No Sense of the Struggle: Creating a Context for Survivance at the NMAI

Atalay, Sonya.

The American Indian Quarterly, Volume 30, Number 3&4, Summer/Fall 2006, pp. 597-618 (Article)

Published by University of Nebraska Press
DOI: 10.1353/aiq.2006.0016

No Sense of the Struggle

Creating a Context for Survivance at the NMAI

SONYA ATALAY

Museums, collecting, anthropology, and archaeology were developed within, and are deeply entrenched in, a Western epistemological framework and have histories that are strongly colonial in nature.[1] As with most contemporary fields of study, these areas of research and practice are fully steeped in Western ways of knowing, naming, ordering, analyzing, and understanding the world. Indigenous people, both outside and within the academy, along with a number of non-Indigenous scholars globally, have struggled long and hard to bring the Western and colonial nature of these fields to the foreground. They have worked to bring us to the place we are today, where such statements are acknowledged (by most scholars) and where those who want to continue working to change these disciplines in positive ways have a space to do so.

The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) is one of those spaces. The NMAI attempts to profoundly change the practice of museology and the role of Indigenous people in museums on a grand scale. In some ways it is successful in its mission, yet other areas leave room for improvement. This piece focuses on the latter, and in it I offer critiques of the exhibits on display during the museum's opening on September 21, 2004. Although the substance of this article is primarily critique and suggestions for improvement of the NMAI's exhibits, I want to be clear in stating that, in writing it, my aim is ultimately to support the NMAI because I believe so strongly in its aims, mission, and efforts and in the profound power it has to speak to so many people about us—our lives, our communities, our struggles, and our rights as Native people of sovereign nations. I strongly believe that along with the NMAI's gift of voice, which is the result of financial, political, and community support from

Native people, the U.S. government, and both private and corporate donors, the museum also carries a serious responsibility to (re)present our stories to its several million visitors each year, both U.S. citizens and an increasingly large global audience.

My perspective is as a Native person (Ojibwe) who has academic training and research experience in archaeology, heritage studies, and public anthropology. My research focuses on Indigenous archaeology and the ways in which Native people in North America, along with Indigenous and local people globally, have positively influenced and continue to change the discipline of archaeology. I am not a specialist in museums exclusively, but museums are a critical part of heritage studies, and I have thought deeply for many years about issues of Indigenous heritage—about our pasts and the role of the past in the present. I've strived both to critique Western archaeological and anthropological practices and to develop models in which to do things better, as I feel that for practices to move forward and improve dialogue and critique are crucial first steps that must be followed by practical models and ideas for change.[2]

Critical engagement, critique, and suggestions for improved practice are prominent themes in much of my own research, which attempts to decolonize archaeology and make it a more ethical and socially just practice that benefits the Indigenous and local communities it studies. In its creation and execution, the NMAI shares some of the aims of Indigenous archaeology. The NMAI consulted and worked closely with Native communities from throughout North and South America, moving beyond standard contemporary museum practices on a grand scale to create a museum and a process of operation that listens intently to the voices and concerns of Indigenous people. In these efforts, the NMAI joins a growing number of smaller, tribal museums in allowing Native people the power to control their own representation and heritage. The NMAI attempts to create an ethical and socially just museum practice—one that benefits Native communities while it also educates the wider American and global community about Native peoples.

The aims of the NMAI overlap in many ways with my own research goals; however, while my work will likely reach only a limited group of scholars, students, and non-academic publics, the messages within the walls of the NMAI will reach a far larger audience. Thus the NMAI has the potential to engender substantial transformations in the way diverse publics think and feel about the Native people of this hemisphere. In

its role as a public educator, the NMAI literally has the ability to touch and influence the hearts and minds of millions—the voting citizens of our country and others, who are increasingly asked to vote on issues that directly affect the daily lives of Native people such as tribal gaming, land and water issues, and fishing and hunting legislation. Visitors to the NMAI include school board members who approve curricula and textbooks that teach about "Columbus discovering America in 1492," and they are the senators, judges, and government leaders who write and have the power to approve legislation such as the proposed changes to NAGPRA and intellectual and cultural property rights law.[3] Important audiences for the NMAI also include many of our own Native children and grandchildren, from both reservation communities and urban areas. In my experience as an educator, I've found that Native youth are keenly aware of contemporary Native American life. They know that we're *still here*, but they are often less knowledgeable of the experiences and struggles our ancestors endured to bring us to this point and of the battles and accomplishments of Native leaders of this century. These stories of struggle and adversity provide inspiration and pride by building a context for understanding our ability to not only survive but thrive in the contemporary world.

In this article, I continually emphasize the educational role of the NMAI, the messages it presents to multiple audiences, and the level at which it successfully engages those audiences. This is because, in walking through the exhibits on opening day, I constantly found myself thinking of exactly how much is at stake in the exhibit halls of the NMAI. Museums play a critical role in painting a picture of the people, communities, and cultures they portray; they create a resonant "take-home" message for visitors. In this way museums shape the public mindset and have an effect on policy in this country and internationally. This is a particularly important role for the NMAI, as it attempts (and rightly so) to remove authority from museums that present Native people only through a Western, anthropological gaze.[4] As the NMAI claims to (re)present Native Americans in their own voices and perspectives, many will look to the exhibits of the NMAI as the authority on Native people, replacing traditional anthropological interpretations and representations of Native Americans with those presented in the NMAI.

In many ways, this marks a hard-won victory for the empowerment of Indigenous peoples to control, represent, and maintain sovereignty over

their own cultural heritage. For several decades, amid struggles with archaeologists and anthropologists, Native people have reiterated the importance of the past in the present and the connection of contemporary research and representations of our communities and heritage for the future well-being of our people.[5] In regaining control over our own heritage and having both the power and opportunity to represent it on such a truly grand scale as a museum on the National Mall of the U.S. capital, it is critical that we remain cognizant of the effects that representations of our cultures, history, and heritage have on future generations. From this vantage point, the NMAI holds a tremendous responsibility to Native people, not only in the past and present, but also quite literally for future generations as well. It is with a profound respect for our ancestors and a deep concern for those of future generations that I examined carefully and have thought critically about the exhibits in the NMAI and write this article.

THE NMAI'S MISSION

As stated on the NMAI website, the museum's mission is as follows:

> 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.[6]

In this mission statement, the NMAI clearly defines its audience as both Native and non-Native publics. Through its exhibitions, the NMAI aims to "recognize and affirm" both historical and contemporary Native cultures, as well as "advancing" knowledge and understanding of those cultures, including the history and cultural achievements of Native peoples. Elsewhere, W. Richard West Jr., the museum's founding director, points out that the NMAI is, "the only national institution in the United States whose exclusive mandate covers the entirety of the native cultures of this

hemisphere."[7] This is quite an ambitious mission, and the challenges inherent in attempting to cover the numerous and diverse cultures living in such a large geographic area, over such a vast period of time, were certainly substantial. There were numerous views to be included and considered and a myriad of thoughts and desires to be accommodated, as both George Horse Capture and Duane Blue Spruce highlight when describing their experiences in the early consultation process with Native communities during the planning stages of the NMAI.[8] Consultation took on many forms, including surveys, interviews, and visits to Native communities throughout the hemisphere. The efforts to incorporate this input productively and to then decide what the organizing principles and themes of the museum would be were certain to have been quite challenging.

While I am aware that much of the organization of the display context in the museum was generated in consultation with Native people and communities, I am unclear on how the *tone* of the exhibits was determined. I use the word "tone" because I've found it difficult to find another word to express what I noticed repeatedly about the NMAI's exhibits. As I explored the galleries on opening day, I was powerfully struck and sadly disappointed by the lack of struggle portrayed in both the text and images present on the exhibition floor. Furthermore, I found that the messages about colonization and its devastating and continual effects on Native communities were benign. In the ways I detail more fully in the following sections, there was a noticeable lack of hard-hitting critique of the process and effects of colonization in Native communities.

AGENCY AND VICTIMIZATION

Postcolonial theorists have pointed out that colonization is never simply a one-way process in which a victim is acted upon by a colonizing individual or force.[9] Binary and unidimensional representations of colonization are vastly oversimplified and remove the agency of the actors involved, particularly for those portrayed as colonized "victims." Such complexity of interaction was certainly the case in the colonization of North America. Native people were not simply passive receivers of colonial actions; they actively resisted repeated attempts of cultural, spiritual, and physical genocide and simultaneously had profound effects and influence upon colonial settler populations and governments.

Native agency and the ways in which Native people actively worked to create and change their lives and circumstance are presented repeatedly in the NMAI's Our Peoples exhibits. Aesthetically beautiful displays offer celebrations of accomplishments and agency of Native people—a goal that I support fully. However, the presentation of these accomplishments is hollow because the exhibits do not offer visitors the context of struggle necessary to appreciate these victories and the ultimate survival of Indigenous communities of North America as sovereign, self-determining nations. The NMAI's goal in presenting Native American history in such a way may have been to give power and agency to Native people and simultaneously to represent to an international audience Native accomplishments and ability to adapt and change in the contemporary world. However, I argue that the Our People exhibits do not do justice to nor adequately (re)present Native history, because they fail to inform and educate the visitor by not *effectively* presenting information and experiences to appreciate and respect the continued existence of Native cultures. Certainly the agency of Native people, in the past and present, is critical to highlight in any telling of Native history, present, and future. However, we do not honor our ancestors and their struggles and sacrifices if we ignore or fail to tell the stories of extreme brutalization, struggle, and suffering that they endured and overcame. Agency is indisputably vital, and representing Native people as passive victims is not only damaging but inaccurate. However, in teaching and presenting the history of Native America, the choice is not one between binaries of active agent or passive victim. Native history can be skillfully presented in ways that demonstrate the horrors of colonization across this hemisphere yet portray the agency of courageous children, strong women, brave elders, and spirited leaders who struggled to resist the decimation of their worlds. Sadly, the NMAI missed opportunities to provide powerful, nuanced versions of Native American history that would have emotional resonance for the visitor and add appreciably to their knowledge about Native life and experience.

GUNS AND BIBLES

The Our Peoples gallery offers several examples of such missed opportunity. One of the focal points of that gallery is a large display of guns,

FIGURE 1. Guns display in the Our Peoples gallery. Photo by the author.

all pointed in one direction, toward the display of gold in the adjacent panel. A portion of the text inside the gun case reads:

> Why Guns? Guns are everywhere in the Native past. Like Christianity and foreign governments, they weave a thread of shared experience that links Native people across the hemisphere. Native desire to adopt new goods drove early encounters between Indians and Europeans. Indigenous people gave up some technologies—pottery, stone, knives, and leather clothing—and adopted brass kettles, metal tools, and eventually, guns. Europeans increased their manufacture capacity to meet the needs of the new American market. Native people made guns their own, using the new technology as they used all new technologies: to shape their lives and future.[10]

Such a reading of these weapons that were used to slaughter, rape, and maim our ancestors is upsetting and outrageous. It literally brought tears to my eyes to read it as I thought about what the countless warriors, women, and children who were slaughtered by those very guns would

have said in reading that text panel. Is the agency given to those ancestors by museum curators worth the massive loss in terms of impact and opportunity for knowledge and education? What do visitors gain from viewing that case? What message do they take away with them?

I argue that in order to be effective and to educate audiences, the guns need to be contextualized in a much different way. The curatorial staff must find a way to give the visitor a sense of the extreme terror inflicted by those guns and the creative and courageous efforts of Native people to use these weapons in order to protect their families, land, and communities. In a time when discussions of terrorism are rampant, these guns might have offered an appropriate and effective way to push back the clock of terrorism in the United States—to remind museum visitors that the first major act of terrorism on this land did not occur on September 11, 2001, and that acts of aggression and the infliction of mass casualties in this country did not begin at the bombing of Pearl Harbor. This would have been an excellent opportunity to educate several million people a year on the facts surrounding this country's foundation on acts of extreme terror, biological warfare, and genocide against civilian women and children.

Recently a t-shirt has become popular at powwows and in Native communities. The t-shirt has a photo of Geronimo and several other Native men holding guns, and the text reads, "Homeland Security: Fighting Terrorism since 1492" (Figure 2). Colleen Lloyd (Tsa-la-gi/Tuscarora) created the Homeland Security t-shirt and sells it , along with other products carrying the same image and message on her website (www.westwindworld.com). This t-shirt effectively and simply communicates volumes about our history as Native people. It gives agency to the men pictured and demonstrates the ways in which they used a foreign object and, to use the words of the NMAI's guns text panel, "made it their own." It brings the past into the present, providing historical context to contemporary events in a way that is humorous yet hard-hitting, powerful yet non-offensive. The t-shirt carries the tone of decolonization—a message that the NMAI is sorely lacking.

The NMAI's discussion of religion in the Our Peoples gallery is another example of missed opportunity. The religion case, located directly behind the guns case, has a series of Bibles that were translated into different Native languages. The text panel for this case reads, in part,

FIGURE 2. Showing t-shirts, "Homeland Security: Fighting Terrorism since 1492." Photo by Colleen Lloyd.

> Why BIBLES? Christianity weaves a thread of shared experience that links Native People across the hemisphere. Wherever Europeans went, they spread the gospel. This wall features more than 100 bibles, translated into nearly 75 indigenous languages. Such translation is a testament to the tireless efforts Christians have made to convert Indians since 1492. Today the majority of Native peoples call themselves Christian. It is a story not only of choice, but also of adaptation, destruction, resistance and survivance.[11]

As in the guns case discussed earlier, the desire to portray the agency of Native people is obvious, but it is made at the expense of utilizing this space to portray Christianity as a powerful agent of colonization, one that Native people fought harshly against. While this text panel does briefly mention the destruction involved in Christianizing Native people, in viewing this display and reading the accompanying text, one does not get a sense of the range of struggles that Native people endured to keep their own spiritual practices alive. The Ghost Dance, the slaughter at Wounded Knee, the illegality of the Sundance, and the great lengths

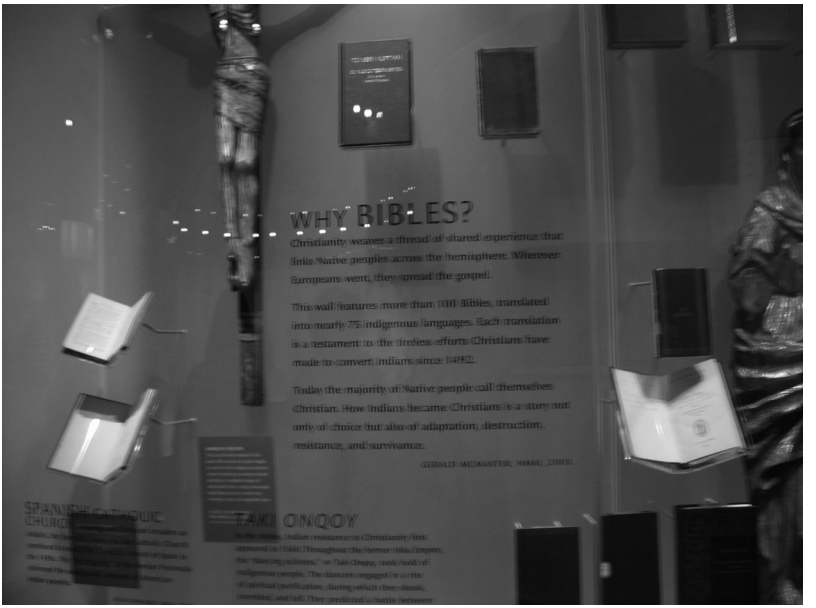

FIGURE 3. Religion case in the Our Peoples gallery. Photo by the author.

Native people went to in order to preserve their traditional spiritual practices are not emphasized. Instead, as in the guns case, the curators chose to give a large space in the gallery to a group of objects that were not made by Native people but were used to control them. At the same time, the display minimizes the role (or reading) of the Bibles as artifacts of colonization.

Curatorial staff might have more appropriately chosen to display the translated Bibles in a way that re-contextualized or re-interpreted them, making clear the intimate connections and multiple threads of action involved. Such threads include contemporary celebrations of the survival (indeed resurgence) of traditional Native spiritual knowledge and practices, dramatic efforts of Christians and government to destroy or silence such knowledge, creative and courageous routes of Native and non-Native people to preserve it, and the extreme misbalance of power embedded in all of this. While the text panel (quoted earlier) mentions "adaptation, destruction, and survivance," it does not offer or effectively communicate a view that problematizes Christian leaders' attempts at spiritual genocide and the powerful impact of shame, language destruction, and fear that accompanied it. The irony of the Bibles and their

translation into Native languages during the same period in which Native children were punished, even beaten, for speaking their language is another point left unexplored in the galleries of the NMAI.

While there is disappointingly little in this display that problematizes for the visitor the inherent power relations involved in Christianizing Native people and the literal demonizing of traditional practices, the gallery adjacent to this one, titled Our Universes, presents various forms of traditional Native American spiritual practices. However, the celebration of traditional knowledge displayed in the Our Universes gallery also lacks emphasis on the connection of the past struggles our ancestors endured to preserve spiritual practices for present and future generations.

Presenting paradoxes and agency in discussions of Christianity and Indigenous people may be challenging, but there are examples where it has been done in a large, national museum context. One such example is from the Australian Museum, the national museum in Sydney, Australia. In their discussion of the changing practices of the Australian Museum and its representations of Indigenous cultures, Jim Sprecht and Carolyn MacLulich mention the Pieces of Paradise exhibit of 1988, which related to cultures of the Pacific Islands. In there review of the Gogodala section of the exhibit, Sprecht and MacLulich note that the exhibits highlight the presentation of Indigenous resistance and cultural revitalist movements in reaction to the, "oppressive practices of fundamentalist Christian groups."[12] Sadly, in dramatic contrast the NMAI chose not to highlight Native resistance. In presenting Native history in Our Peoples, NMAI curators had ample opportunity to educate visitors about any of the multiple resistance efforts undertaken by Native people against the powerful forces of Christianization. Native agency and survivance could have been powerfully portrayed in that way, but instead curators made the choice to provide visitors with benign representations of guns, churches, and governments.

At the NMAI it is not only historical struggles that are benign, absent, or difficult for viewers to access due to lengthy text panels but also more contemporary issues of confrontation such as present-day battles and victories to repatriate our ancestors and the sacred objects lost during colonization. Highlighting this topic would have brought the struggle for spiritual sovereignty into the twenty-first century through an exhibit focused on the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). This is particularly relevant for a national museum that will

have a large non-Native audience, as the case of the Ancient One (Kennewick Man) has been widely reported in the mainstream media, making national newspaper headlines, as well as the cover of *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines, and has even been featured in an episode of *60 Minutes*.[13] Furthermore, efforts in Indian country have been ongoing to amend and improve the NAGPRA legislation to address critical issues such as so-called unaffiliated remains and the very definition of "Native American" under the law.[14] Legislation to amend NAGPRA was recently introduced by former Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell (R-Colorado), and such an exhibit at the NMAI could have played a critical role in helping Native communities educate both Native and non-Native publics about the importance of this legislation as a matter of human rights, religious freedom, and cultural property law.

Along the same lines, the museum might have developed a critical view of the process of collecting, display, and representation of Native objects, culture, and heritage. However such critical engagement with and hard-hitting critique of Western intellectual traditions is sorely lacking. Closely related to these topics, and similarly lacking in the NMAI's exhibits, is any mention of cultural and intellectual property rights and a discussion of who has the right to control, utilize, and profit from Indigenous knowledge, symbols, images, and other areas of intangible heritage (i.e., stories, songs, dances). All of these are crucial and relevant issues for Native people today that will continue to play an important role in our communities for generations, and each involves a strong intellectual tradition of Indigenous scholarship and leadership. Yet the visiting public to the NMAI will have no chance to engage with these issues and to take home with them ideas about the various Native perspectives relating to such critical topics.

CONTEXT FOR SURVIVANCE

My primary critique with the displays at the NMAI is that they provide the visitor with no sense of the struggle that Native people faced as a result of European colonization. Within the Our Peoples gallery, the NMAI introduces the important concept of "survivance." This is a term developed by Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor. In defining the concept of survivance, Vizenor states, "survivance . . . is more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active

presence. . . . The native stories of survivance are successive and natural estates; survivance is an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry."[15] Vizenor goes on to further discuss this concept, and throughout the book *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence*, he provides examples of what he refers to as "stories of native survivance."[16] One of the powerful examples Vizenor provides is that of Dr. Charles Eastman. Eastman was living on Pine Ridge in South Dakota on December 29, 1890, when the Seventh Cavalry massacred ghost dancers and their families at Wounded Knee. In his writings, Eastman describes the massacre and his attempts to find and help any survivors.[17] He writes, "Fully three miles from the scene of the massacre we found the body of a woman completely covered with a blanket of snow, and from this point on we found them scattered along as they had been relentlessly hunted down and slaughtered while fleeing for their lives."[18] Eastman goes on to describe the women, elderly, and children whom the Seventh Cavalry had ruthlessly maimed and slaughtered.

In his discussion of Eastman, Vizenor describes the work that Eastman and his wife, Elaine Goodale, did as they lectured and wrote about "the horror at Wounded Knee." Vizenor goes on to explain the important work that Eastman did as a "name giver" and the central role such work played in helping Native people with land claims and cash settlements. Vizenor describes the writing and work of Eastman saying,

> He encircled the horrors of that massacre in stories of native courage and survivance. That sense of presence, rather than absence or aversion, is natural reason and a source of native identities. The doctor enunciated his visions, memories, and totemic creations as an author. Clearly, his autobiographical stories are native survivance not victimry.[19]

It is my understanding from this and many other notable examples in Vizenor's work that the concept of survivance is not about avoiding or minimizing the horrors and tragedy of colonization. It includes agency and Native presence but does not refuse stories of struggle, particularly those that create a context for understanding and appreciating the creative methods of resistance and survival in the face of such unimaginable turmoil. In my understanding of survivance, Native people are active, present agents whose humanity is emphasized as their responses to struggle are poignantly portrayed. Presenting the horror, injustice, and

multi-faceted aspects of Native peoples' struggles while simultaneously highlighting their active engagement and resistance to such onslaughts is not to portray Native people as victims. One cannot appreciate and experience the power of Native survivance if the stories and memories of our histories are not placed within the context of struggle.

The museum specifically mentions and describes the concept of survivance on one of the text panels in the Our Peoples gallery. The panel reads:

> Survivance: Native societies that survived the firestorm of Contact faced unique challenges. No two situations were the same, even for Native groups in the same area at the same time. But in nearly every case, Native people faced a contest for power and possessions that involved three forces—guns, churches, and governments. These forces shaped the lives of Indians who survived the massive rupture of the first century of Contact. By adopting the very tools that were used to change, control, and dispossess them, Native peoples reshaped their cultures and societies to keep them alive. This strategy has been called survivance.[20]

I agree with the words of this text panel and am particularly pleased with the point made about diversity of challenges, even within the same community. The power of the tripartite forces of "guns, churches, and governments" is also critical, and it is central to discussions of power relations between and among Natives and non-Natives. These are important aspects of Native survivance; however, at the NMAI, and in any museum or other telling of Native histories, there can be no stories of survivance without an understanding of extreme struggle and survival in the face of horrific circumstance. Comments by the museum's founding director, W. Richard West Jr., reflect the museum's choice to not focus on the hard-hitting stories of colonization. West told the *Washington Post*:

> Here's what I want everyone to understand. As much and as important as that period of history is, it is at best only about 5 percent of the period we have been in this hemisphere. We do not want to make the National Museum of the American Indian into an Indian Holocaust Museum. . . . You have to go beyond the story of the tragedy and the travesty of the past 500 years. What we are talking about in the end is cultural survivance. We are still here.[21]

The message that "we are still here" is indeed an important one, and it is one that is effectively and beautifully demonstrated in the NMAI's exhibits. However, as I argued and demonstrated earlier, the exhibits do not offer visitors the context to understand and appreciate Native survivance.

Controversies surrounding the importance of bringing Native people's voice and experience to bear in tellings of Indigenous history occur often in archaeology, my primary field of specialization. Native and non-Native archaeologists, particularly those who are engaged with Indigenous, public, and community archaeology, are exploring more effective methods of involving descendent communities and a range of stakeholders in archaeological research designs and practices and finding ways to make such work relevant and beneficial for Indigenous and local communities. Similarly, both Native and non-Native people involved in the area of Indigenous archaeology are continually facing the challenge of bringing Native voices to bear in the "peopling of the past" and in effective and ethical ways of including Native voices, collaborating with Native people, and making our work relevant in Native communities. Indigenous archaeologists have pointed out that archaeological research should not only focus on precontact periods but that archaeology must also contribute to decolonization by providing physical evidence of the process of colonization, the dramatic effects it had on our communities, and the changes and adaptations Native people made as a result. One of the important goals is to present the public with alternative views to the benign language and interpretations that mainstream archaeologists have put forth for periods of "culture contact." Yet how can we expect this of non-Native archaeologists, when the messages in the exhibits of the NMAI, which presumes to speak for Native people, do not themselves take on this challenge?

PUBLIC AUDIENCES

Exhibitions are designed with audiences in mind, and those at the NMAI are no different. As highlighted earlier in this paper, the NMAI has consistently described its audiences as including both Native and non-Native visitors. The NMAI has also been explicit about the critical role of consultation and the importance of giving up authority and including Native voices on the exhibit floor. However, as Steven D. Lavine points

out, "If exhibition makers are simple facilitators, they still have to decide which version of the past to articulate."[22] Making such decisions can be quite difficult, even when only addressing the needs of *one* community.[23] The challenges are compounded when the aim of the museum is to (re)present diverse cultural groups to a range of audiences, as is the ambitious mission of the NMAI.[24]

In his discussion of the growing industry of cultural tourism and the role that museums play in this area, Greg Richards points out the importance of anticipating and meeting the needs of the visitor.[25] He also demonstrates what visitors expect and desire when they visit a museum, stating: "People are increasingly looking for an 'experience' when they visit museums and other attractions," and their basic motivation is often to learn and experience new things.[26] Richards's research from 1999 indicates that 70 percent of museum-going interviewees stated that learning was an "important motivation for their visit."[27] This research indicates not only that people visit museums in search of being educated on some topic but also that they want to experience something and engage in a meaningful way with museum exhibits. Richards demonstrates why it is "increasingly important to provide a total visitor experience that satisfies not just the passive tourist gaze, but that engages the senses."[28] Therefore the *experience* of the museum is critical, and its exhibits must hold resonance for visitors if they are to provide new knowledge that visitors will actively incorporate into their previous understandings. Providing new knowledge to visitors is particularly important at the NMAI precisely because Native Americans have been so vastly stereotyped and essentialized by people around the globe.

As both Constance Perin and Paulette M. McManus point out, museum professionals do not assume they have a unitary public, and they are increasingly attempting to reach visitors who will engage with the museum in very different ways. Some will browse the exhibits visually, others will read all the text carefully, and yet others will engage with the exhibits using a combination of reading and visual skills.[29] McManus points to the limited time that visitors spend engaging with museum exhibits and reading the text carefully. Her research on a large exhibition about cultural relativism indicated that visitors spent six minutes and thirty-five seconds in each gallery, with an average of four minutes and fifty seconds spent in front of exhibits themselves. With this in mind, it

is critical that written and visual communication effectively convey the intended messages and main themes of the exhibit.

Aside from the way in which visitors experience the exhibits and the time they spend engaging with the text and displays, visitors to the NMAI are quite diverse culturally. As discussed earlier, audiences to the NMAI are both Native and non-Native, and they will also include a large non-American audience. Richards demonstrates the growing tendency of tourists to visit museums as part of their vacation travel.[30] Washington DC is a major tourist attraction, and the National Mall is one of the city's primary tourist destinations. The NMAI will thus not only see millions of American tourists each year but will also benefit from the overall growth of the cultural tourism industry that will bring increasing numbers of foreign visitors through the doors of the museum. To effectively communicate a message to the "streakers" (those who quickly walk through and predominantly visually browse exhibits), the "strollers" (those who engage with displays for a longer period of time exploring both visual and textual materials), and the "readers" (those who take more time and read all the text presented in an exhibit) requires sophisticated layering in museum displays and demands the attention of experienced curatorial staff with the highest level of expertise in museology practice.[31]

I strongly and emphatically agree that Native people from diverse backgrounds, communities, and experiences—women, elders, men, children, spiritual and political leaders, activists, and intellectuals from locations across the hemisphere—should all be consulted and involved in the creation of the NMAI's (re)presentations of Native cultures. Native stories and experiences must be clearly presented in a way that has impact and resonance with the audience, for there is so much at stake in these exhibits. Future generations will feel the direct effects of the impressions, lessons, and messages that visitors take home with them in their hearts and minds.

There is no doubt that the NMAI curatorial staff faced a great challenge in trying to effectively communicate messages and information to accommodate the varied needs of such a diverse public audience. Sprecht and MacLulich describe one such challenge in their work in developing exhibits for the Indigenous Australians: Australia's First Peoples gallery in the Australian Museum in Sydney.[32] They describe how focus groups and evaluations produced "widely divergent reactions." Sprecht

and MacLulich state: "Indigenous respondents felt that the exhibitions would not be sufficiently hard-hitting, whereas non-indigenous people said that it would be too confrontational." This must have been an issue that the NMAI grappled with as well, perhaps even more so since, unlike the Australian Museum, the NMAI has a primary commitment to being a Native place and a mission to collaborate, consult, and cooperate with Native people. Even before accepting the position as director of the NMAI, W. Richard West Jr. had concerns about Native and non-Native audiences. In his essay in *Spirit of a Native Place: Building the National Museum of the American Indian*, West says,

> Before I accepted that honor, and challenge, [as founding director of the museum] I asked myself not only how the museum could become a place where Native peoples could say who we are, but also whether the larger culture would be willing to accept such an institution. Clearly, I decided that it would.[33]

While I appreciate the challenges expressed here, I argue that the primary concern of the NMAI should be with effectively presenting accurate portrayals of Native histories, regardless of whether the larger culture is "willing to accept" it. The NMAI must provide a context for visitors to experience the meaning of our survivance, and all the painful, triumphant, inspiring, resistant, horrific truths encompassed in it—even though such portrayals are confrontational or difficult. In fact, I would argue that such presentations must be confrontational and challenge the visitor to experience Native histories in a way they unfortunately can not find in the educational system of this country, in mainstream media portrayals of Native life, and in all the stereotyped messages and lessons of victimry and noble savagery incessantly present in mainstream American life. It is not only celebratory messages of our success and presence in the contemporary world that will touch the visitor's spirit at the deeper, more personal level of their humanity but also the day-to-day experiences of struggle and survivance. This does not mean that visitors must be hit over the head with stories of victimization and oppression. Shallow messages of victimry have been the mainstay of information presented to American and global audiences for centuries.

What is needed at the NMAI is collaborative museum exhibit design that incorporate the voice and views of Native communities to present real, heart-felt, complex histories and experiences that are not relegated

to only celebration while glossing over the hard-hitting realities that rob visitors of an entire range of emotions and limits their ability to connect, on a basic human level, to Native people. More than anything else, the NMAI must demonstrate to non-Native and Native audiences that we are not two-dimensional cut-outs of victimry or triumph but that we are human and that, as others do, we have a range of stories to tell. Many of our stories are happy songs of revival and strength; others are sad or difficult and instructive of the shadows of colonization that still loom and continue to challenge our communities.

We, as Native peoples, have many stories to tell. We have a unique way of viewing the world, and it is one that has been severely affected by colonization yet is ever changing and resilient. Bringing Native voices to the foreground to share these experiences and worldviews is a critical part of readjusting the power balance to ensure that Native people control their own heritage, representation, and histories. If we wish to share these experiences and histories with each other and a non-Native audience, hoping to foster and protect them and to raise awareness and respect for them, then we must take seriously the job of educating and the important role of effective communication in the exhibits of the NMAI. We must expect that the galleries will not only celebrate our presence but also value and honor the sense of struggle, as it is such struggle that provides a context for understanding and truly appreciating our survivance.

NOTES

I would like to thank Amy Lonetree for inviting me to participate in this issue, and many thanks to Sydney Martin for her careful read and critique of an earlier draft of the article. Both readers substantially improved this paper with their comments and suggestions. I also want to thank Colleen Lloyd of West Wind World for permission to use the "Homeland Security" t-shirt images. This research would not have been possible without the generous support of the University of California President's Postdoctoral Fellowship.

1. The terms "Western" and "Indigenous" are used throughout this article to denote very broad, general groups of people and communities, each of which in itself encompasses a great deal of complexity and diversity of views. While I assume that the reader is aware of the categories that I refer to, I want to be clear that by using these broad categorizations in an attempt to present this argument from a general perspective, I do not intend to insinuate that either term refers to

a monolithic, homogenous group with rigid and clearly defined epistemologies and worldviews, but rather each includes a great deal of diversity.

2. For examples of both critiques and models for a changed practice in archaeology see Sonya Atalay, "Domesticating Clay/Engaging with 'They': Anatolian Daily Practice with Clay and Public Archaeology for Indigenous Communities," PhD dissertation, University of California, 2003; Sonya Atalay, "Gikinawaabi: Knowledge Production and Social Science Research from an Indigenous Perspective," Queens University, Belfast, Ireland, 2003; Sonya Atalay, "Multiple Voices for Many Ears in Indigenous Archaeological Practice" (conference paper, Society for American Archaeology, Montreal, 2004).

3. Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1991. For more information on proposed changes see http://www.indianz.com/News/2004/004562.asp.

4. George Horse Capture, "The Way of the People," in *Spirit of a Native Place: Building the National Museum of the American Indian*, ed. Duane Blue Spruce, 42–43 (Washington DC: National Geographic Society, 2004).

5. The literature on this topic is now quite extensive, but some of the critical texts to consult include Thomas Biolsi and Larry J. Zimmerman, *Indians and Anthropologists: Vine Deloria Jr. and the Critique of Anthropology* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997); Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (London: Macmillan, 1969); Devon A. Mihesuah, ed., *Repatriation Reader: Who Owns American Indian Remains*? (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000); George P. Nicholas, "Seeking the End of Indigenous Archaeology," paper presented at the 5th World Archaeological Congress, Washington DC, 2003; George P. Nicholas and Thomas D. Andrews, eds., *At a Crossroads: Archaeology and First Peoples in Canada* (Burnaby BC: Archaeology Press, 1997); James Riding-In, "Our Dead Are Never Forgotten: American Indian Struggles for Burial Rights and Protections," in *"They Made Us Many Promises": The American Indian Experience, 1524 to the Present*, ed. Philip Weeks, 291–323 (Wheeling IL: Harlan Davidson, 2002); James Riding-In, "Repatriation: A Pawnee's Perspective," in Mihesuah, *Repatriation Reader*, 106–120; Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

6. The NMAI website lists the museum's mission: http://www.nmai.si.edu/subpage.cfm?subpage=press&second=mission.

7. Qtd. in Tom Hill and Richard W. Hill Sr., eds., *Creation's Journey: Native American Identity and Belief* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994).

8. Duane Blue Spruce, "An Honor and a Privilege," in Blue Spruce, *Spirit of a Native Place*, 15–29; Horse Capture, "The Way of the People," in Blue Spruce, *Spirit of a Native Place*, 30–45.

9. Chris Gosden, *Archaeology and Colonialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (City: Blackwell Publishing, 2001); Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998).

10. This text is attributed to Paul Chaat Smith and Ann McMullen, 2003.

11. This text is attributed to Gerald McMasters, NMAI, 2003.

12. Jim Sprecht and Carolyn MacLulich, "Changes and Challenges: The Australian Museum and Indigenous Communities," in *Archaeological Displays and the Public: Museology and Interpretation*, ed. Paulette M. McManus, 39–63 (London: Archetype Publications, 2000).

13. *60 Minutes*, October 25, 1998; *Newsweek*, April 26, 1999; Michael D. LeMonick, "Bones of Contention: Scientists and Native Americans Clash over a 9,300-Year-Old Man with Caucasoid Features," *Time*, October 14, 1996; D. Preston, "The Lost Man," *New Yorker*, June 19, 1997.

14. For more information on proposed changes, see "Two-Word Change to NAGPRA Pending in Senate," http://www.indianz.com/News/2004/004562.asp.

15. Gerald Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 15.

16. Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, 18.

17. Charles Eastman, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977); Charles Eastman, *Indian Boyhood* (Dover, 1971).

18. Eastman, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, 111.

19. Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, 18.

20. Paul Chaat Smith, NMAI 2003.

21. Joel Achenbach, "Within These Walls, Science Yields to Stories," *Washington Post*, September 19, 2004.

22. Steven D. Lavine, "Audience, Ownership, and Authority: Designing Relations between Museums and Communities," in *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine, 137–157 (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 142.

23. For a discussion of this see Lavine, "Audience, Ownership, and Authority." Also see the following for further discussion and examples: Gerald T. Conaty, "Glenbow's Blackfoot Gallery: Working Towards Co-Existence," in *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader*, ed. Laura L. Peers and Alison K. Brown, 227–241 (New York: Routledge, 2003); Nancy J. Fuller, "The Museum as a Vehicle for Community Empowerment: The Ak-Chin Indian Community Ecomuseum Project," in Karp, Kreamer, and Lavine, *Museums and Communities*, 327–365; Jane Peirson Jones, "The Colonial Legacy and the Community: The Gallery 33 Project," in Karp, Kreamer, and Lavine, *Museums and Communities*, 221–241; Stephanie Moser et al, "Transforming Archaeology through Practice: Strategies for Collaborative Archaeology and the Community Archaeology Proj-

ect at Queseir, Egypt," in Peers and Brown, *Museums and Source Communities*, 208–226.

24. Lavine, "Audience, Ownership, and Authority," also discusses some of the challenges. Karp, Kreamer, and Lavine, *Museums and Communities*; McManus, *Archaeological Displays*; and Peers and Brown, *Museums and Source Communities*, each provide examples of museums that attempt to represent diverse Indigenous or local communities; each aims to reach Indigenous and non-Indigenous visitors from both national and international audiences.

25. Greg Richards, "Cultural Tourism," in McManus, *Archaeological Displays and the Public*, 1–11.

26. Richards, "Cultural Tourism," 4.

27. Richards, "Cultural Tourism."

28. Richards, "Cultural Tourism," 8.

29. George F. Macdonald, "Change and Challenge: Museums in the Information Society," in Karp, Kreamer, and Lavine, *Museums and Communities*, 158–181; Constance Perin, "The Communicative Circle: Museums as Communities," in Karp, Kreamer, and Lavine, *Museums and Communities*, 182–220.

30. Richards, "Cultural Tourism."

31. For a description of these terms and a discussion of layering museum displays see Perin, "The Communicative Circle."

32. Sprecht and MacLulich, "Changes and Challenges," 58.

33. W. Richard West Jr., "As Long as We Keep Dancing: A Brief Personal History," in Blue Spruce, *Spirit of a Native Place*, 54.