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Identity And Public History

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IDENTITY AND PUBLIC HISTORY

William Holderfield

Curriculum, Advocacy, and Policy

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements of

Doctor of Education

National College of Education

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**NATIONAL
LOUIS
UNIVERSITY**

1986

IDENTITY AND PUBLIC HISTORY

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Curriculum, Advocacy, and Policy

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DEDICATION

For MJ

In remembrance of Gizmo and Kitty

With love, Peanut, Meowzer, and Bertie

Abstract

This paper considers the creation of identity and self through interaction with museums. By understanding whether there is a correlation between how someone views themselves and their placement within society and the national narrative, consideration of alternative actions in combating social issues is possible. Likewise, through this knowledge, there is the potential for museums and public spaces to become of greater interest as places where topics relating to social concerns are presented and discussed. A qualitative research method was used to gather evidence of the correlation between identity and museums and revealed a relationship between identity and self-understanding and museum interactions.

Preface

At the start of my dissertation, authors in public history and social commentators, including the public, were concerned with the interpretation of history and the use of public spaces involving historical remembrance of varying kinds. Such concerns included the story told through a museum exhibit on the *Enola Gay* and memorials for Confederate soldiers. I brought forward similar concerns that the media increasingly touted as problematic as part of the arguments I formed early on in work on my dissertation, including controversy over the NFL team name “Washington Redskins,” Columbus Day, and the placement of a mosque near the 9/11 Memorial & Museum. Additionally, I pointed out a lack of equal concern over the George Washington Memorial and the preservation of Monticello in remembrance of Thomas Jefferson.

Since I began work on this dissertation, much has changed in the world, particularly in the United States. Many of the Confederate memorials were removed or vandalized, some Christopher Columbus statues were taken down, and place names with negative connotations, that referenced slavery and racism, or that were derogatory toward Native Americans were changed. For example, the Washington Redskins are now the Washington Commanders, and the Cleveland Indians are now the Cleveland Guardians.

Such concerns gained greater traction as #MeToo flourished and Black Lives Matter expanded during the Trump Administration. Little changed after Donald Trump’s term ended and Joe Biden took office, as the nation continued to be divided along lines created by derivations towards matters such as the use of certain education frameworks, gender identity, and treatment of Latin Americas immigrants. Further, as a product of perceptions that COVID-19 originated in China and spread resultant of Asian activities, some Asians and Asian Americans were treated negatively by part of the American population. This negative treatment was a consequence of

ignorance regarding viral spread and medical science, coupled with socio-political division that bred brazen xenophobic and racist ideologies.

The conflict between people of opposing political ideologies, which is causing dissociation, is related to a fear of losing identity. This phenomenon is reminiscent of the Moral Majority of the 1980s.¹ The growing fissure between political sides supports the subject matter originally intended for my dissertation, as it related to personal identity and understanding this identity.² Further, events since 2020 indicate that the topic covered in this dissertation remains

¹ The Moral Majority was led by religious leaders from within the Christian faith, leaned the Republican party in political affiliation, and a conservative right. The movement, led by Jerry Falwell, Sr., supported and provided thoughts on social and political topics to President Ronald Reagan during Reagan's two terms in office. In the 1980s, under Falwell, Sr., the Moral Majority led the charge against progress on matters that included LGBTQ+ rights, equal rights for women, and abortion. In reviewing the legislative actions of Reagan's administration, there is no question the president and this social movement were aligned and most likely, given the lines of communication and support between the two, somewhat intertwined. It is worth mentioning that the leaders of the Moral Majority and Reagan based their ideologies on their lived lives in the 1950s and 1960s. The ideology of those times was like the ideology they espoused in the 1980s and dovetailed with the rhetoric and political actions related to the Cold War that occurred from the end of World War II until the collapse of the communist Soviet Union in 1989. It is worth exploring the relationship between the rise of the Cold War and socio-political outward expressions towards race, gender, sexual orientation, and education.

With the end of Reagan's presidency, the Moral Majority saw a steady decline that came to an end following the single term served as President by the Republican affiliated George H. W. Bush. After the senior Bush, whose son became president a decade later, lost reelection to the opposing Democrat, Bill Clinton, the Moral Majority decade was over.

Falwell, Sr.'s son, Jerry Falwell, Jr. provided support to Donald Trump during Trump's presidential campaigns. Trump, after being elected President of the United States in the 2016 election, gave a speech at the graduation ceremony for Liberty University in 2017. Falwell, Jr. was president of Liberty at the time (following Falwell, Sr. as president of Liberty University). Like many other Trump acolytes, Falwell, Jr. later resigned as president of the university after fallout following controversy (Conklin, 2023).

U2 released the song, "Bullet the Blue Sky" as part of their album, *The Joshua Tree*, in 1987 and included the song in the subsequent documentary film and film's album, *Rattle and Hum*, in 1988. The lyrics point at the religious ideology that Reagan applies to his politics and the relationship to the Moral Majority. U2 does not specifically name the Moral Majority or Jerry Falwell, Sr., but the lyrics reference Falwell Sr.'s show, *The Old Time Gospel Hour*, as well as televangelism, which Falwell, Sr. was, and the use of televangelism to acquire financial gain from viewers who did not necessarily have money to "donate" (Stokes, 2001). This shows the awareness, and possibly popularity, of the connection between Reagan, Falwell, Sr., and application of religiosity to national and international politics during Reagan's administration.

² In this case, fissure is applied as that found in rock formations or along Earth's surface. However, it is not lost to me that we may want to consider the use as the term is defined in relation to the medical condition one might find for human beings given the current state of society and associated political discourse.

relevant. Given the direction of society and politics, this dissertation is more important now than it was when I began working on it. As a result of the societal changes, I provide some updated article references and additional content and commentary as needed.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

By studying the past, a better understanding of the present is made possible. Jules R. Benjamin (2010) articulates the belief of some historians and students of history that present problems are solvable through historical studies. Still, history, as a meaningful field of study to understand how humankind got to where it is today, as a starting point for social commentary/talking points on present day issues, and a means to interpret the world, has come under attack. These attacks are seen in examples in this dissertation that are drawn from the culture/history wars of the 1990s. Examples from 2014 through the present, 2023, are also included and contain news articles as further evidence of the breadth and focus of recent attacks.

Attack is a strong word but applies to what I see as attempts by certain groups/individuals internationally in destruction of historic sites or removal from textbooks to erase people from history. Nationally, I see “attacks” as an appropriate word as evidence in examples that follow but also as terminology applied by opposing groups towards what is occurring in spaces of history (schools, museums, monuments, and extending to corporations). Therefore, attacks are not limited to coming from one group or ideology, as views over what is included, where concerns stem from, which interpretation is presented, and why consumers are harmed changes over time. However, more recent examples between 2016 and 2023 indicate opposing sides as split along religious, racial, ethnic, gender, class, and political lines.

Nationally, questions regarding the importance of history—both as a degree major in post-secondary education, with history often being a proxy for discussions on pursuit of a degree in liberal arts in general, and as a subject taught from kindergarten through high school—persists as changes in curricula, increased learning assessments, and return on investments take center

stage for politicians, education administrators, and society. News stories from 2014 to 2015 included headlines such as “Republicans throw a conniption over the teaching of U.S. history,” “War memorial separates dead by race, divides Southern city,” “Oklahoma lawmakers aim to halt Advanced Placement history course,” and “Texas students aim at Jefferson Davis campus statue,” and news reports from 2017 to 2018 included “Maryland removes Dred Scott ruling author’s statue,” “Should we tear down statues to slave-owning Presidents?,” and “A lynching memorial is opening. The country has never seen anything like it.”³

In the U.S., part of the problem exists due to misconceptions or ignorance towards the importance of history in education and what history is. At the same time, recent actions towards history—particularly, historical monuments and public displays—have created a conflict between cleansing history and acting against oppression. Such actions have also bled into classrooms, and questions over history in museums are coming to the fore, with accusations of revisionism for either the better or the worse of the institutions and society abounding. Since 2020, counterarguments to the use of critical race theory and the inclusion of historical events related to slavery, the LGBTQ+ community, and gender identity have emerged. While not all these counterarguments are directed at history curricula or public history, the impact on these is evident and further examined in the arguments that follow in this dissertation. These counterarguments directly involve the creation and situatedness of identity while having a potential impact on others’ ability to self-identify and develop an understanding of themselves. This dissertation explores such topics and the possible impacts that such actions have, as I argue from an identity lens within the context of public history.

³ Complete reference information for news articles is found in the References section of this paper.

The extent to which similarities between what is occurring in the U.S. and internationally are debatable given historical and cultural differences.⁴ However, what is not debatable are the international discussions and actions taking place regarding history. For example, the Japanese Prime Minister made comments indicating a rejection of the atrocities or the severity of the atrocities Japanese soldiers committed in China and Korea during World War II, angering political leaders in China and South Korea, and causing concerns in the U.S. Nevertheless, the crown prince of Japan called for this history to remain in the minds of the next generation. Further, as ISIS moved through regions of the Middle East, it laid waste to the history of these regions, with the destruction, much like the Taliban committed towards ancient sites, of historic artifacts and museums in the name of false idolatry.⁵ As a result, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) continues to work on a plan to save as much of these sites and artifacts as possible. News headlines from the end of the 2010s, such as “U.S. to pull out of UNESCO,” do not provide confidence in international actions protecting culture and history across the globe.

The actions of ISIS and the Taliban call to mind past events undertaken by warring people and nations in their attempts to wipe out entire histories and preserve only what they felt was in support of their own ideas or causes. *The Monuments Men*, starring George Clooney, depicts actions taken during World War II to save history and heritage from Nazi destruction and

⁴ Although, if the issues in the U.S. are the result of an increasingly ultra-conservative versus ultra-liberal socio-political divide that clashes over American identity and involves topics on abortion, gender identity, racial equity, financial opportunity, and xenophobic ideologies, then the rest of the world is arguably facing the same. This is noted by recent elections and gaining control of nations by conservative politicians and protests over treatment (including mistreatment) of LGBTQ+ communities, foreign persons, women, and those considered outside of the cultural identity led by historical majorities.

⁵ ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) began moving into some of the countries in the Middle East following the withdrawal of U.S. and U.S. allies during the winding down of war and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2014. ISIS wanted to reinstate the ideals of Islam as they defined it in those places they felt were influenced by Western civilization, straying from Islamic law.

Soviet theft by finding, returning, and protecting works of art and historic buildings. George Clooney's character provides the best perspective on these actions, which is relevant to what the world faces today:

They'd tell us that, with this many people dying, who cares about art? They're wrong. Because it's exactly what we're fighting for: for our culture and for our way of life. You can wipe out a generation of people. You can burn their homes, and somehow they'll still come back. But if you destroy their achievements and their history, then it's like they never existed. It's just ash, floating.

If the belief in history as a solution to current problems in society is valid, then history is a valuable educational tool. Lessons learned from history go beyond not repeating past mistakes. For example, lessons from the past help people understand why slavery took place in the U.S., how slavery led to the Civil Rights Movement, and what role racism plays in continued discussions of inequality.

Without such lessons, ignorant bliss would control the lives of Americans and with it would come the inability to participate in difficult discussions on how to reduce inequality and understand the views of groups of people, such as Native Americans, towards continued poor treatment, such as with the retention of the name Washington Redskins for an NFL team. In 2022, the name changed to the Washington Commanders because of acknowledgement of the problematic and potential negative impact *Redskins* has on part of the population.⁶ However, other teams, professional or otherwise, retain Native American themed names. In some cases, these teams speak with Native Americans about the appropriateness of the names and receive positive feedback to continue with their use. As with all these teams, whether they change their

⁶ I tend towards use of Native Americans as the demographic category used in this dissertation. However, American Indian and First Peoples are other options, as in some situations and other settings additional categories may include Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander. Where known and of importance, tribe, or groups of tribes, should most appropriately be used. Before becoming the Washington Commanders, the team ceased use of the name Redskins and associated logo following the 2019 season. During the 2020 and 2021 seasons, the team retained their color schemes but played under the name Washington Football Team.

name, the idea of identity is present; the identity of Native Americans and how this identity is hurt or helped by the names, identity of fans and team cities, and identity of the teams themselves, are ensconced in history.

It is of little surprise, then, that articles from newspapers in the past year increasingly included “Search for missing Native artifacts led to the discovery of bodies stored in ‘the most inhumane way possible’,” “U.S. counts Indian boarding school deaths for first time but leaves key questions unanswered,” and “A grim, long-hidden truth emerges in art: Native American enslavement.” Further, news headlines go beyond Native Americans and include subject-matter related to racism, slavery, religion, and gender identity. These include “Elgin artist asks city to return controversial ‘lynching mural’ to him,” “Teen accused of cultural appropriation after wearing Chinese prom dress,” “Muslim Amir Khan issued death threats and abuse for putting up a Christmas tree,” “Texas school district approves policy banning classroom discussions of race and gender, restricts books and pronoun use,” “Middle schoolers read about trans teen. SC governor says it violates parent’s rights,” and “Dismiss at your own detriment the points Mark Cuban and Draymond Green are making in discussion on race.” Another article was titled “Tom Hanks offers suggestion to those ‘frustrated’ with current affairs: ‘Read history’,” which offered one solution to understanding the past and relevance to present society. Even so, the relationship to identity and public consumption, along with the concern of a loss of certain identities exists. Consider such ramifications as indicated by the following headline in July 2022: “Mom reveals Netflix hack for British parents who are ‘sick’ of their kids speaking with American accents.”

The *Enola Gay* exhibit in the 1990s, which sought to portray a national identity excluding people of Japanese descent by suppressing the internment camps and devastation from the atomic bombs, attempted to retain identification of Americans during World War II as heroes and

their associated actions as patriotic.⁷ The more recent exclusion of Muslims and their resultant feelings of marginalization as part of the 9/11 Memorial indicate that conflicts arising in public spaces of remembrance depict national identities perhaps as much as the actual conflicts the remembrance attempts to preserve.⁸ How does this identity affect the story told in history? How is this history and identity taught in the classroom? What is this legacy that helps future generations shape their belief systems and understanding of the world?

According to a Pew Research Center survey in 2016, people in the U.S. thought society was better in terms of the inclusion of different cultures, races, and ethnicities compared to the past. From my experiences and perception from around that time, anecdotal examples include the Civil Rights Movement being over with an African American president, or equal rights exist because women are CEOs of major corporations, and a woman ran for President of the United States in 2016.⁹ However, 9/11 showed that Americans continue to hold prejudices, whether born through national tragedy or other learned experiences. The issues surrounding Ground Zero, the remembrance of 9/11, and the development of a mosque near the Ground Zero site show a social divide and an inability to achieve inclusion. The lack of inclusion contradicts the idea that the equal and civil rights movements are over and that equity, regardless of categorical classification, exists in the United States today. Further, a follow up survey by the Pew Research Center

⁷ The Enola Gay dropped the first atomic bomb on Japan during World War II. The exhibit referenced here was to occur at the National Air and Space Museum of the Smithsonian Institution. The plane is currently displayed at this museum.

⁸ Although an article from August 2022, "New York 9/11 museum closes after telling tragedy's story, helping survivors heal," may indicate such needs and identities are shifting or become less important to a wider audience over time based on what that identity is. In this case, this museum seems to indicate that the identity connected with 9/11 in New York is no longer of interest to people or became lower on the list of identities.

⁹ Some anecdotes come from discussions with students in history courses around subjects related to the Civil Rights Movement and Equal Rights Amendment. However, these anecdotes hold with studies on views of Americans from the period during and just after President Barack Obama's two terms in office as evidenced by Love and Tosolt (2010) and Bigg (2008).

(Horowitz, Brown, & Cox, 2019) indicated a decrease in such improvements to societal inclusions over the past fifty years. Respondents attributed the decline to the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States.

The controversy over the mosque in New York lends itself to questioning progress in terms of inclusion and equity. The Holocaust and slavery are part of American education; a history of women and gender studies are common in higher education. However, the controversy continues in New York over the placement of a mosque. What impact does this controversy have on the portrayal of the events of 9/11 at the 9/11 Memorial and the remembrance of this event in society? Does this controversy lend itself to larger discussions of the history portrayed or the message sent through historical interpretation and social pressure on museums and historic sites? Who controls the history provided to society and the education of society?

These questions are important to the discussion of historical representation of events to the public and, by proxy, which identities are of value and how self-identity is developed. The representation of history in public spaces affects society in general simply through public viewing. However, public spaces impact education as the history portrayed enters the classroom through teachers, specialists, students, and experiences provided at such locations; a subtle continuation of past views of people from different cultures and groups within U.S. society, let alone internationally, is brought into homes, viewed on television, and becomes part of political debates, and the potential for internalization by the public occurs to some degree. Ultimately, these spaces create long-term messages about events and society's perspectives on such events. These spaces can become places of conflict, and this conflict can be more telling of societal views than the actual historic events portrayed. In this paper, the focus is on places of public history—specifically, museums; indeed, the research for this paper was conducted in museums.

Thus, it follows that history is an educational tool. The ability to solve issues with equity and achieve something that nears equality in society requires a change in the portrayal of history and the work that local historical societies and museums undertake. The changes at the national level previously discussed continue to take place despite beginning the recognition and reconciliation process three decades ago. With local communities experiencing greater diversity in recent decades, local historians must change the mission of their organizations and include objects and stories of racially and ethnically diverse populations to paint a more complete picture of the history of the community. Without such changes, education of the public is not possible or is undertaken in a way that is national in scope and leads to a distancing of the racial and ethnic issues that continue to plague society. Changes must take place at the local level, and history interpretation is central to educating to understand and improve equality.

Local museums and the public spaces that depict local history must work on a more inclusive message. It is a necessity to tell the story, whether the message is exclusion of minority groups occurring until the past decade or of local politicians supporting the presence of an African American church in the 1840s. It was clear from my research that many of the history societies, museums, and history-related bodies in the suburbs of Chicago do not publish any efforts to tell such a story.

Collection efforts geared toward a more modern period or the inclusion of a history of diversification, even as recent as those during the 1970s, '80s, and '90s, were not part of the efforts at the local level during my research. Exclusion of groups outside the early settlers—typically Whites, which included local politicians and businessmen—proliferate the idea of exclusion in the local communities. Thus, even though national conflicts to include groups

previously marginalized have taken place since the 1990s, similar conflicts are only now starting to take place at the local level in some communities.

Since my research and in the wake of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, some historical societies and museums are moving to include previously marginalized or unknown stories of groups historically absent to their narratives.¹⁰ However, these efforts appear limited in scope and hinge on certain aspects of history, such as the first African American resident of a town. Whether this is a lack of historical records or something else is completely unknown. To be clear, I did not get the sense during my research that such missing aspects of historical narrative regarding non-White populations, or other select populations, is based on any socio-political system or racialized views of individuals involved with the work of these societies and museums. Although, due to recent clashes across the U.S. regarding inclusion of underrepresented or hidden histories, further research on current decisions to include or exclude certain narratives by societies and museums is warranted.

Public historians — those who often maintain museums and places of historic importance, including monuments — educate society through interpretation of objects, sites, and archival materials. Historians conduct research and present their findings and interpretations to the world through written works.¹¹ Social/cultural, economic/financial, individual/national, and political

¹⁰ BLM began following deaths of several African Americans at the hands of police in the early 2010s. Covered by the media and viewed, based on video evidence and/or coroner reports, as unjust and the result of continued unequal treatment of African Americans at the hands of police officers. One example was the shooting of Trayvon Martin by a security officer that held particularly racialized connotations in what occurred. BLM took off following protest that led to clashes with police in Ferguson, Missouri in 2015, coupled with the rise of right leaning ideology and rhetoric during the 2016 presidential election and subsequent presidential term of Donald Trump, BLM continued to gain traction. With the death of George Floyd in 2020, that resulted from affixation by the police use of kneeling on Floyd's neck during arrest, the movement was raised to a new level of prominence.

¹¹ While there are variations in the activities and roles of the history teacher, historian, and public historian, for the sake of a simplified and less philosophical discussion the roles of each are as defined above.

events constitute the past, and the interactions between these events and the differing aspects of world existence are where history lives. As Benjamin (2010) notes, the connection between past and present is unbroken. While human action can break history if so desired, the outcome of this break is devastating, as nations, ideas, and heritage may disappear into the sands of time and the construction of meaning is hindered or becomes impossible.

Therefore, history aids in the creation of self-awareness in relation to one's place in society. Commonalities between personal stories, the stories of families, the stories of communities, and the stories of nations help people relate to their worlds, internalizing ever-expanding ideas of self within a global context. In other words, if someone sees how their struggles are the same as those of others around them, they feel a sense of belonging. Likewise, viewing the experiences of their families in relation to the historical experiences of others in the U.S. helps establish a sense of national pride and commonality among people. "Where do I fit in? Where does my family fit in? What about my heritage, culture, and beliefs?" These national stories relatable to individuals and communities tie everyone together as a cohesive unit.

"Everyone is an American. Do I not belong? Am I not an equal part of society? Am I not important to this nation or its past?" It is a sense of inclusion that creates this perception and feeling. If someone were to look at the national story, or even the story of local history, and not see similarities between their experiences or the experiences of their family, they would feel alienated. What is the lesson if groups of people integral to this story are missing? Museums, as places of history education, have a moral imperative to address issues in society.

It is becoming more important for history educators and the spaces where history is portrayed or learned to consider positionality and the creation of identity as it relates to the visitors that come through the doors, as well as what is occurring in the larger scope of society.

Particularly, at this moment, given attacks on parts of the historical narrative that were hard-fought for inclusion are being eroded due to social and political actions, resulting in a once-marginalized population returning to such a status and rejoining other continually marginalized groups.

It is through such consideration that a greater understanding of how external and internal factors, knowledge, and perception of self are created in relation to the historical story being told. This, in-turn, impacts how history is taught or presented to the public but may also help to motivate the public to have an interest in taking a history course or attending a museum centered on history. If no one hears the message, what impact does it have? How can history change society positively if no one is interested in learning history? If people do not feel a connection to history or in attending a museum, what motivation do they have to interact with the valuable lessons provided through history education?

For example, parts of society, regardless of race or ethnicity, believe the Civil Rights Movement is over because there was a Black U.S. president. Other parts of society ignore continued inequality (Levine & Ritter, 2022). Although some applause is necessary for society to recognize that overt racism may have diminished during the tenure of Barack Obama, hidden racism is still present. This was an awakening resulting from the election of Donald Trump and grows with continued division along party lines following the election of Joe Biden. Teachers, historians, and public historians, who can be lumped together as history educators, help society understand these issues by providing interpretations of the past and its relation to the present through history education.

While history educators can raise questions that make society think critically and help society progress towards its betterment, even if only in an idealistic world, it is the most public

of these educators who tend to come under fire when larger discussions take place and controversial ideas are presented. Unfortunately, attacks on formal education related to critical thinking towards historical narratives and the inclusion of lessons and materials on gender-identity and racial injustice are currently occurring. Such attacks have occurred in museums in the past, and they will likely occur again if such attacks on teachers become widespread and successful.

In the scope of historic preservation, protection of U.S. history and culture, and classroom learning, the stories of all groups throughout American history must be included. Exclusion leads to the issues regarding where one fits within the nation and its history. To exclude also produces an inaccurate portrayal of the protected history. While there is a desire to preserve the culture, heritage, and past of the nation through historic preservation, the dominant culture is also preserved. Part of the reason for the neglect of minority, or non-dominant, cultures is the result of what is available and appropriate for preservation and what is available for constructing the story told. Other reasons include the people involved, who are not always the predominant group, and legislation.

Regardless of the reasons, the result is a hidden curriculum in the national story of the past in the U.S. While viewed at the local level, absence of some groups in the historical narrative is most visible at the national level due to the coverage of high-profile stories by the media and legislation that is both more visible, ranges more widely across the nation, and is not easily overlooked. Where does the issue begin? What can be done about the issue? Ultimately, how is history—particularly, as presented in public spaces—used as an educational tool of inclusion and nation-building?

Discussions of inclusion/exclusion, race, and equality tend to occur based on a racial binary that often plays out in the historical narrative of the U.S. and remains the primary focus of many social issues. Based on the apparent increasing prevalence in the media over the past several months, the lessons of history go beyond this binary. Lessons must encompass more than race or ethnicity alone to create a nation, or even a world, where differences are acknowledged. History helps people understand how they and society got to their present situations. History also supports the creation of the self in relation to the world and, more importantly, in cultural understanding/meaning both within the local community and nationally. In addition to creating the self and placing the self within a larger context, history education must aid in creating a society wherein people feel welcome, can feel as if they belong, and can progress in any facet of life without marginalization. Thus, is equity not what the U.S., American democracy, and American capitalism are founded on and for?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Museums impact identity and the creation of self within society. There are two ideas needed to understand this statement. First, the creation of self and identity occurs throughout life and in different settings. Murrell (2007) refers to this as positionality, which is a label used in addition to identity and self throughout this study. Works on positionality often come from the fields of psychology, education, and sociology. Second, public history is a means to interpret history—and, by extension, culture—for preservation and consumption. *Public history* is a general label but includes practitioners such as archivists and historians and involves such locales as museums, historic sites, and monuments. For the sake of this study, museums are the chosen locale given their ability to house objects and narratives and have different focuses in relation to other museums, for comparative study.

Identity and Creation of Self

Bronfenbrenner (1994) discusses the impact of the external environment as it relates to the creation of the self. In this creation, there are three types of external environments. The first is the direct relationship between the individual and the immediate environment, experienced continuously and for extended durations of time. For example, in the family environment, the relationship between parent and child is a direct and extended interaction. Another example is the school environment, wherein the relationship between peers is a direct and extended interaction. In these types of environments, the prolonged and continuous interaction results in the exhibition and reception of actions, grammar usage, thoughts, and other such stimuli or relationship-building based on likeness and mimicry. People around the individual reinforce their actions and thoughts.

A second type of external environment relates to direct relationship wherein the length of the interaction is limited or short. These types of environments include going to the library, going to the store, spending time with a babysitter, or going to a concert. The interaction is with people who are of a less familiar status than those of friends or family, who have only a brief period in which to affect the thought or action of an individual. Similarly, this short duration and lack of deep relationship between the individual and others in that environment is not conducive to reinforcement of a thought or behavior. Therefore, continued sustainability of a particular action or belief is unlikely, such as a mode of speech using slang or drinking that may exist for only that brief period. These actions may not be those typical of the individual but undertaken to fit in.

The third type of environment is indirect. This indirect environment affects other people or the other environments in some manner related to the individual. For example, a parent goes to work and is affected by the work environment, which, in turn, indirectly affects the child when interacting with the parent at home. Work becomes an indirect environmental impact on the child-parent interactions at home.

According to Bronfenbrenner, the environments that impact the creation of the self and the spaces in which learning takes place—classrooms, museums, and public spaces—help in answering or creating perceptions that address questions of the self in relation to society. “Where do I fit in? Where does my family fit in? What about my heritage, culture, and beliefs?” These national stories relatable to individuals and communities tie everyone together as a cohesive unit. “Everyone is an American. Do I not belong? Am I not an equal part of society? Am I not important to this nation or its past?” It is a sense of inclusion that creates this perception and this feeling. If someone were to look at the national story, or even the story of local history, and not see similarities between their experiences or the experiences of their family, they would feel

alienated. If groups of people integral to the story are missing, what is the lesson? Moreover, what impact does this lesson have on the creation of the self in relation to society?

Bronfenbrenner (1994) is important to the argument of identity, and he points out that the creation of the self and understanding of identity are created from experiences; these experiences are external, take many forms, and occur in many settings/situations. Further, the external becomes internalized and is thought about, consciously or otherwise, by the individual, further shaping identity and self. This identity and self-understanding apply not only to the individual but also to their relationship and situation within society. Murrell (2007) argues that the symbolic world shapes people and that learning occurs during socialization, wherein rich cultural communities exist. Murrell goes on to argue that the absence of a sense of purpose and identity leads to a lack of meaning or connection for the individual.

Examples of Bronfenbrenner's (1994) importance to the discussion are found in historic and more recent events as they relate to identity and self-understanding, particularly regarding social awareness and place within society. Clark and Clark's (1950) research showed understanding of self as related to colored dolls and certain emotions associated with such understanding for children aged between three and seven years old. One interesting outcome was the difference between children in the North compared to those in the South, where expected responses being more negatively connotated in the South in 1950 was not supported by the data. In some cases, children from the North experienced emotional distress when asked to take part in aspects of the experiment related to self-identification.

The *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)*. case was a merger of five cases on the issue of school segregation: *Bolling v. Sharpe*, *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*, *Briggs v. Elliott*, *Gebhart v. Belton*, and the case of *Brown*. The lead attorney who took the

Brown case was Thurgood Marshall, who understood that, to win, according to Kluger (2004), it was necessary for the plaintiff to show damages and the extent of damages. What Marshall employed was the use of psychological research and understanding in laying the foundation for racial inferiority as the result of being separate but equal; that inferiority was the reason for the segregation in schools to keep one group of people below another based on race but also resulted in long-term psychological damage that continued to keep one racial group beneath another even after schooling ended.

Marshall looked to research conducted by Kenneth Clark and Mamie Clark (1950) that utilized dolls to determine the effects of internalized racism on children. Kluger (2004) explains that the doll test asked children to select from brown and pink dolls the ones they looked like, the ones they wanted to play with, and the ones that were good/bad. The findings of Clark and Clark's experiments were that African American children learned that white skin was deemed better than black skin and that Whiteness determined aspects of good/bad. Adding to the psychological argument against segregation was the research conducted by other psychologists and researchers who determined that, among African American children, there was a view that Whites were better or preferred over Blacks and that African Americans were unable to progress to high-level jobs or beyond remedial societal functions.

Brown v. Board, 1954, and the presentation of the subject by Kluger (2004) are not the only examples of the application of Bronfenbrenner (1994), nor is the application of the psychology presented by Marshall during the Brown case the only argument for how experiences within society impact identity and self. I do not offer further arguments or studies here, but I do point to more recent examples of the application of Bronfenbrenner.

Consider the impact of Roseanne Barr's joke about politician Valerie Jarrett looking like a character from *Planet of the Apes* as well as some of the other messaging that occurred in society and media in the past several years, including articles referenced in the introduction of this paper and other events, such as the National Anthem and kneeling in the NFL, growth in questioning over BET as racism, and appropriation of style and culture.^{12, 13} Police actions — in some cases where interactions are perceived as racialized and overly aggressive — have sparked the beginning of the current cultural shift towards primarily African Americans is like the actions taken leading up to Rodney King, the L.A. riots, and the O.J. Trial of the early 1990s. Cultural shifts at that time resulted in a boom in hip-hop and rap music in the mainstream, multi-racial casts accepted on television in the form of *Saturday Night Live* and *In Living Color*, and even HIV/AIDS as a homosexual disease and stigma was altered with the revelation of Magic Johnson testing positive for HIV in 1991. These examples indicate an understanding of identity and how such identities are informed by experiences.

While these examples are tied to race, the issues they relate to are not exclusively a matter of race. Murrell (2007) argues that exclusion occurs and exists based on social class, not

¹² It is irrelevant to the event, but for posterity, it is unclear if Roseanne was referencing a specific film or television series with her commentary.

¹³ This includes subsequent coverage, government response, societal views, and actions of both the NFL and team owners regarding kneeling. Kneeling during the anthem came about in response as a political message against the treatment of African Americans by law enforcement. Such activism spread to other spaces, including the NBA and MLB. Due to continued controversy over the action as unpatriotic or as disrespectful to military members, kneeling was largely replaced with optional opportunities to remain off the playing surface during the anthem and some sports implemented policies allowing this action as a replacement for the unacceptable kneeling practice. It is also worth mentioning that the practice of remaining off the playing surface as a sign of protest also occurred since Colin Kaepernick opted not to stand for the National Anthem in 2016 and kneeling expanded, beginning in the NFL. An example of remaining off the playing field during the anthem includes Gabe Kapler, the San Francisco Giants manager, using the measure in the wake of string of mass shootings leading up to a school shooting in May 2022 in Uvalde, Texas.

just cultural racism. Additionally, Murrell points to other biases and exclusions based on sexism and homophobia.¹⁴

According to Rogoff et al. (2007), individuals bring their own experiences and understandings to each situation in which they take part or encounter. How the individual acts depends on the situation in which they find themselves and may differ from how they act in other settings, when alone, or with certain individuals. Their mannerisms, speech, and actions reflect the situation in which they find themselves at any given time. Thus, learned responses or actions occur through interactions within different settings; these learned actions are, to some extent, created, not by a group or individual in the group, but by the overseer of a group's activity. Rogoff suggests that these specific situations rely on adult or teacher overseers (*educators* as a general term for both types of overseers) who create the experiences and set guidelines for how they want children or students to act in the situations provided. Learning and provision in showing what learning took place placate the expected actions and mannerisms that the educator expects. This expectation relates to the student or child, but exhibition through the actions of the adult, parent, or teacher is possible. These expectations may also be the result of collaboration between the overseer/adult and the child/student based on need, interests, or desired outcomes.

As chapter seven by Gallimore and Tarp (1988) in the edited work by Moll (1990) discusses, cognitive theorists believe that learning occurs through experience—particularly, through conducting an activity or thinking. In contrast, socio-cultural theorists argue that learning takes place through watching others act or react and by taking part in activities related to a specific setting or within a specific group. It is clear from Gallimore and Tarp that learning

¹⁴ Murrell (2007) indicates the studies by Connolly and Healy (2004a, 2004b) relating to social class bias. While the topic of bias towards homophobia, according to Murrell, is studied in Kimmel (1994, 1997). Sexism is tackled by Kimmel and Messner (1992), Gilligan (1982/1993, 1992), and Sadker and Sadker (1986, 1994).

occurs through different means. While formal education in a classroom or educational setting is central to content and skills related to the learning process, situational learning, and the ability to maneuver between other types of settings are important for the individual to gain a better understanding of how the formal is applicable to the non-formal. Likewise, learning in a non-formal setting affects how individuals learn in formal settings, which requires the learner to adapt and become part of any system in which they find themselves. This adaptability is important to command and learn from different types of settings and experiences. It is also important to recognize that this learning is based on cultural differences; thus, in the classroom, understanding differences is necessary for acquiring this learning.

As presented in the edited work of Damon and Lerner (2008), and as indicated by Bronfenbrenner (1994), there are a variety of factors related to motivation, and these factors change over time based on age, gender, and race and are impacted by internal, external, and situational factors. Damon and Lerner indicate that different cultures — particularly, as they relate to minority groups — cope with the prevalent social norms and relate to the predominant culture differently based on their own cultural beliefs and understandings. It is through social interaction within their own culture that they learn how to interact with and relate to the culture of others. Their own cultural meaning is part of the relationship in relation to education, the roles of individuals within their culture, and the expectations of society towards their own wellbeing or understanding.

Damon and Lerner (2008) clarify that the interaction with and importance of the extended family play a large part in the socialization process. As such, it is important for children in these groups to have the ability to interact regularly with family members. Meanwhile, this understanding of the extended family and its importance is useful in supporting the education of

children in the classroom and the learning process. In providing settings for such interactions to take place, lessons that allow children to explore these family relationships and how they connect to classroom learning or subject matter, as well as the involvement of the family in the learning process, become essential to the child's learning and socialization regarding both the predominant culture and their own culture.

Hinchey (1998) suggests that imposition of choice, or the perception of such choice, whether in society or in an educational setting, occurs. Predetermined choices are pre-selected, whether by society, a higher authority, or a teacher. Often, these choices are pre-selected by something above the means of conveying or perpetuating the belief or idea, sometimes based on historically created notions. Hinchey goes on to provide examples of choices and how power structures create these choices for the masses. In doing this, she also argues that people must question these choices and power structures. A person can explore new ideas and consider alternative options, maybe even confirming their pre-existing beliefs and choices based on such questioning by this means.

As Sprague (2010) points out, there are different views of or points from which people view the world. These views, according to Sprague, create a sense of understanding of what is taking place in the world and create a "reality" that is based on this view, along with the associated "rules" that exist for the view. Sprague suggests that the view of a researcher affects the outcomes of the research conducted. In general, other than the researcher, people tend to use a view that also creates the reality in which they live or perceive the world around them.

Thus, it is important to understand, first, that there are multiple views, and second, when someone is using a particular view. For Sprague (2010), to understand these views is to understand the arguments and perceptions of others participating in interactions. While such an

understanding is important, in many ways, Sprague suggests that it is not truly a total or complete understanding, as people have their own experiences and beliefs that are unique to them, and thus no one can truly understand someone else.

Overall, Sprague's (2010) work is a general overview of the different epistemologies that exist. It is accurate of Sprague to argue that no one can truly understand someone else or a different point of view; it is possible to come close to a complete understanding and, through such attempts to understand, come to an agreement and relationship with others or other points of view. By making these connections and striving to understand other views, a person better understands their own situational existence in relation to the world around them.

At the same time, Sprague (2010) misses the importance of people coming to some critical level of approximating the views and perceptions of others. This is the important part of the argument, but it tends to get lost in definitions. Non-White, non-male, and non-middle-class groups are capable of these feelings and understanding such different views of the world, which removes the ability of others to have their own views or understand such views. From this belief, White, middle-class males are unable to understand or grasp these other views; when White, middle-class males feel as if they have understood other views, these views are often colored and inaccurate based on the privilege of the White, middle-class males. This argument is contradictory, as there is little mention of the other groups of people who are both unprivileged and grasp the views and perceptions of White, middle-class males.

Crotty (2003) suggests, particularly in a social context, that meaning constructs the world. While this meaning exists in different forms, with different meanings at different times, constructed meaning comes from social context. Certainly, Crotty points out, there are meanings an individual creates independently at some other time, but the primary meaning of the world

comes from learning the meaning that others place upon it. In this sense, people, as Crotty argues, are born into such a world that has pre-existing meaning, and they must learn this meaning through their social interactions. However, Crotty claims that such meaning is pre-existing and is only human-based, suggesting that meaning does not easily change. Further, Crotty does not make a case as to why or how new meanings are created.

If the world contains pre-existing meaning that people are born into, as argued by Crotty (2003), are we to assume that the world has no meaning unless meaning is assigned? For Crotty, meaning-making is solely a human right. This view suggests that nothing else exists with the ability to construct meaning. However, a slippery slope results when we suggest that humans are the sole beings with the ability to construct meaning. First, it puts humans at the apex of the world, and lack of caring for the world can easily develop from such a position. Second, it lends part of the human population to suggest certain groups of people are less human (sub-human) due to a lesser ability to create meaning. This lesser ability can include individuals with lower levels of educational attainment, different ableness, and social status stemming from, among others, financial standing, job title, and political capital. In short, historically oppressed groups are represented in the suggestion, and this same thinking ultimately led to the slavery of Africans, genocide by the Nazis, and treatment of people with different abilities, such as electroshock therapy and institutionalization (and even death) in many places in the world.

Such openness is limited; no real reasoning or explanation for changes in such determination of meaning or acceptance of meaning exists. If Crotty (2003) is correct in saying that people are born into the meaning of the world, then how can meaning change over time? Meaning is alterable during a person's lifetime, and thus, birth into such meaning is dynamic.

However, Crotty offers no real suggestion of how this works. What creates meaning? How does meaning change? Who changes it? Why do they change it?

Trostin (Lukenchuk, 2013) suggests that learning is a reflexive practice taught or learned through autoethnography. This method allows for a greater study of how experiences and situations affect thought and action, allowing for changes in understanding and interaction with the world. Education is, therefore, self-reflection. This is one consideration for an alternative to formal education.

Lukenchuk, et al., (2013) argues the same, in that self-reflection allows for a greater understanding of the forces directing the beliefs and actions of the individual to the world. This understanding produces the creation of a changed self—and, in turn, a changed society—that is better than the previously non-considered self-change. This is a practice highly suggested for everyone but particularly for educators.

Within the microcosm of school culture, teacher-parent relations play a crucial role in assuring academic success and a dynamic and productive social life for students. It is imperative, therefore, for both parents and teachers, who could be representatives of different cultural traditions, to create spaces of mutual understanding and respect and to listen to and learn from one another. (Lukenchuk, 2013)

While placed in a slightly different context, Erini Adamopoulou (Lukenchuk, 2013) suggests that “efforts to advance mental health services for children and adolescents in a particular country should include an examination of parents’ distinct cultural differences and perceptions regarding their children’s mental health.” This is like Maria E. Hernandez-Rodriguez (Lukenchuk, 2013, Chapter 6) and Murrell (2007), both suggesting it is important to gain a better understanding of cultural differences and expectations before addressing changes or policies to advance help. While educational help/improvement exists in the cases of Hernandez-Rodriguez and Murrell, mental health is suggested in the case of Adamopoulou (Lukenchuk, 2013).

Public History and Museums

Ian Tyrell (2005), in *Historians in Public*, argues that, in the 1960s and 1970s, there was a movement to conduct and produce history from the ground-up. This movement stemmed from the work done by historians as part of the New Deal programs and their interest in capturing what took place during the Civil Rights Movement. Such production came on the heels of Carl Becker's (1931) "every man a historian" argument that lent itself well to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. For Becker, everyone is a historian by virtue of having the skills necessary to collect history and record history, which people without formal training or education in such activities do through sharing family stories, building photo albums, and remembering past events.

Where this idea fits with the creation of identity is in people connecting their past to ever-increasing narratives of history. People recall their own history, connect with their parents, connect with extended family, and connect with their locale, and this feeds into a national narrative; it is their identity, how they understand themselves within the context of the national narrative, within the community in which they live, and their own experiences that create the self. Whether an individual reflects on or considers this in their lifetime is unknown.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the argument from outside history was that historians and history education looked too much at specific groups of people, previously underrepresented in the history narrative, and were neglecting the national identity and continued use of the Great Man¹⁵ view of history education, whereby history is regarded as a series of events that are important because of, occur resultant of, or are promulgated by men of great importance. Such men are well-known in history and often include politicians, military leaders, or similarly powerful and

¹⁵ "Great Man" theory is attributed to Thomas Carlyle (1840).

prominent figures. Notice, however, that these people are exclusively men. This exclusion appears in places such as the Smithsonian Institution, with the Enola Gay exhibit, in which military and world leaders, along with prominent military personnel, are included; other stories at the ground level from Japanese citizens or other interpretations of the events were not part of the original narrative. Attempts to include such narratives were criticized when such changes were suggested, leading to part of the controversy surrounding this exhibit.

Tyrell further argues that history broke down from a national story to one of specific groups. Was it necessary to have separate lessons or courses on specific historical topics, or were these lessons and topics to be weaved into a larger picture? Another split took place between historians and public historians based on the question of proper education and training in the profession, as the public historian was in the public eye and thus more highly and easily criticized by both public and professional audiences.

Paul Conklin and Roland Stromberg (1989) discuss the theory and history of the field of history in *Heritage and Challenge* and make it clear that history is a tool but that one should not force the product or create it for a specific agenda. To do so, according to Conklin and Stromberg, is to create a product that is inaccurate, questionable in substance, or, at the very least, looked down upon by others in the field. They acknowledge that history is not truth or simple facts but a complex interpretation of what took place based on the known and through trained skills to make connections based on scientific inquiry where no connections may directly exist. While it is accurate to say that historians create products of history, these products may differ or appear similar in values based on personal interest, public interest, or some other system of valuation.

Eric Foner (2002) discusses how historical events, movements, and ideas have shaped the creation of historical production and research in *Who Owns History?* In this text, he alludes to the notion that history is continually shaped and that our understanding of history continues to change with each generation. New information changes perspectives on history in society. As such, it is in the estimation of Foner that history must be flexible but unalterable at the basic level to the new ways it is used and how it is interpreted. Foner also argues that historians must remain well-trained and must take on a larger role in societal discussions of history.

Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen (1998) discuss the understanding of and use of history by Americans in everyday life in *The Presence of the Past*. The researchers present research indicating that most Americans view college professors as the most authoritative source of historical teaching (54.3%), well above that of high school teachers (35.5%; Rosenzweig and Thelen, 1998). The view is that museums are the most trustworthy source of historical information (79.9%). Personal accounts are between 64.4% and 68.9% based on a public informant or relative, respectively. More education means a higher rate of attending a museum or cultural place or even reading a book on history (Rosenzweig and Thelen, 1998). In terms of connectedness, people feel more connected to history gatherings with family (67.7%) compared to attending a museum (56.0%) or taking a course in school (27.8%; Rosenzweig and Thelen, 1998).

With museums playing such a central role in American society in relation to the dissemination of information, the decision to display or interpret history in any manner is not something to take lightly for museums and public historians. It is also something that educators cannot neglect, especially given the findings of Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998), which suggest that society values the education provided by museums over that by formal schooling. Of

concern is that a wider audience misses out on such informal education due to a lack of formal educational attainment.

The importance of the conversations that take place in museums as part of the exhibits and interpretations can impact societal thought and relay particular and important meanings, shaping views of society for a global audience. As such, the recently opened 9/11 Memorial & Museum, the exhibit on the Enola Gay at the Smithsonian Institution in the early 1990s, and perceptions of the Disneyfication of the nation's story and historic sites are examples of concerns raised by society, academic historians included, over history education and the portrayal of history in public spaces. What is the relayed story? Who is telling the story? Who is receiving the story? These questions are all part of the arguments over public displays of history. What is the role of history? This question is perhaps, presently, the most important question, initially raised during the history wars of the 1980s and 1990s.

Over the past year, news reports on local and national politics, including classrooms and school curricula, point to growing questions (typically by opposition to inclusion of certain narratives, previously oppressed groups, or a method of instruction or interpretation) over what histories and whose histories are presented and taught for public and student consumption (Al-Arshani, 2022; American Legion Post 36, 2022; Associated Press, 2022e; Associated Press, 2022f; Associated Press, 2022g; Brewer, 2022; Brown, 2021; Cusaac-Smith, 2022; Fonseca, 2022; Kohlruss, 2022; List, 2022; Loller, 2022; Love, 2022; Lueders, 2022; Martinez-Keel & Felder, 2022; Matterson, 2022; McShane, 2022; Migdon, 2022; Romero, 2021; Spielman, 2022; Vaisvilas, 2022; WSBTV.com News Staff, 2022; Zalusky, 2022). What are the intentions of historical studies? Is it to raise the difficult questions? If the desire of opposing groups is to maintain hidden narratives and groups of people, is the interest in doing so to present the

traditional Great Nation / Great Men stories that promote nationalism and a singular, sterilized version of history?

Stephen Fjellman (1992) argues in *Vinyl Leaves* that culture is created through collective ideas and understanding. Mass dissemination and consumption of a created object or thought is, whether naturally or artificially, the start of cultural implementation. Culture as a commodity must become popular to the masses and, as the result of successful messaging, is made acceptable in society, necessary for society, and desirable to an individual (Forgacs, 2000).¹⁶ Hence, Fjellman claims that culture, especially pronounced in the twentieth century, is the result of the successful commodification of culture. The example that Fjellman uses in the discussion is the Walt Disney Corporation—particularly, as it relates to Walt Disney World in Orland, Florida.

Fjellman (1992) further argues that the theme parks in Orlando create a sense of the ideal society and associated morals. Visitors to the parks are guests, not visitors, and the aesthetics of the parks relate to a psychological desire to create a safe and entertaining environment that is fulfilling to guests. This is like being a guest at a friend's or family member's home. Disney accomplishes the task by creating an environment that is clean and constructed in a manner to help guide guests to where they want to go, weaving *familiarity* into the experience. That familiarity connects visitors to Disney stories that they grew up with and are aware of through mass media and popular culture. Products, which guests are encouraged to own, are marketed by using this familiarity. Disney is crafted for and understood through American culture, which, in turn, influences and creates a part of that culture.

Fjellman (1992) juxtaposes Disney and popular culture with Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *1984* to describe how a utopian ideology is disseminated and

¹⁶ The basic tenets of this idea come from the work of Antonio Gramsci.

broadcast and society is kept from reality. In Fjellman's argument, history becomes devoid of unpleasant ideas and actions, commodified for the masses, and then restructured to be entertaining, promoting the Great Nation / Great Men narrative with a generally pleasing message. Given Disney's interest in creating historic parks or taking part in historic sites, some historians are concerned with narratives that are hidden or altered to fit more agreeable storylines for public consumption. Despite fear of the Disneyfication of history, there are those who feel that Disney and the creation of entertainment to promote history to the masses is good, as popularization of subject matter can positively impact a desire to study history and the associated narratives. Besides, greater concerns over hidden or cleansed history for mass consumption exist with increasing political actions across the nation to create or preserve national and personal identity.

Regarding national identity, George Lipstiz (1990), in *Time Passages*, argued that the Department of Education and some within the educational community wanted to return history to a place of nationalism and heroism, increasing its importance to schoolchildren and society. What Lipstiz discussed is how popular culture, while serving as an advertising and leisure tool, constructs culture. Processes of cultural creation inform historians of collective thought, according to Lipstiz.

I argue that through the creation, dissemination, consumption, and content of popular culture, regardless of form, it is possible to learn in detail what the ideology and cultural existence of a particular time consisted of. At the same time, popular culture is a way to understand why certain ideologies persist and provides insight into the formation and consumption of culture by the masses.

Lipsitz (1990) makes it clear that popular culture, like history education, is necessary for understanding culture. Popular culture therefore indicates how culture was and is shaped for the people and their nation. This shaping impacts identity formation, as culture plays a role in identity creation and understanding of the self within a culture. Like popular culture, history education provides an unseen opportunity to learn about society and question the present state of the world by posing difficult and sometimes unsavory views or questions about what has and is taking place. It is through this challenge of the known “facts” of history and present-day society that change occurs, first through inquiry and then through action.

Freeman Tilden (2007) discusses in *Interpreting Our Heritage* how national parks and historic sites must help public education by being effective partners in interpretation. Tilden provides six principles for interpretation, which he defines as “an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information (Tilden, 2007).” He goes on to break this down into a private internalization of interpretation and a public function of interpretation, as “interpretation is the revelation of a larger truth that lies behind any statement of fact” and “interpretation should capitalize mere curiosity for the enrichment of the human mind and spirit.” His six principles are paraphrased as (1) what is being displayed to the viewer is personalized; (2) interpretation moves people towards understanding based on information but not vice versa; (3) interpretation is an art that allows for material to be taught; (4) interpretation is provided to invoke thought and discussion; (5) the interpretation addresses the whole story and not just a single part; and (6) the interpretation is age-appropriate in level of communication without leaving out any of the information dependent on age group (Tilden, 2007).

Interpretation must occur from different angles to ensure the reception of the intended message, whether the purpose is to change society or purely to educate. The field of public history, including historic preservation, is open to similar interpretations. Therefore, awareness of their own field and the effect of society on it is important to museums and public historians.

William Murtagh (2006), in *Keeping Time*, discusses the history of preservation in the U.S. The discussion includes the role of the government and Murtagh's own national trust in preservation. It seems that most of the role of the government is to respond to threats to aspects of American heritage through its preservation actions. First, it was the Native American culture, with the *Antiquities Protection Act of 1906*, which protected cultural and natural resources for the American people. Second, there were actions during the Great Depression, such as the *Civilian Conservation Corps*, that gave people jobs and tries to preserve buildings in the face of new-construction losses. This work carried over to national parks and landscapes, and it occurred during a time when the nation was concerned about nationalism—particularly, the rise of fascism and communism in Europe. Third, the *National Historic Preservation Act of 1966* helped establish historic preservation in the nation and grew the number of local museums and organizations as a result; however, it also affected the education of trained professionals in this area as it led to creation of formal educational opportunities and a need to increase knowledge on the topic through further professional development.

The *National Historic Preservation Act of 1966* was also intended to preserve the heritage of the nation according to its language. This was largely the result, according to Murtagh (2006), of urban sprawl and the expansion of the highway system. There is a plausible argument that Murtagh does not make regarding the use of funds from this legislation to rehab old buildings in urban areas at a time when urban areas were deteriorating due to two decades of

funding neglect. This funding and the decision to preserve old buildings were likely not an attempt to help those living in public housing per se, although funding may have aided in some instances; rather, this project was one of historical preservation with social and racial undertones. Furthermore, the question of whose heritage is preserved is of interest, as if sprawl were the reason for the action, and the legislation suggests that those living in older suburbs and rural areas were the most at risk. Given that White society lived in these areas, legislation and decisions to preserve suggest that the preservation of White heritage in America or American heritage was related to the preservation of White society and not those of other minority groups.

In 1966, the nation was going through the Civil Rights Movement, with the right to vote passing just one year earlier, in 1965. In addition, the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* was passed, prohibiting discrimination based on race, and the *Civil Rights Act of 1968* made it illegal to discriminate based on race in housing. Again, the idea of preservation was to save the idea of the Great Man in American history, then the Great Nation, and ultimately the “aesthetics” of the local community under the guise of Great Man / Great Nation.

As Tilden (2007) points out,

A roster of the reasons why people visit parks, museums, historic houses, and similar preserves, though a fascinating excursion into human psychology, need not detain us here...I go upon the assumption that whatever their reasons for coming, the visitors are there.

The expectation for the educator is to leave information for the adult visitor, who comes in with an idea or prior knowledge, in the form of labels or signs to help guide them in learning.

Generally speaking, certainties contribute toward human happiness; uncertainties are a source of spiritual loneliness and disquietude. Whether or not he is conscious of it, man seeks to find his place in nature and among men – not excluding remote men. Primitive parks, the unspoiled seashore, archaeological ruins, battlefields, zoological and botanical gardens, historic sites – all happen to be exactly those places where this ambition is most likely to be satisfied. (Tilden, 2007)

Frisch follows in Tilden's view, claiming that

Audiences may bring to the site a host of general but very firmly fixed images, derived from family and personal history, popular culture and tradition, primary and secondary basic education, modern media treatments, and so on... audiences may be presumed to bring to the visiting of a major site at least a general image and story, and a framework suggesting the place of that story in a wider history. (Frisch, 1990)

What is this perception, and what shapes it or preconceived understanding of history?

Frisch continues:

My evidence suggests that our students' historical memory may not, in fact, be shaped so much by their education or lack of it as by collective cultural mechanisms and structures we need to understand better... Those studies argue the existence in American culture of a set of shared beliefs, myths, "meaning systems," and historical images forming an essentially religious structure, and inquire into the content, origins, and functions of the complex, both as a general cultural concept and in terms of its particular American meaning.

In sum, Frisch calls out the impact collective culture has on social understanding and meaning-making as well as the importance of other institutions, whether physical spaces like museums or cultural structures such as family relationships, in shaping cultural concepts. These cultural concepts, it follows, include history and the interpretation of history. As a result, it is no less important for educators—particularly, those at museums—to be aware of the knowledge that students or the public carry. Further, museum professionals must have this in mind when constructing exhibits, creating signs, and interpreting the history that the public encounters.

Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998) asked in their research which four areas—family, racial/ethnic group, community, or the U.S.—are of most importance to know about the past. Racial/ethnic breakdown of those selecting race/ethnicity as most important was 26% of African Americans, 10% of Mexican Americans, 38% of Oglala Sioux, and 4% of Whites. The research further indicated that the level of connectedness to the past when visiting a museum was lowest for African Americans. It is not clear if museum attendance rates affected connectedness to the

past through museum visits, but according to Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998), African Americans had the lowest response in terms of attendance at museums over the past 12 months. African Americans felt a greater connection when gathering with family and a higher connection watching television or movies about the past compared to visiting museums.

These findings indicate that there is a connection between connectedness and the past in general, but this connectedness relates to race/ethnic identity at the very least. Additionally, the results of the research by Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998) point to questions regarding who attends museums and why as well as why museums appear to be of greater importance to some groups, in this case in terms of race/ethnicity, than to others. Going beyond museums, the findings play an important role in more formal classrooms and lead to similar questions about the importance of history to certain student populations. Are there student populations, whether based on race, ethnicity, or some other demographic categorization, that have greater interest in the subject or feel greater importance to understanding and knowing about the world than other student populations? Whose history is presented and why? How does this impact learning? More importantly, what cultural identities and social understanding are gained or lost?

History, Memory, and Self

Frisch (1990) describes his idea of historical memory as understanding the place of oneself within the greater context of society, which sounds like Bronfenbrenner (1994). That historical memory exists, primarily, through a national consciousness and the existence of a predominant cultural structure is clear. It follows, then, that the accepted historical memory, as a national consciousness, takes on a religious connotation in select situations (Frisch, 1990). The religious connotation here represents the unfaltering and difficult-to-alter beliefs and views that ensconce national consciousness to the point that a large part of society is unwilling and unable

to change the accepted memory. Part of the reason, likened to religion, is that to change this memory and the associated beliefs or views requires a change in self-understanding and identity. Such change is exceptionally difficult or impossible, with great internal and external conflict arising. More directly, nationalism is an example, but so are recent news reports on the fervor over the protection or removal of Confederate statues from public places in the U.S.

It is through an understanding and internalization of history that self-realization in society and identity occur. Often, this self-realization and understanding result from a sudden jolt or can form much quicker through conflicts, public or personal, concerning ideologies and perceptions of the world around an individual. Confederate statues are an example of these conflicts and perceptions, but other examples across the world exist. A more generalized example is the destruction of monuments, temples, and statues by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria in areas in which insurgents took control in the Middle East. The intention of these individuals was to remove the identity and culture of one group and replace it with their own. Such action against cultural identities met with conflict from the local community but also commentary from the international community. Further, the actions of ISIS did not stop with the symbols of a differing culture and identity; they bled into the classroom and curricular implementation to instill a new identity through a new ideology. Museums and historic sites, along with history as a field of study, are places where conflict easily occurs for the very same reasons as those just indicated. Museums, holding their place as preservers of culture and history and thus protectors and creators of identity, come into conflict with those who feel their own self-understanding and identity are under attack.

Gail Anderson's (2004) *Reinventing the Museum* contains articles that discuss topics related to museums. These topics center on museum management, collections, the definition of a

museum, public relations, and the work of the museum. The articles discuss the museum as not just a place to amass collections and preserve history but also a place where the public is able to be educated. A shift in the past two decades towards a more educational role in museums has taken place and remains important to modern-day museums. Presenting history in a way that leads to greater interest in visitors to learn more and, in part, to persuade visitors to consider themselves as agents of change or to reconsider the present based on the past following their visits makes the job of museums difficult. The problem is how to educate the widest audience while also remaining entertaining, which is one of the primary reasons visitors go to museums. This is the most current dilemma facing museums.

Ideologies and positionality—defined by Murrell (2007) as the identity of individuals based on an intersection of multiple aspects from inside and outside the individual that create a sense of one's place in society—and individuals' understanding of themselves relate directly to knowledge of history. To question long-held beliefs, especially those that help an individual define society or themselves, can lead to conflicts when unsettling understandings about a person's own belief system occur. In other words, self-understanding as an understanding of how an individual fits within society and a national or world narrative, and identity as an understanding of who an individual is in all respects, are partly formed through beliefs and ideas. These beliefs and ideas come from experiences over time, some of which family and friends provide, and others of which are provided by society. The stronger and deeper the beliefs and ideas that connect with an identity and self-understanding, the greater the protection placed on the beliefs and ideas.

As such, one's identity and self-understanding are either affirmed or challenged when an accepted national identity, heritage, and religion are made prominent, solidified, or concretized

by museums. Anderson (2004) adds that the increase in the number of specialized museums—particularly, those based on race and ethnicity, such as those found around the National Mall—has heightened tensions and longstanding conflicts in recent decades. That such museums now exist suggests that the historic context of long-standing heritage and racial/ethnic issues bubbles to the surface in a public and expansive manner, invariably leading to tension and conflict over whose truth matters.

As Frisch (1990) points out, these tensions and conflicts find their way into the education system and lead to greater discussion on the importance of an inclusive national identity. This takes away from individualism. It also results in attempts, according to Frisch, to impose a single national identity based on educational reform, blurring the line between culture and politics. Foner (2002) argues that identity creation based on national history is not problematic unless there is neglect of *all* parts of history or failure to acknowledge the role of diversity. Ignoring the negative actions perpetrated against “others” or refusing to acknowledge that other histories exist can result in issues at varying levels. These levels include social conflict, misunderstanding of history, a false sense of self, and the creation of narratives perpetuating ideologies detrimental to social understanding. Movements towards liberty and equality, according to Foner (2002), fall apart in the face of such neglect, and the ideology of democracy diminishes. Regardless, Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998) make it clear that Americans turned to the past to understand their present positions and future plans.

According to Loewen (2007), only one in six Americans takes a course in U.S. history in post-secondary education, which results in most Americans learning about history from other sources, such as movies, museums, and books. Loewen (2007) makes a point about history education and, supported by Rosenzweig and Thelen’s (1998) research, suggests that the identity

and positionality of Americans come from an understanding of history based on movies and museums. Tilden (2008) agrees with the idea that Americans learn from museums and historic sites but further argues that the education that occurs is not as artificial as it is in a movie or novel. He suggests that the education that takes place in museums and at historic sites is based on a physical object that has a direct link to the past and aids in the creation of a person's place in society (2008).

These objects have a greater impact on the individual for two reasons. The first is that the object is real and visible, available for someone to reach out and touch if they wanted. This means, according to Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998), that the object, like the history related to it, is infallible, creating comfort for the individual and suggests that their identity, in relation to the object and related history, is also infallible. The second reason is that the individual trusts the object as a physical and real representation of history due to its intrinsic value and the verifiable authority of the institution displaying it (Rosenzweig and Thelen, 1998). This trust can create conflict very easily, however; since the object and its related history are infallible in the eyes of an individual viewing the site or museum exhibit, any questioning of the object or its related history becomes a personal assault on the individual's understanding, according to Frisch (1990). In the case of national, heritage, or religious identity, the conflict is much clearer and heightened (Frisch, 1990).

Apart from showing the limited progress in society and education through the lens of these conflicts and the handling of similar controversies at the local level, there is a hope that the knowledge gained from this research is applicable to other aspects of society and education. Application of findings from the project may help in understanding housing and job segregation, the controversy over reverse racism, and current and historic equality issues in educational

settings. Further understanding of the forces at play are applicable to the creation and inclusion of queer history and culture in future curricula.

History Wars

The history wars, from the 1980s through early 2000s, coincided with social and political interest in political correctness as it related to museums and history education. The political correctness that played out during this period included relabeling different demographic categories and reconsidering the interpretation of historic events. Generally, the use of the term *political correctness* is pejorative; however, the term, used here, refers to the changing views and expectations occurring during that period. Examples of such changes include the *Enola Gay* exhibit, the passage of the *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990*, the response to Roseanne Barr singing the National Anthem, and the first kiss between two women on television (Roseanne taking part in the scene).¹⁷

Beyond simply the field of history during this period, the culture wars were a clash between two disparate cultural ideologies. On the one side, American exceptionalism, and the need for crafting a uniquely American curriculum, and on the other side, advocates for reconciliation of the history(ies) of the (mis)treatment of groupings of people and calls for the inclusion of previously ignored groups into society. This was a period when an intersection of politics, culture, and efforts toward social inclusion existed in public display and included visible and loud conflicts.

Museums and historic sites were places where these changes and related conflicts often played out. As such, museums and historic sites, as public spaces that connect with politics and a

¹⁷ Roseanne sang the national anthem in 1990. Due to her rendition, many believed she was making a joke out of the event and in some way acting unpatriotic as a result. The kiss referenced here took place on an episode of the television show, *Roseanne*, in 1995.

culture of exclusion, came under heavy criticism for their actions throughout the history-wars period (Anderson, 2004). Subject to criticism and opened to debate were several historic sites and institutions, including museums closely related to historical preservation and interpretation; among them were the Smithsonian Institution, the Library of Congress, the Museum of the City of New York, the National Holocaust Museum, Pearl Harbor, Gettysburg, and the Alamo (Anderson, 2004; Linenthal, 1993; Linenthal, 2001).

Linenthal (2001) argues that conflict in such spaces is the result of memory related to the story told; the conflict over memory increases depending on the number of people remembering and who is remembering, which he terms *pluralistic ownership*. Couple this theory with the religiousness or sacredness of topics related to nationalism, heritage, or religion itself and the conflict quickly escalates. “The act of challenging sacred historical narratives is a thankless task at any time, but especially so in periods of great uncertainty” (Linenthal and Engelhardt, 1996). One such example relates to a proposed exhibit in the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of Air and Space in Washington, D.C.

The *Enola Gay* exhibit, following decades of neglect and the decision to preserve the plane that dropped the atomic bombs that ended World War II, was controversial from the start. Discussions began in the early 1990s regarding the creation of an exhibit for the plane as part of programming to celebrate the 50th anniversary of World War II. Controversy grew over whether the exhibit would present a political statement or a more glorified presentation of the end to the war as solely an American victory, much in the Great Men mentality. What subsequently followed throughout the rest of the planning was the controversy over the narrative provided and the intention of the exhibit as a political and social instrument for the culture/history wars. Was *Enola Gay* an exhibit of celebration, both for ending the war and demonstrating the history of air

power during wartime? Alternatively, was it a statement piece showing the tragic end to the war and the start of a period of fear over weapons of mass destruction?

For the American veterans of the war, the expectation was for a celebratory exhibit standing as a testament to the good they accomplished through their actions. To the Japanese, the exhibit helped to provide an opportunity to explain the actions and the destruction of atomic warfare, allowing a coming to terms between Japan and the U.S. and healing lingering wounds. For others—including Japanese Americans impacted by internment camps enforced by the U.S. government during the war, and individuals opposed to war and atomic weapons—the exhibit was an opportunity to address the wrongs committed on both sides of the Pacific but also serve as a warning about racism and war for future generations.

The proposed exhibit followed on the heels of discussions related to the preservation and interpretation of the start of World War II for the U.S. at Pearl Harbor. Like *Enola Gay*, the airplane and not the exhibit went unpreserved after salvaging ended in the early 1950s. By 1983, proposals to formally preserve and interpret Pearl Harbor as an important historic site had begun. Finalization of the project occurred in the early 1990s, just as discussions about the *Enola Gay* exhibit began. Pearl Harbor, as with the Alamo, became part of national heritage, holding a protective place in the hearts and minds of Americans, especially for those who experienced Pearl Harbor or who were alive during World War II. According to Linenthal (1993), those who were at Pearl Harbor when attacked by Japanese forces became heroes and the first American casualties of World War II.

After Pearl Harbor, Americans viewed the actions taken against Japan as redemption; discussions of whether to include a captured Japanese submarine and personal items from a Japanese pilot as part of the Pearl Harbor site became points of conflict (Linenthal, 1993).

Linenthal (1993) states, “For some, physical defilement is symbolized by the presence of Japanese tourists and Japanese ships at Pearl Harbor, at the visitors center, and at the memorial.” He goes on to state, “believers in the moral symmetry of righteous vengeance have reacted bitterly to the transformation of Hiroshima into a universal symbol of the horror of modern war and human suffering” (Linenthal, 1993). These comments were made at a memorial in Hiroshima for victims of the atomic bomb dropped by the U.S. over the city during the war. Some people thought the national memory of World War II, regarding its aftermath as a major period of growth in American nationalism and a celebration of the successful actions of the military, was diminished by the government and society. In some instances, the legacy was placed under revision in public spaces—in museums and historic sites—of remembrance.

The controversies that surrounded the Pearl Harbor site boiled over into the *Enola Gay* exhibit. The controversies over purpose and inclusion became conflicts about identity—particularly, national identity—because of this questioning of the official historical interpretation. This interpretation centered on *whose* American nationalism and *the significance* of specific events during the war that were deemed necessary to protect the U.S., its people, and its culture. Questioning this national heritage of American actions during the war as necessary and right became sacrilegious in some respects as well. For the historic community, who learned a valuable lesson about the new direction of historical interpretation and inclusion of certain groups in determining the message of history in public spaces, trust from the public was in doubt over historical interpretation (Frisch, 1990).

Museums must be aware of the voices they listen to and the agendas or views that motivate people to speak, as evidenced in the *Enola Gay* example. These same arguments are

true for historic sites and other public spaces where interpretation and presentation of history occur for the public.

It follows that the principles of equality, justice, freedom, and so on that we associate with democracy cannot be decontextualized if they are to be significant. They have to be understood and realized within the transactions and interchanges of community life. Moreover, they have to be chosen by living individuals in the light of the individuals' shared life with others. Therefore, an important dimension of all education must be the intentional bringing into being of norm-governed situations, situations in which students discover what it is to experience a sense of obligation and responsibility, whether they derive that sense from their own experiences of caring and being cared for or from the intuitions and conceptions of justice and equity. (Greene, 1995)

Applied to historic sites and museums, Greene's comments suggest that students and the public must be educated on the sharing and experiential nature of history, and remembrance and portrayal of history by and within a pluralistic society. It is through this education that a better understanding of an individual's societal position and identity form; it is also through this education that the tenets of equality and democracy, the building blocks of the U.S., apply to and support growth towards an infinitely closer equity for all. If ignoring the multitude of histories that make up the nation's past, particularly as it relates to great victories, triumphs, and celebration of innovation, the very nature of "national progress toward liberty and equality" is forgotten (Foner, 2002).

History Wars Continue

Foner's (2002) view on the ignoring of history applies equally to the past and the present, wherein the present consists of current discussions taking place in society that hinge on interpretation of the past and more recent past. Controversies were numerous for the 9/11 Memorial, according to Goldberger (2004). Design and location were two of the controversies surrounding early discussions over a 9/11 memorial; the use of the memorial as a political tool was another controversy, which angered many involved in the project and the public as well. A

major controversy occurred over religion—particularly, the proposed location of a mosque near the memorial site. The site was at the selected location for Ground Zero. “Because memorial planning began so soon after the attacks, emotions remained intensely raw, with searing grief infused into every discussion” (Blais and Rasic, 2011). News reports from the past two years indicate the ongoing conflicts over this topic.

Like the hatred towards the Japanese following Pearl Harbor, distrust towards those of Japanese descent living in the U.S. during World War II as exemplified in the internment of these individuals, and lasting national identification of the Japanese as the enemy during this period, Muslims were viewed in a negative manner by some following the events of 9/11.¹⁸ The view towards Muslims existed after 9/11 despite the speech by U.S. President Bush that the ensuing war and cause of the attacks were terrorist groups and nations supporting terrorism. Nationalism during World War II and the national memory of the event led to the conflicts over the *Enola Gay* exhibit and the Pearl Harbor historic site, particularly when discussions over the inclusion of Japanese artifacts, the internment of Japanese Americans during the war, or the horror over the use of atomic bombs on the Japanese took place. For the American memory of the war, the Japanese were the enemy and were supposed to be held indefinitely in such a role regarding World War II, regardless of current relationships between the U.S. and Japan. Post-9/11, the national identity, based on the American memory of 9/11, included a place of infamy for

¹⁸ September 11, or 9/11, consisted of four airplanes being hijacked by terrorist in 2001. Two planes were flown by terrorists into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, one each, in New York. One of the hijacked planes was flown by terrorist into the Pentagon. The fourth plane, Flight 93, was understood to have passengers attack the hijackers and the plane ultimately crashed in an empty field in Pennsylvania. The hijackings were claimed by the Afghanistan based terrorist group Al-Qaeda, which was led by Osama bin Laden. The events of 9/11 led to the U.S. and some of its allies entering in a war with Iraq and Afghanistan to end terrorism, capture bin Laden, and bring governments supporting terrorist activities to account. The wars and U.S. led occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan lasted until about 2021, with final troop withdrawals. September 11 also led to major changes in air travel, particularly in the U.S., negative treatment towards Muslims, and international activities of the U.S. and allies towards both terrorist groups and governments supporting such groups.

Muslims, who were demonized as the purveyors of the attacks. The public generalized, as did the government with their actions of surveillance and profiling as a means of security, Muslims as the attackers and not the individuals or Al Qaeda.

Like Pearl Harbor, the site of the World Trade Center in New York, as well as the site of the plane crash in Pennsylvania and the Pentagon, is a place where the blood of heroes spilled, and the first American casualties of the resultant war occurred (Blais and Rasic, 2011). As for those attacking the U.S. these sites were symbolic of U.S. strength and were selected as the point of attack for this reason. Additionally, these sites, following the attacks, were places of martyrdom for the anti-U.S. causes of the attackers. The events of 9/11 became part of the American national identity, and the site of the World Trade Center was the representative object situated in a public space; this opened the site and the proposed memorial to criticism. Such criticism was viewed as an attack on the national identity and thus the personal identity of many Americans.

At the Pennsylvania site, the plan for a memorial included an arc of maple trees, but some argued against the use of an arc, as it was too like the crescent symbolism used by Muslims (Moore, 2011). Other plans discussed during early stages of development were for a memorial and museum at the Ground Zero site replacing the World Trade Center name. The plan, which featured a socio-political message that included freedom and religious tolerance, was rejected for being controversial. The belief by victims' families and survivors that any message other than one that was aimed at American nationalism and heroism diminished the event and those involved (Moore, 2011; Pogrebin, 2005). Thus, roughly five and ten years after the events of 9/11, the place of Muslims as a generalized population and purveyors of the attacks had not changed in the American identity.

In 2010, the message was similar; conflict arose after a proposal was agreed to allow the development of a mosque and Islamic cultural center near the Ground Zero site. Many believed that the location of a place related to Muslims was inappropriate near Ground Zero. The group leading the development of the cultural center and place of worship made it clear that the center was to provide additional spaces for remembrance of the World Trade Center and 9/11 but also to include programming for Muslims to remain true to their American identity and avoid fundamentalism within their international community (El-Ghobashy, 2010).

The national identity that resulted from the 9/11 memorial at Ground Zero clearly showed that long-held belief systems related to a historical understanding that Americans included White, Christian, patriotic, middle-class individuals had not diminished. Under the conflicts related to a national identity that resulted from the events of 9/11, Muslims were demonized, and previously ignored groups of people remained on the outside of the American identity. The question was whether the inclusion of a beam in the shape of a cross, for which proponents of the inclusion of the object in the exhibit space of the memorial argued that it was a symbol of the fight to survive and as recognition of the faith of survivors who saw the object as a symbol for their salvation, was raised by non-Christians—particularly, atheists—who felt marginalized from the story as interpreted by this object (Sgueglia, 2013). Whether the conflict was a true depiction of a national identity that excluded atheists and non-Christians or whether those in the traditionally marginalized group continued to harbor an identity of exclusion requires more study. Nevertheless, the appearance, to a degree, of the exclusion of Muslims from the Ground Zero site, a public space, suggests a national identity that is still not free from prejudices.

The *Enola Gay* exhibit in the 1990s sought to portray a national identity, excluding people of Japanese descent and either downplaying or suppressing the internment camps and

devastation from the atomic bombs to retain the identification of Americans during World War II as heroes and their related actions as patriotic. Similarly, the exclusion of Muslims and their marginalization from the Ground Zero memorial indicates the potential for conflicts in public spaces when remembrance is used to depict national identity.¹⁹ The question thus becomes how the official historical narrative and resultant conflict from marginalized groups inform personal or national identity. Subsequently, what role do museums play in creating these identities and providing space for discussions over narratives and conflicts to occur? Furthermore, how is this history and identity consumed through education and in the classroom? How can museums help or support future generations shape their belief systems and understandings of the world, and can museums play such a role?

Museums and Understanding

As During (2007) points out, the museum, as a place of intersection between politics, society, and history, must retain its authority to get its lessons across; part of the lesson needs to include an understanding that history and culture in America are composed of pluralistic memory and experience (Anderson, 2004). According to Anderson (2004), museums must attempt to understand this plurality when undertaking their mission of education to limit blatant inaccuracies in interpretation or misrepresentation of history. Through such understanding, the museums can conduct their work to the best of their ability, create truly public spaces that involve all of society, and continue to maintain the trust of the public.

Greene (1995) argues that the application of the national issues related to this education are applicable to the local level as well. This application at the local level will further personalize the issues of exclusion and positionality. It appears too often that the local message is

¹⁹ Ground Zero is generally used to denote the former location of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York that were destroyed during the 9/11 events.

overshadowed by the national message, whether due to a lack of news coverage, the political connectedness that a national institution can command, or interest in the story of local history.

Loewen (2007) makes a condemning statement that

people who put up markers and monuments and preserve historic houses are usually pillars of the White community. The recent spate of Martin Luther King avenues and monuments notwithstanding, Americans still live and work in a landscape of White supremacy.

Often, conflicts viewed at the national level do not occur at the local level simply because local communities tend towards greater hegemony. Lack of diversity, regardless of the characteristic the diversity takes, preserves long-held beliefs and associated identities at the local level. Changes, therefore, at local museums tend to materialize slowly, if at all, with the general premise for such disinterest coming from a desire to maintain the local aesthetic, or “feel,” of the community.

Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998) make it clear in their research that people tend to think about the past, whether their own or that of others, and reflect on how past actions help them understand and better appreciate the present. Part of these actions at looking at the past to understand the present is an understanding that individuals must both understand their identity and take responsibility for the past (Rosenzweig and Thelen, 1998). National museums and historic sites, as public spaces that help in the creation of a national identity and a movement towards greater equity in society, provide a lesson for similar institutions at a local level. Loewen (2007) points out that

these sites divulge important insights not only about the eras they describe but also about the eras in which they were built. In short, the lies and omissions memorialized across the American countryside suggest times and ways that the United States went astray as a nation. They also point to unresolved issues in a third era...our own.

Since education takes place indiscriminately—meaning that it occurs anytime, anywhere, and in any way—stimulus of any sort must be education (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994). For example, consider only the stimuli that takes the form of ideas, or knowledge²⁰: Knowledge is gathered through education for the individual. This knowledge shapes the individual's perception of the world, providing further information through interactions that contextualize meaning. Whether television programming, classroom involvement, or walking down the street talking with friends, learning occurs, helping to establish a perception, or meaning, of the world for an individual.

The individual creates a sense of self and through this creation of self makes meaning of the world. The individual then comes to understand how their created self fits within the world. This creation of self, according to Bronfenbrenner (1994), involves ecological stimuli, a partial means to self-creation.²¹ Bronfenbrenner does not directly link his illustration to how the self changes from one context to the next, or to another situational setting; in turning to Peter Murrell (2007), this link is found through the idea of a changing self-informed and transformed by situational settings. Murrell (2007) terms this process *positionality* in his book *Race, Culture, and Schooling*.

These concepts support the overarching idea that education occurs in many ways and directly affects the individual and thus society. Both Bronfenbrenner and Murrell lend their concepts to a reconsideration of education—particularly, in schools and, no less importantly, in

²⁰ John Dewey (1896) also suggests stimuli as a part of learning, whereby these stimuli result in a thought or idea that is remembered and recalled. In essence, this is how children, although not exclusively, learn basic reactions and gain an understanding of the world around them.

²¹ The Concentric Circle Theory was developed by Burgess and Parker and published in *The City* in 1925. The theory was based on human ecology and used to study the development/spatial patterns as they existed in Chicago during the 1920s. While the theory became part of the canon for the Chicago school of sociology in the 1920s, it has since been applied in a greater context to urban development itself.

society. When the social aspect is discussed later in this paper, history—particularly, as it relates to its use and portrayal in public spaces such as museums and historic sites—is described as the primary vehicle for driving a discussion about identity formation. The reason for this is that museums and historic sites are arguably the most authoritative means to learn about historical topics and therefore hold more weight in relation to the type of subject matter that can shape understanding of the stories of a nation (Rosenzweig and Thelen, 1998). These settings also provide social aspects and interactions, which are important factors in the creation of self and learning (Murrell, 2007; Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

The importance of historical study is useless if no one listens or is interested in pursuing the associated knowledge and learning from such study or interaction. In other words, if no one attends a museum or a public space involving historical exhibitions—if no one wants to learn about the history, regardless of how well they relate to the story or perceive themselves in the material discussed—the message remains hidden or silent. Why is this important, and how is it related to creating the self?

As described in Damon and Lerner's (2008) *Child and Adolescent Development*, children—particularly, those around middle-school age—are increasingly subject to peer comparison in relation to success and failure. This peer comparison—including perception and understanding of how one's cultural group has experienced certain situations or participated in different aspects of society historically—may lead to student apathy toward learning. Thus, historically, if African Americans were barred from entry into the profession of police officer, then there is a greater possibility in the present for African Americans to choose not to enter this profession.

While it is accurate to say that historians create products of history, these products may have different values based on personal interest, public interest, or some other system of valuation. It is not enough to create works of history; it is also necessary to educate the public on the works and how history affects social thought. Eric Foner (2002) views the holistic teaching of history as necessary to move away from singular beliefs based on a single class of people or demographic, even from the Great Man / Great Nation idolatry that tends to take place from secondary education down and in places such as museums. Maintaining Great Man / Great Nation curricula and interpretations creates singularity in thought, and changes to social norms are thus questioned.

Frisch (1990), connecting museums and exhibits as well as historic sites and monuments, argues that audience participation, understanding, and pre-existing knowledge must be considered as part of public history display and interpretation. He is partly concerned about whether boredom will exist or if learning will take place. He is also concerned about the perception of messages, as such messages may conflict with pre-existing knowledge or first-hand experience. He argues that part of the issue with history education, and thus public history, is that Americans tend to learn certain cultural ideas (i.e., the Great Men syndrome). Furthermore, their lack of specific knowledge outside of general nationalistic ideas creates an obstacle for public historians in museums in creating a truly thought-provoking, educational environment. These historians share a concern for encouraging their visitors to take in or become interested in such displays of the past.

To end the point, Frisch discusses the urban history museum, arguing that these museums tend toward the display of history like the Great Men argument: people typically define the city

in terms of the history they learned about it²²; they simply continue to expect maintaining the previously learned information, with little or no change, when encountering further interaction pertaining to the city's history. In other words, the long-held understanding of the history and identity of the city persists regardless of new information. Therefore, there is a general loss of history to question society or politics, and the ability to engage with the audience in the conversation of issues over time or the present are absent as a result. Such questioning, if contrary to what is previously understood to be true, results in internal and external conflict over self-understanding and identity. Thus, there is a desire to simply ignore or not participate in further discussions when presented with conflicting histories.

²² The Great Men argument of history is that history consists of great men that make history. It is still one way in which history is possibly studied, although with the absence of underlying sexism as the original philosophy.

Chapter Three

Research Design and Methods

This study explores the theory that a museum encounter (such as viewing an object, visiting an exhibit, or reading a narrative) contributes to identity such that an individual feels or understands their identity and the self in relation to history or society. This is a proxy for the impact of public history on social understanding—particularly as it relates to self-awareness and personal identity. This study uses the perceptions of museum professionals to determine whether there is a feeling of connectedness or understanding of self-identity in relation to objects of culture.

Objects of culture, such as music (Janata et al, 2007), hold meaning for people. These objects can elicit feelings, memories, or recollections of sights, smells, or tastes. Why consider encounters with public history, such as museum visits, differently? People encounter cultural artifacts of varying types and periods, but there must be some internal response to each object (Tinio & Gartus, 2018). For example, imagine viewing an exhibit for your favorite sports team, a television show from childhood, or a toy line that your child played with growing up. For many people, hearing “And now, the starting lineup of your...” or the opening bars from “Rock ‘n Roll Part 2” by Gary Glitter makes them think of the Chicago Bulls or Michael Jordan from the 1990s. For others, seeing a red trolley makes them think of Mr. Rogers. What toy comes to mind if the description of it indicates it is made of coiled metal or plastic and walks down stairs?

Recollection resulting from these objects supports the idea of a relationship between an individual and cultural artifact. Familiarity plays a role in recollection, but the relationship of an individual to an object is more cerebral. Why does someone have a recollection of the Bulls from the ‘90s? Why does a red trolley result in remembering Mr. Rogers? Where does the memory of

a slinky come from? With these questions, connecting the object to the individual is necessary, as the individual must consider their past and how it relates to the object.

The same is true during a museum visit and when viewing historical objects, such as an artifact or narrative encountered in an exhibit (Garner et al, 2016). What object or narrative are visitors drawn to? Why are they drawn to it? What do they remember from their visit, and why do they remember what they did? Responses from a visitor will vary depending on visitation purpose, length of visit, whether they were with other people, and a multitude of other variables that include the ability to internalize and reflect on the experience and think critically about their visit (Falk, 2008; Weiser, 2016; and Benford et al., 2022). As internalization, reflection, and critical thinking are not easily accomplished (as evidenced by the need for post-secondary curriculum that includes exercises to improve such skills and a call by federal and state governments to increase learning of these skills in K–12), interacting with visitors to determine how they feel connected to or understand an object as it relates to their identity seems like an impossible task.

In short, it is more abstract or an aspect of themselves that they do not consider or are not required to consider often enough to respond to questions about their feelings of connectedness. Where were you or how did you feel when Michael Jordan led the Bulls to their sixth championship in the 1990s? What did this championship mean to the city of Chicago? I argue that these questions are easier to answer due to their direct connection to the superficial self, as they do not require a tremendous amount of thought or making connections to a more abstract idea; a person can recall their experience in relation to a known object. How does the iconography of Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls of the 1990s help you understand who you

are as a person? This is a different sort of question that requires different knowledge and the ability to connect ideas to an understanding of self or identity.

Concepts of self and identity in relation to their creation and understanding through internalized perceptions of external forces are complex ideas (van Halen et al., 2020). The complexity relates to the ability to grasp certain concepts in relation to others (Perry, 1998). For van Halen et al. (2020), self-confirmation is relatively understood, but when combined with identity and the creation of self-understanding with museum interactions, the subject becomes complex and of greater difficulty to understand (Perry, 1998). This makes studying these concepts through direct research questions difficult when considering a mediator such as museums, requiring modifications to how the concepts and associated questions for data collection are formed and portrayed to research participants.

Falk (2009) discusses the identity of museum visitors, as do other texts and research. However, Falk (2009) considers identity in terms different from those used to answer the question “Who am I?” in the broader sense. How Falk (2009) typically considers identity in relation to museum visitors is in terms of typology. Additional work on the museum visitor and the present identity of visitors involves the use of demographics in terms of how demographics impact learning, how people move through museum space, who visits a museum, and what type of learning occurs (Falk, 2009; Falk, Dierking & Foutz eds., 2007; Falk & Dierking, 2013; Falk & Dierking, 2000; Storksdieck, 2006; and Anderson & Shimizu, 2007). Identification, in these types of works, is used more as descriptive identifiers to group individuals and create statistics to find connections between groups and museum experiences (Faden, 2007). To my knowledge and through my research into texts and studies on museum visitors, there does not exist an analysis of

the creation of identity or self-understanding through museum experiences as an interaction with the cultural artifacts.

Identity, in terms of the individual and in relation to a social context, is learned through interactions occurring within spaces of learning (Rounds, 2006; Kozinets et al., 2017; Eklund, 2020; and, Latham, 2015). These spaces can be public or private and can involve the individual interacting with them directly or through social interaction within them. Examples of such spaces include classrooms, museums, amusement parks, or one's own living room. The mediums through which interactions occur can be a newspaper or television show, but they can also include a museum exhibit, social interaction through discussions with other people, or the viewing of a statue in a park. I contend that it is through these interactions that identity is created or affected and that it is a feeling of connection, or the absence of such connection, that lends itself to this identification by an individual. Such identity creation and understanding of the self allow people to move about social structures, place themselves within a national context, or lead to future interactions within a given space based on this understanding.

Identity is therefore constructed. This construction includes the present but also involves the past. Without acknowledging or understanding history, the present condition of groups and what spatial and social constructs mean is more difficult to both arrive at and comprehend as changing over time. For example, the recent actions taken by society and corporations against those accused of sexual assault or the tearing down of Confederate monuments require a greater historical understanding of treatment and views towards the notion of sexual assault over time, gender inequities, racism, commemoration, and tensions arising from long-term mistreatment by law enforcement and the federal government.

The study of public history, which includes public and private spaces, history education, museums, historic sites, and monuments, allows viewing of the more recent social and political issues to occur through contestation of the narratives involved (Grinell, 2014). At the same time, these narratives, and the spaces in which they are presented, provide a more focused and limited lens through which interaction in relation to identity creation and self-understanding is studied. If identity is constructed, then identity is a product of experiences.

The internalization of external experiences, even in a broad definition of experience, helps the individual form identity, form a belief system, construct lenses, and generate multiple layers of existence within the surrounding environment. Sensations, interaction with others, ideas, and spaces, and the resultant internal dialogue that categorizes each experience within an individual's understanding of self and place, impact identity. History also informs these experiences. Whether during lectures in a classroom, reading a bibliography, discussing genealogy, or visiting a museum, the experience impacts the person's understanding of their identity and their place within a larger historical narrative that informs present situations within society.

The difficulties in conducting research on this topic are the population selected and the method of data collection in relation to the subject matter. Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998) serve as an example of casting a wide net in selecting a population and in using a survey to conduct research on a related topic to my research. Rosenzweig and Thelen received funding from Indiana University, the Spencer Foundation, and the National Endowment of the Humanities to conduct their survey. This indicates to me that large amounts of resources are potentially needed to conduct research. In the research indicated by some of the museums later discussed, studies were completed by external research groups. This indicates that museums, many of whom

suggest that they have limited resources to conduct research, are turning to companies or consultants for help. These companies and consultants offer more specialized researchers, a larger number of researchers that can focus on the study, and the ability to analyze the collected data for reporting and suggesting actions. As an individual with no additional resources beyond myself, the difficulties mentioned are of greater concern for my research.

Simply arguing that the method and population selected for the research are due to a lack of resources alone is absent of more important reasons for such decisions. Below, the reasoning for different aspects of the research is described. In short, the topic is complex and not easily studied. I also believe it was important to allow individuals participating in the research greater opportunity to explore the topic as needed during the interview process, as the notion and reflection of how a historical object, exhibit, or narrative found in a museum helps in understanding identity or informs the creation of self for a participant is not something people generally consider. This is evidenced by the lack of available research on the topic and experience in discussions regarding museums, where visitor experiences and learning are often studied but little else. After all, what is the concern of a museum—is it to enable people to reflect on their identity or learn about how they view themselves within society, or is it to educate the public on certain topics and provide an enjoyable experience?

To this point, different strands of my argument are explored through the examination of the literature pertaining to theory, past studies, historical events, and recent news articles. Given that the topic under study involves history, public history, education, and psychology, it is important to consider a research methodology that fits the various disciplines involved in building the supporting arguments encountered to this point. Further, the intentions of the research that follows are not to draw a conclusion or act as a final authority on identity, the

creation of self occurring in museum spaces, or the gaining of social understanding through historic sites, objects, monuments, or associated spaces portraying historical narratives; the purpose of this study is to support a theory and determine whether the theory warrants further exploration.

Research Methodology

Interviews were recorded and field notes were written for later analysis for 15 museum professionals. The intention of the interviews was to explore whether identity or understanding of self through museum interaction exists. It is my contention that understanding of identity and creation of self occurs through connection to cultural artifacts, including narratives, found in museums. The need to draw from multiple disciplines and the intention to support this theory lends itself to a bricolage research methodology. As Rogers (2012) points out, use of various methodologies is important to bricolage research methodology to allow researchers a toolbox that includes multiple, traditional research methodologies from various fields of inquiry and varying lenses to apply a broader array of knowledge in relation to the subject under study. Sharp (2019) supports the view that a bricolage research methodology is multidisciplinary. Sharp goes on to argue that this methodology allows researchers to have greater flexibility in how research is designed, how research occurs, the data used, and the ability to analyze data. Other methodologies are singular and limit researchers to bounded processes and interpretations.

Underlying methodologies drawn on to form a bricolage research methodology for my study include historical research, hermeneutics, and grounded theory. The use of historical research is applied to this study. In the research that follows, the use of historic videos on the openings of a selection of national museums related to underrepresented groups supports my

theory and findings from interviews I conducted by establishing a trend in identity connected to museums.

The use of this methodology is not an attempt to solve a problem in society, nor is it a documentation or historical analysis on the history of identity or creation of self and museums. This differs from the indication by Wani (n.d.) of what historical research involves from a perspective situated in education. Situated in the field of history, historical research involves the use of primary and secondary sources, both of which were used for this paper. Additionally, historical research involves an interpretation of the past based on these materials. While interpretation involves the selected materials, it is not tied to the past but a theory about identity and the creation of the self.

In terms of hermeneutics, a methodology primarily found in historical research, the focus is on interpretation of materials and what these materials indicate about society (Moules, 2002). Historical research using this methodology includes interpretation about the past that may inform the present. Using aspects of hermeneutics to interpret past events and prior discussions on contentious portrayals or missing aspects of the historical narrative as viewed in relation to identity and creation of self is possible. This paper differs from a traditional use of this methodology in the fields of history and public history.

A more recent attempt to include hermeneutics within educational research couples this methodology with a more traditional education-based methodology, phenomenology. The result is the hermeneutic phenomenology research methodology (Dengal & Josh's, 2020), which regards materials created because of a phenomenon, generally as a reflection of individuals who experienced the phenomenon. As such, if my theory is considered a phenomenon in which the experience of someone at a museum in relation to personal connection to an object is open to

such a methodological interpretation, then the research conducted and the reflection of participants as part of the research could fit this methodology. I do not make this claim but acknowledge it as a possible consideration for future research on the topic and the branch of heuristics that connects with both the field of education and phenomenology.

The other primary methodology drawn on for this paper is grounded theory. Sebastian (2019) indicates there are three main types of grounded theory: classical, interpretative, and constructivist. In my methodological application, aspects of each main type are drawn on, while other aspects are left out. For example, the basis of my research is prior knowledge of the subject studied, which is counter to the classical grounded theory. Sebastian suggests grounded theory is often used as a general label, when a more accurate label is one of these three differing types. While I see the importance of making such a distinction, the methodology I draw on as part of the bricolage research methodology for this paper is best labeled as grounded theory.

Using bricolage, interviews were conducted with museum professionals, and videos of museum openings were viewed in conducting research for this paper. The interviews and video analyses are taken as a whole, and interpretations are necessary to understand an individual's views and feelings, which are not easily packaged into categories. Whereas the use of semi-structured research questions for the interviews and as applied to the videos fits with interpretive grounded theory. The results generated are an interpretation of the collected data and not a static outcome. Interpretation is associated with constructivist grounded theory. In general terms, a grounded theory methodology is drawn from to help with crafting the structure of the qualitative method used and in seeking to confirm the potential for my theory to hold.

Data Sources

For my study, the participants were museum professionals. They represented museums of varying types, foci, and locations. These participants included and were labeled as: Regional Natural History Museum 1, Regional Natural History Museum 2, Regional History Museum 1, Regional History Museum 2, Regional History Museum 3, Regional History Museum 4, Local History Museum 1, Local History Museum 2, Local History Museum 3, Local History Museum 4, Local History Museum 5, Art Museum 1, Art Museum 2, Art/History Museum 1, and Cultural Historical Society 1. Information from the participants was obtained through recorded interviews occurring at the respective museums, although some interviews occurred by phone for participant convenience, and two interviews occurred in-person at a nearby location outside the museum, selected by the participant for convenience and comfort. Field notes provided additional thoughts of mine while conducting the interviews, which I used to recall what was said or what I thought for later analysis.

Collection Method

As a qualitative study, semi-structured interviews were used in my research. Before deciding on the population and information collection methods, I divided my study into five phases. These phases were theory-based research validity, selection of collection methods, generating a short list of questions, IRB approval, and a trial interview. During the first phase, I conducted a short survey of ten students enrolled in a graduate education course to determine whether my theory was valid for research pursuit and whether data collection by survey was reasonable. The population of the course was selected out of convenience. This survey explored connectedness in relation to self-identity and cultural artifacts at a museum. Basic demographic information was collected, and participants were asked about feelings of connectedness to

objects or narratives they encountered during a museum visit. Results did not indicate any relationship between race or ethnicity, age, or gender and a feeling of connectedness with objects or narratives in a museum. In speaking with the student participants, the questions were limited in number, scope, and depth.

As a result, the respondents had a set list of response options that may have given a general sense of their feelings, but more opportunity to explain their responses was viewed as important to clarify their responses and indicate their answer selection. This informal feedback through discussions with survey respondents pointed to the need for the collection of information that allowed more detailed and in-depth responses to understand feelings, identity, and self-relatedness to museums and cultural artifacts. Interviews provided the chance to explore these ideas but also created a space to discuss the subject matter in a way that expanded the ability to discover relationships between identity and cultural artifacts that were either previously not considered by interviewees or whose conceptual understanding differed in language and expression from what I expected. Surveys did not allow these details to be explored or emerge. Further, the participants of the survey indicated a possible need for explanation of the topic and certain terms for them to better understand how they might think of the topic and their response.

This indicated that surveys limit respondents' understanding of the purpose of the study and the terminology used, leading to responses that can go in unintended or alternate directions. Beyond surveying individuals, other data collection options include interviews, observations, timing and tracking, and focus groups. Each of these methods is used to varying degrees in visitor research. Such methods may require multiple researchers, financial support, and access to research subjects. I found interviews to be the best research method to reduce the potential for

misunderstanding, allow room to consider responses, and allow participants to explore and respond more fully to questions posed in relation to the topic under study.

With the theory valid for further pursuit, phase two involved determining an information collection method. Prior literature from Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998) and Frisch (1990) suggested that surveys were possible to get at information, but the use of surveys as the collection method in the first phase suggested that such a method posed obstacles. To not wholly dismiss surveys in a longer form or the inclusion of open-ended questions to collect more detailed responses needed for my research and to determine whether other collection methods yielded results meeting my research needs to aid in deciding whether conducting interviews was the best option for information collection. I contacted various museums at the local, regional, and national levels, spanning museum types, focus, and size. Emails were sent to seventeen museums inquiring about available research that contained items like my dissertation topic. Fourteen museums responded. Of these fourteen, six indicated data collection from visitors or studies conducted regarding visitor experiences. Of these six, three gathered data or conducted a study that was turned into a usable format for research purposes. In other words, roughly half the museums responding to my inquiry gathered data on visitors, but the data was simply collected and never made usable for research. However, one local history museum commissioned audience research that yielded some useful information as it relates to identity and museums. The study used observations of families visiting the museum but was limited in the depth of information gathered using this research method.

For phase three, I searched for verbal examples from museum openings or spaces of public history to study to help me craft questions for the interviews. Verbal examples included secondary-sources, video recordings, and news media wherein visitor or presenter commentary

was available for qualitative study. Video recordings were found online through a general search for videos from museum openings. The secondary-sources and news articles (primary sources) provided quotes from individuals participating in the creation of, participating in the opening ceremonies for, or experiencing a space of public history, including museums. Secondary sources included texts found through a search on discussions in public history and the history or creation of museums. News media were located through either current stories available online or online searches on related topics.

By reviewing these materials, the audio from video recordings and written quotes from other sources, responses related to personal views, experiences, or understanding of the event, and interaction with the spaces or subject matter, I was able to determine a short list of questions. These questions included what I saw as missing from the responses, such as an understanding of self and identity or further questioning to clarify a relationship between the individual making the statement and the historical narrative involved. Additionally, I kept notes on my observations and the verbal expressions from the materials and included some of my findings in my research findings to triangulate interview results.

The next phase in the process was the submission of the research proposal for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. My proposal was approved, and I was able to move forward to the final phase of conducting a trial interview before selecting the population and conducting the interviews for research use. During the final phase, I conducted a trial interview to determine whether basic questions, explanations of topics, and a semi-structured approach yielded useful responses of the detail level anticipated and whether clarity of intention and terminology I used was enough for the interviewee to participate.

This interview further provided an opportunity to determine whether there was a possible connection between identity and cultural artifacts as found in museums. The participant was selected out of convenience to alleviate the need for time to locate a potential participant, reduce nervousness and uncertainty in conducting the interview, allow feedback on technique and structure, and gain guidance where needed during the interview process. The outcome of the interview indicated there was a relationship between understanding of self, identity, and cultural artifacts encountered in a museum space. The questions as worded and the responses given by the participant indicated that the interview, consisting of structure, content, and clarity, was ready.

The interviews were semi-structured to allow flexibility to explore thoughts and responses while maintaining the ability to ask questions and probe ideas that presented themselves in the responses from the interviewees. The interviews were audio recorded, and I took field notes for later reference and analysis. A basic set of questions was constructed in advance. However, these questions were asked at different points in the interviews based on the flow of the interaction and were applied as tools to help move interviews back on topic if responses and lines of alternative questioning began to drift. With interviews as the research method selected, a short list of questions generated, determination that use of a semi-structured approach allows flexibility in responses, and field note taking to collect my thoughts and as reference points during and after the interview, it was time to select the study population.

Population Selection

Two parts exist for population selection for interviewing. The first part is to consider location. In other studies, location may not be of particular importance, being only considered for the place where an interview occurs due to convenience or comfort; some students may consider

location selection to play a secondary role in selecting the case study or providing a survey.

However, for my research, location selection helped determine population and related to collection opportunities.

Public spaces involving monuments or statues as the object of interaction for the research subjects pose difficulties in terms of visitor research. Generally, monuments are a single point of visitation, meaning that an individual goes, sees the object, and moves on, with relatively limited time in that space. While parks including such objects or a collection of such objects are more conducive to visitor research, the spatial arrangement and public access of parks have a limiting factor to any lingering at a single monument for an extended period. These places, as a result, limit the opportunity to approach visitors and conduct an interview of any length. While there are certainly monuments and statues of individuals and groups that represent different events and people connected to history, these are typically little more than decoration or art and are not visitor destinations that allow visitor research at the site to take place.

To help reduce these difficulties, I selected museums as the locations. While there are some similarities between museums regardless of their physical address, type, size, or collection, there is enough variation to consider identity and public history more broadly. Additionally, museums offer multiple objects and narratives, creating, presumably, more opportunity for people to find some sort of identity and relate their understanding of themselves to an object of culture. Collections that are in a more defined and confined space are favorable for visitor research purposes, as this requires a longer visiting experience for any given visit and contains the visitor population within an area. This required narrowing resulted in the focus on museums for the research used in my dissertation. Museums as social and political spaces, with contentious

narratives on display and the very nature of their existence as preservers of the accepted historical story and keepers of culture, make them a microcosm through which to view society.

Selecting a population for determining participants for my research was easier with the location determined. The selected location provided a means to limit the potential participant population to individuals with some level of experience and knowledge of museums. The difficulties in selecting a group of museum visitors include the transient nature of visitors, the lack of visitor data, the willingness of museums to share visitor contact information or allow non-museum personnel to conduct research on their visitors, and the willingness of museum visitors to take the time to participate in research during or following their visit. These difficulties, in other words, limit the use of historical records of visitor research to answer the topic or questions for my study. Further, the desire of museums to protect their visitors' information, such as contact information, is understandable given the expectations of visitors in providing this information to the museums in relation to the information used by the museum. A third-party researcher—particularly, one seeking doctoral research—is generally not part of the visitors' expectation.

The amount of time needed for interviews would cause greater issues to try and conduct them with visitors entering or exiting a museum, particularly if they are there with a group of family or friends. Who wants to leave friends, family, or their visit at the museum for 30–90 minutes to take part in research? The length of time needed for the interview included the set questions, along with additional questions added at certain points in the interview to draw out information from the interviewees that got at the topic under study. Additional explanation and clarification on the research, questions, and certain terms was expected to require some time, with an increased length for visitors who were more likely unfamiliar with or unclear on the

subject matter. Using museum visitors as the population selected contained other concerns. For example, if selecting a visitor at random with hopes that at least one of the approached visitors may consent to participation in an interview, is this visitor a first-time visitor? Why are they visiting the museum? How long did they spend at the museum? How often have they attended the museum or any museum?

Despite these concerns, the frequent visitor offers a greater possibility of connecting their museum interaction to their identity and understanding of themselves in relation to the museum. Additionally, the museum visitor who visits the museum with an intent that is more focused on the narratives and objects presented has greater potential for connecting self and identity to their museum experiences (Everett and Barrett, 2009; and DeWitt and Storksdieck, 2008). Still, the ability of the visitors to make connections and discuss history is varied by their knowledge of history and of the objects or narratives displayed, resulting in greater difficulty for a visitor to discuss and conceptualize responses to related topic questions (Garibay Group, 2012).

This suggests a larger issue with using visitors as the population for my research in that visitors are less likely to have the ability to draw connections between objects, history, and the present. These connections are important for visitors in considering identity creation and understanding themselves through museum experiences. That visitors are less likely to draw these connections, however, does not mean that visitors do not create self-understanding or identity through their museum experiences, but that research on the topic requires greater consideration of the research methods used and the population selected. This fact also points to the potential need for greater researcher resources and visitor willingness to participate in research.

Thus, the population selected had to be familiar with museums, have spent extensive time at a museum or museums, and be better able to consider and formulate a response to questions on identity and self-understanding related to cultural artifacts. With the potential to determine which visitors met these parameters and the length of time to seek out these visitors from the expectedly large number of visitors approached, complicating the visitor population, an alternative population was considered: museum professionals. Museum professionals meet the population parameters (National Research Council, 2000; Sauro, 2018; Persky & Robinson, 2017; and Franse et al., 2020). Even if the first two parameters were met, leaving the third in doubt, a screening process to account for this one parameter was possible through a short explanation of the study as part of a query for participation. Additionally, museum professionals were easier to contact, as a phone number or email was available online for use in contacting this selected population.

Museum professionals were selected based on a preselected list of museums. The museums selected ranged in type, focus, and size. While the primary focus of the museums was history, those selected involved history. *History* is a broad filter, but this broadness allowed the selection of various museums where a population of professionals could make the connection between cultural artifacts of the past and the self-identification of the potential participant. Considering this, the museums included art, natural history, local history, regional history, and national history. Additionally, the museums included those run by park districts (including local governments), non-profits (non-historical societies and non-government entities), and historical societies. The sizes of the museums were more difficult to determine without available data on visitor numbers or financial information. However, an approximation of size was possible based on museum type, location, and general focus. By varying the museum type, focus, and size, I

considered the possibility of these differences affecting the potential relationship between self-identity and cultural artifacts. Other differences impacting the narratives, collections, and exhibit structures, such as mission, funding level, visitors, and location, were accounted for through the selection and inclusion of a variety of museums.

Individuals targeted as possible interview participants depended on the museum. In general, museum professionals with titles indicating a leadership role in the creation of exhibits, educational programming, or object interpretation were selected for initial messaging. For some of the smaller museums, which tended towards local history museums and historical societies (sometimes these do overlap and differ primarily in organization, funding, and management), the number of employees or the leadership hierarchy did not include positions fitting into one of the prior areas listed. In these cases, a director or executive director were the individuals contacted. These individuals had greater opportunity to consider the objects or narratives within a larger context, including their importance to others, as part of their work in relation to the regular visiting population. My reasoning was that the nearness of the objects and creation of the interpretations or narratives resulted in or produced an opportunity for greater consideration that others may not have.

Further, if individuals spending large amounts of time with cultural artifacts and in museums do not connect their identity or understanding of themselves to cultural artifacts, then the potential for a randomly selected museum visitor to make such connections is greatly diminished. In other words, if the proxy theory of a feeling of connectedness to a museum object, exhibit, or narrative occurs, it is reasonable to consider that more exposure to these items in a museum would strengthen such a connection. Museum personnel—particularly, those who work directly with these items, whether creating the narrative or educating the public on the items—

are most exposed to the items. Therefore, if these individuals did not feel a connection to or identify with these cultural artifacts, it is unlikely that even an avid visitor, let alone an average visitor, would.

Selecting this population offered the potential to gain anecdotal evidence of visitors' identities and draw a correlation between the population selected for the research and a more generalized type of visitor. While museum professionals may not recognize their own identity and connection to cultural artifacts, they do, in such anecdotal cases, recognize the existence of such in others. This supports my theory and strengthens my view that the concept is difficult to consider for an individual and that the museum professional population is more appropriate for use in this study. Similarly, museum professionals can speak to visitor research or ways the museum is or is not trying to connect directly with various populations of visitors or communities. These attempts at connection between the museum and external groups of people or entities may also speak to the connection between identity and cultural artifacts or at least point towards an understanding of the identity–cultural object relationship.

Messages sent to the list of individuals did leave open the possibility that, if they were not the appropriate person to take part in the research, regardless of reason, recommendations were accepted for colleagues better able to respond to my query. While there were museums that did not respond, indicated no interest in taking part in my research, or lacked the ability to participate for various reasons, the final number of interviewees was fifteen. Of the interviewees, the population indicated varying demographics and identities. These included museum volunteers, paid employees, former employees, life-long professionals, part-time and full-time status, men and women, various sexual orientations, varying ages, varying levels of education and professional training, immigrants and U.S.-born, and a variety of races and ethnicities.

However, the participants, while diverse, tended to be predominantly White. The population was fairly split between male and female interviewees.

The focus of this study is the theory and not the connection to different populations. I understand that an interest may exist regarding understanding of self-identity and cultural artifacts in relation to museum type, size, focus, or demographic descriptors. For interested parties, the findings from my initial test survey and the findings from my interviews do not support differences based on groups of individuals' responses. Further study, regardless, may still be of value if structured differently from my own study, which may result in findings that differ from mine on participant groupings. I leave this to another study to explore.

Selection of participants was based on museum type, focus, and size. While participants were from various backgrounds, it was not the express purpose of selection and is not a focus of this study. Happy coincidences do add to variability and offer some potential to show differences in responses by descriptive groupings if such findings present themselves. Quota sampling more accurately reflects the process for participant selection. Variability in museum type, focus, and size was of interest and the parameters for participant selection existed as indicated previously. Even so, I sought to have ten to twelve participants for a broad spectrum of individuals from varying museums. Ultimately, sixteen individuals participated (although only fifteen interviews are used in the analysis since one individual did not complete the waiver).

Length of the interviews: while indicating to participants that about 90 minutes were anticipated, the average length tended more toward 60 minutes, with a range in length between roughly 30 and 90 minutes. The length did not indicate any more or less understanding of the subject or involve information from participants suggesting the existence of a connection between identity and cultural artifacts. Length did tend towards the availability of the participant

for the interview based on schedule for shorter lengths, with longer lengths tending to occur because of an interest in the topic or discussing the subject matter. An analysis of these interviews as it pertains to self-identity and cultural artifacts follows.

Analysis Method

My coding of the collected data was theoretical and did not include a strict use of codes to generate categories or themes for the use of certain terms or phrases found in the interviews. Sebastian (2019) uses the term *saturation* to indicate a point in which the coding of collected data through qualitative methods becomes unnecessary or more intuitive as a critical mass is reached for the volume of coded data. This makes the additional coding a largely useless task, as the overall need to recognize whether someone feels connected or understands their identity in relation to an object in a museum is either in the affirmative or negative.

Such determination does not require a set number of coded responses, predetermined key phrases, or the use of a specific term; instances of indication that self-identity is related to an object can occur in more abstract ways through explanation and discussion, as determined through the interview and video viewing processes. Further, prior knowledge and sufficient understanding of the subject are known by the researcher in advance of coding, whereby such coding is not necessary, as it only serves to confirm a theory and categories crafted to support the theory.

Further, the intention was not to study whether certain groups of people based on demographic descriptors feel the connection or whether such a relationship exists at a higher rate for one type or location of a museum compared to another. Wysocki et al. (2022) discuss controlling for variables that impact data analysis outcomes. Their work is connected to the use of controls in quantitative research, but the idea is relevant to my study. Wysocki et al. suggest

that selecting the controls and determining whether to include or exclude their use in the analysis is dependent on, among other things, the intention of the research. If the research is such that a control is not meaningful for use, then the control is left out. Determining whether the theory has merit is central to my study, and if it does, then further study that includes or considers relationships between populations, museum type, museum location, and other variables are warranted.

As such, recorded interviews and field notes were used to determine whether an interviewee felt a connectedness to a cultural object in a way that allowed understanding or defined their identity or understanding of themselves. Other subject matter that went beyond this or provided greater detail that did not add value to the analysis or reporting of the interviews is not provided here. As indicated above, in exploring my chosen topic, interviews could either support my theory or not. The extraneous information, while interesting, was largely irrelevant for the purpose of my study, as were the demographics of the study participants. As such, this information was largely left out of the analysis. The type of museum for the participants is provided to show that this variable does not determine participant response, which is important, as it also suggests that the theory holds regardless of museum type. In terms of the provision of interviewee role within the museum, this information only serves to indicate status as expert or elite.

To capture the interviews, a digital recording device was used for audio recording, and field notes were written during the interview. The audio recordings captured the interview for later review, while field notes aided in collecting thoughts on responses and helping to note key thoughts, terms, or comments by myself and the interviewee for later use in analysis. In some

instances, I noted my own additional thoughts immediately after the interview to summarize or call out important items from the discussion to further consider when reviewing the interviews.

While the interviews provided interesting discussions and greater depth of knowledge on museums in general, aspects of the interviews only pertaining to identity and understanding of self as it occurs in museums were selected for inclusion based on their ability to accurately capture certain terms, phrasing, or thoughts of the interviewees compared to paraphrasing. I chose paraphrasing as the primary method to express the responses of the interviewees, as doing so allows for my analysis of what was said, removes lengthy transcriptions for interviews that sometimes meandered, and summarizes the responses of the interviewees.

Chapter Four

Conducting Interviews

Interviews were conducted for sixteen participants in my study. Of these, fifteen were analyzed. One individual did not complete the waiver and was removed from the study.

Interviews were recorded to allow review and analysis later. Field notes were taken during the interviews to capture my own thoughts and log some concepts of interest to recall later in an interview and for additional aid in interpreting the interviews during analysis. Responses were labeled based on the type of museum to help organize, provide a general idea of the museum type the interviewee worked at, and to anonymize the interviewees. The labels used were Regional Natural History Museum 1, Regional Natural History Museum 2, Regional History Museum 1, Regional History Museum 2, Regional History Museum 3, Regional History Museum 4, Local History Museum 1, Local History Museum 2, Local History Museum 3, Local History Museum 4, Local History Museum 5, Art Museum 1, Art Museum 2, Art/History Museum 1, and Cultural Historical Society 1.

Museum professionals made up the interviewees participating in this study. Given the range of museums, the titles of the participating professionals provided only a general sense of the person's role and level of professional attainment. Specific titles are not provided to further maintain identity protection, as these titles are sometimes specific to a museum or affiliation. Further, some titles are not comparable between museums due to differences in museum size, structure, purpose, and governance. For example, for smaller museums that have a Board of Trustees, a director position is the highest role available, while a museum governed by a local government may have the highest position of executive director. These are the same positions in role and responsibility in comparing the two museums. In other museums, an executive director

can oversee the museum, while a director or multiple directors report to the executive director. In such a structure, the directors may have responsibility in managing a department or operational office or role.

In considering the different positions and the roles that each played at their respective museums, all interviews are considered administrator level professionals. The grouped generalized position titles include vice president, executive director, president, and associate director. President and executive director roles are like each other and generally differ based on governance structure and type of museum but may have other slight relevant differences, such as an executive director falling below a president in some structures. For this reason, they are separated here. Similarly, vice president and associate director may have similar responsibilities, but the titles reflect museum size. Since other nuances of these roles can exist, they are separated here to show only their role and level within the organization relative to those they report to. Of the 15 participants used in this study, five were executive directors, three were vice presidents, four were associate directors, and three were presidents.

The interviews were semi-structured. A base set of questions was used as a guide to ensure consistency between interviews and to make sure the topic under study was covered. In some cases, these questions were answered during the interview without being asked. In other cases, given the direction of the interview and questions asked, wording of the base questions were modified to guide interviewees in clarifying a comment or idea in a way that answered the base question. The base questions were as follows:

Why did you become involved in the museum?

How does the museum lend itself to your understanding of who you are and your relationship to society?

What impact do you feel the museum has on social understanding?

Who do you see as the audience?

Who may come away with a different sense of awareness of themselves or the world around them through their experience with the museum?

The following are summarizations from the recorded interviews, taken from the audio recordings and field notes. Quotation marks indicate verbatim comments from the interviewees. The quotes selected provide a key point, word choice, or term highlighting identity, perceptions of museums or their work, socio-cultural connections, or draw attention to a thought that my summarization and paraphrasing does not offer. Only aspects of the interviews that I found relevant to the subject of my research on identity are provided.

Interviews

Regional Natural History Museum 1

“The things I always found fascinating in museums...allowed me to think about the world different from what I thought of before.” According to the interviewee, museums are misperceived as places to teach. However, museums fail at this in relation to getting visitors to learn from being taught. The museum is a place of entertainment and socialization, and research indicates this. The interviewee claims that 30% of visitors indicate that their reason for visiting a museum is to entertain family and friends. Visitors also indicated less than 7% of the time that they were visiting a museum to learn. Museums offer something other places cannot provide, such as an immersive experience, which visitors want.

For example, objects and things from the past or the world are part of the experience, and visitors seek out the originals as part of the awe of the visit. The museum conducted a study on visitor motivation to visit and the use of digital technology in exhibit space. The outcome,

according to the interviewee, was like other research: visitors want to have a “mind-blowing” experience—in other words, to learn something or experience something that can alter their perception of the world. The interviewee labels this experience as an “aha” moment. Therefore, it is not about learning; it is about grabbing the visitor and getting them to think and want to know more.

Regional Natural History Museum 2

According to the interviewee, teachers visiting the museum are interested in topics they teach in their curriculum. Families visit the museum looking for entertainment but also something new, not necessarily learning as the goal of the visit. The museum seeks to get visitors interested in learning more. The interviewee indicated seeing data that shows museums are more trusted than teachers. This points to the museum as a place for people to consider current events in general but also to present ways to solve some issues, such as global warming. One example is of a recent exhibit on weapons that spanned the history of weapons but also included opportunities for visitors to consider and discuss current issues with weapons in society, according to the interviewee.

However, from what the interviewee knows and what the research seems to point out, dinosaurs, live butterflies, and mummies are the most visited parts of the museum. Additionally, for people from the local community, a walkthrough exhibit of the historic community streets is something that visitors specifically want to see. The interviewee indicated that the collection or objects with which there was a personal connection are the bugs held by the museum. In some ways, according to the interviewee, this relates to the ability to get society to change their views about the world or consider a dislike for something like a bug as a generalized thing and then change their mind after the exhibit about bugs.

Regional History Museum 1

The interviewee created the museum to preserve the past as it relates to LGBTQ identity for understanding by future generations. To accomplish this, the museum needed to be open and easy to access because of its subject matter and desire to get youth to experience it. Within the LGBTQ community, the interviewee indicated that the youth often experience difficulties in “coming out,” which is part of why there is a sizable population of the LGBTQ youth who are homeless or require additional support. This is the reason for the structure of the museum. Early in the creation of the museum, the interviewee felt connected to Alan Turing after learning about him in 1999. This personal connection helped the interviewee identify with the need to present the events, individuals, and stories that have long been absent in the presented and known historical narrative of the U.S., the city, and the world as it relates to LGBTQ. The museum was dedicated twenty years after the original idea for it. It is not about changing the narrative; it is about wanting to reinsert LGBTQ into the historical narrative.

Regional History Museum 2

The interviewee indicated interest in human rights, and the museum is about, in part, human rights. Additionally, the interviewee is Jewish, which results in minority status. Having grown up with a strong sense of equality, the interviewee did not feel there was a personal story to connect to the history or museum. The interviewee feels that being Jewish and a certain gender and analyzing the marginalization of minority groups impacts the “interest in seeing those factors not impact other people.” For this reason, the museum provides “a lot of public programming to bring in general visitors.” Visitor comments suggest the need to keep from similar actions in the future and express “they are inspired to act but don’t know what to do to act.” The interviewee does acknowledge that visitors cannot necessarily be changed through a single visit. Artifacts for

the museum come primarily from the local community, which makes a personal connection with the community members.

Regional History Museum 3

The interviewee indicated that the museum wants people to get involved from the community, particularly those who experienced the history that took place in public housing. Part of the desire of the museum and the interviewee is to connect the past to present issues. This is particularly true for issues related to housing. According to the interviewee, the idea is for the museum to include an exhibit space where there are different family experiences within public housing. The exhibit would allow a connection to local and national impacts on these experiences and hopefully lead to a wider audience connection to make it clearer that public housing and housing issues are not just one-dimensional in terms of what demographic groups are impacted by this, both in the past and in the present.

Connections to the museum's content are based on greater self-awareness of how the interviewee is different from the stories and the people the stories and objects are collected from and who the interviewee works with. This is like past experiences with a different museum for the interviewee, where self-understanding and identity came from the paintings and artwork but also how these were discussed with visitors and interpreted. There was somewhat of a conflict in both museums regarding insider/outsider status. The interviewee talked about connection to a painting from Gauguin that depicts French colonialism, in which there is a "relationship of opposition." Another was an Archibald Motley painting of Chicago's South Side, depicting a 1940s nightclub scene. The interviewee went on to describe a question posed to visitors to the museum where this painting was discussed as part of the tour. The question was, "Where would you be if you were in that painting?" The interviewee felt that there was not so much of an

identity based on the paintings as there was a connection. The interviewee mentioned that, at their museum, there is an animal sculpture from Edgar Miller that was kept at public-housing sites and used as a place to play. It is one that the interviewee feels drawn to or has a connection with. These connections at the current museum are largely due to the stories told and the individuals telling the stories.

Regional History Museum 4

The interviewee indicated that the museum tries not to politicize the exhibits but does try to represent as many people and stories as possible through the exhibits. The idea, according to the interviewee, is to try to connect visitors to stories of historic people to help with visitors' understanding of their community but also to help find solutions or consider ways to address current issues across the nation and in their community. The interviewee suggested that about a dozen objects hold a powerful message for the interviewee in relation to history, challenges to the museum, and public engagement, but that selecting a single object was difficult.

Local History Museum 1

The interviewee indicated a connection to what people made and how they lived in the past as what drew them to museums and pointed to an exhibit that featured items made by people as an example. There is a connection the interviewee makes to a piece of furniture of one of the early settlers in the area as a second example. This connection comes from the story of how the item stayed with the family on their journey, what the item meant to the family, how it stayed in the family, and how it made its way into the museum collection. It is the human element and the identity of the story of the family and this object that the interviewee related to. The interviewee indicated that it is important for the local museum to be connected to the community, as the

museum wants to help the community understand the history of the area and work to bring in different histories from the changing demographics.

Local History Museum 2

This museum works to connect history to the changing demographics of the community. The museum has a local community focus. The interviewee indicates a desire to “spark” interest in visitors to learn more. According to the interviewee, visitors come to the museum and recall the history of the community and places they visited as children. The interviewee finds interesting the stories about humans as something they can relate to personally. “For me, what resonates is the human story.” The interviewee largely connects through human experience to the stories of other humans but also relates to these stories through the lens of a historian. Social change is possible through museums, as indicated by the interviewee as one potential role of a museum.

Local History Museum 3

The interviewee indicated a desire to create an exhibit that changes people’s minds. However, according to the interviewee, the reality is that an “epiphany” moment is somewhat limited in the sense that it is difficult to create and hard to predict what may cause it. The interviewee’s understanding is that museums can affect people. Some of this affecting is accomplished by looking to the past. Additionally, being a part of history helps people make connections to places, helping with meaning-making. Many visitors, according to the interviewee, go to this museum to reinforce what they recall from earlier years but also to be “illuminated” regarding the past they think they remember, meaning that some visitors remember something from their own past about the community, and the museum illuminates this memory in some way. The museum tried to make connections to the older population and Asian

population by offering an exhibit on Chinese games, which the interviewee understood was something that many within the two populations played in the community. While this exhibit did not draw as much interest as expected, the interviewee indicated hope for creating an exhibit on being Jewish in the suburbs. Part of the interest in creating the exhibits is to provide something that leads to more interest and desire to learn when visitors leave the museum.

The interviewee indicated that some of the relationships to different group identities in history is limited in the exhibits, and the narratives do not allow some of the personal connection and understanding to really take place. The interviewee indicated that adults visiting the museum were surprised by the experience in terms of what they saw and the history they were able to connect with. The connection to place and identity comes through in personal items that tell a story—the human element of history. For the interviewee, handmade jewelry boxes and photos are connection points, as are letters from World War I. The interviewee indicated that a journal from a tourist from the early 1830s telling a story of general experiences and exploration in the area is something the interviewee specifically felt connected to, even though the museum does not possess the item. That connection was tied to the ability to identify with places described in the journal and a general feeling that “I could be this guy.”

Interestingly, despite this connection and identity to place, the interviewee did not see identity within the museum, explaining this result potentially comes from the long-term building of the content and prolonged working with the materials. The identity that emerges, beyond those human stories and personal experiences from written records, is based on the understanding that change occurs for the interviewee. One story that draws this out is when the interviewee spoke with a resident who recalled the first African American family in the town. The interviewee felt

some connection to the story told based on perception of the difference between the present and the past based on an indirect analysis of interracial dating at the time.

Local History Museum 4

The interviewee indicated that they were not inspired by art museums but was inspired by local history museums. The role of the museum, according to the interviewee is to provide engaging stories. Additionally, the interviewee felt there was an important to the connection to the individual stories, the human stories, for museums. That stems from the feeling that some labels and presentations of the past is limiting for some people due to how materials are put together but that local museums tend to be “easier to connect with.” Therefore, it is important to connect with people who provide or share the history of the community through the interviewee’s work.

For the museum, visitors tend to be people interested in history who like to visit museums. As the interviewee indicated, “I hope to inspire visitors and make a connection between some parts of their lives and those of the past—specifically, an immigrant history and posing questions to visitors to consider similarities to the present or to their own experiences.” “A part of them was being represented by the museum.” It is important to consider censorship on topics and messaging, as these can be hard on local museums due to the connection that often occurs with park districts or local governments. When putting together exhibits, particularly those on certain aspects of local history and the stories of groups of people, sometimes, the museum is unable to get the materials or stories needed for some exhibits. That results in a reliance on and hope for visitors to connect to a memory or display and then be willing to share materials or stories to help expand what is already on display or cover topics not previously covered before due to material limitations.

It is also important, according to the interviewee, for a museum to have concern over social issues. The interviewee drew some connections to materials related to education. There was a recognition by the interviewee that some immigrants connect with some items based on the experiences they had in their native countries. Ultimately, there is a need to try to allow visitors to share the connections as part of the tour. For the interviewee, it was difficult to place a finger on a connection to a single object or story.

Local History Museum 5

Like some of the other local museums, the interviewee desired to remain anonymous. However, the interviewee indicated making a connection to what is presented as a historian's interest in historical items. One exhibit made the interviewee enthusiastic, but there was no indication if this was due to some identity with the specific narrative or the objects worked on. Given the exhibit and its connection to the local community, there was some level of identity tied to the objects and stories for the interviewee. Regardless, the interviewee made it clear that visitors connect with items that they remember from when they were younger and identify with. Many of these same items are the very ones the interviewee works with.

Art Museum 1

The interviewee indicated that the museum works with the local community to create a sense of connection and inclusion, such as local artist outreach efforts and events for the public. Generally, the museum includes opportunities for visitors to experience reinforcement or “refractive rub” at the museum in relation to understanding identity.

Art Museum 2

The interviewee indicated a personal connection to the person in relation to historic clothing and costumes—in being so close and working with these objects from a specific point in

time, a specific location, and knowing who the individual was that owned the object. In this sense, the identity drawn here is in relation to time and place—in other words, connection to objects in terms of age compared to the past. Regarding the purpose of museums, “tiny takeaways” is what museums should strive to provide visitors, as grand revelations or extensive learning are not always possible.

Art/History Museum 1

The interviewee created the museum. It was placed in the location where it exists based on the mayor’s interest in providing the museum to the community due to changes in local demographics. According to the interviewee, the mayor wanted to create cultural opportunities but also make people feel welcome in the town. The interviewee indicated the provision of multicultural events at the museum that include both Native American and non–Native American groups. The desire, according to the interviewee, is for assimilation by some groups of people, but other groups want to fight against this and retain their culture. The museum and events allow this to occur, along with the work of other cultural museums and centers. Further, multicultural events allow for a greater understanding of one’s own culture while also allowing one to experience other cultures. The interviewee, who is of both Native American and non–Native American heritage, indicated that there are some similarities for him in terms of trying to learn about these two cultures and being a part of these two histories.

Part of the intended audience and focus of the museum, according to the interviewee, is the Native American community, but the museum also intends to help expand understanding among the general community that Native Americans are not Hollywood-created characterizations. According to the interviewee, it is unclear if visitors leave the museum knowing more about themselves, but the hope is that visitors will know more about Native

cultures and have a desire to learn more about them. However, the interviewee hopes this desire includes talking with older family members to learn more and encouraging children to do this in general.

For the interviewee, there is a pull, in some way, to the tribal identity as part of the museum where this connection exists. Identity also provides a pull to learn about different tribes because the space allows it, and the location, since it is not tied to a specific tribe, allows this without political conflicts that may exist in other places. The interviewee discussed research and surveys that the museum conducted that indicated that when the museum markets itself and places “Native American” in the labeling, people feel that it is specifically for Native Americans and no one else. There is an indication that this happens with any experience that has a specific ethnic or race label on it, but it seems particularly true for Native Americans, according to the research indicated by the interviewee. Further, the interviewee saw connections with other cultures, such as German and Russian, through art. There is a commonality and identity, a self-understanding, that occur through art and relationships through art between cultures.

Cultural Historical Society 1

The involvement of the interviewee in the historical society came through racial/ethnic identification. Until working with the public, the interviewee did not understand part of their race/ethnic history. Additionally, a greater appreciation of the diversity of the place in which the interviewee lives is a result of work with the historical society—particularly, through collaborations with other museums, organizations, and cultural centers. The interviewee explained that there was no emphasis by the family on cultural aspects of being the race/ethnicity they were and that the family did not join the local church, which is where some of that cultural connection traditionally came from. The historical society offers the interviewee social

opportunities to connect with the history and culture that do not exist in other settings. The interviewee indicated that there is an understanding of the connection between different cultures and cultural museums, mentioning one cultural practice of the interviewee's race/ethnicity that is like the practice of another race/ethnicity.

Conclusion

In listening to the interviews and reading through my field notes, I heard or came across common themes from the interviewees. These themes presented themselves as repeated commentary from the interviewees and included (1) museums are places for visitor learning and exploring through experiences, (2) visitor learning is difficult to accomplish and measure, (3) use of learning measures to drive museums is difficult, (4) museums must increase interest in learning as a post-visit outcome, (5) museums are places to address current issues, and (6) museums help visitors connect cultural artifacts with the present. Additionally, the interviewees indicated a connection of their identity and understanding of self with cultural artifacts at museums.

Chapter Five

Discussion: Interview Analysis

In listening to the interviews and reading through my field notes, I heard or came across common themes from the interviewees. Overall, regardless of the individual or the museum, there were similar expressions of the museum as a place to provide visitors with experiences. These experiences were opportunities to learn and explore. The interviewees indicated that learning was not something that was easy to accomplish as part of the museum's purpose, as there is a level of subjectivity in what learning entails. Further, measuring learning and using outcomes from such measurement to guide the museum was equally problematic for museums. As such, the interviewees indicated that the museums focus more on getting visitors to walk away with an increased desire to learn more or seek out more information. The retention of information from visitors' museum experiences is a bonus.

The interviewees also indicated that the museum is a place to address current issues and provide opportunities for visitors to learn how objects, histories, and the study of the past relate to the present as part of understanding and seeking some way to move forward. This was true for the art museums as much as it was for the natural history and history museums. While the issues in question are based on the type of museum and how the past and issues are explored are more in-line with the type of museum presenting them, the message remains the same. Likewise, the interviewees indicated that a connection of the visitor to objects and narratives presented are important, and a greater need to accomplish this is important to the work of the museum. In many cases, local history museums, cultural history museums, and art museums work to connect with a diverse population. Museums of different cultural focuses broaden perspectives in

narratives, diversify programming opportunities, and create events and partnerships that can help in getting visitors to expand their understanding of different people.

There was an indication by the interviewees of a connection to some object or narrative, regardless of reason for such a connection. Ultimately, these connections to objects or narratives presented at their museum were based on self-understanding and identity. In some cases, interviewees expressed connections with objects and narratives from other museums they visited or worked at previously, but reasoning behind such connections were the same. While the interview questions regarding which objects or narratives an interviewee felt a connection to or felt related to was difficult to answer for roughly half of the interviewees, the question of identity and self-understanding based on objects and narratives proved difficult for all the interviewees to answer. The reason for this is unclear but may relate to either difficulties in the conceptualization of the idea by interviewees, the ability to provide a clear explanation or ideation of the subject by myself to the interviewees, or the topic being simply new and difficult to formulate a response to during an interview.

Ultimately, the interviews provide strong evidence that identity and self-understanding through museum experiences do occur. While the selected population provides low-hanging fruit to conduct the research, further exploration of a general-visitor population is needed. This further exploration also must consider deeper changes and understanding of an individual's identity and self-understanding in relation to museum experiences to really determine the effect of museums on identity formation or understanding. My interpretation of the interviewees' responses and what the interviewees directly stated, as indicated in Chapter 4, fit with experiences found in several works on the creation of museums.

For instance, the impact of the development of the *Enola Gay* exhibit at the Smithsonian brought the connectedness and identification of Americans, U.S. military personnel, and those of Japanese descent into the increasingly public discussion on remembrance and commemoration of World War II and the use of atomic bombs in Japan towards the end of the war (Linenthal and Engelhardt, 1995). Edward Linenthal made a career out of exploring the remembrance of history and historic events in public places beyond the *Enola Gay*. In his work, he managed to capture personal views that indicate identity formation for a few individuals, and in at least one instance, he captured how the town informs identity and argued for national identity formation in the U.S. at the same time. However, Linenthal did not equate what he studied, or the information collected, to identity creation; the relationship is there and applies to multiple museums, sites, and exhibits during a tumultuous period in U.S. history known as the history wars.

Through my interviews, additional questions, discussions, and interviewee deep thought (often occurring after “that’s a good question” or “I never thought about that”), all interviewees had some aspect of their identity and self-understanding connect with either something from their museum or another museum. There were instances when the interviewees’ connection between identity and object or narrative was based on race or ethnicity, while, in a couple of cases, the identity was gender-based. There was an indication, however, that the interviewee was able to connect their identity with an object or narrative from an identification different from their own. For example, an interviewee may identify as Japanese but connect to a Native American object. In another instance, the individual is from a different socio-economic identity than those represented by the objects or narratives of the museum but still relate their self-understanding based on the differences.

This connection between the self and others is evidenced in the works of Linenthal. In *Preserving Memory*, Linenthal (1995) presents the creation of the United States National Holocaust Memorial Museum (NHMM). Throughout the narrative that Linenthal presents on the creation of this museum, there are anecdotes of individuals and their views towards the process of creation and their relationship to the museum. Linenthal comments, in advance of mentioning more direct anecdotes of those related to the NHMM creation, “Of course it was just this issue – how expansive could a national memory of the Holocaust become without deviating from the established narrative of the Holocaust – that was up to the commission to consider.” Linenthal points to the issues that plagued the commissioners tasked to establish the museum throughout planning, in which the “established narrative” was that of the Holocaust as a Jewish experience, specifically for Jews in territories of Europe controlled by Nazi or Nazi supporters. Eli Wiesel, author of *Night* (about Wiesel’s experience in concentration camps toward the end of World War II), as Linenthal explains, along with others involved in the discussions about the NHMM, began to feel as if the direction being taken on the museum and its importance began straying from the Jewish centrality to the Holocaust. In other words,

a museum built in New York, even if national in intent, would clearly be perceived as a Jewish museum built in the heart of the Jewish community in America. Memory of the Holocaust would remain the province of American Jews. (Linenthal, 1995)

“The argument most often declared the museum misplaced because the Holocaust was not an American event (Linenthal, 1995).” This suggests that the selected location, Washington, D.C., while not in a place heavily populated by Jews or in a space considered Jewish, such as New York, somehow diminished the museum and remembrance of the Holocaust. According to the anecdotal evidence, the very placement of the museum in America, regardless of location, removes the identity of the Jewish community to the event. This supports, minimally, the

arguments from Wiesel. Additionally, Linenthal claims, “several focus-group members believed that a [National] Mall [in Washington, D.C.] location would impress upon visitors the need to take personal responsibility for issues usually deemed affairs of the state.” This suggests that there were those who felt a pull closer to the identity of the museum in terms of democratic ideals for citizens to use their voices to address issues. Therefore, various identities are drawn from this museum and point towards the potential of other museums, public spaces, and historical narratives to include multiple identities for people to connect with and understand their own sense of self. Multiple participants in the focus groups argued for “the need to connect lessons learned from the Holocaust museum to contemporary situations, from the plight of the homeless to the boat people (Linenthal, 1995).”

Perhaps this last sentiment is where Wiesel felt the pull of the focus on the Holocaust from one of a Jewish identity to something that begins to obscure the importance of the NHMM. At the same time, it is also clear that people were beginning to make the Holocaust and the remembrance of the Holocaust important to them and identify with what took place, as well as with those who experienced the Holocaust themselves. Linenthal (1995) presents this in the recounting of “April 23, 1993, just after the museum’s opening, on the eve of the March on Washington” by those sympathetic to gay liberation from across the nation, the museum became a site of remembrance for these forgotten victims. To connect visitors to the experiences of those who suffered through the Holocaust, identification cards provided visitors to follow a singular story through the museum and learn of the individual’s fate at the end. Following the event on April 23, 1993, the museum created eight additional identification cards to represent gay victims of the Holocaust and one card for a lesbian victim. It is unclear whether Linenthal (1995) is pointing out the continued discourse between who owns the Holocaust, can identify with some

aspect or story found in the Holocaust, or is willing to identify with or accept the inclusion of gays and lesbians in the narrative and museum. However, he states, “Stretching the boundaries of memory to incorporate this group of Holocaust victims will also stretch, for some visitors, the limits of their tolerance.” Again, identity is created through the connection of the participants of the March on Washington in 1993 and the missing gay and lesbian victims from the Holocaust narrative and museum. At the same time, the museum acknowledged that identity and some visitors’ desire for the continuance of silence. This is clearly the importance of the March on Washington, external to the NHMM and played out inside its walls, as a message about identity for gays and lesbians in history and in 1993.

According to Novick (1999), “the Holocaust has, in recent decades, moved from the margins to the center of how American Jews understand themselves and how they represent themselves to others.” He seemingly bases this argument on assumptions by pointing to statistics regarding donations by Jews in the U.S. for Holocaust-related projects; there is never any real evidence beyond the claims of statistics. However, is there legitimacy in this argument? Consider the creation of the NHMM and contentious topics related to the Jewishness of the Holocaust and identity related to its creation, location, and inclusion or exclusion of other group narratives as supporting evidence for Novick. It may also be useful to consider the creation of additional Holocaust museums and the preservation of Holocaust history and memory in the U.S. beyond the NHMM.

In Skokie, Illinois, is the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center (IHMEC). The IHMEC opened in 2009 after beginning as a storefront museum in 1981 as a response to neo-Nazi attempts to demonstrate in Skokie in the late 1970s. Survivors of the Holocaust who settled in Skokie decided to take action to preserve the legacy of the Holocaust for the public to

learn from, to fight against hate (IHMEC “About” page, accessed 11/28/2018). Skokie was selected as the site for the museum for multiple reasons, including the village’s status as the proposed location for neo-Nazi demonstrations, its status as a place of settlement for both Holocaust survivors and a large Jewish community, and that the originators of the museum were residents of the village. This museum was connected to the identity of the Jewish population, particularly survivors, in relation to the Holocaust. Despite the Holocaust taking place in Europe, those who survived and settled in Skokie, and those who are Jewish living in Skokie, based part of their identity on the Holocaust and helped create a museum to outwardly exhibit that identity, share that identity, and push to help others relate to an identity that included anti-hate sentiments. This same identity and self-understanding were part of the basis for the creation of the Oklahoma City National Memorial, as described by Linenthal (2001) in *The Unfinished Bombing*.

According to Linenthal (2001), surveys were completed as part of the memorial planning process. These surveys revealed differences in opinion about the memorial’s purpose and inclusion or exclusion. Responses included comments such as “honor the rescue workers and rescue dogs,” “celebrate the ethnic diversity of the Oklahoma workplace,” “should be inclusive religiously,” “a memorial for Waco’s children,” and “don’t forget state workers” (Linenthal, 2001). These comments suggest the multitude of identities of those responding but also the understanding of the identities of those involved at the site of the bombing, regardless of role or experience. Other responses held more specific beliefs or ideals in terms of what to include or exclude and the message visitors should take from the memorial, all pointing to an identity associated with Oklahoma City or the relationship with the event of the bombing.

Linenthal (1991), in *Sacred Ground*, presents this same identity creation and self-understanding in relation to historical narratives and locality. This time, from Linenthal, the sites

of Gettysburg, Little Big Horn, and the Alamo present some of the more compelling examples of conflicts and tensions over identity (individual, group, and national) on display. For the Alamo, interviews conducted in 1986 involving Aristoo Sul, Ray Sanchez, Anastacio Buena, and Gilberto Hinojosa concluded that “Mexican American restorationists believe that a growing awareness of the patriotism exhibited by their Tejano ancestors would lessen racial antipathy and pave the way for greater acceptance of twentieth-century Mexican Americans in the United States” (Linenthal, 1991). Linenthal goes on to protest, based on these interviews, that “some Mexican Americans believe that ignorance of this forgotten history is at the root of the ideological and cultural barriers that have created ethnic tensions between Mexican and Anglo-American communities in San Antonio.” Thus, for those of Mexican/Tejano descent and Native American descent, part of the importance to their identity and self-understanding is to address the historic and present portrayals and misconceptions of these identities among the American majority.

Similar sentiments are presented by Native Americans in terms of preservation and memorialization of the Custer’s Last Stand and Little Big Horn. Both spaces contest over remembrance and portrayal of history and present identities of groups who long feel left out of the minds and equal existence in the United States, including at present. The identities that these two groups and others—and part of the reason for the creation of the National American Indian Museum—are those placed upon them by the majority of U.S. society throughout the historical narrative and historical treatment of these people.

In her study of Native American perspectives of the battle, Mardell Plainfeather, an NPS historian and member of the Crow tribe, notes that only about 2 to 4 percent of the visitors to the Little Bighorn are Native Americans – despite the fact that the battlefield is in the middle of a Crow reservation and near a Cheyenne reservation. (Linenthal, 1991)

According to Linenthal, Plainfeather further indicates in her research that Native Americans take issue with the interpretation and presentation of the site and history being generally conducted by non-Native Americans and without input from Native Americans. The low percentage of Native American visitors to the site, therefore, does not suggest a lack of identification and self-understanding of Native Americans to the past rather the opposite; Native American visitors are staying away from the site because they identify closely with the history and the site, and the portrayal of the history in relation to Native American identity does not fit with that of the Native American. "Some Native Americans also think that if the battle were forgotten, their relations with whites would improve," according to the research of Plainfeather as presented by Linenthal (1991). As a result, Native Americans sought to create change to the site by having the history of their people added to the story at Little Big Horn (Linenthal, 1991).

This same mentality applies to groups that are not based on race or ethnicity, culture, or religious belief. Linenthal (1991) provides the example of Gettysburg and the contention over remembering the American Civil War in terms of slavery but also in relation to a nation at odds that resulted in a Confederate States of America and the United States of America. Part of the reconciliation between the two sides was the understanding and belief that the war, let alone this battle, pitted American against American and family members against each other, and remembrance was to maintain this relationship; it is to honor the soldiers, who were all American but also enemies at the same time. How can an American soldier be both abhorred and honored at the same time? This is not much different from similar questions Native Americans raised over Custer or that Wiesel raised regarding the inclusion of certain ethnicities in Holocaust memorialization, and it even goes back to the portrayal of the atomic bombs at the end of World War II.

At the Pearl Harbor site, contention existed, according to Linenthal (1991), in many ways.

William Manchester expressed his discomfort at the sight of two Japanese navy ships in Pearl Harbor: ‘I jerk upright as we dart by one inlet. Moored there are the last ships I expected to see in Pearl Harbor – two spanking-new destroyers of the Empire of Japan’” (Linenthal, 1991).

“In 1983 a visitor wrote to the NPS to express his “shock and anger” at seeing so many Japanese tourists applaud a Park Service presentation that spoke of the brilliance of Japan’s tactics at Pearl Harbor (Linenthal, 1991).” These comments suggest that the individuals making the comments had a strong sense of identity as it relates to nation, and the strong expression of this identity and understanding of self in relation lead to a similarly strong expression of nationalism. In some ways, while these examples support the argument that museums can help create identity and self-understanding, some of this creation has occurred, and the museum helps strengthen, support, or enhance it for visitors. In other ways, the examples also point to the impact that the understanding of identity has on museums as well as how people act toward others.

Dubrow (1986) points out in her research that in Los Angeles, in 1986, 97.7% of designated cultural and historic landmarks were Anglo-American centered. At the same time, 2.3% were Native American, African American, Latino, or Asian American. Of any such landmarks in Los Angeles at the time, only 4% included women in some way. As Hayden (1997) points out, “identity is intimately tied to memory.” To exclude some groups, such as women, Native Americans, or African Americans from that memory, or in some manner include groups in a way that does not do justice to the history, culture, or people creates an identity that is potentially negatively perpetuating both within society and for individuals within the group.

Spaces based on historical context therefore create memory and relations with groups of people, such as reservations or internment camps. There are many ways to feel connected to a place, yet the missing display within the history or museum in a public manner may limit this connection or create an alternative connection that is one of silence or negativity. How does this impact the individual's sense of self and perception of place within society? These are the very arguments related to identity and self-understanding that are addressed by those involved with historic sites and museum creation, remembrances, and memorials. This is the same reason that the group creating ILHMEC in Skokie fought to have the Illinois government include requirements regarding the Holocaust in the education curriculum for K–12. Hayden (1997) makes it clear that “public space can help to nurture this more profound, subtle, and inclusive sense of what it means to be an American.”

Other examples, many of them from recent news articles, indicate a personal link to the past in similar ways as it did for the interviewees. These links directly relate to identity of the individual in relation to the history presented or under fire, such as those previously mentioned on both sides of the discussions about retaining or removing Confederate monuments across the U.S. Other examples beyond the contentious Confederate monuments are as follows:

1. In response to a visit to the Hiroshima memorial during the recent baseball series between Japan and a team made up of MLB players in Japan: “We value the friendship of our shared game, together we hope for peace” (Mattingly, manager of the Miami Marlins). “I pitched here for nine years, so this is a very special place for me” (Maeda, Japanese player, currently playing for the Los Angeles Dodgers; Footer, 2018).

In response to a plan put together by Chelsea Football Club to take anti-Semitic fans on trips to Auschwitz as part of efforts to educate these fans and rid soccer of anti-Semitism: “It’s still an issue and as Chelsea supporters we know that. If someone with anti-Semitic views went there, I don’t think they would still have them” (Twomey, 2018).

Willie O’Ree, the first African American player in the National Hockey League and recent Hall of Fame inductee, commenting on his visit to the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture: “It brought back a lot of memories for me. My

grandparents, they were slaves, and then bringing up to date, it's just amazing" (Associated Press, 2018).

Signe Nielsen, president of New York City's Public Design Commission, commented on the decision, based on the commission's recommendation, to remove a statue in Central Park of a gynecologist who conducted experiments on Black women: "I'm not a woman of color, but I am deeply moved by what we heard today" (Associated Press, 2018).

In March of 2018, members of the Golden State Warriors took students to the Museum of African American History and Culture. Steph Curry concluded that the visit provided an opportunity to "understand the history that's a part of the fabric of this country" (Haynes, 2018).

In an article from January of 2018, NBA player Tarik Black spoke about his mother working for the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, TN, when he was a kid. He commented, "I have been blessed to grow up in the museum learning where I come from, and it is a huge instrument in influencing where I am going" (Black, 2018).

These are just a few examples of recent indications of self-understanding and identity in relation to historical narratives and spaces—particularly, museums—that present history. In each case, the individuals indicate a greater understanding of themselves and an identity with what is found at the museum or historic site, and even go as far as connecting the history to the present in terms of their place in the present. Again, these responses are like those given by the interviewees.

Returning to the videos of the openings of NMAAHC and NMAI that I viewed in the early phases of my research, I found comments from speakers and coverage of the events that further related to the responses my interviewees provided. Lonnie Bunch, the director of NMAAHC and a primary driving force to get the museum implemented, commented in a CSPAN video from February 22, 2012, during a groundbreaking ceremony, that "there should be a site in the nation's capital that will help Americans remember, and honor, African American history and culture." While this does not speak directly to the celebratory nature of the museum, it does provide an understanding that remembrance includes honoring; in other words, it is not a museum to simply recall the past but to honor or celebrate it.

Governor Sam Brownback, a Republican governor from Kansas who championed the legislation that made the museum possible, spoke at this same event. He more directly related the museum to the idea of a place for celebration by stating,

Some could cynically see [the opening of the museum] as an attempt to gloss over the sins of the past. Or, as an attempt to pay back the injustices. It is neither of those things. It is instead a celebration of a uniquely American triumph of will. To consider this museum an airing of grievances is to, is to sell it dramatically short. It is in fact, a presentation of the triumph of the African American people.

In other words, as some museums are created to simply tell stories that often have specific, political agendas—and, for some critics, this is what NMAAHC may have tried to do—Brownback specifically denied this as the intention. The NMAAHC is not a place to recount the horrible past or gloss over historical episodes. Brownback went on to say,

This museum cannot be for Caucasian grandchildren just to see how awful the crimes of their ancestors were. Or, for the African American grandchildren to see how terrible their ancestors were treated. This museum is for the American grandchildren to see the triumph of great Americans.

Richard Kurin, the Smithsonian Institution's undersecretary, mirrored these sentiments during the same event, as did the Smithsonian Institution's secretary, G. Wayne Cough. However, it was Bunch who said it best in his speech when he stated,

Equally important to this vision [of the museum], was to need to make better, all who visit, the national museum by using African American culture as a lens to more clearly understand what it means to be an American.

The NMAI took on similar meaning for those involved in the creation of this museum and for the people feeling a connection with it. These individuals view the NMAI as a place where recognition of Native Americans for their contributions to the U.S. and its past is possible. In a video from CSPAN at the opening ceremony on September 21, 2004, Senator Daniel Inouye, from Hawaii, and a proponent of the creation of the museum stated that he “could not believe

that out of 400 statues and monuments [in Washington, D.C.], there was not a single statue or monument to the Native American.”

The NMAI became a place where Native American culture and history connected to the national story of the U.S., much in the same way that the NMAAHC did for African Americans.

Inouye continued in his presentation with his comment on Native American history and artifacts:

The deterioration of these precious and priceless artifacts was imminent. And I recall leaving there (a museum in the Bronx that housed Native American artifacts) with the feeling that it would be an obscenity to allow that to happen.

It is a symbol for the hope, centuries in the making, that the hearts and minds of all Americans, even beyond this museum and throughout the Americas, will open and welcome the First Peoples in history and their contemporary lives.

These words were spoken at the September 21, 2004, event by Richard West, director of the NMAI. He went on to state, “in our minds, and in our history, we are not its victims.” For West, “we have survived and, from a cultural standpoint, have triumphed.”

Conclusion

Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998) studied the perceived level of importance, frequency, and historical authority of these interactions in their research. In Rosenzweig and Thelen's study on the use of history in daily life, respondents to their survey "turned national events into settings for personal stories." According to Rosenzweig and Thelen, respondents indicated taking part in public events—typically, war—more than 10% of the time, and events that were personally significant more than 25% of the time. However, these events were often used as a setting for personal experiences or memories. "They talked about how such an event had figured in their personal development or the setting in which they heard about it" (Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998).

Identity and the creation of self, or self-understanding, occurs through museum experiences. It is through these experiences that visitors can understand where they exist and how they relate to society. This importance of connectedness and understanding of self is ever present but seems more so today as individuals, groups, and society struggle to create, accept, and understand the different identities that exist. Consider Ben Affleck and Jennifer Garner divorcing and co-parenting, Meta World Peace changing his name, Caitlyn Jenner changing gender, or a recent story of a man wanting to legally change his age to combat ageism he feels he suffers from in society. Consider then Elizabeth Warren, who indicates she is Native American and feels compelled to have a DNA test to prove this part of her ancestry to appease Donald Trump. Despite the results indicating Native American ancestry, some Native Americans have argued that Warren is not Native American because of what the identity represents. Also, consider Rachel Dolezal who stepped down from her post with the NAACP after people discovered that she is White, despite her previously indicating that she was Black. From the

1990s onward, accusations about Michael Jackson wanting to be White persisted, as did more recent comments on the skin color of Sammy Sosa becoming whiter.

We have entered an era in which identity and the definition of what it means to identify and understand oneself is changing and coming under attack, depending on the situation and setting. Should someone born male but who identifies as female be allowed to use the female restroom at Target? What about a student under similar circumstances wanting to be comfortable using the female locker room at their high school? What about fellow students', parents', school officials', or politicians' identification of this student? How do we define identity, and who can choose identity or determine self-understanding? How are *White*, *Black*, or *Native American* defined?

“Self-acceptance is a prerequisite to the acceptance and valuing of others (Stern & Kysilka, 2008).” Stern and Kysilka (2008) argue that marginalized groups—specifically, minorities and those historically marginalized—have difficulty in “accepting and valuing their own ethnic and cultural heritages.” The authors describe stages of cultural development typology. Citizenship education must address diversity to allow the rectification of disparities between civic expectations and cultural communities (Stern & Kysilka, 2008). Dewey argues that taking part in good citizenship in an educational setting prepares one for a similar existence in society (Stern & Kysilka, 2008). Murrell (2007) points to “new racism” as cultural difference and to institutional racism—rather than overt racism, or “old racism”—as the current issue causing racial divide. However, Murrell (2007) also indicates, and according to others as well, that “discourse practices – the social practices of communication and everyday human interaction in which culture is most frequently and deeply expressed. – (e.g., Alton-Lee et al.,

1993; Bush, 2004; Lewis, 2003; Pollock, 2004; Tatum, 1997; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2002).”

Thus, the issues are not exclusive to race but include all demographic categories and identities.

It is through understanding and learning about differences and those differences in relation to oneself that these issues are rectified. Finding commonality is one way to address identity issues. The absence of a sense of purpose and identity leads to a lack of meaning or connection (Murrell, 2007). Education can provide opportunities to find this meaning and learn about differences. However, it is difficult to provide such education for students as academia becomes more politicized. Another option, therefore, is informal education. Such places include museums, which are perfect places for such learning to occur. Museums hold various meanings and opportunities for learning, but they also offer space for change in the narrative and greater inclusion in the narratives and objects displayed, if only at the expense of accuracy; indeed, the potential is there.

Skramstad (1998) points to museums as needing to begin “inreach,” whereby society can “reach in” museums to draw from experiences that can impact meaning-making and creation of values for individuals. In “inreaching,” a greater understanding of the wider world is also important for altering perceptions (Skramstad, 1998). Dubin (1999) states, “Museums are important venues in which a society can define itself and present itself publicly.” Further, “History is more than collective memory; it is memory formed and shaped so as to have meaning (Lerner, 1982).” Lerner goes on to state, “By tracing one’s personal roots and grounding one’s identity in some collectivity with a shared past – be that collectivity defined by race, sex, class, ethnicity, religion, or nationality – one acquires stability and the basis for community (Lerner, 1982).” Pearce (1993) argues that the entirety of the museum holds meaning and provides

meaning to visitors. This includes the layout, collection policy, arrangement of exhibits, and narratives that are included as well as excluded from the overall story being told.

Race and racism are the most convenient ways to consider these issues and begin discussions, as much of this dissertation does. There is a well-documented history related to the associated issues of race and racism, even with current examples being numerous from which to choose. However, the discussion using race must take care not to lose the importance of issues related to other categories of people.

Racism, as it stands today, requires reconciliation of long-term solutions that previous generations endured to ease racial issues (although desire to eliminate in the future, easing tensions, and racialized issues were the goals for Generation X) with the current trend towards the immediate eradication of such issues. The created conflict has heightened and quickened the need to reconcile previous attitudes and long-term learning—three or four decades' worth—with an immediate, short-term response and change in belief systems, attitudes, self-actualization, and social relationships and understanding. Such conflicting ideas and messaging from long-held perspectives and constructed reality cause extreme pushback from some people struggling to make the switch.

However, is making such a switch necessary? If the previous social reality was constructed over decades, then an immediate change in this reality and structure is not possible in a short period. Further, the newly desired reality is simply a new construction that is replaced in the future with another construction that meets the perceived needs of a future generation. The current switch is a response to both a change in the generational divide and the most recent U.S. presidential election, much in the same manner that similar shifts occurred under President Clinton. This shift lasted one decade, until perspectives on social meaning changed and 9/11

threw perspectives of national identity into one of solidarity regardless of race. Similarly, Pearl Harbor and World War II led to changes in social attitudes.

In other words, it is necessary for people to be self-aware of identity and create agency based on self-awareness, to maintain sense of who they are within society, despite external interactions in a world where negative perceptions and pre-conceived notions exist (Murell, 2007). We cannot ignore different identities or self-understanding. As an example, in ignoring differences such as race, Gilroy (During, 1993) argues that the removal of race as an ideology scares both the oppressed and the privileged. Gilroy further argues that the use of race to separate people into categories can be detrimental. However, the very idea of what makes an American, according to Foner, (2002) is based on “both civic and ethnic definitions.” Slavery created the notion of citizenship based on race, providing the idea that a person was defined as an American solely on exclusion or inclusion of race or ethnicity. “The cultural legacies of a people can provide resources for both character development and intellectual development of students, but only if they are represented in the social and cultural environments of the school (Murrell, 2007).” Again, this is not specific to race or ethnicity, and the discussion must broaden, which it seems to have done to some extent regarding gender identity from discussions on trans use of bathrooms in 2016 and discussions on children at drag shows, inclusion of gender identity in K-12 school curriculum/textbooks, and merchandise displays supporting the LGBTQ community in retail stores in 2022 and 2023.

According to Anderson (During 1993), nationalism becomes an ideology and is just an imagined sense of connectedness and belonging between those within a certain border or who express the created ideology within a given region based on some sense of relationship between strangers. In the same instance, Sedgwick (During, 1993) makes the same argument as Gilroy,

only in terms of sex, and Fraser (During, 1993) indicates the existence of multiple public spheres, not unlike the oft-mentioned Murrell (2007) in relation to positionality.

Certainly, museums play an important role in this discussion. As the present research indicates, identity and self-understanding in relation to the self and place in society occurs through museum experiences. Such experiences can offer opportunities to find commonalities between peoples and seek ways to address present-day issues. From this, the hope is that the same opportunities and addressing issues can occur within classrooms. This is not a new idea; even comedian Bill Cosby (1976) suggested in his dissertation that elimination of institutional racism is needed, and a curriculum is needed to support children's growth to meet their full potential, whereby the curriculum attempts to remove racism. To this end, he offered television as an alternative learning opportunity in relation to curriculum because he recognized the prevalence of television in daily life as well as the barriers that formal education and institutions can have on the learning process. Television, therefore, is a social tool, in that it provides social ideas and transmits ideologies to the masses, particularly children. Cosby remarks, "school curricula lack congruence with the realities of their world" and offers the character of Fat Albert as a positive role model.

While the arguments he presents are valid for the subject matter, there are sure to be some who feel that his inclusion in this paper is inappropriate or at least something to be reconsidered due to sexual abuse allegations and related legal actions. However, Cosby and the television shows he appeared in, especially *The Cosby Show* and *Fat Albert*, are cultural artifacts that cannot be ignored due to their representation of African Americans from both ends of the cultural spectrum, along with class differences. Beyond the arguments Cosby presents in his work, he is an example of changing Identity. Consider the perception and long-standing belief in Cosby as

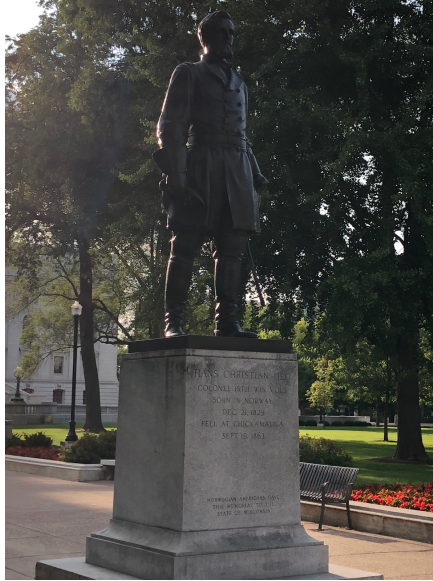
America's father, a well-regarded television actor, a celebrity comedian, and doctor and advocate of education beyond the television shows mentioned.

Through these identities, Cosby was also elevated and viewed as an example of attainment potential for African Americans, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. However, with women coming forward about their experiences with him and the resulting media coverage and court decisions regarding his criminal actions, his identity has changed; he is now considered a sexual predator and serial rapist. With his prior identities being wiped from television reruns, and with the cleansing of the present television schedule, so too, in many ways, is Cosby's former identity held previously by the masses who watched these shows and read the books as children and adolescents. The identities of these people may require individuals to reform their self-understanding in relation to Cosby and the wholesome family sitcoms they once loved.

This process is like my proposal for museums. However, it is through identity creation and self-understanding that we can begin to remove injustices and address social issues. It is now in the creation of self that the lenses through which and the ideals by which we interact with our world emerge. The museum, in helping create an identity and self, allows some of the negative views of oneself or others to be both addressed and redressed.

Consider the following examples:

What follows is a photo taken by me in 2018 of the Hans Christian Heg statue that sat outside the capital building in Madison, WI. The inscription indicates the individual depicted by the statue as being born in Norway and the statue as being given to the state by Norwegian Americans. This establishes the identity of Norwegian Americans in the state and in relation to the history of the nation through their shared identity with Hans Christian Heg.



This same statue was torn down, decapitated, and thrown into a nearby lake in 2020 (Beck & Andrea, 2020). According to the media, the statue was vandalized in this manner because of anger by Black Lives Matter protesters following the arrest of a local Black protester not long after the death of George Floyd at the hands of police officers in Minnesota; for these protestors, the statue signified an unjust government. It is perhaps unfair to make the connection between the figure in the statue and a White male (which was also a reason for targeting the statue), but the possibility exists given the circumstances of events and other media coverage of the tearing down of statues depicting historic individuals connected to the American Civil War (although Confederate or pro-slavery characters were depicted by those statues). Ironically, Heg was anti-slavery and fought for the Union during the American Civil War.

The following photos, which I took in a visit to the church, are from the interior of the First Congregational Church of Des Plaines. Religious iconography may provide a connection to identity for some. Whether they attend this church, are from Des Plaines, are religious, have an interest in stained glass or art, or have other unknown reasons, the ability to identify is there. The building became part of the National Register of Historic Places in 2019 due to its significance in

architectural and art history. The stained glass depicted in the second picture, along with a difficult-to-see gold border along the bottom, to the left and right of the stained-glass window, were done by Edgar Miller (who was mentioned earlier in this dissertation). The original building and much of the interior elements that still exist were the work of Pond & Pond, Martin, and Lloyd.



In Chicago, the Christopher Columbus statue was removed following growing concerns over Columbus' connection to the genocide of Native peoples in North America, and defacement of the statue stemmed in part from expanded reconsideration of statues and memorials in public places following Black Lives Matter protests (Spielman, 2022). While the statue, as a representation of Christopher Columbus, was viewed by some as that of a racist historical figure, Italian Americans made the connection to the Italian as an explorer who led to later settlement of the New World. It is this dual identity that caused the conflict—for those seeing their identity as connected to the genocide, slavery, and continued treatment of Native Americans, the statue needed to come down; for those identifying with an Italian heritage and what this identity brought, along with the connection to the role of Italians in history and Chicago, and the treatment of Italians throughout this history, the statue needed to stay. For others identifying with

Chicago, perhaps there was a mix of feelings, although this does not seem to be directly discussed. The options were either to remove the statue because of the negative connotations or to maintain it because of its positive connotations and connection to the city.

The Jefferson Davis statue at the University of Texas, which was removed for similar reasons (Warren, 2015). Negative aspects of Jefferson Davis, such as racism and slavery, made the statue a reminder of how a group of people were treated. For some, this identity and reminder of the ideology oppressing it made the continued presence of the statue unacceptable. For others, the statue represented aspects of their identity, such as their race, their heritage, the state of Texas, the university, and other non-racial aspects.

In 2023, we find ourselves staring at the ramifications of identity and our understanding of ourselves in relation to history and society. Some of these ramifications are scary, while others indicate our connection to or interest in a connection to the past continues. Headlines such as “Owners of a 136-year-old Palatine house want historic preservation commission in their town,” “Ohio university pays out \$400,000 to Christian professor ‘for violating his First Amendment Rights’ after he was investigated for refusing to use transgender student’s preferred ‘she/her’ pronouns,” “Putin approves new foreign policy doctrine based on ‘Russian World,’” “‘I’m Korean, people need to accept that’: Oli London defends ‘transracial’ identity against Black woman,” “Buttigieg awards grant to tear down divisive Detroit highway,” “Hate literature distributed in Palatine Township, Long Grove, and Schaumburg neighborhoods,” and “‘Ghost signs’ to bring a sense of history to downtown Antioch” support the prominence of these topics. These headlines also show that identity and a sense of self are important to us, and that if these are called into question, conflict arises.

Perhaps now more than ever, a reflection on what narratives are included or excluded in society, how this impacts identity, and whether some of the social ills that persist or have reared their ugly heads over the past several years are potentially addressed through changes towards expanded inclusion. The same applies to curricula in education and on television. Some progress was made in these areas, but in direct response to maintaining certain identities that felt threatened by such progress, conflicts arose. How do we proceed beyond attempts to continue inclusion in objects used for identity creation and understanding of ourselves?

Application and Further Research

My research shows a relationship between museum interactions and identity and understanding of oneself. Beyond my study and applied more broadly, identity and understanding of self are informed by connectedness to what is included and excluded in public spaces. How cultural artifacts are experienced and interpreted and the extent of access to cultural objects play roles in this connectedness. Further, who creates, interprets, displays, and determines other aspects related to cultural-object access and consumption in some way affects whether and how connectedness to an object occurs as much as the identity and understanding of self are constructed by individuals or groups. In short, there are varying considerations in how, why, and by whom identity and understanding of self occur.

My study does not consider these variables, as my intention was to determine proof of concept for the potential of cultural artifacts in museums to relate to identity and understanding of self. As the concept appears valid, focus and further research must turn toward the application of this knowledge. Museums can use this information to further consider how language is used in displays, how exhibits display objects, what accessibility to certain spaces means to different populations, or who is involved in the creation of exhibits and programming.

Application beyond museums is also possible. Beyond museums, public spaces displaying and interpreting monuments, statues, objects, historic homes, and celebrations of historic events may need broader input from communities, visitors, and subject-matter experts. Further, post-secondary institutions, K–12 schools and school districts, agencies or governing bodies focused on education, curriculum designers, textbook publishers, and educators must consider how cultural artifacts are used in learning and the role and importance of identity and understanding of self in relation to inclusion and exclusion for individuals. Businesses also must consider how they provide products and services and market themselves. Society-at-large may have an interest in and must consider how people interact with others and how an individual is situated within the larger community. In many ways, these matters are playing out in society today, as shown in the various news articles mentioned already. While the application of my research points to aspects of society that are relevant and can benefit from the information presented herein, there is a need for further guidance on how to apply the findings in a more meaningful way.

Museums, as one such place where interactions occur between the past and present, learning about history, exploring social issues, and the connection to identity or understanding of self, are alternatives to some of the other spaces mentioned (such as schools), making museums an important component in these endeavors. The reason is that these other spaces can experience implications from their attempts or hindrances in their abilities to carry out these tasks due to political and social pressures. Even with such pressures, museums have a history as well as a role and purpose connected to maneuvering discussions of these topics. To this end, I offer the following thoughts:

We must be more proactive by acting instead of reacting. We know many of the problems that exist in society, so why not address them? It seems that much of the anger, distrust, division, and frustration present in our society stems from those with the ability to change and improve not taking the steps to do so. Furthering the frustration and anger of groups seeking change is the seeming inability or unwillingness of those with change power to employ it.

Another issue is the use of words and understanding what they mean. This includes how they make people feel and how they can cause divisions. Consider the following words and how you think of them: black, white, red, yellow, race, ethnicity, poor, one percent, suburb, urban, rural, homosexual, trans, appropriation, culture, police, millennial, boomer, immigrant, heritage, South, left, right, conservative, liberal, crime. These words are applied to groups, but they are also understood by the appliers and the applied as to how these words relate to identity. Whether right, wrong, fair, unfair, applied to, or self-applied, these words are tied to identity. We must consider how we talk about subjects as much as the words and phrases used. These words can turn an open discussion into a confrontation or a divided room that stops participation in a discussion as soon as it starts. Identity gets in the way.

This is the problem in current issues over symbols, inclusion and exclusion in classroom curricula, statues and memorials, and museums. Identity is inserted, and there is no more discussion, because it becomes a matter of trying to alter or remove an identity, or heritage, resulting in inherent division.

We can recognize this and use it as part of future discussions, but there must also be action to correct the identities that are negatively impacted without such discussions or actions. Thus, we can either make no one unhappy, one group happy, or everyone happy. The first two are

easy, as we have several examples and a vast history of how to accomplish this and the results, and the third is more difficult but necessary.

Again, perhaps this is accomplished by considering new ways to talk. There are different ways to express ourselves to one another. This points to museums. There is also the proactive approach of trying to correct before discussion occurs. This is difficult, but cultural artifacts and their creation may help.

Further research is suggested to consider some of the thoughts and applications of my study. Such research might consider exploration of feelings of connectedness to cultural artifacts in museums for the average museum visitor; how certain words are perceived in relation to identity or meaning-making; whether similar research outcomes to those of my study occur in relation to other cultural artifacts, such as television programming; how customers, students, and employees define their identities in relation to bathroom designations; whether high school students' beliefs of social equality relate to their perceptions of fellow students' clothing styles or to coursework related to the study of the Holocaust; or how pre-service teachers define their identities in relation to their perceptions and reasons for wanting to work or not work for certain school districts. Certainly, other options exist for future research that applies directly to identity or understanding of self, cultural artifacts, museums, public spaces, and public history.

However, caution is needed in application. On the one hand, there is the potential of application to address social issues that continue to exist and appear to increasingly play out in places and ways that extend across the U.S., even in some instances spanning the globe. On the other hand, there is the potential for application to enter a point of absurdity if taken to the extreme. In attempts to address and include everyone, it is possible to lose sight of the intentions and to reverse progress by placating to every individual or group. This was seen in the 1990s

with the political correctness movement, which led, not to progress in social interactions and awareness, but to a point when the entire era became the brunt of jokes and not taken seriously to create change (Hess, 2016)²³; in some ways, this movement created an anti-political correctness that persisted the cultural norms from the period preceding it.

The concern is that there is an increasing amount of eye-rolling and even push back in some places when trying to include every individual and group in discussions, planning, and making change. This came up in one interview conducted for my research, when discussing identity and use of a descriptor for groups and individuals. In the interview, the topic was the use of the acronym *LGBTQ*. At one point, the term used to refer to people of this community was *gay* or *homosexual*, and *queer* was used as a negative term. However, *gay* and *homosexual* were used to categorize two different groups. Out of this came the creation of *LGBT*. Then, to not offend anyone and be more inclusive of varying sexual orientations, *Q* was added (as *queer* became acceptable again as a term for defining oneself and others).²⁴ Next came the addition of a plus

²³ It is possible that this move towards political correctness stemmed from the culture wars that occurred from the late 1980s into the early 1990s. See the works of Linenthal and earlier discussions of the Enola Gay in the Smithsonian for examples. With the entrance of Bill Clinton as the U.S. president, this political correctness persisted throughout both of his terms in office. Some of his direct actions helped in pushing political correctness to a new level with passage of legislation leading to the “don’t ask, don’t tell” rule for allowing recruits to enlist and personnel to serve in the military if gay/homosexual orientation is not disclosed. Strengthening international relations, efforts to ease tensions between Palestine and Israel, and appointment of multiple female and minority judges would prove difficult without attempts at improving treatment of non-White, non-male population in the U.S. It seems this ideology began to erode towards the end of his second term following the Monica Lewinsky scandal (a White House intern who had an affair with President Clinton), the resulting impeachment trial where President Clinton lied under oath (later accepting suspension of his law license in Arkansas as a result), and the out-of-court settlement Clinton had with Paula Jones who filed a sexual harassment lawsuit against him. Clinton certainly was not the only reason for the rise of political correctness during that time, nor was its degradation all the result of Clinton’s actions. The burst of the technology industry that impacted the stock market at the end of the 1990s, the events of 9/11, and subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan also play roles in the demise of political correctness. This certainly raises the question over how the end of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, devolving international relations, coupled with the presidential term and rhetoric of former President Donald Trump plays into the new and current culture wars, further promoted and pushed forward by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis in his actions and Supreme Court reversal of the *Roe v. Wade* decision (to name just two examples).

²⁴ I had similar discussions with a few experts on the topic of descriptor use when creating a course on LGBTQ history around 2013.

sign to limit the need for continued additions of letters to the alphabet soup, leaving society with *LGBTQ+*. As of 2023, the plus sign is no longer enough to signify and allow identification with the label for some, so the acronym is now *LGBTQIA+*.

A similar example is the increased use of land acknowledgements. These short statements are increasingly used by certain institutions, governing bodies, and other entities to acknowledge that the land they are situated on or operate on was once inhabited by or part of the territory of Native Americans. In these acknowledgements, there is often a tribe or multiple tribes that are presented as the original inhabitants or users of the land. The acknowledgements are a way to create awareness and identity about the history, past, and present situatedness of Native Americans in relation to the land and society. Although mention of the treatment of the First Peoples is not expressed in the acknowledgements, the extensive list (or lack thereof in many cases) indicated by these acknowledgements can cross the boundary between exclusion and inclusion but also between trying to be meaningful and being so lengthy that the meaning for any one tribe, let alone the larger designation of Native Americans, is diluted.

How the issues related to determining to what extent each individual or group is consulted or included in discussions and decisions requires greater consideration. The extent is mostly situational. Nevertheless, it is important to consider inclusion and exclusion in such discussions, as the outcome can depend on such involvement of differing voices and viewpoints, which is sometimes beneficial and sometimes detrimental.²⁵

Museums, public spaces, places of public history, and classrooms must allow these types of discussions to occur. Opposing voices and views are important to these discussions and have a

²⁵ Detriment includes inclusion and exclusion of people, but also includes delaying decisions, actions, or creation of solutions that harm the extent to which issues are addressed. For examples of these types of discussions, see *Preserving Memory* by Linenthal (2001).

place in exploring the topics. To try to come to an understanding of how to move forward and ways to address some of the issues that have long existed, it is important to have spaces where identity and understanding of self are explored and discussed. It is necessary to have such spaces for interactions with cultural artifacts. Consideration must also be given to the language used, who participates, and how topics are covered in other public and semi-public spaces, such as television, signs, the media, and political discourse.

Museums, schools, and current creators of cultural artifacts can drive discussions and offer a means to explore dichotomous social issues. If these entities and their agents are not allowed to lead these efforts, progress will end, and the progress attained over the past fifty years is reversed. The public must support these entities and agents regardless of personal belief. Silencing voices and deterioration of identity can occur for any group at any time, as recent actions by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis regarding rejection of and pressure for changes towards the College Board's AP curriculum on African American history, removal of the inclusion of LGBTQ topics from public schools, censorship at all education levels through post-secondary in use of critical race theory and White privilege, and legal actions towards Disney in retaliation for Disney's leadership voicing opposition to the Don't Say Gay legislation enacted by DeSantis.

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