

"Red Man's Burden": The Politics of Inclusion in Museum Settings

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# “Red Man’s Burden”

*The Politics of Inclusion in Museum Settings*

NANCY MARIE MITHLO

The interactions of two distinct groups, broadly defined as Native American populations and individuals associated with the museum profession, primarily anthropologists, have fueled countless studies, manuscripts, films, and articles.<sup>1</sup> The contact, negotiations, and legal entanglements of these constituents and their varied interests over the past century are commonly characterized by oppositional social mores and strategies. Typically, Indigenous knowledge is perceived as subjective and restricted while Western knowledge is seen as scientific, objective, and free of restrictions. How accurate are these divisive portrayals? How do individuals and institutions work both within and outside of these parameters? On a broader level, what do these dialogues tell us about cultural encounters in an age that has been characterized not as “postcolonial” but more accurately as “late imperial”?<sup>2</sup>

This article addresses the engagements of these constituencies in a highly charged and divisive era that I will term “pre-repatriation.”<sup>3</sup> Although debates concerning the return of Native American ceremonial objects and human remains alienated from their original communities under the rationale of science or warfare have existed for a century or more, the discourses of the 1980s were characterized by a surreal, epic quality that highlights core beliefs, common narratives, and political stances. This era of ideological warfare was the period in which I received training as a museum professional of Native background. I am a member of the Fort Sill Chiricahua Warm Springs Apache Tribe of Oklahoma; I received my museum training at Appalachian State University, the School of Visual Arts, Institute of American Indian Arts, Stanford University, and the University of British Columbia. The examples I draw

from may be described as an opportunity sample of places, individuals, and circumstances that informed my perspective as a professor of museum studies at a tribal college.<sup>4</sup>

My intent is not to present an inclusive overview of the debates but rather to offer a personal testimony that identifies key trends and attitudes in the formation of contemporary Indigenous museum curation methods, an emerging professional field. I will argue that the rationales developed in the 1980s that advocated the inclusion of Native Americans within the museum profession as a means of bridging conceptual divides failed to achieve significant social change. While well intended, proponents of inclusion often neglected to incorporate alternative paradigms of knowledge, resulting in unrealistic assumptions about reconciling colonist legacies. Incorporation of Native bodies does not necessarily indicate incorporation of Native thought. Reductionist approaches therefore contradict the necessary interrogation of multiple knowledge systems, organizational values, and individual identities in cultural heritage debates.

I will begin with an example shared with me by my late mentor, ethnologist Edmund J. Ladd of the Pueblo of Zuni. At the time I came to know him seventeen years ago, Ed Ladd worked with the State of New Mexico's Museum of Indian Arts and Culture as their curator of ethnology. He was also responsible for overseeing the process by which eighty *AHAYU:DA* (commonly termed "War Gods" by non-Zunis) were returned to the Pueblo from thirty-eight separate repatriations over a fifteen-year period.<sup>5</sup> Ladd was my link to understanding how anthropology worked for Native people—he was an Indian anthropologist who was not confused, as Vine Deloria complains, about his allegiance to the profession over the community.<sup>6</sup> When I asked Ladd about his thoughts on Native control over their objects and representations in museums, he spoke eloquently about the cultural differences, really intellectual differences, involved in the repatriation debates.

We believe that things that are put in museums will eventually eat themselves up "*EEWETONAWAH*." In other words, they will completely disintegrate and do their own thing anyway no matter what the museum does to preserve it. We are saying to the museum "Keep them because we know better." We say to the museums "If you return [sacred objects] we will curate them according to our

traditions. According to our traditions, they have to be put into the ground and destroyed.” Curate simply means to take care of. We take care of it the way it is supposed to be taken care of. Preservation is not a part of Zuni culture. Preservation is completely opposite of our concept of deterioration and disintegration as a means of refurbishing and re-entering into [the] afterworld.<sup>7</sup>

Ladd’s description conveys how a lack of coherence between the museum enterprise and Zuni belief systems is both a problem of semantics and philosophy. In this passage, he indicates that the pueblo is not only knowledgeable of the museums’ value systems, they also are aware that their own belief system will prevail. The pueblo has even appropriated the use of the term “curate” and altered its meaning to fit their social reality.

The total divergence of values reflected in this passage—to preserve on the one hand and to allow to deteriorate on the other—is indicative not of a misunderstanding of museum values but of an alternate ideology at work. To simply term this ideology religion and dismiss its beliefs as invalid or unscientific, as many who fought against repatriation did, is to misunderstand, or perhaps more correctly, to delegitimize Zuni beliefs.<sup>8</sup> Ladd’s presence as a Native museum professional was a testimony to how individuals working within social institutions may productively appropriate existing systems of interpretation for alternative ends. Too often this re-appropriation is viewed as a conscription of sorts. Indigenous knowledge can exist within a scientific paradigm without sacrificing the contours of unique worldviews.

Roger Anyon and T. J. Ferguson characterize these differing cultural views as a Euroamerican belief in archaeological resources as “abandoned inanimate things from which information can be extracted,” compared to a Zuni belief of archaeological resources as embodying life forces that cannot be alienated over time. They interpret the Euroamerican view of cultural resources as restrictive or bound, a concept incompatible with the Zuni view of the entire landscape as a cultural resource with no fixed boundaries and no fixed significance. In the Zuni worldview meaning and significance may change by time of year or by virtue of ceremony. Anyon and Ferguson ask, “How can one bound and separate a spring at which deer drink from the ancestral archaeological sites this deer visits to pay its respects to the spirits inhabiting that site?”<sup>9</sup>

These complex and multiple readings of meaning and significance do not easily mesh with standard museological or cultural resource management practices.<sup>10</sup> Anyon and Ferguson conclude (perhaps more subtly than I advocate in this work) that “The gulf that separates the western view of the inanimate and abandoned from the Zuni view of the alive and inhabited creates challenges for Zunis conducting CRM” (cultural resource management).<sup>11</sup>

Casting an Indigenous knowledge system as a religious endeavor in opposition to a scientific pursuit results in the characteristic of Indigenous nations as antiscience. In fact, the Zuni people do utilize science—they were one of the first Native communities to operate their own archaeological program in 1975. The archaeology program at Zuni (today known as the Zuni Heritage and Historic Preservation Office) was established after the tribal council noted that contracting non-Zuni archaeologists to work on Zuni projects often resulted in the alienation of both objects and knowledge from the pueblo. By establishing their own archaeological program, the Zuni people took control of their cultural resources—their “property,” including cultural artifacts, intellectual property, and the currency inherent in public display and interpretation.

This illustration of the complexities involved in Indian/non-Indian relations in museums points to several of the key factors I want to address in this article. First, both Indigenous knowledge and Western knowledge systems can be interpreted as subjective enterprises with restricted codes. Museum mandates to collect and preserve are not universal standards but particular norms associated with specific embedded social histories. Second, the adoption of an oppositional credo, while serving to maintain boundaries and differentiate values, ultimately oversimplifies and thus mischaracterizes the aims of both parties, Natives and anthropologists. And third, the policy of inclusion, anticipated by both Native and non-Natives as *the* solution to representational divides, places an undue and often unworkable burden upon Native museum professionals to “bridge” broad conceptual gaps. Museums are self-perpetuating institutions that generally maintain authority, despite efforts to “give Natives a voice.” I conclude with reflections on new research methodologies that problematize not only standard ethnographic methods but also selection of research agendas.

With over two million people representing some 580 tribes, corporations, and rancherias, some claim that it is impossible to speak knowl-

edgeably about Native Americans in a generalized sense due to the great regional, political, and social diversity of these groups. I follow anthropologist Edward Spicer in regarding historical experience above language, kinship, and customs as the primary factor in construing social identity. Spicer states:

The Indians . . . have in every case where they survive with an active sense of identity, undergone distinctive experiences as compared with non-Indians. They have seen portions of their land appropriated by others, land associated with a mythology of the past and regarded as sacred. They have experienced the invasion of their communities by traders, bureaucrats, and missionaries . . . They have been made aware of the ethnic classifications used by the invaders and have watched the success or failure of various plans for changing the Indians' ways.<sup>12</sup>

This control of Native identity results in shared experiences of Native Americans in regards not only to the loss of land and language noted by Spicer but also in relationship to contemporary social experiences such as boarding school trauma, a high incidence of substance abuse, endemic poverty, and continued racial discrimination.

The enactment of legislation such as the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA) recognizes the relationship of Native tribes and the federal government as distinct political bodies. This type of bargaining on a national level to address the collective claims of Native Americans, which has traditionally drawn the criticism of non-Indians who view these parameters as special privileging. During the debates surrounding the enactment of the legislation, many museum professionals testifying against NAGPRA advocated instead for a nonlegislated case-by-case resolution of property disputes, a claim that was eventually denied in favor of national legislation. Not only, then, is there internal justification for utilizing the concept of a Native American identity (following Spicer's argument of a shared historical experience), there also exists legal claims for consideration of a pan-Indian constituency in the museum/Native discussions addressed here.<sup>13</sup>

I take the term "Red Man's Burden" as an Indigenous play of words on the phrase.<sup>14</sup> Early contact with the Indigenous people of North America led the settlers of this continent to conclude that forced assimilation was the humanitarian solution to the so-called Indian Problem. The problem

itself was one of expansion. A congressional debate of 1869 surmised “many tribes of Indians have been induced to settle upon reservations, to cultivate the soil, to perform productive labor of various kinds, and to partially accept civilization. They are being cared for in such a way, it is hoped, as to induce those still pursuing their old habits of life to embrace the only opportunity which is left them to avoid extermination.”<sup>15</sup>

Thus the task of imbuing morals to Native American populations became the classic tale of the “White Man’s Burden.” This trajectory, one that Cherokee scholar Rayna Green characterizes as “almost-biblical” in its proportions, describes the colonizer’s self-assumed responsibility to civilize the Natives so that they might successfully assimilate into the dominant society.<sup>16</sup> The use of the term “Red Man’s Burden” turned back to reference the colonizers signals both a reverse paradigm and an accompanying critique of Western values. As I will point out in my conclusion, the suggestion that Native museum professionals have a *responsibility* to literally sort through the culmination of colonial legacies via museum collections is a narcissistic assumption.

Finally, it must be noted that the cultural encounters I am describing position sovereign Indigenous nations as a pan-Indian totality in contrast to a profession—anthropology. Both groups are composed of individuals from diverse backgrounds. A pan-Native American identity is not a profession, just as anthropologists are not a cultural or political group. It may be that anthropologists tend to subvert their cultural identity as secondary to their profession more than Native Americans. Likewise, Native Americans as the subjects of early anthropological investigations are perhaps more likely to be explicit in recognizing their background and political role in addressing colonial legacies. This structural problem of comparing a profession with a cultural or political group may well account for the often circular thinking and cross-purposes these debates entail.

The history of anthropology in America is largely a history of the encounters of scientists, explorers, and traders among Native American communities. Propelled by the belief that Native cultures would soon vanish under the pressures of civilization, early anthropologists and collectors adopted the method of salvage anthropology—to collect all they could of early Native American material culture before it vanished. During a six-year period in Zuni Pueblo (1879 to 1885) 12,609 objects were collected for the Smithsonian Institute alone, from a community of

fewer than 2,000 individuals. The speed and recklessness of these early encounters is disturbing to us today as we see in hindsight how the removal of Native material in great quantities from remote Native communities might actually have accelerated the process of acculturation.<sup>17</sup> Museums flourished and objects were readily had due in part to disease and violence, the influx of mass-manufactured goods, the influence of Christian conversion, and federal legislation outlawing Native ceremonies, such as the potlatch of the Pacific Northwest Coast.

In order to fully understand how this historic dimension shaped contemporary debates, I will briefly address how early anthropological investigations in the Pacific Northwest Coast inextricably tied material culture with assimilationist views. I draw heavily from the scholarship of historian Douglas Cole, a biographer of the anthropologist Franz Boas.<sup>18</sup> Boas, the German-born researcher known as the “Father of American Anthropology,” began his career as a geographer; his first expedition to Baffin Island in 1883 was to investigate the influence of the environment on population movement. Desiring to emigrate to the United States, Boas borrowed money from his family, intent on establishing himself as an Americanist by studying the language and mythology of the Indigenous people of the Northwest Coast, particularly the Bella Coolas. He calculated that his loan could be repaid by collecting ethnographic items cheaply in British Columbia and selling them dearly in the United States or Germany. Boas proved to be an excellent trader—successful in his ability to turn a profit from this initial expedition (he eventually sold the bulk of his 140-piece collection to the Berlin Museum)—and he remained in America.

Boas’s second Northwest Coast visit in May 1888, funded by the Canadian government, had as its emphasis physical anthropology—the collection of Native American skulls and skeletons, specifically from British Columbia. It was a geographic area he would continue to work with for the rest of his career. This expedition more than his previous work exposed Boas’s conflicting ethical and professional allegiances. Boas paid \$20.00 for a complete skeleton and \$5.00 for a skull resulting in a collection of two hundred crania valued at \$1,600.00. The collection was eventually accessioned at the Chicago Field Museum in 1894. Boas both purchased and collected his own skulls by grave robbing, an activity he called “repugnant work” but “someone has to do it,” reasoning, skeletons were “worth money.” The shipping boxes bound for the great eastern muse-



ums that contained the skeletal remains were purposely misidentified to alleviate suspicion by authorities and the Cowichan Natives in whose graves he dug.<sup>19</sup>

This early history forms the backdrop from which later developments such as repatriation may be viewed. Primary is the fact that collecting Native bodies and artifacts was an investment in property, both physical and interpretive. Cole argues that the whole of the collecting process must be seen against the more powerful forces of an expanded Western capitalism. While the trading process on the Northwest Coast can be viewed as simply an economic transaction, a product of supply and demand, the activities were part of a larger colonial encounter fueled by a dominant economic system. Economic incentives drove both Boas the anthropologist and his Native informants and suppliers to breach social contracts in pursuit of a profit, both monetary and in relationship to professional advancement. Thus the pursuit of science at the turn of the century was not a neutral endeavor but was embedded in particular social histories where both restrictions and subjectivity played dominant roles.

By taking Boas to task for participating in an illegal activity—grave robbing—I am not simply applying current ethical standards to a previous time period in an effort to discredit his work. Among Boas's many accomplishments in museum theory was his critique of classificatory exhibition techniques (exhibiting weapons with other weapons, for example, as an indication of evolutionary progress) and his insistence that an inductive method be employed (a display of artifacts within cultural groupings). This holistic approach to curation supported his philosophy advocating cultural relativity, for "the main object of ethnological collections should be the dissemination of the fact that civilization is not something absolute, but that it is relative, and that our ideas and conceptions are true so far as our civilization goes."<sup>20</sup> The concept of cultural relativity is often referenced as a means of avoiding ethnocentric and racist interpretations of exotic "others" and is a standard premise of introductory anthropology classes today.

What I intend to show is that in spite of Boas's many contributions, any consideration of complex individual histories will negate the clearly established boundaries (Native equals subjective, West equals objective) we continue to reference today. The Western ideology that necessitated grave robbing was, even in Boas's time, clearly not a rational, objective

endeavor, just as the actions of the Cowichan people themselves were not altogether simply subjective and emotional. In fact, the Cowichan people hired a lawyer to press claims against Boas and his assistant for their activities and even secured a search warrant for the bones, but nothing was found.

This historic backdrop informs the development of tribal museums in British Columbia in the late 1970s. Here, too, a dichotomy appears to exist in reference to museums and Native populations; however, the Native population in this instance is represented by a variation of the museum model—the tribal cultural center. Both the Kwakiutl Museum of Cape Mudge and the U'Mista Cultural Centre of Alert Bay, British Columbia, were established as a result of the repatriation of ceremonial goods from major Canadian museums to their original communities of origin. The saga of how these items were taken from the community is not one of alienation under economic pressure as described in the historic period, but a story of confiscation and persecution.<sup>21</sup> In 1922 forty-five people were arrested following a large potlatch at Village Island. An 1884 law forbid the Native people of Canada from practicing their cultural heritage, including the potlatch ceremonies, but the law was not strongly enforced until the Indian agent William Halliday pressed claims against the Kwakwaka'wakw people of the region. Twenty-two people were sentenced to jail and seventeen containers of masks, rattles, whistles, and other dance paraphernalia were shipped to the Victoria Memorial Museum in Ottawa. The collection, numbering some 450 items, was eventually accessioned to the Royal Ontario Museum in Ottawa and the Museum of the American Indian/Heye Foundation in New York.<sup>22</sup> Kwakwaka'wakw historian Daisy Sewid-Smith states:

Indian Agent Halliday thought he had succeeded in abolishing the potlatch but it simply went underground. What he did do was force the Kwakwaka'wakw people to learn the legal system of this country for they employed their own lawyers to find legal ways of beating the potlatch laws. Potlatching was never defeated for the people just simply found ways of camouflaging their activities. It was not until 1952 that the Native Brotherhood of B. C. finally won their appeal to have this law changed for the sake of the next generation.<sup>23</sup>

In 1974 the board of trustees of the National Museum of Canada agreed to return its portion of the collection, on the condition that a fire-

proof museum be built to hold the collection. Eventually two museums, one at Cape Mudge and the other at Alert Bay, were built for the different family owners. The negotiations for the return of artifacts at the Royal Ontario Museum and the National Museum of the American Indian were more protracted and confrontational in nature but were eventually successful. Note that here, as in Boas's example, we see Native populations employing Western legal arguments to assert control over their cultural patrimony and material culture.<sup>24</sup>

This precedent of building a museum as a condition for the return of objects taken sets a good rationale for viewing the museum as an oppositional endeavor in legal terms. However, it was not legal but social interpretations that led anthropologist James Clifford to reference the term when he visited the Kwakiutl Museum of Cape Mudge and the U'Mista Cultural Centre of Alert Bay in 1988. The resulting essay, "Four Northwest Coast Museums: Travel Reflections," used a comparative approach to analyze competing values of the "art-culture system," particularly how Native groups both take part in and subvert the dominant practice of collection and display. Clifford describes the tribal museums as "minority or oppositional projects within a comparative museological context."<sup>25</sup> The display of origin stories at the entrance of the U'Mista Cultural Centre prompted Clifford to state: "From the outset the U'Mista Cultural Centre strikes an oppositional note, highlighting the politics of identity and of history . . . From the outset, the power to reclaim and recontextualize texts and objects 'collected' by outside authorities is demonstrated."<sup>26</sup>

As a graduate student in residence at the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology (one of the four Northwest Coast museums described) shortly after Clifford's visit, I was given the opportunity to review early drafts of Clifford's essay. I subsequently followed Clifford's four-museum travel itinerary to compare his findings with my own. The oppositional stance adopted by Clifford, I charged in a later paper, was attributable to his perceived situation of himself as an avowed "white American visitor" and his construction of a theoretical framework by observation and the comparative method.<sup>27</sup> Our subsequent debate and correspondence over the conceptual idea of opposition resulted in the finalized version of the article "Four Northwest Coast Museums" reflecting a softening of the purely oppositional perspective. His correspondence in response to my essay read, "a better term for this reality is

needed.” Noting that the term oppositional includes more than explicitly mobilized political actions, Clifford described the Native interpretive stance at the U’Mista Centre more along the lines of “self-fashioning, caught up, entangled (not completely) in other systems of power.”<sup>28</sup>

Certainly, as a woman, a student, and a single mother from Native background with my six-year-old child in tow, I may be expected to perceive the tribal museum in a different light than Clifford. Before my visit I called the U’Mista Centre director, Gloria Cranmer Webster, to ask if I might see her. She responded with an invitation to stay in her home. My initial reaction was to be modest, “No I can sleep on the mainland.” Then I realized this was a prominent Kwakwaka’wakw (Kwakiutl) woman I was speaking to. To reject an offer of hospitality was an insult! I quickly agreed to her offer and arrived not only to be housed but also fed and entertained.

I wondered how this oppositional concept between a minority museum and a majority culture could be attributed to a place where as I observed there were people simply doing what they have always done—telling stories, talking among themselves about themselves. I sent my essay to Ms. Cranmer Webster to have her check my accuracy and she penned me the following reply:

The world of Anthropology never ceases to amaze me. Here we are, in our little cultural center, doing our thing, unaware that all this controversy is going on about what we’re doing and why we’re doing it! I suppose this might be considered another contribution of U’Mista to the world out there.

Reading your paper and re-reading Clifford’s made me think back to when we were building this place and how our plans developed. I cannot honestly remember white people ever being considered when we were deciding about anything. The majority/minority issue never came up, maybe because on this island we are not a minority. What shit-house luck that we did all these clever things without knowing what we were doing!<sup>29</sup>

Is identification of the oppositional character of tribal cultural centers imposing an imperial Western order—“a discrete entity capable of generating knowledge and institutional power over the rest of the planet”?<sup>30</sup> If oppositional politics of identity take precedence over the cultural center’s goals of preservation and maintenance of heritage—a focusing of

attention toward the majority—then clearly a defensive rather than offensive strategy is at play. Oppositional denotes a reactive stance—betraying, I think, not only a focused belief in the operational strategies of the majority but also a lack of innovative proactive measures on the part of tribal initiatives.

The danger in characterizing the perceived minority as oppositional is that alternative ideologies are overlooked. Clifford's analysis seeks to address this imposition of values by stating that "in other crucial aspects they [tribal museums] are not museums at all: they are continuations of indigenous traditions of storytelling, collecting and display."<sup>31</sup> This recognition of Indigenous interpretations as an extension of preexisting cultural traits signals a movement toward embracing alternative ideologies.<sup>32</sup> Gloria Cranmer Webster confirms this crucial distinction in the following statement: "U'Mista was never meant to be a museum. Wouldn't we have called it that, if that's what it was going to be? Our Board of Directors said, at the time we incorporated as a registered society, 'We're not building a museum. Museums are for white people and are full of dead things.'"<sup>33</sup>

The variable of audience is a crucial consideration here. Although two audiences are recognized at U'Mista—local Natives and outsiders like himself—Clifford noted that a "shaming discourse" prevailed, contributing to "the white person's feeling of being looked at." Further, the open-air exhibits of the repatriated masks with accompanying historical texts telling of their removal and return brought Clifford to confess: "The display's effect, on me at least, was of powerful storytelling, a practice *implicating* its audience. Here the implication was political and historical. I was not permitted simply to admire or comprehend the regalia. They embarrassed, saddened, inspired, and angered me."<sup>34</sup> Is the presentation of local community histories inherently reactive to majority museums and their constituents? Stated more directly, can tribal museums express their own histories of exploitation and survival without indicting a perceived Western totality? What of majority institutions whose constituents are the perceived minority?

The Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) represents the greatest challenge to older notions of conveniently divided intellectual terrain. Established in 1989 by an act of Congress, the NMAI consists of the George Gustav Heye Center in New York City, the Cultural Resources Center in Suitland, Maryland, and the main facility

that will open on the National Mall in Washington DC, in 2004. The NMAI has sponsored numerous exhibits, public programs, an interactive Web site, cultural events, and consultations with Native communities since its inception, attempting in each instance to create as founding director W. Richard West states, “native places of a kind.”<sup>35</sup>

The existence of the National Museum of the American Indian—its establishment via Congress, its location on the last remaining space of the Mall, its implicit mandate to be the public face for Native concerns of the Western Hemisphere from history to the present—is nothing short of monumental. The character of the NMAI will necessarily be impacted by the positioning of the museum as a nationalistic endeavor. As I write in the year of its intended opening, there exists a broad base of support for the museum’s success and a sense that finally Native Americans have arrived back at the center of the nation’s debates on selfhood, citizenship, and power. In the pre-repatriation era of the 1980s, however, the legitimacy of majority museums was viewed as “increasingly questionable” by theorists like Clifford who saw the cultural center model as a “more diverse, interesting, and fair distribution of cultural ‘property.’”<sup>36</sup> Mainstream museums garnered a poor reputation during cultural property disputes pre-NAGPRA from tribal constituents as well.<sup>37</sup> The ideology of inclusion of Native Americans within the museum practice thus played a potential key role in diffusing these tensions.

Advocacy of inclusion is clearly evident in the Smithsonian publication *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian—Museums and Native Culture*, a collection of essays from a 1995 symposium of the same name. Director of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts Evan M. Maurer concludes, “As more Native Americans become involved in the process it will be their opportunity to lead and our time to listen and be guided.”<sup>38</sup> Similarly, James Nason, director of the American Indian Studies Center at the University of Washington, states: “Native Americans have complained for decades that museum exhibitions misrepresent their history and culture. They should therefore welcome the opportunity to experiment with mechanisms in the creation of new and hopefully better interpretations.”<sup>39</sup>

My criticism of this approach is both theoretical and practical. In light of historical precedence, the call for Native Americans in museum practice is not altogether new—Franz Boas himself utilized this method in the hiring and training of George Hunt, the son of an English Hudson’s

Bay Company factor and his Tlingit wife. Hunt was culturally a Kwakiutl; he was an initiate in the Hamatsa, the highest Kwakiutl secret society, and he married Kwakiutls and raised his family within the Indian society. Hunt's activities with Boas, however, even stealing skulls and artifacts from burial caves, resulted in his life being threatened by his own people. He did continue to collect, playing on his position as an insider to quell community objections with gift giving and trading for needed cash.<sup>40</sup>

The moral dilemma evident in Hunt's role as a researcher is not expressed as a concern by those who, some seventy years later, pressed for Native participation in the field, thinking that if Indians were only properly educated about the value of bones they would not demand reburial. The proceedings leading up to the enactment of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act clearly expose archaeologists and museum professionals thinking along these deterministic lines. For example, Leslie Wildeson of the Society for American Archaeology states:

[We] support increased participation, education and interpretation of, for, and by, Indians of the native American heritage of this nation. Why should foreign scholars do all the work? Where are the native scholars, to foster pride in their material history, to explain to the newcomers about the last 12,000 years of history, to pass that knowledge and pride along to the next generation, Indian and non-Indian alike?<sup>41</sup>

Here is the "Red Man's Burden" of today. In an era where Native Americans are still among the nation's poorest, least educated, and most exploited peoples, yet another task is given—to take up the cause of archaeology for educating the "foreign scholars." Robert McCormick Adams, secretary for the Smithsonian Institution, in 1987 testified:

We find ourselves in a situation where one would gather from this hearing, that the Indian communities are pulling in one direction and the archaeologists in another. What seems to me to be fundamentally wrong with that would be best corrected by increasing the effort to provide people with historic training, with museum training, people who can provide a bridge between these two communities pulling in two different directions now, and that means people from Native American communities. The more effectively and the

more rapidly we do that the more quickly we get past the point of trying to worry about whether that object is sacred or really just another lousy artifact.<sup>42</sup>

If one follows the logic of these passages, it could be concluded that (a) Native people, if only properly educated, will embrace the values of the museum system, including preservation; (b) Native people have a responsibility to educate others in this inquiry—both Native and non-Native; (c) there is nothing worthwhile in Native epistemologies that may alter or contribute to the museum agenda; (d) Native people themselves desire this training; and (e) Native people possess an innate knowledge to interpret any Native culture, regardless of their own specific tribal background.

What is flawed in this line of thinking? The museum enterprise, built upon a colonial heritage that demanded control of Native people, now has need of Native informants to both correctly identify objects and serve as negotiators between two parties with vested interests. It would logically appear to be the responsibility of the museums that originally collected the artifacts to lead the effort to make the situation right.<sup>43</sup> On a more practical level, and as a former museum studies educator at a tribal college, I know the challenges of Native people becoming accredited in the field. Graduate training programs are few and expensive, admissions are selective, high schools on reservations do not adequately prepare Native students for graduate work, and without the graduate degree, Native American interns are restricted in their ability to move beyond entry-level collections management work.

In addition to a lack of training programs available to Native scholars, the dangers of working with contaminated objects (objects that have been treated with preservation chemicals such as arsenic) are becoming painfully evident.<sup>44</sup> Chemical treatments of historic artifacts have created a workplace hazard for museum professionals in training. Where I previously placed students in collections management posts typical of internship duties, I now advise students to go straight for the graduate degree so they can work on an administrative level, hiring out for the collections work. It is this level of practical application that will really be the decisive factor for Native American participation in museums, not solely ideological constructs.

Certainly prominent curatorial professionals of Native background



such as Ladd and Cranmer Webster, as well as respected non-Native anthropologists such as Anyon and Ferguson, demonstrate how these seemingly impossible conceptual impassés might be remedied on an individual level. For each of these exceptional examples of individuals successfully crossing broad ideological differences, however, there are countless others that withdraw at the point of contact or fail to ever attempt to try. Native students commonly choose the more culturally acceptable professions of law, education, or medicine over anthropology, and non-Native students are intimidated from entering the field of Native studies where they may be maligned as cultural interlopers. In the words of Michael Ames, a contributor to the *Changing Presentation* publication, “because museums as we know them are essentially white European inventions designed to serve the interests of mainstream or non-Aboriginal segments of society . . . the value of that environment is not self-evident to most First Peoples, nor is the museum’s internal organizational culture entirely compatible with Aboriginal sentiments.”<sup>45</sup>

This brings me to my final point on new research methodologies in museum settings. The early years of American anthropology witnessed an explosion of museum collections. These artifacts largely still sit on shelves; some estimate that as many as 90 percent of these collections have never been studied. Anthropologist Nancy Parezo suggests three reasons for this.<sup>46</sup> First, studying material culture is akin to doing library research. It is not original field research but secondhand data from someone else’s research endeavors. Second, anthropology as a discipline has shifted away from a museum-based discipline to a university-based discipline. Third, most researchers today do not know or fully understand the research aims of the original collectors. She advocates studying the anthropological collectors themselves in order to use the collections more intelligently.

This approach of turning back to the discipline itself may be helpful in salvaging some meaning from these vast holdings, but it fails to adequately address the importance of these objects for Native communities. In his earlier work, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums*, Michael M. Ames states: “Our purpose is not just to identify the careers of objects and institutions, like collecting and arranging so many butterflies, but also to use this information to liberate dominated peoples from the hegemonic interpretations of others so that they can speak for themselves.”<sup>47</sup> This type of democratization of museums is

viewed by Ames as a broader development in the museum enterprise, affecting Native and other minority constituents. The call for inclusiveness, described by Moira G. Simpson in the text *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era* as “one of the major issues facing the museum profession in recent years,” is also framed in the argument to “give voice” to underrepresented constituents.<sup>48</sup> Although these arguments appear logical, or even liberal in their stance, many may question if the museum has the power or even right to be positioned in the role of savior to cultures interpreted as disempowered.

The incorporation of Native perspectives, the collaborative approach between Native consultants and museum curators, and inclusion in training and hiring all serve to increase the participation in the museum enterprise but fail to connect real research needs of tribes with the activities of the museum. Indigenous thinking on this representational quandary points to establishing research criteria that necessitates an obligation to the community studied. As early as 1970 Vine Deloria Jr. surmised: “I don’t believe, in view of the awakening of nonwestern European peoples in this country, that an observational science can be a valid science if the person observing is not intimately tied to the community that he’s observing and shares some of the burdens and responsibilities for what is happening in that community.”<sup>49</sup> The same argument is made by Maori researcher Linda Tuhiwai Smith some thirty years later in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*.<sup>50</sup> Adopting the terms “insider” and “outsider research,” Smith states that most research methodologies assume the researcher is an outsider (read “objectivity, neutrality”). Indigenous research approaches problematize these roles for not only do inside researchers have to think critically about process, they also have to live with the consequences of their process on an everyday basis. Indigenous museum curation methods thus must be drawn directly from Indigenous research methodology, including choice of topics studied, selection of methodology, and incorporation of theoretical aims pursued. Both the academic and the more public face of Indigenous intellectualism in majority museums such as the National Museum of the American Indian can achieve this awareness of purpose.<sup>51</sup>

The manner in which these research approaches finally find fruition in the museum setting depends, I think, on to what degree Indigenous knowledge is incorporated not only into the exhibit content but also in

how research questions are chosen and implemented. Developments at the National Museum of the American Indian will be worth noting as an indicator of how extensive the anticipated museological shift will be. The blurring of divisive genres represented by Native American majority museums may offer the complex situational circumstances for the dominant paradigms—Western/objective, Native/subjective—to finally be deconstructed in favor of more realistic forms of representation. As the traditional subjects of scientific inquiry increasingly interrogate standard systems of interpretation, re-figuring them as “Native places of a kind” in national and global contexts, new conceptual terrain can be established outside of existing dichotomies. This third space, if claimed in its fullest sense and not as another “Red Man’s Burden,” has the possibility of altering the conceptual stalemate of Native American representations of the past century.

#### NOTES

1. Examples include Nancy O. Luri, “American Indians and Museums: A Love-Hate Relationship,” *Old Northwest* 2, no. 3 (1976); Nancy Rosoff, “The Relationship Between Native American People and Anthropology and Museums” (unpublished paper, 1999); *Bones of Contention/Native American Archaeology* (Films for the Humanities, BBC Productions, 1998); Devon A. Mihesuah, *Repatriation Reader: Who Owns American Indian Remains?* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

2. Thomas Biolsi and Larry J. Zimmerman, *Indians and Anthropologists: Vine Deloria Jr. and the Critique of Anthropology* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 7.

3. Gloria Cranmer Webster reminded me in an e-mail correspondence (April 12, 2004) that the repatriation of the Potlatch Collection from Alert Bay, British Columbia, took place before what I reference as the pre-repatriation era in the United States.

4. This article was originally presented as a talk at Smith College in February 2001. I served as professor of museum studies at the Institute of American Indian Arts full-time from 1997 to 1999 and subsequently on contract as a researcher and adjunct professor.

5. See T. J. Ferguson, Roger Anyon, and Edmund J. Ladd, “Repatriation at the Pueblo of Zuni: Diverse Solutions to Complex Problems,” *American Indian Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (1996): 251–73.

6. Biolsi and Zimmerman, *Indians and Anthropologists*, 219.

7. Edmund Ladd, personal communication, 1992.

8. For an extremist position see, for example, the American Committee for Preservation of Archaeological Collections literature.
9. See Roger Anyon and T. J. Ferguson, "Cultural Resource Management at the Pueblo of Zuni," *Antiquity* 69 (1995): 915.
10. The A:shiwi A:wam Museum and Heritage Center was established in 1992 based on the "eco-museum" concept.
11. Anyon and Ferguson, "Cultural Resource Management," 914–15.
12. Edward H. Spicer and Raymond Thompson, eds., *Plural Society in the Southwest* (New York: Weatherhead Foundation Interbook, 1972), 26.
13. NAGPRA is designed, however, to rule on claims by individual federally recognized tribes, corporations, and rancherias. My argument is that the legislation itself legitimizes the communal pan-tribal crisis of Native American bodies and objects alienated from their communities under similar rubrics of science, evolution, and colonialism.
14. I credit Richard W. Hill Sr. (Tuscarora) with the coinage of this term in recent popular use.
15. Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States, 1871–1872, Congress of the United States.
16. Rayna Green, personal communication, 2000. My research indicates the phrase "White Man's Burden" may be attributed to the poem by Rudyard Kipling ("The White Man's Burden," 1899) concerning the United States and the Philippine Islands.
17. For a thorough documentation of this process in the Southwest, see Nancy J. Parezo's "The Formation of Ethnographic Collections: The Smithsonian Institute in the American Southwest," in *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory*, vol. 10 (San Diego CA: Academic Press, 1987).
18. Douglas Cole, *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1985).
19. Cole, *Captured Heritage*, 119–21.
20. Cole, *Captured Heritage*, 116.
21. Daisy Sewid-Smith, *Prosecution or Persecution* (British Columbia: E. W. Bickle, 1979). Note that Gloria Cranmer Webster (e-mail correspondence, April 12, 2004) states that the Indian Act was revised in 1951 and the section related to potlatch prohibition was simply deleted.
22. Gloria Cranmer Webster, "The 'R' Word," *MUSE* 6, no. 3 (1988).
23. Daisy Sewid-Smith, *Prosecution or Persecution* (The NU-YUM-BALEESS Society, 1979), 2.
24. Gloria Cranmer Webster states (personal communication, April 12, 2004) that "At no point did we resort to legal strategies, although we were prepared to do so."
25. James Clifford, "Four Northwest Coast Museums: Travel Reflections," in

*Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 215.

26. Clifford, "Four Northwest Coast Museums," 236.

27. Nancy Marie Mitchell, "Oppositional Theory and Minority Museums" (unpublished paper, 1990).

28. James Clifford, personal correspondence, 1990.

29. Gloria Cranmer Webster, personal correspondence, 1990.

30. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 272.

31. Clifford, "Four Northwest Coast Museums," 215.

32. For a more recent approach to cultural studies and the term "opposition," see James Clifford, "Indigenous Articulations," *Contemporary Pacific* 13, no. 2 (2001): 468–90.

33. Gloria Cranmer Webster, e-mail correspondence, April 12, 2004.

34. Clifford, "Four Northwest Coast Museums," 240.

35. Web site of the National Museum of the American Indian, <http://www.nmai.si.edu/musinfo/index.html> (accessed July 22, 2003).

36. Clifford, "Four Northwest Coast Museums," 242.

37. For an example, see Webster, "The 'R' Word."

38. *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian: Museums and Native Cultures* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 28.

39. *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian*, 44.

40. Cole, *Captured Heritage*, 158.

41. Hearing before the Select Committee on Indian Affairs, United States Senate, One hundredth Congress, First session on S. 187 to Provide for the Protection of Native American Rights for the remains of their Dead and Sacred Artifacts and for the Creation of Native American Cultural Museums (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, February 20, 1987), 177.

42. Hearing before the Select Committee on Indian Affairs, 74.

43. Gloria Cranmer Webster disagrees with my assertion emphasizing the positive efforts of museums engaging with Native communities. She gives the examples of the aboriginal internship programs at the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Royal British Columbia Museum as well as the First People's Hall Advisory Committee at the Canadian Museum of Civilization. She also cites the involvement of the Alert Bay community during the Chiefly Feasts exhibit at the American Museum of Natural History.

44. For more on contaminated objects see the Web site of the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections, Forum 17, <http://www.spnhc.org>.

45. *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian*, 77.

46. Nancy J. Parezo, "The Formation of Ethnographic Collections: The

Smithsonian Institute in the American Southwest,” in *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory*, vol. 10 (San Diego CA: Academic Press, 1987).

47. Michael M. Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1992), 150.

48. Moira G. Simpson, *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era* (London: Routledge, 1996), 12.

49. As quoted in Murray Wax’s “Educating an Anthro,” in *Indians and Anthropologists: Vine Deloria Jr. and the Critique of Anthropology*, ed. Thomas Biolsi and Larry J. Zimmerman (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 57.

50. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999).

51. See Miriam Clavir, *Preserving What Is Valued: Museums, Conservation and First Nations* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002).