

**AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF “OUR LIVES”:
COLLABORATIVE EXHIBIT MAKING AT THE
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN**

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Cornell University

In partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

By

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August 2008

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AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF “OUR LIVES”: COLLABORATIVE EXHIBIT MAKING
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Cornell University 2008

In September of 2004, the National Museum of the American Indian opened in Washington, DC next to the United States Capitol. Based explicitly on a commitment to collaborate with Native peoples, this museum presents the grandest experiment to date in ethical relations and exhibition strategies regarding the indigenous peoples of the Americas. This is an ethnography of the making of two “community curated” exhibits in the *Our Lives: Contemporary Life and Identities* gallery, which featured eight communities from the Arctic to the Caribbean, including the urban Indian community of Chicago and the Kalinago community of Dominica. This account is based on two years of fieldwork, formal and informal interviews, and participant observation through volunteer work in the museum and in these two communities.

The community curating process and its product, “Native voice,” give the NMAI its legitimacy and symbolic capital as both a Native institution and an ethical museum. Taking seriously NMAI references to Native community members as “co-curators,” this is also an ethnography of “experts,” focusing on bureaucratic practice, the collaborative production of “Native voice,” and the performance of both cultural and professional identities. By foregrounding the politics of expertise in collaborative work, the debates, decisions and compromises that are inaccessible in the finished exhibition are revealed, as well as the impact this work had on the lives of its producers both in the museum and in Native communities.

Although community curating was seen as essential to fulfilling the museum’s mission, it was also at the center of ideological differences among museum

departments that were founded in different interpretations of best practice and thus espoused different forms of agency: translation versus advocacy. Although collaboration was generally praised as a process and founded in theoretical critiques of representation, reviewers criticized its product as indiscriminating and lacking “scholarship.” What this ethnography of collaboration reveals is the contested nature of expertise, identity, Native authority, and anthropology in the museum and in Native communities alike, as well as the impact of the audience (whether real or imagined) on both the practice and the future of community curating at the NMAI.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jennifer Shannon is originally from Chicago, Illinois. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Biology and Anthropology at Bowdoin College in 1997. She spent a semester abroad in Australia for her junior year and worked with Aboriginals in Townsville on an independent study project about local politics and Aboriginal rights to common lands. She wrote a senior honors thesis addressing resource exploitation and indigenous land rights claims in Alaska and Australia. A year later, she attended the Masters Program in Social Science at the University of Chicago; her thesis analyzed court decisions regarding tribal sovereignty and Indian country in Alaska and the importance of self-governance and subsistence among Alaska Natives. After completing her master's degree with a concentration in Anthropology in 1999, she was hired as a research assistant in the Curatorial department at the National Museum of the American Indian. During her time at the museum, she also was contracted by a tribal lawyer to do archival research on behalf of a U.S. tribe seeking federal recognition. In 2002, she left the museum to begin her doctoral studies in Sociocultural Anthropology at Cornell University.

*For Grandma and my mom:
Two extraordinary, inspirational women.*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was made possible by an individual dissertation research grant from the Wenner-Gren foundation, a Cornell University Sage Fellowship, and a Society for the Humanities research travel grant from Cornell University.

I would first like to thank NMAI staff and the Kalinago and Chicago community members for welcoming me so kindly into their lives and for their contributions to this research through thoughtful conversations with me over the years—especially Dr. Cynthia Chavez, who encouraged me to embark on this work, and Garnette Joseph and Joe Podlasek, who encouraged me to complete it. I want to express my deepest appreciation to my committee members Annelise Riles, Hiro Miyazaki, Dominic Boyer, and Pamela Smart for their work and the guidance they provided me over the years. I would also like to acknowledge professors A. Terry Straus and Terry Turner for their inspiration along the way, with special thanks to Sara Dickey, who first sparked my interest in Anthropology at Bowdoin College.

Of course, I could not have achieved this work without loving support from my family and friends—from encouraging words to long procrastinating phone calls to a pan of brownies delivered at 2am in a time of need. Thanks to fellow graduate students Eric Henry, Kim Couvson, and Elana Chipman for their comments on early chapters and their support more generally. To my aunts Mary Ann and Lucy and my friends Jodi, Jeff, Casey, Cécile, Tiff, Sue, Rae, Jess, Eli, and especially mom and Brendon—thank you for being there for me, and with me, at various times during this journey. To mom and dad, thank you for providing the opportunity of a good education and encouraging me in whatever path I chose. And finally, I want to express my gratitude to Craig Howe for guiding me along the right path at the start—a path that eventually, surprisingly, led to this dissertation.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAA	American Anthropological Association
AAM	American Association of Museums
AIC	American Indian Center
BIA	Bureau of Indian Affairs
CLM	Carib Liberation Movement
CRC	Cultural Resources Center
D+C	Design+Communication, Inc.
GGHC	George Gustav Heye Center
MAC	Mall Action Committee
MTT	Mall Transition Team
NAASA	Native American Art Studies Association
NAES	Native American Educational Services
NASM	National Air and Space Museum
NMAI	National Museum of the American Indian
NMNH	National Museum of Natural History
NPC	North Pacific Coast exhibition [<i>Listening to Our Ancestors</i>]
OCon	Smithsonian Office of Contracting
OL	Our Lives gallery
OP	Our Peoples gallery
OP&A	Smithsonian Institution Office of Policy and Analysis
OU	Our Universes gallery
PM	Project Manager
RA	Research Assistant
SI	Smithsonian Institution

PREFACE

Who Killed Curatorial?

In 2004 the National Museum of the American Indian—the newest and last Smithsonian museum to be constructed on the National Mall—opened to the general public in Washington, DC. This story, in the broadest sense, is about how it got to be what it is today. Although stereotyped images of them are prevalent in popular culture, Native Americans are virtually absent from contemporary media and politics (barring fleeting and often biting comments about casinos more recently). They have been largely invisible in American life for the majority of the people who live in the United States. This building, right next to the capitol, makes visible Native peoples who have always been making pilgrimages to this space on the mall since this young country was founded.

Delegations from tribes have been coming to the Capitol to address treaty rights and violations for hundreds of years, and congress has figured prominently in their lives through policies of termination, assimilation, and more recently self-determination. The identities of Native peoples in the U.S. have been intertwined and circumscribed and litigated by the powers that be in Washington since the country was founded. For many Native individuals, this prominent and permanent symbol of Native presence in America, in the shadow of the capitol and at the center of power, is a triumph. At the grand opening of the museum, its “main message” was “We are still here.” This message was most directly displayed in *Our Lives: Contemporary Life and Identities*, one of the NMAI’s three inaugural exhibitions and the main focus of this dissertation.

The difficult history of relations not just between the government and tribes, but also between Native Americans and museums, has been well documented. It was

no doubt a daunting task for the Smithsonian's NMAI, a federal and bureaucratic institution, to create positive and trusting relations with Native tribes. "Authentic Native voice," which was produced through collaboration with Native peoples, is what NMAI director Rick West promises in his introduction to *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian: Museums and Native Cultures*.¹ The manner in which this trust and authenticity were accomplished, I argue, was through the *process* of collaboration with Native peoples throughout the western hemisphere in a particular kind of exhibit making practice called "community curating."

Just as Sally Price acknowledged at the start of her account of the birth of the Musée du quai Branly in *Paris Primitive*,² there are many different people and places and times that could begin this story. For example, it could begin in 1897 when George Gustav Heye began his "obsessive" collecting practices with the purchase of a deerskin shirt,³ in 1916 when Heye's collection was officially transitioned into the Museum of the American Indian-Heye Foundation,⁴ in 1967 with a gathering of young American Indians who embarked on a fight for American Indian religious freedom,⁵ or in 1989 with the signing of the National Museum of the American Indian Act as a result in large part of the advocacy of Senator Daniel Inouye.⁶ These have all been suggested to me, and for good reasons. But I chose to begin my story in 1999: when the groundbreaking for the new museum was celebrated on the National Mall, when the new home for Heye's collected objects was completed in Suitland, MD, and when

¹ Richard West, "A New Idea of Ourselves: The Changing Presentation of the American Indian," in *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian: Museums and Native Cultures*, ed. National Museum of the American Indian (U.S.) (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of the American Indian, 2000), 7.

² Sally Price, *Paris Primitive: Jacques Chirac's Museum on the Quai Branly* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

³ Roland W. Force, *Politics and the Museum of the American Indian: The Heye & the Mighty*, 1st ed. (Honolulu, Hawai'i: Mechas Press, 1999), 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵ Interview with Suzan Shown Harjo, at the Mall Museum Resource Center, November 23, 2004.

⁶ Public Law 101-185. See also Force, *Politics and the Museum of the American Indian: The Heye & the Mighty*.

I, along with a host of other individuals, was hired to work at this new facility called the Cultural Resources Center.

Since then, and with the opening of the museum, a lot has been written about the NMAI—by the museum itself and in newspapers, scholarly journals, and online.⁷ I leave out much of what’s been written for the public about the museum and try to offer something that is available uniquely through ethnographic fieldwork: a sense of perspective from the participants in the making of the museum’s exhibitions, insight into the daily experience of their work, and an openness to contingency that is the hallmark of ethnographic research.⁸

While it is not the central issue of my dissertation, midway through my fieldwork there was a dramatic and unexpected turn of events, a kind of mystery that provided a convenient motivation to the narrative. The Curatorial Department was the most prominent department in the museum that was associated with and practiced the much-lauded (in contemporary museology and more specifically in the NMAI) practice of “community curating,” which *was* the central focus of my research. By 2005, however, Curatorial was the only department slated to be “disbanded” and eradicated from the bureaucratic structure in an upcoming major reorganization of the institution, which was referred to as a “flattening of the organization”—a concept in the business world designed to make bureaucratic practice more efficient.

⁷ Although no catalogues were published for the inaugural exhibitions, a “companion” piece was published in time for the opening: Gerald McMaster, Clifford E. Trafzer, and National Museum of the American Indian (U.S.), *Native Universe : Voices of Indian America* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2004).

⁸ I am indebted to Mary Bouquet’s call for a more in-depth ethnography of museums and museum practice which first encouraged me to think of the NMAI as field site. See Mary Bouquet, ed., *Academic Anthropology and the Museum: Back to the Future* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001).

Much like Chris Paine's question "Who killed the electric car?"⁹ that introduced his documentary of the same name, I invite you to consider the following question as motivation to read on: "Who killed Curatorial?" I did not anticipate this framework to be applicable to my own work; I never would have predicted in 1999 or when I began my fieldwork in 2004 that this department would be wiped from the organizational structure of the museum by the time my fieldwork came to a close in 2006. In the end, rather than a single culprit, the film presented a variety of agents, and a complex web of factors, that led to the disappearance of (or, perhaps, disappeared) electric car. In the Epilogue, I provide some similar thoughts regarding the Curatorial Department of the NMAI.

Notes on Language and Structure of the Thesis

Like any bureaucracy, the NMAI has many acronyms and shorthand terms that staff members sometimes referred to as "NMAI-speak." One NMAI curator commented, after watching an exhibit video segment in which a Pamunkey Indian man used the term "Natives," that he, too, had been "infected with NMAI-speak." So, some of this language not only traveled within the institution, but also among its partners in collaboration while making the exhibitions.

The term "community" is widely used at the NMAI. I use the term "community" as an indigenous term to the people with whom I work; I do not intend

⁹ Chris Paine et al., "Who Killed the Electric Car?," (United States: Sony Pictures Classics, 2006).. While I was considering these developments and began to write this dissertation, I saw a film that was framed as an investigation into the demise of the electric car as a viable and sustainable alternative to other automobiles. This movie detailed the history of the electric car, its promise and its failure to be commercialized. Over the course of the movie, Paine presents a number of "suspects" that may be guilty of the demise of this promising vehicle, such as oil companies, car companies, consumers, batteries, government, California Air Resources Board, and the hydrogen fuel cell. All but the batteries were found "guilty" to some extent. Some of these "suspects" resembled Latour's actants, and the film's subject matter itself called to mind another story of a failed but promising technological innovation: Bruno Latour, *Aramis, or, the Love of Technology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

to undermine the political or legal status of tribes by using this language (I address the term in more detail in Chapter 1). “Native” is also a term that is used by the NMAI precisely for its lack of specificity, no doubt a result of the institution’s hemispheric scope. This term is interchangeable with American Indian, Native American, indigenous person, aboriginal, First Nation, etc. These more specific terms are used regionally throughout the Western hemisphere.

The terms “community curator” and “co-curator” are virtually interchangeable. While some staff told me there was a switch later in the process from using the former to the latter term, archival research suggests this was not the case. However, that perception alone was important in that it suggested that staff felt Native community members were less in control of the process as it moved forward (from curator to *co*-curator). *Our Lives* community liaisons, or Native community members assigned to facilitate NMAI staff visits to their communities, were often lumped into the category of “co-curators” and functionally contributed to the exhibits as such.

The terms “Curatorial” or “Exhibits,” or other NMAI department names, refer to both agents and locations. For example, one can say “Curatorial held a meeting yesterday” or “I went into Curatorial but couldn’t find where people were meeting.” Likewise, “Chicago” or “Kalinago” are terms that can refer to agents (the community as a whole or a small group of co-curators), the exhibit, or a location, depending on the context of the conversation. For example, one might say, “Chicago wants the walls to be green,” referring to the co-curators. On the other hand, “Chicago has a nice video segment in it” refers to the exhibit.

The use of parenthetical tribal affiliation is a convention that the NMAI uses and that I replicate at times here. For example: W. Richard West, Jr. (Southern Cheyenne). When I refer to individuals’ job titles, it is their title *at the time of* the interview or event being described. Their titles are likely to have changed since then,

and many of them no longer work at the NMAI. For instance, I refer to Rick West (as he is more commonly known) as the director, but he has since retired from that position. In footnotes, “interview” indicates a formal, recorded session, while “conversation” was a meeting or chance encounter that was not recorded.

As for the structure of the dissertation, in addition to the chapters there are “interchapters” that reflect conversations occurring outside of the museum or Native communities, but which very much impacted and reflected what was going on within the NMAI. When I began my fieldwork, an important part of the multi-sited research was attending academic and professional conferences in which museum staff presented their own interpretations and theoretical analyses of their work at the NMAI. I saw these performances as moments in which NMAI staff members were not only making sense of their own work to themselves, but also indicating how they wanted their work to be received by others in their field. In other words, the interchapters illustrate how experts attempted to frame both anticipated and actual responses to their work.

In “The Complicity of Cultural Production,” Fred Myers also recognizes that symposia are a part of the cultural production associated with exhibitions.¹⁰ He writes that a symposium is an “evanescent moment of translation” and a “significant site of cultural practice.”¹¹ Like Myers, I saw conference presentations as “an alternative interpretive practice for the exhibition” that highlighted demands for and deliberations

¹⁰ Fred Myers, “The Complicity of Cultural Production: The Contingencies of Performance in Globalizing Museum Practices,” in *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, ed. Ivan Karp, et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). For discussion more broadly about the “structure of academic expertise” and how it can enable misrepresentation through circulation and acceptance of its authority, see Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 152.

¹¹ Myers, “The Complicity of Cultural Production: The Contingencies of Performance in Globalizing Museum Practices,” 528.

over changing practices in both anthropology and museology, and how these fields are mutually constitutive.¹²

I also recognized that NMAI staff participated in conferences and symposia in my own academic field of anthropology. Dominic Boyer writes about the challenges of the anthropology of experts, noting that “since the anthropologist confronting another professional is at once expert and parvenu, at once colleague and competitor, professionalism and the politics of expertise must be forefronted in our analysis of our ethnographic research in these areas.”¹³ I devote an entire chapter to the politics of expertise, but it is a theme that runs throughout the dissertation.

Following the work of Boyer and Myers, then, the structure of the thesis is designed to recognize that an exhibition is not just what is built on the museum floor, but also how its makers present it to others; it is designed also to highlight that, along with my own account, there are countless others who were writing about the NMAI and participating in the same academic and professional arenas. Accordingly, I provide vignettes, between the main chapters, of academic conferences that I attended in which NMAI staff presented—framed, interpreted, critiqued, translated—their work at the museum. Just as Myers’ recognizes the interplay between museology and anthropology, and Boyer insists that we recognize the politics of expertise, I argue throughout that anthropological methods, critiques and theories infused NMAI curatorial practice and Native communities’ expectations in their collaboration with the institution. Therefore, among others, the American Anthropological Association meetings feature prominently among these interludes.

As many of the people represented in this account have presented on the NMAI, and are well-known within the museum world, I want to make a final note on

¹² Ibid., 513.

¹³ Dominic Boyer, "The Dilemma of the Anthropology of Experts" (paper presented at the American Anthropological Society, Chicago, IL, November 2004), 5.

the use of individuals' names in this dissertation. When researching a public and highly publicized institution like the NMAI, the issue of whether to use real names when writing ethnography has been resolved differently by a number of anthropologists working in similar contexts.¹⁴ To credit individuals for their contributions, and due to the nature of the institution as well as my relationships with those with whom I worked to complete this research, names used in the following chapters are real.

Although all participants were offered anonymity, none asked for it. In the course of many interviews and conversations, there were only a couple statements that individuals specifically requested to be attributed anonymously. I occasionally generalized statements or social or professional positions to protect a person's identity when I felt it was necessary. I thank all of those who contributed to this research for their time, candor and courage. I have tried to represent their concerns, ideas, and experiences accurately, appropriately and with sensitivity to the nature of fieldwork relations as well as to the possible impacts on their professional development.¹⁵

¹⁴ Bruno and Steve Woolgar Latour, *Laboratory Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), see preface, Hugh Gusterson, *Nuclear Rites : A Weapons Laboratory at the End of the Cold War* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1996), xvii, Georgina Born, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

¹⁵ I do not intend here to describe issues of gender and ethnicity among NMAI staff, though there is no doubt they are salient to the relations and practices of the institution. Although issues of Native versus non-Native, "rez" versus city, particular tribal affiliation and gender are part of the dynamics in each of the communities with whom I worked, I do not address them systematically here. Gender and ethnicity issues were far less talked about than departmental affiliation or pay scale at the NMAI; while I recognize this observation alone may entice readers to want an explication of these dynamics within the museum, with respect to my interlocutors I leave it for another scholar or another time.

INTERCHAPTER

(0.5)

AAA 2007

First Encounter: A Return

At the American Anthropological Association annual meeting in Washington, DC on December 29, 2007, I encountered National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) staff as an audience for the first time. Over the years, NMAI staff had been friends, colleagues, and participants in my research. But this day, they were my audience as I participated in a panel that was organized by Christina Krepps to celebrate the life and work of Michael Ames.¹ Ames was a respected figure in museum anthropology who was well-known for supporting museum collaborations with Native peoples. He had contributed to *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian: Museums and Native Cultures*, a book published by the NMAI that was about the imperatives and possibilities for this kind of work.² I began my presentation with Ames' provocative question from the title of his contribution to the volume: "Are changing representations of First Peoples in Canadian museums and galleries challenging the curatorial prerogative?"

¹ "Thinking Outside the Glass Box: The Legacy of Michael Ames." As I explained in my presentation, Michael Ames was inspirational to both the content and methods of my work. The collaboration he called for between museums and indigenous peoples is similar to the inaugural exhibitions' "community curating" process at the NMAI, and my interest in ethnographically documenting this process also reflects his call for a more theoretically engaged anthropology of museums. See Michael M. Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992), Michael M. Ames, "How to Decorate a House: The Re-Negotiation of Cultural Representations at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology," *Museum Anthropology* 22, no. 3 (1999), Michael M. Ames, "Free Indians from Their Ethnological Fate: The Emergence of the Indian Point of View in Exhibitions of Indians," *Muse* 5, no. 2 (1987).

² Michael M. Ames, "Are Changing Representations of First Peoples in Canadian Museums and Galleries Challenging the Curatorial Prerogative," in *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian: Museums and Native Cultures*, ed. Richard West and National Museum of the American Indian [NMAI] (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of the American Indian, 2000).

I proceeded to give my answer to this question in the American context through the example of the NMAI. I was terribly nervous as I gave a presentation that included some of the content of this dissertation. I quoted conversations with staff members who were sitting in the rows of chairs facing me as I spoke.³ My hands were shaking. At one point I dropped the paper from which I was reading, quickly dipped down to pick it up off the carpet with a nervous laugh, squared once again to the podium, and continued speaking. I was giving details and analysis, from an anthropological perspective, and describing events and practices that these anthropologists had themselves theorized, deliberated over, and put in to practice. After the talk, they said they appreciated my presentation and that it “sounded right.” That experience, in the midst of writing my dissertation, gave me confidence that I had been lacking. But the notion of speaking for others, of selecting or summarizing their conversations and perspectives and organizing their experiences according to my own perspective and purposes, continues to be an anxious exercise.

³ Current and former NMAI curators were present.

INTRODUCTION

ANTICIPATION

Theo: *And this is exciting for us!*

Jen: *Why, why is it exciting?*

Theo: *Because we can show the world how we live today.*

Terri: *Yeah.*

Theo: *How much impact the world has on us today.*

Jen: *Has it been frustrating always having people ask you how things were before you were born?*

Theo: *Yeah, uh-huh.*

Terri: *Yes.*

[...]

Terri: *Some people ask us if we still live in igloos. So this is what we're doing now—it's going to tell the world that we don't live in igloos anymore [she laughs].*

Jen: *Well, if that's something that's really exciting for you—*

Theo: *It is exciting!*

Terri: *It's very exciting.¹*

Introduction

In September of 2004, the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) presented its inaugural exhibitions to the public on the National Mall in Washington, DC. As Rick West has explained, the NMAI represented “the culmination of nearly 15 years of planning and collaboration with tribal communities from across the hemisphere.”² Although the museum on the mall was not built until 2004, it existed in the imaginations, documents, hopes and dreams of countless individuals who labored to make it a reality over the years. NMAI staff, congressmen, Indian country, and many more had great expectations for this site. In the years leading to its grand opening, staff often talked in the future tense about the museum; they also often talked

¹ From transcript of a co-curator meeting at the Igloolik Research Center, Igloolik, Nunavut, June 2003.

² Smithsonian Institution Office of Public Affairs [SI], "Press Release: National Museum of the American Indian Announces Grand Opening on Sept. 21," (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2004), 1.

as if the structure already existed, because in many ways it did in their minds. They all were dedicated to the promise of, and felt anticipation for, this future museum. They also labored under the awesome responsibility of preparing a museum that was to represent all Native peoples in the Western hemisphere, for all time, in one place. One curator promised a gathered crowd a year before the museum opened, “We conspire to dazzle and amaze... the toughest and most jaded critics.”³

In 2000, NMAI staff presentations at the American Anthropological Association meetings in San Francisco evidenced much excitement, pride, and hope for the new museum they were building. *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian: Museums and Native Cultures*, published in the same year, can be seen as both part of, and a prescription for, the “paradigm shift”⁴ that founding director Rick West (Southern Cheyenne) and other NMAI staff hoped to implement through their museum. In the introduction to this edited volume, West places Native voice at the center of this paradigm:

From the start, our new museum has been dedicated to a fresh and, some would say, radically different approach to museum exhibitions. To put it in the most basic way, we insist that *the authentic Native voice and perspective* guide all our policies, including, of course, our exhibition philosophy.”⁵

Nowhere was collaboration, the commitment to “Native voice,” and the NMAI exhibition philosophy more evident than in the “community curated” exhibits in the museum’s three permanent galleries. To understand what this form of collaboration entailed, this ethnography focuses specifically on the making of the *Our Lives: Contemporary Life and Identities* exhibition, one of three permanent galleries that are on display at the NMAI. *Our Lives* is about contemporary Native identities, while the

³ Paul Chaat Smith, NAASA 2003 presentation.

⁴ By 2004 this phrase was widely used by the NMAI staff to explain the nature of their work.

⁵ West, “A New Idea of Ourselves: The Changing Presentation of the American Indian,” 7. My emphasis.

other two galleries depict Native cosmologies (*Our Universes: Traditional Knowledge Shapes Our World*) and histories (*Our Peoples: Giving Voice to Our Histories*).

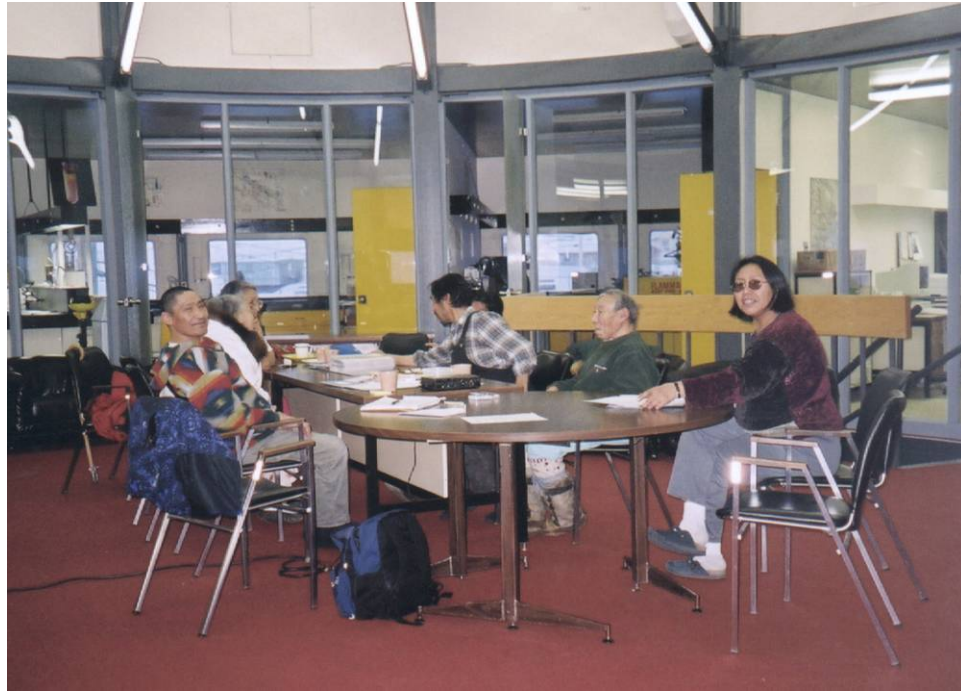


Figure 1: Co-Curator Meeting at the Igloolik Research Center, Igloolik, Nunavut. Theo Ikummaq (left) and Terry Iyerak (right) facing camera. June 2003.

In June 2003, as lead researcher for the *Our Lives* gallery and staff fieldworker working with the Inuit community of Igloolik, I conducted a final exhibit script review with Igloolik “co-curators” (Figure 1 above). I asked the Igloolik co-curators, considering that over four million people per year would read their introduction to the exhibit, what did they most want people to know about them? Their resounding response: “We don’t live in Igloos anymore!” We all broke down laughing because it seemed silly to us to have to put it in writing, but they insisted that is what the world needed to know. They explained that it was the most common question they were

asked by non-Inuit people. So, the last line on the introductory panel in the Igloolik exhibit in the *Our Lives* gallery stated precisely that.⁶

As the above exchange shows, Native communities who worked on the *Our Lives* gallery hoped they would be able to counteract pervasive stereotypes in the Americas, and they were excited to be able to communicate with the public in their own words. This scene is emblematic of the subject matter and scope of the dissertation: it acknowledges that my work on behalf of the museum in the past contributed to my perspective in writing about it; it shows the Igloolik co-curators had both direction over the content of their exhibit as well as a particular understanding of who their audience would be; it highlights the ubiquitous practice of transforming recorded conversation into exhibit display text; and, finally, it shows the desire of the co-curators to tell what their life is like *today*, in their own words. It also reflects the high level of excitement and anticipation before the opening of the NMAI which was present not just among community curators and NMAI staff, but throughout Indian country.

Reflecting on my work with the Igloolik community in many ways motivated the questions and methodological approach of my dissertation research. My ethnographic engagement with the people with whom I worked throughout my fieldwork resembles the methods and ethical concerns espoused by the National Museum of the American Indian Curatorial staff in community curating. This is not surprising, as this methodology and the commitment to presenting “Native voice” was one of the reasons I applied to work for the museum in 1999,⁷ and it responded to the

⁶ It is my in-depth experience with the exhibit making process in Igloolik that prompted my current research and methods. It this same experience, however, that led me not to return there for my fieldwork. Unlike in the Chicago and Kalinago communities, I was the main museum representative in Igloolik. I felt this might have made it awkward for Iglulingmiut co-curators to provide a critical feedback and evaluation of the exhibit making process.

⁷ Coming from a background in studying indigenous rights and representation and Federal Indian law, I was predictably skeptical of museum representations and relations with Native communities. My

critiques of representation in anthropology and in museums that I too was concerned with when I entered the discipline.

The first part of this introduction provides a theoretical approach to collaboration and the second part of the chapter discusses ethnographic research methods that led to, and were derivative of, this approach. Here a kind of doubling occurs, where the method of collaboration is located in the relations between the museum staff and the Native co-curators in exhibition development as well as in fieldwork relations that are theorized as professional-to-professional relationships. This doubling is mirrored at another level, in that both the NMAI and myself—our methods, concerns and approaches to working with Native peoples—owe a particular debt to a common theoretical lineage, the “Americanist tradition” in anthropology.⁸ This tradition is in part what has contributed to the rendering of collaboration as ethical practice when working with Native peoples.

An Ethnography of Collaboration

What makes the NMAI a fortuitous site, and indeed the inspiration for this orientation to collaboration, is that the museum’s modus operandi in all its endeavors—from original consultations about the nature of the museum to architectural design features and exhibition content—has been an iterative and specifically “collaborative” process with Native peoples. At the NMAI, collaboration is not just a buzz word among museum people and a call from Indian country; it is also

undergraduate and masters theses focused on Native land rights claims and legal cases in Australia and Alaska and were informed by South American indigenous rights struggles. As the NMAI was hemispheric in its scope, my knowledge about Native peoples outside of the United States was seen as balancing to the largely U.S.-centered specialists in the Curatorial department at the time of my hire.

⁸ Regna Darnell has labored convincingly to make visible again the impact of Boas and other American theorists on contemporary anthropology, which I address later in the chapter. See Regna Darnell, “Theorizing Americanist Anthropology: Continuities from the B.A.E. To the Boasians,” in *Theorizing the Americanist Tradition*, ed. Regna Darnell and Lisa Philips Valentine (Toronto ; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

the latest method in exhibit development, describes the exhibit form, and is an ethical stance—the “right way” to make exhibits about Native peoples. A common description of this process is of someone going to a community and saying, “This is what I heard you say. Did I get that right?” The idea is not just to listen as a symbolic behavior of respect or a ritual practice, but to develop content based on accurate representations of the intent and information that was presented in the encounter between museum staff and Native community members.

In essence, over the course of my fieldwork, I documented the production of the *Our Lives* exhibit as it unfolded from an imaginary entity to its materialization in September 2004, and its subsequent reception and interpretation by its collaborators. This processual analysis is based on two years of fieldwork from June 2004 to June 2006.⁹ Taking seriously NMAI references to Native American community members as “co-curators” of the inaugural exhibitions, I conducted my ethnographic research as a multi-sited ethnography of “experts” (whether museum or cultural). For comparative purposes, my fieldwork lasted up to six months in three of nine communities involved in the making of the *Our Lives* exhibition: the museum professionals in Washington, DC; the Kalinago people in the Carib Territory on Dominica Island in the Caribbean; and, the American Indian community in Chicago, IL. Therefore, this approach brings together the study of small and large scale societies, of rural and urban Indian experience, of people near and far from the centers of power and cultural production.

⁹ This dissertation is also based on an immense archive of collected documents, including exhibition plans, memos, meeting minutes, design drafts, field notes, and interview transcripts from all three communities during the exhibition process. In addition to these archives, I added the numerous documents, field notes, and interviews that I collected during my fieldwork period from 2004-2006, which also included attending academic and professional conferences in which NMAI staff gave presentations. I also revisited the Carib Territory November 13-26, 2007. I go into more detail in Chapter 1.

This research is also rooted in my own learning experiences of working in the NMAI's Curatorial Department from August 1999 to May 2002, first as a research assistant for the *Our Peoples* gallery and later as the lead researcher for the *Our Lives* gallery. I was also assigned as the main fieldworker and museum representative to the Igloodik community of Inuit in Nunavut, Canada from 2001-2002, and continued as a consultant for the NMAI media team's visit to this community in 2003.

A Neo-Boasian Approach

At the NMAI, emphasis on collaboration manifests in the framing of Native communities in general as “experts” of their own experience and cultures and as “co-curators” of the exhibits. By using these terms, NMAI staff clearly attempted to refigure the authority of Native peoples in museum representation and practice.¹⁰ These designations also provide an opportunity to rethink fieldwork relations with indigenous peoples.

Refiguring fieldwork as an anthropology with experts (a characterization that came *from* the field site rather than was applied *to* it), I basically went into the field asking experts on community curating and exhibition development about this collaborative process. Based on my training in anthropology (which included Deloria's *Custer Died for Your Sins*),¹¹ as well as my experience working at the

¹⁰ These terms also respond to and counteracts particular trends in anthropology where, for example, culture and identity are rendered through the lens of politics in which Native peoples strategically use them. The “invention of tradition” debate in anthropology brought to the fore and highlighted real world consequences of academic theories that had the potential to, and sometimes did, undermine the rights of Native peoples. See for example E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge Cambridgeshire ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983). For a thoughtful redirection from this approach, see Hirokazu Miyazaki, "The Limits of Politics," *People and Culture in Oceania* 17 (2000). For an excellent discussion of how this form of theorizing can undermine the authority of Native communities, see Charles Briggs, "The Politics of Discursive Authority in Research on the 'Invention of Tradition'," *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 4 (1996).

¹¹ Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988). First published in 1968, Deloria's manifesto included “Anthropologists and Other Friends,” a notorious and satirical criticism of the extractive relations anthropologists had with American Indian tribes. When scholars cite Deloria, it is often to indicate a particular recognition of

NMAI, I was never comfortable with the notion of “studying” people. Therefore, in choosing the exhibition to organize my field site and by focusing on knowledge production, I considered the exhibition to be a “third” in the fieldwork relation. In other words, the exhibition process was something that the participants in my research could look at, reflect on, and study *with* me. In addition, as an artifact of our knowledge practices, the *Our Lives* exhibits are an objectification of our identities—both of the museum professionals and the Native community members—and therefore, in reflecting on the exhibit together, we in turn were also viewing an objectified version of ourselves.

In many ways, this (re)orientation to the ethnographic subject, as something the ethnographer and her interlocutors puzzle over together, resonates with the Neo-Boasian approach to anthropology that Matti Bunzl proposes in a critique of the Malinowskian model for fieldwork.¹² Writing against the notion that anthropological knowledge must be produced through a distance between the ethnographic Self and the Other, thus reifying and sustaining a hierarchy of difference, Bunzl combines Boasian ethnography with Foucaultian genealogy and proposes that both insiders and outsiders to a culture have a common “epistemic position vis-à-vis the ethnographic subject,” which he suggests to be a “history of the present.”¹³

past misdeeds and a commitment to ethical practice with Native nations and individuals. See for example Elizabeth S. Grobsmith, "Growing up on Deloria: The Impact of His Work on a New Generation of Anthropologists," in *Indians and Anthropologists: Vine Deloria, Jr., and the Critique of Anthropology*, ed. Thomas Biolsi and Larry J. Zimmerman (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1997). She states, “Those of us ‘raised on Deloria’ have had built into our knowledge of our discipline issues of ethics and morality, legality and propriety, jurisdiction and self-determination, seldom considered by pre-1950s ethnographers, their offensive and frequently unethical field techniques having been well documented” (45). Grobsmith writes about how Deloria’s critique gave a new standard for “anthros” working with tribes, and made them desperately avoid being the image of the “tiresome meddler.” It also made anthropologists defensive about their usefulness and more accountable for their actions (37).

¹² Matti Bunzl, "Boas, Foucault, and the “Native Anthropologist”": Notes toward a Neo-Boasian Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 106, no. 3 (2004).

¹³ *Ibid.*: 440.

With regard to the relationship between insiders and outsiders to a culture, Bunzl explains, “Anthropological knowledge would thus not emerge as a function of reified difference but on the grounds of their analogous location.”¹⁴ This “would thus follow Boas in turning our attention [to the] historical production and ethnographic reproduction” of cultural differences. The Neo-Boasian approach, then, makes the *temporal* dimension of difference, rather than the *cultural* dimension of difference, the focal point of analysis.¹⁵ In my case, it is the exhibition (or the history and analysis of the exhibition) that becomes our shared focal point of analysis.¹⁶

Collaboration as Subject and Method

This shared epistemic position between ethnographer and ethnographic subject can be seen as a form of collaboration. Over the last twenty years, collaboration has emerged as a solution to issues of representation in such fields as anthropology, media production, and museum studies when working with indigenous peoples; it has also been posited as “good practice” in business administration, state-citizen relations, and international development projects among other endeavors. In the museum world, collaboration is considered to be both research method and ethical practice by Native and non-Native people.

I realized over the course of my fieldwork that collaboration was not only the subject but also the method of my fieldwork. For this realization and its central part in the focus of my dissertation, I am indebted to Hiro Miyazaki and his work, especially *The Method of Hope: Anthropology, philosophy, and Fijian knowledge*, in which he

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.: 439.

¹⁶ Each *Our Lives* gallery community curated exhibit is a history of the present. This represents a kind of doubling: my ethnography is a history of the present (the exhibition as recent history), and each OL community curated exhibit is a history of the present (representing contemporary life up to the moment it was set in material form in 2004). In addition, the OL exhibition is, in the end, cultural differences on display in the form of distinct community exhibits.

presents hope as method.¹⁷ Where Miyazaki intends to provide a space for anthropological engagement with philosophy through his attention to hope, I seek this engagement in a more mundane sphere—in everyday organizational practice. For this attention to the intersection of collaboration and bureaucratic practice, I am indebted to Annelise Riles and her work on non-governmental organizations and everyday bureaucratic practice in *Network Inside Out* and *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge*.¹⁸

Collaboration is often taken for granted to be ethical, positive, and enabling. This provides a contrast with Miyazaki’s work. He writes that theorists are leery of approaching the subject of hope due to its being taken up by conservative politicians, which brings in the issue of ethical concerns over its “content and consequences.”¹⁹ Collaboration, on the other hand, is often overlooked by theorists not because they are wary of ethical implications, but rather because it is often presented specifically, and simply, *as* ethical practice itself. For that reason, Miriam Kahn, a curator and professor of anthropology at the University of Washington, believes much is lost in analysis. In her article “Not really pacific voices: politics of representation in collaborative museum exhibits” she explains that, following the critiques of representation in the 1980s,

Today, most self-respecting anthropology museums in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and many European countries rally around the same set of principles and practices of including native advisors, advisory boards, community councils, task forces, etc.... Several accounts have appeared describing these collaborative processes and the results. With few exceptions, these reports relate mainly problem-free processes, with little or no

¹⁷ Hirokazu Miyazaki, *The Method of Hope : Anthropology, Philosophy, and Fijian Knowledge* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004). This work also influenced my analysis in Chapter 4 about the prospective and retrospective perspectives in the exhibits of Kalinago and Chicago communities co-curators, respectively.

¹⁸ Annelise Riles, *The Network inside Out* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), Annelise Riles, *Documents : Artifacts of Modern Knowledge* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

¹⁹ Miyazaki, *The Method of Hope : Anthropology, Philosophy, and Fijian Knowledge*, 1.

mention of miscommunications, tensions, or factionalism, and almost no discussion of how successful these collaborations are in solving problems of representation.²⁰

I do not intend do a critique of collaboration, but rather I approach it as a form of knowledge production, and describe and analyze its inner workings and its representational consequences. Taking up collaboration as subject and method implies certain analytical opportunities and challenges. This ethnography does not address nor seek to describe or illuminate the inner workings of “cultures,” museological or otherwise. Instead, it looks to collaboration as an alternative organizing trope of sociality, using it as a lens through which to view social relations, knowledge production, and the representational strategies of culture producers. In other words, collaboration is a form of meaning making, represents a particular kind of belonging, and can present a heuristic concept for moving “beyond the cultural turn” to see how else we might represent and work together with the participants in our research.

Exhibition as Field Site

While there is a growing literature of an anthropology of museums, it has mainly resembled an “anthropology of things”²¹ and the field site has been bounded by the institution itself. What appears to be characteristic of the anthropology of museums is a lack of “thick” ethnographic engagement with the museum, its subjects and/or objects.²² The “question of ‘fieldwork’” is often “problematic,” as Graburn and

²⁰ Miriam Kahn, "Not Really Pacific Voices: Politics of Representation in Collaborative Museum Exhibits," *Museum Anthropology* 24, no. 1 (2000): 58. Kahn was a curator for *Pacific Voices*, an exhibit about the contemporary lives of seventeen “Pacific Rim cultures.” It was created in collaboration with leaders of those communities and displayed at the University of Washington’s Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture.

²¹ This insight is from the review of museum anthropology by Jones, citing Appadurai 1986: Anna Laura Jones, "Exploding Cannons: The Anthropology of Museums," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 22 (1993): 203. See also Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

²² Nelson Graburn and Kathryn Mathers, "Museums inside and Out," review of *Destination Culture and Reflections of a Cultural Broker*, *Current Anthropology* 41, no. 4 (2000): 692. However, some notable ethnographies have since been published, for example Patricia Pierce Erikson, Helma Ward, and Kirk

Mathers suggest in “Museums Inside and Out.”²³ Although they call for more ethnographic information about the audience, I sought more ethnographic information about the exhibition producers and their knowledge practices.

Exhibitions have been conceptualized in anthropology in a number of ways, but they have seldom been approached through multi-sited ethnography or as products of a “cultural bureaucracy.”²⁴ For example, exhibitions have been conceptualized as: an “artifact” of our society²⁵ and of our discipline;²⁶ as an “amalgam” of knowledge and practices;²⁷ as a “built ethnography” (as opposed to written);²⁸ as a cultural performance;²⁹ as a “complex process”;³⁰ and, as a “contact zone.”³¹

The methodological challenges that inhere to this particular kind of study are those of continuity, pace, and distance. In my fieldwork, I followed the *Our Lives* exhibit through time and space, in mainly three locations. This, of course, provides a challenge to the continuity of experience and ethnographic record keeping in these communities: as the exhibition was developed and opened in September 2004, there were events and discourse associated with *Our Lives* that were occurring

Wachendorf, *Voices of a Thousand People : The Makah Cultural and Research Center* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), Sharon Macdonald, *Behind the Scenes at the Science Museum, Materializing Culture* (Oxford ; New York: Berg, 2002).

²³ Graburn and Mathers, "Museums inside and Out," 692.

²⁴ Cf. Born, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde*.

²⁵ Michael O'Hanlon, *Paradise: Portraying the New Guinea Highlands* (London: British Museum Press, 1993), 92, Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums*, 44, Jeanne Cannizzo, "Inside Out: Cultural Production in the Museum and the Academy," in *In Academic Anthropology and the Museum: Back to the Future*, ed. Mary Bouquet (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001), 164.

²⁶ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture : Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 2.

²⁷ Mary Bouquet, "The Didactics of Exhibition Making," in *Academic Anthropology and the Museum: Back to the Future*, ed. Mary Bouquet (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001), 195.

²⁸ ———, "Thinking and Doing Otherwise: Anthropological Theory in Exhibitionary Practice," *Ethnos* 65, no. 2 (2000): 233.

²⁹ Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums*, 44.

³⁰ Anita Herle, "Torres Strait Islanders: Stories from an Exhibition," *Ethnos* 65, no. 2 (2000): 253.

³¹ James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 188-219.

simultaneously in all three communities, yet one cannot be in three places at once. This is related to the structure of the study, which attempts an ethnography of an exhibition as it was modified, unfolded and materialized over time—which suggests the second methodological challenge: pace. Briefly, in so far as the exhibition itself was on a deadline to open in late September, so too the pace of my own field work had a sense of deadline and fast pace. This experience of time was quite different in different field locations. In Dominica after the opening, for example, time seemed to pass much more slowly.

Finally, the main methodological challenge is one of analytical distance, as the participants in my research were at the same time cultural experts, anthropologists and bureaucrats; in other words, their knowledge practices were much like mine. This particular challenge has been noted by a number of scholars working in contemporary institutions,³² and is often shorthand as a “lack of distance.”³³ For example, the experts that are the co-curators of the *Our Lives* exhibits—both the Native community members and the museum professionals—use ethnographic methods and anthropological concepts. In fact, the NMAI recognizes that when dealing with Native identity, the community members themselves are better anthropologists—better at articulating what it means to be Iglulingmiut or Kahnawake Mohawk.³⁴

³² See for example Doug R. Holmes and George E. Marcus, "Cultures of Expertise and the Management of Globalization: Toward a Re-Functioning of Ethnography," in *Global assemblages : technology, politics, and ethics as anthropological problems*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), Riles, *The Network inside Out*, Dominic Boyer, "Censorship as a Vocation: The Institutions, Practices, and Cultural Logic of Media Control in the German Democratic Republic," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 03 (2003), Doug Holmes, *Integral Europe: Fast-Capitalism, Multiculturalism, Neofascism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), Stacia E. Zabusky, "Ethnography in/of Transnational Processes: Following Gyres in the Worlds of Big Science and European Integration," in *Ethnography in Unstable Places : Everyday Lives in Contexts of Dramatic Political Change*, ed. Carol J. Greenhouse, Elizabeth Mertz, and Kay B. Warren (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

³³ In common or more “traditional” conceptions of anthropological practice, the act of going somewhere unfamiliar, the distance from home, provided a “space” for reflection and analysis. My fieldwork provided both kinds of opportunities—anthropology at home *and* anthropology abroad.

³⁴ This assumption is reflective of the Americanist tradition, particularly extending from Boas and Sapir, which I discuss later in the chapter.

Much of past anthropological analysis relied in general on distance, both literal and figurative, between the “modern” and the “traditional,” the anthropologist and his or her “informants,” between “us” and “them,” between here and there. These challenges associated with such endeavors as anthropology of experts are, I believe, the latest “predicaments” for contemporary anthropological theory and methods.³⁵ My approach to this challenge is to structure my ethnographic practice much like what it seeks to examine: the process of collaboration in cultural production.

An Ethnography with Experts

While there are many ways in which the National Museum of the American Indian—its staff and its content—can be rendered through various tropes like tradition and modernity, local knowledge and cosmopolitan expertise, urban and rural, indigenous and bureaucrat, here I am interested in what happens when we symmetrically consider the various participants as experts, or cultures of expertise. Therefore, I attempt a “symmetrical ethnography”³⁶ of *Our Lives*, where the subjects are both us and them, and the participants in the making of the exhibit are both human and non-human (for example, design diagrams, content worksheets, and computer imaging programs also impact content and design). I take this symmetry to also mean the museum professionals (both Native and non-Native) and the Native co-curators with whom I worked are treated equally—equally engaged and invited to interpret the exhibition, its process and its impact. And, as an organizing trope, the notion of *Our Lives* as being the central focus of our interpretive endeavors is a convenient device to recognize that the author is involved as well as the ‘subjects’ within the frame and in framing of the ethnography.

³⁵ Cf. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

³⁶ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

In taking seriously the NMAI commitment to co-curators as experts (as well as the museum professionals as such), I turned to a number of anthropologists who have discussed the challenges of doing anthropology with experts. Dominic Boyer's "The Dilemma of the Anthropology of Experts" resonates in many ways with what I found in my own fieldwork experience: culture was a category that experts would offer to explain particular social arrangements, already there in the "auto-analysis" (as I call it) of the interlocutors of his research.³⁷ Community curators, in this sense, are very much theorists in the ways they think, define, and speculate about their identity for the sake of the exhibition and other public presentations.

Boyer's interlocutors could provide ready-made theories and analysis for his dissertation with their critical inquiries into their own social environments. Similarly, like Stacia Zabusky's interlocutors in the European Space Agency who, when questioned, would theorize about "cooperation"—the focus of her ethnography— but generally did not have such discussions during the workday,³⁸ NMAI staff and consultants whom I interviewed were quite adept at explaining to me what was anthropologically interesting about the museum. In the first month of my fieldwork, a museum consultant told me that the tensions that exist at the NMAI are everywhere—they were not a product of just this particular museum, and in that way they were "anthropological." She continued to say that part of it was Native-non-Native tensions, part of it was the historical and classic "Design versus Curatorial" tensions. But, she added, "Really, it's all about power."³⁹

³⁷ Boyer, "The Dilemma of the Anthropology of Experts".. Similarly, Dornfeld (1998: 97) includes what he refers to as "ethnotheory," or analysis by the experts with whom he works, as part of what he records in his ethnography. I use a more self-directed term, as my interlocutors often offered both technical and social analysis—analyzing their own circumstances as well as the museum exhibits and exhibition process.

³⁸ Stacia E. Zabusky, *Launching Europe : An Ethnography of European Cooperation in Space Science* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 21.

³⁹ Conversation with Elaine Gurian, at her home, July 1, 2004.

Like Boyer, I believe that this kind of analysis of analysis has always been present in some ways in anthropological engagements with informants; for, in translating their lived experience to outsiders they are bound to theorize about why things are the way they are. But what is changing is perhaps that the (culture) concepts, attentions, and professional standing are more alike between expert and ethnographer. In my own fieldwork, I found that it provided me with an opportunity to discuss my analysis with the people with whom I worked in all three communities, asking them about ideas I had about what was going on around us, not separating the data from the analysis or keeping my theorizing a secret from people, so to speak. Like Zabusky's space mission members, the participants in my research were "expert theoreticians" on the concept of collaboration that I was studying, and at times I was interrogated by participants while at others we puzzled together about the notions of collaboration and community curating.

I found resonance with my work in studies about the European Space Agency and a large computer music research institute. I also found a similar approach in Traweek's ethnography of particle physicists,⁴⁰ as she also sought to understand from these experts how they "work to produce knowledge." It may seem odd that I find resonance most in the anthropology of science and experts when writing an ethnography about American Indians; but that is precisely because I am not writing an ethnography about American Indians. Rather, it is about the "American Indian Museum," as many Smithsonian staff called the NMAI; it is about the production of knowledge about Indian identity through a particular process of collaboration (community curating) with Native and non-Native actors. In this focus on working

⁴⁰ Sharon Traweek, *Beamtimes and Lifetimes : The World of High Energy Physicists* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988). Traweek's attention to institutional locations and their impact on social organization influenced my approach to describing the NMAI. However, while she critiqued the practices of knowledge production but not its content, I hope to provide insight to both practice and content here.

with museum professionals and Native individuals as co-curators, my relationship with the participants in my research resembled more that of experts than “others.” In other words, the context and scope of this account is bureaucratic process and creative output, rather than a tribe or bounded local.

Circling Back

So, I began my fieldwork by returning to three communities from a position of formerly being in a professional relationship with them, and then lived with them for an extended period of time. In explaining the term “circling back,” Annelise Riles recounts how she was educated in human rights law and it is in that field that she formed the problems and questions that motivated her to study anthropology; she explains, “I then came to anthropology as an anthropologist comes to the field—in search of solutions to those problems.”⁴¹ My fieldwork, as well, is an instance of circling back. And indeed, as Riles notes, it “poses certain challenges” that occur in the relationships with one’s former colleagues who are now participants in the research, and there are certain politics of ethnography and ethnographic writing as these participants will read and be affected by it.⁴² Thus, there is a certain kind of ethics in the way in which one interacts with, writes, and imagines the readers of the ethnography.⁴³ This was certainly evident when I gave a paper about my research at the American Anthropological Association meetings in 2007, and people who I quoted in my paper were present in the audience, as I noted in the first interchapter.

Just as the NMAI is the center for attention and focus of the exhibition, so too is it in this rendition of my fieldwork experience. There are many stories that could be

⁴¹ Annelise Riles, “Anthropology, Human Rights, and Legal Knowledge: Culture in the Iron Cage,” *American Anthropologist* 108, no. 1 (2006): 63.

⁴² Ibid. See also Caroline Brettell, *When They Read What We Write : The Politics of Ethnography* (Westport, Conn.: Bergin & Garvey, 1993).

⁴³ Riles, “Anthropology, Human Rights, and Legal Knowledge: Culture in the Iron Cage,” 64.

told, but I have chosen to maintain a narrow focus on the community curating process. This means that my experiences of the 2005 national election in Dominica, the 2005 NMAI panels at a American Associations of Museums conference, the AIC's annual powwow in Chicago, and countless other events and encounters go unwritten here. But they are not unacknowledged; they informed and guided my understanding of the relationship between community members, NMAI staff, and the subject matter of the exhibition.

My first field site was the NMAI itself in 2004, as it was preparing to open. I briefly but significantly re-encountered the co-curators with whom I would later be working during the week of September 20, as they were flown in to participate in the Native procession and the grand opening of the museum (see Chapter 6). While that was a brief encounter and very museum-centered, returning to the Carib Territory and Chicago for fieldwork was quite a different experience: I had no community liaison to aid in meeting people and to explain who is the right person to talk to about particular subjects, no structured agenda, and no focused group meetings with tangible goals to achieve (though I did host a co-curator meeting in each community to present what my dissertation research was about and to invite people to contribute). However, unlike NMAI curatorial fieldwork, I also had more than a week or two to work with community members.

Comparative Fieldwork Methods

In each community I arrived not only into existing ideas of what an anthropologist does, but also what a volunteer can do, and specifically what someone from the NMAI can do. For the NMAI, I was an expert on the inaugural exhibitions and was welcomed to assist in ongoing plans for the opening; at one point, a new associate director questioned me at length about the history of the *Our Lives*

exhibition. For the Kalinago, I was first greeted as an expert in computers and computer literacy training, but my administrative skills proved to be most valued by a number of different “task forces.” In Chicago, I was greeted as a museum specialist, and assigned to keep a Native arts gallery running until a replacement could be found for the former Arts Director; they even surprised me with personalized business cards stamped with the American Indian Center’s logo that read, “Jennifer Shannon, Program/Public Relations.”

Accordingly, in each location I engaged in the day to day activities of fieldwork in different ways, responding to the volunteer work I was doing, the different sensibilities of each community, the former experiences communities had with researchers in their midst, and the particularities of each field site (ease of access to community members and events, modes of transportation, etc.). For example, at the NMAI site, recognizing that I had once been an employee there and that I blended in almost too well, I carried my ethnographer’s notebook much of the time—pencil in hand—to remind people that I was there as an ethnographer, as well as a volunteer. In other sites, I employed multiple devices that were suggested to me by Native community members with whom I worked to let people know I was an anthropological researcher, including providing articles for community newsletters, making community presentations with co-curators, and making announcements on local radio.

My daily life in each community was quite different, as well, according to the pace of life, access to transportation, my volunteer work, frequency of contact with co-curators and community gathering practices. I volunteered in whatever capacity each group of community members asked me to. I did volunteer work in each community as a method for participant-observation, which provided me with ethnographic data, rewarding professional relationships, and rich learning experiences. It meant that the

main social situations in which I interacted with participants was through work environments. I also collected archival documents, attended conferences and symposia, and conducted formal and informal interviews.

More specifically, not including chats at the water cooler or over a meal, non-recorded formal interviews, informal conversations, etc.: I conducted 30 recorded interviews at the NMAI in 2004 with 21 individuals, including from the lowest worker bees to the director, and in many different departments. In 2006, I returned and interviewed eleven individuals—many of the same as in 2004—and for the Education Department I recorded visitor interviews about the North Pacific Coast exhibit *Listening to Our Ancestors: The Art of Native Life along the North Pacific Coast* in the changing gallery, and on my own I collected a small sample of visitor responses to the *Our Lives* gallery.

In Dominica, I conducted twenty-three recorded interviews with thirteen individuals along with visiting council meetings, task force meetings, political party meetings, and community celebrations. In Chicago I attended weekly AIC staff meetings, board meetings, powwow committee meetings, elders lunches, community gatherings and powwows, and had countless informal conversations with people at the community center and the art gallery. I conducted interviews with thirteen Chicago individuals, some multiple times, which included the co-curators and others who had visited the museum on opening day.

My fieldwork also included six professional conferences in which NMAI staff gave papers or organized sessions about the inaugural exhibitions.⁴⁴ This allowed me

⁴⁴ These include: the Native American Art Studies Association (NAASA) conference in Salem, MA (Nov. 2003), in which NMAI curators gave talks, and Gerald McMaster chaired the plenary session titled, “A New Indigenous Discourse: Beyond Postmodernism in Contemporary Native American Art;” the NMAI opening week scholar symposium held at the Mall Museum (Sept. 2004) titled, “The Native Universe and Museums in the 21st Century: The Significance of the National Museum of the American Indian;” the Deerfield Symposium in Deerfield, MA (Nov. 2004) in which NMAI curator Jolene Rickard spoke about the NMAI; I came back from Dominica briefly to attend the American Association

not only to better understand how staff and co-curators made sense of their work, but also to see the critique and evaluation of the museum through the lenses of different cultures of experts, including anthropological, art historical, and museological specialists.

Professional-to-Professional Relations

With all of these locations (workplaces, professional conferences, Native communities, the museum, and the exhibition space itself) included in the “field site,” fieldwork of an exhibition can provide not only an opportunity to refigure and reconceptualize what is the field, but also the nature of fieldwork relations. In this form of fieldwork, I found our relationships to be mutual and equally engaged, and in that respect my research resembles the very thing it studies: collaboration with communities in a representational context; in this case, the NMAI.

For example, I remember one interview with Cynthia when she and I were both taking notes on our conversation. This happened often. From my field notes:

[Cynthia] asked me what we had talked about yesterday... and so I looked back at my handwritten notes from the day before and told her. She said thanks, and wrote some thoughts down. I asked if it was for the AAM [American Association of Museums conference] paper, and she said it's for herself in general, and that this is really helping. She wants to make note of things so she can start writing papers about her experiences. It's clear talking with me is helping her process things, and that she is taking notes as I am on our conversations.⁴⁵

of Museums (AAM) conference in Indianapolis, IN (May 2005), in which Carolyn Rapkivian from the NMAI Education Department organized a panel of NMAI senior management and staff to speak about the NMAI, and OL lead curator Cynthia Chavez organized a panel of community co-curators to evaluate the community curating process; the NAASA meetings in Phoenix, AZ (Oct. 2005) in which curators and co-curators spoke about the NMAI and also the process of community curating on the *Listening to Our Ancestors* exhibit; and, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) meetings in Washington, DC (Nov. 2005) in which numerous NMAI staff spoke and NMAI director Rick West gave the keynote speech.

⁴⁵ Field notes, July 29, 2004.

This mutual learning and creative thinking was one of the greatest benefits of working with people. Overall, the staff welcomed my presence and were quite engaged in thinking about the museum, its exhibitions, and the process of community curating with me. A pivotal moment in one of our conversations, when Cynthia explained how communities can be “pawns”⁴⁶ in inter-departmental power struggles to control exhibit content and design, shows how an interview became an intersection of two different papers we wrote: for me, it was a paper about “The construction of Native voice at the National Museum of the American Indian”⁴⁷ that was published in a book about Native peoples and museums and contributed to chapters three and four here; for her, it became part of her discussion of what it means to be an NMAI curator and an American Indian woman seeking to establish trust relationships with Native communities.⁴⁸ As this anecdote shows, Cynthia and I write for and participate in the same professional and academic communities, and our conversations about our professional experiences became central to my understanding of *Our Lives* and the ethnography of its making.

But it was not only at the NMAI, among museum experts, that I maintained this approach to ethnographic practice. As the communities with whom I worked included both a small island community and a large bustling metropolis, rural farmers and bureaucratic professionals, this research provided me with opportunities to challenge and rethink approaches to and the classification of anthropological

⁴⁶ “The communities are pawns in a game they don’t even know they are involved in;” conversation with Cynthia Chavez, in her office at the CRC, March 31, 2003 (during the preliminary fieldwork period when I was seeking permission to conduct fieldwork at the NMAI). Another curator later used the term “pawns” to refer to Native communities in this same context (conversation in his office, April 11, 2006).

⁴⁷ Jennifer Shannon, “The Construction of Native Voice at the National Museum of the American Indian,” in *Contested Knowledge: Museums and Indigenous Perspectives*, ed. Susan Sleeper-Smith (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Forthcoming).

⁴⁸ Cynthia Chavez, “Collaborative Exhibit Development at the National Museum of the American Indian,” in *The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversations*, ed. Amy Lonetree and Amanda J. Cobb (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Forthcoming).

“subjects.” In other words, I consider how doing anthropology with experts involved in community curating provided an opportunity to rethink and to shift to an alternate metaphor for fieldwork relations – “work” or professional engagement— as opposed to informant, or friendship (fictional or otherwise), or teacher, etc. This is based on what I found myself in the course of fieldwork saying: “I’m going to work” on days I would head to my volunteer positions, and I often referred to participants in my research as “the people I work with.” Taking that language seriously, I call this approach, for lack of a better term, a “professional-to-professional” relationship in ethnographic relations.

Similar to the notion of “collegiality” in fieldwork that Rena Lederman and Annelise Riles have separately written and talked about, in my fieldwork I considered my relationship to the interlocutors as professional-to-professional, meaning that there was a basic agreed upon and stated purpose of our discussions and meetings—the exhibition—and a more structured context for our encounters. Of course, other kinds of living and interactions and subjects become part of our dialogue and practice, but my purpose was never to get “in” with a community, see what goes on behind closed doors at home, or create fictional friendships to access insider information.

What surprised me was the overwhelming sense from people that they didn’t want me to leave. As my leaving time approached in each place, community members often would ask—did you get what you need? What else can we help you with? We had forged a partnership of sorts. I don’t write this to exemplify how appreciated or “in” I was in a community—something I have heard anthropologists (or graduate students) boast about. The truth is, I wasn’t very “in,” if that includes being a part of a family, or being asked to join in regularly on private activities, or getting a behind the scenes look at the “underbelly” of the community. And when I was privy to such experiences, I made it clear that without explicit instructions and consent to make it

so, the information would not be recorded in published work (but it did improve my understanding of the circumstances of my fieldwork). I say this because it means that this kind of approach to field work relations can be productive in both maintaining positive relations with the community as well as having a focused and productive research program. While all fieldwork encounters are inevitably imbalanced, this has been my attempt to create an ethical response to these concerns.

But there were also times, during my fieldwork, when I was placed in the position of an informant or was confronted with the stereotype of the anthropologist in a Native community (both at the museum and in other sites). In conversations, NMAI staff often asked me what I thought about the exhibitions, or what other interviewees talked about. One new associate director extended our conversation for almost six hours, through lunch and on to dinner time, asking me questions about the history of the institution, as she was newer to the NMAI. She also said she would hope that I would let her know if, in the course of my research, I heard that her employees had issues that she could address.

However, there were three moments when it cut the other way, when staff members with whom I had worked closely in the past made a comment or explained my presence to an outsider. For example, one NMAI associate director (and anthropology PhD) said to a colleague, “I see you have your academic observer with you.” My former colleague and peer responded, “like germs under a microscope.”⁴⁹ Another former colleague explained my presence to a newer hire, saying that I was studying them like they were in a “fishbowl;” we all laughed and I took the light hearted ribbing as an opportunity to briefly describe my project.⁵⁰ Finally, another staff member commented while describing my project to another, “She has us all

⁴⁹ Field notes, September 3, 2004.

⁵⁰ Field notes, August 9, 2004.

under a magnifying glass, and when the sun comes out we're going to burn to a crisp."⁵¹ Clearly, my methods were developed in part to allay these anticipated fears of exposure and feeling like one was being “studied.”

The Anthropologist Slot

In “Anthropology and the Savage Slot,” Michel-Rolph Trouillot outlined how anthropology filled its “savage slot” in the existing tropes of Western discourse, and how the Other in anthropological discourse was a reproduction of this larger trend.⁵² But Native critics and scholars—talking among themselves or in books and journals (especially Vine Deloria, Jr. in “Anthropologists and Other Friends”)⁵³— created somewhat of an inverse trope through their own counter-discourse: what I would call an “anthropologist slot”⁵⁴ that, especially among American tribes, is a figure the researcher often meets and must come to terms with through sincerity and a commitment to reciprocity.

One evening when I was interviewing Eli Suzukovich (Cree/Serbian) from the Chicago Indian community who was about to enroll in an anthropology PhD program, he noted that in the Chicago community,

everybody reads Vine Deloria’s *Custer Died for Your Sins* and they stop at page 99 [the end of “Anthropologists and Other Friends”]. So they’re like, [he

⁵¹ Field notes, June 5, 2006.

⁵² Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness,” in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard Fox (Santa Fe, N.M.: School of American Research Press, 1991).

⁵³ Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*. I believe this critique, formed most eloquently by Deloria in the 1960s, was a fair one. His humor and insight provided a caricature that, while it only was accurate about some anthropologists and may feel unfair to newer anthropologists with different methods and goals, his critique provided an important amount of wariness and empowerment for Native communities working with outside researchers.

⁵⁴ For this term, I am indebted to Riles’ and Jean-Klein’s discussion of the “anthropological slot” in NGOs in Iris Jean-Klein and Annelise Riles, “Introducing Discipline: Anthropology and Human Rights Administrations,” *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 28, no. 2 (2005): 184. They also provide insight into how anthropologists can get enrolled, often problematically, in bureaucratic and activist projects.

speaks in a dopey voice] ‘Oh, Anthropologists are bad and blah blah blah’—this sort of this antiquated view. So what I always liked about [elders] Angie and Susan and Josephine is that they remember Boas, and they have a higher opinion of [anthropologists]. So, having them kind of quell that—so what? They’re anthropologists, *big deal*. Then make sure you tell the right story. So I think it changed a lot of attitudes that Indians have always had a say in their interviews, and that you can *direct*⁵⁵—I mean the community co-curator thing, I think it was *good* in that it kind of showed people that they are empowered.⁵⁶

Eli was cautioning members of his community not to automatically place museum workers from the NMAI in the anthropologist slot when they came to work with the community. Instead, he saw NMAI staff as providing an empowering rather than an extractive experience. It is important to note that his exception to the kind of anthropologist that Deloria describes is Franz Boas (I will return to this shortly).

Another example of how anthropology is “slotted” in a community—there is a certain expectation about a white, young woman in some Native groups, too, that reflects this tension between anthropological researcher and local community. One comment I heard the first week in Dominica from a young Afro-Dominican man when I was walking along the road was, “Go home to your own country! We're not apes in a f***ing zoo!”⁵⁷ Needless to say, perhaps the proliferation of tourists and investigators in the area no doubt left some people displeased; one co-curator said the community was tired of researchers coming and asking questions all the time. In general, American Indians don't have a rosy view of “anthros.” In Chicago, one elder, while glaring at a non-Native man sitting at a table after volunteering to serve meals at an elders’ lunch, was outraged and said she thought he was “studying” her and the other elders because all he did was sit and watch them.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ This is an important Americanist/Boasian recognition: that individuals being interviewed by anthropologists have some control in interviews through what they say or in directing them.

⁵⁶ Interview with Eli Suzulovich, at my home, January 8, 2005. Eli was the former archivist at NAES College before going to graduate school.

⁵⁷ Field notes, January 23, 2005. I told former chief and co-curator Garnette Joseph about this encounter several weeks after it occurred. After providing a description of the young man, Garnette told me that he was not from the Carib Territory.

⁵⁸ Field notes, September 7, 2005.

These are legacies we encounter in the field. As the people with whom we work become more aware of the history of anthropology and what we do (or, more likely, what people *think* we do), we encounter this antagonism to anthropological expert as a category (even if we feel far from an expert and rather as a student to the situation); when relationships form, and expertise is made available to the community, the expert can in some cases be placed in a different category, and become a “resource person” (a term in the Carib Territory that combines our notions of expertise and community service, see Chapter 3). Of course, we focus on the instances of critique because they are moments of anxiety in the research process and they cut to the quick in light of the “professional-to-professional” methodology I espoused during my fieldwork. The narrative I present is based on the outcome of positive and productive professional relationships with NMAI staff and Native community members, as well as the anxieties and concerns that inhere in the nature of this anthropological work.

“Invisible Genealogies”

What people “think we do” in Indian country has been greatly influenced by critiques of anthropology such as Vine Deloria, Jr.’s; these critiques also had an impact on the discipline of anthropology and museum practice. But his critique had been going on among Native communities long before he penned his witty and biting caricature of the “anthro.” In fact, as Regna Darnell mentions in her description of Americanist tradition,⁵⁹ which I detail below, Indians were pivotal in shaping the nature of anthropological practice in America from Boas onwards. This impact of Native Americans on the discipline of anthropology began, in part, at the Smithsonian

⁵⁹ Regna Darnell, *Invisible Genealogies : A History of Americanist Anthropology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 29, 170.

Institution Bureau of American Ethnology and at Columbia University where Boas institutionalized his own vision for the discipline in America.

The contemporary narrative about the development of anthropology notes two major periods of “crisis” and experimentation in anthropology over the last twenty years that have converged on the notion of collaboration as anthropological method and ethical practice. During the 1980s, epitomized by *Writing Culture, Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, and *The Predicament of Culture*,⁶⁰ the notion of ethnography as literary genre brought to light issues of representation and authority in ethnographic texts. It was a crisis of representation, and collaborative strategies were posited in response to these critiques included multivocal or dialogic text and co-authorship.

In the 1990s, epitomized by *Anthropological Locations, Ethnography through Thick and Thin*, and *Routes*,⁶¹ there was a sense that changing how one writes is not enough; the implicit assumptions of what “the field” is and how anthropologists relate to it were deeply questioned—both as a result of changing theoretical orientations as well as what is perceived as the changing nature and growing complexity of “the field.” From this examination, multi-sited research methods and collaborative strategies in fieldwork relations were posited in response, illustrated by the reformulation of “informants” as “alliances”⁶² or “counterparts.”⁶³ These developments can be characterized as a shift from locating the problem of

⁶⁰ James Clifford and George Marcus, *Writing Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique : An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*.

⁶¹ Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, *Anthropological Locations : Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), George Marcus, *Ethnography through Thick and Thin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*.

⁶² Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*.

⁶³ Holmes and Marcus, "Cultures of Expertise and the Management of Globalization: Toward a Re-Functioning of Ethnography." This work was also the source of my use of the phrase “cultures of expertise.”

representation and authority within the text— “writing” ethnography— to the practice of fieldwork, or “doing” ethnography.

Bunzl asserts that the insights of the “Writing Culture” group were influential, but not new, and that “like many paradigm-shifting contributions, that work tended to obfuscate its own historicity;” he situates this work in response to the “crisis in anthropology” that occurred in the 1960s, with Del Hymes’ *Reinventing Anthropology* as emblematic of the times.⁶⁴ In this edited volume, Hymes begins with Boas and traces his influence to Herder and German Enlightenment tradition.⁶⁵ However, the influence of Boas is absent in later renditions of crisis and concern in the discipline, an absence that Regna Darnell seeks to address in *Invisible Genealogies: A History of Americanist Anthropology*. Her preface states that the Boasians “laid the groundwork for a number of contemporary developments,” including the “reflexive moment” of *Writing Culture*.⁶⁶

Earlier I mentioned the “Neo-Boasian” approach, as detailed by Matti Bunzl.⁶⁷ It was through Bunzl that I began to trace my own “invisible genealogies”⁶⁸ implicit not only in how I developed my methodological practice but also my concerns for the perspectives of the people with whom I worked. Seeking a greater understanding about the Boasian nature of the work I turned to Regna Darnell, whose description of

⁶⁴ Matti Bunzl, “Anthropology Beyond the Crisis: Toward an Intellectual History of the Extended Present,” *Anthropology & Humanism* 30, no. 2 (2005): 188-89.

⁶⁵ Dell Hymes, ed., *Reinventing Anthropology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972). Bunzl and Darnell both caution against overemphasis on the 1980’s “crisis” as a radical break, rather than a continuation of, what was already happening in the discipline. Boyer also cautions against crisis rhetoric in Chapter 2 of Dominic Boyer, *Spirit and System : Media, Intellectuals, and the Dialectic in Modern German Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁶⁶ Darnell, *Invisible Genealogies : A History of Americanist Anthropology*, xviii.

⁶⁷ Bunzl, “Boas, Foucault, and the “Native Anthropologist”: Notes toward a Neo-Boasian Anthropology.” I encountered Bunzl’s work late in my writing process, and, along with Darnell’s “Americanist tradition,” it fit seamlessly with my own conceptualization of my dissertation in that I felt my “theoretical contribution” was a methodological one. Of course, theory is derived from what is made available through a particular methodology.

⁶⁸ Regna Darnell’s work was essential to this process: Darnell, *Invisible Genealogies : A History of Americanist Anthropology*, Regna Darnell and Lisa Philips Valentine, *Theorizing the Americanist Tradition*, Anthropological Horizons (Toronto ; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

Boasian anthropology and its influence on contemporary anthropology (and critiques of representation) was like a revelation. All the “signs” that indicate one is an “Americanist,” according to Darnell, rang true to my work. Like J. Peter Denny, I backed into this understanding of my own—and the NMAI’s, for that matter— debts to the Americanist tradition through Darnell’s work. Denny writes,

My experience of the theme of this volume, “Theorizing the Americanist Tradition,” has been similar, I believe, to that of some other contributors; my membership in such a tradition was not very self-conscious, and I had certainly not done any theorizing about it. The editors, however, were very perspicacious in divining the theorists hidden inside us.⁶⁹

For me, reading Darnell struck me in the same way, though I was less inculcated in the work of Boas, Whorf and Sapir as was Denny. I did gravitate to their work, and my concerns in how to do anthropology (and how the NMAI went about its own curatorial practices) was shaped by the same constituencies that they had: Native American peoples. Again, I believe it is an important point to highlight: Native peoples shaped Americanist anthropology, and their critique and proximity to anthropologists and demand for accountability are part of what has shaped the nature of the Americanist anthropology as a diverse but recognizable body of theory as Darnell describes it.⁷⁰

I had been describing the theoretical contribution of my dissertation as a theory about methods, only to later find out that this was so very *Americanist* of me. It was good to find company, and to connect my own work with that of Boas, an ancestor to the discipline I admired for his courage to speak against the prevailing notions of the

⁶⁹ J. Peter Denny, "Current Extensions of Sapir and Whorf in Cross-Cultural Cognitive Science: Cognitive Styles and Ontological Categories," in *Theorizing the Americanist Tradition*, ed. Regna Darnell and Lisa Philips Valentine (Toronto ; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 365.

⁷⁰ This did not only occur in America. For example, I believe Terry Turner shows how the community he worked with profoundly shaped not only his practice (and turn to activist anthropology) but also his theoretical approach (theorizing culture change) in anthropology. See Terence Turner, "Representing, Resisting, Rethinking: Historical Transformations of Kayapo Culture and Anthropological Analysis," in *Rethinking History and Myth*, ed. Jonathan Hill (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

time in his anti-racism stance and for his forethought on museology and the public in *Some Principles of Museum Anthropology*, which I felt foreshadowed not only issues of writing ethnography but also about the conflict between education, scientific pursuits and entertainment in museums.⁷¹

In Darnell's terms, Americanist anthropology is not *where* you do fieldwork—though its approach was created in the context of fieldwork at home in the U.S. with American Indian tribes—but rather it denotes particular concerns and methods for practicing anthropology.⁷² She also writes against the notion that Boas, his followers, or Americanists in general are “anti-theory.” According to Darnell, the “Americanist tradition” has seven “distinctive features” that “form an interrelated package, [but] this is not a finite system model.”⁷³ Though she goes into detail for each, briefly these features are:

1. Culture is a set of symbols in people's heads, not (or at least not merely) the behavior that arises from them.

⁷¹ Franz Boas, "Some Principles of Museum Administration," *Science* 25, no. 650 (1907). In this article, Boas describes the tension between entertaining the public and providing scientific and systematic information; he notes the former draws a bigger crowd. He also talks about how objects in the collection are made by people and used in daily life—"and almost all of them receive their significance only through the thoughts that cluster around them... Thus it happens that an array of objects is always only an exceedingly fragmentary presentation of the true life of a people. For this reason, any attempt to present ethnological data by a systematic classification of specimens will not only be artificial, but will be entirely misleading. The psychological as well as the historical relations of cultures, which are the only objects of anthropological inquiry, can not be expressed by any arrangement based on so small a portion of the manifestation of ethnic life as is presented by specimens" (928). I see this as the material counterpart/foreshadowing of *Writing Culture* critique of ethnographic fragments. Though I realize I may be seeing too much into his comments because that is how we think today, his frustration over the challenges of adequate contextualization in museum displays is well documented. A letter by Sapir is cited in Darnell (2001) in which he writes that "time will show that" ethnographic texts are "subjective performances" (23). While he prefers the "raw data" and "primary sources," he recognizes one must write for the respect of one's colleagues; but he worried in the letter that the lines between Native knowledge and interpretation might become indistinguishable in this particular kind of witting. These anxieties continue into the present day, including at the NMAI.

⁷² For example, I would categorize Fred Myers' (2006) work on indigenous media as Americanist though he does not work with US tribes; his emphasis on representation, and his "uneasiness" that he feels while representing Aboriginal people in an exhibit symposia are indicators (see Preface on Myers). Myers distinguishes the agency inherent in rendering Native peoples as culture producers rather than culture bearers, and considers a focus on cultural *production* as tied to respect for indigenous agency (506). He also recognizes scholars are culture bearers as well (506).

⁷³ Darnell, *Invisible Genealogies : A History of Americanist Anthropology*, 12.

2. Language, thought, and reality are mutually entailed in ways that are accessible to investigation.
3. Texts from Native speakers of Native languages are the appropriate database for both ethnology and linguistics.
4. There is considerable urgency to record the knowledge encoded in oral traditions as part of the permanent record of human achievement.
5. “Traditional” culture is a moving target, always changing and adapting to new circumstances.
6. Native people are subjects and collaborators, not objects for study.
7. Fieldwork takes a long time.⁷⁴

Considering each of these features in detail and the various disciplinary lineages that contributed to them, I realized that the Americanist tradition not only governed my own practice, but the assumptions and practices of the NMAI staff (particularly the curators) in working with Native peoples as well. And in this way, I was studying Americanist anthropology-in-practice in the museum through the Americanist lens during my fieldwork.⁷⁵

Although I return to this insight in the conclusion to the dissertation, there are some basic tenets of the Boasian tradition that are foundational to this Americanist approach, to the NMAI, and to my own work that I want to highlight before moving on.⁷⁶ First, I want to emphasize again that one of the major reasons why I think

⁷⁴ Ibid., 12-20. In the succeeding pages she details factors for why these genealogies became invisible; briefly, these include specialization in the discipline, insights become taken for granted, and a lack of territorialism or claim to centrality in the discipline (Americanists “weren’t a contentious lot... Many Native American groups withdraw rather than confront whenever possible; ‘their’ anthropologists have apparently learned this lesson well,” she notes), anthropologists (though they acknowledged oral history sources) may not have properly acknowledged their academic influences in their writing, and, she says, Boas would likely have characterized the “eclipse of Americanist genealogies by what he called ‘secondary rationalization.’”

⁷⁵ I am indebted to Dominic Boyer for this phrasing. In *Spirit and System*, Boyer (2005) describes a similar experience with respect to dialectical social theory. Accordingly, like Boyer I treat knowledge practices as objects of ethnographic analysis, and I focus specifically on people who are “agents” in knowledge formation (2005: 13, 29). For Boyer, identity is a dialectical formation among Germans. For my research, it was a collaborative and material production, thus impacting the exhibit form.

⁷⁶ For my understanding of Boas’ work as a whole, I am again indebted to works by Matti Bunzl and Regna Darnell: Matti Bunzl, “Franz Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition: From Volksgeist and Nationalcharakter to an Anthropological Concept of Culture,” in *Volksgeist as Method and Ethic: Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition*, ed. George Stocking (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), Darnell, *Invisible Genealogies: A History of Americanist Anthropology*.. See also Ira Jacknis, “Franz Boas and Exhibits: On the Limitations of the Museum Method of Anthropology,” in *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture*, ed. George Stocking (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), Ira Jacknis, “The First Boasian:

Americanists' works have particular features, including my own, Boasian and that of the NMAI, is in large part due to the fact that they have been influenced and shaped by American Indians. As Darnell notes of the reciprocal relationship between Native peoples and anthropologists: "for a long time Native Americans have been teaching anthropologists how to behave in a civilized fashion and respond to local communities' needs and concerns."⁷⁷

When Boas collected objects, or recorded ceremonies, he felt it was important to record the community member's own perspective on why it was meaningful ("Native texts"). For Boas and those who followed him, working with American Indians entailed particular kinds of ethics and commitments, including respect for the Native point of view, interest in their 'texts,' and the belief that words of informants were crucial information. And because the Americanists emphasized the importance of Native texts over theorist's interpretations of it,⁷⁸ they have often been deemed atheoretical, or even anti-theoretical.⁷⁹ Boas brought together a focus on psychology

Alfred Kroeber and Franz Boas, 1896-1905," *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 2 (2002), G. W. Stocking, Jr., "Franz Boas and the Culture Concept in Historical Perspective," *American anthropologist* 68, no. 4 (1966). For primary sources, see for example Franz Boas, "Museums of Ethnology and Their Classification," in *Museum Studies : An Anthology of Contexts*, ed. Bettina Messias Carbonell (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004 [1887]), Franz Boas, "The Study of Geography," *Science* 9, no. 210 (1887), F. Boas, "On Alternating Sounds," *American Anthropologist* 2, no. 1 (1889), Franz Boas, "Report on the Academic Teaching of Anthropology," (1919), Franz Boas, "The Methods of Ethnology," (1920).

⁷⁷ Darnell, *Invisible Genealogies : A History of Americanist Anthropology*, 29. See also Jones, "Exploding Cannons: The Anthropology of Museums," 212. and Julie Cruikshank, "Oral Tradition and Material Culture: Multiplying the Meanings of 'Words' and 'Things,'" *Anthropology Today* 8, no. 3 (1992). They both note that indigenous people are challenging and motivating changes in museum practices. Jones discusses how the possibility of protest by indigenous communities has led museums to fear embarrassment and seek "safe" approaches—or to work in collaboration with Native communities.

⁷⁸ Darnell notes that the imperative and urgency of "salvage anthropology" often displaced theorizing; Boasians often considered collecting and recording their top priority—there would be time for interpreting the materials later.

⁷⁹ For articles that detail what I would call a theoretical and Americanist approach from outside of the American context, see for example Turner, "Representing, Resisting, Rethinking: Historical Transformations of Kayapo Culture and Anthropological Analysis.", Charles R. Hale, "Activist Research V. Cultural Critique: Indigenous Land Rights and the Contradictions of Politically Engaged Anthropology," *Cultural Anthropology* 21, no. 1 (2006).

(what people think) and history (rather than a static framework), which is captured in the Neo-Boasian approach and the account I present here.

Conclusion: Refiguring the Museum

My intention is to refigure the museum through documenting how the NMAI sought to be “museum different” and through presenting the museum exhibition as a productive site for contemporary anthropological methods and theories beyond the subfield of museum studies. As the collaborative exhibit at the heart of this ethnography is about Native identity, this research attends to the process of creating representations of indigenous peoples and how Native communities interpret and produce notions of identity explicitly for public consumption. It also provides a window into how individual identities contribute to collaborative products. This research was also a means for these communities to evaluate the process of collaborative exhibit development and provide responses to the exhibit itself.

The work of Annelise Riles, Dominic Boyer, Doug Holmes and George Marcus provided inspiration for a different approach to museum exhibitions, including a focus on the anthropology of institutions, professionalism, and “refunctioning ethnography” to meet the challenges of working with experts.⁸⁰ As this was an experimental approach for me, there were some motivating questions that propelled the research: What might an anthropology of “experts” look like? Is the framework of “expertise” or even “exhibit making” appropriate to considering the process of knowledge production? Can it adequately address such disparate locations, knowledge practices, and cultural communities in an analytically useful way? What then becomes the role and interpretive activity of the anthropologist in such a framework?

⁸⁰ Riles, *The Network inside Out*, Boyer, "The Dilemma of the Anthropology of Experts", Holmes and Marcus, "Cultures of Expertise and the Management of Globalization: Toward a Re-Functioning of Ethnography."

And, finally, this dissertation seeks to refigure the museum as both a federal bureaucracy and an institution of media and cultural production, a workplace and a context for collaboration among experts. In detailing the “community curating” process, I provide documentation of this form of collaborative, cultural production to the field of museum studies, where the literature and models for this practice are only just emerging.⁸¹ Furthermore, each chapter brings to the foreground a different figure of the museum, although it is all of these at once: a bureaucracy (Chapter 2), an amalgam of different cultures of expertise (Chapter 3), a site of mediation (Chapter 4), and an institution of indigenous media and cultural production⁸² (Chapters 5 and 6).

Knowledge Production and/or The Structure of the Thesis

Native community co-curators, as experts of their own experience, were tasked by the NMAI with producing the content for their exhibits in the *Our Lives* gallery, as they were the “experts about what it is to be Native.” While there are standard tensions in museum institutions, the emphasis here is specifically on the role and impact of NMAI curators and Native community co-curators throughout this process of collaboration. Each chapter considers these two concepts—content development and relations with community curators—through different perspectives. Each chapter presents artifacts of the museum, but they are not (or not only) the objects in the collection. They are artifacts of bureaucracy, collaboration, and media production.

⁸¹ See for example Laura L. Peers and Alison K. Brown, *Museums and Source Communities : A Routledge Reader* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁸² Myers states it nicely in a way that resonates closely with my own approach: “By calling attention to exhibition as a field of cultural production, as something processual, I call attention to the capacities of minoritized subjects to gain a purchase in the world of representation. This purchase is also not total and complete. Exhibitions are themselves points of cultural process and do not statically represent what is ‘out there.’ More likely they cunningly recontextualize forms and practices, producing something new. It is in this uncertain form that I wish to regard the museum as a site of cultural production in a globalizing cultural economy. That these processes are not straightforward and that they take place in ironic fashion is the point of my story.” Myers, “The Complicity of Cultural Production: The Contingencies of Performance in Globalizing Museum Practices,” 504-5.

They are the things that were created along the way to the exhibit, what informed or organized or became the exhibit, and the varied responses to it.

More specifically, Chapter 1, “Our Lives,” considers the exhibition as a symbolic vehicle not only for the communities represented but also for the museum professionals who worked on it. In this chapter, I explain what community curating is, who is involved in this process, and how life histories of individuals and the gallery impact the changing content of the exhibition over time. Chapter 2, “Bureaucracy,” presents the institutional side of the partnership of community curating which is the museum bureaucracy. It examines how the bureaucratic nature and spatial organization of the museum impact the content of exhibition development. Chapter 3, “Expertise,” continues with a more focused attention to the antagonism between departments, and (re)presents the departmental dynamics of the institution through an attention to them as “cultures of expertise” and how relationships to community curators complicate normal tensions that exist among departments in museums. This chapter can also be read as contestation about translation.

Chapter 4, “Authorship,” views collaboration through an attention to how Native voice is produced through community curating, focusing on collaborative authorship of exhibition concepts and text. This chapter can also be read as representation. Chapter 5, “Installation,” includes a photographic tour of the exhibition; it represents the process of materialization. Chapter 6, “Performance,” is about the performance of cultural and professional experts, and documents the experiences of the co-curators at the museum opening and the evaluation of the exhibition by art critics, NMAI staff, and community curators. It also includes the impacts of working on the exhibition within the communities; as such, it can be read as intervention (in popular understandings about Native peoples, and in Native communities).

To sum, Chapters 1 and 2 set the scene; Chapters 3 and 4 discuss knowledge production through lens of expertise and authorship; Chapter 5 presents the visual outcome of these endeavors, and Chapters 4 through 6 provide the full “arch” of production to reception, from culture producers to culture consumers, prescribed but often absent in media studies. The Conclusion in part explains how community curating—its process and product—was seen as essential to fulfilling the museum’s mission while at the same time it was at the center of ideological differences in the museum.

There are also a number of themes that can be read across the various chapters. Agency, representation, community, and identity are presented in different guises throughout the dissertation in an attempt to explore them both ethnographically and theoretically in the context of collaborative practice. For example, agency in collaboration is rendered through various forms such as advocacy, translation and voice. Power is perceived through the lenses of representation and expertise—how each is defined and by whom.

Community can be seen as defined through place (Chapters 1 and 2), forms of expertise and knowledge practices (Chapter 3), shared or representational “voice” (Chapter 4), public performance and discourse (Chapter 6). Identity is detailed as lived (1), produced (4), and performed (6); it is experienced as a form of self-expression (4) as well as a form that is challenged and constrained by outsiders (6). All of these approaches to definitions of individuals and communities lead again to agency, power and representation: who acts on behalf of whom, in what capacity, and for what purposes, and what are the social and material implications for those actions as they are produced through community curating, a relationship between the museum and the communities whose lives are featured inside.

INTERCHAPTER
(1.5)

AAA 2000

*The Public Face of Anthropology in the Millennium*¹

The American Anthropological Association (AAA) meetings held November 15-19, 2000 in San Francisco, CA were the first time NMAI staff came on the scene in a concerted effort on behalf of the new museum. At the time, estimates for when the museum would be open were earlier than the eventual 2004 date. CRC staff in particular—curators, conservators, and research assistants—took this opportunity to present their work with Native peoples to the anthropological community. They introduced the museum as a model for other institutions and its staff as ethical, responsive individuals collaborating with Native communities and learning new ways to do their work in the process.

At the time, I was a research assistant for the *Our Peoples* gallery, which focused on “tribal histories.” OP research assistants Heidi McKinnon and Alex Benitez and I co-wrote a paper as part of a panel that Bruce Bernstein organized about the NMAI. He provided us with a thick binder full of what he felt were pertinent articles to read which included excerpts from *Writing Culture*, *The Predicament of Culture*, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes*, *Local Knowledge*, *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian*, *Our Hearts Fell to the Ground: Plains Indian Views of How the West Was Lost*, *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation* and articles such as Julie Cruikshank’s “The Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory,” Craig Howe’s “Keep Your Thoughts above the Trees: Ideas on Developing and Presenting Tribal Histories,” and Alfonso Ortiz’s “Indian/White Relations: A View from the Other Side of the ‘Frontier.’”

¹ This was the conference theme.

Our paper was about Curatorial research practices and how they changed over time; the last line in the presentation was, “we wanted to come here to tell you that we have been doing lots of things wrong, and that we *wouldn’t want it any other way.*” We detailed how we had produced copious summaries of secondary research about, for example, the Seminole tribe. But, “thousands of pages of text and dozens of pages of our careful rewording were distilled into a single page—a list of contemporary direct quotations by Seminoles. This was a hard lesson, of long hours of work that, essentially, *had missed the point.*... As researchers within this process, it is not our job to interpret their histories, but rather to find the materials that illustrate how Native peoples themselves speak about these events.” With guidance from Deputy Assistant Director of Cultural Resources Craig Howe, we learned to seek “tribal histories” which were “generated within the community and takes its cues from a different set of references than the disciplines of history and anthropology.”

We provided other *Our Peoples* gallery examples of lessons learned with the Eastern Band of Cherokees and the Tapirapé from Brazil. The Cherokee co-curators, for example, reoriented an event in their exhibit away from highlighting individuals who signed a treaty that led to the Trail of Tears (as most secondary sources presented it), and instead featured the people who protested the treaty and the division it caused within their tribe. The object they selected to portray this event was consequently a petition rather than a treaty. We asked ourselves, “how close do we or can we come to meeting this ideal of conducting research that reflects Native authority and self-representation?”, ultimately advocating for a “flexible” and responsive research process according to the needs of communities.

Conservator Marian Kaminitz's presentation was about a March 2000 consultation with Hollow Water Anishnaabe elders at the NMAI.² The elders had come to the museum to view the opening of sacred birch bark scrolls. Prior to their arrival, conservators had practiced unrolling birch bark samples and when the elders arrived they discussed with them their concern for the integrity of the scrolls if opened. The conservators were prepared to open the scrolls, but the elders decided not to. The conservators concluded that,

through this experience, the conservation department developed an understanding that one of our responsibilities is to provide information to the communities, which can assist them in making decisions appropriate for the care of their cultural material. It is not necessary for us to know why decisions are made, but simply to realize and acknowledge that appropriate knowledge resulted in appropriate action for all parties involved.

Emphasizing the value of working with Native communities in conservation, the conservators explained that this consultation was among the “first collaborations that paved the way for an overall shift in the way NMAI conservators do their work... Our methods will continue to evolve with experience as we adapt and develop strategies for different projects.”

The overall focus of the NMAI presentations was on experimentalism, methodological openness, privileging Native voice, and being receptive to community wishes in curatorial and conservation work. The next chapter details the people and places that were involved in these collaborative efforts for the *Our Lives* gallery, as well as the development of ideas that led to the prominence of community-centered and community-directed exhibits in the museum.

² For a published work that refers to this event, see Jessica Johnson et al., "Practical Aspects of Consultation with Communities," *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 44, no. 3 (2005). As I did not take notes on her talk at the conference, above I provide quotations from the abstract of this paper.

CHAPTER 1

OUR LIVES

The National Museum of the American Indian shall recognize and affirm to Native communities and the non-Native public the historical and contemporary culture and cultural achievements of the Natives of the Western Hemisphere by advancing—in consultation, collaboration and cooperation with Natives—knowledge and understanding of Native cultures, including art, history and language, and by recognizing the museum’s special responsibility, through innovative public programming, research and collections, to protect, support and enhance the development, maintenance and perpetuation of Native culture and community.¹

Introduction

As the above selection shows, the original mission statement of the National Museum of the American Indian specifically calls for collaboration between the museum and Natives. As I’ve stated earlier, this collaboration for the inaugural exhibitions was mainly and most visibly in the form of “community curated” exhibits. To understand what this form of collaboration entailed, this ethnography focuses specifically on the making of the *Our Lives: Contemporary Life and Identities* exhibition, one of three permanent galleries that are on display at the NMAI. *Our Lives* is about contemporary Native identities, while the other two galleries depict Native cosmologies (*Our Universes: Traditional Knowledge Shapes Our World*) and histories (*Our Peoples: Giving Voice to Our Histories*).

¹ NMAI Mission Statement ca. 2002, from personal files (See Appendix A). The mission statement was later changed around 2004 to read: “The National Museum of the American Indian is committed to advancing knowledge and understanding of the Native cultures of the Western Hemisphere—past, present, and future—through partnership with Native people and others. The museum works to support the continuance of culture, traditional values, and transitions in contemporary Native life.” (Community Services Brochure from January 16, 2007, available at www.nmai.si.edu/collaboration/files/CS_Guide_English0708.pdf [accessed 5-30-07])

My account presents the *Our Lives* exhibition as a field site, a particular form of social relations, a medium for cultural production, a history of ideas, and an artifact of our identities.² While I present the exhibition in its broadest sense, I focus very narrowly on two groups of actors involved in its making—NMAI curators and Native community co-curators—among many in the exhibition process. This narrow focus reflects my interest in an empirical and ethnographically grounded understanding of collaboration, as well as my “situated knowledge.”³ In short, *Our Lives* provides not only an apt location for fieldwork but also is a poignant metaphor for fieldwork relations.

Mine is not the first account labeled as ethnography and addressing the NMAI as an institution. In Roland Force’s *The Heye and the Mighty*, he explains that from 1977 to 1990 he recorded data

as a participant observer while serving as Director (and then Director and President) of the Museum of the American Indian-Heye Foundation (MAI). The account chronicles the trials and tribulations of the transition of that Museum to a new status as part of the Smithsonian Institution, the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). I have come to consider that era, representing my ‘New York fieldwork,’ comparable to research I did decades earlier in the Palau Islands of Micronesia. A time when I sat through hours of meetings with chiefs in traditional structures and additional hours with elected representatives in contemporary buildings. The leaders in both the Pacific and New York were equally skilled and all sought their own agendas.⁴

While Force describes his account as being about “Museums, Money, and Politics,”⁵ mine focuses on collaboration, expertise and knowledge production. However, his

² Cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture : Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*, 78.: “Exhibitions, whether of objects or people, are displays of the artifacts of our disciplines. They are for this reason also exhibits of those who make them, no matter what their ostensible subject.”

³ Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women : The Reinvention of Nature*, ed. Donna Haraway (New York: Routledge, 1991).

⁴ Force, *Politics and the Museum of the American Indian : The Heye & the Mighty*, xv.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xvi.

mention of “turf wars” maintained significance and became a continued theme that I also observed (see Chapter 2).

Rather than focus on institutional and city politics at the top as Force did among board members and trustees, I did field work with the employees of the institution and their counterparts in Native American communities. During my fieldwork I did not have access to senior management level meetings or the Board of Trustees’ meetings. In this chapter I introduce the locations and communities that were involved in community curating and with whom I worked. I also provide a loose interpretation of life history for the gallery and some of its makers at the center of the community curating process.

While other people have written about the history of the NMAI,⁶ critiqued its exhibitions or considered it a failure in properly representing American Indian history in the national narrative,⁷ and proscribed its lessons learned for other museums,⁸ I provide a very narrow focus and micro-social analysis of one process and one part of a larger exhibition: community curating. But this practice and its contributors impacted the museum, its exhibitions, their own communities, and national and international publics in profound ways, and that is the story that follows.

⁶ Ibid, Edmund Snow Carpenter, *Two Essays: Chief and Greed* (North Andover, Mass.: Persimmon Press, 2005), Ira Jacknis, "A New Thing? The NMAI in Historical and Institutional Perspective," *American Indian Quarterly* 30, no. 3 & 4 (2006).

⁷ See for example Amy Lonetree and Sonya Atalay, "Special Issue: Critical Engagements with the National Museum of the American Indian," *American Indian Quarterly* 30, no. 3 & 4 (2006), Patricia Penn and Shari Huhndorf Hilden, "Performing 'Indian' in the National Museum of the American Indian," *Social Identities* 5, no. 2 (1999), Margaret Dubin, *Native America Collected: The Culture of an Art World* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), J. C. Berlo and A. Jonaitis, "'Indian Country' on Washington's Mall—the National Museum of the American Indian: A Review Essay," *Museum Anthropology* 28, no. 2 (2005).

⁸ See for example Richard West, "The National Museum of the American Indian: Journeys in a Post-Colonial World (Plenary Address)," in *The Meaning and Values of Repatriation Conference World Archaeological Conference* (Canberra, Australia: National Museum of Australia, 2007).

Locating the Field

As I noted in the previous chapter, I see the museum, or rather the process of exhibit development, as an ideal “location” for the study of collaboration—its methods, its subjects, its ethics and its limits—as well as for the study of cultural production, tensions between creative and bureaucratic practice, and the coming together and negotiation between diverse knowledge practices. As such, this study of the NMAI and the *Our Lives* gallery provides a unique opportunity to take seriously “experiments” in and “renegotiations” of ethnographic methods that respond to contemporary critiques of anthropology.⁹ During the course of my fieldwork, I followed the *Our Lives* exhibit content through the various sites of knowledge production that were involved in the “practical aspects of translation into design that actually make knowledge materialize.”¹⁰ This approach also follows Marcus’ notion of “tracking the thing”—following the exhibition to various sites of its production—in multi-sited ethnography.¹¹

There are three ethnographies within the anthropology of institutions that provide appropriate models for the “field site” that I am suggesting here: Kathleen Gregory’s 1984 study of Silicon Valley computer professionals,¹² Stacia Zabusky’s 1995 study of the European Space Agency,¹³ and Georgina Born’s 1995 study of a large computer music research and production institute in Paris.¹⁴ These three anthropologists focus on collaborative projects between experts, and use the social

⁹ Marcus, *Ethnography through Think and Thin*, Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*, George Marcus and Michael Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999).

¹⁰ Bouquet, “The Didactics of Exhibition Making,” 179.

¹¹ Marcus, *Ethnography through Think and Thin*, 39. When he talks about “following the thing,” he notes that “the thing” can be people, objects, metaphors, conflicts, etc. In this case, I track the exhibition.

¹² As cited in Helen B. Schwartzman, *Ethnography in Organizations*, *Qualitative Research Methods*; V. 27 (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1993).

¹³ Zabusky, *Launching Europe: An Ethnography of European Cooperation in Space Science*.

¹⁴ Born, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde*.

formations of “the project”¹⁵ and “the mission”¹⁶ to follow the changing contour lines of their field sites, much as I view “the exhibit.” For example, after she began her ethnographic research, Zabusky changed her focus from a (bounded, localized) department to a scientific mission.¹⁷

To provide an ethnography of “the exhibition,” there are three locations in which I conducted fieldwork for six months or more (Figure 2 below). The first was the Cultural Resources Center (CRC) which is the research building and collections storage facility of the NMAI located in Suitland, Maryland, just outside of Washington, DC. This is where the curators, collections, conservationists and researchers involved in exhibit development were located (along with the departments of community services and repatriation). Once the museum opened on the National Mall in DC, this central location moved to the periphery, so to speak, as the museum shifted its focus to the visiting public. There was already a feeling of dislocation between those who worked in Maryland and those who had offices in DC.

The other two main fieldwork sites were Chicago, Illinois, and the Commonwealth of Dominica, an island in the Caribbean. They are two of eight Native communities featured in the *Our Lives* exhibition. The urban Indian community in Chicago is an eclectic bunch of individuals that are brought together through the institution and activities of the American Indian Center (eclectic in relation to their tribes, origins, religions, number of years of urban experience, relations to reservations, etc.). The Carib Territory, where the Kalinago community is located, is in a remote and rural location on the tropical island of Dominica.

¹⁵ In Ibid. and in Gregory, cited in Schwartzman, *Ethnography in Organizations*.

¹⁶ Zabusky, *Launching Europe : An Ethnography of European Cooperation in Space Science*.

¹⁷ Ibid., 128.



Figure 2: Map of Native communities of the Western Hemisphere that were represented in the Our Lives gallery; fieldwork locations are circled in red.

I chose these three communities in consultation with the lead curator of the exhibition, Dr. Cynthia Chavez, in part because each community had projects for which they had requested help from the museum. For the NMAI, I provided feedback from communities about the collaborative exhibit making process. With the Chicago Indian community, I volunteered at the American Indian Center and its Trickster

Gallery for Native American arts. And with the Kalinago community, I offered my time and resources to aid in the development of a history curriculum for their schools that reflects their own experiences as Carib people, as well as served as a note taker on multiple task force committees.¹⁸

My approach to the field site of “the exhibition” is to look at it from multiple perspectives, in multiple locations, with the various co-producers of the community curated exhibits. The Native communities selected represent two very different experiences of Native life and articulations of identity, as one resembles the “traditional” field site of anthropology (a small, rural island community), and the other is multi-tribal and located in the heart of one of America’s largest cities. Each of these three communities were also sites of comparison for interpreting the process and outcomes of *Our Lives*.

Our Lives “Communities”

Before I introduce the three locations and communities with whom I worked, I want to make a note about the term “community” itself. In “Reconceptualizing Community,” Vered Amit seeks to “balance polarizing tendencies” of scholarly discourse about communities,¹⁹ advocating a rapprochement of the two main theorizing trends in anthropology: imagined communities and sociologically defined ones. She stresses that “communities” are both social and conceptual,²⁰ an “idea and/or form of sociality.”²¹ In other words, community denotes the interaction

¹⁸ For similar enrollments in local projects, see Paul Nadasdy, *Hunters and Bureaucrats: Power, Knowledge and Aboriginal-State Relations in the Southwest Yukon* (Toronto: UBC Press, 2003), 23, Riles, *The Network inside Out*, xv. Nadasdy took meeting minutes and participated in local committees. Riles provided “technical assistance.” There is a recognition of our interest in observing, and in this manner we find ways to participate and at the same time produce something for both ourselves and our interlocutors.

¹⁹ Vered Amit, “Reconceptualizing Community,” in *Realizing Community : Concepts, Social Relationships and Sentiments*, ed. Vered Amit (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002), 18.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

between the concept of community and the “actual and limited social relations and practices through which it’s realized.”²²

While Amit considers the term “community” as an analytical one, “community” was an indigenous term to all three field sites where I worked. Therefore, when I use that term it is according to the groups’ delineations of definition or membership, often rooted in place, common heritage, common practices and commitments, and other means. It is specifically an indigenous term to the NMAI in defining the units of agency, or who authors its exhibits—in terms of the “community curated” exhibits. In other words, because my focus is on the community curated exhibits, “community” is defined according to the boundaries inherent in the NMAI vision of these groups.

On the other hand, I use the phrase “cultures of expertise” (see especially Chapter 3) as an analytical category; it is a heuristic or tool for defining the contours of groups for the sake of my analysis.²³ In other words, I use this phrase to highlight particular social alignments and delineate particular kinds of socio/technical groups for my own purposes. Following a Boasian model for “culture,” cultures of expertise have a shared (technical or perceptual) language, a shared worldview, and a common

²² Ibid., 18. These two communities could too easily be juxtaposed along this spectrum as “imagined” (Chicago) and territorially bounded (Carib Territory). For example, Susan Lobo writes that urban Indian communities are “primarily abstract” and “based on a series of very dynamic relationships and shared meanings, history and symbols” rather than residence (2001: 83). And the Kalinago are described as “absorbed” into the surrounding Creole society, but remain distinct as a community mainly because of their residential boundaries (Honychurch 1997: 292 and in his dissertation). However, as Amit suggests, I believe these communities are *both* conceptual and located. Chicago’s Indian community is embodied in scattered sites, like the AIC or the Ho Chunk tribal office, throughout the city in which the community materializes through events and daily work; the Kalinago are conceptualized as an *indigenous* community by some, but not all of its residents. See Susan Lobo, “Is Urban a Person or Place? Characteristics of Urban Indian Country,” in *American Indians and the Urban Experience*, ed. Susan Lobo and Kurt Peters (Walnut Creek: Altimira Press, 2001). and Lennox Honychurch and Chris Gosden, “Crossroads in the Caribbean: A Site of Encounter and Exchange on Dominica,” *World Archaeology* 28, no. 3 (1997), Lennox Honychurch, “Carib to Creole: Contact and Culture Exchange in Dominica” (University of Oxford, St. Hugh’s College, 1997).

²³ As I mentioned earlier, I draw the phrase “cultures of expertise” from Holmes and Marcus, “Cultures of Expertise and the Management of Globalization: Toward a Re-Functioning of Ethnography.”

history (how they got to where they are today) and psychology (how they think about the world around them, or what we might refer to as shared epistemology).

Amit also notes that “community” (like “identity” and “culture,” I would add) is analytically “sterile.”²⁴ I believe that is part of what made it such a useful—and more importantly neutral— term for the museum. “Community” can be applied to many groups while at the same time masking, or not discriminating among, a host of different characteristics. For example, group scale (single reservation or larger tribe), language preference (clan, tribe, reservation, community), size (200 individuals or 2,000), and tribal status (legally recognized by state, federal, or neither) can all be subsumed under the same name/unit. And finally, unlike “tribe,” it is not a political (in its legal definition with associated rights) nor a specifically anthropological (or anthropologically-imposed) term.

The Institution at the Center

The National Museum of the American Indian has three main sites today: a display venue in New York City (the George Gustav Heye Center, or GGHC), a research and collection housing facility in Suitland, MD (the Cultural Resources Center, or CRC), and the main public exhibition space, or Mall Museum, on the National Mall in Washington, DC between the National Air and Space Museum (NASM) and the U.S. Capitol. It was estimated near the time of its opening in 2004 that the Mall Museum would have more than four million national and international visitors each year due to its location next to the National Air and Space Museum (the most visited museum in the world).

In 1922, George Gustav Heye, an “obsessive” collector, opened his large private collection to the public of New York city in a space he called the Museum of

²⁴ Amit, "Reconceptualizing Community," 1.

the American Indian.²⁵ In 1989, the U.S. Congress transformed the Museum of the American Indian into the National Museum of the American Indian, the newest museum of the Smithsonian Institution, and plans for its occupation of the last spot on the national mall began. In 1990, Richard West, Jr. (Rick West) was appointed the founding director, and in 1994 a permanent exhibition space opened in the Customs House in lower Manhattan, now called the George Gustav Heye Center (GGHC).

While exhibitions continue in the GGHC, the main location for the NMAI was always intended to be Washington, DC. In 1999 there was a groundbreaking ceremony as construction got underway, and in 2001 a Welcome Center— a small trailer with information panels containing details about the planning, design and construction of the museum— opened at the construction site. Reflected in the Welcome Center information panels as well as its various other forms of publicity, the mission statement and guiding principles of the NMAI stressed the contemporary presence of Native peoples and their participation in every aspect of the NMAI’s development and exhibition process.

The NMAI is the most recent addition to the Smithsonian Institution, which since the bequest of James Smithson in 1829 has strived for the “increase and diffusion of knowledge.” While the original interpretation of this mission was to record and display for posterity dying Indian cultures that were becoming acculturated,²⁶ the NMAI’s guiding principles answer back in the twenty-first century, “We are here now” (see Appendix A), or as the “main message” of the museum in 2004 declared: “We are still here.” And, unlike the other Smithsonian museums, the NMAI explicitly recognized in its literature and staff discourse two groups to which it

²⁵ Force, *Politics and the Museum of the American Indian : The Heye & the Mighty*, 3.

²⁶ William W. Fitzhugh, "Ambassadors in Sealskins: Exhibiting Eskimos at the Smithsonian," in *Exhibiting Dilemmas: Issues of Representation at the Smithsonian*, ed. Amy Henderson and Adrienne L. Kaeppler (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 214.

is responsible: a “constituency” (Native peoples) and the “audience” (non-Native visitors) of the museum.²⁷

The Museum Professionals at the Center

In the beginning, there was Curatorial. Or at least, that was how it felt to the Curatorial department staff in 1999.²⁸ Curatorial staff felt they were at the *center of the mission* of the museum, hired to work with over twenty-four Native communities and develop the relationships and content necessary for the inaugural exhibitions. Likely that was how each department at the Cultural Resources Center (CRC) envisioned its unique position and monumental task in preparation of opening the latest and last museum on the National Mall. For Collections and Registration, they were tasked with moving and re-cataloging over 800,000 objects from New York to the CRC in Suitland, Maryland. Each object (whether a feather headdress or a miniscule potsherd) was to be uniquely packaged, shipped, unpackaged, photographed, catalogued by bar code, and positioned in its own allocated section of the collections space in the CRC. For Curatorial, the task was to create the most progressive, coherent, ethical, and large scale exhibitions with and about Native Americans to date.

²⁷ Scott Brown Venturi and Associates, "The Way of the People: National Museum of the American Indian," in *Master Facilities Programming, Phase 1 Draft Report* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Office of Design and Construction., 1991), 36. This division has been delineated since at least 1991, as this report shows: “NMAI has as its primary *constituency* all Native American people. However, the largest *audience* to visit NMAI facilities, especially the Mall Museum, will be non-Native. The wider public will come with a different perspective than that of Native Americans, and will have different informational expectations and needs. While programs and exhibitions will address these informational needs, they will do so with Native American voices and perspectives and in multi-sensory environments to enhance them. It is believed that all people will respond to this approach and value its *authenticity*" (emphasis added).

²⁸ This feeling of beginning something brand new stemmed from the fact that most CRC staff members were new hires, many from other states who came specifically to be a part of this institution and its mission. However, since 1989 the NMAI was in existence with the intention of building its main presence on the national mall. For those staff member working in New York or *downtown* before 1999, this likely seemed a continuation of, or finally getting to, what they had already been working on until this point.

In 1999, these departments began imagining and preparing to create exhibitions for a building that was yet to be constructed on the mall. The departments operated largely in isolation from one another, while the staff often socialized together. Over the course of the following five years, this trend would be inverted, where staff increasingly became more professionally interdependent and yet privately or socially distant from one another. At this point, I simply want to provide a sense of these institutional locations to set the scene for the later chapters which investigate this divide in more detail.

Downtown and the CRC

This section mainly references the period between 1999 and 2004, and focuses on the two institutional locations that are characterized quite distinctly by staff and referred to as “downtown” and the “CRC.” Before 1999, NMAI staff and exhibitions were located at the GGHC in New York, with additional staff offices downtown in Washington, DC that were located at various buildings over the years, including the Victor Building, the Aeronautics Building, and L’Enfant Plaza (these offices were later consolidated into the fifth floor of the Mall Museum once it was built and operational in 2004).

As one staff member who worked in Washington, DC put it:

Proximity does make a difference. And I still think that it’s a huge problem for CRC to be in Maryland, and for us to be here. I mean, even that fifteen minute, twenty minute drive—whatever it is—is still a proximity issue of *them* and *us*. Whoever, whichever site you’re at, is we’re the them, and they’re the us. There’s not that water cooler chit chat... that running into people in the break room, or having somebody walk by your office and go oh,... I wanted to tell you, [to] talk to you about this! It just doesn’t happen.²⁹

His “us and them” refer to *downtown* and the *CRC*.

²⁹ Interview with Kerry Boyd, in his office at the Mall Museum, November 17, 2004.

Downtown was a common reference to NMAI staff located in Washington, DC, which included most senior managers as well as departments such as Exhibits, Publications, Media Services, Human Resources, and then Education, Public Programs, and Visitor Services as the museum was about to open. *Downtown* had always been the *center of power* in terms of control of funds and proximity to senior managers and the director of the museum, and was close to a main source of money for the museum: Congress.³⁰ These staff members later became known as “the Fifth Floor,” as that was where *downtown* staff members were relocated within the Mall Museum building when construction of the office space was completed in the summer of 2004. While *downtown* departments were then all centralized in one location, except for the associate directors, they were now all working in a maze of low and high walled cubicles rather than closed offices.³¹

The NMAI in general put a lot of emphasis on design and aesthetics and paid great attention to symbolism in its Mall Museum building (opened in 2004) and its predecessor, the Cultural Resources Center (opened in 1999). Each design plan was developed through consultation with Native peoples and Native architects. The Mall Museum is now well-known for its unique, curvy architecture and sandstone exterior. It is located in the political and cultural center of Washington, DC, facing the grassy expanse of the National Mall and situated next to the Capitol, surrounded by the other Smithsonian Institution museums (Figure 3 below). The NMAI contrasts with the main museums on the mall which are largely rectangular and have Greek-inspired

³⁰ As one curator urged me, if I wanted to understand where the power in the institution was, I needed to “follow the money.” Unfortunately, I did not have access to financial information about the exhibitions.

³¹ There was a lack of privacy and distracting ambient noise. Only associate directors had walled offices with doors. The fifth floor was the only office space in the Mall Museum; the cubicles were a permanent arrangement. The elevated status of Fifth Floor staff was oddly contradicted by these new spatial arrangements. But even among cubicles, there were hierarchical differences—low walls, high walls, and, for the lucky few (often Publications staff who needed quiet for writing), there were doors on their high walled “cubes.”

architecture. The color of the sandstone, water features and wild landscaped exterior also distinguish this museum from other buildings in the local area. These unique design features were considered to reflect an Indian aesthetic through the absence of right angles and the return of the land to its original state through indigenous plant species of the area.

The Cultural Resources Center is within the DC metropolitan area (Figure 4 below). It is isolated along with the Natural History museum's Museum Support Center in Suitland, Maryland about eight miles outside of the city. Both centers are located on a grassy, landscaped site enclosed by a high, imposing black metal fence with gated entrances and security guards. Across the internal drive from the boxy, hangar-like MSC building is the CRC, a salmon colored building surrounded by trees and shrubbery with a metal nautilus-looking structure rising above its entry way—a rare architectural beauty for the area. Staff considered Suitland an unsafe place due to its crime rate, and, unlike the Mall Museum, there is no cafeteria or nearby cultural attractions. There are few locations to eat out in the area, the main restaurants being places like a Chinese buffet or a fast food pizza joint in a small strip mall. In other words, it is both a remarkable building as well as isolated and seemingly out of context—socio-economically and architecturally—to the area in which it sits.³²

³² There was a notable division of race among the various departments at the CRC: most Administrative and security staff were African American (and lived in the Suitland area), and the rest of the departments were a mix in of Native and non-Native people (with Collections and the “Move Team” mainly Native). Most CRC workers lived in DC, Alexandria, VA, or in suburbs in MD. Downtown staff was also a mix of Natives and non-Natives; when the museum opened, this balance continued, except the Cultural Interpreters who worked out on the museum floor with the public were all Native.



Figure 3: The NMAI Mall Museum.



Figure 4: Cultural Resources Center in Suitland, MD. June 15, 2006.

Designed to house the collection and host tribal visits and research-related activities, the CRC includes a library, archives, and the departments of Curatorial, Conservation, Collections, Registration, Community Services, Photo Services, and Information Technology. During the time staff at the CRC were preparing the inaugural exhibitions, the Mall Museum was under construction and then opened to staff for office use and exhibition installation in the summer of 2004. During this period, the whole collection (except human remains which would be repatriated) was moved from the Research Branch in the Bronx to the CRC by the “Move Team.”

From 1999 until 2004, the NMAI in Washington, DC *was* the CRC. I returned briefly to the CRC in 2003 to ask permission to conduct my dissertation research. Each morning, staff enters the building through a security check at the loading dock area. As I approached this time, I walked by the water feature flowing down the right side of a progression of shallow steps angling towards the visitors’ entrance. In times past staff had conducted a boat race in this small running stream, with each department creating and rooting for its own miniature rendition of a seaworthy vessel. I entered the building, greeted by the large rotunda that is warm and inviting with skylights and wooden floors and posts; it is a space in which I observed many tribal celebrations and seasonal blessings over the course of working at the CRC. Beyond this entryway, the rest of the building contained long hallways with locked doors opened by swipe cards leading to different departments and their workspaces.

The main purpose of the CRC building becomes clear when one enters the collections space. With three floors of motorized moving cabinets and variably-sized shelves, the collections space is bright, airy, and has windows. It is unlike most storage spaces in museums. This is because, as any staff member would explain, it is not a storage facility but a “home” for the objects. The windows are there for them to

connect with the outside world, to “breathe.” The third floor collection space is a small loft, created for those objects that should never be walked over.

The collections are housed according to tribal affiliation, rather than object type. It is a welcoming space where Native peoples come to view—and to touch, use, and—the objects. In addition, there are two “ceremonial spaces” near the collections. One is outside behind the building—a wooded area reached by a path that ends in a circular clearing, and the other is a small room with floor to ceiling windows facing this exterior wooded area. There is a changing room nearby and a fire pit located in the small room where smudging (purification through smoke) and other stewardship activities might take place. It is no wonder that many staff as well as a prominent museum consultant refer to the CRC as the “heart” of the museum and associate it most closely with the mission of the museum.

Within the NMAI, there are common understandings of these two institutional locations (*CRC* and *downtown*), which I develop in detail in the next chapters that focus on the institutional structures (Chapter 2) and speech networks (Chapter 3) that are represented by the Exhibits and Curatorial departments who are located at these separate institutional locations in Washington and Suitland, respectively. Although nothing maps easily to each individual, these were the general characterizations that staff provided of these two locations; they were salient “images” staff had of each other. *Downtown* was considered the locus of power and decision making, often referred to as the “public face” of the museum (and I have heard consultants and downtown staff call it the “NMAI for the public”). In contrast, the *CRC* was described as the “heart” of the museum, where the mission was carried out on the ground and tribes came to be with the collection objects.

A Life History of the Our Lives Gallery

While the life of the *Our Lives* gallery began *downtown*, it was later situated in the politics and practices of the *CRC* as it moved conceptually from a thematic exhibit to a community curated one, which was reflected in its name change over time from *Living in the Native Universe* to *Our Lives*. The gallery had many contributors over its history and at one point it was even threatened to be relegated to “Day 2,” I was told, which meant it would not open when the rest of the museum did. Here, I focus very narrowly on the *Our Lives* gallery and the different conceptual incarnations that people proposed over time, rather than the struggle to physically create the gallery (which I develop in the following chapters). Perhaps surprising to those who have visited the museum, especially in light of its methodological centrality to the mission of the museum, the *Our Lives* gallery did not start out as a community-centered exhibition.

Long before the *CRC* was built and its staff hired, plans circulated as early as 1991 about the permanent galleries’ exhibition contents. A document produced from nation-wide consultations with Native people called “The Way of the People” included general prescriptions such as the exhibitions should have “Indian interpreters from the tribes represented,” be “multisensory environments analogous to Native American architectures and landscapes,” “in other words, *NMAI*’s galleries will be more like theaters, but with the audience in the middle.” And, it also comments that “Non-Indians are novices with little knowledge and many stereotypes about Indians and they need to understand some fundamentals before they proceed to other exhibitions and performances.”³³

By 1995, a “Mall Facility Exhibition Master Plan” was produced with professional consultants that included a description of three “broad overarching

³³ Venturi and Associates, “The Way of the People: National Museum of the American Indian.”

themes” that the permanent exhibitions would address “spirituality; lifeways; history” and diversity among tribes as well as among individuals. More specifically, there is a description of the “Storyline and Emotional Pathway,” in which the OL gallery is described as “The Museum of Native Lifeways.” This conception of the gallery explains that the “Visitors will ‘meet’ individual native people and learn about their experiences while passing through the cycle of life, from childhood to old age;” it continues with the “emotion” of the exhibit: “The ideas in this section—family, tradition and generational change—are very familiar to non-Indians and should help establish their sense of comfort and connection with native peoples.”³⁴

Detailing this conception, the summary of the gallery reads,

Living in the Native Universe, or the museum of native lifeways, will be organized into divisions representing the cycle of life: birth, childhood, adulthood, death and afterlife. Exhibits in this area will explore the notion of *process as being as important as product*. Here native people of different ages, genders, and culture groups will tell stories of their own experiences while passing through the cycle of life. These stories will recount how doing things in a native way made profound differences in these lives. Exhibits in these galleries will be about Indian ways of growing and learning; Indian ways of being in the world; passages from one stage of life to the next; relationships between generations; and the wisdom of elders.³⁵

For example, visitors would meet individuals from many tribes talking about what it was like to “grow up Zuni,” and there was an emphasis on audiovisual technologies to tell these stories. The text explains that an exhibit “might use four tribal groups within the hemisphere to portray a diversity of voices with each stage of life for each culture.”³⁶

The 1995 conceptual diagram labeled “Storyline diagram showing content sequence and visitor flow” of the gallery includes a small circle representing an

³⁴ Gerard Hilferty and Associates, "National Museum of the American Indian Smithsonian Institution Mall Facility Exhibition Master Plan, Phase I Interim Report: Orientation and Research," (Washington, DC: 1995).

³⁵ Ibid., Section 5.1, page 6. Emphasis added.

³⁶ Ibid., 16-17.

introductory exhibit, leading to a kidney bean shaped “bubble” that says “Life Cycle.” There are also three small circles interrupting the outline of the kidney bean: a “resource center satellite” station that has computers linking to the main Resource Center and two changing or temporary exhibit areas.³⁷

In 1997, after additional consultations, a revised draft of the Mall Exhibition Plan was circulated to staff, who referred to it as “The Duck Book” (there was a duck decoy artifact on its cover).³⁸ NMAI director Rick West introduced the book, writing,

Part of our task has been to synthesize a number of different realities. We have had to find a way to create an Indian place within the context of a Smithsonian museum on the National Mall. We have had to develop approaches to bring together the Native voice with the scholar’s insight, tradition with innovation, aesthetics with harsh realities.³⁹

This draft included a significantly different conceptual plan for the “Living in the Native Universe.” The gallery had moved from the second to the third floor, and there was a “Mentor’s Statement” provided by Gerald McMaster that reoriented the subject matter and framing of the gallery to identity and survival:

Indigenous people of the Americas continue to strive for a sense of identity. For us, defining who we are as individuals or people is a complex, contingent, and sensitive matter. Our identity has many aspects. Prior to the arrival of strangers, we did not think of ourselves as sharing a unified identity. Even today this idea obscures the extraordinary diversity of our culture and of our individual experiences. Yet, it is our commonality that brings us together under the term ‘Indian.’ Above all, our identities persist as an important part of everyday life against the backdrop of a constantly changing world: we continue to be Indians.

For many indigenous peoples today, fundamental principles and philosophies continue being guides for our survival, even for those who no

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ The participants who created the content for the book are divided into lists of people under the titles of Core Planning Team (NMAI Exhibits and Hilferty staff), Content Development Mentors (one for each permanent exhibition, including Gerald McMaster for “Living in the Native Universe”), Circle of Advisors (including prominent Native scholars and museum consultants), Content Researchers, Extended Review Group (mainly NMAI staff, Native and non-Native), Architectural Design Core Team, and Design Advisory Group (Native advisors for architectural design) (Hilferty 1997: 7-9).

³⁹ Gerard Hilferty and Associates, "National Museum of the American Indian Smithsonian Institution National Mall Museum Exhibition Plan, Revised Review Draft," (Washington, DC: 1997).

longer live in their culture's homelands. These foundations stress the importance of language, family, community, ceremony, and respect for the environment. Some of our deepest connections are with the places and people we associate with 'home'—where we come from; the family that nurtures us; the community that cements its relationships through tradition and ceremony; and the languages we speak. We take these principles and weave them together into a life that makes sense for us and keeps our cultures alive.

As the indigenous people of the Americas, we have always expressed ourselves in distinctive ways, whether it is in art, music, dance, language, architecture, attire, literature, environment, ceremony, everyday practice, or our relationships with others. We continue balancing our enduring principles to meet the needs of living in a contemporary world. We sustain customs and traditions by adapting them to the world around us. Our cultures provide us with traditional ways that enrich our everyday lives and empower us to thrive in a continually changing world.

In the words of Simon Ortiz, 'We persist and insist on living, believing, hoping, loving, speaking, and writing as Indians' into the twenty-first century.⁴⁰

The vision for the gallery in 1997 continued to be focused on individual "conversations" where visitors will "meet" Native people in thematic areas of the exhibition. But instead of the life cycle, the pathway of the exhibition followed subthemes listed under the main title, "Heritage": language and tradition; family and community; place; names; relations with others; public and private gatherings; contemporary artistic expression; everyday practice; and, fundamental principles.⁴¹ The "Living in the Native Universe Concept Diagram" now was subtitled, "Cycle of Identity and Continuity" (redrawn in Figure 5 below).

⁴⁰ Ibid., 55.

⁴¹ Ibid., 56-63. There is also a development of design diagrams from the Design+Communication firm that was assigned to the gallery. These somewhat parallel the internal documents, but there are some significant differences. For instance, in a 1998 Startup Final Report, the conceptual diagram was the same—four circles—but the center circle was titled "Introduction; Witness," and the other three circles around it were titled, "Identity; Dialogue; then "Community; Interaction;" and then "Heritage; Change," with arrows to denote movement from one to the next in that order.

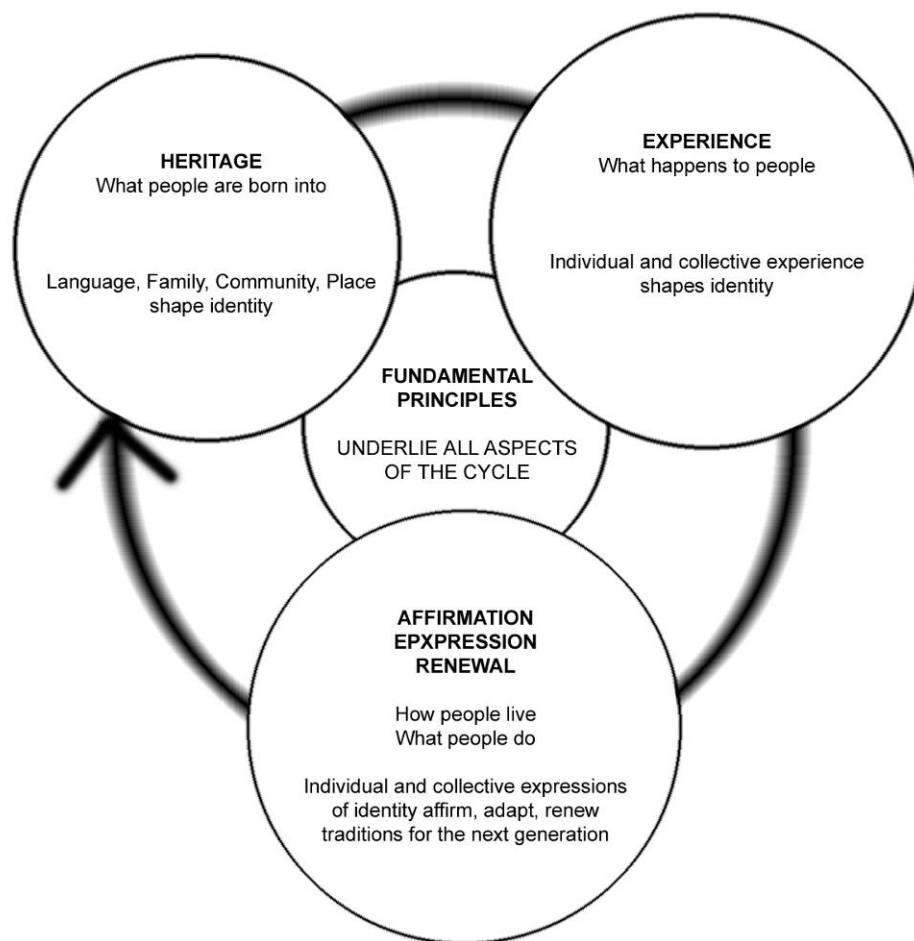


Figure 5: “Living in the Native Universe” concept diagram (redrawing).

The Duck Book was widely “trashed”⁴² in vetting sessions with scholars, museum professionals and tribal leaders. Craig Howe (Oglala Lakota)⁴³ and Ann McMullen⁴⁴ were present at these meetings, and would later come to work in the

⁴² Conversation with Ann McMullen, March 25, 2004. She also noted that Ruth Phillips was at the “scholar” consultation. The negative critique may have been due to the pan-Indian nature of the design and content, as these scholars were instrumental in the eventual shift to community-centered exhibits and content. However, what was trashed was never explicitly mentioned by either person who used this term to describe the review.

⁴³ Craig held a dual Ph.D. degree from the University of Michigan in Anthropology and Architecture. Before joining the NMAI, Craig had worked on the Hypermedia Tribal Histories Project at the D’Arcy McNickle Center for American Indian History at the Newberry Library in Chicago, IL.

⁴⁴ Ann had a Ph.D. in Anthropology from Brown University. She was a curator at the Milwaukee Public Museum before working at the NMAI.

Curatorial Department. Duane Blue Spruce (and architect who worked on the Mall Museum) said of the Duck Book that, although the exhibit concepts were thrown out, the visitor experience information basically stayed the same and was still relevant.⁴⁵ These critical review meetings were the impetus for the community-centered approach to exhibit making that was later implemented in three permanent exhibitions.

Craig Howe was hired as Deputy Assistant Director of Cultural Resources in 1999, overseeing the Curatorial work, and developed a “braid of feathers” concept connecting the three permanent exhibitions; he was key to re-conceptualizing the exhibits as tribal-centered. His conceptual diagram of the galleries was distributed by Bruce Bernstein⁴⁶ via memo (Sept. 24, 1999) to Curatorial researchers working on the galleries, along with revised narratives for OU and OP and the museum mission statement and guiding principles. Craig’s sketch became a well known, well received, and often referenced image for the galleries among Curatorial staff (Figure 6 below).⁴⁷

By 1999, the permanent exhibitions’ names shifted to *Our Universes*, *Our Peoples*, and *Our Lives*.⁴⁸ While OP and OU were relatively far along in conceptual design, OL was the last to be developed and the last to be assigned a lead curator. Until one was assigned in 2000, Tristine Smart was the lead researcher compiling research and liaising with possible contributors to the gallery.

⁴⁵ Interview with Duane Blue Spruce at his office in the Arospace building, April 1, 2004.

⁴⁶ Bruce had a Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of New Mexico under Alfonso Ortiz. He felt Rick West had hired him due to his experience being a curator at the Museum of New Mexico and participated in the community curated 1997 exhibition *Here, Now and Always: Voices of the First Peoples of the Southwest*.

⁴⁷ This mainly circulated only among Curatorial to represent the relations between the three galleries.

⁴⁸ It was not until around 2004 that the full names of the galleries became settled, circulated among staff, and produced in literature as *Our Lives: Contemporary Life and Identities*, *Our Universes: Traditional Knowledge Shapes Our World*, and *Our Peoples: Giving Voice to Our Histories*.

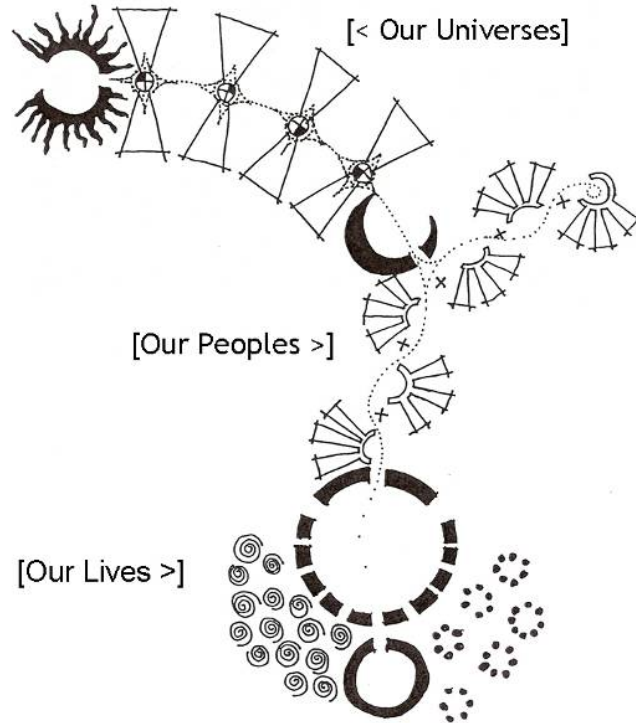


Figure 6: Craig Howe's conceptual drawing of OP, OU, OL galleries (labels added).

Craig left the NMAI in 2000 and Ann McMullen arrived shortly after to become the head of the Curatorial Department; Gerald McMaster was hired in August 2001 to take over the position of Deputy Assistant Director of Cultural Resources. A meeting about the gallery in 2000 concluded that, with Gerald's addition to the staff and his role as the gallery's original mentor, there would likely be changes in the *Our Lives* plan.

In the preliminary conceptual diagram by Craig Howe, the OL gallery focus had shifted yet again, with thematic sections titled "individuals," "tribes," and "indigenous intertribal organizations." By June 1999, the gallery had a walkthrough narrative and was divided into four sections: "communities/tribes; intertribal organizations; individuals; and an NMAI-curated section dealing with the impact of

education policy on Native individuals.”⁴⁹ As Ann recalled to me, Craig’s idea of OL at the time had tribal flags and resembled the halls of justice; the emphasis was on sovereignty and had a “united indigenous nations” feel to it.⁵⁰ A list of possible tribes and intertribal organizations were prepared, but many were left out of the final exhibition plan.

In the summer of 2000, staff completed preliminary research into possible OL tribes and organizations, but no formal contacts were made. At this point, I was asked to take over the lead researcher position because Tristine was leaving the NMAI, and Cynthia Chavez (San Felipe Pueblo/Hopi/Tewa/Navajo) was transitioned from a research position in contemporary art to the lead curator for the gallery. In January of 2001, the gallery began anew with a full curatorial team in place: Cynthia as lead curator, myself as lead researcher, and Taryn Costanzo as research assistant.⁵¹

Cynthia developed a new walkthrough narrative with the advisement of Gerald McMaster. This marked a shift to an emphasis on cultural identity (more closely resembling Gerald’s original mentor statement) rather than political identity or sovereignty, which was emphasized by Craig Howe during his tenure at the museum.

After several different drafts of the narrative for the gallery, the final conceptual organization consisted of “Tribes/Nations/Communities” that would be community curated, and a “personal stories” section that would be NMAI-curated (developed by NMAI curators and not through community curating).⁵² The final exhibition layout for the gallery included community curated exhibits and an NMAI-

⁴⁹ Email from Tristine Smart to myself and others, January 17, 2001.

⁵⁰ Conversation with Ann McMullen, in her office at the CRC, July 8, 2004.

⁵¹ Arwen Nuttall would later be hired as a research assistant and I would leave in 2002.

⁵² The NMAI-curated section also changed a number of times; two guest curators, Gabi Tayac and Jolene Rickard, were responsible for the final installation. However, in this chapter and throughout the dissertation, I only attend to the community curated sections and do not focus on this portion of the gallery.

curated thematic introductory section in the central space of the gallery that I describe briefly in Chapters 5 and 6.

As staff changed over time, so too did the conceptualization of the gallery; these changes reflected staff critiques of earlier models as well as their commitments, identities, and values. The *Our Lives* gallery moved from a classic life cycle display, to “conversations” with Native people, to a presentation of tribal sovereignty and life stories, to a community-focused representation of cultural identity. In addition, the notion of identity changed over time. First, it was linked to growing up and the life stages from birth to death, then heritage and language and place, then it was tied to sovereignty and government policy, and then it was about cultural identity and change. In this final rendition, when left in the hands of the community members themselves to define how they would interpret the overall identity-focused theme of the gallery, identity became “what it’s like to live today” in their communities.

The lead curator, Cynthia, wanted to leave much of the interpretation of what “contemporary Native identities” meant to the communities, and so gave very little guidance as to how they should approach “identity” as an exhibit theme. But, she did give the co-curators three guidelines of what their exhibit “should *not* be:

1. A history of the community. History will undoubtedly be part of each community’s exhibition, but it should not be the focal point. History should be referenced as it relates to a contemporary event, organization, activity, etc.
2. A sanitized, tourism office version of the community.
3. Focused solely on traditional or historical practices of the community. Every community has changed over the years. This is what has contributed to their vitality and survival.”

And, she also listed what “every community component *should* be”:

1. An honest, complex representation of the community.

2. A presentation about the specific community, not the culture in general. For example, if a community is Mohawk, the focus should be on that specific Mohawk community and not Mohawk culture in general.

These instructions were intended to encourage communities to present “authentic” representations of their experience. They also demonstrated Cynthia’s desire for a nuanced exhibition about Native identity in which she did not have control over the specific issues that would be contained in its exhibits. It is from these sparse guidelines that the content for the exhibits in the *Our Lives* gallery was developed through the process of community curating.

The Process of Community Curating

While I discuss different moments in the community curating process throughout the dissertation, here I provide a brief overview. Except for the opening week celebrations in 2004, any interaction between curators and co-curators described here is in the context of the community curating process, or community visits by NMAI staff. While there were some rare instances in which co-curators visited the NMAI (like the Pamunkey, from Virginia), due to the late start of the *Our Lives* exhibition team, most of the time and money available was spent traveling to communities rather than bringing co-curators to the museum. This meant that, for object selection, co-curators viewed binders of printed photographs of the collection rather than visiting the objects in person (co-curators from the other two permanent galleries visited the collection onsite). Therefore, this brief description represents the community curating process specifically as it was practiced by the *Our Lives* team.

Cynthia was the Lead Curator for the *Our Lives* gallery. She took a flexible approach to community curating, leaving it to each community to determine a proper method for co-curator selection. The committees were therefore organized in various ways. Co-curator committees included anywhere between 4 and 10 people. For

example, the American Indian community of Chicago selected co-curators through nomination and election at the American Indian Center; I learned through fieldwork that this was a familiar process for this community. For the Kalinago in Dominica, the chief of the Carib Territory selected the co-curator committee, making sure there was representation from each hamlet, male and female members, and basket makers, canoe builders, political figures, and cultural experts included (I go into more detail on this selection process in Chapter 3, “Expertise”).

The process of community curating for *Our Lives* and for the inaugural exhibitions in general was unique in that the NMAI curators spent a significant amount of time in each community. There were regular meetings between the curator and the co-curator committees from 2001 to 2003. For example, in Chicago, first there was an introductory meeting to invite the Chicago American Indian community to participate in the exhibition. These meetings were held at the American Indian Center.⁵³ Once the community agreed to participate, periodic meetings between the NMAI staff and selected co-curators began.

These meetings were recorded, and the dialogue from these discussions as well as individual interviews with co-curators and other community members became the text of the exhibit. In the first meetings, the NMAI curator listened to the co-curators as they began to formulate what it means to be a member of the American Indian community of Chicago today—for instance, activities like powwow that bring them together, community gathering places like the Anawim Center and the American Indian Center, and the various ways in which they maintain their Indian identity in the midst of a large metropolis. The emphasis was that the Chicago community was a

⁵³ The AIC is a central place to access the community, but of course it also excludes many American Indians who do not participate in activities at the Center. The issue of the limitations that this approach had for a broader representation of Chicago Native experience is beyond the scope of this chapter, but is addressed specifically in James B. LaGrand, *Indian Metropolis : Native Americans in Chicago, 1945-75* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 5.

multi-tribal and widely diverse group of people. Cynthia listened, and returned to the community with themes that represented the various issues that were discussed—and the co-curators helped to further define these themes.⁵⁴

Then the co-curators selected objects from within the NMAI collection (via “Object Binders,” or booklets of photographs), as well as material items from their own homes, or sometimes created or commissioned new artworks to represent these themes. The co-curators were later visited by the design team, discussing their visions for presentation, and reviewed the design team’s sketches and layouts of the exhibit. An NMAI media team also went to Chicago, interviewing community members on video, recording important events during the week they were there such as a powwow and a graduation ceremony. At each stage, people working on the exhibit came to the community—to talk with community members and get a sense of place—in order to better represent them through their work and in the museum.

Overall, the community members were most involved in the development of content for the exhibit, and their conversations and interviews were the source for label copy and video displays. In addition, everything in the exhibit was authored (a mandate from NMAI director Rick West). For example, for general introductory panels, it said “Chicago co-curators.” For specific quotations, it would say the person’s name and their tribal affiliation. Community member faces, photos of their children, objects with their bead work, were all authored and attributed to specific individuals.

⁵⁴ Wenona Rymond-Richmond was the fieldworker assigned to this community. She assisted in taking meeting notes and providing materials for Cynthia to review in her absence. Only three communities had fieldworkers assigned: Chicago, Dominica and Iglolik. The rest relied on regular visits and mainly group meetings (rather than also individual interviews) with Cynthia. Another exception is Pamunkey, where Ann McMullen was the main NMAI contact with that community. Having multiple fieldworkers helped to get the OL fieldwork and exhibition completed in time for opening.

The co-curators for the *Our Lives* committees⁵⁵ were selected in a variety of way and the dynamics among co-curators varied in each community (according to gender, age, expertise and protocol). Regardless of the composition of the various and varied co-curator groups, through this form of community curating, the *committee form* resulted in a unified, authoritative voice in each exhibit—where the “community curators” authored as a group each of the main sections of their exhibits (I go into more detail about this in Chapter 4, “Authorship”).

The co-curators were also responsible for determining the “main message” of their exhibit. For example, the Kahnawake co-curators decided their contemporary identity was best captured with the message: “Kahnawakehro:non assert their sovereignty in all aspects of their lives.” For the Pamunkey, it was that the “The Pamunkey proudly serve the Creator as stewards of the land and waters that have sustained them for thousands of years.”

The Communities at the Periphery

Many people wondered why certain communities were selected over others, including those chosen who asked, “Why us?” In response, as lead researcher I was asked to prepare a document that explained why each community was selected for the gallery (see Appendix B). Communities were selected primarily according to a particular distribution logic that was tied to the collection: each gallery was to present a number of tribes in four “zones” of the hemisphere that proportionally matched the geographic distribution of collection objects in these regions. In other words, if 75% of the collection is in North America, then 75% of the tribes in each gallery should be from that region.

⁵⁵ Cynthia at first shied away from calling these groups committees; the term derived from how communities referred to their own co-curator groups in the early stages of the process.

Because the inaugural exhibitions were all being curated at once, in many cases particular communities within these zones were selected because NMAI staff had some form of connection to them (through community members or other scholars), which helped speed up the process of locating and contacting the appropriate people. As further explained in Chapter 4, the reasons why a community may have been interesting to staff to include in a gallery about identity (based on extensive preliminary research prior to contacting tribes) were often not mentioned in the exhibit content developed through the community curating process.

The Kalinago and Chicago communities were selected for a number of factors. Though often thought to no longer exist, the Kalinago were the only Native peoples to have their own territory in the Caribbean. Chicago boasted the oldest multi-tribal Indian center in the nation. There has been an ongoing Native population present in Chicago since the 19th century despite a lack of Indian reservations within the state, but the urban Indian community of Chicago was also a kind of “invisible”⁵⁶ community: few city dwellers were aware of this history or the Native presence in Chicago more generally. Both communities spoke English; most Kalinago also spoke *kweyol* (a local patois with French and Carib words),⁵⁷ and some Chicago members also spoke Native languages.

⁵⁶ Beck begins his description of the Chicago Indian community with the title, “An ‘invisible minority’” in David Beck, “The Chicago American Indian Community,” in *Native Chicago*, ed. Terry Straus and Grant Arndt (Chicago: McNaughton and Gunn, Inc., 1998), 167.

⁵⁷ Some elders only spoke *kweyol*, a local patois. In terms of language ideology, people were very articulate about why they chose this patois over English at times. The common reasons given are that *kweyol* is more expressive, “emotional,” “spicy.” It has a lot of double entendre words in it, and so often there is a bit of lewd humor that goes along with it. People say they would never say things in English that they say in *kweyol*, that it would seem improper. This is why when you hear *kweyol*, you also often hear people laughing. A visiting scholar on a Watson Fellowship who was studying patois throughout the Caribbean called this language “anti-establishment.” The official Dominica language is English. The last person to speak some Carib phrases died in the early 20th century.

The Kalinago Community of the Carib Territory, Dominica

The island of Dominica where the Kalinago people live is located halfway between Puerto Rico and the Venezuelan coast in the West Indies arc of islands in the Caribbean. Most people know the Kalinago (as they prefer to be called), or Island Caribs, to be one of the first indigenous groups that Christopher Columbus encountered in the Caribbean on his second voyage in 1493. Through contact and colonization, the Kalinago were subsequently decimated by disease, slave raiding, and genocidal warfare to the point where today, most people think there are no indigenous peoples left in the Caribbean. However, since the time of Columbus, there was a small population who survived and took refuge on the inaccessible, rugged east coast of Dominica, and a Kalinago community remains there to this day.⁵⁸

The Kalinagos are recognized for their long campaign of concerted resistance to colonial powers (Spanish, British and French), missionization, and enslavement between 1492 and 1700.⁵⁹ By the year 1700, the population may have decreased by as much as 90 percent to around 2000 people,⁶⁰ but their resistance had affected the Caribbean economy and politics more broadly.⁶¹ Since 1635, settlement and possession of Dominica went back and forth between the French and British, but after 1763 it was formally ceded as a British possession. In 1764 Kalinagos had jurisdiction over 223 acres set aside by the British government on the eastern coast of the island.⁶²

In 1903, as part of an allotment process instigated by the British colonial government, a sympathetic administrator, Hesketh Bell, enlarged this area and set aside one allotment that was labeled the Carib Reserve and held in common by the

⁵⁸ Patrick L. Baker, *Centring the Periphery : Chaos, Order, and the Ethnohistory of Dominica* (Jamaica: The Press, University of the West Indies, 1994), 24.

⁵⁹ H. M. D. Beckles, "Kalinago (Carib) Resistance to Colonization," *CARICOM Perspective* (1992).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*: 13.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Crispin Gregoire and Natalia Kanem, "The Caribs of Dominica: Land Rights and Ethnic Consciousness," *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1989).

Carib people. Today, with eight hamlets and a population of around 4,000,⁶³ this 3700 acre plot of land is administered by the Carib Council and referred to as the Carib Territory⁶⁴ (Figure 7 below). The Carib Territory's eight hamlets were wired for telephones in the 1960s and for electricity in the late 1980s. There is one main paved road filled with potholes that runs through the Territory.



Figure 7: Map of Dominica (from Honychurch 1984; emphasis added).

⁶³ Special Projects Assistance Team [SPAT], "Carib Identity in the New Millennium," *Koudmen: Issues in Development* 9, no. 2 (2000).

⁶⁴ Garnette Joseph, "Five Hundred Years of Resistance," in *The Indigenous People of the Caribbean*, ed. Samuel M. Wilson (Miami: The University Press of Florida, 1997), 215.

The Carib people are the origin—along with the “peaceful Arawaks”—of the enduring stereotypes of Native peoples as either “noble savages” or “fierce cannibals” that were conjured by Columbus in the late 15th century.⁶⁵ Unlike other Native peoples, for the Kalinagos, even in 2005, these stereotypes were not something fabricated in a distant land: they were the popularly imagined Carib history that Kalinagos were confronting daily in their school textbooks and national politics, and they provided the context in which they were attempting, as Terry Turner puts it, to “take control over the process of objectification itself.”⁶⁶ The most notable and publicly visible exercise of doing so was the Kalinago *Our Lives* exhibit.

While I was in Dominica in 2005, Kalinago community members were talking about whether to participate in the movie *The Pirates of the Caribbean II* in which they were asked to portray cannibals, how to represent themselves in the soon to be opened heritage center, and what they wanted to teach their children about Kalinago culture. They invited me to participate in the tasks force and community meetings about these projects, which I viewed as forms of “collective self-production.”⁶⁷ Taking a cue from their concerns, the Kalinago contributed to my understandings of the contemporary politics of representation and indigeneity, and the rise of “cultural consciousness,” as the Kalinago call it, in Native communities.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ David Hurst Thomas, *Skull Wars : Kennewick Man, Archaeology, and the Battle for Native American Identity*, 1st ed. (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 2000).

⁶⁶ Terence Turner, "Representation, Politics, and Cultural Imagination in Indigenous Video: General Points and Kayapo Examples," in *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, ed. Faye Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 88.

⁶⁷ Faye Ginsburg, "Mediating Culture: Aboriginal Media and the Social Transformation of Identity" (paper presented at the Conference on Communication and Empowerment: Uses of Media and Information Technologies in Developing Countries, Los Angeles, CA, April 11-13 1996), 2.

⁶⁸ Garnette Joseph (former Carib Chief) and Jennifer Shannon, "The Carib Liberation Movement: The Legacy of American Indian Activism in Dominica," in (*Edited Volume on American Indian Activism*), ed. A. Terry Straus and Kurt Peters (Forthcoming). Although in very different circumstances, Terry Turner documents the formation of cultural consciousness among the Kayapo in the Amazon that provided another way in which to think about how notions of culture, community representation, and anthropological practice are intertwined: Turner, "Representing, Resisting, Rethinking: Historical Transformations of Kayapo Culture and Anthropological Analysis."

When I first arrived in Dominica, Garnette Joseph, a former chief and NMAI co-curator, explained that I would be witnessing two important events: Carnival in February, and the national election. Both events would later consume much of the time and talk of the community; even cricket season (a favorite pastime for players and spectators in the Territory) was postponed as community members were bussed for free to towns all over the island for political rallies for either the United Workers Party (symbolized by the color blue and a serrated work saw with a wooden handle) or the Labour Party (symbolized by the color red and a men's shoe). It was a fierce political season where neighbors in opposing parties sometimes refused to patronize each other's roadside shops or even stopped talking all together.

It was after three months of being in the Territory (and traveling to political rallies, and helping serve chicken at a Carnival event with the Karifuna cultural group, etc.) that the various task forces—about the “Carib Model Village,” about revising the local education curriculum, and creating a Carib craft association—got underway. So, there was a distinct acceleration of projects, volunteer activities, and interviewing that occurred in my last three months of fieldwork in the Territory, but invitations to visit with or participate in these committees were grounded in my participation or attendance at cultural and political events, spending time with the cultural groups and in the Carib Council house, introduction in the local newsletter, and walking along the road and visiting with community members, beforehand.

Today, Caribs are listed as one of Dominica's “special features” for tourism, as they are the only indigenous peoples to have a territory in the Caribbean. Celebrating Dominica as “The Nature Island” due to its “unspoiled” lush forests, mountains, geothermal attractions, and many waterfalls and rivers (Figure 8 below), the island's

tourism advertising also emphasizes that it is only the home of a living population of “Pre-Columbian Carib Indians.”⁶⁹



Figure 8: View of the Carib Territory from the Kalinago Barana Autê (formerly known as the "Carib Model Village"). November 17, 2007.

There are “Carib Tours” along with “Nature Tours” packages offered by cruise ships, the island’s main source of tourism dollars. In a country where Caribs have been historically discriminated against but are now celebrated as main attraction for tourists, we can see how “the conjunctural forces in the late-capitalist world [are] favoring the development, political recognition, and social valuation of cultural and subcultural identities.”⁷⁰ Banana production declined and the island turned more and more to tourism for revenue in the early part of the 21st century; no doubt, this was a

⁶⁹ Carib descendants are dispersed throughout populations on other islands like nearby St. Vincent.

⁷⁰ Terence Turner, "Anthropology and Multiculturalism: What Is Anthropology That Multiculturalists Should Be Mindful of It?," *Cultural Anthropology* 8, no. 4 (1993): 427.

factor in this re-valuation and the 2006 opening of the Carib Territory's *Kalinago Barana Autê* (Carib Village by the Sea), a heritage center formerly known as the Carib Model Village and 30 years in planning.

But it was not just economic factors but also social movements that contributed to a higher valuation of Kalinago peoples by themselves, beginning in the late 1970s. Dr. Lennox Honychurch,⁷¹ author of the definitive account of contemporary history of the island titled *The Dominica Story*, writes of the arrival of the rights movement in Dominica: "It takes time for ideas or fashions to drift down to the Caribbean, and so the effects of the protests in the U.S. were not felt until the very end of the 1960s."⁷² But, while he discusses the "the Black Power boys" and the Rasta movement and how in Dominica in the 1970s there was a "wave of animosity" among Afro-Dominican black urban youth,⁷³ neither Honychurch nor other authors who write about Dominican history or Caribs consider or give specific account of late 20th century political formulations or community organizing created in response to the heightened race consciousness of the 1970s from within the Territory by Kalinago people.

In the 1970s, Kalinago people—including the core group of Kalinago co-curators— finally had access to secondary school education, and with this opportunity

⁷¹ Prosper told me (interview April 24, 2005) that Lennox Honychurch (a non-Native white man with a PhD in Anthropology and Museum Studies from Oxford University) was originally asked by the Kalinago to be a co-curator. He is often the person people seek for information about the Kalinago (rather than the Kalinago themselves). The Kalinago appreciated his work, and invite him to speak at Carib Week celebrations each year. But, Prosper told me, the Smithsonian said no because they wanted *Native* co-curators from the community. I found out during my fieldwork in the Territory that this was a positive development, because although people like Garnette were highly educated and Prosper had read the same materials as Honychurch, despite living in the Territory they were often overlooked because Dr. Honychurch was "the expert" with a "PhD," they noted. In fact, they felt that Honychurch's work restated much of prior scholarship. Garnette preferred Hilary Beckles' work on Caribbean history because he focuses more on "Carib *achievements*." Honychurch was contracted by the Dominican government to make the introductory wall panel exhibit about the history of the Kalinago for the Carib Model Village without consultation with the community. The difference between what is an "expert" and what the Kalinago call a "resource person" is detailed in Chapter 3.

⁷² Lennox Honychurch, *The Dominica Story : A History of the Island* (Roseau, Dominica, Windward Islands, West Indies: Dominica Institute, 1984), 242.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 243.

came a greater awareness that they were “not alone”—that there were other indigenous groups like them, experiencing similar discrimination and struggles.

Prosper Paris explained to me once:

To me the whole consciousness of 1970s was getting up. We had the black power for example in the U.S.— it filtered through the Caribbean. So we had the Dread people getting into identifying themselves as Africans and Rasta men... Now, we couldn't identify with *that*. We had to find *our* roots also... ... there was a new image that we should rise up as Carib people. That new generation had to stand up, because everything was not lost... People who went through education had a lot of problems, being discriminated against as being a Carib or inferior race.⁷⁴

These same people who went through a secondary education, learned about other Native communities and also experienced severe discrimination in close contact with the wider Afro-Dominican population, were the first generation collectively committed to raising Carib “cultural consciousness” in the Territory. This generation included the founders of the Karifuna Cultural Group, formed in 1978, which was created to raise cultural consciousness about Carib people within and outside the Territory. The Carib Liberation Movement (CLM)⁷⁵ was created around the same time to raise political consciousness to progress Carib rights in Dominica. Garnette Joseph, Irvince Auguiste, Prosper Paris, and Worrell Sanford were key members of each of these groups in their early days, and they continue to advocate for Kalinago political and cultural consciousness today. Sylvanie Burton and Gerard Langlais also were Karifuna members in its early days.

Therefore, the strong cultural awareness that these Kalinago co-curators speak about today has roots in their experience of community organizing around political and cultural consciousness. As one member of the CLM explained to me: “it didn't

⁷⁴ Interview with Prosper Paris, at the Karifuna Cultural Group/WAIKADA office, July 20, 2005.

⁷⁵ For a co-authored account about the CLM in particular and its connection to American Indian activism, please see Joseph (former Carib Chief) and Shannon, "The Carib Liberation Movement: The Legacy of American Indian Activism in Dominica."

last very long, but it did put us in a new energy by just meeting and discussing what is the next move and what is out there, and how people are looking at us. It builds you into another level.” The organizers of this short-lived movement at one point through a concerted effort “took control” of the Carib Council: Irvince (at age 21 in 1980 to 1990) was chief, with Prosper and Garnette as councilors, and Sylvanie Burton as the Council Clerk. In later years they became Carib Council members, two served in the office of Carib Chief, one later hosted a Kalinago Voices radio program, and several held leadership positions in the Karifuna cultural group. They all volunteered time to various community organizations and development projects during my fieldwork time in Dominica, and they contributed to Carib Week activities as well. In other words, they were the “usual suspects” at task force meetings and other community initiatives for the empowerment of Kalinago people, including participating in making the NMAI exhibition and highlighting the continuing importance of raising cultural consciousness.

The exhibit introduced the co-curators and their self-defined roles in the community:

This exhibit was developed in collaboration with the following Kalinago curators: (from left) Gerard Langlais, Karina Cultural Group manager; Jacinta Bruney, craft-maker; Prosper Paris, Karifuna Cultural Group artistic director; Chief Garnette Joseph; and Sylvanie Burton, community development worker. Not pictured: Alexis Valmond, Carib Council member; Cozier Frederick, teacher; and Irvince Auguiste, tour operator.⁷⁶

But, as with my experience in Chicago, through formal interviews and everyday conversations, I was able to learn more about each individual than these brief descriptions, as well as to better understand their roles in their communities that led them to be selected as co-curators.

⁷⁶ From the final exhibition script. See Appendix F for full script.

After being in the Carib Territory for six months, I learned that that there were many issues that divided the Kalinago co-curators: for example, national political party affiliation, religious affiliation, support for or against the sitting Carib Chief Charles Williams, what cultural group they are affiliated with in the Territory, and whether or not they had “mixed” parentage (Kalinago and Afro-Dominican).⁷⁷ However, these divisions were never apparent to NMAI staff during their meetings with the co-curators.

In Dominica, I could intersect with many community co-curators on almost a daily basis, through various volunteer projects or attending cultural group meetings or just walking through the Territory along the main road. In contrast, I found the Chicago community to be very difficult to intersect with. Not interact, because I always was welcomed by community members. But to *intersect* was more difficult—to see people outside of AIC or other planned community events, or have chance meetings with them in the city, was virtually impossible. I was alone for a good portion of my volunteer work at the Trickster Gallery, in a suburb about a forty minute drive from the AIC on Wilson Ave.

One Saturday night I was at the movies, and I sat there during the incessant previews thinking wow, I feel so out of contact with the community of the AIC, with Indian experience in general here, while I am sitting here in the movie theater with my own family member and watching a feature film. I never felt that way in Dominica or DC. Am I too outside the community or too inside my own experience to be doing ethnography? This is markedly different to how immersed I felt with the people, the media, and the concerns of the Kalinago in Dominica. I always felt surrounded by the community. Then I realized perhaps this is exactly the feeling that the Chicago

⁷⁷ On “looking Carib” – community members named people who are “pure Carib” as having lighter skin and long, straight hair. While intermarriage and a fear of the “race” “dying out” were mentioned quite often during the course of exhibit making meetings, these issues were not included in the exhibition.

community members themselves must also face: trying to feel surrounded by their own ideas, peoples, and values in a place where they are constantly bombarded by media, work place encounters, and other people that are not part of this other type of existence, of community, that they have in the AIC.

Urban Indian Community, Chicago

Many Chicago area residents are unaware that the area was a meeting ground for Native peoples long before the onset of the fur trade. The Illini and Miami, confederations of Algonquian speaking peoples, were the first known residents in the area. Potawatomi, Ojibwe (Chippewa), and Ottawa (Odawa) tribes later pushed them out; they too were supplanted when through the Treaty of Chicago (1833) they relinquished their claim to the land. Since then, no tribes have had formal homelands in the state of Illinois. Indians would later be viewed as curiosities in displays in the World's Columbian Exhibition in 1893. By 1923, those American Indians who chose to stay in the area formed the first intertribal organization in Chicago: the Indian Council Fire. While World War I brought some additional Native residents to the city, it was not until after WWII that they arrived in larger numbers.⁷⁸

Today, some nations have established tribal offices in Chicago that, along with other Native organizations in the city, help enroll individuals in their tribes and serve both enrolled and non-enrolled Native individuals. The city has become a place to maintain, reconnect, or connect for the first time, with an individual's tribal identity and community; the American Indian Center is often the first step in this process.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ A. Terry Straus and Debra Valentino, "Retribalization in Urban Indian Communities," in *American Indians and the Urban Experience*, ed. Susan Lobo and Kurt Peters (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2001), 87.

⁷⁹ Lobo, "Is Urban a Person or Place? Characteristics of Urban Indian Country," 89-92. Straus and Valentino discuss "retribalization" going on in the city, where the process of moving from pan-Indian to tribally specific Indian identity can occur (contrary to common conceptions of city life) (92).

Today, as David Beck notes, “more American Indians live in urban areas than anywhere else in the United States.”⁸⁰ However, one would be hard pressed to find representation of urban Indians, or urban Indian communities, in museums or the national press. In Chicago, American Indians are “one of the least visible minority groups” in the city.⁸¹ Like the Kalinago community, Beck recounts the experience of a community member, a recent (1998) student at a suburban grade school, who was “told that there are no Indians alive anymore” by her teacher in class.⁸²

But there was a particular moment when all American Indians looked to Chicago. One of the major events in American Indian history was the concerted action among U.S. tribes that began in Chicago in 1961 and galvanized a national movement for Indian activism. The American Indian Chicago Conference took place at the University of Chicago June 13-20, 1961. While it was not focused specifically on the Chicago Indian community, it was an important moment in American Indian activism and community building, and its location in Chicago highlighted the active and growing Native community in Chicago. There were 90 tribes represented by over 450 delegates from all over the western hemisphere. The conference was hosted and paid for by the University of Chicago and its professors and students and granting foundations. Dr. Sol Tax, Dr. Nancy Lurie, and Robert Reitz coordinated the project. Mayor Daily of Chicago declared June 13-20 American Indian Week.

The Declaration of Indian Purpose was a policy statement which among other things demanded a reversal of the federal government’s termination process,⁸³

⁸⁰ David Beck, "Developing a Voice: The Evolution of Self-Determination in an Urban Indian Community," *Wicazo Sa Review* 17, no. 2 (2002): 117.

⁸¹ Beck, "The Chicago American Indian Community," 167. Beck provides an excellent history of Native organizations in Chicago as well as statistics for the Chicago population at different points in time.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 169.

⁸³ Termination was a general policy position of the U.S. government in mid-20th century in which it attempted to end the special rights and obligations that tribes were due according to treaty agreements. The relocation program after WWII was a part of this effort. The assumption was if the U.S. government could encourage American Indians to move to cities and away from reservations, the it

increased Indian educational opportunities, more economic development programs, better health care, the abolition of ten Bureau of Indian Affairs area offices, and the protection of Indian water rights. This document is credited with promoting development and greater awareness of American Indian concerns nationwide, as well as sparking the creation of the National Indian Youth Council.⁸⁴ The Chicago community would become known for its organizations, and its members for being consummate organizers; this later bore out in the Chicago American Indian Organizations Conference in 1981.

In times past, they have concentrated in the Uptown neighborhood, but today they live throughout the city and suburbs of Chicago, which is represented by the two locations the American Indian Center now manages: the American Indian Center on Wilson Ave. in the city, and the AIC Trickster Gallery in Schaumburg, IL. Community members live in both neighborhoods (Figure 9 below).

Anthropologist Terry Straus and community member Debra Valentino write “in the early twentieth century, Chicago had an Indian population (188 were counted in the 1910 census), but no Indian *community*.”⁸⁵ They locate the beginning of this community with “purposeful gatherings” in the 1920s.⁸⁶ What began as social organization eventually turned to social service as well as more Indians were pushed (through federal Relocation programs) or pulled (with the hope of jobs) to the city.⁸⁷

could hasten the break up of the reservations and terminate its fiduciary and legal responsibilities to the tribes.

⁸⁴ Based on NAES College archives, Sol Tax collection.

⁸⁵ A. Terry Straus and Debra Valentino, "Gender and Community Organization Leadership in the Chicago Indian Community," *American Indian Quarterly* 27, no. 3&4 (2003): 523.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*: 524.

⁸⁷ About 25% of the Indian community came through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) relocation program between 1940 and 1960. For additional accounts of the Chicago urban Indian community, see for example David Beck, *The Chicago American Indian Community, 1893-1988 : Annotated Bibliography and Guide to Sources in Chicago* (Chicago, Ill.: NAES College Press, 1988), LaGrand, *Indian Metropolis : Native Americans in Chicago, 1945-75*, Terry Straus and Grant P. Arndt, *Native Chicago*, ed. Terry Straus and Grant Arndt (Chicago: McNaughton and Gunn, Inc., 1998).



Figure 9: Map of AIC locations in and near Chicago (based on mapquest.com).



Figure 10: The American Indian Center of Chicago.

The American Indian Center of Chicago, first called the All Tribes Indian Center, was established in 1953 (Figure 10 above). In 1954, the AIC hosted its first powwow; by 1957 the AIC broke away from BIA support, and by the 1970s the “Relocation era” was over.⁸⁸ Beck explains that “people created new ‘families’ in their organizational affiliations,”⁸⁹ and during my time at the AIC members did refer to it as a family. The different organizations in the city provided an important “web of support” for community members, who still today suffer from economic and social hardships at disproportional rates to the surrounding population.⁹⁰

What is common among the co-curators is their commitment to the urban Indian population as a community that they maintain through their own tribal practices and acts of participation and volunteerism, often in service of addressing the hardships fellow community members face. The Chicago exhibit lists the co-curators, and their tribal affiliation and the roles they chose to define themselves for the purposes of the exhibit:

This exhibit was developed in collaboration with the following Chicago Native curators: Cyndee Fox-Starr (Omaha/Odawa), American Indian Health Service of Chicago, Inc.; Mavis Neconish (Menominee/Potawatomi), collection management assistant, The Field Museum; Patricia Xerikos (Anishinaabe/Colombian), American Indian Center (AIC) Advisory Board; Rita Hodge (Diné), Native American Support Program, University of Illinois at Chicago; Cynthia Soto (Sicangu Lakota/Puerto Rican), Citywide American Indian Education Council; David Spencer (Chata/Diné), AIC fundraising developer; Susan Power (Dakota/Yanktonai), founding member of AIC, historian, and elder; Ansel Deon (Sioux/Navajo), AIC cultural coordinator; and Joe Podlasek (Ojibwe/Polish), AIC executive director. Not pictured: Jayne Wapahnok Blacker (Menominee/Potawatomi), student, University of Illinois at Chicago.

⁸⁸ Beck, "The Chicago American Indian Community.", Grant P. Arndt, "Relocation's Imagined Landscape and the Rise of Chicago's Native American Community," in *Native Chicago*, ed. Terry Straus and Grant Arndt (Chicago: McNaughton and Gunn, Inc., 1998).

⁸⁹ Beck, "The Chicago American Indian Community," 174.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 175.

These co-curators represent not only the many tribes of this urban community, but also the diverse experiences of Natives in the city—some coming before Relocation, others whose families arrived due to this legislation or on their own as job seekers; some were born in the city, others arrived with their parents; and again, some were “Indian center babies” and became members of the AIC community as young children or teens, while others connected more deeply to their Native heritage later in their adult lives. And, there was a concerted effort among co-curators to include the generational perspectives of the community, from elders to middle age to youth.

When I first arrived in Chicago in the spring of 2005, the community had just celebrated the opening of the American Indian Center’s Trickster Gallery in Schaumburg, IL. Dedicated to displaying contemporary Native American arts, the gallery was a source of excitement for most but also consternation for a few, who felt that this suburban site would divert time, money and staff from the main AIC location in the city. AIC staff were debating what kind of displays the gallery would present and whether it should resemble an art gallery or a museum. The other major focus of community meetings and excitement and debate was over the AIC powwow, such as how to run it, how to advertise it, and to what extent AIC staff should formally be involved in its operation. This powwow is a major annual event every November that draws Native Americans from all different tribes and from all over the nation and Canada to the University of Illinois arena to dance competitively, to visit the various craft booths, and to reunite with or make new friends.

Kalinago and Chicago communities were in part forged, or reconstituted, through the work of activism and increased cultural awareness and pride linked to the “Red Power” movement in the United States. Grant Arndt explains the ironic twist and unintended consequence of the assimilationist policy embodied in the Relocation

Program: rather than “dismantle” the reservations, it created a “new form of community through which American Indians could take a unified stand *on behalf of* both their reservation homelands and their lives in urban America. Using the American Indian Center as their platform;” in the words of an AIC director cited in a newspaper article in 1957: “It is a sad mistake to say Indians are a voiceless people. ...we have a voice and we are voicing a unified stand.”⁹¹

The “Core” of the Our Lives Project

There was a “Core Team” in OL, and I noticed that co-curators in Chicago and the Carib Territory also called three individuals from each committee the “core” members contributing to exhibit development. Kalinago and Chicago co-curators said one of the greatest challenges was getting the group of co-curators to all come to the meetings; those who showed most consistently, met on their own, and worked most with the documents and scripts provided by the NMAI were the core. I did career/life histories with the co-curators in each community, but provide brief introductions below only to the core members (not only did they have more intimate knowledge of the various aspects of producing the exhibition, but they also were among those who visited NMAI for the grand opening and so they contributed more feedback on the process, as evidenced in Chapters 4 and 6).⁹²

All of the “core team members” for the OL gallery were relatively young women, and for many it was their first time working on such a large project; for some, like myself, it was their first time working in a museum. Cynthia Chavez and Taryn

⁹¹ Arndt, "Relocation's Imagined Landscape and the Rise of Chicago's Native American Community," 126. Emphasis mine: I return to this notion of “acting on behalf” in Chapter 3 and the Conclusion. In Grant’s analysis, the move to the city was “transformative” and refigured the reservation as “homeland,” “repository of traditions and history” and a “reminder of unjust treatment” by the U.S. government.

⁹² I do not intend to diminish the significant impacts of the other community curators in any way, but for the sake of this particular account and brevity, I only focus here on six of them.

Salinas (née Costanzo) were core members from Curatorial, later joined by Arwen Nuttall (Cherokee). Cynthia was just finishing her PhD in American Studies⁹³ when she began working as a research assistant in contemporary art at the NMAI. She transitioned to the position of lead curator of *Our Lives* while completing her dissertation to earn a Ph.D. in American Studies and with the encouragement and support of senior managers Bruce Bernstein and Gerald McMaster. She often returned to her home at San Felipe Pueblo for family visits and cultural ceremonies. Ann McMullen, though not a “core” team member, was the head of the Curatorial department and was assigned as the fieldworker for the OL Pamunkey exhibit due to her expertise in New England tribes.⁹⁴

Cynthia’s immaculate and sparse office was contrasted with Ann’s cluttered and overburdened shelves and desk surface, filled with books and stacks of papers and hints of color from “sticky notes” everywhere; she also had jokes and comics about cats pinned up across the window to her office and mechanical punching dolls among other knick knacks on her shelves. Ann was always working in her office due to the impossible number of projects she contributed to as well as a love for the work itself. Cynthia, too, loved the work she was responsible for, and so for a large part of the time she was gone from the office, visiting OL communities.

One of the more surprising insights I gained through recording life histories with Kalinago co-curators was that a number of them had all read *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*⁹⁵ and had been a part of what they referred to as “the CLM.” I had asked Prosper what his favorite book was. He mentioned he had read *Bury My Heart*

⁹³ Cynthia Chavez, "Negotiated Representations: Pueblo Artists and Culture (New Mexico)" (Ph.D., University of New Mexico, 2001).

⁹⁴ Ann McMullen, "Culture by Design : Native Identity, Historiography, and the Reclamation of Tradition in Twentieth-Century Southeastern New England " (Dissertation, Brown University, 1996).

⁹⁵ Dee Alexander Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee; an Indian History of the American West*, [1st ed. (New York,: Holt, 1971).

at *Wounded Knee* in the late 1980s and explained that it was first introduced by Garnette and then circulated among a close “circle” of Kalinagos. People in this circle included Irvince, Prosper, Garnette, and Sylvanie.

For the Kalinago, the “core” members were Garnette, Sylvanie and Prosper. They were all members at one point of the Karifuna cultural group; Prosper was still in charge of it. Garnette was a former chief and well-respected for his intelligence and commitment to the community, Sylvanie was referred to as a “daughter of the soil” by Dominica government officials, and Prosper was called a “cultural icon” by everyone. These three individuals were involved in almost every kind of community project that was underway. Sylvanie was well known for her successful grant writing⁹⁶ and Prosper for his vast knowledge about Kalinago culture and history. Both Garnette and Sylvanie had graduate degrees from an indigenous theater program in Canada; Garnette also had training in business administration and Sylvanie had done a course in England in rural poverty alleviation. Prosper was a self-taught cultural scholar.

For the Chicago, their “core” was Rita Hodge, Joe Podlasek, and Cyndee Fox Starr. Rita, like Cynthia, often returned to her own Native community from the city. These individuals, like the Kalinago co-curators, were dedicated to volunteerism and involved in many community projects, most often associated with or hosted by the American Indian Center. Rita’s daughter Nizhoni worked at the AIC, Joe was its director, and Cyndee ran the elders’ program there. Rita worked for the University of Illinois at Chicago American Indian program, and had a keen interest in helping Native kids excel and cope with life in the city. Joe had worked in computers and been a technical engineer at the Chicago Historical Society before his director position at the AIC; he was a fierce negotiator and an able networker, constantly on the lookout

⁹⁶ Sylvanie was also well known—and unique—in that she had a salaried, steady job with a husband who also worked regularly (as a fisherman). Together they had two automobiles, were able to get bank loans, and had a cement block house and plans for retirement.

for ways to bring revenue in to the AIC (a nonprofit organization) to maintain staff salaries and improve programs for the community at large. Cyndee had a heart of gold and an infectious laugh, and she cared not only for elders in the community but also its youth. Along with Rita, Cyndee participated in the Enter the Circle program where they taught kids how to sew dance clothes and introduced them to powwow.

All of these individuals, their individual histories and experiences, shaped the content and expression of identity in the *Our Lives* exhibition. As Cynthia and co-curators acknowledged to me, had a different group been selected to be on the co-curator committee, or had the exhibit been created at a different point in time, they had no doubt that it would have come out different.

Conclusion

By framing the exhibition as field site, I was able to document not only the interaction between and among curators and co-curators in this process but also the unique personal histories of these individuals that contributed to the whole. Over the course of the development of the *Our Lives* gallery, as each new person joined the project, and through their own personal history and perspective on what is Native identity, they shaped and changed the structure and content of the exhibition. Ironically, while the exhibits are about, for example, the Kalinago or American Indians of Chicago, their everyday life and identity were far less defined by the museum than those who worked at the NMAI. All the co-curators had other jobs and programs that they were working on, besides providing for their families. This was not their life's work, even if, according to Kalinago co-curator Sylvanie, it made her life seem more meaningful for having participated in it.

This became clear to me one day exactly one month into my fieldwork in Dominica in 2005 when I wrote in my notebook: "all of a sudden asking people about

the museum seems ridiculous. It's such a small part of their lives, there's so much else going on." I realized that people at the NMAI wanted to talk about the museum and curation process. It was as if they needed someone outside the office to talk to, to sort out their thoughts about it, to explain what could have been. Staff often welcomed the unusual opportunity to "reflect" on their work or engage in the bigger questions of its meaning, and two staff members called it "therapeutic," another "cathartic." Making the exhibitions consumed almost every day of their lives for four years or more, and will continue to be a part of who they are and how they define themselves. It was their life's work; their career paths were affected by the results on display, and their reputations as museum professionals were laid bare to their colleagues in the exhibition walls and multimedia for judgment.

In the Native communities, however, co-curators experienced a number of brief but intense visits by NMAI staff over the course of three years. In fact, Kalinago co-curators frankly told me they were skeptical all along that anything would come of their work, until the media crew showed up. People were happy about the result but it was clear they did not have their whole professional identities and personal lives tied up in it.

These communities were hopeful that sharing their own lives through exhibition, they would become more visible through a museum that would be visited by millions of people each year. Although both communities had hosted significant historical milestones in the history of the hemisphere that had wide ranging consequences for Native people—the first encounter with Europeans and the 1961 American Indian Chicago Conference that produced the "Declaration of Indian Purpose," further inspiring the Red Power movement nationwide—they remained largely invisible in contemporary literature, popular imagination, and public and political spheres both nationally and internationally.

Both Native communities also shared a kind of common past: they had reunited after devastating campaigns against their existence and lifeways by foreign governments. For the Kalinago, it was the Spanish who committed genocide to the point where most people, including scholars, believe there are no longer Native peoples in the Caribbean. For the Chicago community, Native individuals and families came from many reservations—some more recently, some to escape the impoverished conditions due to the removal of Native peoples from their lands to reservations, or by a relocation program that was part of the termination policies of the U.S. government. In both cases, these communities revived *as* communities,⁹⁷ though they remained marginalized by the dominant societies in which they live as well as the wider family of indigenous peoples. As for the NMAI museum professionals, over time they marginalized the curatorial staff within the exhibition process and the museum institution. I detail their roles and relations within the museum in the next chapter.

⁹⁷ Arndt, "Relocation's Imagined Landscape and the Rise of Chicago's Native American Community.", Joseph, "Five Hundred Years of Resistance."

INTERCHAPTER
(1.5)
NAASA 2003

A New Indigenous Discourse

The Native American Art Studies Association (NAASA) meetings November 5-6, 2003 at the Peabody-Essex Museum in Salem, MA were in part organized by Karen Kramer, a former NMAI research assistant and project manager who had worked on what was then called the “Northwest Coast exhibit,” later titled *Listening to Our Ancestors: Art and Life along the North Pacific Coast*. This particular year emphasized issues of collaboration and postmodernism in exhibition making. Throughout the entire conference, collaboration was advocated as proper and productive museum practice by Native and non-Native individuals alike. But rather than rendering collaboration as simply practice, they presented it as an antidote of sorts to postmodernism. For example, various participants in the meetings talked about postmodern theory and moving “beyond” it, turning to “collaboration,” and, the need for Native people to be permanently employed by institutions (rather than be “consultants”).

I was told by a curator that NAASA meetings used to be more object focused, with mainly art historians and anthropologists in attendance. But, in more recent years, including this one as evidenced by NMAI staff who attended, there was greater emphasis on contemporary Native art, and Native artists participated regularly in the biennial meetings. NMAI staff who presented included Gerald McMaster (Plains Cree/Siksika Nation), Paul Chaat Smith (Comanche), Jolene Rickard (Tuscarora; NMAI guest curator), and Truman Lowe (Ho-Chunk; curator). Truman, curator of the NMAI inaugural exhibition *Native Modernism: The Art of George Morrison and Allan Houser*, was the keynote speaker for the conference. They were all Native scholars

who worked at or with the museum in curatorial roles (mainly for the NMAI-curated portions of the exhibitions, except for Truman). Paul was also a book author and essayist, Jolene an artist and university professor of art history, Truman a sculptor and university professor of art, and Gerald had a doctorate from the Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis. The emphasis of museum staff at this conference seemed three fold: to showcase the exhibition concepts they were working on, to assure that real collaboration was underway at the museum, and to demonstrate their theoretical acuity. None of the NMAI curators who worked on community exhibits were present.

NMAI staff participated in the plenary session titled, “A New Indigenous Discourse: Beyond Post-Modernism in Contemporary Native American Art.” Gerald McMaster was the discussant for this session. In his remarks he noted that there would be “postcolonial tension” as people came into the NMAI and that the museum was coming to terms with Native voice, “beyond the ‘ventriloquist acts’ of the past few years.” He said there was now a “new paradigm” of “collaboration” with indigenous peoples and that this style of collaboration was happening on a “daily basis” at the NMAI—“it is not a trendy buzz word, it is really happening.”

In the “Museum Collaborations with Communities” session, John Grimes (Director, Peabody Essex Museum) said that his museum was the most recent “convert” to the collaborative point of view. Like Gerald, he advocated for what was occurring now: “real collaboration” and “not tokenism,” where Native individuals would “have a real voice” and “not be a prop.” In the second part of this session, the Canadian Museum of Civilization’s Andrea Laforet and Gloria Cranmer Webster of the U’Mista Cultural Center (who would later work on *Listening to Our Ancestors* as an NMAI community curator) gave a joint paper “about big museums and Indians.” They talked about “power,” and how the older theory was that the curator is where power was localized; collaboration, they said, was broadened this, citing Michel

Foucault. They explained that, as the exhibition moved forward, power became located at different offices at different times, but not in the committee or curatorial members of the committee, where people often assume authority resides. They added, “It’s a ‘gray hair’ process.”

Similarly, in his presentation Paul Chaat Smith mentioned that, before coming to the NMAI, he had heard all the rumors about the NMAI being “dysfunctional,” a “warfare between tribes,” and a “big mess.” “All true!” he added, and the audience laughed. The “NMAI is a preposterous venture,” he continued, and said it would be under intense scrutiny, as it has “grown up in public.” Part of its growing up in public was through academic conferences like this one that both exposed it to critique but also allowed NMAI staff to frame it in specific ways to a particular kind of audience before it opened (how effective this framing was can be gleaned from Chapter 6). Chapters 2 and 3 explore the dynamics of the institution and why some NMAI staff members did indeed feel like it was a “gray hair” process..

CHAPTER 2

BUREAUCRACY

*Because we're doing something for the first time, and we know no matter what you do, whether it's creating purchase orders, feeding paper all day, or doing what you've done— talking to communities and moving objects— it's like, you've touched generations. And you've truly made an impact, whether you meet those people or not, whether they say it to you or not, you can always say, "You know what? I changed and I've impacted people."*¹

-Downtown staff member

*You know, if there was a point three or four years ago where all of us in Curatorial had a mental picture of what we were creating and it was an elephant... now, throughout this process, we have three legs of an elephant, it's got, like, a jackass's head, it's got somebody else's tail on it. Because that's basically what we've done, each one of the exhibits is a Frankenstein monster in its own way.*²

-CRC staff member

First Encounter: A return

Within minutes of my arrival at the Cultural Resources Center in Suitland, Maryland to start my fieldwork in June of 2004, I was greeted by a former Curatorial colleague who said, "Wanna go outside?" He sat with me on a bench in the shade, filling me in on what life was like there now. My impression of the CRC from when I worked there several years earlier was that it was a bustling and energetic site of activity, but his characterization that the NMAI was really just a "shell" indicated

¹ Interview with Tanya Thrasher, Communications Coordinator for the Mall Transition Team, in the NMAI cafeteria, October 25, 2004.

² Interview with Ann McMullen, Curator, November 23, 2004. She explains this statement further: "because there is no single vision of what was supposed to happen. There's no single vision of the mission of the institution, there's no single vision of what Native voice might be, there's no single vision or belief in what that dotted line or iron curtain is between community curation and NMAI design. It's always this negotiated thing."

great changes in the intervening years. He was not alone, as a number of staff would later intimate to me that the CRC felt like a “ghost town.”³

The image and feeling of a ghost town reflected the loss of personnel (mainly researchers and people who worked on the Move Team transferring objects from New York to Suitland), but also a change in morale as well. In 2002, there were probably around 145 people working in the CRC building; by 2006, there were less than 75.⁴ In 2004, many CRC staff members had left or were facing the ends of their terms and knew they would not be renewed, while the Mall Museum in Washington, DC was ramping up staff and hiring cultural interpreters and other public program employees. CRC staff members were concerned about their job security, and the main work of the research assistants in Curatorial was two fold: arranging travel plans for community curators to come to the opening of the museum in September, and archiving years of accumulated research documents they had produced before they were let go from their jobs.

A shift in focus and activity from the CRC to the Mall Museum was underway in the summer of 2004. Installation—the actual building of the exhibits and placement of objects in cases (see Chapter 5 for more detail)— was just about to begin at the Mall Museum for the *Our Lives* gallery. By the time I left the museum in December 2004, the curators and Curatorial research assistants had experienced a swing from the exhilaration of the opening week to the tedium of printing, indexing and boxing up related documents to be placed in the archives in the basement of the CRC. A number of desks at which people had worked were now occupied instead with storage boxes filled with papers files (Figure 11 below).

³ Conversation with Casey MacPherson, outside the CRC entryway, June 2, 2004.

⁴ Conversation with Jane Sledge, in the CRC “James Bond” (large) meeting room, March 16, 2006. After an institution-wide departmental reorganization, she was named Associate Director of the newly titled “Museum Assets Operations Group.”



Figure 11: Desk in the Curatorial Department at the CRC. November 24, 2004.

In 1999, however, the CRC was a forward looking, lively place. It was populated by a mainly young, “idealistic” crowd of Native and non-Native individuals, as one person recalled, utterly excited for the opportunity to work at the museum—whether for contact with the objects, or for the opportunity to “give voice” to Native people in a museum context. For myself at that time, having studied indigenous rights in Australia, the Arctic, the Amazon, and U.S. federal Indian law, the last thing I wanted was to work in a museum. But I was convinced, like many others, that, because of the institution’s unique mission and commitment to collaborate with Native peoples, it was indeed going to be a “museum different.”

So, imagine a small group of people working on a monumental task—unique to each department but no less daunting and requiring long hours—whether it was to open a new museum, to move the entire collection of over 800,000 objects from New

York to Maryland, or to create the inaugural exhibitions in collaboration with over 24 tribes. The staff knew there was far more work to be done than their numbers could handle, but everyone felt, as many described in similar words to me during my fieldwork, “the struggle was worth it.”

In addition, most people at the CRC first entered into this social and work group as newcomers, working toward a mission-oriented goal. A number of us would often scarf down our food to play hackeysack outside in the 20 minute lunch period allotted, and after work on Fridays we would play volleyball next door on the NMNH’s Museum Support Center lawn before heading to our respective homes, or perhaps to someone’s place to play cards. It was a small, hardworking, and very social group of young people. In other words, for the first couple years, it very much felt like the frenzy and dedication of a small NGO.⁵

By 2004, as one staff member explained, she was sad to see the “loss of naiveté” in everyone over the years.⁶ I also noticed when I returned in 2004 that CRC staff lunches were longer, people rarely spent time outside of work together in groups, no one played sports together anymore, and most employees wanted to get away from work and were reticent to work overtime. In staff member’s terms, it had become “just a job,” rather than what had, to many, felt like a vocation. Some individuals felt that senior management was trying to “get rid” of all the early Curatorial staff members, who could only be disappointed at the final results of the exhibitions. They needed people without the experience of that “honeymoon period,” who could be more practical, to continue the work of the museum, people reported to me.⁷

⁵ A large blow to the cohesiveness and morale in the Curatorial Department in particular was the loss of Craig Howe a year later in 2000. He was widely respected within the department for his intelligence, vision, mentorship, and ethics.

⁶ Conversation with Fran Biehl, at her cubicle at the CRC, March 29, 2004.

⁷ Conversation with RA’s, at lunch, July 9, 2004.

In many ways, this story could be told as a shift from what felt like start-up company—a mission-oriented, experimental and tight-knit group of enthusiasts transplanted from other places to the CRC⁸— to a large and increasingly impersonal bureaucracy that rationalized and made more “efficient” the practice of community curating with increasing oversight by other departments. In fact, the new Associate Director as of 2006, Tim Johnson, emphasized his goal of making the museum more “business-like” in an interview.⁹ By 2006, the Curatorial department would be disbanded and much of the CRC desks empty. But how did that come about? And what contributed to these changes?

To address these questions, I attempt to “look past objects”¹⁰ in the museum, where they are usually the center of analysis. Past attempts at the anthropology of museums have generally been theoretical rather than ethnographic, focusing on the context and history of collecting,¹¹ the historical and changing methods of display and curatorial practice,¹² and the circulation and valuation of art and museum objects.¹³ I

⁸ I am indebted to Pamela Smart for this apt analogy; I had earlier relied on a comparison with NGOs, but a start-up company evokes far more the freedom, experimentalism and dedication that I had hoped to capture by comparison. What I mean by experimental here is their willingness to try new forms of representation in the museum, which included their model of community curating, visits regularly with communities, and sharing curatorial authority on a grand scale—keeping in mind that they were developing exhibitions with twenty-four communities all at the same time.

⁹ Conversation with Tim Johnson, in his office at the Mall Museum, April 13, 2006.

¹⁰ Reacting to the regional literature, Iris Jean-Klein explains her research about Palestine as an attempt to “see past the political” in a place where it is always studied (personal communication, 3/27/03). This has inspired my wording here.

¹¹ O'Hanlon, *Paradise: Portraying the New Guinea Highlands*, Anthony Alan Shelton, "Museums in an Age of Cultural Hybridity," *Folk* 43 (2001).

¹² Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums*, Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Cultural Broker: A View from the Smithsonian* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997).

¹³ Shelly Errington, "What Became Authentic Primitive Art?," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 2 (1994), Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture : Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*, Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher Steiner, "Art, Authenticity and the Baggage of Cultural Encounter," in *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*, ed. Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

instead emphasize in this chapter the museum as bureaucracy, an institution that is a gathering place of diverse knowledge practices¹⁴ and a “place of work.”¹⁵

I am interested here in how bureaucracy itself did or did not come into view for these experts in their work, how they characterized it, and when it became apparent to them and why. To begin, I turn to the material conditions and departmental dynamics of the museum, for these are the conditions and relations that both affected the community curating process as well as were significantly impacted by it. By using the viewing device of center and periphery when considering bureaucratic power, I hope to provide a sense of perspective that is uniquely achieved through a multi-sited approach to ethnography.

Beyond an attention to social relations and departmental perspectives in the workplace, I also provide insight to this particular kind of “cultural bureaucracy” through its artifacts.¹⁶ By focusing on documents, I highlight the ways in which the NMAI contained at once routinized form and creative practice, structured rules and flexible interpretations, in its attempt to fulfill its commitment to collaborate with Native communities. What comes to light through these documents is not readily apparent in the exhibitions or observable in interactions among museum staff. The documents record a changing relation, increasingly structured by bureaucratic procedure, between Native communities and the museum. They provide insight into the various forms of social and ethical relations that the museum engendered—collaborative and contractual, interpersonal and institutional—with its Native partners.

¹⁴ Bouquet, ed., *Academic Anthropology and the Museum: Back to the Future*, 195.

¹⁵ Jonathon Friedman, "Museums, the State and Global Transformation: From Temple of the Muses to Temple of Amusements," *FOLK* 43 (2001): 265.

¹⁶ I am indebted to Annelise Riles' work for leading me to the concept of documents *as* artifacts (of bureaucracy and modernity, more generally). See Riles, *Documents : Artifacts of Modern Knowledge*.

The Museum as a Creative Bureaucracy

A central part of this ethnography is the attention to the institutional dynamics and bureaucratic nature of the NMAI. I use the term “creative bureaucracy” to highlight the tensions between the artistic and the bureaucratic knowledge practices of the museum as it engages in script, design and exhibit planning. I also use this term to reference the ways in which the NMAI dealt with the intersection between bureaucratic and Native sensibilities—the ways in which the museum responded to the needs and ethics of Native peoples by creatively navigating the Smithsonian rules and regulations in its quest for best practice in the museum (see “Artifacts of Bureaucracy” below).

When the Museum of the American Indian became the *National* Museum of the American Indian, it was incorporated into the Smithsonian Institution—a branch of the federal government that is in part funded by allocations from Congress. And, like other government organizations, the NMAI has fixed salary levels (“GS levels”), purchase orders, a vendor system, and extensive regulatory oversight. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the collaboration *within* the museum that is the foundation and structural support for the collaborations that occurred outside the institution in Native communities (the focus of Chapter 4).

There are few studies that highlight this dimension of museum practice; instead, they focus on material culture or its display.¹⁷ Neither has the anthropology of institutions literature provided insight to the museum, as it has focused mainly on the state,¹⁸ “total institutions,”¹⁹ service bureaucracies,²⁰ and scientific and academic

¹⁷ For exceptions, see for example Macdonald, *Behind the Scenes at the Science Museum*, Kahn, “Not Really Pacific Voices: Politics of Representation in Collaborative Museum Exhibits.”

¹⁸ Catherine Alexander, *Personal States : Making Connections between People and Bureaucracy in Turkey*, Oxford Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine : "Development", Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Cambridge England ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Michael

institutions.²¹ However, a notable exception is Georgina Born's *Rationalizing Culture*.²² She writes about the Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique (IRCAM), which is a state-subsidized institution in Paris that promotes and develops avant-garde music through collaboration between computer technicians and musicians. She discusses the "collaborative ideal" and tensions between artistic and bureaucratic practices. Considering Born's IRCAM and the NMAI as models, I add to the literature another ethnography of what Born terms a "cultural bureaucracy," highlighting the unique nature of, and tensions within, institutions where artistic and bureaucratic practices contribute to cultural production.

Like IRCAM, the NMAI is also a cultural institution that is state subsidized. Born considers IRCAM within the broader "sphere of subsidized high culture," which she points out is lacking ethnographic engagement.²³ In addition, she also notes another oversight—the lack of distinction in the literature about cultural institutions (especially in the field of cultural studies) between culture as "lived" versus culture as "professionally produced."²⁴ At the NMAI, however, it is both at once: culture lived (by the Native communities) is culture that is professionally produced (by the NMAI staff).

Herzfeld, *The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992).

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), Erving Goffman, *Asylums; Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co., 1962).

²⁰ Michael Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1980).

²¹ Donald Brenneis, "Discourse and Discipline at the National Research Council: A Bureaucratic Bildungsroman," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 1 (1994), Gusterson, *Nuclear Rites: A Weapons Laboratory at the End of the Cold War*, Latour, *Laboratory Life*, Zabusky, *Launching Europe: An Ethnography of European Cooperation in Space Science*.

²² Born, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde*.

²³ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

The similarities between the institutions indicate they are of similar bureaucratic type; this extends from their classification as cultural institutions, the tensions between experts within the institution, and the coming together of technical and artistic expertise and practices in everyday work. There is also a similar desire to elucidate the collaborative relationships, bureaucratic pressures, and notion of crisis in the institution. Born describes how IRCAM composers are experiencing crisis as both aesthetic and sociological;²⁵ in this case, crisis is related to issues of representation and past relations between Native peoples and museums. Accordingly, I consider Born's account of IRCAM in comparison with the NMAI as essential to illuminating the questions: What is a cultural bureaucracy? What does it have to offer to the anthropology of institutions? What does rendering the NMAI in this relief "do"—what does it bring into the foreground that is otherwise often overlooked in museum studies?

Smithsonian Institution Models of Knowledge Production

In 2006, to better understand how the NMAI fit into the wider Smithsonian family of museums, I sat down with sociologist Andrew Pekarik who worked at the SI's Office of Policy and Analysis (OP and A).²⁶ His job was to conduct exhibition evaluations and interview visitors for all of the Smithsonian museums. From his vantage point, he provided a comparison of NMAI to the other Smithsonian museums, explaining there are "distinctive methods" for exhibit making at each SI museum. For example, at the Sackler art museum, the curator "calls all the shots," except for the title of the exhibition or public relations issues. The curator is the "decision maker," and there is a designer-curator relation that is a "struggle of near equals." The curator

²⁵ Ibid., 6.

²⁶ Conversation with Andrew Pekarik, in his office at the Arts and Industries building, May 23, 2006.

is also “in charge” at the National Museum of American History, but the team he or she oversees includes an education person (“as the visitor voice” he added) and an official project manager (so that the curator is “spared” from doing budgets, etc.).

At the National Museum of Natural History, there is a core group plus the project manager who runs the meetings, and “every person in the team has veto power.” If the team cannot come to consensus on something, the disagreement is settled by the assistant director (who does not have specific knowledge on the issue). The assistant director usually “sides” with the person whose professional expertise is more relevant to the discrepancy—designer or curator—depending on the nature of the disagreement. Because the team does not want the decision made by the assistant director, they usually work until the “curator comes around,” and there is a “compromise.”

“An Absence of Rules”

But the NMAI, Andrew asserted, is a “new situation.” The NMAI staff were reconstructing the (exhibit making) model at the same time they were constructing the exhibits. The idea was that the “world of Native communities meets professionalized world of exhibit development, and makes original, effective exhibits... But neither the exhibit development or the community people had a sense of the visitor dimension.” He explained there was “no prior testing,” “no diversity in presentation.” And, he critiqued the NMAI for using the “standard message model,” where the exhibit is a medium of communication that delivers the messages, and the visitor is a “passive recipient.” Only a small group of visitors receive messages, he added— never more than 50% of visitors at the SI “get” the “main message.” He asked, are the rest “just losers,” then? He explained that the NMAI as a group follows the “message model” as opposed to a “service model” (what Andrew supports), which focuses on “what

people need,” or how it can benefit them, and you try to use resources to find the “middle ground” between “delivering and benefiting.” (Here, for Andrew, a “service model” is with reference to serving the public or even more specifically a majority of Euro-American visitors. NMAI Curatorial might have also considered their work a service model, but with respect to Native communities.)

The NMAI style of exhibit development had a “lot of conflict,” he continued, and the curator power changed a lot over time at the NMAI. In the past, they were “like the god calling all the shots,” and there was a lot of conflict between curator and designer. “I knew the designer was way more right,”²⁷ he added, and there was “no way to resolve it like at American History” with its long list of rules learned through prior failures. When the NMAH team is at an impasse, it goes “upstairs.” Plus, they have “rules,” which prompt them to ask is whether the impasse is related more to the “expertise of the designer or curator?” “Content versus placement?” What NMAI lacked, he felt, was “motivation” to build “consensus” like at the NMAH.

The NMAI, then, in the “absence of rules” ended up being about how “two characters can or can’t get along,” he concluded. It becomes “interpersonal politics.” Then, the program manager controls the budget and schedule, which in the end gets taken over by “deadlines.” And that’s how the decisions get made. At one point he commented, “It’s obvious, I’m pro-visitor.”²⁸

The “OP&A” perspective was, then, that NMAI staff were inexperienced and that there needed to be more emphasis on visitor needs and formal procedures. But in a museum that has a separate constituency from its visitors, this created a split in museum division of labor and responsibility as to which group to prioritize: the

²⁷ As I note elsewhere, and what is likely the case here, people who provided generalized analysis of the NMAI exhibitions were often referring to the personnel, events and subject matter of the *Our Peoples* gallery.

²⁸ I responded in my field notes: “I wonder to myself—what is the opposite of pro-visitor? Anti-visitor? Pro-curator? Pro-Native communities? It seems a false dichotomy to me.” Field notes, May 23, 2006.

constituency (tribes) or the audience (visitors), a classification that is also present in NMAI rhetoric. Common characterizations from within the museum seemed to map neatly these concerns and constituencies onto the separate locations of the NMAI, referred to as the *CRC* and *downtown*.

Bureaucracy at the Center

At the Native American Art Studies conference in Salem, Massachusetts in November of 2003 (detailed in the previous interchapter), I met Ruth Phillips, a widely-respected curator who has long worked with Native peoples on collaborative exhibits and with exhibition teams within her own institution, the Canadian Museum of Civilization.²⁹ We had both elected to go on a pre-conference tour of the Pequot Museum in Connecticut, and at lunch she encouraged everyone to introduce themselves. She later asked me more specifically about my research at the NMAI. I described to her what I was currently experiencing during fieldwork—the installation process in the *Our Lives* gallery—and explained what had seemed surprising to me (the amount of waiting these professionals did). She said this was not an uncommon scene in a large museum.

I described how there were three contracted mount makers, three people from the collections department, two conservators, a curator and curatorial research assistant, one person from registration, and a program manager gathered in the unfinished gallery (Figure 12 below). The three contracted mount makers worked non-stop, placing objects in cases, when the fabrication process (the construction of the walls and cases in the exhibit) wasn't holding them up. At the same time, all the other individuals much of the time would be standing there, watching them. The

²⁹ She wrote the introduction to a recent edited volume on museum collaborations: Ruth B. Phillips, "Community Collaboration in Exhibitions: Introduction," in *Museums and Source Communities : A Routledge Reader*, ed. Laura L. Peers and Alison K. Brown (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003).

pressure! Their poise! Each staff member had a specific job to do—whether cleaning the glass case cover, rolling objects on the cart in and out of a storage room, scanning barcodes, suggesting slight changes to object placement, making object mount notes, or dusting the case. But between performing their delimited tasks, many of them stood around talking or they would bring books and sit somewhere out of the way to read. Much of the time was spent waiting for a task that would take minutes to perform. But, they had to be present.



Figure 12: NMAI staff and contractors installing objects in the Kahnawake Mohawk exhibit (from left: curator Cynthia, mount maker Abbey, Registrar Maria, and RA Arwen). September 2, 2004.

Dr. Philips explained this seemingly inefficient process as a result of the increasing professionalization of museum departments, which happens most in large museums like the NMAI (and the Canadian Museum of Civilization, where she

worked on the First Peoples Hall). She had similar stories of infighting, frustration, power plays and compromise. We talked about how each group becomes more insular in its expertise as well as more territorial about it.

As the installation scene shows, many specialized departments participate in the process of making the exhibition and installing it. Each department relied on its own technical language, documentation practices, and forms of organizing and transmitting information to contribute to their part of the exhibit making process. They are indeed unique cultures of expertise; however, they are also in constant collaboration, a choreographed performance of various knowledge practices and products that must come together to create the exhibition.

“Teamwork”

While there was constant talk of “collaboration” with Native communities, the work within the museum was almost never referred to as “collaboration” and instead was often called “teamwork.” The *Our Lives* “core” and “extended” team members were from *downtown* and the *CRC*. A year after Curatorial began working on the current and final instantiation of the *Our Lives* gallery, the whole *Our Lives* team convened for the first time in February of 2002. In a document titled “Our Lives Core Team Meeting Summary,” the project manager, Jennifer Miller, listed each person’s “roles and responsibilities” (I have added where each person’s office is located).³⁰

Carolyn Rapkievian, Educator & Public Programs Liaison [*downtown*]

- Primary task is educator assigned to *Our Lives*. This role helps to articulate messages to visitors, with emphasis on multiple communication methods to reach all visitors.

³⁰ “This was the first meeting of the *Our Lives* core team. The meeting goals were to define roles and responsibilities, and to address communication needs and next steps.” From Jennifer Miller’s meeting notes provided to the OL team via “Ohana,” the NMAI intranet website. Dated February 25, 2002.

- As Public programs liaison, assists the team in connecting to other areas, for example Resource center, Film and Video. This role gets more emphasis later in the project.
- Public programs plans to contract with people to develop the programs for the Mall, this is a point for connecting the communities and the NMAI.

Susan Secakuku, Community Services liaison [CRC]

- Primary task is to work with selected communities, keeping track of initiatives that emerge from the work.
- Creates/facilitates long-term relationships with communities.
- Connects the communities with other NMAI programs – for example radio programs, training, film and video – acting as catalyst.

Cynthia Chavez, Curator [CRC]

- Establishes and maintains relationships with communities, working with them to develop content for the exhibition. Holds 2-3 co-curation sessions with each group.
- Role is as facilitator/collaborator in the back and forth process of developing the exhibition content.
- Mediator between internal NMAI groups (like the core team) and the communities.
- Interested in ways to give back to the communities, for example the workshop under development with the Chicago community.
- Actively creating a curatorial/community services model for future work.

Evi Oehler, Design Liaison [*Downtown*; by 2004 no longer with NMAI]

- Serves as the connection between the core team and the design and construction group for the Mall building.
- Helps contracted exhibit designers to understand the building, keeping channels open between D+C and the general contractor.
- Represents the project with other SI groups, OFEO in particular, to coordinate code compliance, etc.
- Works one-on-one with D+C to represent exhibit ideas in a buildable way.
- Brings experience of other projects to help avoid pitfalls.

Mark Hirsch, Script Editor [*Downtown*]

- Develops scripts, taking the information provided and organizing it, making voices understandable to visitors.
- Works with curatorial to understand how information connects, and how best to transfer information.
- Working with Ann McM and Karen F to develop script process, which includes editing phases, etc.

Kathy Suter, Media Coordinator [*Downtown*]

- Sees three phases to media work: communication phase – how NMAI-curated and community work is developing, what are the messages. This informs initial ideas for media. Media is defined broadly: audio/visual; combos of objects/sound/light; web casts, etc. Next is production phase – taking the standard media process and customizing it to our needs and specific situations. Final is post-production phase, including editing, etc.
- Coordinates and oversees Mall media productions, acting as executive producer.
- Has developed media production guidelines to help define process.

Jennifer Miller, Exhibit Project Manager [*Downtown*]³¹

- Primary responsibility is the effective coordination and management of the exhibition development and production.
- Coordinates internal museum functions between offices for the exhibition.
- Resolves conflicts in schedule, budget, and tasks within project team.
- Handles requests from NMAI offices and SI divisions for specific information, images, reports on the exhibition.

The *Our Lives* “Extended Team” included the contracted design firm, Design+Communication, Inc., and a number of staff members who were more or less involved at different stages of the exhibition process, including Maria McWilliams (Registration), Erik Satrum (Registration), Liz Brown (Conservation), Dan Davis and Kathy Suter (Media Coordinator), and Collections staff members.

Turf Wars and Cults of Personality

On paper, each gallery (OP, OU, OL) group was referred to as a “team.” And, when face to face, members did appear to work toward common goals. But in isolation, in private conversations, and even in formal interviews, the sports metaphor was replaced by battle metaphors that permeated people’s speech about their experience working on the exhibitions. As one staff member explained to me, “the

³¹ A *downtown* staff member who worked with the Mall Transition Team characterized the project managers as the “watchdogs” for fabrication, installation, designs, graphic design, media, coordinating the “nuts and bolts of the space.” She said that Jen Miller had the long term view all through the ranks, and then added that the project manager, script writing and management are all in a “tug of war with curatorial.”

more a museum is bureaucratized, the more a department has to protect its turf and has to be asserting themselves, and the more they have to be shaping the exhibition.”

When I asked why they have to protect their turf so diligently, the response was quick: “Because then they’re inconsequential if they don’t.”³²

I found it interesting that in the course of my fieldwork, when I talked to people in Dominica about the community projects or committees they worked on, bureaucracy in its familiar forms— complaints of delays, government inefficiency, incompetence, “red tape” and “experts” who know nothing about the local situation and make poor decisions—came to the fore, particularly with respect to the Carib Model Village (also a government-sponsored cultural site). At the NMAI, however, every time I asked people about it, the issue of bureaucracy seemed to keep receding into “personalities” and “turf.”³³ Not only were there “tugs of war” between departments and issues of “territorial” departments and their “turfs,” exhibits features represented “battles” won and lost. For one *downtown* person “research was a weapon” used by Curatorial before the opening of the museum.³⁴ One person characterized the issue as Indians being “pawns in a pissing match between two white guys.”³⁵ Here I focus on the departmental dynamics *Our Lives* team members experienced, extending beyond a focus on one gallery and to view the NMAI as a wider complex of bureaucratic and social structures.

³² Interview with Cécile Ganteaume, in her office at the CRC, October 12, 2004.

³³ This was ironic, given that a “Mall Action Committee,” which was later termed the “Mall Transition Team,” was specifically developed to make faster decisions than the bureaucracy of the NMAI would permit as the museum neared and pushed through the grand opening. Jim Volkert was in charge of this committee. One committee member suggested that his leading the committee meant decisions would stick. One Transition Team member mentioned (Interview April 6, 2006 in the CRC library) that “it really *was* Exhibits versus Curatorial... there was definitely a them mentality, the them being curatorial.”

³⁴ Phone interview with Jim Volkert, June 13, 2006. At this time he was no longer working at the museum but was serving as a consultant for the NMAI and other museum projects.

³⁵ Conversation with CRC staff member, April 11, 2006 (referring to the heads of Curatorial and Exhibits). A project manager at the Mall Museum construed the conflict as “contested territory of cult leaders” (conversation on March 23, 2006).

Countless staff members, when questioned about the bureaucratic nature of the museum, replied something akin to, as one person put it, “bureaucracy is not the problem—it’s more the turf business.”³⁶ It seemed that the “turf wars” Roland Force wrote about over where in New York City the Museum of the American Indian would move to in 1987 (including Ross Perot’s bid for it to go to Texas)³⁷ had become internalized in the Smithsonian “Indian museum,” among professional boundaries and within the exhibition galleries. “Personalities”—that word, provided as explanation for the state of affairs among departments—occurred across departments both *downtown* and at the *CRC*, most often tacitly referencing the assistant directors in charge of the Exhibits and Curatorial departments.

Only one curator, who had been at the NMAI for over 20 years, explained how bureaucracy was a social form that inhibited curatorial process. Cécile Ganteaume was a curator at both the Museum of the American Indian (MAI) and the George Gustav Heye Foundation. She continued on when the museum transitioned to the Smithsonian as the NMAI and worked extensively on the community curated exhibits in the *Our Peoples* exhibition. Cécile explained the difference between the small private institution and the large federal institution as a matter of scale, responsibility, and bureaucracy.

At the Heye Foundation, which was a very small institution with few small members, she did whatever work was needed, including a bit of registration work, photography, writing grants, fund raising—“you just do a bit of everything.” She started working in Latin American archaeology, then switched over to the Exhibits Department, then ended up in North American ethnology, and then later returned to

³⁶ Conversation with Photo Services department staff member, July 30, 2004.

³⁷ Force, *Politics and the Museum of the American Indian : The Heye & the Mighty*, 357-67.

the Curatorial Department. She continued to say the main difference is “the bureaucracy.” At the NMAI, on the other hand,

you really do work in one department, and department’s are territorial. And that’s the major difference, is that you very much get pigeon-holed. So, for example, at the Heye Foundation I had a lot of hands-on work with the collections. But here, we have a collections management department, so I don’t have much hands-on work with the collections. At the Heye Foundation I worked a lot with visiting researchers, that was a Curatorial responsibility. Here, that’s not a Curatorial responsibility, it’s a Collections responsibility.³⁸

She also noted that what bureaucracy introduces to the exhibit making process is “rank,” whereby “there’s nothing you can do” if a senior manager makes a particular decision. “In a private institution, the curator is in control of the exhibit, and here that is not the case. There are senior managers above the curator who are shaping exhibits and making decisions.”³⁹

The Project Manager (the “PM”) also began to take on a greater role as the exhibition progressed, particularly as the shift from research to production began. One *downtown* staff member characterized the project managers as the “watchdogs” for fabrication, installation, graphic design, and media coordinating—the “nuts and bolts of the space.” She added that Jennifer Miller, the PM for *Our Lives*, had the long term view “all through the ranks.” And the project manager, script writer and management were all in a “tug of war with Curatorial.”⁴⁰ Elaine Gurian, a consultant to the museum who, with Ken Gorbey, advised on the post-opening organizational restructuring, said that Curatorial was a “cabal” that needed to be “broken up,” and Jim Volkert commented that the problem in the institution was the “silo mentality” of the departments.⁴¹

³⁸ Interview with Cécile Ganteaume, in her office at the CRC, October 12, 2004.

³⁹ Interview with Cécile Ganteaume, in her office at the CRC, October 12, 2004.

⁴⁰ Conversation with Tanya Thrasher, at the SI Castle, April 1, 2004.

⁴¹ Phone interview with Jim Volkert, June 13, 2006.

Hierarchy, Committee and Compromise

A number of staff members pointed to the hierarchical organization of the museum as a source of continuing problems in exhibit making. A senior manager could radically alter the course of an exhibition by deciding who would stay or go on a project, for example. One curator explained that, in meetings, where a person sat in the hierarchy would determine if people thought his or her idea what a good one, adding, “just because someone is high up in this institution doesn’t mean their ideas are better than anyone else’s...there was a tremendous amount of frustration, on almost every level, spurred by these differences of opinion, this sort of *hierarchical crap*.”⁴² In other words, staff members felt that their job assignments, the aesthetic quality of their work, and their ideas were subject to the judgment and individual tastes of more senior managers.

There was a kind of hierarchy among departments, a “class structure,” as one staff member described it. She said from a Collections stand point, they felt they were “the lowest position on the totem pole. The lowest position in the museum.” Curatorial and Conservation were afforded a higher “level of respect” than other departments, despite the fact that, for example, “there are several people on the Move Team that have masters degrees, and who have worked in museums for ten, fifteen years.”⁴³ There was a time hierarchy put in place, as well, by *downtown* staff and museum consultants. Tanya Thrasher, a member of the Mall Transition Team explained how the “Day 1” and “Day 2” terminology from Te Papa museum in New Zealand was basically “dropped into NMAI culture” by Elaine Gurian and Jim Volkert.⁴⁴ *Day 1* indicated projects that would be complete by the opening day of the museum. *Day 2* indicated projects that would be completed at a later time. There was

⁴² Interview with CRC member, November 23, 2004

⁴³ Interview with Theresa Burchett, in the CRC library, June 18, 2004.

⁴⁴ Conversation with Tanya Thrasher, at the Arts and Industries building NMAI exhibit, April 1, 2004.

a time when *Our Lives* was “threatened” to be *Day 2* when the development of the NMAI Curated section was behind schedule.

While hierarchy was felt through decision making, as far as a singular guiding vision for the exhibitions, clear leadership was lacking. Ann McMullen, head of the Curatorial Department at the CRC in 2004, provided the opening image to this chapter of the inaugural exhibitions as Chimera-like figures; she explained how this coordination among departments would sometimes lead to dissatisfying results, as there was no one person in charge of the vision for any given gallery (curators traditionally had this role), although many *thought* they were in charge.

And as a result, you can say it’s *too many chiefs and not enough Indians*... So it ends up being like this big conglomerated mess of no single vision...it’s certainly not that of the community curators, it’s not that of the NMAI curatorial staff, it’s not that of the designers, because they feel that their work is being compromised—everybody feels it’s a compromise. And it’s not usually a happy compromise, either, because there’s so much at stake with people trying to get their way.⁴⁵

It is the problem of, as another curator similarly identified it, “exhibit by committee.” It’s all watered down by so many compromises, she lamented.⁴⁶ And while working in committees apparently was a positive experience when working within Native communities (see Chapter 4), it was not so for internal collaboration among the NMAI staff.

The term “compromise” was uttered in frustration by both *downtown* and *CRC* staff (from media team members to project managers to curators to conservators), along with the issues of “time and money.” Compromise necessitated dealing with other departments’ requirements or changes to an exhibit, and it indicated a certain relinquishing of control in the face of the deadlines and budget restrictions that often forced decisions for staff members. For example, Liz Brown, the OL conservator,

⁴⁵ Interview with Ann McMullen, in the rotunda of the CRC, November 23, 2004

⁴⁶ Interview with Cécile Ganteaume, in her office at the CRC, October 12, 2004.

explained the importance of a compromise between “design concept and object safety.”⁴⁷ Cynthia, the curator for OL, said it was the word everyone was using, and it was clear she was getting frustrated with it. In a meeting with media department staff from *downtown*, Cynthia was disappointed that interviews with Iglulingmiut on video would be dubbed rather than subtitled. It was a “compromise,” the media producer said.⁴⁸

Another curator told me how he and his research assistants developed a strategy to deal with the changes other departments would inevitably want to make to the content Curatorial had developed: they decided to include extra text in their exhibit label drafts when working with other departments so they could negotiate out what is not important (the extraneous information), allowing them to appear to be compromising while keeping material they felt was important in the exhibit. He seemed to be intimating that other departments wanted to make changes for the sake of placing their stamp on the exhibit; it was not so much about making the final content better but rather changing its original form to mark their intervention or their participation, or perhaps simply to wield a certain kind of power.

Artifacts of (Creative) Bureaucracy

So the familiar notions of hierarchy and specialization (and their concomitant issues of compromise) were present in the NMAI, along with the pressures of deadlines and budgets. As a part of the federal bureaucracy, part of NMAI life involved the completion and circulation of standardized vendor forms and time sheets, budget proposals and project reports. As a creative bureaucracy, the museum, through

⁴⁷ Interview with Liz Brown, in the CRC Conservation department library, June 22, 2004.

⁴⁸ OL Media meeting, CRC conference room, Wednesday, May 14, 2003. I was at this meeting with her, and was also disappointed. We were concerned about, among other things, an elders' statement being cut mid-sentence (and Inuktitut speakers recognizing that), and the representational and symbolic issues of talking over an elder's voice, rather than providing translation through subtitles.

coordination of its various departments, also produced an abundance of documents that were expressive, artistic, uniquely crafted and intended to reach a greater audience, including exhibition catalogues, design documents, and the exhibitions themselves.

But at the NMAI there were also quintessential artifacts of bureaucracy—standardized forms for bureaucratic routines—that, through creative execution at this museum, pointed to a unique confluence of cultural and bureaucratic practice. For example, I stopped by the Repatriation department to say hi to Terry Snowball (Prairie Band Potawatomi/Ho-Chunk) one day in 2006. He was in the process of preparing an invitation for another seasonal blessing at the CRC. He was typing up a “vendor form,” standard Smithsonian Institution document, for members of the Maliseet Indian Tribe to give a blessing, so they would be “in the system” for travel reimbursements and honorariums.⁴⁹

I was required to fill out a standard “Burn Permit” in 2006 to accompany another blessing ceremony to be conducted, this time in the *Our Lives* gallery. I emailed NMAI staff members about Joe Podlasek’s request to visit the Chicago exhibit to give a blessing for the drum encased in glass in the center of the display. He wanted to place some tobacco down for the drum and to burn some sage (the tobacco would be placed outside the case, he said, and it would be all right for it to be swept away later, as he understood the requirements of the gallery).⁵⁰ I received prompt replies on how to proceed:

>>> Jennifer Tozer 06/06 10:19 AM >>>
Bill, Jeff and Kathleen,
One of the co-curators for the Chicago exhibit in the Our Lives Gallery will be here the [sic] Thursday and would like to do a blessing at the drum case in the gallery that would involve burning sage and offering tobacco. He'd

⁴⁹ Conversation with Terry Snowball, at his cubicle in the CRC, Monday, June 5, 2006.

⁵⁰ Email, June 5, 2006.

like to come around 8:30 am and would be accompanied by Jennifer Shannon, one of the research assistants.⁵¹

Is this possible? Is there anyone else we should notify so we can be sure alarms are off in that area at the correct time? Please let us know how to finalize coordination for this small ceremony.

Thanks, Jen

Jennifer Tozer, Exhibit Manager
Office of Exhibitions and Public Spaces
National Museum of the American Indian
Smithsonian Institution

>>> William Johnson 06/06 11:19 AM >>>

Jen, Jeff has sent you one of the things you will need is the burning permit and the next thing you will need is to have a fire extinguisher on stand-by. We have a blue water extinguisher in the Potomac green room for that purpose.

>>> Jennifer Tozer 06/06 12:03 PM >>>

Bill,

Jennifer Shannon has agreed to be the burn "supervisor", but does not have access to the Potomac Green room. Will a security officer be able to get her in there to retrieve it on Thursday morning?

Thanks, Jen

Date: Tue, 06 Jun 2006 13:03:07 -0400

From: "William Johnson" <>

To: "Jennifer Tozer" <>

Cc: "Jennifer Shannon" <>, [list omitted; included eleven Office of Protection Services staff emails]

Subject: Re: AIC Director/co-curator Request to go to Chicago Exhibit Thurs.

Jen, there are two extinguishers in the (Our Lives) gallery. One on the wall next to entrance of 3010 workshop and the second one is in a wall case next to stairway "C". I suggest [you] have the one at 3010 on stand-by. If the extinguisher is discharged, we have to be notified so a report can be generated and the extinguisher recharged.

⁵¹ Although I was a volunteer, I was called as "research assistant" in this email perhaps in part because Jen Tozer knew that I had held this position in the past, but more so because the duties and responsibilities being assigned and entrusted to me in this case were beyond what the role or title of volunteer would normally have been associated with.

William B. Johnson
Security Manager, NMAI Security Unit

Jeff had sent me a standard Smithsonian burn permit form which was required, and I was notified that I would be the “burn supervisor” with the responsibility of accessing the fire extinguishers and filling out the paper work. According to NMAI staff guidance, I filled in the form and returned it with Joe listed as the “equipment officer” (Figure 13 below).

Bruce Bernstein recounted in his AAA 2007 conference presentation in Washington, DC that the *Our Universes* team had bought a bull, no doubt through a travel advance or purchase order, to appease angry gods that had forsaken a community curator’s village for sharing too much religious information without following proper protocol. In all of these cases, NMAI staff were able to navigate the institutional forms and regulations of the wider SI bureaucracy with their own categorizations of cultural specialists and cultural practices as correlating to the bureaucratic forms of a vendor in the system, a burn permit, or a purchase order.⁵²

⁵² Although I do not go into detail here, Ann McMullen has written a conference paper that details the practices of honorariums and payments for Native community curators: Ann McMullen, "The Currency of Consultation and Collaboration," in *Preserving Our Pasts, Telling Our Stories: Indians, Museums, and the Management of History* (Eugene, Oregon: University of Oregon, 2006).

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
NATIONAL MUSEUM of the AMERICAN INDIAN
OFFICE OF FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

PERMIT OF WELDING, CUTTING, AND BURNING
(Submit all request at least 24 hours prior to start of work.)

Building (Wing, Floor) 3 rd Floor, Our Lives Gallery	Date of Work Thursday, June 7, 2006
Location on Floor – Chicago Exhibit	Expected Starting Time - 8:30am
Nature of Work – tobacco and burning sage to honor the drum	Expected Finish Time – 9:15am
Name(s) of Operator(s) of Equipment: Joe Podlasek will do the ceremony	Title Director of the American Indian Center, Chicago, IL (and community co-curator)
Supervisor in Charge	Title
Pework Inspection of Site Made By:	Title
Permit Issued By:	Title Date Issued
Fire Alarm Shop Acknowledgment Issued By:	Ticket Number: Date of Acknowledgment:
Fire Suppression Clearance Issued By:	Date: Time:

The issuance of this permit to a contractor will in no way relieve the contractor of responsibility to abide by standards established under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1990, or other applicable laws or regulations, responsibility to exercise prudent care or responsibility for all damages to persons or property resulting from their negligence in connection with the prosecution of the work.

THIS PERMIT VALID ONLY FOR THE AREA AND WORK GIVEN ABOVE AND ONLY ON THE DATE ISSUED.

Distribution: Copy retained on the work site _____ Smoke detectors bagged or disabled
 Copy to NMAI Security Manager (OPS) _____ Fire Extinguisher on site
 Copy to Control Shop (OPS) _____ OPS Notified
 Copy to Engineers (OPP) _____
 Copy to NMAI Building Manager (OFM) _____ Work area Clean

SI 2013 Revised 05/15/9

Figure 13: NMAI Burn Permit.

Charts and Contracts

Another quintessential bureaucratic document—the organizational chart—was also present among the museum’s artifacts. What is notable, however, is the relative absence of these charts for years—staff would complain of not knowing the organization of the museum, who was in charge of what. They could not get their hands on an org chart if they tried. I managed to find one from 2002. By 2006, organizational charts abounded: they were on the staff internal website and detailed the long awaited “reorganization” that I had been hearing about since 2005 while I was in Dominica (see Appendix D). Each time I spoke with staff members at that time, especially those at the CRC—and even more so people who worked in Curatorial—they worried to me about an upcoming “restructuring,” or “reorganization.” They were told it was going to happen, but not how, or what it meant for their jobs. There was a high amount of job insecurity.⁵³ I go into more detail below about this reorganization.

Similarly, there was a shift to contracts in the relationships with communities, exemplified by a different model of community curating used for the 2006 exhibition *Listening to Our Ancestors: The Art of Native life along the North Pacifica Coast*, which was featured in the NMAI changing gallery.⁵⁴ This exhibition, like *Our Lives*, went through fits and starts for about five years. In 2005, it was “restarted” when a new project manager joined the project. Unlike the inaugural exhibitions which relied on the relationships between curators and communities to establish trust, in *Listening to Our Ancestors*, collaborators signed contracts to establish rights and responsibilities. In this case, there were formal agreements, and the museum

⁵³ Both in my interviews and conversations with staff, and noted in Elaine Heumann Gurian and Ken Gorbey, "Gurian-Gorbey Report 3-03," (Washington, DC: National Museum of the American Indian, 2003).

⁵⁴ Among staff, early on this exhibition was called the “Northwest Coast” exhibition. Later, it was referred to as “NPC,” for North Pacific Coast.

endeavored where possible to work with institutions rather than groups of individuals. The exhibit community curators (specifically not referred to as “co-curators”) were usually professionals in a museum or cultural field. In addition, the community curating process involved more members of NMAI staff, from across departments, interacting directly with community curators and visiting their communities.⁵⁵

In 2006, I spoke at length with Geoff Cavanagh,⁵⁶ a “management support assistant” for the newly organized department of the museum titled, “Museum Assets and Operations.” He had worked on the *Listening to Our Ancestors* (or “NPC” among staff) exhibition and had intricate knowledge of the contracting process. My assumption at first was that these “contracts” were like the memoranda of understanding (MOU) used at Te Papa between the museum and the Maori. But, Geoff corrected me, these agreements and documents were actually more like contracts and not MOUs. In late 2003 the first “collaborative agreement,” as the contract was labeled, was created. In the legalese of the contract, there is mention of these contractual partners as “sole source.” Accordingly, a justification was required within the contract for why it was not sent out to multiple groups (like a request for proposal) before choosing a final source for the partnership, as is standard federal bureaucratic procedure. Geoff explained that “sole source” in the contract is about why are you not asking Kwakwaka’waka from other communities besides Alert Bay to participate. Nobody questioned selecting that one community, he added, “it’s just part of the contracting process.” It’s what happens when you “mesh community curating with contract process.” In one instance there was no cultural institution with

⁵⁵ Unlike the term “fieldwork” used by Curatorial when visiting with communities, the *Listening to Our Ancestors* NMAI team wrote up a document about their 2003 visit with the communities in which they called it “the camping trip.”

⁵⁶ Conversation with Geoff Cavanaugh, at his desk at the CRC, June 7, 2006.

which to forge a contractual relationship, and so the contract was written between the NMAI and a hereditary chief of the Hetsilik tribe “as if he was an organization.”

The major change between *Listening to Our Ancestors* and the inaugural exhibitions was that they changed the status of communities from “invitational travelers” to contracts with cultural institutions that required “deliverables.” Because the exhibition was changed from premiering in New York to Washington, DC, the contract was modified a number of times. Each time, the contract had to be passed around and signed by all parties involved. Geoff said March 18, 2006 was the date of the last document signed (the exhibition opened in February of 2006, but the contract had stipulations for portions of the exhibits to travel to the communities).⁵⁷

The “Rights in Agreement” clause was something the Makah (Neah Bay) objected to, Geoff said. It was the “Rights and Data clause.” A Makah community member said it sounded like “the white man has Indian pictures and can do whatever he wants with them.” They didn’t want materials used outside the exhibition—not in books, brochures, or even non-commercially, without getting renewed permission through the Makah Cultural and Resource Center (the cultural institution with whom the contract was forged). Working with the MCRC was slow-going, and the letter they wrote regarding their concerns was “about trusting one another.” And because these contracts were between the NMAI *as an institution* and other institutions, the Smithsonian Office of Contracting (OCon) oversaw the process; Geoff said the contracting attorney there provided a “good deal of flexibility, which is what we needed.”

⁵⁷ In the original planning of the inaugural exhibitions, staff talked about having portions of the exhibits travel to the communities who co-curated them. One idea was to make modular exhibits that could begin in the museum or in the community and then travel to the other. Due to time and budget constraints, the inaugural exhibitions were made as permanent structures and no plans were developed after installation to bring portions of the inaugural exhibitions to the communities. The Chicago community in particular asked a number of times if the museum could send their exhibit to the AIC.

I asked how people in the communities responded to receiving these formal contracts. The contract was received, Geoff said, and it was “not objected to.” They “understood.” And, it required that the museum fulfill an obligation to send particular materials from the displays to the communities after the exhibition was over. But it also meant “there was an extra bureaucratic step involved.” Any changes in the exhibit travel plan, for example, meant OCon would again have to review the contract, which meant it had to go out to communities again and get signed and returned again. The cultural center was placed as “contractor,” and it did the “fee payouts” to the people who worked on the exhibition.⁵⁸ When I asked Geoff what this contract was modeled on, since it was not the MOU widely praised at Te Papa, he said it was based on a standard form of contract that was used for an “organization with a service” to the Smithsonian. The opening exhibitions (OL, OU, OP), he continued, “dealt with people” and it was not the “beginning and end relationship we had here.” In other words, the contract stipulated a precise date when the formal relationship would end, whereas the inaugural exhibitions had no such written agreement. The inaugural exhibitions were framed as working primarily with people, not institutions, like NPC.

It seems here, then, it was the contract that was in negotiation over the years, and what constituted the “back and forth” between the museum and the communities. Unlike the inaugural community curating process, where it was the people who traveled—curators and co-curators—here it was the contract that traveled. The knowledge producers were largely professional culture producers who were responsible for selection of objects (first—again unlike *Our Lives*), and then the actual

⁵⁸ There was “still some tension between the heads of museums and cultural centers and people who actually did the work in getting paid,” because now rather than the NMAI staff providing individual payments, the institutions determined who would get paid what from the money provided by the NMAI. Geoff said in the future they need to include in the contract an “administrative overhead fee” and be “specific as to how much money goes to community curators” (as opposed to leaving that up to the contracting cultural institution).

writing of the scripts. Therefore, there was less collaborative *knowledge production* than the inaugural exhibitions (though there was collaboration among cultures of expertise). And it was a contract-based, rather than a personal relationship-based, model for exhibit making.

And finally, to note briefly—there was one attempt at making policy that failed. Suzan Shown Harjo, an early board member, told me about how when she moved from being on the Museum of the American Indian to the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian Board of Trustees, they had to craft policies for “everything” (there was no staff at the time)—“The repatriation policy, identity policy, the collections policy, the... exhibits policy.”⁵⁹ She alerted me to what I came to think of as the elusive “Identity Policy.” I had hunted for it but no one seemed to know what I was talking about. I finally found traces of a similar impetus when I told Ann McMullen about my search for these policies. Talk of a “research policy” began at a meeting on November 26, 2001 (according to internal meeting notes); by February of 2002, a senior manager, an educator, Bruce, Ann and Gerald were working on a document. Ann said this document began a “turf war,” invoking the language and anxieties that I detailed above.

A preliminary draft was created by Ann and Bruce, which they had created as a result to a list of questions from the Board of Trustees dated June 26, 2001. Their draft was critiqued as “too dense” and not reflecting the view of personnel in Public Programs. Then Gerald wrote a response to this draft, to which Ann added “overall Curatorial comments” that had been gathered in a department-wide meeting as a preface to it, which included “need to include community feedback on processes, outside evaluations, etc.” and “need definition of Native voice.”

⁵⁹ Interview with Suzan Shown Harjo, in the Mall Museum Resource Center, November 23, 2004.

There was a conflict between Public Programs and Curatorial over what is “research”: Public Programs thought there should be a section including Native researchers who are trained by the museum; but Ann felt this was training (the person is a “contractor”), not research. The draft was amended and sent out in December of 2001 for additional comments, but the document was never finished nor submitted to the Board. Ann referred to it as a “nitty gritty cultural resources document.” It is virtually unknown by other museum staff.

There were some policies, it seems, in which their iterations were too contentious, and they faded in the process: This one was last seen as an email attachment in a computer archive. Other documents, like the *Listening to Our Ancestors* contracts, lived despite the many tedious iterations, no doubt a testament to the desire on both parties to keep the project in motion. These above examples of artifacts show an institution bureaucratic, creative, and in transition. The question is, what was driving this transition and to where was it leading?

Subverting Bureaucracy

Multiple attempts to short circuit bureaucratic conduits of decision making were attempted at the museum. There were informal groupings like the “The Coffee Group” and the “Gang of Five,” and more formal, institutionalized bodies like the Mall Transition Team and the Mall Action Committee. These were all small groups of powerful decision makers—the actors were nearly identical. They were largely created to bypass the large and lethargic Senior Management Group. But while the participants viewed these groups as “subverting the bureaucracy” and collaborating across departments, others saw them as gatherings of elitist “power mongers” secretly doing “the smoke-filled room thing”— particularly with respect to the informal groups.

The Coffee Group, for example, was an effort to bridge Exhibits and Curatorial, with members from both departments. It was an effort to create “water cooler chat” at the highest level and across the separated institutional locations. Ann, Bruce, Gerald, Jim, and Karen Fort were in this group. The Mall Transition team and the Mall Action Committee,⁶⁰ on the other hand, included no one from Curatorial or the CRC except for Fran Biehl, a member of the Collections department, who worked as a liaison to the CRC. The Mall Action Committee, one curator noted to me, “got a budget” and it was powerful because “the power is where the money is.”⁶¹

The Mall Transition Team (MTT) was created at the urging of consultants and dedicated to publishing the results of its streamlined decision making regularly on the museum’s internal website. In 2003, Elaine Heumann Gurian and Ken Gorbey were hired by the NMAI to ensure the museum would open on time. They not only assessed the museum, but also made a series of suggestions for it to move forward. The main theme that runs through their reports is the lack of decisive and quick decision making in the museum, and the lack of adherence to decisions once they were made.

It is worth noting that their summary report was filled, again, with battle language: “pull the trigger” (begin making decisions and stop second guessing them), “retrenching exercise” (eliminate all unnecessary work), and “this is not a review committee but rather a Swat team” (in reference to the new MTT).⁶² In the Summary Action Steps report, they stated the MTT should “build an enforcer system that signals a final decision” and that this team should “use guerilla type action while being kind

⁶⁰ The MTT was created for hastening decisions to get to opening day. It was such an “effective” body that it was later institutionalized more long term as the MAC.

⁶¹ Conversation with curator, July 8, 2004. Over the course of the development of the inaugural exhibitions, money was removed from departmental allocations. Part of the later reorganization effort was to apportion money with projects/project managers and not departments.

⁶² Gurian and Gorbey, "Gurian-Gorbey Report 3-03."

and inclusive.”⁶³ Ultimately, they asserted that the “culture must shift.”⁶⁴ They painted a picture of lethargy in decision making and inertia to respond to decisions at the museum. This and the reorganization that they also contributed to were presented as methods to get around the cumbersome bureaucratic pace of work at the museum, particularly as the opening loomed in the near future.

“Flattening” the Organization

The transition, as I noted at the start, *felt* like a small startup company of enthusiasts to a large bureaucracy of workers, was materialized by 2006 through the overall increase in staff at the museum and its structural reorganization. The same forces that were driving this transition (consultants, senior managers) were also notably trying to make the bureaucracy more efficient (MTT, reorganization). The drive to restructure the departments was in part due to the desire to shift the decision making power in the museum, and in part reflective of changing funding realities as the institution transitioned to a fully operational museum. And it happened immediately. For example, the day before the museum opened, NMAI staff got an email that said the government is not going to be so easy, nor lenient, anymore about money—they would be transitioning to the “use or lose” standard fiscal policy of Congressional allocation of funds and could no longer carry over money from year to year:

From: Cynthia SMITH
To: [Long list, omitted]
Date: Monday - September 20, 2004 9:51 AM
Subject: ATTENTION: NMAI's conversion to one-year funds in FY05
[Enclosed:] New Deptids for GGHC - Draft NMAI 08-13--04.xls

⁶³ Elaine Heumann Gurian and Ken Gorbey, "National Museum of the American Indian Mall Museum Transition Office Summary Action Steps," (Washington, DC: National Museum of the American Indian, 2003).

⁶⁴ Gurian and Gorbey, "Gurian-Gorbey Report 3-03."

For the past several years NMAI's appropriation has been no-year, which meant funds were available for obligation without fiscal year limitation -- they were to remain available until expended.

Beginning in Fiscal Year 2005, NMAI's appropriation will become a one-year appropriation, which means funds are made available for a specified fiscal year and are available for obligation ONLY during the fiscal year for which it is appropriated. The federal government's fiscal year begins on October 1 and ends September 30 of the following year. If you fail to obligate your allocated funds by the end of the fiscal year for which they were appropriated, they cease to be available for obligation and are said to have "expired" for obligation purposes.

The new chartfield for NMAI's one-year funds will be posted in Farsight beginning October 1, 2004 as follows:

[Details Omitted]

Also, with the organization realignment of GGHC we have established new org codes in Farsight for staff at the GGHC location (see attached excel spreadsheet). New codes are noted in RED.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact the Administration office in DC or CRC.

Cynthia M. Smith

During the reorganization, only two departments were changed radically: Admin was "decentralized" and Curatorial was "broken up." While Admin staff moved to different locations in the museum according to their departmental assignments, Curatorial Department staff continued to have the same offices, but reported to different people and had different job titles. It did not go unnoticed (often with a raise of eyebrows) that all of the non-Native curators were now situated under "Collections Research" while the Native curators are mainly in "Public Programs"⁶⁵— behind the scenes versus out in public, many noted.

⁶⁵ Ann, along with Cecile and Mary Jane Lentz (all non-Native) were relocated in collections research, while Truman, Paul and Emil Her Many Horses (all Native) were relocated to Public Programs. Ramiro Matos lost his title of curator and was assigned the title "special assistant" to Jim Pepper Henry in Community Services. Ramiro insisted on continuing to tell people he was a curator, because he felt

Though many people would remain in their same offices, the names of the departments and NMAI divisions changed, and who each person reported to changed. Senior manager Tim Johnson described this transition as to a more “corporate” and “businesslike” operations at the NMAI for greater “efficiency.” *CRC* often joked about the idea that this was somehow a “flattening”—one comment, delivered with comedic timing, was “Yeah, flat like a pancake—on its edge!” Although “flattening” is intended to refer to the “project team approach” that brings people from across different departments together, the organizational chart looked very “vertical” to staff, and even Tim acknowledged the museum was more hierarchical after the reorganization.

When I asked staff what the goals for reorganizing were, one *CRC* staff member’s comment sums staff perspective well, so I quote this person at length:

I have Rick’s reasons stamped in my mind. It’s to flatten out the hierarchical flow chart and encourage cross-communication, working with more flow between the departments. But then there’s the gossipy side of it all that you hear, you know, to “get rid” of Curatorial department. It was this person versus that person for all these years, and then someone finds out that this person is consulting from a contract—you know, Jim—and then one day I find out that he’s a paid consultant on this and everyone feels enlightened when they find that out.

Because the position that Bruce and Jim were in all those years—it really *was* Exhibits versus Curatorial. And I was physically stuck in that during the Mall Transition Team a lot. But do I agree with that? I hope that Rick West is above that. I do know Rick to a degree on a personal note... So I have had casual conversations with him about everyday life besides work. And I hope that he is as intelligent as he seems to rise above that kind of bullshit. There are a couple things that I’ve observed about the reorganization that I’ve found really puzzling... why do the other three major departments [besides Curatorial] still have assistant directors but Museum Assets and

his new title didn’t “mean anything” to people. I wondered to myself if this split was according to Native v. non-Native, or if it also was due to people’s specialties (Ann, MJ and Cécile were well-known for their familiarity with the collection, but so was Emil).

Operations does not? Why is there still that middle area for other departments?⁶⁶

Considered by many as the “architect” of the reorganization, Jim Volkert (former head of Exhibits), after he left the NMAI, became a consultant to the museum and helped structure its MAC, the MTT, and the reorganization of the departments.

Bureaucracy at the Periphery

So far I have described the bureaucracy from the center, but the NMAI was also visible from a distance in communities which had their own bureaucratic experiences and practices. In this section, I briefly note some of the ways in which bureaucracy came into view for the Kalinago and Chicago communities—often more readily, I came to learn, than at the museum.

For the Kalinago co-curators, the NMAI bureaucracy viewed from a distance looked like a \$1.00 check. One afternoon in April of 2005 I sat with Gerard Langlais, Kalinago co-curator and leader of the Karina cultural group, on the performance stage that was also the front porch of his family’s house. I asked Gerard if he had any contact with the museum since he had come back from the opening of the museum. He said no, except that he got a check that said, “Pay to Gerard Langlais, one dollar.” We both laughed as he retrieved the very official looking one dollar check from his house to show it to me. Gerard told me he had wondered to himself, “I was saying what is that... is it one dollar, or one hundred dollars? One dollar!” and he began laughing again. I said I would email Ann at the museum to ask about it. He nor I knew what it was for.⁶⁷

Later in the month I went to co-curator Jacinta’s home to share a meal and work on weaving a *larouma* basket, with her guidance, for my mother. She told me

⁶⁶ Interview with CRC staff member, April 6, 2006.

⁶⁷ Interview with Gerard Langlais, at his home, April 21, 2005.

about her experiences being an “extra” in the movie *Pirates of the Caribbean II*, which was being filmed then on the island. When I mentioned Gerard’s one dollar check, she went in the house and came back with *her* \$1.00 check from the Smithsonian (Prosper and others got them too). She also showed me tax exempt forms mailed from the Smithsonian for income earned in the US. We both cracked up after she said, in a deadpan and conspiratorial manner, that she wasn’t planning on filing.

As I had promised, I wrote to Ann McMullen, head of Curatorial, for an explanation:

"Jennifer Ann Shannon" <...> 4/27/05 12:16:43 PM >>>
Hi all, [addressed to NMAI curators/RAs]

Just thought you might find this as amusing as the folks here in the Carib Territory have. Jacinta and Langlais, two of the co-curators (and perhaps others, but I haven't heard it from them) have recently received checks in the mail from the Smithsonian... for 1.00 US!!! Yep, one dollar. They both brought them out to show me, to see if I knew what it was for. It was a good laugh... None of us have a clue as to what it's about. Some think perhaps the decimal was put in the wrong place, others call it a "souvenir" sent from the SI! Any ideas?... Jacinta also got a tax exemption form in the mail from the US. My best guess was the check was to cover postage to send it back?? ha ha. Anyways, see you all soon at the AAM! :) jen

Ann,
if you can forward the following information to the correct person, I think folks here would like to find out the end of the story... Clearly, the cost to send the envelope was more than the sum on the check!

Jacinta Bruney, check from SI for 1.00
Issued 2/3/05; Vendor XXXXXXXXXXXX
Check # 204976636586
Agency schedule XXXXXXXXXXXXX

Gerard Langlais, invoice # 450XTA1617-1

Jen Shannon
Department of Anthropology
Cornell University

Ann’s prompt reply was:

On Wed, April 27, 2005 12:43 pm:

Jen:

Even though the Kalinago folks had received their reimbursements in advance (and why we took them to the bank when they were here), when their final reimbursements were processed, the exchange rate had changed or something, yielding one dollar owed each of them. The Smithsonian, in its own special way, just sent these out. They can consider the checks a souvenir of their stay with us for the opening or whatever.

best,
Ann

As both Chicago and Kalinago co-curators attested later (see Chapter 7), there was no follow up in their communities by the NMAI;⁶⁸ this \$1.00 check was the final communication between the museum and the Kalinago after the grand opening.

The NMAI was not the only bureaucracy the Kalinago were dealing with, considering a number of the co-curators were on the Carib Model Village Task force. John, a Canadian consultant hired to put together a marketing and business plan for the Carib Model Village, began one of the task force meetings by passing out a list of reports that had been made over the last 25 years; he said there had been enough reports, what they needed was *action*. Describing himself as a “results oriented” person, and lamenting the “painfully slow” process of “getting things done” in Dominica, John was in the Carib Territory for a year to get the Carib Model Village up and running in collaboration with Willa, a Kalinago woman who was the manager of the site. The list of reports and past “incarnations” and meetings and ideas for the Carib Model Village were lengthy, but even in 2005 it was still not open—although the Kalinago exhibit had said it would be open in 2001 (it opened in 2006). This project was hampered by fluctuating funds and problematic contractor relationships,

⁶⁸ Except, as they noted, from Cynthia and I. She invited co-curators to conferences, as I noted in the AAM interchapter, and I connected Chicago and Kalinago co-curators to Smithsonian Business Ventures to get books or videos from their communities sold in the NMAI bookstore, for example.

lack of consultation with the local community and poor choices of building materials (as a result).

One of the criticisms was there were no Kalinago people employed on the (re)construction efforts of the Carib Model Village, while there were competent and available Kalinago in this field. The Permanent Secretary of Tourism and Willa explained to me that there is a “tendering” process that the Caribbean Development Bank requires (they were funding the project with loans). In order to put in a bid, you had to be a company or organization—and the Kalinago had no such organized body to do so. This was certainly not a “creative bureaucracy” in the sense of being flexible to the circumstances of Native peoples and, for example, construing Kalinago individuals as organizations like the NMAI did.

Prosper (co-curator and cultural expert) was actually contracted to supervise the traditional thatching of the roofs of the structures in the Carib Model Village. In a period of three months since they had first been hired, he and his Kalinago four-man crew only finished two buildings because there was not enough grass and it was the wrong part of the growing season to harvest it. So, John wondered to me why the grass-growing season wasn't taken into account and the thatching started earlier in the year. Willa explained that when Prosper put in the bid a year and a half ago, the grass was plentiful and there was time to finish. But, he only got approved by the government bureaucracy in February.

Unexpectedly, bureaucracy was a lot more visible in the communities. Whereas the Kalinago had a problem of too much documentation and not enough action, the Chicago community was experiencing quite the opposite. For them, paper did not symbolize inaction, but rather a form of anonymous agency. At a board meeting of the American Indian Center, on November 8, 2005, shortly before the annual powwow, the meeting was brought to order under the guidelines of “Robert’s

Rules.” The meeting began with a concern for how powwow finances were being handled; there was an emphasis on making “policies”—putting rules in writing, so that the AIC would be “protected.” Using documents was a way to mitigate “personal issues.”

This need for policies in writing was intended to address security for both the place and the reputation of the center, as well as the “point system” at the annual powwow. Participants in the meeting expressed concerns over how points were assessed for competition dancers and the variation of tribal affiliation of the head judges (at an intertribal powwow, they thought it inappropriate for all the judges to be from the same tribe). Another person commented that if judges do not show up, they should be replaced, like drums groups are. The director said, we “need to set policies for this— if x then y.” He wondered allowed who was going to be responsible for having to tell the judges the rules.

The chairman said “what is a piece of paper going to do?” The director replied, “it sets the rules.” The chairman said if we *had* a policy, they can’t just say we made the rules up just now. In other words, if it’s already on paper, whoever is being addressed cannot say the person has made the rules on the spot, for his or her own purposes. The director replied yes, the rules would be from the Board of Directors (implying they are not from the individual enforcing them). In this case, policies, as rules on paper, provided a way to empower individuals to enforce a certain order without having to be personally accountable to a fellow community member.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Like the NMAI, these communities also dealt with organizational adversity through “consultants,” but in very different ways. The Dominican government brought in international consultants to bring the Carib Model Village to completion; in Chicago, the community invited an Ojibwe healer and conducted community talking circles to deal with difficult issues, including “individuals” who were dividing the community and instances of people “identity policing.” The healer and his wife also conducted a domestic abuse workshop.

Conclusion

Although bureaucracy seemed to be named and more visible in the Native communities, it was also present and named at the NMAI—just not by the people who were working most closely with the community co-curators. There are two different kinds of (mental) work that went on at the NMAI, and sometimes people served both functions. Rebecca, an administrator, was constantly doing routine filing and filling in forms in the travel database, for example. Cynthia, a curator, rarely did such routinized work, except perhaps for filling in forms that detail her travel receipts. Most of her tasks that resembled form filing were actually creative work; working on exhibition “worksheets” or “script structures” may look like bureaucratic tasks, but they provided for far more imaginative input (see Chapter 4). Ann, on the other hand, was both a curator and the head of the department. As such, she both signed people’s requests and time sheets, as well as provided creative content for exhibit scripts. In other words, while they all worked on forms, some required routine input, and others creative input.

When I interviewed staff about their experiences within the federal bureaucracy, their roles and responsibilities, and their often unanticipated jobs as they worked to create the exhibitions, it was clear that the interviews themselves served two purposes: first, as two or three interviewees mentioned, it was somewhat “cathartic” to talk about their frustrations, which is similar to a host of others who said it was nice to have a moment to reflect on their work, which their daily routine and practices rarely provided for; second, for many staff it was important to them to have in some way recorded the gap between their vision and reality, between what was possible and what was practical in the course of making the exhibitions. It is this latter impetus that I often recognized in conference papers by curators who provided interpretation and critique of the NMAI exhibits, whereas *downtown* staff were more

likely to present their organizational, technical, and project management practices as models for others to emulate (as evidenced by the AAM meetings in the next interchapter).⁷⁰

These interviews and my fieldwork more generally also served to be a kind of “salvage” ethnography of the museum in transition, documenting the changes that occurred as it became a fully functioning and open museum. As Bruce told me when I first approached the NMAI to do this research, he thought it was a good idea because no one had been keeping records of the development of the museum or exhibitions. And although there was a lack of documentation of the organization and chains of command in the museum initially, by the time I finished my fieldwork, there were many documents on file, including timelines, organizational charts, lists of deadlines, and recorded interviews.⁷¹ (The process of community curating, by the nature of its practice, was well-documented by Curatorial.)

A similar recuperation of process is Edward Linenthal’s *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum*. He talks about Elie Wiesel’s “ambivalence about the project,” quoting Wiesel, who likened the Holocaust Museum to “the invisible temple of a Talmudic story”:

“I’m always afraid,” he said, that “because of bureaucracy, because of the nature of things, because of the fact that we deal with prosaic matters, meetings, budgets, human relations, positions, honors, telephones... somehow this vision of the temple... occupying a space that is between one world and another... will disappear.” And, Wiesel reminded council members, “it is this temple that we are trying to bring down in Washington.”⁷²

⁷⁰ After the opening, one CRC staff member told me that “staff are very ignorant. They don’t even know Indians 101.” This is because “they don’t come to the job for Indian stuff” but rather for “their technical ability.” Conversation, October 6, 2004.

⁷¹ This documentation was a result of both my work and the work of project managers and consultants.

⁷² Edward Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 118-19. This book is a social history of the making of the Holocaust Museum, and provides a greater understanding of the various actors and interests at stake in the way the Holocaust narrative would be presented, and who it would include. Paul Chaat Smith at the NMAI had suggested I read this book, which not only discusses contested meanings and narratives of the holocaust but also presents historical information about the National Mall.

Staff at the NMAI had these same fears. But the institution proved to hold both standard frustrations as well as some innovative adaptations to bureaucratic routines.

As the institution matured, and with the guidance of prominent museum consultants, the NMAI went from (to characterize it roughly): curatorial power, to no curatorial power, to no curatorial department. Community curating moved from having personal relations at the intersection between the museum and community members to having contractual relations between institutions at its center. There was also a movement from a lack of documentation of the organization to an abundance of organizational charts and contracts. It is interesting to note that the department most steeped in the ethos of advocacy, and responsible for the community curating process, failed to codify its research practice satisfactorily.

Highlighting the museum as bureaucracy also foregrounds the different social relations that are engendered through its work with Native peoples. A person offering a blessing can be a “vendor” or an “operator of equipment;” a hereditary chief can be a “service organization.” For community curating, exhibitions have largely been developed either through personal relationships, as in *Our Lives*, or through contracts, as for *Listening to Our Ancestors*. I do not mean to infer that there were not meaningful relationships cultivated through the latter exhibition, but rather I want to highlight its fundamentally different framing for museum-community partnerships. Broadly speaking, the OL exhibition relied first and foremost on personal relations between the Curatorial staff and the co-curator committees to accomplish the exhibits. Recall that, in contrast, the *Listening to Our Ancestors* exhibition relied on contracts between the museum and other cultural institutions.

Interpersonal and contractual relations can too easily be rendered as simply positive and social versus negative and bureaucratic. Each form of social relation embodies a different kind of ethics—what I have referred to elsewhere as

collaborative versus contractual ethics⁷³—and both entail particular commitments. For example, although trust relations developed through the community curating process for *Our Lives* were essential for creating its exhibitions about Native identity, each community's request to visit the museum at its opening, or to have parts of their exhibit be loaned or displayed in their own community after they were removed from the gallery, was consistently met by OL curatorial staff with something along the lines of, "we will ask, but we can't promise anything." Curatorial did press for these requests within the institution, but they did not have the authority to make it so. In addition, OL curatorial staff did not want to place themselves in the position of having to break promises (co-curators were keenly aware of this dynamic, as detailed in later chapters).

Curators clearly saw themselves in a different relation to communities—more personal, long term, and ethical—than "merely" contractual, legally binding and legally finite relations that defined the NPC museum-community relationship through formal documents. Curators considered themselves flexible and responsive to each community as opposed to rigidly adhering to bureaucratic procedure; this included CRC staff's representational experimentalism and openness to Native communities as evidenced in the AAA 2000 interchapter.

The curators were also the mediators between the bureaucracy and the communities, but they had little power to make the institution accountable to the community members with whom they worked. For example, although the original plan was to have "modular" community exhibits that could travel to communities, budget and time dictated otherwise. And, as evident in Chapter 6, while Curatorial worked hard to have the communities invited to the opening, in the end it was

⁷³ Jennifer Shannon, "Informed Consent: Documenting the Intersection of Bureaucratic Regulation and Ethnographic Practice," *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 30, no. 2 (2007).

achieved on a relatively shoestring budget as somewhat of a last minute arrangement. For *Listening to Our Ancestors*, on the other hand, the museum was contractually obligated to travel the exhibits to the communities as well as to provide money for community curators to attend the opening of the exhibition. In this way, the contract provided reassurances that independent actors in the museum often could not. However, it seems the museum relied too heavily on the contract to maintain relations with the communities in this case, where there was a great amount of changeover of staff and no consistent mediator between the communities and the museum bureaucracy to advocate within the institution and ensure their voices were, according to community curators, faithfully shepherded through the exhibit making process (see NAASA 2005 interchapter).

Like contracts, we are inclined to see power claims as negative—as about egos and hierarchical maneuvering. Access to information and the shaping of the exhibit process can too easily be considered by those involved as wielding power for power's sake. Many times decision making is indeed about politics both professional and personal, but not always; sometimes it is about competing visions for proper and ethical action. In this case, there were times when power was seized not simply to gain control, but rather to practice quality control. In other words, people cared greatly about their work—whether for reasons of professional integrity or personal commitments or both. When a commitment to doing things properly was interpreted differently by different actors, a commitment to the integrity of the project and the care for its making often set individuals or groups with fundamentally different perspectives at odds. These ethos are explored in detail in the next chapter.

The museum also sought to move from opaque to “transparent,” from “leisurely” decision making (according to the consultants' review) to a sleek, “flattened” and “efficient” practice. The allocation of funds was relocated to projects,

rather than departments. More generally, the NMAI also represents, with respect to the process of community curating as it was conducted for the inaugural exhibitions, a routinization and bureaucratization of ethnography (I go into the details of that practice in Chapter 4). But in this process, there were two forms of mental work at museum: Creative document filling (curators and scripts) and routinized document filling (administrative staff and vendor forms).

Furthermore, the notion of “creative bureaucracy” also speaks to the emphasis that staff placed on “personalities” as being obstructive to the work of the museum. *Personalities* in this instance seems to combine the notion of “that hierarchical crap” (rank as a measure of one’s intellectual contribution or as the ability to reject intellectual contributions of those of lower status without explanation) and “aesthetics” (glossed as subjective judgment, personal taste, or the unexplained reason something gets changed). But the specific personalities, or people, that staff mainly referred to were not just a combination of bureaucratic power and idiosyncratic creative judgment, but also they represented dueling departmental ethos and perspectives on community curating. In the next chapter, I explore the ideologies and ethos of the *downtown* and *CRC* staff, with an attention to the ways in which expertise, translation and advocacy are both actions and indicators of particular speech networks in these public- and community-oriented departments.

The institution essentially shifted from the feel of a small start-up company (with power located with the curators) to a large bureaucracy (with power located with the project managers), and with the opening of the Mall Museum the center of activity shifted from the *CRC* to *downtown*. In the course of this transition from imagined possibility to materialized reality, one curator felt that a “switch to practicality” was

needed on behalf of Curatorial, but some staff could not make that transition.⁷⁴ She said “we had to surrender our values or dreams” along the way to make it happen. Project managers were in charge of the “drive to open” the museum, which was a “steamroller you can’t stop.” She continued to say that Curatorial staff was perceived to be “obstructionist.” And, as more than one curator told me, if you are called an “obstructionist” at the museum, you get “removed from the project.” By 2004, facing job insecurity and internal museum politics, a number of low-level Curatorial staff were “depressed” and seeing an ombudsmen, a counselor, or both. The attitude in the CRC overall by 2006 had changed from frustration to resignation. One person told me, with a sense of sadness and resignation, “it’s just a job...I just need to get my work done... it didn’t used to be like that.”⁷⁵

But here I want to make an important caveat: this shift from start-up to bureaucracy, but more so from interpersonal to contractual relations—I do not intend to suggest that this is a one way street. At the moment in time when I was documenting the museum, that is how it appeared. It is not unidirectional but rather it shows examples of the different possible futures for the work between the museum and Native communities. However, it is certain that while the museum may not always or only use contracts in the future, whatever form of community curating takes it will not be the same process as it was for the inaugural exhibitions (at least in detail, if not spirit). It is clear, in talking with staff and senior managers, that this process was no longer viable once the museum was in operation; it took too long, was too

⁷⁴ And here I have no doubt she was recalling in part a well-respected scholar and fieldworker, Harvey Markowitz. He had worked closely with Cécile on the *Our Peoples* exhibition and left the museum after what he felt were a number of poor senior management decisions in which tribes were not contacted when major changes to the exhibition were made; he felt he had been placed in a situation in which he had to break promises he had made in good faith on behalf of the museum to Native communities.

⁷⁵ This is likely very different from how the newly hired, enthusiastic Cultural Interpreters working at the Mall Museum felt at this time.

expensive, and relied on a particular kind of freedom from regulatory and fiscal oversight by the Smithsonian in its nascent stage.

This caveat can also be applied to a number of dichotomies that roughly, perhaps even problematically (though I believe instructively), can be mapped on *downtown* and the *CRC*, and they have been by various individuals inside and outside the museum over the years. They also rose to the surface as I mapped the cultures of expertise, speech networks, locations and personal relations among NMAI staff. For example:

Downtown	CRC
Exhibits	Curatorial
Consultants	Invitational travelers
Visitor advocates	Community advocates
Presentation	Research
Design	Content
Visual	Textual
Audience focused	Constituency focused
Center of power	Center of mission
Public Face	Heart of Museum
For the public	For the tribes
Connection to politics, donors	Connection to objects, communities

Ultimately, these characterizations represent a dichotomy of public product versus process and the various ways that people separate content development (associated with Curatorial) from design and presentation (the declared specialization of the design firm and the Exhibits department). Not surprising, this is a false dichotomy; each step of the process, as detailed in Chapter 4, impacts content. At this point, it is simply important to note that this notion of division between content and design, textual and visual, and process and product became conceptually significant to individuals in the institutional locations and specialized departments of the NMAI, and the staff members assigned to the *Our Lives* gallery represented the collaboration

(*teamwork*), or lack thereof, between these dichotomized realms of exhibit making as well as among individuals of various specialized museological skills.

There is another broad stroke that I'd like to add as a final note: exhibits staff (as later consultants, or as project managers) were involved in "reducing" bureaucracy within the museum, while curators were involved in the mediation of bureaucracy to communities. For, at the NMAI, those who participated in the curatorial and design aspects of exhibit making often felt overt time pressures limited their ability to do their best work (a bureaucratic sense of time). However, there is another view which relates to the temporal quality of the NMAI as a "bureaucratic machine." In Terry Turner's caution against proprietary research with indigenous peoples, he describes the situation of having a "massive research apparatus waiting" for the "data" to come in.⁷⁶ This was a cogent pressure upon Curatorial, as their collection of "data" with the communities was a rate determining step to the progress of other staff responsibilities, particularly as the new museum struggled to stay on course for its grand opening. The curatorial research staff was constantly aware of and sensitive to the need to mediate between the bureaucratic needs of this large institution and the communities with whom they work. Chapter 4, "Authorship," explores this dynamic as it details the collaborative process in the communities.

⁷⁶ Terence Turner, "The Yanomami and the Ethics of Anthropological Practice" (paper presented at the Science, Ethics, Power, University of Michigan, Spring 2001 2001), 58.

INTERCHAPTER
(2.5)

AAM 2005

Bringing the Past into the Present¹

The AAM conference held the first week of May in 2005 in Indianapolis, IN was, like the American Association of Anthropology meetings of the same year, a debut for the NMAI. The museum had a strong and visible presence at these meetings by sponsoring several sessions and having a large number of staff in attendance. There were two panel sessions that were planned by NMAI staff for the meetings that I highlight here, one by Carolyn Rapkievian (*downtown*, Education) and the other by Cynthia Chavez (*CRC*, Curatorial). Both Carolyn and Cynthia had provided me with the proposals for their panel sessions while I was at the museum in 2004; I flew back from Dominica where I was conducting the second leg of my fieldwork to attend. The approach that Carolyn and Cynthia took in organizing and presenting information about the NMAI spoke to their own conceptions of expertise and what they had to offer to their respective professional fields.

The AAM is basically a nuts and bolts, practical conference unlike, someone told me, the AAA “which is more about content” (and, I would add, its theorized analysis). As the conference sessions go on, there is also an expo or trade show area where exhibit, lighting, and other companies set up displays. Everyone exchanges business cards and trade booths pass out freebies like mini tape measures or lanyards with logos. But more important, the conference gave me the opportunity to touch base with NMAI staff again. I discovered that my return to the museum in the spring was well-timed—at this conference I heard a lot of fretting and confusion over a major reorganization of the departments that was underway, presumably with curatorial to be

¹ This was the conference theme.

the most affected, as hinted at in a recent “all hands meeting” at the NMAI. NMAI staff at the conference were nervous, unsure about the future of their jobs.

The AAM conference sessions are more how-tos, troubleshooting or documenting projects in exhibit development, museum administration and marketing, among other fields. For example, I attended one table discussion about developing a “brand” for your museum.² I also collected a few business cards myself and learned from one of the expo booths that the NMAI planned to have wireless PDA technology being used in coordination with the exhibits by January (that never happened). But it was the NMAI sessions I was most interested in, as each session organizer located the relevant expertise and evaluation of the exhibitions for future museum work in different places—Carolyn (*downtown*) in senior museum professionals, Cynthia (*CRC*) in Native community curators.

Titled “Are all roads good? Opening the National Museum of the American Indian—Lessons learned,” the intent of Carolyn’s session was, as she wrote in the proposal, to consider “what the lessons learned at the NMAI mean for the future of museums.” This NMAI senior staff session included introductions by director Rick West and associate director Jim Volkert, and then the twelve staff members split into table discussions which were labeled for attendees to gravitate to the “expert” of their choice—to learn about marketing, media production, business administration, getting projects to completion, teacher training, etc. For example, Jim Volkert led a discussion on “implementing change and nurturing diverse thinking throughout an organization,” Carolyn Rapkievian addressed “evaluation at soft openings—refining operations before the grand opening;” and, Karen Fort conducted a roundtable for “opening five major exhibitions—simultaneously.”

² At the Carib Model Village task force meetings a tour company representative kept telling the meeting participants that they need a “brand” for their Carib Model Village to market it successfully to tourists.

I sat in at the media production table with media coordinator Kathy Suter because she promised to emphasize Native voice in her roundtable. During the table's discussion, titled "making media in Native voice—how the blending of new and traditional media techniques can work, and where they do not," a couple participants raised issue with Kathy's notion of "unfiltered" Native voice, granting that while the video may be "unfiltered" (without a narrator), interviewee's voices are filtered ahead of time by the curator's influence in the selection and direction of the participant's subject of conversation.³

The panel that Cynthia coordinated was very different; titled "Community Curatorship: The National Museum of the American Indian and Native Peoples Working Collaboratively," rather than providing her own proscriptions or models for other museum professionals, she invited co-curators to give constructive criticism of the exhibit making process. In her session proposal, she said that "Native representatives from communities in *Our Lives* will critique their involvement as community curators" in the different phases of exhibit making. A handout provided during the session promised attendees would "learn how inclusive curatorial methods and processes can enhance the representation of Native peoples and their communities in exhibitions, and understand the limitations of inclusive methods in collaborative exhibitions." No other senior managers, nor the director, were present. Cynthia provided leading questions that the co-curators knew beforehand. The panel included Arlen Washines (Yakama; Yakama Nation Wildlife Manager), Jacinte Lambert (Métis; Community Organizer), and David Spencer (Chata/Diné; Arts Director of the American Indian Center of Chicago).

³ As noted in Chapter 3, curators were well aware of, and they insisted that, there is no such thing as completely "unfiltered" voice. But the concept was prevalent at the NMAI, especially in Rick West's language

At one point, Cynthia recalled that when she first met Arlen, he had said he wanted the exhibit to be “more than beautiful objects in cases.”⁴ She asked for his response. Arlen said his goal was to make the exhibit be something he wanted his children to see and learn, adding it was also to educate the people of the world. He had been in to Europe, Hong Kong, and Japan, and they all had a fascination with Native people. But all they knew was beads and feathers and what he called “the Hollywood effect”—chanting, dancing around bonfires. They asked him, “Do you still live in tepees?” He continued, “I wanted to share with those people of the world who we are...and to share we still hold onto those traditions regardless of what Western civilization has done to our people.” A woman approached Arlen afterwards and said that she felt he was holding back how he felt, that he was more critical than his presentation let on. He said his idea when he first started work with the museum was to make it like the Holocaust Museum, but that was not how it turned out.

Dave, who credits Cynthia appreciatively with encouraging him to pursue a master’s degree at the Art Institute of Chicago, talked about how such educational institutions teach French theory, critique, and mainstream large institution perspectives. But it is not useful to someone like himself who works in a small community gallery. What was useful from his educational experience was thinking about “the objectification of culture.” He critiqued Chicago-area institutions like the Field Museum for only involving Chicago Indians in the final stages of exhibition making. For example, for the much lauded *Hero, Hawk and Open Hand* exhibition at the Field Museum, it was not until after five years of making the exhibition that the museum contacted the Chicago Indian community—three weeks before the opening they were invited to sit at a table at a press luncheon. Dave said, “they wanted our

⁴ This reflected community curator wishes in the NPC exhibit as well; see the Epilogue and Rachel Griffin, “Aesthetics and Authenticity at the National Museum of the American Indian,” (2005).

endorsement.” There was a debate within the Chicago Indian community about whether to participate; he “refused.” As the session came to a close, Dave said that when the NMAI asked the Chicago community to make an exhibit, it was “really a historical moment.” He added that the community’s experience with the NMAI was directly responsible for their success with the AIC Trickster Gallery.

As the session came to an end, Arlen noted that the Yakama co-curators had done a prayer in their NMAI exhibit space before the opening—“we had our own time before others saw it... we think it’s a wonderful place.” When he visited the exhibit, “it made me feel at home, made me feel good... knowing that people of the world will know who we were, who we are, and see what we have. Maybe not 100%, or all of it, but at least some of it.” His comments would be reiterated in interviews and questionnaires I conducted with other community curators throughout the course of my fieldwork.

I attended the Native American Museum Professionals-sponsored lunch, which was overwhelmed with NMAI people—there was at least one staff member at each table. During introductions, one woman announced she was just recently selected to be a co-curator on an NMAI upcoming exhibition; she was clearly proud to share this with everyone present. Through this luncheon and more generally, I noticed that there was a network of Native people in the museum field. One prominent member of this network, who was the head of a Native American Museum Professionals chapter of the AAM, gave a presentation about an exhibition she had worked on that resembled community curating. We talked afterwards, and she told me that the big difference in comparison to other museums is that Native people feel “ownership over the exhibits at the NMAI.” Chapter 4 (“Authorship”) provides insight into why Native communities felt “ownership” over their exhibits, while the next chapter (“Expertise”) provides insight into why these two NMAI sessions were structured so differently.

CHAPTER 3

EXPERTISE

*I remember Rick Hill, who was here as Assistant Director of Public Programs, mentioned early on, he said: Doug, there's one thing you need to remember is that Native people are the experts about what it is to be Native people.*¹

—Doug Evelyn, NMAI Deputy Director

*From the standpoint of museum professionals, it is one thing to call on one's 'native informant' and quite another to work with a co-curator.*²

—James Clifford in *Routes*

*We're not curators, we're facilitators in your exhibitions.*³

—Gerald McMaster, NMAI Deputy Assistant Director

*We DO translate from the communities to the exhibit, NOT a bad thing—that's our job. "Good translation is comprehensive."*⁴

—Jennifer Miller, OL Project Manager

*[The reason we were able] to work with communities in this way was because... people in Cultural Resources believed in this process that had been instituted. And other people that weren't a part of Cultural Resources, maybe they didn't all believe—some of them surely did—but even if they didn't believe in it they still knew it was an instituted methodology that we were going to adhere to... It become somewhat of a law around here.*⁵

—Cynthia Chavez, OL Lead Curator

Introduction

Following the commitment to symmetry I explained in Chapter 1, this chapter expands on the anthropology of experts (which usually focuses on elites in institutions

¹ From an interview with NMAI Deputy Director Doug Evelyn, at his office in the Mall Museum, November 15, 2004. In somewhat classic NMAI-speak, Doug invokes the words of a prominent Native curator to perform and guide his own understanding and basis for his discussion of the subject of community curating.

² Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, 211.

³ Conversation with Gerald McMaster, his office at the Aerospace building, April 1, 2004. He was explaining what he says to tribes who work with the NMAI.

⁴ From meeting minutes posted on museum intranet titled, "Exhibits Mtg. 8/29/00."

⁵ Interview with Curator, October 29, 2004.

of power), by including the Native community curators themselves as experts, thus taking this designation seriously by the NMAI. This model goes beyond posing the usual dichotomy of expert versus local knowledge. My approach is to look at the category of “expert” as it is constructed and contested from within and across these various groups in the museum and in Native communities, how working on the project of *Our Lives* mobilized certain kinds of expertise within these communities, and in turn what happens in the “contact zones” in which these cultures of expertise interact.

While previous chapters discussed Exhibits and Curatorial as departments within a bureaucratic structure and in different institutional locations, in this chapter they are (re)presented as cultures of expertise in a wider context of knowledge making, and juxtaposed to similar processes within Native communities as they put together their own specialists as co-curators. As I describe below, “community wishes” about exhibit content that are generated in the process of community curating at times were considered by NMAI staff as expert contributions (with attending heft), by others reconfigured as specifically non-expert and not a credible source of expertise for making the exhibits. Curators were seen as experts, and then again as not enacting enough museological expertise in the course of community curating.

Drawing mainly on discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, and the anthropology of experts, this chapter examines one debate that emerges in the collaboration among “experts” that centers on whether the community curators should be regarded as experts in the context of exhibit making. In addition, it examines how community curators chose appropriate representatives or experts for the co-curator committees which participated in exhibit making. In both cases, expert is a category that is seen as legitimized and delegitimized, as contested and caught up in the debates and philosophies of departmental competition and community identity, to be mobilized or demobilized by each group at different times.

An Anthropology of Experts

There are two main bodies of anthropological literature from which one can draw an anthropology of experts. One employs the ethnography of elites such as financial traders, scientists, or political leaders to understand the contemporary condition, addressing such concepts as globalization, multiculturalism, or postmodernism. The second body of work is a subset of the first, also studying elites but with a tighter focus on cultural producers involved specifically in mass media production. While not often categorized as such, an often overlooked category of research about experts is the anthropology of museums, which is also about the interaction of elite culture producers in public institutions of authority.

Anthropologists focus on experts for a number of reasons—many of which, crudely, can be boiled down to accessing ethnographically the lived practices and materiality of globalization, national politics, and scientific and public knowledge producers. In other words, the anthropology of experts is one way of “studying up,”⁶ of accessing the movers and shakers of modernity. For example, in “Cultures of Expertise and the Management of Globalization: Toward a re-functioning of ethnography,” Holmes and Marcus turn their ethnographic engagements to the “managers of globalization” to better understand this contemporary phenomena.⁷ They propose a way to elucidate globalization through the experts that motivate, articulate, and produce knowledge about its forces and materiality.

Holmes and Marcus pay attention to the “para-ethnographic” practices of international bankers, noting the widespread application of anthropology’s ethnographic method across different disciplines and specialized knowledges. Their focus on “cultures of expertise” was clearly influential in the approach I took here.

⁶ Laura Nader, “Up the Anthropologist,” in *Reinventing Anthropology*, ed. Dell Hymes (1974[1969]).

⁷ Holmes and Marcus, “Cultures of Expertise and the Management of Globalization: Toward a Re-Functioning of Ethnography.”

However, my interlocutors were not only doing para-ethnography, but they were also often trained specifically in ethnographic and interviewing practices through anthropology or other disciplines like American studies. Therefore, the “fit” between their knowledge practices and mine was even closer. In addition, Holmes and Marcus suggest that when dealing with experts, anthropologists’ “subjects” are more “counterparts” than “others.” In my case, the subjects represented in the ethnography were both “other,” in a more traditional sense and anthropological use of the term, and “expert,” in the way that I have written here.

Experts addressed as such in anthropological literature are often powerful elites, people who have the ability to affect public spheres in some way. Curators and co-curators are experts in representational practice, whether museological or cultural. Community curators, who are more recognizable as non-elites, were also very much theorists in the ways they think, define, and talk about their identity for the sake of the exhibition and other public presentations, as will be discussed in more detail below. No doubt, due to the millions of people coming to see the NMAI each year, Curatorial staff and community curators contributed significantly to the public sphere, but not through positions of power—rather through the power of representation.⁸ This of course is a cogent source of power; however, the curators were culture producers who felt “disempowered” while representing non-elites. Although they work in an elite

⁸ In general, analysis of museums usually puts forth that they are elite institutions asserting their privilege. Within the institution, however, that kind of authority is not what is examined nor presented here. I do not mean to deny that culture producers in the NMAI are elites, nor that the power to represent is a significant one. I want to emphasize that, while the NMAI is an elite, influential and powerful institution, this particular account is about people who felt relatively disempowered within the museum. To use a familiar turn of phrase, I was in the unusual situation of “studying up” culture producers who “give voice,” or empower underrepresented peoples (I do not intend to imply with this language that I was studying people; see introduction). They did not perceive themselves as having much power in this process, regardless of the view from outside or the results of their efforts to a broader audience. There are other NMAI staff who would have more readily identified themselves with the elite status and power that is often associated with the Smithsonian Institution.

institution, these were not elite actors who could mobilize political or financial power in public or professional spheres.

If one takes expert to mean having highly specialized knowledge through training, then in anthropology with American Indians and in my fieldwork for the NMAI, experts abound—religious experts, tribal historians, material culture specialists, and more. In this case, the anthropology of experts has been going on for a long time, even if they weren't recognized as such. Or, at least, there has been documentation of expertise without the recognition of expert status. For, expert is somewhat of a political term, a differentially valued category. Labeling a Native community member as cultural expert, as the Curatorial ethos and practice did at the NMAI, is an ethical stance, a self-consciously subversive classification of sorts, a balancing of academic and oral traditional modes of knowledge training.

I consider the exhibit as an artifact of modern exhibition practice and museological experts, but so is the labeling of community curators as experts. So again, I do not take what is an “expert” for granted. In my field sites, this term had different valences and requirements. It was a concept that was employed for certain gains; for example, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, it was a way to equalize relations between NMAI curators' knowledge and Native community members' knowledge.

Finally, generally, the anthropology of museums has not been considered as a part of the field of anthropological literature addressing such concepts as experts or elites, media studies, postmodernism or globalization. In part this is due to the often recognized split between anthropology and the museum, in theory and in practice.⁹ Although the number of museum ethnographies is small, they can provide the growing

⁹ Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums*, Bouquet, ed., *Academic Anthropology and the Museum: Back to the Future*.

subfield of the anthropology of experts a source and comparative look at a subset of professionals at work in cultural institutions.¹⁰

For, as Anita Herle explains in “Torres Strait Islanders: Stories from an Exhibition,” collaborative exhibitions with Native peoples include “cross-cultural collaborative work, reflecting the changing roles of museums as sites for contact and research combining curatorial expertise and indigenous knowledge.”¹¹ She continues,

The contextualization of the collections in the centenary Exhibition necessarily involved both Islander and curatorial knowledge and expertise... There are few ethnographies of the making of an exhibition and insider evaluations usually take the form of relatively standardized visitor surveys designed with an eye towards marketing. Those actively involved in producing exhibitions are well aware of the negotiations between the different interests of specialist museum staff (curators, designers, conservators, educators) and outside experts (academic specialists, indigenous representatives, community and special interest groups), as well as the practical limitations imposed by time, space and resources.¹²

As Herle’s description intimates, it is not unique to the NMAI to consider the experts making an exhibition to include indigenous peoples as well as museum staff, nor is the experience of negotiating the various interests of the parties involved.¹³ This chapter intends to answer her call for a more in-depth study of these dynamics of the collaborative process.

¹⁰ See for example Lisa C. Roberts, *From Knowledge to Narrative: Educators and the Changing Museum* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), Herle, “Torres Strait Islanders: Stories from an Exhibition.”, Joel Kahn, “Anthropology’s Malaysian Interlocutors: Toward a Cosmopolitan Ethics of Anthropological Practice,” in *Embedding Ethics*, ed. Lynn Meskell and Peter Pels (Oxford, UK ; New York: Berg, 2005), Erikson, Ward, and Wachendorf, *Voices of a Thousand People : The Makah Cultural and Research Center*.

¹¹ Herle, “Torres Strait Islanders: Stories from an Exhibition,” 253.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ See also Kahn, “Not Really Pacific Voices: Politics of Representation in Collaborative Museum Exhibits.” and Ames, “How to Decorate a House: The Re-Negotiation of Cultural Representations at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology.”

Expertise in the Contact Zone

In *Routes*, James Clifford renders museums as “contact zones.”¹⁴ This is a complex concept that describes the meeting of indigenous peoples and museums in ongoing relations connected to a colonial past that are intercultural and contentious, entailing uneven reciprocity and political negotiation as well as alliances and advocacy. While he considers how collections and objects traverse these contact zones, I choose here to borrow this concept, and vivid image, to consider the impact of different forms of expertise as they came into contact during the making of the *Our Lives* exhibit.

Clifford explains that “neither community ‘experience’ nor curatorial ‘authority’ has an automatic right to the contextualization of collections or to the narration of contact histories.”¹⁵ But this is precisely where the “battle” was waged: to contextualize the exhibit content. The constant mention of “personalities” and “turf” issues between departments mentioned in the previous chapter was in part a battle over jurisdiction, over boundaries of professional expertise. Expertise was contested, enacted, and located differently by various departments. The notion of Native community members as “experts” was very differently viewed by the Exhibits Department and the Curatorial Department, two main NMAI departments involved in exhibit development. Individuals both inside and outside the museum assured me that the tension between these two departments is classic, and occurs in all museums. However, at the NMAI there was a new element: the “community curator.”

The NMAI has said, since it’s early planning documents and today, that it has both a constituency and an audience, the former being Native communities and the latter the visiting public (which to some extent includes those communities, but it is

¹⁴ Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, 188-219.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 208.

generally envisioned as an uninformed, non-Native public). The interests of the constituency is not only represented by the Board of Trustees who set policy for the museum, but also by the people with whom the museum shares authority in making its exhibitions. Staff viewed Exhibits as prioritizing the non-Native public, and Curatorial as prioritizing the Native constituency, most notably in the guise of co-curators. These two ethos were opposed, and situated the locus of expertise and professional responsibilities differently. In an interview with NMAI director Rick West, even he intimated that “Curatorials” are on one side, and Exhibits on other.¹⁶ He explained that Curators were “told early on in the process to let it flow, not to filter Native voice, and they’ve been very disciplined in that.”¹⁷ Apparently, to their detriment according to Exhibits staff evaluations.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there are set of dichotomies that adhere in museum structure and practice: that of process versus product, form versus content, and textual versus visual, where Exhibits is to be responsible for the final product and the form and visual properties of the exhibition, and Curatorial is responsible for the process, textual output and content. But every translation from two dimensions to three—from design documents to spatial installation, from worksheet to text panel, from the juxtaposition of objects to the adding of audiovisual media—impacts content as the next chapter will illustrate. Whether it’s about being a visual thinker, being able to anticipate the audience, or knowing the right way to work with communities, each NMAI department had its own, to borrow one curator’s term, “M.O.” (modus operandi). Through examining the category of expert, the ethos and jurisdictional boundaries that intersect in the debate over what is best practice for community curating are illuminated.

¹⁶ Interview with Rick West, in his office at the Mall Museum, November 18 2004.

¹⁷ Interview with Rick West, in his office at the Mall Museum, November 18 2004.

Cultures of Expertise

The category of expert, and the anticipation of what kind of expert is necessary to the particular tasks of the NMAI, can be seen in a number of different ways—through the contestation of professional responsibility within the museum, through the selection of particular individuals for co-curator committees, and even for the categories of expertise that the museum defined as its consultants in its development phases. For example, during the 1997 meetings to review the recently created Exhibition Master Plan, much like earlier consultations about the planning of the museum itself, the NMAI kept separating and categorizing groups of experts in these meetings—often academics, Native scholars, and museum professionals.¹⁸

Much like the representational calculus conducted by the Kalinago below for their co-curator committee, Rick West states in his memorandum to NMAI staff about the upcoming meeting, “I believe we have come up with lists of people for both sessions that have rough geographic balance and variety, gender balance, diverse subject expertise, and hemispheric representation” for the “scholars and academics” list and the “Indian museum community” list.¹⁹ For example, as I will detail in the next chapter, in the 2000 “Vetting Session” for the OL gallery, which was a meeting with “Native scholars,” the museum sought certain cultures of expertise, as it defined them, to accomplish its goals of consultation and also substantiation.

¹⁸ An example list of consultation categories from the 1991 Exhibition Plan: Museum directors, administrators and designers, May 2, 1991; Contemporary artists, May 3, 1991; Researchers, May 30, 1991; New York City Urban Group, June 13, 1991; Educators, June 27, 1991; Libraries, Archives, Collections, July 8-9, 1991; Santa Fe Regional, July 15-16, 1991; Washington DC Urban Groups, July 23-24, 1991; NMAI Board, September 5, 1991; Technology, September 9-10, 1991; Staff and Consultants Programming Work Session, Philadelphia, September 16, 1991; Council of Bureau Directors, Smithsonian Institution, September 23, 1991; Alaska Regional, Anchorage, November 4-5, 1991; Sulphur, Oklahoma, May 31-June 1, 1990 (before report authors were involved); Warm Springs, Oregon, October 15-16, 1990 (before report authors were involved). From Venturi and Associates, "The Way of the People: National Museum of the American Indian," 58.

¹⁹ NMAI Internal Memo August 11, 1997.

Within the museum there are also many different “cultures of expertise,” each with their own ethos, material practices, technical languages, and power structures. From design, to collections management, to curatorial—there are many expert communities of practice within the museum bureaucracy. Add to these the community curators as well—in this case, the Chicago urban Indian co-curators and the Kalinago co-curators, and it becomes a large field of collaborating experts and knowledges, a complex “contact zone” in which the exhibition is produced.

Doug Evelyn, the NMAI Deputy Director during the development of the inaugural exhibitions, provides a picture of this contact zone as:

being a collaborative one within the museum, requiring different sets of expertise and disciplines to pull off... And we were anxious that there was an interplay between the design and the production side of the house, and the Curatorial. And there’s always tension in that process, there’s got to be at some point a baton pass, where the curatorial people kind of wrap up the script. Now, in this case, who were the curators? The curators were both NMAI people, who facilitated a much larger set of interactions with tribal curators—that was all very complex.²⁰

The “baton pass” was in part at the heart of conflict between Exhibits and Curatorial, as well as the complex interactions with and on behalf of the community curators in the process.

Here I focus on the two main departments responsible for the management of exhibition development: Curatorial and Exhibits. This does not mean to exclude other experts at work in this process with significant contributions to content and context of the exhibits—most notably design contractors and media consultants—but these cultures of expertise will be addressed more directly in the following chapter about representation and authorship. Here, I want to emphasize the opposing ethos of two departments at the NMAI, whereby the community curators and their roles in exhibition development became a central point of contention. For the sake of a

²⁰ Interview with Doug Evelyn, in his office at the Mall Museum, November 15, 2004.

comparison, I take the leaders of the Curatorial and Exhibits departments to encapsulate the ethos and commitments of their groups, with additional comments by staff.

Each side of this institutional divide had different ideas about the community curating process and the criteria for evaluating the success of exhibits. It seems the conflict between the Exhibits and Curatorial departments—and anyone working there readily acknowledged this struggle had been going on for many years, as it often does in other museums—is that, in this particular case, they look to different constituencies.²¹ The original NMAI mission statement lists two: “Native communities and the non-Native public.” Generally, I think this is a fair assessment from someone working in a public-oriented department.²² The curatorial staff worried about doing things “the right way” and squarely faced and served Native communities in its philosophy and practice to accomplish this, while the Exhibits and Education departments were more consistently mindful and directed towards doing appropriate “translation” for the museum-going public.

Curatorial Experts and Advocacy

As I explained in Chapter 1, the Curatorial department at the NMAI shared authority with Native co-curators during the making of the *Our Lives* exhibition, considering them to be the experts of their own (cultural) experience and producers of the exhibition content.²³ As Rick West states, there is an “intellectual openness that

²¹ Interview with Mark Hirsch, in his office at the Mall Museum, September 8, 2004. Tanya Thrasher also thought the tensions between the departments were because Curatorial had a responsibility to the community, and Exhibits to the public (conversation in the SI Castle lounge area, April 1, 2004).

²² I am in no way suggesting that public-oriented department staff do not also have a strong desire to do what’s right for Native communities; but this divide in language, interpretation, perception and practice about how to fulfill NMAI’s mission of Native voice among NMAI departments is a key part of the museum’s internal dynamics.

²³ The divide between design and content will be discussed further in the next chapter. Native co-curators, like NMAI Curators (except perhaps guest curator Jolene Rickard who is an artist), were prohibited from designing—that was not part of their recognized or enabled expertise.

recognize[s] the place and the authority of indigenous peoples in their own interpretation and representation.”²⁴

This collaborative approach fundamentally changed the role and relationship the curators had to the subjects and subject matter of exhibits. Traditionally, as Ames explains,

The customary method of exhibition development could be summarized by saying it is governed by the “curatorial prerogative.” By that I mean: (a) the final decision, authority, or prerogative for the exhibition usually lies with the curatorial team, subject to the approval of senior museum administration and budgetary constraints; and (b) the team is led or authorized by a content specialist or knowledge expert, designated as the curator or guest curator, rather than by a conservator, designer, educator, administrator, or specialist consultant.

The process thus is hierarchical in structure: from the governing bodies of a museum, who set its mandate, to the director and/or senior management, to the curator, to the exhibition team composed of museological specialists. The assumption underlying the key role given to the curator is that specialized research knowledge is a primary consideration, subject to the exhibition and financial policies of the museum as monitored by the director or senior administrative official. Research or “knowledge” is considered a primary good, therefore the person specializing in its production expects, and usually is accorded, privileged status in the decision-making process and in any public benefits.²⁵

In contrast, NMAI curators not only described themselves as facilitators—which is not unusual in collaborative exhibit development with source communities²⁶— but also as “advocates” for Native communities within the museum. They squarely placed the “prerogative” and content specialists within the Native communities, and placed themselves as intermediaries, representatives and sometimes even protectors of this prerogative in interdepartmental meetings.

²⁴ Richard West, Speech, September 9 2004.

²⁵ Ames, "How to Decorate a House: The Re-Negotiation of Cultural Representations at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology," 42.

²⁶ For example, see Phillips, "Community Collaboration in Exhibitions: Introduction."

At a vetting session in 2000 which aimed to brainstorm for the framework and content of the *Our Lives* gallery, a small group of respected Native scholars²⁷ and NMAI staff members²⁸ sat around a conference table in the Curatorial Conference Room at the Cultural Resources Center. Bruce Bernstein, Deputy Assistant Director of Cultural Resources began the meeting by explaining that:

All three [inaugural] exhibits are community curated, at least 70 percent. What we mean by that is the museum curators, the museum staff, whether native or non native serve as facilitators or advocates, that the *experts reside in the communities*. So not only should we go to the communities to get their voices, many exhibits over the last 20 or 30 years have sought native people to be voices. Then, however, they put them in front of the exhibit to comment on the exhibit but haven't really allowed them into the exhibit...

As we are going into the design phases for these two exhibitions, the difficulty of non-native people to hear a lot of what these experts have told us. Yesterday we were in the design session for Universes, and there is a tendency for the people who are working with these individuals to reassemble everything.

So it is our responsibility not so much to correct them that it's not red but it's blue, but rather to get them to have a comfort that native people know what they are speaking about. If you really think about the problem exhibitions, it's still the general public or the museum-going public's *discomfort with expertise*.²⁹ Academically, as well, you can understand that museums like academic institutions are based upon writing, based upon publication. If you have the scholars, like myself, who write and publish, then you add Native peoples' narrative, *which is more legitimate*³⁰...the power of narrative [in our society] is overwhelming. Certainly that is a lesson that comes out of Native cultures everywhere in the hemisphere. So we're trying to resituate the exhibition so that people hear narratives as important as any other view...

[NMAI staff are] trying to work with [native people] in partnership *advocating their point of view*. It is taxing on people, to say the least. You can imagine how it is when you've worked with one community and going back and forth. Things sometimes change in communities. The governors change,

²⁷ Invited Native scholars were Gerald McMaster (who would later be hired as Deputy Director), Angela Gonzales, Wesley Thomas, Inez Hernandez Avila, and Paul Chaat Smith (who would later be hired as a curator)

²⁸ Ann McMullen, Cynthia Chavez as newly appointed lead curator, myself as newly appointed lead researcher and note taker during the meeting, and Bruce Bernstein.

²⁹ Compare this prediction with reviewer comments in Chapter 6 and the debate over scholarship.

³⁰ This statement that Native people's accounts are more legitimate hints at the ideology of Curatorial; as noted, Chapter 6 shows that this logic may not be shared by others who viewed the exhibits.

and there are all those family differences. The museum has to remain as much a neutral body as we can possibly be. Therefore, the museum on the Mall becomes a venue for native people to tell their story *without the filter, without the interpretation of NMAI*.³¹

Here we see a reversal of the conventional notions of expertise: what is oral is more “legitimate” than what is published, and the Native community member is more legitimate than the accredited anthropologist, Bruce Bernstein (who was speaking), who represents an institution that is not to interrupt the Native story with its own “interpretation.”

As Bruce’s introduction to the session shows, NMAI curators viewed the co-curators as experts, and used language as such to describe them since 1999.³² This meant that the exhibit content and themes were to come from Native community members. Therefore, as the lead curator Dr. Cynthia Chavez explained to me, her job was to listen carefully, and to group together co-curators’ ideas into coherent themes within their exhibit and organize them in a way that can be visually presented in the form of an exhibit. She also commented,

Well, looking at myself as a curator within the context of the NMAI and then this particular exhibit I see myself more as a facilitator—of information—and also someone who is a liaison. And, you know, I think that that’s what I’ve been best at doing... we either have to *not* call me a curator, or we have to redefine what a curator is. Because I certainly don’t see myself as that in a traditional sense, of that word or that definition.³³

³¹ Vetting Session meeting transcript, in the Curatorial Conference Room at the Cultural Resources Center, December 14, 2000. Emphasis added. I changed “another view” to “any other view,” presuming error by the transcription company.

³² There are two notable exceptions: a guest curator and a more recently hired curator in the course of the inaugural exhibitions, both self-described Native “intelligentsia,” who were outspoken in their criticisms of NMAI being “anti-intellectual” and who did not agree with this characterization or commitment to community curators as “experts.” One, for example, referencing the OP gallery, was known by the Curatorial staff to have said that, in many cases, Native peoples “don’t know their own history.” However, at the time of this vetting session these curators were not NMAI staff.

³³ Interview with Cynthia Chavez, in her office at the CRC, June 18, 2004. One guest curator said that for a Curatorial staff member to say she is not a curator but rather a facilitator, meant she did not have enough mentoring. This guest curator felt that this was one of the problems with the way the exhibits were designed. As I noted earlier, many, like SI staff members at the Office of Policy and Analysis, said that the NMAI was put together by people who were not experienced in exhibit making.

Hearing various staff members construe the community curating process quite differently, I asked a number of staff members what being a curator *at the NMAI* meant. When asked if the curators provided any kind of role in the exhibit development beyond just listening to what community members said, which was the characterization made by many “Fifth Floor”³⁴ staff, one curator responded that “curators *did* have to translate knowledge—it’s a question of whether you think they have a certain expertise or they just facilitated,” she said.³⁵ Put another way by the head of the Cultural Resources Center at the time, Bruce Bernstein explained that “although you can’t be an expert in eight different cultures, you can be an expert in talking to people about their cultures... it means we have an expert in working with Plains people. But it doesn’t mean that we’re *the* experts in Plains people.”³⁶

Speaking of how other staff members perceive the Curatorial department, Cynthia commented, “I think there’s sort of a feeling that there is not expertise in this department... That pretty much anyone can curate an exhibit and that we don’t have anybody around here in this department that has such a specialized body of knowledge that we *need* them, that they’re necessary.”³⁷ This perception was corroborated by comments from the head of the Exhibits department in his comments in interviews over the years, which I will detail below. But in interviews with Ann McMullen, she insisted the curators did have special skills, and that they were challenged by other departments. Ann was the head of the Curatorial Department and a curator for portions of the *Our Peoples* exhibition; she was also the assigned fieldworker for the *Our Lives* Pamunkey exhibit.

³⁴ This term, explained in the previous chapter, signifies upper management and people who have offices on the Fifth floor of the Mall Museum. The departments included are Publications, Exhibits, Education, Public Programs and Visitor Services—most people involved with the “public face” of the museum and whose work is mainly concerned with and produced for its audience.

³⁵ Interview with Cécile Ganteaume, in her office at the CRC, July 6, 2006.

³⁶ Interview with Bruce Bernstein, in his office at the Mall Museum, November 22, 2004.

³⁷ Interview with Cynthia Chavez, in her office at the CRC, November 24, 2004.

I sat with Ann on a number of occasions, in informal and formal discussions, to talk about the role of Curatorial in the museum. One day in November 2004, shortly after the museum's opening to the public, we sat in chairs next to the rotunda area of the CRC, the large panoramic windows marking the hours as the day faded and turned to night. During our conversation, Ann directly addressed what she saw to be the expertise of NMAI curators, and how they were indeed viewed as having little or no relevant expertise by other departments in the museum.

Ann pointed out that Curators provide what's not written down, which is essential to "get it right," and talked about a commitment based on intimacy— knowing the back story, so to speak— between the Curators and the communities. She explained to me about "the curator's ability, and the curator's *tact*, and the exercise of negotiation within the communities, to be that mediator between museum forces" and that "there are people within NMAI— even people who *ought* to know better— who feel that *anyone* can be a curator."³⁸

She went on to explain that the curators' knowledge is key to determining what is important and relevant in the "raw transcripts" which "included a lot of sensitive information and a lot of irrelevant information, and some relevant." Her main concern was that this information "would be given into the hands of someone who had no idea of what those relevances were— who had no idea how the text and the things that were in the transcripts actually related to the *rest* of the exhibition as it had been developed so far." To Ann, this demand to turn over raw transcripts by the Program Manager, rather than write exhibition scripts within Curatorial based on them, "was the place where Curatorial authority was really at stake. Because we ran the risk of sort of just opening up the transcripts," a risk whereby community requests or even

³⁸ Interview with Ann McMullen, in the Rotunda of the CRC, November 23, 2004.

tacit understandings that particular conversations that co-curators had with NMAI staff not get displayed in public could have gone unheeded.³⁹

The fear in Curatorial was that the content of the exhibit would more reflect what “piqued the interest of the script writer,” possibly presenting something “horribly overemphasized in the exhibit that resulted,” that the community did not agree with. She continues,

So, it was like that was like *the big fight*. And the *whole* thing hinges on— for me— authority. And how authority is constituted within NMAI. Because in the same way that I described everybody having a piece of the exhibit and having no single picture... because there’s *no recognition that Curatorial stands in a unique face to face position with the community*, and being in the *best* position to actually, in some cases, *interpret* the feeling of the community when there’s no possibility of going back and asking every single question. That *somebody’s* got to take *responsibility* for that. And it seemed at that point that *at that time*, members of Curatorial, specifically the lead curators, were the only ones who recognized that it was a *responsibility*. And it was what we *owed* communities.

That you couldn’t understand communities and what they wanted for their exhibits solely by what was recorded on paper, what was in the transcripts, or anything else like that. Part of it had to do with the development of personal relationships and *feelings* of community, of having *heard* them, of having heard their often emotional reactions to what they’re talking about. Having heard their own ideas about what the exhibit might be, and try to tailor them to what might actually be possible within a physical exhibit space, or anything else...

So, there’s all these, people sticking their fingers in this pie, and if curators sit between those things, they’re the only ones who can actually say, I don’t think the community’s going to like that—that isn’t about what they said, it’s not what they stressed, when we talked to them or anything else like that...

Part of the [problem with] *some* of the design teams, and not all of them, but some of them would be they’d always be introducing their own research. They’d be going on the web, and they’d be going to the library and they’d be checking books out... We were like, no! That’s not what they said—this is supposed to be *what these community people said*. And if you want to *back* it up with something, we still have to *check* with them about whether it’s ok to do that.⁴⁰

³⁹ Interview with Ann McMullen, in the Rotunda of the CRC, November 23, 2004.

⁴⁰ Interview with Ann McMullen, in the Rotunda of the CRC, November 23, 2004.

In other words, Ann stressed that the face-to-face relationship curators have with communities in part compels them to be advocates within the museum, where the exhibition content gets manipulated into a three dimensional exhibit—where the content is affected by multiple experts transforming it through script editing, the juxtaposition of images or objects, and use of colors and textual strategies of emphasis or de-emphasis.

This responsibility to advocate is, in part, based on a particular kind of intimacy (or shared knowledge) curators have with co-curators and their desire to be a part of the exhibit making process beyond merely collecting “raw” data:

And part of our understanding in Curatorial of Native voice was a couple things, which was: the content of the exhibits went as far as the communities *wanted* it to...Because part of the curator’s relationship to the community members is also one of *intimacy*. For instance, I can remember having for any of my research, doing interviews with people where the person that you’re speaking with automatically assumes that you *know* something, or that you *don’t* know something. And if they feel that you have a shared background, they *don’t* talk about the abc’s of the situation.

Ann further explained that this familiarity between the curator and co-curators allows for a higher level of detail in conversation, but as a result sometimes the curator may “become somewhat blind to the fact that *more* introductory information is actually necessary.”

Ann also described what she saw as the role of the curator in community curating and contrasted it with her view of how exhibit developers consider the curator role this process:

But part of the difficulty was that understanding of curator as *the mediator* between the *source*—the communities themselves—and what we’ve presented in the exhibits has not been recognized as being a valuable part of the process... But there’s all this stuff where this ability of the exhibit developers—they’re supposed to take this *raw content* and transform it into what exhibits look like, imagining that curators had no part in that, that curators were simply these sort of people with dust pans kind of scraping up things and collecting stories and everything, and bringing back and *handing*

them over in that raw fashion to somebody else. And that was sort of the struggle that was going on when *I* first arrived, was that Curatorial was expected to *hand over* and *step back*. And not *do* anything. It was, you know, it was basically up to the Exhibits to actually transform this raw material into exhibits...

She then detailed what she saw as the essential undermining of Curatorial, and consequently and ultimately, community curator authority in the process:

Because part of it, *all* of it has to do with who's got authority over what... Native voice was supposed to be the *representation* the communities had, physically, within the exhibit design. And it was supposed to be, also, some kind of empowerment of what they *said* about what was in there, as well. And that's a thing which sort of was sort of a push-pull thing of the whole of NMAI in different places. Which is, that if Native voice was truly more than words, and the communities were supposed to have solid input into their designs, but this other side comes over and it said, like: the designers are the final authority on what the exhibits will look like—that community curators are not in a position to approve or disapprove the design... then essentially, it sort of simultaneously *disempowered* the community curators and it disempowered Curatorial as a unit itself.

Because if Curatorial is put in a position of representing the interests of disempowered people, *how* empowered can Curatorial itself be? ... if no one's listening to Curatorial, then community curators themselves are effectively silenced... And that's a question about community curation, which is, how do you actually get to that point of intimacy where you can actually guess what somebody's going to say. Where you can actually judge what's going to matter, and what's not going to matter. And that's the point that NMAI is at now, because there are people downtown who think that anybody can be a curator—that you can send *anybody* out there to a community and come back with what members of Curatorial have.⁴¹

Ann's comments are very much representative of what the Curatorial ethos was in general: a desire to advocate for “community wishes” (as they were often called) against other interests and actors within the bureaucracy, and a desire to remain connected to and shepherd the exhibit content that was developed in what is conceptualized as an intimate partnership with Native community members through the rest of the exhibit development process. They felt that, as the co-curators could

⁴¹ Interview with Ann McMullen, in the Rotunda of the CRC, November 23, 2004.

not always be present in departmental meetings or at important decision making moments, the NMAI Curatorial staff was charged with the responsibility to represent co-curator interests throughout exhibit development as they were closest (socially and spatially through repeat visits) to the communities.⁴²

Exhibits Experts and Translators

Like many Exhibits staff, Mark Hirsch, the script writer/editor⁴³ saw his job as bringing “clarity” to the exhibit process, making it easier for the visitors to understand the exhibits. He and I talked about how sometimes the co-curators would choose not to provide content for exhibits that the museum staff were interested in. He said, “I felt we often acted as supplicants at times when we should have provided direction [to communities in curating]. And I don’t think that was helpful. Again, a very subjective feeling. I mean, I think that’s probably heresy in Curatorial.” He discussed “paying the price” for just doing what the community wants, and added that it is the exhibition team that staff members should have allegiance to, not their departments.⁴⁴

What is ironic about this common conception from outside the Curatorial Department—that there is a “cabal” as museum consultant Elaine Gurian put it once in during a discussion as to why Curatorial needed to be “broken up,”⁴⁵ or that they have an allegiance to each other rather than the wider exhibition team—is that Curatorial did not have a single meeting as a department during the entire course of my fieldwork. In fact, a number of staff complained to me about the lack of meetings, the

⁴² In general, other departmental staff members lamented that they did not have such intimate experiences as Curatorial’s direct contact with Native communities. In this way, in a symbolic capital sense Curatorial was at the top of the hierarchy, and its members considered in a respected field. But in a power sense, decision making capacity within the museum structure, they were far lower on the chain of command.

⁴³ The hiring of a script *writer* was an unexpected surprise to curators at the NMAI, who assumed that they would be responsible for working with communities to write the exhibition scripts and labels. His title as “writer/editor” highlights the contestation over his role in the process.

⁴⁴ Interview with Mark Hirsch, in his office at the Mall Museum, September 8, 2004.

⁴⁵ Conversation with Elaine Gurian, at a Starbucks in Pentagon City, Virginia, June 7, 2006.

lack of discussion of any kind amongst curators, and one Curatorial member even suggested that *I* arrange a meeting for the department. During my fieldwork period, a number of Curatorial staff members did not even talk to each other for various reasons over the course of the development of the inaugural exhibitions. Here, I think “Fifth floor” people like Mark got this wrong: there was not an allegiance among Curatorial staff to their department or to each other, but rather—and fiercely—to the Native communities with whom they worked.

Mark also emphasized to me the difference between fieldwork and museum labels, stating that only politicians talk in sound bytes, not community members. So, their comments needed to be rewritten to suit the audience for better understanding. He construed his own lack of knowledge about Indians as helpful in an editorial capacity (“ignorance is bliss” he joked), because it helped him come at it from the visitor’s perspective.⁴⁶ Mark is one person among others on the “Fifth Floor” about which other staff members say they don’t know “Indians 101.”⁴⁷ In this case, he presents it as an advantage, a better way to represent the average audience member coming to the museum. He is, in other terms, representative of the imagined audience: imagined here as an ignorant public.

Mark also shows that what is seen as advocacy in Curatorial, in other departments was viewed as a certain kind of paternalism⁴⁸:

⁴⁶ Interview with Mark Hirsch, in his office at the Mall Museum, September 8, 2004.

⁴⁷ After the opening, one CRC staff member (conversation October 6, 2004) mentioned Mark Hirsch whom, like many others said whenever they mentioned him, was a “very nice and intelligent man” but he did not know very much about Indians. She clearly did not see this as an advantage to his work. And, she felt the NMAI editors in general often would rewrite, rather than edit, her work. She insisted on working with a different editor than Mark for that reason, as she refused to sign her name to something she did not write. Bruce Bernstein (conversation at NMNH, June 2, 2006) also said that when he wrote articles for publications, the editors tended to rewrite, rather than edit, his work.

⁴⁸ One *downtown* staff member described Curatorial’s attitude as a “racist conceit” because, he said, the curators did not trust other departments’ staff to be “sensitive” enough to work directly with communities. This comment is also noted in Chapter 6, “Exhibition.”

I think the twist is that... this is kind of hard to explain, actually, I'm not sure I'm going to do this justice. This is one of those points where I think *maybe* this is the moment where we should shut the tape recorder off. *But!* Let's not, let's see how far we go. You know, I felt like the opposition between Curatorial—or the tension between Curatorial—and Exhibitions here was perhaps more pronounced than I think it is naturally in other places. And I got the sense that Curatorial's main constituency were the Native communities, and they really at some level *apparently*—I'm not saying this as *fact*—it *seemed* to me that sometimes that that was the only constituency that they were particularly interested in... And that the museum content that they were acquiring was important content, and that they had to sort of defend the interests of Native people. In some ways, I tended to look at some people in Curatorial as like the Indian agents... there seemed to me to be a kind of almost sort of paternalism, you know, Indian people can't take care of themselves so we have to take care of them. I think the tension on the other side was that, you know, we're here to create exhibits and tell people about Native people and the constituency for Exhibits was the public.⁴⁹ And I think that dichotomy was very pronounced... Again, this is very subjective, you need to talk to other people about this.⁵⁰

In many ways Mark bridged the two departments, working on materials provided by Curatorial while situated on the Fifth Floor near the senior managers and the head of the Exhibits department. His language reflected the Fifth Floor speech network, with similar phrases about, and critiques of, Curatorial and community curating.

For example, in a series of interviews with Jim Volkert, the head of the Exhibits Department for much of the planning of the inaugural exhibitions, he also told me that he felt the Curators had not stepped up to the table with museological expertise, that they simply would go “to a community and say, tell us your story.” Jim believed this approach had injured the final outcome of the exhibits. The notion that curators did “whatever the communities told them to” was an often used phrase in criticism of Curatorial from *downtown* staff.

⁴⁹ Compare this to what I wrote about earlier in my field notes: “Exhibits and Curatorial sitting back to back, facing their constituents, public and Native tribes, respectively. Makes it hard to communicate and their philosophies are quite different.” Here, Boyer's (2004) “dilemma” and our similar knowledge practices are made clear: Mark provided the same conclusion I had reached.

⁵⁰ Interview with Mark Hirsch, in his office at the Mall Museum, September 8, 2004.

Jim's contention was that the problem was with using experts to talk to the museum public, regardless of what kind of experts they are:

We simply replaced the experts with Native people we call experts. You know, just a different group of experts, that's all. So, if we were a museum on trains, we would have train experts. But we're about Indians, so we have Indian experts. Well, that's not enough. You know, that's not the answer, you know. And I am in no way saying that the authority of the museum doesn't go back to the community. I'm not saying that at all. What I'm saying is when we isolate them as experts in a non-conversational way, we've done the same thing that museums have done for a hundred years.⁵¹

In other words, Jim saw the role of Exhibits (and some would say the exhibit developer), as bringing those experts into conversation in an effective way with the visitors. That was the Exhibits staff's particular expertise.

Jim explained that the sharing of authority in exhibitions may have been new ten years ago when the museum was in the planning stages, but it's not new any more.⁵² He then said he located the authority in Native communities, but emphasized the expertise of Exhibits to bridge the conversation between the Native cultural "expert" and the non-Native museum visitor:

You know, we're not in the forefront of that [notion of sharing authority in exhibitions], as much as we might think we are... because that's just replacing one expert with another, replacing an anthropologist, you know, with an Indian.⁵³ But I think what's *more* important is that we found ways to bridge that conversation, from expert to visitor. In ways that are more

⁵¹ Interview with Jim Volkert, in his office at the Mall Museum, July 8, 2004.

⁵² Jim, almost two years after the museum opened, also had a different idea about curators role in general (as general researchers). He said "it doesn't matter the subject of the exhibition" for solid research to be done. The idea that you "must use a curator with subject expertise before" you decide if an exhibit is a good idea is not right. What you need is a "nimble, global curator" who can work on developing good exhibits as opposed to a curator who knows a specific subject or community—"you can always find that" when you need it. But not all researchers have that "nimble global" quality (phone interview with Jim Volkert, June 13, 2006).

⁵³ In this conversation Jim finally used the term "anthropologist." I had noticed in his interviews he had not mentioned particular things: Bruce Bernstein, or even Curatorial more generally, were only mentioned rarely and Jim never said "anthropology." There is something to be said as much about the terms people used as those they did not use (but felt like elephants in the room). This was the first time he used anthropology as an example of an expert, which was what I thought he also was referring to in past discussions but instead he would say astronomer, biologist, etc. as examples.

conversational... I think that's what's important about the way this museum operates... on the authority transfer from the museum to Native people. Here, it's more about the communication quality of the voice, so the issues that this museum needs to focus on is taking on its own responsibility when that communication doesn't work. In other words, just because a Native person *says* it, doesn't mean a non-Native person *gets* it.⁵⁴

Jim suggests here that while Curatorial empowers communities by resting content authority in them as it accesses Native voice, Exhibits improves its quality for museum visitors.

Much as Ann intimated, Jim did not see working with communities as a particular skill of Curatorial, citing for example the earlier *Woven by the Grandmothers: Nineteenth-Century Navajo Textiles from the National Museum of the American Indian* exhibition that was featured at the GGHC in 1996. In fact, he saw Curatorial as “sequestering” communities from the rest of the museum:

The community conversations, to some extent, took on a kind of exclusive quality... only certain people could talk with the communities. And that's what I mean by sequestered. And the show process suffered because of that, the exhibition process. Because while the conversations might have been lovely, they weren't going towards making exhibitions very well.⁵⁵

And, in what seems a blatant disregard for what the Curatorial department saw as its purpose and as the specific role of the communities (exhibit content), Jim stated in one interview:

I think museums, *us* in particular, worry too much about content. You know, that some of that's the *reason* that everybody's coming to the museum. And in fact, and we've had *endless* discussions over the years about *that*. And, I think we've made *far* too much of that conversation. I mean, you know, what we're talking what? Three hundred square feet for the tribal areas, and we have endless days of conversation about them. When taken in the totality of the building, it's a tiny piece of it. I'm not trying to minimize the work at all, but, you know, we think that it's the single piece that will have the most impact on the visitors, and in fact it's not...⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Interview with Jim Volkert, in his office at the Mall Museum, November 9, 2004.

⁵⁵ Interview with Jim Volkert, in his office at the Mall Museum, November 9, 2004.

⁵⁶ This notion, echoed in Rick West's statement after the opening that the exhibits only constitute 30% of the museum real estate, suggests something to pay attention to. I return to this issue in Chapter 6.

And I understand all about the process that we've done here, and so forth and so forth, but at the same time I think that we've tied ourselves up a bit without fully understanding what we were trying to do. The outcome of this was not to have good conversations with communities, although we did. The outcome was to make a physical representation of that that other people would walk into... But I think what we have to be careful of is that we the museum bring all of our skills to bear, because otherwise it could seem like some of the communities are just... not very interesting, not very thoughtful, not very engaged.⁵⁷

Basically, Jim suggested that museum staff acted as if the “intimate” conversations that curators valued with the communities was what was most important, when in fact they should have been more oriented towards creating exhibits than they were, because *that* is what a museum is about.

He went on in a later interview to conclude that “filtering,” or translating in common museum terms, is necessary. In many ways, this is what he saw the role of Exhibits to be: to translate in a way that elevates the product of the collaboration and also makes the communities look good. Otherwise, not using that expertise is “unfair.”

You know, and so I think one of the mistakes we've made, I think we've adjusted since then, but early in the process there was this fear of the museum somehow filtering Native voice. And it came to be a kind of pejorative statement, you know, that it has to be sort of pure, unaltered, unfiltered. And I think that was a mistake. You know, I don't think there is such a thing, actually.⁵⁸ And nor do I think is that desirable. You know, I think that the museum's responsibility is to synthesize and evaluate and converse about and make apparent, and those kinds of things. Not to say, whatever you, Native person, have to say is what we're going to do. Because that's, well I talked about that before, I think it's unfair. So, part of it is being better at having conversations. We're just not very good at it yet.⁵⁹

Note here that, compared to the previous quotation, Jim is working with two concepts of “conversation”: the one that worked well (interpersonal), and the one that did not (museological).

⁵⁷ Interview with Jim Volkert, in his office at the Mall Museum, August 25, 2004.

⁵⁸ A number of curators and the media coordinator recognized in their work that there is no such thing as “unfiltered” Native voice.

⁵⁹ Interview with Jim Volkert, in his office at the Mall Museum, November 19, 2004.

In a similar vein, one program manager in the Exhibits Department said community curating is “not like a real job; it’s a process definition” allowing people “traditionally not in the inner sanctum of the museum to enter the fold”—“not as spectators, but as participants.” Community curating “has value, but we went way too far in one direction... [and] abdicated our responsibilities” to visitors, including the information they wanted and the intellectual framing of the exhibits.⁶⁰

Kerry Boyd, who was hired as head of Exhibits to replace Jim at the tail end of the development of the exhibitions, echoed the sentiment that not enough guidance was offered to communities:

So, it is challenging here... And there were so many conflicting view points. And the overriding thing is that Native voice has to be heard without, in theory, without filters. So, how do we best do that... I think part of the problem is that we let a lot of communities come in unfiltered. And not only did we not filter them, we didn’t really guide them. And I think some guidance might have assisted us—the presentations in the galleries— be more cohesive. Some communities—Seminole, Cherokee, Santa Clara—I mean, those communities have thriving cultural centers and museums and they kind of know—and they’ve been subjects of exhibits before—and they kind of know exhibitry. Ka’apor, Tapirape, you know, I mean, the communities are not experienced... I think, personally, some more guidance in assisting them tell stories might have been better for our visitors to understand their stories.⁶¹

Kerry’s comments show how there is a sort of common language and conceptualization of the process in Fifth Floor language (“without filters”), that was not common in the Curatorial staff. It is clear that among these two cultures of expertise—Curatorial and Exhibits—not only their own technical languages and tools vary, but also the common conceptions and language about the exhibition process and community curating, although the view is quite different from each vantage point.

What can be gleaned from these commentaries by the two departments is that there was by Curatorial a deferral to communities for exhibit content and cultural

⁶⁰ Conversation with Barbara Mogel, in the Fifth Floor meeting room, March 23, 2006.

⁶¹ Interview with Kerry Boyd, in his office at the Mall Museum, November 17, 2004.

expertise, and they saw their roles as facilitators and advocates working in communities as requiring specific skills. The Exhibits department, on the other hand, viewed the Curators as not providing enough expertise, or museological guidance, to the communities to develop the best exhibition possible. This is also related to their characterizations of Curatorial as being too protective of communities, and not letting other departments have “access” to them.⁶²

One of the only decidedly anonymous comments (meaning, a comment someone asked to keep anonymous but to include in my account) during the course of my fieldwork created a more blunt distinction:

There was very much at the front end [of making the exhibitions] a total disbelief and distrust that Indian people could interpret themselves from the Exhibitions Department at this museum. And that hindered the work from the onset. And that’s what the arguments between [department heads] were about, quite frankly... that Indian people could speak for themselves, but needed a developer, or an Exhibits person— a pertinent person of great expertise, to interpret that.⁶³

What many of my interlocutors said was at stake, including this one, was power. But, what kind of power? In this case, I believe it was the power over representation. And here, ethnographically, the politics of representation become highlighted in two of its many aspects: as re-presentation (or translation), and as acting on behalf of (or advocacy).

For Exhibits, it was the power to make the exhibit a representation of Native life that is accessible to the audience (and in so doing benefits the reputation of Native communities), for Curatorial it was the power to maintain a faithful representation to the wishes of the communities as to how they want to represent themselves (and in so

⁶² In what was no doubt a tacit reference to Curatorial (and a sentiment I had heard from other department members outside Curatorial), Jim said, “Nobody *owns* the community. Nobody *owns* the people. You know, or owns *access* to them, for that matter” (interview with Jim Volkert, in his office, July 21, 2004).

⁶³ Interview, anonymous comment, 2006.

doing maintain ethical relationships with Native communities). While the museum as a whole recognized that the Native communities are “experts” of their own experience, staff contested the extent that expertise could define the exhibit itself. Each department interpreted this role of expert in different ways.

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, one curator revealed to me that in the museum bureaucracy, the Native communities often become “pawns” in interoffice power struggles.⁶⁴ She hated doing it, the curator said, but at times to get people in other departments to do something a specific way, she used the phrase, “the community wants it that way.” This became a trump card in many ways, due to the institution’s mission and it was mobilized due to the dwindling power curators had in decision making in the exhibits. Even if she felt the community might be willing to compromise on an issue of design or otherwise, even if she didn’t think it was necessary, she spoke on their behalf to maintain the plan as they had approved it by insisting that this was the way the community wanted it to be. In essence, expertise of one sort could be trumped by “community wishes,” or community expertise. And from this perspective, controlling access to “community wishes,” access to legitimating knowledge, could indeed be considered a form of power.

This conflict between departments was also alluded to as a “pissing match” between department heads, and a clash between two “cults of personality.” As I mentioned before, many staff members suggested that what was happening at the NMAI was all about “power;” and that the main issue between these departments was control over the exhibitions, and whether it rested in the museum or outside of it, in the communities. What we see here is a competition between cultures of expertise, staking out their professional territory in the process of collaborative exhibit

⁶⁴ Interview, October 29, 2004.

development and advancing their own interpretations of what is best practice in representational practice.

Cultural Experts and Community Curators

Regardless of the “battle” raging inside the institution about the roles and responsibilities of curators and co-curators, there was also an evaluation and selection of experts within the Native communities as well.⁶⁵ During the course of my fieldwork in both Chicago and Dominica, I realized that the people who had been selected for the co-curator committees were people who often volunteered or were recruited into various community projects or by outside organizations as representatives. In other words, they were already recognized as having specialized skills or knowledge from within their communities, and often were asked to represent their communities to outsiders.

At the NMAI, each gallery required a certain kind of expert: for *Our Peoples*, it was elders or tribal historians; for *Our Universes*, spiritual practitioners or religious experts; for *Our Lives*, it required an expertise on “Native identities,” as per the exhibition’s theme. An expert on identity, in many ways, can be any individual in a community—anyone can be an expert on their own life experience. But *Our Lives* is

⁶⁵ In my dissertation I focus specifically on community curated exhibits; but, “NMAI-curated” sections had Native curators who were museum specialists, like Jolene Rickard who worked on the introduction sections of both OP and OL. At the 2004 Deerfield Symposium during her presentation about the OP gallery, Jolene criticized the Press for focusing exclusively on museum collaboration with *community* curators (in the community curated exhibits). She told the audience, “I’m from Tuscarora, and a curator—why am I less of a community curator than someone within a community but with less professional experience?” She said that her experience, along with that of Paul Chaat Smith (Comanche) and Gabi Tayac (Piscataway) who also worked on the NMAI-curated sections in the inaugural exhibitions, were “erased from Press presentations” of the exhibits (conference presentation, November 6, 2004). In a conversation I had with her at the same symposium, she said the NMAI “hasn’t dealt with Native people like her—they prefer non-experts.” Again, she asked “why don’t they [the NMAI] see us as Native collaborators?” She said that the “NMAI wants ownership” over the NMAI-curated sections, basically. She said it’s about “territoriality,” but we need to be open, to collaborate, to learn, she added. To Jolene, an artist and well-known curator in the museum world, the communities in the community curating process “weren’t really collaborators, they were informants.”

about community identity, and so specific people were mobilized as having the appropriate expertise to represent the community in this endeavor. The formation of the co-curator committee tells us about the expectations community members had of the work they would be asked to do, indeed it required a pre-conceived notion of what community identity comprised, regardless of how the exhibit eventually was interpreted in meetings.

Therefore, in selecting the group there is an assumption of what kinds of expertise are necessary to make a complete representation of community identity. Each community in the *Our Lives* exhibition was charged with providing a committee of four to six community curators with whom the NMAI could work. The selection of committees in Native communities both enacts a collaboration between experts as well as reflects established modes of bureaucratic practice in these groups. For example, while community curators were selected by the Chief in the Carib Territory, in Chicago they were elected through a nomination and voting process. In each of these communities, the committees were developed through familiar processes of determining representatives for projects both internal and external to their communities.⁶⁶

While “expert” was a native category among museum staff, in the communities this word was not used often, and, when it was, it was sometimes used disparagingly.⁶⁷ But that does not mean there weren’t recognized specialists in these groups. For

⁶⁶ One way to think about the OL co-curator process is that it morphed into what were already existing practices in the communities—perhaps like Sahlins’ *Islands of History*: something foreign made to fit in existing logics and practices. Or perhaps this “fit” had more to do with how bureaucratic practice has traveled, cross culturally; I encountered committees and task forces, Roberts Rules of order, and NGO work in Chicago and Dominica. Between the BIA, local tribal governments, community development work and cultural institutions being established in these communities, bureaucracy is certainly a familiar form in Indian country. See Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

⁶⁷ But this term could also be similarly and negatively glossed in the museum when referring to the cultural elites, as I note later in Chapter 6 where Rick West mentioned that non-Natives understand the exhibitions “inversely proportionate to their expertise.”

example, in the Carib Territory the term “resource person” had a meaning similar to, but not quite the same as, expert (to museum staff). In fact, at the end of my stay the community liaison told me I had become a “real resource person,” no doubt in recognition of my administrative note taking and computer fixing skills that were often put to use.

The important thing to Kalinago community members was that the skills of the person are put to use for the community; that is an added component, I would argue, that makes “resource person” have a somewhat different connotation than simply expert. I asked Prosper Paris, a member of Kalinago the co-curator committee, what makes someone a resource person. He replied,

[A resource person is] somebody you can rely on... if the person can type, if the person does certain skills. If you’re talking about herbal medicine and history and planning and all this... they say come to Prosper. If you’re talking about project writing... you go to Sylvanie [Burton]. If you want to talk about motivation of community development, you go to James Frederick. If you’re talking about tourism... you go to Irvince Auguiste. So different people with different skills, we have them there—a resource person, not only that they have a *skill*, but somebody we *know* that *will* contribute. Because somebody may have the skill, they have the resource, they can do certain things... but when you put them [in the situation] they don’t do [the] work.⁶⁸

When the Kalinago were charged with creating a co-curator committee, the Chief selected a group of “resource persons” that would adequately represent the Territory in the making of the exhibition. At the time, Chief Garnette Joseph chose a deliberate mix of representatives according to their skills, residency, and gender: “The make up of the committee co-curators was based on people’s skills and different interests, and we felt that the selection was well done and covered the areas—education, tourism, craft, community development.”⁶⁹ In the Carib Territory, there

⁶⁸ Interview with Prosper Paris, at his home in the Carib Territory, April 24, 2005.

⁶⁹ Interview with Garnette Joseph, at my home in the Carib Territory, April 13, 2005. Note the similarity to the categories of “representational experts,” as I call them, that Rick West selected for consultations mentioned earlier.

seems to be a small group of people that are often tapped for cultural projects and resources, not only because they have a history of working on such projects, but also because they are organized, reliable, and committed people to getting projects done. These were the people that were selected by the former chief of the Territory to be on the co-curator committee. When I asked them, each committee member could state precisely why they were on the committee, and I learned in time that the “core”⁷⁰ committee members were also go-to people for many volunteer community projects in the Territory.

I asked Garnette Joseph, the chief at the time of the co-curator committee selection, how the community curators were selected. He selected the co-curator committee in part according to his judgment for who would best represent and follow through with the co-curator work. He made sure there was representation from each hamlet, male and female members, and craft makers, political figures, and cultural group leaders. Similar to the various “Task Forces” I participated in while in the Territory where community members gather and each is a “resource person” with specific contributions to make regarding a project—whether it’s a craft association, a heritage project, or a curriculum project—the Kalinago committee was drafted in this manner, each person expected to represent a particular subset of Kalinago experience.

Similar to Prosper, Garnette said, “we looked at people’s involvement in different areas. Like, in craft—Jacinta, also did culture—Cozier and Prosper, Irvince because of his involvement in tourism and culture, and Alexis Valmond because he was the councilor responsible for culture. Basically, this is how people got on board the co-curators committee.”⁷¹ I also asked him if the committee was a familiar way for people to work together. He replied, “Well, yes...we have a history of working

⁷⁰ A smaller number of co-curators were more involved in the co-curator responsibilities than others; this was referred to as the “core” by a couple of the co-curators.

⁷¹ Interview with Garnette Joseph, at my home in the Carib Territory, March 17, 2005.

together, because we are one people anyway.” Garnette chose Prosper as the “coordinator” because “he had been in coordinating the movement of people in tours, so it would not have been anything difficult for him because already he involved in people in, and be with them, and guide their activities for the entire day. So, it’s nothing unusual... I felt that the people who were selected had different roles to play, they were best chosen because they are involved in that.”⁷²

What I learned in my fieldwork is that the process that the co-curators underwent in working on the exhibit is the same process for any project undertaken in the Territory: first there is an initiative to accomplish something, so they form a small committee; then they send out written letters of invitation and gather together a group of “resource persons” for a “community meeting,” get their ideas and give the project some legitimacy and support; then, the committee moves on from there to form ideas and, in some cases, implement them (this last part was often frustratingly not accomplished; many people said there is plenty of talk and not much action). But the key is having the right people involved so that they are aware that something is going on, and feel that they had some input into the process.

These “resource persons,” while not referred to as experts, are what I would describe as the usual suspects when rounding up knowledgeable people in the community. In other words, they were recognized specialists in the community. For instance, Sylvie Warrington, a nurse very involved in women’s issues, was at the community meeting for the NMAI (see Chapter 4), was invited to the curriculum meeting, and was often called upon as a representative of women and health. Irvince Auguste was a past chief and considered one of the most knowledgeable people in the community about tourism. Sylvanie Burton was considered exceptionally successful

⁷² Interview with Garnette Joseph, at my home in the Carib Territory, March 17, 2005.

in community development projects.⁷³ Prosper Paris (referred to often by community members as a “cultural icon”) and Gerard Langlais (a self-described medicine man in training) are Kalinago cultural go-to men. In other words, there is a certain kind of expertise recognized as the competent representation of a particular subset of the population.

Like the Kalinago, the Chicago community also had a co-curator selection process and practices that reflected their usual way of producing projects in their community. In Chicago, the co-curators were selected by a nomination and secret ballot voting process, they were a larger group (10 including the liaison, with alternates), and resembled NGO organizational practices that their community was familiar with. However, these co-curators were not selected based on specific specialties. In fact, in this multi-tribal community, people are loath to step forward and claim representative authority over the bunch.

When I was talking to Eli, a Chicago community member who later enrolled in an anthropology graduate program at the University of Montana, I commented to him as I prepared this chapter that, beyond Dave Spencer (who was trained at the Art Institute of Chicago and curated art exhibits, including *Dissipating Indians: Reflections on Native Iconoclasm*s at the AIC Trickster Gallery in 2005) and Mavis Neconish (who was employed by the Field Museum and worked with the Anthropology collections there) who were suggested to participate as co-curators based on their museum experience, others seemed to be selected according to their level of community participation rather than their specialized knowledge. Eli

⁷³ She does this work often in concert with government departments. At a book launching for *The Heritage of the Kalinago People* in November 2007, the government officials giving speeches on the book and the Kalinago people constantly referred to her hard work on behalf of the community and called her a “daughter of the soil”; they referred to her similarly in other formal events, always noting her dedicated service to the community.

explained that it's a "polyethnic community," where no one wants to "step on" other people's expertise or be responsible for representing other people's tribes. He said the co-curator committee was made of people who worked for the various community organizations that service Chicago Indians, had good contacts within the community and had access to people and information that others may not have. He called this a "coalition method," representative of other types of organizational planning that occurs in the community.⁷⁴

The Chicago urban Indian community was often described to me as a place where anyone can come into the community and be welcomed—it is a community based on voluntary participation. So too was the process for selecting co-curators. Leaders in the American Indian community of Chicago decided it would be best to host a nomination and election process at the American Indian Center to determine who would be co-curators. This was a familiar practice for that community, much like they organized their annual powwow committee each year (that also was a multi-tribal event, attracting Natives and non-Natives from all over the States). Furthermore, referred to as the "Smithsonian Institution Project"⁷⁵ in liaison Rita Hodge's notes, the co-curator committee was divided into sub-committees termed "cultural," "political," "social" and "contemporary," much like how a powwow committee worked where people volunteered to specific subcommittee tasks (like Fundraising, Vendors, Publicity) according to their own interests and skills. Per meeting notes from October 29, 2001, at the AIC, and under the title "Circle = Identity" (Figure 14 below). In later meetings, Rita would ask for updates from each

⁷⁴ Phone call with Eli Suzukovich, March 12, 2007.

⁷⁵ This was the title used by Rita Hodge in her meeting minutes documents from independent meetings among co-curators. The Kalinago also rarely referred to "the NMAI," more often using the term "the Smithsonian" when talking about the project to others, presumably for its more recognizable name—the NMAI had not been opened yet and was a new institution and concept to community curators when they began the process. The Smithsonian, however, was well known.

group of people, who were expected to meet on their own to discuss these aspects that they anticipated would be the major categories of their rendition of maintaining Native identity in the city.

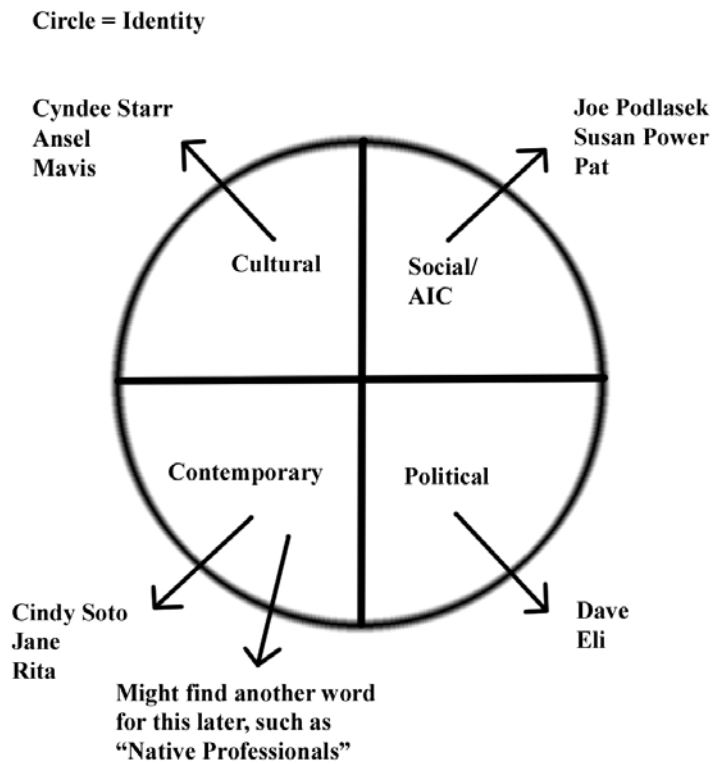


Figure 14: Chicago co-curator chart of "sub-committees," October 29, 2001.

Anthropological Expertise

In each of these communities, anthropological expertise itself is represented as variously a resource, an epithet, and model for knowledge generation. The NMAI institution presented an antagonized relation to anthropological expertise and experts, which was revealed in discussions with people as well as in literature by the

museum.⁷⁶ Bruce Bernstein commented that anthropology has always felt “superiority to Native people, it’s an old idea. No doubt it’s still alive in places in anthropology. It has *no* place at NMAI, I don’t think it has a place in anthropology either, by the way, but that’s my opinion.”⁷⁷

Bruce further commented that the “real anthropologists” (in the way staff often imagined them) were the project managers, the way they “*lorded* over the projects. And *knew* what was best for the interpretation of these communities, and knew what was best for the exhibition. Its probably more on *that* side. So this smoke screen of saying ‘it’s too anthropological’ is just in existence everywhere.”⁷⁸ In other words, “anthropological” (at least in its stereotype) was a dirty word that NMAI departmental staff members threw around disparagingly. But the model for community curating, the language of “fieldwork” and commitment to “Native voice,” come from the methods of anthropology and its reflexive critiques.

I still remember the day in 2001, when I was working for the NMAI, I was walking with two Native staff members and one said, “I hate anthropologists.” Taken aback, I said, “But you know I was trained in Anthropology, right? But in indigenous rights and land claims legislation?” The person reiterated, “I hate anthropologists” (recall Deloria’s critique from Chapter 1). Truly, at the time, working at the NMAI made me question if I really wanted to go on in anthropology; I questioned if I really wanted to work with communities that didn’t want me there. This personal anecdote, this internal uneasiness with the discipline, was not just a symptom of anthropology’s colonialist and extractive past; it was an undercurrent at the NMAI as well.

⁷⁶ Multiple interviews with CRC staff; see also Richard West and National Museum of the American Indian [NMAI], eds., *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian : Museums and Native Cultures* (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of the American Indian, 2000).

⁷⁷ Interview with Bruce Bernstein, at his office in the Mall Museum, November 22, 2004.

⁷⁸ Interview with Bruce Bernstein, at his office in the Mall Museum, November 22, 2004.

Conclusion

There is one usually normalized dichotomy that was particularly eschewed in the museum: expert versus local knowledge. This was at the heart of the Curatorial ethos, electing to consider community curators as cultural experts (or, at the least, experts on their own experience). This highlights how in the collaborative ethic, and community centered paradigm, curators and the nature of their expertise is changing. They are no longer area specialists. The main curator I worked with said she didn't feel she was a curator, but a facilitator. Another curator (and artist) felt this was a failing of mentorship at the NMAI—an abdication of expertise that should never have happened. Others might argue that it was curators' knowledge for *how* to work with communities that comprised a particular kind of expertise.

The Exhibits staff claim to have “specialized knowledge” for translating the final product to the visitor, while Curatorial staff were more emphatic about their ethics in the process of collaborating with Native communities in “the right way.” Here, Pamela Smart's museum ethnography of the Dominique and John de Menil Collection in Houston, TX, provides a useful comparison to the NMAI, specifically regarding what she calls the “practice of exquisite care” that was referred to among museum staff as “The Menil Way.”⁷⁹ Smart's “story of the Menil collection” provides insight into the intentions of the Menil's for the use of the objects as well as their personal history in amassing the collection. However, her story is not just another account of collecting. Instead, she also provides insight into daily practices and experiences of staff at the museum, including personnel training that is crafted according to the mission of the museum.

⁷⁹ Pamela Smart, "Aesthetic Experimentation and Catholic Modernism," in *American Anthropological Association* (Washington, D.C.: 2007).

The Menil Collection, comprised of religious objects, is aimed to “recuperate spirituality” in modern times—to reunite the sacred and the modern—by providing visitors with an “aesthetic experience.” One point that Smart makes in this account is that, unlike Pierre Bourdieu’s unconscious, normative *habitus*, routine and everyday practices of staff were “self-conscious practices of cultivation.”⁸⁰ In other words, the museum emphasized “a *training* of ethical sensibilities so as to foster the possibility of a new social and moral order.”⁸¹ “The Menil Way,” she explains, was not “codified” or a “mandated policy,” but a routinely and often referenced “set of practices that were essentially ethical in character” that she was able to deduce through the work of ethnography. This is similar, I would argue, to what Curatorial originally referred to as “the right way” to work with Native peoples. She clarified that this “way” was not a set of techniques to secure particular outcomes, but instead it was a set of “ethical injunctions.”

Like The Menil Collection, the NMAI was a museum that was mission-driven with “exquisite care” for its collection, as well as its source communities. And, in some quarters of the museum, there was indeed an unwritten code for doing things “the right way.”⁸² Cynthia’s description of a kind of tacit “law” that opened this chapter is an indicator of this “way.” One CRC staff member said that Native voice was in the CRC’s “DNA.” As one curator put it, and in a way that further illustrates the opposing ethos between the *CRC* and *downtown*: “project management doesn’t teach doing things in the right way... It teaches creating flow charts, and moving your

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Unwritten codes of ethics in practice are precisely what Meskell and Pells refer to as “embedding ethics.” I want to note that I am not suggesting Curatorial was the only group that had an ethically informed practice in the museum. They were the only ones to stress that it was a “way.” A commitment to Native voice and Native peoples as authorities was recognized throughout the museum, though it was interpreted and guided professional practice differently among the various departments.

project along the flow chart, and getting things done, as expediently as possible.”⁸³ In other words, the “economy of care,” to borrow Smart’s term, that was self-consciously cultivated by curatorial managers,⁸⁴ embraced as law and defended by Curatorial staff, was not an institution-wide way of managing relations with Native peoples and the collection. Doing things “the right way” was an attitude that permeated the CRC more generally—and it was interpreted differently in practice according to the nature of their work by Collections, Registration and Conservation staff towards objects and their tribal visitors or makers, and by Curatorial in its relations with communities.

Collaboration, then, was an outcome of this imperative, this collection of moral injunctions, summed in the desire to “do things the right way.” One of the characteristics of collaborative knowledge production is that its product is emergent, and often not predictable or pre-figured by any one vision. Like Boasians who believed Native texts were valuable and interesting in and of themselves, so too did Curatorial believe at the start that whatever Native people had to say would be inherently of interest to the visiting public—a hypothesis Exhibits explicitly did not share. The exhibit process, then, was one in which they did not know what the product would be but had a certain faith that it would bring forward something valuable and insightful.⁸⁵

For Curatorial, it seemed fulfilling the mission of the museum came at a special cost to their power, prestige and jobs. This development plays out over the remaining chapters here in the details of the creation and critique of the exhibitions.

⁸³ Interview with NMAI curator, November 24, 2004.

⁸⁴ Particularly Craig Howe, Bruce Bernstein, and Ann McMullen—all anthropologists.

⁸⁵ This unanticipated product that materialized from a set of commitments highlights the difficulty of trying to capture an unfolding present through ethnography. Although I began my fieldwork before the opening of the museum and espoused a processual approach, my writing and much of my interviewing happened after the fact, as subsequent chapters show. For an analysis of the challenges of ethnographically accessing and depicting an emerging moment see for example Miyazaki, *The Method of Hope : Anthropology, Philosophy, and Fijian Knowledge*, 138.

In general, I see the various actors involved in *Our Lives* as representational experts (act *as if* they are experts in practice; as has been demonstrated above, it is questionable if all staff who work with them really believe that they are), and experts in representation (they co-produce the displays for the public). Or, to put it another way the museum professionals (Exhibits and Curatorial) and the two Native communities were all cultures of expertise in which their expertise is representation itself (on behalf of communities and in the production of representations about communities for the public).

To shift the focus from interdepartmental dynamics to the intercultural collaboration between museum and communities, it becomes clear that the participants in the community curating process—curators and co-curators—are indeed experts in self-representation (and self-objectification). The next chapter examines these processes of (self-)mediation, and even essentialization, in more detail. It also highlights how these cultures of expertise saw two different imagined publics—the audience and the constituency, or the museum visitor and Native communities—and how that greatly influenced content development for the *Our Lives* exhibits.

INTERCHAPTER
(3.5)

NAASA 2005

*The Role of Community in Contemporary Art Practice*¹

The NAASA meetings held during the last week of October 2005 in Scottsdale, AZ included a number of NMAI presentations. I attended a session convened by Bruce Bernstein that was titled, “Beyond Museum Walls: Collaborative Community Work” in which Lindsay Martin (Tshimshian; Program Director, Museum of Northern British Columbia) and Rachel Griffith (NMAI Research Assistant) co-authored a paper about their work on the NMAI *Listening to our Ancestors: The Art of Native Life Along the North Pacific Coast* exhibition. This exhibition opened at the Mall Museum in February 2006 and closed in January 2007. It was the next major community-curated project at the NMAI after the inaugural exhibitions, and provided a very different model of community curation (as detailed in Chapter 2 and the Epilogue), including contracts with partner institutions and “guest curators” from cultural centers in Native communities who were responsible for writing the script.

Bruce’s paper, “Born of Clay: Research Methods and Results,” was about an exhibition he had curated. He described the collaborative process with a “curatorial team of regional specialists” as well as eight Native “potters/artists/curators” invited to co-curate the exhibition as “equal partners, without the intervention of interpretation.” He described this process as “shifting authority from the museum to the artists,” insisting “the most important product of our exhibitions and programs are the relationships and reciprocity that are created.” He concludes, stating,

the dissolving of curatorial privilege as a scholarship of exclusion is one of the guiding principles of an increasing number of museum collection based and academic projects throughout the Native art world... NMAI’s mission is to

¹ This was the conference theme.

define Indian people on their own terms. Following this basic methodological premise, we can begin to conceptualize the research and scholarship agenda for the museum. It is about production and development of a methodology for the production and use of knowledge... Through the discussions with informed and authoritative Native people we develop... an inside out view, rather than a mere description.

Lindsay and Rachel spoke about their exhibition which was yet to open, providing details of the community curating process and some of its rough spots.²

Both women were candid in their discussion. For example, Lindsay said that,

As a community curator, you were considered THE authority or expert. This was a very frightening idea for me. From a museum standpoint, I know that someone has to be accountable... This concept was intimidating as I did not consider myself the ultimate authority. To say this, I don't mean that I don't stand by the information. What I do mean is that the history was shared with me, it was passed down generation to generation to the community members I talked with. It is a history that will also flow through us to future generations.

Rachel and Lindsey also noted that the distance—temporal and physical—between the community and the museum was a challenge to collaborative work. Rachel asked, “How can we measure success of such endeavors?” NMAI’s “hope,” she said, “is to provide the space and resources so that Native voice may shape the exhibition, its presentation and design, rather than NMAI shaping Native voice to fit exhibition development.” She considered the degree of Native voice in *Listening to Our Ancestors* to be a “notable success.” And, “although community curators appreciated the opportunity to dictate the content and message of the exhibit, they also sought the guidance of NMAI staff, Peter Macnair, and Jay Stewart to demonstrate exhibit process and methods.” Lindsay added that some community curators needed more of an introduction to museum work than others.

Lindsay concluded her portion of the presentation stating, “Overall, it is bringing two cultures together - First Nations’ culture and Museum culture.” She

² Rachel Griffin and Lindsey Martin, "The Art of Native Life Along the North Pacific Coast: Eleven Communities, One Exhibit," in *Native American Arts Studies Association Meeting* (Phoenix, Arizona: 2005).

continued, “Sometimes it is like we are speaking two different languages, when in fact we are all speaking English.”

Then she gave an example in which she was tasked with developing the text for her community’s portion of the exhibit. She explained,

we were told to write what we wanted to write to tell our story. In an ideal world we could use as many words as we want, or share the story the way we want to. Realistically though, you have museum staff telling you that this term should be changed, or this paragraph should be shortened. In some instances, it comes down to having to change your content. *What happens to Native voice then?* We were trying to share the complexity of our history, the sophistication of our people but were told that some of the concepts would not be understood by the average visitor. I think when starting out, it is important for museums to establish not only deadlines for things such as exhibit text but also *explain who the audience is.*³

Lindsay went on to convey that although there were times when she felt frustrated, “when you did ask why? Why continue when you felt your voice was being censored,” she would tell herself that “the aim of the project was to develop these relationships between museums and native communities.” She acknowledged that “the staff at NMAI are not uncompromising,” that “they have tried to accommodate us in every way.” In her ultimate assessment, the rewards outweighed the challenges, because “this is establishing a new type of relationship between museums and our native communities, opening our eyes to what museums can be in terms of bringing Native voice, and native perspective to objects in the collection at NMAI.”

Rachel concluded their presentation, stating that the challenge is “to guard against the disappointment that may result when collectors or other visitors don’t see the exact presentation that they may have expected.” She ends on a hopeful note for the “continued advance of the collaborative process between museums and Native communities,” where “we can advance our understanding of Native American objects

³ Emphasis added.

beyond that of simply art, anthropology, aesthetics and authenticity, and towards a more informed and accurate – although complex – consideration of the material.”

The next chapter, about collaborative authorship and the production of Native voice in the *Our Lives* exhibition, finds resonance with the experiences of these women. Lindsay’s overwhelming feeling of the great responsibility she took on when she became a co-curator representing her nation, her question of what is Native voice after it is mediated through the NMAI institution, her insistence that knowing the audience is essential to writing, and Rachel’s connecting community curating to more accurate representations are all insights that were echoed by those participating in the *Our Lives* exhibition as well—except for Lindsay’s criticism that what was on the exhibit walls did not represent her own voice. In contrast, the OL co-curators felt their voices were represented in their exhibits. In hindsight, this may have been due to the fact that, although the community curators in the *Our Lives* exhibition were attributed and claimed authorship and credit for exhibit scripts, they were not asked nor did they physically *write* them like Lindsay did.

CHAPTER 4

AUTHORSHIP

I used to doubt it right at the beginning, you know, like the first year and a half. I was just like, “Oh my god, I’m never going to be able to do this”—working with all these communities—how am I going to put this together? How is this going to come together?

...I don’t know if I would say [the exhibits] are a success. I guess I’m looking at the successful part being more about the collaborative process, and I see that as separate from the actual final product...But certainly, I think that just in the way that I went about working with the communities, and what we ended up coming up with—I think that was successful.¹

—Cynthia Chavez, Lead Curator of the *Our Lives* gallery, 2004

Introduction

In December of 2000, the process to develop the gallery restarted from earlier attempts and was a year behind in comparison to the *Our Peoples* and *Our Universes* galleries. After a year of lying dormant, the *Our Lives* project was underway and a new team of curatorial staff was assigned to the gallery. Bruce Bernstein, head of the Cultural Resources Center, convened a “vetting session” (mentioned briefly in Chapter 3) with OL team members and five “Native scholars” to discuss the *Our Lives* gallery “narrative”—a preliminary description of its thematic structure and content— that Cynthia had written based on past descriptions of the gallery as well as her own vision for its future.

¹ Interview with Cynthia Chavez, in her office at the CRC, October 29, 2004. Cynthia Chavez began her career at the NMAI as a research assistant to curator Truman Lowe, working on a contemporary art exhibition. When management was looking for someone to take on the OL gallery which had fallen behind in schedule and was without staffing, she was asked to co-curate the gallery with Amy Lonetree, who had been a visiting summer intern, to take on the task. While Lonetree declined, Cynthia agreed to become the Lead Curator and took council from other NMAI staff such as Gerald McMaster, the original “mentor” for the gallery in the internal literature of the early 1990s, for ideas and guidance as she ramped up to full involvement in the process.

The group sat around the large curatorial conference room table surrounded by executive desk chairs and illuminated by floor to ceiling windows on two sides of the room. The meeting was chaired by Bruce but relatively unstructured. Discussion ranged from evaluating the narrative Cynthia provided, to the greater goals of what an exhibit like this should be, to what the audience will or should know, to the participants' own personal narratives of contemporary life in their own communities.

Cynthia also took this meeting as an opportunity to express and seek guidance on some of her worries concerning the process she was about to embark upon:

MS. CHAVEZ: Is it realistic to go into a community and ask them, you know, to articulate a communal identity? Is that something that can be achieved? That worries me.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: It worries you?

MS. CHAVEZ: Yes.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Why?

MS. CHAVEZ: Because I think there's a fine line between having them communicate what they think their communal identity is and having them just talk about what's going on in the community. Do you know what I mean?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: There are different negotiations as to how to present that. They would be concerned about how they portray their image in public.

MS. CHAVEZ: Yes, and some of these contestations and conflicts and compromises that we've been talking about, how are you going to get them to communicate some of that?²

² From the transcript of the *Our Lives* vetting session, Curatorial conference room at the CRC, December 14, 2000. Attendees included: OL team members Cynthia Chavez and Jennifer Shannon, NMAI curator Ann McMullen, NMAI Assistant Director Bruce Bernstein, and invited Native scholars Angela Gonzales, Wesley Thomas, Inez Hernandez Avila, Paul Chaat Smith (later hired by NMAI), and

In the course of the meeting, participants also guarded OL staff against working with “Rolodex Indians”—Native people who were often enlisted as consultants with museums— and considered how to make “identity” in the exhibit not look like isolated individuals but rather like community identities. There were concerns about the possibility of leadership changes in a community and how that might jeopardize the project, and participants returned a number of times to the issue of sovereignty. The Native scholars emphasized that the exhibition be a challenge to visitors *and* Native people (not just a packaged message about them), and discussed public misconceptions about what it means to be “traditional.”³

This meeting, much like others described below in Chicago and the Carib Territory, was long, wide-ranging, and interpolated with concerns, subject matter, and suggestions that expanded beyond the scope of the exhibition. In other words, these Native scholars were not just talking to NMAI staff, but also to each other. This same dynamic occurred in the original consultations in the early 1990s and continued throughout the iterative process of dialog with Native communities to establish the museum and to create the inaugural exhibitions. Similar meetings among Native and non-Native scholars had also resulted in shifting the NMAI to developing community-centered exhibits in the galleries and the process of community curating (as noted in Chapter 1).⁴

Cynthia’s concerns about working on the *Our Lives* gallery continued throughout her work on the exhibition, as her opening statement suggests. Her

Gerald McMaster (later hired by NMAI). I have substituted “portray” for “betray” in the original document, presumably an error made by the transcription service company.

³ Participants discussed the inclusion of an urban Indian community, which was agreed here to be Chicago, and what it would mean in the context of other more conventional ideas of community such as a reservation or single tribe.

⁴ Originally referred to and conceived of by Curatorial (Craig Howe and Bruce Bernstein were most notably involved in promoting this model) as a “Five Phase” process, the community curating process was modified for OL due to the shorter timeframe available compared to the other two galleries. For a detailed description of the Five Phase Process, see Craig Howe, “Exhibiting Indians: Communities, Collaboration and Control,” *Exhibitionist* 20, no. 1 (2001).

anxiety related to her relative inexperience in curating exhibits, the number of communities she would be working with, the time that was allotted to complete the exhibition, and an uneasiness of representing others that permeated the staff as well as the Native community co-curators' efforts (described by Lindsay Martin at the NAASA 2005 and by Chicago and Kalinago co-curators which I detail below). Cynthia's uneasiness, as she describes in an article written in 2006, also was due to her being Native herself (San Felipe Pueblo/Hopi/Tewa/Navajo) while at the same time occupying a mediating position between the bureaucratic museum institution and Native communities.⁵

Cynthia's emphasis on the process, noted in the statement above, was also a common perspective among Curatorial staff. What often surfaced when I was working for the museum, and later when I interviewed people about it, was that the process is as important as the product (and many would say it is more important). This aphorism was reiterated many times in Curatorial, has been emphasized in literature about museum work with Native peoples, and is somewhat of a truism in Native communities. For example, Peers and Brown explain in the most current and definitive book about museum-community collaborations that:

One of the most important elements of the new way of working with source communities is that trust-building is considered integral to the process, and creating respect or healing the effects of the past is seen as being as important as co-writing labels or enhancing the database.⁶

Accordingly, this chapter focuses on the process of content development for the community curated exhibits in the *Our Lives* gallery and the social relations and

⁵ Chavez, "Collaborative Exhibit Development at the National Museum of the American Indian."

⁶ Laura L. Peers and Alison K. Brown, "Introduction," in *Museums and Source Communities : A Routledge Reader*, ed. Laura L. Peers and Alison K. Brown (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003), 9.

concerns that informed that process—and, by accounts from both sides of the partnership, fostered trust between curators and co-curators.

In other words, while the Chapter 3 (“Expertise”) addressed how discourses of paternalism versus advocacy and translation versus intimacy revealed different communities of expertise with different ways of knowing, understanding, and engaging with the community curating process, this chapter focuses on the text and media that conveyed the content or subject matter of the exhibit. Where Chapter 3 discussed the ideological struggles and social relations within the museum, this chapter presents the representational strategies and collaborative practices associated with these views.

What makes the *Our Lives* exhibition particularly interesting is that it was at the same time a locus for cultural production, reflexive ethnography, and collaborative knowledge production. The Native co-curators were not primarily talking about objects or ceremonies or historical events (though these were included in their exhibits), they were talking about *themselves*. They were talking about their “identities”—what it means to be Inuit in Igloolik, Kalinago in the Carib Territory, urban Indian in Chicago, or Mohawk in Kahnawake. These were situated identities, reflected upon and conveyed through the Native-authored text of the exhibit. The exhibits were a presentation by and about *reflexive subjects*.⁷ Taking the signing practice involved in the exhibition’s text panels seriously, I first turn to authorship as a frame for understanding collaboration in exhibit content production, most notably in the form of “Native voice,” and then move on to consider the mediation of authenticity that is symbolized in these panels.

⁷ On the shift from objects to “reflexive subjects” in museum display, see also Shannon, “The Construction of Native Voice at the National Museum of the American Indian.”

Artifacts of Collaboration

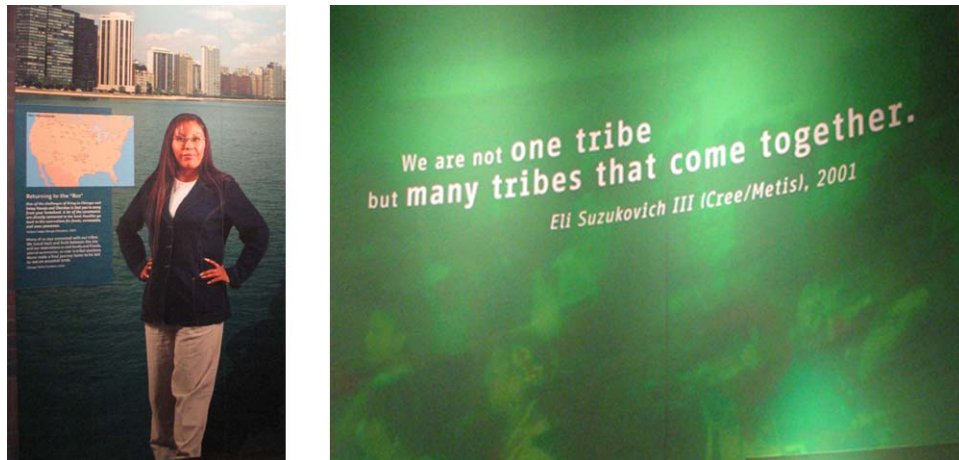


Figure 15: Chicago exhibit text panels.

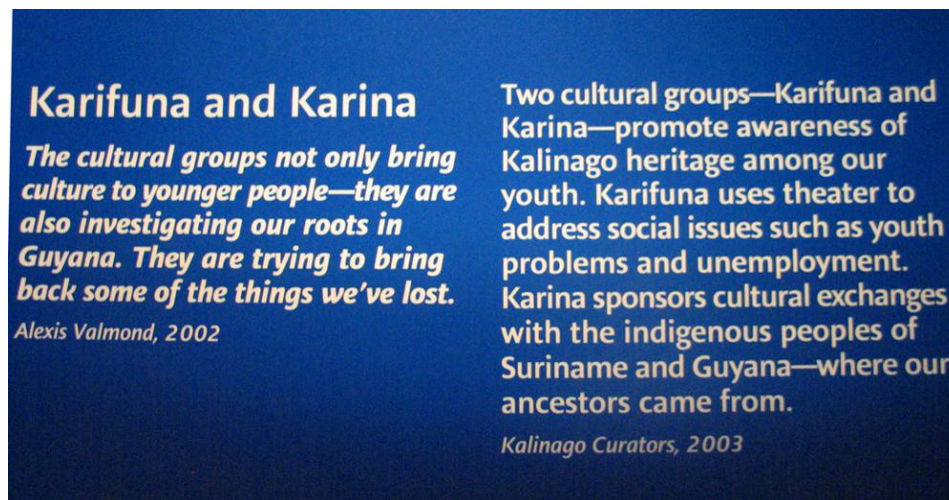


Figure 16: Kalinago exhibit text panel.

The quintessential artifact of collaboration at the NMAI—and index of both “Native voice” and Native participation *as* reflexive subjects—was the Native-authored text panel that was ubiquitous throughout the museum’s exhibitions. For example, on general introductory panels, text is attributed to “Chicago co-curators” as

a group. For specific quotations, a person's name and his or her tribal affiliation are displayed (Figures 15 and 16 above). These artifacts are products of collaboration in exhibit making at two levels: in the meetings where Native American community co-curators discussed the content of the exhibit and in the museum institution where museum specialists worked together to transform Native community discussions into exhibit text. Therefore, there is a wider "circumference of authorship" (a phrase borrowed from Mario Baggioli) than simply those named on the text panel.⁸ I begin, then, with a very basic question: how were these authored text panels *created*?⁹

Authorship, as Mario Baggioli explains in his analysis of bylines in scientific papers, is about credit and responsibility;¹⁰ in contemporary museum practice with Native communities, it is also about ethical practice and authenticity.¹¹ So I also address, what does authorship *mean* in this context? Who is *responsible* for the text? And how is authenticity mediated through this form of authorial practice? Attempting to answer these questions will bring us into the communities and into the museum, and discussion will range from topics as diverse as intermarriage to label size. I approach these questions ethnographically, and consider the answers to be located at the intersection between museum professionals and Native community members struggling with how to characterize Native identities to a greater public.

⁸ Mario Baggioli, "Documents of Documents: Scientists' Claims and Scientific Claims," in *Documents : Artifacts of Modern Knowledge*, ed. Annelise Riles (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 136.

⁹ Or, to put it in terms of practice theory: what is authorship *in practice*. See CITATION. Also Ortner. Or put in introduction? For a succinct introduction to and critique of practice theory, see Sherry B. Ortner, *Anthropology and Social Theory : Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Baggioli, "Documents of Documents: Scientists' Claims and Scientific Claims."

¹¹ See for example Peers and Brown, *Museums and Source Communities : A Routledge Reader*, West and [NMAI], eds., *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian : Museums and Native Cultures*.

An Anthropology of Mediation

By considering the *Our Lives* exhibits as forms of media,¹² I intend to highlight the complex interplay of authorship and mediation that occurred between the communities and the museum, and provide some insight into the way in which each community chose to interpret what contemporary Native identity means. William Mazarella defines a medium as, most broadly,

a material framework, both enabling and constraining, for a given set of social practices. In this guise a medium is also a *reflexive and reifying technology*. It makes society imaginable and intelligible to itself in the form of external representations.¹³

As the co-curators and NMAI staff contemplated their own cultural identities and/or career trajectories, they discussed and wrote and produced Native identities as built material forms in the museum exhibit. They certainly engaged in a process both reflexive and reifying.

Furthermore, in his treatise that calls for an anthropology of mediation,¹⁴ Mazarella explains that,

mediation produces and reproduces certain configurations of close-distance, *mediated self-understandings that depend on the routing of the personal through the impersonal, the near through the far, and the self through the other*. Close distance is therefore a figure for the dialectical engagement and alienation inherent in all cultural politics.¹⁵

So, a medium that engages in representing the self depends on the knowledge of the self passing through some external form.

¹² Exhibit as a mediating form can refer to the exhibit as a whole or to its varied components of media (text, video, photographs).

¹³ William Mazarella, "Culture, Globalization, Mediation," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33, no. 1 (2004): 346. Emphasis added.

¹⁴ Fay Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Terry Turner and others who work on indigenous media production have been advocating a turn to mediation for some time.

¹⁵ Mazarella, "Culture, Globalization, Mediation," 361. Emphasis added. While a notion of dialectical self-knowledge has been well documented in anthropology, I turn to Mazarella's work because it specifically places it in terms of an anthropology of mediation and fits well with specifically indigenous media and mediation in the work of Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers and Terry Turner.

At this juncture I believe the work of Barry Dornfeld to be particularly useful. In his ethnography *Producing Public Television, Producing Public Culture*, Dornfeld analyzes the production of a PBS documentary television series about cross-cultural practices in childrearing by doing ethnography with, and in the meetings among, the series' producers.¹⁶ While Mazzarella asserts that the notion of agency is what is taken to extremes in media studies (a *theoretical* false dichotomy of agency rendered as either an over-determined cultural imperialism or an over-active audience),¹⁷ Dornfeld instead problematizes the segregation of scholarly studies and analysis of production and reception (revealing, I would argue, that underlying this theoretical false dichotomy is a *methodological* one). Dornfeld insists that, in practice, production and consumption are intertwined. He explains that the anticipation of reception, or the *imagined audience*, is part of the production process.¹⁸ In other words, assumptions about the audience guide producers' creative decisions.¹⁹

Bringing Dornfeld's attention to the imagined audience into conversation with Mazzarella's definition of medium prompted me to identify the imagined audience as (one of) the external form(s) through which exhibit makers passed their self-understanding in order to arrive at an exhibit about their own identity. The prefigured

¹⁶ Barry Dornfeld, *Producing Public Television, Producing Public Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998). Dornfeld, like myself, was a practitioner before he became interested in documenting the process of collaboration among experts involved in cultural production. His analysis in many ways inspired a number of questions that I brought with me into the field. One of the ways in which Dornfeld advances the field of media studies is to offer a processual analysis of knowledge producers; in order to accomplish this, he sat at meetings among producers and academics involved in the documentary to observe how information was gathered, discussed, decided upon, and reproduced for a larger audience, as I had sought to do at the NMAI and in co-curator communities.

¹⁷ Mazzarella, "Culture, Globalization, Mediation," 350.

¹⁸ Dornfeld, *Producing Public Television, Producing Public Culture*, 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 188. I separate production (Chapter 4, "Authorship") and reception (Chapter 6, "Performance") in my own chapters here, where they represent different moments in time in the development of the exhibition. Analytically, I hope it is clear that production and reception are mutually constitutive in both chapters.

audience, in other words, could be seen as an actant²⁰ in determining the content of the exhibit, which in turn revealed that the characterization of the prefigured audience was another conceptual fault line separating the various experts at work on the *Our Lives* exhibition. I borrow Barry Dornfeld's concepts of the "social organization of authorship"²¹ and the "ideology of authorship"²² to frame my attention to the community curating process. Ultimately, I hope to demonstrate what an anthropology of mediation can offer the anthropology of museums, and what an attention to authorship can do to illuminate practices of self-representation and how contemporary Native identity is produced for public consumption.

The Sociology of (Collaborative) Authorship: Community Curating

Our Lives lead curator Dr. Cynthia Chavez invited each co-curator committee represented in the *Our Lives* gallery to interpret the term identity in whatever way they chose for the purposes of the exhibition. Recalling from Chapter 1, Cynthia first gave the community curators basic guidelines for what their exhibit "should *not* be": a history, tourism version, or solely traditional view of the community. She then offered what "every community component *should* be": honest, complex, and specific. These sparse guidelines for the communities indicated the high degree to which the co-curators were responsible for the content of the exhibits. There were many instances

²⁰ Following Latour; however, while he considers material objects, the imagined audience is a non-human and non-material actant with consequences to human action "Actant: Whatever acts or *shifts actions*, action itself being defined by a list of performances through trials; from these performances are deduced a set of competences with which the actant is endowed; the fusion point of a metal is a trial through which the strength of an alloy is defined; the bankruptcy of a company is a trial through which the faithfulness of an ally may be defined; an actor is an actant endowed with character (usually anthropomorphic)" (emphasis added); from Madeleine Akrich and Bruno Latour, "A Summary of a Convenient Vocabulary for the Semiotics of Human and Nonhuman Assemblies," in *Shaping Technology/Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*, ed. Wiebe E. Bijker and John Law (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 259.

²¹ Dornfeld, *Producing Public Television, Producing Public Culture*, 69.

²² This is inspired by Dornfeld's discussion of the "authorial ideology" of the *Childhood* series producers, which was seen as "collegial and negotiated" in *Ibid.*, 179.

in which the co-curators did not include in their exhibit content what NMAI staff had researched and anticipated they would.

To prepare for working with the communities, NMAI Curatorial staff did extensive research on each community and possible “identity issues” that might be highlighted in an exhibition about contemporary Native life. For example, tribal membership rules or residency requirements, even the 1990 Oka crisis, were not mentioned in the Kahnawake Mohawk exhibit, which crafted a main message about sovereignty.²³ But some topics, like Racial Integrity Act of Virginia and its affect on the Pamunkey tribe, no community member wanted the *responsibility* of being the author or crafting the words, even if it was a topic they had discussed in co-curator meetings and felt that it should be part of the exhibit. In the only instance of its kind that I found in the OL gallery, but one that highlights the twin nature of authorship that Baggioli describes, the co-curators asked NMAI curator and OL Pamunkey exhibit fieldworker Ann McMullen to include the topic and to specifically place *her* name as author on the text panel.²⁴

On the other hand, this research demonstrated a certain amount of effort and knowledge that was appreciated in communities. For example, at a preliminary meeting with prominent Chicago American Indian community members on July 25,

²³ With a blood quantum requirement of 50%, higher than the Canadian government’s Indian Act requirement, Kahnawake asserts control over its community membership as part of its sovereign right; this was not included in the exhibit, but was part of NMAI research/preparation files. The Oka Crisis of 1990 was another instance; although a symbol for sovereignty in Indian country, this event was a divisive issue in the Kahnawake community. While “asserting sovereignty” was their exhibit’s “main message,” the co-curators chose to emphasize language immersion and iron working/crossing international borders instead. But note: the Oka crisis was introduced by curators Gabi Tayac and Jolene Rickard in the NMAI-curated section of *Our Lives*. Tayac said that, in this section, the NMAI curators were able to present issues—like blood quantum and Oka—that no community wanted to author but likely would agree were important issues to educate people about.

²⁴ Interview with Ann McMullen, rotunda of the CRC, November 23, 2004: “So, for instance, when it came time to say who the author was of the label that said that Virginia was bad because they implemented the racial integration—Racial Integrity Act—they said: oh no, you’re name stays on that [Jen laughs]. So, they didn’t go as far as to actually, you know, take back authorship of some of those things that would have credited them with saying something that was critical of the state of Virginia, because it can’t necessarily put themselves in that position.”

2001 at NAES College to determine an appropriate process for selecting co-curators to represent them (there is no tribal government or central governing body that oversaw the whole urban community like on a reservation), community members asked Cynthia why they were selected over all other urban communities in the United States. Cynthia's well-researched response impressed community members and earned her a shout of "Good research!" from a future co-curator, followed by kind laughter by the group.²⁵

As briefly noted in Chapter 1, Cynthia left the method of co-curator selection up to Native community leadership. The "representational calculus" I detail in Chapter 3 for forming these committees was essential in each community for creating a representational body with the authority and legitimacy to work on behalf of the community, according to their own standards. It also determined who would represent their communities as authors for the content of the exhibitions and, equally important, who could be trusted to be responsive to the museum and sustain the project over time.

For each community a "liaison" was selected—a person responsible for organizing NMAI visits with the community, presiding over independent meetings when they were not present, gathering the objects and other items for the NMAI, and selecting and coordinating interviews for both the fieldworkers and the media teams, among many other tasks. For Chicago, Rita Hodge was the liaison; for the Kalinago, it was Prosper Paris. I want to note here the central role these individuals had not only in sustaining the interest and momentum of the exhibition work over years of sporadic interaction with the museum, but also in their legitimizing the project.

²⁵ Her comments included that Chicago had the oldest urban Indian center, it was a major relocation site, there was a lack of recognized tribal lands in Illinois, and that the conference of 1961 that brought all these native leaders to Chicago was "really one of the jumping, starting points of talking about self-determination" among native people. Then she added that there was "a long history of native people living here in Chicago" before the federal relocation program—a comment that was, I am sure, particularly appreciated by the group. From the session transcript.

In “Private Politics, Public Strategies: White Advisers and Their Aboriginal Subjects,” Paul Batty discusses the relationship between government advisors and Aboriginal communities in Australia, and the need for Aboriginal authorization to conduct projects in their communities. He examines how Aboriginal people must endorse these advisors, investing them with cultural capital. Through one-on-one relationship with a particular Aboriginal person (like a community liaison in the NMAI community curating process), the white individual’s motivations, personal commitment and alignment with the broader group could be explained and endorsed by his or her Aboriginal partner.

In other words, confirmation that a hitherto “unknown white fella” was “on side” was facilitated through his or her demonstrable relationship with an Aboriginal person within the group. One could say that through these arrangements, the Aboriginal partner “empowered” his non-Aboriginal outsider to work on behalf of the Aboriginal community.²⁶ While NMAI curators were both Native and non-Native, their relationship to Native communities as outside government advisors (in museum matters) can also be seen as needing endorsement by the community. Particularly in the process of interviewing or other work outside of the community curator meetings, the liaison and Native co-curators were essential to NMAI staff being introduced to and having positive working relationships with additional community members.

Building Consensus: Committee Meetings and the Thematic Approach

During the community curating process, NMAI staff encouraged a thematic approach to exhibit making. Therefore, co-curators were largely responsible for producing knowledge about themselves through a thematic structure; they were also

²⁶ Phillip Batty, "Private Politics, Public Strategies: White Advisers and Their Aboriginal Subjects," *OCEANIA* 75, no. 3 (2005): 217.

tasked with creating a “main message” for their exhibit. Because I cannot elaborate upon all the meetings, like Dornfeld, I intend to focus on the “density of moments for evaluation and interpretation, and the centrality of these processes for shaping the emerging text.”²⁷ I offer some highlight moments in each community for insight into the process—focusing more specifically on two meetings in the Carib Territory to focus on dialog, and on a more general sweep of meetings in Chicago to illustrate the progression of the community curating process.

Kalinago: Looking Forward

Themes emerged, no doubt, in part as a result of the composition of each committee. The majority of the Kalinago co-curators, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, were part of the first generation of Kalinago who went to secondary education and felt connected to indigenous communities as part of a larger, worldwide movement. They were, in other words, founders in their community of, and deeply committed to, a movement for Kalinago “cultural consciousness.” It is not surprising, then, that through a series of meetings over the course of three years (2001-2003), these Kalinago committee members created the main message for their exhibit as: “The Kalinago survive despite numerous challenges” that included “cultural consciousness” among the three main themes for their exhibit, along with “economic survival” and “challenges” (see Appendix C for additional OL main messages).

We can see what kind of deliberations the co-curators went through to arrive at these themes by looking at a sample transcript of a Kalinago co-curator meeting during the second visit of the NMAI to the Carib Territory, which was led by the assigned fieldworker and Community Services staff member Susan Secakuku

²⁷ Dornfeld, *Producing Public Television, Producing Public Culture*, 69.

(Hopi).²⁸ At this meeting on January 15 of 2002, co-curators sat around a table in the Carib Council House (Figure 17 below), a hexagonal structure with a meeting room that had fading yellow paint on the walls and fans turning overhead.



Figure 17: Carib Council House. November 20, 2007.

The meeting moved forward with a fast rotation of speakers, often finishing each others' sentences, in conversation with *each other* as much as in explanation to Susan. Susan often spoke the hallmark NMAI, collaborative ethic, phrase, "so you're saying..." as a commitment to accuracy and a form of guidance to discussion. Broadly, the co-curators expressed concerns over the impact of the outside world through television, the Dominican government, and the surrounding Afro-Dominican society on youth, economy and education in the Territory (some of these themes were

²⁸ As an *Our Lives* researcher, I was responsible for transcribing this taped recording. The following account of the meetings are from my meeting notes, Susan's notes, and session transcripts.

reflected in a text panel titled, “Let’s Teach Ourselves”; Figure 18 below). As usual, there were a lot of humorous asides in the meeting—something that unfortunately (as Cynthia and I have discussed) did not translate into the exhibition despite it being an important and enjoyable part of working with communities. In any case, the group often returned to what they *would like* to see happen in their community in the future.

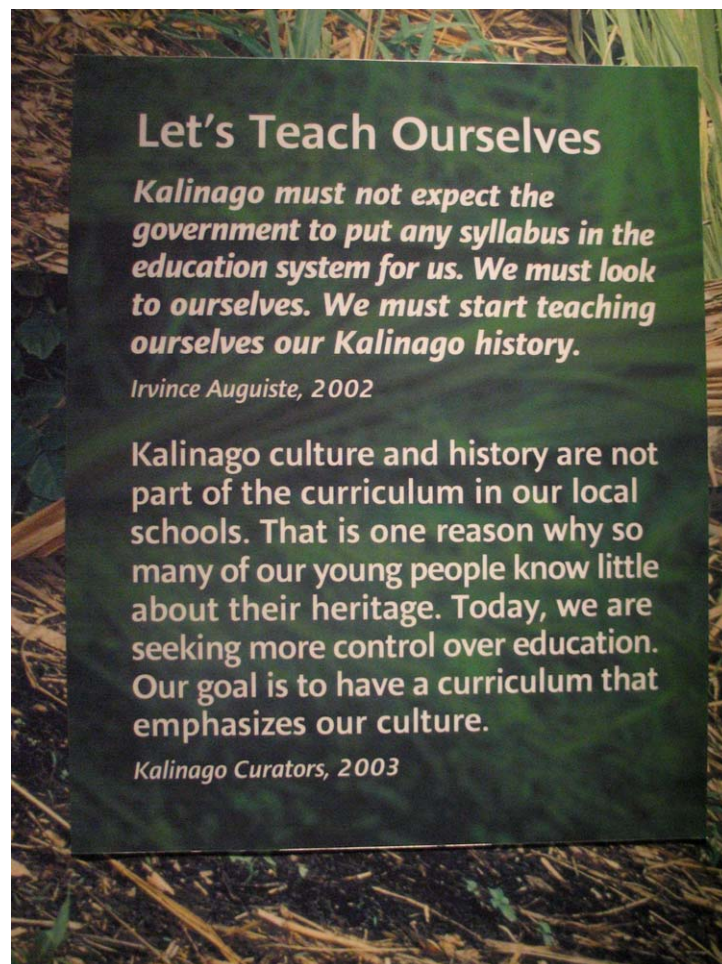


Figure 18: Kalinago exhibit text panel, "Let's Teach Ourselves."

For example, at one point in the meeting, Susan brought up the issue of “self identity,” saying she heard someone mention it earlier. Sylvanie rephrased this as “Who you are.” Then Susan asked if she heard right from community members—that

it's a "conscious decision to be Carib."²⁹ To which Sylvanie replied that the co-curators would like to have the exhibit be "not just focusing on the past, but something in the future."

Later in this meeting, Susan again recalled something someone said to help guide the discussion to possible exhibit themes. She said, "You said something a little earlier I want to go back to about: right now, you're an agricultural based people, right?" She asked if that is changing, to which Garnette replied yes, and Sylvanie added, "The pressure is on to change." Garnette reiterated, "Pressure is on." When Susan asked from whom, Garnette said, "We see, well, the global system is at hand, and we are part of it." He continued, "But, we've seen changes begin in the tourism industry, for example. For the past five years, we find organized tours coming into the Carib Territory. And around that we've seen changes—the craft marketing, and the *possibility* of strengthening the craft industry. So, I mean, there are very serious constraints here." He then mentioning a lack of marketing and a need for increased exports of Kalinago crafts. "More can be done," he concluded, and Prosper repeated, "More can be done."

Garnette began again, "More can be done. Our Heritage Village that is due to open soon, and there are possibilities around that as well." Susan then said, "I'm listening to you and I want to make sure I heard you right: you're moving, you think, to more of a craft-based and tourism—" and the co-curators finished her sentence, agreeing, "—tourism based economy." The concerns expressed in this co-curator meeting, in interviews and subsequent community-wide meetings, would highlight these same themes of hardship, survival, tourism, and future cultural potential (some

²⁹ In meetings, and in the community, the term Carib was most often used by Carib Territory residents. But in preparing the exhibition, the co-curators decided they wanted Kalinago to displace that term, even though they often used Carib themselves in discussion.

of these themes would be highlighted in the “Kalinago Economy” text panel; Figure 19 below).

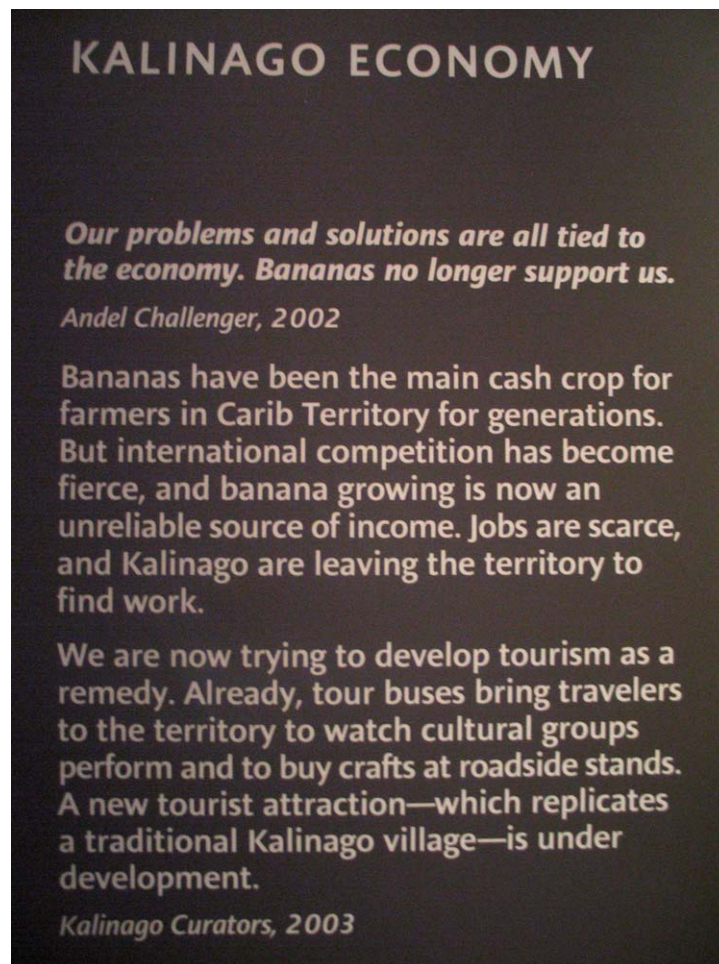


Figure 19: Kalinago exhibit text panel, “Economy”

It was important to the co-curators that the exhibit not be from their perspective alone, but from the community as a whole. So, they held the first community-wide meeting two days later, when Prosper invited all of the prominent “resource persons” of the Carib Territory to the meeting.³⁰ The co-curators intended

³⁰ January 17, 2002, at the Carib Council House. Attendees: Participants: Susan Secakuku (NMAI fieldworker), Jennifer Shannon (research assistant), Prosper Paris (Co-curator and liaison), James Frederick (Sineku Development Committee), Eve Sanford (elder), Faustulous Frederick (former chief, artist and Cozier’s father), Regina Joseph (banana farmer), Judith Francis (youth representative), Sylvie

to get a wider view about Kalinago identity from a broader cross section of people from the Territory. I was present as a research assistant, again taking notes. The meeting also took place in the Carib Council house, where community members were seated in rows of benches, and NMAI staff sat at a table facing them.

After an elder offered a prayer to begin the meeting, Prosper gave a summary of the work conducted so far by the NMAI and the co-curators, saying that “it is a project of the Carib community” and he didn’t want people complaining that they didn’t know about it. He referred to the gallery as “Our life and time.” Susan then described the focus of the *Our Lives* gallery to the gathered community members:

[This gallery is about] the identity of indigenous peoples. Contemporary identities today. I think a lot of non-indigenous peoples believe either we’re no longer around, no longer live here or exist in this world, or that we still wear feathers or, you know, live in tepees. Everybody lives in tepees, they think. And we’ve never lived in tepees [people laugh], and I know that the Kalinago never lived in tepees. Our goal is to try and *demonstrate to the visitor* coming in, saying, we are still here as indigenous peoples, but we live in a particular way, and we have different issues today than we did way back when. But we still have the same thinking and values probably that we did, that have maintained us today.

So, what we’re trying to ask from you is—or get some information from you is—pretty much what does it mean to be a Carib? How do you define yourselves as being a Kalinago?... And the other...eight communities we mentioned are going for the same thing... they’re all being asked, what does it mean to be a Yakama? What does it mean to be a Mohawk? ... And all these will be put in the same room, and the visitor will decide, will hear from you directly what does it mean to be a Carib.

Prosper explained that what people said was being tape recorded, and then opened up the floor to the community members. One by one, each person stood and made a statement about what it means to be Carib in a passionate way, sometimes being called on specifically by Prosper, who insisted that everyone contribute. At one

Warrington (nurse), Murvina Thomas (basket maker), Reny Auguiste (youth representative), Maulyn Stout (elder), Jerome Octave (elder), Hillary Frederick (former chief), Andel Challenger (teacher), Garnette Joseph (Co-curator), Kevin Dangleben (teacher), Gerard Langlais (Co-curator), Raphael Auguiste (tourism/driver), Irvince Auguiste (Co-curator), Reny Auguiste (youth representative), Jacinta Bruney (Co-curator).

point, a teacher who would later manage the Carib Model Village³¹ in 2006, said that an exhibit in the NMAI would be an opportunity for tourism: “I think it is a very good medium for Dominica on the whole *to market itself as a tourist destination*, as an eco-tourist destination, [that] showcases indigenous people.” Later, Susan and I would walk away from this meeting impressed by the candor of the community members present. Many talked of discrimination and insisted that to be a Carib, one must be, and they were, proud to be Carib (represented in the text panel in Figure 20 below).

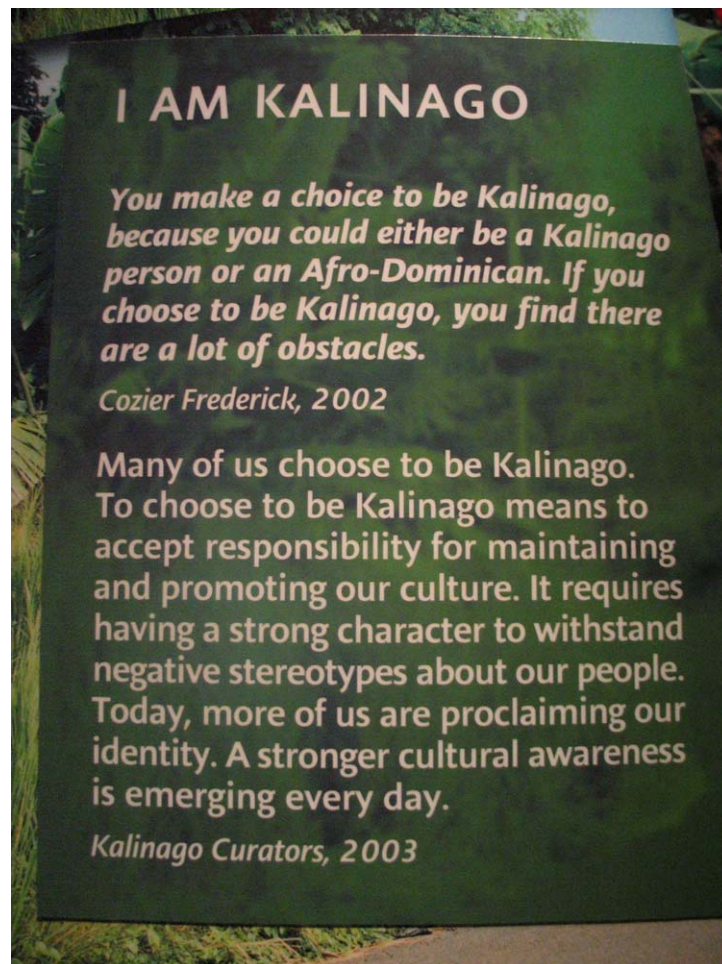


Figure 20: Kalinago exhibit text panel, "I am Kalinago"

³¹ By 2006, the Carib Model Village was opened and its name was changed to Kalinago Barana Autê (Carib Village by the Sea). For clarity, I leave the name unchanged here.

The second community-wide meeting, almost exactly two months later (March 17 2003), was basically a vetting session for the specific main message and themes the co-curators had developed in the meantime, which Susan read aloud to those gathered.³² At this point, the main message was “The Kalinago people make a conscious choice to be Kalinago despite numerous difficulties.” The main themes were: Cultural Revitalization, Cultural Tourism, and Difficulties.

Prosper then opened the meeting up for group discussion. Some community members were concerned about the negative tone of the exhibit. Cozier, a representative for youth on the co-curator committee, suggested that they needed to “strike a balance” in the positives and negatives of the exhibition. Co-curator Irvine, a representative for tourism and former chief, asserted that the museum is like an advertisement, and that it is something they are not dependent on the Dominica government for: “it’s now *our* business to develop and how we can maximize this advertisement.” Prosper indicated that the exhibit should not be too positive (keeping Cynthia’s guidelines in mind) such that it does not reflect reality, because then people will not be inclined to help them.³³ In this meeting, individuals were more talking to each other, and the discussion ranged from wanting something back from the NMAI to concerns over intermarriage and that their “race will die” in the near future.

During the co-curator meeting directly after this community gathering, Prosper, responding to concerns about the negative tone of the exhibition, suggested

³² March 17, 2002 at the Carib Council Meeting House. Attendees: Susan Secakuku (NMAI), Jennifer Shannon (NMAI), Paulinas Frederick (Karifuna Cultural Group), Irvine Auguiste (Co-curator), Louisette Auguiste (Irvine's wife), Faustulus Frederick (former chief, artist and Cozier's father), Lawrence Daroux (former Parliamentary Representative), Alexis Valmond (Co-curator), James Frederick (Sineku Development Committee), Reny Auguiste (youth leader), Reina Auguiste (youth representative), Cozier Frederick (Co-curator), Aniel Challenger (teacher), Prosper Paris (Co-curator and liaison), Sylvie Warrington (nurse), Miranda Langais (Karina Cultural group, Gerard' wife).

³³ Prosper said at the March 17 community meeting, based on my notes at the meeting, that the Kalinago should not “run away from the reality of things. We don't want to pretend to be what we're not. If we say we are not hungry, no one will want to send food. If we say we are hungry, someone will send food. It's that we have a good meal now, but don't know about the next one. It fluctuates, good sometimes, bad sometimes.”

the term “challenges” instead of “difficulties” for the main message. Susan commented perhaps “survival” can be a more positive spin, referencing another person’s concerns. The co-curators agreed. The main message was finalized, then: “the Kalinago survive despite numerous challenges.” Then the co-curators went down the list of themes, one by one, asking where particular kinds of information should be placed in the exhibit script according to the revised categories: Cultural Consciousness, Economic Survival, and Challenges (Figure 21 below). It was basically a classification exercise, as they determined what kinds of community practices go under which themes. This was not always an obvious task; for instance, Cultural Groups could have gone under Economic Survival, as they earn money for performances for tourists; but, the co-curators chose to include them under Cultural Consciousness instead.

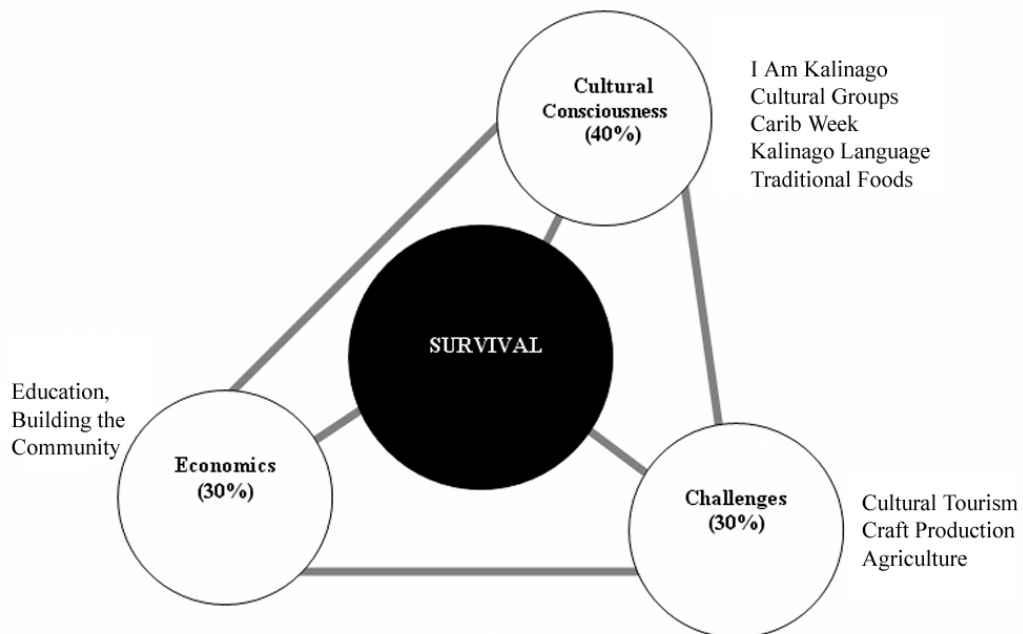


Figure 21: Kalinago "bubble diagram" (developed by NMAI curators to communicate to the designers the relative “weight” each content category should receive).

Chicago: Establishing a Foundation

The Chicago community also held similar co-curator meetings in which they deliberated over how to represent their community in an exhibit. Whereas visits with Kalinago were months apart and a week or more at a time due to the difficulty and expense of traveling there, in Chicago there were more frequent, shorter visits between the co-curators and NMAI staff (Cynthia and Wenona Rymond-Richmond, who was a contracted fieldworker and graduate student at Northwestern at the time). In this section, I highlight the invitation and design meetings as a way to address other aspects of the collaborative process.³⁴

The Chicago main message was, “Native peoples from different tribes come together in Chicago and maintain a supportive community network.” This reflected the over one hundred tribes represented in the Chicago area (including Lakota, Ojibwe, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, etc.) and the fact that the community was based on voluntary association and had no central governing body. The American Indian Center³⁵ served as a gathering place over the years, but it was not the first place the NMAI went to find representatives to help determine the best way to put together a committee of co-curators. Unlike the other communities in *Our Lives*, there was no government to help determine this.

The first encounter between NMAI staff³⁶ was at an informal dinner the night before a more formal meeting at the Native American Education Services (NAES)

³⁴ Meeting information is based on transcripts and notes from the meetings recorded by Wenona, the fieldworker, and Rita, the liaison.

³⁵ LaGrand (2002) explains how the AIC is often selected by people wanting to work with the Indian population of Chicago for ease of access for research, though it does not and cannot represent or provide access to the more than 30,000 Native peoples in the city alone (not counting suburbs and rural areas). However, for the purposes of this project, “community” was primarily defined as the AIC community, even if some co-curators objected to the exhibit being so AIC-centered (most overtly, Susan Power).

³⁶ Cynthia and Wenona were the NMAI’s Curatorial representatives for the Chicago community. I was present only for the introductory meetings in Chicago as OL lead researcher.

College with its director and a number of prominent community members.³⁷ NAES College had been recommended as a “neutral” organization through which to contact the community by a scholar who was well-respected by the community in the area. The group produced suggestions for who should be involved in the exhibition project, including young people.

At the July 25th meeting at NAES, each person told their own story about their experience in the community and where they fit (some were in the city because of relocation, others were born and grew up in the city, and others were passing through). This would be repeated in meetings with the eventual co-curators, as well. At his turn to speak, Ed Two Rivers commented that,

There’s a history here... The board meetings used to be a war zone at the Indian Center. You would go to a board meeting and tribal people were saying, ‘*That’s* not the way it’s done, why the Navajos would never do that!’ But the Sioux would say, ‘But that’s the way *we* do it!’ [laughter]... but out of that, we became—we got solidified eventually. We *married* each other! [more laughter].

A second person added, “Now we fight at home!” which was met with laughter all around.

Ed Two Rivers also spoke about how Chicago Indians were unique—always organizing, even in prisons. His own words would resurface as a “pull out” quotation in the final exhibit (Figure 22 below). Everyone agreed that the AIC provided a place for Indians to come and be welcomed when they first arrived in the city. This focus on the community being inter-tribal, on organizations and coalitions, on its welcoming

³⁷ On July 24, there was an informal dinner meeting to orient NMAI staff to the Chicago community at the Casablanca restaurant on Peterson, one block from NAES College with Cynthia Chavez (NMAI), Jennifer Shannon (NMAI), Wenona Rymond-Richmond (NMAI, contracted fieldworker from Northwestern University), Faith Smith (NAES director), RJ Smith (Faith’s son, youth group leader), Eli Suzukovich III (NAES archivist, youth group leader). The following day, a more formal meeting was held at 11:00am at NAES College; attendees included Christine Red Cloud, Wenona Rymond-Richmond, Jennifer Shannon, Cynthia Chavez, Antonia Wheeler Sheehy, Joseph Podlasek, Mary Anne Armstrong, Eli Suzukovich, Megan Bang, Beverly Moeser, Ed Two-Rivers, and Vincent Romero (Eli and Joe later were elected as co-curators).

spirit—these themes were reiterated by other community members over time and eventually became the main display issues in the exhibition.

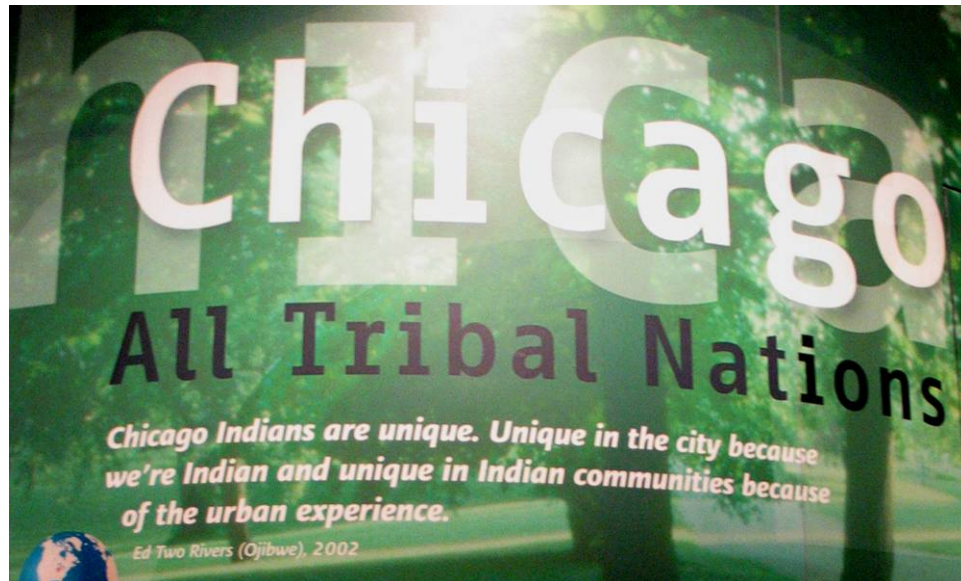


Figure 22: Chicago exhibit text panel, quoting Ed Two Rivers.

Three months later, with Rita Hodge selected as liaison, a meeting was held at the AIC on October 29, 2001. The co-curators had been selected as well as alternates, and almost all of them were in attendance: Cynthia and Wenona (fieldworker), Rita Hodge (liaison), Eli Suzukovich (he later moved away and Pat Xerikos, an alternate, took his place), Susan Power (she brought her friend, elder Angie Decorah), Cindy Soto, Cyndee Starr, Ansel Deon, Mavis Neconish (alternative co-curator who later became more involved), Jayne Blacker (Mavis' daughter), David Spencer, Patricia Xerikos (alternative co-curator), and Joe Podlasek.

Rita began the meeting with her own main message of sorts, to begin discussion. She suggested, "Urban Natives: Weaving our circles of strength through heritage, culture, education." Heritage referred to the past, culture to the present, and education as a tool for the future, she added. One person said to use the term

connections rather than weaving, because weaving referred to specific tribes (connecting this to Rita being Navajo). The group discussed the concept, and along the way Cynthia cautioned them not to design, but instead create “themes” and “topics” for the exhibition (the exhibit would be designed by a contracted design firm, Design+Communication, Inc.).

Both Cynthia and Rita directed the meeting, and they each wrote lists on a board to keep track of the terms they were hearing in the course of conversation, including:

- “serving communities”
- “cultural traditions”
- “social gathering”
- “cultural teachings”
- “connection- drum, reservation, healing”
- “recover ID”
- “rejuvenate, balance”
- “1970’s- era AIM politics”
- “Hub.” AIC is known nationwide
- “Native People- VOICE”
- “extended family”
- “role model”
- “Native Professionals”
- “tradition vs. _____”
- “willingness to help”
- “respect for other tradition”
- “uniqueness”
- “diverse within diversity”
- “feeling of closeness”
- “AIC Powwow and beyond”
- “identity”
- “struggles- voice”
- “ID- Pan-Indianism → inhibiting and enhancing”
- “1970s hindered ID- in Public School”

This meeting, like the others that followed, and like the Kalinago co-curator meetings, it was a mixture of educating NMAI staff, talking amongst themselves, brainstorming,

and personal narratives. This meeting was also where they formed the sub-committees I mentioned earlier.

At a meeting on December 17, 2001, Cynthia asked, “how do you maintain your Indian identity in an urban area?,” and encouraged each person to comment from their own experience. So, they went around the table and did so. Cynthia encouraged them to think about what’s different about the urban experience, as the rest of the exhibits in the gallery would be reservation-based.

By the February 8 meeting of the same year, the conversation turned to categorizing the topics co-curators wanted to highlight in their exhibit that had been recorded into a worksheet by NMAI staff. References to the worksheet dominated the conversation: “Section I, C-1” and “3A, cross that out.” The co-curators were focused on the task of properly categorizing so that items, like NAES College, were not present in more than one category (it could be located in the outline under education, community support, or powwow). The co-curators also worked on filling in other boxes in the worksheet that included “media” and “objects” they wanted to accompany the various themes and sub-themes of their exhibit.

As they talked about media and objects, Cynthia asked if the co-curators wanted to be reflected in the exhibit (their images, their comments) or to have other community members not on the committee to be displayed instead? The group members said they also wanted to be included. The group also discussed the use of the term “pan-Indianism;” they removed the word from the worksheet but kept the stories associated with it. One co-curator said that term was a “political thing,” Cynthia noted that it was an academic word from the “white perspective” and not from Indians; a young co-curator said it made her think of assimilation. Cynthia then discussed with them what to expect for their design consultation, the upcoming meeting with the NMAI that would also include Design+Communication staff.

April 14, 2002 was the “design consultation.” After Cynthia reorganized the worksheet/exhibit thematic categories according to the co-curators’ suggestions, she presented the newly organized content and guided the meeting to make sure each sub-theme supported its overriding theme. The group also talked about the bubble diagram—how much relative emphasis/space each theme should get (Figure 23 below). The conversation included, “So what are your thoughts on these other things, community organizing, tribal intersections... We have to take 5 percent or should these be moved around to these other ones? Community support is 40 percent.” “Where did you put that 5 percent?” “Does that come out to 105 percent the way we have it now?”

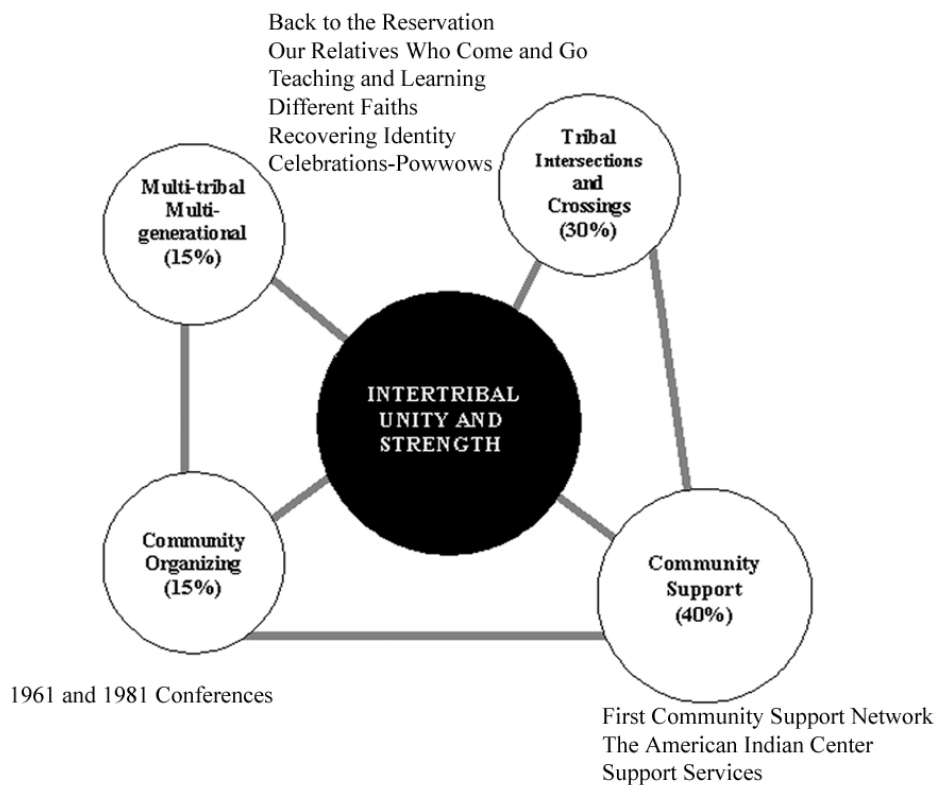


Figure 23: Chicago "bubble diagram."

Jean St. Cyr of D+C asked, “If you had one postcard from this exhibit, what would it be? [What] would be representing you?” He was trying to elicit what would

become the “icon,” as his firm called it, for the exhibit. A design team representative also said that the exhibit, and exhibits in general, were emphasizing visitor *experience* over objects today. He explained, “Because we're dealing with the identity, your identity today, we won't make use of the Smithsonian collection.” Later in the meeting, the design team again stressed that there are no “artifacts” available in the collection. St. Cyr emphasized that the co-curators not try to “compete” with the NMAI collection; that they would instead use ordinary objects to communicate ideas and that “testimony will be a very important part of this exhibit. With complex issues it's the best way to deal with them by just having people telling the stories, telling how it is. It's the best way to communicate.”³⁸

This emphasis on “testimony” came out strongest in the Chicago in a reconstructed “living room” filled with “ordinary objects” (provided from the homes of co-curators and other community members), with a television that played videos of interviews with different families explaining their experiences being Native in the city (Figure 24 below).

St. Cyr listened and commented during a discussion about what is a unique image in the community: “you’re saying, dancing with the cityscape background?” The group settled on “powwow in the city” as “what would make us unique” in the context of the exhibition. St. Cyr replied, “that’s a good one.” The group also discussed the symbolism they wanted to communicate—activity, inviting other people in—that this focus on powwow in the city would have. When St. Cyr asked the committee about sounds they associated with their community, one co-curator got everyone laughing with a quick response: “the el train!”

³⁸ He offered examples from other communities of objects they provided for the exhibit, such as from Kahnawake a steel plate that was taken from Ground-Zero in New York (they have an exhibit about ironworking).

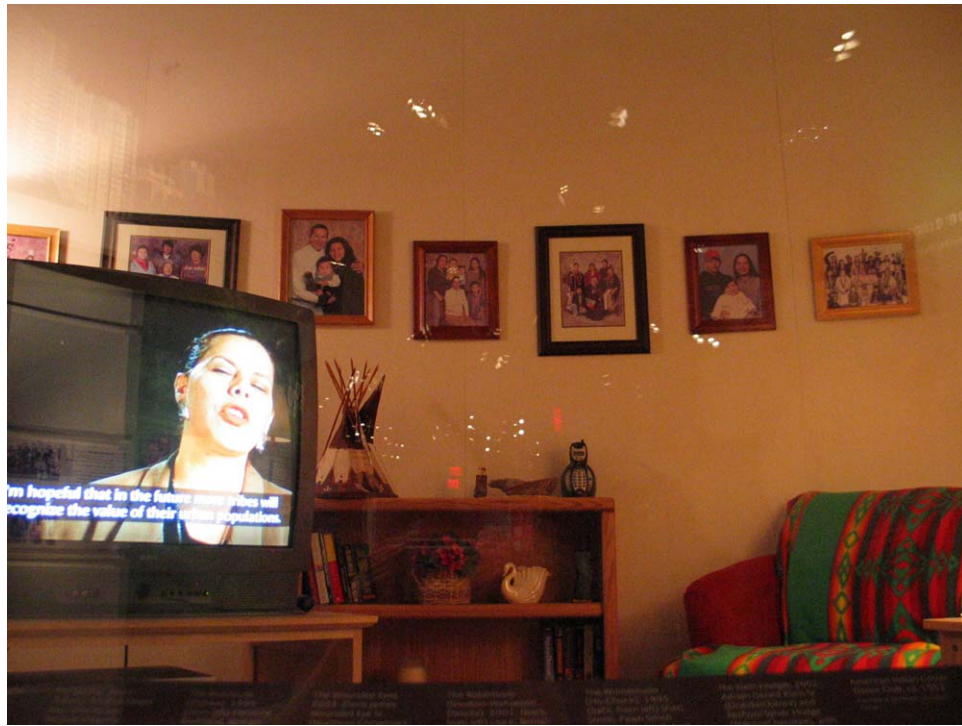


Figure 24: Chicago exhibit "living room."

The second day of the design consultation, April 15, was again held at the AIC. Cynthia opened the meeting with, “Taxes are due!” Everyone laughed and then got down to business with Jen Miller, the project manager, leading the discussion. She systematically went through each theme, eliciting object ideas and explaining they would need size information for each object for the design plans. June 2002 was the upcoming deadline for object, photo, and loan information. Wenona was tasked with conducting one-on-one interviews with co-curators and additional community members about the various themes in the worksheet.

In a committee meeting nine months later on January 19, 2003, Cynthia visited Chicago again to give an update of the exhibit, telling the co-curators that the “icon” for the exhibit would be the Chicago skyline and the “main attraction” would be the intertribal powwow. Cynthia prepared the co-curators for the upcoming “media team”

visit, and asked for suggestions for who to interview on video tape and what events to cover. In a later independent meeting among co-curators on May 29, 2003, the group reviewed a “needs list” from Cynthia for the media visit (who to interview, photograph, etc.) and prepared for the upcoming visit with the media team.

In each community, a media team comprised of NMAI staff and contractors visited the communities to video and photographically record individual interviews, community events, b-roll images, and occasionally scripted scenes according to the needs of the exhibit. At the same time, these 2003 media visits were also often the last visit by curatorial staff to the community, so they included final object collection and measurement and final script approval by co-curators.

Mediating Native Voice

As community input moved from recorded conversation to transcript to script to wall panel, it passed through what may for some have seemed like a “black box” to those outside of the museum (and inside, as well).³⁹ I go into less detail here than is available on how various specialists in the museum worked with co-curator generated knowledge, as my general focus is on the intersection between co-curators and NMAI staff. Many museum professionals contributed to the transformation from field recording to authored text panel.

What was unusual about this particular exhibition was that the script editor worked on the content with no visuals (and not having “been there”) and designers determined the amount of space available for words in the exhibits—label lengths and sizes—in the graphic elevations before the text labels were created.⁴⁰ In the end,

³⁹ I borrow this image from the field of Science and Technology Studies.

⁴⁰ Phone interview with Erica Denison of D+C, June 21, 2004.

regulations like required font size from the Americans with Disabilities Act⁴¹ and space availability in the museum just as much determined the (amount of) text as did the content co-curators developed. Script writers and designers were working at the same time that curatorial staff were working with the communities, all in relative isolation from each other, and with little or no (in the case of the script writer) interaction with the communities. This was one of the more stark bifurcations or divisions of labor between the visual and textual tasks of the collaborative work. While the design team did meet with each community once, the script writer only encountered co-curators as names and transcript quotes—in other words, as text.

Script Development

Once the co-curators had selected their exhibit themes and finalized their sub-themes, NMAI staff worked on script structures; a record of their collaboration can be seen in the colorful dialogue represented in an example from the Kalinago exhibit (Figure 25 below). After the co-curator meetings were recorded, and transcribed, Curatorial staff excerpted portions of transcripts and categorized them along the themes and sub-themes selected by the co-curators. Originally, curators assumed they would be responsible for writing the exhibit scripts, as they had worked closely with the communities and knew what, of the hundreds of pages and hours of transcripts, was most important to include in the script (see Chapter 3). The hiring of a script writer—one who “did not know Indians 101”⁴² and who did not have intimate contact with the communities—was not welcomed by Curatorial. This was part of the “hand off” that they contested, as detailed in Chapter 3.

⁴¹ See for example U.S. Department of Justice, "Code of Federal Regulations: A.D.A. Standards for Accessible Design," (1994), <http://www.ada.gov/adastd94.pdf>.

⁴² This is a common phrase in Indian country. A curriculum guide for Chicago public schools I was given, created by staff associated with the AIC, was titled “Learning and Teaching about Indians 101: Teaching Resources.”

Post 11/18 curatorial revisions Last edited by MH: 1/21/04 Reviewed by CC: 2/13/04 Edited by KM: 2/24/04	
	<i>Kalinago Curators, 2003</i> #
GRAPHIC: Map of Carib Territory with Kalinago place names G10.2.5.1 This is courtesy of Lennox Honychurch. This graphic is being recreated from a map he drew.	The Kalinago name for Dominica is Waitukubuli which means “tall is her body.” Map with Kalinago place-names. Courtesy of Lennox Honychurch. Waitukubuli contains several Native place names, including Bataka and Sineku. Waitukubuli—the Kalinago name for Dominica—means, “tall is her body.” <i>Kalinago Curators, 2003</i> #
Traditional Foods T10.2.6 Should this say “farina”? What is “farine” exactly? Taryn’s note: Farine is flour made from cassava, used in different recipes	Kalinago Cuisine Sometimes when I give my children Kalinago food, they tell me they want store-bought bread. <i>Sylvie Warrington, 2002</i> Our young people are more interested in store-bought foods, so fewer people are making traditional foods these days. But we still consider food an important part of our heritage. Traditional foods such as farine and cassava are often served at special events, celebrations, and tourist attractions. <i>Kalinago Curators, 2003</i> #
PHOTO: Cooking cassava G10.2.6.1	A versatile root, cassava can be made into bread, pudding, and even beer. Here the root has been peeled, shredded, and the water extracted. People then add sugar to the meal and roast it on a hot iron, which produces cassava bread.

Figure 25: Kalinago script structure; different colored text denotes different NMAI staff members.

As the OL script process was somewhat opaque to me, and it involved a number of writers, compilers, and contributors from Curatorial, Exhibits, and a contracted script writer (some of whose work Curatorial staff considered uninformed and cliché of Native stereotypes; the work was rewritten by Curatorial staff), this part of the process remained a bit of a black box to me. But it is clear that the final script and text panels, sections of text attributed to “Kalinago curators” or “Chicago Native curators” were in some cases written, in others edited, by the script editor Mark Hirsch in such a way that co-curator committee and community member statements were

paraphrased or summarized to introduce the main thematic sections of each exhibit. The quotations that were attributed to particular individuals, like “Ed Two Rivers,” were near verbatim statements, sometimes paraphrased or shortened or with slight wording changes by the script editor for “clarity.”

However, in lead curator Cynthia’s eyes, as she told me in 2003 before I would return to begin my fieldwork, curatorial work was “translated into regular museum text” through this process of script development carried out by non-Curatorial staff—“as if this is a regular museum,” she added (clearly indicating she had thought it would not be). Cynthia said those who support simplifying the script like this thought the visitors “won’t get it.”⁴³ But, she asked, exasperated, “How do they know if they don’t try?” How do we know if we don’t try to do something different? She felt that her work with the communities had produced “something different.” Again she asked, “How do we know that they would not have gotten it?”, adding that curators have all argued with the script editor over these issues. They felt that the editor took all of the nuances out of the script: the script is all just “glossed over” and sounds “matter of fact now,” she said, disappointed but resigned to the fact (see Appendices E and F for script outlines and drafts).⁴⁴

The final script later was transformed into a “sticker” for the exhibit wall, or text panel, through the creative work of designers and the material production of fabricators (Figure 26 below).

⁴³ This is a recurring theme, particularly after the opening. See Chapter 6, “Performance.”

⁴⁴ Phone call with Cynthia Chavez, September 18, 2003.



Figure 26: Hadley fabricator Dennis (facing camera) and coworker replacing the introduction “sticker” to the Kalinago exhibit wall section (in rear).

Media and Design

It was the designers who ultimately determined how much of the script text would go in the exhibit, as they provided the label size. They also were responsible for the location and juxtaposition of media, text and imagery in the exhibits. The technologies that media and design professionals used to create their contributions to the exhibits contributed to the overall “feel” of the gallery as busy, loud (in sound and image), lively, and colorful. The media team stood in somewhat of an intermediary position between Curatorial and the contracted design firm. They crafted media “sketches” of what they wanted to collect in their visits with the communities—particular photographs or video sequences—in order to compliment the existing themes developed by the co-curators.

I spoke with Dan Davis, NMAI media producer, one day in June 2004 in his office as he sat before a couple monitors and a bank of knobs and buttons; he was splicing together digital footage from the Kalinago community and replaying his handiwork (Kathy Suter, the media coordinator and his supervisor, joined our discussion later). Dan explained to me that Exhibits had wanted the shortest length of video segments of what visitors “can take” and Curators had wanted seven or eight minutes (which was presumably longer).⁴⁵ But, he said, “the visitors can’t stand for eight minutes, and we can’t alienate the visitors, according to Exhibits.” He said that he and Kathy “are in between,” meaning they believed it should be somewhere in between what the two departments wanted.

Dan also explained that if the media team recorded something in the community that contradicted the “thesis” of the curator, then he did not put in the media piece.⁴⁶ He was responsible for editing all of the OL videos (the interactive displays were completed by a contracted firm). He went to a number of communities himself, and he also edited the materials from communities he didn’t visit that were provided by Kathy. He lamented at not being able to do preliminary visits with communities before the actual media trip; but, he said, they needed “time and more money” to do so. Kathy said she felt they were more like a “news team than a documentary team” dropping into communities unprepared. They were “doing work forced into a news format.” She explained, “news tramples a place, a place you are never coming back to.” You are dropped in somewhere, and you make the best of it

⁴⁵ Conversation with Kathy Suter and Dan Davis in his office at Aerospace, June 21, 2004. Dan noted that Carolyn Rapkivian from the Education Department (*downtown*) would sit in on the media reviews; he said she “actually supported” Kathy and Dan as far as having longer media pieces, unlike people in Exhibits. He said Exhibits staff said that 120 seconds should be the maximum time for each piece. Kathy added that she was trying to get Exhibits over the notion of “how long is that piece?” It was the question always asked before and after they showed a media piece. Dan countered, “How long does it feel?” “What does 4 minutes feel like to you?” Kathy Suter said that visitors will just self-select—the videos run on loops.

⁴⁶ Conversation with Dan Davis in his office at Aerospace, June 21, 2004.

instantly, knowing you are never coming back. For a documentary, on the other hand, you start with a couple “cold visits” without the camera. “We survived it,” she said, but “the process could have been better.” She liked product—she said the media pieces could not have been better—but it was the process that she did not like. Between the budget and time constraints, and the NMAI curators’ schedules, Dan said it “ends up being lots of compromises.”⁴⁷

He also described the media team process to me as we looked at some of the Kalinago footage Kathy and her media team had collected in Dominica. As he showed me the rough cuts that would later be displayed in monitors on the walls of the Kalinago exhibit, Dan mentioned how hours of tapes get filtered down into minutes. And, while they tried to feature everybody who was interviewed, with very little time in the pieces, it was not always possible. He said ten hours of a community’s footage would get reduced to an average of ten minutes total in the gallery.

Kathy told me that her interpretation of Native voice in the media pieces, and how she instructed Dan to edit the video (and recommended to other museum professionals at the AAM meetings as I detailed in the interchapter), was to not have a narrator “who helps glue it together.” This meant that Dan, in the editing process, had to string clips of interviews with Native community members together, with only their own words to continue the narrative. To begin this process, Dan would start with an event. He would put together footage that explained what it was and then remove the “tangents” that people may go off on in the interviews. Once he finished putting together all of the “talking,” the words he needed to explain the event or theme for the exhibit section he was working on, then he would overlay pictures (b-roll) that

⁴⁷ Conversation with Dan Davis in his office at Aerospace, June 21, 2004. Kathy added later that a media crew can cost \$2,000.00 a day, plus labor and equipment. That did not include travel or food. So, the trips were very expensive, she said. She felt that not many people understand what it takes to do their work, and that media had been relied on as a “savior” in terms of adding back content. She added, “there has been a learning curve for the curators.”

corresponded with what the person was talking about. It does not change the “essence” of what they’re saying, he assured me. The problem is, he said, he needed “sound bytes” and “Native people tend to be long winded.” Again, noting the content reduction, he added that four days of interviewing needed to be condensed into a three minute story. It’s “like a crossword puzzle,” he said, you have to be “really creative.” The “rule of thumb” is “to show rather than to tell.”

“It’s a rewarding, and fun, challenge to work on” but, he said, the “review process is hard on all of us.” Each person has “passion to do a good job.” But, each of us sees things differently, he continued. Because he did not know what would be on the wall around the videos he was creating, he relied on the curators to review and be sure the tone of the media piece was appropriate. Once he reviewed the video transcripts, selected clips and completed an edited rough cut, he would hold an internal review with Kathy and then afterwards would show it to the curator “as is,” expecting no changes.⁴⁸ The media pieces were not reviewed by the community co-curators, because, he said, “who knows how long it would take?” and time was short.

Kathy noted—in a way that sounded a lot like what Curators said about Native communities (see Chapter 3)—that they needed to work on building trust with the *NMAI* curators. She said that the “building of trust with the curators took the entire eighteen months that we were in the field.” Our “biggest hope is that we meet communities early on” in the future. She wanted a little more “self-sufficiency, so that we can email so and so, and get more details” from Native community members—and not always have to go through the curators to contact them.

Both the media and design teams also contributed to what one person described to me as “putting words back into the exhibit”—or, making space for

⁴⁸ A “script” for the media team is a transcription of the video recorded interview that Dan reviews to pick out segments of video he wants to use. For Curatorial, a script is the text in a document that is prepared for what will be in the exhibit labels. One is raw, the other cooked, so to speak.

previously omitted information or text to be reintroduced in other places than the main text panels. Virtually every contributor to the *Our Lives* exhibition, like Dan above, acknowledged the large amount of material and information that was left out of the designed exhibit. For example, Erica Denison of D+C considered the photo captions in the exhibits to be “disguised text,”⁴⁹ a way to include additional information that label size restrictions prohibited.

Kathy explained a similar process of adding back information as a result of the media sketches being made in advance of the final scripts. The media team was working with the earliest drafts of the scripts, or maybe even the script editor’s “script structures,” which were created as outlines before the prose of scripts were drafted and content reduced. As a result, Kathy said that although the script label length was limited, the information could come out somewhere else—so the curators squeezed a lot into the media, she explained, which was collected last in the community curating process, making up for what could not fit on the wall. Kathy considered herself and Dan “the last stand, like the wild west” they “can’t be controlled”—they provided a place where the information could come out. The older versions of the scripts were often what she and Dan created their media sketches from because they did not receive later drafts created towards the end of the process. So, they were “turning back the clocks” on the information that “vanished from the wall scripts.”⁵⁰

The OL wall scripts, or large graphic stickers, were a new form of exhibit production that was no doubt a way for Design+Communication, Inc. to present its leading edge display methods in a highly anticipated new museum. The design of the *Our Lives* gallery in particular was largely influenced by its display of innovative technology—most notably in the form of “supergraphics” (but also in its large

⁴⁹ Phone interview with Erica Denison of D+C, June 21, 2004.

⁵⁰ Conversation with Kathy Suter in Dan Davis’ office at Aerospace, June 21, 2004. She had joined our discussion midway through when stopping in to visit with Dan.

reflective video walls in the entrance to the gallery). Pushing image resolution and image size to the limits, D+C's "supergraphics" were essentially wall-size stickers that the design firm created and printed to be mounted on the aluminum infrastructure of the exhibits. All of the images and text and background wall colors—anything that was not a built structure like wall contours or glass cases or video monitors—were essentially large, two dimensional stickers with printed borders and shading to give the illusion of three dimensional layering of items on the walls.

When I spoke with Erica at D+C, I asked if OL and the supergraphics were "what's trendy in design right now," or if this method was derivative of the nature of the content the NMAI presented the designers, or something else. She said that "*Our Lives* is really on the cutting edge of technical advances... the surfaces are just so big." She said that some of the supergraphics files are "5 gig"(abytes)—they have G5s (Mac machines), and the most recent versions of the software. She added, "Last year they couldn't have done it—or at least it would have taken an hour to save a file, for example. And, they would have had to split the supergraphics into pieces, instead of making one continuous image." In other words, until this particular year they did not have the machines and capability to do this kind of exhibit production.

I asked Erica to describe how the designers select images and layout the exhibits. She explained that "the look of OL, knowing the designers involved" and being a "good friend" of a graphic designer, D+C designers often worked in front of a computer together, noting of the firm, "sometimes I find we're too photoshopy...for my taste—I'm a minimalist." The designers worked with the software program Adobe Photoshop a lot. "It's a cozy, close" work environment, she added. I told her I had an image of a few people gathered around a computer screen, looking over the seated person's shoulder, dragging "layers" of images around on the screen, saying, "move this there, how about that?"—and she said that was about right.

In sum, while the co-curators' authored text panels were developed through their meetings and transcribed text, their words were edited and summarized by a script editor. According to the space available, the script was then placed on labels (literally stickers) that were embedded in a wider context of "supergraphics" and audiovisual media—none of which was viewed by the co-curators until they visited the museum in September of 2004.

The Ideology of Authorship: Reflections on the Exhibit Making Process

During my fieldwork, I asked curators and co-curators to reflect on the community curating process. Prosper Paris compared the thematic approach to writing down a title for a song and then composing lyrics according to that title; he told me it was a familiar process to him. Prosper, like Garnette, believed this approach to be successful. Garnette said it worked "Because I think listening to people speak, and some of the things that they spend more time [talking about], I guess, that is only because it is important to them. If people keep on saying the same thing all the time, then that is how we feel most of the time."⁵¹

In other words, Garnette's comment points to an assumption in a thematic approach that is coupled with collaborative practice—and no doubt also reflects the responsibility of authorship by co-curators *on behalf of* a wider community: that the more people talk about something, the more important it is; that the themes should derive from what community members talk about the most. However, it was the responsibility of the co-curators to determine which of those recurring topics were appropriate for the exhibit. Prosper further noted, "I'm very satisfied that we had a good cross section of people. We had the community workers, we had people

⁵¹ Interview with Garnette Joseph, at my home in the Carib Territory, April 13, 2005.

involved in tourism, in community work, farmers, boat makers, and youth and all these people... we can safely say that we had the *voice* of the Carib *People* on *tape*.”⁵²

At one point during a tape recorded interview with Sylvanie in 2005, I asked her specifically who wrote the script. She talked about NMAI “pulling” the script out from recordings, and both of us started laughing as she detailed a process that I was engaging in as she was describing it. She explained that it was the community members who did the script, not the NMAI staff—“because it’s *you* who said everything anyway! It wasn’t *they* [the NMAI], [they were] just asking all the questions and throwing out the topics or whatever for us to discuss, and saying what do you think of this?”⁵³ She said the script came from “meetings and discussions,” and added, “everybody’s contribution was recorded [she laughs]. And out of that, certain script was selected and then when [NMAI staff] came down we had a *consensus* on... different things.”

So the *selection* and *visual arrangement* of quotations from transcripts and images from the media team visits were made by the NMAI staff members. While the co-curators did not physically write the script or select the quotations that resulted from these meetings, they were responsible for making sure they were accurate. Sylvanie said the NMAI “put [this exhibit] together in a way that *we ourselves* were really happy.” A Chicago co-curator said the same for their exhibit, noting it was best the NMAI made those choices, and not themselves, so that other community members would not think it was the co-curators who placed themselves so prominently (and disproportionately) on display on the walls of the exhibits.

Sylvanie and the other Kalinago co-curators felt strongly that the script reflected their voices. Garnette said their job was to basically make “corrections” to

⁵² Interview with Prosper Paris, at his home in the Carib Territory, April 24, 2005.

⁵³ Interview with Sylvanie Burton, at the Carib Council office, April 8, 2005.

the script,⁵⁴ fact-checking names and dates. He said he didn't change the content of the script because it came from the community, and that people were already familiar with the script because it was what they themselves had said.⁵⁵ This ideology of authorship suggests credit for the script is related to widespread community contribution, content choice, and oral statements inscribed in the text panels (and paraphrased from meetings)—not necessarily the practice of particular content selection and arrangement, or writing the script.⁵⁶

The Chicago co-curators made similar evaluations—that they revised, not wrote the script—at a meeting I held with them in October of 2005, a year after the opening of the museum.⁵⁷ Joe and Rita said that one year the “core” co-curators, to meet a deadline, were reviewing and working on the script at Rita's grandson's birthday party. Joe said they were “still working when we weren't supposed to be working... we sat out there and went through scripts... from the themes.” They looked at all of the “quotes, comments and stories—and it was a book!” Rita added that they went through “a bunch of revisions.” Joe said that everyone who was a co-curator was asked to “sign off” on their comments that were in the script. Rita said they revised the script, but did not select which comments were used in it. Joe added, “we had no input as to what actually was going to be put on the walls”—there were general ideas, like beadwork will go here, or pictures there. He said, for instance, that they didn't know Eli's statement was going to be in “really big letters” (Figure 15 above).

⁵⁴ Interview with Garnette Joseph, at my home in the Carib Territory, March 17, 2005.

⁵⁵ Interview with Garnette Joseph, at my home in the Carib Territory, April 13, 2005.

⁵⁶ From oral, conversational to textual, definitive. Compare the curator/co-curator/script editor generated script to Lindsay's work, in the interchapter, which began as a ready-made written text for the script editor/writer to review and make changes.

⁵⁷ Meeting with Chicago co-curators, in the Tribal Hall of the AIC, October 11, 2005. Rita Hodge had contacted the co-curators and arranged the meeting so I could present my research to the group and they provided feedback about their experiences creating the exhibit.

Joe said that “we had no idea this was going to happen. Or what the quote would be, whose quote it would be. So, we actually saw it for the first time on that Monday” during the grand opening of the museum. Cindy felt that having the NMAI choose the quotations was better, to avoid “fighting” and to avoid the group making the community “look one certain way, or lean towards maybe one belief”—in other words, to have it be more objective. Although there were some comments in the text panels that some co-curators may not agree with, she said that it did reflect some community members perspectives. Rita agreed, saying “we had to keep reminding ourselves, you know, it’s not our little—it’s not our exhibit. It’s the community’s.”

And like the Kalinago, the co-curators noted that the script came from what had been gathered in their community, so they felt they had read or previewed it before. Then Joe added, “Something I’d be really interested in is getting some feedback from somebody that *hasn’t* been to Chicago, to our community, and get an opinion of what their interpretation of our community is now. You know, maybe from a rez, from another urban Indian community, to see did we do what we were supposed to do and represent.” This emphasis and curiosity about reception from other tribes stood out to me in stark contrast to the Kalinago co-curators’ hopes and attentions for speaking to tourists through their exhibit, which I address in the following section.

The Chicago co-curators also agreed that at the time the NMAI was working with the community, people didn’t understand the impact that the museum was going to have. One of the biggest challenges was getting community members to donate items or participate in the exhibit. Cyndee explained running around her home and gathering items for the exhibit because they did not get the turnout and contributions of everyday items (like unfinished beadwork) from the community. But now, she said, “it’s a whole different perspective... if I asked somebody to donate something

now to the NMAI, they'd be hustling to get it," and she punctuated her statement by snapping her fingers.

Although participating in the exhibit may not have been as widespread as the co-curators would have liked, both communities were practiced at talking about the subject matter of the exhibition. I asked co-curators if it was usual for them to talk about their identity (as a measure of the impact of the museum's intervention in their community). Kalinago co-curator Gerard, a co-curator and cultural group leader, said,

it is an everyday topic, every day people talk about Kalinago, the identity, and so on. But sometimes we have that pull between who is a Kalinago and who is a half breed or who is a negro... So, that was kind of a little bit ticklish. That talk about Kalinago identity, and so on, it's something that everybody's talking about in the Carib Territory. But as I said, some straight hair people and some who have the *real* features, would look at the [laughs a little, perhaps sheepishly] you know half breed and say well you're a negro, you're not a Carib, you're not a Kalinago man, you know? You something else. That sort of thing, but we get over that and we all work together and so on.⁵⁸

I learned through fieldwork that comments like Gerard's were common in more forthright community conversations—even at the Carib Model Village task force meetings. And, while it was broached in the community-wide OL meetings, the issues of race and racial mixing were not included in the exhibit.

In the Chicago community, again, identity was a common if sometimes pained topic. Identity discussed in the community was more about blood quantum and tribal enrollment or membership, rather than organizations and powwows. In fact, at a previous powwow meeting, "identity police," as critical community members referred to them, had challenged publicly and raised doubts about a community member's tribal status by waving their own identity cards in the air (he was, indeed, an enrolled member of a tribe, but did not, perhaps, "look" Indian). Other ways of talking about identity in the community revolved around reservation and city tensions, and the

⁵⁸ Interview with Gerard Langlais, at his home in the Carib Territory, March 16, 2005.

process of “becoming Indian” or learning about one’s heritage through the welcoming embrace of the AIC community. One AIC program, called “Enter the Circle,” was dedicated to teaching community members to sew dance clothes and learn powwow dances. In other words, the “identity” on display in the gallery was one that was more descriptive about daily life in the community, leaving out the sometimes contentious issue of identity as a matter of belonging.⁵⁹

Co-curator Dave Spencer noted at the AAM 2005 panel session (see interchapter) that working on the NMAI exhibit was the first time the community had talked about “first voice issues” and “self-representation”—it was not common discourse in the community. He told of a debate among the co-curators about whether to include a bronze statue in the Chicago exhibit that was created by a non-Native person from outside the community, depicting the “stereotype” of Indian on horseback with bow and arrow. Five out of nine co-curators wanted the sculpture to represent the community; in the end, the debate was resolved and the object was not used.

Intermarriage and race in the Carib Territory— like suicide in Igloodik or pan-Indianism and organizational infighting in Chicago— was a topic that was spoken in many meetings among community members when preparing the exhibition, but was not incorporated into the exhibit. While suicide prevention was in the original Igloodik script at the co-curators request, it was the NMAI script editor who removed it from the final text. For the Kalinago, it was the co-curators themselves who decided not to incorporate the recurring conversation about intermarriage into their exhibit.

⁵⁹ The exhibit carefully skirted around specifically *tribal* identities; Dave Spencer explained the focus on powwow as a result of trying to be “safe, universal, inclusive.” For example, the Chi Town drum was selected for display because it did not have a Native language name and was therefore not privileging or representing one tribe above others (AAM 2005 meetings; see interchapter).

Collaborative Authorship and the Imagined Audience

Again, drawing on Mazarella and Dornfeld, and on the work of Faye Ginsburg, an attention to authorship renders the exhibit as a form of mediation that is routed through the imagined audience, the “other” that each contributor—the script editor, the NMAI curators, and the Native community co-curators—considered as he or she participated in making the exhibit. Through his ethnography, Dornfeld found that the imagined audience for the PBS documentary producers closely matched their own class position, life experiences and values. In other words, they assumed an audience like themselves. For those involved in community curating, this seemed to follow for the script writer, but not for the co-curators.

Imagining the Audience from the Center

The script writer and curatorial staff had very different interpretations of best practice in how to represent communities in the museum. One way of understanding these different orientations is to examine the audience that each imagined and wanted to speak to through their work. If you recall the NMAI mission statement that recognized a dual audience, it was widely thought among museum staff that the Curatorial department looked to the “constituency” (or tribes), while the Exhibits department looked to the NMAI’s “audience” (envisioned as a largely uninformed, non-Native public).

Although I do not elaborate on his role here, briefly, the imagined audience of the script editor was the non-Native visitor. Again, NMAI staff often commented to me that the script editor did not know “Indians 101,” but he told me this made him a better translator for the visitor, who was “in the same boat.” Cynthia and at least one group of co-curators involved in the *Our Lives* exhibition noted that after the script

editor's influence, all the exhibits seemed to have a "happy go lucky" tone about them. And generally, the public-oriented departments (Exhibits, Education) imagined their audience as "National Air and Space Museum overflow" (or "streakers" in museum-speak) who they believed did *not* want to read a lot of text (rather than "studiers," as they're called, that might be associated with, say, the Holocaust Museum; the in-between category is "strollers").⁶⁰

Lead curator Cynthia Chavez expressed great anxiety in the course of making *Our Lives*. She worried over proper representation of the communities as well as what she called the "*huuuuge* and endless sort of subject" that contemporary Native identity is.⁶¹ She said of her beginning weeks on the project, "a lot of the advice I was getting was to sort of create a framework for identity. And I'm thinking, 'How can you create a framework for identity?!?'"⁶² Her anxiety was also related to her imagined audience, which was the *community curators with whom she worked*—a group of particular persons to whom she felt accountable (which ties into the expertise of intimacy and advocacy that I detailed in the previous chapter).

⁶⁰ SI OP&A staff Zahava Doering and Andrew Pekarik both criticized the NMAI for not paying enough attention to visitors; Jim Volkert and Carolyn Rapkievian, Zahava noted, were the most "visitor-centered" at the NMAI, however. Conversation with Zahava Doering, in her SI office, November 23, 2006. Carolyn, Jim, Elaine Gurian, Zahava and Andrew all share their own speech network and set of concerns as visitor-centered professionals. And, although addressing this "culture of expertise" is beyond the scope of the dissertation, it is worth noting that Carolyn was strongly influenced by Andrew and Zahava Doering's work, explaining to me that she learned a lot from Zahava, who said that visitors want to interact with the museum in ways that are not always about messages and learning: about 1/3 want to learn, 1/3 want a social experience, and the last 1/3 is split between wanting an aesthetic experience with objects and an introspective experience to reflect on their own lives. She said she also learned from Zahava that these three different expectations don't have to be met in every exhibit—but can be in different places throughout the museum. Conversation with Carolyn Rapkievian, in her office at the Mall Museum, May 3, 2006.

⁶¹ Interview with Cynthia Chavez, in her office at the CRC, July 29, 2004.

⁶² Interview with Cynthia Chavez, in her office at the CRC, July 29, 2004.

Imagining the Audience from the Periphery

While the public-oriented staff insisted that their expertise was essential in translating community-produced knowledge to the museum audience, what they perhaps missed was that the communities had their own audiences in mind as they worked on the exhibits. For example, as Joe Podlasek, co-curator and director of the American Indian Center intimated in the 2005 co-curator meeting, wondered how *other tribes* would respond to the Chicago exhibit.

The Chicago main message was, “Native peoples from different tribes come together in Chicago and maintain a supportive community network.” The imagined audience of *other tribes* is reflected in the more retrospective perspective⁶³ of their exhibit, the emphasis on the *longevity* of the Chicago community, the emphasis on institutional support for maintaining Indian identities, and demonstrated tolerance for different tribal traditions. The Chicago community no doubt appreciated being included in the NMAI and its sense of validation and celebration of their identity, in counterpoint to the reservation versus city antagonism that can occur about who is a “real Indian.” (Keeping in mind that over half of all Native Americans live in cities, this was the first time that I know of that an urban community was treated and displayed equally to reservation communities in a single exhibition).

The Chicago co-curators were also aware that many of their community members—members of many tribes like themselves—would eventually visit and see their work in the NMAI, unlike the Kalinago community whose prefigured audience was not like themselves. The Kalinago imagined their audience to be *potential tourists* as they constructed their exhibit. Prosper said people felt they were “talking

⁶³ I am indebted to Hiro Miyazaki for this phrasing and attention to temporality. See Hirokazu Miyazaki, "Documenting the Present," in *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge*, ed. Annelise Riles (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

to the world.”⁶⁴ Their exhibit maintained a future perspective, hoping that their audience would see the exhibit and visit and participate in their local economy. This perspective was also reflected in their highlighting a Model Village which didn’t open until 2006, and Carib week and Cultural Groups (which in co-curator meetings they said were lacking in recent years), as having *potential* for a greater awakening of cultural consciousness in their community.

For the Kalinago, consensus on exhibit content was not so much the challenge as was doing the exhibit the right way. Perhaps this was because the Kalinago were practiced at defining themselves to outside audiences as a whole; Garnette, co-curator and former chief, once said to me, “I’ve been representing people half my life.”⁶⁵ It seemed the most difficult task in the process for the Kalinago was the local politics of representation: who was on the committee, where the money from the museum went, how co-curators were perceived as benefiting from the process, and staving off jealousies, apathy or false accusations from others. The most important aspect of exhibit making that the Kalinago co-curators stressed was making sure that a wide swath of the community was represented on the co-curator committee, that the wider community was involved in producing exhibit content, and that the community felt ownership over the project.

In contrast, for the Chicago community, they told me that consensus building around *a* concept of identity for a multi-tribal community, or the substance of the exhibit, was what was most difficult in the process. Few co-curators were practiced at representing this community *as a multi-tribal whole* besides Joe, the director of the American Indian Center. In fact, the greatest challenge of the co-curator meetings—beyond getting people to come, as co-curator Rita Hodge told me—was respecting

⁶⁴ Interview with Prosper Paris, at his home in the Carib Territory, April 24, 2005.

⁶⁵ Interview with Garnette Joseph, at my home in the Carib Territory, April 13, 2005.

each others' very different tribal traditions in the course of making an exhibit about identity.⁶⁶ This struggle and ethical commitment within the Chicago committee, in the end, became the main message about the community as a whole. And rather than focus on specific tribes, the exhibit presented the main institutions of support for all tribal peoples in the community.⁶⁷

We can see that through their exhibit, the Kalinago made a case for economic need and a call for tourist engagement; they promised a renewed cultural product would be waiting for these potential visitors (see exhibit imagery of Kalinago roadside hut in Figure 27 below). The Chicago community made a case for longevity and support of tribal identities *despite* living in a city, and have mentioned being in the NMAI in grant applications among other things (see exhibit imagery of the AIC building in Figure 28 below).

For both of these usually marginalized communities, often written by academics or considered by surrounding societies as somehow “less” Native than others (through assimilation due to a devastating history, racial mixing, or being in greater contact with a dominant society), no doubt part of their being “honored” to participate in the inaugural exhibitions was due to their appreciation for the validation and symbolic capital gained through their representation at the NMAI alongside the more familiar museum representations and forms of Native identity and life.

⁶⁶ Interview with Rita Hodge, in her office at University of Illinois, November 29, 2005. She said, “In our case, like I said, because we were from many different nations, we couldn’t just represent *one* nation over the other. So I think that was probably one of the most challenging things that we had to work with, is to be respectful, to be mindful of the other nations, their traditions, their cultural traditions and so, that was really challenging.”

⁶⁷ These imagined audiences were present in other activities in each community. For example, the future tourist was discussed in Carib Model Village task force meetings. The Chicago community, on the other hand, was involved in planning a major annual powwow that invited many different tribal members for dance competitions, and was attended by Native peoples from all over the United States.



Figure 27: Kalinago exhibit "Craft house" photo collage.



Figure 28: Chicago exhibit, facade of AIC entrance.

Conclusion

The *Our Lives* gallery is in many ways eight auto-ethnographies assembled by museum and community experts. Patricia Erikson describes “autoethnography” as Native communities’ “representations of themselves that engage with dominant cultural systems yet still have a degree of local control.”⁶⁸ Far from creating a multi-vocal exhibit as NMAI staff had predicted in 2000 during the vetting session for the gallery premise, through the process of community curating, collaborative authorship, and the *committee form* that relied on a consensus approach to knowledge production, what resulted were artifacts that presented a group authoritative voice and unified thematic content for each community.⁶⁹

Peers and Brown explain that “for many source communities, collaboration means full and equal partnership in all stages of a project; it is a recognition of their expertise and their attachment to objects that are central to their culture, and their participation will often be based upon expectations of community benefit.”⁷⁰ This expectation of reciprocity blended with taking control over representation has elsewhere been characterized as a form of “tactical museology.”⁷¹

Museum Frictions, the latest edited volume on museums by Ivan Karp and others, considers, among other things, museums in the globalized world and economy.⁷² Kratz and Karp write in the introduction about the tensions in

⁶⁸ Erikson, Ward, and Wachendorf, *Voices of a Thousand People : The Makah Cultural and Research Center*. When using the term autoethnography, Erikson references Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes : Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1992), 7.

⁶⁹ Again, the co-curators authored *as a group* each of the main sections of their exhibits. This is a result of the collaborative practices in the communities as well as the work of the NMAI script editor.

⁷⁰ Peers and Brown, "Introduction," 9.

⁷¹ Gustavo Buntinx and Ivan Karp, "Tactical Museologies," in *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, ed. Ivan Karp, et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). I prefer Faye Ginsburg's approach to gaining control over representation as a form of mediation (see dissertation conclusion).

⁷² Ivan Karp et al., eds., *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), Ivan Karp, Christine Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), Ivan

contemporary museums, where they are striving to be simultaneously “community-based, national, regional and global.”⁷³ They explain that communities have “sought the legitimacy conferred by museums for themselves, not necessarily to display themselves for others.”⁷⁴ Ivan Karp and Gustavo Buntinx introduce the concept of “tactical museology” in this volume, whereby groups take advantage of the symbolic capital of the museum or employ it for legitimizing a group identity, particularly in community museums.⁷⁵

Keeping in mind that NMAI director Rick West has described the NMAI as more like a community museum than a national one, it would seem that this idea of tactical museology could apply to what I have presented here—particularly with respect to the Kalinago in light of their particular imagined audience. But I would caution against this simple explanation. For state-subsidized cultural institutions such as IRCAM (and I would argue the NMAI), Born explains, in the “absence of validation through market, legitimation is the primary concern” in “avant gard and subsidized spheres.”⁷⁶ Born discusses how IRCAM “continually legitimates itself.”⁷⁷ The NMAI does so as well, and I suggest that this is observable in and accomplished by its rhetoric of collaboration and thus ethical museum practice, most notably through the co-curating process and emphasis on Native voice.

What I want to emphasize about the artifacts of collaboration I have been describing is that the NMAI as an *institution* is what gains symbolic capital here. It is a two way street. If you recall director Rick West’s promise of authenticity through

Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).

⁷³ Corrine A. Kratz and Ivan Karp, "Introduction: Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations," (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 8.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷⁵ Buntinx and Karp, "Tactical Museologies," 27.

⁷⁶ Born, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde*, 27.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

Native voice that I noted in the Introduction, it is these artifacts, these indexes of community participation—the faces, the signed text panels—*these* are what give the *museum* legitimacy in the eyes of both its audience and its constituency.

Like the *Childhood* documentary in Dornfeld's ethnography, the museum exhibit was also filled with "media texts" that "viewers grapple with and reproduce understandings of cultural identity and cultural difference."⁷⁸ Today, it seems that the dominant metaphor is culture as "resource." Terry Turner explains that "culturalism" is on the rise, and the more sophisticated approaches to culture in anthropology are often reduced to "identity" beyond the walls of academe. Turner writes that culture "replaces nationalism as a political resource" and cultural identities become an avenue through which to assert social power and to struggle for collective social production: "This is a struggle for social production in the broadest sense, not merely 'cultural' politics at the level of 'discourse' or 'imagination.'"⁷⁹

Perhaps this is a way to view the Kalinago exhibit: that they represented their own identity through their economic needs, and recognized that their survival was tied to an economic future that depends on the production of cultural difference. Their hopes for tourism and concerns over intermarriage, just as the Chicago community created institutional and organizational mechanisms for sustaining difference in an assimilation environment that is the urban context, are indeed about the social (re)production of their own communities.

⁷⁸ Dornfeld, *Producing Public Television, Producing Public Culture*, 5.

⁷⁹ Terence Turner, "Indigenous and Culturalist Movements in the Contemporary Global Conjuncture," in *Las Identidades Y Las Tensiones Culturales De La Modernidad*, ed. Francis Fernandez del Riego, Terence Turner, and et al. (Santiago de Compostela: VIII Congreso de Antropología, 1999), 52-72.

Collaborative Authorship and the Imagined Audience

In many ways, the co-curator names on the text panels are like science authors in the Seventeenth Century that Michel Foucault describes in “What is an author.”⁸⁰ In other words, the specific names signed under the text give it legitimacy. Who they are—their identity—matters. Where Foucault describes how the individual author emerged as an outcome of historical events, Baggioli asks what the author represents, focusing on the *function* of the author’s name. For the NMAI, the names function to establish and indicate a Native author, or that Native voice is on display. Finally, Dornfeld provides a model in which the audience participates in the author’s creative work. All of them question the seeming naturalness of the category.

By exploring how authorship is produced in *Our Lives*, it becomes clear that the artifacts of collaboration elided a number of producers involved in their making.⁸¹ Ironically, while the exhibits are about the Kalinago or American Indians of Chicago, their every day life and identity were far less defined by the museum than those who worked at the NMAI. While the communities might experience exhibit making sporadically for a number of days every few months or so when NMAI staff visited with them, exhibit production was an ongoing and frenetic experience at the museum. The researchers’ and curators’ lives and sense of identity revolved around working on this exhibit. In other words, the exhibition was not just about the lives of the co-curators, but also about the lives of the NMAI curators: their competence, ingenuity and the future of their careers.

During the course of my dissertation fieldwork, an NMAI person I worked with suggested I read Geertz, Basso and Myers. Another suggested that to understand

⁸⁰ Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?," in *Reading Architectural History*, ed. Dana Arnold (London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2002).

⁸¹ There was a text panel in at the back of the gallery—a list of names that included everyone who contributed to the gallery but was not a co-curator, from Dan Davis to Taryn Costanzo to Mark Hirsch to the fabricators and D+C.

a museum's departmental dynamics, I must read *Stigma* and *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* by Erving Goffman. A Kalinago person suggested I read Hilary Beckles for a proper, more politically relevant Caribbean history rather than the well-known Dominica-born Lenox Honychurch. Another taught me to sing a song in his Native language that he wrote based on an Eighteenth Century dictionary compiled by a missionary and informed by the work of anthropologist Douglas Taylor. A Chicago person invited me to a community fundraising meeting that turned out to be a contentious forum for the ongoing debate of enrollment cards and American Indian identity credentials. Woven throughout these experiences is a keen awareness and recognition of an audience—whether it is an audience to the museum display or even to my dissertation—as well as the complexities of identity.

Authorship, as Mario Baggioli illustrates in his analysis of bylines in scientific papers, is about credit and responsibility;⁸² we can see that the credit and responsibility for the content of the exhibits did indeed reside in the co-curators: they developed the themes, their names were on the panels. However, in contemporary museum practice with Native communities, I would add that authorship—particularly collaborative authorship—is especially about ethical practice and authenticity. Like the NMAI itself, the co-curators had both a constituency (their neighbors, family and friends) and an audience (other tribes or potential tourists). And, just as the museum felt collaboration with Native peoples was the best practice for making exhibits about them, so too did the co-curators emphasize collaboration within their own communities to arrive at an “authentic” exhibit about themselves.

Rick West's promise of authenticity has always been located in the concept of Native voice. At a senior management retreat, he acknowledged that “we have had a great debate from time to time about what [Native voice] is.” In his point of view, he

⁸² Baggioli, "Documents of Documents: Scientists' Claims and Scientific Claims."

said, Native voice “is authoritative Native people speaking in an unfiltered way.” He continued, “I do not want an unsigned label in sight.” Because, if it is unsigned, and one cannot attribute to an individual, then it has likely been “filtered.”⁸³ Through the mediation of Native voice—from tape recorder to script editor to sticker—there was, of course, “filtering” going on, as curators noted. However, the community curators recognized their own “voices,” their own concerns and decisions about content, in the text and signed it as their own.

As Anna Tsing writes, only when one speaks “in a publicly recognized genre,” can one “gain voice.”⁸⁴ By exploring the social practice of authorship in the *Our Lives* gallery, we see how the artifacts of this form knowledge production—about the self, in relation to an other—is a form both recognized and constructed as Native *voice*. For NMAI staff, the term Native voice is intended to displace authority from the museum to the communities from which the content of the exhibits are made. Chapter 6 provides some insight into how this form, this genre, that was recognized as “authentic” but not necessarily perceived or accepted as authoritative.

As a final note, when I returned to Dominica in 2005 to begin my fieldwork, during the second week I was there I was invited to a cultural performance by the Karifuna cultural group. Two bus loads of white-haired, older American tourists arrived from a cruise ship. They came here as part of a “Carib Indian Tour” (as opposed to the rainforest tour). As they wound their way upstairs into the Sineku resource center where the performance would take place, I noticed a woman with a Pamunkey Indian Tribe t-shirt on. It turned out not only was she Pamunkey—she was carrying around two photos of the *Our Lives* Pamunkey exhibit in a Ziploc bag: one of

⁸³ From internal NMAI document, “W. Richard West: A Vision for the Visitor Experience,” remarks prepared for the Senior Management Retreat on June 6, 2002.

⁸⁴ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, “Indigenous Voice,” in *Indigenous Experience Today*, ed. Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn (Oxford ; New York: Berg, 2007), 39.

her two grandchildren's photos in the display, and the other of the text panel with the name of the tribe and its introduction. She had seen the Kalinago exhibit while at the NMAI, and told her friends from California they too should take this tour to see the Carib people. After the performance, she met Sylvanie and showed her the photos. Sylvanie told me later that day that she felt encouraged that the exhibit really was having an impact, that people were seeing it and coming to visit.

The next chapter details the *Our Lives* exhibits and the impact they had on NMAI staff as they viewed them for the first time on the gallery floor in the summer of 2004.

INTERCHAPTER
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NMAI 2004

NMAI Scholar Symposium

On September 20, 2004, the day before the grand opening of the NMAI, the museum hosted a symposium for scholars in the main theater of the Mall Museum. The founding director of Te Papa, the director of the Museum of World Cultures in Sweden, and the founding director of the Canadian Museum of Civilization were among the nine presenters, including Rick West and Elaine Gurian, at this event. The focus of the symposium appeared to be the recognition of the NMAI as a world class institution as well as its predecessors and their pioneering work in museum-source community relations.

I attended the first part of the symposium then left my tape recorder running on the arm of a chair while I went upstairs to accompany *Our Lives* RA Arwen with the Kahnawake co-curators who were going up to do their “blessing” in their exhibit space. I also missed the afternoon session due to my assigned volunteer duties at the time. In the days afterwards, there was not much talk about the symposium among staff (few attended), except for the presentation given by Rick Hill. Whether viewed in person or on the NMAI website, his talk was praised by a number of NMAI curators and scholar Amy Lone Tree (Ho-Chunk), who suggested I take time to view it.¹

In Rick West’s opening remarks, he welcomed the opportunity to be “self-critical and self-analytical” about the NMAI as it “has *attempted*, in a consistent and systematic way, to go about the representation and interpretation of Native people in a somewhat different fashion.” West’s earlier work contended that the NMAI was the

¹ I had originally not been aware of the symposium, despite having been at the museum for months leading up to the opening; it was Elaine Gurian that alerted me to it during one of our interviews.

museum different, and that privileging Native voice was what made it so.² But, in 2004, in front of an audience of museum professionals who had pioneered similar work in their careers (according to their introductions), he acknowledged that the NMAI did not invent this form of representation, but rather it was the first museum to attempt it at this “scale” and “magnitude.”

Rick emphasized his point by adding, “That Native peoples are *not* some kind of ethnographic remnant, waiting on the stage of history to be pushed off into decline.” And, what seemed a less firm attitude about Native voice, he continued to say that what “sits at our theoretical and mission core, if you will, is the invocation, *however we may over time define it*, of the Native or first person voice in the interpretation and representation of Native peoples.” He then noted that “Anthropology, archaeology, art history, history—all of those are systems of knowledge that have had great value in the interpretation and representation of Native peoples, their lives, their ideas, their cultures and their cultural patrimony,” framing Native voice as an alternative knowledge system. The goal of the NMAI, he said, is to bring Native voices to “that table of conversation... in eliciting *meaning* out of objects, out of people, out of communities, that *originate* in the experience.”

Moderator and museum consultant Elaine Gurian then spoke, praising Rick West’s character and accomplishments. She named her “minders [who] gave up more social capital than I ever was risking, because each of *them* had status...*mana* in their own community,” and they supported the NMAI project with risk to their own reputations.³ Elaine then acknowledged the impact of Native peoples on changing museum practices:

² See for example West and [NMAI], eds., *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian : Museums and Native Cultures*.

³ Like the co-curators in their own communities, as I referenced to Batty’s (2005) work earlier.

indigenous people have been, by their individual and collective exultations, responsible over the last two decades for creating the most profound change in museums as institutions... The collective and individual agitation resulted in change in national laws and museum policies [and] a changed power relationship between the institution called museums and the descendants of the material. Many first peoples felt that museums as an institution had failed them, and from my point of view they were right in their assertions.

But, today, they are “stakeholders, now recognized as partners.”

Later in the program, Rick Hill (Tuscarora), former NMAI Assistant Director of Public Programs when the main facility was in New York, reminded the audience that regardless of the work that goes on in museums, it is work in the communities that is more important and needed. He introduced himself and noted to the audience that he had “quit most museums I’ve worked for,” his “disgruntled” departure from the NMAI included. He added that “Native people speak with their feet” as he did when he left, but that thousands would come to the museum the next day to celebrate the opening of the museum. “Despite the spotted history of the museum,” they still “hope this museum might do better than the other museums.” It is this “sense of hope” that brings them here; “but we’re also realists.” He emphasized that the money spent, the millions, will not go to change communities; the NMAI “is still a museum,” a “federal facility.” He challenged the notion that it is a “Native space” as a sign outside proclaimed, and continued his presentation that was a mix of humor, irreverence, history and insight. During his presentation he noted dryly that they spent “150 million dollars on the museum” but “they forgot to buy a remote,” as he called out for someone to advance to the next slide, adding, “maybe this *is* an Indian place after all!”

His presentation recounted the changes that have occurred in Native life, including boarding schools and alcohol abuse, and the theft of objects by museums from their communities. He showed Native artwork—both contemporary and hundreds of years old—that either represented, or provided the opportunity to invoke discussion about, these changes. He also talked about how the saying used to go “the

only good Indian is a dead Indian,” but nowadays it seems “the only good Indian is a dancing Indian...we feel we have to perform for you to get you to listen to us.”

Throughout his talk, he emphasized that the museum is not the “real stuff.” He talked about the “commodification” of Indian culture through museums and the commodification of Indians through the collection of DNA samples. He asserted that tobacco (for prayer and ceremony) is more useful in preserving Native culture than the museum, and that “the real stuff” is tied to the “beliefs we have.” In the end, he said, “my search for the good museum is a foolish search.” But, he acknowledged, there was an “awful lot that holds true to the original vision” of the NMAI: there is “Native voice there, and some objects *do* sing.” The next chapter, “Installation,” provides a tour through the space that is the embodiment of this vision and shows some of the objects on display.

Rick Hill closed his presentation with this final appeal: that the museum is not a Native community or Native land, and that he wished the same amount of money Native people spent to come to the opening would also be spent at home on language programs for their communities. This juxtaposition of the community and the museum, what is “real” and what is “performance” or symbolism, confront each other in Chapter 6, which depicts the co-curators’ experiences during their visits to the opening of the museum.

CHAPTER 5

INSTALLATION



Figure 29: Installation in progress, August 18, 2004.

Introduction

In an ethnography about a museum exhibition, it may seem odd that there has been no mention of the actual museum *gallery* up until this point—its space, layout, or physical properties. That is because the space did not exist until 2004. The object installation was occurring at the same time that the exhibit structures were being constructed, and the building itself was still under construction at the time (Figure 29 above). There were speculations that the building, and parts of the galleries, would not be completed on time.¹ Throughout the months of July to September 2004 I

¹ The building did not end up completed, and there were some portions of galleries yet to be installed (particularly in OP), but staff considered these omissions to be mainly unrecognizable to visitors.

traveled between the CRC to the Mall Museum to observe and help out with the installation process in the *Our Lives* gallery.

Up to this point, I have focused mainly on the social relations and practices of making the *Our Lives*, while recognizing such factors as building locations, bureaucratic documents, and text panels as materials that are important signs and actants involved in the unfolding of the exhibition process. I have presented parts of the *Our Lives* exhibits but not yet the gallery as a whole, which came together *as a whole* in the final days before the opening that are represented in this chapter. I now turn more specifically to the objects and physicality of the exhibition space—as material products of the collaborative process and the display of contemporary Native identities. This chapter, then, represents the materialization of the exhibition during the installation process and includes a photographic tour of the *Our Lives* gallery. While there are photographs interspersed throughout the dissertation, this chapter is intended to be a visual accompaniment to Chapters 4 and 6, which together present the production, display, and reception of the *Our Lives* community curated exhibits.

Counting Down

One of the more unique factors in the process of making the *Our Lives* and other inaugural exhibitions was that the community curators and NMAI staff were creating the plans for exhibits without having seen the space in which they would be displayed. As I mentioned, the building was being constructed at the same time as the exhibitions were being planned. It was sight unseen. This was a voiced frustration for community curators who did not have a clear idea of the size or shape of the space their exhibits would occupy. In addition, it also meant that the exhibits were being installed as the building was being completed: both were literally (and mostly) finished hours before the opening of the museum.



Figure 30: Countdown timer at Aerospace building, June 21, 2004. Less than one month later, on July 21, the installation of the *Our Lives* gallery began.

Before the *downtown* staff had relocated their offices to the Mall Museum building, they had hung a countdown timer in the reception area at their office space in the Aerospace building (Figure 30 above). It embodied the feeling of time speeding up and the hectic pace to the finish before the opening day. As the day drew nearer, an employee taped a blank sheet of paper over the seconds column, as the race of numbers soaring by was apparently too much for people to confront each day as they passed through the office. The image of this countdown timer was replicated in cyberspace, where museum employees viewed it every time they visited the front page of the NMAI's internal website.

The Campo Bush

In contrast to this image of time flying by, recall the installation scene in Chapter 2 (“Bureaucracy”)—the image of professional boundaries represented in the collection of museum experts gathered around object cases and the slow days of waiting one’s turn to perform a specific task. But what I did not mention before was that all the while this small and usually quiet group worked at a location in the OL gallery with the objects, there was a larger group of “fabricators”—picture men with carpenter’s tool belts on, music playing, and occasional joking as they constructed wall panels and built the exhibition’s infrastructure—constantly working away throughout the gallery, with occasional visits from electricians and audiovisual specialists as well. Particularly as the opening drew near, the amount of activity and the number of specialists at work in the space increased.

For months, years even, the *Our Lives* gallery was an amalgam of documents and images, seen by different experts through their own particular renderings of the gallery space: for the designers, bubble diagrams and elevations; for the fabricators, a thick book of “fabrication drawings” with line drawings and precise measurements; for the project manager, another large compendium of graphic elevations with colorful layouts of each exhibit; for Curatorial and the co-curators, scripts and worksheets and object lists; and, for the media team, video clips and three ring binders full of transcripts. Whether it was “the Kalinago exhibit” to Curatorial or “Exhibit Area 10” to the fabricators, the physical manifestation and coordination of all these experts’ contributions finally began to materialize in space in the summer of 2004.

These physical outcomes represent faithful, and sometimes compromised, translations of the documented plans. They exposed fissures in communication within and among departments, as well as budget, time, and resource constraints on the process. For example, In June 2004, a month before installation of the *Our Lives*

exhibition began and three months before the museum opened, I talked with Erica Denison who worked with the Design+Communication, Inc. design firm contracted for the *Our Lives* gallery. When I told her I was interested in understanding and documenting the process of making OL, she said, “I’m just as curious as you are.”²

She presented the “Campo tree” for an example. For the Campo Band of Kumeyaay Indians, the oak tree is an important part of who they are and where they come from—and it was translated into an “icon,” or main design feature, for their exhibit. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, this is a design approach by D+C, where each community’s exhibit has a memorable object in it, something the visitor can associate with the community and remember it by after they leave the museum—a sort of mnemonic device. For the Kahnawake Mohawks, it was a large iron work structure. For the Saint-Laurent Métis, it was a large vehicle used for ice fishing. For Chicago, it was the city skyline. For the Campo Band, it was the oak tree.

Erica explained that the tree started as a three dimensional, abstract form with photographs of community members hanging off the tree like leaves. This element went from evocative, she explained, to more and more literal. More like a “diorama.” The tree was “too expensive,” so they reformatted it to be less costly. It was “reduced down to” a “cut out,” she said. A picture of a tree with images collaged on it.

However, when the design firm approached the Campo community to collect images of people for the tree, no one was available to do it. So then it was just a tree with no images. The trees at the Campo reservation were oriented horizontally to the landscape, she explained, but because of the space limitations in the exhibit, the representation of the tree had to be more vertical. So when they took a photograph of a tree at Campo reservation and made it proportional in the space provided, Erica said that “now we have a cardboard cutout of a bush.”

² Phone interview with Erica Denison, June 17, 2004.



Figure 31: Cynthia Chavez in front of the OL Campo exhibit. August 12, 2004.

When the day came in August that the “Campo tree” was installed in the gallery space, Erica’s vision of what it would look like was spot on. First the exhibit fabrication team’s project leader saw it; he said it looked like a bush. Then OL research assistant Arwen viewed it and said it looked like a “shrub.” When Cynthia saw it—her face dropped. She said this was the kind of thing she was afraid of, and looked disappointed and nervous (Figure 31 above). Arwen, Cynthia and I went over and stood in front of the Campo tree together. Cynthia said she should take a photo to send to the co-curators so they wouldn’t be shocked when they come for the opening. That was her first concern—that the Campo co-curators would dislike it. Cynthia said

that she had lost sleep worrying about it. She asked me to take a photo so she could email it to the Campo co-curators later.

Then Cynthia saw the Polaroid photographs taped up on the wall to the right of the “bush” that mocked up the tree and rocks; they were created months before to ensure the installation was properly done on site. She then realized the project manager from NMAI Exhibits Department had seen the “bush” up in Buffalo, NY where the exhibit materials were prefabricated. No one had ever told Cynthia about the changes in design; it was certainly not on the last design layouts that the firm sent in July of 2003. Cynthia had not been included on the decision making nor informed of the change. Worried that this could ruin visitor and Campo co-curator impressions of the exhibit, she later talked to the project manager about it, who replied that she would make D+C fix it. But, by the time the museum opened, there were no plans to fix the “bush” and it remained.

This anecdote touches upon a number of themes already present in preceding chapters, including faithful translation, departmental antagonism, bureaucratic constraints, and advocacy for Native communities. Again, it highlights the relationship between curators and communities: the NMAI curator’s first concern was about the reaction of the community and that materials the co-curators approved would not be what they saw when they came to view their exhibit.

Conflict over exhibition content reduction was also an issue to which many departments contributed. For, the process of exhibit making was a process of distillation, from hundreds of pages of interviews to a 70 word statement; from the rich three dimensional abstract tree to a flat, reduced and less comprehensible bush. In addition, there were bureaucratic constraints that affected the exhibition content and design. Cost and deadlines influenced design, and design shaped content. The change Cynthia requested was never made, the reason given was because of other pressing

priorities for the opening and the cost was too high. After this episode, there was no more mention of the “bush.”

The “bush” incident occurred early in the installation process as the structure for the gallery was being constructed. Towards the end of the summer, Cynthia and the designers were more focused on object placement. They often arranged objects in collages, rather than one object per glass case, as one would expect in a “traditional” display. As I watched the installation unfold, I noted the extreme care and stewardship that Collections, Conservation and Registration staff demonstrated for the objects through their actions. They followed strict protocol for lighting, dusting, and mounting objects, as well as for watching over them at all times (objects were never to be left alone without an NMAI staff member at their side; at times, someone would stay behind with a cart of objects during the lunch break so that the cart would not have to be moved and locked away in the meantime). In addition, staff members treated the props as seriously as the collection objects.³ And no wonder, as some of these objects that were classified as props by the museum (and sometimes loans) were important objects to the community members who provided them for the exhibition.

While I do not dwell on the objects themselves in the gallery, each one has its own “cultural biography.”⁴ The ways in which NMAI staff showed great care for the objects not just in the museum, but also in the communities, helped to cultivate and maintain trust relations in the community curating process. For example, Cynthia made a special trip to fly to Chicago to pick up a “scrap book” in person from co-curator Susan Power. It was filled with archival documents about the Chicago Indian

³ A bar coding system was specifically created for the props and maintained separately from the one developed to track collection objects.

⁴ Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," in *The Social Life of Things*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

community and AIC. Cynthia insured it and personally vouched for the safety of this precious record of memories of the American Indian community.

Museum Tour

What follows is an abbreviated photographic tour of the museum space. While this, too, is merely a reduction of the sights, sounds and experience of moving through the space, I hope to provide some holistic and visual sense of the material production of the exhibition work.

As you walk into the museum, you enter the “Potomac”—a rotunda area designed for gathering groups, showing live demonstrations, and hosting performances (Figure 32 below). The first floor also includes a main theater, a cafeteria that serves Native foods like salmon and wild rice, and a more expensive gift shop that some describe as another exhibition space (Figure 33 below). A less expensive gift shop takes up most of the second floor. The third floor includes the *Our Lives* gallery, the Resource Center, and the changing gallery. *Native Modernism: The Art of George Morrison and Allan Houser*, was the inaugural exhibition in this gallery, curated by Truman Lowe. With its boldly colored and curved walls, minimal text, and sparsely displayed artworks, this exhibition was a calm respite to many visitors after the overwhelming amount of information and imagery and sound in the other galleries (Figure 34 below).

The Lelawi Theater, *Our Peoples* and *Our Universes* galleries are on the fourth floor, and the entire fifth floor is dedicated to staff offices. Along the hallways of the various floors are additional glass cased exhibits; most prominent is the *Window on Collections: Many Hands, Many Voices* exhibition of objects organized according to type (beads, containers, arrowheads, etc.) (Figure 35 below).



Figure 32: Powwow dance demonstration in the Potomac area inside the main entrance to museum.



Figure 33: First floor gift shop.



Figure 34: *Native Modernism* was the inaugural exhibition in the changing gallery.



Figure 35: Beadwork exhibit in *Window on Collections*.

Our Lives Gallery

When approaching the *Our Lives* gallery from the hallway, the motion of passersby in the entryway to the exhibition catches one's attention—it is a short hallway flanked by moving video screens of people walking by, with a reflective glass intended to give visitors a view of themselves walking along side these various Native people (Figure 36 below). The message is that they are all Native people—whether dressed in a Naval uniform, in plain clothes, with dark skin, with light skin—and that anyone walking beside you anywhere in America could be a Native person.

Greeting you as you pass through the entryway is a sea of faces, in a wash of colors and accompanied by a video on a loop that bisects and divides a single face through a combination of a myriad of colors, shapes and features. This was a design by Jolene Rickard, with photographs by Cindy Frankenburg. It was referred to as the “Face Wall” among staff, and the majority of these photos—close-ups of Native people's faces—were actually of NMAI staff members and their families (Figure 37 below).⁵ On the reverse of this wall is a description of the various ways in which Native identity has been defined through time by outsiders such as the U.S. government and anthropologists. Other sections of NMAI-curated displays include land rights issues, Indian activism, and international indigenous organizations.

⁵ It was not necessarily planned this way; the photographer put out a call for Native people to come in and be photographed on a particular day. Visitors at the CRC participating in consultations and various staff members answered the call. There is notation on each photo of the person's name and tribal affiliation(s).



Figure 36: Our Lives gallery entry.



Figure 37: Our Lives introduction.

This introductory “Face Wall” and the other central portions of the exhibition were “NMAI-curated” by guest curator Jolene Rickard (Tuscarora) and NMAI’s Gabi Tayac (Piscataway).⁶ They blended academic terms (Native scholar Gerald Vizner’s “survivance”) and sociological and historical research, with imagery and contemporary Native art, to convey the various legal and political constraints and historical milestones of activism and organization that impact the lives and identities of contemporary Native peoples. Other aspects of the NMAI-curated sections included land rights among South American tribes, “hard choices” tribes have had to make about mining and casinos for economic survival, the American Indian movement in the 1970s, United Nations and other indigenous organizations, and the importance of the maintenance and survival of Native languages in contemporary communities.

The NMAI-curated exhibits occupy the central area of the gallery, with the circular community curated exhibits positioned along the exterior walls. The community curated exhibits are dedicated to a realism that invoke the feeling of “being there.” Each community exhibit is essentially a flat surface⁷ with huge graphics that span the walls and recreate each community’s local environment. Larger than life images of co-curators and other community members cover the walls (Figures 38 and 39 below). While there are eight community curated exhibits, here I focus on the Kalinago and Chicago exhibits.

⁶ Jolene Rickard is an artist, a curator, and a professor of art and art history (first at SUNY Buffalo and then later at Cornell University); she holds a bachelor of fine arts from the Rochester Institute of Technology and a doctorate in American Studies from SUNY Buffalo, among other degrees. Gabi Tayac worked in the education department of NMAI, curated exhibits and also authored publications through the museum; she holds a doctorate in sociology from Harvard University.

⁷ As I mentioned in Chapter 4, the designers used the software program Adobe Photoshop to prepare layouts and plan the gallery space. Familiar with this program myself, it came as no surprise to me later that it was perceived as a “flat” exhibit. One curator said it reminded her of a “movie set” with its flat (layers rather than built) environments, like movie scene backdrops painted to give the illusion of depth (for example, to show distance mountains are painted smaller in scale and at the top of the canvas).



Figure 38: Yakama Nation exhibit with sacred mountain as “icon.”



Figure 39: Igloolik exhibit showing “media inuksuk” detail.

The Kalinago exhibit is the only one to have a more abstract approach to its imagery—a famous waterfall and a craft shop are not single images but collages of many photographs (Figure 40 and 41 below). The designers had said this was reminiscent of postcards or tourism photos. The Kalinago exhibit also has the least prominent objects—and some are even behind camouflaged cabinet door that are hard to open. There are small baskets, a cricket bat and ball, DVDs and brochures and books on display (Figure 42 below). The bulk of the visual impact comes from the various videos in the exhibit, which the co-curators liked very much. They later told me, however, that they were disappointed that a number of objects they had provided and expected to be on display—such as bigger, more impressive baskets and a canoe—were not present.



Figure 40: Kalinago exhibit. At center is an image of a rock staircase leading to the ocean with Prosper Paris on video telling the tale of the boa constrictor that created it.



Figure 41: Kalinago exhibit with photographic collages.



Figure 42: Object cases with brochures and DVD and baskets in Kalinago exhibit.

Unlike the Kalinago exhibit, Chicago has a lot of built-in architectural features that added more depth to the display (Figures 43 and 44 below). There is a replica façade of the American Indian Center, a full size and three dimensional living room, and a huge 3x3 multi-screen video of powwow and graduation ceremony. There are beaded items, flyers, and everyday household items. The exhibit includes a contemporary American Indian Center cotton t-shirt folded neatly and presented alone in a glass case with a label (Figure 45 below) as well as commissioned beadwork. Cyndee Starr said that the most challenging part of being a co-curator was actually making the princess crown featured in the Chicago exhibit (Figure 46 above). She

was tasked with creating a replica of the original princess crown, which had been lost. She explained, “I did the beaded crown that’s in the exhibit... I duplicated [it] from a picture. I wanted to make it more elaborate looking.” Keeping to the design of the photograph “was more challenging to me than to do something real bright and shiny and flashy, how I’d like to do it. I had a hard time sitting down to do that... I kept thinking this isn’t what I want to sew. But I’ll do it like it says in the picture..”⁸

Whether a casino mug, t-shirt, archival photograph, clay pot, fiddle, or pair of seal skin pants, each prop and object was selected with a purpose by the co-curators to communicate something about their life today. The item most talked about was a large ice fishing vehicle in the St. Laurent Métis exhibit called a bombardier. The size of a car, this object was not exclusively made nor exclusively used by this community or the Métis more generally, but it was important to this community’s lifeways. It is this blend of props and objects, everyday things and hand crafted artworks, items visitors recognize and those that were unfamiliar—what is often glossed as the “traditional” and the “modern”—that make up the unique character of the *Our Lives* gallery.

⁸ Interview with Cyndee Fox Starr, at the AIC, January 16, 2005.



Figure 43: Chicago exhibit.



Figure 44: Chicago exhibit.

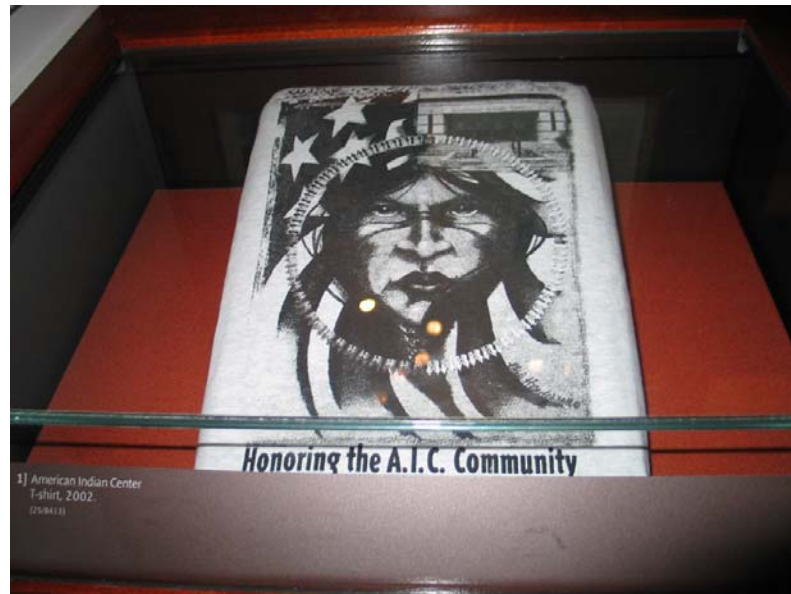


Figure 45: AIC t-shirt in Chicago exhibit.



Figure 46: AIC Princess hat in Chicago exhibit (upper left), along with AIC 50th Annual Powwow poster, t-shirt and program.

Conclusion

Seeing the gallery in photographs, or even in person, is not the same as walking through it with its makers. As I went through the gallery space with NMAI staff members over the course of the installation period in the summer of 2004, and spoke to curators about their reactions to the gallery as it materialized and they measured it to the imagined landscape they had conjured in their minds over the years, Keith Basso's *Wisdom Sits in Places* about Apache place-making came to mind.⁹ The gallery was a more literal form of place making, but it still evoked the same sense of walking through space and having its features elicit remembered histories and the tales of how a people (the NMAI) came to be (decisions about objects, cases, color choices, attributions, photographs and text panels; budget constraints and deadlines, compromises and personality conflicts, usurpations and triumphs).

As staff members passed through the gallery space, each object, wall, text panel had a story behind it in ways that went beyond the subject matter and evident content of the exhibits to a shared and contentious history and experience of its making. And, like the Apache in Basso's account, the stories people told about the past that resided in these spaces on the exhibit landscape was not only about remembering the past, but also about communicating something in the present. The moral of these stories was often: this is not how we wanted it to be.

One curator explained to me that, as she was walking through the *Our Peoples* gallery with her supervisor, he asked why did they put a rock there? She replied to him, "We fought it for one and a half years."¹⁰ Later, she summarized this experience by saying, "you walk in and see specific physical features [in the gallery], each one

⁹ Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places : Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

¹⁰ Conversation with Ann McMullen, in her office at the CRC, June 4, 2004.

represented a hard won compromise or a battle lost.”¹¹ For curators, the images on the walls and later video monitors recalled meaningful—sometimes enjoyable, sometimes tense—interactions with Native community members, NMAI staff, and designers. Each image, object, “rock” or “bush” in the exhibits represented embedded social relations, shared history, and particular kinds of social practices to those who collaborated in their making; it was a landscape whose history could be “read” in this way only by the community who made it. This includes not only how the co-curators could read the “cultural biography” of things in the exhibits—Cyndee running around her house to collect half finished beadwork for the “living room scene” in the Chicago exhibit, or sitting diligently to create an outdated beaded design—but also how the NMAI staff viewed the exhibition in which these objects were encased.

The images of Native people on the walls would be symbols of Natives (their voice, perspective, difference) to visitors and other NMAI staff rather than individuals with their own life histories (as they were to people who worked with them directly, like NMAI curators). Without this intimate knowledge of the gallery landscape—its history and creation stories—known only to those who had “been there,” the experience might seem like watching someone’s “wedding videos,” one curator worried. In other words, and what would bear out over the course of the NMAI’s opening week in the next chapter, when co-curators and Curatorial passed through the space, they saw familiar faces and individuals they knew.

A scholar who worked regularly with the Chicago Indian community emailed me what amounted to a “wedding video” experience after a visit to the NMAI:

I had such a wonderful experience at NMAI in front of [the Chicago] exhibit a week ago. I stood watching the video of the graduation pow-wow (which I attended, btw). And, to my astonishment and delight, Sterling Big Bear walked right out of the tribal hall and the other world, and right up in front of me with

¹¹ Conversation with Ann McMullen, at her home in Washington, DC, July 8, 2004.

his wonderful smile, and waved at me. Of course, it wasn't at me. But it felt that way. It made my day!!

I called Kermit to tell him, and he said... look down, your coat is sitting on the glass case which holds his drum.

It was great.¹²

Like a nostalgic and reminiscing couple, co-curators and other community members would indeed enjoy the exhibits, particularly the video portions of them as they viewed their friends and family on screen. But for visitors (and other NMAI staff), like non-family members who were not at the wedding, the curator worried before opening that the exhibits might be too much information, boring, or tedious to view.¹³ As I mentioned, the curators and NMAI staff recounted these places to me in ways of talking about the past that communicated to the present; their comments reflected trepidation over the coming reception of their labors and a desire to anticipate the critiques and speak of what might have been.

In some ways, this apprehension was a recognition of the constraints and problems of collaborative exhibit making. A shift in museum practice and authority to source communities as reflected in community curating is often portrayed as a rupture or break from past exhibiting practices. However, there are also some enduring continuities, including a commitment to realism and the culture concept. I would like to briefly consider the latter, beginning with an insightful comment and familiar experience Miriam Kahn describes in her elaboration of the collaborative process of the *Pacific Voices* (1997) exhibit:

While working with community advisors, I was continually reminded of a contemporary paradox. Just when anthropologists are questioning the concept of culture, especially as a bounded, integrated whole, those same groups who have been invited into museums are clinging passionately to it, conscious of its

¹² Personal communication, February 24, 2008.

¹³ Talk with Paul Chaat Smith, at his office at the CRC, April 11, 2006. He was citing Ann's observation that exhibits were like "wedding videos."

power as a marker of modern identity. While anthropologists are deconstructing, destroying and discarding the concept, community groups are invoking, embracing, and deploying it...

Whereas as curators and academics wanted the museum to portray the dynamics of such things as inter-generational tensions, competition between local and central forces, and intra-community variability..., many advisors wanted to focus instead on an idealized, unified, "frozen moment."¹⁴

In other words, although anthropologists are trying to move "beyond the cultural turn,"¹⁵ indigenous peoples have been embracing "culture" as a legal, political and economic resource and thus a source for empowerment. William Mazzarella marks this development with a "slightly bemused recognition that while the culture concept was undergoing an apparently terminal crisis in anthropology the rest of the world was lustily discovering it."¹⁶ Or, to put it another way as Marshall Sahlins famously wrote, "All of a sudden everyone 'got' culture... 'If we didn't have kastom,' the New Guinean said to his anthropologist, 'we would be just like White Men.'"¹⁷ As long as culture is considered to be a thing that people have¹⁸ and the "postmodern marketing of heritage" continues to render "the display of identity as culture or art,"¹⁹ the trope of tradition and the notion of culture loss will continue to persist in presentations of Native identity in the museum and elsewhere. The *Our Lives* exhibits both embodied and resisted these concepts.

¹⁴ Kahn, "Not Really Pacific Voices: Politics of Representation in Collaborative Museum Exhibits," 71.

¹⁵ See for example Victoria E. Bonnell, Lynn Avery Hunt, and Richard Biernacki, *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, Studies on the History of Society and Culture (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999), Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, "Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference," *Cultural Anthropology* 7 (1992).

¹⁶ Mazzarella, "Culture, Globalization, Mediation," 347. See also Annelise Riles, "Law as Object," in *Legal Legacies, Current Crises*, ed. Don Brenneis and Sally Merry (School of American Research Press, Forthcoming). Following Marilyn Strathern, as cited in Miyazaki, "The Limits of Politics."

¹⁷ Marshall Sahlins, "Two or Three Things That I Know About Culture," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 5 (1999). Sahlins adds in a footnote, "One thing was clear about doing anthropology in contemporary Papua New Guinea: everyone was self-conscious about 'culture'. Papua New Guineans, like others worldwide, were invoking culture in dealing with a fluidity of identity and a shift in the locus of important resources in a late-20th-century, postcolonial 'modernity' -- a modernity progressively affected by transnational capitalism and by state power."

¹⁸ Richard Handler, "On Having Culture: Nationalism and the Preservation of Quebec's *Patrimoine*," in *Essays on Museums and Material Culture*, ed. George Stocking (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

¹⁹ Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, 219.

The *Our Lives* exhibition at times reinforced and at others worked against notions of “culture” that are embedded in the popular imagination but have long been critiqued in anthropology. For example, the manner in which the *Our Lives* exhibition was produced—as a community-centered design and through committee work and consensus-based knowledge production—resulted in exhibits that maintained an authoritative voice that represented each community as a whole, suggesting Native community members were homogeneous in their thinking. This was clearly not the case, as details of co-curator meetings in Chapter 4 showed.

However, what I learned from the fieldwork experience is that for public presentation, each community often did have a well-known and somewhat well-defined narrative about its identity in opposition to the surrounding society. I would argue this is often a burden of being Native: having to assert one’s identity in the face of forces that constantly—through legal, popular culture, or other means—attempt to erode or undermine it. The display of each community as a self-contained curved space separated from its neighbors reinforced the notion of bounded cultures, but the communities’ emphases on contemporary life and the changing circumstances of their lives worked against the depiction of a “frozen moment” or common and outdated conceptions of indigenous culture as static or only valuable as an idealized past.

INTERCHAPTER
(6.5)

AAA 2005

Bringing the Past into the Present¹

In early December of 2005, I attended the AAA meetings in Washington, DC. The NMAI was prominent at these meetings, and director Rick West was the keynote speaker. It was a coming out of sorts, a grand entrance onto the academic scene as a fully functioning museum. In a published interview dated January 14, 2005, Rick West indicates the AAA meetings as the occasion that drove the content and purpose of his major speech for the year, which he would give at multiple conferences. "I'm going to try to insinuate myself right into the American Anthropological Association annual meeting this year," he said. "It's not that I'm simply defending us, that's not the idea... I think, after fifteen years, that I do have a far better understanding intellectually and museologically of what it is the National Museum of the American Indian is about, and I think it is a worthy shift in paradigm, and I want it to be understood even better going forward."²

On the Friday of the AAA meetings, I went to a session in which Bruce Bernstein gave a paper about museum repatriation. The response to his work indicated attitudes in the museum world had indeed changed over time. Speaking with a reporter after his talk, Bruce recalled that in the 1990-1991 AAA meetings he gave a similar paper to this one, but in that session, unlike today, the "crowd was not pleased." Another person approached him after his talk and suggested that the NMAI is a "Rorschach."

¹ This was the conference theme.

² Amanda J. Cobb, "Interview with W. Richard West, Director, National Museum of the American Indian," *American Indian Quarterly* 29, no. 3/4 (2005).

When I was at Rick West's keynote speech later in the day, I ran into former Smithsonian colleagues who were seated for the address—a woman from the NMAI and a man from the NMNH; both had worked extensively with Native communities. As two of them were talking, he mentioned that the critics were all negative about NMAI, that they “didn't get it.” He said the NMAI is a “political statement,” “not a museum.” He also asked if I had read a recent review by Claire Smith (little did I know this review would figure prominently in Rick's speech that was just about to start). I had not. He said it was a positive review in *Antiquity* magazine and that she was politically situating herself (she was an Australian archaeologist who works with indigenous peoples). In other words, how one evaluates, writes, or speaks about the NMAI can be a political matter and have professional consequences. (It is in this sense that I refer to a “performance of expertise” and the politics of critique when considering the reviews of the museum in Chapter 6.)

Rick's speech was titled, “The National Museum of the American Indian: Journeys in the Post-Colonial World.”³ He began by recounting his own history with the AAA: “Within months after I was appointed to the Directorship of the National Museum of the American Indian in 1990, I addressed the Association in one of the very first of my efforts to articulate the vision of this cultural institution.” But, this time, he wanted to discuss “the National Museum of the American Indian fifteen years later, not as only theory and vision” but also as a “Native place” at “America's monumental core and political center.”

³ Richard West, “The National Museum of the American Indian: Journeys in a Post-Colonial World (Keynote Address),” in *American Anthropological Association* (Washington, D.C.: 2005). Rick presented variations of this speech at other museological, archaeological, etc. conferences throughout the year. Based on an email to me from Rick, he had been working on the contents of this speech since December 29, 2004. At that time, it was about two months since the opening of the museum and the press reviews were still very much on staff members' minds; perhaps that is why a central emphasis of his paper was in response to them.

His forty-five minute talk began with an anecdote about a “frustrated art museum trustee” who could not “peg” the NMAI. Rick insisted “something else is going on here.” He reiterated what he spoke of at the NMAI Scholar Symposium—that other institutions were moving in the same direction as the NMAI, but not at the “magnitude” or with the same number of visitors. He said that “the curatorial process at the NMAI has been recalibrated and refashioned along lines that have found increasing acceptance in museums and among anthropologists even as those processes depart from previous models and approaches” that pave the way, essentially, for the museum to be a “genuine civic space” and “dialogical forum.” While he went on to talk of the uniqueness of Native peoples and their heritage, I emphasize here his framing of the reviews that were cues for how he wanted people to interpret the museum and the public’s response to it.

The NMAI practices a “scholarship of inclusion” that turns “the conventional paradigm on its head;” he talked about the “implications” for this which, to put it most bluntly and according to the brunt of his talk, referred to the critical reviews in the press. But he began first with a nod to Claire Smith’s review in *Art and Antiquity*,⁴ and essentially used her article “The National Museum of the American Indian: Decolonizing the Museum” to frame the remainder of his talk. He cited her directly a number of times throughout his presentation, including her statement that

The empowerment of new voices, however, also can involve a diminution of the authority of established voices. By widening the concept of authority to include the voices of Indigenous peoples, many of whom feel they have been silenced too long . . . the NMAI, either intentionally or inadvertently, challenges the position of non-Indigenous peoples as authorities on Indigenous cultures.

⁴ Claire Smith, “Decolonising the Museum: The National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, Dc,” *Antiquity* 79, no. 304 (2005).

Rick continued, asserting that “such fundamental shifts sometime will not be taken lightly, particularly among critics whose museological paradigm emanates from more conventional origins.” He mentioned specifically a critical review in *The New York Times* (he did not name the reviewer, but it was Edward Rothstein⁵) which “expresses deep regret that the NMAI is moving away from the ‘museum as a temple with its superior, self-governing priesthood.’ and opine that it should have moved “in the opposite direction” West specifically addressed Rothstein’s comment that the museum exhibited a “studious avoidance of scholarship.” He then cited Roger Kennedy (a “Director Emeritus”) who noted “the patronizing stench emerging from that passage.”

In his speech he also spoke directly to his audience:

I want to state an addendum here that is neither gratuitous nor disingenuous – and has nothing do with my knowing who else is in the room this afternoon. It is this: I fully appreciate – and honor – the reality that, in *anthropology’s deconstruction and reconstruction of itself in that past two decades, this system of knowledge has re-positioned in critical ways that align with much of what I have described.*

With respect, specifically, to the involvement of Native peoples in its work, the discipline of *anthropology now has proceeded well beyond the notion of Native “informants” to strike genuinely collaborative and partnering relationships with Native peoples.* It also acknowledges and attempts to incorporate, through this partnering, the subjective tethers and nuances of culture that tell us so much more about the first citizens of the Americas than the excessive devotion to a sometimes empty “descriptiveness” did a generation ago.

Moreover, I have never claimed, during my tenure as the Director of the National Museum of the American Indian, exclusivity or an ascendancy of right, for our use of the first-person Native voice in interpreting and representing Native peoples and cultures. We appreciate that in the museum setting the roads to interpretive legitimacy and relevancy can be several. All I ask is that those, like us, who have labored long, and will continue to do so, to develop new approaches to representation, grounded directly in Native

⁵ Edward Rothstein, "Museum Review: Museum with an American Indian Voice," *New York Times*, September 21 2004.

communities themselves, be granted the same respect as truth-seekers from other quarters.⁶

After acknowledging the role of anthropology in advancing the practice of collaboration with Native peoples, he then turned to the notion of what it means to be “more than a museum” or a “cultural destination.” He cited Elaine Gurian’s work and her model of the “community museum” which he found instructive for the NMAI, and her observation that museums are not about “access to the ‘real thing’” but rather they are “institutions of memory” that can build a “sense of community.” He also cited Richard Kurin who has written about museums performing the social function of the dissemination of knowledge.

Rick finally put forward his vision for the NMAI as a place for civic engagement, citing Ellen Hirzy’s essay in *Mastering Civic Engagement: A Challenge to Museums* and reiterated the museum’s commitment to invoking “Native voice in all aspects of the Museum because we have an abiding faith in its authenticity and authoritativeness,” ... and because we believe that it brings new knowledge and perspectives to what we learn about the first citizens of the Western Hemisphere.” Like much of his previous work, he again connected Native voice with authenticity and authoritativeness, and suggested the NMAI as “a potential model” for other museums. His final words were from Claire Smith’s article, in which she writes that the NMAI is “leading the nation down a path of understanding and reconciliation” and is “reversing the impact of colonialism and asserting the unique place of Native peoples, past, present and future of the Americas.”

In other words, Rick suggested that paradigm shifts encounter resistance, and he believed the museum was not just representing Native peoples but also fundamentally altering their relationship with the dominant society in which they live.

⁶ I have added emphasis in this passage to highlight his regard for anthropology’s contribution to the NMAI perspective, which one would not find in the discourse within the museum walls by senior management and prominent consultants to the museum as I’ve discussed in other chapters.

At a party in the conference hotel that Saturday evening—a gathering of mainly Native but also non-Native anthropologists and students—a petition to create a AAA section for indigenous anthropologists was circulated. I spoke with a young Native woman who commented that no one was sufficiently critiquing the NMAI. She thought it would happen in an academic forum (I noticed she too had been at a number of the sessions in which NMAI staff were presenters), but she was not impressed so far. She mentioned that she heard people “grumbling,” including anthropologist Bea Medicine (Lakota), during Rick West’s speech.⁷ Rick’s mention of a particular review in his speech— Rothstein’s comment about a lack of scholarship at the museum—had been circulating among staff since opening week. Chapter 6, in part, considers how this criticism traveled, why it touched a nerve among NMAI staff, and perhaps sheds light on West’s direct attention to it in the presence of the AAA (as well as the grumbling going on in the audience).

⁷ Bea Medicine came to the party later that evening; when she left I realized how important this young woman’s comment about specifically Bea Medicine’s grumbling, and her judgment more generally, was. When Bea Medicine left the party, there was a spontaneous procession as she was wheeled in her chair through the room towards the door, wearing a feathered tiara and covered in tinsel. The room erupted in a loud musical rendition of “here comes the queen,” hummed and dah-dah’d by everyone present. With raised voices they chanted “Bea!” “Medicine!” “Bea!” “Medicine!” There was a big “wahoo!” by the crowd as she passed through the doorway. It was clear she was a greatly respected, loved, and good humored woman. Not much later, the hosts were kicked out of room by security due to the noise. Charlie, one of the hosts, responded, “that just increases my reputation!” Medicine passed away later that month at age 82. She wrote about being both Native and an anthropologist in Beatrice Medicine and Sue-Ellen Jacobs, *Learning to Be an Anthropologist and Remaining "Native": Selected Writings* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

CHAPTER 6

PERFORMANCE

There's always been a feeling, for me, that we're kind of invisible. I can't tell you how often I've felt invisible in my lifetime... it was almost like something every one of us had been waiting for our whole lives, and couldn't really believe it was happening. Just the basic gathering of all these Indian people in one place, to be honored, was such a fantastic thing for us. It has never happened before—ever—in this country and it was wonderful.¹

—Valerie Wilson, Chicago American Indian Center Board member, 2005

Some of [the co-curators] were asking are they going to be required to give a speech. You know, they didn't realize how big the opening was going to be. I don't think anyone realized how big the opening was going to be. And it was all about giving of ourselves, to make [the co-curators] feel a little more welcome.²

—Teresa Tate, Curatorial Lead Researcher, 2004

For a while [the buzz in Curatorial] was just the reviews, you know, because we were getting a lot of bad reviews and people were just talking about them. And, just generally, what we thought about them and wanting to read them, you know, what's the latest bad review, kind of thing.³

—Cynthia Chavez, October 2004

Introduction

At the opening of the National Museum of the American Indian, 80,000 people (including 30,000 indigenous peoples) marched or were present on the National Mall to celebrate the Native peoples of the western hemisphere. This gathering was a main topic of news for about a week—in television, newspapers, on the radio and online. The capitol was literally overrun with Native peoples everywhere you looked, proclaiming the museum's message through its crowds, the media, and word of

¹ Interview with Valerie Wilson (Nitmuck), at the American Indian Center, September 10, 2005.

² Interview with Teresa Tate, in the CRC library, October 15, 2004.

³ Interview with Cynthia Chavez, in her office at the CRC, October 29, 2004.

mouth: Indians are still here. While this message was widely celebrated and well-received, the content and design of the exhibitions provoked more varied responses.

In the first half of this chapter, titled “Exhibition,” I briefly present the experience of the opening of the museum by the community curators and how co-curators were treated differently as objects (images, words on the wall) and subjects (living, breathing persons who attended the opening)—or viewed another way, as symbols (as diverse “Indians” marching on the National Mall) and experts (as “co-curators” of the exhibitions)—and consider the implications of the lack of formal recognition they received from the museum during this time. The second half of the chapter, titled “Reception,” is dedicated to the ways in which critiques and praise of the museum circulated among staff, how they responded to these reviews, and the impacts participating in the exhibitions had on the communities with whom I worked. While Chapter 4 acknowledged that production and reception are inseparable, this chapter forefronts the politics of expertise, presenting both exhibition *and* reception—on the Mall, in the museum, in conferences and discourse—as performance. I use the term performance to highlight intentionality, audience, and a practice-oriented analysis, not to suggest something disingenuous or inauthentic about individual presentations.

This chapter explores the performance of cultural identities at the level of both popular notions of culture, as well as the cultures of expertise as I have framed them here. Performance of cultural identities comes in a more recognizable form in the first half of the chapter; in keeping with a principle of symmetry, in the second half of the chapter, the cultural identities being performed are those of different cultures of expertise. In other words, this chapter seeks to expand the concepts of “exhibition” and “reception” beyond a built gallery and the visitor response. The former also references Native people on display more generally, the latter how they were received

not only as museum displays but also culture producers in the museum and in their communities. For museum professionals, art critics, academics and the like, the performance of expertise is also a politics of critique, where the way in which they write impacts and discloses their own professional commitments and aspirations.

In the anthropology of museums, analysis usually focuses on the content and design of museum exhibitions, and more recently the methods of their makers (which I have documented here as well). In this chapter, I present the *experience* of exhibition—by the co-curators in the procession on the Mall and in the gallery space. In more recent studies in museology and the anthropology of media, reception studies typically consider the agency of the audience in its interpretation of media as opposed to culture producers' intentions.⁴ In this case, I go one step further, so to speak, and consider the agency of the culture producers to frame and reproduce audience response in their own fields of expertise (as I noted in the Introduction, one purpose of the interchapters is to show how experts attempt to frame anticipated and actual reception).

In addition, I also expand the notion of exhibition reception to include how people involved in the exhibition process were received in their own communities as a result of their collaboration with the NMAI. By viewing all of the knowledge practices of the various cultures of expertise in this account through the lens of performance, I hope to show how the politics of expertise can be an alternative perspective to the seemingly predictable and problematic characterizations of identity

⁴ Ethnographies of audiences emphasize that meaning making is unpredictable, heterogeneous, and dependent on social context, suggesting the notion of the interpretive, active audience. See Ien Ang, *Living Room Wars : Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World* (London: Routledge, 1996), 64, Purnima Mankekar, *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics : An Ethnography of Television, Womanhood, and Nation in Postcolonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), Purnima Mankekar, "National Texts and Gendered Lives: An Ethnography of Television Viewers in a North Indian City," in *The Anthropology of Media: A Reader*, ed. Kelly Askew and Richard Wilk (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002).

politics when considering Native participation and discourse in public cultural and legal spheres.

Preparing the Way

In preparation for the museum's opening week celebrations,⁵ staff invited and planned for a tremendous number of invited guests to both the museum opening as well as the associated First Americans Festival, sponsored by Smithsonian Folklife. These invited guests were associated with different departments in the museum and included dignitaries and diplomats, congress members, tribal delegations, and donors to the museum. NMAI staff explained to me that the Smithsonian Folklife and *downtown* staff had been inviting "big wigs" and tribal people from all over the world, but never thought to also include the community curators who had worked on the exhibitions. At a Steering Committee meeting, a Curatorial research assistant told me, a senior staff member apologized to Curatorial for "forgetting" about the co-curators.

Curatorial was concerned because it had no budget to cover the costs of bringing co-curators to the opening: "one of the things that NMAI and especially Curatorial have always tried to make at the forefront of our work here, is hospitality and care towards our co-curators who are giving us so much for our exhibits. And, it's painful that we can't treat them the way we want to, and that they deserve to be treated."⁶ Curatorial lobbied for money for co-curator travel and received it; but instead of SI travel agents or Folklife staff who had experience doing mass travel, the Curatorial RAs would have to manage the invitational travel for over 140 community curators and guests.

⁵ Here I only briefly mention events during the week. See Appendix H for a more detailed ethnographic account of each day of the opening week.

⁶ Interview with Curatorial RA, August 3, 2004.

Due to the budget provided, only a certain number of co-curators from each community would be paid for (this resulted in, for example, only six of the eight Kalinago co-curators receiving money to attend the opening, forcing their committee to decide among themselves who must stay behind). In fact, several Curatorial staff members mentioned that the amount of money provided for bringing the co-curators to the opening, \$150,000, was the same amount of money paid to the National Park Service for the anticipated destruction to the National Mall grassy area due to the First Americans Festival. Staff quipped that the co-curators “were literally treated like dirt.” Ann McMullen and the RAs were also were trying to “scrounge” for tickets to a “preview reception” for distinguished guests and to plan a dinner reception as well.⁷ As they prepared the travel arrangements and schedules for the co-curators’ visits, making phone calls to consulates and communities, restaurants and hotels, Cynthia and the rest of the OL team were at the Mall Museum placing objects selected by the co-curators into glass cases (see previous chapter).

Just as I was watching the OL gallery rise before my eyes, the opening was coming near, and I felt the anticipation of staff building... I had to leave the scene. I went to the Carib Territory from September 10 to September 17 to ask for permission from the Carib Council to conduct my research in the Territory. It was an abrupt change from the loud, bustling city to a lush, rugged, and isolated countryside. In the course of a day, from one field site to the next, my priorities and focus changed from learning how to install an object to how to find dinner and get in touch with people. My entire stay was plagued with torrential rains that kept everyone inside their homes

⁷ While chatting with an RA when I returned from Dominica, I realized, with sincere shock, that the “preview reception” I had heard about before I left for Dominica was not specifically *for* the community curators. It was for the “important’ people,” she said, correcting my false assumption. That was why the research assistants and Ann were “scrambling” for tickets—to get the co-curators added on to the guest list. Curatorial insisted that the co-curators be invited because no special museum-related events had been planned for them otherwise.

and later became Hurricane Ivan. Between the rain and the cancellation of Carib Week—a major reason why I had come at this particular time—the hours passed slowly as I did little more than sit in my apartment listening to the rain pounding on the metal roof (missing the Press “soft opening”⁸ was underway back in DC, after which reporters and art critics would write their reviews).

The last evening in the Territory, Prosper Paris talked with me about his concerns for the Carib Territory, including the still unopened Carib Model Village. He said he was on every single board there was regarding the Carib Model Village and “it’s all red tape, red tape, red tape.”⁹ When the government and tour operators “do Carib tourism,” he said, “we are the product.” He explained that he tried to get people in the Territory to understand that, but there “isn’t a lot of consciousness” here. Prosper also mentioned what would be a recurring request that went unanswered by the museum despite my and Cynthia’s efforts: he wanted a video from the museum that showed the Kalinago exhibit to be able to present it to the rest of the residents in the Carib Territory, who surely would never see it otherwise (I return to this concern later in the chapter).

These dislocated experiences and occasional frustrations are indicative of the multi-sited experience and highlight the pace and momentum that the museum had in Washington, DC, and some of the more typical experiences of time in Dominica I would come to know better during my longer stay there. I left Dominica happy to have had my moment with the Council and to have reconnected with Prosper, Sylvanie and Garnette again. I was also relieved to be returning to the museum to

⁸ A “soft opening” is like a preview of the exhibitions before an official opening. There was one for the press (though the exhibitions were not complete—labels and media were not yet in place), another for staff members, and a “preview reception” on September 20 which I detail below.

⁹ This is one of the many times bureaucracy—here in its most recognizable symbol, red tape—came to the fore with respect to this government sponsored cultural heritage project (see Chapter 2, “Bureaucracy at the Periphery”).

witness the event that I had been waiting for and that figured prominently in my story of an exhibition unfolding in time: its unveiling to the public, museum staff, and the community curators.

Exhibition

I returned to DC the morning of Friday, September 17. After a brief visit at the Mall Museum where the OL gallery was now filled with a cacophony of sound and movement, I went to the CRC where RAs were chatting in the curatorial conference room and preparing for the arrival of the community curators the next day. One RA mentioned that Rick West had emailed the staff his opening day speech; she was annoyed that he was not planning to thank the co-curators; this sentiment would only grow stronger as the week proceeded. The RAs also provided me with a “schedule” (a stapled group of 11”x17” spreadsheets) that include the days and times I would meet different co-curator groups at the various DC area airports, my “welcome desk” duties at the hotel where the co-curators were staying, and my scheduled times to visit the *Our Lives* exhibition with the Chicago, Kalinago and Igloodik co-curators.

Visiting the Exhibits

The next day, September 19, the co-curators were first able to visit their exhibits on their own. I was told this was a privilege Curatorial insisted on and “fought for” and that it almost did not happen. It was a symbolic gesture that Curatorial felt strongly about—that the co-curators should, if possible, be able to see their exhibits for the first time alone and before the visiting public viewed it. A number of the co-curators later told me that this portion of their visit was their favorite and most meaningful experience of the week.

In the first week of September, there was a flurry of emails among the Curatorial RAs, myself, Ann and Bruce to plan for these visits. Teresa, the *Our Peoples* lead researcher, assigned everyone to specific communities and in an email wrote: “Please ask your communities if they want to do a blessing, what supplies they will need, how many people will be there, should it be indoors at their exhibit space or outdoors, do they have a preference to the time of day?” She then scheduled CRC staff and myself to accompany “our” communities for their “quiet time” in the exhibits on particular days and times.

I was assigned to accompany the Igloodik co-curators for their scheduled time with their exhibit at 9:00am in the morning. When we arrived at the gallery, the video and sound were not turned on. We first went straight to the Igloodik exhibit, and they liked the “media Inuksuk” of stacked television monitors. They spent about ten minutes in the space and seemed disinterested. This would change days later when they returned and the video was running; then they were pleased and patient to watch the entire presentation, spending more time in the exhibit that had come to life with the voices and moving images of family and friends.

When the Kalinago co-curators (Garnette, Sylvanie, Gerard, Cozier, Prosper and Jacinta) entered the space later that morning, they immediately noticed and talked about some spelling errors in the videos on display (for example, Sylvanie’s name was spelled “Sylvie Nbutu”). The Kalinago co-curators gathered next to the craft shop graphic in the exhibit to do a blessing in the space, lighting a tuft of sweet grass in a bowl. A plume of smoke flowed steadily to the ceiling (Bruce had ensured the fire alarms would be turned off during blessing times) and they circled in close together as Gerard led the blessing. Cynthia and I respectfully gave them privacy; she then explained to me that, later into the exhibit making process, the media team was sending video scripts to the script editor and no longer to Cynthia, and that was why

what would have been a glaring spelling error to her was overlooked by others and not corrected ahead of time. Then Cynthia returned downstairs to a “donors’ brunch” while I gave a quick tour of the rest of the gallery to the Kalinago co-curators. On our way out, we passed the brunch—it was a fancy affair in the Potomac rotunda on the main floor of the museum, with china and cloth draped tables and an army of caterers laboring behind a privacy screen.

The Chicago co-curators’ “blessing time” was scheduled for the following day, Monday, September 20—again during a catered event (the Preview Reception). As additional community members arrived at the museum to meet up with the co-curators, NMAI staff told them not to “stray” on their way to the OL gallery, as there was a reception was in process. They proceeded directly to Chicago exhibit. The co-curators were pleased with what they saw when they walked into the exhibit, except that the largest feature of the exhibit—the stack of television monitors— was not turned on. Once they were all gathered within the curving walls of the exhibit, the community members formed a circle around the Chi-Town drum encased in glass at its center. They had brought a videographer and a photographer to record the event (they later would publish and sell the video, titled “From Wilson Ave. to Washington, DC”). They passed tobacco and said a prayer and took turns speaking. They asked Cynthia to speak, as well. Among Cynthia’s comments that were included in the edited film, she said to the circle of Chicago community members: “Thank you for lending your expertise to this project.”

Preview Reception and Co-Curator Dinner

Some co-curators of the inaugural exhibitions expected that upon arriving they would be honored for their contributions to the museum, perhaps have to give a speech, or receive some sort of ceremonial appreciation. Many recognized upon

arrival that the scale of the event was far beyond their own contributions, but Curatorial staff was more critical. They did manage to secure tickets for the co-curators (but not additional family members) to the Preview Reception. At the reception, the Kalinago co-curators watched the spectacle for a while and then eventually gravitated to the *Our Lives* gallery to talk with visitors in their exhibit (Figure 47 below).



Figure 47: Cozier Frederick and Sylvanie Burton in Kalinago exhibit with visitor.

The only event that was planned specifically for the co-curators was a dinner “reception.” This event was hosted at a Vie de France chain restaurant across from the museum, where donors and dignitaries were wined and dined nightly.¹⁰ The co-curator dinner reception included a poorly lit, lukewarm buffet—it felt like slapped

¹⁰ For example, the Preview Reception was cleared at 5:30pm because there was a later event at the museum that evening.

together affair, set under a canopy in an open-air cement lobby of an office building (the Kalinago co-curators had gotten lost on the way to this in between space down the street from the museum). And, due to budget constraints again, unfortunately only co-curators and one guest could come to this dinner; if they had more family members in town, they had to find food elsewhere. But those who attended were polite about the circumstances, and people enjoyed finally having a moment to visit with each other. There were no speeches, no visits from senior NMAI staff— just mainly co-curators, some family members, and CRC staff.

It was an awkward experience for Curatorial; they made the best of the situation but were embarrassed at the utter banality of the event and the obvious under-recognition of its attendees, knowing it was all that their allocated money could buy after the travel arrangements had been made. But in the dim light, and with the so-so food, NMAI staff and the co-curators made time to visit and enjoy each other's company, often speaking with people whose names they were well-acquainted with but had never met.

Months later when I was in the Carib Territory, Prosper expressed his disappointment to me at never meeting any “higher ups” when he was at the NMAI, because, he said, he knew the Curatorial staff (“you guys”) had very little power:

One of the difficulties... we had is that we only dealt with co-curators. We never got a chance to look at the director of the museum, for example, some people more that could take decision for anything that would be a follow up to what we have done. I thought that was bad. We had no communication with anybody—director, deputy director—anybody doing programs directly... [someone who could say] yeah, I'm a program manager for this, and we can help you in that area here. We saw some brochures... but that was all. I think that was a big gap between us and the museum” [as far as continuing the relationship]. “I mean, you guys was there, the co-curators were there, but you couldn't make decisions on behalf of the museum. As far as I know if you

didn't come back here, if Cynthia didn't come back and say anything, the linkage is closed. There's no link.¹¹

He wanted to network,¹² to find a way to have Kalinago crafts sold in the museum, or to get an invitation for the cultural group to dance in the rotunda of the museum.

Instead, the co-curators only interacted with staff they already knew.

The rest of the museum staff was either too busy, or disinterested, or uninformed, to visit with the co-curators with whom they had produced the exhibits. But the co-curators were greeted with a lot of pomp and circumstance the next day, even if they experienced it as part of a much, much larger group of Native Americans being honored more generally on the Mall.

Grand Opening

For a decade and a half I have thought about what I would say in the next seven minutes. I realize that no reflections of mine can possibly match in significance what we celebrate today on America's National Mall. But once in a great while, something so important and so powerful occurs that, just for a moment, history seems to stand still – and silent - in honor.

— Rick West in NMAI grand opening ceremony speech, September 21, 2004

September 21st was the long awaited day. To celebrate the opening of the museum, there was a procession of Native peoples along the National Mall, an opening ceremony with speeches by dignitaries and museum staff, and then the launching of Folklife's First Americans Festival. The opening procession was a joyous and emotional experience for many who worked at the NMAI as they witnessed all these Native peoples finally arrive, the museum ready to receive them,

¹¹ Interview with Prosper Paris, at the Karifuna Cultural Group/WAIKADA office, February 23, 2005.

¹² This was the main reason current Chief Charles Williams lamented at not having the opportunity for a current Carib Council to go to the opening. He specifically wanted to network with U.S. tribal leaders and talk to them about how they manage taxes and regulate their reservations as possible models to learn from for the Carib Territory.

and they could finally exhale and enjoy the result of so many years of preparing the way for this to happen.

The Native Nations Procession began at 8:00am and lasted four hours (Figure 48 below). Picture-taking was the most notable activity on the mall during the procession—by observers and by participants. Everyone was taking in the spectacle, filming, taking photos, recording the experience for themselves—either for being a part of history and participating in it, or for recording the exotic others that had descended on the capitol. The Chicago co-curators had a videographer, and the Kalinagos a disposable camera, to document their experience of walking in the procession (Figure 49 below).

Many people in the procession were waving fans in front of their faces, or holding them over their heads for shade—the day was very hot under a bright sun that was memorable to participants months later as part of the experience. NMAI Associate Director Jim Pepper Henry (Kaw/Muscogee) was in full regalia and leading the procession of tens of thousands of Native peoples from all over the world—North, Central and South America, as well as Hawaii and New Zealand. Native people in regalia were singing, drumming, and walking proud. There were young men in chest-baring regalia (un-tanned skin outlining absent t-shirts), others in every day clothes like I was wearing, some wearing hides, others with elaborately colored cloth dresses. Every kind of clothing you can imagine.



Figure 48: Native Nations Procession, September 21, 2004.



Figure 49: Kalinago co-curators Sylvanie, Gerard and Cozier in the procession.

Some marched with their nations (like the Kalinago co-curators and AIC co-curator Susan Power), others with the Native organizations (like the AIC co-curators) in the procession. There were many Native people that were also not in the procession, watching from the sideline to call out in solidarity with particular tribes or to recognize old friends. Many people recalled to me chance meetings and unexpectedly familiar faces in the crowd—some of whom they had not seen since the activism of the 1970s. When the procession ended, all of the Curatorial RAs and OL co-curators gathered to sit in folding chairs under a tree near the main stage to watch the opening ceremonies together.

At noon Rick West began the opening ceremonies and the first person to speak at length was Peru President and indigenous leader Alejandro Toledo (Quechua). Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell and Senator Daniel Inouye also spoke. Described by Campbell as the person most responsible for the creation of the museum, Senator Inouye called the museum a “monument to the first American.”¹³ Then Senator Inouye introduced Rick West, who, he said, “walks with mastery in both worlds”—the Native one and the world of law, politics, and museums. Everyone was clapping and standing when Rick took the podium. He said “history seems to stand still and silent in honor,” as noted above. The museum “uses the voice of Native people themselves to tell their stories,” and it is a “symbol for the hope that the hearts and minds of Americans will welcome Native American people in their history and their contemporary lives,” he continued. And of colonization, “we are not its victims...from a cultural standpoint... we have survived... triumphed.” It is a “true cultural reconciliation.” He concluded, “To all here, Welcome to Native America” (the crowd applause was deafening). He continued after a pause, “To all Native Americans, Welcome home!” And the crowd again went wild. West then spoke in

¹³ All the speakers used this phrase, which was new to me as a reference to the museum.

Cheyenne about the great mystery, and everyone was standing, then the drums began to play as he exited the stage. He and the speakers went to the mall museum for a more private ceremony inside.

With the end of the opening ceremonies, the First Americans Festival was officially underway; it would last until the closing ceremonies on September 26. That afternoon, an Andean pan flute band at the Potomac stage, while the National Congress of American Indians “social dance circle” hosted a Nakota young man who was an award winning hoop dancer while his father played a drum and sang. Later, a Tlingit story teller presented a commentary on Indians in the contemporary prison system through a story about how mosquitoes came to be. This diversity of performers and the variety of performances would only increase in the days to come, including “Scissor Dancers,” throat singers, and countless other celebrations of humor, tradition, art and athleticism. Rita Coolidge’s performance ended the day; her opening remarks were: “A dream should come true—and it did today!”

There were Native people, in plain clothes and dance clothes, everywhere you looked in the city—on the sidewalks, in the restaurants, and in the museum. It was a rare occasion that the balance of visitors in the museum were overwhelmingly Native American. At the RA’s Welcome Desk later that day, co-curators gave feedback to NMAI staff about the museum: “outstanding!” “You all did an outstanding job!” By the next day, most of the co-curators would return home.

That night I went to the hotel bar— it was a lively, late night center of activity and chatter for the co-curators and other community members to gather and commiserate at the end of each day. I sat with Igloodik co-curators Leah Otak and Arsene Ivalu. Leah, ever concerned and dedicated to Inuktitut language preservation and learning, was telling me about her upcoming visit to an Inuit immersion school in Greenland the following week. At one point during our conversation, a woman who

had clearly been celebrating and drinking came up to our table and asked if she could be in a picture with Leah. Leah looked at her somewhat uneasily. I asked, "Where are you from?" The woman replied, "Kansas." I said I was from Chicago; Leah said she was from Canada. The woman asked her friend take a picture of her with Leah and Arsene. The woman then explained, "I'm Dakota Sioux, and *you* were in the exhibit. That's why I want to take a picture of you." And then Leah said "Oh, ok." The woman continued, addressing Leah and announcing loudly to all who were sitting in the bar, "I'm *Dakota* Sioux. You did justice to your people; we're real proud of you, we have a lot of respect for you." Leah quietly said thank you. After the woman left I told Leah, "You're a celebrity now!" and we laughed.

The next day, September 24, was the last day of the "Open House" at the CRC and the final NMAI event of the opening week. The open house was an opportunity for the museum to show off its innovative collections space, as well as for visitors and Native peoples to visit with the objects. Big busses arrived each hour and Collections manager Pat Nietfeld would give them an introductory talk in the rotunda. She talked about the building and its connection to the outside with large windows in the collection space as being "different." "It's not a warehouse," she said, like the collection's previous home at the New York Research Branch in the Bronx. She introduced the various departments at the CRC and left people to explore on their own. They could go into the Conservation, Photo Services, or Collections departments.

Most people went into the Collections first. Pat told visitors that there are signs on the shelves in collections that say "don't touch the objects." She added, in typical CRC fashion, "that doesn't mean Native people can't touch their objects." Everyone working the CRC open house was waiting for noon when the open house would be over. When the whole week would be over. They all wanted to go home,

and *everyone* was talking about how they were looking forward to the weekend to finally get some sleep. It sounded like they hadn't slept for years.

Intervention

“Before” is an ubiquitous term in the Carib Territory, as in “before we used to work together, but now we are selfish.” Or, “before we used to eat healthy,” or wear a “waicou” (loin cloth), or walk days to get to market to sell our crafts. This vague reference, *before*, is never followed by a qualifier—not before Columbus, not before the road was built, not before the killing of 90% of our people, not before the British invaded. Just *before*. But it is clearly understood as the time when Kalinago cultural knowledge and practices were still “intact,” without the influence of “neg” culture (*neg* is patois for black man). Similarly, though the term is far less pervasive, one elder in Chicago also noted along similar lines as she critiqued contemporary powwow attire: “before, you could tell by the dress someone was wearing where they were from, but not anymore.” Now, everyone wants to wear jingle dresses, she added, because they like the way they look. But the Jingle Dress Dance is specifically associated with the Ojibwe tribe.¹⁴

Opening day of the museum was a first encounter, first contact, between the NMAI staff and a visitor public. It, too, signified a rupture between what the museum was “before”—a promise to an imagined public, a hope of paradigm change in the mind of its makers, and what it forever would be: a material reality traversed by, and responsible to, an outside public. Public culture was now in contact with the NMAI community—directly influential on its practices and defining it through discourse. While the audience had always, however defined, been present as an imaginative force

¹⁴ Conversation with Susan Power, at the Newberry Library, October 5, 2005. The Jingle Dress Dance is considered a gift from the Creator to the Ojibwe. The dress itself is slim fitting and covered in rows of metal cones that jingle as the woman dances.

influencing the work of the various cultures of expertise, it now inhabited its space. The comments of reviewers, and the responses on visitor surveys, would from now on impact the established philosophies and practices of the cultural producers in the museum. They would also show that, while the NMAI recognized and presented Native communities as experts of their experience, the public was not always convinced this was so.

During the exhibit making process and after its opening, from its anticipation to its reviews, the NMAI was an intervention on two levels: in discourses both public and private—in the national media and around the water cooler, in the Smithsonian Institution and in the social lives of its makers. In the full arch of the exhibit making from conception, production, exhibition, to reception, as I noted earlier, this chapter contributes a wider notion of “reception” than is generally put forward in media and museum studies. Instead of looking to visitor studies (though there is some mention of that), or printed reviews of the exhibition (again, they too are included), the main focus is on the impacts of the exhibition as intervention in the everyday lives of its participants. In other words, while the first part of the chapter considered how the exhibit makers as subjects and objects were received in and by the museum, this part of the chapter presents the reverse perspective: the ways in which the exhibits were received and evaluated by insiders and outsiders and how the exhibition process impacted those involved in its making after the museum opened.

Reception

The reception of the Native peoples in Washington, DC was overwhelmingly positive and encouraging—for procession participants and observers alike. However, the reception of the exhibitions was far more varied. Amidst all the transition that was occurring at the time of the opening—a shift in focus from the CRC to the Mall

Museum, the loss of CRC staff, the hiring of new staff at the Mall Museum, and a radical change from a private to a public existence—the long awaited reviews from critics, scholars, community members and visitors about the museum and its exhibitions began to enter into the discourse, emails, and talk around the office.

In considering audience and community (constituency) reception of the exhibits, I present ethnography as an alternative perspective on the process that cannot be gleaned from newspaper archives and academic journal articles.¹⁵ In other words, I do not intend here to provide a summary of visitor surveys or newspaper reviews. Instead, during and after the opening week, I paid attention to the kinds of details that could not be found in print: which reviews circulated and were talked about most among staff (and were later represented in their written work like Rick West's AAA 2005 speech in the interchapter), what the community curators said about the exhibitions after seeing them, and what impact working on the exhibits had on the three communities with whom I worked. I provide additional insight through internal NMAI documents that were not made available to the public.

During the opening week, specific press reviews had sparked a lot of discussion among the staff.¹⁶ The most common phrase I heard in response to these reviews the opening week and beyond was, like the visitor I first encountered opening day, "they just don't get it." This sentiment would be repeated again in more formal settings, including in a memo to staff, in a staff-wide meeting, and interviews I did

¹⁵ I do not intend to provide a general review of the print media responses to the exhibition. There are a number of journal articles that address them directly. See for example Akim D. Reinhardt, "Defining the Native: Local Print Media Coverage of the NMAI," *American Indian Quarterly* 29, no. 3&4 (2005), Ruth B. Phillips, "Disrupting Past Paradigms: The National Museum of the American Indian and the First Peoples Hall at the Canadian Museum of Civilization," *The Public Historian* 28, no. 2 (2006), Lonetree and Atalay, "Special Issue: Critical Engagements with the National Museum of the American Indian."

¹⁶ I missed the media coverage leading up to the opening and during it, due to my schedule during the week and being in Dominica previously. That is perhaps why my attention was first drawn to the reviews that staff talked about most. This was later facilitated by a folder on the CRC shared computer network drive in which some of the curators were compiling all of the reviews that they could find from newspapers and online media.

with people including *CRC* and *downtown* staff. The first formal acknowledgement to the museum as a whole of the negative press, and an attempt to put it in context, came one week after the NMAI's grand opening day.

Seven days after the opening, George Horse Capture (A'aninin [Gros Ventre]), Special Assistant for Cultural Resources and Senior Counselor to the Director, emailed a heartfelt memo to museum staff:

To: NMAI Administration and Staff
From: George P. Horse Capture

As we enjoy the long sought peaceful rest we can be proud and honored that we had the privilege to build the National Museum of the American Indian. Soon the elation and fatigue will give way to melancholy as this part of the circle closes and we see many of our friends, some of whom we worked with for years, begin to leave. The binding force that will keep memories alive over the years is that we shared an incredible historic experience together that will forever change, not only Indian country, but far beyond.

Some reviews have been critical of the exhibits, but that shouldn't dampen our joy, because we did something no one else has ever done and may never do again- build a national museum for the Indian people. Remember the tribes came from everywhere in unprecedented numbers to take part in the procession, their faces filled with great joy. I have never seen such a thing before and they made me feel proud to be an Indian. I had almost forgotten how pretty and proud we are. As we walked, I looked at the museum and felt the emotions of the Indian people around me and knew we had succeeded in our quest. Here are the people and there is their museum. Good and solid. Nothing can change that. Improvements are always made later, but now the buffalo has his nose firmly in the tipi- before we didn't even have a tipi. So those long hours, weekends and years of work was well worth it, you have helped to build a legacy. Celebrate in it, you all did a great job and now you have bragging rights.

Thanks, we all appreciate it.
George P. Horse Capture

George's memo was appreciated among staff. His recognition of staff exhaustion, the loss of staff, and the negative reviews were recurring themes as I spoke with staff in

my remaining few months in DC (before going to Dominica in January); they were also the main focus of the “All Hands” meeting the next day.

At 9:15am the following morning, people gathered in the Main Theater of the Mall Museum, where Jim Volkert convened the first general staff meeting after the opening. I noticed that none of the curators were present; the meeting was being broadcast to the CRC by “webcam.” Most of the *downtown* staff and more recent hires like the Cultural Interpreters were present. There was a lot of chatter and one administrative assistant was combing her hair. Then Jim walked across the stage to the podium and said, “Good morning.” People settled down as he welcomed everyone back after their first week working at a “truly world class museum.”

Jim first listed some statistics for the week:

Attendance: 112, 310 people came through the museum
161 memberships were made
The shops did \$970,400 in sales
8,640 rolls of toilet paper were used
3,000 buffalo burgers were sold
54,000 glasses of wine were consumed

It had been an “extraordinary week” and “we got wonderful press.”

Later, Elaine Gurian, who Doug Evelyn called “a guiding force in the background through the years,” came to the podium and gave an emotional pep talk of sorts. She was a consultant that had been hired on to help the museum get through to opening and as part of her work also contributed to the reorganization of the museum’s departmental structure (see Chapter 2). But there was an earlier role Elaine played at the NMAI that many staff did not realize:

For those of you who don’t know me, I had the privilege of being in the first staff here, the staff *before* Rick, the staff that was seccuded from other parts of the museum. And I left from here and went to the Holocaust Museum and then ten years ago I became a consultant who works with museums around the

world as they build and then open. You are probably somewhere in the neighborhood of my twenty-fifth museum.¹⁷

She compared the NMAI with her experience at the opening of the Holocaust Museum, describing the NMAI as a metaphor for “all the inspiration and hopes of the Native people of our land” and as a place that is “more than a museum.”¹⁸ She said the NMAI was “also a museum” and “a civic space that talks about the ways in which we need to treat each other and talk to each other.” She got choked up and said, “*You* did it” and praised the work of the staff.

During the meeting, Elaine also addressed the negative reviews, and framed them in a way that would later be reiterated by Rick West as well—she said that the exhibits are only part, 30% in fact, of the museum as a whole. She responded to the critics with the same phrase many staff did (“they didn’t get it”) and similarly dismissed these critics as being only a small part of the audience as a whole:

The critics of this museum judged it as a museum. And I would venture to say that they thought your exhibitions were the reason you were in business, and the Potomac was only a very large quite outsized entrance foyer. *But the reality is your exhibitions are 30% of your land mass,*¹⁹ and the Potomac is where the heartland is. So, they didn’t get it. But, they are a small percentage—do not get fussed about the critics who didn’t get it. Not that they were necessarily wrong, the exhibitions are not perfect. That’s ok. The exhibitions were a direct conversation between the people who lived some place who wanted to talk to others. And they do exactly what they’re supposed to do.

I go into detail of these twin responses: “they didn’t get it,” and “30%,” in further detail below. It is important to note here that the first phrase traveled among all groups in and outside the museum; the latter, however, mainly associated with Elaine,

¹⁷ This is from a recording I made of Elaine’s speech, which I transcribed and then made available to the NMAI staff by email at staff request and with Elaine’s permission.

¹⁸ Elaine and Rick were close and clearly had high respect for each other and talked to each other about the NMAI. I am sure this speech influenced his later penning of the AAA keynote speech of 2005, as did a letter she wrote to him which I detail later in the chapter.

¹⁹ Each time I heard Rick or Elaine say something like this, the tone was as if they had said “*only* 30%,” seeming to intimate that one should not judge the whole museum by something that *minor*.

Rick and Jim, was sometimes shocking, at other times disappointing or depressing, among NMAI staff.

Later that evening, I dropped into Cynthia's office to say hi. She brought up the "New York Times September 21" article²⁰—she said it was one of the few she had seen that was critical; she wished there were more that provided such feedback. She also mentioned with annoyance how there were all those fancy dinners for people happening at the museum and that there was never anything like that planned for the co-curators during the opening. By this time this was a common complaint among researchers and Curatorial staff (as noted above). Perhaps their omission from being acknowledged in any formal or informal talks by senior management during and since the opening—including the All Hands meeting—was a reason it surfaced again on this particular day. She then showed me photos of her and her family in the procession and talked about what a wonderful experience it was.

"They Just Don't Get It"

I want to backtrack here a bit and consider the two propositions that Elaine mentioned and Rick echoed again later in his 2005 AAA speech: that critics "just don't get it"²¹ and that the exhibitions are only "30% of the land mass." The former statement was ubiquitous, circulating since the press opening on September 18; the latter, as I mentioned, was a disheartening and troublesome response to those people who had worked earnestly on the exhibits.²²

²⁰ Rothstein, "Museum Review: Museum with an American Indian Voice."

²¹ For a similar development in Dornfeld's work in which producers of the television series responded to critics by saying, "our audience wasn't ready for us," see Dornfeld, *Producing Public Television, Producing Public Culture*, 170.

²² Again, I found that when people were talking or writing about the museum as a whole, or the exhibitions, they were often referring for the most part to the *Our Peoples* gallery. A controversial exhibition in its making and content both within the museum as well as without, it was the focus of most reviewers as well as critique from within the museum.

The *Washington Post* did a host of articles on its front pages and in its Style and Metro sections prior to and during the week of the NMAI opening; the articles covered everything from the architecture and landscaping, to the event dates and times for the procession and festival, to reviews of the exhibits, cafeteria and gift shops. Some of the articles were celebratory, others more critical. For example, in one article published before the opening and titled “In Tonto, the Museum Comes Face to Face with its Biggest Faux,” Hank Stuever contends that the museum “doesn’t unpack” stereotypes but rather “serves...an altogether new flavor of tourist Kool-Aid, redefined concepts of history, cosmology, spirituality, and diversity.”²³ Although a number of critical articles were written like this one, two in particular—often referred to as “the Washington Post” and the “the New York Times” articles—were most often mentioned in staff discussions of reactions to the new museum. It is these two articles that I address in detail below.²⁴

“A studious avoidance of scholarship”

To provide some background, the phrase that staff often referred to as a criticism about a “lack of scholarship” was from a *New York Times* article where Edward Rothstein wrote the phrase that would travel like wildfire among staff. In the midst of his negative critique, he wrote:

the *studious avoidance of scholarship* makes one wish that the National Museum of Natural History's American Indian Program, with its scholarly staff (directed by an anthropologist, JoAllyn Archambault, herself a Standing Rock

²³ Hank Stuever, "In Tonto, the Museum Comes Face to Face with Its Biggest Faux," *Washington Post*, September 18 2004, C2.

²⁴ I also want to note that these articles impacted reviews in other media markets. For example, a *Chicago Tribune* article juxtaposes how Indians appreciated the museum, but art critics from the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* “have faulted it for a lack of focus and for not showing enough artifacts.” It details that the museum had on display 8,000 of 800,000 pieces in the collection and cost \$219 million, including educational programs (half of that was from 277,000 donors, \$30 million from tribes). From Michael Kilian, "Many-Hued Tribal Pride on Display," *Chicago Tribune*, September 22 2004, 8.

Sioux), could have proceeded with its once-planned revision of its aging exhibits instead of having to close them down, scuttle hopes of renewal and slink into insignificance in response to its new competition.²⁵

Not only did this critic insinuate there was no scholarship or “scholarly staff” at the NMAI, it praised the NMNH in comparison. No doubt this played into existing internal SI politics in which, I was told by an NMAI curator, NMAI curators were looked down upon by other SI curators (NMAI curators were not, for the most part, PhDs in anthropology except for Ann and Bruce, and were therefore treated as lower status within the SI community).

Furthermore, Rothstein concludes his essay writing,

The museum... seems satisfied with serving a sociological function for Indians of the Americas. It may indeed succeed, because it has packaged a self-celebratory romance. Understanding though, requires something more. It is not a matter of whose voice is heard. It is a matter of detail, qualification, nuance and context. It is a matter of scholarship.²⁶

Three months later in an article that praises the work of the Chicago Field Museum in comparison to the NMAI, Rothstein again touches upon the issue of scholarship at the NMAI: “Since almost no tribes had a written culture and oral traditions were disrupted by disease, massacre, government policy and assimilation, the tribal curators often seem to know less about their history than do scholars. Yet scholars’ assessments are ignored in favor of self-promotional platitudes.”²⁷

Staff response was often incredulous. For example, in response to the reviews, Gabi Tayac (Piscataway), a sociologist and curator who worked on the NMAI-curated section of *Our Lives*, said “the level of checking was extremely high.” She simply said in exasperated disbelief, “Not scholarly?”²⁸ This charge of a lack of scholarship seemed tragic when viewed by those who espoused the collaborative ethic and the

²⁵ Rothstein, "Museum Review: Museum with an American Indian Voice."

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Conversation with Gabi Tayac, in her office at the CRC, October 6, 2004.

ethos of advocacy, whose acute knowledge and attention to scholarship (and history) informed and prompted their commitment to Native voice— its authority and its expression, unqualified by outsiders, in the museum. Another Curatorial staff member said, “You know, all the criticisms—I’ve seen the paper talking about our lack of scholarship and stuff. And I think what a bunch of hooey.” He insisted that NMAI staff “know exactly what it means to achieve a high standard of scholarship and research.” He saw the NMAI’s work as “push[ing] the envelope; we wanted to have these people from these communities tell their story. Why is that somehow less academically stringent? It blows my mind.”

He dismissed the review as either “an old fashion way of looking at the world,” a “case of sour grapes in some other institution,” or a result of talking “about philosophy,” for example in the case of *Our Universes*, “to a people who don’t have a philosophy” (meaning the reviewers). “Have we fallen down?” he asked, and continued, “yeah, most certainly. But there’s a lot to be learned from *that* [bangs the desk with hand] aspect as much it is from the things that we felt like we succeeded, too... we’ve never made any bones about what we were doing, and we went out and did it, and kept going forward, you know? Pretty fantastic.”²⁹

Anthropologists Ann and Bruce responded to “a lack of scholarship” directly in a document they wrote for the Research Committee of the Board of Trustees. It was an attempt to contextualize the unexpectedly critical response to the exhibitions and foster discussion among board members at their upcoming meetings. Their interpretation of this critique was that the exhibit philosophy, as it was carried out in display, was not persuasive in establishing Native voice as authoritative voice:

What is clear from the reviews is that NMAI’s dependence on Native voices—
—without “conceptual rigor” and without integration with other sources,
versions, or voices—makes the exhibits and their content distinctly

²⁹ Interview with OU RA Casey MacPherson, in the CRC library, October 12, 2004.

unpersuasive. The direct question posed is “Why should visitors believe what the museum says, including what Native people say?” This suggests that NMAI has failed to make a case for Native voice as an authentic source by not providing visitors a foundation in the essential subjectivity of all sources—— Native or non-Native——and failed to explain its own epistemology in bringing forward Native voices and depending on them for the authority of the exhibits.³⁰

Essentially, Ann and Bruce felt there needed to be more contextual information about the methods and process and underlying theory of why the exhibits were created the way they were. But Rick West, Ann told me, did not let the board talk openly about the critiques. Curators Paul Chaat Smith and Cynthia Chavez also had been present at the Board of Trustees Research Committee meeting, and provided me with some details about the discussion. Rick, “in top form” as Paul recounted, steered the discussion by saying the exhibits reflected the next phase in museology, intimating that the reviewers were unprepared for what they saw. Rick also told the board not to judge the museum on its exhibitions alone, that it is just *one* thing they do. In his recalling of this scene Paul added, “But museums *are* judged by their exhibits.” One of the more poignant comments by a board member at the meeting, according to the curators was: now that the museum is open and “We are still here” has been established, what message does the museum want to convey next?³¹

“Skin deep”

The second most common critique that circulated among staff was represented in an article by Marc Fisher that came out the day of the opening, titled “Indian Museum’s Appeal, Sadly, Only Skin-Deep.” His article contends that the museum’s form (its outside) was beautiful, but its content (what was inside) was disappointing.

³⁰ Ann McMullen and Bruce Bernstein, “Mall Museum Reviews: An Overview and Analysis (Unpublished Internal NMAI Document Created for the Board of Trustees),” in *Permission by authors* (2004).

³¹ Conversation with Paul Chaat Smith, in his office at the CRC, October 28, 2004. I also learned about the BOT meeting from Cynthia, who reread and shared her notes from the meeting with me.

It is this criticism that I link with senior managers and consultants emphasizing that the exhibitions are only a small portion of the overall institution.

Fisher touches on both “the lack of scholarship” (as not being given the tools to “judge” Native stories as accurate) and the “30%” (a beautiful building with disappointing exhibitions) critiques,³² but Paul Richard was the more infamous *Washington Post* critic among NMAI staff. Richard had a more positive review of the *Our Lives* exhibit than Fisher (“The ‘Our Lives’ exhibit, in which various tribes suggest the various ways they live, is more coherent, and more poignant”) embedded in a similar review of the museum as “skin deep”: “the new museum that opens to the public today is better from the outside than it is from the in.” Like Rick West, Richard contends that “what’s best about the building is that it isn’t just a museum. It’s a reparation, and a reconciliation.” But, at the same time, he also raises the specter of a lack of scholarship: “one of the museum’s problems is the extent to which it *does not discriminate*. Are ancient painted bowls made before the white man came and those thrown for the gift shop equally authentic?” He recognizes and affirms that Indians have survived and their stories deserve to be presented, but he contends that this was not done “with enough precision and discrimination so that they are believed.”³³

I sat down with Rick West in November of 2004 to ask for his reflections on the opening of the museum in his office, which was a bright and sparse space with floor-to-ceiling windows along one wall that lead to a balcony.³⁴ The office was tucked away in corner off of a curving corridor on the fifth floor of the Mall Museum. It was quiet and peaceful in comparison with the sea of cubicles and desks and chatter on the other side of the floor. He first commented on what George and others had

³² Marc Fisher, "Indian Museum's Appeal, Sadly, Only Skin-Deep," *Washington Post*, September 21 2004.

³³ Paul Richard, "Shards of Many Untold Stories: In Place of Unity, a Melange of Unconnected Objects," *Washington Post*, September 21 2004. Emphasis added.

³⁴ Interview with Rick West, in his office on the Fifth Floor of the Mall Museum, November 18, 2004.

noticed: the museum “became a kind of symbol.” Rick felt it indicated “a *shift* in the cultural consciousness, I think, in this hemisphere, about the *place* of Native peoples in the history of the hemisphere, [and] their role right now.”

When I asked him specifically about his personal response to the exhibitions, he responded with the “30%” line of reasoning before he brought up the reviews that staff had been talking about. He noted the almost “*obsessed* quality on the part of people who look at museums and talk about what they do” in how they *only* look at the exhibitions. He called the museum a “cultural center” and emphatically insisted that the museum “is *not* just the objects but it’s about the people who made the objects... I want people to understand that in terms of how I would fundamentally *define* this place... I *don’t* look just at exhibitions.”

Then he went on to talk about the reviews, separating what he considered to be “the intellectual wheat—from the chatty chaff.”³⁵ His comments reiterated what he had said in board and staff meetings and in his conference papers. He also mentioned the notorious articles: “the New York Times review, the Post review, and then derivatively the thing that showed up on the electronic magazine or whatever it was, *Slate*—which really kind of came from both of those.”

The *Slate* article, “The National Museum of Ben Nighthorse Campbell: the Smithsonian’s new travesty,” was less mentioned by staff by name, but Timothy Noah’s point did become a topic of discussion (and some staff agreed with his assessment): that Ben Nighthorse Campbell was a congress member who helped implement the museum, and having a temporary exhibit about his jewelry crafting in the museum at its opening was a conflict of interest. But Noah was also critical about the “museum’s botched debut” and was critical of West, a former lawyer, who was not an “experienced museum director.” He suggested that an experienced director would

³⁵ Interview with Rick West, in his office on the Fifth Floor of the Mall Museum, November 18, 2004.

“seek legitimacy among scholars, and we can probably expect quiet changes in that direction over the next few years.” Noah also predicted that “Native Americans, too, will likely chafe over the museum's amateurishness—if not now, then after the achievement of getting it built fades into memory. But why should we have to wait? The Smithsonian should have gotten it right the first time.”³⁶

Rick appreciated some of the criticism critics provided, but dismissed others as individuals not understanding “what they were bumping up against,” which was “the following: *this* institution, in a very very fundamental way, has turned the museological paradigm...*on its head*.” Before, “the *influence*, the *expertise*, the exposition all sat *inside* the institution.” Now it rests in the communities. Then he went on to cite Claire Smith once again whose review inspired his “2005 major speech topic,”³⁷ noting that while he can talk about theory, how they “spin it” on the actual exhibit floor is more challenging. He hoped that it would not “involve a departure in principle from letting these voices *speak* in as unfiltered³⁸ a way as is possible.”

As we walked out the door, Rick noted that, when Native people come to the museum, they “get it”—they understand it is a place for Native communities. He asked, “Do you think Paul Richard would understand that? No way.” Non-Natives, if you pull someone off the street—“they get it, too.” He surmised that for non-Natives, they “get it inversely proportionate to their expertise.” He said that for others, they have “just enough museological expertise to be dangerous,” each approaching the museum with a particular set of expectations.

It is clear that Rick felt that Claire Smith was on the right track, that she “got it.” Kyle MacMillan’s “D.C. Indian Museum Keeps Dialogue Alive” was another

³⁶ Timothy Noah, “The National Museum of Ben Nighthorse Campbell: The Smithsonian’s New Travesty,” (Slate, 2004).

³⁷ This became “Journeys in a Post-Colonial World” (see AAA 2005 interchapter).

³⁸ “Unfiltered” was a common term for West, though it seemed Curatorial recognized it was impossible not to be somewhat filtered and Exhibits felt it was their job to filter (see Chapter 3).

article I had heard Rick appreciated, and shows again how the notorious reviews circulated not only among NMAI staff but among critics as well, prompting rebuttals like Smith's.³⁹ MacMillan writes that "notions among critics, curators and members of the public about what museums are and should be remain very much in flux. This became clear during recent heated disagreements over the new National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC;" he specifically refers to Noah's *Slate* piece and Rothstein's *New York Times* article. He then goes on to quote Nancy Blomberg, curator of native arts at the Denver Art Museum, who emphasizes that the NMAI's "stated mission is to give voice to native communities in their museum," and that it has accomplished this. She says, "For centuries, there has been enormous mistrust between museums and Indian Country, '...' And they have worked very hard to overcome that mistrust and to make Indian people ... feel a sense of ownership and pride in this museum. That's no small accomplishment." MacMillan concludes, "Who's right in this debate? Who's to say?"⁴⁰

For Native and non-Native scholars who weighed in on this debate, while the emphasis on Native voice and the community curating process was generally commended, the content of the exhibits left many dissatisfied. Scholars also circulated, and often took issue with, these notorious reviews in their work.⁴¹ Scholars in museum anthropology specifically praised the process and intention of the NMAI to "disrupt past paradigms," as Ruth Phillips puts it.⁴² However, as Amy Lonetree's

³⁹ Ruth Phillips, in an article comparing the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the NMAI, referenced the *Times* and *Post* articles and commented, "the reviewers missed the point" in Phillips, "Disrupting Past Paradigms: The National Museum of the American Indian and the First Peoples Hall at the Canadian Museum of Civilization," 79.

⁴⁰ Kyle MacMillan, "D.C. Indian Museum Keeps Dialogue Alive," *Denver Post*, November 14 2004.

⁴¹ See for example Berlo and Jonaitis, "'Indian Country' on Washington's Mall—the National Museum of the American Indian: A Review Essay.", Reinhardt, "Defining the Native: Local Print Media Coverage of the NMAI."

⁴² Phillips, "Disrupting Past Paradigms: The National Museum of the American Indian and the First Peoples Hall at the Canadian Museum of Civilization."

(Ho-Chunk) work suggests, some Native scholars felt that the museum “missed an opportunity” to highlight the colonial encounter and genocide of the Americas.⁴³

Visitor responses were also mixed, as a 2005 NMAI visitor survey concluded:

Though it was not what they expected, most people enjoyed the Our Lives exhibit. They liked the personal accounts and media usage; they liked seeing things they knew and learning new things. They understood the central themes of the exhibit: identity, survivance, community, and modernity. The complaints include way-finding within the exhibit..., being overwhelmed, not finding specific tribes/communities, and a lack of history.⁴⁴

According to Carolyn Rapkievian, most visitors were disappointed because they “want a history lesson,” something that is “chronological” (as opposed to cyclical or thematic). She said the visitors did get the message that Native people are here today, and that they are diverse—“we are getting that across.” They also “get” that the “museum is from the Native perspective;” those are the three things “that visitors are getting.” But, she added, “beyond that,” they are not getting “some of the deeper messages.”⁴⁵

Impact of Exhibit(-making) in Communities

In contrast to the negative press reviews,⁴⁶ positive reviews traveled among staff as well from the Native communities. The general vibe in Indian country was a positive one, and that is in part related to the notion that the museum exists at all. But here I want to focus more on the Native community members who had participated in

⁴³ Amy Lonetree, "Missed Opportunities: Reflections on the NMAI," *American Indian Quarterly* 30, no. 3 & 4 (2006).

⁴⁴ From June 2005 NMAI internal survey of *Our Lives* exhibit titled, “Our Lives: Evaluation of Community Curated Sections.” Provided by Carolyn Rapkievian on May 3, 2006. Purpose of the “interviews and observations” was to “see which community curated exhibit [visitors] enjoyed most.” “Survivance” is a term coined by Native scholar Gerald Vizner.

⁴⁵ Conversation with Carolyn Rapkievian, in her office, May 3, 2006.

⁴⁶ There were a host of positive ones about the procession and its historic and celebratory nature, but again, they did not travel in the same way among NMAI staff.

making the exhibits and who, as a whole, liked the exhibits and felt their work and voices were accurately represented by the museum.

The impact that participating in exhibit making has on collaborators within their own communities—during and after the exhibition has been completed—is often a particular kind of reception that gets overlooked in projects with source communities like the *Our Lives* exhibition. In this section, I focus comparatively on the impact of the intervention of the NMAI in these communities both in and at a distance from Washington.⁴⁷

Considering repercussion for Native communities as a whole, in places that are more remote and not in the U.S., like Igloodik in the Arctic and the Carib Territory in the Caribbean, there was very little community-wide impact for having been a part of this exhibition. For Igloodik, they had worked with museums before and were frankly quite blasé about it (until they saw the final product, and were beaming at seeing family members and friends in the videos on display). On the other hand, for the St. Laurent Métis of Manitoba, it sparked a cultural center project, as they had won awards for their exhibit and were recognized in Canada for their contributions to the NMAI. For the museum professional community—the Curatorial staff—working on the exhibitions created antagonisms with their colleagues and further destabilized their role in the museum and exhibit making process.

Curatorial: Increasing Uncertainty

Over the course of the development of the inaugural exhibitions, participating in community curating had profound effects on Curatorial who gained trust in Native

⁴⁷ As Craig Howe notes, inter tribal dynamics can be set into play when participating with a museum, but also collective knowledge of the community is acknowledged and affirmed. In addition, communities want copies of information developed for exhibition Howe, "Exhibiting Indians: Communities, Collaboration and Control," 32,33..

communities but reputations for being “obstructionist” within the museum. The dual impact of the “lack of scholarship” and “30%” statements were particularly difficult blows to Curatorial who had not only dedicated a great amount of scholarly attention to their work, but also dedicated years of their lives and in part staked their professional identities on the exhibits.⁴⁸ They felt under-appreciated, and that other departments did not really understand what they had done, or how they had achieved these exhibits and why. One researcher told me, “I don’t think [Mall Museum staff] have the *feeling* that we’ve all put into it. I think that’s the hardest thing to get over.”⁴⁹ But, Cynthia had told me the day of the All Hands meeting, you don’t do it because it’s a job. You do it because you believe in something.⁵⁰ Cynthia craved constructive, critical feedback from the co-curators themselves. Accordingly, she had invited four community co-curators—Marylin Malatare (Yakama), Dave Spencer (Chicago), Kanatakta (Kahnawake), and Louise Manney (St.-Laurent)—to be part of a panel discussion with her at a conference in Kansas (like the AAM 2005 interchapter).

To highlight one of the speech networks that included Exhibits, consultants and the director, I discovered during my fieldwork that behind Rick’s comments, reiterated to staff and in conferences and personal interviews, about the exhibits being 30% of the museum real estate was another, less publicized but nonetheless acted upon conclusion. In a conversation with Elaine Gurian, she told me she had written a letter to Rick which made two points after the opening: exhibits are not all the

⁴⁸ For example, one curator commented on Rick’s statement: “I always wanted to feel like NMAI wasn’t just a museum. And to me, a museum is just exhibitions, primarily. So you know, I don’t really find that problematic. But I guess I find it problematic—or not find it problematic, but it leaves me wondering—especially since we spent so many years and time working with twenty-four Native communities that... sort of everything was leading up to the opening of this museum and these new exhibits... Then just to say well, well they’re just 30%-- well then what’s the other 70%, that’s what I want to know [laughs]. So I guess that’s the only thing that would kind of bother me a little bit is that part. Because I think it was some important work that we did, and that we’re never ever going to do again. So, you know, we shouldn’t just toss it aside so easily” (November 24, 2004).

⁴⁹ Interview with Teresa Tate, in the CRC library, October 15, 2004.

⁵⁰ See Chapter 3 for the Curatorial ethos of advocacy, and the dissertation conclusion for a related discussion about doing things “the right way.”

museum does (Rick had clearly taken up this point), and that the NMAI had to “break hold of curators as translators,” to knock out the “arrogant curators” and the PhDs from the process. She said the curators just would not “give content over,” which was a problem.⁵¹ She added that part of the “worldview” of Indians is that they “don’t trust PhDs.”⁵² She suggested that Native artists, naming examples such as Truman Lowe, Gerald McMaster and Rena Swentzel, would make better “guides” or “translators” for exhibits than curators.

The poor reviews—or at least, the impression that they were overwhelmingly poor, which came with a focus on art critics rather than Natives and academics—provided some after-the-fact justification for a further weakening of Curatorial’s role in the museum. As I described in Chapter 2, the department was basically gutted: researchers were gone and the curators were reassigned to other departments. The reorganization was not a result of the reviews, but rather a long time coming as a result of consultants (see Chapter 3), a shift in museum practice (to an exhibit developer model), and a stated desire to make the bureaucracy more efficient and businesslike (again, see Chapter 2 about the “flattening” of the organization). The lack of appreciation for the curator and co-curators, along with the widely discussed poor reviews, seemed to cause curators to further retreat into their own projects after the opening.

⁵¹ Conversation with Elaine Gurian, in her home in Arlington, VA, November 17, 2004.

⁵² However, Cynthia had a PhD and was well received by communities. Everyone, curators included, recognized Elaine’s intelligence and insight to museum practice. In this case, one curator said that she was still under assumptions she had taken on during the early 1990s consultations (in which these were indeed the sentiment of advisees), but that she had not updated her notions according to the actual practice of curators at the NMAI since. Many felt that this very influential consultant greatly misunderstood the *NMAI* curatorial prerogative (see conclusion).

Chicago: Making the Most of National Exposure

Joe Podlasek told me that about 10% of the American Indian Center community had visited the NMAI. As an urban community that is part of the United States, the exposure in the museum was experienced through recognition on a personal scale (at powwows, meeting other Native individuals, Chicago co-curators would be greeted with “I saw you in the exhibit!”). But it also afforded the Chicago community a more public recognition as a *Native community*: community members mentioned their participation in the *Our Lives* exhibition in everything from grant applications to public gatherings. And, not only did they record their experience attending the opening in a video entitled, “From Wilson Ave to Washington, DC,” but the video won an award; it was later sold in the AIC gift shop and in the NMAI.

The community was also made more visible regionally, where, for example, one *Chicago Tribune* reporter used the occasion of the NMAI opening to recount the sketchy history of scientific racism in the Smithsonian, to highlight the Chicago exhibit, and to notify the readership that there are more than 30,000 Indians in the Chicago area. The article even quotes Ed Two Rivers from a text panel in the Chicago exhibit (see Figure 22 in Chapter 4).⁵³

There was a sense of revitalized energy in the Chicago community as a result of participating in the *Our Lives* exhibit, as well. Eli Suzukovich (Serbian/Cree) was working at NAES College as an archivist in the early days of the exhibit making process, and he was present at the first meetings between the NMAI and Chicago community members before he went to Montana to pursue an advanced degree in Anthropology. He spoke with me one day January 2005, not too long after the opening of the museum: “Had the Smithsonian exhibit not come about,” he said, the community would not have realized how “unique” it was—“Because a lot of people

⁵³ Michael Kilian, “D.C. Museum Honors Indian Spirit, Identity,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 16 2004.

were really shocked that Indians from across the United States picked *Chicago*... It brought back some pride” and helped his own goals of promoting community history and reflecting on its impact on “modern attitudes.”⁵⁴ Co-curator Cyndee corroborated Eli’s observation: she told me in an interview “I think I value things a lot more than I did before,” adding she had not realized that a lot of the everyday things she did were valuable and she gained a better appreciation for it (like her beadwork).⁵⁵

Participating in the exhibition lit a “fire under their asses,” one community member said with humor about the community. It also empowered them to expect more reciprocity, in some cases, from the institutions with which they worked. One co-curator told me that she had been invited to sit on a committee as a consultant for the Field Museum of Chicago that was working on a new exhibition of Native North Americans. When the museum refused to consider a relationship like community curating with its Native consultants, she chose not to participate.

Kalinago: Struggling to Share their Experience

For the Kalinago in the Carib Territory, there was a sense of pride in being selected, but it was only realized in the few people who participated directly in the exhibit and traveled to DC for the opening. There was little acknowledgment or knowledge about the opening of the NMAI or the Kalinago exhibit in Dominica, though Sylvanie said when she returned to the Carib Territory that people did say they were looking for the co-curators amidst television coverage of the Native Nations procession.

The co-curators desperately wanted to share their experience—not just to show the community what they accomplished, but also to allay particular suspicions and to

⁵⁴ Interview with Eli Suzukovich III, at my home in Chicago, IL, January 8, 2005.

⁵⁵ Interview with Cyndee Fox Star, at the AIC, January 16, 2005.

demonstrate what kind of an opportunity the community had in participating in the museum. In all the community meetings, co-curator meetings, even individual interviews, community members wanted to know what they would get back from the museum. The Kalinago co-curators had requested of the museum (and through me, as well) a video of the museum and their exhibit in order to show their community what they had done in DC, and how their community was portrayed in a major international museum.

The museum never provided the video, so instead I prepared a slide presentation of photographs of the NMAI that the co-curators presented in each hamlet of the Carib Territory. At the slide presentation on the evening of June 6, 2005 at the Sineku preschool, Cozier was the presenter. At the end of the meeting, a well-recognized “resource person” from the hamlet thanked us and asked what the community gets back from this experience. Cozier mentioned the possibility of Kalinago crafts being sold in the museum and that a tour company from Canada had expressed interest in the Carib Territory (by way of St. Laurent Métis co-curator Jacinte) as possible benefits. Neither of these possibilities came to pass.

A week later Sylvanie gave a presentation in the Carib Council house. As I was taping printed out copies of text from the exhibit to the walls (they featured many familiar names to gathered community members), Sylvanie said “you know, Jen, we get so many people coming to the Carib Territory who take information and we never see them again. I never expected this would happen, but the NMAI kept coming back.” She said it was a real surprise. Sylvanie introduced her presentation by sharing this same sentiment with the audience—that here in the Carib Territory, it’s frustrating the way things end up not happening. That they didn’t know if it was really going to work out, and they were spending all their time at these meetings. But the NMAI kept coming back. She said they “collected exhibits” (artifacts), but there was quite a bit

that was not used because there was little space in the museum. They sent a boat, but you do not see it in the exhibit. And then she proceeded to show them images of the Kalinago exhibit. Like Cozier, Sylvanie anticipated the community's primary concern: "you might ask about the benefits," she said. She too mentioned possible craft sales,⁵⁶ but she also added that "we are seeing some benefits already." She then recounted the story about the Pamunkey woman who came to visit the Carib Territory. So, she concluded, the other benefit is that people will see the exhibit and come to the Carib Territory. And, at the least, they will "know we are not extinct." That is a benefit, she said. In the five years the exhibit will be up, at 4 million a year, that will be 20 million people learning about us, she added.

The importance of disclosing their work with the NMAI was also due to the fair amount of suspicion from community members and from the more recently elected chief about their involvement in making the *Our Lives* exhibition—not so much for being selected among others to co-curate it, but rather because they traveled to Washington, DC.⁵⁷ It was important to the co-curators to validate that their travels were legitimate, that they earned it, and that it was not a mishandling of funds or for personal gains.

⁵⁶ Although Marian, Prosper's wife, and I spent two weeks creating a "Craft Catalogue" of crafts, their sizes and prices, and photos of each craft maker from all of the hamlets, at the time we were in contact with the Smithsonian Business Ventures experienced downsizing and our main contact left the organization. More recently, the SBV has expressed interest in a new book that has a number of articles in it by Kalinago co-curators, published by the Cultural Division of the Dominica government: Ministry of Community Development Cultural Division, Gender Affairs & Information, Commonwealth of Dominica [Cultural Division], ed., *Heritage of the Kalinago People* (Lethbridge, AB: Paramount Printers, Ltd., 2007).

⁵⁷ Chief Charles Williams had written a letter to the NMAI demanding an explanation for why a former chief (and co-curator Garnette Joseph) and other individuals, rather than the current chief, were invited and paid to go to the museum opening. This played into existing tensions between the current and former chiefs. Williams' email was passed along from department to department until it finally reached Curatorial just prior to my preliminary visit to Dominica in September of 2004. The museum never responded in writing, and so it was left to me to explain in a one-on-one meeting with Chief Williams that the museum's arrangement was to provide funds for community curators and not heads of state.

Furthermore, because of the tight budget provided to the Curatorial department for co-curator travel, only six of the eight co-curators were provided travel funds. The co-curators selected the six who attended the most meetings, and so Alexis Valmond and Irvince Auguiste were left behind. Being left behind for such a momentous occasion clearly fostered resentful feelings, as was later demonstrated to me when reviewing the process of the exhibits with co-curators. Unlike Chicago, where individuals paid their own way in some cases to attend, and many other community members traveled by plane or bus to see the work of the co-curators and participate in the procession or would see it later at NMAI powwows, the Kalinagos had neither the means to visit the museum nor did they have access to the same amount of media coverage with which to feel connected to the event or exhibition during or after it the opening over.

Conclusion

Many NMAI staff felt “brain dead” after the opening.⁵⁸ The immense pressure to complete their work in time, and the overwhelming response from Indian country was a heady and exhausting experience. Many commented they felt they were witnessing “history in the making.” The spectacle of the procession was unprecedented, and its purpose a simple one: to celebrate the lives of Native peoples and to make visible their continuing presence in this hemisphere. The diversity of identities and their symbolic expression through song and dance, clothes and language, was everywhere on display in the capitol that week.

What I have attempted to show from these observations of the opening week—what staff and co-curators did (“Exhibition”) and what they talked about (“Reception”)—is that, in true symmetric form and through the framework of

⁵⁸ Conversation with Gabi Tayac, in her office at the CRC, October 6, 2004.

“performance,” performance is not just for Indians, and expertise is not just for professionals. These observations also revealed how co-curator identities in symbolic (Indians in the procession) and expert (exhibit co-curators) forms were received differently by the museum and the public. In the procession, the public was quite comfortable with Indians as (recognizable) signs of themselves, as representations of song, dance, regalia, and difference. In fact, this more general form was the only specific recognition the wider museum formally arranged for them. As co-curators, they were praised in museum rhetoric in general as symbols, as “Native voice.” However, the exhibitions failed to persuade many reviewers that Native voice was legitimate expert knowledge *for a museum*. Contrary to the perspective of curators and co-curators, although most visitors and reviewers considered community curation and the exhibitions as authentic representations of Native peoples, they did not necessarily think it good museum practice.

In other words, although the co-curators were essential to producing the symbols and content that was Native voice and Native identities in the museum, when the community curators arrived at the institution in person, they were not honored or recognized in a way that was expected by some NMAI staff.⁵⁹ For all of the prominence the co-curators maintained as symbols and objects on the walls of the museum, as experts or creative subjects they were little acknowledged outside the confines of the gallery. They were visible as symbols, but not formally recognized as creative agents by the museum when they arrived in person (not through events, speeches, or interaction from upper level staff). Native voice was publicly praised in concept, but those who provided its substance were not celebrated by name.

⁵⁹ This oversight was corrected by the time *Listening to Our Ancestors* was created; having a separate community event from the opening of an exhibition in which the co-curators are honored was suggested in post-mortem documents as essential to the process.

The juxtaposition of the “tribal donor’s brunch” that Cynthia attended, and the dinner “reception” for the co-curators, was a stark contrast that led some CRC staff to comment bitinglly that the museum cared more about money than the communities. Cynthia’s response to the experience reflected what a number of Curatorial staff had told me: “the co-curators weren’t really recognized or really identified for their contributions to the exhibits.”⁶⁰ In other words, the museum lavishly feted and honored donors of material capitol, but not donors of symbolic capital. One CRC staff member noted this was the NMAI’s M.O.: “use and lose.” The second portion of this chapter, titled “Reception,” demonstrated that once the inaugural projects were completed, and despite intentions to the contrary, there was very little follow up or contact on behalf of the museum with the co-curator communities beyond individual efforts (like Cynthia inviting them to speak with her at academic conferences).

According to NMAI intern Meg Birney’s visitor research (see Appendix G), “The two most memorable things in at NMAI are the building, and the Lelawi Theater.” Not the exhibitions. The exhibitions only made a brief intervention in DC, U.S., and international media and political discourses. It was less of an intervention than staff and American Indians had hoped for in elevating Native lives to the national and political scene. However, the media coverage that did occur brought to the fore a fundamental debate about scholarship—including who defines it and what constitutes it—in public and academic discourse. This debate over the legitimacy, content, and review of collaborative exhibitions is also about the status of Native voice as expert knowledge.

⁶⁰ Cynthia added that her response to what she felt was an oversight was that she wanted their perspectives to be heard, so she continued to keep them involved by inviting them to speak at conferences with her. On this note, Cynthia and I focused on a similar goal but in different ways. Interview with Cynthia Chavez, in her office at the CRC, November 24, 2004.

As the NMNH scholar noted at the AAA 2005 meetings (see interchapter), a reviewer's article was seen as "a political statement." By forefronting the politics of expertise, here we see that writing reviews are *also* performance, as much as walking in the procession or crafting an exhibition are. They are all forms of performing expertise. In the juxtaposition of exhibition and reception, performance is rendered two fold: on the national mall and in public discourse.

Museum professionals who work with Native peoples appreciated the NMAI as a feat, a model for contemporary practice, and a necessary methodology for Native American-museum relations. They celebrated the presentation of Native voice, which likely aiding in their building trust relations with other Native communities. But art critics and press reviews clearly wanted to see "fact checking" by "PhDs" and scholars up on the walls as well. They wanted more direction in judging what objects, and what community self-representations, were more and less authentic or accurate. These varying responses can be characterized, again, in polarizing terms: it is either a lack of scholarship in which Native voice required a particular kind of "expert" validation or interpretation, or a long awaited and ethical commitment to self-representation and the validation of Native voice as expert knowledge. Each performed a kind of politics in their own fields of expertise—whether it was to be professionally ethical or professionally critical—in a way that signalled taking risk and being theoretically informed.

Similarly, the main NMAI responses to the negative reviews can also be viewed through the lenses of the departmental ethos and also illustrate staff performing their expertise: for those who espoused an ideology of advocacy, they said "they just don't get it." For those who espoused the ideology of translation, they said the exhibits are only "30% of our real estate." To put it bluntly, and in my own terms: the former asserted there is a change in paradigm and wanted to maintain the integrity

and value of the community-created content (consequently responding through greater contextualization and transparency about the *process*); the latter contended this is what happens when you rely on amateurs, and wanted to rewrite or reframe the content (consequently contextualizing the *product*).

In *Being Ourselves for You*, Stanley notes the “stubborn resistance of an audience to revise its stereotype” of indigenous peoples.⁶¹ Meeting some of the goals of the NMAI and the co-curators relied on invoking a particular kind of reception by the audience and critics alike. While the museum endeavored to present Native co-curators as experts, the audience did not always respond favorably to this refiguring of the object (the American Indian) as speaking subject (expert knowledge producer). Stanley provides a provocative question regarding the reception of the NMAI, its exhibitions, and its practices: “Is it going to be judged in terms of performance or representation?”⁶² It was, in fact, judged as both. If I may interpret the term performance according to what I have laid out here, I suggest this is in part why the reviews were so disparate; it is also at the heart of the dichotomy between process and product, and again advocacy and translation. To put it succinctly, when the NMAI was judged as a performance—a process—of equating Native voice to other experts in museological discourse, it was praised; when it was judged as a representation—the product of this process—about Native peoples, it was not.

It seems, then, that while collaboration is considered ethical practice in the museum and appreciated and celebrated as such, its product has yet to be widely accepted as authoritative. The most prominent critique was that there was a “lack of scholarship” in the exhibitions. This could be due to two factors: the organization and content of the exhibitions, and the knowledge form in which this was communicated.

⁶¹ Nick Stanley, *Being Ourselves for You : The Global Display of Cultures* (London: Middlesex University Press, 1998), 63.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 168.

Collaborative knowledge production, particularly in community curating, engendered certain constraints on the curators in that they did not direct the content of the exhibits; even if they had particular ideas they wanted to convey in the exhibition they did not do so through the community curated exhibits—except perhaps at the widest level of gallery thematic orientation and organization. More accustomed to museum exhibition and critique, it is true that perhaps the NMAI curators could have created a different kind of exhibit crafted to avoid particular kinds of critiques. Instead, they shared authority and considered the infusion of different perspectives from community curators into exhibit making as instructive and valuable in their work.

Patricia Erikson discusses this tension between what she calls “academic freedom” and scholarship in collaborative ethnography and auto-ethnography.⁶³ Academic freedom is not compromised, she insists, but rather accounts are made more accurate and new forms of theory and insight are produced through this collaborative work. Similarly, Ruth Phillips asserts that “what collaborative exhibits seek, in contrast to those they replace, are more accurate translations.”⁶⁴ But it seems that when these “more accurate translations” are created they sometimes fail to persuade non-Natives that Native expertise and authority are equal, or at least equally valuable, to other knowledge forms.

Community curating, as a form of collaborative knowledge production that incorporates very different cultures of expertise in its authorial practice, challenges conventional notions of scholarship. Its product, “Native voice,” was at the heart of the museum’s ethics, regardless of where one sat in the organization. Native voice is a form of knowledge that is presented as first person, plural (we), possessive (our),

⁶³ Patricia Pierce Erikson, ““Defining Ourselves through Baskets”: Museum Autoethnography and the Makah Cultural and Research Center,” in *Coming to Shore : Northwest Coast Ethnology, Traditions, and Visions*, ed. Marie Mauzé, Michael Eugene Harkin, and Sergei Kan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

⁶⁴ Phillips, “Community Collaboration in Exhibitions: Introduction,” 166.

authoritative, narrative and descriptive. It speaks directly to the visitor in a conversational tone. The goal of the paradigm change NMAI staff desired requires recognizing this form as expert knowledge, as more or at least equally legitimate and informative to the literature of credentialed scholars who have studied Native communities. The resistance may in part be due to the fact that “voice” itself is usually associated with activism, protest, and performance, rather than scholarship. It is associated with oral history and perspective, rather than written history and fact. In other words, “Native voice” may be a publicly recognizable genre, but it is not recognizable as an expert one.

Therefore, the paradigm shift must include not just a recognition of Native knowledge as expert knowledge, but also a recognition of the value and legitimacy of the various forms in which this knowledge is conveyed. In other words, rather than describe this form of knowledge production as collaboration with underrepresented peoples, perhaps it is more accurate to say it is a form of knowledge produced through collaboration with people who are *over*represented—by other people, scholars, institutions—to the point where expectations disrupt the reception of their voices as legitimate if they do not reinforce those expectations.

The hope among staff and co-curators was that the “changing presentation” of Native Americans would replace the stereotypes and assumptions about them in the popular imagination with “more accurate representations.” The preliminary reception of the museum in the public sphere suggests that while museum professionals were willing to recognize Native peoples as experts, this conceptualization butted up against the popular conceptions and attitudes that showed some people (one education staff member said about half of the visitors) were less willing to accept them as an authoritative voice in the museum. Perhaps as the museum ages, and through the

personal experiences of its visitors (millions each year), there will be some cumulative impact that cannot yet be gauged, if ever.

CONCLUSION

REFLECTION

The Honor Wall, Gift of Reconciliation: Help us keep our promise to Native peoples by inscribing for posterity on our Honor Wall. When the museum opens, it will signify more than a commitment kept by the Smithsonian. It will be a historic act of reconciliation and cultural justice, an act to which you can add your name... As millions of visitors to the Museum walk along the balconies overlooking the central public welcoming space called the Potomac, they will see your name and thousands of others who have helped us keep our promise.¹

—NMAI appeal for donations

I said to my husband: this is the best thing I've ever done. It's the best thing I've ever done with my life.²

—Downtown staff member

For as much drama as there was, it's very successful.³

—CRC staff member

Introduction

In America, Native Americans are largely invisible in public and political spheres, except for those communities who are situated nearby reservations. And even then, what is visible can be hateful, like the road signs I see along highway 81 posted by angry locals in upstate New York near the Onondaga Nation. Many pass these vitriolic signs near Syracuse with little understanding of what they mean or what the conflict is about.⁴ Nowadays, many people think about casinos when they think about Indians; and (even) then, they are somehow not considered “real Indians.” The age-

¹ From a wall panel at the NMAI “Welcome Center,” a trailer at the site of the museum as it was under construction. The Honor Wall includes names of people who donated money to the museum National Museum of the American Indian [NMAI], “Welcome Center on the National Mall: Information Panels,” <http://www.nmai.si.edu/subpage.cfm?subpage=visitor&second=dc&third=welcome>.

² Interview with Kathy Suter, in her office on the Fifth Floor of the Mall Museum, October 14, 2004.

³ Interview with Collections staff member, April 6, 2006.

⁴ A sign says, “ONONDAGA NATION WHERE TRADTORS [sic], RAPISTS AND MURDER'S RULE...” For more information, see Michelle Breidenbach and Mike McAndrew, “Sign on Indian Land Now Targets Spitzer: I-81 Billboard Repainted to Criticize the Attorney General Rather Than Gov. Pataki,” *Syracuse Post-Standard*, no. June 22, 2008 (2006), http://www.onondaganation.org/news/2006/2006_0603.html.

old stereotypical images still persist in popular culture of the Plains Indian figure in feather headdress and living in a tepee, or the new age image of an environmental steward or shaman; beyond these popular fantasies, the contemporary lives of Native peoples are relatively unknown to the point where some non-Natives think they no longer exist.⁵ On September 21, if only for a brief moment in time, that changed with the widespread publicity and thousands of Native people attending the opening of the National Museum of the American Indian.

Many people, like myself, have perhaps entered a museum and reviewed its exhibits assuming that the display is as it was always meant to be. But over the course of my fieldwork, it became clear that each exhibition, through its multiple authors and multiple specialists, and through its architectural, budget and design requirements, represented instead a compromise of competing commitments, interests, and visions. As a museum staff member in 1999, I had anticipated a uniquely successful intersection of postmodern engagement and authoritative representation in the museum; however, I found in the course of my fieldwork that the authority of the Native communities in these collaborative exhibits, while not contested, did not satisfy many reviewers both within and outside of the museum. The museum did, however, create ethical relationships with *Our Lives* contributors and accurate representations according to those who were closely partnered in the co-curator committee meetings.

Before the NMAI opened, when it was being planned and imagined by its makers, it embodied hope for its constituency and the promise of authenticity to its

⁵ This invisibility, I believe, is one of the reasons that framing the museum as “reconciliation” did not resonate in America as well as it did in Australia. Rick West sought guidance from museums in Australia and New Zealand (in particular Te Papa), where Elaine Gurian and Ken Gorbey had experience consulting. Reconciliation is not as recognizable a term in the U.S. when compared to Australia because there is no general or institutionalized recognition of the genocide against Native peoples in the founding of the country, nor are American Indians as visible in American life. Later, Rick and the consultants would frame the museum as a “civic space” instead, indicating more conversation and learning was needed with and about Native peoples in the U.S.

audience. It celebrated a commitment to collaboration with Native peoples to tell their stories as well as to privilege their voices in the telling. The NMAI, its staff and supporters—in academic conferences and publicity and literature—insisted that its work and presentation embodied “a paradigm shift” in the representation of Native peoples and their relationships with museums.⁶ The work of the museum to urge this shift into action was part of what motivated staff to participate in conferences and to work long and hard at their jobs, sometimes in the face of adversity.⁷

Many NMAI staff and community curators felt that the long journey to open the museum was difficult for very different reasons, but it was rewarding nonetheless. As the second statement above shows, for many staff members they felt this was, up to this point, a major highlight if not the pinnacle of their careers. From “drama” was forged a dramatic display of the diversity and vitality of Native peoples in the political and power center of the United States. This journey was guided by a mission that insisted on collaboration. Although the museum’s mission was interpreted differently over time, by 2000 the “instituted methodology” to fulfill this commitment to work with Native peoples was community curating.

Collaboration and the Curatorial Prerogative

I began with the framing of this account as an ethnography of collaboration in the form of community curating, seeking not just to document the history of an

⁶ See Kuhn for an example of a recipe for a paradigm shift: Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Latour’s work is also another model for understanding how resources are mobilized, and entextualized, to make something seem natural and matter of fact: Bruno Latour, “Drawing Things Together,” in *Representation in Scientific Practice*, ed. M. Lynch and S. Woolgar (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1990).. For similar processes as specifically relating to bureaucratic practice, see Latour, *Laboratory Life*.

⁷ One of the challenges for the *Our Lives* gallery was to complete this exhibition with one third the time and one third the money compared to the other exhibitions. Many believed the gallery would become a “Day 2” project; its completion for the opening was considered a triumph of will and hard work and overtime. Conversation with Ann McMullen, July 8, 2004.

exhibition but also to understand how collaborative knowledge production impacted the form and process of its making. I sought to capture the emerging exhibition as the materialization of imagined forms as well as the result of complex social relations among the many cultures of expertise working towards its completion.

Each “culture of expertise”—Curatorial, Exhibits, Kalinago co-curators, Chicago co-curators—had their own shared language (a recognizable shared ideology through speech networks and common conceptions of their identities), recognized specialists for the tasks at hand, imagined audience they were speaking to, varied motivations for participating in exhibition development, and ethos or ideology for how best to represent Native peoples in the museum. All of these “cultures” interacted with or through the bureaucratic structure of the museum, which made sincere attempts to accommodate its constituency. However, notions for how best to make these accommodations were varied according to where a person sat in the organizational structure and physical location of the bureaucracy.

Virtually every staff member commented on the epic “battle” between two major cultures of expertise in the museum: Exhibits and Curatorial. At the heart of their conflict were two opposed ethics, forms of agency, and notions of best practice. Curatorial staff stood in a unique mediating role: they worked on behalf of the museum in the Native communities, and they worked on behalf of the Native communities within the museum bureaucracy, often in what was perceived as an antagonizing relation with other departments. Exhibits, on the other hand, insisted translation was necessary—believing it was their responsibility to make better exhibits by mediating between the communities and the imagined visitors.

If we look to the division of expert labor represented by these cultures of expertise within the institution, we see a set of dichotomies that adhere in the museum structure and practice: process versus product, form versus content, and textual versus

visual. These dichotomies do not hold, as this account has illustrated: content is constrained and enabled through the movement from two dimensions to three, the transformation from ideas to documents to fabrication, the winnowing and reduction of collected conversations and objects, and the juxtaposition of objects and text and audiovisual media. All of these factors and more impacted both process *and* product.

Perhaps the epic “battle” within the institution between the Exhibits and Curatorial departments was in part due to the outsourcing of their most central and traditional roles in exhibition making: the development of gallery visual and structural form was contracted out to design firms; the development of gallery text and content was largely the responsibility of co-curators and later script editors (the former was intended, the latter considered an usurpation). Each department struggled to reassert their jurisdictional boundaries and control the quality of the work, essentially becoming information and people managers in the process: Curatorial staff as “facilitators” of content produced by groups outside the institution, and Exhibits staff as project managers within the institution.

These developments within the museum were due in part to the new “paradigm” the NMAI espoused, but also they were due to circumstances in the wider field of museum practice. These tensions reflected a growing development in museums more generally in which control over exhibitions has shifted away from curators and towards “exhibit developers.” For example, John Terrell wrote a biting commentary in 1991 of his experience transitioning to the “team approach” at the Field Museum of Chicago.⁸ Terrell claimed that the “era of the curator-driven exhibition is dead. From this day forth, we will give our ‘museum visitors’ what they

⁸ This form of museum exhibition practice is considered to have originated with the work of Michael Spock. Bruce Bernstein wondered aloud to me during one meeting whether Spock had intended or would be dismayed that his efforts could be seen as leading to what happened to the content and curators at the NMAI.

want, when they want it, and how they want it... from now on, museum educators are to be...the lucky ones to decide what visitors may and may not see in museums.”⁹ He talks of the Field Museum’s “reorganization” to increase “efficiency” and the existence of “two cultures” at the museum: the curators versus everyone else.¹⁰ In a sarcastic tone mimicking common critiques of curators, he says they don’t care about museum visitors and that’s why they are being “driven back into their ivory towers.”¹¹

I now return to Michael Ames’ question in *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian*, which I mentioned in the first interchapter: “Are changing representations of First Peoples in Canadian museums and galleries challenging the curatorial prerogative?” Traditionally, as Ames explains, this team’s authority is imbued to the curator as “content specialist or knowledge expert.”¹² In other words, content knowledge trumps all other forms of expertise, and is the locus for final decision making. Taking up Ames’ question in the American context, instead of only considering the impact of shared authority with Native communities on the curatorial prerogative, I also looked to challenges to this prerogative, and curatorial status, *within* the museum. This dual focus revealed that the curatorial prerogative was challenged from within the museum at the same time that it was invigorated through work with Native partners on the outside. Terrell’s commentary shows that the curatorial prerogative had already been challenged for quite some time from within the museum. In this case, this displacement was complicated, even facilitated, by curators’ willingness to relinquish content authority to Native peoples. In doing so, it allowed

⁹ J. Terrell, "Disneyland and the Future of Museum Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 93, no. 1 (1991): 149.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*: 150.

¹¹ *Ibid.*: 152.

¹² Ames, "How to Decorate a House: The Re-Negotiation of Cultural Representations at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology," 42.

other cultures of expertise within the museum to diminish the jurisdictional boundaries of the curatorial profession and push them to the periphery.

When working with source communities, I would argue that the substance of the curatorial prerogative has changed over time, from a specialization in, or responsibility for, *content* to *methodology*. And, although they were no longer responsible due to their area or subject specialty, perhaps the methods and training they underwent to achieve that specialty is what was most important to collaborative exhibit making. As curatorial practice moves out of the institution and into communities, in an age when they often read and heed the critiques of Vine Deloria and Michael Ames among others, I hope—and provide this ethnography as evidence—that the antiquated stereotypes of curators and anthropologists are being reconsidered. But, as I discuss below, these stereotypes persist despite the role of anthropology—its theory and critique—in the crafting of the community-centered and collaborative methods of museum curation.

Native Voice as Expert Knowledge

By focusing on the collaborative process of exhibition development, we can see how a “thing” like an exhibit acquired its “thingness,” how text and imagery became Native voice, and whether these constructions satisfied the promises of authenticity and authority made by the museum. We can see how the discourses, practices, and ethics of advocacy and translation entailed different ways of knowing and different relations with the reflexive subjects of the museum’s exhibitions. This form of inquiry leads us to better understand the role of the curators and their commitment to communities in this collaborative process. We see that Native voice is constructed not only through material representations but also through the social relations of its producers, including the “source communities” and museum staff.

Native voice is not just the authored text in the exhibit, it is also the anxiety and commitment and advocacy that NMAI staff *and* Native co-curators bring to the process—each interacting with one another and being responsible for each other within their own communities.¹³

Collaborative knowledge production employed to create the *Our Lives* exhibits did not just invoke particular forms of agency in the bureaucratic structure of the museum but it also relied on the committee as a particular form of social relations. The committee engendered a particular form of knowledge production that relied on thematic content development through consensus. This form produced exhibits that were bounded (community-centered) but not static, with the “community” as author, creating a single authoritative voice in each exhibit. Other factors like technology, hierarchy, budget and time also effected the content on display. In other words, the collaborative form of exhibit-making put on display particular forms of bureaucratic sociality—committee, compromise, consensus, division of expert labor, and expertise.

Through these knowledge forms and practices, “identity” began as a neutral category that was filled in through the contributions of co-curators and the (para-) ethnographic work by NMAI curators. Like Riles’ account of “gender” between brackets in a UN document, “identity” was a debated term that on the exhibit floor seemed always already settled.¹⁴ In the history of ideas that was the *Our Lives* gallery and through the process of community curating, it was an empty term filled through the ethnographic work and reflexive conversations of Curatorial staff and co-curator committees. The production of identity for display, therefore, was a social, material

¹³ Some of these paragraphs appear in Shannon, "The Construction of Native Voice at the National Museum of the American Indian."

¹⁴ In the final version of the document, the removal of the brackets obviates days of contentious discussions over the meaning of “gender,” allowing the text to flow seamlessly and seemingly uncontested. See Annelise Riles, "Deadlines," in *Documents : Artifacts of Modern Knowledge*, ed. Annelise Riles (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

and self-conscious process crafted for a particular audience—a quite literal form of the “presentation of self in everyday life.”¹⁵ These exhibits of Native life held the promise and ideals of authenticity and a more inclusive conceptualization of expertise, authority and authorship; they embodied the hope for a new way of doing things. In practice, the ideal concepts were subverted at times by entrenched institutional practices, hierarchies and established ways of thinking about and responding to Native identities and museum displays.

I have argued that extending the category of “expert” or “expertise” to Native community curators was an attempt to subvert entrenched conceptions of Native peoples and their knowledges—that it was an ethical act intended to both recognize and correct the inherent and historical imbalance of power and authority between museums and Native peoples. Therefore, ethnography of collaboration is also a form of “embedding ethics.”¹⁶ Lynn Meskell and Peter Pels explain that “rethinking ethics implies rethinking expertise, and that implies rethinking modernity as well: as something that emanates not from ‘us’ but from interaction.”¹⁷ The individual community curators with whom I spoke felt empowered by the interactions involved in the collaborative process and appreciated the work of the NMAI curators and researchers to elicit and organize their discussions and respect their wishes in the course of exhibit development. In this respect, the museum was successful in building trust relations with these communities.

¹⁵ Cf. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959).

¹⁶ Lynn Meskell and Peter Pels, "Introduction: Embedding Ethics," in *Embedding Ethics*, ed. Lynn Meskell and Peter Pels (Oxford, UK ; New York: Berg, 2005).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8. My account has been narrowly focused on the *Our Lives* gallery. Craig Howe provides his perspective from working on the *Our Peoples* gallery in which he explores “the problem of collaboration across divergent interests and antagonistic regimes of value” and concludes with the failure of this methodology in the development of this gallery that resulted in a moral and ethical breach: Craig Howe, "The Morality of Exhibiting Indians," in *Embedding Ethics*, ed. Lynn Meskell and Peter Pels (Oxford, UK ; New York: Berg, 2005).

The museum itself, then, was a site of embedded ethics. Collaboration was a set of practices characterized as the “right way” to work with Native peoples and source communities. In the course of this ethnography, it became clear that while the process was praised (specifically for its ethics and intentions), the product was often highly criticized. This may or may not be due to the fact that collaboration, in the form of community curating as it was practiced in the *Our Lives* exhibition, produced exhibits as an emergent and unpredictable product.

Although the goal was to exhibit Native identity through the medium of Native voice, neither the content nor form of either was predetermined or agreed upon within the institution. As a result, I believe the two main departments were at an impasse over what counts as Native voice and how to represent it to the audiences they each imagined. The two forms of agency they espoused acted upon expert Native knowledge in very different ways: one sought to legitimate it *as* expert knowledge (Curatorial advocacy), while the other wanted to transform it for the audience into more recognizable or palatable knowledge forms (Exhibits’ translation).

To return to Sally Price’s *Paris Primitive* that I referenced in the Preface, there is a particular parallel in our accounts in which both museums sought through their particular forms of ethics to elevate “the Native” in a particular way. Whereas the Musée du quai Branly intended to elevate Native “objects” to the status of art through its methods of dramatic, sparse display and lack of contextual labeling, the NMAI sought to elevate Native “subjects” by providing them control over the contextualization of their objects. In other words, the Musée du quai Branly sought to increase and recognize the value of Native objects as art, and the NMAI sought to increase and recognize the value of Native subjects as experts.¹⁸ The former was

¹⁸ In *Paris Primitive*, Price (2007: 173), Price cites a letter to the editor in the October 12, 2006 *Le Nouvel Observateur* in which an Inuit person shows frustration with the lack of information about the objects on display: “I am Inuit... At the Musée du Quai Branly, I looked for my people. I saw so many

criticized by Native people and praised by art critics, the latter quite the opposite. This seems to get at the crux of collaboration as ethical practice: even though its process may be considered ethical and consequently praised, its product—shorthanded as Native voice—is not necessarily equally appreciated beyond those who were involved.

Timothy Mitchell's *Rule of Experts*¹⁹ is instructive in considering the work of the museum to create "Native voice." In Foucaultian fashion, Mitchell describes the birth of a "new object"—the economy, which he places somewhere between the 1930s and 1950s. The concept is neither purely social construction nor simply a better name for something that already existed. Instead, he locates its birth in the work of a new field of macroeconomics, historical developments in finance during and after World War II, the management of technology, and the collapse of international affairs at this time. He views the economy as a set of practices "for organizing what appears as the separation of the real world from its representations, of things from their values, of actions from intentions, of an object world from the realm of ideas."²⁰ He suggests we take these false distinctions for granted. He reveals the various actors, politics of expertise, projects and agencies that transformed "economy" into "a global form of knowledge."²¹

Mitchell's work led me to consider, along with Anna Tsing's labeling of "indigenous voice" as a publicly recognizable genre,²² whether Native voice had indeed become a global form of knowledge—even if only in a "thin" network of human rights organizations and museum presentations, and how the work of experts

beautiful objects in the beautiful dark cases... Next to our objects there were several lines with brief description... I came away with the feeling of having been parked in a big reservation for savages without culture who can't be mixed in with the great civilizations of the world that are presented in other museums. – Jo"

¹⁹ Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

²¹ Here, "global" indicates a "widespread but very thin network of ties and exchanges" (Mitchell 2002: 7).

²² Tsing, "Indigenous Voice," 39.

(anthropological, museological, cultural) had contributed to its recognizable form. Mitchell focuses on process to undermine the seeming naturalness of the binarism between reality and representation, human and non-human, objects and ideas.²³ I have attempted most directly do something similar in Chapter 4 (“Authorship”) by detailing the labors and experts involved in transforming conversations among Native individuals into the symbols and genre of Native voice. Mitchell focuses on “what strategies, structures, and silences transform the expert into a spokesperson for what appear as the forces of development, the rules of law, the progress of modernity, or the rationality of capitalism”²⁴—or, in this case, Native voice. What I sought to provide, like Mitchell, was a vision of the movement between the communities and the institution, “the field and the survey office,” as a “chain of social practices” rather than simply “the distance between reality and its representation, between the material and the abstract, between the real world and the map.”²⁵

Mitchell’s account of the “invention of the peasant” is instructive in terms of how this category of human being became an area of expertise, rendered through the genre of “descriptive realism”²⁶ whose subjectivity is represented by “peasant voice.” But, Mitchell contends, “The voice is presented not as the product of an American writer, or even of the peasant encounter with the writer or with other local forms of Western hegemony, but as the speaking of the autonomous subject.”²⁷ If we had simply critiqued the exhibition as a finished product, Native voice, and the individuals listed on the OL text panels, would indeed have appeared as autonomous authors. But

²³ Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*, 11.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 123. Mitchell also asks what are the politics of “producing and reproducing all this realism?” (124). If we ask this same question of the NMAI and specifically the Our Lives gallery with its recreated environmental vistas, life size images of community members, and videos of talking subjects, perhaps this genre of realism is how the museum communicates the notion of authenticity beyond the authored text panels.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 144.

in the course of processual analysis and attention to bureaucratic practice, we can see that Native voice was a product of collaboration, created through the work of many cultures of expertise. It is in this manner that “the peasant subject [or Native subject] is produced for non-peasant [or non-Native] consumption”²⁸ (produced by the university press for Mitchell and by the museum in this case).

One of the major debates that continues to surround exhibitions that privilege Native voice is over scholarship. In many ways, the “paradigm shift” that the museum sought was to redefine what scholarship is or can include. This battle continues to be fought, but it has not been won. It hinges on whether audiences can see Native peoples as both objects of museum display as well as (and at the same time as they are) speaking subjects and experts about what is on display.

When reviewed as representations, Native peoples’ identities are often either analyzed as self-evident, natural (and without reflection) or simply a form of interested political maneuvering. However, like “the economy,” Native voice becomes a taken for granted, seemingly natural “thing” rather than a constructed representation. This is in part why an ethnographic investigation of collaboration as ethical practice is so important: although it produces “voice” in the form of a recognizable genre, part of the purchase of this genre is that it presents Native identity as authentic lived experience. Consequently, it was perhaps hard for museum reviewers to critique “voice” because it appeared as experience, rather than performance; perhaps this is why they could not find “scholarship” (or professionally crafted representations) at the NMAI—all they could respond to was the lives of Native peoples (rather than their representations). The audience, in other words, was encouraged to see the community curated exhibits as Native *voice*, rather than as representations of Native peoples. Native voice was produced through collaborative effort with museum staff in such a way that

²⁸ Ibid.

community curators felt comfortable claiming the representation as their own voice. Through ethnography, I showed how Native voice was crafted through collaborative knowledge production, as well as the reflexivity of the culture producers in the museum and in the communities that was part of this process.

Mediating Identities

If Native voice is recognized as a medium for authentic self-expression, mediating authenticity, then, is at once the purpose and the conundrum of community curating. There were many structural positions and acts of mediation in the community curating process that provided an intricate web or chain of representational practices as the exhibit content moved from the community to the museum, from oral history to written documents, from conversation to exhibit.²⁹ Although Rick West considered Native voice to be an “unfiltered” representation, everyone from the communities to museum staff recognized that it was “filtered” through many people and technologies and material transformations (one curator said that Native voice was “massaged” in the course of exhibit development). The desire to “be there,” to experience the “real thing” is represented in the aesthetic of realism in the OL gallery. In contrast to object-centered exhibitions of the past, in the NMAI, the authenticity of the representation is staked in the identity of the knowledge producers, rather than in the history or form or use of the objects on display (including knowledge as object).

Postmodern critique has influenced a shift from authority residing in the third person/object(ive) to first person/subject(ive), which mirrors the shift from objects to people, from culture to identity in ethnographic museum displays. There has been in

²⁹ This ethnography had its own set of dichotomies to mediate: between here and there (“Our Lives”), center and periphery (“Bureaucracy”), advocacy and translation (“Expertise”), self and other (“Authorship”), intent and outcome (“Installation”), subject and object (“Performance”), and most broadly, process and product.

general in museum exhibitions with source communities a shift in emphasis from authentic *things* to authentic *testimony* (or what I have referred to as “ethnographic evidence” elsewhere; in museum literature, some would call it authentic “experience”³⁰). For example, it did not matter that the seal skin pants in the Igloodik exhibit were created specifically for the exhibit and never intended to be worn, or that the American Indian Center’s beaded crown was a replica recreated specifically for display: the objects were made authentic by their authors, by the authority of the subjects, by the “Nativity” of the persons who created them.³¹ It is the authenticity of subject rather than the object that was prioritized and presented in *Our Lives*. The community curated exhibits were designed to capture this sense of authenticity that director Rick West promised time and again through the display of peoples and their interpretation provided by the voices of the people themselves, produced through collaborative authorship and called “Native voice.”

The commitment to collaboration and Native voice provided the opportunity for communities to engage in what Ginsburg calls “mediating identities,” or the various ways that Aboriginal people attempt to “gain visibility and cultural control over their own images.”³² I would argue that the NMAI in this sense co-produced Native voice, rather than participated in the problematic practice of “giving voice.”³³

³⁰ Shannon, “The Construction of Native Voice at the National Museum of the American Indian.” See also Lorraine Daston, “Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe,” in *Questions of Evidence : Proof, Practice, and Persuasion across the Disciplines*, ed. James K. Chandler, Arnold Ira Davidson, and Harry D. Harootunian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

³¹ In his discussion of the valuation and authenticity of Native art, Ames asks what makes a work indigenous, its aesthetics or “is being Native enough, sharing in the indigenous experience?” in Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums*, 82-83.

³² Faye Ginsburg, “Mediating Culture: Indigenous Media, Ethnographic Film, and the Production of Identity,” in *The Anthropology of Media: A Reader*, ed. Kelly Askew and Richard E. Wilk (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 228.

³³ In reference to human rights practice, Jean-Klein and Riles explain that “giving voice” became a “kind of postmodern solution to the critiques of positivism on the one hand, and to the vilification of theory on the other.” They describe the work of Human Rights NGOs as collecting narratives as a form of “relief” and activism that engages ethnographic practice in a routinized and predictable way (gathering abuse narratives, for example). See Jean-Klein and Riles, “Introducing Discipline: Anthropology and Human Rights Administrations.” As the “Authorship” chapter showed, the

This form of knowledge making, that mediates both authenticity and identities, can be seen as characteristic of, and in resistance to, the ideals and critiques of postmodernism. It can be argued that under the rubric of postmodern critique, subject position is now the seat of authority and authenticity. At this juncture, collaboration seems to be posited as what comes after postmodernism (see the NAASA 2003 interchapter), or somehow an antidote to its insistence that there is no objective reality, that instead all observations are perspectival and subjective, and that no one can authoritatively speak on behalf of another person. This is all part of what urges the display of, and what locates authenticity in, the authoritative *speaking* subject—a “first person” perspective. In addition, this display of authenticity also reflects the search for the authentic that is often connected to a disillusionment with modernity.

Kahn suggests that while collaboration establishes productive and ongoing relationships with Native communities, it does not correct past problems of representation: “although the recent changes are a step in the right direction, museums cannot simply add multiple voices, itself a response to an academic—and, specifically, postmodern—critique.”³⁴ The main issue in presenting Native identities to the public, then, is not really about creating better representation, she explains. It is about who has authority and control over representations to create more equal relations between communities and the museum.³⁵ This was precisely Curatorial’s goal and Exhibit’s criticism of the exhibit making process for the inaugural exhibitions.

What was essential to this mediation of authenticity was the practice and discourse of a deferred agency (to communities) by museum professionals. The ethical implication of this deferral is that professionals engaged with Native peoples as

production of Native voice was beyond mere collecting of narratives and instead was a self-conscious production by collaborators who incorporated an imagined audience and sought to correct existing stereotypes.

³⁴ Kahn, “Not Really Pacific Voices: Politics of Representation in Collaborative Museum Exhibits,” 71.

³⁵ *Ibid.*: 72.

subjects (creative agents, co-curators) rather than objects (of their expert knowledge). Although this recognition of co-curators as creative agents was sustained in the work of community curating, it was not recognized in the celebrations of its product at the opening of the museum. The opening of the museum was also a moment in which both Native and non-Native peoples were waiting to see if each had “kept its promise” to the other through the vehicle this museum. NMAI staff hoped it would generate and reinforce a paradigm shift, that it would radically alter how people viewed Native Americans—their identities, histories, and worldviews. An unpredictable product of ethical injunctions, the museum was indeed an experiment and a risk. Some found it lacking, only partially living up to its promise. Others, like George Horse Capture, felt the opening and reception by Native peoples indicated a process that had “come full circle.”

Representational Expertise

Ultimately, I realized in the course of my fieldwork that by focusing on the politics and practices of experts involved in mediating Native identities, I was able to see a wider trend in action. There were two kinds of expert agency at play: translation and advocacy. While Exhibits embodied the former and Curatorial the latter, the community co-curators were both translators (to the Curators) and advocates (within their community). All of these forms of agency can be characterized as “representational expertise,” whether in terms of *re*-presenting or acting on behalf of.³⁶

³⁶ I in part credit this insight, and consider it akin, to Annelise Riles’ (2000) discovery in *Network Inside Out* that, among Fijian activists, “networking” was their purpose and expertise in practice; in my fieldwork, it was “representation.” The form of representational expertise I am talking about here includes skills at self-objectification as discussed in the work of Terry Turner and Faye Ginsburg; in conversation with Kalinago Garnette Joseph said my notion of “professionalization of indigeneity” “sounds right.” For additional treatments of similar processes, see Mazzarella’s discussion of “auto-orientalism” in his ethnography of advertising. See William Mazzarella, *Shoveling Smoke : Advertising and Globalization in Contemporary India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 138. In his study of advertising in India, Mazzarella defines “auto-orientalism,” as the “use of globally recognized signifiers of Indian ‘tradition’ to facilitate the aspirational consumption, by Indians, of a culturally marked self”

Museum professionals are well recognized and practiced at the complexities and forms of representation they practice on behalf of others. So too have indigenous peoples become accustomed to this form of agency as well—through indigenous organizations and conferences at national and international levels and their participation in museum work and NGOs and rights movements. I see these developments as contributing to “the professionalization of indigeneity,” or how some Native people are experts at representation itself—on behalf of their communities and in the production of representations about their communities for the public. These individuals contribute to and practice a common discourse, circulate in familiar networks (both national and international), and conceptualize cultural and political activism in similar terms.³⁷

Indigenous people are increasingly becoming involved in the indigenous associations, conferences, and meetings abroad and in representing their communities for wider publics (like at the NMAI). These events are often aimed at networking or training for Native peoples. For example, among the co-curators alone: Garnette has been to DC several times for Organization of American States meetings, Prosper went to New York to give a speech at the United Nations World Forum of Indigenous Peoples, Sylvanie went to Canada to work with the indigenous peoples subgroup of the World Summit of Information Systems, and Joe Podlasek has worked with a nation-wide coalition for Native families. Indeed, the main reason the Kalinago chief Charles Williams was dismayed at not having someone represent the current Carib

(138). Compare to Harald E. L. Prins, "Visual Media and the Primitive Perplex: Colonial Fantasies, Indigenous Imagination, and Advocacy in North America," in *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, ed. Faye Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).. Prins describes the “primitive perplex” which describes the noble savage as a useful trope for Natives to get publicity and gain political support.

³⁷ See for example A. Muehlebach, "" Making Place" At the United Nations: Indigenous Cultural Politics at the Un Working Group on Indigenous Populations," *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 3 (2001).

Council at the opening of the NMAI was that he felt he missed an opportunity to “network” with other Native nations from the States.

This form of networking, and “representational expertise” more generally, cannot be separated from the larger processes of objectification, multiculturalism and the heightened value and presence of “culture” in common conceptualizations of belonging and discourse. In *Exhibiting Cultures*, Karp and Lavine state that the entire United States is “debating its own pluralism—uncertain that the melting pot works or should work, in search of some territory of shared culture, uneasy about the place of the United States in the international arena. These debates,” they explain, “echo in the precincts of the museum.”³⁸ Clifford believes that museums “epitomize the ambiguous future of ‘cultural difference,’” and notes an “increasingly widespread” “museum-structure of culture,” which is “objectified tradition, construed as moral/aesthetic value and marketable commodity.”³⁹

Karp and Lavine describe this historical moment of the early 1990s as a time in which museum exhibition was a contested terrain and there was a “heightened worldwide interest in multicultural and intercultural issues.”⁴⁰ This was the backdrop for the NMAI’s incorporation by the U.S. government into the Smithsonian in 1989, the grand opening of the Heye Center in 1994, and the 1991-1995 consultations that determined the course of the Mall Museum and its content. Almost ten years later, NMAI director Rick West appealed in his “Cultural Rethink” to the museum professional community to transform museums “from temples of an elite, privileged

³⁸ Steven D. Lavine and Ivan Karp, "Introduction: Museums and Multiculturalism," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan and Steven D. Lavine Karp (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 8.

³⁹ Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, 219,18.

⁴⁰ Lavine and Karp, "Introduction: Museums and Multiculturalism," 1.

caste into places fostering multicultural dialogue.”⁴¹ Myers observes that the expansion of capitalism and consumerism has “intensified the value of ‘culture’ and indigenous identities.”⁴² Nowhere is this more apparent than the first Americans getting the last spot on the National Mall.

As this “emerging multicultural framework”⁴³ matured, the NMAI changed its focus to reflect this growing space for culturalism in national politics.⁴⁴ Through its rhetoric of reconciliation, the NMAI attempted a form of “cultural mediation” to increase understanding between Native and non-Native peoples. Although the rhetoric of reconciliation faded, West’s later formulation and emphasis was on the museum as a “civic space.”⁴⁵ These two conceptualizations of the NMAI—as reconciliation or civic space—again map onto the advocacy versus translation conceptualizations of the museum’s purpose. The NMNH curator’s comment in the AAA 2005 interchapter that it is a political statement rather than a museum speaks more directly to understanding which of these two renditions of the museum gains purchase with the American public.

The NMAI was fashioned (and publicized), to some extent, as a Native authored media production—whether through its exhibitions or in its publications. One of the main issues that motivated Native peoples to become involved in

⁴¹ Richard West, "Cultural Rethink," in *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian: Museums and Native Cultures*, ed. National Museum of the American Indian (U.S.) (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of the American Indian, 2000), 100.

⁴² Myers, "The Complicity of Cultural Production: The Contingencies of Performance in Globalizing Museum Practices," 507. See also Turner, "Anthropology and Multiculturalism: What Is Anthropology That Multiculturalists Should Be Mindful of It?," 411.

⁴³ Meg McLagan, "Spectacles of Difference: Cultural Activism and the Mass Mediation of Tibet," in *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, ed. Faye Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

⁴⁴ See Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Public Worlds ; V. 1 (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 15. See also McLagan, "Spectacles of Difference: Cultural Activism and the Mass Mediation of Tibet," 91.

⁴⁵ In Richard West, Plenary Address, July 8 2005. The language of reconciliation virtually disappeared after opening. While the notion of reconciliation has been widely recognized and accepted in Australia, in the U.S. there is no history or political movement for this particular kind of relationship to Native Americans.

indigenous media production is their desire to take control of their own images, and to tell the world “how we truly are,” as a Kayapo leader says in an introduction to a Kayapo authored video,⁴⁶ or, as Rick West puts it in an introductory panel about the NMAI: “who we are, and to use our own voices in the telling.”⁴⁷ It is, as Ginsburg’s model suggests, an institution that “mediates” Native identities. This mediation of identities was literally what making the *Our Lives* gallery entailed.

However, as Elizabeth Povinelli documents in *The Cunning of Recognition*, indigenous peoples are often caught up in “impossible desires” that are associated with the “liberal forms of recognition” that multiculturalism entails.⁴⁸ She describes multiculturalism as “a new metaethics of national life”⁴⁹ that the U.S. takes on only partially. The movement of Native American representations from the National Museum of *Natural History* (note—they were rarely represented in the exhibits or collections of the National Museum of *American History*) to the National Museum of the *American Indian* suggests that once a melting pot, the U.S. is confronting a more multicultural idea of itself.

Similar to Povinelli’s observations in Australia, in America and in museum self-representation in particular, indigenous peoples are often “called upon to perform an authentic difference in exchange for the good feelings of the nation and the reparative legislation of the state;” as these individuals or communities identify “with the impossible object of ‘authentic self-identity,’” she notes that they must do so

⁴⁶ Terence Turner, "Defiant Images: The Kayapo Appropriation of Video," *Anthropology Today* 8, no. 6 (1992): 8.

⁴⁷ [NMAI], "Welcome Center on the National Mall: Information Panels." See also Prins, "Visual Media and the Primitive Perplex: Colonial Fantasies, Indigenous Imagination, and Advocacy in North America.", American Indian College Fund [AICF], "Getting the Word Out: Have You Ever Seen a Real Indian?," <http://www.collegefund.org/news/news01/campaign2001.shtml>.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition : Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism*, Politics, History, and Culture (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2002), 6,4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

without looking opportunistic (as tactical museology might suggest, for example).⁵⁰ In these multicultural frameworks, there is “incitement to difference”—Povinelli chooses this word very deliberately—where individuals and communities are “called on to perform particular types of liberal and nonliberal differences for a variety of other persons and communities.”⁵¹ I hope that, by focusing on the politics and performance of expertise, Native identity can be unmoored from (solely being analyzed as a form of) political maneuvering in academic treatments and instead be situated within a wider global recognition and non-recognition, expectation and rejection, of specific forms of knowledge in the public sphere.

(In)Visible Genealogies

As I have already noted, the community curating practice was an emergent one. Not only did the NMAI curator not have control over content beyond some basic guidelines, but also the content of each exhibit, and what kind of message they produced in concert, was unknown throughout much of the development of the *Our Lives* gallery. The emphasis was indeed on the process, on its ethical and collaborative properties. The difficulties of documenting the present as an emergent process, even as a recent history of the present, are well-documented.⁵² Hiro Miyazaki states,

If, in the past, the gap was between anthropology and other disciplines, or between the West and the non-West, now the gap is between knowledge, more generally, and its object, that is, an emergent world. Here both anthropologists and philosophers, or anthropologists and their subjects, now share a common ground from which to explore this emergent world.⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid., 6,8.

⁵¹ Ibid., 13.

⁵² See for example Miyazaki, "Documenting the Present.", Michael Fischer, "Emergent Forms of Life: Anthropologies of Late and Post-Modernities," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 28 (1999), Miyazaki, *The Method of Hope : Anthropology, Philosophy, and Fijian Knowledge*, 136-8.

⁵³ Miyazaki, *The Method of Hope : Anthropology, Philosophy, and Fijian Knowledge*, 136.

The *Our Lives* gallery was the epitome of the Neo-Boasian approach: a history of the communities' present, told through their own texts. It was also a demonstration of how Native communities were themselves knowing and grappling with this emergent world.

More generally, I argue here that Curatorial staff, with their ideology of advocacy and belief in the intrinsic value of Native voice, and who mediated between the bureaucracy and the communities, exemplified the Americanist tradition. The ethical imperative of collaboration (in the form of community curating) can be seen as a derivative of both the Americanist tradition of anthropology as well as a result of working with, and responding to the demands of, Native peoples. I return now to the theory and practice of Americanist Anthropology that I mentioned in the introduction.

In particular, I want to return to some of Darnell's "features" of the Americanist tradition more specifically in relation to the dissertation and the NMAI. For example, feature 6 ("Native people are subjects and collaborators, not objects for study") was similar to what I had written in my approach to ethnography as a "professional to professional" relation.⁵⁴ What is key in Darnell's commentary on collaboration here is that she notes that the emphasis on working with Native people on their texts "forces the investigator to attend to how an individual speaker constructs the meaningfulness of her or his culture."⁵⁵ The NMAI method of community curating did just this: what was on display in the *Our Lives* gallery was what community members thought was meaningful about who they are today. Furthermore,

⁵⁴ Darnell (2001) cautions, however, that in their desire to create collaborative partnerships, sometimes anthropologists conflated the role of experts; in the past, she explains, the "informants" who worked with anthropologists were often of mixed descent or had been removed from their communities through boarding schools (17). These culture brokers may not have been, according to fellow community members, the "experts." In the case of the NMAI inaugural exhibitions, it was community members, most often a representative governing body, who chose the "experts" appropriate for the task at hand with the museum.

⁵⁵ Darnell, *Invisible Genealogies : A History of Americanist Anthropology*, 17.

Darnell explains, resulting texts could be “analyzed and reanalyzed, or they could simply be valued for their own sake.”⁵⁶ I believe that the latter is what Curatorial assumed: that museum visitors would be interested in “Native texts” as Boas would have called them—“Native voice” in NMAI-speak—for their intrinsic value (again, other departments would disagree).

Darnell also describes the nature of the relationship between Americanists and their audiences as well as issues of authorship in ethnographic relations. She explains that Americanists “are more accustomed to worrying about the reactions of the Native people who read what we write and impose their ethical and political agendas on us than are colleagues who work in distant areas.”⁵⁷ This would become a main Curatorial concern, and continues to be mine as well. In Darnell’s more detailed explanation of feature 6, she describes how in the past, there was a problem of authorship—texts by Native producers were recorded under the names of the anthropologists that collected them. But more recently there has been a “transfer of ownership of the words back to the language community of the original speakers. Appropriation of knowledge expressed in words is just as significant, in local terms, as appropriation of materials or skeletal remains.”⁵⁸ This “transfer” is more directly evidenced in the NMAI’s insistence on authored text panels—by Native community members involved in the community curating process—as I detailed in Chapter 4. Similarly, Darnell notes that “Americanist texts have always resulted from consultation and collaboration” and that these anthropologists recognize “they are not ‘our’ words but ‘theirs.’”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 18.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 15.

Feature 4 (“There is considerable urgency to record the knowledge encoded in oral traditions as part of the permanent record of human achievement”), often termed “salvage anthropology,” however, more characterizes my work than that of the *Our Lives* community curating process. When I first introduced my proposal to Bruce Bernstein, then head of the Cultural Resources Center, he welcomed my project because, he said, no one was recording what was happening at the museum and someone should. Much of the history of the making of the exhibitions, the recent history of the institution, in other words, was oral history. Staff encouraged me to do this work, in part because they trusted me and wanted to support my studies, but also because they felt a commitment to preserving a particular history that would otherwise go unreported.

For all of these indicators that the methodology and philosophy that underpin the very mission of the museum can be traced to the Americanist tradition in anthropology, the NMAI tended to conceal its own genealogies and epistemology. It is ironic that this very *Americanist* institution, with methods informed by anthropological critiques of representation and the changing nature of relations between anthropologists and their interlocutors, has such an anti-anthropology bent. Not only has the institution been described to me (either positively or negatively) as “anti PhD,” “anti-curator,” and “anti-anthropology,” it has also been widely considered (negatively) by Native intellectuals who have worked on behalf of the museum to be “anti-intellectual.”

Much of this attitude was displayed through the politics of expertise and organizational restructuring in the museum. But it can also be seen in public discourse. For example, Associate Director Jim Pepper Henry told one reporter,

“We’re not an anthropology museum. We’re a museum of living cultures’”,⁶⁰ he said that the museum lacks an authoritative voice, which is replaced by many Native voices. The same article quotes Gerald McMaster as saying, “Anthropology as a science is not practiced here.”⁶¹ To be fair, the “anthropology” that most are referring to are archaeologists of long ago and the stereotyped extractive “anthros.” In contrast, the work of curators reflected a humanistic if not scientific anthropology, one that included an understanding of postcolonialism, human subjects protocol, and collaborative and reciprocal research relations. It is an Americanist anthropology that they practiced.

In another article, Rick West contrasts the NMAI with what a “straight anthropologist” might do: the NMAI puts “Native peoples, in their first person voices, at the table of conversation about Native peoples and Native communities, past and present. That is a distinction *compared to what straight anthropologists might be doing.*” The reporter states that “such words are declared without harshness or bitterness, but there is a long history behind them, one that Natives find painful. ‘Anthropology’ and ‘archaeology’ are very close to pejorative terms in Indian country.”⁶² Distancing itself from the field of anthropology seemed to be a rhetorical device and act of political positioning by the museum, much like praising or panning the NMAI was interpreted to do similar labors among colleagues for its reviewers.

On the other hand, representative of Curatorial, anthropologist Bruce Bernstein, one of the architects of the community curating process, tells a reporter, “The gist is that this place isn’t designed for the entertainment of tourists—despite the museum’s hope that it will attract 4 million to 6 million visitors a year. It’s meant to

⁶⁰ Joel Achenbach, "Within These Walls, Science Yields to Stories," *Washington Post*, September 19 2004, R1.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, R7.

⁶² *Ibid.*

be ‘*useful*’ to *Natives*, Bernstein says.”⁶³ Bruce describes the museum as providing an “inside-outward view.” However, the reporter states that although the exhibits as “carefully created,” they may be “visually striking, but not spectacular.”⁶⁴ The reporter ends his article in a way that resonates with the pervasive multiculturalism of the times: the NMAI is “an artifact of a nation trying to understand itself circa 2004.”⁶⁵ I would suggest that it is also an artifact of collaboration in which Native communities were trying to get a nation to understand *them*, their lives and experiences and histories, circa 2004.

The Politics of Collaboration

The main themes in the *Our Lives* exhibition—collaboration, Native identity, and representation of indigenous peoples—are subjects that have been widely discussed, theorized and critiqued in anthropology and museum studies. My approach was to present an ethnography of an exhibition that was in the making, rather than a critique of a completed exhibit. Ultimately, this was a story of the politics of expertise, the rise of representational experts, the exhibition of and by reflexive subjects, and the shift of the locus of authenticity from object to subject. At the heart of the matter was a concerted effort—and debate and resistance—to redefine the boundaries of scholarship and expert knowledge to include a particular, and collaboratively produced, form of Native knowledge.

By viewing the exhibition process through the politics and cultures of expertise, it became clear that collaboration is a process fraught with conflict and contestation, consensus and compromise. The former is obscured and the latter embodied in the final exhibit text and display. The politics of expertise provided an

⁶³ Ibid. Emphasis added.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

opportunity to view the ways in which various experts attempt to frame—and to justify—their work and its significance to colleagues and a wider public. It also helps us understand why some genealogies—like anthropological theory and practice—were antagonized in NMAI discourse.

Collaboration is a positively inflected term that is most often invoked to indicate ethical practice, equalized power relations, and “unfiltered” representations in culture production.⁶⁶ This was not only evident in its central place in the mission statement of the museum, but also in NMAI staff’s reiteration of the term in conferences and presentations, as evidenced throughout the interchapters. Of course, through the ethnography of collaboration we see that all three of these premises are challenged from inside and outside the museum in different ways—and sometimes in academic forums. The ethnography of collaboration reveals the underlying ideologies and professional commitments at work in the nature and content of these challenges. In addition, when the museum or Native communities are depicted as *a* “culture” in literature or exhibitions, this obscures these debates among their members as well.

Similar to my experience, Sharon MacDonald notes in her museum ethnography of a national science museum in the UK that her fieldwork “was exciting, absorbing, demanding and, sometimes, a political nightmare.”⁶⁷ Longer term fieldwork in the three communities featured in this ethnography made clear that what

⁶⁶ The practice of collaboration can sometimes be seen as a barrier to “good practice” when compromises must be made (particularly when collaboration between departments overrides decisions made in collaboration with Native communities). Iris Jean-Klein provides an interesting contrast to the rhetoric of collaboration as “good practice.” It is important to note that, in her ethnographic approach to the activism in the First Palestinian uprising or Intifada, she focuses on the “process of managing ‘collaborators with the enemy.’” Therefore, collaboration is not always associated with a positive evaluation or considered representative of ethical practice like it is in museum work and anthropology more generally. See Iris E. F. Jean-Klein, “Judging by Aesthetics: ‘Due Care’ in the Management of Collaborators During the First Palestinian Intifada” (Edinburgh University, 2003).

⁶⁷ Macdonald, *Behind the Scenes at the Science Museum*, 3. She documents the “agendas and assumptions involved in creating science for the public” as well as the debates that were occurring in the museum as it began to implement a charge for attendance. She listed the debates of the moment as “over public accountability, consumerism, the role of national cultural institutions, knowledge, authority and authorship.”

was left out of the exhibits was politics—of all orders— including organizational politics among professionals, local politics among community members, and national electoral politics. And, beyond the politics of expertise as I have presented here, I too choose to leave particular kinds of politics out of my account. Community co-curators and NMAI curators were embroiled in their own local webs of personal bonds and betrayals, professional usurpations and local political coups; they were caught up in various *other* and sometimes conflicting affiliations that crossed the communities as they were defined for the sake of the exhibition. But there is little mention of these particular kinds of conflicts here.

There is also no mention of the fierce red and blue rivalries in both the U.S. in 2004 and in Dominica in 2005 during intense national elections that consumed a number of experts mentioned in this account. These events were beyond the scope of what is this particular history of the (exhibition's) present. However, the elections did bring to mind another wider trend I was seeing at the time in national politics, media journalism, and museums. In all three cases, it seemed there was an emphasis on finding out what the audience wanted to determine what producers would create. But, to paraphrase one curator, how do they know what they want if they have yet to experience something different? American politics and media, as well as museums, are now often conducting visitor and audience surveys to test exhibition names and executive decisions. In other words, polling is now an ubiquitous form, or perhaps engine, of knowledge production, where audience expectations drive content and design decisions. When I spoke to one anthropologist about these ideas, he said the NMAI is now about consumerism and anti-intellectualism, just “like US society.”

Although I discuss particular artifacts of collaboration and bureaucracy throughout the dissertation, I rarely make note of the various collection and collectable

objects that were either present in the gallery or presented as gifts to me in the communities. When I left Dominica, my bags were filled with baskets crafted by people with whom I had worked and personal items that they hoped would help me remember them from a distance. The best gift for me was when all the Kalinago co-curators, despite their own busy schedules and disparate alliances, arranged and came together for a surprise farewell dinner with me the night before I left that was filled with laughter and storytelling.

In Chicago, when I had announced my leaving date to return to the NMAI for my final three months of fieldwork, I was asked to stay one week longer so that I could celebrate with the community the one year anniversary of the Trickster Gallery where I had been volunteering during my stay. Joe Podlasek was chairing the event that day and asked me to join him at the front of the gathering. He and Michael, the Arts Coordinator of the gallery at the time, then proceeded to present an oil painting to me—it was a bold painting in red, white and blue that depicted the strong and determined face of an American Indian warrior surrounded by a stylized U.S. flag (Figure 50 below). It was also the very painting whose image was all over the new AIC website and past gallery brochures. I was overwhelmed at this priceless and far too valuable and symbolic gift. They asked me to say something into the microphone, but I was so taken aback and overwhelmed I just stuttered for a few minutes and finally said, “I’m speechless.” Joe quickly retorted, “That’s a new one!” and we all laughed.

The painting represented to me an image of Native presence and power in America, much like the built structure of the NMAI on the National Mall landscape. Now that this institution has established that Native Americans are “still here,” whatever the next message it chooses to communicate, or how it will do so, remains to

be seen; but there is no doubt that the NMAI now represents a highly visible space in which Indian country can communicate it to the world.



Figure 50: Painting by Chris Henderson, 2000.

EPILOGUE

Listening to Our Ancestors

While I was in Dominica in 2005, I called Ann McMullen at the NMAI on the 31st of January. She was updating me on what was going on at the museum since I had left at the end of November. She said that staff was starting to “talk about what you and I talked about,” including “what is community curation,” and whether they wanted to continue doing things that way. In 2006, I returned to the NMAI for three months to see what NMAI employees were working on, what they had learned from the inaugural exhibitions, and how that experience impacted later projects. Cynthia, Taryn and Arwen were no longer present at the CRC.¹ I spent more time at the Mall Museum during this time, volunteering to conduct visitor surveys for the Education department and interview people about the *Listening to Our Ancestors: The Art of Native Life along the North Pacific Coast* exhibition (NPC). It was the most recently opened community curated exhibition after *Our Lives* and provided some clues as to the future of community curating at the NMAI.

After the inaugural exhibitions, the notion of community curating itself came under scrutiny and review at the museum. The project manager for *Listening to Our Ancestors* sought more, and more formalized, staff feedback on the exhibit making process this time around. The museum had implemented a very different model for community curating than the inaugural exhibitions, as I detailed in Chapter 2. For example, it relied on contracts with cultural institutions in Native communities, generally worked with established professional culture producers and curators in those communities, returned object selection to the start of the exhibit making process, and

¹ Of the OL curatorial team, only Arwen remained, but she was now working at the Mall Museum Resource Center. Cynthia became the Indian Arts Research Center Director at the School of American Research in New Mexico and Taryn was working as a researcher at National Geographic.

did not include an NMAI curator on the exhibition team. In addition, the community curators were responsible for physically writing the script, though it was still edited by an NMAI script editor (see community curator Lindsay's critique in the interchapter regarding this process).

Although there was little reflection that occurred after the inaugural exhibitions opened, some lessons learned from them were embedded in project manager Barbara Mogel's "postmortem" document about *Listening to Our Ancestors* dated March 17, 2006.² Some relevant highlights according to the issues I have discussed in this account are: they preferred partnering with institutions; the tight schedule was not a good model for the future efforts; too many researchers were let go after the opening; there should be two exhibit opening events—"one for and guided by the communities...and the other...a reception style event for NMAI donors, political constituents, etc.;" and, "Community curators need to be engaged in a *more accountable contractual process*."

On the one hand, it was reiterated a number of times in different ways throughout the document that staff wanted more access to the communities; on the other hand, it was recommended that NMAI staff should know more about the communities and community curators before working with them. In addition, in what appears to be an indication of the possible demise of community-directed content development, under a section titled "quality control" the review states that "NMAI assumed that the person chosen by the [contracted] institution was mutually agreed upon by the community: this was not always a correct assumption. There were conflicts of authority that NMAI should avoid in the future... How NMAI picks who

² Barbara Mogel, "Summary Of "Listening to Our Ancestors" Debriefings (Internal NMAI Document)," (2006). Emphasis added.

we partner with is still a problem... *No matter how content is developed*, we still need object care and consultations with the community(s).”

The postmortem also indicated that,

the consultation with the community curators needs to be in the form of ‘roles’ presented as job descriptions (for example, Tribal Historian, Museum Director, Hereditary Chief, etc.), that clearly identifies for each ‘role’ the unique responsibilities for NMAI and the community curator, and specific deliverables appropriate to that ‘role.’ All expectations need to be clearly defined from the beginning, *but always focused on the final product—the exhibit*. The individuals in the communities can then pick which job description best meets their expertise, and NMAI can better understand the staff resources needed to execute the project.³

And there were “new rules” the team felt should be put in place: once a step or “deliverable” is completed, it cannot be revised or changed by an individual; each team member must meet deadlines “or be willing to be removed from the team;” and, “those who miss deadlines cannot expect the rest of the team to make up for the missed deliverables.” In these prescriptions, contrary to the assumptions and practices used in making the inaugural exhibitions, the intent is clear not only to codify the process and to render it inflexible in practice and content, but it also insists that the product, rather than the process, is of the utmost importance.

Finally, in a section titled “Future work with the Communities,” the document states “NMAI’s and the communities’ outcomes did not match for the Washington, DC exhibit. This will be evidenced when the objects return to the communities in ‘Phase II’ as possible changes in object selections, and text.” Rachel Griffin, an anthropologist and Curatorial Research Assistant at the time of the making of the NPC exhibition, provides some insight into how these outcomes did not match.⁴ She notes

³ Emphasis added.

⁴ In her presentation at the NAASA 2005 meetings with Lindsay Martin (see interchapter) and in an essay she wrote for an upcoming edition of the *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*. Here, I rely on an unpublished draft she provided me in March of 2006 at the time of my fieldwork: Griffin, “Aesthetics and Authenticity at the National Museum of the American Indian.” A published version can be found here: Rachel Griffin, “The Art of Native Life: Exhibiting Culture and Identity at the

in particular the disjuncture between Native curators' emphasis on beauty of the objects but insistence they are not (just) art. In the end, this latter goal was not attained in the NMAI exhibition due to "limited budget and schedule" and "audience."

For this exhibition, Rachel explained, the publications staff named it and focused it more on Native objects as "art," as "the determining factor in publication decisions is: how will the product be received by the *purchasing* public."⁵ She restates her faith in collaboration between Native communities and museums to "advance our understanding of Native American objects beyond that of simply art, anthropology, aesthetics and authenticity, towards a more informed and accurate—although complex—consideration of the material."⁶ In other words, in her more object-oriented essay focused on a reevaluation of Native art materials and public expectations, Rachel advocated on behalf of Native communities whose wishes, she felt, were not honored as directly as they might have been. And, she sought more accurate representations through partnerships with Native communities.

There is no doubt that the commitment to Native voice will continue at the NMAI, however it is defined. Although community curating was originally a process unfettered by buildings or publics and held accountable mainly to the Native people with whom the museum worked, it and its product are now also and being confronted by the demands of the SI bureaucracy and the visiting public. It is clear exhibit making processes continue to evolve, and the future of community curating is uncertain but likely to continue in some manner. Consequently, the NMAI inaugural exhibitions were truly a unique experience and experiment in collaboration.

National Museum of the American Indian," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 31, no. 3 (2007).

⁵ Griffin, "Aesthetics and Authenticity at the National Museum of the American Indian," 16. Emphasis added.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 19,20.

In the Preface, I provided a motivating question for this account: “Who killed Curatorial?” There were many possible “suspects,” including the Exhibits department personnel and competing exhibition philosophy, the consultants hired to make the museum run more efficiently, the exhibits that failed in the eyes of some reviewers, the abdication of content authority from NMAI staff to Native communities, the prevailing model of exhibition development that invests more control in project managers, the devalued role of anthropology in the Native museum, and more. Like the electric car, it was not any one thing but a web of factors, persons, things, and attitudes that led to the demise of Curatorial as a department.

So, where are they now? As of 2007, the NMAI curators who remained at the museum continued to work on exhibitions and participate in publications and research. However, rather than being in the Curatorial Department under Cultural Resources, they were divided into separate divisions of the museum (see Appendix D). Ann McMullen, Mary Jane Lenz, and Cécile Ganteaume were in Collections Research, under Collections Information Services, in the Museum Assets and Operations Group. Emil Her Many Horses and Paul Chaat Smith were labeled museum specialists along with historians and geographers in the Research division of the Museums Programs Group. Ramiro Matos became a “special assistant” to Associate Director Jim Pepper Henry in the Community and Constituent Services Group.

The absence of the Curatorial Department after the reorganization and the lack of an NMAI curator working on *Listening to Our Ancestors* suggested a significant shift in protocol and practice at the NMAI. In her discussion of the *HuupuKawanum Out of the Mist- Treasures of the Nuu-chah-nulth Chiefs* exhibition, Christina Kreps explains that sharing curatorial authority can be difficult because “it runs counter to

the trend toward specialization and professionalization in museums.”⁷ She continues that some museums cede authority and let people “speak for themselves” and presents an example of a collaborative exhibit in which the curatorial authority “was not only shared with the people whose culture was on display, but also relinquished, to a certain degree.”⁸ The NMAI curators for the inaugural exhibitions embraced this philosophy. Kreps advocates that “sharing authority and power should not diminish the role of professionalism in museums. Instead, it should widen the field and make room for the inclusion of other forms of knowledge and expertise.”⁹

This latter point had an ironic twist at the NMAI: by including Native knowledges in the making of the exhibitions, Curatorial knowledge and practices were largely marginalized by other institutional actors. The struggle between the Curatorial and the Exhibits departments at the NMAI was framed as a battle between the two heads of the departments, but it appeared to be even more a conflict between fundamentally different interpretations of ethical and professional best practice in the museum.¹⁰ The organizational restructuring can be rendered as the “triumph” of Exhibit’s philosophy over Curatorial’s.

In many ways, the figure of the curator (as all powerful, speaking for Native peoples from aloft in their ivory tower and only able to communicate to his or her own ilk in the academy) was a straw man at the NMAI. On the one hand curators were criticized for not asserting their expertise within the institution, and on the other hand they were often characterized as hoarding knowledge and being too protective of it.

⁷ Christina Kreps, *Liberating Culture: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Museums, Curation, and Heritage Preservation* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 155.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁰ Jim Volkert left then NMAI and became a consultant. His influence remained very strong at the NMAI, as he was a consultant who worked on the organizational restructuring. Bruce Bernstein, former head of Cultural Resources, left the NMAI in 2006 and later became the Executive Director of the Southwestern Association for Indian Arts in Santa Fe, NM.

The main criticism by Exhibits of curators in the inaugural exhibition work was that they failed to bring museum expertise “to the table” with the Native communities, that they just did whatever the communities told them to. This was not entirely the case, as this more detailed account shows. No doubt in part a result of these attitudes, the *Listening to Our Ancestors* exhibition used a community curator model in which no NMAI curator was assigned to work with the communities; there was a publications representative, a script writer, an education representative, a project manager and a conservator. In the “postmortem” for *Listening to Our Ancestors*, they faulted some community curators for not having enough museum expertise and thus requiring staff at the NMAI to assist or write for them. But it seems no one considered the special skills the curator brought to the table—as mediator and facilitator—to be the “missing skills” they listed on behalf of the communities. It seems that, in trying to kill the *idea* of the curator so entrenched in the museum and Native communities, the department that championed the sharing of authority between them was lost along the way.

Finally, I would like to suggest that we listen to some of the “ancestors” of community curating—including the Chicago and Kalinago co-curators, and the NMAI staff whose ideas and analysis have been engaged here. Their experiences provide additional insights for the future of museum-community relations. It is this role that many Chicago co-curators told me they wanted to take up—they wanted the opportunity to introduce and to explain the community curating process to other Native groups so they would be better prepared to tackle the onerous task of representing their communities in the museum and on the world stage.

APPENDICES

- A. **Curatorial Staff Handout** (distributed at the CRC in 1999; from personal files, marked 2002)

- B. ***OUR LIVES* Communities: Reasons for Inclusion in the Gallery** (from personal files; created by author in 2001)

- C. **Main Messages of the *Our Lives* Gallery**

- D. **NMAI Organizational Charts** (2002, 2006)

- E. **Kalinago and Chicago Schematic Design Table of Contents** (2002)

- F. **Kalinago Final Script submitted to Design+Communication, Inc.**
Dated March 5, 2004

Chicago Final Script submitted to Design+Communication, Inc.
Dated March 5, 2004

- G. **NMAI Visitor Study** (provided by Megan Birney, under the direction of Carolyn Rapkievian in October, 2004)

- H. **The Opening Week of the NMAI**

APPENDIX A

NMAI Mission Statement and Goals

National Museum of the American Indian

Mission Statement

The National Museum of the American Indian shall recognize and affirm to Native communities and the non-Native public the historical and contemporary culture and cultural achievements of the Natives of the Western Hemisphere by advancing—in consultation, collaboration and cooperation with Natives—knowledge and understanding of Native cultures, including art, history and language, and by recognizing the museum’s special responsibility, through innovative public programming, research and collections, to protect, support and enhance the development, maintenance and perpetuation of Native culture and community.

Statement of Goals

- Acknowledge the diversity of cultures among the indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere.
- Acknowledge the continuity of cultural knowledge among the Native peoples of the Western Hemisphere.
- Acknowledge and incorporate indigenous methodologies for conservation, documentation, and collections care.
- Acknowledge the importance of interpretation of culture within the context of indigenous worldviews.
- Acknowledge and respect that some indigenous communities have restricted cultural knowledge.
- Acknowledge and incorporate Native-based knowledge — such as oral histories and cosmologies —into exhibition—and program-related research.

Exhibition Guiding Principles

Community: *Our tribes are sovereign nations.*

Stress that Native rights and issues are community-based, and that tribal communities possess unique rights and inherent powers. The focus is on Native nations that are indigenous to the Western Hemisphere.

Locality: *This is Indian Land.*

Show the interrelationship between geographical landscape, spiritual tradition and community identity. The focus is on particular geographical places and their inextricable relationships to indigenous spiritual traditions of the Western Hemisphere.

Vitality: *We are here now.*

Present Native cultures as living cultures that continue through time and across space. The focus is on the continuities within Native communities today.

Viewpoint: *We know the world differently.*

Develop interpretations from interdisciplinary viewpoints, but with indigenous worldviews always central. The focus is on Native philosophical systems, the distinct worldview of each and the Native languages that transmit this information.

Voice: *These are our stories.*

Include stories from multiple and divergent perspectives, but with Native voices always central. The focus is on Native individuals and their personal stories.

APPENDIX B

OUR LIVES Communities: Reasons for Inclusion in the Gallery

- ▶ **Distribution of communities according to Zones** (see map on following page): These zones separate the western hemisphere into 4 parts. The number of communities per zone in each gallery is determined according to the relative percentage of objects from the Heye collection that originated in each zone.



- Entire Heye Collection percentage of total collection by zone:

Zone 1: 15%

Zone 2: 59%

Zone 3: 13%

Zone 4: 13%

OUR LIVES percentages:

Zone 1: 3 communities out of 9 = **33%**

Zone 2: 4 communities out of 9 = **44%**

Zone 3: 1 community out of 9 = **11%**

Zone 4: 1 community out of 9 = **11%**

- ▶ **Distribution of communities among the three galleries:** The *OUR LIVES* gallery was the last to begin Phase I development so it included communities not covered geographically by the other two inaugural exhibitions already in development.
- ▶ **Existing experience and contacts at NMAI:** The *OUR LIVES* gallery is on an accelerated pace in its development to open with the new museum so some communities were chosen based on referrals from NMAI staff who had professional relationships with scholars in these areas.
- ▶ **Community has objects in the NMAI collection:** The NMAI is based on the George Heye collection from New York, making it preferable that Native communities in the galleries have significant numbers of objects in the collection. This is to provide community members with more objects to choose from to enhance their community presentation, as well as to display as much of the NMAI collection as possible. An important part of this gallery is the new accessions from these communities that are being added the NMAI collection since the OL gallery focuses on contemporary identities and lifeways.

Please note: *The number of objects in the collection listed under each community are for that specific community location and cultural group. Each listing is stated as ">" or more than that number, because there are additional objects under a general culture heading that are missing perhaps a provenience or a secondary culture name and could possibly be identified later and associated with that particular group.*

INUIT

Igloolik, Nunavut (Canada)

- Located in the Nunavut Territory
- Reputation as being actively involved in the maintenance of Inuit values and traditions
- Homebase of an active elder's society called the Inullaritt society which has helped create a large Inuit oral history archive
- Site of Nunavut Government's Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth

Igloolik is located in the new Native territory of Nunavut. The Nunavut land claims agreement was signed in Igloolik in 1999, establishing a Native government over this region. The Nunavut government's Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth is located in Igloolik.

Igloolik is considered Nunavut's "cultural nerve center." It is a thriving community where Inuktitut is widely spoken, the Elders' Society is very involved in the community, and the local research center holds an oral history archive of interviews conducted with community members since the 1980s. Members of the community continue to be involved in traditional hunting practices, as well as in the administration of the new government of Nunavut. In Nunavut, Igloolik has a reputation for being actively involved in the preservation of Inuit values and traditions, with an emphasis on passing traditional Inuit knowledge to the youth by the elders.

Igloolik was also chosen for geographic reasons—the other galleries focused on northern peoples much farther west. It has an oral history archive that greatly facilitates our research process, and the Elders are accustomed to using video conferencing technologies, which allow us to stay in close contact between visits.

Objects in collection: >22 [Eskimo, Iglulirmiut].

RED RIVER MÉTIS

Saint-Laurent, Manitoba (Canada)

- Recognized as one of the more culturally vibrant Métis communities in Manitoba
- One of the largest Métis communities in Manitoba
- Heritage of community members descended from Red River Métis ancestors
- Descendants of Métis families who founded Saint-Laurent continue to live in community

Saint-Laurent is recognized as one of the largest and more culturally vibrant Métis communities in Manitoba, with a rich heritage and community members descended from Red River Métis ancestors. The descendants of Métis families who founded Saint-Laurent continue to live in community.

The history of the Red River Métis is ingrained within the region of Winnipeg Manitoba, which served as a hub for fur trappers and trading. Saint-Laurent Métis have a unique, mixed cultural and linguistic identity that equally recognizes and draws from Native and non-Native traditions and languages. They are descendants of intermarriage between Native women in central Canada and French, Scottish and Irish fur traders of the 18th century. The identity of Métis in Manitoba is closely linked with the history of trading that developed in the Red River region. Métis in the 1800s were skilled buffalo hunters and provisioners of the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company.

Today's Saint-Laurent Métis community members descend from Métis of the Red River region. Métis from the Red River area moved to the Saint-Laurent region after 1870 and founded the community. Older community members speak a dialect of Michif French, which is a significant

aspect of their identity as Métis. Saint-Laurent has various Métis cultural celebrations throughout the year such as Métis Days in the summer. Jigging, fiddle playing, fishing, hunting, and gardening continue to play a role in the community and attest to the vibrancy of Métis culture in Saint-Laurent.

Objects in collection: There is no category for Métis in particular in the NMAI collection. Consequently, Ojibwe, Sauteaux, and Cree objects will be considered for this exhibit as well as new accessions that are specifically of the Métis people from Saint-Laurent.

MOHAWK

Kahnawake Mohawk Nation, Quebec (Canada)

- Located near the US/Canada border
- Surrounded by non-Native urban areas, specifically Montreal, Quebec
- Oldest Mohawk settlement (1667). Moved to current location in 1716
- One of the first reserves formed in Canada.
- Active in asserting their sovereignty to the Canadian Government

The Kahnawake Nation is located near the US/Canada border, and is surrounded by non-Native urban areas, specifically Montreal, Quebec. It is the oldest Mohawk settlement (1667), and has been at its current location since 1716. Kahnawake was the first reserve formed in Quebec or Canada, and the community has been very active in asserting their political sovereignty against the Canadian Government ever since its formation.

Kahnawake's location has been central to their development and history as a community. Due to Kahnawake's close proximity to Montreal, a number of significant historical events and traditions emerged. For example, ironwork among Mohawk men has a long history in the community beginning with the Canadian Pacific Rail Bridge, and many of their economic opportunities stem from their location such as the proliferation of privately owned businesses due to the number of non-Natives that travel through Kahnawake by way of the Mercier Bridge. The Kahnawake Mohawks are leaders in the assertion of Native self-determination and sovereignty, and are adamant about controlling their own affairs without interference from the Canadian Government.

In addition, the NMAI collection is predominantly from Kahnawake, which influenced their selection over other Northeastern Mohawk communities in New York and Quebec.

Objects in collection: >776 [Iroquois, Mohawk: Kahnawake Reservation].

YAKAMA

Yakama Nation, Washington State (US)

- Confederated Nation of 14 bands and tribes
- Territory encompasses several non-Native communities and landowners

Yakama Nation is a confederated Nation of 14 bands and tribes, and its territory encompasses several non-Native communities and landowners' properties. The Treaty of 1855 brought together 14 previously autonomous bands and tribes within one reservation to be one nation. As a Nation, they now exist under one government, but continue to maintain their band distinctiveness in various ways. The Treaty is celebrated annually and highlights the extensive governmental infrastructure the Nation has established.

Within the Our Lives gallery, Yakama Nation is the largest community in population and land acreage. The community is dispersed throughout their land base with several small towns located throughout. A substantial population of non-Natives lives with the Yakama Nation's borders on privately owned land, which was the result of allotment.

Objects in collection: >419 [Yakima].

CHICAGO INDIAN COMMUNITY

Chicago, Illinois (US)

- Oldest urban Indian Center in the United States
- Illinois is a state with no recognized tribes or tribal lands
- One of the first five major relocation cities
- Long history of urban Indian community prior to relocation
- Long history of political and educational activity such as the American Indian Chicago conference in 1961 and NAES College

There are many urban Indian communities in the United States, Mexico, and other parts of the hemisphere. Including one in this gallery illuminates these communities that may otherwise be invisible due to conventional ideas about what is a Native community.

Illinois is a state with no recognized tribes or tribal lands. It is not surprising that Chicago is not usually thought of as a Native place—but it is, and has been since time immemorial. The Chicago Indian community also hosts the American Indian Center, the oldest urban Indian center in the United States.

The Chicago area has maintained a Native community throughout time and has contributed to the joining of diverse Native peoples and traditions, while also impacting communities and movements outside the area's borders. Historically, the Chicago area has been occupied by Native peoples such as the Miami, the Ho-Chunk, and the Potawatomi. While the contemporary image of the Native community in Chicago is associated with the large number of American Indians that came to the area through the Relocation Program of the federal government's Bureau of Indian Affairs in the 1950s, there was already an active Native community living in Chicago who helped acclimate the relocatees. It was during this time that the American Indian Center was created to establish a place where urban Indians could gather. In 1961 the University of Chicago hosted the American Indian Chicago Conference, which produced the "Declaration of Indian Purpose," a major impetus for the Native rights movement.

Objects in collection: There are no objects in the collection that would be appropriate to associate with this community, so we see this as an opportunity to begin collecting new items that are categorized as belonging to an urban community, of multiple and sometimes blending traditions.

PAMUNKEY

Pamunkey Tribe, Virginia (US)

- One of the oldest reservations in the U.S.
- Not a federally recognized tribe, but state recognized
- Part of the Powhatan confederacy (need more on this, why it is significant)
- Continue to reside on ancestral lands despite years of non-Native contact

It was important to include a contemporary and thriving Native community that was near Washington, DC where the new museum will be located. The Pamunkey have one of the oldest

reservations in the country and have never been moved from their ancestral lands. They are state recognized but not federally recognized, and are currently fighting to preserve and get recognition for their indigenous identity at the federal level.

Historically, the Pamunkey were part of approximately 30 Virginia Indian groups that formed the powerful Powhatan Confederacy at the time of contact with the English. The Pamunkey also are directly descended from Chief Powhatan and his famous daughter Pocahontas. According to Pamunkey oral history, Chief Powhatan is buried on their reservation.

The Pamunkey River is an important part of their cultural heritage as it has been a source of fishing with the tribe maintaining a shad hatchery since 1918. The riverbanks were also a supply source of clay for their pottery making traditions, which continue to this day.

Objects in collection: >256 [Powhatan, Pamunkey]

KUMEYAAY

Campo Band of Kumeyaay Indians, California (US)

- Near the US/Mexico border
- Cross cultural exchanges with Mexican Kumeyaay
- Recognized as the Kumeyaay Band who have retained more of Kumeyaay traditional culture
- Involved in various environmental management projects that draw from traditional Kumeyaay environmental management practices
- Recognized as descendants of the mountain Kumeyaay not missionized Kumeyaay

The Kumeyaay peoples' lands were artificially divided when the US-Mexico border was created. Due to this division families and relatives became separated and, as the U.S. border patrol became more strict, visitation between U.S. and Mexican Kumeyaay became increasingly difficult. The Campo Band people have relatives that live in Mexico and have hosted and visited Mexican Kumeyaay who have retained traditional art making skills while the Campo Band has retained the musical and dance aspects of Kumeyaay culture. The two groups have shared their knowledge with one another on different occasions.

The Campo Band received national recognition in the early 1990s when they proposed to develop waste disposal facility as part of their economic development initiatives. In conjunction with this, the Campo Environmental Protection Agency (CEPA) was created, whose responsibility is to "protect the health, safety and the environment of the reservation and surrounding community." CEPA continues to implement environmental management and restoration projects in the Campo Band community.

Objects in collection: >184 [Diegueno, Campo]

CARIB

Carib Territory, Dominica (Caribbean)

- Only indigenous group in the Caribbean that have their own designated territory
- One of the first indigenous groups Columbus encountered

The Caribs of Dominica were one of the first indigenous groups Columbus encountered. They are one of the few Native peoples that survive in the region, and they are the only indigenous group in the Caribbean that has their own territory. Their territory was established in 1783 on the island of Dominica, and their identity is closely associated with their rights to these lands. The Carib will be

opening a Carib Heritage Village, which they hope will help promote tourism to their region. This will contribute to economic development as well as to the preservation of Carib culture. Significantly, the Caribs are the only community from the islands to be included in the inaugural mall exhibitions.

Objects in collection: >33 [Carib or Culina, Dominica]

WICHÍ

- Comparatively large number of objects in collection from this region

Choosing an Argentine group was important because there was no representation in the other galleries of peoples in the southeast region of South America, and many people think that all indigenous peoples in this area have either disappeared or become acculturated. The Wichí are one of the largest groups of indigenous peoples living in this region, and one of the few groups that have objects in the NMAI collection.

Objects in collection: >193 [Mataco, Chaco]

APPENDIX C

Main Messages of the *Our Lives* Gallery

***Our Lives* gallery main message:**

Despite many challenges, we continue to exist as distinct communities, determining our own lives.

***Our Lives* community curated exhibits main messages:**

KALINAGO

The Kalinago survive despite numerous challenges.

CHICAGO

Native peoples from different tribes come together in Chicago and maintain a supportive community network.

CAMPO

Campo Kumeyaay strategically manage and maintain their resources to assure their future as a people.

SAINT-LAURENT

The Saint-Laurent Michif remember and respect the values and teachings of their ancestors by expressing their proud heritage in their everyday lives.

YAKAMA

Yakama people respect and value their cultural traditions and take responsibility for their Nation's future.

IGLOOLIK

Iglulingmiut strive to maintain Inuit language and culture through traditional and innovative ways in the face of rapid change.

KAHNAWAKE

Kahnawakehronon assert their sovereignty in all aspects of their lives.

PAMUNKEY

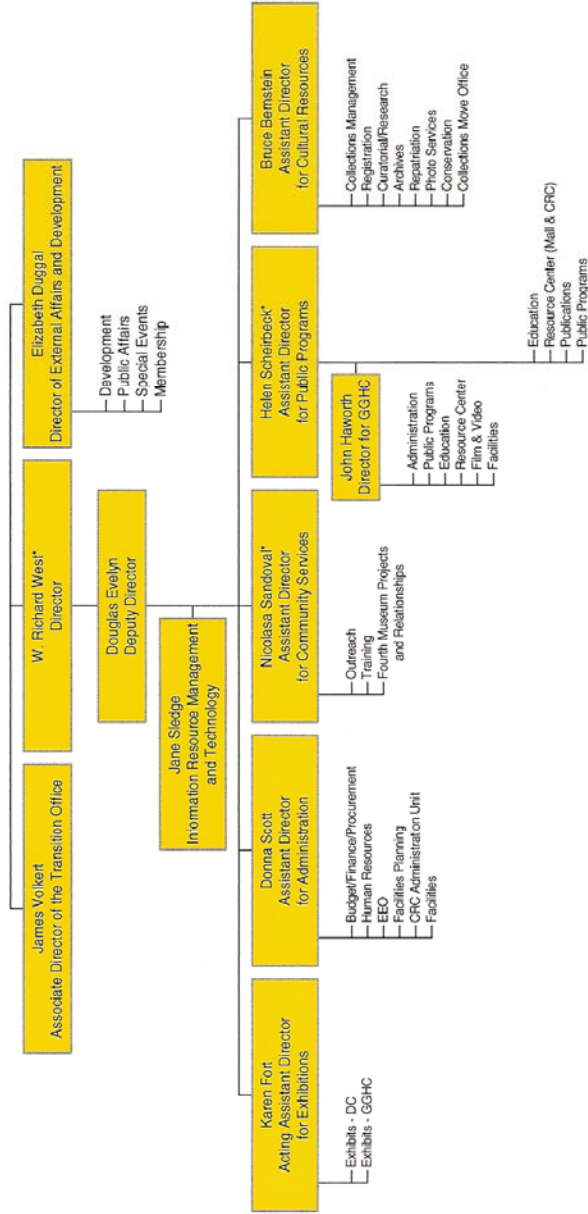
The Pamunkey proudly serve the Creator as stewards of the land and waters that have sustained them for thousands of years.

APPENDIX D

NMAI Organizational Charts

NMAI Organization Chart from 2002 (1 page):

National Museum of the American Indian
Organizational Chart

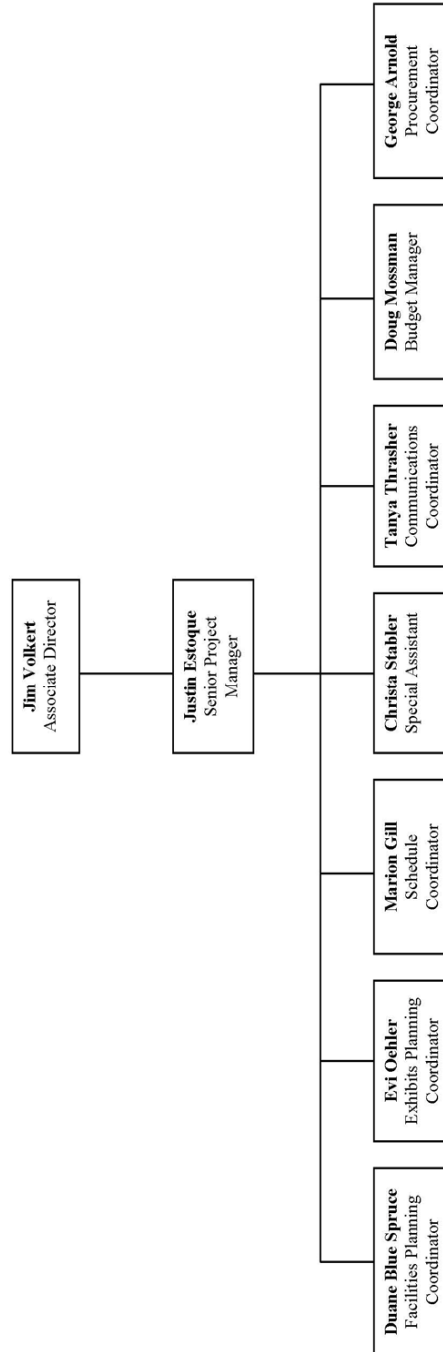


January 2002

*Denotes Native American/American Indian

NMAI Mall Transition Team Office organizational chart from 2002, provided on the shared network drive:

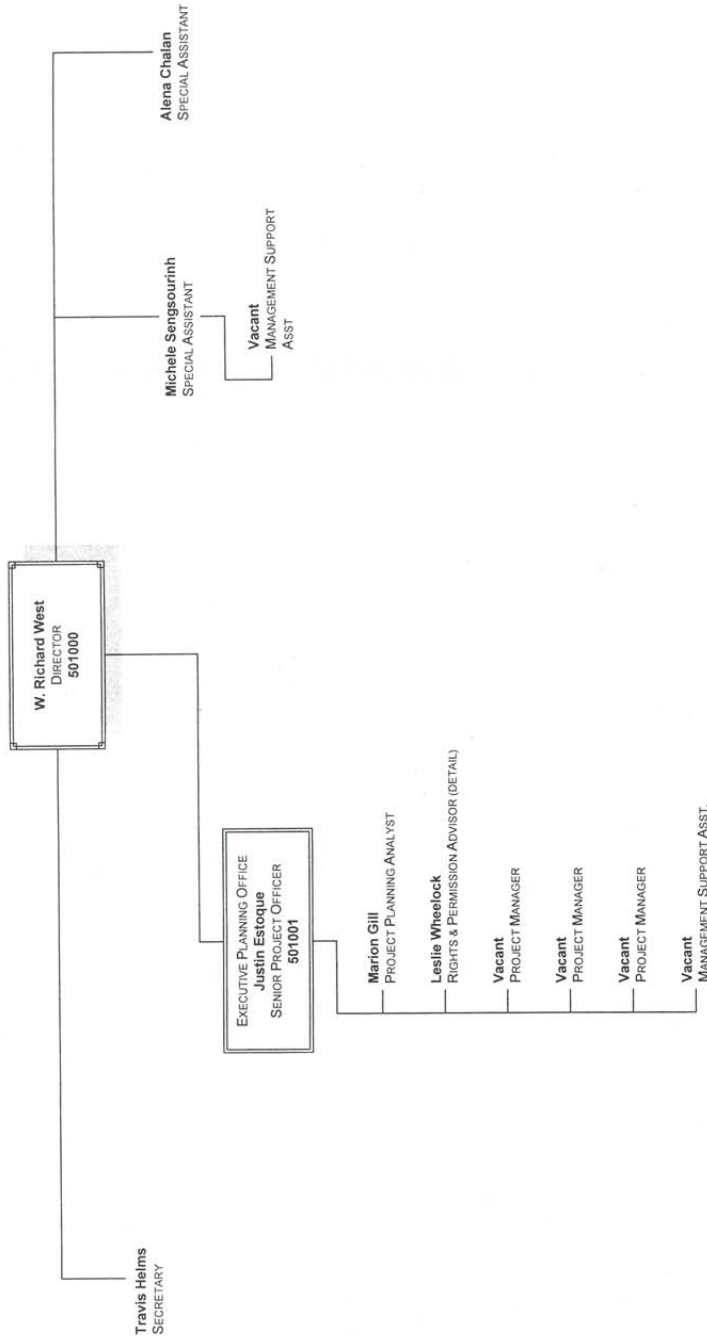
National Museum of the American Indian
Mall Museum Transition Office
Staff Organization Chart



*Please note Carolyn Rappkivian (Public Programs), Maggie Berlin (OE:A&D), Fran Biehl (Collections) and Debbie Nauta-Rodriguez (OFEO) are all active members of the Transition Office, but report to their respective departments. 7/12/02

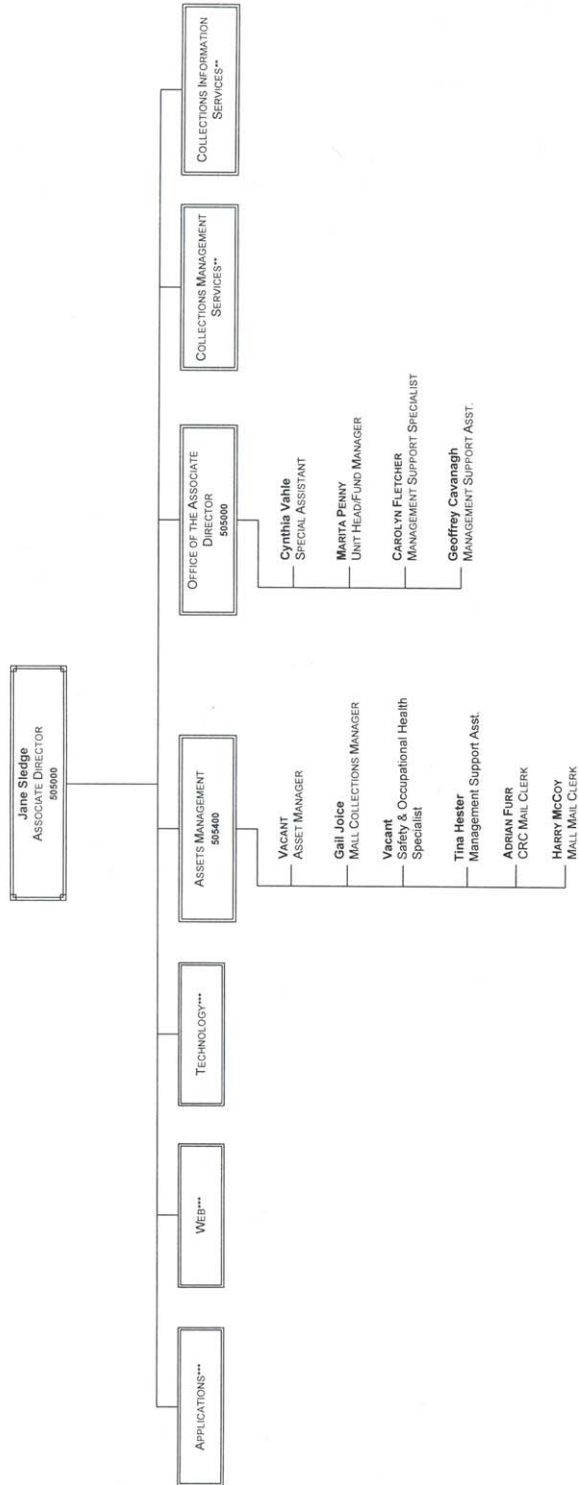
NMAI Organizational Charts from 2006, describing reorganization of departments and posted on shared network drive (11 pages):

Office of the Director Organization Chart



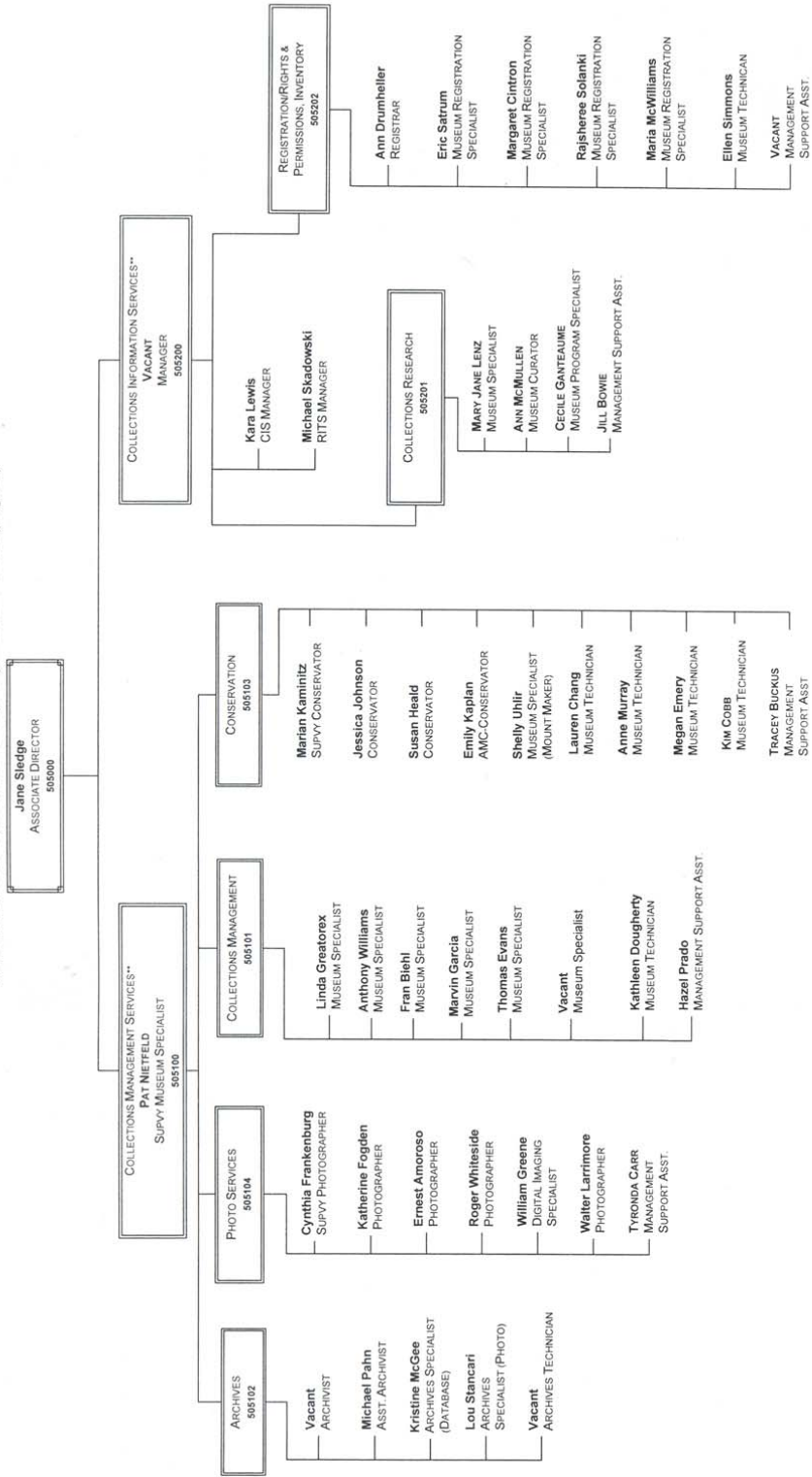
February 2006

Museum Assets Operations Group Organization Chart (page 1)



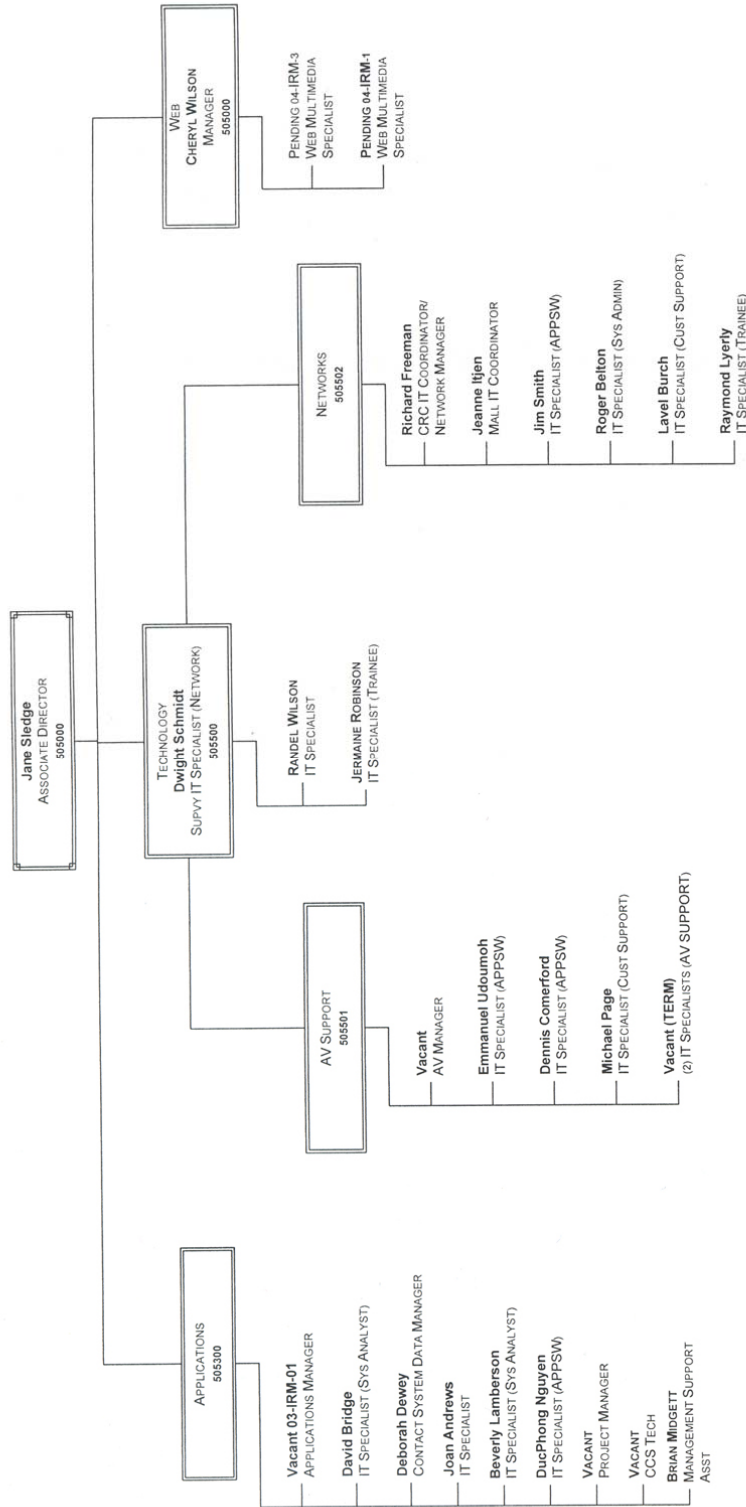
February 2006

Museum Assets Operations Group Organization Chart (page 2)



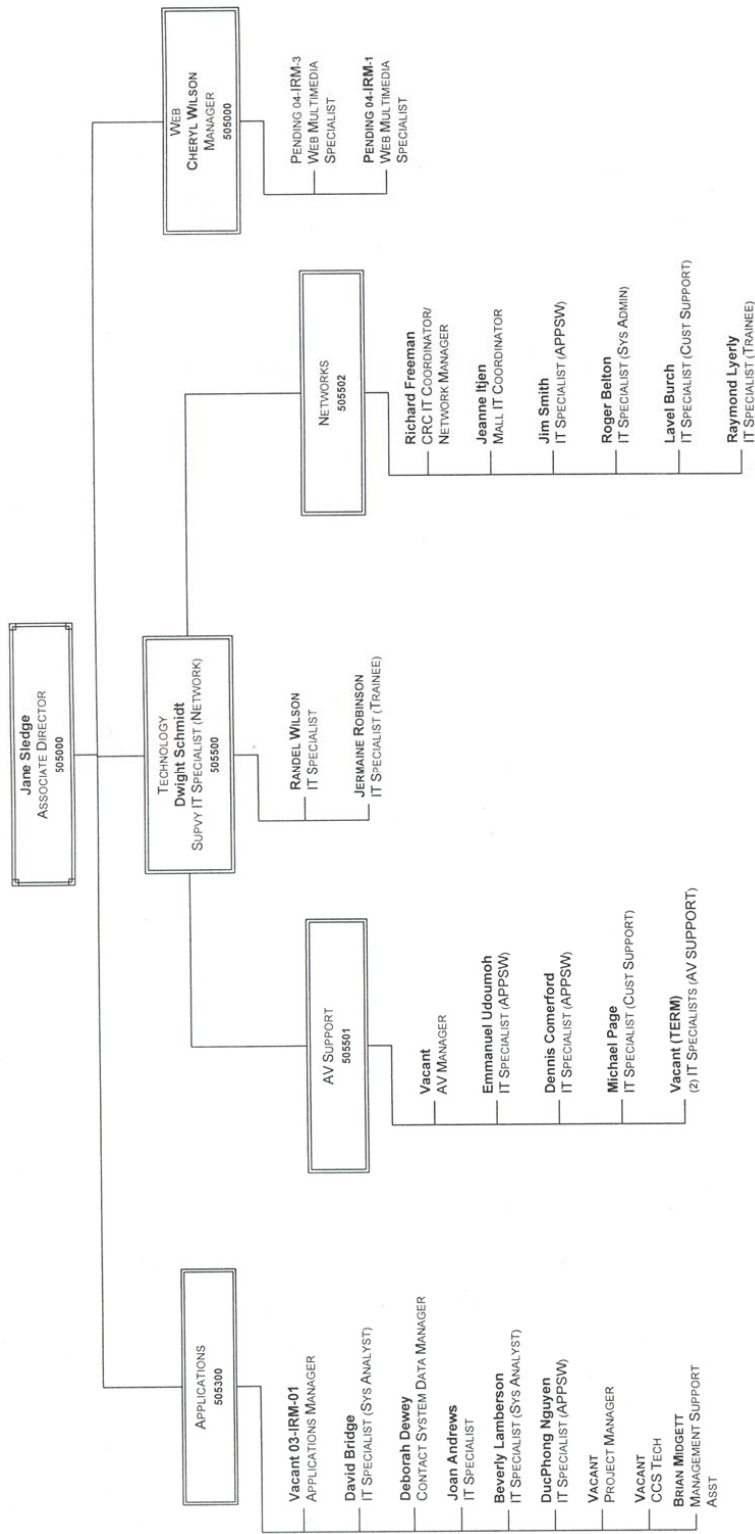
February 2006

Museum Assets Operations Group Organization Chart (page 3)



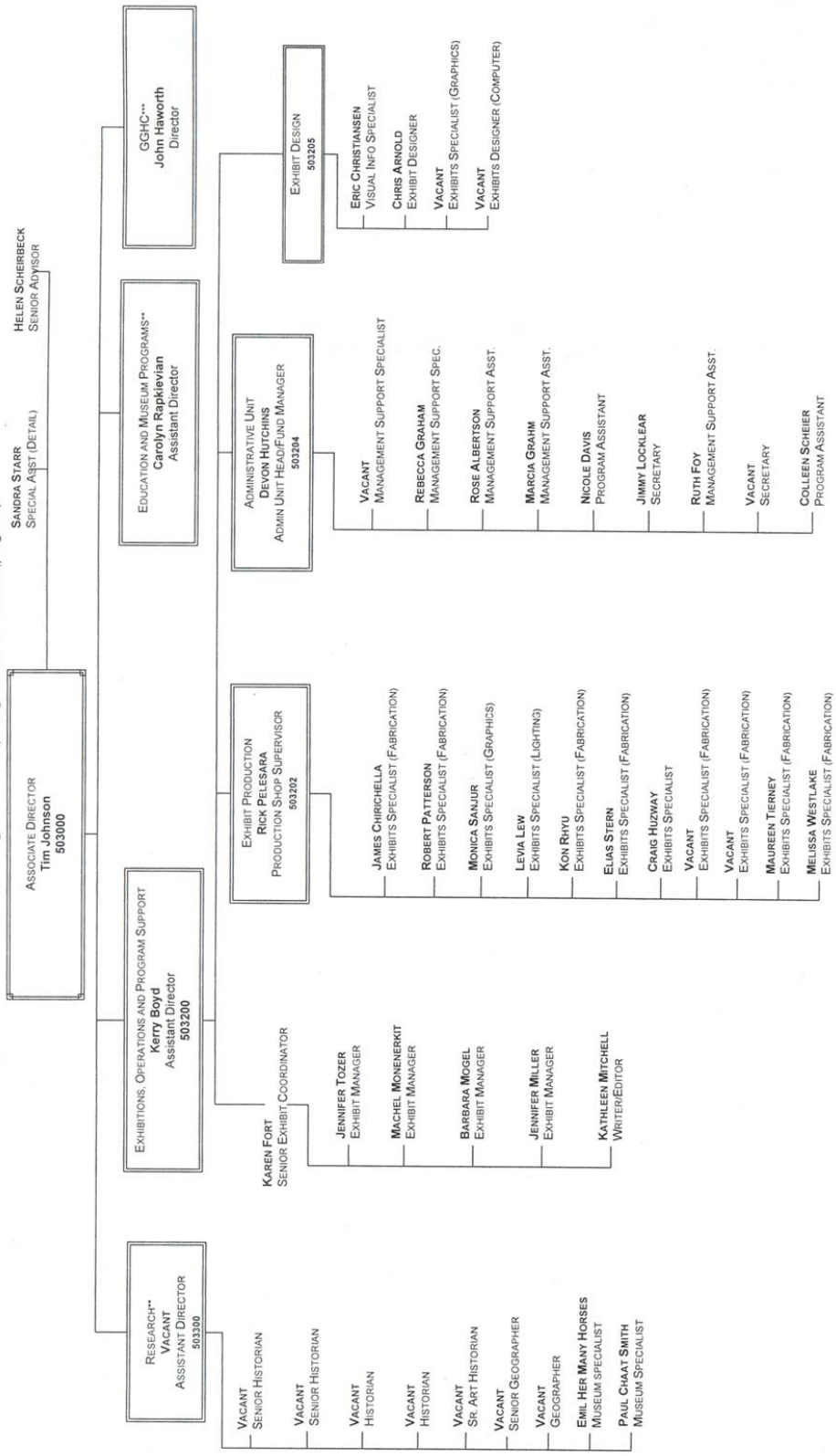
February 2006

Museum Assets Operations Group Organization Chart (page 3)



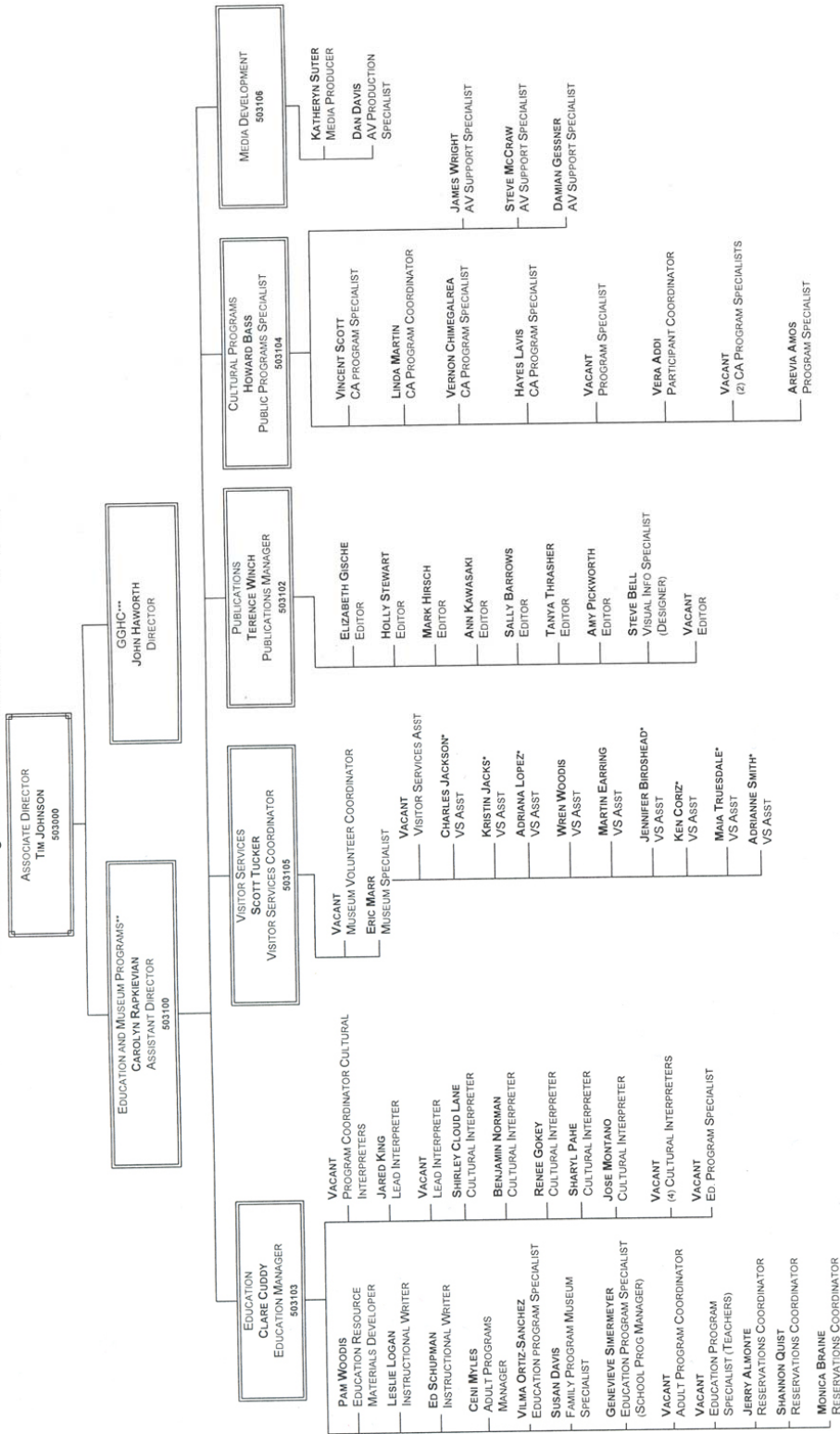
February 2006

Museum Programs Group Organization Chart (page 1)



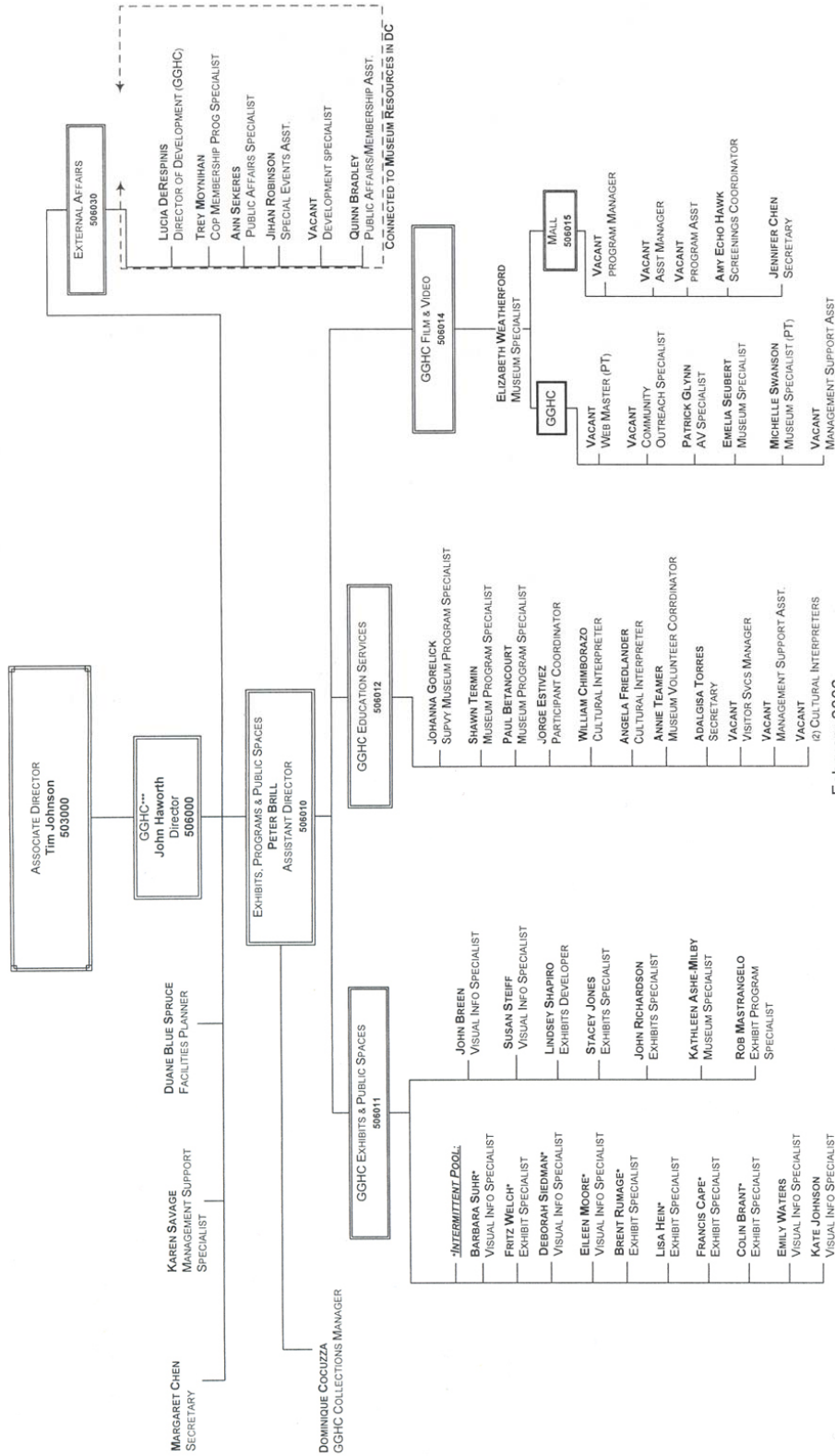
February 2006

Museum Programs Group Organization Chart (page 2)



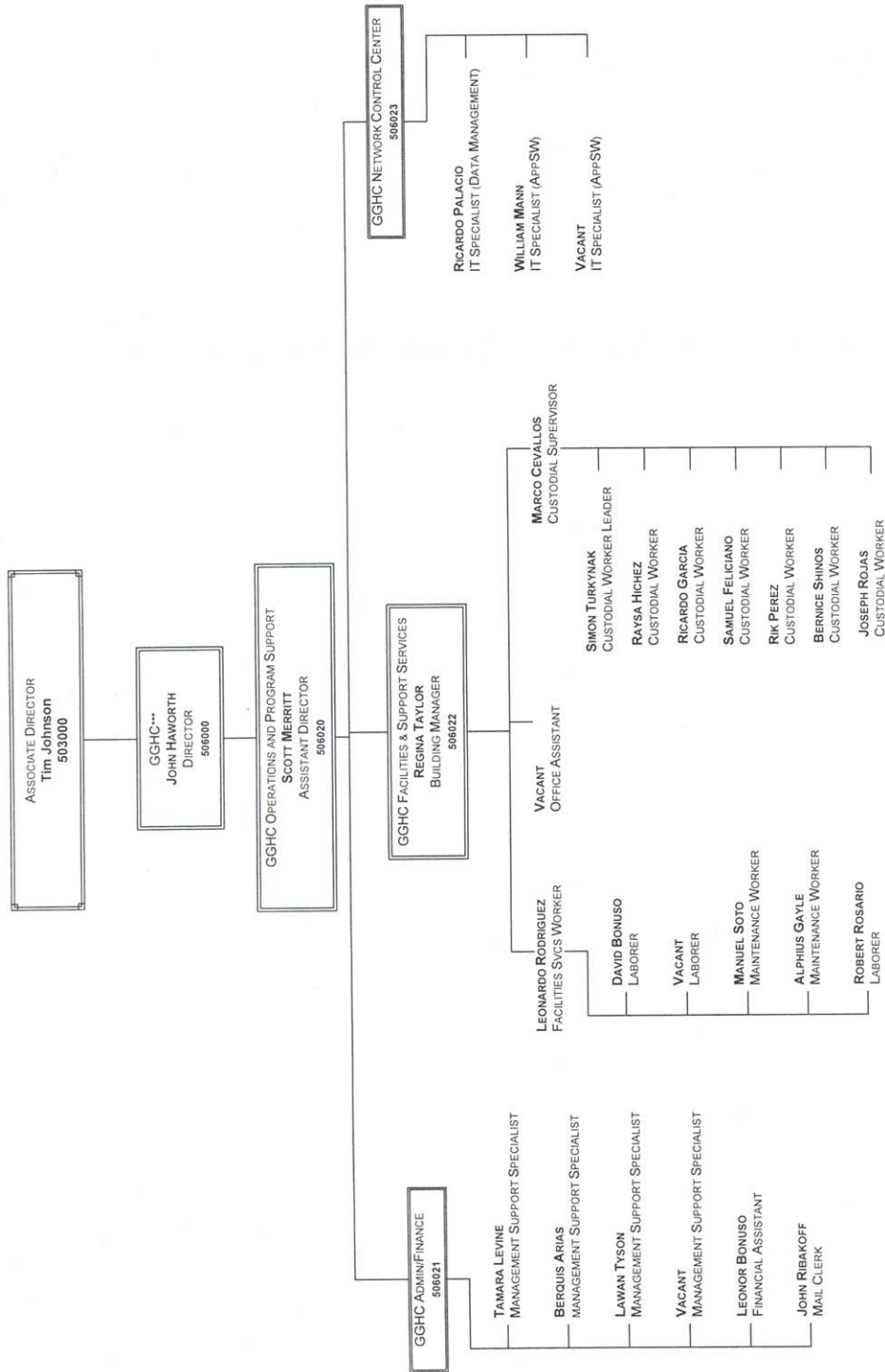
February 2006

Museum Programs Group Organization Chart (page 3)



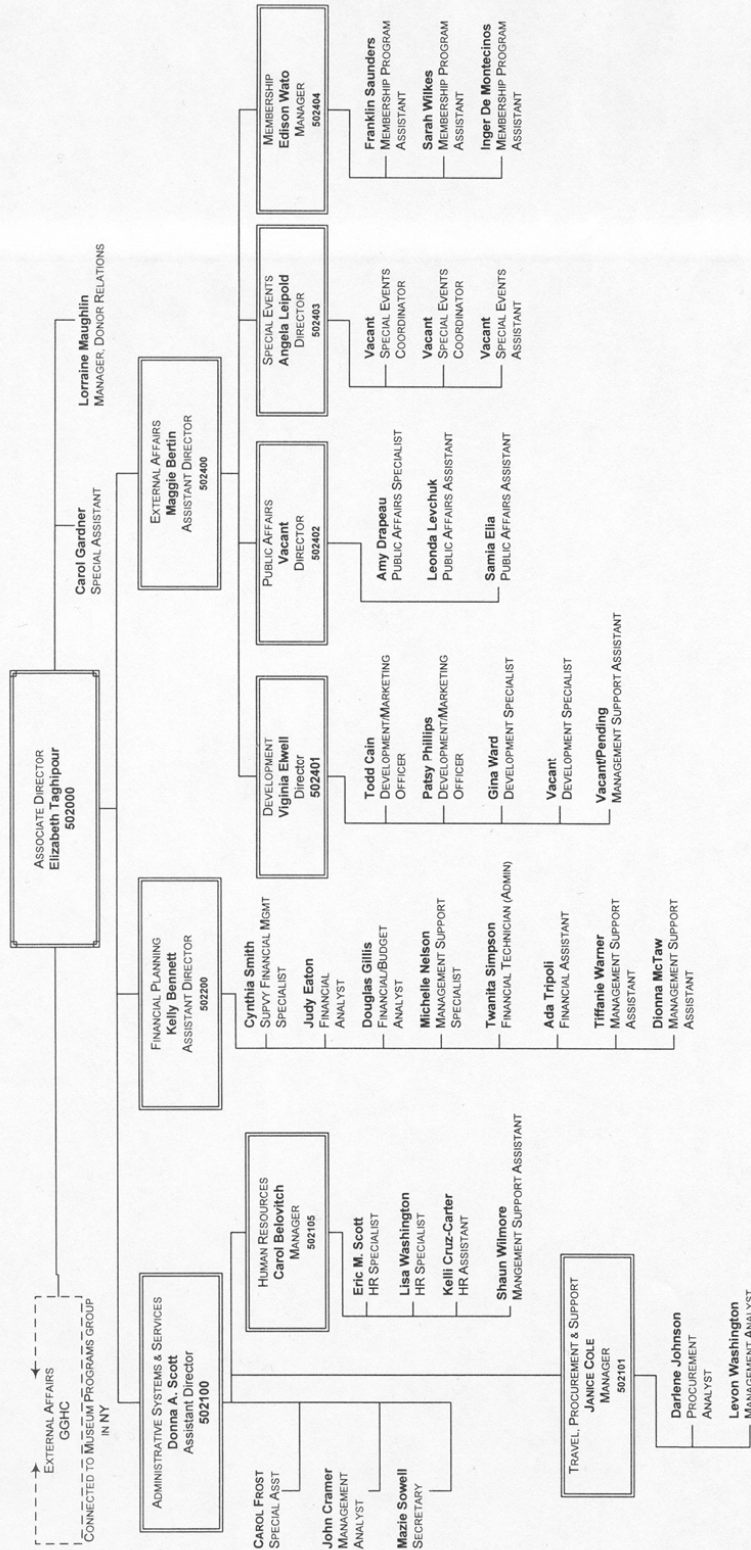
February 2006

Museum Programs Group Organization Chart (page 4)



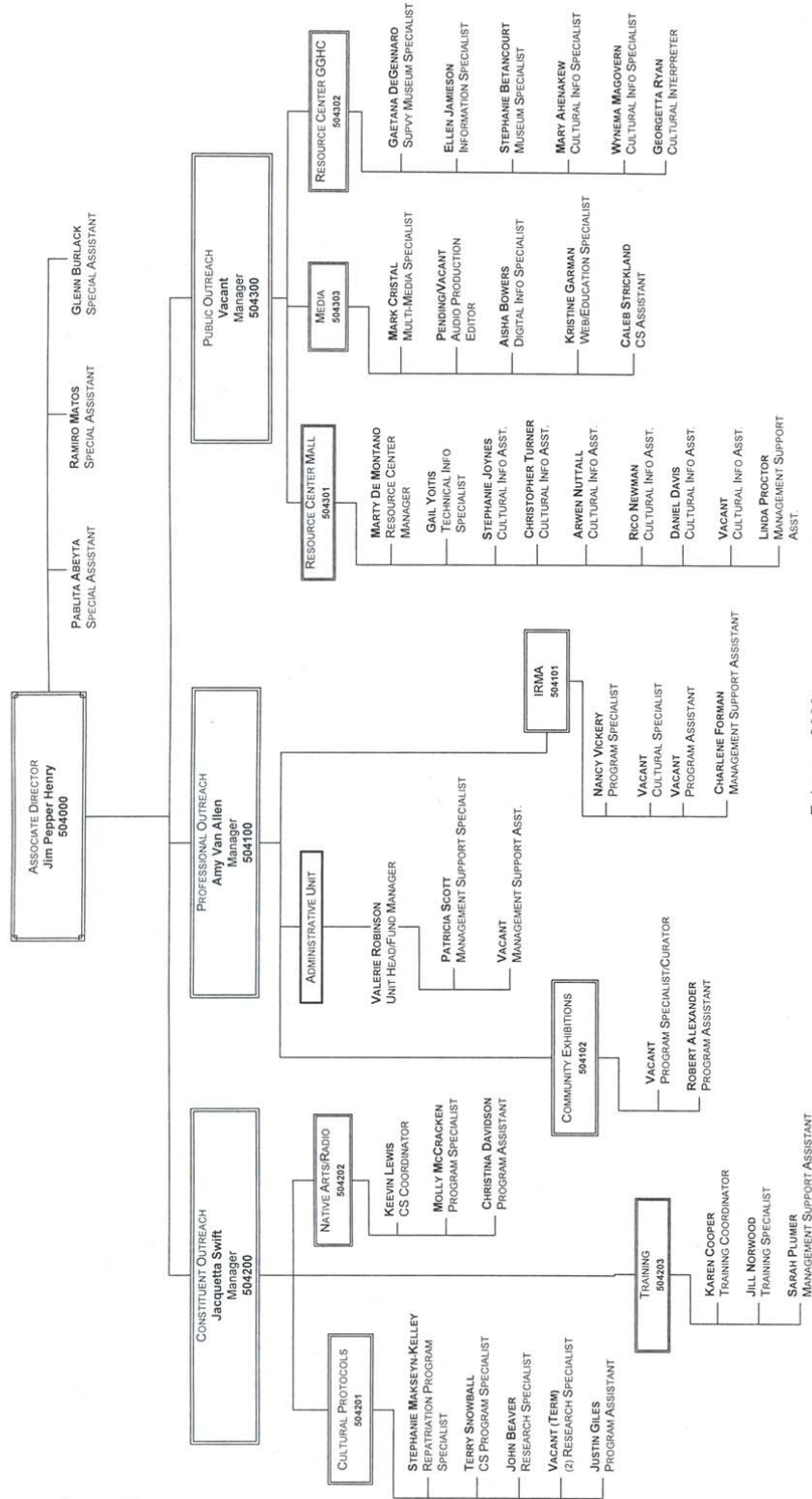
February 2006

Museum Resources Group Organization Chart



February 2006

Community and Constituent Services Group Organization Chart



February 2006

APPENDIX E

Kalinago and Chicago Schematic Design Table of Contents

National Museum of the American Indian, *Our Lives*
Kalinago Schematic Design
October 2002

KALINAGO OVERVIEW

KAL-01 INTRODUCTION

- KAL-01.1 Critical Facts
- KAL-01.2 Main Message: Survival Despite Challenges
- KAL-01.3 Timeline
- KAL-01.4 Kalinago Community Curators

KAL-02 CULTURAL CONSCIOUSNESS

- KAL-02.1 I am Kalinago
- KAL-02.2 Cultural Groups
- KAL-02.3 Carib Week
- KAL-02.4 Kalinago Language
- KAL-02.5 Traditional Foods
- KAL-02.6 Cultural Exchanges

KAL-03 ECONOMIC SURVIVAL

- KAL-03.1 Cultural Tourism
- KAL-03.2 Craft Production
- KAL-03.3 Agriculture

KAL-04 CHALLENGES

- KAL-04.1 Education
- KAL-04.2 Building the Community

National Museum of the American Indian, *Our Lives*
Chicago Schematic Design
5th Draft, January 2003

CHICAGO OVERVIEW

09-CHI-01 INTRODUCTION

- 09-CHI-01.1 Introducing Chicago
- 09-CHI-01.2 Chicago Curators

09-CHI-02 COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- 09-CHI-02.1 Fulfilling Dr. Montezuma's Dream
- 09-CHI-02.2 First Community Support Network 8
- 09-CHI-02.3 American Indian Center
- 09-CHI-02.4 Support Services

09-CHI-03 COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

- 09-CHI-03.1 Working Together
- 09-CHI-03.3 1961 and 1981 Conferences

09-CHI-04 TRIBAL INTERSECTIONS AND CROSSINGS

- 09-CHI-04.1 Introduction to Tribal Intersections and Crossings
- 09-CHI-04.2 Multi-generational, Multi-tribal
- 09-CHI-04.3 Back to the Reservation
- 09-CHI-04.4 Comers and Goers
- 09-CHI-04.5 Teaching and Learning
- 09-CHI-04.6 Different Faiths
- 09-CHI-04.7 Recovering Identity

09-CHI-05 MAIN ATTRACTION: CELEBRATIONS

- 09-CHI-05.1 Pow Wow

APPENDIX F

Kalinago and Chicago Script Drafts

KALINAGO FINAL SCRIPT (Dated March, 2004)

OUR LIVES	Carib Territory Kalinago
Introduction Introducing Kalinago T10.1.1	<p>We are still surviving and we still hold on strong to our culture. We are still striving to maintain it and to revive some of what we have lost.</p> <p><i>Judith Francis, 2002</i></p> <p>Mabrika, Mabrika!</p> <p>We live on land designated as Carib Territory on the Caribbean island of Dominica. Outsiders refer to us as Carib—a name given to us by Europeans. Today, we want to be known as Kalinago—a name that comes from our people.</p> <p>Many are unaware that we have survived as indigenous people. We have struggled to maintain our culture, and we look towards the future knowing we will have to work to keep our traditions. With determination and commitment, we know we can.</p> <p><i>Kalinago Curators, 2003</i> #</p>
<p>GRAPHICS: Map of Caribbean G10.1.1.1</p> <p>Maps will only have one caption.</p>	<p>Some 3,000 Kalinago live within Carib Territory, which stretches for nine miles along Dominica’s northeastern coast. A paved coastal highway links the territory’s eight hamlets: Bataka, Crayfish River, Salybia, St. Cyr, Gaulette River, Mahaut River, Sinecou, and Concord.</p> <p>#</p>
<p>GRAPHIC: Map of Dominica showing Carib Territory G10.1.1.2</p>	
<p>GRAPHIC: Map of Carib</p>	

Territory indicating the main road G10.1.1.3	
GRAPHIC: Map of Carib Territory in Western Hemisphere G10.1.1.4	
OBJECT: Sample Box Sample box items may or may not be identified.	
TEXT: Fact box These facts may be included in the introduction depending on the design.	<p><u>Carib Territory Facts</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 3,800-acre Carib Territory is the only officially recognized Native-held reserve in the Caribbean. • Carib Territory’s eight hamlets were wired for telephones in the 1960s and electricity in the late 1980s. • The Kalinago won title to their land in 1978, the same year Dominica achieved full independence from Great Britain. • Beginning in the late 1400s, Dominica was colonized by two European powers, France and Great Britain. • Kalinago speak English and Kweyol, a dialect that blends French, Kalinago, and West African languages. <p>#</p>
Kalinago Curators, 2003 T10.1.2	<p>Introducing the Kalinago Curators</p> <p>The Carib Council appointed Prosper Paris, Jacinta Bruney, Cozier Frederick, Gerard Langlais, Alexis Valmond, Irvince Auguiste, Sylvanie Burton, and Chief Joseph to work with NMAI on this exhibit. When I met them in November 2001, the subject of identity came up immediately. Sylvanie said, “You choose who you are,” and she and the other curators discussed the responsibilities and challenges that come with choosing to be Kalinago.</p> <p>Other community members talked about their Kalinago identity in interviews. They shared their cultural knowledge through baskets, carvings, food, dances, and stories. People spoke passionately about their identity and presence in the 21st century.</p>

	<p>Kalinago see themselves as survivors. They are still here despite all odds. This exhibit tells of their struggles and hopes for the future.</p> <p><i>Cynthia L. Chavez, NMAI, 2003</i></p> <p>All photos by Katherine Fogden, NMAI, 2002, unless otherwise indicated.</p> <p>#</p>
<p>PHOTO: Group photo of community curators G10.1.2.1</p>	<p>This exhibit was developed in collaboration with the following Kalinago curators: (from left) Gerard Langlais, Karina Cultural Group manager; Jacinta Bruney, craft-maker; Prosper Paris, Karifuna Cultural Group artistic director; Chief Garnette Joseph; and Sylvanie Burton, community development worker. Not pictured: Alexis Valmond, Carib Council member; Cozier Frederick, teacher; and Irvince Auguste, tour operator.</p> <p>Photo by Evi Oehler, NMAI, 2002.</p> <p>#</p>
<p>Introduction to Cultural Consciousness T10.2.1</p>	<p>I Am Kalinago</p> <p>You make a choice to be Kalinago, because you could either be a Kalinago person or an Afro-Dominican. If you choose to be Kalinago, you find there are a lot of obstacles.</p> <p>Cozier Frederick, 2002</p> <p>Many of us choose to be Kalinago. To choose to be Kalinago means to accept responsibility for maintaining and promoting our culture. It requires having a strong character to withstand negative stereotypes about our people. Today, more of us are proclaiming our identity. A stronger cultural awareness is emerging every day.</p> <p><i>Kalinago Curators, 2003</i></p> <p>#</p>
<p>Carib Week T10.2.2</p>	<p>Carib Week</p> <p>The whole aim of Carib Week is to educate Kalinago about our history. It is directed at everybody, especially the young people.</p> <p>Sylvanie Burton, 2002</p> <p>We celebrate Carib Week in September. We have educational sessions, and people make traditional foods and do traditional dances. Every year, more awareness is created in the</p>

	<p>community. We learn about problems facing our people, our history, where we came from, and where we want to go.</p> <p><i>Kalinago Curators, 2003</i> #</p>
PHOTO: Miss Kalinago G10.2.2.1	<p>Highlights of Carib Week include the Miss Kalinago and Princess Natari pageants.</p> <p>Anillia Sanford, Miss Kalinago 2002. #</p>
PHOTO: Princess <i>Natari</i> Contestants G10.2.2.2	<p>These five young contestants are competing for the role of Princess Natari 2002. <i>Natari</i> is the Kalinago word for “young girl.” Wynonna Joseph (far right) eventually won the title. #</p>
Cultural Groups T10.2.3	<p>Karifuna and Karina</p> <p>The cultural groups not only bring culture to younger people—they are also investigating our roots in Guyana. They are trying to bring back some of the things we’ve lost.</p> <p><i>Alexis Valmond, 2002</i></p> <p>Two cultural groups—Karifuna and Karina—promote awareness of Kalinago heritage among our youth. Karifuna uses theater to address social issues such as youth problems and unemployment. Karina sponsors cultural exchanges with the indigenous peoples of Suriname and Guyana—where our ancestors came from.</p> <p><i>Kalinago Curators, 2003</i> #</p>
PHOTO: Karina Cultural Group performing on stage G10.2.3.1	<p>Members of Karina Cultural Group rehearsing for Caribbean Festival 2000 at the Karina Cultural Village, 1999: (from left) Clement Frances, Narcissus Frederick, Nathan Paris, Gerard Langlais, and Calvin Sanford. Courtesy of Karina Cultural Group. #</p>
PHOTO: Karifuna Cultural Group performing G10.2.3.2	<p>Karifuna Cultural Group sharing Kalinago dances with visitors to Carib Territory, 2002. Photo by Cindy Miller Hopkins/Danita Delimont.com. #</p>
OBJECT: Karifuna CD case, <i>Nou Se Kalinago</i>	<p>Karifuna’s CD, <i>Nou Se Kalinago</i> (“We Are Kalinago”), features original songs by the group. Their sound is influenced by the</p>

C10.2 (EP0071.000)	Creole music of the region and incorporates Kalinago words. #
OBJECT: Drum C10.2	This drum is typical of those played by members of Karifuna and Karina. Drum, made of wood and goat hide by Gerard Langlais, 2002. (26/3260) #
Cultural Exchanges T10.2.4	Connecting with Our Brothers and Sisters We have lost so many things that we must learn from somebody else. South America, where our forefathers came from—that is where we have to go to learn. Gerard Langlais, 2002 We see the importance of connecting with Native people throughout the Western Hemisphere. The chief of Carib Territory attends Native gatherings outside of Dominica, and the cultural groups carry music and dance throughout the Americas. In these ways, we promote awareness of our culture, rediscover lost traditions, and seek ways to support our economic development. <i>Kalinago Curators, 2003</i> #
PHOTO: Reunion of the Condor and the Eagle Gathering G10.2.4.1 Note to designer: We might replace this photo.	During the Reunion of the Condor and Eagle Indigenous Action Summit in Dominica in 2002, Native leaders from all over the Americas gathered to build partnerships and discuss economic development. The eagle symbolizes the indigenous peoples of the Northern Hemisphere. The condor, the indigenous peoples of the Southern Hemisphere. Reunion of the Condor and Eagle Indigenous Action Summit Closing Ceremonies, 2002. Photo by Gail Lewis. #
Language T10.2.5	Communication and Language We've lost most of our language. But what little we have, we put into song and dance. Sylvanie Burton, 2002 Before Europeans arrived, we had our own language. That was 500 years ago. Today, most of us speak Kweyol, a blend of

	<p>French, Kalinago, and West African languages. Still, we always try to use Native words and phrases the elders have taught us.</p> <p><i>Kalinago Curators, 2003</i> #</p>
<p>GRAPHIC: Map of Carib Territory with Kalinago place names G10.2.5.1</p>	<p>The Kalinago name for Dominica is Waitukubuli, which means “tall is her body.”</p> <p>Kalinago Curators, 2003</p> <p>Map of Carib Territory with Kalinago place-names. Courtesy of Lennox Honychurch. #</p>
<p>Traditional Foods T10.2.6</p>	<p>Kalinago Cuisine</p> <p>Sometimes when I give my children Kalinago food, they tell me they want store-bought bread.</p> <p><i>Sylvie Warrington, 2002</i></p> <p>Our young people are more interested in store-bought foods, so fewer people are making traditional foods these days. But we still consider food an important part of our heritage. Traditional foods made from cassava are often served at special events, celebrations, and tourist attractions.</p> <p><i>Kalinago Curators, 2003</i> #</p>
<p>PHOTO: Cooking cassava G10.2.6.1</p>	<p>A versatile root, cassava can be made into bread, pudding, and even beer. After the root has been peeled, shredded, and the water extracted, people add sugar to the meal and roast it on a hot iron, which produces cassava bread.</p> <p>Making cassava bread, 2002. #</p>
<p>Introduction to Economic Survival T10.3.1</p>	<p>Kalinago Economy</p> <p>Our problems and solutions are all tied to the economy. Bananas no longer support us.</p> <p><i>Andel Challenger, 2002</i></p> <p>Bananas have been the main cash crop for farmers in Carib Territory for generations. But international competition has become fierce, and banana growing is now an unreliable source of income. Jobs are scarce, and Kalinago are leaving the territory to find work.</p>

	<p>We are now trying to develop tourism as a remedy. Already, tour buses bring travelers to the territory to watch cultural groups perform and to buy crafts at roadside stands. A new tourist attraction—which replicates a traditional Kalinago village—is under development.</p> <p><i>Kalinago Curators, 2003</i> #</p>
PHOTO: Banana Harvesting G10.3.1.1	<p>It is very difficult within the territory. There aren't too many job opportunities. If you're really lucky, you might get something in town, in Roseau.</p> <p>Cozier Frederick, 2002</p> <p>Harvesting bananas, 2002. #</p>
PHOTO: Owner of store and internet cafe G10.3.1.2	<p>Some Kalinago own stores and other small businesses to support themselves.</p> <p>Kevin Dangleben in his store/internet café, Salybia, 2002. #</p>
OBJECT: Banana leaf cricket bat C10.4 This case includes media (OL-AV 10.3) showing a cricket game in Carib Territory.	<p>We enjoy cricket, a popular recreational sport introduced by the English. Makeshift bats are often made from banana-tree leaves, which are cheaper than manufactured cricket bats.</p> <p><i>Kalinago Curators, 2003</i></p> <p>Banana-leaf cricket bat, 2002. (26/0552) #</p>
PROP: Manufactured cricket bat C10.4 (EP0563.000)	<p>Cricket wasn't part of our culture, but now most of Dominica will tell you if you want to see good cricket just go to the Carib Territory.</p> <p><i>Sylvanie Burton, 2002</i></p> <p>Commercial children's size (junior) cricket bat. #</p>
PHOTO: Banana trees with blue plastic bags over bananas G10.3.4.1 This photo will be adhered to door of case 10.5.	<p>These blue plastic bags protect the developing fruit from birds and insects. Bags provide better-quality fruit for the market, but are expensive and may be used only once.</p> <p><i>Kalinago Curators, 2003</i></p>

	Developing bananas covered in bags, 2002. #
OBJECT: Two Manufactured cricket balls C10.5	Manufactured cricket balls are made of hard leather. All commercial cricket gear is imported. Manufactured cricket balls. (26/0538) #
OBJECT: Two Blue plastic cricket balls (EP0347.000) and (EP0489.000) C10.5	Store-bought cricket balls are expensive, so young people make their own by recycling blue plastic bags used to protect bananas. Plastic bags are melted together, layer upon layer, and rolled into a ball. Homemade cricket balls. #
OBJECT: Blue plastic banana bag C10.5 (EP0381.000) No caption	
Cultural Tourism T10.3.2	Caught in the Wave of Tourism We hope to develop our own type of tourism. We don't want to preserve our culture just so people can come and see us. It must be for our own identity. <i>Garnette Joseph, 2001</i> We see a need to organize tourism to Carib Territory so we benefit more directly from it. The Carib Model Village will help us do so. Tourists will learn about Kalinago crafts, food, dance, and music at a site based on our traditional architecture. <i>Kalinago Curators, 2003</i> #
PHOTO: Carib Model Village G10.3.2.1	The Carib Model Village will be like a living museum, because, today, you don't see the Kalinago people as you would have seen them 100 years ago. We are just like any other people, wearing the type of clothes that anybody would wear. <i>Alexis Valmond, 2002</i> Carib Model Village, 2000. Courtesy of the National Development Corporation of Dominica.
GRAPHICS: Map showing highlights of Kalinago Territory	Tourist attractions in Carib Territory include a legendary rock formation called L'Escalier Tête Chien, walking trails to

G10.3.2.2	<p>Crayfish River Falls, Karina and Karifuna performances, and roadside craft stands. No one knows this island better than a Kalinago.</p> <p><i>Kalinago Curators, 2003</i> #</p>
<p>Craft Production T10.3.3</p>	<p><i>Bananas are Finished—Craft is Now Coming</i></p> <p>I learned to make baskets from my parents. I didn't want to make baskets when I was growing up because I thought I would go somewhere else to work. Now I'm glad I can make them.</p> <p><i>Jenny Auguiste, 2002</i></p> <p>As the banana economy weakens, many of us have returned to making traditional crafts for a living. Baskets and other crafts can be found throughout the territory—made almost exclusively for sale to tourists.</p> <p><i>Kalinago Curators, 2003</i> #</p>
<p>PHOTO: Larouma plant G10.3.3.1</p> <p>Photo adheres to door of case 10.6. with the objects listed below (C10.6)</p>	<p>We use material from the larouma plant to weave baskets. Weavers use the sun to dry the split reeds, and color the reeds a shiny black by burying them in mud for several days. Additional colors, such as purple and yellow, are derived from local plants.</p> <p><i>Kalinago Curators, 2003</i></p> <p>Larouma plant, 2002. Photo by Evi Oehler, NMAI. #</p>
<p>OBJECT: Small basket (prop) C10.6 (EP0350.000)</p>	<p>Small baskets like these are sold to visitors. #</p>
<p>OBJECTS: Small knives for basket-making C10.6</p>	<p>Small knives used to cut larouma reeds into strips for weaving baskets, ca. 1980. (26/3276) #</p>
<p>OBJECT: Samples of larouma plant C10.6 (EP0351.000)</p>	<p>Strips of larouma. #</p>
<p>OBJECT: Large purse C10.6</p>	<p>Tourism encourages the production of crafts, which is one of the strongest aspects of Kalinago identity.</p> <p>Garnette Joseph, 2002</p> <p>Kalinago create many everyday items for sale, such as this purse, made by Paul Frederick, 2002. (26/0556)</p>

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OBJECT: Basketry bottle C10.6	Basketry bottle, which is formed by weaving over a glass bottle, made by Paulinus Frederick, 2002. (25/9605) #
OBJECT: Machete C10.6	Machetes are one of the most important tools in this tropical environment. They are needed to cut through the abundance of growth you find in the territory. It is not uncommon to see people walking down the street with machetes. Machete, ca. 2002. (26/3278) #
Handling objects in C10.7 These handling objects include: 1 small basket (EP0334.000) 1 miniature canoe (EP0332.000) 1 wife puller (EP0335.000) 1 blue plastic cricket ball (EP0336.000) 1 rattle (EP0333.000)	
OBJECT: Wife puller C10.8	This finger trap—also known as a “wife-leader”—is popular with tourists. Pulling the ring causes the trap to tighten around the finger, preventing removal. <i>Attrape-la-main</i> (finger-trap toy), made by Steven John, 2002. (26/0539) #
OBJECT: Bird feeder C10.8	The Kalinago create popular tourist items from natural resources, such as this coconut-shell birdfeeder, made by Marian Charles Paris, 2002. (26/0547) #
OBJECTS: Necklaces (2) C10.8	Seed necklaces, made by Steven John, 2002. (26/0545) #
OBJECT: Small mortar and pestle C10.8	A mortar and pestle is a common kitchen item used by Kalinago women. Smaller versions are sold to tourists. Mortar and pestle, made by Martin Etienne, 2002. (25/9695) #
Agriculture T10.3.4	Our Garden Kalinago people depend on two things: agriculture and

	<p>craftmaking.</p> <p><i>Regina Joseph, 2002</i></p> <p>Passion fruit, mangoes, coconuts, dasheen, cassava, breadfruit, and, of course, bananas are some of the foods grown in the territory. We can never go hungry because all we have to do is pick fruit off the trees.-Many of us also tend gardens. They provide us with food and we can sell some of our harvest.</p> <p><i>Kalinago Curators, 2003</i> #</p>
<p>Introduction to Challenges T10.4.1</p>	<p>Building the Community</p> <p>The culture today is a challenge and you have to be very strong. How can you integrate with the modern ways? And how can we stay abreast of what's happening around us? It's like the world is going one way and you're turning the reverse. The really important thing is to decide what you can bring with you.</p> <p>Prosper Paris, 2002</p> <p>We face many challenges: limited educational and work opportunities; an exodus of our people to neighboring islands for work; and limited transportation to get to schools and jobs on the island. Still, we remain hopeful that education and solidarity will help us overcome these obstacles.</p> <p><i>Kalinago Curators, 2003</i> #</p>
<p>Education T10.4.2</p>	<p>Let's Teach Ourselves</p> <p>Kalinago must not expect the government to put any syllabus in the education system for us. We must look to ourselves. We must start teaching ourselves our Kalinago history.</p> <p><i>Irvine Auguste, 2002</i></p> <p>Kalinago culture and history are not part of the curriculum in our local schools. That is one reason why so many of our young people know little about their heritage. Today, we are seeking more control over education. Our goal is to have a curriculum that emphasizes our culture.</p> <p><i>Kalinago Curators, 2003</i> #</p>
<p>OBJECT: Carib Book #1 by Honeychurch</p>	<p>This book, part of a series, is one resource for Kalinago wanting to learn more about their history and culture.</p>

C10.9 (EP0086.000)	Lennox Honychurch, <i>Book 1: The Caribbean People</i> (Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1995). #
OBJECT: <i>Kalinago Myths: A Retelling</i> C10.9 (EP0085.000)	This collection of stories preserves—and makes more widely available—stories from Kalinago oral tradition. Julius Green, <i>Kalinago Myths: A Retelling</i> (WAIKADA, 2002). #
OBJECT: "Quest of the Carib Canoe" video case C10.9 (EP0383.000)	In 1997, the <i>Gli Gli</i> , a 35-foot dugout canoe, set sail from Carib Territory on a journey to reunite the Kalinago with Carib communities in Guyana. The building of the canoe and its journey was documented in the <i>Quest of the Carib Canoe</i> (2000). #
PHOTO: Gli Gli canoe photo G10.4.1.1	<i>Gli Gli</i> and crew, 1999. Photo by Clay Mills. #
GRAPHIC: Forward from Kalinago Myths book (in C10.9) G10.4.1.2	
Object: Two postcards in C10.9 Prop (EP0499.000)	
Object: 2 brochures in C10.9 Prop (EP0497.000) (EP0498.000)	
Building the Community T10.4.3	Reuniting Ourselves We tend to forget our traditional ways. We are becoming too individualistic, too selfish. We must strive to reunite ourselves. <i>Faustulus Frederick, 2002</i> Community cooperation—or <i>koudemen</i> —was a cornerstone of traditional life. Whether building a house or harvesting bananas, we helped each other meet life's challenges. Today, cooperation is harder to achieve. There are eight separate hamlets in our territory, and limited transportation makes it hard for us to come together. Still, we are working to unify our people—to bring <i>koudemen</i> back into our lives. <i>Kalinago Curators, 2003</i>

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PHOTO: Protest during Carib Week G10.4.3.1	Demonstration to raise political awareness during Carib Week, 2002. #
PHOTO: Three women making outfits during the Miss Kalinago and Natari pageants G10.4.3.2	People work together to prepare for cultural events, such as the Miss Kalinago and Princess Natari pageants. Women making clothes for the pageants, 2002. #
PHOTO: Group of cricket players G10.4.3.3	Cricket brings Kalinago together for fun. Cricket players, 2002. #
PHOTO: Carib Territory Guest House G10.4.3.4	Several established Kalinago businesses support tourism. The Carib Territory Guest House, owned and operated by Charles and Magarete Williams, 2002. #
PHOTO: Linda's One-stop Grocery Stop G10.4.3.5	Linda Auguiste owns this small grocery, one of many Kalinago-owned businesses that cater to the local population. Linda's One-Stop Grocery Shop, 2002. #
PHOTO: Craft Shop Owner G10.4.3.7	Many Kalinago sell baskets and other crafts at roadside shops and stands. Roadside craft shop, 2002. #
GRAPHIC: Pull Quote	For me, I am not Carib. I'm not black. I'm not white. I am a Kalinago. <i>Renney Auguiste, 2002</i>
GRAPHIC: Pull Quote	I think Kalinago are courageous people. We are courageous because we can stand above struggles.-That's why we are still here today. <i>Alexis Valmond, 2002</i>
GRAPHIC: Pull Quote	I'm still here. I'm a very proud Kalinago. I identify myself by identifying with my ancestors. <i>Raphael Auguiste, 2002</i>

CHICAGO FINAL SCRIPT (Dated March 2004)

CHICAGO	
<p>Introducing Chicago T09.1.1</p>	<p>Chicago <i>All Tribal Nations</i></p> <p>Chicago Indians are unique. Unique in the city because we're Indian and unique in Indian communities because of the urban experience.</p> <p><i>Ed Two Rivers (Ojibwe), 2002</i></p> <p>Our community is different from the other Native communities you've encountered in <i>Our Lives</i>. For one thing, we represent many different tribes from all over North America. For another, we're urban Indians—residents of one of the biggest cities in the U.S. Welcome to our exhibit!</p> <p>Each of us brings different beliefs and traditions to Chicago. By working together, we've built a strong community and a network of organizations that serve our needs. The foundation of our community rests on shared Native values. They keep us strong.</p> <p><i>Chicago Native Curators, 2003</i> #</p>
<p>GRAPHIC: Map of Chicago metro area, highlighting various offices and programs that support the American Indian community (G09.1.1.1)</p>	<p>This map indicates the location of more than 30 organizations and programs that meet the social, spiritual, educational, health, and political needs of Chicago's American Indian community. #</p>
<p>GRAPHIC: Map of Chicago within the western hemisphere (G09.1.1.2)</p>	
<p>OBJECT: Sample Box</p>	
	<p><u>Chicago Native Community Facts</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chicago ranked 8th among cities with large Native populations in 2000. • Representatives of more than 100 tribes and nations live in Chicago.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chicago is the 3rd most populous city and metropolitan area in the U.S. • After World War II, the federal government established special programs to encourage Native people living on reservations to move to urban areas, such as Chicago. <p>#</p>
<p>Introducing the Chicago Curators T09.1.2</p>	<p>Introducing the Chicago Native Curators</p> <p>I spoke to representatives of Chicago’s Native community in July 2001 to request they be a part of <i>Our Lives</i>. Within a month, I was sitting down with Susan Power, Mavis Neconish, Joe Podlasek, Cindy Soto, Rita Hodge, Ansel Deon, Cyndee Fox-Starr, Jayne Blacker, Pat Xerikos, and Dave Spencer. All had been nominated and elected at a public meeting to act as curators on this exhibit.</p> <p>The hard work, organization, and care that went into the curators’ decisions and actions showed me how their community operates. They approached this exhibit much like other projects in their community: through delegation, identification of resources, and support from the larger community.</p> <p>Support from the community came in many forms: donations of objects, loans of photos, and time for interviews. They are proud to be the only urban Native community represented in <i>Our Lives</i>.</p> <p><i>Cynthia L. Chavez, NMAI, 2003</i></p> <p>All photos by R. A. Whiteside, NMAI, 2003, unless otherwise indicated.</p> <p>#</p>
<p>Chicago Curators PHOTO: Group photo of community curators (G09.1.2.1)</p>	<p>This exhibit was developed in collaboration with the following Chicago Native curators: (first row, from left) Cyndee Fox-Starr (Omaha/Odawa), American Indian Health Service of Chicago, Inc.; Mavis Neconish (Menominee/Potawatomi), collection management assistant, The Field Museum; Patricia Xerikos (Anishinaabe/Colombian), American Indian Center (AIC) Advisory Board; (second row, from left) Rita Hodge (Diné), Native American Support Program, University of Illinois at Chicago; Cynthia Soto (Sicangu Lakota/Puerto Rican), Citywide American Indian Education Council; (third row, from left) David Spencer (Chata/Diné), AIC fundraising developer; Susan Power (Dakota/Yanktonai), founding member of AIC, historian, and elder; Ansel Deon (Sioux/Navajo), AIC cultural coordinator; and Joe Podlasek (Ojibwe/Polish), AIC executive director. Not pictured: Jayne Wapahnok Blacker (Menominee/Potawatomi), student, University of Illinois at Chicago.</p> <p>#</p>

<p>Introduction to Community Support T09.2.1</p>	<p>Fulfilling Dr. Montezuma’s Dream</p> <p>There is a strong sense of community here—with a lot of services that support it. There’s health, social services, education, jobs, and training. Every one of them serves as magnets that keep pulling Indians back into the center of the community.</p> <p><i>Antonia Sheehy (Blackfeet), 2002</i></p> <p>Dr. Carlos Montezuma (Yavapai, 1865–1923) sowed the seeds for Chicago’s Native organizations in the early 1900s. A surgeon and activist, he helped Indians traveling through Chicago and defended Native people whose rights had been violated. His dream of building a community-based support network continues to inspire us.</p> <p>More than 30 Native organizations and programs provide for the well-being of Chicago’s Native people. Each one is grounded in Native values such as reciprocity, generosity, and sharing. In many ways, they fill the role extended families play in tribal communities.</p> <p><i>Chicago Native Curators, 2003</i> #</p>
<p>PHOTO: Dr. Carlos Montezuma (G09.2.1.1)</p>	<p>Dr. Carlos Montezuma. Courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, ca. 1890. (NAA 3421B1) #</p>
<p>First Community Support Network T09.2.2</p>	<p>Sink-or-Swim Years</p> <p>We chose to bond together in an intertribal way to make this community.</p> <p><i>Susan Power (Dakota/Yanktonai), 2002</i></p> <p>In the 1920s and ’30s, Chicago had a small but thriving Native community. People worked together to help one another and to bring attention to Native issues. This diverse group built our first support network. They are now the elders of Chicago’s Native community.</p> <p><i>Chicago Native Curators, 2003</i> #</p>
<p>PHOTO: Current photos of Chicago community elders (G09.2.2.1)</p>	<p>Current community elders, who helped build the foundation for the Chicago Native community, 2003: (first row, from left) Clifford Blackbird (Omaha), Josephine Blackbird-Fox (Omaha), Susan Power (Dakota/Yanktonai); (back row) Angie Decorah (Ho-Chunk).</p>

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PHOTO: The early years (G09.2.2.2)	<p>They always say you should pull yourself up by your bootstraps. That's what we did. We had no way to pick up a phone to call home, and no one to borrow from. There was no social service agency to go to and no Indian Center to get groceries from. We had nothing. Most of us would keep a box of crackers on hand, because we knew if we ran out of money, what would we eat? We had it hard, but it made you strong.</p> <p><i>Susan Power (Dakota/Yanktonai), 2002</i></p> <p>Community gathering at the American Indian Center on LaSalle Street, ca. 1960: (first row, from left) Stella Johnson (Ho-Chunk); John Artichoker Sr. (Ho-Chunk); Mrs. Artichoker; Father Peter Powell (adopted Cheyenne); (second row, from left) Lillian Naquayouma (Ho-Chunk); LaVerne Heaver; Fredeline Bearskin (Ho-Chunk); (third row, from left) Lenore George (Cayuga); Lyman George (Seneca); Rob Johnson (Ho-Chunk); Ernest Naquayouma (Hopi), unknown; (fourth row, from left) Hattie Walker (Ho-Chunk); Melvin Walker (Mandan/Arikara); unknown; Helen Hardin (Ho-Chunk); and unknown. Photo by Ben Bearskin. Courtesy of D'Arcy McNickle Center, The Newberry Library, Chicago.</p> <p>#</p>
PHOTO: Powwow at AIC on LaSalle St. (G09.2.2.3)	<p>Powwow at the American Indian Center on LaSalle Street, ca. 1953: (dancers, from left) Dennis Keahna (Mesquakie); Everett Kapaya (Mesquakie); Kenny Funmaker (Ho-Chunk); (drummers) Fred Green Deer (Ho-Chunk); Ben Bearskin (Ho-Chunk/Sioux); Harry Funmaker (Ho-Chunk); Jesse Wells (Ho-Chunk); Ernest Naquayouma (Hopi); (sitting, left side) Anita Winnishiek (Ho-Chunk); Suzanne Cordier (Oglala); Rose Maney (Ho-Chunk); Fredeline Bearskin (Ho-Chunk); (sitting, right side) Ludie Bettise (Alabama Coushatta); Dan Bettise (Alabama Coushatta); Willard Lamere (Ho-Chunk). Photo courtesy of the American Indian Center.</p>
The American Indian Center T09.2.3	<p>Home Away from Home</p> <p>This is what I grew up in—the American Indian Center. This is what everyone calls home. It's the home base, the reservation for Chicago.</p> <p><i>David Spencer (Chata/Diné), 2002</i></p> <p>The American Indian Center (AIC) is one of the oldest urban Native centers in the U.S. Since 1953, the center has brought Native families and individuals together for social, cultural, political, and educational programs. It serves as a place where Native people can find out about jobs and meet other Indians. Most of all, it's the place where we go to be ourselves.</p> <p><i>Chicago Native Curators, 2003</i></p>

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PHOTO: AIC, 1970 (G09.2.3.1)	The most important thing for American Indians in Chicago is the AIC. You'll see people that'll go off and become the head of an organization. Well, some of them learned to be Indian at the Indian Center. <i>Susan Power (Dakota/Yanktonai), 2002</i> AIC on Wilson Avenue, ca. 1970. Courtesy of the American Indian Center. #
GRAPHIC: American Indian Center logo (G09.2.3.2)	The American Indian Center is one of the first places Native people come when they arrive in Chicago. This is the "mother" of the community, as we call it. Probably 99.9% of the Native organizations in Chicago originated at the AIC. <i>Joe Podlasek (Ojibwe/Polish), 2002</i>
OBJECTS: Replica of American Indian Center bulletin board with postings C9.3	
OBJECT: AIC bulletin board flyer "Powwow Jan. 4, 2003 C9.3 (EP0041.000)	
OBJECT: AIC bulletin board flyer "Starting a job soon?" C9.3 (EP0325.000)	
OBJECT: AIC bulletin board flyer "Joliet Powwow" C9.3 (EP0042.000)	
OBJECT: AIC bulletin board flyer "Native American Graduation Ceremony and Powwow" C9.3 (EP0102.000)	
OBJECT: AIC bulletin board flyer "Prevention Outreach" C9.3	

(EP0371.000)	
OBJECT: AIC bulletin board flyer "Native Medicine Garden" (EP0374.000)	
OBJECT: AIC bulletin board flyer "Positive Paths" C9.3 (EP0373.000)	
OBJECT: AIC bulletin board flyer "CIMC-CBO flyer" C9.3 (EP0385.000)	
OBJECT: AIC bulletin board flyer "Walk for Life" C9.3 (EP0376.000)	
OBJECT: Binder containing original membership list of American Indian Center and document that created AIC (L00101.001) C9.2	Susan Power, founding member of the American Indian Center, has kept this binder containing documents that chronicle its history. The binder includes a copy of the Articles of Incorporation and the original membership list. American Indian Center Articles of Incorporation, ca. 1955, and membership list, ca. 1958. Loan from Susan Power. #
GRAPHIC: 1959 AIC newsletter (G09.2.3.4) This has changed to a graphic from an object.	AIC newsletter, 1959. Courtesy of the American Indian Center. #
OBJECT: Current AIC newsletter (EP0104.000) C9.3	
OBJECT: American Indian Center t-shirt C9.3	AIC T-shirt, 2002. (25/8413) #
Support Services T09.2.4	<i>Caring for the Community</i> This is an Indian community with morals and values. We all

	<p>need each other to survive here. We help each other, and everybody kind of knows everybody else, and that's a good thing.</p> <p><i>Leonard Malatara (Salish), 2003</i></p> <p>Our community organizations are not just about work. They're about showing people that we care. They're about Native people taking care of one another. They're about building personal relationships and helping people find others with whom they share common experiences.</p> <p><i>Chicago Native Curators, 2003</i> #</p>
<p>PHOTO: Native American Educational Services (G09.2.4.1)</p>	<p>When you take all your classes and do all of your work at NAES, you aren't doing it just as a personal accomplishment. You're doing it for the community.</p> <p><i>Nora Lloyd (Ojibwe), 2003</i></p> <p>Established in 1974, Native American Educational Services (NAES) College emphasizes tribal knowledge, community service, community development, and leadership. NAES is the only independent, Native-owned and-operated college in the U.S.</p> <p>NAES College's Chicago campus, 2003. #</p>
<p>PHOTO: Anawim Center (G09.2.4.2)</p>	<p>I feel comfortable at Anawim because I can come here and pray in my Indian way.</p> <p><i>Peggy M. Dejarlait (Arikara), 2003</i></p> <p>The Anawim Center is an interfaith center for Native and Catholic spiritual learning and practice.</p> <p>Anawim Center, 2003. #</p>
<p>PHOTO: St. Augustine's Episcopal Center for American Indians (G09.2.4.3)</p>	<p>At St. Augustine's we treat you as family. We take you as you are. We love you unconditionally. We're there and we'll try to help you if you're trying to help yourself.</p> <p><i>Arlene Williams (Oneida), 2003</i></p> <p>St. Augustine's Episcopal Center for American Indians provides counseling, family support, and religious services. It also includes Bo-sho-ne-gee, a drop-in center for homeless Native and non-Native people and those struggling with addictions.</p> <p>St. Augustine's Episcopal Center for American Indians, 2003. #</p>

<p>PHOTO: Indian Health Services (G09.2.4.4)</p>	<p>We would commute from Indiana to Indian Health to get my children's shots, checkups, and whatever they needed. I felt more comfortable coming here. They weren't just patients. There was actual concern for my children's health and well-being.</p> <p><i>Cyndee Fox-Starr (Omaha/Odawa), 2003</i></p> <p>American Indian Health Service of Chicago, Inc. is the only Indian health facility in Illinois.</p> <p>American Indian Health Service of Chicago, Inc., 2003. #</p>
<p>OBJECT: Medicine pouch C9.2 (EP0353.000)</p>	<p>The American Indian Health Service's logo features a medicine pouch and a handcarved rattle. Both are used in traditional healing.</p> <p>Medicine pouch, made by Norma Robertson (Dakota), 2003. #</p>
<p>OBJECT: Hand-carved rattle C9.2 (EP0354.000)</p>	<p>Handcarved rattle, made by Ron Lawe (Menominee), 2003. #</p>
<p>Community Organizing</p> <p>Introduction to Community Organizing</p> <p>T09.3.1</p>	<p>Working Together</p> <p>Over the years we've found a way to network and strengthen each of our organizations so that we're not overlapping services. We use the strength each organization provides.</p> <p><i>Joseph Podlasek (Ojibwe/Polish), 2003</i></p> <p>Our community comes together to work on common goals to unify Chicago's diverse Native community. Unity strengthens the community's voice and enhances its power to improve the lives of urban Indians.</p> <p><i>Chicago Native Curators, 2003</i> #</p>
<p>PHOTO: Coalition Group (G09.3.1.1)</p>	<p>Members of the Chicago Coalition of the American Indian Community meeting to address issues that affect Chicago's Native people, 2003: (first row, from left) Megan Bang (Ojibwe), American Indian Center (AIC); John Dall (Ho-Chunk), Ho-Chunk Nation-Chicago Branch; Jennifer Scott (Chickahominy/Choctaw/African-American), The Field Museum; Bill Buchholtz (adopted; unknown tribal affiliation), Anawim Center; (second row, from left) Nizhoni Hodge (Navajo/Cherokee), AIC; Clarissa St. Germaine (Ojibwe, Lac du Flambeau), Metropolitan Tenants Organization; Susan Stanley (Ojibwe, Lac du Flambeau), California Indian</p>

	<p>Manpower Consortium; Sister Patricia Mulkey, Anawim Center; Frances L. Hagemann (Ojibwe/French Canadian), Chicago Native community representative; (third row, from left) Ananda Drake (Choctaw), Truman College; Joseph Podlasek (Ojibwe/Polish), AIC; Cynthia Soto (Sicangu Lakota/Puerto Rican), Native American Support Program, University of Illinois at Chicago.</p> <p>#</p>
PHOTO: List of Native organizations in Chicago (G09.3.2.1)	<p>Courtesy of the American Indian Center.</p> <p>#</p>
1961 and 1981 Conferences T09.3.3	<p>Chicago Conferences</p> <p>Chicago was the site of two major conferences on Native American issues. In 1961, the American Indian Chicago Conference gathered over 400 Native people from 90 tribes across the U.S. to discuss tribal sovereignty and self-determination. In 1981, the Chicago American Indian Community Organizations Conference (CAICOC) brought together for the first time representatives of Chicago’s Native organizations.</p> <p><i>Chicago Native Curators, 2003</i></p> <p>#</p>
PHOTO: 1961 AIC Conference (G09.3.3.1)	<p>The American Indian Chicago Conference issued a “Declaration of Indian Purpose” to promote awareness in the U.S. government of tribes’ concerns on issues including economic development, law, housing, and education. The meeting also spawned a new organization: the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC), which for the first time provided Native youth with a political voice.</p> <p><i>Chicago Native Curators, 2003</i></p> <p>American Indian Chicago Conference, 1961. Photo by Peter Weil. Courtesy of D’Arcy McNickle Center, The Newberry Library, Chicago.</p> <p>#</p>
PHOTO: 1981 CAICOC Conference (G09.3.3.3)	<p>During the Chicago American Indian Community Organizations Conference of 1981, participants identified needs and problems in the community, such as education, employment, housing, and youth.</p> <p><i>Chicago Native Curators, 2003</i></p> <p>CAICOC conference session at American Indian Center’s Tribal Hall, 1981. Photo courtesy of NAES.</p> <p>#</p>

<p>Tribal Intersections and Crossings T09.4.1</p> <p>Introduction to Tribal Intersections and Crossings</p>	<p>Tribal Intersections and Crossings</p> <p>Maintaining that connection to Native identity in an urban environment is the hard part.</p> <p><i>Jayne Blacker (Menominee/Potawatomi), 2001</i></p> <p>Our community deals with unique challenges and circumstances that arise from being Native in an urban environment. Individually, we try to maintain the values and traditions of our respective tribes. At the same time, we need to respect others' beliefs.</p> <p><i>Chicago Native Curators, 2003</i> #</p>
<p>Multi-tribal and Multi-generational T09.4.2</p>	<p>Our Community is Multi-tribal and Multigenerational</p> <p>It gets difficult maintaining one specific tribal identity because we're multi-tribal in Chicago. You learn about other tribes and their ways.</p> <p><i>Christine Red Cloud (Ojibwe), 2003</i></p> <p>Five generations of Native people have made Chicago their home. The first generation arrived in the 1920s and '30s. Others came after World War II, when the government created a relocation program to encourage Native people to move to cities such as Chicago. Our grandmothers and grandfathers, mothers and fathers often married Indians from other tribes. Their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren make up Chicago's third, fourth, and fifth generations. So not only do they grow up in a multi-tribal community, they often have multi-tribal identities.</p> <p><i>Chicago Native Curators, 2003</i> #</p>
<p>PHOTO: Robert Smith family (framed) (G09.4.2.1)</p>	<p>The Smiths, 2003: Robert J. Smith (Ojibwe and Assiniboine) and Netawn Kiogima (Odawa, Santee, and Blackfoot), with their children, Miigwaans Faith Smith and Robert Zhaawon Smith. Photo by Warren Perlstein. Courtesy of the Smith family. #</p>
<p>PHOTO: Redcloud family (framed) (G09.4.2.2)</p>	<p>The Redclouds (Ojibwe), 1995: (from left) Christine Redcloud, William Redcloud Jr., Elaine Redcloud Kelty, and (seated at center) Margaret Redcloud. Photo by Warren Perlstein. Courtesy of the Redcloud family. #</p>
<p>PHOTO: Wounded Eye family (framed) (G09.4.2.3)</p>	<p>The Wounded Eyes, 2003: Davis James Wounded Eye Sr. (Northern Cheyenne) and Christine Redcloud Wounded Eye (Ojibwe), with their son Winfield Redcloud Wounded Eye. Photo by Warren Perlstein. Courtesy of the Wounded Eye</p>

	family. #
PHOTO: Robertson family (framed) (G09.4.2.4)	The Robertsons (Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota), 2001: (back, from left) Lisa K. Bernal-Canning, Shawn M. Canning Jr., Nadia I. Bernal-Ortiz, Jennifer R. Bernal; (front) Norma Robertson (seated) and Chaske S. Bernal. Photo by Warren Perlstein. Courtesy of the Robertson family. #
PHOTO: Winneshiek family (framed) (G09.4.2.5)	The Winneshieks (Ho-Chunk), 1995: (back, from left) Sheri Smith, Fawn Smith Stumblingbear, Robert K. Smith Jr.; (front, from left) Tyler Decorah, Annie Winneshiek-Lim, and Eunice Winneshiek-Mallory. Photo by Warren Perlstein. Courtesy of the Winneshiek family. #
Section 4.2.6 PHOTO: Klein-Hodge family (framed) (G09.4.2.6)	The Klein-Hodges, 2002: Adrian Gerald Klein Sr. (Oneida/Ojibwe) and Nizhoni Sylver Hodge (Navajo/Cherokee), with their son, Adrian Gerald Klein Jr. Courtesy of Nizhoni Hodge. #
PHOTO: AIC Dance Troupe-early years (framed) (G09.4.2.7)	American Indian Center Dance Club, ca. 1953. Courtesy of the American Indian Center. #
Back to the Reservation T09.4.3	Returning to the “Rez” One of the challenges of living in Chicago and being Navajo and Cherokee is that you’re away from your homeland. A lot of the ceremonies are directly connected to the land. Living in the city doesn’t mean that you’re stationed here forever. There’s a lot of movement back home. Families go back to the reservations for feasts, ceremonies, and even powwows. <i>Nizhoni Hodge (Navajo/Cherokee), 2003</i> Many of us stay connected with our reservations. We travel back and forth between the city and our tribal communities to visit family and friends, attend ceremonies, or vote in tribal elections. Many make a final journey home to be laid to rest on ancestral lands. <i>Chicago Native Curators, 2003</i> #
GRAPHIC: Map indicating the tribes Chicago Natives return to (G09.4.3.1) Note to designers: A title for this map is sufficient.	Places We Also Call Home #

<p>Our Relatives Who Come and Go T09.4.4</p>	<p>Our Relatives Who Come and Go</p> <p>When people come from other reservations, it's a learning moment for us. We try to take advantage and learn about their cultural traditions to add to our understanding and growth.</p> <p><i>Rita Hodge (Diné), 2001</i></p> <p>Native people pass through Chicago to attend meetings, powwows, and other special events. Others become short-term residents, such as students who attend the National American Indian Ironworkers Training Program. The Chicago Native community welcomes all visitors.</p> <p><i>Chicago Native Curators, 2003</i> #</p>
<p>PHOTO: Ironworker program participants at an American Indian Center Powwow or doing community service (G09.4.4.1)</p>	<p>National American Indian Ironworkers Training Program students taking part in an annual walk/run fundraiser for cultural activities, 2001. Photo by Joseph Podlasek. Courtesy of the American Indian Center. #</p>
<p>PHOTO: Special events like the Navajo Code Talkers who visit the American Indian Center (G09.4.4.2)</p>	<p>Special events bring invited guests such as Navajo code talker Samuel Billingson to the American Indian Center.</p> <p>Samuel Billingson, 2001. Photo by Joseph Podlasek. Courtesy of the American Indian Center. #</p>
<p>Teaching and Learning T09.4.5</p>	<p>Teaching and Learning</p> <p>I was raised here in Chicago, so one of the things I do to maintain my identity is take beadwork classes at the American Indian Center. I'm also learning how to do basketmaking at NAES College.</p> <p><i>Patricia Xerikos (Anishinaabe/Colombian), 2001</i></p> <p>Basketmaking, beadwork, cooking, dancing, drumming, and language instruction are alive and well in the "Windy City." Classes and workshops help us remain in touch with our heritage. They also provide opportunities to teach our non-Native neighbors about Native cultures.</p> <p><i>Chicago Native Curators, 2003</i> #</p>
<p>PHOTO: Robert Wapahi telling Native stories to schoolchildren, c.1997. (G09.4.5.1)</p>	<p>Robert Wapahi (Lakota), former AIC cultural coordinator, telling Native stories to visitors at The Field Museum, Chicago, 1997. Courtesy of the American Indian Center. #</p>
<p>PHOTO: Ansel doing a school</p>	<p>AIC has a school tour program to help increase awareness of</p>

presentation (G09.4.5.2)	Native American cultures. Ansel Deon (affiliation), AIC cultural coordinator, showing children from Anne Fox School how to make talking sticks, 2003. Photo by Warren Perlstein. Courtesy of Warren Perlstein. #
OBJECT: Native American Foster Parents (NAFPA) brochure (EP0378.000) C9.5	
OBJECT: NAES Bachelor of Arts Degree In Public Policy brochure C9.5 (EP0103.000)	
OBJECT: Beadwork bag C9.5 (EP0349.000)	
OBJECT: Beadwork kit C9.5 (EP0348.000)	Beadworkers often carry around small kits filled with beads, needles, and thread to make dance regalia and other items. Beadwork kit, ca. 2003. Courtesy of Cyndee Fox-Starr. Needle case, made by Jeremy Charley (Navajo), ca. 2003. #
OBJECT: <i>Skins: Drumbeats from City Streets</i> C9.5 (EP0039.000)	This is a collection of poems by Native writers living in Chicago. <i>Skins: Drum Beats from City Streets</i> (Washington, DC/New York: Barrick & Associates, 1994). #
OBJECT: UIC Native American Support Program brochure C9.5 (EP0040.000).	
OBJECT: Newberry library brochure (EP0324.000) C9.5	The Newberry Library houses the D'Arcy McNickle Center for American Indian History, an important resource for Chicago's Native community. #
OBJECT: 6 th Annual Native American Film & Video Festival program (project of Red Path Theater) C9.5 (EP0106.000)	

<p>OBJECT: AIC bulletin board flyer “Song Workshop” C9.5 (EP0372.000)</p>	
<p>Different Faiths T09.4.6</p>	<p>Balancing Different Faiths and Beliefs</p> <p>Sometimes at the sunrise services I feel like I’m going to be there by myself, and I’m surprised when 20 to 30 people show up, young and old. It’s a coming together, and it’s a wonderful inner peace of sharing with one another.</p> <p><i>Mavis Neconish (Menominee/Potawatomi), 2003</i></p> <p>We bring different spiritual beliefs to Chicago. For some, spirituality is a private matter. For others, the American Indian Center, the Anawim Center, St. Augustine’s Episcopal Center for American Indians, and Native American Educational Services provide places for spiritual guidance.</p> <p><i>Chicago Native Curators, 2003</i></p>
<p>PHOTO: Sacred Hoop Journey (G09.4.6.1) Being reviewed by the curators.</p>	<p>Members of the Chicago Native community participated in an event organized by White Bison, Inc., an American Indian nonprofit group that uses Native spirituality to teach sobriety and general wellness. The Sacred Hoop carries the gifts of Healing, Hope, Unity, and the Power to Forgive the Unforgivable.</p> <p>Entrance ceremony: the Sacred Hoop of 100 Eagle Feathers and the Chicago Hoop surrounded by Chicago hoop carriers and Don Coyhis of White Bison, 2003. Photo by Vette Middleton. Courtesy of White Bison, Inc.</p> <p>#</p>
<p>Recovering Identity T09.4.7</p>	<p>Recovering Identity</p> <p>I felt I needed to reconnect with my Chickahominy identity because that part of me was not being nurtured. I knew I was part Indian and needed to find, for my own healing, who my people were and to learn from my people.</p> <p><i>Jennifer Scott (Chickahominy/Choctaw/African-American), 2003</i></p> <p>Some Native people living in Chicago have lost touch with their culture and identity because they were adopted or grew up in non-Native foster homes. The search for their tribal identity often begins by connecting with individuals in the community and local organizations such as the Native American Foster Parents Association (NAFPA). All together, we try to help Native people reconnect with their long-lost roots.</p>

	<i>Chicago Native Curators, 2003</i> #
Celebrations -Powwows T09.5.1	Sharing Who We Are Powwow is part of who we are and sharing who we are with others. <i>Joe Podlasek (Ojibwe/Polish), 2001</i> Powwows are held every year in the Chicago metro area. The American Indian Center's annual powwow is the largest cultural education event. Native people meet to socialize, renew friendships, dance, sing, and celebrate their identity. Whether social or competitive, powwows promote respect and understanding among people of different tribal backgrounds. <i>Chicago Native Curators, 2003</i> #
PHOTO: Barbara and Eagle Staff (G09.5.1.1) Being reviewed by the curators.	Families who lost a loved one in the military each donated an eagle feather to this staff made by Andrew Aitken (Ojibwe). Staffs are brought in during the Grand Entry at powwows and represent Native nations. Barbara Whitehead O'Rourke (Ho-Chunk/Sioux) with Ma stung nau zin (Stands Strong) eagle-feather staff, 2003. #
PHOTO: Mavis Neconish and Eagle Staff (G09.5.1.2)	Mavis Neconish (Menominee/Potawatomi) and the Sekakoh (Chicago) eagle-feather staff made by Menominee tribal members from Chicago and the Menominee reservation in Wisconsin, 2003. #
PHOTO: G09.5.1.3 Hilda Williams and Eagle Staff (G09.5.1.3)	Hilda N. Williams (Ottawa/Odawa) with eagle-feather staff made by Scott Thundercloud Williams (Ottawa), 2003. #
OBJECT: AIC 2001 Annual Powwow program C9.6 (EP0384.000)	
OBJECT: AIC 50 th Annual Powwow poster (EP0473.000) C9.6	
OBJECT: AIC 50 th Annual Powwow T-shirt C9.6	

<p>OBJECT: Miss Indian Chicago crown C9.6</p>	<p>The young woman chosen to be princess of the American Indian Center's annual powwow is crowned "Miss Indian Chicago."</p> <p>"Miss Indian Chicago" crown replica, made by Cyndee Fox-Starr (Omaha/Odawa), 2003. (26/2961) #</p>
<p>OBJECT: Chi-Town drum (L00100.001) C9.7</p> <p>Note to designers: The drum, drumsticks, bag and blanket will be displayed in the center of the exhibit with two photos.</p>	<p>I sing at a drum because it connects me to traditional life. But the other thing is that it provides good medicine. Every time you hit that drum the medicine inside the drum helps you. Those songs help a lot of people, me included as a singer.</p> <p><i>David Spencer (Chata/Diné), 2002</i></p> <p>Chi-Town drum, ca. 1980. Lent by Warren Perlstein. #</p>
<p>OBJECTS: Drumsticks (L00100.000) C9.7</p>	<p>Drumsticks made by Warren Perlstein (adopted Potawatomi), 1996. Lent by Warren Perlstein. #</p>
<p>OBJECT: Drumstick bag (L00100.002) C9.7</p>	<p>Drumstick bag made by Skip Twardosz (Potawatomi), 1996. Lent by Warren Perlstein. #</p>
<p>OBJECT: blanket C9.7</p>	
<p>OBJECT: Head man's stick (L00100.003) C9.7</p>	<p>The Head man's stick indicates the head singer of the drum group. The head singer holds the stick in one hand while drumming with the other. The stick can be passed from singer to singer.</p> <p>Head man's stick, made by George W. Garvin (Ho-Chunk/Mesquakie), ca. 1980s. Lent by Warren Perlstein. #</p>
<p>PHOTO: Chicago Drum group (G09.5.1.4)</p>	<p>Cricketthill drum group at a powwow at the American Indian Center, 2003: (clockwise from left) Mark Stevens (Oneida); Shann Maupin (Mississippi Choctaw); Sterling Big Bear III (Ponca/Yankton); Jeremy Charley (Navajo); Ansel Deon (Oglala Lakota/ Diné); Warren Ortega (Oneida/Menominee/Stockbridge); David Spencer and son Niyol Maguire-Spencer (Diné/Mississippi Choctaw); and Warren Perlstein. #</p>
<p>PHOTO: Four Drums of Chicago (G09.5.1.5)</p>	<p>Drums representing the four drum groups of Chicago, 2003: (from left) Myndajada, Shki Bmaadzi, Cricketthill, and White Hawk.</p>

	#
GRAPHIC: Pull Quote	<p>We are not one tribe but many tribes that come together. When something happens to a Native American, the Chicago Native community comes together.</p> <p><i>Eli Suzukovich III (Cree/Métis), 2001</i></p> <p>#</p>
GRAPHIC: Pull Quote	<p>A lot of my friends are from different tribes but we're all extended family. My children have aunties that are Navajo and Ho-Chunk. They accept my children and we all learn different ways and we respect each other's ways.</p> <p><i>Cyndee Fox-Starr (Omaha/Odawa), 2003</i></p> <p>#</p>
Graphic: Pull Quote	<p>The American Indian Center has been part of my life since 1958. I was 10 or 11 years old and I remember going downtown to LaSalle Street at night. About 3 blocks away, I could hear drums and singing. I thought that was really something, right in downtown Chicago.</p> <p>Ronald Kelty (Chippewa/Potawatomi), 2003</p> <p>#</p>

APPENDIX G

NMAI Visitor Study

Visitor Study

Memories of NMAI

Written and Conducted by Megan Birney

October 15, 2004

Introduction

Upon opening, the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) was interested in discovering more about their audience and their audience's responses to the subject matter presented in the museum. It was decided that interviews would be conducted with the public to determine what they found memorable in regards to their visit. This study was purely exploratory in nature with the purpose of gauging visitor's opinions, and the goal of defining and detailing future topics to be examined by the NMAI. This study will present a variety of view points and attempt to offer insight to the experiences people are having at the museum, the connections they are making, and illustrate what they are learning, as well as offer suggestions for improvements. This study does not claim to represent all guests, or all attitudes that can be found concerning the museum.

Method

Over the course of six days, from September 30-October 9, 2004, approximately 100 visitors were interviewed. Each visitor or group of visitors was approached by the interviewer. The interviewer introduced herself and identified herself as an employee of the museum and then said: "we are trying to discover what is capturing our guests' attention; would you tell me something that you will remember from your visit today?"⁶²² Only two people declined to answer on the basis that they had just entered the museum and did not feel prepared to give an opinion. Interviews ranged from two minutes to thirty minutes and were not recorded with audio devices. All quotes and observations are based on interviewer's notes. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, only first names were requested from visitors.

Visitors were interviewed on each of the four floor levels in the pause-areas and along the hallways. No people were interviewed while inside an exhibition. Due to crowd complications, and entering and exiting confusion, this study was not designed as an exit study.

The interviewer attempted to speak with a variety of guests, not necessarily a representative group. Demographics, specifically age and gender, were reported by the interviewer and not requested of the visitors. Of those interviewed 52% were female, and 48% were male. Ages ranged from 3 years old, to over 80 years old: 53% of the respondents were over the age of 40 and 47% were under the age of 40. Of the 65 interviews conducted, 24 interviews were with groups of two or more visitors; a total of 97 people were interviewed in all.

While effort was made to eliminate biases by selecting a variety of people, without a scientific selection method, which was impossible due to lack of personnel, some selection bias was intrinsic due to innate human error.

Results

Audience

The audience that was selected was of a far-reaching variety. Men and women, children and elders all visited. There were visitors from the DC metro area, and there were visitors who traveled from afar. They came with school groups and senior citizen programs. They were Native to the Americas, and citizens of the world. We had people from Germany, Canada, Taiwan, Australia, and Puerto Rico. The

⁶²² Please refer to Appendix A to see full list of topic mentioned by NMAI visitors.

only similarities found was that these people were all currently in Washington, DC and had some varying level of interest in Native culture and the NMAI.

Some of the guests came to Washington DC with the sole purpose of visiting NMAI, for others it was an added bonus to an existing trip. Some were dragged here by spouses or children. There were tourists who were just trying to see everything on the Mall, and guests who had done in depth reading through newspaper, magazines, and the internet prior to their visit. We had self-proclaimed “history buffs” and artists, unaware guests and those wanting to learn. Some had been there for hours, others just minutes. All of these visitors were looking for something, some type of relationship so that they could discover where they could relate to the museum.

What they got out of their visit

Experience An experience is more than a trip to a museum. An experience is when the visit brings about feelings and emotions. The NMAI is an experience in itself. The building and the environment draws in the audience as much and maybe more than any exhibit. These people felt a connection to the museum as an entity because the museum really is more than a collection of objects in a building. The effort and attention given to the NMAI can be felt by many who come to visit.

The mere fact that the museum exists was enough for some. One woman who identified herself as Lakota said that “There could be a teepee in the middle of Washington, DC and I would be happy.” It wasn’t that she thought there should actually be a teepee; it was that she was thankful to have any recognition given to Native Peoples. Like many other visitors, she felt that the creation of the NMAI on the National Mall was an accomplishment in itself.

Other guests to the museum might not have been as passionate about the basic existence of the NMAI, but they still shared in the experiential qualities that the museum possess’. The two most memorable things in at NMAI are the building, and the Lelawi Theater. One in five people said that the building, architecture and landscaping was what they would remember from their visit. People thought that the building was beautiful and amazing. One woman acclaimed the angles and curves; another noted the water seemed to flow into the building. One man, Howard, said that when he was outside the building and saw the marsh lands he felt as though he caught a glimpse into what life might have been like for Native Peoples before European contact. He could place himself in their world and actually experience life as they might have. When trying to explain himself he said “You can tell someone what cold water feels like, but they won’t know until they step into the Atlantic Ocean in the middle of winter, or they put their hand in a bucket of ice water and they can actually feel the sensation.” Howard thought that the building and landscape brought about such an experience.

The Lelawi Theater was the second most popular experience. People enjoyed the multi-media presentation, but also the content and scope. They liked seeing the diversity of the tribes and the variations amongst the lifestyles of different Indigenous peoples, but of the 16 viewers who commented on the theater, no one provided more than a couple words to elaborate on their experience with the Lelawi. As seen during the soft openings, people loved what they saw, even if they did not understand the presentation, or their feelings.

Other visitors had experiences with the art, the communities, or the museum itself. One teenage boy described his experience in the Native Modernism exhibit. He said that *Reflections* by Houser was his favorite piece because it was the piece he had spent the most time in front of; he had examined it for about ten minutes. He said that at first he didn’t know what it was, but after looking at the piece for a while it began take form. He went on to describe to the interviewer exactly how he interpreted the piece: he felt that the posture mimicked a crouching human, and that the hair looked wet; from this, he took that *Reflections* was a person looking at their reflection in a river. What he also liked was that when he moved, it changed. The piece was interactive for him. He was not just seeing the art; he was experiencing it, creating a relationship.

Ashley, a 19 year old girl connected with the Anishinaabe exhibit in Our Universes. She had never studied the tribe but felt that their beliefs and traditions, especially the Seven Grandfathers, ‘made sense.’ She felt how personal the space was and thought it was very important that it was community curated. Her experience was one that allowed her to relate to that community and view where they were coming from.

The last person that the interviewer spoke to was a man named Gerry. Gerry exemplified how NMAI as an entity was important, and how its existence created an experience. Gerry and Lauren, his daughter, are Native people who had been standing next to me on the second level looking over the Potomac and we saw a large group of tourists, approximately 30 people all over the age of 60 sitting to take a picture. The group then began to make “war whoops.” Gerry was disheartened that the first thing he saw in the museum was a group of people making “caricatures of negative stereotypes,” but he sees the NMAI as an educational experience and knows that “we can’t do away with ignorance, if people don’t want to learn, they won’t.” He said that his tribe has been trying to teach white people for the last 500 years, and it would probably take 500 more. Yet Gerry is thankful that there is finally a high profile facility for Indigenous peoples. He thinks that it is important that the museum is in the Nation’s Capital, because “if people want to learn about art, they go to Paris...if people want to learn about the American Indian, they should go to the Capital.” Gerry was also very proud to see “bricks and mortar evolve to embody the spirit of the American Indian.”

Connection Almost everyone found some type of connection with or to the museum. For some it was a reminder of home or of childhood. For others, it was of a past experience, or a current event in their lives. Some visitors just liked to see a name and place that was familiar. Overall though, once that connection was made, it was something that they would take with them.

Thomas, a retired man who spent time in the US Armed Forces, found a connection with the Bombardier in Our Lives. He said that it reminded him of the vehicle they used when he was in the service to find ‘people who got lost in the winter.’ By finding an object that he could place in his life, he was able to discover how he fit into the museum.

Juanita, a 75 year old woman born in Puerto Rico, found it interesting to compare cultural similarities of her community with other communities of Indigenous people; she was exposed to in the museum. When she was young, elders in Puerto Rico were very important people to be respected and cherished; but now she feels that young people have lost that respect. In the museum she saw how many native cultures have similar views in regards to the high level of respect for elders. She was glad to see that at least their culture continues to recognize the importance of their elders.

Yolanda, a 30 year old teacher thought it was interesting to see the application used by Native People to verify their blood lines. Although she identified herself as African-American, she has some Native ancestry and thought it was interesting that she would have to prove that to a government “that has already taken away so much.” Yolanda was also surprised that the museum had chosen to exhibit this fact, but she was glad that they did. She connected with this because she knew that if she ever chose to claim her ancestry, she would have to go through this application process. Her connection was made on a level of shared oppression. She found herself relating to the discrimination of Native peoples in the Western Hemisphere.

Educating

Many visitors to the museum said that they would remember something they had learned or found something that they had not expected. This learning experience was important because it created a new memory that they could trace back to their museum experience.

Andrew, a 15 year old boy was impressed with the Inuit kayak. He thought it had great ingenuity and had always thought of boats built by Native people as hallowed out trees. Instead he realized that “these people really knew what they were doing.” He learned that the Native people had amazing expertise and craftsmanship without modern tools.

Many guests enjoyed the plethora of information provided by the Windows on Collections touch screens. Paco and Philippe, two young men who had not expected such technology in a museum thought that the combination of museum artifacts with new methods of providing information was great. They each had their different, favorite objects, but it was the multi-media approach that was available that caught their attention.

Shirley, a middle aged-woman found the connections amongst the communities the most interesting. How so many tribes had similar characteristics: the gender roles, the four seasons, the creation stories, and just their general morals and principles. She also thought that some traits, namely morals and principles were universal in their connection with organized religions such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. She learned that Native philosophies and beliefs were not as different from the practices she had grown up with and that there are fundamental similarities amongst many varying religions.

Mary, a 14 year old girl who was visiting with the Technology Student Association (TSA) also felt that the importance of her trip came from what she had learned. While she liked hearing all of the stories in Our Universes, she found those stories were important in that they showed people's "roots." She liked to see where Native peoples had begun and how their cultures have assimilated and adapted to today's practices. She thought it was important to know what aspects of a person or group's past worked to create who they are today.

Frustrations

While few guests were frustrated, some did express disappointment. There were approximately 15 individuals that had some type of criticism for the NMAI, yet on all but three occasions these critiques were given only after the guest had praised the museum for some other aspect.

One problem dealt with the availability of information. The most often heard frustration was that the museum was overwhelming. There was a consensus that not everything could be seen in one day and that there would have to be return visits. One couple seemed to relay the feelings of many guests when they commented that they were surprised at how much there was to see, and that it was "not bad, not good," just more than they had expected.

Another common complaint was that the museum did not have an exhibition that highlighted certain tribes people wanted to see. This might have been a tribe that they belonged to, a tribe who they lived near, or a tribe that they knew a member of. These people were searching for a connection and could not find it because they had no prior knowledge of the communities they saw.

The final information problem was signage and way finding. An older gentleman mentioned that he had a difficult time reading labels and signs within the exhibits both because the signs were too low and too small, and because the spaces were too crowded. In regards to way finding, people are comfortable in the main museum space but they are lost in the exhibits. They referred to the exhibition spaces as mazes and often followed exit signs only to discover those exits were for emergencies only. Additionally, those who did not begin their visit on the fourth level were often upset that they had to go up to the third level before they saw an exhibit. Two ladies were so frustrated that by the time they reached the fourth level, they did not even want to go into the exhibits and were sitting outside Our Peoples waiting for their husbands.

Some visitors were not so much frustrated as they actually did not understand the museum. They thought that it wasn't finished, or that the space that didn't have exhibits was just wasted space.

Additionally, a small percentage of visitors did not like the content presented at the NMAI. One gentleman thought that the collection was unorganized and felt that he need a more general overview of Native peoples in the western hemisphere and their history. He saw the exhibitions as "a potpourri of Indian things;" while there were beautiful and meaningful pieces, they had no place, nor depth. The women who were upset about the layout of the museum were also dissatisfied with the content. They

were not as interested in the modern aspects of Native people's lives; they wanted to see historical relics and Betty and Diane from Alabama wanted to see "teepees."

One critic discussed potential and experience. He did not feel that the museum was living up to its potential. He thought that with all of the money and time spent, a more satisfying visit was to be expected. "There is no smell of scent, there is only one sense being used here-we have five." Because of this lack of connection, he did not think that people were learning from the museum, not because people weren't reading but because the museum wasn't doing its job to educate in a way that people could truly learn.

Conclusion

Visitors strive to make a connection. Some were able to make it by simply being in the building or seeing the Lelawi Theater and even if they could not elaborate, their sense of amazement was telling that the museum had reached them on some level. Other guests needed a more steadfast example in order to solidify their place in the museum. They found it in their own past or current life situations. Many visitors also brought something away in the form of a learned idea or fact. These guests were able to apply what they had learned and perhaps see their own lives in a different way. But all of these visitors found a part of the museum that they could relate to; they left feeling that they were a part of something great.

Yet as overall connections were being made, some visitors were missing the point of the museum. They expected the National Museum of Natural History and instead experienced a place like none they had ever seen. They expected a historical account and in its place found a collection that explores the past as a way to view the present.

Many found this overwhelming and a few were disappointed. They were also frustrated that the information they were looking for was not readily available in a fashion they were use to. And while not everyone can be pleased, it would be of a great help to have a large map of the Western Hemisphere with all of the current tribal areas. If nothing else, people would learn that there are Native people everywhere. And Betty and Diane could learn that there are Indians in Alabama.

Appendix A

List of topics mentioned by NMAI visitors

Building: Architecture and Landscaping
Lelawi Theater
Native Modernism
Windows on Collections
Concept of Museum
Exhibitions and their Contents:
 Our Lives
 Our Peoples
 Our Universes
Particular Tribes
Media
Prisms
Boat Building
Oneida Sculpture
Nighthorse Jewelry
Potomac
Object in Museum Store
Regalia

APPENDIX H

The Opening Week of the NMAI

This appendix provides a more detailed account of the opening week and my responsibilities during that time; it also shows how, like museum practice, ethnographic writing involves the reduction of lengthy text, as is evident when comparing this account with the first half of Chapter 6 (some of this information is included or referenced there). I was only in contact with co-curators and NMAI staff during this time, and even among this group, the experiences of RAs and co-curators were very different from NMAI curators, who attended receptions at the museum for donors and other invited guests. Consequently, I provide a patchwork of experiences that comprised my view and some of the experiences of the RAs and co-curators during this time.

Preparing the Way

As the opening approached, I volunteered my time during opening week in whatever capacity was needed. I was asked, to my delight, to assist Curatorial staff in their opening week work by welcoming and escorting particular community curators from the airport to their hotel, and to accompany them to the museum throughout the week. The RAs assigned me duties as if I were one of them, which meant that my time during the opening week was rigidly scheduled. Although this left little time for a more wide perspective and engagement with the opening week's activities, it provided me greater access (and greater reward) to be with the particular community curators to whom I was "assigned" throughout the week and to have a more personal engagement with the interaction between community curators, Curatorial staff, and the museum opening experience. Working with the research assistants throughout the opening week and sharing their responsibilities resulted in long, exhausting, and exhilarating days. These twin feelings of exhaustion and exhilaration were shared many staff and contractors in their efforts as they readied the museum for opening day.

Part of the preparation for opening involved staff inviting and planning for a tremendous number of invited guests to both the museum opening as well as the associated First Americans Festival, sponsored by Smithsonian Folklife. These invited guests were associated with different departments in the museum and included dignitaries and diplomats, congress members, tribal delegations, and donors to the museum. There was one group that had gone overlooked in this process: the community co-curators of the inaugural exhibitions.

I was told by the Curatorial research assistants that at a Steering Committee meeting in April about the opening, a senior staff member apologized to Curatorial for "forgetting" about the co-curators. One RA paraphrased the senior manager at the meeting, using a flippant and annoyed voice "we should have helped arrange that with Folklife, but we forgot" and added that it a "backward apology." Curatorial was concerned because it had no budget to cover the costs of inviting co-curators to the opening, "and one of the things that NMAI and especially Curatorial have always tried to make at the forefront of our work here, is hospitality and care towards our co-curators who are giving us so much for our exhibits. And, it's painful that we can't treat them the way we want to, and that they deserve to be treated."¹

One researcher explained to me that the RAs knew they would "play some role, but we never thought we would be the travel agents for our 140 travelers." They had been having periodic, even monthly, "conversations about opening travel probably as early as October of 2003" about what their anticipated needs might be for the opening. She said, "I think that NMAI dropped the ball and never put anything in writing, or even *spoke* with the Folklife staff. Because when [Curatorial staff] initiated conversations with them... Folklife had no idea that they were supposed to be helping us."²

NMAI staff explained to me that the Smithsonian Folklife and *downtown* staff had been inviting "big wigs" and tribal people from all over the world, but never thought to also contact the

¹ Interview with Curatorial RA, August 3, 2004.

² Interview with RA, August 3, 2004.

community curators who had worked on the exhibitions. When they realized this, Curatorial lobbied to have the co-curators invited, and were told by upper management that if they wanted the co-curators to come, then the Curatorial research assistants would have to make all the arrangements.

Due to the budget provided, only a certain number from each community would be paid for (this resulted in, for example, only six of the eight Kalinago co-curators coming to the opening). In fact, several Curatorial staff members mentioned that the amount of money provided for bring the co-curators to the opening, \$150,000, was the same amount of money paid to the National Park Service for the anticipated destruction to the National Mall grassy area due to the festival. Staff quipped that the co-curators “were literally treated like dirt.” A number of *CRC* staff, again, interpreted this development as typical of *downtown* attitudes, to forget about the community members that actually put the exhibits together.

Therefore, while the curators seemed somewhat more relaxed immediately before opening (they were mainly assisting in installation at the Mall Museum), the Curatorial research assistants were not, due to the major and unanticipated project of arranging for the community curators to attend the opening in September. This task became an overwhelming burden for four young women (Taryn, Teresa and Arwen along with Theresa who served as liaison with the event hotel) who were never trained, nor practiced in, the art of mass travel arrangements. Over the summer months leading to the opening of the museum, they talked to me a lot about their frustrations in being responsible for this task; one researcher worried to me that if anything goes wrong, “It will all be my fault.” The research assistants each had specific communities they were responsible for coordinating, often referring to them as “my people.”

I was invited to attend one of the travel meetings on June 25, along with the RAs from all three permanent exhibitions and the temporary gallery, the head of Curatorial, an administrative assistant for the department and a Smithsonian Travel Office representative who had been invited for advice on how to tackle arrangements for this large number of people. After introducing the meeting participants and their role in the institution, the discussion turned to the needs of specific individuals: “Jimmy needs dialysis and oxygen,” “Igloodik should get passports,” “Dennis... is driving from Pine Ridge,” the “hotel’s buffet serves rotisserie chicken that the Ka’apor [can] eat,”³ and it was noted that one Cherokee person was going to bring forty family members to the opening. After the meeting, one RA said “it’s too much.”

The RAs often talked to me about “travel” as they were dealing with passports and visas, special needs for elders and accommodations for family members. Shifting their considerable research and organizational skills from anthropological, historical, and object research to community members’ travel arrangements, Teresa, Taryn and Arwen created massive spreadsheets in what they called “the travel database.” These 11”x17” spreadsheets detailed for each Native community member everything from who they were traveling with to their arrival and departure dates, airport and flight information, meal plan, wheel chair needs, preferences for smoking or non-smoking rooms, and the volunteer duties of staff members associated with each co-curator group.

By the end of August, all the RAs were frantically trying to finalize these arrangements, fill in the final details of their matrices to manage the growing number of community visitors, while many community members and co-curators continued to make changes in their specifications. At the same time, Taryn was a new mother, sometimes bringing her son to work, and she and Arwen and Teresa were actively looking for new jobs as theirs were ending before the end of the year. It was, in other words, a labor of love.

As Ann McMullen and the RAs struggled with the plans for getting the co-curators to Washington, D.C., they also were trying to “scrounge” for tickets to a “preview reception” for distinguished guests and to plan a dinner reception as well (no plans had been made or separate funds secured for any kind of reception or recognition ceremony for the co-curators). The RAs were preparing for the impending visit of the co-curators, making phone calls to consulates and co-curators, restaurants and hotels, while Cynthia and the rest of the OL team were at the Mall Museum placing objects selected by the co-curators into glass cases.

³ From notes I took while present at the meeting.

Dominica Interlude

Just as I was watching the gallery rise before my eyes, the opening was coming near, and I felt the anticipation of staff building... I had to leave the scene. The weeks preceding the opening of the museum were both hectic and then desperately slow for me—indicative of the multi-sited field experience as I moved between Washington, DC and the Carib Territory in the Caribbean and back again. This visit allowed me to reconnect with the Kalinago community curators, who I would see again just days after I returned to Washington, DC, when they arrived for the opening.

I went to the Carib Territory from September 10 to September 17 to ask for permission from the Carib Council to conduct my research in the Territory. I had not planned to visit so close to the opening of the museum, but co-curator and former chief Garnette Joseph had asked that I come at that time so that I could meet with the newly elected chief and councilors and experience Carib Week, a celebration of Kalinago culture featured prominently in the exhibit. Garnette insisted that I come after the new chief was elected so that the new Carib Council would approve my research proposal.

I arrived in Dominica on Friday, September 10, and took a taxi to where I would be staying—the accommodation was reserved ahead of time for me by Garnette (this was the same apartment I would later occupy during my fieldwork in 2005). It was an abrupt change from the loud, bustling city to a lush, rugged, and isolated countryside. Garnette dropped by that evening to welcome me and we talked about the soon-to-be-opened NMAI; he said that, at first, when the Kalinago co-curators were told that the exhibit would open in 2004, “it seemed so far away! And now it’s next week!” But, in general, there seemed little enthusiasm about the opening by the co-curators that I met with that week (Prosper, Sylvanie and Garnette). They were mostly concerned with getting their visas in time and the price of getting clothes made for their walk in the Native Nations procession.

In the course of a day, from one field site to the next, my priorities and focus changed from learning how to install an object to how to find food (without my own garden, and no restaurants or supermarkets in the Territory) and how to get in touch with people (without a phone or email or knowledge of where people lived—there were no road signs or house addresses). There was no way for me to announce my arrival beyond word of mouth to set up meetings in advance with Kalinago community members. Furthermore, my entire stay was plagued with torrential rains that later became Hurricane Ivan and nearly threatened my return to the NMAI in time for its opening. As my host explained, “when it’s like this, we stay inside.”

Between the rain and the cancellation of Carib Week (it was postponed to the following week), the hours passed as I did little more than sit in my apartment listening to the rain pounding on the metal roof. I read a 300 page book—twice in a row. I created a crossword game to fill the time. And I continued to be anxious that I was missing the press “soft opening” back in DC, after which reporters and art critics would write their reviews to prepare the public for what they would see once the museum opened. It was difficult, not to being able to be in two places at once.

The last evening in the Territory, I went to the Karifuna cultural group’s practice session, which they conduct on a platform at the side of the road and spoke with Prosper at length about my research, and he about his concerns for the Carib Territory, including the still unopened Carib Model Village. He said he was on every single board there was regarding the Carib Model Village and “it’s all red tape, red tape, red tape.” When the government and tour operators “do Carib tourism,” he said, “we are the product.” He explained that he tried to get people in the Territory to understand this, but there “isn’t a lot of consciousness” here. Prosper also mentioned what would be a recurring request that went unanswered by the museum despite my and Cynthia’s efforts: he wanted a video from the museum that showed the Kalinago exhibit to be able to present it to the rest of the residents in the Carib Territory, who surely would never see it otherwise.

Prosper made one another request: in preparation for their arrival, that I purchase two mop poles. I was confused but later did as he asked when I returned to Washington; these would be the sticks with which the Kalinago co-curators held their country’s flag aloft during their walk in the Native Nations procession. We parted knowing we would see each other in a few days at the grand opening of the museum, and I walked home to my apartment and packed to leave the next day. The next morning, I met briefly with the Carib Council before having to literally run to catch my ride to the airport. Once at the airport, I worried that I would miss the museum opening due to flight delays. In the last possible moment, a pilot was able to land on the island and we left before the storm worsened.

Leaving a bustling museum in preparation, the rain and relative inactivity in Dominica, the canceled Carib Week which I had planned to see, and finally the postponed meeting with the Council that did not occur until the day I had to leave—these dislocated experiences and occasional frustrations highlight the pace and momentum that the museum had in Washington, DC, and some of the more typical experiences of time in Dominica I would come to know better during my longer stay there. I left Dominica happy to have had my moment with the Council, and to have reconnected with Prosper, Sylvanie and Garnette again. I was also relieved to be returning to the museum to witness the event that I had been waiting for and that figured prominently in my story of an exhibition unfolding in time: its unveiling to the public, museum staff, and the community curators.

Arrival and Welcome

I arrived in Washington, DC at 7:30am in the morning on Friday, September 17, took the metro home, changed my clothes and went straight to the Mall Museum. The RAs got in touch with me immediately: Taryn called to tell me that Teresa would have my “schedule” (a stapled group of 11”x17” spreadsheets) of pickups at various airports in the DC area, welcome desk assignments, etcetera, waiting for me at the CRC when I arrived there later in the day.

By 9:30am I entered the *Our Lives* gallery and was greeted by a riot of sound and color—all of the walls were completed, and this was the first time the video and some of the sound was turned on (although all of the sound and video would not be running until opening day, and some interactives not available until even later). As I entered the gallery, the Hadley guys (the contracted fabricators for the gallery) were asking about my trip, glad to see me after being concerned that hurricane Ivan had struck near to Dominica. I toured the gallery now near completion, and with most of the lighting finished it seemed very dark in comparison to prior weeks when the space was filled with work lights. There were now lots of shadows, and it made some of the text difficult to read. I mentioned the change to Kirk, a team member from Collections, and he agreed—when he first came in it seemed very dark to him, but he said he had gotten used to it. So I let my eyes adjust, and took in the scene while staff completed their last minute tasks.

The community curated sections were now complete. They were dedicated to a realism that invoked the feeling of “being there.” Each community exhibit was essentially a flat surface with huge graphics that spanned the walls and recreated the local environment. As I mentioned in chapter 4, the designers used the software program Adobe Photoshop to prepare layouts and design the gallery space; familiar with this program myself, it came as no surprise to me later that it was perceived as a “flat” exhibit. One curator said it reminded her of a “movie set” with its flat (layers rather than built) environments, like scene backdrops painted to give the illusion of depth—mountains in the distance, etc. Larger than life images of community members and co-curators were on the walls. I walked through the exhibits, which were now complete. I also spent time helping Cynthia with some last minute preparations. We were working on the Saint-Laurent Metis scrap book, taping newspaper articles onto acid free paper to be laminated and placed in the exhibit as a hands-on experience that visitors would flip through. I also occasionally stood watch over some feather headdresses to relieve conservator Liz, so that the objects were cared for according to protocol and she could move around freely to do her own last minute tasks in the gallery.

By 2:30pm I was at the Holiday Inn, across the street from the museum and where all of the community curators would be lodging for the opening week, to welcome co-curator Joe Podlasek and his family as they arrived from Chicago. An important part of the RAs’ planning was to have each group of co-curators be welcomed at the airport and escorted to the hotel by someone who was a familiar NMAI staff member, if possible. Later in the evening I went to two different airports to meet communities to which I had been “assigned”: Igloodik and Kalinago.

After seeing Joe and his family settled in, I took the metro over to the CRC at 3:00pm. When I arrived, Theresa was putting together “goody bags” for the community curators in the curatorial conference room. While chatting with her about the upcoming days, I realized, with sincere shock, that the “preview reception” I had heard about before I left for Dominica was not specifically *for* the community curators. It was for other ‘important’ people, she said, correcting my false assumption. That was why the research assistants and Ann were “scrambling” for tickets—to get the co-curators added on to the guest list. Curatorial insisted that the co-curators be invited because no special museum-related events had planned for them otherwise.

While I was helping the RAs with the NMAI signs for the airport meetings with the co-curators in the conference room, one of them said that she was annoyed that Rick West in his speech (distributed to staff by email) was not planning to thank the co-curators. At 6:30pm I went to Dulles airport to meet the Igloolik co-curators. When they saw me, big smiles spread across their faces—they appreciated seeing a familiar face, and I was so happy to see them again. We got their baggage and rode the shuttle arranged by the museum back to the hotel. We drove through a torrential down pour; apparently, there were several tornadoes in the area due to weather associated with Hurricane Ivan. The Dulles airport had been closed and then reopened just before their flight landed. We arrived at the hotel, and they checked in.

Once the Igloolik co-curators went up to their rooms, I left on the shuttle again to pick up the Kalinago community curators. Due to the weather, their plane had been delayed and they arrived around 1:00am. The flight had a lot of turbulence, and they were noticeably glad to be on the ground. Everyone was tired, and we went straight to the hotel. (I would later be responsible for meeting the Kahnawake co-curators at the airport on the 19th and more Chicago community members on the 20th). I got home around 2:00am, exhausted—much like the “bleary eyed” RAs, I noted in my field notes that day—knowing I was scheduled to be at the hotel “Welcome Desk” the next morning. The days that followed were just as hectic and long and wonderful as this one.

On September 18 the NMAI “Welcome Desk” at the Holiday Inn was in operation. The Welcome Desk was created by the Curatorial RAs in a hallway of the hotel to greet arriving co-curators and give them their “welcome packets” (including reception tickets and meal tickets) and room assignments. At first, I was mostly trying to get a handle on all the spreadsheets Taryn and Teresa had made; we were assigning rooms to Native community members, giving them their packets and “goody bags,” and making sure everything was set for them as they arrived. That evening there was a Staff Reception at the museum in which former employees, current employees, and their families and friends were able to view the exhibitions and be honored for their efforts. I attended briefly, but then returned to my post at the hotel.

Over the course of the first few days, there were a number of people traveling with the community curators that seemed unhappy at not receiving the same financial support or information packets as the co-curators, including family members not having meals paid for or tickets to the Preview Reception. A lot of people came with the co-curators, and the curatorial department simply did not have the budget to pay for all of them. Explaining this was a great source of discomfort for the “volunteers” (mainly Curatorial and other CRC staff) who were manning the Welcome Desk. Around 10:30pm, another RA came to stay overnight at the hotel and “relieve” us (there was a room specifically set aside for the RAs to use during the week to have someone “on call” at all times for community co-curators and their families). RA Arwen and I packed up and left after the last group checked in—around 11:30pm.

Visiting the Exhibits

The next day, Sunday, September 19, the community co-curators were first able to visit their exhibits on their own. I was told this was a privilege Curatorial insisted on and “fought for” and that it almost did not happen. It was a symbolic gesture that Curatorial felt strongly about—that the co-curators should, if possible, be able to see their exhibit before the visiting public. A number of the co-curators later told me that this portion of their visit was their favorite and most meaningful experience of the week.

The Curatorial RAs, Ann and Bruce had been emailing staff throughout September in order to plan for these visits (which, as Teresa indicates, were then included in the large “GRID schedule” spreadsheets):

>>> Teresa Tate 09/02/04 03:21PM >>>

I added a tab to the GRID schedule just for Blessings.

Please ask your communities if they want to do a blessing, what supplies they will need, how many people will be there, should it be indoors at their exhibit space or outdoors, do they have a preference to the time of day?

Bruce is willing to do the blessing with the Santa Clara.
Ann how about scheduling you for the Pamunkey and you and I can do the Huichol one together(?)

Jen would you like to be the staff member for the Kalinago and Igloodik during their blessings, if they want to do blessings or just have quiet time in their space?

>>> Jennifer Shannon 09/02/04 04:56PM >>>

Teresa, Thanks for asking-- yes, and for Chicago too if that's possible. Thanks!! Let me know if I can help in any way. :) jen

>>> Teresa Tate 09/03/04 07:55AM >>>

Find out what they want to do for a blessing: burn sage, just have quiet time in their space, etc.

Find out when they want to do their blessing: The Igloodik and Kalinago arrive on the 18th so they can do it anytime on the 19th. The Chicago aren't all here until after 3:00pm on the 20th. So, work with Arwen to find out if they do want a blessing or just quiet time. How many people are we talking about...not a mob. Let them know this is not the visit the gallery but just a blessing time before anyone else sees their exhibit.

t.

Date: Tue, 07 Sep 2004 10:11:41 -0400
From: "Arwen Nuttall"
To: "Jennifer Shannon", "Teresa Tate"
Cc: "Taryn Costanzo"
Subject: Re: Blessings

There are some issues with Chicago, Yakama, and Kahnawake I need to speak with Ann about, but they do plan to perform a blessing. They have not yet specified what they're going to do, but I would assume smoke may be involved. Kahnawake may burn tobacco, but they may do it outside.

St. Laurent would like to do something quiet for their blessing (no specifics) and Pamunkey just wants to spend quiet time in their exhibit. I have been unable to reach the contact person in Campo so far.⁴

This "quiet time" was also the first time the co-curators would see the context in which their exhibits were situated—the "NMAI-curated" portions of the exhibit that comprised the central area of the gallery, with the community curated exhibits positioned along the exterior walls. From the hallway, the motion of passersby in the entrance way to the exhibition caught one's attention—it is a short passage that is flanked by projections of life size people walking with and past you as you enter the gallery. The notion was that they are all Native people—dressed in a Naval uniform, in plain clothes, with dark skin, with light skin. Anyone can be a Native person walking beside you, anywhere in America.

As per my assigned schedule, I accompanied the Igloodik co-curators to their scheduled time with their exhibit at 9:00am in the morning. I met them at the Welcome Desk and walked with them over to the Mall Museum. When we arrived at the gallery, the video and sound were not turned on. We first went straight to the Igloodik exhibit, and they liked the "media Inuksuk." They spent about 10 minutes in the space and seemed disinterested. This would change days later when they returned and

⁴ I've reversed the email thread so that it reads chronologically.

the video was running; then they were pleased and patient to watch the entire presentation, spending more time in the exhibit that had come to life with the voices and moving images of family and friends.

Cynthia came in at one point to greet the Iglulik co-curators (she made a point to greet the co-curators for each exhibit when they first came to the gallery), and she noted to me that the videos in Kalinago were out of place inside the cases. The banana harvesting video was in the case about playing cricket, the basket making video was in the banana harvesting case. And, co-curators' names were misspelled in the videos—not just Sylvanie (“Sylvie Nbutu”) as I had noted earlier, but Garnette and Gerard and his wife Miranda as well. It was an embarrassing error that pained Cynthia, as the Kalinago were next to visit the gallery. When the Kalinago visited the gallery again during the grand opening day, they noticed the errors were corrected.

The Kalinago co-curators (Garnette, Sylvanie, Gerard, Cozier, Prosper and Jacinta) met me at the front of the museum at 10:30am; the Iglulik co-curators had waited to meet them before going on a walk along the mall. When the Kalinago entered the space, Garnette asked if I had the materials for the blessing, but I was unprepared. I did not know that the museum was providing those materials—but I should have guessed, having seen a box labeled “blessings” at the hotel Welcome Desk. I called the Welcome Center and Miranda (*Native Modernism* RA) said she was on her way with sweetgrass.

In the mean time, Gerard informed me he needed something to burn the sweetgrass in and something to make fire. So, I went downstairs during the “tribal donor’s brunch,” which Cynthia was supposed to be at but was upstairs with us. It was a fancy affair, with china and cloth draped tables and an army of caterers laboring behind a privacy screen in a hallway off the rotunda of the museum. I walked into the area roped off for the caterers, pleading for something to burn a blessing in. One of the catering staff gave me a big white ceramic terrine, and then they asked aloud if anyone had matches. Another caterer pulled some out of her pocket and handed them to me. I gave profuse thanks, and ran outside to the street corner to wait for Miranda.

Miranda arrived not only with sweet grass but also a stainless steel bowl and some matches. Obviously, it had been used in another blessing—there were ashes in the bottom. Standing there with the large terrine in hand, as DC traffic whirred by, it I must have looked ridiculous. I thanked her, returned the bowl to the caterers on my way upstairs, and then gave the Kalinago the blessing materials.

Gerard and Prosper took the materials and stood under the craft shop graphic in the exhibit, lighting the sweet grass in the bowl. A plume of smoke flowed steadily to the ceiling (Bruce had ensured the fire alarms would be turned off during blessing times) and Gerard led the blessing as they all circled in close together. Cynthia and I had been standing near the entrance to their exhibit to be sure they were not disturbed. When they moved on to prayer, she and I moved away from the space to give them privacy, and that was when she told me the Kalinagos had all noticed and talked about the video errors while I was way searching for blessing materials. We expressed mutual frustration at the lack of sound and video and the spelling errors. Cynthia explained that, later into the exhibit making process, Kathy was sending video scripts to the script editor and no longer to Cynthia, and that was why what would have been a glaring spelling error to her was not corrected ahead of time.

The Kalinago exhibit was the only one to have a more abstract approach to its imagery—a famous waterfall and a craft shop were not single images but collages of many images. The designers had said this was reminiscent of postcards or tourism photos. The Kalinago exhibit also had the least prominent objects—and some were even behind camouflaged cabinets that were hard to open. There were small baskets, a cricket bat and ball, DVDs and brochures and books and a small drum on display. The bulk of the visual impact came from the various videos in the exhibit, which they co-curators liked very much. They later told me, however, that they were disappointed that a number of objects they had provided and expected to be on display—more impressive baskets, a canoe—were not present.

I gave a quick tour of the rest of the gallery to the Kalinago co-curators while Cynthia went downstairs to the donor brunch. I said they had some time to explore on their own. At this time, Prosper pulled me aside to ask about where people can find out more about the Territory—for tourism purposes, or other inquiries. He also asked about a video of the exhibit again. The co-curators, again, did not walk around much, and it seemed to me only Garnette was reading the text closely.

I then took them over into the sparse and serene *Native Modernism* where, like the Iglulingmiut, they really enjoyed the display. Cozier took pictures with his disposable camera of Garnette and others in front of sculptures. This changing gallery was a calm respite to many among the overwhelming amount of information and imagery in the other exhibits. After they spent time in *Native*

Modernism, the Kalinagos went for a walk before returning to the hotel for lunch. I went directly back to the hotel to return the blessing materials and notified the media producer of the errors in the Kalinago exhibit. He said it was perfect timing—he was just working in the file to change Sylvanie’s name, and took the other corrections as well (they were fixed before the Preview Reception).

The Chicago co-curators’ “blessing time” was scheduled for the following day, Monday, September 20, after the Preview Reception at 5:15pm. Unlike the Kalinago exhibit, Chicago had many objects in it and a lot of architectural features that added more depth to the display. There was a replica façade of the American Indian Center, and a huge multi-screen video of powwow and graduation ceremony. There were beaded items, t-shirts, flyers, and everyday household items. They were pleased with what they saw when they walked into the exhibit, except that the largest feature of the exhibit—the stack of television monitors— was not turned on.

As we arrived in the exhibit, Cynthia and I asked people to leave the Chicago exhibit space, as the reception was winding down. I went down and met the Chicago community members that did not have tickets to the reception at the south side entrance (only the co-curators, not their family members or other community members, had been allowed at the Preview Reception). NMAI staff told us to stay together, to not “stray,” and to proceed directly to the OL gallery. The community had brought a videographer and a photographer to record the event; they later would publish and sell the video, titled “From Wilson Ave. to Washington, D.C.” Once in the gallery, the community members gathered in a circle in the Chicago exhibit space, around the Chi-Town drum encased in glass. They passed tobacco and said a prayer and took turns speaking. They asked Cynthia to speak, as well. Among Cynthia’s comments that were included in the edited film, she said to the circle of Chicago community members: “Thank you for lending your expertise to this project.”

Preview Reception and Co-Curator Dinner

Some co-curators expected that upon arriving they would be honored for their contributions to the museum, perhaps have to give a speech, or receive some sort of ceremonial appreciation. Many recognized the scale of the event was far beyond their own contributions, and considered that as explanation enough for what followed. But Curatorial staff was less impressed with turn of events. The preview reception the co-curators attended was a last minute scramble to find tickets: co-curators were added on to the list. The Kalinago co-curators milled around, staying mainly among themselves as they sipped the Champaign and enjoyed the atmosphere of decadence. They eventually gravitated to their exhibit and talked with visitors entering the space.

The only event that was planned specifically for the co-curators, but was largely under-funded, was a dinner “reception.” This event was hosted at a Vie de France chain restaurant across from the museum where donors and other “important” people were wine and dined nightly (for example, the Preview Reception was cleared at 5:30pm because there was a later event at the museum that evening). The dinner experience included a poorly lit, lukewarm buffet, slapped together affair in canopied open-air cement lobby of an office building. And, due to budget constraints, unfortunately only co-curators and one guest could come to this dinner; if they had more family members in town, they had to find food elsewhere. But those who attended were polite about the circumstances, and people enjoyed finally having a moment to visit with each other. There were no speeches, no visits from senior NMAI staff—just mainly co-curators, some family members, and the curatorial staff and CRC RAs.

The Kalinago had gotten lost on the way to this out of the way, in between space down the street from the museum and nestled between office buildings. It was an awkward experience for Curatorial; they made the best of the situation but were embarrassed at the utter banality of the event and the obvious the under-recognition of its attendees, knowing it was all that their allocated money could buy after the travel arrangements had been made. But in the dim light, and with the so-so food, NMAI staff and the co-curators made time to visit and enjoy each other’s company, often speaking with people whose names they were well-acquainted with but had never met. I had a wonderful conversation with Pam and Val Fabela, Yakama community members, sharing our family histories and talking about boarding schools, language and heritage.

While in Dominica in 2005, Prosper expressed his disappointment at never meeting any “higher ups” when he was at the NMAI, because, he said, he knew the curators had very little power. He wanted to network (the missed opportunity Chief Williams had complained about), to find a way to have Kalinago crafts sold in the museum or get an invitation for the cultural group to dance in the

rotunda of the museum. Instead, the co-curators only interacted with staff they already knew. The rest of the museum staff were either too busy, or disinterested, in visiting with the co-curators with whom they had produced the exhibits. But the co-curators were greeted with a lot of pomp and circumstance the next day, even if they experienced it as part of a much, much larger group of Native Americans being honored more generally on the Mall.

Grand Opening

September 21st was the long awaited day. To celebrate the opening of the museum, there was a procession of Native peoples along the National Mall, an opening ceremony with speeches by dignitaries and museum staff, and then the launching of Folklife's First Americans Festival. I went to the mall around 7:30am to see what was going on, as the procession was scheduled to be from 8:00am to noon. I went to the center of the mall, stood on a hay bail, and watched as people began to line up and prepare to walk in the procession. I took a photo, and started to choke up, overwhelmed at the scene. To lighten the mood, I joked with myself, recalling the phrase from the movie *Field of Dreams*: "if you build it, they will come."⁵ Later, talking with NMAI staff, I learned that almost every NMAI staff member could recall a moment in which they broke down with overwhelming emotions during the opening week—from Repatriation staff to the media coordinator, RAs to the Collections staff.

Native Nations Procession

Picture-taking was the most notable activity on the mall during the procession—by observers, by participants. I saw one example of a South American indigenous group asking a North American tribe to pose in a photo with them. Everyone was taking in the spectacle, filming, taking photos, recording the experience for themselves—either for being a part of history and participating in it, or for recording the exotic others that had descended on the capitol, it seems. The tourists were snapping photos left and right, and some procession participants were holding up video cameras as they walked.

I heard stories later from NMAI staff about how some tourists were grabbing at the Huichol co-curators in their colorful clothing to ask them to be in photos. The Aztec group got the most attention, it seemed, with their tall and wavy feathered headdresses extending up and out from their heads—waving up high above the crowd. The more exotic the clothing, the more insistent visitors were about getting photos. I began watching the procession from the "social dance circle" area in the center of the mall, then later moved to join co-curators nearer to the stage.

In the procession, small fans (a circle piece of cardstock with NMAI imagery on a popsicle stick) were handed out along with Native Americans Festival programs. Many people were waving the fans in front of their faces, or holding them over their heads for shade—the day was very hot under the bright sun. Jim Pepper Henry (Kaw/Muscogee) was in full regalia and leading the procession of tens of thousands of Native peoples from all over the world—North, Central and South America, as well as Hawaii and New Zealand. As the procession moved by, Native people in regalia were singing, drumming, and walking proud. There were young men in chest baring-regalia (white t-shirt marks on their un-tanned skin), others in every day clothes like I was wearing, some wearing hides, others elaborately colored cloth regalia. Every kind of clothing you can imagine. There were many Native people that were also not in the procession, watching and calling out, snapping photos along with non-Native tourists. Some marched with their nations, others with the Native organizations and independents that followed afterwards in the procession.

I found the Kalinago sitting in the stage right area, and Susan Secakuku (former NMAI Community Services staff who had been the fieldworker for their exhibit) stopped by to say hello. The Kalinago co-curators were sitting together, holding their Dominica flag on mop poles. The co-curators looked hot, and weren't that talkative like usual. They were seated a little behind the co-curator section the RAs had staked out, where the Yup'ik and Huichol co-curators were. But the Igloodik co-curators had yet to arrive.

RA Taryn then called to tell me that Madeline, one of the Igloodik elders, was about to collapse and they were at the NASM using the bathrooms. I borrowed a wheelchair from a Yup'ik woman who was already seated in the co-curator area, and I literally ran careening down the street adjacent to the

⁵ Phil Alden Robinson et al., "Field of Dreams," (United States: Universal Pictures, 1989).

mall procession to bring the wheelchair to Taryn at her request. En route, Audra Simpson (a new Cornell hire in our department at the time and Mohawk woman from Kahnawake) called out and said Jen Shannon! And I said hi, I have to run! We both laughed about it later. This was only one instance of many that people recalled to me of chance meetings and unexpectedly familiar faces in the crowd. Taryn and I then brought the Iglood group to sit with the other co-curators and watched the opening ceremonies with them.

Opening Ceremonies

At 12:10pm, Rick West began the opening ceremonies and the first person to speak at length was Alejandro Toledo (Quechua). Peru President and indigenous leader, Toledo talked about “reconciliation.” He was an eloquent speaker and emphasized poverty among Native Americans is a “structural problem of society.” There was loud applause when the next speaker, Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell, approached the podium. His talk focused on past tribes and the history of Native peoples. He said in the past, they knew not alcohol or drug abuse; he mentioned diseases like small pox and the common cold to talk of the devastation at contact. He said Native peoples numbered from 50 million in the year 1500 to 200,000 in the US in 1900. He said there were 190,000 US Native veterans, and the crowd responded with loud applause again, indicating their revered status among tribes. Campbell talked about past injustices, like Indians lacking the right to vote despite their service to the country and boarding schools, and he acknowledged the high rates of suicide that plague today’s communities.

Campbell also noted that the idea and practice of democracy came from the Iroquois—and that line got the most applause. He referred to the museum as a “monument to the dreamers.” He said a Hopi prophesy about Native reemergence was coming true today: “The reemergence of the red people now has come true,” he said. Then he introduced his “co-chairman... mentor... military hero... a warrior chief among warriors,” Senator Daniel Inouye, who got even more applause than previously witnessed, with a lot of wahoos! Campbell said that Inouye was most responsible for the creation of the museum.

Senator Inouye listed some things that were the impetus to begin the process for getting the NMAI: first, when he came to office he realized that in a city of monuments, there was not a single one of a Native American; second, he learned that the GGHC objects were deteriorating in their facility in New York; and, finally, with 18,500 human remains at the SI from the Army Medical Museum that were unassociated with particular groups, he asked, would Irish Americans, or German Americans want their relatives’ remains in green boxes? The crowd went wild with applause in response. He called the museum a “monument to the first American.”⁶ Then Senator Inouye introduced Rick West, who, he said, “walks with mastery in both worlds”— the Native one and the world of law, politics, and museums.

Everyone was clapping and standing when Rick took the podium. He said, “history seems to stand still and silent in honor.” He said the museum “uses the voice of Native people themselves to tell their stories” and it is a “symbol for the hope that the hearts and minds of Americans will welcome native American people in their history and their contemporary lives,” he continued. And of colonization, “we are not its victims...from a cultural standpoint... we have survived... triumphed.” It is a “true cultural reconciliation.” He began to conclude by saying, “to all here, Welcome to Native America,” and the crowd applause was deafening. He continued after a pause, “To all Native Americans, Welcome home!” The crowd again went wild. West then spoke in Cheyenne about the great mystery, and everyone was standing, then the drums began to play as he exited the stage. He and the speakers went to the mall museum for a more private ceremony inside.

I walked back to the museum with the Iglood co-curators, and then went up to the RAs’ hotel room to download my photos. There I ran into an RA’s mom who was Native and two other relatives who were also middle age women; they were taking off their regalia after the procession. The mom said that their local museum wanted to buy a dress that she’d been making. She said no, it’s for her daughter. The women explained as they removed duct tape from their legs that Indian people use them

⁶ All the speakers used this phrase, which was new to me as a reference to the museum.

to keep their moccasins up; otherwise, the soft material and would slouch. They prefer the tape to wearing “the stiff moccasins,” which cause blisters and rub their skin.

They changed into every day clothes; one woman had a shirt with cowry shells sewn to it and I asked if she had made her clothes. She said she does sew, but she also liked to “support the Indian economy,” so she also would buy items made by people with better sewing skills. The mom commented that a lot of people at the procession asked them to stop walking so they could take their photos. She said the Aztec people (with their long feather plumes waving several feet in the air above their heads) were stopped a lot. Finally, she said, they “got fed up.” Someone said “nice costume” to her, and she obviously was offended. She explained to the passerby, it’s called “our dance clothes.” Her daughter had also been dressed up that morning—not in the eccentric, fun and colorful clothes she was known to wear at the CRC that signaled she was an artist, but rather a flower-patterned cloth and ruffled dress that celebrated her Cherokee heritage as she walked in the procession.

First Americans Festival

With the end of the opening ceremonies, the First Nations Festival was officially underway; it would last until the closing ceremonies on September 26. At 4:00pm I went to see the festival. I passed by an Andean pan flute band at the Potomac stage, and went to the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) “social dance circle.” I sat on a hay bale and watched a Nakota young man who was an award winning hoop dancer; his father played a drum and sang while he danced. I also saw a Tlingit story teller who presented a commentary on Indians in the contemporary prison system through a story about how mosquitoes came to be. This diversity of performers and the variety of performances would only increase in the days to come, where I would also see “Scissor Dancers,” throat singers, and countless other celebrations of humor, tradition, art and athleticism.

While I was at the social dance circle, I started talking to a man sitting beside me—from the Six Nations Mohawk reserve in Canada. His daughter, a Yale University student, sat beside him in a long buckskin dress with fringes. The father said that he really liked the iron work section in the *Our Lives* Kahnawake exhibit. Many people, like him, took days off of work to be here; they flew, rode trains, and drove far distances to be here. They also took days off work, and many spent money to put together their regalia (like the Kalinago), or saved up for the trip, or were financially supported by their tribal leadership.

There were powwow dances, Maori dance performances, countless Native bands and musicians. Comedian Charlie Hill was mceeing the main performance of the evening—a lineup of famous pop and folksong stars who were Native American, including the band Indigenous and Rita Coolidge. Charlie Hill asked the audience, as I was walking towards the main stage, “How many Cherokees are here?... I mean the *real* ones?” and the audience laughed. He also commented, “It’s just so hard to get good white help nowadays!” Then he introduced Buffie Saint Marie (Cree), who had an Academy Award and seventeen albums. Many people afterwards (performers and people on the street) remembered her from the 1960s and 1970s and would either say how great it was that they saw her perform or how disappointed they were that they didn’t see her. As she came on stage, her opening remarks were: “A dream should come true—and it did today!”

There was Native people, in plain clothes and dance clothes, everywhere you looked. In the museum, in the restaurants, on the sidewalks of the city. It was a rare occasion that the balance of visitors in the museum were overwhelmingly Native American. I went to the museum, which was going to be open all night long. I went in at 6:00pm and listened to visitors near the entry way of the *Our Lives* gallery commenting that it was “weird,” and “isn’t that neat?” and “amazing.” Another person said, “You can’t read everything,” and another, “There’s no way you can see this all in one day.” After a quick survey of the OL gallery (there was no sound in the Igloolik media inuksuk, the Chicago living room scene had no lights on, and the interactives were not operating), I went straight back to the hotel. There, while at the Welcome Desk, co-curator feedback about the museum was “outstanding!” “You all did an outstanding job!”

All the RAs left without attending the festival. They were too tired. The RAs and the curators were not as interested so much in the festival—they were more focused on the museum, the preview reception, and the co-curators. During the week curators Emil, Ann, Cecile and Cynthia all came to the hotel to check in, help out, and visit with co-curators. The curators were also required to attend the

various formal receptions and brunches with distinguished visitors who wanted to ask questions or meet the lead curators of the exhibitions.

At the end of the day I returned to the hotel and saw Angie, a Chicago elder, asking the front desk how to get to her hotel. She was planning on walking. Although she was a fiercely independent, vigorous and capable woman in her eighties, I insisted on giving Angie a ride because it was after midnight. When I arrived to do fieldwork in Chicago, Angie and I would often sit together and talk at the AIC elders' lunches on Wednesdays, and she would often introduce me to people by telling this story. When I returned to the hotel again, I chatted in the hotel bar with a Huichol scholar and Igloolik co-curators. The hotel bar was a lively, late night center of activity and chatter for the co-curators and other community members to gather and commiserate at the end of each day. Retiring to the hotel room around 2:00am, I chose to speak into a recorder that night rather than write field notes. I later found it amusing that, when I transcribed the recording, there was a series of pauses and then a long pause that interrupted the narrative towards the end of the monologue; I likely dozed off in the middle of recording my impressions of the day.

Farewells

By the next day, Wednesday, September 22, the farewells to co-curators were already underway. As I was saying goodbye to Pam and Val Fabela, they hugged me and said what a wonderful time they had. Similarly, I noticed that all of the co-curators were hugging the NMAI RAs as they left.

The RAs had made a concerted effort to find a way for the Kalinagos, who had brought a bunch of baskets, to sell their crafts before they departed. A number of co-curators had brought items to sell at the festival, so the RAs had also set up a hotel conference room for this purpose. Although the conference room did not draw as many visitors and purchasers as they'd hoped (NMAI curators did some buying as well), it turned out to be a wonderful meeting place for co-curators from all over the hemisphere; Leah from Igloolik and Cozier from the Carib Territory exchanged email addresses, for example. When this room set aside in the hotel did not result in the sale of all of the items, Heidi, an *Our Peoples* RA, was able connect the Kalinago with an Amazonian Alliance representative on the last day of their stay to buy the rest of their crafts to sell in her booth at the First Nations Festival "market place." The woman had run out of Amazonian items and was happy to buy the Kalinago crafts to sell in her booth.

This was also the last evening the Kalinago co-curators had before returning to Dominica in the morning, and they had one request: to go to Wal-Mart. That afternoon Teresa (*Our Peoples* RA) and I drove the Kalinago co-curators to a bank to cash their honorarium checks and then to Wal-Mart and then to an airport hotel near the Baltimore airport where they would depart in the morning. When we entered the store, everyone immediately dispersed. Sylvanie and Jacinta were done right away, but the men took a long time. We were not in a hurry. Teresa and I helped Cozier look for clothes for his little girl and shoes for his baby nephew; we chatted with Prosper as he looked for clothes for his sons. Some of the co-curators bought small suitcases to carry home their purchases. Afterwards, we went to dinner at pizza place in Alexandria (one of Teresa's favorite restaurants) to relax before saying goodbye later that evening.

I returned to the hotel that night and sat up late in the hotel bar with Leah and Arsene, Igloolik co-curators. Leah, ever concerned and dedicated to Inuktitut language preservation and learning, was telling me about her upcoming visit to an Inuit immersion school in Greenland the following week. At one point during our conversation, a woman who had clearly been celebrating and drinking came up to our table and asked if she could be in a picture with Leah. Leah looked at her somewhat uneasily. To provide an opportunity for introductions, I asked, "Where are you from?" The woman replied, "Kansas." I said I was from Chicago, and Leah said she was from Canada. The woman asked her friend take a picture of her with Leah and Arsene. The woman then explained, "I'm Dakota Sioux, and you were in the exhibit. That's why I want to take a picture of you." And then Leah said "Oh, ok." The woman continued, as if announcing it to all who were sitting in the bar, "I'm *Dakota* Sioux. You did justice to your people, we're real proud of you, we have a lot of respect for you." And Leah said thank you. After the woman left, I told Leah, "You're a celebrity now!" and we laughed.

CRC Open House

By Friday, Friday, September 24, all of the co-curators had returned home and I had spent some time walking around the festival. The final activity for the opening week was the last day of the “Open House” at the CRC—an opportunity for the museum to show off its innovative collections space, as well as for visitors and Native peoples to visit with the objects. As NMAI staff and I were standing around in the collections, waiting to welcome visitors to the space and answer questions, Teresa said that she went to bed the night before at 8:30pm and then awoke with a start at 2:00am—did she forget a shuttle? Did people not have one to get to the airport? She laughed in a way I hadn’t heard for years, really. A relaxed, goofy laugh. It was a wonderful sound.

For the CRC open house, big busses arrived each hour and Collections supervisor Pat Netfield would give them an introductory talk in the rotunda. She talked about the building and its connection to the outside with large windows in the collection space as being “different.” “It’s not a warehouse,” she said, like the collection’s previous home at the New York Research Branch in the Bronx. She introduced the various departments at the CRC and left people to explore on their own. They could go into Conservation, Photo Services (they had tables with binders set out of photos on them in the Curatorial Work Room), or Collections.

Most people went into the Collections first. Pat told visitors that there are signs on the shelves in collections that say don’t touch the objects. She added, in typical *CRC* fashion, “that doesn’t mean Native people can’t touch their objects.” I underlined “their” in my little notebook. Everyone working the CRC open house was waiting for 12:00pm when the open house would be over. When the whole week would be over. They all wanted to go home, and *everyone* was talking about how they were looking forward to the weekend to finally get some sleep. It sounded like they hadn’t slept for years.

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