).
- 3 Amanda J. Cobb, “The National Museum of the American Indian as Cultural Sovereignty,” *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 57, no. 2 (June 2005): 485–506; Janet Catherine Berlo and Aldona Jonaitis, “‘Indian Country’ on Washington’s Mall—The National Museum of the American Indian: A Review Essay,” *Museum Anthropology*, vol. 28, no. 2 (2005): 17–30. See also John Bloom, “Exhibition Review: The National Museum of the American Indian,” *American Studies* vol. 46, no. 3–4 (Fall/Winter, 2005): 327–338.
- 4 Amanda Cobb, “Interview,” 528, 536.
- 5 W. Richard West, Jr., “The National Museum of the American Indian: Reflections on a Journey,” 2007.
- 6 Jacki Thompson Rand, “Why I Can’t Visit the National Museum of the American Indian: Reflections of an Accidental Privileged Insider, 1989–1994,” *Common-Place*, vol. 7, no. 4 (July 2007): 1, 9. *Common-Place* is an online journal published at [www.common-place.org](http://www.common-place.org)
- 7 Holland Cotter, “This Art is Your Art, This Art is My Art,” *The New York Times*, July 1, 2007.
- 8 W. Richard West, Jr., “The National Museum of the American Indian: Whence the Art Object?” June 16, 1995.
- 9 Paul Chaat Smith, “The Terrible Nearness of the Distant Past: Making History at the National Museum of the American Indian,” in Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn, eds., *Indigenous Experience Today* (New York; Berg, 2007), 382.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 395.
- 11 W. Richard West, Jr., “The National Museum of the American Indian: Whence the Art Object?”
- 12 Amanda Cobb, “Interview,” 518.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**DUANE CHAMPAGNE** (Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, North Dakota) is a professor of sociology and American Indian studies at the University of California-Los Angeles and a member of the Faculty Advisory Committee for the university's Native Nations Law and Policy Center. He received his BA and MA from North Dakota State University, and a Ph.D. in sociology from Harvard University. Champagne's research focuses primarily on issues of social and cultural change in both historical and contemporary Native American communities. He has authored and edited more than 125 publications, including *Social Change and Cultural Continuity among Native Nations* (2007).

**CATHERINE S. FOWLER**, professor emerita at the University of Nevada, is a cultural anthropologist and linguist in the Anthropology Department at the University of Nevada-Reno. In 2011, she was elected to the National Academy of Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 2005, she received the Earle A. Chiles Award from the High Desert Museum for contributions to Great Basin anthropology. Fowler, who has published extensively on Native Americans of the Great Basin, earned master's and doctoral degrees in anthropology at the University of Pittsburgh. She is past president of the Council for Museum Anthropology and the Society of Ethnobiology, and active in tribal language and cultural preservation programs. Fowler served on the National Museum of the American Indian's Board of Trustees from 1996–2001 and began a second term in 2008.

**KEVIN GOVER** (Pawnee) is director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian and former professor of law at the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at Arizona State University (ASU). He also served as co-executive director of ASU's American Indian Policy Institute. Before joining the university faculty, Mr. Gover was assistant secretary for Indian Affairs in the U.S. Department of the Interior, where he oversaw programs in Indian education, law enforcement, social services, treaty rights, and trust asset management.

**SUZAN SHOWN HARJO** (Cheyenne & Hodulgee Muscogee), president of The Morning Star Institute, a national Indian rights organization founded in 1984, is a writer, curator, and policy advocate who has helped Native peoples recover sacred places and more than one million acres of land. An award-winning columnist, her work has appeared in myriad publications, broadcasts, and seminars. Harjo was the first Vine Deloria, Jr., Distinguished Indigenous Scholar (University of Arizona, 2008); the first Native woman Montgomery Fellow (Dartmouth College, 1992); the first Native American Haas Visiting Mentor (Stanford University, 1996); and the first person to receive back-to-back fellowship awards from the School of Advanced Research (for poetry and as a summer scholar). A founder of the National Museum of the American Indian, she is guest curator and general editor for NMAI's upcoming exhibition and publication *Treaties: Great Nations in Their Own Words*.

**FREDERICK E. HOXIE** is Swanlund Professor of History at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he is also an affiliate faculty member in the American Indian Studies program and the College of Law. Hoxie was formerly director of the Newberry Library's D'Arcy McNickle Center for American Indian History and vice president for research and education. He is the author or editor of more than a dozen books on Native American history, including: *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (1984); *The Encyclopedia of North American Indians* (1995); *Parading Through History: The Making of the Crow Nation in*

*America, 1805-1935* (1996); *The People: A History of Native America* (2007). His history of American Indian political activism will be published by Penguin in 2012. He has served as a historical consultant to both Indian tribes and federal agencies. A founding trustee of the National Museum of the American Indian, Hoxie returned to the board in 2006.

**GERALD McMASTER** (Plains Cree and member of the Siksika Nation) is the Fredrik S. Eaton Curator of Canadian Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO). McMaster was responsible for the highly acclaimed re-hang of the AGO's permanent collection of Canadian art. His exhibition, *Inuit Modern: Art from the Samuel and Esther Sarick Collection*, opened at the AGO in the fall of 2010. McMaster worked for the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian from 2000 to 2004. During his tenure he guided the successful completion of the permanent exhibitions, as well as co-curated and co-edited *Native Universe: Voices of Indian America* (2004); *First American Art: The Charles and Valerie Diker Collection of American Indian Art* (2004); *New Tribe: New York* (2005–06); and *Remix: New Modernities in a Post-Indian World* (2007). He has received many honors for his work in advancing the field of aboriginal historic and contemporary art, including the ICOM-Canada Prize (2001); the National Aboriginal Achievement Award (2005); and, more recently, Canada's highest civilian honor, Officer of the Order of Canada. McMaster is originally from Saskatchewan and holds a Ph.D. from the University of Amsterdam.

**DAVID HURST THOMAS** is a curator of anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History and adjunct professor at Columbia University and the City University of New York. A California native, Thomas received his undergraduate and doctoral degrees from the University of California-Davis. The author of numerous books, monographs, and scientific articles, he is well known for his archaeological work on Native American sites and at the Franciscan mission on St. Catherines Island off the coast of Georgia. In 1989, he was elected to the National Academy of Sciences. Thomas is a founding trustee of the National Museum of the American Indian.

**W. RICHARD WEST, JR.**, a citizen of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma and a Peace Chief of the Southern Cheyenne, is founding director and director emeritus of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). West has devoted his professional life and much of his personal life to working with American Indians on cultural, educational, legal, and governmental issues. As director of the National Museum of the American Indian, West was responsible for guiding the successful opening of the three facilities that comprise the NMAI. He oversaw the creation and completion of the George Gustav Heye Center, a museum exhibition facility, which opened in New York City on October 30, 1994. He supervised the overall planning of the museum's Cultural Resources Center, which houses its vast 800,000+ object collection in Suitland, Maryland. West's philosophy and vision were critical in guiding the architectural and program planning of the Mall museum, which opened on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., on September 21, 2004.

Before becoming director of the NMAI, West practiced law at the Indian-owned Albuquerque, New Mexico, law firm of Gover, Stetson, Williams & West, P.C.; previously, he was a partner in the Washington, D.C., office of Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson. As general counsel and special counsel to numerous tribes and organizations, he represented clients before federal, state, and tribal courts, various executive departments of the federal government, and Congress. West received his MA in American history from Harvard University and graduated from the Stanford University School of Law with a JD in 1971, where he also was the recipient of the Hilmer Oehlmann, Jr., Prize for excellence in legal writing and served as an editor and note editor of the *Stanford Law Review*.

**ROSITA WORL** (Tlingít) is the president of the Sealaska Heritage Institute and vice-chair of the Sealaska Corporation, a tribal entity created by Congress to implement the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971. She is also a member of the Alaska Federation of Natives board. Worl, who earned a Ph.D. at Harvard University, has written

extensively about Alaska Natives, publishing articles on such topics as Tlingít property law, the role of women in whaling, and the changes that came about as a result of the creation of Native corporations. She has been the recipient of numerous honors, including the American Anthropological Association Solon Kimball Award for her work as an applied anthropologist, the Gloria Steinem Award for Empowerment, and the Women of Hope Award. Worl, whose Tlingít names are *Yeidiklats'akw* and *Kaa.baní*, is an Eagle of the *Shungukeidi* (Thunderbird) Clan from the *Kaawdliyaayi Hit* (House Lowered from the Sun) of Klukwan and a *Lukaax.ádi yadi* (Child of the Sockeye Clan).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has been greatly anticipated and joins five earlier volumes in the *NMAI Editions* series. My task, initially as copy editor and later as editor, was an enjoyable one due to the powerful content and the fine scholars with whom I had the pleasure to work. I want to thank, in particular, NMAI founding trustee Dr. David Hurst Thomas for his superb introduction. Dr. Thomas also served as the moderator of the symposium this book documents. The essays of all the contributors—their stories of the past, observances of the present, and thoughts on the future—enliven these pages. Collectively, they tell the remarkable and inspirational story of the NMAI as both a “Museum Different” and a “museum of the Native voice.”

I want to acknowledge director Kevin Gover (Pawnee) and associate director for museum programs Tim Johnson (Mohawk) for their ongoing support of this book. At the time of “Past, Present, and Future” Kevin was the newly appointed director, poised to take the helm from founding director W. Richard “Rick” West, Jr. (Southern Cheyenne and citizen of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma), to whom the symposium and this volume pay tribute. I especially want to thank publications manager Tanya Thrasher (Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma), for asking me to be the editor and also for directing the project. Editor Arwen Nuttall (Cherokee) managed production and photo research. Our late colleague, photo archivist Lou Stancari, provided archival images while photogra-

pher Cindy Frankenburg and the NMAI photo services staff provided program/event photographs. Managing editor Ann Kawasaki handled the myriad contractual details of the project and senior designer Steve Bell saw to the volume's elegant look. A very special word of thanks also is extended to the late Dr. Helen Maynor Scheirbeck (Lumbee), former assistant director for public programs, Ceni Myles (Navajo/Mohegan), former NMAI public programs specialist, and special assistant Alena Chalan (Cochiti Pueblo) for their work in organizing the symposium.

Finally, I want to thank Rick West for all of his years of support and friendship. It continues to be an honor to work for him.

—Liz Hill (Red Lake Band of Ojibwe)



## PHOTO CREDITS

The sources of the images featured in this volume are gratefully acknowledged below; in some cases, photographers and lenders are credited in the caption text. Images from the Photo Archives of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) are identified by photograph or negative number where they appear.

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## **Native Knowledge 360°**

### **A National Education Initiative**

The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) has partnered with Native communities and educators nationally to help change the way American Indian histories, cultures, and contemporary lives are taught in K–12 classrooms. Known as Native Knowledge 360° (NK360°), this experiential online project launched in February 2018. It builds upon the scholarship and diversity of views presented in this book and widens the lens through which to view new perspectives on the rich history and cultures of the Americas. Visit the NK360° website at [AmericanIndian.si.edu/nk360](http://AmericanIndian.si.edu/nk360) to explore its latest offerings, classroom resources, and professional development activities.

Providing educational materials and teacher training, NK360° challenges common assumptions about Native peoples—their cultures, their roles in United States and world history, and their contributions to the arts, sciences, and literature. NK360° offers a comprehensive, accurate, and engaging connection to Native narratives of the past as well as to the vibrant peoples and cultures of today. Building on the ten themes of the National Council of Social Studies' national curriculum standards, the NK360° experience reveals key concepts, or Essential Understandings, that reflect untold stories about American Indians that deepen and expand the teaching of history, geography, civics, economics, science, engineering, and other subject areas.

The NMAI acknowledges the support of the Montana and South Dakota Offices of Indian Education, as they first established Essential Understandings for their respective states and have partnered with NMAI to help guide this national framework.



Marcus Amerman (Choctaw), beaded portrait of W. Richard West, Jr., 2005. Glass beads, fabric, and thread; 32.7 x 29.8 cm. 26/5559

*“We were sitting in the shadow of the U.S. Capitol, and there were probably 25,000 Indians outside, either on their way to the airport or wandering around the galleries of the museum, or walking the streets of D.C. The term “critical mass” came to mind. Indian people were here, they were eager to participate, and they were quite comfortable being in charge. They were not at the margins; they were at the center of the nation. I loved that moment.”*

—Frederick E. Hoxie  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

NATIONAL  
MUSEUM  
OF THE  
AMERICAN  
INDIAN

