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Listening to the Native Voice: Museums as a Medium in Correcting Native American Stereotypes

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Oral Presentation 4.1

**LISTENING TO THE NATIVE VOICE: MUSEUMS AS A MEDIUM
IN CORRECTING NATIVE AMERICAN STEREOTYPES**

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Native Americans have historically been viewed as a static, and even dead culture. Of course this is simply not true. Native Americans are an evolving, ever-changing, ever-growing culture. I believe it is the responsibility of museums not only to educate on Native American culture, but also to promote contemporary artists and historians to show through example that Native American culture is not static.

My project consists of three parts. The first is to describe the responsibilities of museums to educate the general public on Native American culture and history, and also to educate Native Americans themselves in their own culture and history. In order to do this, I will first trace the history of museums' effect on Native culture and the country's view of Native Americans from about 1880 to the present. From this history, I will then show the importance of the museum as a medium in which to educate the public, and also the importance in the Native American community. Museums have the power to build community and self-worth, which is extremely important in a culture raising itself from years of oppression.

The second part is viewing, and evaluating several tribal museums. The tribal museums will consist of the Museum of the Cherokee Indian in Cherokee, North Carolina, the Southwest Museum in Los Angeles, California, and the National Museum of the American Indian which is associated with the Smithsonian Institute, but is still considered a tribal museum, albeit on a much larger scale. I will see how they incorporate different theories of museum studies in their museums, and how they handle problems specifically associated with Native American artifacts, such as repatriation and the display of sacred objects.

The final part will be a case study exhibiting the John Wesley Powell Collection housed in Sheean Library. The exhibition of these pieces will put into practice the theories and ideas gathered from the previous two parts.