

**Reframing 'Culturally Specific Museums':
The Emergence of Rights-Based Museums in the United States**

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The phenomenon of 'culturally specific museums' that have developed since the 1960s across the United States has been significantly under-investigated. Yet the 'black museum movement' and the push to 'indigenise' museums can be understood as producing some of the most significant developments in museology over the last fifty years. At a time when museums are increasingly called upon to address race, this study explores and historicises the emergence of 'culturally specific museums' at the Smithsonian Institution; unique sites that embody racial justice amidst a 'universalist' and 'national' museum context.

While 'culturally specific museums' have been greeted as sites of reconciliation, they have attracted vociferous public debate, and even disdain, for their perceived 'politicisation', 'racialisation' and 'Balkanisation' of the past. Drawing on Fraser's characterisation of 'counterpublics', I approach two 'culturally specific' museum projects at the Smithsonian Institution – the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) and the 'National African American Museum Project' (NAAMP) – as new sites for the negotiation of racial histories and racial justice, that have each served as a focus point for wider ideological questions over the continued significance of race in America.

Through a grounded study of archival material, interviews, displays, and the political discourse encircling these museum developments, I demonstrate how so-called 'culturally specific museums' can be more productively reframed as 'rights-based museums'. Rather than being understood simply as 'correctives' to mainstream museum practice, or 'responses' to the call for greater representation, such museums constitute a dynamic site for the ongoing struggle for rights and racial justice. Understood as 'rights-based', their approaches can be better distinguished from other museums at the Smithsonian and beyond. As such, this study concludes by calling into question the possibilities of addressing race outside of a rights-based museum frame.

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List of Abbreviations

AAM	American Association of Museums
AIM	American Indian Movement
IRB	Institutional Review Board
NMAAHC	Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture
NAAMP	National African American Museum Project
NMAH	Smithsonian National Museum of American History
NMAI	Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian
NMAL	National Museum of the American Latino
NMHT	Smithsonian National Museum of History and Technology
NPG	Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery
SIA	Smithsonian Institution Archives
SI	Smithsonian Institution

Abbreviations relating to government sources:

S. Rec.	Senate Record
S. Hrg.	Senate Hearing
R-	Republican Representative, followed by represented U.S State, for eg. R-TX
D-	Democratic Representative, followed by represented U.S. State

Chapter 1

Introduction

1. Research aim and purpose

In 2004, the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) opened on the National Mall in Washington D.C., amidst triumphant celebration of its significance as 'the expression by the Native people' of 'their own stories, and their own perspectives' (C-SPAN, 2004). In 2003, after several decades of campaigning, the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) was written into law with the proclamation of being 'the only national venue that can serve as an educational healing space to further racial reconciliation' (NMAAHC Act, 2003). By the time of its opening in September 2016 on the National Mall in Washington D.C. – the public and civic core of monuments and museums in the nation's capital – progress was being made in the United States Congress towards an anticipated 'National Museum of the American Latino', to address the Smithsonian's 'pattern of willful neglect' in recognising Latino contributions to the United States (Smithsonian Institution Task Force on Latino Issues, 1994). The role of what I will collectively, and not unproblematically, refer to in this thesis as 'culturally-specific museums' has been anticipated as one of righting wrongs, and addressing racial oppression not only at an interpretive level with respect to representing the nation's racial past, but also at a structural level with respect to the Smithsonian's racial past as a cultural institution. Despite the emergence of 'culturally specific museums' and 'culturally specific' programmes at the Smithsonian since the 1960s, explicit reference to the concepts of 'race' and 'racism', and representation of racial oppression in the United States has been largely absent in outward-facing media and discussions emanating from the Smithsonian until well into the second decade of the twenty-first century. There was little indication of any broader Smithsonian activity beyond these 'culturally-specific' developments that was designed to address issues of race in history or its legacies in the Smithsonian's institutional structure. Furthermore, critical scholarship and journalism in response to the inaugural exhibitions of the NMAI in 2004, soon after the Museum opened to the public, suggests that

racialised violence and colonial oppression remained relatively unexplored in their interpretive scope (Neary, 2005; Atalay, 2008, pp. 272-273). This research sought to investigate the emergence of culturally specific museums at the Smithsonian to draw out the factors and approaches that shaped the early development of these new museums as key sites for addressing the multi-layered issues of race. The study was designed to explore the significance of such museums for the Smithsonian's wider efforts to address race at interpretive and structural levels, and to examine museum planning work, practice, projects, public programming, changing strategies, and, where possible, internal discussions and debates, as key indicators of the changing approaches taken to navigate this difficult issue at the Smithsonian over several decades.

While an ambitious project in terms of thematic focus, a tightly planned series of investigations, involving interviews, Smithsonian archival material, public debate, and museum practice, focusing in particular on the late 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and early 2010s has led to new insights that together help to reveal the changing discourses of race, and key assumptions of the agency of museum practice in the context of a network of national museums within the United States of America. The need for new culturally specific museums at a national level is currently heavily contested across different public, media and political spheres, as well as within the museum professional community, yet existing studies of the Smithsonian's museums and practices have not sufficiently explored the processes and implications of creating these museums in terms of shifting museum practice, and indeed positioning matters of race and racial experiences in the national cultural and historical narrative. As new culturally specific museums are now being imagined for the Smithsonian, with the proposed National Museum of the American Latino gaining momentum, this research offers a timely investigation of the shift towards 'culturally specific' narratives – through institutional strategies of diversity and the emergence of rights-based practice – to better historicise these debates and offer critical insights into their role and implications for the broader sector.

The key question framing my study was:

What have been the implications of emerging 'culturally specific museums' for the broader aspirations of addressing race in the context of the Smithsonian?

The purpose of undertaking this research is threefold. Firstly, it contributes to knowledge of the implications of new museum developments of this kind which have been largely under-researched, particularly from the vantage point of cross-museum developments and socio-political shifts in ideas of 'race'. Secondly, the findings help to illuminate the context that provided for the emergence of new models of 'culturally specific' and inclusive practice that challenged the assumptions of the relevance of the racial past. Finally, the findings of this research offer a critical framework for locating and assessing distinct approaches to race and diversity programming within the museum sector, in a way that supports a greater differentiation between addressing matters of race as identity, experience, and as system of oppression, past and present, at national, institutional, and 'culturally-specific' levels. Ultimately, I demonstrate in this thesis that a 'culturally specific' and 'national' museum framework have each had a demonstrable influence on the way in which race has been positioned, both conceptually and temporally, within new museums. I show how broader socio-political discourses of race and diversity have allowed particular narratives of oppression to be side-stepped in museum practice, and point to new theories on the significance of culturally specific museums for rights-based practice and the retention of race as an issue to address over time. This research opens up insights into the way the very language around addressing 'race' in museums has its own implications for practice and for the broader processes of pursuing racial and social justice.

Recognising the varied forms of 'addressing race' in museums, these questions necessarily needed to be underpinned by a broad definition of 'race', and what it means to address it in the museum context. My starting point was the recognition that the very existence of 'culturally specific museum' work constitutes an attempt to challenge racial bias at some level of practice. To begin to unpack the particular approaches taken, and assess the significance and impact of these efforts, it is first necessary to further situate the research in context and briefly explore existing understandings of culturally specific museums. The next section puts forward a definition of 'culturally specific museums', and argues for the need to approach these museums as fundamentally concerned with rights and racial justice. Following this, I turn to unpack the fluid notion of 'race' and how it has been typically approached, in order to establish the theoretical positions and underpinning ideas that have informed this study. Towards the end of this introductory chapter, the methodological

approach taken to the study is described and assessed, and the analytical framework is summarised to show how the research was undertaken. Finally, this introductory chapter concludes by providing the reader with a roadmap for the thesis as a whole.

2. Conceptualising ‘culturally specific museums’

This research focuses on the phenomenon of what are often referred to as ‘culturally specific museums’, yet the collective grouping of all museums focusing on ethnically- or culturally-defined identities is not without problems. To justify the use of this term for the purposes of this research, this section offers an overview of this new ‘type’ of museum. I also draw out existing knowledge and attempts to theorise the role and significance of such museums from across the museum studies and practice-based literature, before situating my study in terms of existing knowledge of such museums.

The term ‘culturally specific museums’ has been used to refer to a broader range of ‘Black museums’, ‘tribal museums’, and museums and galleries that purport to focus on particular racially- or ethnically-defined groups in the United States. Since the 1960s, the United States has witnessed a surge in community-focused museums, devoted to identity categories such as ‘Jewish Americans’, ‘African Americans’, ‘Latinos’, ‘Japanese Americans’, ‘Arab Americans’, ‘Chinese Americans’, and even ‘German Americans’. Today, sites of this kind exist in most major towns and cities in the United States. The Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History and Culture, for example, opened in Detroit in 1965. The Wing Luke Memorial Museum focusing on Asian-American experiences opened in Seattle in 1967. Ethnic museums continued to develop into the 1970s and 1980s, with the National Museum of American Jewish History and the African American Museum opening in Philadelphia in 1976. Sites focusing on particular tribal nations or other Native groups – which Cooper refers to as ‘museum-like’ sites - also emerged as community-run venues, often having dual purposes in terms of offering community resources and acting as sites for attracting tourism (Cooper, 2007, pp. 120-121). Despite this nation-wide phenomenon of museum building over the last fifty years, there have been surprisingly few attempts to explore the approaches of new identity-focused museums as they have reshaped the museum landscape in the United States (Burns, 2013; Autry, 2013, p. 58).

The term 'culturally specific museum' is a relatively recent one, appearing in Edmund Barry Gaither's work on pluralism in the American museum in 1992, later used in 2010 in a profession-facing report by the (then) American Association of Museums, and resurfacing in a Smithsonian-hosted public debate in 2012 (Farrell and Medvedeva, 2010: p. 20). It has since been used in a very limited number of academic texts (see for example Brown *et al.* 2017). There is no fixed or accepted definition of what this term refers to, nor any significant attempt within the museum studies literature that argues for its recognition as a term. However, it has largely replaced the term 'ethnic museums' which has fallen out of widespread usage. It is likely that the term 'culturally specific museums' emerged in response to the renewed usage of notions of 'culturally specific' and 'culturally responsive' in other sectors. As a term, it offers a greater emphasis on the centrality of constructed and fluid 'cultures' rather than the sense of a more fixed ethnic identity or background (Aronson and Laughter, 2016).

Musing in the late 1990s on the inadequacies of a range of terms to describe the ethnic museum movement, the (then) director of the Smithsonian's Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies at the Smithsonian, Richard Kurin, opted for the unwieldy term 'racially and culturally specific museums' (Kurin, 1997, p. 95). At the same time, Kurin suggested that the concept of race and culture are both problematic in this context, as race implies the existence of race as a biological category, while culture stands in for ethnicity as an imprecise term. In a recent journal article, Nicole Reiner discusses her preference for the term 'ethnically-specific museums' as better referencing earlier work in this field, despite 'culturally-specific' being a more 'contemporary' term (Reiner, 2012, p. 34). The alternative term 'community-focused museums' has been advocated for the purposes of a live debate held in the late 1990s by Smithsonian museum professionals and interns including Claudine Brown, Yolanda Muhammad and Alma Jean Smith (cited in Kurin, 1997, pp. 102-103). Autry has referred to such sites as 'identity-driven' museums (Autry, 2013). Yet over time, no single term seems to resonate among museum stakeholders, professionals and scholars. As such, and purely for consistency within the thesis, I settle on 'culturally-specific museums' and occasionally 'ethnic museums' as synonymous terms, that best express the ways in which these museums have been written and spoken about over the years. Given this lack of clarity and resolution, however, I use these existing terms tentatively, and attempt to

mitigate the risk of their potential effects by placing them in inverted commas at various times throughout the thesis. I have not done this each time, however, to ease readability. Additionally, I maintain a critical distance from these terms through my analysis. Indeed, part of my research has been to assess the power dynamics implied by the use of the notion of 'culturally specific' itself.

I use the term 'culturally specific museum' in my research to reflect the current (although not widespread) usage of this particular term in the context of debates around the distinct but interconnected museum developments at the Smithsonian which include the National Museum of the American Indian, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the early calls for a National Museum of the American Latino. Existing museum studies literature that attempts to characterise such museums typically falls short of being able to capture the significance of these museums in the context of the Smithsonian. Holo, for example, has referred to 'ethnic or culturally-specific museums' as existing in opposition to 'encyclopaedic museums' which display a wide variety of cultures under one roof (Holo, 2009, p. 389). In the context of the Smithsonian however, this characterisation is inadequate. The Smithsonian Institution is a national museum and research complex which currently consists of 19 museums and a national zoo. Following Walker, I approach culturally specific museums in this particular Institutional context as part of a broader suite of sites that together have sought to be 'encyclopaedic' or 'universal' in coverage (Walker, 2013, p. 2).

The scale and breadth of the Smithsonian as a cultural and research institution makes it difficult to characterise in simplistic terms. Founded in 1846, it has grown from a single building housing the nation's collections to a vast, networked and global operation. The Smithsonian is made up of several museums and research facilities across the United States and worldwide, with many of its renowned museums situated on the National Mall in Washington D.C., on land managed by the U.S. government's National Park Service (Figure 1). There is significant federal government oversight in the Institution's funding and governance. Approximately 60% of its income is from federal monies, from a combination of a congressional appropriation (overseen by a special Federal appropriations committee) and

federal grants and contracts (Smithsonian, 2019a). The remainder of its income is generated from donations, corporate sponsorship, and its commercial activities including restaurants, shops, memberships and the Smithsonian magazine enterprise (*Ibid.*). Its staff base is currently around 6,800 employees (Smithsonian, 2019a).

Its central location, size, and global reputation make the Smithsonian one of the most visited and accessed museums in the world. The Smithsonian's audience can be understood as diverse and international with millions of American tourists and international visitors accessing the various sites each year (Atalay, 2008, p. 283). All Smithsonian museums are free, and there were nearly 30 million visits to the Smithsonian in 2017 (Smithsonian, 2019a). Since it opened in 1976, the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum has become the most visited, with around 311 million visitors in total (Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, 2019). Standing immediately next to this, and opened in 2004, the National Museum of the American Indian welcomed 1.3 million visitors in 2014. The new National Museum of African American History and Culture, which opened in 2016, drew around 2.4 million visitors in 2017 (Smithsonian, 2019b).

While there has been significant research into national museums in terms of representing universal histories, hegemonic processes, and colonial systems (Bennett, 2004; Elgenius, 2015; Kreps, 2003; Walker, 2013), there has been far less attention upon national museums that focus on the use of minority ethnic group experiences in the context of national identity or nation-building. Reiner notes that 'culturally specific museums' are strikingly 'under-researched' and 'only shallowly debated' (Reiner, 2012: 39; Ruffins, 1997, p. 80). An exception is an edited volume on the NMAI by Amy Lonetree and Amanda Cobb (2008), which offers a range of perspectives on the development and reception of this new museum. This volume includes a chapter on the negative reviews in the mainstream press that greeted the museum upon its opening (Jonaitis and Berlo, 2008, pp. 208-240). As national, federally supported museums that prioritise marginalised group histories within a 'universalist' frame of a major cultural institution (the Smithsonian), it is not surprising that the Smithsonian's new culturally specific museums have been sites of contestation and struggle over different views of the national narrative of the United States (Dyson, 2005, p. 119; Reiner, 2013, p. 34). Culturally specific approaches, whether in the form of exhibitions or as whole museums, have been attacked for their perceived divisiveness and



Figure 1 - 'The National Mall, Washington D.C.' (Photo: National Museum of American History, 2006). (Used under creative commons license - [www.flickr.comhttps://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/legalcode](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/legalcode))

'Balkanisation' of history (Bedard and Huey-Burns, 2011). As national museums focusing on ethnic histories, questions emerge from across the social and political sphere about who they are for and who should run them. They raise questions of audience and relevance, as well as ideology and power. Addressing some of these questions, Andrea Burns anchors 'Black museums' as sites which can be understood not as being for the benefit of particular groups, but as being primarily sites for intercultural connections between ethnic

communities and broad audiences (Burns, 2013). Yet while this position captures something of the profoundly public nature of museums imagined for the National Mall, the implications of museums in terms of intercultural power relations and their agency in representing racial histories and experiences to a broad audience requires substantial interrogation. As such, this study necessarily looks beyond existing theories around culturally specific and community-focused museums, in order to better account for the phenomenon of culturally specific museums emerging in a national and 'universalist' context. Moving beyond anthropological concepts of authenticity and cultural representation, it offers a new lens onto culturally specific museums as manifestations of rights-led approaches and politically-shaped identity within a broader museum landscape.

The emergence of 'culturally specific museums' has been broadly understood as a response to under-representation, misrepresentation or marginalisation of particular histories and experiences within 'mainstream' museums (Luby, 2011; Kurin, 1997, pp. 96, 102; Ruffins, 1997; Gaither, 1992; Karp and Lavine, 1991a, pp. 1-2). As such, culturally specific museums are positioned in a particular way in both museum and public discourse. Characterised overtly as sites of reaction and response to mainstream museums, and offering a focus on 'alternative' histories and cultures, they are typically positioned as sites of difference. This evokes what Nancy Fraser, in her critique of Habermas's notion of the 'public sphere', refers to as the creation of 'subaltern counterpublics'; the constitution of alternative publics and discursive space that evolve to counter the systematic exclusions of public discourse along the axes of gender, race and class (Fraser, 1990). This characterisation is useful for at least two reasons. Firstly, Fraser's notion accounts for the complexity of such sites for identity-construction, development and growth in a designated space that sits separate to the 'mainstream' and does so in a way that is productive. Secondly, the question of such sites as encouraging an undesirable 'separatism', as evidenced through the charges of the 'Balkanization' of history within revisionist frames is acknowledged through this notion by the invocation of such sites as 'public'. As Fraser explains: 'Insofar as these arenas are *publics* they are by definition not enclaves' (Fraser, 1990, p. 67 [*italics in original*]). Fraser further explains the complexity of such sites in terms of their 'dual character':

On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities

directed toward wider publics. It is precisely in the dialectic between these two functions that their emancipatory potential resides (Fraser, 1990, p. 68).

In this way, 'counterpublics' serve an important function in the performance and accessibility of democracy. Within the context of the Smithsonian as an umbrella institution, museums that offer spaces for the production of 'counterpublics' have, I suggest, implications for the nature of the Institution as a whole, in terms of the presence, movement and interaction of public discourse. These processes require exploration in the face of critical debate, and this thesis offers a contribution to that work, while also offering an exploration of how such sites and their attendant processes of democratic museology are discussed and valued across museum and public spheres.

For museum scholarship and practice internationally, these museums' perceived oppositionality to the exclusionary status quo has come to represent inspiring approaches of community-centred museums. Yet within this broader museum studies discourse, such museums are typically approached as individual case studies of practice rather than as a new, nation-wide museum movement of rights-led constructions of 'self-definition' in response to the histories and legacies of the racial past (Autry, 2013, p. 62; James, 2005). Scholarship has largely overlooked the complex political and social shifts sitting behind their existence until more recently with the work of Burns (2013), Autry (2013) and Walker (2013). Burns has emphasised the emergence of African American museums in particular as part of a long history of black institution building (Burns, 2013). Indeed, Burns' study is one of the first significant studies to locate African American museums in broader citizenship and rights discourses since Reconstruction at the end of the nineteenth century. In this sense, Burns' account locates such museums as part of the construction of broader counterspaces; as part of rights struggles in the museum landscape. Meanwhile, Cooper argues that Native American 'museum-like' centres, which often steer away from the problematic label of 'museum', represent sites of ongoing protest against an industry that has misrepresented and mis-treated Native peoples (2007, pp. 120-121). For Cobb (2005) the NMAI can be understood as part of a broader process of cultural resurgence within Native communities and part of a wider enacting of 'cultural sovereignty'. Walker (2014) however, offers an account of their emergence at the Smithsonian as part of a longer institutional history of the gradual and at times, logical fragmentation and negotiation of the

‘universal museum’ concept. In this, Walker’s valuable account nevertheless downplays the role of the broader black and Native museum movement and broader civil rights movements in accounting for changes at the Smithsonian. In contrast, Message (2007, p. 239) notes that the civil rights movement was a central ‘reference’ for the emerging National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). However, deepening these assertions, and building on the work of Cobb (2005), Cooper (2007) and Burns (2013), this study moves beyond existing explanations of ‘culturally specific museums’ as *responses* to civil rights and racial justice movements, or *correctives* to broader ‘mainstream’ museum practice. Rather, I argue, that culturally specific museums need to be understood as a facet of the struggle for rights and movement for equality in their own right - as constituting rights-based practice - within the professional museological landscape. This approach fundamentally distinguishes culturally specific museums from other museums at the Smithsonian. To further explore the implications of rights-based museums emerging in what can be described as a ‘non-rights-based’ institutional context, I draw on two further theoretical concepts – the notion of ‘containment’, and the notion of ‘interest convergence’ as set out by Critical Race scholar Bell (2004; 2005). Each notion pertains to broader critiques of multiculturalism as an approach to managing difference, and each helps to explain the relationship between processes of inclusion through rights-based approaches and the maintenance of broader structures of power that exist outside of a rights-driven frame. As a vast institution that arguably attempts to be ‘universal’ in scope, these theories help to explore the Smithsonian as a complex site shaped by the interactions of multiple forces.

Understood as part of a broader museum sector-level project of multiculturalism, and formed within a context of a strategic shift to recognising ‘cultural diversity’, new cultural museums of this kind have been understood as not only representing ethnic communities but also representing the state’s ideological needs, thereby working to enhance the political power of the dominant group. Citing Phillips, Message has argued that the significant developments and successes of ethnic museums have served the majority group politics and publics, by not only resonating with government’s need to support notions of inclusion and multiculturalism, but also to draw attention away from more difficult problems, such as those stemming from racial and ethnic prejudice (Message, 2007, pp. 251). As Bennett *et al.* (2005) point out, ‘The mainstreaming of ethnic pluralism and cultural diversity has been

greeted as a sign that a modern, multiethnic polity can recognize and proclaim difference' (2005, p. 113). This captures what Bell has termed 'interest convergence'; the idea that the 'interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites' (Bell, 2005: p. 35). This notion can help account for the emergence and timing of developments in rights-based museology within the Smithsonian, which offered answers to urgent calls for greater diversity and cultural recognition within the Institution in light of flourishing racial justice movements. Yet far from adopting a rights-based frame, the Smithsonian welcomed the possibilities afforded by resourcing new 'counter-sites', without attendant scrutiny and urgency in relation to several of its existing Smithsonian museums. As an institution seeking to recognise a diversity of cultures by 'adding to' the core, the Smithsonian can be understood as a site that has shifted towards multiculturalist ambitions over time, influenced by the desire to capture authentic expressions of the diverse American experience, and only driven by social justice movements in pockets of practice. If multiculturalism, for many, 'stands for a strategy of containment of resistance and revolt rather than for a true-desire for the elimination of racial [...] oppression' (Bennett, *et al.* 2005, p. 227), how, then, might 'strategies of containment' be present in the approaches to race taken at the Smithsonian over time? What impact has the arrival of 'culturally specific museums' had on the Smithsonian as a whole, and furthermore, what are the implications of addressing race within an institutional context that is not firmly rooted in ending racial oppression?

The notion of 'containment' has been under-developed in museum studies literature, but has been detected across museums of different kinds that engage with difficult and particularly racial histories. Bunch, for example, has highlighted what he terms the 'prism of optimism' where the history of race as told through museums and galleries often arrives at a premature sense of closure, relegating the struggle against racial prejudice as something past and complete (Bunch, 2010a, p. 31). Race and racial justice movements are confined to a historical moment without demanding recognition of contemporary and ongoing racism and struggles for change. Similarly, 'distancing' strategies were evident in Waterton *et al.*'s (2010) examination of museum exhibitions focusing on Britain's involvement in the slave trade. At the Smithsonian, narratives of optimism and cultural celebration at the NMAI have been understood to close off the possibilities afforded by a 'culturally specific museum' on

the Mall, resulting in 'missed opportunities' and a depoliticised, de-historicised narrative of 'American Indians' that over-emphasises Native agency in colonisation (Atalay, 2008, pp. 273-275). More recently, Autry (2013, p. 77) has found, across a number of African American museums, a tendency to emphasise positive identity constructions in relation to difficult histories of slavery and segregation, which she indicates as growing out of ethical deliberations on the part of curators who seek to instil pride among audiences of colour. Burns, meanwhile, defends the often critiqued "'we, too, were here'" narratives that aim to recognise black contributions, suggesting that these narratives have a long and important history in the face of outright racial segregation and historical omission in previous decades (Burns, 2013, p. 9).

A further aspect of 'containment' lies within the framing of race as an issue. Race is often approached as a 'black issue', thus problematically conflating racial histories to black histories alone. This tendency carries through to museum work, offering further evidence of a 'containment' and 'management' of the issue of race at different levels. Autry observes that culturally specific museums are the 'primary site where America's racial histories are explicitly deliberated' (2013, p. 60). This problematic 'containment' of race to sites of black history has sparked questions of where and how race should be addressed. Brown *et al.* (2017, p. 128) conclude their chapter on 'culturally specific museum' practices by asking what role there might be for 'non-culturally specific museums' in negotiating the racial past. By focusing on the context of the Smithsonian, this study offers a possible response to this question, as unlike other museum sites, the Smithsonian as an entity can be understood as largely comprising 'non-culturally specific museum' approaches.

New museums such as the NMAI and the NMAAHC have emerged within a national framework, where 'mainstream' national, disciplinary, political and cultural ideologies can be understood to shape practice. Following theories of multiculturalism and its role in governance, their location within the Federally-overseen national institution and their presence physically on the National Mall signifies their operation as state apparatus. Yet while necessarily read as state sanctioned, such museums are defined and approached in this study in a broader way. As Message and Witcomb contend, museums are sites associated with communities and with individual curatorial agency, as well as governments (2015, p. xlv). 'Culturally specific museums' cannot be explained by modes of

governmentality alone. Following Hetherington, while my focus remains on revealing power, I am approaching these museums as 'space[s] of continual emergence and subjectivity' (Hetherington, 2015, p. 37), shaped over time by both movements for justice and the subsequent management and containment of new narratives within a mainstream organisation. This, I argue, is a suitable approach for this study, which works to locate a shifting idea in practice and discourse through official narratives, policies, rhetoric, programming decisions, and individual utterances on the role that these museums are intended to play. It draws attention to the agency of particular individuals, programmes and historical moments in the shaping of ideas about race. Ultimately, this study also reveals unresolved problems of the validity and implications of the very term itself - 'culturally specific' - in the complex work of addressing race in museums.

'Culturally specific museums' at the Smithsonian thus offer a unique site for research into the impacts and implications of such sites on broader discourses, as they exist as *relational* sites, which together with surrounding museums and initiatives, represent shifts towards the inclusion of different 'counter' histories and cultural narratives within a mainstream public institution, and potentially rendering such narratives as being of national, universal, or global significance. Looking across key moments over some thirty years of museum development time, both within and beyond new 'culturally specific museums', has enabled an assessment of the implications of what has been an emerging and evolving, rather than static, form of new national museum. Building on previous work, my study reflects on how museums of this kind have interacted with shifting political and cultural approaches to race, and both reproduced and challenged existing ideologies and structures at different moments. Ultimately, this study also reveals unresolved problems of the validity and implications of the very term itself - 'culturally specific' - in the complex work of addressing race in museums.

3. Defining 'race'

As a study designed to critically explore emerging 'rights-based' museums, and to identify the impact of the emergence and development of these museums in addressing race, it is important to establish not only a definition of 'race' but a sense of how race has been

positioned over time as a key issue to confront both in museums and in social justice movements more broadly. Together with key theories pertaining to 'culturally specific museums', the theories and conceptions of race expounded here help to expand the theoretical positioning of this inquiry. Ideas discussed here also help to identify key conceptual problems, which complicate studies that set out to explore the multiple meanings of race.

The existence of 'race' in a biological sense as distinguishing physical or intellectual characteristics has been widely discredited in scientific circles since the end of the Second World War (Bennett, *et.al.* 2005, p. 290; Cornell and Hartmann, 2007, p. 25). The prevailing view in sociological fields is that race is constructed and utilised in social and cultural spheres (Collins and Solomos, 2010). Sociologists have defined race as a 'pre-eminently *socio-historical* concept' (Omi and Winant, 1994, p. 11 [*italics in original*]). As Omi and Winant state, '[r]acial categories and the meaning of race are given concrete expression by the specific social relations and historical context in which they are embedded' (1994, p. 11). This study subscribes to this view of race as socio-historical construction. However, it also acknowledges that race is not simply based on expressions of ideas of difference at particular moments in time. Rather, as Hall explains, racism is embedded into structures of society including cultural institutions; a discursive system with real political, economic and social effects in society (Hall, 2002, p. 453). Museums, then, intentionally or otherwise, are complicit in supporting the structures of racism as Lynch and Alberti claim, through their situatedness in the broader social world as well as their more specific roles in the production of knowledge and the shaping of national memory (Lynch and Alberti, 2010, p. 14).

As a cultural study of museums, rather than a sociological study of race, the main focus of the research has been to systematically explore the varied articulations of the *issue* of race within and around museum practice, and assess these articulations in relation to perceived museum agency. My primary objective, then, has not been to locate instances of racial categorisation, or what Gunew and other sociologists have referred to as the process of 'racialisation' (Gunew, 2004, p. 16), or, the process of 'signification of race through social practices' (Bennett *et al.*, 2005, p. 291). The form that 'race' takes, then, in this study is predominantly as a suite of pre-existing ideas within the social world and within scholarship,

that can be described variously as racial histories, racial issues, racial experiences, racial justice activism, and *ideas* of race in contemporary society which become the subject of museum discourse at various times for various reasons. However, these meanings of race can be understood as both pre-configured by social and historical discourses, and simultaneously reconstructed within the processes of museum-related representations. In this way, my study is concerned with the implications of *representations* of race in relation to museum practice at various levels. Nonetheless, racialisation cannot be easily disentangled from the practices and discourses of addressing race. Indeed, such processes of racialisation – important as they are to locating museums' complicity in racial oppression – need to be understood as part of the context of any study of museum practices that seek to shift power to marginalised groups.

This study is underpinned by a recognition of the broad and deep significance of issues of race in the history of the United States (Feagin and O'Brien, 2010, p. 57). This research is built on a premise that race can be considered as central to, and embedded within, the formation, histories and contemporary cultures of the United States, and that it remains a pressing issue to address in cultural, social, economic, and political arenas of society. Furthermore, this study follows the lead of race scholars such as Cornell and Hartmann (2007) and Omi and Winant (2007), who posit that race is a fundamental issue that is significant to the histories and lived experiences of all Americans, rather than being something pertaining predominantly to a particular cultural group or groups. At the same time, the way that race can be addressed and approached is more complex than this universalising idea allows. While race in the context of the United States – particularly ideological constructions of the concepts of white supremacy and black inferiority – are well theorised as tools that rationalised economic exploitation and political dominance over several centuries, race is also a concept that operates at many different levels, playing a role in constructions of identities, individual and shared, focusing emancipatory movements, and in seeking and sustaining political agency through, for example, the shaping of 'counterpublics' (Fraser, 1990). It is also a notion that cannot be understood in isolation from other characteristics and oppressions such as those enacted along the axis of gender and sexuality (Davis, 1982). As such, questions of who can address race are paramount and resound across the thesis.

While race is often acknowledged as central to the United States as a nation in recent professional, popular and scholarly discourses, direct and more widespread reference to 'race' or 'racial issues' in the context of museum exhibitions, programming, or professional and scholarly museum discourse has been rare until very recently. In museum practice, notions of 'blackness', 'whiteness', 'race' and 'racism' are often implied rather than referred to directly. When 'race' is used, it is often used as a shorthand to refer to the multifaceted issues and legacies of racial categorisation and oppression. This poses challenges to a study which focuses on articulations of race, but at the same time, the way in which race is coded into discourses of diversity, multiculturalism, voice, inclusion, self-representation, rights, inequality and ethnicity offers insight into how race as an issue is understood in the context of museum work (Gunew, 2004, p. 16). These broader notions, then, also indicate the approaches taken to race in museum practice, and have been central foci of my study.

Writing about museums and race has also been aligned with the positivist, progressive and somewhat depoliticising tendencies seen within museum practice (Lynch and Alberti, 2010). Ethnicity, rather than race, has been the favoured concept in museum thinking since the development of the museum studies field, and the two terms are often used synonymously. This has been supported by disciplinary shifts that emphasise the notion of 'ethnicity' instead of race as a more appropriate frame of reference (Hirschman, 2004). Guntarik has noted a significant surge in ethnic and interethnic self-consciousness over the last few decades and notes its significance in terms of emerging museum practices (Guntarik, 2010, p. 11). Yet the term 'ethnicity' has no stable meaning and has been used in different ways over time (Bennett *et al.*, 2005, p. 112). There appears, however, to be a consensus among scholars that it is becoming an increasingly important term (Williams, 1983, p. 27; Bennett *et al.*, 2005, p. 112; Kirwan, 2010, p. 446). Bennett *et al.* offer a definition of 'ethnic affiliations' as 'a quasi-primordial collective sense of shared descent and distinct cultural traditions', and propose that 'ethnicity' indexes 'a range of non-biological communal identifications including nationality, religion, history, language, and culture' (2005, p. 112). In referring to non-biological (and therefore malleable), shared, and potentially self-imposed identifications such as 'nationality, religion, history, language, and culture', and by being more widely applied than 'race', the term ethnicity in its current, present-day and scholarly usage can de-emphasise the connotations of racism and prejudice (Collins and Solomos,

2010, p. 3; see also Feagin and O'Brien, 2010, p. 53). The relatively neutral and positive connotations of the umbrella term 'ethnicity', as well as the history of its usage, also goes some way toward explaining the lack of an equivalent term for 'racism' with the term 'ethnicity' (Collins and Solomos, 2010, p. 3). Indeed, the political agency of notions of 'ethnicity' in the context of cultural work has been called into question. Amit-Talai and Knowles have critiqued Stuart Hall's notion of 'new ethnicities', a term he coined to emphasise ethnicity as a *process of becoming* rather than a state of being (Hall, 1997b). For Amit-Talai and Knowles, Hall's concept may support the recognition of more 'authentic' forms of presentation for 'multiple black identities', it nevertheless falls short of offering a mode of political engagement for addressing racism (Amit-Talai and Knowles, 1998, p. 13). In response to this, this study aimed to capture both the presence and absence of direct references to race and racism within Smithsonian practice, and within 'culturally specific museum' developments in particular, with the assumption that the choice of phrasing and level of directness in discussions of race can indicate and reveal broader positions and purposes in relation to this issue; such as the need for more accurate and respectful representation of identities or, conversely, the need to enhance political agency.

In the sections which follow, I describe the questions that framed my research, my research design and methodological approach in detail. Building on the theories and evolving contexts of race and museums presented above, I show how these have impacted the design of the research and my approach to the analysis in significant ways.

4. Research design

The central aim of this research project has been to explore the implications of 'culturally specific' museum developments on the Smithsonian's approaches to addressing race, through understanding how race – as an historical and contemporary issue – has been positioned and articulated within this national museum context over time. In order to draw out new understandings of the role of 'culturally specific museums' in relation to the wider institutional context of the Smithsonian within which they have developed, the study was designed to answer the following question:

What have been the implications of emerging 'culturally specific museums' for the broader aspirations of addressing race in the context of the Smithsonian?

Rather than attempt to locate any presumed direct effect or causal relationship between these new museums and broader Smithsonian practice, this study instead took an exploratory approach, focusing on discourse and practice within and surrounding these new museums during their early development stages and key moments of development, and assessing these in the context of practice in the Smithsonian. Central to this analysis was the need to establish how the Smithsonian had sought to address race within its museums and programming over time, within and beyond these new museums. The intention was to produce a 'cultural history' of addressing race at the Smithsonian and to situate this within museum approaches more broadly across the sector. Crucially, this approach enabled the phenomenon of new, national, culturally specific museums to be understood within their wider political, social, historical, museological and ideological contexts, as embodied by professional and public discourses, while recognising the Smithsonian as a unique political, institutional and nation-focused cultural space.

Acknowledging the varied and complex professional and publicly expressed aspirations for new culturally specific museums, the research also entailed a close look at the practice and professional discourse closely surrounding these new museum developments at the Smithsonian. This is an approach that has been successfully used by Autry, who suggests that the museum can be productively understood within its broader context and through close attention to its founding discourses, which fundamentally shape its approaches (Autry 2013: pp. 58-62). In light of recent reflections on race and museums, this historical context helps to demonstrate and highlight shifts in thinking about race over time, and supports a critical approach to the present. Following Foucault's lead, this process of research is not concerned with locating the origins of a given discourse, but on offering a 'history of the present' (Foucault, 1991, p. 31, cited in Hicks and Taylor, 2008, p. 64). As such, my study looks across Smithsonian history to reflect on a changing area of museum thinking and its manifestation in practice.

4.1 Philosophical approach

Researching race and racism, as any other topic, forces all researchers implicitly or explicitly to pose questions about the nature of the reality that is being examined (Bulmer and Solomos, 2013, p. 3).

Approaching 'race' as a socio-historical concept that can have real effects through both its presence and absence in articulations and representations of 'reality', and seeking to locate the implications of these, positions this research in the interpretivist paradigm. This philosophical position recognises that there are many 'realities' (Mason, 1996, pp. 4, 12; Given, 2008, p. 460). The subjectivity and selectivity, conscious or otherwise, inherent in what is expressed as 'known' and what is said - or cannot be said - about race, are key foci of my inquiry. An interpretivist stance acknowledges the fluidity and complexity of shifting and multiple expressions of reality and ideas about race. At the same time, however, my approach recognises that ideas about race – its meaning, significance, effects, and relevance to society, for example - are essentially historically located and structurally-defined. Within my research, there is a strong poststructuralist element that holds that discourses on race emerging within the context of professional museum practice are inevitably shaped by pre-existing power structures within society and the institution (Hall, 2002, p. 453). Indeed, the notion that discursive practices can both make and unmake social structures (see for example the work of Angermuller, Maingueneau, and Wodak, 2014: p. 74) can serve to overlook the structural barriers of 'unmaking' race as a system of oppression through discourse alone. Yet a study of representations in relation to 'counterspaces' necessitates a more open position. In contrast to structuralism, a poststructuralist approach allows for the possibility of greater complexity and change in the constitution and agency of discourses, and offers the analytical dimension of locating changes over time (Mason, 2006, p. 19).

Crucial to accepting many 'realities' is a commitment to challenge any sense of universality of the agency and experience of structures. The postcolonial approaches of Edward Said and Homi Bhabha address the complexities of power as dominance and the processes of power as resistance, by locating Western discourses in their imperial and colonial contexts, thus deconstructing the notion of their universality (Nichols, 2010, p. 117). Discourses, for postcolonial thinkers, constitute power and the conditions for agency through both an instrumentalising and a resistance approach (*Ibid.*). Drawing on Mason's explanation,

poststructuralism supports studies concerned with the cultural politics of identity by 'draw[ing] attention to the power struggles involved in the attribution of meanings and the value systems attached to those meanings' (Mason, 2006, p. 20).

In the context of this study, I assume a constructivist approach that accounts for the complexity of discourse in relation to museums. Discourses reflect, inform, and indeed constitute power or what Michel Foucault terms 'regimes of truth', in complex and not necessarily hegemonic ways (Mason, 2006, p. 25; Fairclough, 1992, p. 45). Following Foucault, I also approach discourses as inevitably reinforcing of continued meanings at individual and collective levels through repetitions and discourse pervasiveness, pointing to the significance of discourses in professional and organisational contexts in shaping practice (Foucault, 1972). Ultimately, discourses and their manifestations in representations and museum practices are approached in this study as evidence of particular collective positions on race and museums, framed knowingly or otherwise in the context of structural systems of oppression and resistance. The impact of such representations in changing practices and approaches to race is approached critically, without assumptions that their inherent agency echoes their intended use. Rather the purpose is to chart the shifts in these discourses, representations and practices, in order to point to the intended significance and perceived impacts for museum work within and beyond these new museum developments.

Interdisciplinarity has proved particularly useful to the study of race, enabling an expansion of traditional sociological frames and a deeper recognition of its pervasiveness, effects and agency as a categorisation in social movements (Romero, 2010, p. 64). A museum studies approach offers an inherent interdisciplinarity, and a focused site for grounding the work of cultural studies (Message and Witcomb, 2015, pp. xliii-xliv). Cultural studies itself supports research that refrains from the expectation that a broad theory can provide a satisfactory explanation of reality, and instead recognises that the existence of 'relativist', site-specific and historically-contingent versions of 'reality' (Best and Kellner, 1991, cited in Hicks and Taylor, 2008, p. 52).

Stuart Hall's seminal cultural studies work on representation serves to locate the object of study – the museum – and its relationship with 'realities' more precisely, as constituting a series of representations (Hall, 1997). This allows for a broader conceptualisation of the

structures and forms that power takes, including the non-discursive. Kendell and Wickham assert that discourse can be approached as 'a material practice with definite, public, material conditions of operation' (Kendell and Wickham, 1999, cited in Hicks and Taylor 2008, p. 61). This follows Mason's argument that museums as sites of research are valuable for the way they 'materialize cultural and historical differences' (Mason, 2006, p. 19). Scholars of museums have often drawn on Foucault to understand museums as sites of power through public exhibition, as well as collections and the formation of disciplinary knowledge (see Hetherington's analysis of Hooper-Greenhill and Bennett's work, Hetherington, 2015, pp. 27-29). In this study on early museum development work, museums are understood to be constituted and materialised through various forms such as consultation practices, oration at political and public events, interpretive narratives (whether exhibited or not) and other sites that represent the museum in some way. This research has been designed to reveal the significance of new, national and 'culturally specific' museum development in addressing, locating, valuing and interpreting 'race' as a social, historical, cultural and national issue. Indeed, to draw on Clifford's notion of museums as 'contact zones', museum practices and activities within the museum space are approached as activities that are responsive to, and thus can reveal, broader contexts of 'dominance', 'hierarchy' and 'resistance' (Clifford, 1997; Mason, 2006, p. 25).

4.2 The politics and agency of research on race

Writing about race and ethnicity can have unintended impacts (Bhatt, 2010). Chetan Bhatt has described how the use of race in scholarship, either as the key focus of study or as part of an analytical frame, is riddled with dilemmas and risks. Bhatt and other scholars have noted the way the term has been heavily used, and thus reinforced in social science and humanities discourse: 'Though the biological validity of race was rejected after World War II, racial discourse and race-thinking continue to thrive in Euro-American academia' (Bhatt, 2010, p. 90; see also Denton and Deane, 2010, p. 69). While the underlying motivations of studying 'race' within analytical discourse are often concerned with challenging racial ideologies, Bhatt warns scholars that 'our "racing" may unleash a variety of open-ended effects that escape us, and are beyond our command' (Bhatt, 2010, p. 91). Similarly, Bhatt

extends his thoughts on 'racing' and 'race-thinking' to the spheres of political and community activism that might be termed 'anti-racist'. For Bhatt, the very language of anti-racism echoes that of racism: 'Conversely, the idea of race is seemingly dispensed with by racists who are anti-racist in order to be more effective in their racism [...], a conceptual Möbius strip that makes race meaningless and meaningful in the same move" (Bhatt, 2010, p. 124).

Ultimately, this study is guided by the recognition that over-emphasising or indeed under-emphasising the notion of race can each have political consequences or unintended social impacts. Indeed, my position on race is far from neutral. Engaging in research on race, or indeed on any topic, is a political act, as Mason reminds us (Mason, 1996, p. 18). This study has been underpinned by my personal belief that race needs to be more explicitly addressed in the context of museum scholarship and practice at all levels, in order to reveal the ways in which museums are implicated in broader political processes of containment, oppression and privilege. Critical to this, however, is to recognise that research of this kind may simultaneously enact those processes. In writing about race and museums in the United States as a white scholar working in the context of UK academia, it is crucial to attempt to identify and reflect upon the possible effects, and the broader ethical implications of the study, and how risks can be mitigated through the research design and analysis.

Exploring discourses and interpretive practices at the expense of undertaking political action in research has been significantly critiqued by critical race scholars and cultural studies scholars alike as presenting an overly 'idealist' approach to addressing social justice issues that is aloof from real change (Curry, 2007; Pickering, 2008). Indeed, a key limitation of my study is its location in an established field of race writing in which research labour, as Bhatt claims, is primarily focused not on 'an actual structure of power' but on 'cultural interpretations' (Bhatt, 2004, p. 16). Yet, far from subscribing to what Bhatt (2004) describes as the self-conscious 'fantasy' that research of this kind, focusing as it does on museum practices and discourses, can remedy injustice, I see this research as just one strand of inquiry, which has the potential to support – through its findings or a challenge of its findings – further research and political action. As Hicks and Taylor note (citing Taylor and White, 2000), 'focusing on discursive practices [...] can make an important contribution to influencing practitioner/researcher practice' (Hicks and Taylor, 2008, p. 53). Fundamentally,

my anchoring points are based on aspirations of the possibilities for change, and a recognition of the importance of critical reflection on approaches to race, diversity, inclusion, empowerment and cultural representation within the museum profession. I seek to contribute robust research to understanding a complex area of museum practice to support further research, practice, and prompt further interrogation.

Alternative approaches to race research embed more deeply an activist stance, through a process that seeks to directly support structural change through methodological decisions in particular. For example, Critical Race Theory, in its 'deconstructivist'/'reconstructivist' forms, embodies activism and social justice. As a study that has not been explicitly designed to activate social justice, but indirectly support museum change, it is important to approach Critical Race Theory sensitively and with caution. Within this area of research, scholars remain aware that attempts to use Critical Race Theory to progress change in racialised settings may inadvertently support white agendas. As Bergerson observes, Critical Race Theory cannot be 'fully open' to white scholars because of the fundamental tenet to prioritise the voices and experiences of people of colour, but, she argues, drawing attention to the invisibility of whiteness and its presumed neutrality is a crucial step towards recognising the structures and systems of privilege within institutions (Bergerson, 2010, p. 57). It is my intention that this study offers insights towards understanding how and through what frames museums have addressed race over time, and in ways that continue to reveal approaches to race, including the maintenance of whiteness, in the context of predominantly white museums. Nevertheless, this contribution is understood as having limitations, particularly pertaining to its positionality in the largely white structures of university-based scholarship, and its reliance on a singular and white interpretivist perspective. The findings should not be read, accepted and acted upon in practice without significant awareness of a range of perspectives and insights.

Romero notes that legal studies, criminology, education and a range of other fields have been significantly developed by scholars of colour over many years, who have brought to light the political theoretical dimensions of academic inquiry and professional practice (Romero, 2010). Indeed, there have been expanded calls within the museum profession, predominantly led by professionals of colour, for white museum professionals to more explicitly acknowledge their whiteness and inherent privilege in terms their 'normative'

racial status, particularly to inform racial justice work and broader inclusive practice (Ng, Ware and Greenberg, 2017). A new body of museum practitioner-facing writing and calls to action around issues of race advocates the need to begin with 'self-work'; a process of critically assessing our roles and identities within systems of oppression (Machida 2016, cited in Fischer, Anila and Moore, 2017). In light of these calls, it is important to acknowledge that my methodological decisions are problematically shaped by the very institutional structures of race that shape museums and academic contexts. In these contexts of knowledge creation and power, which are often misleadingly presented as 'neutral' and 'objective', manifestations of 'race' can often be a subject of cultural studies research without fully acknowledging or locating the effects of those manifestations on the lived experiences of people of colour, whether they be museum practitioners or publics. Indeed, situating 'race' as a social, cultural and structural 'issue' to address in research, in ways that render it *external* to the contexts of knowledge production, risks masking the complicity of research and memory institutions in upholding white privilege. In the museum contexts that are at the core of my study, 'race' is typically used as a shorthand for the social issues, inequalities and injustices which result from current and past processes of racial categorisation. This usage has ultimately defined my approach, as a study that seeks to critically explore museum development and practice. However, in the work of analysing museum programmes and projects over time, it should be recognised that a deep exploration of the pervasiveness of racial bias within the museum institution over time is often sidestepped in scholarship; this omission, I would argue, is made easier when the scholar or practitioner in question is white. To mitigate this potential omission, my thesis begins by producing a history of the Smithsonian in terms of racial bias as a context for the work which follows. However, my thesis inevitably offers an outsider perspective into a political museological landscape, a cultural context, and a set of racially-framed experiences that sits outside of my own everyday cultural experience. Any use of this thesis must approach it as such, recognise its structural limitations, and seek broader perspectives on the implications of 'culturally specific museums' than those I am able to offer.

4.3 Research questions and objectives

In the absence of an existing study of the Smithsonian through this lens upon which to build, my research took an exploratory and inductive approach by casting a wide net across different manifestations of addressing race, through institutional and museum-specific discourse and rhetoric, museum practice and programming, and political and public debate over time.

Two main research questions guided my research:

1. How have 'culturally specific museums' at the Smithsonian addressed the issue of race?
2. How have these museum developments intersected with, reaffirmed or challenged broader approaches to race within the Smithsonian Institution?

These questions entailed a focus on the historical development of 'culturally specific museums' and their emerging practice, and an interrogation of their perceived role in addressing issues of race across broader cultural and political spheres. Together, the qualitative data generated in response to each of these questions offered insights into the significance and implications of 'culturally specific museums' as key sites for addressing race, in the context of changes within museology and broader developments, policies, strategies and initiatives at the Smithsonian.

Researching an organisation's attempts to address racial issues, past and present, requires a degree of openness, which allows for shifts in the focus of analysis. Taking on board a recognition that ideas and meanings about race in relation to museum developments and national narratives manifest themselves in different ways, the research activity was directed by a focus in three distinct areas: (i) the discursive positioning of race in the development of culturally specific museums, and the Smithsonian more broadly; (ii) the presence or absence of race in the governance and interpretive scope set out for these museums; and (iii) contemporaneous perceptions of the relationship between 'culturally specific museums' and race in broader spheres of society. The questions posed within each of these three areas are described below.

(i) Race in the context of museum developments at the Smithsonian

To what extent is 'race' (racial justice, the racial past, the issue of race) directly discussed within the Smithsonian in relation to new museum developments over time? What recurring themes and narratives emerge in articulations of the purpose of culturally specific museums, and how do these position race in relation to the cultural group, the concept of the United States as a nation, notions of American history, and in terms of historical time and contemporary relevance? Through what frames and concepts does the Smithsonian address race beyond these new museum developments? Through what policies and initiatives are approaches to the issue of race made explicit? How did these align or differ to broader museum-sector approaches?

(ii) Race in the interpretive scope of culturally specific museums

How was 'race' envisaged in discussions of interpretive scope within 'culturally specific museum' projects? How was race as an issue discursively and materially positioned in their exhibitions, events and other programming as these museums emerged and began to build their audiences, sites and collections? Within these museum development projects, was race addressed in terms of national histories, cultural histories, experiences or in other ways? Were there any key debates internally on how the racial past or contemporary legacies of race were to be addressed?

(iii) Perceptions of culturally specific museums beyond the Institution

How were 'culturally specific museums' initially received, debated and critiqued beyond the Institution (for example in Congress, in the media, in public and community forums, and in broader professional practice and scholarship)? How did these external debates position the role of museums in addressing race, and how did this differ to internal articulations of the museum's role in this regard? How did these debates position race as an issue within the nation? Which groups were felt to deserve a museum and why?

The research activities have been concerned with identifying and exploring the ways in which ‘culturally specific museum’ developments have operated for different groups and stakeholders as sites through which issues of race can be addressed. It is important to note the way in which the focused research questions articulated above have been iterative, and interlink with each other, rather than representing discrete pockets of research. Indeed, to provide insight into the discursive and (potentially) non-discursive role of such museums in reflecting, challenging and shifting dominant narratives of race in America, these museums are interpreted through the broader lens of the Smithsonian's history of negotiating race over time across different museums and formats, to reveal the specific contribution of ‘culturally specific museums’ to this agenda.

4.4 Research focus

There is an inherent breadth required by studies which explore representations of the (often elusive) concept of ‘race’, which is rarely *directly* articulated as an issue in practice, and which cannot be disentangled with the broader social, political and historical conditions of practice. The research aim, the context-specific nature of ideas of ‘race’, and the paucity of existing literature and theories on the phenomenon of ‘culturally specific museums’, particularly at national level, necessitated an exploratory study of new museum development projects. Approaching the Smithsonian using a case study approach offered a framework for drawing on ‘multiple sources of evidence’, and supported the building of new theories, particularly of the relationship between site-specific practices and the wider social and political context (Gillham, 2010, p. 2; Simon, 2009, Prologue). As a unique and complex site of museums and research centres, a case study approach served the purposes of the process of locating the role of a new form of museum in the context of the forces and movements and ideas about race and injustice that have shaped it. It offered a clearly bounded and yet open focus for exploring museums’ engagement with race in relation to notions of society, history, communities and nation. At the same time, the Smithsonian is a federally-supported and administered national institution. Its federal budget and spending is overseen by a United States Senate Committee on Appropriations, in a subcommittee that also oversees other national cultural institutions (United States Senate Committee on

Appropriations, 2018). Congress vested responsibility for administering the Smithsonian into a Board of Regents, which includes a number of U.S. Senators and Representatives and the United States' Vice President, *ex officio*. The changing political climate, together with congressional debates on new national museums, were thus important sources of evidence and context for this study.

The breadth of possible data sources implied in my key research questions, together with the breadth of the Smithsonian as a case study institution were factors that were offset by a research design that maintained a close focus on a small number of emerging museum projects within the Smithsonian as key foci for the research. This contributed to the feasibility of this exploratory study. Given the Smithsonian's vastness as an organisation, with several culturally specific research centres, programmes, and new and emerging museums, I decided to focus the study on to those developments that had sparked the most public and political debate. After careful exploration of the Smithsonian's historical trajectory towards new culturally specific museums, two concurrent museum projects were selected to form the focus of this study: the NMAI and the National African American Museum Project (NAAMP), the precursor to the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC). I also focused on these developments at a heightened time in their development from the late 1980s to the mid-2000s in particular.

The decision to focus on more than one culturally specific museum development was driven by the early finding that these museums, in the context of the Smithsonian, are strategically and philosophically entwined. An examination of their founding principles, visions, scope and approaches to knowledge, within and in reference to the Smithsonian's broader landscape of museums, showed many overlaps and layers of interconnection both between these museums and between wider cultural programming across the Institution. Culturally specific museums, then, have developed relationally in response to community claims for authority over collections, to fill particular gaps in focus, and in response to each other. These points of contact between similarly positioned museums, that exist in the same, albeit highly diverse, institutional context, present an opportunity to trace the emergence and development of these museums in ways that reveal the extent, nature, and significance of these interconnections and the impact of the broader social, political and cultural conditions on their interpretive scope and development.

‘Culturally specific museums’ are rapidly evolving, and debates on their role continue. At the time of beginning my research in 2011, a proposed new National Museum of the American Latino was beginning to raise debates about the role of culturally specific museums at the Smithsonian more broadly. As such, I also explore more recent developments and discourses around race and culturally specific museums. However, rather than researching a developments and meanings that are still unfolding, the focus of my study ends in the early 2010s, prior to the opening of the NMAAHC. Rather than analysing the contemporary moment, this thesis expounds upon several ‘key moments’ in the development of culturally specific museums over the last 30 years. Such an approach helps to explore culturally specific museum developments in their wider Institutional and cultural contexts. This supports the key research aim of this study to illuminate the intersections of approaches to race within and beyond new ‘culturally specific museum’ developments.

4.5 Methods of data generation

Qualitative case study research values the perspectives of multiple participants and a range of data sources, in order to build gradually towards theories (Simons, 2009, p. 13). A case study approach to research is concerned with collecting data in ‘naturally occurring circumstances’, but also values ‘generated’ data through interviews (*Ibid.*). However, it is debatable whether any data of the kind used here can be understood as ‘naturally occurring’ and ready to ‘collect’. Mason, for example, points to the ‘range of relationships between researcher, social world, and data’ in qualitative research that shape what is considered data (Mason, 1996, p. 36). Indeed, my case study approach forms a cultural study that looks for the presence as well as absence of ‘race’. As such, I used multiple qualitative methods of data generation which involved sourcing evidence from researcher-generated interviews, documents, online recordings, transcripts of events, oral histories, and site visits.

Initially, the first stages of my research involved getting to know the Smithsonian as a case site using the existing literature and primary sources that were readily available online, which offered a general context for my research. These sources included the online archive of *Smithsonian Magazine* articles, online images pertaining to Smithsonian history, museum

websites detailing museum exhibitions, histories and projects, and historical newspaper reviews. As noted by Gillham, getting to know your case in its wider setting can be usefully undertaken 'in parallel' with reading existing literature at the very outset of case study research (2010, p. 15). I focused my early research around the Anacostia Community Museum, which for me represented the Smithsonian's first 'culturally specific museum' and a likely focus for further research. This helped to shape up the key questions around addressing race in practice through 'culturally specific museums'. The quality of existing literature and historical accounts of the development and role of this unique museum as I commenced my research ultimately led me to pursue more recent 'culturally specific' initiatives at the Smithsonian – specifically the NMAI and NAAMP projects – although this early Anacostia work offered a crucial context for the research which followed.

My main period of fieldwork took place between January 2014 and September 2016. During this time, and with my key research questions formed, I systematically reviewed a number of online-based and library-based archives of primary evidence including newspaper articles, the United States' *Congressional Record*, C-SPAN, and Smithsonian annual reports since the 1920s, with a particular focus on the 1960s to the 2000s. Beyond institutional and congressional sources, I explored broader public and sector discourses through National Public Radio broadcasts, and other media programme archives and transcripts, and the proceedings from the American Association of Museums (AAM). Working through these documents and indexes, and undertaking key word searches, enabled me to draw out passages of spoken and written text which related to my research questions. In particular, I looked for mentionings of the Anacostia Museum, the NMAI, the NMAAHC, the NAAMP, and other related terms such as 'diversity', 'ethnic', 'race', 'racial', 'American Indian', 'Afro-American', 'Negro' (as a common term to refer to black in previous decades, for example, 'Negro history') together with the terms 'museum' or 'memorial'. Through the process of close reading of, and increasing familiarity with, these sets of evidence, broad findings began to emerge in relation to my research questions.

My site-based data generation activities in Washington D.C. were spent based at the Smithsonian Institution Archives (SIA) on Maryland Avenue with the support of Dr. Pamela Henson, a Smithsonian historian and the current Director of the SIA. I gained temporary formal affiliation as a Smithsonian 'Research Associate' from 2015 to 2016, with the support

of the SIA staff, in order to facilitate access to the collections, staff and sites of the Smithsonian during my fieldwork. I undertook three research visits to the Smithsonian, in October 2014, July and August 2015, and September 2016. While based in the UK, I conducted data analysis using an extensive body of primary evidence collected digitally through photographs taken during my archival and site visits. Capturing archival material digitally in this way allowed me to generate a significant amount of material during my research trips, which could then be sifted in the UK. Where gaps or further questions emerged from this sifting and interpretation, these became the focus of subsequent research trips. This allowed for an exploratory and flexible approach to the case study as new insights emerged (Gillham, 2010, p. 17).

The Smithsonian operates its own Institutional Review Board (IRB). This Board ensures that all research undertaken at and with the Smithsonian Institution complies with the established legal and ethical frameworks and institutional protocols pertaining to research with human subjects. Given that my archival work and interviews involved human subjects, I gained approval from the Smithsonian's IRB ahead of my fieldwork, in addition to gaining approval from the University of Leicester Ethics Committee. Both approval processes offered a framework for considering the risks and potential for harm in my research. As a study looking at how issues of race are addressed in museums, the subject matter may have been considered sensitive or difficult for some participants, and some research data could place individuals and the Smithsonian as a whole in a critical light. An important decision was the need to demonstrate to those I spoke with during my research that the focus was not on highlighting racist or racialising ideas articulated by individuals, but rather looking at how race was determined as an issue through, for example, museum practices, officialised and public discourses, group discussions and institutional initiatives. I obtained written and signed informed consent from each of my interviewees and was granted access to a number of oral history interviews recorded in the 1980s and 1990s held at the SIA with the consent of the interviewer and SIA. The online SIA search tool and indexing tools were essential to an effective use of the archives. Indeed, the archival research would have been impossible to conduct effectively without the advanced indexing systems established by the SIA.

My archival research spanned several different kinds of documents dating from the 1980s to the mid-2000s, with a particular concentration on the key moment of the early 1990s which

was a critical time for development of both the NMAI and the NAAMP. More recent, relevant material from the last 15 years was often present in the archives but restricted. However, I was nevertheless able to access extensive materials pertaining to the years prior to 2000, and engaged with a range of more recent material, including internal Smithsonian newsletters, that were unrestricted. For later time periods, I predominantly relied on other sources of evidence including interviews, newspapers, and recordings of key speeches and events. In order to locate relevant documents, my archival work focused on exploring three main areas:

- documents that were directly concerned with the development of the NMAI or the NAAMP;
- documents explicitly focusing on 'cultural diversity' strategies and culturally specific initiatives from across the institution;
- explicit mentions of 'race' or 'racism' or 'ethnicity' (or related terms) in relation to Smithsonian programming or events over key periods.

The documents of most use to my research included institutional vision statements, legal and policy documents, annual reports, Task Force meeting minutes, exhibition development meeting minutes, proposals, consultations, letters, emails, and Smithsonian Council discussions. These offered top-level and institutional-wide material for understanding the SI's strategic direction and activities. The papers of Claudine Brown, who led the work of the NAAMP project was a key focus, as were the records of the Cultural Education Committee, and other diversity programmes emerging at key moments in time.

A characteristic of qualitative case study research is the focus on subjective data, and subjectively collected data (Simons, 2009, p. 13). As such, the data generated through archival research reflects my own decisions and actions of identifying and prioritising relevant material (*Ibid.*, p. 86). It is important to note that the archival search cannot be considered exhaustive. Further searches into what is a vast archival resource may have yielded more material to potentially develop or deepen some of the themes and findings that emerged. Nevertheless, through immersion in the data, a number of patterns and findings clearly emerged over time.

To complement the archival data, I secured interviews with a number of key individuals who were deeply involved in the development of 'culturally specific museums' and other 'culturally specific' initiatives at key moments of time at the Smithsonian. These were undertaken face-to-face with the exception of one telephone interview, and all were semi-structured to allow for some flexibility around a series of questions (Robson and McCartan, 2016, p. 286). Through open questions, data was elicited around the experiences of museum development work, and the Smithsonian as a context for such work, as well as individual opinions on the role of 'culturally specific museums' in the past and now.

My interviewees were approached as 'elite interviewees'; each of them having long professional museum careers and holding expert knowledge of the sector and the Smithsonian in particular (Bogner, Littig and Menz, 2009, p. 2). All still have significant seniority at the Smithsonian, and each interviewee was insightful and knowledgeable about the questions I posed. All were involved in direct ways with the new museum projects at the centre of my study. As such, many had a professional interest in the research, and valued 'sharing [...] thoughts and ideas' with an external researcher (Bogner, Littig and Menz, 2009, p. 2). Those interviewed were as follows:

- Dr. Deborah Mack was involved in the initial meetings that helped lead to the establishment of the NMAAHC. She has been working at the Smithsonian since the early 2000s (NMAAHC, 2018a). Mack served on the Scholarly Advisory Committee in the early years of the museum's development. At the time of the interview, she was leading on the NMAAHC's strategic partnerships work.
- Dr. Fath Davis Ruffins has been a historian and curator at NMAH since the early 1980s. She was a curator of African American history and culture in the Division of Home and Community Life at NMAH. She is also a published historian of the Smithsonian.
- Dr. Lonnie G. Bunch III is the current and founding Director of the NMAAHC. Bunch was involved in the early push for a national African American museum (NAAMP). He was also a senior curator at NMAH during the 1990s (Smithsonian, 2018a).
- Dr. Gabriella Tayac has been an educator and curator at the NMAI since the late 1990s. She was involved in preparing the NMAI's inaugural exhibitions ahead of the Museum's opening in 2004.

- Dr. Richard Kurin, then the Under Secretary for Museums and Research at the Smithsonian. He is a senior executive at the Smithsonian, and has worked at the Institution for more than two decades. As an anthropologist, he directed the Smithsonian Centre for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, and has overseen development of several 'culturally specific' museums and projects at the Smithsonian (Smithsonian, 2018b).

I approached all interviewees through email introduction and, upon their acceptance to be interviewed, provided information about the research and a consent form for them to sign. The interviews were held in Smithsonian meeting rooms and offices, and in the case of Kurin, via telephone.

In addition to approaching Bunch, Kurin and Ruffins as interviewees to explore their professional experiences and insights, I also drew on their published work as part of my literature review. Bunch has written and spoken extensively on museums, black history and matters of race (Bunch, 2010a). Kurin has written about the 1990s' debate on the need for 'culturally specific museums' (Kurin, 1997). Ruffins, as a historian, has written on the development of 'ethnic museums' on the Mall during the late 1990s (Ruffins, 1997; Ruffins, 1998). The interviews, in contrast to these sources, offered a chance to ask about key memories of these projects, including memorable moments and debates. They offered a personal rather than a scholarly account of professional decisions and early museum approaches (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 3). The questions and responses to them, while predominantly focused on past events, strategically drew on recent debates and museum approaches in the present day to draw out trajectories and comparisons, for example in how the issue of race had been approached over time.

While elite interviewees clearly have the freedom to express their opinions and offer critical perspectives on the SI museums and approaches to race, it is important to note that all were still situated in the SI at the time of my fieldwork in positions of authority. As such, their insights into museum practices, past and present, will have been affected by their ongoing status as employees, leaders and supporters of the SI and its goals.

My interpretation of the data involved reflection on the status and role of the interviewee, and the factors that may have shaped their responses (Denscombe, 2010, p. 156). Indeed,

recognising that interviewing is a social method involving the researcher, it is important to acknowledge that, while the questions were formed as 'open' rather than 'closed' questions, my own role in the interview situation will also have shaped what was elicited from interviewees (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 151). For example, my status as cultural outsider on many levels is significant to the data produced. A 'cultural outsider' status has recently been discussed by Ganter who notes that in direct interactions during research, interviewees may be affected by the researcher's status in what they say (Ganter, 2017, p. 943). A clear indication of this was the way in which interviewees carefully and clearly described their experiences, and offered further sources of data to support the research.

The final element of fieldwork involved site visits to museums and exhibitions related to my study. These visits offered a chance to familiarise myself with key settings relating to the study, and to observe the approaches taken to addressing racial histories and race as a subject within the interpretive approaches of 'culturally specific' and other museums. As Simons has noted with regards to case study research, 'through observing you can gain a comprehensive "picture" of the site, a "sense of the setting" which cannot be obtained solely by speaking with people' (Simons, 2009, p. 61). Sites visited included the Anacostia Museum, the first 'culturally specific' museum at the Smithsonian which opened in 1967 in a suburb of Washington D.C.; the NMAI and its inaugural, and more recent, exhibitions; the high-profile travelling exhibition 'RACE: Are We So Different', which was temporarily hosted at the Smithsonian in 2011 involving associated SI programming, and was at the Carnegie Museum of Science in Pittsburgh in 2014 during my fieldwork; the temporary gallery space of the National Museum of African American History and Culture located in the National Museum of American History during 2015; and a two-day site visit of the newly opened NMAAHC and attendance at its opening ceremony in September 2016. A range of other Smithsonian museums were also visited during my fieldwork such as the National Museum of Natural History, the National Portrait Gallery, and the National Museum of African Art. These visits offered a context for my research, and provided a sense of how discourses of race are framed by Smithsonian museums over more recent years. Data collected during these visits was in the form of observational notes and images of the exhibition texts and spaces. These offered contextual and supporting information that helped me assess the

significance of the emerging findings that stemmed from my primary documentary and interview evidence.

4.6 Approach to the analysis

In the process of this research, analysis and interpretation were interactive. As described by Simons, it involved moving 'backwards and forwards between the data, the understandings [I was] gaining, the questions [I was] refining and the next field visit, set of observations or interviews'. (Simons, 2009, p. 120). My interpretation of the data was a process of thinking through what I encountered, including my notes and my transcripts, through 'different lenses' stemming from my research questions (Simons, 2009, p. 120). Themes emerging from this critical interpretation of the data began to point to a number of distinct discourses in how race was understood in the context of these new museums and within the Smithsonian more broadly. Taking a Foucaultian position on analysing data, I accepted that data can be 'discontinuous' and 'contradictory' and can point to many truths (Hicks and Taylor, 2008, p. 64). Rather than acting as a barrier to locating clear findings, this complexity became a familiar characteristic of the data and a key part of the focus and findings of the research.

Data that directly referenced concepts of 'race', 'culture', and 'ethnic museums' along with similar terms initially presented a key problem for my interpretation and analysis. Each are slippery socio-historical terms and are ascribed different and imprecise meanings depending on the context of use (Omi and Winant, 1994, p. 11; Bennett *et al.*, 2005, p. 290). In addition, I recognised that the use of such terms in the data were not situated in the same context of use as the research process itself. My assumption was that the meanings and associations of these words may have shifted considerably over time, and my own understandings of these terms might affect the significance I placed on them. However, these semiotic shifts and the ideas and meanings they imply became a key part of what this research attempted to locate, as they are enacted to describe evolving concepts of the scope, audiences and purposes of 'culturally specific museums'. Furthermore, interpreting past events and articulations through a present-day lens – as it might be argued all historical research inevitably does (Gunn and Faire, 2012, pp. 208-9) – served the purpose of my

research well. To borrow from Foucault, my research efforts are not predominantly concerned with locating the origins of a given discourse, but on offering a 'history of the present', with which to better understand new and emerging museum approaches (Foucault, 1991, cited in Hicks and Taylor, 2008, p. 64). Nevertheless, I interpreted the use of particular terms in an open and tentative way, assuming a messy and sometimes loose relationship between terms like 'race' and their intended meaning, and taking time to consider why such words were used in preference to others. Indeed, I considered the reasons for purposeful choice of terms. As a study of articulated aspirations for imagined and emerging museums, this was a particularly important factor in approaching the data critically.

Foucault's approach to discourse analysis offers an appropriate approach for a study of articulations of, and museological approaches to, 'race'. His focus on 'taboo' topics such as sexuality, pointed to the significance of both the presence and absence of terms and concepts in the data, and what this reveals about the construction of knowledge and power through social and institutional practices (Hicks and Taylor, 2008, p. 63). As Hicks and Taylor note, to achieve rigour, the researcher needs to move beyond the argument presented in the data to 'focus on how the account is constructed, what is included, and what is omitted' and what the 'speaker/writer achieve[s] by producing their account in this way' (Hicks and Taylor, 2008, p. 68). For this study, accounts were approached with these critical questions, together with a careful acknowledgement of historical situatedness.

In the work of researching complex museum institutions, Bennett posits that such sites should not be 'read' as sites of 'unified discourse' but rather as sites shaped by several discursive layers that have evolved and receded over time (Bennett, 2004, p. 117). Thus questions can be asked about a complex network of ideas about 'how such ideas emerge in different times and places, how they compete with each other, form linkages, or fault lines' (Hicks and Taylor, 2008, p. 64). This approach to the data was particularly suited to the study of multiple perspectives and practices pertaining to addressing race in museums.

Building on this Foucauldian basis of discourse analysis, my guiding analytical frame for drawing out broader meanings from the various sets of data - archival, interview, observational – was based on a cultural studies lens. This best suited the research questions

and philosophical approach, which refrained from analysing the data primarily in terms of linguistics or form, but rather used a framework that combined political, historical and social analysis in relation to an analysis of changes within museology. This aligned with the key research questions, which were concerned with understanding Smithsonian museum developments in relation to broader trends in museums, scholarship, and approaches to race. To this end, museum-related discussions, debates and practices operating at the micro level within particular projects, meetings, events or interpretive programming were analysed in relation to larger professional and institutional trends, as well as more macro cultural, social and political discourses in relation to racial issues within the nation. This approach assisted in illuminating the particular role that culturally specific museum developments have played in relation to wider approaches to addressing race. Indeed, rather than take a directly comparative approach of practice and discourse within and outside of 'culturally specific museum' projects, my findings emerged through the application of an analytical framework that could account for the complex 'layers' of influence that Bennett alludes to (2004, p. 117).

While the majority of my documentary evidence was explored through a process of 'intuitive processing' through immersion in the data, I chose to apply a more formal method of inductive analysis for several particularly rich data sets (Simons, 2009, p. 203). Specifically, I undertook a thematic analysis on the following data: the transcripts held in the SIA that captured consultation exercises with community participants in relation to the new museums; a Smithsonian-led symposium held in 2012 to explore the role of 'culturally specific museums'; the transcripts of existing oral histories with key Smithsonian personnel held in the SIA; and the interview data I generated with my elite participants. These were key sets of evidence, which offered multiple perspectives on the perceived significance, aspirations and critiques of 'culturally specific museums'. With this data, segments of text were interpreted and coded into a series of themes, that for me captured the essence of the content (Simons, 2009, p. 203). Over time, the presence or absence of these themes across different data sets was noted, which helped to draw out recurring ideas across different museum stakeholder groups over time. The multiple themes further developed and crystallised in the process of looking across the various data and applying the socio-

historical analytical framework, helping to triangulate emerging findings, and to offer new insights (Simons, 2009, p. 203).

4.7 Presenting the data

In this thesis, the ‘human participants’ that are associated with the archival data, including Smithsonian staff, community-based consultees, and members of the public who wrote letters to the Smithsonian are not referred to by name. Although their names are visible in the publicly-accessible archives, this strategy helps to protect the identity of these individuals. This has affected the format of the full references in the bibliography at the end of the thesis. Data pertaining to, or generated from, human participants are generally paraphrased rather than directly quoted, unless direct quotes are required to illustrate my analysis with clarity.

I use a number of abbreviations throughout the thesis to refer to the range of projects and museums under scrutiny. A list of all abbreviations is provided at the start of the thesis.

5. Roadmap of the thesis

This thesis presents the findings of my research across five key chapters. These are framed as thematic, but the structure of the chapters is loosely chronological, in order to identify the key moments of this study and shifts in museum practice over time. The following offers a brief precis of the content of each chapter, in order to show how the thesis progresses.

Having summarised here the concepts, tools and approaches of this project (Chapter 1 Introduction), Chapter 2 ‘Addressing race at the Smithsonian’ provides an historical anchoring chapter, which reviews the emergence of culturally specific museums and shows in general terms how ‘race’ and racial histories have been approached within the Smithsonian since its founding in 1846. This chapter posits that race has been understood as (1) a category; (2) a social issue; and (3) an ‘issue’ to manage through inclusive practice and diversity programming. This chapter helps to conceptually link institutional forms of oppression, which are often overlooked, with more recent museum practices.

Chapter 3 'Imagining the political roles of culturally specific museums' presents and discusses the discourses that have emerged in relation to new and emerging museums. Beginning with a history of the notion of museums as inherently political, an idea that gained in acceptance during the early 1990s, this chapter shows how 'culturally specific museums' have been imagined variously as sites of bias and redress in terms of the racial past. The chapter ends with an examination of the relationship between national 'culturally specific museum' developments and the nation state.

Chapter 4 'Two culturally specific museum projects in the 1990s' explores the early approaches to these museums in relation to the 'culture wars' moment. This was a key moment in shifting meanings of race and nation in the context of the end of the Cold War, but was also a time of increased momentum for the NAAMP and the NMAI. This chapter shows how racial issues were addressed by the Smithsonian in distinct but overlapping ways that focused on generalised notions of pluralism, and on rights-based discourses of cultural activism.

Chapter 5 'Culturally specific museums and post-race aspirations' analyses the implications of two dominant narratives of reconciliation in relation to my case study sites in the 2000s and 2010s. Firstly, that museums offered sites of celebration that could detract attention from more difficult narratives of grievance. Secondly, that museums contributed to existing tendencies towards post-race ideas, in an era that was questioning the nature of identity.

Finally, the concluding chapter 'Reframing 'culturally specific museums' presents a series of new theoretical understandings of the significance and implications of culturally specific museums in the context of the Smithsonian, and in the context of museological practice more broadly. It calls into question the way that these museums are typically framed, and ends with a reflection on more recent shifts and practice to locate the research in the current political and museum landscape.

Chapter 2

Addressing race at the Smithsonian

1. Introduction

The traditional narrative of the emergence of culturally specific museums begins with the rights movements of the 1960s. It posits that 'ethnic museums' at this time and at this 'nation-wide' level emerged primarily from the failure of mainstream museums to adequately integrate minority group perspectives into their interpretation and representation (African American Museums Association, 1988, p. 3; AAM, 1984, p. 74; Luby, 2011; Brown et al. 2017: 121; Karp and Lavine, 1991a, p. 1-2). However, this view tends to overlook the longer trajectory of activism, lobbying, social change, resistance to change, institution building, opportunism and experimentation that was characteristic of the Smithsonian's approaches to addressing and managing the issue of race over its history. It largely fails to critically acknowledge the way in which new museums were shaped by, challenged by, and ultimately benefitted, the work of the Institution, and it neglects to account for why the development of new national museums and 'culturally specific' programming became more desirable and feasible than greater integration efforts within existing national museums within this context (Ruffins, 1997, p. 80; Walker, 2013, p. 228). To offer a more nuanced historical context for understanding the role of culturally specific museums at the Smithsonian, this chapter takes a long view of the Smithsonian's history of race since its founding in the 1840s, and shows how 'race' was approached over time, beginning as a subject to display, then a social issue to attempt to address, and finally as a matter of inclusion and affirmative action across the 1980s. As such, this chapter offers a new cultural history of the Smithsonian, which reveals how culturally specific developments played out in an institutional and professional context that, from the 1960s onwards, increasingly attempted to address, manage and contain issues of race. Ironically, as museum discourses evolved towards a more explicit acknowledgement of their inherently political nature, and as the sector more broadly began to make significant attempts to come to terms with its colonial past, issues of race were primarily addressed within the Smithsonian

through increased social consciousness and inclusive practices, that nevertheless veered away from the growing minority-led discourse and scholarship around racial justice and civil rights.

While the focus of this chapter is on shifts over the second half of the twentieth century, I begin by contextualising this with a brief summary of the Smithsonian's earlier relationship to race. The Smithsonian can be understood, not unlike other modern museums emerging in the nineteenth century, as an institution that constructed and maintained white racial privilege over many decades, particularly in relation to its research activities, collecting, governance, and approaches to cultural display. The Smithsonian's early racial situatedness is crucial to explore in the task of pinpointing how race has been acknowledged and addressed in more recent decades.

2. Racial beginnings

Upon his death in 1829, the illegitimate son of the Duke of Northumberland, John Smithson left his entire fortune to the United States to, in his own words, 'found at Washington, under the name [of] the Smithsonian institution, an establishment for the increase and diffusion of Knowledge among men' (SIA, 2015a). Chartered by the United States Congress in 1846, the Smithsonian Institution can be considered as among the earliest modern museums globally and was one of the first major museum institutions within the United States. The Smithsonian Institution was founded during a period of significant racial oppression involving systems of both physical and cultural violence against indigenous and black populations globally, established to support white economic advantage. Notably, these systems of oppression – the domestic slave trade and colonial expansion towards the west of the continent – were tangible aspects of the early Institution, visible through a wholly white Board of Regents, and a research focus on Native peoples as scientific objects of study. The slave pens of the city were situated immediately opposite the new Smithsonian Castle building, and coffles of slaves on the area of the National Mall were a frequent sight (Green, 1967, p. 29). At the time of the Smithsonian's founding, Washington D.C. had one of the highest proportion of free African Americans, and the building of black schools, churches, and institutions was on the rise (Gillette, 2011, p. 27; Smithsonian

Anacostia Museum and Center for African American History and Culture, 2005, pp. 44-53). The sheer scale of free blacks in the city prompted a series of restrictive laws and 'codes' to contain their movements and gatherings in the form of curfews and registrations (Gillette, 2011, p. 28). Social and racial tensions were high in the District, and the kidnapping and illegal selling of free individuals into slavery was common (Smithsonian Anacostia Museum and Center for African American History and Culture, 2005, pp. 44-53).

The Smithsonian's founding legislation determined that the Institution should hold the nation's art, natural history and ethnology collections (Hafertepe, 1984, p. xxi; Walker, 2013, p. 14). Indeed, museums emerging in the 1800s across Europe and North America were organised around academic disciplines, which reflected a colonialist stance on cultural collecting, research and display. Unlike Peale's natural history museum in Philadelphia which opened in 1784, or the Metropolitan Museum of Art which opened in 1870 in New York, the Smithsonian Institution held a unique status in the new Republic as the national research and museum unit for the United States government. As a museum framed around governmental interests and disciplinary knowledge, the social unrest and tensions in its immediate locale were of little concern to the Smithsonian, which distanced itself from social and political debates. During the 1860s under Secretary Henry, the Smithsonian avoided the by then highly charged issue of slavery by disallowing abolitionists the opportunity to use the Smithsonian facilities for their lectures (Smithsonian Anacostia Museum and Center for African American History and Culture, 2005, pp. 44-53). The Smithsonian was, however, pursuing an interest in Native American cultures for reasons beyond advances in science. Indeed, white America's insatiable interest in the lifeways of American Indians had, from the earliest days of the Institution, shaped the approach taken to collecting and display (Walker, 2013, pp. 20, 30; Hafertepe, 1984, p. 131). This popular interest would prove to be a crucial factor in the possibilities of a National American Indian museum over a century later.

The collecting of anthropological material began in the 1840s for the new 'ethnological department'. The all-white Board of Regents set forth that the Institution collect 'the natural history of the country, and more especially the physical history, manners and customs of the various tribes of aborigines of the North American continent' (Smithsonian Institution,

2015). By the late 1850s, Secretary Henry, the first Smithsonian Secretary, had realised that if the museum became popular, the government would be more likely to resource and eventually, he hoped, appropriate the museum allowing the museum to finally become separated from the Institution, which he felt should be focused on research rather than public education (Hafertepe, 1984, p. 129). To this end, responding to the commercial as well as intellectual concerns of the new Institution, the Indian paintings of John Mix Stanley were added to the collection for their anthropological value and ability to draw in the crowds (Hafertepe, 1984, p. 131).

The Smithsonian Institution's growing collections were intimately tied to colonial expansion activities both at home and abroad. The first systematic anthropological collecting initiative was prompted by Secretary Baird, and in 1858, the government collections transferred to the Institution including material from various government sponsored expeditions (Smithsonian, 2015). The collections continued to grow as the nineteenth century progressed, yet objects were rarely purchased. Several scientists, anthropologists and missionaries in Africa, such as Captain John Camp and William Harvey Brown were actively collecting African 'ethnographic' objects from several tribes for the National Museum towards the century's end (Leopold, 1994, pp. 11-13, 15-16). A significant proportion of the collection was made up of gifts and bequests, including some five hundred paintings of American Indians by George Catlin which were bequeathed to the Smithsonian in the 1870s (Smithsonian Institution, 2015). The other main source of new collections was Government-sponsored expeditions and expositions. Indeed, the National Museum became the only legal place to deposit specimens from the many western expeditions that took place during this time (Goode, 1895; Oehser, 1949, p. 85).

In 1879, Congress established the Bureau of American Ethnology within the Smithsonian as a research-focused unit separate to the National Museum (Smithsonian Institution, 2015). The Bureau's focus was North American Indian cultures including archaeology and linguistics, and this unit substantially advanced research in anthropology in America. In 1895, in perhaps the first institutional history of the Smithsonian, curator George Brown

Goode details the link between the Bureau's collecting and federal policy with respect to American Indian removal policies.

The Bureau of Ethnology is an outgrowth of activities beginning early in the history of the Institution, which has from the very outset devoted much attention to the native American races. The Special work of the Bureau in its present form was begun in 1872, in response to a request from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, who desired trustworthy information concerning the affinities of the Indian tribes, to serve as a guide in grouping them on reservations. The question was referred by the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution to Major J. W. Powell, then engaged, under the direction of the Institution, in explorations in the Southwest. Combining the vocabularies and other manuscripts already in possession of the Institution, he prepared a report showing the character and extent of existing information, and the manner in which it was possible to utilize this in the segregation of the Indian tribes, at the same time suggesting plans for the completion of the work of classification (Goode, 1895).

Powell's report was able to draw on the 'thousands of specimens in the nature of artifacts, skeletal remains, and cultural objects' collected during various surveys of the American West (Oeser, 1949, p. 85). The Smithsonian thus served as a powerful and authoritative knowledge base for white control over Native populations.

During the 1870s and 1880s under the direction of Secretary Henry and later Secretary Baird, George Brown Goode and his successor Otis Tufton Mason shaped the National Museum as a 'museum of anthropology' (Walker, 2013, pp. 24-35). As Bennett has suggested, museums of natural history and ethnology across Europe operated at this time as 'laboratories' for emerging disciplines, of which anthropology was one (Bennett, 2004, p. 2). Unlike many anthropology museums of Europe, however, curators at the Smithsonian's National Museum sought to blur the boundaries of ethnography, industrial and scientific collections and in the process, group white and non-white material culture within displays, in order to show relational and evolutionary ideas (Walker, 2013, pp. 24-25). Goode took as his main cue the typological approach of ordering collections from the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, which was designed to show the evolution of mankind from savage to civilized (Walker, 2013, p. 25). As Bennett suggests, such approaches were a distinctively American tendency that racialised cultures in relation to biological stages of development, rather than centralising cultural traits to account for racial differences (Bennett, 2004, p. 121). Leading figures in the emerging discipline of anthropology such as Franz Boas, objected to this

approach. For Boas, typological arrangements which saw objects of the same type or similar function brought together could not adequately support an understanding of the objects' broader cultural context, he asserted that display by cultural group would give a deeper understanding of other cultures and lifeways (Walker, 2013, p. 37). Eventually, a dual approach to classification and display ensued at the Smithsonian's National Museum which saw collections presented in two broad categories: 'technology', which brought together all objects of a certain type, regardless of cultural origin; and 'ethnography' which was displayed in the context of distinct ethnic groups. The 'ethnography' approach was the favoured approach only where the Museum did not have a broad collection of similar types of objects to display them in a typographical arrangement (Walker, 2013, p. 27). This approach to the classification of the collections, which prioritised an evolutionary way of viewing cultures, from savage to civilised, and supported the growing science of race, persisted for many decades. Far from being unique, this aligned with contemporary practices at the American Museum of Natural History in New York where a 'dual approach' was also pursued (Bennett, 2004, p. 121).

By the mid-nineteenth century, African Americans and individuals of African descent were, in both scientific and popular realms, frequently classified as 'savages' whose culture was 'primitive', and this image persisted through the early twentieth century (Arnoldi, 1997, pp. 70-71). In 1922, the newly acquired African collection from English artist Herbert Ward went on display. The collection comprised several thousand objects including carved figures, masks, baskets, ceremonial staffs and spears, as well as a number of lifesize bronzes which depicted male and female individuals based on Congolese models (Arnoldi, 1997, pp. 72-73). Ward stipulated in his bequest that these 'ethnographic' bronzes be displayed with the zoological and cultural objects together to echo the highly decorative style of display of the collection in Ward's Parisian studio, and to chime with the fashionable approach to private displays of ethnography at the time (Arnoldi, 1997, p. 77). This display approach, together with an extensive label honouring the work of Ward in Central Africa, had the effect of glorifying the collector, while the bronze statues were interpreted as portraying the 'soul of Africa'. Part of the label read:

For more than five years Mr. Ward lived among the natives of Central Africa and during that time he developed the idea of preserving an epitome of the primitive life

with which he was surrounded and which would be an index of the primitive life of all men [...] The African Negro that Mr. Ward studied impressed him as possessing fine qualities of simple dignity and loyalty (Arnoldi, 1997, p. 77).

For white museum anthropologist Walter Hough, the display reflected the progressive evolution of art from primitive to high. Hough stated: 'The steps from the aboriginal craftsman to the sculptures of Mr. Ward are plain to those who study the development of art' (Arnoldi, 1997, p. 81). The statues remained on display with the Ward collection in the Natural History Museum until the early 1960s (Arnoldi, 1997, p. 88).

Beyond its intellectual drivers, the Smithsonian remained a white public institution in a predominantly African American city. While the legacy of the Civil War and the emergence of Jim Crow policies and laws impacted upon the Smithsonian, outright segregation was not significantly enforced within the Institution (Henson, 2015). Unlike museums in other large cities, such as the Metropolitan Museum in New York, which limited and segregated black visitors, the Smithsonian Museums were never segregated at either visitor or staff level, yet Walker suggests the re-categorisation of collections during the mid-twentieth century echoed policies of keeping 'races' apart (Walker, 2013, p. 40). The 'increase and diffusion of knowledge' was pursued as a universal and global goal and the broad remit was for humankind, which philosophically designated the Smithsonian as having a higher purpose beyond local (national) policies and practices. Nevertheless, racial tensions in the city ultimately prevented the mixing of blacks and whites in public spaces, and right up until the early 1960s, the Smithsonian was almost exclusively visited by whites (Green, 1967, pp. 6-7). An exception to the general pattern of white visitorship was an annual event at the National Zoo. Spending Easter Mondays at the Smithsonian's Zoological Park became a popular family activity for many African Americans by 1900. Traditionally, blacks worked as servants on Easter Sunday, and as a result, Easter Monday became an unofficial day of recreation for African Americans at the turn of the century (National Zoo, 2015). This Easter visiting tradition goes unmentioned in Goode's account of Smithsonian visitors and the Zoological Park in his 1895 publication, suggesting a lack of emphasis on non-white audiences at this time (Goode, 1895).

The first display of African American culture at the Smithsonian was a travelling exhibit known as *The American Negro Artists Show* in 1929. While not a Smithsonian-developed show, the Smithsonian agreed to host the exhibit of more than 50 artworks following negotiations with the exhibit sponsors; the Federal Council of Churches (FCC) and the Harmon Foundation (SIA, 2017). As a project developed partially in response to the rise in racial violence across the nation since 1919, the exhibition was a significant attempt to counter the racial hatred that was rife during the 1920s towards more harmonious racial relations (SIA, 2017). In contemporary correspondence around this exhibition planning, senior Smithsonian personnel revealed concerns about the likely African American visitorship as potentially an ‘embarrassment’ for those using the main gallery spaces at the Smithsonian (SIA, 2017). The exhibition ran in the foyer of the National Museum building, away from the National Gallery of Art, and proved a popular show with African Americans and critics (SIA, 2017). Yet the Smithsonian were concerned about the ‘political’ nature of the show, and it was clear that the high turnout of black visitors was not something the Smithsonian desired to repeat. Voices for national recognition within cultural and historical narratives, however, were beginning to mount.

The first African American museum in the nation was begun in 1868 at the Hampton Institute in Virginia, a black college founded in the immediate aftermath of the American Civil War, in recognition of a general belief of educational potential of museums to support an emerging educated class (Schwarzer, 2006, p. 9). Beyond black college campuses however, African American museums were not a feature of the public museum landscape until the middle of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the idea of a national museum or memorial dedicated to African Americans had long been articulated as African Americans began to call for their own dedicated spaces and institutions. In 1915, Union Army veterans gathered together on the Mall to celebrate half a century since their 1865 victory march down Pennsylvania Avenue at the close of the Civil War. Yet for some African American veterans, the event was described as “bittersweet” as they had not been invited to join the march of fifty years before (Wilkins, 2003). Adding to this, the discrimination faced by the veterans during the 1915 anniversary celebrations led the *Baltimore Afro-American* newspaper to ask: ‘What has [sic] these 50 years of fame or honor to them that they might feel proud that they once fought for a grateful country?’ (cited in Wilkins, 2003). Following

the march, a number of veterans calling themselves the 'Colored Citizens Committee' wrote to President Woodrow Wilson of their desire to build a national memorial to African American achievement in Washington D.C. It took until 1929 for the then President Coolidge to pass a law to authorise the creation of a National Memorial Building to African American achievements, but the country slipped into economic depression and the memorial was never built (Wilkins, 2003). Although not a Smithsonian project, this idea for a permanent memorial presence in Washington would be the precursor to the National Museum of African American History and Culture established in 2003. The lack of funds from Congress would thwart several attempts to establish such a museum for several decades in the late twentieth century, and the possibility of such a museum under the Smithsonian umbrella did not resurface in a significant way until the 1980s.

3. Race as a category

In the early part of the twentieth century, with the biological notion of the existence of distinct races still intact, the Smithsonian approached race as a category in terms of research, collections and approaches to display. Museums pursued knowledge of 'racial subjects' in terms of national policy, scientific accuracy, and to record groups at risk of 'disappearing' or becoming 'tainted' by the forces of modernisation. Yet the social and educational services that public museums were seen to provide, while predominantly focused on notions of class rather than race, also fostered small pockets of outreach and education activities that reached African American and new immigrant audiences (Schwarzer, 2006, pp. 11-12). At a time of legal segregation and overt racial violence in the South, museums in a handful of places stepped over racial categories through policies of education for all. Indeed, museums were imagined as sites for public education and underpinned by democratic ideals from the earliest days of the American Association of Museums (see for example, AAM, 1907, pp. 85-87).

The pioneering educational practices of John Dewey, and the innovative outreach activities of Brooklyn Children's Museum in the 1890s, had begun to open museums up to more inclusive social agendas (Alexander, 1997: pp. 133-138). As highly valued institutions, museums were looked upon by civic leaders as resources to promote a set of values and

moral codes for communities and to raise aspirations (Schwarzer, 2006, pp. 8-10). Yet as Schwarzer notes, museums emphasising an inclusive public service could be understood to be sending 'mixed messages' in the context of a deeply segregated society (Schwarzer, 2006, p. 10). Museums, she notes, may have been open to all, and even free of charge, but they were often sited in public parks and venues considered 'off-limits' to people of colour (Schwarzer, 2006, p. 10). Some museums had special opening times for black visitors, yet some museum personnel may still have refused entry to those attempting to visit (Schwarzer, 2006, p. 10). By the 1920s, the social agenda of museum curator John Cotton Dana was to continue the push away from elitism and offer new forms of participatory practice and access for Americans with disabilities and for working-class families. Dana, of the Newark Museum in New Jersey broadened access to his museum to diverse communities and sent collections out to community organisations such as schools, clubs and libraries (Alexander, 1997, p. 15). Many museums of art in the United States were also centred on educational missions, and by the end of the 1930s, the notion of museums as essentially in the service of public education was widespread (Newsom and Silver, 1978, p. 16).

Against this backdrop of reform, the Smithsonian pursued an agenda of education for the masses yet, like other museums, lacked a direct role in contemporary movements for racial equality. Nevertheless, the Institution was to play host to a remarkable historically-focused exhibition in the mid-1940s, which was explicitly designed to address contemporary racism. Much as the American Negro Artists show of the 1920s, the exhibition was disconnected from the central concerns of the Smithsonian, but indicated a general tolerance and support for addressing race in society through the contained approach of a hosted exhibition. Opened in May 1944, *Portraits of Outstanding Americans of Negro Origin* was developed by the Harmon Foundation, and was created 'with the express goal of reversing racial intolerance, ignorance and bigotry by illustrating the accomplishments of contemporary African Americans' (National Portrait Gallery, 2015). The Harmon Foundation, which had also helped to develop the earlier show, was established in 1922 during the Harlem Renaissance, and was widely known for its support for African Americans in the arts and the recognition of African American achievements in other spheres of public life (National Portrait Gallery, 2015). *Portraits of Outstanding Americans of Negro Origin* toured

around the United States for a decade, and further portraits were added over time to the original twenty-three in the exhibition.

The recognition of individual African Americans in the 1940s was not confined to socially-minded philanthropic institutions such as the Harmon Foundation. In a post-war climate that was turning towards a recognition of national advances in science and technology, and a visible display of racial tolerance at home, President Truman designated the 5th of January as George Washington Carver Day in honour of the late Carver's services to education and science. Indeed, Carver was one of those featured in the Harmon Foundation's 'Portraits' exhibition. In 1954, as the Supreme Court overturned the constitutional basis for separate-but-equal segregation, the exhibition tour was prematurely ended, in the misguided belief that racial tolerance had been achieved (National Portrait Gallery, 2015).

Beyond hosting this externally created exhibition, however, the Smithsonian Institution in the 1940s was not demonstrably active in celebrating minority group achievements, or confronting the social and political issues of race within Jim Crow America. While museum institutions in other areas such as New York and Chicago had at their core notions of cultural education, the Smithsonian's steadfast mission 'To increase and diffuse knowledge', was served in the 1940s by a focus on natural and biological scientific research, under the leadership of two natural scientists, Charles Greeley Abbot (1928-1944) and Alexander Wetmore (1945-1952). Despite advancements in inclusive practices elsewhere in the museum world earlier in the century, the Smithsonian was to inch away from its socially inclusive roles in an era shaped by a suspicion of communist sympathies, particularly directed at cultural progressives. Indeed, the educational philosophy of the much-celebrated Dewey had by the 1950s been dismissed as 'communistic', particularly in reference to his association with art collector Albert Barnes who was a believer in "'Negro" education' (Schwarzer, 2006, p. 18). It was also a time of increasing professionalism and a focus on standards, together with a wider shift towards more overt patriotism. As the Cold War progressed, the Smithsonian prioritised work that would strengthen the nation's sense of resolve and its technical achievements in relation to the rest of the world. Yet some ten years later, with the arrival Secretary S. Dillon Ripley and the passing of the Civil Rights Act 1964, the Smithsonian would begin to outwardly shift attention towards social issues and to

take a more active stance in progressing rights movements that were gaining momentum in society.

During the mid-1950s, the perceived inaccuracies of racial characteristics in cultural displays of American Indians at the time, namely those in the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, were coming under increasing scrutiny by anthropologists, as critical advances in the 'science' of race developed. The task for young anthropologists who recognised exhibitions as a key educative tool, was on correcting the simplified portrayal of American Indians with more accurate representations, which could better demonstrate the complexity and diversity of American Indian cultures. These efforts were celebrated in the press. In a contemporary review of the 1955 exhibition of Carl Bodmer's work, noted as an 'artist of Indians', *The Washington Post* writer Leslie Portner begins by commenting on the proliferation of images of American Indians and their wide appeal for Americans. Portner's article details the inaccuracies of Hollywood's portrayals of Indians, a topic which was later to come under strong scrutiny from activists who were challenging popular stereotypes of Native Americas, towards the end of the century. Portner writes:

The wide variation in physiognomy [in the paintings] is another surprise; here again Hollywood has accustomed us to a hawk-nosed classic type, completely ignoring the wide variation in individual tribal characteristics. It is refreshing to be taken again to the source [Bodmer's paintings], and to find an accurate record of how the Indian actually looked and dressed, and how much richer and more varied his life was, than is usually thought (Portner, 1955).

Of course, race as a category was not being significantly dismantled as a concept overall in this and other exhibitions at the time, nor was it challenged in the press. At the heart of curatorial re-interpretation lay new ideas in the rapidly evolving discipline of anthropology, rather than a decisive break with the existence of the race as a fixed biological trait. As Bhatt has noted, although race as a category began to be contested after the Second World War, the concept continued to thrive in academia (Bhatt, 2010, p. 90). The Smithsonian Annual Reports of the early 1950s, for example, which report on the activities and achievements of each Smithsonian Institution department, describe comparative anatomies and physiologies of 'Eskimos', 'Whites' and 'Negroes', including skin colour, facial features and cranial differences, signalling a particular focus in racial categorisation efforts. There was widespread interest in this topic, among staff researchers and visitors alike. In these same

reports, the Bureau of American Ethnology sections note the 'numerous inquiries concerning the American Indians, past and present, of both continents' (Smithsonian Institution, 1951).

Bequests from teachers of primary and secondary grades and from Scout organisations continue to increase and indicate a rapidly growing interest in the American Indians throughout the country (Smithsonian Institution, 1951, p. 95).

Recognising the long-standing interest in American Indians among the American public, the National Museum of Natural History opened the first of its modernised Indian Halls in 1955. The Indian Halls were the product of nine years planning, and the focus of the redisplay was largely on technological advancements in exhibition media (Walker, 2007, p. 44), and educational resources, as well as new 'scientific' knowledge of particular tribal groups. Dummies representing American Indians, some dating back to the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, were remodelled and repainted with "various shades of brown" according to up-to-date knowledge of particular tribal groups' features (Sampson, 1955). The concept of the first Indian Hall, which focused on geographic regions (Walker, 2007, p. 44), was outlined in *The Washington Post* in the Spring of 1955, shortly before the Hall's opening: 'The idea is to interpret the basic economy of each Indian culture in terms of their food, clothing, shelter and handicrafts' (Sampson, 1955). One element that this exhibition sought to refresh was the way Indians themselves were included in the exhibit. The positioning of dummies in a series of dioramas was intended to show objects in use, in ceremonies and life-like scenes. *The Washington Post* relished the new approach. 'The Hopi Indians are now doing their famous snake dance at the Smithsonian Institution with the benefit of Broadway stage lighting', the *Post* announced on 17 April, 1955 (Sampson, 1955). In the Pueblo display 'a young Indian maiden is shown painting a design on a pot, with her brushes and paints scattered around her' (Sampson, 1955). Indian traditions were being 'brought to life' in ways that differed from the earlier object focused displays and aimed to bring a heightened level of accuracy of ethnographic detail and sensationalism to the visitor's experience. These efforts were part of a long history of new technological innovations within the museum profession to enhance the authenticity of displays, by placing objects in their 'natural' surroundings. A push for more contextualised natural

history specimens could be seen as early as the turn of the century within the proceedings of the American Association of Museums (AAM, 1907).

A particular issue faced by the Indian Hall's curators was the erecting of a twenty foot Arapaho tipi, which was to be put up using the same technique as Arapaho tribe members used one hundred years ago (Walker, 2007, p. 52). Following many unsuccessful attempts, the chief curator Jack Ewers brought in an Arapaho elder who was able to remember how the tipi had been erected in her childhood. Consultation with communities was far from standard practice, however, and expertise on cultures was still seen to remain firmly with the curators themselves. This stance was beginning to be challenged, however, from the outside. During the 1950s, several letters were written to Ewers from Indian tribal leaders to ask for some intellectual control over the presentation, but the offers of help were politely refused (Walker 2007: p. 52). The direct refusal of Indian representatives in the modernising of the Indian Halls may have had a significant impact on the way that Indian advocates began to target the practices of museum-based study and exhibition of cultures, and demand their own voice be represented in the decades which followed (Walker, 2007; Cooper, 2008, pp. 2-3).

Despite genuine attempts to 'update' and reinterpret American Indian lifeways with accurate portrayals, and to correct "Hollywood" stereotypes within the Smithsonian Institution, the power to interpret and represent cultures was firmly with the white anthropologists, curators and experts, and categories of race still shaped display and programming within the Institution. Cultural authority within cultural groups themselves was not clearly visible or addressed by museum managers and curators at this time.

The 1950s was a politically charged time in debates about race, rights and segregation, yet it was the spectre of the Cold War that was playing heavily on the minds of Smithsonian senior officials and shaping their actions (Walker, 2013, pp. 52-53). This was to play a direct role in the organisation of collections of different cultures that had far-reaching implications for late twentieth century critiques of racism in cultural display. It was the opening of a new Smithsonian museum – the National Museum of History and Technology (NMHT) – that prompted a major disciplinary reorganisation of collections during the 1950s (Walker, 2013, p. 56). Ushered in to compete with a forthcoming Russian national museum glorying that

nation, the desire to bring 'history' together with 'technology' aligned with the American public's nationalistic spirit during the aftermath of the Second World War (Walker, 2013, p. 53). With the arrival of the new museum, the historical and technological collections and displays that were housed in the Natural History Building were more fully separated from the anthropological collections. As Walker tells us, 'the creation of the Museum of History and Technology precipitated a sorting process that resulted in the removal of all Euro-American cultural collections from the Division of Ethnology and, eventually, the Natural History Building' (Walker, 2013, p. 55). The racial significance of this sorting process for Walker, was merely the physical manifestation of existing boundaries in disciplinary realms where anthropologists were not as concerned with 'modern' and 'civilized' peoples, and where historians largely emphasised the political activities of white men (Walker, 2013, p. 55). Despite the disciplinary logic of this process for Smithsonian staff, the parallels with broader changes in the organisation of people across the city may have been plain to see. As Walker notes:

Although not explicitly stated, the racial assumptions behind the sorting of collections and rearrangement of departments were apparent. Using the word "segregated" to describe the process of sorting would have had a particular resonance in the first decade of the twentieth century, the period when Jim Crow became firmly entrenched in Washington, D.C. It was in this period that facilities in several government offices were segregated (Walker, 2013, p. 40).

Prior to the 1960s, the Smithsonian, in alignment with the museum sector as a whole, largely approached matters of race in terms of disciplinary knowledge and the pursuit of accuracy and authenticity in modes of display. Museums rendered race as a subject of study and display rather than showing signs of wrestling with movements towards the recognition of social or structural issues within the Institution or beyond, even though shifts in the social landscape were beginning to take hold.

As the United States gradually edged into an era of mass civil rights campaigning and protests over the treatment of minority groups, the goals of self-determination and self-representation, initially officialised by government for Native Americans in the 1930s, were becoming clearly aligned goals to counter the use of Native culture in museums. Of key concern was the grouping of Native American culture together with specimens of natural

history, and this was to be a recurring criticism of museums' unacceptable categorisation of cultures for years to come. For Walker, 'The physical separation of collections and exhibits accompanied a deeper separation that would fundamentally recast the notion of a 'universal museum and would open the doors towards culturally specific museums' (Walker, 2013, p. 40). In making racial categorisation visible, this separation certainly provided the impetus for continued external pressure to push against traditionally white disciplinary expertise and control of cultural collections.

4. Race as a social issue

The Civil Rights movements which gained widespread attention in the US in the 1960s, cast a critical eye over all arenas of cultural production. Finding existing representations of African American, Native American and other ethnic groups insufficient, inaccurate and indeed harmful, increasingly organised groups consisting mainly (although not solely) of self-identified members of the marginalised-groups in question began to claim some power over these representations (Jonaitis and Berlo, 2008, p. 209). The movement towards self-determination was, of course, not limited to cultural representation and production, but spanned the wider political and social spheres of American society. In general terms the outcome of many Civil Rights protests was a rise in culturally-specific ideas, histories and consciousness, which not only worked to complicate the image of a dominant white American culture, but also created new spaces and resources for cultural and political expression of various ethnic and cultural groups in society. Existing museums played multiple roles in the Civil Rights movements, most often symbolising the establishment and critiqued for their unacceptable representations of particular groups, while also serving as sites for potential redress. It was during this era in the United States (and elsewhere) that many new museums focusing on particular racial, ethnic, or cultural groups were first conceived of, even if the doors to such institutions did not finally open until later in the century.

Race began to be increasingly cast as a social issue in need of addressing during the early years of the 1960s and this spurred a number of new initiatives across the museum landscape. Educational activities, community festivals, mobile art vans, and other forms of

outreach were devised to address notions of diversity (Schwarzer, 2006, p. 20). At the Smithsonian, new interdisciplinary programmes, and emerging research into 'folklife' traditions characterised an era of fluid responsiveness to social changes that were taking place beyond the Mall. From being understood as a category, or a subject for display, and framed around traditional disciplinary concerns, race began to be recognised as a social issue to be addressed. While Smithsonian curators working on major history exhibitions were becoming aware of the political importance of exhibitions amidst the events of the Civil Rights Movement, the emerging recognition of an insufficient level of inclusion within their practice was difficult to content with. As a young curator in political history at the new NMHT in the early 1960s, Keith Melder brought a strong interest in women's rights movements, but ultimately found his museum's work was unable to adequately address issues of race. Speaking about the *Hall of Historic Americans* which opened in 1964, Melder and others had recognised at the time a lack of African American figures within the exhibition, largely due to an absence of such material among the key collection items available (Melder, 1999). Efforts were soon underway to identify and collect African American materials but the task, while 'well meaning' was complicated by the emergence of community-based and culturally specific approaches. Reflecting on the efforts of this era, Melder recalled:

It was a huge community relations problem, because, in a sense, at the very time we were discovering this topic, hundreds of other people were finding it also, and African-American colleges and other institutions suddenly realized that they were hot topics. The leadership in the African American community began developing its own historical programs. I think some of the people that we tried to deal with were a bit naturally suspicious and resentful of here's one of the premier cultural institutions in the country suddenly latching onto a story that had been largely forgotten (Melder, 1999).

Issues of underrepresentation of particular ethnic and racial groups had become a concern for some curators at the NMHT, but a collections-focused approach and a lack of access to, and existing relationships with, non-white community groups and scholars, encouraged staff to continue to use broad themes and emphasise diversity rather than specificity in their displays.

The biggest shift in the Smithsonian's official approach to issues of race came soon after Secretary S. Dillon Ripley took up office in 1964, the same year as the passing of the Civil

Rights Act which outlawed “discrimination or segregation of any kind on the ground of race, color, religion, or national origin’ (National Archives, 2015). In the early 1960s, the museum landscape across the nation was beginning to change as large-scale culturally specific museums devoted to African American history were beginning to spring up. Chicago's DuSable Museum of African American History led the way in 1961, with Detroit's Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History following shortly after in 1962. The Museum of African American History in Boston opened to the public in 1964. Prior to Ripley's arrival, however, the Smithsonian had made little attempt to acknowledge the movements which had taken shape and gained momentum for increased participation in mainstream cultural institutions. There were efforts to mark historical anniversaries, such as a small exhibit in 1963 in the Smithsonian's Arts and Industries building with objects relating to the Emancipation Proclamation of 100 years before, and the beginnings of curatorial interest in women's history and social history but issues of race were not at the forefront of these endeavours, and black history was notably absent in the inaugural displays of NMHT which opened in 1964 (Melder, 1999; Hughes, 1999). The idea of a culturally specific museum within the Smithsonian had not yet been formally suggested, and it would still be several years before a push for a national African American museum would resurface in Congress.

Between 1965 and 1968 under the direction of Secretary Ripley, the Smithsonian Annual Reports show an increasing emphasis on fostering a new social consciousness within the Institution. The Secretary's statements posited the need for contemporary social issues to become a key focus for some of the Smithsonian's activities. This lay in stark contrast to the focus of the Smithsonian under the direction of Leonard Carmichael, who stepped down as Secretary in January of 1964. Just eighteen months into his tenure, Secretary Ripley overtly positioned the Smithsonian as a socially minded institution, by aligning new education projects with the Democratic government's 'Great Society' social agendas. Societal issues and a climate of 'unrest' was something to which existing Smithsonian expertise could be directed, through the discourse of education. Yet there was no direct emphasis on addressing racial histories, or supporting contemporary racial justice movements as part of these efforts at this level. The emphasis was largely on widening audiences and incorporating diverse experiences into existing programming, and addressing broader social programmes. In the Annual Report for 1965, Ripley details initiatives to engage youths in

summer programs and training opportunities, as "part of the President's war on poverty and the Youth Opportunity and United Planning Organization campaigns" (Smithsonian Institution, 1965, p. 8).

Shifts were also beginning to be seen in the Institution's disciplinary foci. By 1966, a renewed urgency in anthropological research became a key focus for the Institution, as traditional lifeways were seen to be vanishing in the face of societal change and contact among indigenous communities worldwide. As declared in *Smithsonian Year*: 'the Smithsonian now plans to take a leading role in the rapid increase in anthropological field research that is required' (Smithsonian Institution, 1966, p. 5). The desire to record indigenous cultures before they were tainted with 'modern' society was an anthropological imperative. This heightened concern matched an ever-present interest from the American public. In 1967, *Smithsonian Year* reported that enquiries from members of the public about 'American Indians' were second only to enquiries about 'dinosaurs' (Smithsonian Institution, 1967, p. 19).

At this time, Smithsonian staff were evidently uncomfortable with the grouping of human cultures with natural history within the Museum of Natural History. Proposals were ignited by Ripley, following the lead of respected anthropologists, for a modern 'Museum of Man', which would see human cultures from disparate cultural groups displayed together, and crucially, separately from other forms of life at the Natural History museum (Smithsonian Institution, 1967, p. 5). For Ripley, this was not merely an issue of classification but an issue of respect.

The emergence of new nations [...] signals the end of the era when there was "civilized man" who ruled another kind of man called "natural man," and often displayed him in a museum along with precious jewels, rocks, and dinosaurs. All cultures and all humans should be accorded equal dignity and respect, and for this they deserve a museum of their own (Smithsonian Institution, 1967, pp. 5-6).

Yet a museum of this kind was never realised. In 1968, the Office of Anthropology instead opened the Center for the Study of Man, described as 'the focus for a number of broad, interdisciplinary programs involving scientists from other departments and bureaus of the Smithsonian and from academic centers elsewhere' (Smithsonian Institution, 1968, p. 300). An innovative venture, this new center failed to alter the status quo in display and

arrangement of American Indian material culture within the context of natural history. Such material continued to be displayed alongside rocks, gems and natural history specimens for several further decades, eventually inviting harsh criticism and creating a clear target for the Smithsonian to be charged with overt racism.

The Centre for the Study of Man was a bureau-level organisation that included an 'Urgent Anthropology Program' and an 'American Indian Program'. It was an attempt on the part of Ripley and renowned anthropologist Sol Tax, to address contemporary social issues at a global level through anthropological knowledge (National Anthropological Archives, 2015). The American Indian Program involved producing a new multiple-volume *Handbook of North American Indians*, and supporting 'action anthropology projects' in collaboration with various American Indian groups (National Anthropological Archives, 2015, p. 3). While research into American Indians had long been carried out through interactions with community groups in the field – Ewers' research with the Blackfeet in the 1940s as one example (Walker, 2013, p. 57) – the balance of power and the benefit of research, particularly with regard to dissemination, had long rested on the side of white anthropologists. With this new desire to using the Smithsonian's resources to tackle social issues of the day, however, a shift towards more mutually beneficial research and curatorship was beginning to form.

For Ripley, this shift needed to be equally applied at the level of exhibits and display. The Institution, he proclaimed, had 'a moral responsibility to consider its exhibitions for the effect that they may have on all sorts and conditions of people' (Smithsonian Institution, 1968, p. 1). In essence, cultural display could no longer be approached as divorced from political and social issues of the day. While not everyone at the Smithsonian felt comfortable with this position, Ripley's stance was to inform the newly established Smithsonian Folklife Festival from the start.

In 1966, Ripley approached Ralph C. Rinzler, a specialist in crafts and music, about the idea of a concert series featuring ethnic music styles at the Smithsonian (Walker, 2013, p. 93). The outcome of this meeting however, was the seeds of an idea of a folk festival that would bring musicians, artists, and craftspeople from diverse regions in America to Washington D.C. (Walker, 2013, p. 93). Rinzler was eventually hired by the Smithsonian to see this

project through. In many ways, the initial programme for the Smithsonian Folklife Festival was attuned with the anthropological push for urgently capturing diversity in musical traditions, in the face of modernisation and rapid social and cultural change. Prior to his Smithsonian appointment, Rinzler was motivated in his extensive fieldwork to capture and help revive local musical traditions before they could be homogenised or commercialised (Walker, 2013, pp. 97-98).

The first Festival in 1967 brought together traditional cultural practices and performances of many kinds, broadening the Smithsonian's remit towards contemporary cultural practices. Intended to present to the public 'living traditions', it sought to showcase a range of traditional American cultures and offer a more dynamic and fluid representation than those within the more static cases and cabinets of the Smithsonian museum buildings (Walker 2013, p. 100). The Festival featured 'American basket makers, carvers, doll makers, needleworkers, potters, blacksmith, silversmith, spinners, weavers' and performances of 'brass and string bands, gospel, spirituals, music from Puerto Rico and New Orleans, folk ballads, and Mesquakie Indian music and King Island Eskimo dancers' (Smithsonian Folklife Festival, 2015). From the start, the Festival was inclusive of different cultural groups, including those seen as 'white', and pushed the boundaries of museum representation particularly through the interactions between visitors and cultural performers themselves: a wholly new opportunity in 1967 for the Smithsonian visiting public. Influenced by his earlier fieldwork, Rinzler was convinced of the need to involve cultural practitioners and performers themselves in the way their craft was framed and interpreted (Walker, 2013, p. 103). The dialogic nature of the Festival, where performers, staff, and visitors could interact on a social level, was the key enabler for establishing this kind of cultural authority (Walker, 2013, p. 103).

The success of the Festival in terms of visitor numbers and levels of satisfaction, evidenced through positive reviews and letters each year, was clear, yet some Smithsonian curators questioned the Festival's intellectual standards with the ceding of 'interpretive authority to non-professionals' appearing as 'an abrogation of the responsibility to increase and diffuse knowledge' (Walker, 2013, p. 111). As Walker explains:

Despite its success, the festival remained the rebellious stepchild of the Smithsonian, and the institution's officials viewed it by turns as an out-of-control experiment in

need of reform and a vital asset that burnished the Smithsonian's reputation (Walker, 2013, p. 116).

These first few annual Folklife Festivals played a significant role as a platform for Native American activists. Issues of racial injustice and intolerance were voiced at first through introductory speeches and opportunistic moments during Native-led performances (Walker, 2013, p. 116). Many Native performers were ultimately participating in order to alter the widespread stereotypes of American Indians among the public as war-like, primitive, or culturally fixed in the past (Walker, 2013, p. 116). This goal, however, notably differed from Rinzler's own interpretive goal in bringing diverse cultural practitioners together. For Rinzler at the first Festival in 1967, the American Indian elements were chosen to illustrate the very nature of tradition, as changing over time, rather than any social or political goal (Walker, 2013, p. 135). Recognising the way the Festival was being used, Rinzler changed his approach.

From 1970 to 1976, Rinzler sought the assistance of Clydia Nahwoosky, a Cherokee woman who worked in the federal offices to help support the political and cultural aspects of the American Indian programming in a culturally sensitive way (Walker, 2013, p. 131).

Nahwoosky chose to design the American Indian programming to include both cultural performances and discussions of key social issues such as land rights, the Federal policy of termination, and tribal recognition and poverty on reservations (Walker, 2013, p. 131).

Linking cultural traditions with the political and social context of Native communities was, for Nahwoosky, vital in combatting the devastating effect of white America's view of American Indians that had shaped popular culture, museum display, and federal Indian policy over the decades (Walker, 2013, p. 132). This innovative programming of the early seventies anticipated the interpretive approach of the National Museum of the American Indian that was to come some thirty years later (Walker, 2013, p. 131).

During his early years as Secretary, Ripley was pushing for a radical rethinking at the core of the Smithsonian's offer: the cultural displays of the History and Technology Museum.

Addressing this museum in particular, he stated his position in the *Smithsonian Year* of 1968

The principle facts of the history of our nation revolve around the cultural pluralism of our people. We are not all as one and we are certainly not all nice and 'gussied up,' nor have we ever been. Our museums, among them the Museum of History and

Technology, should be concerned with this theme of presenting truth in a social context. Far too little has been done to delineate the history of the ethnic minorities of our country or to single out and describe their achievements. In the preservation trap, it appears as if innovation and intellectual and technological achievement were either racially anonymous or were the prerogative of Anglo-Saxons from western Europe, especially Protestant of course. [...] Here and there in the historical museum there may be a reference to slavery or to wars against the Indians, but for the most part our ethnic subcultures, our minority groups, come off very badly indeed (Smithsonian Institution, 1968, p. 3).

A full two years before Nahwooksy's curation of the Folklife Festival's American Indian programming, Ripley was already calling for cultural display to be set in its social context. Yet at the time of writing this, a new Smithsonian museum in a suburb of Washington D.C. was already providing a new socially-driven series of displays for its local, predominantly African American community. The Anacostia Neighborhood Museum was a Smithsonian experiment which quickly turned into a culturally specific museum at the forefront of museum practices in community engagement.

5. Race as inclusion

The task of addressing racial marginalisation at the Smithsonian eventually took a more tangible and permanent form with the founding of a new community-focused museum. By the late 1960s, the Smithsonian was directing its attention to new experiments which could broaden its audiences, its educational role, and the need to reach out to the African American communities close to home (Smithsonian Institution, 1967, p. 15; Committee for a Wider Audience, 1988, p. 2). In the annual report of 1967, Ripley began to draw attention to the museum audience as a subject of study in its own right: an 'untapped resource' in the study of culture and use of knowledge (Smithsonian Institution, 1967, p. 6). Within this climate, at a museum education conference sponsored by the American Association of Museums, Ripley envisaged 'an experimental store-front museum' to link the Smithsonian's collections and activities to a disadvantaged Washington D.C. community (SIA, 2011). Ripley was keen to diversify the Smithsonian's visitor base and in particular, wanted to attract the 'black community', whom he realised, made up a significant percentage of city's population (Conoway, 1995, p. 343).

This was to become the Smithsonian's first culturally specific museum. First named The Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, it focused on interpreting the local, social issues of the Anacostia community of Washington D.C., as a lens onto African American history and culture more broadly. Unlike other 'black museums' emerging at the time, such as those in Chicago and Los Angeles, The Anacostia Neighborhood Museum was not initially intended to be a 'culturally specific' museum in terms of subject as much as a 'satellite' Smithsonian museum. Anacostia museum curator Portia James noted that Smithsonian planners perceived the museum as 'an emissary institution that would bring the larger world of the Smithsonian to neighborhood-bound, non-museum-going, "isolated", inner-city African-American residents' (James, 2005, p. 343).

This museum project, as initially conceived, was concerned with empowering residents of a relatively deprived particular area to participate in the development of a new museum that was to be 'their' museum: 'It must be on the spot, participated in by the people who live there' (Ripley, 1969, p. 106). Anacostia was chosen as the site for the museum because it was an 'aspiring' area, populated by low-income families, and with a clear community infrastructure and active organisations concerned with social change (Davis, 1999, p. 50-51). Ripley's careful choice of location paid off. From the earliest days of planning the museum, there was a strong interest from local citizens who met as the Neighborhood Advisory Committee, and helped to open the museum with Smithsonian officials Charles Blitzler, who was then the director of its Office of Education and Training, and Caryl Marsh, a consultant to the City's Recreation and Parks Department (Alexander, 1997, p. 148). The Committee had a large membership overall, with ninety individuals at its first meeting. The only restriction to membership was that the majority of its members should be residents of the Anacostia region (James, 2005, p. 342).

The inaugural exhibition, which was never named, presented a range of objects from the Smithsonian collections (James, 2005, p. 342). The earliest activities of the museum duly followed the original intentions of Ripley, to bring something of the Smithsonian's collections and resources to this outlying neighbourhood. But then, a shift in perception among the community propelled the museum from a 'store-front' for the major museums of the Smithsonian to a neighbourhood museum and educational centre focused on local and national issues. Indeed, the Museum's first stated mission was 'the documentation and

preservation of the social and cultural history of African Americans from a community-based perspective' (Bass, 2006, p. 37). The new audience that Ripley had tried to reach was now the self-declared subject of the museum, and social issues were at the heart of its mission.

Tracing the development of exhibitions at the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum further illustrates a shift in the museum's mission, yet this was not simply a shift from Smithsonian collections to Anacostia's local history and culture. James notes that even the earliest exhibitions did not limit their focus to the neighbourhood, but also dealt with broader urban and national subjects, and, following the assassination of Martin Luther King and the ensuing riots, by the second year after its opening, exhibition themes were exclusively concerned with black history and culture (James, 2005, p. 343; Hutchinson, 1987). While museums of African American history had sprung up in small numbers across the country, the Anacostia Museum, where local residents were able to shape content and suggest new exhibition ideas, marked an innovative mode of practice, which, by the 1980s had gained widespread attention among museologists internationally, as an example of successful place-based community participation (Alexander, 1997, p. 149; Corsane, 2005: p. 11). The Museum produced a range of high quality exhibitions over the first eight years of operating. Working towards positive changes in the community, through educational and popular exhibits such as *The Rat: Man's Invited Affliction*, was a key element to its work. Such socially progressive exhibitions were supported by the Center for Anacostia Studies, established by the museum to put these social and environmental issues into an historical context. The idea for producing *The Rat* had originally been conceived after a conversation between staff and some local children who described experiences of encounters with rats (Kinard, 1987). Without an explicit plan to do so, the museum, through such interactions, gradually became a platform for the representation of 'urban' issues and the African American experience (Kinard, 1987).

The Anacostia Neighborhood Museum might have paved a clearer path towards community collaboration and ethnic group representation in the museums on the Mall. Yet the Anacostia remained in many ways at a distance from the Smithsonian's other museums. The way this museum was, for Ripley, located both physically and conceptually apart from the Smithsonian's spaces on the Mall comes through in a reflective account in *The Sacred Grove* which he authored in 1969:

I wanted to keep the Neighborhood Museum rather individual, just itself, different from the rest of the Smithsonian. It is their Museum in a real sense, not ours. However, after a while I had wanted to have a small, discreet sign put up, saying in effect, 'If you want more of this, take the such-and-such bus line over to central Washington and go to Constitution Avenue Northwest between Fifth and Fourteenth Streets and you can see more of it, on the Mall; [...]. How to get people who never went anywhere to go to a museum where somehow change and evolution in their own lives might be set in train? Surely, if museums of the future are to be valid, they must be of use, must communicate to the very people who need them most (Ripley 1969, pp. 10-11).

In his account, Ripley made some interesting assumptions about Anacostia residents in his pursuit of expanding their horizons: they never go anywhere; and exposure to the Mall's museums would be life-enhancing. As noted by Anacostia staff member Louise Hutchinson, Ripley approached the issue of black visitorship to the Smithsonian as predominantly caused by a lack of knowledge, interest, time or transport, rather than sensing an understanding of cultural barriers and feelings of being unwelcome and un-represented in the museums on the Mall (Hutchinson, 1987; see also Message, 2013, p. 211). Yet Ripley's primary aim was to encourage Anacostia residents to make the journey to the monumental centre to set in motion a real change in their lives. He appears not to see the same kind of possible benefit if the journey is *from* the Mall (or anywhere) *to* the Anacostia Museum. Yet the museum had already proven itself by this point as a venue of significant interest. As Conoway writes that 'During its first year, the Anacostia museum attracted 80,000 visitors from all over the city' (Conoway, 1995, pp. 343-346).

Despite this sense of distance, over the years that followed, Ripley remained a strong and unwavering and sometimes singular advocate for this experimental museum, whose first director was a well-respected and local community worker, John Kinard. Ripley supported Kinard's ambition to grow and develop the 'museum' from what was considered by many as an outreach programme, to a Congressionally-recognised national museum within the Smithsonian family (Hutchinson, 1987, pp. 34-35). Anacostia staff were encouraged by Kinard to develop relationships with key figures in the broader Institution and explore ways of collaborating (Hutchinson, 1987, p. 46). Yet the Anacostia Museum and its small but growing collection remained largely apart from the main Smithsonian. No major exhibition on the Mall sought to highlight the collections and themes that were being addressed at the

culturally-specific Anacostia Museum, nor attracted its audience to the Mall. The notion of community ownership and distinctiveness had perhaps closed-down opportunities for broader visibility and integration of this community's history and museum work.

It was the assassination in 1968 of Martin Luther King and the civil unrest that followed that were to be something of a turning point for several Smithsonian staff across the Institution with regards to addressing race. A memo was sent out by the Director General of Museums Frank Taylor to urge Smithsonian museum curators to reflect on how they could increase 'black presence' across the museums (Hoover, 2001, p. 19). Meanwhile, a new surge of contemporary collecting activities from the Division of Political and Reform History, based at the National Museum of American History, which sought to document the protests and marches of the 1960s, was adding a new layer of material evidence to the Smithsonian's collections (Message, 2013). In her account of the emergence of activist practice at the Smithsonian, Message noted the increasing 'interest in community-based museological practice' during the 1960s was in part connected to the civil rights demonstrations of this era, yet she also reveals that curatorial interest in 'contemporary collecting, community consultation and collaboration' played a role (Message, 2013, p. 6). But while there was certainly curatorial interest in social action, there was not yet a strong infiltration of race scholarship, nor sufficient visibility or recognition of established black history specialists that white curators felt they could draw on (Hutchinson, 1987). Attempts to address black history resulted in the appointment of a few established African American community members to education teams. Yet strikingly, according to curatorial staff at the time, the perceived shortage of access to black history specialists led to black designers and other non-curatorial staff at the Smithsonian being called upon to help with advice and efforts to integrate more diverse perspectives into exhibitions (Hutchinson, 1987; Kidwell, 1999).

The push for change was channelled into a series of new experiments – the Folklife Festival and the Anacostia Museum – that moved away from the Smithsonian's discipline focused approaches to race to address contemporary social contexts. Meanwhile, collections and staffing resources were beginning to be reviewed in small pockets of the Institution as part of a desire for more representative and inclusive histories; a task made more urgent and central in the wake of 1968. Race was being reckoned with through efforts to include wider histories, collections and staff. But it was to be the creation of the Anacostia Museum and

the presence of its staff within the Institution which would contribute to new, small-scale developments in addressing race through black history consciousness and scholarship over the coming decade of the 1970s.

6. Race as diversity

Although the Smithsonian emerged from the 1960s as a more socially-conscious institution, that had experimented in integration and inclusion, these initiatives had largely played out at a distance from the core and permanent work and sites of the Smithsonian. While a more open, experimental approach to addressing racial inequalities had been pursued, the years that followed saw such issues integrated and embedded into new discourses of cultural diversity and inclusive practice. With race as a scientific category discredited and new forms of inclusive practice flourishing, the ongoing spectre of racial categorisation and discourses of racial marginalisation began to lose their agency and urgency among white museum professionals, in what was still predominantly a white institution. This shift aligned with the broader cultural sphere, and with the rise of a new ethnic consciousness over the course of the 1970s that accented the celebration of ethnic diversity over the pursuit of racially-framed inclusion. While an emphasis on cultural diversity was to open the door to a handful of new minority museum professionals during this decade, it was the idea of a culturally specific museum on the Mall that would help retain the issue of race and racial marginalisation as an ongoing national concern.

Inspired by the African American civil rights demonstrations that were widespread across the United States, the American Indian Movement was officially launched in 1970. At the national level, the political and cultural landscape changed dramatically through the 1970s, as the American Indian Movement (AIM) developed and federal policies towards American Indians shifted towards an emphasis on self-determination. Legally and politically, tribal history and heritage were increasingly recognised and self-determination was pursued within the museum and cultural spheres. As a leading centre of anthropology, the Smithsonian Institution was a vilified federal institution in the landscape of 1970s Native rights activism (Cooper, 2008, p. 6; Walker 2011, p. 479). Yet at the same time, through the

approaches of Ripley, Rinzler and Nahwooksy, and the curatorial approaches at the Anacostia Museum, the political landscape of the Smithsonian seemed responsive and outwardly showed signs of interest in the inclusion of non-white individuals as consultants and collaborators during this time. Indeed, the civil rights movement was contributing to new forms of exhibition narrative that encouraged dialogue and elicited debate (Message, 2013, p. 47). As Message reveals, the Smithsonian was actively situating itself, through senior staff and curatorial activities, as a 'point of negotiation' between 'the people' and the government (Message, 2013, p. 47).

A climate of critique began to find its way in to the sector-level professional meetings, particularly through new museum education specialists who brought a focus on audiences and visitors. Indeed, during the 1970s, staff based at the Anacostia were to have a significant role in sector-facing meetings. This visibility would begin to open up opportunities for Anacostia staff in the broader Smithsonian, particularly in supporting new scholarship in black studies (Martin, 1973; Anon, 1973). 'Afro-American Studies' departments had emerged and were developing at universities around the country since the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the Smithsonian began new projects to identify the resources it had across its museum collections to teach and support black history as a distinct and new field (Hutchinson, 1987, p. 53).

The mid-1970s saw expansion of the Smithsonian Institution's museums on the Mall, with the completion of the Hirschhorn Museum in 1974, and the National Air and Space Museum in 1976. Congress approved a new national museum of African American history in Wilberforce, Ohio in 1972. A year later, the director of the newly created Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, Marvin Sadik, wrote to Secretary Ripley to suggest that the 'one remaining spot on the Mall might well be devoted to a National Museum of the American Indian' (Evelyn, 2004, p. 182). For Sadik, this would be an exercise in self-determination. It was, he wrote, 'high time that the American Indian was seen primarily on his own terms, rather than solely through the eyes of ethnologists, sociologists, historians, art historians, etc.' (Evelyn, 2004, p. 182). The suggestion was discussed informally among government officials and in December 1975, Vice President Nelson Rockefeller wrote to Sadik declaring his support of such a possibility. The Museum of the American Indian, established in 1908 in

New York by collector George Gustav Heye, was eyed by Secretary Ripley for a possible merger, yet no formal action was taken at this time (Evelyn, 2004, p. 182).

Meanwhile, across the Smithsonian, staffing had diversified to a small degree. 1972 saw Leon A. Higginbotham join as the first African American on the Board of Regents.

Higginbotham was a citizen member of the Board hailing from Pennsylvania. Dr. Bernice Johnson-Reagon, a renowned civil rights activist and musician, joined the American History Museum in 1978. The museum's assistant director for public programs Lonny Taylor described this as a time when that the Smithsonian was beginning to broaden its scope: 'The museum had been oriented to the American-Anglo point of view and we were trying to introduce Hispanic and black and Asian-American cultures' (Gamarekians, 1988, p. B6).

Describing her approach to the Smithsonian, Dr. Reagon said 'We felt the museum was also a public service agency and in some way it should be assisting society in coming to terms within itself, especially in transnational and changing times' (Gamarekians, 1988, p. B6; see also Cooper, 2008, p. 56). At the NMHT (later to be renamed NMAH), the results of hiring 'blacks, Hispanics and women in key managerial positions' over a number of years since the late 1970s was, for director Roger G. Kennedy, 'beginning to show up in our exhibition programming' (Gamarekians, 1988, p. B6). This indicates the clear expectation that staff of colour would ultimately instigate material change, and suggests a note of successful progression that diversity was being achieved. Non-white curators and staff were still highly under-represented, however, and a focus on diversity in staffing did not seem to be sustained. Recalling a conversation with a group of retirees, curator Lonnie Bunch, was surprised to hear of the lack of investment in new mid- and entry-level African Americans over the decades: 'Though they applauded the recent appointment of several minority curators, they startled me by saying that once "we leave, the professional staff at the museum will be whiter than it was in 1963"' (Bunch, 2010b, pp. 106-7). Reflecting in the 1980s, curator Ralph Rinzler noted that the senior leadership had failed to focus on diversity in staffing during the 1960s when programming began to be thought of in terms of diversity (Committee for a Wider Audience, 1988, p. 2). Indeed, the oft-used segregationist tactic of 'tokenism' appeared to be in operation within the Smithsonian (Formisano, 2004, p. 44; Ruffins, 2015b).

Under the leadership of Sadik, the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery (NPG) which opened at the end of the 1960s worked to collect and display portraits of those who had shaped the country. In a Smithsonian Council meeting in November of 1969, as the bicentennial programme planning was beginning to get underway, the newly appointed Sadik commented that he was keen to see 'a history of Black America' within his museum, and qualifying this statement said 'I hope that this Gallery will not only praise famous men but capture more honestly the spirit of this country' (Smithsonian Council, 1969, p. 3). However, at this same meeting, there was considerable discussion among Council members about the difficulties of focusing on any one ethnic group. A summary of the discussion suggested that while the Council was enthusiastic of emphasising diverse contributions in relation to the nation, as part of the bicentenary exhibition approaches, there would likely be significant pressures from 'governmental and lobbying groups' for inclusion. Indeed, the problems of 'focusing sharply on particular ethnic exhibits' as opposed to broader, cross-group themes such as migration and mobility was discussed at length (Smithsonian Council, 1969, p. 5). Despite Sadik's voiced aspirations, there appeared to be significant reservation among the Council members for what might now be referred to as 'culturally specific' programming (Smithsonian Council, 1969, p. 5).

In 1973, an exhibition entitled *Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution, 1770-1800* opened at the NPG. Supported by Sadik, the exhibition was led by curator Sidney Kaplan while the extensive schools programme was developed and run by Louise Hutchinson, an African American and socially-minded local, and a close acquaintance of Kinard and other Anacostia Museum staff. In this role, Hutchinson was keen to see African American history and education developed (Hutchinson, 1987). The exhibition was the first time that the early history of Washington D.C had been told with the role of black Americans woven in, offering a focus on the experiences of the struggle for black freedom and independence at this time. More akin to a historical, rather than an art exhibition, *Black Presence* utilised portraits but also documents and photographs (Strick, 1973). A further 'culturally specific' show focusing on the black experience followed, named *A Glimmer of their Own Beauty: Black Sounds of the Twenties*. As part of her schools' programming, Hutchinson was inspired to draw on the permanent displays and collections elsewhere in

the museum, such as portraits of white historical figures, that were intimately connected to black history (Hutchinson, 1987).

In contrast to the focus on black experiences in temporary shows at the NPG, exhibitions at NMHT were still dominated in the 1970s by a focus on diversity. Indeed, in a climate of increasing critique of museum representation, diversity itself often became the defining goal for cultural programming. Inspired by new social history and the growing visibility of African American history, NMHT curators brought an interest in a range of ethnic groups and experiences to their work (Hughes, 1999; Kidwell, 1999). Understood as a 'universal', national museum further justified such an approach. Yet this inclusive breadth proved unable to shift the sense of whiteness as the central frame of reference. Beyond the cultural history curators and within the costume department, curator Claudia Kidwell recalled other ways that diversity began to be approached:

We thought in terms of class [...] but had not thought about cultural groups. If anything, if we had of thought about it, we were in some ways sort of discouraged, because in an effort to be equal, you didn't collect information about that. You didn't ask about race. You didn't ask about ethnicity. [...] We were thinking in a sort of generalized hegemonic way, which had a white face on it (Kidwell, 1999, p. 12).

While diversity was a key goal, there were also small efforts to address race in other ways. An opportunity in the early 1970s to update a 1966 exhibition at NMHT enabled curators to address racial and degrading terminology and nod towards America's appreciation and fascination with Native peoples. However, it did so without recognition of the increasingly vocal calls for self-determination that were at that time being voiced by the AIM (Ahlborn, 1975). 'Art and Spirit of a People' was an exhibition of domestic and folk art that sought to represent diverse cultural and regional life, and the review was intended to 'correct errors, upgrade quality and improve appearance' (Ahlborn, 1969). References to Indians as 'squaws' were removed, and the draft of the new introductory text for the exhibition reinterpreted the presence of the many images of American Indians in mainly European-American folk art:

This lively, often sentimental collection of American popular art simply and diversely illustrates these themes: a people's religious fervour and awareness of death; the role of women and the family; the individualism of enterprise; [...] and the apology of a society salving its conscience with a multitude of images of the Indian (Ahlborn, 1969).

Although indicating a consciousness among curators of the effects of colonisation, and a hint towards an 'apology' of the nation, the thrust of the interpretation romantically overplayed a comforting idea for a white audience; that the numerous representations of American Indians in folk art ultimately represented an honouring of the Indian. In the climate of rights struggles, social critique, and AIM, this interpretation was clearly an attempt at a response. The objects within the exhibition, donated by a white collector Mrs. Marsh, were unable at this time to be recast in terms that could address racial violence in broader, direct and more social and political ways.

NMHT's exhibition *A Nation of Nations* opened in 1976 and was an early and significant attempt to include African Americans, Native Americans and other non-white cultural groups as a key part of the national story (Hughes, 1999). The exhibition was developed as part of the United States' bicentennial so it retained a note of celebration, but nevertheless did not shy away from drawing attention to various tensions in society over time, including 'the problems of prejudice and discrimination' faced by ethnic groups (Smithsonian Institution, 1974). Rather than present a cohesive whole, the exhibition focused on the tensions of ethnic and cultural diversity (Hughes, 1999). It was also one of the first exhibitions to use popular culture as a way of exploring history and opened up 'cultural history' as an approach at the Museum (Hughes, 1999; Kidwell, 1999). Nevertheless, as Walker notes, the focus on particular cultural groups was 'subsumed under the larger narrative of the United States as a nation of immigrants' (Walker, 2011).

In a review of a draft of the planned exhibition sections written in 1971, one NMHT chairman responded with strong support of including the black experience in the exhibition: 'The black experience simply has to be dealt with.' The response stated that 'the Negro's many craftsmanly skills and their contribution to American colonial culture and economy should be made explicit [...]' (NMHT chairman, 1971). The key philosophical position imagined for the exhibit, emphasised that it should not try to acknowledge the specific contributions made by 'each and every separate group' but rather emphasise the overall 'richness and diversity in American life that is a result of the peopling of a nation with various immigrant groups'. This was critiqued by the chairman, who pointed out that this would be very difficult to achieve: 'Surely it will be necessary to acknowledge some specific contribution from some separate groups, otherwise there will be no exhibit' (NMHT

chairman, 1971). Concerns abounded that there may be criticism and charges of bias if any specific groups were emphasised, suggesting curatorial sensitivity to external critique. 'I think', the response concluded, 'we have to ignore the possibility of complaints from some of those left out' (NMHT chairman, 1971).

While cultural history was blossoming at NMHT, the maturation of the Smithsonian Folklife Festival from the late 1960s to the end of the 1970s echoed the development of a new field of inquiry – ethnic studies – that had emerged across universities and college campuses. The rise of ethnic studies scholarship can be retrospectively seen as having two strands, one which accented race and another which accented ethnicity. Unlike the emerging scholarship on race which prioritised issues such as institutional racism, segregation, and the legacy of slavery, largely written by non-white scholars, ethnic studies scholars who were mainly white, focused on issues of assimilation, ethnic identity and immigration (Feagin and O'Brien, 2010, p. 53). In different ways, the Smithsonian-fostered dialogue concerned both strands of new scholarship that lay under the umbrella of 'ethnic studies'.

In 1973, the Smithsonian founded the Research Institute on Immigration and Ethnic Studies, which was transferred to the Center for the Study of Man just a year later when this bureau was established. The primary role of the Research Institute on Immigration and Ethnic Studies was to study the various waves of immigration to the United States since the 1960s, as well as immigration to US regions abroad (SIA, 2015b). Popular as well as academic interest in ethnic identity was to grow over the 1970s (Cohen, 1979, p. 399). In 1978 the *Guide to Ethnic Museums, Libraries and Archives in the United States* was published by the School of Library Science at Kent State University, which surveyed 828 'ethnic' institutions including those of 'Afro-Americans, American Indians, Jews, and Spanish speaking groups' (Wynar and Buttlar, 1978, p. 121). This publication evidences a newly emerging 'type' of museum: a specialist museum focusing on particular racial or ethnic group and which constructs that group as a 'minority'. In this account, such museums are rendered distinct from mainstream or universal regional or national art and history museums. Nevertheless, it grouped together museums concerned with white immigrant populations with African American and tribal museums, thus emphasising the role of such museums in representing ethnic differences rather than racial justice. It was the first publication to capture the breadth and scope of these new museums across the United States.

Richard E. Ahlborn, a curator of cultural history at the Smithsonian's American History Museum and a specialist in Spanish American arts became interested in the notion of ethnic museums in the late Seventies. In 1977, Ahlborn spoke at a seminar entitled 'The Immigrant Ethnic Museum,' and a few years later, wrote, with historian Howard W. Marshall, a paper entitled 'Two Views of Ethnic Museums.' This paper was never published, but it began to problematize the culturally specific museum movement that had swept the country (Ahlborn and Marshall, no date). Ahlborn and Marshall's paper discussed what they saw as the common pitfalls of ethnic museums, including the insular and essentialising nature of these museums, which tended not to define cultural groups within their larger social or national contexts. The paper reflected upon an ethnic studies approach to American culture, showing how broad notions of tradition and folklife framed the key concerns of ethnic scholars:

Acculturation, assimilation, regional personality, cultural patterning, change and conflict rivit [sic] attention in social history. Crevecoeur's old question - 'what is an American?' - keeps getting asked. With the coming of ethnic studies as an approach to American culture, we have started looking again at what ethnicity means and will mean [...]. One of the problems in studying folklife is the omnipresence of evolutionary theory, which when applied to culture makes us suppose that ethnicity and folklore are dying out and that what remains are mere survivals from a more primitive age with little or no social function left. That view misses the point. Traditions (like culture itself) are constantly changing and revised by their users and keepers (Ahlborn and Marshall, no date, p. 13).

Intriguingly, Ahlborn and Marshall make no direct reference to the peculiarities of ethnic museums relating to the African American museum movement that had, by the late 1970s, permeated many large urban centres across the United States. Of key concern were the multitude of museums that had emerged in this decade to record and interpret 'Euro-American' ethnic groups. Marshall's observations in the second part of this paper nevertheless point to commonality of purpose between both types of ethnic museum:

Museums show links with the past. They are 'living history' at their best, and can nicely portray the community's social history. [...], these operations can speak for those who have had no voice, for those who are left out of formal history. In this sense, folk or ethnic museums are revisionist and try to correct false stereotypes (Ahlborn and Marshall, no date, p. 21).

At the core of their account of ethnic museums, while acknowledged as political and community-focused, their assumed singular focus (on a particular group), renders them

problematic in terms of issues of accuracy. It is clear from this account that the role of culturally specific museums, as perceived by Ahlborn and Marshall, predominantly involved issues of cultural change, tradition and assimilation. While understood as culturally constructed, ethnicity in their account is approached as a subject - as ethnic identity - rather than referencing a socio-historical or political frame in which ethnicity (or racial identity) is additionally a tool of subjugation in the maintenance of cultural or racial hierarchy.

Whereas the language of ethnicity as identity and culture found an easy home in Smithsonian thinking and practice at the time, there was no corresponding familiarity or confidence with the emerging discourses and scholarship on race, which foregrounded the 'critical race' tradition of writing and research that was emerging. Indeed, within the Smithsonian, the emphasis on representing ethnic diversity was firmly directed to notions of culture, cultural expression and an anthropological agenda of 'cultural conservation'; a concept that emerged from a policy study led by the United States Department of the Interior and the Smithsonian's American Folklife Centre in the early 1980s (Kreps, 2003, p. 12). It would be some years later, during the mid-1980s and throughout the 1990s, before race scholarship would significantly permeate the Institution. Yet by the late 1970s, some ten years after its opening, the Anacostia Museum had begun to take on the role of being the 'advocate within the Institution for Afro-American studies, history and culture' (Hutchinson, 1987b, p. 38). The Anacostia Museum also had a role with supporting minority museum professionals and museums beyond the institution, indicating a significant influence of this 'culturally specific' museum on the wider sector beyond the Smithsonian. Indeed, for the bicentenary, the Anacostia provided touring exhibits on subjects relating to minority experience in the Americas (Smithsonian Institution, 1974). While pockets of temporary programming were beginning to focus on representing black history as the 1970s progressed, emerging voices in the scholarship on race, rights and self-determination from beyond the Smithsonian were to transform approaches to race within the Smithsonian as the era of the history and culture wars commenced.

7. Conclusion

The path towards culturally specific approaches from the Smithsonian Institution's founding to the end of the 1970s was far from an even or straightforward one. Even as disciplinary boundaries were critiqued and reformed, and even as activists participated in the core and periphery activities and programming of the Smithsonian in a civil rights climate, a holistic shift in racial thinking at the Smithsonian did not occur. Although efforts to alter the core offer were promoted, the focus of transformation was on a range of small programmes and initiatives. It would take time for culturally specific histories to find even a temporary place on the Mall, and these approaches were viewed with apprehension in an era that was already newly preoccupied with the inclusion of diverse perspectives in the national story.

Over the century and a half since its establishment, the Smithsonian mirrored broader approaches to race across society. The notion of race as a scientific category and subject of study gave way to an outpouring of social action and experimentation to alleviate the injustices of marginalised groups during the era of Civil Rights activism. External forces and events ultimately prompted a degree of change within the Institution towards greater acknowledgement of other perspectives on American history and culture. Yet these changes were dominated by the goals of inclusion, diversity, and integration rather than group self-definition, and efforts did not significantly connect with discourses of power, voice and rights. Racial issues and histories were considered difficult to address as subjects in their own right and such work was considered too political and potentially problematic in its exclusion of other issues and histories. In contrast, inclusive programming and principles of diversity could support a celebration of American history as a whole and would also maintain white cultures at the core of the interpretation. A new racial consciousness was, however, building on the periphery of core Smithsonian practices, directed largely by external movements in the development of African American history, sector-level platforms for museum practice, new scholarship, and civil rights organising. Small shifts and new ideas emerged at the Smithsonian to address race not simply as a response to civil rights movements, through a dedication to inclusion, but as a continuation of them. Indeed, it would take significantly more organisation and action around issues of race in the decades that followed to translate a growing racial consciousness into new museum practice. New,

'culturally specific museums' were to ultimately offer a key and sustained platform for this work to progress.

Summing up the influence of Secretary Ripley, Smithsonian cultural historian Walker has recently suggested that he approached the issue of race in four distinct ways (Walker, 2013, p. 6-8). First, he notes, Ripley gave rise to an annual folklife festival as a form of an outdoor range of 'living' displays, which showcased traditional crafts and ways of life from across many cultural groups. Secondly, Ripley embarked upon a series of improvements to the core exhibitions to address the evolutionary ordering of cultures that had been the mainstay of cultural display since the Institution's inception. Thirdly, Ripley put forward a new vision for a universal museum – a Museum of Man – that could draw together different cultural groups to form a coherent and diverse view of America. Fourthly, Ripley addresses race through the creation of culturally specific museums. Walker's observations show clearly how Ripley was able to address race in a host of different ways. Yet this summary omits the grassroots influences of the Anacostia museum community and the centrality of external events in the civil rights era that prompted an urgent, 'top-down' Smithsonian response. It also suggests that race was thoroughly tackled in this era, when in fact the Smithsonian outwardly fostered support in new knowledge areas of ethnicity and diverse cultural traditions, and inclusive programming focused on enhancing the core, rather than tackling the issue of racial histories and legacies of racist federal policies among non-white groups. That would come much later in the century, beyond Ripley's tenure, with a shift to legally-defined rights-based practice to recognise and enact Native group access and ownership of collections. Indeed, Walker's narrative obscures the fact that Ripley and his team did not necessarily set out to focus on contemporary political grievances and social issues when they created the Folklife Festival and the Anacostia Museum. Indeed, the emergence of the Smithsonian's first culturally specific museum was part of an audience development drive rather than an attempt to address the issue of race at a programmatic, interpretive or staff level. Finally, at the level of culturally specific museums, Walker's analysis stops short of the ways in which they alone became the foci for a permanent presence of racial histories and experiences on the Mall, beyond the scope of temporary exhibitions. Indeed, the chapters which follow endeavour to critically expand upon these observations that point to problematic notions of 'containment' in addressing race.

Chapter 3

Imagining the political roles of culturally specific museums

1. Introduction

Over the course of its history, the Smithsonian Institution approached the idea of race as a category, a social issue, and a rationale for progressive activities of inclusion, experimentation and change. In the context of evolving rights movements, race and racism were, in many ways, situated as contemporary issues to address, and as community-specific histories, rather than as themes that were embedded into the history of the United States. In these early discourses, the contemporary was accented through, at first, the presumed biological truth of 'race', and later through the referencing of cultural differences, communities, social issues and movements, and new potential audiences and stakeholders within the Smithsonian museums. Within this arena, the emergence of the idea of 'culturally specific museums', namely the idea of a national museum devoted to American Indians and a national museum devoted to African Americans, provided one of the few stable platforms for debates on how museums could and should address America's racial past.

This chapter develops from the last, to explore the main ways in which concepts of new, culturally specific museums were understood in relation to the process of addressing race. It considers official and public aspirations for these new museums from both within and beyond the Institution during the course of 1980s and 1990s, as they each reached key milestones in their development. Despite the Smithsonian's experimental and radical responses to contemporary movements and a new social consciousness in preceding decades, this period ushered in a focus on museums as political and plausible sites of redress, reconciliation, memorialisation, and self-definition in response to past injustices, filling a void left by other museums on the Mall. Indeed, in contrast to 'ethnic-' and 'diversity-' focused programming across the Smithsonian, culturally specific museums could symbolise the progress of national cultural recognition.

This chapter offers new insights into the emergence of the distinct but related ‘colourblind’ and ‘post-race’ discourses that prematurely and rhetorically emphasised a sense of equality and unity among groups, or emphasised progress and change at the expense of a national history of racialisation. Indeed, the extent to which racial inequality was recognised or prioritised as an issue for society to address appears to be an operative force that underpinned a range of opinions about the need for, and role of, ethnic museums. By the mid-1990s, amidst more visible racial tensions and a conservative turn at the political national level, culturally specific museum developments began to elicit detectable tones of suspicion and fear in the predominantly white halls of Congress. This chapter analyses the key discourses in relation to race and racial histories sparked by culturally specific museums, before drawing conclusions on the implications of these new developments for the Smithsonian at large. It begins, however, by setting forth an account of how the idea of museums as ‘political’ began to manifest in discussions and initiatives at the Smithsonian, and how the notion of self-definition, that were to become integral to culturally specific museum developments, were not able to be simultaneously embedded more broadly in the institution.

2. The emergence of the ‘political’ museum

One of the key shifts within museum thinking between the emergent social consciousness of the early to mid-twentieth century and the newly articulated ‘social role’ of museums towards the end of the century was the growing recognition that museums could no longer be seen as sites of objective knowledge, but as political and non-neutral in their framing of the world. Indeed, as altering as the 1960s were in many respects in terms of social consciousness more broadly, it was perhaps the eventual internalisation of the political nature of knowledge into disciplinary scholarship, such as anthropology and history, that had the greater impact on the profession’s recognition that museums and their representations were inherently subjective (Karp and Lavine, 1991b; Karp, Kreamer and Lavine, 1992). The professional sector was beginning to question more directly how ‘meanings come to be inscribed and by whom’ (Macdonald, 2006, p. 3). Indeed, these questions were seen as vital, for the extent to which they could expose inequalities and

‘particular regimes of power’ in the wider world (Macdonald, 2006, p. 3). During the 1980s, theorisations of knowledge as plural, contingent, and fluid was increasingly taken up by the profession. While an explicit acknowledgement of the museum’s political role was evident in museum practice during the 1960s, museums in the United States continued to professionalise and flourish over the 1970s and 1980s, bolstered by a focus on their educational roles and the possibilities of social mobility through education (Scottish Museums Council, 1986, pp. 20-23). These values, internalised in institutional agendas, ensured not only museums’ survival but also their growth.

In its 1984 publication *Museums for a New Century*, the (then) American Association of Museums accurately foresaw a key contradiction that would play out at the Smithsonian over the next thirty years: ‘Institutions dedicated to fostering and preserving particular ethnic heritages’ it observed, ‘will be increasingly important in helping Americans understand their historical experience from different perspectives,’ yet ‘museums are in an uncomfortably contradictory situation in that their celebration of pluralism does not always extend to their internal hierarchies’ (AAM, 1984, p. 25). This tension in the need for new culturally specific perspectives in what was still a predominantly white, middle-class profession was key for a newly created Office of the Committee for Widening Audiences (OCWA) at the Smithsonian. The OCWA, which Secretary Adams founded in 1983, was intended to advise museums across the Smithsonian on widening participation in their programmes and internships. Its remit to widen ‘audiences’, however, was called into question by some on the committee. Many felt strongly that diversifying audiences could only be achieved with greater diversity in the workforce (CWA, 1988, pp. 3-5). Hiring was seen to be a crucial factor and the committee was to broaden its remit to broader concerns for growing diversity across the institution as the decade went on. At times, committee meetings also offered an opportunity for discussing often subtle notes of racism that staff had encountered day-to-day (CWA, 1986, pp. 7-9). Indeed, the committee offered a platform for addressing race not only in programming, marketing and audience development work, but also in more institutional and systematic terms within the organisation itself. It was amidst this climate of both representational and institutional critique that an African American curator at the newly named National Museum of the

American History (formerly NMHT) was to begin to develop a landmark exhibition of African American history on the Mall.

Curated by Spencer Crew, *From Field to Factory: Afro-American Migration 1915-1940* opened in 1987 and explored the 'Great Migration' of the early twentieth century in which African Americans moved in significant numbers to northern states in search of greater prosperity and tolerance. While the museum had made efforts over the 1970s in particular to grow its collections with respect to black history, particularly around musical heritage with the work of Johnson-Reagon, this was the first time that a specifically African American history-themed exhibition had opened on the National Mall and in the museum of national history; the exhibition was hailed as 'a clear signal of the Smithsonian's commitment to Afro-American scholarship' (SITES, 1988). Featuring a recreated tenant farmhouse, a Ku Klux Klan outfit, and a segregated train car, the exhibition aimed to evoke personal stories of social experience and oppression (Schwarzer, 2006, p. 162). This more emotive, story-focused approach to exhibitions was also present in another exhibition opened in the same year, which brought a different racial history to the fore. *A More Perfect Union: Japanese Americans and the U.S. Constitution* used oral histories documenting experiences of Japanese Americans during their unlawful mass incarceration during World War Two. This exhibition was also noteworthy for its explicit emphasis on injustice, based on race, at the hands of the United States government (NMAH, 1988).

Grounded in new social history, and a critical stance on the celebratory narratives of the United States, these new, temporary exhibitions of the late 1980s began to attract both praise and concern among public and staff. Attempts to tell racial histories that prioritised particular cultural perspectives through emotive storylines were, in an era of national pride, difficult for many to accept, and were seen as a product of cultural bias. Yet, ever led by scholarship, the Smithsonian was to broadly welcome the idea of new social and black histories and narratives that explored alternative views and darker periods of the American past, and was to struggle onwards in small-scale attempts to attract, retain and develop the resources, both staff and collections, that could represent these alternative perspectives (Kreps, 2003: p, 83; Ruffins, 2015b; Yeingst and Bunch, 1997).

Culturally specific programming, such as the two 1987 exhibitions at the Smithsonian's Museum of American History represented a growing interest in community involvement in interpretation and narrative. However, the political goal of self-definition had not yet been prioritised. Indeed, as the possibility of acquiring the largest American Indian collection of artefacts - the Heye collection in New York - and opening a National Museum of the American Indian at the Smithsonian began to be explored, calls for Indian self-definition mounted from beyond the Institution.

The civil rights and American Indian movements drew attention to the harmful portrayals of ethnic cultures in mainstream institutions. At issue was the way in which representations of vanishing or static cultures, and a lack of acknowledgement of colonial processes and their negative impacts on Native communities, could have effects in maintaining the marginalisation of Indian communities (Erikson, 2008, p. 46). Those with an interest in the new tribal museum movement that had developed alongside the growth of black and ethnic museums around the country were keen to approach the Smithsonian to strike up collaborative possibilities for Native displays. An approach in 1981 by the North American Indian Museum Association under the leadership of Richard Hill (Tuscarora) for a collaborative relationship with the National Museum of Natural History to address its planned renovation of its American Indian exhibits was, however, essentially rejected as it was felt there was no desire for an official relationship or steering group on this issue at that time (Erikson, 2008, pp. 51-52). Pressure on the Smithsonian for fuller Native control over cultural objects was to mount over the 1980s in response to new information revealed on the extent of culturally sensitive material and skeletal remains held by the Institution (Erikson, 2008, pp. 56-57). In February 1987, the Secretary of the Smithsonian testified to the Institution holding more than 18,500 human remains before the U.S. Senate's Committee on Indian Affairs (S. Hrg. 108-421, 2004). Describing the 'significant protest' of the portrayal of 'traditional American Indian life' in the ethnographic exhibits and the 'retention of large American Indian skeletal collections for study', Secretary Adams noted in 1987 that the Smithsonian was 'at least fortunate' to have two American Indians on staff that are helping to intercede in these difficult discussions as 'curators and colleagues' (Adams, 1988, p. 14). Yet the significance of this pressure and the Congressional oversight of the Smithsonian would ultimately require legal intervention to resolve the dispute.

Congressional lobbying from American Indian tribal leaders, activists, and other political figures during the 1980s was to finally succeed in bringing about changes to the law that resolved the question of American Indian ownership over Native cultural artefacts in museum collections. Native ownership was enshrined in the National Museum of the American Indian Act of 1989, which also provided measures for the expedient return of sacred objects and skeletal remains held by the Smithsonian, and a year later in 1990, the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act would follow suit in relation to museums across the United States. In her account of the founding of the NMAI, Kreps notes that the spirit of these acts was one of cultural rights and restitution, laying new groundwork for the work of racial justice and paving the way for Indian control of collections and display, yet the passing of these acts was not driven by institutional or governmental agendas (Kreps, 2003, p. 101). Indeed, for Kreps, NAGRPA was far from a 'progressive' move on the part of the US government, but rather a last resort as scholarship, ethics, and self-critique were not seen as being able to bring about real change in how the sector viewed and treated Native communities (Kreps, 2003, p. 83). Indeed, while efforts to diversify perspectives were broadly pursued, control of collections and display remained firmly with curatorial teams.

Another key outcome of the American Indian rights movements and the focus on self-definition in the cultural sector was the increased representation of Indians on museum boards, advisory groups, and in staffing (Maurer, 2004, p. 15). By the late 1980s, the need for American Indian staff and advisors was strongly advocated by Secretary Adams. Amidst the loud protests from beyond the Smithsonian, his address in Smithsonian Year 1987 drew attention to the problems of representing cultural 'others' as almost inevitably being 'trivializing and demeaning' when the cultural background of staff does not represent those cultures (Adams, 1988, p. 7). 'Affirmative action' to increase women and minorities in 'professional, technical and administrative staffs' was now seen as an obligation for the Smithsonian (Adams, 1988, p. 8). In addition, the Smithsonian had begun to recognise the lack of impact of its ethnic programming on core approaches, and had begun to address the systematic issues around race within the Institution. A new Cultural Education Committee, chaired by Smithsonian Regent Jeannine Smith Clark and representing 'prominent membership drawn largely from the Washington community' provided an advisory role to the senior management (CWA, 1987, p. 1; Adams, 1988, p. 13), and was to play a significant

role in working to support the Smithsonian to attract 'minorities' as audiences, and employees (CWA, 1987, p. 1). Meanwhile, the Smithsonian's Office of Equal Opportunity, in June 1988, drafted an Affirmative Action Plan for Women and Minorities which noted the need to 'expand and integrate the Women's, Hispanic and Ethnic programming into other Smithsonian programs'. The plan also sought to address gender and ethnic representation issues across Smithsonian boards, committees, councils and advisory groups (Smithsonian Institution, 1988). However, there was a sense of pride in the work that had already been achieved by this point:

While not under any illusions that there is not a great deal more to be done, I believe that in recent years the Smithsonian has made progress on several fronts. Much takes the form of concerts, lectures, symposia, and other performances and educational activities. In addition, the role of minorities has been highlighted in a number of permanent and special exhibitions at the National Museum of American History, the National Museum of American Art, and the Anacostia Museum (Adams 1988, p. 12).

Self-definition as a key principle was beginning to be slowly absorbed into the workings of the institution and paved the way for the possibility that the likely merger with New York's Museum of the American Indian to create the NMAI would be an opportunity to embed American Indian control over their cultural representations. Affirmative action, however, was to elicit strong feelings around the continued relevance of race, as the 1990s proceeded.

New narratives, driven by new scholarship, were often the focus of hostile internal and external debate. Discourses of pluralism emerging from the 1960s had embedded within the Smithsonian under Ripley as a broad call for the representation of greater 'cultural diversity' within its research, programming, audiences and staff, but plurality was still a contentious subject in a research-driven Institution. In his address at the opening of the 1990 Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, Secretary Adams spoke of the pursuit of cultural pluralism, specifically the inclusion of the voices of the 'studied' into a dialogue 'or even multilogue' with curators and researchers, as both 'ethically correct' and 'good for scholarship' (Adams, 1990a, p. 5). In the context of the Smithsonian, cultural diversity referred almost exclusively to ethnic diversity, as suggested in the two-day Smithsonian Council Meeting of 1991. The focus on 'cultural diversity' translated to a discussion on representing Asian Americans, Latinos, American Indians, and African Americans, rather

than other non-ethnic cultural groups (Smithsonian Council, 1991). In terms of research, collections, displays and staffing, a commitment to diversity was discussed through plans to increase funds and further develop programs and resources focusing on American ethnic groups.

While the Smithsonian faced significant controversy surrounding its extensive collections of Native American human remains, it also faced criticism from some of its long-time public supporters in its response to the ethical and political issues that the question of repatriation created, which were seen to threaten the Institution's scholarship and objectivity. One short letter in response to this controversy simply read: 'I am opposed to the National Museum of the American Indian. [...] The skeletal remains of Indians should be retained for research and not be reburied' (Letter to Senator Bentsen, 1989). Another letter of complaint argued that 'the Smithsonian should be apolitical' (Letter to Adams, 1991). Responding to tensions around the Smithsonian's support for new ethnic museums and programming prompted the Smithsonian Council members, some four months before their annual meeting of 1991, to revise the meeting's two-day agenda (Young, 1991). The first day had originally been set aside to focus solely on the newly established National Museum of the American Indian, but the afternoon was later reserved for a half-day session, co-ordinated by Tom Freudenheim, the Institution's Assistant Secretary for Museums. This was described as a '[d]iscussion of the role of the Smithsonian in presenting new scholarship and varied contemporary perspectives in programs for the public' (Smithsonian Council, 1991). In advance of the meeting, a number of Smithsonian staff, many of whom were African American, met to discuss the newly proposed session. Several recommendations were made to the Smithsonian Council that ranged from the need to define 'cultural diversity', 'cultural pluralism' and other key terms, to the need to conduct 'valuing cultural diversity workshops' in which staff could critically examine 'the Western canon' (Early, 1990). Indeed, despite its presentation as an institutional priority, these staff members were keen to point out the challenges of such work: '[C]ulturally-diverse perspectives will indeed challenge the reigning mythology of national values and [...] this initiative will, no doubt, raise the anxiety level of those who believe in myths and inaccuracies propagated in American culture and history' (Early, 1990). Moreover:

The Smithsonian Council should question the professionalism and quality in judgement of staff in high positions [...] regarding issues of cultural diversity and cultural equity. Criticism that some of these individuals are not responding to cultural diversity priorities of the Institution, are countered with statements that they are protecting higher standards and will not lower them. The same argument is raised at management committee when the Institution says it is prepared to protect 'core' (unicultural) programs and release 'peripheral' (multicultural) programs (Early, 1990).

These remarks signalled internal philosophical resistance to the cultural diversity agenda with respect to the standards of scholarship. The Smithsonian Council meeting itself would emphasise 'a broad orientation on how to understand and adopt cultural diversity policies', and an overview of achievements and current initiatives at the Smithsonian in this area including the Folklife Program, the African Diaspora Program, the African American Institutional Studies unit, the Quincentenary Programs and cultural diversity programming in the Natural and Human Sciences (Smithsonian Council, 1991, p. 2). Amidst discussion of Institutional initiatives in the context of debates on culturally specific programming, the Council clearly stated the importance of continuing with 'bold, provocative exhibits that reflect new insights and scholarly understanding' (Harris, 1991, p. 9). 'At the same time', however 'in keeping with past tradition, the Institution's exhibits must assiduously avoid becoming vehicles for any political agenda' (Harris, 1991, p. 9). A balance of perspectives was sought to allow visitors to 'fairly make up their own minds' (Harris, 1991, p. 9). The approach of offering 'balance' to the issue of museums as inherently political was widely accepted by the museum sector as a whole.

3. Sites of self-definition

Vilified around its treatment of Native peoples during the American Indian rights movements, and slammed by emerging Native, Black and critical scholarship for its omission of African American and Latino perspectives, the Smithsonian was seen across many circles by the 1970s as highly complicit in racial oppression. Political recognition of sovereignty, a long-term priority of American Indian movements translated into a discourse of 'self-definition' within the cultural and arts spheres (Maurer, 2004). Museums had long been critiqued as sites that exploited Native peoples and cultures for their own gain and

maintained views of Native peoples as inferior in the process (Green, 1989). By the 1990s, the empowerment of Native communities had become a shared principle with key staff at the Smithsonian. The Native American Graves and Repatriation Act of 1990 secured the rights of Native descendent communities to request sacred items, but the relationship between the Smithsonian and Native communities was far from resolved (Bordewich, 1997, pp. 170-1).

During early community consultations on the newly legislated NMAI in the 1990s, many were still reeling from the revelations that the Smithsonian had collected and preserved many thousands of Native American human remains and sacred objects without consent or knowledge from tribal groups themselves. One consultee said 'I will not want to bring my family to visit [this] museum. A museum does not speak well of how our people were treated in the past [...] Most of these artifacts [sic] were stolen by the White man and the objects have no value to the Indian communities now that they are in the hands of the Smithsonian' (Smithsonian Institution NMAI, 1993, p. 2). Other participants in the same consultation were recorded to have said: 'This is a centralized system controlled by the Rockefellers. It is run and operated by non-Indians' and '[C]ultural imperialism is being practiced by the museum people' (Smithsonian Institution NMAI, 1993, pp. 4-5). The funding and governance structures of the Smithsonian itself were deeply problematic in the imagining of a new museum about 'American Indians', as the predominantly white Smithsonian, as the umbrella institution, was understood to retain its power and agency.

Indeed, while the principle of 'self-definition' was a key goal for the NMAI among Smithsonian staff, the framing of such enterprises within the Smithsonian as site in the national interest would spark concerns over the separatism this would entail (Green, 1989). In an exchange of letters following the Council Meeting between Secretary Adams and Professor Neil Harris as Council Chair, a number of concerns were raised about the development of the NMAI which indicated questions around the relationship between political shifts and museums as sites of 'objective' disciplinary knowledge. Representing the view of the Council meeting attendees, Harris queried the 'larger philosophy' of the museum, asking '[w]ill it be celebratory? If so, is there a danger that new romantic myths about Indian peoples might be created concerning, for example, their harmonious relationship with nature or their universally peaceful value systems?' (Harris, 1991). Citing

the NMAI's collections which include both items of 'anthropological value' and 'acclaimed fine art', the Council questioned whether there was enough art history expertise within the Indian community to successfully curate this material. Adams responded:

This is the first time, Indian people will become the principal agents of, and partners in, an enterprise that depicts, interprets and displays their own culture, history, and art. For this reason, the first-person voice of the American Indian will be given emphasis in the process. NMAI staff are highly cognizant of the aesthetic and artistic aspects of the collections, no less than the anthropological, cultural, and historical dimensions. Each of these facts of the new museum is being weighed carefully in the ongoing process of consultation, planning, and development (Adams, 1992).

Having made his point about the importance of Indian self-definition as well as traditional disciplinary concerns in the process, Secretary Adams then voiced a note of caution on the nature of culturally-specific interventions and programs. While a coherent, national viewpoint, 'albeit a pluralistic and diverse one', was expected and sought, Adams felt this should be obtained 'not simply by stacking up separate interests, but rather melding, fusing, synthesizing, and even transcending the ideas, symbols, and subcultures of the constituent parts' (Adams, 1992). Indeed, in this particular letter, Adams revealed an awareness of the political agency of museums as places which could reconcile differences between different communities by imposing something of a master narrative that would link these separate parts together. 'Self-definition' then, could potentially be framed and even transcended by broader narratives of the nation.

The principle of self-definition also came to the fore in critical responses to the idea of a national African American museum. Glen Loury, an African American writing for the *Boston Review*, reacted against the racial lens in response to which ethnic museums were clearly developing, with a plea to move beyond race as a defining category:

Ironically, to the extent that we blacks see ourselves primarily through a racial lens, we may end up sacrificing possibilities for the kind of personal development that would ultimately further our collective racial interests. We cannot be truly free men and women while laboring under a definition of self derived [sic] from the perceptual view of our oppressor, confined to the contingent facts of our oppression (Loury, 2008).

Echoing some of this concern, John Tchen, then director of the New York Chinatown History project, who had been invited to a meeting of Claudine Brown's Institutional Study committee – a committee to consider the feasibility of a national African American museum

at the Smithsonian – pointed out a key issue with museums as sites for presenting alternatives to the ‘master narrative’: ‘As problems of content are being addressed,’ he said, ‘form must not be overlooked because form itself carries a great deal of the logic of the master narrative.’ Furthermore, for Tchen ‘the presence of Asian or African Americans on decision making committees does not, by itself, fundamentally change the logic of domination and marginalization which is inscribed in traditional museum practice’ (African American Institutional Study Advisory Board, 1990, p. 18).

Culturally specific museums, then, were approached as tentative sites for ‘self definition’. The national museum frame was concerned particularly with community representatives in this regard, while white senior representatives of the Smithsonian could see potential in the idea that such museums could allow communities to represent themselves on their own terms. Prevailing museological discourse, particularly within universities, was focused on examining the museum as a Western construct that contributed to colonial projects and continued to operate within this troubling paradigm (Karp, Kreamer and Lavine, 1992). This scholarship, together with newly developed scholarship in ‘ethnic studies’, would help to underpin the aspirations of ‘self-definition’ at the NMAI, and would popularise the concept of ‘voice’ in museum work, yet such scholarship often stopped short of promoting fundamental shifts at structural levels within organisations. In this context, despite its Smithsonian framing, the NMAI served as an innovative new model of community voice and decolonised practice for an aspiring profession that could reimagine the potential healing power of museums in the face of their colonial pasts. The degree to which this effectively served the needs of Native peoples or self-served the Smithsonian, however, would be called into question by ever more critical scholarship and community debate into the 2000s, as the following chapter will show.

4. Sites of racial bias

The notion of ethnic museums first sparked considerable controversy when, in May 1991, news of the unanimous support of the Smithsonian Board of Regents for a proposed National African American Museum reached the press. While many greeted the news as a sign of progress, it touched a nerve for many members of the American public. At the heart

of this was a deep concern that the development of an ethnic-specific museum on the Mall would be socially divisive, even racially suspect, for a nation which was seen to represent both equality and unity. Claims of racial bias on the part of the Smithsonian were predicated on a stance that race was no longer an issue of concern to the extent that it would warrant one group to be highlighted for special treatment over another. This 'colourblindness' was endemic within not only the broader populace but also evident within the Smithsonian itself during the 1980s in particular (Yeingst and Bunch 1997, p. 154). Within the professional museum discourse more broadly, race was rarely directly alluded to as a relevant issue to museum practice beyond the confines of culturally specific projects and programming. However, new cultural programming and 'revisionist' histories that appeared to promote the interests or experiences of a marginalised group attracted disdain across the cultural field (Macdonald, 2006, p. 4). Culturally specific museums were no exception to this, but the national context of the Smithsonian and proposal of a whole museum for an ethnic group, added a new level of anger to these critiques.

At the heart of this position was the notion of a culturally specific museum as a form of discrimination that censored the experiences and contributions of other groups in society, particularly those considered white. Indeed, culturally specific museums appeared to pose a threat towards whites who were accustomed to staking a claim in American life and whose concept of America was based on ideologies of equally shared if not white notions of belonging. Referring to the proposed National African American Museum, one Florida resident, signing his letter as 'Americans Against Rotten Politicians', wrote to the Smithsonian Secretary to express his outrage:

This is an insult to every other race and nationality that has made America the greatest country in the world. Nobody objects to recognizing the creativity and accomplishments of persons of African descent but to single out that group with a museum for that purpose is an outrageous discrimination not worthy of sponsorship by any institution. You can achieve the same objective (and promote peace and harmony) by creating a unique American National Museum that celebrates the creativity and accomplishments of all persons that have contributed to American history. Why are you trying to divide us?? (Anon, 1991a)

For many such readers of the *The New York Times*, news of this museum amounted to a form of racial discrimination which would silence other groups' stories. Moreover, it was seen to segregate museum audiences, as well as histories. During the 1980s, the American

Left had developed a strong 'anti-racist' discourse, which emphasised the concept of equality and a shared human experience. To notice a person's skin colour was unacceptable and to be avoided (Yeingst and Bunch, 1997, p. 154). Among conservatives, affirmative action interventions and revisionist approaches to history across education, academia, and government policy, were the focus of significant criticism during this era among those in public office and among the wider public. Actions which were seen to advantage some groups were shunned as being unfair and overly shaped by political lobbying. Critiques of Afrocentric approaches to education, for example, were faced with angry reactions which emphasised the importance of unity and equality (Greenberg, 1991; Anon, 1991b).

Further insinuations of racism and 'political correctness' came flooding in to the Smithsonian in response to the news of its support for a national African American museum from those with both liberal and conservative leanings. A mocking segment appeared in the editorial page on in May of 1991 in the *Richmond Times Dispatch* which noted 'We anxiously await the opening of this and future taxpayer-funded historical museums dedicated to Aleut-Americans, Asian-Americans, Hispanic Americans, Gay and Lesbian Americans, Dead White Male European Americans, Non-Communist Academics (which would be a very small museum), *ad nauseam*.' A clipping of this piece was sent to the Smithsonian Secretary by a member of the public with a note saying that this 'expresses very concisely the opinion of millions of U.S. taxpayers in regards to another African American Art Museum' (cited in Letter to Adams, 1991b). Indeed, some wrote to the Smithsonian to withdraw their financial support of the institution, with one adding 'Why can't we just be Americans?' (Letter to Adams, 1991c). Another letter, addressed to 'Mr. Adams, Smithsonian Officials, and Board of Regents' read:

I am adamantly opposed to any tax-supported museum that singles out one group of hyphenated Americans over all others. [...] Are you implying these other groups are second class citizens? I don't think, at least I hope, you didn't mean to give that impression but that is exactly what your proposal conveys. If on the other hand you want to portray the seamier side of our country, with a National Museum of Oppression you would have to begin with the Native Americans and include Africans, Chinese, Jews, Mexicans, Irish, Italians, Japanese, Greeks, etc. and show how each group coped, created and fought for their rights. This is a more laudable mission for a museum of Smithsonian stature. In conclusion, I do not and will not accept your Orwellian theory that 'all are created equal – only some more equal than others' (Letter to Adams, 1991d).

Another letter of complaint took a more bigoted stance on this argument, declaring that Irish-Americans, and other immigrant groups should have their own museum 'long before any museum is created to recognize the blacks' (Letter to the Board of Regents, 1991a). It continued: 'Without these immigrants and their accomplishments, there wouldn't have been a country here to take in the American Africans (American should come first in the name), to cave in to all of their demands and collapse under their criminal aspects and lack of thankfulness for all they have been given here' (Letter to the Board of Regents, 1991a). Scrawled on in handwriting as an afterthought, the letter writer added 'There is NO justification to single out the blacks!' (Letter to the Board of Regents, 1991a). This particular letter was forwarded to Secretary Adams with a short note from an internal member of staff which said 'Bob, the argument for an Ethnic Heritage Museum, in lieu of an African American museum, will mount' (Letter to the Board of Regents, 1991a).

Indeed, the argument for a broader museum did mount. A short letter to the Smithsonian Board of Regents from a Texas resident argued that changing the Arts and Science Museum Building into an African American Museum will 'interject race into the Smithsonian museums by emphasizing one culture and race while ignoring the contributions of other ethnic groups and races to the development of the United States' (Letter to the Board of Regents, 1991b). This particular letter put forward an alternative proposition: 'I would encourage you, instead, to develop a museum that emphasizes the contributions of all races and cultures to the development of the United States. This would eliminate the element of race and give credit to all the people that have made this country what it is' (Letter to the Board of Regents, 1991b). Member of the Board of Regents David Rockefeller was swayed by this argument. Forwarding the letter to the Smithsonian Secretary, he jotted an accompanying note: 'Bob – Mr. Janes has a point. Were it not for the measures of The Black Caucus, I would think an Ethnic Heritage Museum more appropriate than an African American Museum. Certainly the collections would be far richer [...] Is it entirely out of the question? Let's discuss. David.' (Letter to the Board of Regents, 1991b). It was evident that opinions on the need for ethnic-specific museums differed internally among the Smithsonian's senior staff and cultural allies.

Those who recognised the importance of representing a wider array of cultural groups within the national museum complex also promoted a different approach to the proposition

of a new museum. One member of the public wrote to urge the Smithsonian to rethink its support for a separate museum and instead integrate black history into existing museums for all Americans: 'If the Smithsonian can't find a way to present American history [...] good and bad – in a meaningful and unifying way, then I fear for our future' (Smith, 1991). To this, Claudine Brown, the Project Director for the African American Institutional Study, which had been set up to explore the case for an African American museum on the Mall, responded that the concern for a 'possible proliferation of "hyphenated museums"' was a shared one (Brown, 1991). 'The impetus', Brown explained, 'for a free-standing African American Museum does not grow from a desire to separate African American culture from that of other Americans. In fact, its purpose is to celebrate American achievement and contributions (Brown, 1991). While the contributors are African American', Brown continued, 'the contributions are of national significance, and in many instances parallel the contributions of working people throughout the country' (Brown, 1991). Brown also made her case based on scope and urgency. For Brown, a free-standing museum was recommended by her twenty-one member committee, largely because 'many issues warranting research and exhibitions did not fall into the missions of existing Smithsonian Museums; and because there was a compelling need to collect material which might be lost to public institutions because of rapidly increasing market values' (Brown, 1991). Further letters poured in, decrying the Institution's 'politically correct' conduct and 'concern with "separatism"' (Letter to Brown, 1991).

While offering logical arguments on scope, practicalities and distinctiveness, responses from Smithsonian staff were unlikely to have had an impact on those who decried an Institutional trend towards identity politics and the perceived claims of cultural groups to be represented on their own terms. This was a longstanding, broadly conservative argument in response to the dramatic social shifts of the 1960s and 1970s that had sought to upset the status quo and positioned many whites on the defensive in matters of history, heritage and culture. Yet while culturally specific museums had not prompted these sentiments, they did offer new manifestations of so called 'identity politics' at work in a major, and highly respected institution. Such criticisms also drew out insecurities among funders and allies of the Smithsonian who questioned the narrow focus on particular group. Nevertheless, the idea

of ethnic museums as sites of racial bias remained a recurring critique throughout the 1980s and 1990s among a vocal few, predominantly located beyond the Institution itself.

5. Sites to pursue reconciliation

The NMAI and the idea of an African American museum on the Mall each elicited aspirations for the larger role of reconciliation, in which these museums were seen to play a role. Yet differing ideas on how they would support this broader process of reconciliation reveal different emphases on the recognition of oppression in the context of national museums. At least two distinct discursive strands in relation to culturally specific museums were in operation. Many saw these new museums in terms of memorialisation. The process of victim remembrance, it was argued, could help to draw attention to the realities of past oppression, as a distinct focus to the ever-present emphasis on discourses of ‘race relations’. For others, culturally specific museums were sites for the realisation of democratic ideals of respect and voice, which could offer connection and elicit commonality within the populace. This second discursive strand was explicitly aimed at addressing race relations. Whereas notions of voice, respect, recognition and education were shared and palatable goals for the NMAI, notions of memorialisation, which would necessarily highlight narratives of violent oppression and even grievance, were seen as separate endeavours to the work of museums which could potentially offer a broader scope of educative possibilities on community concerns. Nevertheless, the issue of memorialisation remained a key focus for community participants involved in museum planning meetings, as this section will demonstrate.

Despite much criticism, the concept of an ethnic museum was felt by many to support the need to better treat Native Americans and African Americans across many aspects of society. Supportive letters in the early 1990s congratulated the Smithsonian on its commitment to new ethnic museums. Addressing Secretary Adams, one Washington DC resident said in response to the NMAI: ‘It is good to know that at long last steps are being taken to redress the wrongs we have so long visited on these great people, who can teach us so much about things that are worth knowing’ (Sittler, 1991). Indeed, the successes in developing these new museums were celebrated as significant steps towards the

reconciliation of the past by both whites and non-whites. The concept of a National African American museum sparked a different set of issues from some within the African American community, namely that a national museum would be insufficient in and of itself for addressing the need for memorialisation and recognition of the racial past and its victims.

One individual identifying as a 'black army officer' wrote to the President of the United States, expressing his support for the museum, but also expressing concerns that it needs to 'avoid merely becoming an interesting museum' (Spencer, 1991). Rather, it should aspire to act as 'the national shrine it deserves to be':

This country still lacks two things which can help free it from the shackles of racial misunderstanding: a Slave National Monument and a Slave Memorial Day. [...] [W]e have not sought to memorialize what is surely the greatest human sacrifice ever made for America – those millions of human beings, Americans, who gave their lives, their labor, and their human dignity but who never received compensation. I am speaking of the victims of the institution of American Slavery. [...] We say we have made great strides since the days of slavery, but the elimination of physical bondage has not brought with it a concomitant freedom from the psychological bondage of racial animosity. [...] The act of the U.S. government officially recognizing the past wrong of American Slavery will go far toward opening the psychological door that keeps blacks from feeling that they can ever truly be part of America (Spencer, 1991).

For this individual, the proposed museum was welcome but would not on its own fulfil the need for a memorial. He goes on to present his vision of such a memorial: 'We should build the monument in Washington D.C., right in front of the National African American Museum. People need something physical on the ground to see, to touch. The museum itself will not fill this vital psychological need. [...] The National African-American Museum is a wonderful project but it needs the monument and the memorial day to complete a full perspective for all Americans' (Spencer, 1991).

Around the same time, consultations were being conducted with Native American tribal communities on the design and scope of the emerging National Museum of the American Indian. The issue of a memorial as a distinct entity also featured in these discussions. At the NMAI Consultation meeting with Northwest Coast Tribes, a memorial was not felt to be the purpose of the new museum. The summary statements made at the close of the consultation were those of Lou Weller, a Native design specialist, and were recorded as follows: 'LW [Lou Weller] said that many of the comments [of those consulted] pointed out

the resentments, pain and frustration that the First Nations people felt about past injustices and that this project was not to establish a memorial but to show respect and honor. He suggested that a future project might be an Indian Memorial of some kind' (Smithsonian Institution NMAI, 1993). Seen as separate projects, however, the museum concept fell short for some participants, with one arguing, in response to the proposed building design for the new museum, that '[t]his building does not show any of the struggles and hardships that the Indian people had to endure in the past. It is an idealized concept in that it represents the Indian culture by materials without a relationship to who Indian people are' (Smithsonian Institution NMAI, 1993).

Politically, an appeal to commonality and American freedoms was seen to be an advantage in the push to create a new African American museum on the Mall. Indeed, in the context of Congressional debates, this appeal overshadowed the narratives of restorative justice for a minority group still significantly disadvantaged in U.S. society, economically, socially, and politically that were more apparent in other spheres. In the face of a Senate defeat of a bill that would sign the 'National African American Museum' into law, Democratic Senator Paul Simon of Illinois lamented on the situation: 'The museum will help facilitate the knowledge and understanding of African American culture that may change unhealthy attitudes and help foster better relations between people of all races' (Cong. Rec. S., 1994). It was clear that museums, particularly within the Smithsonian, were strategically positioned in positive terms in the context of their push for approval.

Writing about the politics of memory, Walters asserts that calls for racial reconciliation in the United States can never be realised with any form of reconciliation that consists of 'forgetting' the work of oppression and simply 'moving on' when the harm of oppression is lodged in the collective memory of a group (Walters, 2009, p. 5-7). Walters also notes the tendency to focus on race-relations as sidestepping the necessary focus on the perpetrators and victims of oppression (Walters, 2009, p. 5-7). These insights can be read in the discourses of reconciliation around new culturally specific museums coming from different stakeholders. Mukherjee suggests that early forms of 'post-race' thinking could be detected in cultural and political discourses as a disdain for the more radical approaches of the 'race-conscious' in a climate where ongoing inequality (in this case in processes of cultural representation and heritage) is unacknowledged or downplayed (Mukherjee, 2014). For

Mukherjee, this kind of post-race position is part of the neoliberal state's practical efforts to accept and absorb the values of diversity and inclusion where they best serve the advancement of stability and economic growth:

Recognizing some racial differences while disavowing others, it confers privileges on some racial subjects (the white liberal, the multicultural American, the fully assimilable black, the racial entrepreneur) while stigmatizing others (the 'born again' racist, the overly race-conscious, the racial grievant, the terrorist, the illegal). (Mukherjee, 2014, p. 51).

In this context, as Mukherjee explains, individualism is revered, creating new processes of marginalisation for those who sit uneasily with the commercial, national agenda, and de-emphasising the role that race plays in the organisation and life chances of its citizens. The aspirations of the culturally specific museums at the Smithsonian as sites of 'self-definition' and cultural recognition, then, were problematic as the frame of the national museum as democratic and inclusive (perhaps even assimilative) would seemingly censor efforts to evoke grievance or oppression narratives, despite the role of memorialisation that many community members felt was crucial to undertake.

6. Sites of containment

National museums were undoubtedly problematic sites which were ill-equipped to act as platforms for grievance narratives. For Smithsonian staff who were working at the heart of ethnic museum projects in the 1990s, however, a different issue was at the forefront of their minds. As many of the complaint letters suggested, an ethnic museum might work to excuse the existing Smithsonian museums from presenting more diverse narratives. Existing projects and programmes focusing on African American history within the National Museum of American History, or on Native cultures at the National Museum of Natural History, for example, might be threatened with the opening of ethnic museums which overlapped with their objectives. This concerning relationship with other museums on the Mall was addressed in the 'Life' supplement of the *Washington Times* in October 1991. In this article, Claudine Brown was reported to have said: 'We think a national African American Museum whose exhibits refer to other museums on the Mall will give visitors a chance to figure out that they fit into all of the museums. But there is some question whether this new museum

will create more, not less, segregation. The National African American Museum could result in a kind of reverse discrimination by freeing other Mall museums from the responsibility to feature black exhibits' (Colp, 1991).

This predicament was further expanded upon in internal discussions led by the National African American Museum's Institutional Study. Rick Hill, who had worked closely with the NMAI, was invited to speak at the second meeting of the Institutional Study Board, and was asked by a member of the meeting the following: 'There will be a National Museum of the American Indian and there is a consensus that there should be an African American Museum. How will the existence of these museums affect the fact that mainstream institutions are also charged with representing Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanics etc. in their institutions?' (African American Institutional Study Advisory Board, 1990). Hill responded: 'While it is important that the host institution have an overall commitment to multicultural representation, it is also important that a space be created so that Indian culture can be presented specifically from an Indian perspective' (African American Institutional Study Advisory Board, 1990). During the discussion which followed, members agreed that there was a risk that other ethnic programming throughout the Smithsonian may be cut, or transferred over. For Hill, however, the role of ethnic museums was to allow for the processes of self-definition, and this was vital. Peggy Cooper Cafritz, a participant in the meeting, observed that 'this debate raised serious questions about the Smithsonian's relationship to the new museum and noted that there was a great fear in some quarters of the Institution that the creation of such a museum would undermine other programs and collections' (African American Institutional Study Advisory Board, 1990). Further discussion then ensued on the risks involved, to which Cornell West, Director of Princeton University's Afro-American Program and a member of the advisory committee, responded: 'Because the Smithsonian is a symbol of national significance [...] [i]t is incumbent upon the participants to insure [sic] a high degree of representation of people of color in every nook and cranny of the Smithsonian' (African American Institutional Study Advisory Board, 1990). West emphasised that this was a much larger project than simply discussing a museum, and highlighted a tension 'between insisting on a strong representation of people of color throughout the Smithsonian, and also arguing for a distinct and separate museum' (*Ibid.*). For West, '[i]t was important not to convey the

impression that the new museum was a form of 'ghettoizing,' or the product of a narrow black nationalist perspective which presumed that the African American experience can be separated out from the larger context of U.S. history' (*ibid.*). On the other hand, he went on, it was important not to fall into the "'faceless integrationist trap", which assumes that African Americans are no different than any other immigration group [...] The question is one of 'walking that tightrope' so that the distinct space can be created while insisting on the presence of people of color in all other Smithsonian programs and activities' (African American Institutional Study Advisory Board, 1990).

While debates continued among Smithsonian staff and within consultations, there was little outlet for broader public opinion to be aired until 1992, when, in response to mounting criticism, the Smithsonian's Office of Museum Programs set up a public debate. This was to discuss the purpose and desirability of ethnic museums. Two groups were formed, led by the director of the Centre for Folklife and Cultural Heritage Richard Kurin, and Claudine Brown, together with Smithsonian interns, to argue the case for and the case against what they termed 'racially and culturally specific museums' (Kurin, 1997). The views put forward were not necessarily those of the speakers themselves, and it is difficult to know to what extent non-Smithsonian publics took part in the event. However, the range of arguments drew on many of those expressed in the media, among the public, and within museological circles.

The case put forward against the proliferation of culturally specific museums by Kurin and his group of Smithsonian interns focused in large part on the issue of their separation from so-called 'mainstream' institutions. Speaking of the hundreds of ethnic museums around the country, it was argued that 'These museums [are] not only separate, they are unequal, often lacking public money or the support of rich donors, operating with small, often volunteer staffs, few professional positions, and virtually no access to sources of power and money' (Kurin, 1997, p. 96). Rather than build new museums of this kind, energies should, they argued, be channelled towards changing the mainstream (*ibid.*). Reasons cited included the transformation of mainstream identity and culture, changing demographics and diversity, and the fusing of different ethnic cultures in society (Kurin, 1997, p. 97). More philosophically, however, the debating team argued that America had 'turned the moral corner on creating separate and unequal institutions' (*ibid.*). The issue of separatism

continued in their speech, as the debating team emphasised the interrelationships between cultures: 'a museum about diasporas, a museum about immigration, a museum about adaptation, a museum about urban arts, are all likely to produce greater insight about the human condition in all its varieties than will a monocultural or monoracial museum' (Kurin, 1997, p. 99).

In response, Brown's debating team attempted to de-polarise the issue. The case put forward in support of culturally specific museums emphasised that groups are not trying to avoid being seen as part of a larger whole, but simply that 'in the face of exclusion, they seek something positive to sustain them' (Kurin, 1997, p. 102). Likening such museums to other culturally-specific institutions, Brown's team argued that there 'is nothing wrong with people forming self-help societies, social clubs, lodges, churches, temples, and so on. [...] And they need not diminish people's loyalty to or understanding of the larger, more encompassing society' (Kurin, 1997, p. 106). Crucially, they argued, 'having separate community-focused museums does not obviate the need for broader, more inclusive, national, regional, or local museums' (*Ibid.*). While the practicality and logic of specialisation, within a landscape of more universal museums was invoked for the majority of this counter-response, Brown's team ended its case with the need for ethnically-specific museums based on the pursuit of social justice and its importance to the nation: 'Having American Indians tell their stories through these museums redresses a historic, recognized wrong. Justice and fairness are public goods' (Kurin, 1997, p. 107). Overall, the staged Kurin and Brown debate of 1992 encapsulated the key arguments, but also tried to move past them by questioning and reconciling their seemingly oppositional positions. Proponents of ethnic museums had, over the preceding years, based their arguments on the importance of achieving justice for minority groups, but discussions increasingly emphasised the practical logic of distinct entities.

Paradoxically, the need to reach across cultures was seen on different sides of the debates to be both facilitated and hindered by the creation of culturally specific institutions. Robert McCormick Adams' term as Smithsonian Secretary was drawing to a close at this time, and the nation was about to shift in its political leaning towards a climate that would deepen the divisions among cultural groups, and impact the provision of multicultural projects and

funding. As the 1990s progressed, the question of separate or universal museums would resurface with even greater force.

7. Sites of separatism

New concerns about the power of ethnic minority groups were raised during the mid-1990s that impacted upon discourse around ethnic museums. The mid-1990s was a time of increasing anxiety about race relations. A shift toward the right within national congressional elections saw Republicans in the majority in the House of Representatives and within the Senate, and impacted upon the development of diversity and multicultural programming (LaBelle and Ward, 1996, p. 102). A conservative backlash on what was termed 'political correctness' emphasised the need to promote unifying aspects of American culture within the school curriculum, as opposed to focusing on ethnic minority narratives (LaBelle and Ward, 1996, p. 102). This deepened debates on race and inequality across the nation.

An Extension of Remarks on the 'State of Race Relations' for Congress offered a series of warnings concerning the increasing polarisation of American identities and attitudes along racial lines, citing the responses to the O.J. Simpson trial and the criminal justice system as a case in point (Hamilton R-IN, 1995). Also noted was the success of the Million Man March, which had been led by Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan; a rally which purported to promote dignity and pride among African American males and the shunning of drug-use among the younger generations. Despite the reported peacefulness of the event, Farrakhan was nevertheless a controversial figure, who had admitted to playing an indirect role in the assassination of his former Nation of Islam comrade Malcolm X some thirty years before, and who was frequently criticised for anti-Semitic statements (Hamilton R-IN, 1995). In his closing remarks to the House of Representatives, Hon. Lee H. Hamilton of Indiana offered a troubling analysis of current race relations:

White and black America continue to drift apart. Many blacks feel aggrieved. They observe that black incomes are still only 60% of white ones; black unemployment is more than twice as high; and more than half of black children live in poverty. They say whites have lost interest in their plight, cutting federal programs that benefit their communities and curbing affirmative action programs that have created

educational and job opportunities. The response of a growing number of blacks is not a call for more integration with white America, but separation and self-help. Many white Americans, for their part, feel a different kind of frustration. They say this country has spent billions of dollars on fighting poverty, particularly in black communities, but poverty rates remain persistently high. They complain that affirmative action programs take jobs and college opportunities from deserving whites. They say blacks should take more personal responsibility for their actions, rather than look to the government for help. They often believe, mistakenly, that the average black is faring better than the average white in terms of access to housing, education, jobs and health. We can argue all day about the causes of this separation - the lack of economic opportunities; racism; the burden of history; the rise of illegitimacy and single parent families - but the question Americans must answer is whether this trend toward separation is desirable. I think it is not. This country will not prosper if we do not work together to create opportunities for all of our citizens. [...] We must talk frankly, listen carefully, and work together across racial lines. We must talk less about separation and bitterness, and more about unity, reconciliation and shared values. We must reach out to people of different races and provide opportunity for all persons to make the most of their lives. Government can help by pursuing fiscal policies that promote job creation, enforcing anti-discrimination laws and supporting programs that are pro family - but reconciliation will mainly come through individual contacts. We should not tolerate the existence of two Americas. (Hamilton R-IN, 1995)

While Hamilton's speech articulated a trend towards separation, seemingly created by attitudes of both black and white communities, the rhetorical solutions presented to overturn this trend was focused on finding common ground. Emphasising individual actions, Hamilton somewhat downplays direct support from government to re-establish affirmative action schemes and other systematic approaches to addressing the inequality and rife poverty he cites. This aspiring to unity was echoed across the debates about ethnic museums, and at this time, a shift towards patriotism was to deepen divides within the Smithsonian community itself.

A more celebratory tone was beginning to be sought within Smithsonian programming, following the controversy around the display of the Enola Gay. The exhibition *The Crossroads: The End of World War II, the Atomic Bomb, and the Origins of the Cold War*, had been heavily criticised by veterans and members of Congress for its emphasis on the Japanese casualties and critical stance on the decision to drop the bomb on Hiroshima, which was seen to vilify the United States incorrectly. By May 1995, under the new Smithsonian leadership of Ira Heyman, the Enola Gay finally went on display. Remarks in Congress to mark the opening spoke of the earlier 'historic revisionism and distortion of fact

by a group of people that was determined to editorialize and promote an anti-American message about the end of World War II'. Representative Sam Johnson of Texas went on to congratulate the Smithsonian on its portrayal of American ingenuity and 'the brave crew that flew on a historic mission' (Johnson, 1995). The bias of this new exhibition was palpable and deliberate, but for many, it was a fairer portrayal of the mission given the context of war at the time (Schmidt, 1997).

Speaking on national radio in 1995, the new Smithsonian Secretary Heyman had called into question the need for 'ethnic museums on every stripe of the Mall', although he was soon to offer his full support for the African American museum project (Trescott, 1995). The Bill to establish an African American museum was reintroduced to Congress in 1995, after previously stalling due to budgetary and funding concerns. The case put forward to the House of Representatives from Congressman John Lewis at this time was highly celebratory, focused on the contributions made by outstanding African Americans to the nation. In addition to mathematician Benjamin Banneker and scientist George Washington Carver, Lewis also noted: 'Some of our Nation's greatest cowboys were black, including Bill Pickett and Deadwood Dick' (Lewis R-GA, 1995). Lewis concluded: 'Until we understand the African American story in its fullness and complexity, we cannot understand ourselves as a Nation' (*ibid.*). Aligning with the political climate of the time, the context of oppression and under-representation was notably absent from the Congressman's introductory speech.

The increased anxiety around race relations of the mid 1990s sparked a new set of concerns within Congress around the possibility that an ethnic museum might operate as a political platform for separatist group concerns. Debating the African American Museum bill, questions were put forward in the following way:

Question - How will the Smithsonian deal with requests by other groups--e.g., the Nation of Islam, or other "black separatist" groups, or members or adherents to such groups, who may desire to participate in the museum's planning, operation, programs or activities? What problems will you encounter when these groups seek to use the museum to honor any of its leaders?

Answer - The National African American Museum is committed to telling the whole story of African American History. That story includes the issues of public and private citizens of all ethnicities. The current planning which resulted in the mission statement quoted herein was developed with the cooperation of scholars throughout the country advocating broad and diverse positions. Groups will not

control the content of the museum's programs and exhibitions. The Smithsonian Institution will have the final say on any and all programs.

Question - Will the Smithsonian permit any taxpayer funds, allocated to this museum, to go directly or indirectly to the Nation of Islam or any other 'black separatist' group?

Answer - Taxpayer funds will be used to develop balanced exhibitions and programs. There are no plans for the Smithsonian to fund any groups for any purpose (S. Rec., 1994).

The fears of the time were evident, and American political discourse pressured the Smithsonian into defending its ethnic museum plans. Despite the emphasis on self-definition within ethnic museum approaches, it was politically important to express Smithsonian oversight in the content of the African American museum.

8. Conclusion

As the idea of culturally specific museums on the Mall emerged and developed, museums began to be cast in different ways, as both problematic sites of bias and positive sites of redress. As they began to be publicly debated, these new museums offered a focus for a series of articulations concerned with addressing the racial past within the nation. For the Smithsonian, culturally specific museums as new development projects were alone in their ability to offer such a platform. While the National Museum of American History had opened up new 'ethnic' narratives and racial histories to broad Mall-going audiences in their innovative and emotive exhibitions on Japanese-American internment and African American migration to the North, neither endeavour allowed the Institution to debate and pursue the possibilities of memorialisation, reconciliation, self-definition, or commemoration to quite the same degree. While it must be noted that these broader discourses are far from museum-specific, the process of imagining culturally specific museums was able to elicit such discourses in tangible ways through imagining a building in a national memorial landscape at the centre of the United States, and in ways that helped to articulate the role of a national museum complex as a potential site for racial justice. This chapter has shown, however, that notions of race were interpreted through the lens of self-serving interests on the part of proponents, critics and representatives of the State, allowing only certain forms of racial justice discourse to come to the fore.

An exploration of the discourses in response to the idea of ethnic museums at the Smithsonian has revealed the tendency towards palatable themes among proponents such as celebration and national unity, in stark contrast to the themes of oppression and genocide among some community representatives beyond the museum. Indeed, ethnic museum developments offered a platform for both critics and proponents of new museums to exercise their political and ideological views, as well as sometimes expressions of collective anger and grief. While there were differences in how and where alternative histories were to be presented, there was rarely disagreement that alternative histories should be told. For some, the ultimate goal was unity and cohesion, for others, it was adequate memorialisation which could then lead to cohesion in time. Yet for others still, museums at the Smithsonian remained an occupying force of colonial violence that was once again exploiting the indigenous peoples of the continent for its own goals; tapping into that ever-present white fascination with the Native 'other'.

The extent to which ethnic museums would frustrate efforts to address minority group histories in existing museums was a further source of contention, where the risks of 'containment' for new museum proponents were nevertheless felt to be outweighed by the possibilities for increased resources and expanding scope that would come with a new, separate museum. More fundamentally, critics argued that museums should not be swayed by identity politics and should strive to be neutral places resistant to group lobbying, and shaped instead by (Western) scholarship. Above all, the question of separation versus inclusion in universal museums dominated the discourse at all levels, touching on both ideological notions of America as a unified nation, and critical notions of a nation still divided along racial lines. Finding a sense of unity and inclusion through the recognition of alternative histories made for a compelling case across political quarters and among leading figures at the Smithsonian, who would undoubtedly seek a means to build trust and redress past wrongs in the wake of the human remains scandal.

The debates around ethnic museums serve to illustrate existing insights on the relationship between museums, multiculturalism and the State. Collins and Solomos, for example, claim that 'for the "new right" the appeal is by and large no longer to racial supremacy but to cultural uniformity parading under the politics of nationalism and patriotism' (2010, pp. 7-8). Throughout the public debates on ethnic museums over time, the appeal to national

unity and commonality across cultures effectively sidesteps more challenging discourse on the persistence of social and economic divisions within society. Citing Althusser, Message notes that representation by a nation state can only be possible if it serves the ideological needs of the state (Message, 2007, p. 251). This view chimes with the theory of 'interest convergence' as developed within Critical Race Theory (Bell, 2004; 2005). These theories invoke the underlying political dimensions of responses to ethnic museums, which can be read as being concerned, ultimately, with state control. Yet the museological aspects of the debate around the representation of ethnic histories in a national museum context provide a unique stance on these issues. Such museums, as symbols of self-definition and professional change, promised as much for the future of museums as for the long-awaited recognition of the racial past.

Chapter 4

Two culturally specific museum projects in the 1990s

1. Introduction

The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) and the renewed attempts for a national African American museum on the Mall emerged in the late 1980s within a broader cultural and political context which promoted the idea of a successful, multicultural and multi-ethnic democracy. At the close of the Cold War, this national image offered a contrast and a potential model to Soviet bloc nation states and fuelled a notion of successful progression on issues of race for a predominantly conservative America (Atanasoki, 2006, p. 215). Scholars have identified a shift in the discourse of race within political and cultural arenas, from a rights-based demand for institutional recognition which developed from the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s, to a celebration of cultural diversity during the 1980s and 1990s (*Ibid.*).

As a whole, the Smithsonian Institution had by the mid-1980s aligned itself strongly with a cultural diversity agenda which expounded a rhetoric of inclusion and cohesion (Smithsonian Institution, 1986). Racial issues were coded in to this rhetoric, and were not explicitly addressed within the Institution's strategic aims (*Ibid.*). Professional discourse within the museum community, however, was also strongly shaped by rights movements, new scholarship, and the flourishing of culturally-specific institutions more broadly. With the enacting of the NMAI in 1989 and the feasibility study of an African American museum launching in 1991, new culturally specific museum projects maintained their focus on the principle of inclusion and self-definition that had arisen from the modern civil rights era and were embedded in the practice of African American museums and tribal museums across the country. In the context of the Smithsonian during the 1980s and 1990s, therefore, issues of race could be framed in a multitude of ways, and could move in and out of direct attention and conversation. This chapter evidences the particular discourses of race within

the development of culturally-specific museum projects, starting in the early 1990s, and examines the extent to which they impacted upon museum practice at the Smithsonian more broadly. Evidence of discussions, debates and formalised approaches at this time reveals the particular ideas about race that were prioritised within museum strategy and programming, and shows how other ideas about race were sidestepped in the planning and consultations of the NMAI and the National African American Museum Project (NAAMP). This complicates the notion put forward by scholars and practitioners that the Smithsonian was largely 'colourblind' as an institution, but shows how matters of America's racial past and present sat uneasily in the discussions and debates not only beyond but also within new culturally-specific museums and ideas on what they could achieve for both community stakeholders and broader audiences.

Although overlapping to a degree, two distinct approaches to addressing racial issues can be detected during this period. The first can be understood as largely a response to the cultural shifts within the Smithsonian towards the advocacy of pluralism and diversity, and the willingness among staff to actively rethink and reframe the presentation of non-white cultural groups in America. The second has its roots in an explicit discourse on race, fuelled by post-civil rights scholarship and critical studies on race and gender inequalities that lapped around the edges of official and celebratory cultural diversity policies. This chapter considers these distinct approaches in turn. The first part of the chapter considers the impact of disciplinary shifts and changing ideas of cultural rights and expertise in relation to new historical narratives, changes within natural history, and the difficulties for many within the Smithsonian in defining the disciplinary focus of the NMAI which was to be first and foremost a museum of Native voice. This took its inspiration from the institutional shift towards the celebration and integration of cultural diversity over the 1960s to the 1980s. The second part of the chapter explores the increased organisation of African American perspectives, taking its inspiration from critical race studies and global anti-racism movements. As this chapter will show, culturally specific museum projects were supported by an institution which fostered both approaches, but were nevertheless shaped in key ways in relation to specific strands of these.

The 1990s was a transformative period within the history of the Smithsonian. While significant changes had occurred within the Institution during and since the directorship of

Secretary Dillon S. Ripley in the 1960s, it was Secretary Robert McCormick Adams that lead the Smithsonian through the 1990s, as urgent calls to be more inclusive were set against conservatives' fear of increased socialism and excessive action on behalf of ethnic minorities (Nicol, 2013). Reflecting back on the 1970s and 1980s, Lonnie Bunch has characterised the Smithsonian as an organisation that was willing to change, but did not always know how best to accomplish its goals and meet the needs of diverse staff and constituents (Bunch, 2015). While it has succeeded in diversifying its workforce to a degree, and made some key curatorial appointments particularly during the 1970s and 1980s, it also suffered from structural inequities, brought forward by the work of the Office for the Committee for a Wider Audience and highlighted by formal investigations around bias in the promotion, or lack thereof, of ethnic minority staff (Message, 2013; Cunningham, 1990). By the 1980s, the discourse of multiculturalism and the celebration of cultural diversity offered a strategic avenue to challenge underrepresentation and misrepresentation of cultural groups across staffing, collections, and public programming. New critical scholarship from across the academy spurred a resurgence in openness to institutional self-critique, and traditional forms of 'Western' expertise were being challenged across the museum sector. It was within this context that new and more substantive culturally-specific programming and projects evolved.

2. Disciplinary shifts

The Smithsonian's strategic priority of cultural diversity aligned with a general shift towards multiculturalism within cultural institutions across many western liberal democracies (Ivison, 2010, p. 1). The art world was also tackling issues of ethnic identity and the canon head-on through a 'revisionist' frame in the United States and elsewhere. For example, a New York-based artistic exhibition entitled *The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s* opened in 1990, which was designed to 'openly' address the 'issues of racial, ethnic, sexual, and even class identity that were then being explored by visual artists' (Wallace, 1999). This was viewed as a 'revisionist' show which questioned 'prevalent museum practices' by using a team of curators who represented the ethnic groups of each of the artists on display (Ramirez, 1992, p. 67). Revisionist art exhibitions were also being staged

within the Smithsonian. The 1991 exhibition *The West As America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier*, shown at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, sought to explore the role of art in the construction of national narratives. Curated by William Truettner, the exhibition and its associated publication sought to expose the accepted narrative of the heroic settling of the West, a pervasive national story within white society, and present an alternative perspective of this expansion of the United States (Trachtenberg, 2007, p. 292). Works by frontier painters such as George Catlin and Albert Bierstadt were reinterpreted through text panels for their role in promoting a Euro-centric and nationalist view of a fertile and available landscape to be colonised (Anon, 1991c). Highlighting the exhibition's rendering of expansionist policies as racist, scholar Alan Trachtenberg commented:

Principally, it suggested that nineteenth-century territorial expansion, justified at the time as the fulfilment of Manifest Destiny, included military conquest and outright theft of lands from native peoples. It also pointed out that this imperial aggression was justified by an ideology that described Indians as 'savages' – inferior peoples whose only hope lay in adopting the white man's ways; otherwise, extinction (Trachtenberg, 2007, p. 293).

Trachtenberg analysed the exhibition's visitors' book, and highlighted both positive and negative remarks, with those upset by the exhibition reacting 'with pain, disbelief and anger at seeing adventure and settlement recast as expansion and conquest' (Trachtenberg, 2007, p 292). News of the exhibition's critical narrative reached Congress, and Senator Ted Stevens, an Alaskan with connections with the oil industry, threatened to investigate the Smithsonian and withdraw funding (Message, 2013). It emerged later that Stevens had not visited the exhibition himself, but had taken his cue from historian and former director of the National Museum of History and Technology, Daniel Boorstin, who disapproved of what he saw as an attempt to shame the nation (Thomas and Glick, 1991).

The growing discontent with revisionist histories which were seen to foreground multiculturalism and display cultural bias, and which seemingly came at the expense of established narratives of the American past, provided a frame for further attacks on the Smithsonian's exhibits as unacceptably 'political'. Such attacks were not always in relation to new projects or programming. Indeed, a letter in the early 1990s addressed to the Smithsonian from a Seattle resident complained about the approach taken at the National Museum of American History to the 1987 exhibition *A More Perfect Union: Japanese*

Americans and the U.S. Constitution. Indeed, the exhibition remained the only long running exhibition on the Mall over the 1990s which focused on a particular group's historical experience, and did so through the lens of a moment of racial anxiety within the nation. The complainant focused on a number of perceived inaccuracies with some of the facts given in the exhibition around the decision to 'remove' Japanese Americans from the west coast, but in the climate of the times, the issue was cast as a subversion of accurate history towards a particular cultural group's political aims: 'You do your country a great disservice when you subvert the original purpose of a great American institution like the Smithsonian into a propaganda instrument for a special interest group' (Letter to the Smithsonian Institution, 1991).

Beyond the ground-breaking exhibition on Japanese internment in the late 1980s, an emphasis on cultural diversity had paved the way for increasing consideration of the visibility of Asian American perspectives across the Smithsonian, yet it was the new NMAI that provided the context for challenging the scope of representation that was required, and asked whether exhibitions and programs within the context of broader museums were sufficient to the task in hand. In 1990, the Asian Pacific American Heritage Committee at the Smithsonian said of the NMAI and the state of Asian American representation at the Smithsonian:

We have good reason to be particularly proud of the exhibit, 'A More Perfect Union' which deals with the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Other than this and occasional exhibits of Asian American artists, the only exhibits focussing on Asian and Pacific Americans have been done by our committee on a shoe string. The Smithsonian's exhibits of Asian art in the Sackler/Freer Galleries and the Halls of Asian and Pacific Island cultures in the Museum of Natural History are no substitutes for exhibits about Asian and Pacific Americans. [...] The mandate of the new Museum of the American Indian includes native Hawaiians. [...] Opinions are mixed as to whether this lumping of 'native Americans' will actually be good or bad for the Pacific Islanders, who will, at best, assume a very minor position in the new museum (Franklin and McCutcheon, 1990).

For much of the twentieth century, race referred not simply to a social category or issues, but to biological categories as Chapter 2 illustrated. As a centre of research and scholarship, scientists and cultural historians at the Smithsonian from the middle of the century recognised that clear differentiation of races within the human species had been widely

discredited. Race was generally understood by scientists as a social concept, rather than a biological reality (Miles, 2000, p. 126). Yet the organisation of collections and cultural displays within the museums on the Mall lagged behind in articulating these more contemporary scientific ideas.

During the 1980s, the classification and display of cultural differences at the Smithsonian remained closely associated with the study of the natural world, which encouraged a biological, comparative approach in understanding different cultural groups and de-emphasised national and historical aspects of culture-formation, yet perspectives were beginning to shift (Walker, 2013). In 1987, Robert S. Hoffman, a respected biologist of small mammals and the new Director of the National Museum of Natural History, launched the Museum's strategic document, *Directions and Goals for the 21st Century*. This presented a broad articulation of human cultures as part of the 'encyclopaedic' presentation of the natural world, and emphasised the Museum's mission in promoting understanding and preservation efforts. It also covered current political contexts and museological changes in relation to cultural representation in outlining research priorities for the coming century:

[I]n the last twenty years, scholars in natural history museums [...] have changed their philosophy and perspective. Of particular note is the increased concern for the value and relevance of basic research, whether for environmental conservations and/or cultural survival and education among native peoples. [...] Concern for Native American cultures has resulted in a burgeoning of Native American museums around the country, as well as new Native American programs at the Smithsonian (Hoffman, 1987, p. 8).

The recognition of new 'Native American museums' and new perspectives within natural history museums provided a context for a sharp critique of the Museum's existing displays. Hoffman's description of Exhibit hall 11, 'The Native Peoples of North America', was damning:

Cases in this hall reflect concepts prevalent more than 100 years ago and say virtually nothing of current significance about present-day Native Americans. Worse yet, the hall conveys outdated attitudes and misinformation about Native Americans that are patronizing and offensive to these groups. [...] In addition to large, thematic exhibits, smaller experimental, or living exhibits would bring the visitor closer to the world of nature including the rich variety of human cultures (Hoffman, 1987, pp. 13-14).

More specifically, it was hoped that the Natural History museum could include an offering of 'cultural exhibits with periodic "live" demonstrations of dance, music, drama, wood carving, weaving, pottery making, food preparation, body ornamentation, storytelling, and many other forms of cultural expression' (Hoffman, 1987, p. 15). Engaging audiences with manifestations of present day 'living culture' in this way offered an alternative approach which would see Native peoples participate in museum programming, and would follow the lead of the annual Smithsonian Folklife festivals but in the context of a permanent museum facility. The agency of Native peoples to shape such presentations however – something which the Folklife Festivals had battled with over the years – was not directly addressed here, perhaps suggesting a naivety in understanding the long and problematic history of museum-Native community relations, particularly regarding natural history displays. The very framing of Native Americans within natural history collections was viewed as hugely problematic within Native communities. Indeed, the binarism of showing a living versus a dead culture, as if contemporary culture were not underpinned by past traditions, was also highlighted as unhelpful some years later in deliberations on the NMAI's vision (Ortner, 1989).

The acknowledgement of the relativism of 'Euro-American' thought, and the role that natural history museums might play in valuing different worldviews, were areas that senior members of the Natural History museum's staff were keen to explore. In 1990, the new Associate Director for Public Programs Robert Sullivan produced something of a personal reflection on his thoughts on the changes that lay ahead in a 'report' entitled "*The Unity of All Creation: A New Paradigm for The National Museum of Natural History*" (Sullivan, 1990). The overall philosophy was one of 'a new interconnected paradigm for the museum; that all things, people, termites, the chemistry of the atmosphere are linked, interdependent, part of a single organic whole' (Sullivan, 1990, p. 1-2), but Sullivan also presented a new social role for the Museum:

In an increasingly confident, assertive, pluralistic world, the intellectual, economic, cultural, ethnographic authority and primacy of Euro-American, western society are being challenged everywhere. The ascendant vertical search for truth has also gone horizontal with all truths including anthropological and scientific, now viewed as contingent, contextual, relative. Multiple ways of knowing, explaining, being in the world are now the expected and accepted norm. Natural history museums can no longer be merely scholarly curious observers of culture, we must be active

champions of cross-cultural respect, empathy, tolerance, and equity (Sullivan, 1990, p. 4).

Inspiring though this vision may have been for cultural scientists at the time, the social role was difficult, in reality, to embed. It was far from easy to move beyond the difficulties of representing the American Indian in the natural history frame. A culturally-specific focus stood in contrast to the broad, scientific focus on natural history and the diversity of human cultures (Hoffman, 1987, p. 1) A focus on 'minorities' was most clearly embedded into the area of educational programming (Hoffman, 1987, p. 4).

3. The NMAI's disciplinary conundrum

The concept of a national museum of 'American Indians' caused something of a disciplinary conundrum for Smithsonian officials, funders, and broader stakeholders. Even as a clear message of the rights of Native peoples' to represent their own cultures was being voiced by Secretary Adams, as well as by the newly appointed NMAI director Richard West, the question of the appropriate disciplinary focus for the new museum was being wrangled with. The Smithsonian Council were sensitive to matters of accurate representation, disciplinary expertise and professionalism in regard to this new ethnic heritage museum, but had not yet grasped the implications for practice in prioritising 'Indian voice'. The emphasis on first-person voice was troubling to those familiar with the Heye collection of the Museum of American Indian in New York, which was being transferred to the Smithsonian as the basis of the new NMAI's collection. In a letter of thanks following a Regents Dinner, Native American art expert and curator Ellen Taubman alluded to her ambivalence about the goals of the new museum: 'It was very troubling to hear little or no conversation of comment on the calibre of art collection around which this museum is being built. The greater emphasis seemed to be on the contemporary Native American cultures, which, while very important, do not encompass what George Heye's goals for the Foundation were' (Taubman, 1990). One of the key funders James Block wrote to Secretary Adams with what he saw as the key disciplinary puzzle for the new museum to confront:

A collection as extensive and encyclopedic [sic] as this can support a permanent exhibit with a variety of emphases – historical, cultural, anthropological, ethnographic or artistic. While all of these have merit and are by no means mutually

exclusive, any museum needs a focus and point of view which in turn presupposes a clear statement of purpose and mission. [...] From the material which you forwarded as well as from several newspaper reports, it would appear that there is a high level of interest in seeing the National Museum become a focal point for and showcase of Native American culture. Under this scenario the museum would become involved not only in presenting a coherent historical view of the cultures indigenous to the continent but also of present day realities and issues of concern and importance to American Indians. There is no question but [sic] that is a valid and laudable mission and one of importance and relevance for the national center that the Museum can and will become. Having said that, there is also a valid need to be met by a more traditional art history museum which selects objects for viewing based on artistic merit rather than historical or social import and places these within an historical context. While narrower in focus, an art museum would through the display of masterpieces celebrate and chronicle the artistic and aesthetic heritage of the peoples of this hemisphere (Block, 1990).

The response to Block from Secretary Adams underscored the extensive discussions and debates that were happening with communities and scholars on the new museum and the role of art within such discussions. The essence of the museum, as expressed by Adams, would be to explore the role of tradition in contemporary life, and art provided excellent opportunities 'for interpreting the world view of a people from earlier times to the present day' (Adams, 1990b). It was clear that the NMAI was to be first and foremost a museum in which Native peoples' perspectives would be prioritised. Indeed, in an extended vision statement drafted in 1990, advisor to the NMAI Rayna Green, wrote: 'It is a museum in which no one disciplinary perspective – anthropology, history, art history – would take precedence; in fact, it will emerge as one in which Native perspectives and interpretations can exist alongside others or take precedence themselves' (Green, 1989).

The ambition of developing with Native communities a new paradigm for the representation of Native peoples through the new museum was tempered by concerns around the increasing sense of separatism from existing departments and disciplinary expertise at the Smithsonian. This was of particular concern to staff within the National Museum of Natural History, whose expertise in Native cultures was felt to be being ignored. Bill Fitzhugh of the Natural History Museum wrote to Dean Anderson, the Undersecretary of Museums, to express these concerns, admitting that while the NMAI effort 'is certainly broader than the current interests of the Anthropology Department', the planning process 'continually seems to be unfolding in offices across the Mall with hardly any contact with our staff here' (Fitzhugh, 1990). Fitzhugh warned against the growing ill-feeling among his staff, which if

allowed to continue, might hinder good relations for scholarship and resources in the future, although he recognised the strategic importance of separation at least for a key moment in the NMAI's establishment:

Some of us have been waiting for the deal with New York and Congress to be clinched in [the] hope that our lack of visibility in the NMAI acquisition and planning was deemed politically necessary. But as time goes on, and the isolation grows, the chances for engendering positive, collaborative effort fades (Fitzhugh, 1990).

A jotted note from Secretary Adams attached to the letter read: 'Dean - I do think we should assure Anthro [sic] linkage and inputs. Bob.'

The political necessity of distancing the NMAI from the National Museum of Natural History during the 1980s was not in question among senior personnel within the Smithsonian, yet the emergence of the NMAI had stalled plans for improved representation of American Indians within that museum (Thompson, 2004). By 1989, the redevelopment of the Indian Halls, which featured the direct involvement of Native communities, had been postponed to avoid diverting attention and funds away from the new NMAI development (*Ibid.*). For West, however, the opportunity offered by a new museum for a new, more Native-centric disciplinary focus was a priority, and the separation with Natural History was more than an internal political necessity during its establishment in the halls of Congress. In his address to a conference, West noted:

[I]n this Museum we must be sure that all those elements that make up Indian culture are represented. For too long we have been interpreted primarily through the eyes of the anthropologist and the ethnologist. This approach has much to do with our status in museums as the 'dead' and the 'studied' rather than as full members of the contemporary human family (West, 1990, p. 9).

Indeed, the NMAI would be the manifestation in museum form of a new disciplinary paradigm, which foregrounded issues of social justice and tribal concerns, and which had been manifest within universities since the late 1960s in various forms such as departments and programmes of Native American Studies and ethnic studies (Hu-deHart, 2011). Multidisciplinary in nature, it also resembled approaches taken forward through new tribal museums and cultural centres across the country (Jacknis, 2008, p. 29).

As the 1990s drew on, the potential agency of the new NMAI in addressing racial histories and contemporary social issues came to the fore. While many congratulated the

Smithsonian on an important new project which would see American Indians rightly recognised and venerated within the national memorial landscape, others were more critical of the development as a misplacement of much-needed resources for Native communities. Following a campaigning letter for donations to the NMAI, a Smithsonian Associate Helen Rice sent a provocative response enclosing a number of recent solicitations for money from local Native communities 'to forestall crises of need for basic necessities associated with day-to-day living' and asked what possible role the museum could play in addressing Native peoples' plight (Rice, 1992). She continued that while the NMAI might 'succeed in calling further attention to Indian culture', such a development does 'not speak to their immediate and critical needs at the sites where they now live' (Rice, 1992). Moreover, she asserted, a 'national embarrassment' would lie ahead with the 'grossest shame of knowing that \$100,000 donations are being spent for self-serving political campaigns, while our Indians are being supported by the humanity of citizens who understand their condition under a government that has generally held them in virtual contempt' (Rice, 1992).

Meanwhile, a letter from Scott Stone of Hawaii, who identified himself as having 'roughly 25 per cent Aniyunwiya (Cherokee) ancestry' offered a few philosophical principles for the new museum, including the need to involve Indian communities in the process, as well as broader publics (Stone, 1990). Stone was keen that the NMAI portray Indians 'realistically' as both everyday people like everyone else, but:

[a]t the same time, it would be a mistake to de-mythologize the American Indian so completely that a viewer might wonder why we're bothering with all of this. [...] [P]reserve truth without sacrificing romance [...], keep that certain aura of – if not nobility, at least excitement (Stone, 1990).

Stone went on to offer thoughts more specifically of the racial policies of the United States, and the importance of educating American children: 'well, it's a Pandora's box that nevertheless should be opened', he wrote. Stone continued:

I had lived several decades before the appearance of a decent Cherokee history, telling the facts of the Trail of Tears. Had I this information as an adolescent or young man it might have changed the direction of my life. Who knows what the missed opportunities are because we have withheld or distorted facts of our elimination of American Indians? In a sense, until recently, the Americans took the Indians' lives and then took their history. So one vital external program would be deep and on-

going programs sponsored by the museum in classrooms all across the country, programs that educate and challenge (Stone, 1990).

New academic fields of 'ethnic studies' and 'Native American Studies' were thriving in the 1990s, and the upcoming quincentenary of Columbus' voyage to the Americas offered an urgency for significant debate into the American experience (Hu-deHart, 2011). Programs of Native American Studies had developed across the academy since the 1970s and emerging scholarship underpinned the ways that the new NMAI was imagined among Native scholars and community leaders who formed the NMAI's Board of Trustees and its scholarly advisory group. Yet while an ethos of cultural diversity within the Smithsonian was shaping critical questions about the appropriateness of a Native-centred approach behind closed doors, the focus of the NMAI's development during the 1990s offered little room for sustained discussion of the broader, predominantly white Smithsonian-visiting public in relation to the new museum. It was clear that Native scholarship and perspectives were firmly at the forefront of the new museum. Yet the climate of celebrating diversity and broader internal critique also connected with issues of history and race in other areas of the Institution, generating awareness on the need for change across many aspects of the organisation, such as staffing, programming, and audience development.

4. Addressing race: New questions and narratives across the Smithsonian

Discourse on race in the early 1990s within the Smithsonian continued to take other forms, outside of culturally specific museum programming and developments. In the Summer of 1990, a forum sponsored by the Office of Museum Programs was held on 'the role of museums in influencing public perceptions of gender, ethnicity and race' (Eng, 1990, p.1). Contributions to the debate were written up in the Fall edition of *Four Star*, the newsletter of the Smithsonian Institution Women's Council. The forum developed from a group of Summer interns who had voiced concern over the content of some Smithsonian exhibits. Staff members from Natural History and American History also participated in the debate, which revealed distinctly different positions on addressing race than those being articulated within the NMAI development. Indeed, these debates, coming as they were from staff who could see structural issues of race and gender inequality within the Institution, could

perhaps be more unwaveringly critical of the Institution than those looking for support and acceptance for a new museum development. Such discussions certainly focused more heavily than the NMAI project on the challenge to educate museum audiences on the key issue of race at this time.

The forum heard from Edith Mayo of the Museum of American History about the ‘gap between the rhetoric of inclusion of women within the framework of the Institution – in collecting, exhibition and research – and the ability to actually carry that out’ (Eng, 1990, p. 1). Richard Ahlborn, also from American History, focused on the usefulness of using stereotypes in displays of ethnic cultures. For Ahlborn, as paraphrased in the newsletter, this could:

[...] show the evolution of an ethnic group’s image and serve as a contrast to the more complex, accurate portrayal of an ethnic group. In this way, stereotypes can be used to encourage thought about the meaning of ethnicity (Eng, 1990, p.2).

At the time, Ahlborn was deeply involved in the Columbus Quincentenary exhibition to be held in 1992 to mark the events of 1492, and his current research focus was, he revealed, primarily on ethnic relations in New Mexico after 1500. Michael Blakey from Natural History went on to talk more directly about addressing ‘the blind side of race’. For Blakey, as summarised in the newsletter:

Identifying and presenting stereotypes of groups of people will help the public recognize subtle racism in society. [...] You have to recognize the [racial] categories that have been operative in order to correct the inequities involved. [...] The way in which to move forward is to become fully critical of those categories in order to formulate a non-racial and non-racist society (Eng, 1990, p. 2).

Blakey also added further thoughts on the shifts that needed to take place:

[Racism] is most powerful when you have to push to define it and find it, and when you are involved in it without even knowing it or acknowledging it,” Blakey added. Museums need to undergo “paradigm breaking,” in which other perspectives can help “to achieve a critical view that [...] can see the blind side that’s so pervasive in Euro-Americans, he said. There needs to be a more thorough continuation of Smithsonian efforts to find and end racism in exhibitions and in hiring [...] (Eng, 1990, p. 2).

Following these contributions from Blakey, the Museum of Natural History’s Kathleen Gordon added her concerns on the new exhibition on human evolution that was being

developed at the time, which will 'demonstrate the fallacies behind racial theory and the difficulties of applying current racial labels' (Eng, 1990, p. 7). The newsletter detailed her recent unsettling experiences in the matter before quoting her directly: 'This summer Gordon worked with an intern who found subtle racism in a human variation exhibition, where Gordon had not detected problems':

I know firsthand [sic] having different perspectives and different sensitivities [...] is inordinately valuable [...]. Euro-Americans cannot expect to have or to know the perspectives of other ethnic groups. (Eng, 1990, p. 7).

Such discussions, as written up in *Four Star*, offer a contrasting approach on the need to address race which stemmed from those working on audience programming away from the culturally-specific museum projects underway at the time.

As the Quincentenary approached, a range of events were staged which helped to reflect on the impact of Columbus' arrival in the Americas in 1492. *Seeds of Change: Five Hundred Years Since Columbus* was a large, high profile exhibition produced largely by the National Museum of Natural History. The focus of the exhibition was framed heavily around the ecological and biological impact of this contact, and it featured five 'case study' exhibits, focusing on the exchange of sugar, potatoes, disease, maize, and the horse. Rather than focus on a national history, the exhibition prioritised a global story: 'By focusing on five major case studies [...] we are able to examine forces of encounter and exchange which reordered the ethnic composition of countries in every corner of the globe, transformed the diet and health of people everywhere, initiated whole new economic systems, and altered the flora and fauna of both the Old and New Worlds' (Adams, 1991a). The exhibition was perceived to be something of a risk for one sponsor of the exhibition, the Potato Board. In a letter of thanks post-opening for the 'brilliantly conceived and executed exhibit', President and CEO of The Potato Board, Douglas Slothower, admitted his trepidation for the program 'and its potential for adverse publicity among ethnic groups' (Slothower, 1991). He continued, 'Again, I must compliment you [...] in that the weight of the Smithsonian's reputation seems certain to insulate us from unwarranted and unfavourable attention from political groups' (*Ibid.*). Indeed, the exhibition which opened in October 1991 and its associated publication *Seeds of Change* proved immensely popular and well received, with an 'incredible array of laudatory publicity [...] received in print, video, and local and national

television', and record breaking book sales (Viola, 1991). Even Cristobal Colón, the Duke of Veragua and the direct descendent of Christopher Columbus wrote to express his appreciation (Colón, 1991).

Criticism of the exhibition from some public members of the Smithsonian inevitably came in, and stood in sharp contrast to responses from within Native communities and press. One New York resident wrote of his disgust that the events and facts of history had been so twisted: 'It's unfortunate', he wrote, 'that history is usually written by the victors; but those responsible for the "Quincentennial Commemoration" in the name of the Smithsonian Institution have committed the quintessential error of wasting public funds to propagate the re-writing of history by the losers (Letter to Adams, 1991e). The reply, perhaps in order to win back the favours of this 'Contributing Member', emphasised the neutrality of the exhibition, which was intended to focus on 'good, bad and indifferent' aspects of change. The reply further underscored that *Seeds of Change* was 'not intended to be "revisionist"' but merely a popular presentation of accepted scholarship on this period of history (Adams, 1991b):

Admittedly, what happened as a result of 1492 was not always for the best. Diseases from Europe, Asia, and Africa did in fact kill millions of American Indians; the horse, on the other hand, which also came from the Old World, helped many American Indian tribes attain a cultural renaissance that would have otherwise been impossible. Sugar, which came to the Americas from the Old World, did in fact introduce slavery to the Caribbean; but as a result of slavery, a whole new African American culture was created (Adams, 1991b).

Meanwhile, the quincentenary had sparked a social movement among indigenous activists across the nation, which, according to scholar Jeremy Hunt, articulated 'assertions of indigenous historicity and bold claims around environmental guardianship' (Smith, 2001). In presenting an exhibition striving to be apolitical, the Smithsonian was clearly out of step with the social movements being directed from within Indian Country, even as the NMAI planning was underway.

As part of the Quincentenary, the Smithsonian held a symposium in 1991, entitled "'Race," Discourse and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View of 1492' which may have offered a forum for the exploration of contemporary Native opinions on the meaning of the Quincentenary among different groups. The purpose of the symposium was envisaged to

create 'a new world view' by exploring the European contexts of the period, and 'recovering the lost history of the non-European world' (Wynter, 1996). However, the event proved to be of little help to contemporary, popular debates centred around the Native community. The symposium contributions were developed and published in 1997 in a publication of the same name, which received mixed reviews, with one declaring that the proceedings and conference are 'mis-named' as the contributors 'do not seriously investigate concepts of race', and barely mention Native Americans, but do focus on some important themes on Europe such as Iberian expansionism and Christianity (Wynter, 1996). However, the contribution of Sylvia Wynter, who alone focused on the differing views of Native activists, outlined what she saw as a hopeful reconciliation of views in the *Seeds of Change* approach to understanding the significance of 1492:

We are overwhelmed by an avalanche of arguments between the celebrants and the dissidents. The celebrants are intellectuals of Western European and Euroamerican descent, and the dissidents are intellectuals mainly of indigenous or Native American descent, joined by Euroamerican allies such as Hans Koning, the writer, and Kirkpatrick Sale, the environmentalist. How, the arguments runs, is the 1492 event to be perceived – as a “glorious achievement,” a “heroic and daring deed” of discovery and exploration, a triumph for the Christian West that was to liberate the indigenous peoples from their Stone Age, deprived existence [...]? Or, is it to be seen from the dissident perspective – as one of “history’s monumental crimes,” a brutal invasion and conquest that led to a degree of genocidal extinction and of still ongoing ecological disaster unprecedented in human history? (Wynter, 1996).

For Wynter, the 'dissidents', were just one part of a story that should be balanced, and in no one group's favour, and to this end, she quotes the introduction to the *Seeds of Change* publication as an example of 'one of the most impressive attempts to reconcile these opposing views' which renders the 'true story of Christopher Columbus' as one of 'exchange'; two worlds linking; and the 'crucial intermingling of peoples, animals, plants and diseases between Europe, Africa and the Americas' (Wynter, 2006). Citing Susan Harjo's call to redefine the entire history of contact and join together to reinterpret the past, Wynter instead frames a solution which goes 'beyond the premises of both celebrants and dissidents' with a 'human view [...] of *natural* and newly conceived *cultural* history' [emphases in original] which recognises the organic development of hybridity (Wynter, 2006). Such contributions would have sat well with the desire for a more positive, unified and less overtly political response to the significance of Columbus' voyage, even as different

communities continued to occupy different discursive realms and rhetorical approaches in the addressing of a racial past and present.

Meanwhile, although the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History's reinterpretation of its Africa Halls were postponed, museums of natural history began to develop their displays of cultural diversity. The 1980s and 1990s were characterised by Smithsonian staff member Deborah Mack as a more open time, when new narratives could come to the fore (Mack, 2015). In its reinterpretation of its Africa Halls which opened in 1993, the Field Museum in Chicago pioneered exhibitions about slavery, and supported teachers to develop new lessons on this area, within a national curriculum that did not at this time include the transatlantic slave trade (Mack, 2015). Mack, who had worked on the Field Museum's new Africa Halls recalls a time of openness and growth. There were a 'growing number of initiatives where we were all talking to each other at a time that I think coincided with, in the greater museum field, a willingness to recognise that [museums] were not hitting the mark' (Mack, 2015). Inspired by museums like the National Japanese American museum, a non-Smithsonian national museum in Los Angeles which opened in 1992, and tribal museums across the country, there was a feeling among some curators within the profession that 'we had to take control of these institutions' (Mack, 2015).

Within the Smithsonian, the 1990s proved to be a decade of increasing critique, control and organisation around African American representation within the staff, collections, programming and displays. Activity among African American curators continued, however, with Spencer Crew and Lonnie Bunch of the National Museum of American History meeting regularly with others to discuss issues of Black history across the institution and share emerging practice in this field. Before his death, Kinard had worked to secure the acquisition of the Scurlock Collection for the Smithsonian (Ruffins, 2015a). Efforts were small-scale but registered as important steps forward: there had been an effort to address African American history with the *After the Revolution* exhibition of 1985 and with the *Nineteenth Century American Life* exhibition of 1987, which included a small section on slavery and the transmission of African culture to the United States, and *From Field to Factory* was to make a significant impression by 1987 (Ahlborn, 1999, p. 15). The 1987 exhibition was inspirational for curators like Deborah Mack, who was overwhelmed at seeing her 'family story' represented on the Mall (Mack, 2015). However, curators voiced concern that there

was general opposition to directly addressing African Americans' experience of slavery or, as Bunch added later, 'the experiences of the free black community' (NAAMP, 1992a, p. 6).

The potential for a new American Indian and a new African American museum on the mall had certainly attracted debate, but the efforts to incorporate ethnic specific experiences and culturally specific approaches within the more 'universalist' spaces of the Smithsonian, such as National Museum of American History, were to prove more contentious from both proponents and critics of new ethnic histories. While creating a space to focus on Black history and perspectives was seen as crucial, some voiced strongly the need to integrate this with white history, not for the sake of diversity, but for the sake of adequate contextualisation, and a focus on the forces of oppression. While the press and public praised the NMAH for its temporary exhibition *From Field to Factory*, John Kinard, as director of the Anacostia Museum, and still the most senior African American staff member in the Institution, was critical of its focus on the stories of migration.

[...] when migrations were occurring with blacks, something was happening with whites. They were doing something. So why not integrate the whole thing? You don't just point up blacks or point down whites, you integrate it. You show while this movement was going on, something else was going on, or somebody was pushing those blacks to leave. Who were they? What were the circumstances and situations? (Kinard, 1987).

Indeed, Kinard was vocal about the need for a strong African American presence in the historical presentations on the National Mall. The implications of such a facility for his own Anacostia Museum were complex, and the mission for this existing culturally specific museum was to be redrawn at this time away from national histories and towards its original Anacostia neighbourhood focus, partly as a political move to emphasise the need for a 'national' African American museum (Smithsonian Institution Anacostia Museum, 1989). In the closing lines of a tribute to Kinard shortly after his death, a confirmation of his position on the Anacostia, and the concept of a larger museum facility on the Mall, was underscored: 'Mr. Kinard expressed his desire for the Anacostia Museum to be "a shining example to other museums of African American history" [and] that a comprehensive, national African American museum should be on the Mall' (Anon, 1990). For Kinard, however, his broader frustrations at the lack of African American viewpoints and histories

on the Mall, are clearly on show in an oral history interview in the late 1980s, shortly before his death:

Why don't we tell American history? For example, they don't talk about Indians in the [Museum of American History]. In the Museum of American History, how could you even call it that and not treat the American Indian? How is it that you could treat the American Black as a side issue in something called 'Migrations'? (Kinard, 1987)

As scholar Andrea Burns suggests, Kinard's frustrations may also have spoken of his anxiety that major African American exhibitions could now be supported for a Mall audience, while his own Anacostia Museum struggled to articulate its identity and secure sufficient resources from the Institution (Burns, 2013, pp. 166-167). His concern, however, was one shared by many others within and outside of the Smithsonian. Perhaps due to the possibility of a forthcoming national African American museum, there were no permanent exhibitions installed on the Mall during the 1990s which would cover the African American experience. When *From Field to Factory* closed in 1988, African American history and perspectives were once again missing from the Mall's public presentations.

African American perspectives may not have been visible in the exhibitions of the Mall, but they were certainly gathering force within the meeting rooms and auditoriums of the Smithsonian complex. In April 1989, Secretary Adams was at the centre of a Congressional Hearing on racist staffing practices at the Smithsonian, an issue which had been simmering since the early 1980s, and within a month, 'The Smithsonian African American Association', or 'SAAA', had been born. The SAAA saw its mission as a direct outcome of the Hearings:

The Smithsonian African American Association is comprised of the Institution's employees who have organized to project a united voice and to have an impact upon pan-institutional policies that affect African Americans. In Congressional hearings held in March and April 1989 on minority hiring and promotions at the Smithsonian, Secretary Adams testified that it is his belief that the Institution 'should provide leadership in both the personification and the representation of American cultural diversity and pluralism. It does not do so. It cannot shirk the challenge to do so.' [...] The Smithsonian African American Association hopes to facilitate and expedite the development and use of human resources both inside the Institution and with the larger community to address these issues (SAAA, 1990).

By 1990 the SAAA was over 500 members strong and met monthly. It has its own publication – *The Prophet* – which was produced with funds from the Office of Public Service. Its inauguration event in May 1990 was held at the Carmichael Auditorium at the

National Museum of American History, with speaker Representative William Gray, Majority Whip to the House of Representatives as the guest of honour. As written up in *The Prophet*, Gray:

[...] urged SAAA to demand change, to organise for change, and to press forward for change. “Your willingness to stand fast and monitor those issues that are of interest to you, your ability to identify those individuals and resources that can help you achieve your objectives and the energy and the tenacity with which you pursue these goals will determine the long term impact of SAAA.” [...] Gray’s message was one of hope and inspiration. In a sermon-style deliverance, not unusual for this Baptist minister, he spoke of positive change, of accountability. [...] The inaugural event, he said, could be the genesis of an influential and respective [sic] voice within the Smithsonian (SAAA, 1990).

The SAAA was active in a number of ways, such as petitioning the proposed cuts in 1991 to funding Black History Month programming and the Afro-American Index Project, a project to index African American collections across various collections and units of the Institution (Cunningham and Franklin, 1990). *The Prophet* also helped to record and share news of relevant activities across the Smithsonian, and the Association’s events helped to celebrate key figures in African American rights struggles such as Martin Luther King and Harriet Tubman, much as the Anacostia had done before. The SAAA also took inspiration from global struggles against racism. A write up in the Summer 1990 edition of *The Prophet* of the visit of Nelson Mandela to the District described his speech on the crisis of Apartheid and action which he gave at the Washington Convention Centre. The final paragraph of the write-up read as follows:

Although it will take further struggle for the Smithsonian Institution to achieve its goal of cultural equity and for our country to rid itself of racism, horrendous crimes, drugs, poverty, and famine, we must remain loyal to our aspirations. Mr. Nelson Mandela is a celebrated example of the fact that when we hold steadfast to our goals: WE CAN MAKE A CHANGE! (Austin, 1990, p. 1).

Perhaps in no small part owing to this climate of change, and supported by curators Dr. Michael Blakey and Robert Sullivan, a key decision was taken in 1991 to rectify the inaccurate portrayal of people of African descent at the National Museum of Natural History. By 1991, the ‘Origin of the Negroid Race’ exhibits in the Hall of Physical Anthropology had been declared in Secretary Adams’ view as ‘too out-of-date to remain on view’, and had been dismantled (Adams, 1991c).

Despite increased organisation and activity among the Smithsonian's now sizable number of African American staff members, the most significant call for a national African American museum on the Mall came from outside the Smithsonian (Ruffins, 2015a). Tom Mack, an African American business owner of a touring company that had been granted an exclusive contract to run coach tours to the National Mall, set up a foundation which called for funds to create a museum on the Mall dedicated to the experiences of African Americans, something he felt was sorely lacking (Ruffins, 1997; Ruffins, 2015a). Mack contacted Representative Mickey Leyland, chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, who acted as the first sponsor of bills in Congress to establish a national African American museum, and the call was taken up by Representative and experienced civil rights activist John Lewis, upon Leyland's death in 1989. The question of whether such a museum would be part of the Smithsonian or not spurred Secretary Adams to set up a feasibility study, to be led by Claudine Brown, a museum educator.

5. Addressing race through two culturally-specific museum projects

By the early 1990s, two culturally-specific museum projects were underway at the Smithsonian; the consultations and committees set up to develop the scope, collections and interpretive strategies for the NMAI facility on the Mall (even as the NMAI's New York facility was still underway in its transition from the Museum of the American Indian to a Smithsonian national museum), and a committee to explore the collections, potential site and feasibility of an African American museum on the Mall (Ruffins, 2015a). Although neither project had been spawned from the Smithsonian itself, the Institution bore an openness to new ways of ensuring diverse perspectives were being nurtured, and took each of these projects to the heart of its strategic goals for 1991 (Smithsonian Institution, 1992). The Smithsonian now found itself at the centre of debates about the concept of national ethnic museums, and found new avenues to address the legacies of the racial past.

The NMAI had begun in earnest on an ambitious consultation plan which would see staff travel to major urban and rural centres of Native culture across the United States.

Discussions with community stakeholders were not always easy, as many communities were suspicious of the Smithsonian's motives or even hostile to the concept of a major museum

facility that would supposedly represent their interests, under the banner of the Smithsonian Institution. Negative press on the extensive collections of dubiously acquired skeletal remains had swamped the American Indian press just a few years before, and the long-standing problematic relationship between museums and Native Americans had fuelled feelings of anger and distrust. Yet those who engaged with the consultations and saw the potential value of a museum facility on the Mall, representing their concerns, articulated high expectations for the meanings and impact of such a museum.

For the Smithsonian, the role of the consultations was seen optimistically as one of potential reconciliation between disparate communities. In the proposal for the consultations plan, Jacki Thompson Rand stated:

Each consultation, whether in the field or on SI grounds, represents a baby-step toward a re-evaluated and reconstituted relationship between the Smithsonian and the American Indian community. [...] It is not for me to predict the cumulative impact of the overall process, but I am optimistic that it would take us further down the road toward a collective consciousness raising (Thompson Rand, 1990).

A Collections Task Group was formed to support the planning of new approaches to the management and care of Native American material culture within the museum, to ensure the needs of collections, users, and Native American communities were met (Smithsonian Institution NMAI, no date a). On 31st May, 1990, the Group led the first of several consultation meetings with representatives of Native American communities in Oklahoma to establish 'a list of critical issues and concerns that must be addressed by the staff of the Museum' during the planning of collections management facilities and handling of material (Smithsonian Institution NMAI, no date b). At this meeting, participants voiced their concerns that there was an '[u]nwillingness of non-Indians to truly understand many feelings of Indian people' and that the NMAI was a 'key to a national understanding and a "healing" with the contemporary Indian peoples and cultures' (*Ibid.*). It was felt by participants to be a 'time of risk and danger' where those involved '[m]ust not allow the old, bad feelings to get in the way' (Smithsonian Institution NMAI, no date b). For some, the NMAI and its collection could be 'a means for social change - with the right advice' (*Ibid.*). Indeed, involvement of Native peoples was paramount, and, some hoped, involvement would raise 'self-esteem' within the communities involved.

A rethinking of the disciplinary framework of cultural interpretation was high on the agenda during consultation meetings with community members, which occurred around the country. The Oklahoma participants in the Collections Task Group's consultation for the NMAI felt that American Indian art has thus far been approached through a 'discipline without a philosophy' (Smithsonian Institution NMAI, no date b). In terms of other disciplinary interests, the same participants commented: '[There] needs to be a "formula" developed by archaeologists and Indians together, regarding the investigation of past Indian civilizations' and the Smithsonian should take the lead in this (Smithsonian Institution NMAI, no date b).

Tentative plans for exhibition programming and overall principles for the museum were drawn up soon after the first consultations began. Meanwhile, NMAI planners in the Smithsonian were working on fundraising priorities for the new facility, to meet the challenge of raising one third of the total cost from private fundraising efforts. Getting Native communities behind the project was seen as essential and questions encircled around 'how to achieve a national goal among tribal groups' and 'how to market the National Museum of the American Indian as a focal point for historical and contemporary issues' (Burnette, 1990, [underline in original]).

By 1992, the NMAI was beginning to present its goals with more confidence, and the social role that the Museum would play had come clearly to the fore. Rick Hill, the NMAI's Assistant Director for Public Programs, sent a draft of the NMAI Exhibitions Planning Document to Doug Evelyn, the Deputy Director of the NMAI, which identified the following statement of purpose for the exhibitions of the museum:

The Exhibitions Program of NMAI is dedicated to increasing public appreciation for the enduring nature of Indian cultures and to present indigenous perspectives of art, history, culture and concerns of the native peoples of the hemisphere (Hill, 1992).

'Artistic and cultural trends in art' and new perspectives on history including 'Indian/White relations' were key areas that the museum was planned to address (Hill, 1992). An anticipated strand of exhibition programming would be on social issues: 'Contemporary social, political, religious and legal issues will be explored' (Hill, 1992).

The increased clarification on the mission of the museum brought a sense of ill-ease among participants at later consultations, who felt they were being asked to contribute something to a process that was already 'in high gear' (Smithsonian Institution NMAI, 1993). Comments at the North West Coast consultation in 1993, following a presentation of the concepts and plans for the NMAI, drew heavily on the racialized relationship between museums and Indian communities. One participant said:

The Smithsonian Institute [sic] must change in their attitudes toward People of the First Nations. Most museums have a negative impact on their representation of Indian artifacts and culture and are misguided by a European model of cultural genocid[e] [sic] of displaying a dead culture. The Smithsonian people must be educated in the ways of the First Nations People (Smithsonian Institution NMAI, 1993).

It was clear that among many consulted, museums were felt to be perpetrators of damaging relations, and could not be adequate vehicles for communication of Indian histories and cultures. Those that supported the project asked that it '[a]cknowledge that you have made a mistake towards Indian/First Nation People' and 'there is still much to educate the non-Indians about the Indian Ways to understand why Indians wish to be Indians' (Smithsonian Institution NMAI, 1993).

The Way of the People was a multi-volume strategic document for the NMAI that went through several drafts and became the 'touchstone document' for staff right through to the opening of the museum on the Mall in September 2004 (Tayac, 2015). Within this strategy document, the audience for the NMAI was envisaged to be 'an international audience of Native and non-Native scholars, artists, teachers and interested laypeople' (Smithsonian Institution ODC, 1991, p. 3). The greater emphasis, however, lay in reaching Native audiences through outreach and satellite programming (*Ibid.*). The NMAI, it stated, 'has as its primary constituency all Native American people. However, the largest audience to visit NMAI facilities, especially the Mall Museum, will be non-Native' (Smithsonian Institution ODC, 1991, p. 36). This diverse audience would be served, planners believed, by providing the informational needs of those unfamiliar with Native cultures through the voices of Native people (*Ibid.*). Its ambition, in terms of its larger audience was to offer accurate portrayals of Native culture which would combat existing misperceptions that have been fostered by 'quincentenary events, the film "Dances With Wolves", environmental concerns,

and New Age spiritualism' (*Ibid.*, p. 37). It stated: 'To the extent that NMAI succeeds in debunking stereotypes held by wide audiences, it may have an impact on American culture few other museums have had' (Smithsonian Institution ODC, 1991, p. 37).

Meanwhile, the opportunity to shape a new museum that would be dedicated to African Americans that was presented to Claudine Brown in 1990 enabled the issue of race in relation to culture and nation to be taken beyond the restrictions imposed by culturally-specific programming that had developed in pockets across the Institution. A series of Task Force meetings were held between 1991 and 1992 to debate the key approaches to be taken by a National African American Museum and to make detailed plans for the philosophical approach of this building-to-be. For the History Task Force dedicated to shaping this museum, this was to be "'a new, hybrid cultural institution" unlike existing museums' (NAAMP, 1992a, p. 2). A range of new approaches were discussed for the African American museum that included the merging of disciplines - history, musicology, art - and addressing new scholarly fields such as diaspora studies (NAAMP, 1992a).

The issue of confronting racial categories was brought up in Task Force planning meetings as distinct from 'cultural and ethnic constructions of Black identity'. This was felt by Task Force members to be particularly difficult in relation to the desire to address the African diaspora and demonstrate the impact of African culture on American culture in a way that had not been allowed before within the Smithsonian (NAAMP, 1992a). Beyond notions of identity, a focus on the diaspora may, they felt, force the confrontation of racial links. Yet noting non-Black North African migrations, Task Force group member Edris Makward noted that the distinction 'between an African diaspora and a Black diaspora is a relevant one' (NAAMP, 1992b, p. 7).

6. Conclusion

Racial issues were at the forefront of many Smithsonian staff members' minds in the 1990s, although the form and rationale for such a focus differed across different projects at the Smithsonian. Two overlapping approaches to racial issues can be found at this time. The first of these approaches, which lay outside of culturally specific museum developments, saw the

pursuit of pluralism as a key responsibility for staff at all levels of the institution. There was a willingness among staff to rethink and reframe the presentation of non-white cultural groups in America, and support polyvocal presentations within their museums. Key to this was a desire for cross-cultural understandings and an effort to dig deep into everyday museum practice and try to 'see race' and expose it, in order to successfully move beyond it. This contrasted with the culturally specific approach, which was fuelled by ongoing civil rights discourses and active organisation of ethnic group representatives (Ruffins, 2015a). In the era of culture wars and attacks on political correctness, approaches to race in the form of 'revisionist' exhibitions in existing, mainstream museums were the main focus of excessive controversy which illuminated Smithsonian practices beyond the Institution to an ever-more critical public. Culturally specific approaches meanwhile, although attracting some debate and concern among Congressman, right-leaning journalists and members of the public, were less open to widespread outrage and protest. Indeed, these approaches were also less in the spotlight compared to new exhibitions, and indeed were prioritising new museum interpretations through new museums facilities, rather than tampering with and deconstructing existing ones. The inevitable separation of culturally specific museums and the focus on new disciplinary frameworks thus may have helped such projects avoid some of the most severe and vociferous challenges among varied museum stakeholder communities, who felt the Smithsonian had taken its diversity agenda too far at the expense of standards of scholarship.

The NMAI and NAAMP were, of course, emerging museum projects that needed to satisfy very diverse constituencies, including traditional funders and other long-time Smithsonian supporters, while also, in the case of the NMAI, meeting the needs of Native communities who saw the museum as both deeply troubling but also an opportunity to correct harmful stereotypes through sharing their cultural knowledge in their own ways with the public. Culturally specific museum developments were able to satisfy the call for increased cultural diversity, while also sidestepping some of the more controversial aspects of bringing new interpretations to the fore.

In her article on the culture wars that encircled the art world, Michele Wallace had drawn attention to the relative unimportance of the culture wars to black artists and those interested in the recognition of black culture (Wallace, 1999). She describes a 'White

bourgeois liberalism' which provides a zone without censure or judgement. 'Thus, pieties about freedom of expression coexist with unremarked yet systematic racial exclusions' (*Ibid.*). As she states:

My point is that these debates over what is allowable in the form of public expression have a cultural specificity that is not often taken into account. [...] The culture wars are often seen as a universal struggle over censorship in the abstract, a boorish conservative attempt to limit the overall liberalization in civil society around issues of sexual preference, gender, race, and ethnicity (Wallace, 1999, p. 177).

Deborah Mack, now staff member at the National Museum of African American History and Culture, reflecting on the significance of the culture wars, has declared them as 'generational'; part of the transition for older Americans between older national narratives and newer ones (Mack, 2015). This chapter supports Wallace's position, in that it shows them as framed by white civic values that react negatively to all forms of cultural specificity (whether in programming or whole museums). Through the lens of new national museum developments, this chapter contributes an illumination of the distinct discourses of race within the context of cultural diversity strategies, contrasting revisionism with pluralism, and demonstrating the influence Native, Black, and critical race scholarship on emerging practice.

Chapter 5

'Culturally specific museums' and post-race aspirations

1. Introduction

In the early 2000s, extensive consultations and exhibit planning were underway for the new Mall facility of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). Just one of several facilities comprising this new museum, the Mall facility was to be its premier display space. With a prime location overlooking the Capitol building, the new NMAI would sit adjacent to the 'most visited museum in the world', the Smithsonian's National Museum of Air and Space (Smithsonian Institution ODC, 1991, p. 37). Described as 'the museum different', the new NMAI presented an opportunity for a fundamentally different relationship between museums and Native peoples (Cobb, 2005, p. 488). As a museum project, the NMAI was to embody the principle of self-definition through Native 'voice' at every possible level, from governance to modes of display, exhibition themes, and care of collections (Dorris, 1992). This 'different' approach was concerned with overturning the 'Western epistemologies, systems of classification, and ideological assumptions' that had underpinned approaches to the display of Native people in museums for more than a century, and which, for Cobb, had made museums one of the most significant cultural forces of colonisation in the United States (Cobb, 2005, p. 488). The use of Native views and perspectives in order to significantly reshape traditional museum approaches has, for Cobb, been part of exercising Native 'cultural sovereignty', which she describes as a process of 'integrating the old ways and core cultural values and traditions into the very concept of what a museum is and can be – changing what has historically been a cabinet of curiosities into a community-centred gathering place for the celebration of living cultures' (2005, p. 288). However, in their accounts of the significance of the NMAI, other scholars have debated just how radical a departure the Museum was from earlier Smithsonian and wider museological practice at this time. Indeed, while the Museum emphasised self-definition, the principle of consultation with Native communities who could claim cultural ownership of collections had become, by the early 2000s, an accepted one in United States' museum practice.

Furthermore, 'self-definition' was being pursued across legal, cultural, political, and media realms (Clifford, 1997; Ames, 1991; Peers and Brown, 2003). By 2000, consultation with communities of origin particularly in ethnographic museum work was expected, rather than merely encouraged (Peers, 2000). Walker's view as a historian looking across Smithsonian practice over several decades concludes that the NMAI represented less something new, and more of 'an outgrowth of a long process of adding and revising [museum] space' (Walker, 2013, p. 1). In contrast, however, Jacksonis, identifies the 'tribal museum' qualities of the NMAI and posits that it can be best understood as a tribal museum on a larger scale, and thus a 'unique' museum in that regard (Jacksonis, 2008, p. 29). As a new site through which issues of American Indian racial identity and racial oppression were being newly explored in a major museum context, I argue that the NMAI was not only significant as the Smithsonian's first opportunity to centralise matters of race in its Mall-sited museums, but also significant as a manifestation of racial justice that would elicit new positionings of race in relation to the nation's past and present. Yet even as America's violent racial past was being newly explored within a national, and partly federally-funded museum development project, discourse more broadly within the Smithsonian and beyond was emerging that would render new culturally specific museums as out-of-step and largely irrelevant to what was seen by many to be a progressive, soon-to-be 'post-race' America.

As the NMAI was preparing to open its doors, the Smithsonian formally welcomed another new 'culturally specific museum' to its family of national museums that would offer an alternative platform for discussions of race. The National Museum of African American History and Culture was, after many years of lobbying, enacted by an Act of Congress in 2003. A high-profile development, *The Washington Post's* Jacqueline Trescott observed that the NMAAHC was 'one of the most closely watched cultural enterprises in Washington' (Trescott, 2005). As I shall discuss in this chapter, this Museum was to address and re-negotiate the notions of 'self-definition' and would centralise notions of race within the nation, ultimately with the effect of reconceptualising the hotly debated 'culturally specific museum' model in the years that followed. Yet despite these two major Smithsonian projects, race, either as an identity marker or as a system of oppression, was far from an easily approached subject of interpretation in the NMAI or in the NMAAHC at this time, and the role of national museums in addressing the racial past and its legacies remained

uncertain. This chapter offers an extended discussion of the significance and challenges of racially-framed national museums in a climate of post-race aspirations, focusing largely on the key moment for Smithsonian 'culturally specific museum' development in the early 21st Century.

2. Debating race in response to the National Museum of the American Indian

The NMAI had, since its founding in 1989, been a site that would offer a symbolic reparation in the aftermath of a long and violent history. As construction work began on the NMAI's Mall site in 1999, the new museum was seen by many of its supporters, Native and non-Native alike, as an 'antidote to centuries of racist stereotyping' and broken treaties on the part of the Federal government (Clines, 1999). In direct challenge to the United States government policies, and reigning mythologies of the Indian, past and present, the museum was envisaged to be a site of symbolic protest and education for a non-Indian public. However, the various aspirations for the new museum in addressing race were dominated by the principle of self-definition in the museum's early planning documents. The guiding principles for the new NMAI were enshrined in the early 1990s (Smithsonian Institution ODC, 1991). A culmination of extensive community consultations with Native publics and tribal representatives, both federally-recognised and otherwise, the internal report *The Way of the People* report reveals that a deep examination of racial histories and policies was far from the central interpretive strand imagined for the new museum. Indeed, while community consultations offered up a range of ideas of what should be emphasised, including historic and ongoing colonial violence, *The Way of the People* established the NMAI's primary goal as one of representing Native communities as the primary constituents, if not audience, and offering a non-Indian public a way of challenging their misconceptions about Native people in the contemporary world. Indeed, Ostrowitz demonstrates how Native perspectives on the new museum, captured in the 'sweeping' set of consultations undertaken with Native communities across the hemisphere, were often obscured in the translation to the museum's guiding principles (Ostrowitz, 2008, p. 91).



Figure 2 'Queuing outside the recently opened Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian' Washington D.C. (Photo: K. Bunning, 2004).

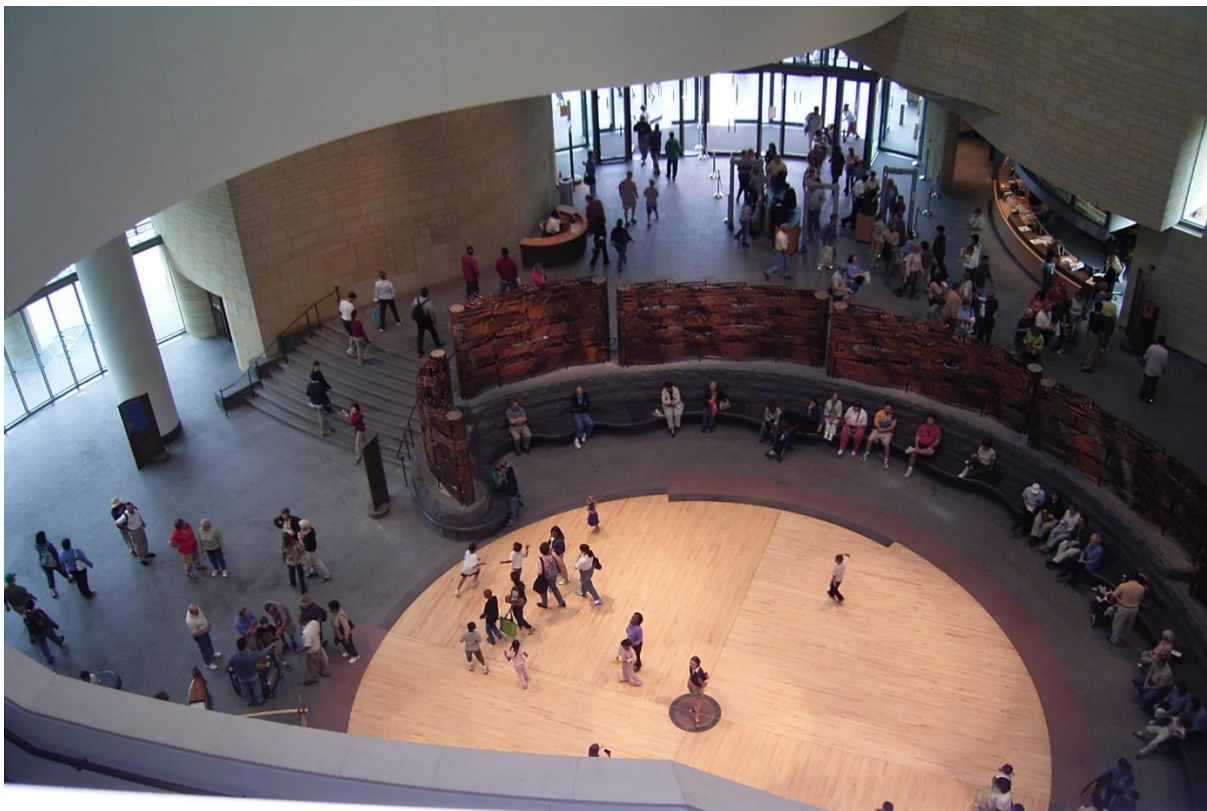


Figure 3 - 'The central Potomac, Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian' Washington D.C. (Photo: K. Bunning, 2004).

Nation (Washington State), Saint-Laurent Metis (Canada) and Pamunky Tribe (Virginia) discussed their everyday lives and experiences of being Native today (Volkert, Martin and Pickworth, 2004, p. 59).

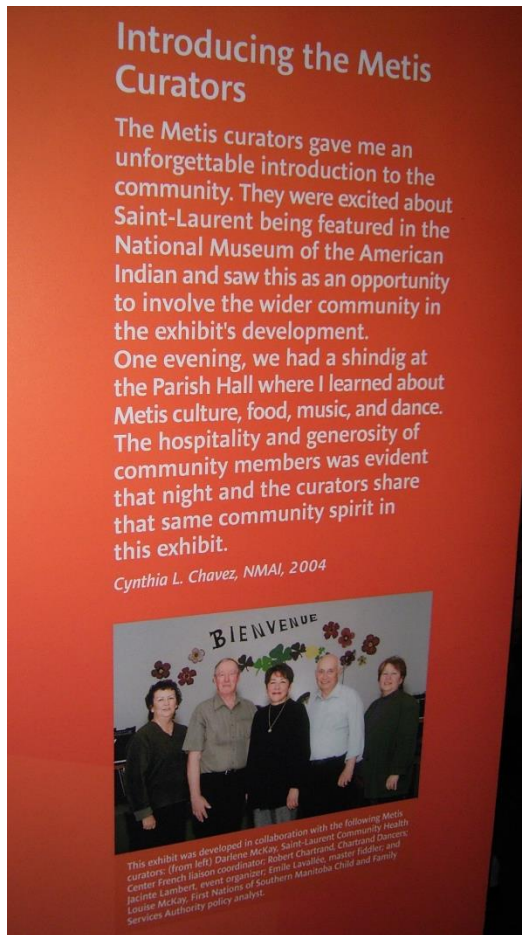


Figure 5 - 'Metis Curators introductory panel in *Our Lives*, Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian' 2004-2014, Washington D.C. (Photo: K. Bunning, 2004).

The emphasis on community curation made a new 'national' narrative difficult to achieve, yet a national memorial was central to the vision set out by Native representatives during the planning stages of the new museum. Of key importance in the consultations was the Mall facility's location in Washington D.C. as an acknowledgement and memorial to the Native peoples who had died and survived in the five hundred years since Europeans established themselves in the Americas (Smithsonian Institution ODC, 1991, pp. 15-16).

Yet this was part of a recognition and acknowledgement of Native peoples within the United States at a symbolic level; how this history should be represented, and what it should emphasise, was not set out with any precision in these early moments of master planning for the museum.

As the NMAI's Mall-site opening drew closer, the focus on 'self definition' was emphasised in response to increasingly difficult questions of how the NMAI should represent the nation's colonial and racial history, specifically the expansionist and extermination policies targeting American Indians over several centuries. These questions were far from straightforward in the national climate as the new millennium dawned. The terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington D.C. that had drawn the country to a stand-still on 11th September, 2001, ushered in a watershed moment in approaches to the issue of race and national identity (Mukherjee, 2014). The mid-2000s were an anxious time for the United

States and its relationship with the world in the wake of the attacks. Criticism of the United States and its foreign policies, particularly around the Middle East and Iraq was difficult terrain. Censoring of those critical of the government through job dismissal was not unknown in some cultural, media and academic arenas (Tucker and Walton, 2012, pp. 96-97). The sudden shift in the national mood not only created a hostile environment for many Muslim and Arab-Americans, it also created a climate of patriotism, which for NMAI staff, called into question the way in which the Museum could address a difficult and violent national past (Tayac, 2015).

An educator at the NMAI, Gabriella Tayac, recalled new questions as to how far the United States could be implicated in the racial histories that would be a part of the inaugural exhibitions. Staff considered terms such as 'genocide' as potentially problematic in their public programming. However, committed to the principle of self-definition, it was agreed to simply 'let each tribe say what it has to say' (Tayac, 2015). The community-curated sections of the inaugural exhibitions, however, were to prioritise the opportunity to focus on matters of cultural survival, identity, and origin stories. Indeed, the NMAI's symbolic and educative value was firmly positioned as correcting an absence of power and voice within the Smithsonian Institution and the museum field more broadly. Race was primarily addressed as a structural issue, within the context of museums, rather than in terms of the national narrative.

Beyond the developing interpretive approaches of the new museum, the NMAI was to be considered as a site for celebration, and new possibilities. Nowhere was this more pronounced than in the outward-facing rhetoric, where this new national museum was partly- resourced, supported and welcomed as progressive site for reconciliation. While broader articulations of the significance of the NMAI would evoke the centuries-long histories of oppression, allusions to this past and its legacies would be overshadowed by a discourse of hope for the future. In public facing articulations, and in contrast to a strong evocation of oppression and cultural survival at the ground-breaking ceremony some four years before, NMAI director Richard West issued a press release two weeks ahead of the museum's opening in 2004 that reflected on the greater meaning of the NMAI as a site for reconciliation:

This convergence [of the histories of this hemisphere] brings bright illumination to those shadow lands of the history of the Americas, and in so doing offers resolution to a long and often troubled past relationship between peoples. Even more important, it also creates for the future the very real possibility of fresh points of beginning in cultural relationships that are newly and mutually understood, respected, and reconciled in ways that have proved elusive in the Americas heretofore (West, 2004).

As a symbolic site, significant agency was anticipated for the new museum in resolving the racial past. The national mood may have affected the emphasis on the role of the museum as a site of 'resolution', yet the museum's opening two weeks later prompted renewed articulations of ongoing racial injustice across public, museum, and political spheres that would jar with this discourse.

The opening of the NMAI in September 2004 was a highly emotive event for many in attendance. Around twenty-five thousand people, many of them representing Native tribes and communities across the nation, were in Washington for what was seen to be an historic moment (Jonaitis and Berlo, 2008, p. 208). The opening involved an outdoor festival and a march from the NMNH, along the National Mall, towards the U.S. Capitol building. Karen Coody Cooper, who had started working at the NMAI the previous year before and who had helped to design some of the opening day celebrations, noted: 'for many Native Americans, NMAI's opening served as a protest directed at past museum injustices perpetrated upon Native Americans' (Cooper, 2007, p. 167). A write-up of the event in *Indian Country Today* described the procession as 'grounded in a gravity that never gave way to elation, for too many ancestors had gone before them into the sacred space of the spirits' (Reynolds, 2004). The physical museum on the Mall was celebrated as a symbolic manifestation of a national recognition of sovereignty and Native rights, yet the tone of the event was also at times one of challenge and unresolved collective trauma.

The new NMAI was marked in an array of statements during the Congressional session on the day of the opening, and many felt moved to applaud the efforts of the individuals and organisations involved. Frank Pallone (D-NJ) of New Jersey applauded the significance of the Museum to the House of Representatives, noting of his visit earlier that day, 'it was not so much a museum about the past [but] about communities that exist today' (Pallone, 2004). Yet while some members of Congress saw an opportunity to point to the problematic social, political and economic conditions faced by Native communities within their respective

districts, such attempts received mixed responses. Representative of Oklahoma, Carson, was one of those who took to the floor at the House of Representatives, and while echoing earlier sentiments, also used the opportunity to draw attention to matters affecting Native American communities:

[W]hile we honor this monument to our native peoples today we must not forget the ongoing struggle these communities face to retain their dignity in face of poverty, unemployment, lack of access to adequate healthcare, among other issues. [...] So on this occasion, I ask my fellow Members of Congress to join me in honoring the opening of the American Indian Museum, and I also ask you to join me in seeking to address some of the difficulties facing our native population in order to truly honor the first Americans (Carson, 2004).

Washington State Representative James McDermott (D-WA) followed, drawing attention to the 'abysmal' treatment of Native Americans, and exclaimed that the issue 'is not over'. Drawing on the case of the Dowamish and Chinook tribes in his State of Washington, McDermott criticised the current Bush government's treatment of their claim for recognition:

The President [Clinton] signed the order creating this relationship with the Chinooks and the Dowamish, and when the new administration came in, one of the very first things they did was reach back into the desk drawer and wipe out the Dowamish tribe. They do not exist any more, to this administration (McDermott, 2004).

Wrapping up the series of statements on the new NMAI made that day, Representative Vern Ehlers [Rep - MI] thanked his colleagues for their 'fine speeches' but added 'I must express my concern that the gentleman from Washington State tarnished this joyous event by raising partisan issues' (Ehlers, 2004). Over the course of September to November 2004 several further remarks in Congress commemorated the opening of the NMAI, yet in these remarks, the significance of the museum's location, the fact of the realisation of the museum, and the celebration of the contributions of colleagues in its realisation, took precedence over a discussion of the museum's content and approach. Indeed, the museum's creation did not present a welcomed opportunity to discuss key issues and grievances. While new culturally specific museums were undoubtedly enabling critical expressions of the treatment of racially defined groups in American history, acts of subtle censorship and dismissal were subsuming grievance narratives into the process of uncritical

celebration. Although museums had been positioned over time as new forces for reconciliation, it was clear that this remained at a symbolic level in the halls of Congress.

Critical reflections on the newly opened NMAI were to call into question a preference for celebration, over a deeper focus on oppression. Responses to the new NMAI showed significant disappointment among activists and Native stakeholders in its representation of racial histories. The American Indian Movement Grand Governing Council issued a statement on the opening day of the NMAI that congratulated the work of individuals in realising the Museum, but stated:

The American Indian Movement Grand Governing Council [...] feels that the Museum falls short in that it does not characterize or does it display the sordid and tragic history of America's holocaust against the Native Nations and peoples of the Americas. [...] While the Museum displays the beautiful culture of Native Peoples, it must also serve as an institution of education about America's holocaust on the American Indian. The fact that the Smithsonian Institution still holds in its vaults thousands of skulls and skeletal remains and funerary objects of our ancestors, most victims of this holocaust could, as a beginning, be made a part of the memorial to this great crime against humanity (American Indian Movement Grand Governing Council, 2004).

There was a clear dissatisfaction not only with the content of the new museum, but also with the Smithsonian's separate holdings within the National Museum of Natural History collections, which, remained both outside of NAGPRA, and outside the NMAI's primary holdings and principles of care.

Scholarly and media critiques followed, claiming that the inaugural exhibitions lacked coherence, and failed to tackle colonialism in any depth (Carpio, 2008; Lonetree, 2008; Atalay, 2008; Jonaitis and Berlo, 2008). The permanent galleries of the NMAI were charged with 'de-politicising' history, leaving an exploration of historical racial government policies and contemporary marginalisation largely unexamined in the NMAI's interpretive scope (Atalay, 2008). The inaugural exhibitions were also charged with the avoidance of key issues such as unemployment and poverty that plagued contemporary Native American reservations, thus falling short of representing contemporary social issues that were of urgent concern within Native America (Lonetree and Cobb, 2008; Message, 2007).

While for many, the Museum had failed to address the experiences and systems of racial oppression in any significant depth, the Museum also attracted criticism for its perceived

emphasis on racially-framed identity. The early 2000s were significant years in the re-classification of race in the United States. For the first time, the US census enabled individuals to tick more than one racial or ethnic category to describe their identity, and identity was perceived as fluid and self-defined (Krieger, 2000). At a time of increasing discussion of identity as unfixed, notions of racially-defined histories and experiences became more easily problematised. Critic Paul Richard, writing in the *Washington Post*, drew attention to the lack of an overarching narrative connecting disparate objects together for visitors. Yet a substantial part of Richard's critique, published shortly after the museum opened its doors, concerned the contradiction of expressing diversity among Native groups in a museum that unites them as one:

That Indians are fabulously varied is obvious. As fisherfolk and astronauts, as nomads and attorneys, as dwellers in the woodlands, the deserts and the Arctic, how could they not be? [...] The rest of the assertion - that by virtue of their history, and by virtue of their blood, all Indians share an overarching "Indianness" - is a lot harder to swallow. What is this Indianness? Well, according to your CDIB (Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood issued by the Bureau of Indian Affairs), it comes with your genes; you inherit it. A thousand cultures share it. Indianness exists in people now alive and those dead 12,000 years. It is ineffably mysterious. No one can describe it except in generalities (Richard, 2004).

For Richard, the NMAI rested on the flawed notion of a homogenised racial unity under the term 'American Indian', which undermined, for him, its logic and success. Indeed, the tendency of culturally specific museums to focus on ethnic identities that can be understood as racially defined was not a new line of critique, and such museums would invite further criticism of the 'racialising' of ethnicity over the following years. Yet this positioned culturally specific museums as first and foremost about assertions of cultural identity rather than addressing racial oppression, whether at Institutional level in the Smithsonian itself or in terms of racial oppression more broadly. Indeed, the Museum's own positioning of race in its gallery interpretation certainly echoed this discursive approach. More coherent to Richards than the focus on cultural identity was the symbolic and political meaning of the NMAI in the landscape of Washington D.C., and its role in fostering national (rather than culturally specific) identity: 'What's best about this building is that it isn't just a museum. It's a reparation, and a reconciliation. It soothes the nation's conscience as its limestone undulations soothe the strictness of the cityscape' (Richard, 2004). Here, Native America on

the Mall was welcomed as a counterspace, and valued for the way it could address white America's guilt in relation to the nation's first inhabitants.

Meanwhile over at the *New York Times*, critic Edward Rothstein similarly challenged the Museum's logic and scope. Finding issue with the mission of the museum 'to protect, support and enhance the development, maintenance and perpetuation of native culture and community', Rothstein argued that the museum was overly concerned with supporting and advocating the contemporary communities related to the objects acquired from George Gustav Heye's New York Indian Museum (Rothstein, 2004). The Museum's social role for Rothstein was flawed by the scale of its potential coverage – 'making that museum answer to the needs, tastes and traditions of perhaps 600 diverse tribes [...] results in so many constituencies that the museum often ends up filtering away detail rather than displaying it' (*Ibid.*). Questioning the validity of self-definition as an approach, Rothstein also perceived a 'studious avoidance of scholarship', claiming the tribal voices that are put centre-stage actually have 'little to say' (Rothstein, 2004). Yet critics such as Richard and Rothstein emphasised the perceived failures of the community-led galleries, and remained largely silent on the galleries that addressed racial histories in a more curatorial voice. Indeed, despite disappointment in how the racial past was de-emphasised, themes of colonialism, racial violence and ongoing oppression were not completely absent from the new Museum's galleries.

The *Our Peoples* gallery explored the history of initial 'contact' and colonisation of European powers in the Americas. Themes such as the role of Christianity, the role of guns, and the intentions of the United States' government in its expansionist and Indian removal policies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were explored with often evocative, poetic text, which, rather than presented anonymously as was standard practice across the Smithsonian and other museums at the time. Label text was shown to be explicitly authored by the inclusion of the names of the curators and their tribal affiliations (Figure 6, 7 and 8).

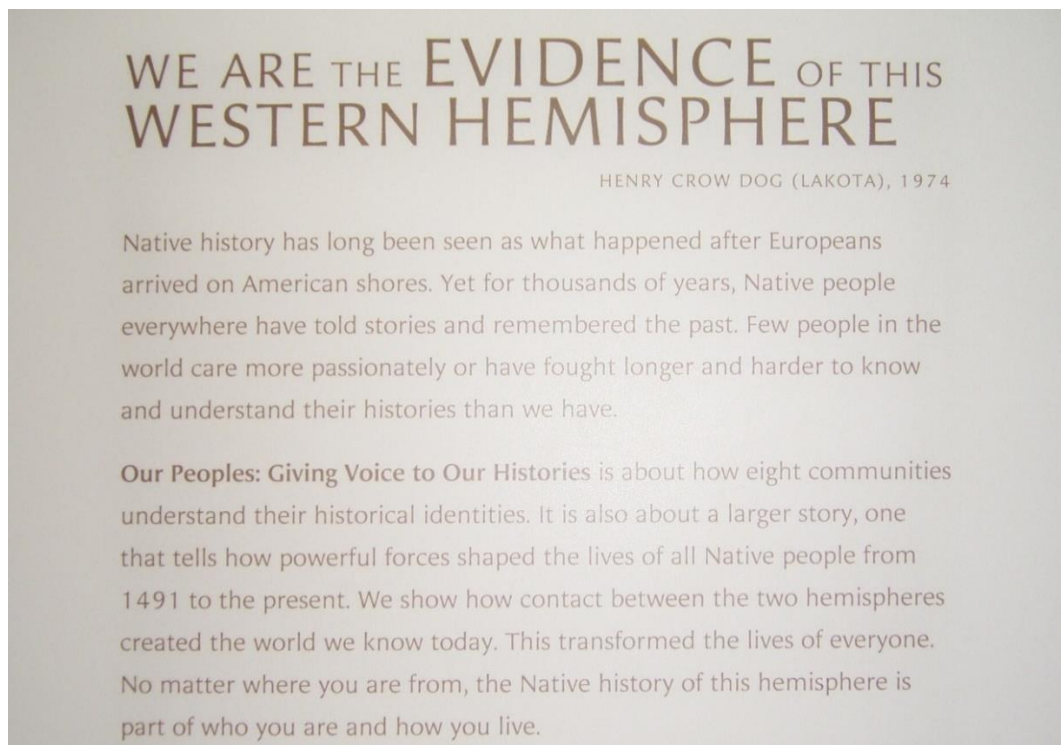


Figure 6 - 'Introductory panel text in *Our Peoples*, Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian' 2004-2014, Washington D.C. (Photo: K. Bunning, 2004).

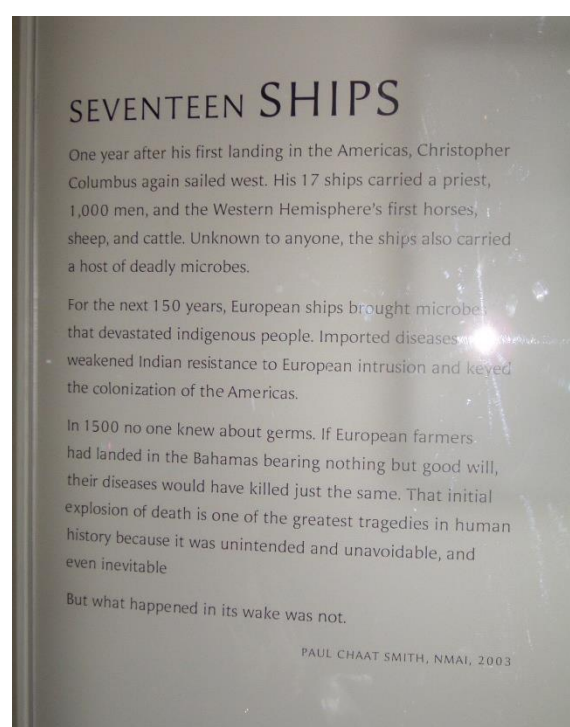
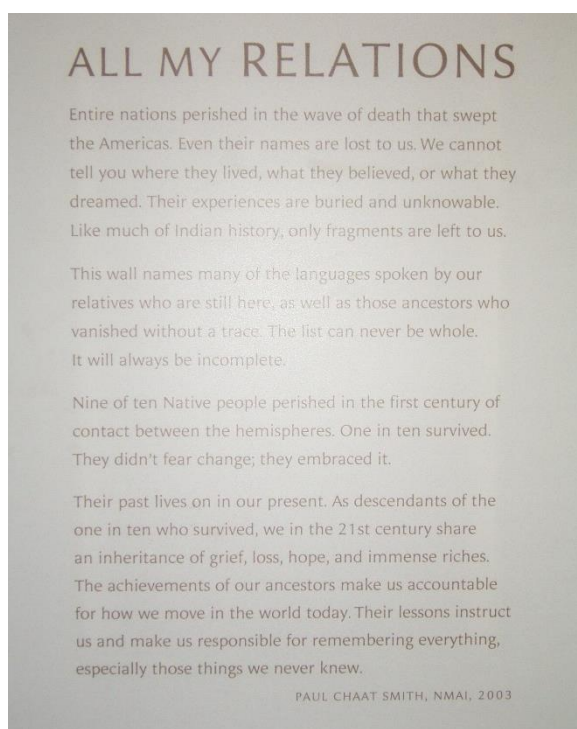


Figure 7 - "Seventeen Ships' label text in *Our Peoples*, Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian' 2004-2014, Washington D.C. (Photo: K. Bunning, 2004); Figure 8 - "All My Relations' label text in *Our Peoples*, Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian' 2004-2014, Washington D.C. (Photo: K. Bunning, 2004).

'Contact' between colonial forces and Native peoples and the death through disease it initially brought was presented as an 'unintended [...] and even inevitable' tragedy in the words of curator Paul Chaat Smith, the *Our Peoples* gallery, yet, he implies, the racially-based extermination policies that came after in the 'wake' of initial contact were not inevitable (*Our Peoples*, 2004). The closing text of *Our Peoples* opened with the words: 'Entire nations perished in the wave of death that swept the Americas,' and ended with an expression of how Native people might define themselves in the present: 'As descendants of the one in ten [who survived] who wake up in the 21st century, we share an inheritance of grief, loss, hope, and immense wealth' (Smith, 2008). Yet while overarching panels pointed clearly to the racial violence of the past, the thematic displays did little to develop the historical narrative with detailed explanations (Ostrowitz, 2008, p. 117). While self-definition - a Native-centred narrative in a Native voice - characterised *Our Peoples*, the 'contact' themes would develop an integrated narrative in which specific acts of colonial violence were downplayed in favour of presenting the ingenuity and change inspired by Native and European American interactions. While this approach emphasised the agency of Native Americans in the context of expansion and colonisation, it refrains from, as Atalay point out, referring to the death, rape and terror inflicted by Europeans within Native communities (Atalay, 2008, p. 237). However, there was no intention in the curators' minds that this depiction of 'contact' was to steer away from the 'holocaust' that ensued (Smith, 2008, p. 137).

The NMAI's overarching concept was not concerned with exploring the details of racial histories, nor with emphasising cultural and physical loss. Rather, the primary message was one of Native agency. The key conceptual framing of the NMAI's inaugural interpretations was articulated as 'survivance', a term coined by Anishinabe scholar Gerald Vizenor to denote not mere survival but also 'an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy and victimry' (Atalay, 2008, p. 278). The NMAI's narratives were concerned with identity and traditions, and above all, celebration and exercise of processes of self-definition, both as enacted in the past and in the present. Indeed, while curators were determined to tackle the devastating effects of 'contact', explicit denunciation of the United States' government policies over time were strikingly absent or de-emphasised across the galleries in favour of narratives of the struggle for survival. This approach was underscored by the hemispheric

scope of the new museum, and the notion of planning exhibits for a 'global' audience (Smith 2008, pp. 134-135). An emphasis on the specifics of US policy with respect to what was positioned as a broader colonial story spanning North, South and Central American countries would not have suited the interpretive scope. Yet while this breadth prevented more local and national histories of race from being included, it served to foster a sense of relevance of the Native experience to visitors from across the world. A statement of intent for the gallery written in 2002 explained the ambition for the story to have 'Indians at the center but also, by definition, [to be] relevant to every visitor, whose identity and personal history is shaped by those events' (Smith, 2008, p. 134-135). Indeed, it was argued that understanding this hemisphere 'is impossible without investigating the centrality of the Indian experience' (Smith, 2008, p. 134-135). This integrative approach, however, was overshadowed by discourse that emphasised identity over attempts to use historical narrative approaches that would be more familiar to a broadly white and non-Native audience.

A more overt approach to addressing race that the NMAI brought was focused on the perceived gap between the Museum's content and the general visitor. While a global audience was imagined within the *Our Peoples* curatorial team, the general assumptions for the NMAI audience throughout the development was that the audience would be largely white, and partly a generation who had grown up with a stereotyped view of Native culture as Hollywood Indians (Stuever, 2004). In this way, the NMAI continued the Native rights movements' attacks on this derogatory view of 'the Indian' (Maurer, 2004, p. 26-45). This was to be achieved by the emphasis on a diverse range of community depictions, told from a Native perspective. It was also achieved in part through a focus on contemporary Native lives, and political as well as cultural contributions (Figure 9), directly contrasting to the widespread 'anthropological' framing of Indians in museums as pre-historical or traditional in their lifeways (Hill, 2000, p. 103).



Figure 9 - 'Display in *Our Lives*, Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian' 2004-2014, Washington D.C. (Photo: K. Bunning, 2004).

Yet NMAI curators wished to take the issue of racialised identity further to include Native as well as non-Native definitions. While there was little curatorial editing for many of the community-led sections of the inaugural exhibitions (Tayac, 2015), curators Tayac and Rickard felt strongly about opening up a difficult debate on Native identity and blood quantum within the *Our Lives* gallery, which sought to explore identity as something fluid and constructed, and which raised questions about contemporary ways of measuring and defining 'Indianness' (Tayac, 2015). The combination of authored text panels, universal themes, and open questions within exhibitions, was envisaged as a way of allowing different and contradictory interpretations to exist side by side (Cobb and Lonetree, 2008). In this context, the notion of race (expressed as an imposition of identity from Europeans on a diverse set of tribes and groups in the Americas), could be challenged and questioned. Textual strategies within the exhibitions' panels drew attention to the questions of identity,

defined by blood, by culture, by outsiders, and by oneself. In the *Our Lives* gallery, the curators utilised rhetorical questions aimed at visitors such as, 'Who is Native?', 'Who decides?', and 'Which part of you is Native?'.

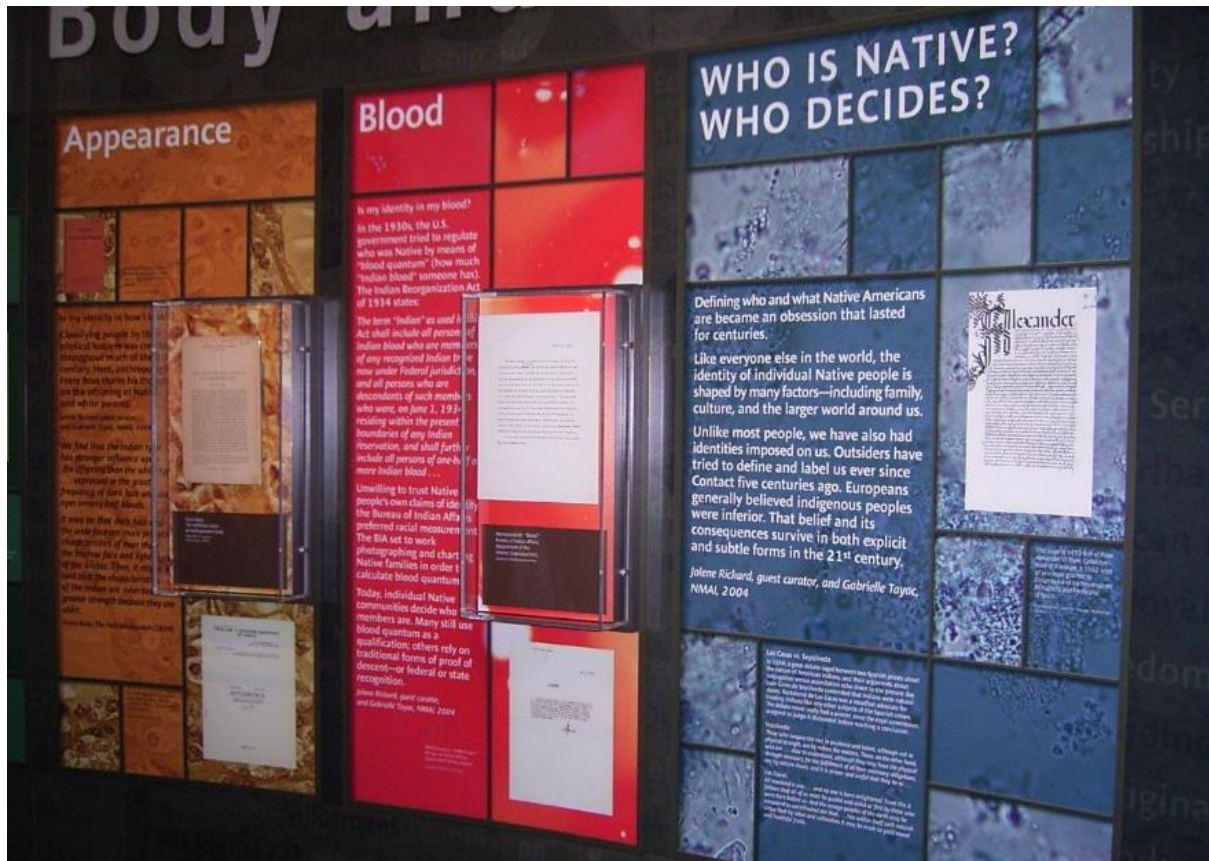


Figure 10 - 'Labels in *Our Lives*, Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian', 2004-2014, Washington D.C. (Photo: K. Bunning, 2004).

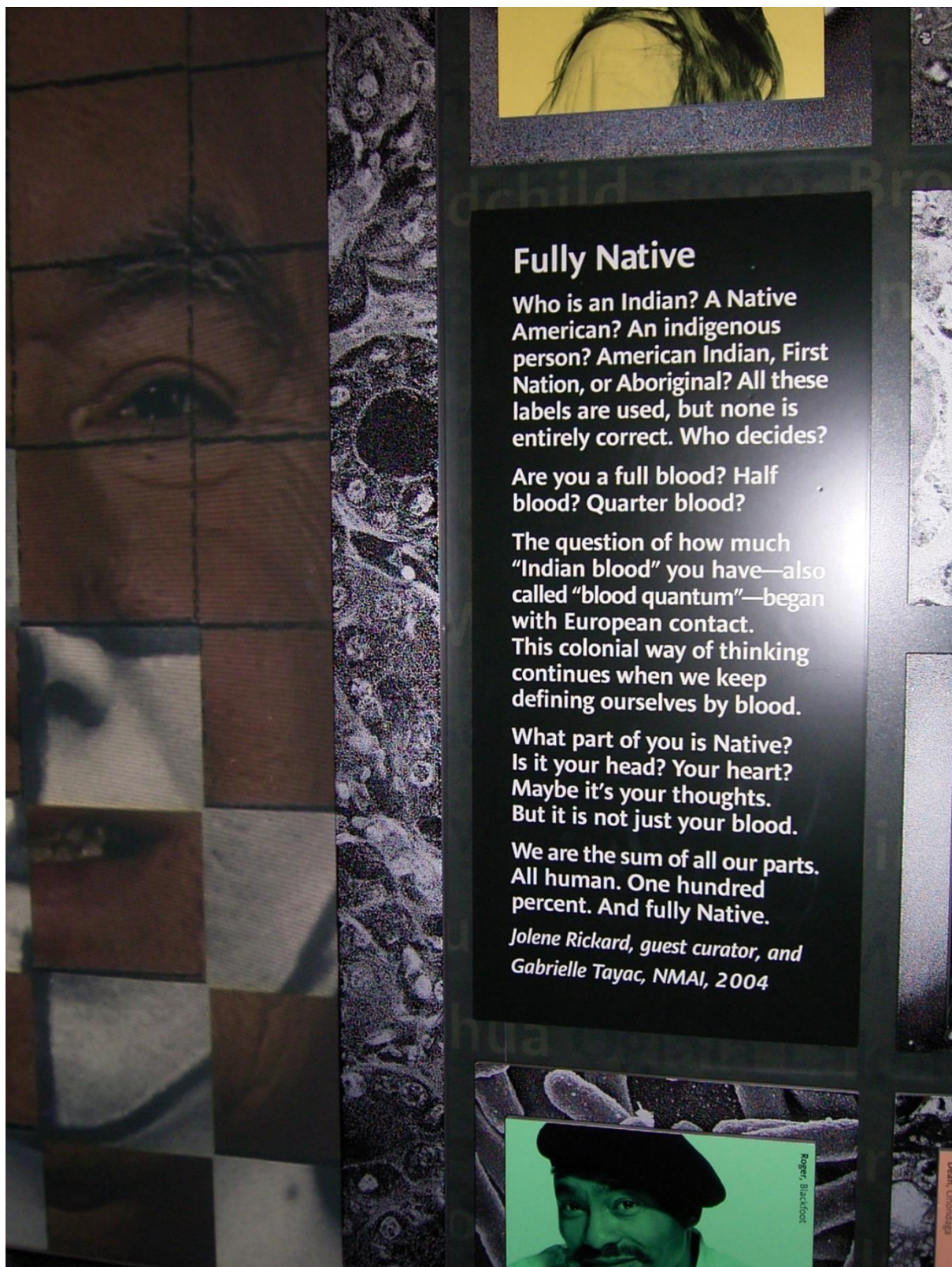


Figure 11 - "Fully Native" label in *Our Lives*, Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, 2004-2014, Washington D.C. (Photo: K. Bunning, 2004).

In its content, the NMAI opened up questions around race in terms of racial identity and racial stereotyping, and pointed to a global story of colonial contact and violence. Yet the hemispheric scope of this culturally specific museum opened up a media-led critique of its breadth rather than furthering conversations of the complicity of the United States in racial histories and legacies. The NMAI was, in its approach, unable to focus on racial violence at a more local level, and, as Jacksonis observes, was more akin to a tribal museum on a broader scale than to a national museum on a specifically national history (Jacksonis, 2008; Tayac, 2015). As such, the overtones of racial injustice and protest of the NMAI opening day, and the expressions of grievance that found an audience that day, would largely go on existing away from the Mall facility, and out of sight of its large visitorship, in the years that followed. Arguably more visible to white America were the media critiques of the scope and scholarship of the NMAI, in which 'self definition' was challenged by questions of the existence of any valid 'American Indian' voice. The fallacy of race as a biological notion offered critics a key argument against the validity of culturally specific museums. This was reinforced by approaches within the NMAI's interpretation that would ensure that racial oppression remained at the margins of responses to the new Museum, particularly those of the white elite.

3. Addressing race through the new National Museum of African American History and Culture

The NMAAHC emerged through an Act of Congress around the same time that the NMAI opened its doors. The two new museums had long referenced each other in discourse, scope and purpose. The NMAAHC Act itself, passed in 2003, echoed elements of the phrasing of the NMAI Act passed some fourteen years before. The NMAAHC, however, was born of a different struggle and a different discourse around race. As Smithsonian historian Fath Ruffins has noted, the predominant force behind the creation of the NMAI as 'the museum different' was the need to gain control over a vast collection of material culture already held in the Smithsonian, or soon to be held there with the acquisition of the Heye collection (Ruffins, 1998). In contrast, the struggle for an African American presence in Washington D.C. was for recognition and inclusion of the importance of African American

contributions and experiences in the national consciousness. There was no major existing collection and no significant presence in the Smithsonian Institution that could undertake this work, and that was the issue at hand. Ruffins demonstrates the way that these differing objectives impacted upon the battles to see the museums' creations through Congress (Ruffins, 1998, p. 79-80), but it also reveals the specificity of each museum as a site of racial justice, as expressed through political and museum leaders, and in cultural and media spheres. Ultimately, the NMAAHC brought a new centralisation of matters of race in history and society, and renegotiated museum discourse around culturally specific approaches and 'self definition' that had aligned so closely with the long history of Native rights activism. Yet representations of racial oppression and slavery within a national museum context were still new territory for the United States, and the handling of the racial past remained tentative and partial in the discourses arising from the newly created Museum.

The new NMAAHC was envisaged not only as an entity that could symbolise cultural recognition, but could contribute to governmental agendas and national moral aspirations. In May 2001, Representatives J.C. Watts (R-OK) and John Lewis (D-GA) reintroduced legislation for the African American museum. Introducing the bill to Congress, Representative Sam Brownback (R-KS) drew attention to the social agency such a museum could have:

We do not pretend that our legislation is a cure-all for the problem of racial division. It is, however, an important and productive step toward healing our nation's racial wounds (S. Rec., 2001).

The post 9/11 patriotic chords could be detected in key documentation supporting the proposed African American museum. In 2003, the members of the 'National Museum of African American History and Culture Plan for Action Presidential Commission' submitted their final report to the President and the Congress. This report, *The Time Has Come*, set out the mission and purpose of the museum, for persons of African descent and all Americans. Military contributions were particularly emphasised in the rationale given for this 'urgent' museum project by members of Bush's Commission, such as the need to recognise and honour the contributions of individual African Americans and collective efforts, such as those involved in the Civil War, and Civil Rights movement, as well as music and song, and black workers (NMAAHC Plan of Action Presidential Commission, 2003). Such contributions

were expressed as integral to American values of 'individual freedom and equal rights' and 'dignity' (*Ibid.*). The report also emphasised the importance of this project beyond the African American community:

[T]he time has come to establish the National Museum of African American History and Culture because the museum is important not only for African Americans but for all Americans. It is the only institution that can provide a national meeting place for all Americans to learn about the history and culture of African Americans and their contributions to and relationship with every aspect of our national life. Further, the museum is the only national venue that can respond to the interests and needs of diverse racial constituencies who share a common commitment to a full and accurate telling of our country's past as we prepare for our country's future. And, even more importantly, it is the only national venue that can serve as an educational healing space to further racial reconciliation (NMAAHC Plan of Action Presidential Commission, 2003).

Although a social purpose was highlighted, the focus of the NMAAHC at this time of lobbying was very much in the interests of national cohesion rather than community support or advancement. As a museum positioned to infuse familiar national and historical narratives with a new accent on the African American experience, the NMAAHC's communities were discursively constituted at this time as American citizens of all ethnicities. Across the key documents of its establishment, planning, and its public-facing promotional material, it is notable that contemporary African Americans as a social, cultural or racial group are rarely mentioned. There are two brief exceptions in the report *The Time Has Come*. This report talks of the need to educate African Americans in particular to understand themselves in the present, and later, a hope expressed that the Museum will 'tap into the creativity of young people, inspiring them to embrace their cultural heritage and interface with others of different races and creeds' (NMAAHC Plan of Action Presidential Commission, 2003). Yet neither allusion would emphasise contemporary experiences of racial injustice, nor challenge the overriding focus on an anticipated audience of 'all Americans' and a museum of 'national' narratives.

Whereas the founding legislation and public documents emphasised the role of the African American museum as a site to foster better race relations in the present, discourses of oppression dominated in community consultations. This echoed the contrasts between the views of NMAI's community stakeholders and Smithsonian officials a decade or so before. As stated in *The Time Has Come* (NMAAHC Plan of Action Presidential Commission, 2003),

the single most important factor for potential donors and audiences of the NMAAHC, would be a deep look at the experience and history of slavery. Outlining the Museum's programmatic priorities in regards to securing private donations, the report noted: 'An overwhelming requirement of virtually every potential African American donor interviewed was that slavery must be honestly depicted'. The public, museum professionals and others attending the 'Town Hall' style meetings across the country to discuss the idea for the NMAAHC, shared the feeling that an 'uncompromising' depiction of slavery should be the priority of the museum, while also agreeing the sense that the museum ought to focus on African American contributions (for example, to the military, to science, and to the classical arts). Town Hall attendees also asked for a museum that would show 'the humiliation and suffering of ordinary African Americans under Jim Crow and how they resisted' (NMAAHC Plan of Action Presidential Commission, 2003).

The positioning of the subject of slavery in the new museum revealed a tension between addressing its experiential aspects and legacies, and its legal and sanctioned status within the United States. The Bill itself, as introduced in 2001, rhetorically positioned the legacy of slavery as one which could offer knowledge and strength to the nation as a whole, and which could speak to the nation's ideals of freedom and democracy. It could also, however, emphasise the legality and governmental perpetration of slavery within the American courts:

Congress makes the following findings. [...] Over the history of our Nation, the United States has grown into a symbol of democracy and freedom around the world, and the legacy of African Americans is rooted in the very fabric of our Nation's democracy and freedom. [...] Slavery was an accepted practice in this Nation, authorized by the Government through legislation such as the fugitive slave law of 1793 (1 Stat. 302) and sanctioned by the Supreme Court in the Dred Scott decision (Scott v. Sanford, 60 U.S. 393 (1857)). [...] Those African Americans who suffered under slavery and their descendants show us the strength of the human character and provide us with a model of courage, commitment, and perseverance. A national museum dedicated to the history of and commemorating those who suffered the grave injustice of slavery in this country will help in "binding our Nation's wounds" rooted in slavery and will allow all Americans to understand the past and honor the history of all Americans (S. Rec., 2001).

The version of the NMAAHC Act that was finally enacted by Congress, however, took a much less direct approach. By 2003, reference to slavery as a 'grave injustice' and 'an accepted practice in this Nation' had been removed, and there was no explicit denouncing of federal

racial policies of the past (NMAAHC Act, 2003). The terrorist attacks of September 2001 on New York and Washington D.C. had changed the mood of the country towards one of patriotism, resilience and defiant national strength, and this was to have an impact on the development of culturally specific museums, including, for the NMAI, on questions of how far the new museum should go in representing difficult histories of the United States (Tayac, 2015)

Narratives of reconciliation that highlighted racial oppression could be found among members of the Black Caucus as well, who were key supporters of the new museum in Congress. In June 2003, Representative John Lewis, surveying the possible site for the soon-to-be established NMAAHC, was reported to remark, 'It would be very powerful. The healing we could foster. The message we could send from here' (Clemetson, 2003). Lewis, who had been responsible for pushing the NMAAHC bill forward and was a key figure in the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, argued that the physical location of the anticipated museum itself would be a powerful symbol of racial reconciliation: 'In the South I remembered when black people could not enter through the front door of white people's homes [...]. The Mall and the space around it, that's the front door to America. I did not want a museum to be at some back door' (Clemetson, 2003). Similar sentiments had been expressed during earlier public consultations: 'Any other site [...] would inevitably echo the subjugation and segregation of the past, would be perceived as second-class, and would reduce fundraising efforts and visitation rates' (*Ibid.*, p. 2). Establishing a place on the National Mall was, at it had been for key supporters of the NMAI, a crucial symbolic step towards addressing the racial past.

Over the early 2000s, despite decades of planning, culturally specific museums were only just beginning to have a physical presence on the National Mall. The balance of presenting cultural expressions and contemporary lives with histories, legacies and perspectives on racial oppression over many centuries of the American experience was not yet set out. This, I argue, made them open to critique around matters of self-definition and helped to illustrate what would be a growing tendency in an era of celebrating diversity and integrating histories that favoured forward-looking sentiments. Culturally specific approaches at museum-wide level were to offer opportunities for integration in a national story at a scale that temporary exhibitions of previous years could never have achieved. For



Figure 12 - 'Constructing the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture', Washington D.C. (Photo: K. Bunning, 2014).

both museums, however, the symbolic space of the National Mall would serve to offer a statement of cultural recognition of non-white experiences on the part of the United States and the Smithsonian Institution.

4. Post-race aspirations

Across public and political spheres, the late 2000s and early 2010s saw an echoing expression, although not necessarily a deep conviction, of the possibility that the United States was close to a 'post-race' reality (Gallagher, 2003; Lenitin, 2014). In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and the delays for many of those affected in receiving aid, studies suggested that while white Americans largely believed that racial equality had been nearly achieved, a majority of black Americans disagreed (Dawson, 2012). For many, Barack

Obama's campaign for the presidency in 2008 and his election success the following year was understood cautiously as a sign of 'hope' rather than a sign of a post-racial reality, yet these events had nevertheless changed the national mood in matters of race towards one of celebrating a new era of possibility (Hero and Tolbert, 2014). In this climate, the idea that racism was largely a phenomenon of the past began to be more widely and visibly expressed across public, cultural, political and media spheres.

The questioning of the continued significance of racially-defined identity was apparent in shifting discourses around the NMAAHC as the 2000s progressed. In 2006, the then newly appointed founding director Lonnie G. Bunch III wrote: 'Recently, I was asked if museums that explore the African American experience are still valuable as they once were in this diverse and more integrated America' (Bunch, 2006). Indeed, a progressive discourse had characterised the cultural and museum sectors, and pointed to 'newness' and a shift to more complexity and sophistication (Message, 2006, p. 12). Diversity and inclusion had long been used as concepts in the professional sector, and there was a palpable need expressed in many quarters for a transcendent approach to ideas that were seen to have long divided and troubled the national experience.

The new possibility of a post-race society served a long-standing critique of culturally specific museums as symbols of an overly race-conscious position. This echoed a persistent 'colourblindness' tendency that had characterised the earlier decades of the 1980s and 1990s, in which (most often) whites would render notions of race, and unavoidably by extension, racism, in society as no longer sanctioned, no longer politically correct to notice, and thus no longer requiring critical attention in the contemporary moment (Bunch, 2010b). The conundrum was that to notice the effects of race in a situation was to racialize it. Discursively moving beyond ideas of race to achieve a 'race-less' society was seen to be a productive approach among many conservatives and liberals alike in realising a more equal and less threatening society. The alluring and idealistic post-race narrative was to build in the early 2010s, amidst newly heightened discussions of generational and demographic change.

The NMAI and NMAAHC had each attracted challenges of validity around racially-framed identity over some time, but during the early 2010s, it was the proposition of another

‘culturally specific museum’ at the Smithsonian – the ‘National Museum of the American Latino’ – that was to reignite and expand the critical debate among cultural pressure groups, museum professionals, the press, the public and members of the United States Congress around the validity and desirability of ‘culturally specific museums’. Voiced in these debates were concerns about the implications of a perceived ‘proliferation’ of ethnic museums in ‘ghettoizing’ the national narrative that had been articulated nearly two decades earlier (Colp, 1991). At the same time, and in response to these critics, the Smithsonian and its ethnic museum supporters also revealed long-standing concerns with the ‘ethnic museum’ label for its apparent containment of nationally significant stories into culturally-specific or ‘minority’ focused venues. As I will demonstrate, while these arguments were not new, they were, in the early 2010s, bolstered by a new level of questioning of the continued relevancy of race.

An emphasis on racially-defined cultural experiences in museum work had been pursued within a ‘cultural diversity’ agenda in previous years, yet this approach came into question within museological discourses as the second decade of the twenty-first century began. New sector-level discourses on inclusive practice, in which museums were positioned as ‘meeting grounds’ for intercultural exchange were newly emphasised, and at times, this called into question the tendency to focus on defined community groups in museum programming and audience development. Museum sector conversations around the implications of demographic changes for museums were aired in a 2010 horizon-scanning publication by the (then) American Association of Museums’ Center for the Future of Museums. Questioning whether ‘minority’ groups ‘actually form a coherent whole’, the report asked whether in the future, such groups will ‘find common ground in experiences, perceptions, motivations and tastes that museums can use to develop strategies for community engagement? Or’, it continued, ‘will Latinos, African Americans, Asian Pacific Americans, Native Americans and others continue to be separate groups with more differences than commonalities—all of them remaining minorities by virtue of their size—who will need to be reached through different kinds of museum strategies and programs?’ (Farrell and Medvedeva, 2010). Approaching racially-defined groups in terms of ‘differences’ and ‘commonalities’ to one another in the context of the relevancy of museum strategies echoed the questioning of identity coherency voiced some years before. Yet the Center for

the Future of Museum's 2010 report went on to ponder the broader sector-wide implications of generational shifts in terms of meanings of race.

Do the conventional categories of race and ethnicity reflect intractable social divisions in the U.S.? Or do changing attitudes from one generation to the next mean we are on the cusp of some new post-racial, multiethnic, global era in which the old divisions are destined to fade in the face of new realities? (Farrell and Medvedeva, 2010).

Moving past 'differences' towards an emphasis on the 'common ground' would certainly have been a welcome idea for many across the museum field, yet at this moment, it was characterised by a reluctance to accept the assertion of racial identity and, by extension, all forms of racially-framed programming. Indeed, the political and experiential aspects of addressing race, and even the historical treatment of the racial past, were largely absent amidst professional rhetoric of inclusion and social cohesion which dominated the sector at this time, rendering race, and more particularly, culturally specific approaches to museum practice, as a limitation or a boundary to a more sophisticated approach to representing the complexity of American life. Yet emerging practice within the Smithsonian's newly created culturally specific museums themselves were already showing that these boundaries were far from fixed. Collaboration was a key value in the earliest public programming of the new NMAAHC (Bunch, 2012). In 2008, a collaborative exhibition between the NMAI and the NMAAHC was opened entitled *InDivisible*, which focused on the largely unknown stories of those with dual Native and African American heritage. Underpinned by rights-based practice, culturally specific museums embodied a centralisation of perspectives and experiences of those cast within racial minority frames over history, rather than an aversion to racially-framed experiences and expressions.

Although expressed more widely and with new conviction, questions of audience and contemporary relevance of culturally specific approaches were far from new concerns for those who had been involved in culturally specific museum projects. During the early 1990s, the question was raised to the Committee exploring the need for an African American museum of who might be the target 'African American' audience for the museum (Mack, 2015). An apparent emphasis on 'traditional African American membership' was noted, at the exclusion of other people of African descent who had emigrated to America during the twentieth century for a variety of social, educational and economic reasons (Mack, 2015).

Yet more contemporary generational changes were discursively associated with a notion of racial and cultural 'mixing' and processes of assimilation to a multicultural (rather than necessarily white) mainstream that problematised museums whose formal remits appeared to prioritise a more stable ethnic identification, whether or not these museums were, in practice, more centred on 'intercultural' concerns and the fluidity and socially-constructed aspects of racial identity.

The assumption of a static relationship between culturally specific museums and expressions of fixed racial identity can be detected in a range of responses to the proposed Latino museum on the National Mall. Yet, rather than promoting a stable ethnic identification, the idea for a Latino museum at the Smithsonian had, like the NMAI and NMAAHC, emerged largely from a different need, and one that was focused on addressing a significant racial bias within the Institution. The idea had been first discussed publicly in the mid-1990s, at a time of broader institutional critique and diversity initiatives. In 1994, a Task Force set up by the Secretary and Under-Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution to review the Smithsonian's treatment of Latino histories and cultures concluded with a clear and unflinching statement 'The Smithsonian Institution [...] displays a pattern of wilful neglect towards the estimated 25 million Latinos in the United States' (Smithsonian Institution Task Force on Latino Issues, 1994). The report cited the complete absence of Latinos in any top managerial positions and on the prestigious Board of Regents, and pointed to the existence of only two Latino curators across the Institution. In terms of programming, it concluded: 'no Smithsonian facility focuses on Latino history and culture, and only one recently-inaugurated permanent exhibition American Encounters at the National Museum of American History minimally addresses the achievements of Hispanics in the United States' (*Ibid.*). Pointing to the systematic exclusion of Latinos at 'every level' of the Institution, the report noted 'It is difficult for the Task Force to understand how such a consistent pattern of Latino exclusion from the work of the Smithsonian could have occurred by chance' (*Ibid.*). Perhaps to avoid allegations of self-serving interests, the final report emphasised the relevance of these findings not for a 'single population group', but for the broad diversity of American population groups (Smithsonian Institution Task Force on Latino Issues, 1994). Once again, there was an apparent disconnect between the rights-based discourses of racial identity among proponents of culturally specific museums that were directed chiefly

towards equal and visible recognition and representation, and the identity-based discourses of wider groups that centralised concerns with accuracy, diversity and inclusivity.

While urgent action was demanded in the final report of the Latino Museum Task Force of the 1990s, it took time to build support and for the concept of a new Latino Museum to be presented to Congress. In response to lobbying by Representative Xavier Becerra, Congress enacted a commission in 2008 to investigate the feasibility of a national museum focusing on American Latinos. The commission began its work in 2009, and concluded in 2011 with a report to the President and Congress. The outcome of the investigation was that the 'wilful neglect' of Latino histories and experiences within the Smithsonian's collections and programming strategies, as identified by an earlier Smithsonian report in the mid-1990s, should now be addressed with a new museum focusing on Latino culture and experience within the United States (NMAL Commission, 2011). Yet in this new climate, which had seen race somewhat recast as something America might soon transcend, the perceived significance of culturally specific museums in addressing race had lost its clarity. Added to this was the breadth of identity and experience under the 'Latino' umbrella term that meant the identity category itself could be more strongly challenged.

Culturally specific museums were only just arriving as physical entities on the National Mall, yet the allure of transcending the need for such institutions was widely expressed. Voicing this publicly, cultural commentator Philip Kennicott of *The Washington Post* mused on the possible lack of relevance of a new Latino museum not only in the context of demographic change but also anticipated museological shifts in how history could be told in more dynamic ways:

[T]he entire concept of a Latino American Museum seems almost retro. [...] There's resistance to [ethnic-specific museums] among people who don't identify as minorities, and while much of that resistance is based in racial and ethnic animus, some of it represents legitimate concern that history won't be well served by an infinite fracturing into sub-narratives, each under the control of a different cultural group. [...] It seems likely that within a generation, the Mall could have a large collection of very quiet and not terribly relevant museums. Not because the stories they have to tell are irrelevant or uninteresting, but because the game changed. The appetite for history will be for complicated master narratives that cross lines between ethnic groups, that dip into technology and economics and art, and can't easily be told in an old-fashioned, balkanized museum of ethnic identity. The big

danger is that the National Museum of the American Latino will arrive just as the heyday of ethnic museums is passing (Kennicott, 2010).

Kennicott's comments echoed those of others across media and public spheres. His comments point primarily to an understanding of 'ethnic museums' as concerned with essentialising identity and culture, rather than addressing race. The concept for a new museum along more cross-cutting lines was already beginning to gain traction at the time Kennicott was writing, and made headlines the following year in 2011. The idea for a 'National Museum of the American People' was presented by its proponents in Congress as a direct reaction against the perceived divisiveness of the 'culturally specific museum' concept, and as an antidote to the anticipated proliferation of ethnic museums long into the future (Bedard and Huey-Burns, 2011). This museum would be 'all-encompassing', representing the breadth of ethnicities and cultures that make up America and telling the story of their contribution to the United States. This idea gained support from the left and right, including from Democratic Congressman James Moran and, according to Moran, had support from a host of ethnic organisations across the States. A project of overt American exceptionalism and a celebration of intercultural cohesion, for Moran, this museum would be 'devoted to telling the story of how the world's pioneers interwove their diverse races, religions and ethnicities into the strongest societal fabric' (Moran, 2011). In contrast, for Moran, the creation of distinct museums for distinct groups would generate a problematic separation of audiences and histories along ethnic or racial lines and would ultimately be 'un-American' (Bedard and Huey-Burns, 2011; Hopkinson, 2011). Indeed, the provocative and negative terms used to describe the effects of culturally specific museums, such as 'balkanising' and 'ghettoising', situated such museums as distinctly hostile to the promotion of a national identity. A cohesive national narrative that could incorporate and recognise what was perceived as a growing diversity within the population was strongly defended in response to the notion of institutions rendered as separatist and divisive organisations.

In response to the heated debates sparked by the proposed National Museum of the American Latino and Moran's concerns on 'ethnic museums' for national cohesion, the Smithsonian Institution organised a symposium in 2012 with the title *(Re)Presenting America: The Evolution of Culturally Specific Museums*. This day-long symposium was held at the NMAI and offered an opportunity for museum and cultural professionals involved in

various ethnic museums across the country to demonstrate how their museums had evolved in terms of their programming and their conceptualisations of their communities. The generational shifts in identity were key areas of discussion among the speakers who hailed from Chicago's National Museum of Mexican Art, the Wing Luke Asian American Museum in Seattle, and the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan among others. At the core, were questions focused on maintaining relevance in the face of changing ideas of community identity through fostering close relationships with audience groups. Yet this focus on generational shifts was not bound up in an emphasis on either separatism or cohesion. Indeed, the centrality of collaborative and fluid approaches amidst demographic complexity was a recurring theme for the day's speakers. As Eduardo Diaz from the Smithsonian's Latino Center argued, collaborative approaches are central '[b]ecause the Latino community is everybody. We are black, we're Asian, we're indigenous, we're European, we're every religious community possible, gay, lesbian, we are all of this [and as a result] we have an obligation I think to focus on all of that diversity within this diversity' (Diaz, 2012).

The symposium of 2012 offered a chance to air concerns that had been internally and privately circulating across the Institution around the implications of new museums for the existing facilities and collections that might overlap in content, aims and collections, namely the museums of American History and Natural History. In part, this went beyond a practical question and involved a concern with regards to the need to change core practices and address exclusions across the whole Institution. In his opening remarks, Ray Suarez, a PBS broadcaster who chaired the proceedings, raised what he saw as a 'valid question' on whether audiences would necessarily be aware of these different narratives if they chose only to visit museums that fit with their own narratives of history: '[o]nce you create a separate building, a separate institution, a separate collection, and a separate story, you're not really modifying that comforting, reifying, reinforcing story, the big arc of American history that a kid could be expected to learn' (Suarez, 2012). *The Washington Post's* Kennicott, who as a key commentator was also invited to the morning panel discussion, framed culturally specific museums as partly an important development to 'correct' the 'master narrative' (Kennicott, 2012). Indeed, a need to 'correct' the core work of the Smithsonian was felt to be overlooked or even undermined by the introduction of new

facilities that would serve to contain rather than embed underrepresented histories and voices. This had long been a concern of both culturally specific museum proponents and critics alike, and the overriding position remained into the 2010s that a focus on the core was understood as insufficient to the task at hand in practical terms (Clough, 2012). More fundamentally, there was also a strong argument towards the national relevance of having 'comparable lenses' onto American history, rather than a singular narrative of national history that chimed with the new focus on complex identities (Bunch, 2012). Indeed, there was no discussion at the symposium on how other Smithsonian museums should respond to the arrival of culturally specific museums. Still, the sense that the Smithsonian had an obligation to 'tease out a national consensus amidst our messy democracy' remained (Price, 2012).

In the midst of a discursive shift towards 'post-race' ideas, culturally specific museums continued to progress in practice within a race-conscious position. Race was an assumed focus for the African American museum that many would assert. In a 2012 article for *The Washington Post*, Linda Davidson wrote that Lonnie Bunch must do nothing short of building 'a museum that will house, navigate and explain the atrocities and complexities of race in the Americas' (Davidson, 2012). Such comments underscored the widely held perception of the containment of racial histories to a national museum of African American history and culture. Within the profession and museum studies scholarship, much had been said about the complexities of dealing with 'difficult histories' (Rosenberg, 2011; Segall, 2014), and national culturally specific museums were understood as places that would be able to carry these complexities through. At the same time, the perceived threat of feeling uncomfortable in response to such work, was also alluded to in various ways. The emphasis on the diversity of Americans as intended audiences of these representations prompted Kennicott during the 2012 symposium to ask how the NMAAHC would engage its visitors in 'moral lessons' without being confrontational and 'depressing' (Kennicott, 2012). Price offered his thoughts on the need for balancing the notions of 'the perfectibility of the republic' with 'some of the stories that aren't pleasant, that are difficult,' as one of the 'great challenges' that the Smithsonian faced (Price, 2012). Calls for a sense of universalism in approaching difficult subjects were also aired. As panellist David Penney remarked in the

2012 symposium: 'We know when we do it right, it's not about making people feel bad. To a certain degree it's making them feel more human' (Penney, 2012).

Museologically, discourses on the social role of museums and their responsibility to address contemporary social issues were maturing globally (Sandell, 2002; Silverman, 2009; Sandell, 2012). Ideas about new museums and their role in addressing race as a difficult history was primarily assigned as a matter of professional responsibility to shift power relations with audiences, and often targeted programming to underserved communities (Thelen, 2005; Gordon, 2005; Watson, 2007). Yet these approaches were increasingly understood as frequently tokenistic, with such work lacking sufficient time, resource and impact to sustain radical shifts in inclusive practice (Karp and Lavine, 1991a, p 2; Lynch and Alberti, 2010; Waterton et al. 2010). Universalistic appeals for museums to tell racial histories in ways that drew on human connections and in ways that could support the bettering of the nation became increasingly prominent in the early 2010s in comparison to earlier decades, which had prioritised inclusion through community-specific themes. Indeed, this could be detected in the progressive museology towards intercultural and participatory work. For example, in her work on intercultural dialogue, Simona Bodo argued that 'culturally specific' programming often works to isolate and essentialise 'target' cultures from wider communities and histories through frames of seemingly fixed identity categorisation. Based on this observation, she advocated for a more integrated model of diversity programming (Bodo, 2012, p. 183-4). While offering important, nuanced insights into practice in the context of public cultural sites, few museum-focused scholars acknowledged the role that seemingly fixed identity categorisation, and 'culturally specific' practices, can play in advancing cultural recognition.

In a cultural moment that saw the questioning of ethnic and racial emphasis amidst articulations of a possible 'post-race' present, or future, the culturally specific museum was pitched as both an agent of the problematic maintenance of misleading identity boundaries and, by those within the ethnic museum field, an agent that could support and reflect complex and shifting identities (Tayac, 2015). Despite evidence of broad, intercultural and partnership programming, 'culturally specific museums' were, by the early 2010s, presumed to have allegiance to a singular and essentialised identity category. Characterising these views was a perception of new museums as bounded by a singular political aim. Far from

being understood as dynamic and developing new institutions, some saw new culturally specific museums as primarily politically-driven 'correctives' to a status quo. This, however, emphasises a notion of such museums as not only narrow in their approach, but also fixed and unchanging as sites of heritage, culture, and rights. While these are not necessarily widely shared assumptions, they have significant visibility in the popular circles of the news media and elite cultural and political discourse in the Smithsonian context.

In essence, culturally specific museums were often perceived as oppositional and indeed threatening in their separateness. Indeed, for those who wanted to see the Smithsonian change and become more inclusive, questions around the implications of 'separate' museums in this work continued to be raised and debated. The perceived characteristics of these new museums – as separatist, troubling and fixed – played into these debates in ways that reveal a hierarchy of value in approaches to inclusive practice, as the next section will show. Indeed, in a climate of competing views of the continued relevance of race in U.S. society, and amidst their partly accurate, but problematically narrow characterisations as sites of 'identity', culturally specific museums at the Smithsonian began to be reimagined and reframed in relation to the national narrative.

5. Rethinking culturally specific museums

For those that wished to see the Smithsonian address racial bias in its work, and include underrepresented histories and experiences, the distinct objectives of both 'culturally specific' programming on the one hand, and a change of practice in 'core', existing museums on the other, was frequently sought (Colp, 1991; Price, 2012; Clough, 2012). Inclusive practice across the broader Smithsonian museums was often framed as the greater challenge, but also the more fundamental task at hand. Separate museums, including the Anacostia Museum, raised concerns of possible continued marginalisation where the existing core narrative of the American experience would be moderately enhanced through additional facilities, rather than radically reconfigured as non-centric. The *(Re)Presenting America* symposium of 2012 had seen this question raised as one of a problem of separation of histories and the inability of new facilities to change the core narratives. This was a shared concern across professional, public and political realms, yet it was differently

emphasised in different quarters. While the central leadership of culturally specific museums emphasised the need for separate facilities for specialism and scale, for many of those at a distance from these museums developments who advocated for greater inclusivity in museums, the more urgent and sophisticated approach was that of an inclusive museum for a wide Smithsonian audience that integrated ethnic experiences into broader narratives.

Questions of inclusion in terms of models of integration or models of separatism dated back to earlier efforts to include culturally specific histories and experiences in the Smithsonian's existing museums. Indeed, the debates around the agency of separatism echoed those privately expressed within the Smithsonian during the earlier Civil Rights Movement; further illustrating the close connection between culturally specific approaches and the wider struggle for rights. Curator of political history at the National Museum of American History in the 1960s, Keith Melder, recalls 'the struggle within the Civil Rights Movement at that time over how to distribute power within the movement [...] to impact the larger society [and] the whole issue of Black Power, for example' as raising internal questions on 'how to deal with African-American history as a separate or an integrated topic' (Melder, 1999). Recalling his work in the 1990s, Melder stated that the question is 'still crucial, and I don't know where to come down on it. I suppose in a sense, you almost have to do it in both ways, because in so many respects it has been a distinct story [...] But it's not a separate story. It's part of the whole. So it's really a puzzle' (Melder, 1999, p. 20). Speaking in an earlier interview in the late 1980s, curator Louise Hutchinson noted the work of Spencer Crew, Bernice Reagon and others working on African American histories, and pondered the effect of integrating these histories into the American History museum:

[I]t might diminish the need for an Anacostia Museum, except I really don't believe so. I think it's the same kind of question as, "Does the integration of American colleges negate the need for black colleges?" I think certainly we need them both. I don't see it as an either/or. [...] I think certainly, as Kinard says, there is so much that has been omitted for so long, that there's a lot all of us need to be doing (Hutchinson, 1987).

As a museum opening in the late 1960s which would focus on what was then often called 'Negro history', the Anacostia addressed a significant need for inclusion in response to the rights movements of the era. Yet the relationship between the Anacostia as a 'culturally

specific museum' and the museums on the Mall was far from close. Asked whether the Anacostia's collaborative efforts with other museums across the Smithsonian had had an impact on shifts towards minority histories at the Smithsonian as a whole, Hutchinson replied:

I'm not really sure. [...] When [Smithsonian leadership] hear large howls of protest from outside, I think they move. When something becomes popular, I think they move. But to say that this is going to be part of our central program, our ongoing program, and to make that kind of firm commitment, I don't think they've gotten there yet' (Hutchinson, 1987, p. 59).

Drawing on instances of the lacklustre development of African American collections at the American History museum, Hutchinson indicates a lack of rights-based practice at the Smithsonian. Bunch similarly notes the relatively shallow attempts to integrate African American history in the Smithsonian's existing museums, despite the long-standing emphasis on diversity (Bunch, 2015).

There had long been a concern that new culturally specific museums could make the goal of diversifying the narratives and collections of the wider Smithsonian all the harder, as available resources and efforts would be diverted, and thus contained, to the new museums. Indeed, a review of practice and the general lack of materialisation of racially-defined experiences and groups across the Smithsonian museums reveals that this containment was real, and that efforts to explore and expand collections and programmes around race and racially-framed identities and histories were difficult to proceed with beyond the scope of culturally specific museums. Yet the very notion of 'culturally specific' was more vociferously challenged by those within these museums as the 2010s progressed. Indeed, such museums would be fundamentally repositioned in a way that would strengthen the idea of a whole museum devoted to a particular group's experience, and throw into question the possibilities of integrative model of practice for wider museums. The relevance of racial histories and legacies to communities across America, to all Americans, would sit at the centre of a process of universalising the relevance of the culturally specific museum, as the 2010s progressed.

Establishing African American experiences as central to the histories, cultures and experiences of all Americans was an idea that flourished under the advocacy and rhetoric of

Bunch's oration in the early 2010s. Nevertheless, this assertion had its roots at least as far back in the community views gathered during the early project of envisioning the new museum, under the leadership of Claudine Brown. The unique experiences of people of African descent in the United States, Brown stated in a letter to a member of the public, 'represent experiences and events which have had an impact on the lives of all Americans' (Brown, 1991). Quoting the Presidential Committee's report that she had led on to assess the feasibility of the museum, she continued: 'Each Smithsonian museum, including a new African American Museum, will be called upon to tell the American story to the best of its ability, being mindful that no people in this country, no matter how cloistered, are unaffected by others' (Brown, 1991). Culturally specific museums were to be positioned as key parts of a national story. Notions of racially-framed identity and irrelevance that had characterised external perceptions of a forthcoming 'African American' museum were met with an insistence upon a broader perspective. The Museum's current statement of purpose continues this strand; to be a 'place that transcends the boundaries of race and culture that divide us, and becomes a lens into a story that unites us all' (NMAAHC, 2018b). Indeed, this message gained some acceptance among the public. It was reported in a Smithsonian survey that '60 percent of white respondents said they thought the new museum would be for them, too' (Trescott, 2012). It was clear that there were efforts to broaden racial histories to audiences beyond the African American community who had so clearly asked for slavery and segregation to be a central part of the new museum's narratives during consultation exercises some ten years previously.

The assertion of the deep, national relevance of the American Indian story was to have a direct impact upon the developing approaches of the NMAI. The interpretive scoping for the NMAI in the early 2000s had emphasised the relevance of Native history to all Americans (Smith, 2008, p. 134-135) but this was far from the central interpretive strand of the museum. As a national museum that brought to the National Mall a 'tribal museum' approach, the NMAI was celebrated as having created the 'gold standard for community consultation', with the primary 'client' for the NMAI as the Native communities themselves (Tayac, 2015). Yet in light of significant criticism, and visitor studies, that found the interpretive narrative confusing for the public, the NMAI teams began to question their status as a 'national' museum (Tayac, 2015). Spurred forward by the approaches taken by

the now established NMAAHC, the NMAI understood that it needed to change its interpretive scope in ways that centralised audience engagement in Native cultures and experiences as directly relevant to their own identities and lives (Tayac, 2015). This would be a process of reconceiving the museum as a national institution that would no longer solely prioritise tribal views or an un-edited narrative (Tayac, 2015). NMAI director Kevin Gover was reported as commenting in a 2012 article for *The Washington Post*, the NMAI would take more responsibility for 'mediating between the communities and the public' in order to make the exhibitions more coherent (Kaufman, 2012). At the same time, the redevelopments would also aim for more intercultural approaches to history, as Gover explains: 'We all have been largely misled or under-educated about the influence that native [sic] American achievements have had, both on the history of the Americas and on the entire world' (Kaufman, 2012). The *(Re)Presenting America* symposium of 2012 offered NMAAHC director Bunch to reflect on the future of such museums:

In essence, I would argue most importantly what is the future of these institutions is that they must reclaim their American-ness. They must demonstrate that while they are of a particular culture and that that culture is important to a particular community, they must also show that their history, that their presence casts a greater shadow that goes beyond their communities (Bunch, 2012).

This emerging discourse of the importance of centralising 'culturally specific' approaches as national museums was accompanied by a critical self-reflection among NMAI staff on the centralisation of 'self definition'. In a reflective paper in 2008, NMAI curator Paul Chaat Smith offered his own reflections on the future possibilities of the museum, and concludes with a rebuttal of steadfast self-definition in the context of the importance of a globally-significant story: 'As far as the white folks are concerned, I think this biggest of all stories should attract the sharpest minds from all over the planet, and the color of their skin matters not at all'. Indeed, Smith was keen to challenge the misconceptions of the NMAI as a museum dominated by American Indians, particularly in the content and interpretation teams (Smith 2008; Tayac 2015). Noting that Indian staff were 'a minority in the Indian museum', Smith wrote, 'for those concerned that a large pack of dour, nonhegemonic Indian nonscholars have taken over a Smithsonian museum, I can assure them that no such thing has happened' (Smith, 2008, p. 142). As Smith notes:

We are nothing to be afraid of, just a thin red line of government workers surrounded mostly by white folks who are also government workers (and often some of the nicest people you'd ever meet), making our way as best we can (Smith, 2008, p. 142).

While a central concept in the development of the NMAI and its perceived stakeholders and communities, and enshrined in its Board membership requirements, Native identity and processes of self-definition among the staff and practices at the national museum itself was less emphasised. More central to the new directions of culturally specific museums was the importance of different forms of expertise, and for Bunch, a diversity in the background and characteristics of the workforce (Smith, 2008; Bunch, 2015).

'Culturally specific museums' as a model of practice were shifting. The stories of American Indians and African Americans were being repositioned as universally relevant and the centrality of self-definition was beginning to be deemphasised in favour of a centralisation of non-white experiences. Yet what was also centralised under the tenure of Bunch at the NMAAHC as its formal opening drew closer was the issue of race (Bunch, 2015). This lay in contrast to earlier discussions of the emerging African American museum, which as Bunch recalls, were more concerned with the role of the museum in remedying 'early omissions' (Bunch, 2015). While the need to address omissions was still 'a small part of what the new museum does' Bunch asserts that in contrast to other models of culturally specific museums, the NMAAHC innovates in its focus on an 'inclusive' approach and the emphasis it places on exploring race as shaping the American experience (Bunch, 2015). Yet the NMAAHC's assertion of itself as fundamentally a national museum sits for Bunch as one side of a 'two-sided coin', where a 'culturally specific' or 'insiders' view' comprises the other side (Bunch, 2015). This harks back to the earlier curatorial discussions of the need for both 'separate' and 'integrated' approaches to African American histories. Yet rather than taking an Institution-level view, these approaches come together, for Bunch, in the NMAAHC itself. In terms of addressing race within the Smithsonian as a whole, the key task ahead is, for Bunch, closer collaboration between the different museums, and this remains an ongoing effort (Bunch, 2015).

Emerging from more recent discussions of culturally specific museums and their roles within the Smithsonian in addressing race, has been a rejection of the very term 'culturally specific museum' itself. Indeed, as Chapter 1 described, there has never been an accepted term that

would group such museums together as a museum type, but rather a range of descriptive terms used to denote a variety of museums based on culture, ethnicity, or racially-framed identity. Many of these museums perhaps share, at a visible level, only their starting point as reactionary museums, based in rights discourses. That their names focus only a specific group has, I argue, left them open to charges of identity reductionism and essentialism. Yet this has also meant that efforts to group them as a type of museum in response to a majority white core have seen them commonly framed in racially-coded ways, and in relation to this 'core' (Mack, 2015). In essence, the term 'culturally specific museum' can be understood to pitch 'mainstream' or 'universal' museums as more neutral. As Mack observes, every museum could be described as 'culturally specific' (Mack, 2015). Indeed, in rethinking culturally specific museums as a model of museum, new approaches to such museums might be said to be *reframing* rather than *correcting* the core.

6. Conclusion

Over the 2000s and early 2010s, culturally specific museums at the Smithsonian were a high-profile development and served as a site for significant ideological debate about the relative merits of separate spaces versus integrated approaches. The arrival of new museums of this kind on the Mall continued to signify an attempt to centralise marginalised histories and experiences in American history through national museums. The significance of the NMAI has been recognised as multi-layered, representing what some have referred to as a national-level 'tribal museum' that has made manifest key tenets of activist-based, Native studies scholarship, and represents logical progression to earlier approaches to practice at the Smithsonian (Jacknis, 2008; Walker, 2013). My study suggests that the significance of the NMAI in the broader contexts of culturally specific museums and race brings a further aspect to its role at the Smithsonian. At a moment in time when the reality of race as an issue was being contested, the NMAI and the NMAAHC in tandem, over the first decade of the new millennium, offered a race-conscious site of practice and discourse amidst a United States that was increasingly uncomfortable with directly acknowledging and addressing race. Manifestations of racial thinking had become ever-more complex in a society that was confronting its changing identity in the face of demographic changes, and

reassessing the material and social effects of race in the wake of Obama's successful campaign for presidency. It also was also a society deeply anxious of its reputation abroad, and was engaged in re-emphasising its democratic ideals and cultural cohesion in the aftermath of the Cold War, while reeling from the shock of its perceived imperial arrogance in the wake of events of 11th September, 2001. Each of these shifts and anxieties shaped the responses and critiques to 'culturally specific museums' and their perceived insistence on racially-framed realities in American history and contemporary society. In addition, these wider contexts shaped the extent to which culturally specific museums could address the racial past and its devastating legacies in practice, particularly in public-facing programming.

The model of 'culturally specific museums' experienced a shift over the late 2000s and early 2010s as emerging practice materialised on the National Mall, and as interpretive plans for the proposed new museums developed. Crucially, notions of such museums as fixed by their political emphasis on identity categories were not borne out in practice. The desire for physical integration, rather than separation, of new versions of history within museum practice was palpable among both proponents and critics of these new museums. In the context of the United States, however, discourses of inclusion, and indeed rights, differed in relation to different groups, and this was to have a significant impact on culturally specific museum approaches over the course of the 2000s. American Indian activism had long called for a recognition of tribal sovereignty and notions of United States 'citizenship' were deeply problematic for many Native Americans. Indian removal policies of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had ensured a culture of community separatism over integration, and this was to impact upon discourses of Native identity in relation to the State. Yet the push for a museum that could exercise a policy of self-definition, in part a call to take back control of objects and interpretation from white Smithsonian staff, was called into question with the arrival of the new NMAAHC and evolving approaches at the NMAI post-opening. Indeed, in the context of rights movements, separatism was seen as hostile, despite a long history and legacy of enforced segregation in the United States. The long heritage of values that demanded cohesion and integration at the expense of separation resurfaced in the context of debates around 'culturally specific museums' as late as the early 2010s.

While the NMAI had taken steps to address racial histories and contemporary racial experiences in its inaugural exhibitions, it had largely failed to offer the depth of historical

context and a critique of government policies – past and present – that many Native Americans and some Representatives in Congress felt needed addressing. In part, this may have been one effect of post-9/11 patriotism, which purportedly discouraged negative portrayals of the nation. Yet set against the Town Hall meetings and public consultations of both museums, this omission showed clearly the balance of power was firmly in the hands of the predominantly white elite who could afford to jeopardise the potential utility of culture for genuine social change in exchange for a persuasive, less objectionable narrative of American values; echoing broader cultural discourses, notions of diversity were subsumed into notions of national unity.

In terms of museological approaches, the 2000s and early 2010s tended towards forward-looking sentiments where a focus on diversity and an emphasis on inclusive practice pointed to a transcendent approach in response to claims for recognition and representation. Museums were characterised as sites of reconciliation and progression, which may have impacted the extent to which museums and their supporters could accept the discourses of discontent and anger that were given a temporary platform of expression as these new museums emerged. Yet key to this museological scholarship was the recognition of the museum as political and having real-world effects that mirrored - and could reinforce - inequalities in society.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: Reframing 'culturally specific museums'

This research set out to explore how, and to what extent, 'culturally specific museum' developments have enabled the Smithsonian to address race. Culturally specific museums have long been heralded as important sites for tackling racial bias and injustice. They have offered opportunities for processes of 'self-definition' through community engagement, governance and partnerships, and have presented narratives that foreground the experiences and histories of culturally and racially-defined groups that are often absent or marginalised from other museums. In recent years, their role has been expressly articulated as one of addressing race for the nation (Davidson, 2012). Yet the idea of 'culturally specific' or 'ethnic museums' has received recurring backlash from media, politicians and various publics over at least the last thirty years. Their status as Smithsonian museums on, or to be built upon, the National Mall has raised questions for many of their agency in tackling difficult racial and colonial histories. More recently, their relevance, desirability and sustainability has been called in question in view of a changing and 'progressing' society.

Given a significant lack of research efforts and publications which explore and theorise these new sites for practitioners, historians, and museum scholars, my research sought to develop new knowledge on the implications of emerging culturally specific museums for the broader aspirations of addressing race in the context of the Smithsonian. To help explore the meanings and implications of these sites in this particular context, I developed two key research questions:

1. How have 'culturally specific museums' at the Smithsonian addressed the issue of race?
2. How have these museum developments intersected with, reaffirmed or challenged broader approaches to race within the Smithsonian Institution?

These questions offered a way of building theories of the significance of 'culturally specific museums'. While many projects and sites at the Smithsonian could have offered critical

insights, I focused my study in particular on the development of two major culturally specific museums - the NMAI and the NMAAHC – that evolved considerably, and in tandem with each other, from the 1980s to the 2010s.

In order to identify the implications of new museums in this regard, my analysis involved a deep exploration of how race has been positioned and articulated over time within these 'culturally specific museum' projects and within the Smithsonian more broadly, and where differences and tensions lie. This final chapter summarises and assesses my key findings, which together offer a set of theories that contribute to emerging efforts to unpack the unique role of, and challenges faced by, culturally specific museums; work begun by Autry (2013), Burns (2013), Cobb (2005), and Walker (2013). Although focusing on a unique case site for research, I anticipated from the outset the possibility of contributing to broader understandings of museums and approaches to race and 'culturally specific' practices beyond the Smithsonian. I conclude this chapter by evaluating the implications of these theoretical insights for museums, and their work in addressing race, going forward.

1. Sites of 'containment' and 'retainment'

Walker's historical study of the Smithsonian as a changing universal museum characterises the shift towards 'culturally specific' approaches within the Institution as part of a long institutional history of increasing 'dispersal' and 'splintering' of its collections and spaces (Walker, 2013, p. 1). Walker rightly acknowledges that culturally specific museums were understood as a key route to addressing race for senior Smithsonian officials, although this may not have always been articulated with quite this directness in practice (Walker, 2013, pp. 6-8). Building on Walker's account with this study of approaches to race in more recent decades (post-1970s) reveals a more nuanced picture of the emergence and development of race as a social justice issue in the context of the Smithsonian. While Walker offers a much-needed institutional history that charts internal discourses and practices, my own research highlights the role played by broader social and political contexts, which significantly impacted upon the ways in which 'race' could be discursively framed and understood in the work and development of new and existing museums. This has allowed

for a more critical lens on the significance and limitations of 'culturally specific museums' as complex sites for addressing the difficult issue of race.

Locating 'race' as a fluid and politically-charged term, my study shows how this concept was activated in museums in relation to broader, rights-based discourses within the socio-political landscape of the 1960s and subsequent decades. The idea of 'race' as a social issue that was relevant to the Smithsonian's work, was operationalised both externally and internally; in relation to museum-focused protests; museum-based equalities initiatives; and culturally specific projects, over this time. Yet it was a concept that could be overlooked or under-emphasised, even within curatorial practice committed to inclusiveness. Looking across official documents, and both internal and external-facing discussions at the Smithsonian, it is clear that direct references to 'race' were rare, with the concept often omitted even in the context of planning and lobbying for new culturally specific museums, perhaps as a way of making such museums palatable and desirable for those who might fund and support them. Other notions like 'diversity' and 'self-definition' offered coded ways of alluding to need to address racial (white) bias. The shift towards increasingly indirect allusions to race was, I argue, part of a strategy of 'containment' over the 1990s in particular, in which negative concepts like racial injustice and bias were largely abandoned or reframed to offer positive notions that could be taken up within museum practice.

Smithsonian practice as a whole was undoubtedly influenced by broader socio-political shifts in racial justice discourses from the 1960s to the 2010s. As the Smithsonian became overtly more conscious of the biases and discriminations it perpetuated through collections, displays, and audience and staff demographics during the late 1960s and early 1970s, approaches to practice were characterised by liberating and exploratory discourses that involved critical questions, experiments and interventions such as the Anacostia museum and the diversification and politicisation of the Folklife festival (Walker, 2013, pp. 118-152). An arguably centralised but small-scale commitment to addressing racism through Institution-wide equalities initiatives in relation to staff, collections and audiences in the 1980s, eventually gave way to an institutional commitment to pluralism and the pursuit of 'cultural diversity' in the 1990s, which was nevertheless accompanied by a lack of direct references to colonial violence and race that continued through to the mid-2000s. This subtle shift from foregrounding 'race' to foregrounding 'diversity' has been detected across

other cultural and political spheres, and has been established as a core process in the containment and management of racial issues at state and institution level, that has served but also disempowered particular processes of action and change (Watson, 2000; Mukherjee, 2014).

The Smithsonian, then, can be understood to have echoed broader discourses of race in ways that served to manage a difficult and threatening concept. Crucially, however, culturally specific museum projects at the Smithsonian offered discursive sites that *retained* a direct focus on issues of race. My study shows how the emergence of 'culturally specific museums' offered the Smithsonian a genuinely new, sustained, and highly visible terrain upon which to explore questions and respond to debates around the racial past and present. For example, the NMAI presented the first permanent opportunity to exhibit race on the National Mall, and provided an opportunity for renewed visibility for public expressions of the legacies of racial injustice. In the early 2000s, and in the cacophony of responses upon its momentous opening, the new museum elicited substantial vocalising of America's troubling racial past and racial present. And it did so even as a deeply unsettling, racially-charged and patriotic 'post-race' public discourse unfolded.

The emergence of culturally specific museums elicited public expressions that demonstrated a significant turn towards post-race ideas; ideas of the nation and its social reality that proclaimed race - and therefore racially-defined narratives - as divisive, inaccurate and irrelevant. These effects, I argue, can be understood as characteristics of a 'post-inclusion' positioning of race, in which museums – presumably through discursive rhetoric and small-scale initiatives alone - are seen to have already achieved cultural recognition on behalf of diverse, marginalised groups. This is, to draw on Message, resonant of a tendency to conflate social progress in museums with cultural outcomes so that 'cultural outcomes are celebrated as if they were concrete socio-economic or political outputs' (Message, 2007, p. 239). Nevertheless, internally, Smithsonian staff remained quietly critical. Efforts to include and integrate cultural histories within more universalistic frames were genuinely and sometimes successfully pursued, yet such projects of inclusion and integration were rarely considered sufficient in scope. While post-race narratives of this kind can be understood as operating broadly across the social, cultural and political spheres, involving critical responses to affirmative action initiatives for example, I posit that the arrival of culturally

specific museums at the Smithsonian offered a concrete manifestation of inclusion and cultural recognition that would nevertheless stand in for broader institutional change, particularly in interpretive scope and the representation of racial histories (Mukherjee, 2014).

Culturally specific museums, cast by museological discourse as potentially positive sites of community-focused practice and cross-cultural encounters, were open-ended in their possibilities for progressing issues of race. They were assumed to be inherently concerned with addressing race at a structural and interpretive level, thus problematically rendering the issue of race as cause for cultural-level rather than national concern. Changing characterisations of museums as sites of inclusion and change shaped the ways in which the museum profession could imagine museums as sites of redress for past injustices. Yet at the same time, an externally positioned view of museums, particularly stemming from ethnic group stakeholders, were less convinced of a national museum's ability to perform the important work of memorialising racial violence and genocide. At key points in their development and public presence, reconciliation narratives that focused on race relations and democratic processes overshadowed narratives of grievance and state-sanctioned violence. This suggests more than just a gap between community-focused aspirations and the work of museum officials; it also demonstrates processes of ideological dominance on the part of an entwined relationship between national museums and the federal government, that could foster only aspects of community interests that converged with those operating at a more macro level.

While scholarship around race played a significant role in the evolution of culturally specific museums, existing analyses of practice, in particular the NMAI's inaugural exhibitions, suggests a preference for Native agency and human-level narratives, that deemphasised the role that the museum might have played in addressing oppression. Despite keenly felt cultural views of racial histories, and an emphasis on voice among museum planners, there was uncertainty in how to present racial oppression over time. Indeed, as the 2000s commenced, museum publics showed increasing preference for articulating complex ethnic identities and racially 'sophisticated' positions that moved beyond earlier rights-based discourses to post-race aspirations. Social divisions and histories of violence were not confidently highlighted in a nation emerging from the shock of the terrorist attacks of

September 2001, and confronting the troubling indications of how America might be perceived in the wider world.

The discourses of race that encircled these developments reflected, but also differed in significant ways from broader racial discourses expressed by the elite within other cultural, social, academic and political spheres of the United States. Anticipated as major facilities in the nation's monumental landscape, these museums offered a way of articulating the symbolic value and political potential for visible reconciliation that could suit multiple political positions on the desires for an improved United States. They also supported processes and discourses of memorialisation. These new museums also promised the potential of widening the audience for both museums and for histories and experiences of oppression to encompass a diverse American, and international, public. It was not until the early 2010s, however, that renewed debates on the need for culturally specific museums ushered in new positions on these museums. These debates indicated specific conceptions among publics that both reinforced and questioned the continued relevance on matters of race.

Many of the findings within this study around the museological 'containment' and retaining of race as an issue can be explained at least in part by the theory of 'interest convergence'. Despite ostensibly being sites for inclusion, self-definition, and indeed intercultural connection (Burns, 2013), it was clear that dissenting discourses that failed to chime with progressive notions of either museums or the nation as a whole were broadly overlooked or rebuffed within congressional debates, public addresses, and indeed within museum display and practice itself. I argue here that the initial implications of culturally specific museums for the Smithsonian then, in addressing the issue of race, might ultimately be that they have offered a site for changing debates about 'race' as a relatively abstract and malleable concept, laden with notions of identity, anthropological and social discourse, and contemporary issues of inequality, rather than a site for more direct histories and experiences of oppression that underpin those problematic manifestations of race. Indeed, culturally specific museums, as sites heralded to address 'race' and racial exclusion through museological policies, practices and programming from their very beginnings, may have had the effect of allowing the Smithsonian to sidestep direct and difficult narratives of oppression, not only in the United States as a whole, but also, as demonstrated across the

chapters in this thesis, those more micro, structural acts of oppression within the Institution itself that prioritise some narratives over others. Race itself, then, in the context of museological discourse and practice, emerges from this study as a conveniently opaque code-word and 'catch-all' for alluding to some of the many outcomes of ongoing racial oppression.

2. From 'culturally specific' to 'rights based'

Beyond shifts in the language of 'race' and 'diversity', this study identified at least two distinct co-existing discourses of 'addressing race' operating at the Smithsonian. One can be characterised by the need to identify and *transcend* racial bias within the Institution's museum practices and broaden museum audiences. This was pursued among relatively small groups of practitioners, committees and working groups. Simultaneously, however, the discourse of addressing race encircling and emanating from 'culturally specific' projects foregrounded notions of 'self-definition' and 'voice' in work which sought to amplify broader rights-based and culturally-based discourses beyond the Institution. In emphasising voice, the focus was not solely centred on eliminating racial discrimination and racialising practices within the Institution; effectively situating practice as a *response* to rights movements. Rather, it was focused on creating structures, spaces and resources for the representation, recognition and development of African American and Native American perspectives and historical narratives, including those of colonial violence and the existence of ongoing oppression. In this way, culturally specific museums can be understood as offering a 'counterspace' for negotiation and action; an institutionally-located platform for rights-based practice, rather than an institutional response to rights movements existing beyond the museums. This theory supports but also deepens Message's observation that the civil rights movement was a central 'reference' for the new NMAI (2007, p. 239). It also moves beyond existing explanations of 'culturally specific museums' as *responses* to civil rights and racial justice movements, or *correctives* to broader 'mainstream' museum practice. Rather, I argue, that the Anacostia Museum, the NMAI, the NMAAHC, and other culturally specific museums can be better understood as a facet of the struggle and movement itself - as constituting rights-based practice - within the professional museological landscape. This

finding, which supports the ideas of Burns (2013), fundamentally distinguishes culturally specific museums from other museums at the Smithsonian, and points to the likely limitations of the impact of such museums upon other museums at the Smithsonian that operate outside of a rights frame.

The broader suite of museums, sites, projects and activities under the umbrella of the Smithsonian are diverse and difficult to characterise in any singular way. Many of them embody the broad turn to rights and social change (Kreps, 2003, p. 80). However, broadly, the Smithsonian has centralised a number of key responses to rights-based discourses that nevertheless fail to centralise self-definition or serve as the basis for processes that characterise counterspaces (Fraser, 1990). These include: strategic, top-level goals that support inclusivity and diversity programming, including culturally specific approaches; efforts to integrate marginalised histories through inventorying, collecting and programming of various kinds; and direct support and collaboration with culturally specific museums.

The notion of culturally-focused museums as 'rights based', and the linking of these museums to longer struggles for recognition and change helps to move beyond the inadequate terminology of the notion of a 'culturally specific museum.' 'Culturally specific' as a descriptor places emphasis on the notion of separation and cultural difference in relation to a white mainstream, which bypasses the cause of such difference and separateness. The term inherently denotes a relevance and focus that is delineated by culture interests rather than national interests, while also maintaining the centrality and thus dominance of a supposed 'non-culturally specific' mainstream in its discursive construction. Nevertheless, racially-framed museums have offered tools and resources to racially-framed movements for justice. Indeed, 'culturally specific' practice and the separation and illumination of racially-framed experiences that they offer, retain significant agency in rights-based work that has yet to be fully acknowledged and welcomed in the museological and public spheres. Too much emphasis has been placed on positive notions of inclusion and diversity towards the goal of ultimate integration within the museum landscape, which, I argue, has side-stepped a recognition of rights-based, culturally-dictated practice. While acknowledging that the 'universal and the particular' can productively coexist, Walker concludes his study with a question: 'As the Smithsonian splits subject matter and collections into more and more different spaces, how can it also continue to

lump things together?’ (Walker, 2013, p. 228). Emphasising the long-standing vision of the Smithsonian as a universal site is an important strand of critique, yet this, I suggest, underplays the agency and power to change traditional, white-centric practice that is embedded within the pursuit of the ‘particular’, while overplaying the desirability of the universal. Rights-based approaches – whether within museums or beyond them - bring the need for spaces of dissent, time for growth and the possibilities of centring racially-framed collective experiences.

In sum, and despite the immense difficulties and cautiousness of representing an oppressive and racially problematic national past and present (Message 2007; Lonetree 2008), and the attendant censorship and self-censorship in public discussions that was at play, I argue that 'culturally specific museums' offered the Smithsonian a series of permanent, dynamic and central museum spaces for ongoing rights-based museology amidst a museological context that, I have shown, largely favoured discourses of cultural diversity rather than discourses of dissent. At the same time, however, racially-framed histories and experiences have not yet found sufficient expression in other museums where rights-discourses remain on the periphery, and this poses broader questions that could be addressed by future research and practice.

3. Undesirable sites

This project is a contribution to museological knowledge not only in relation to the analysis it presents of the evolution and concept of 'culturally specific museums' - and this term emerges as highly problematic – but also of the perceived significance of race in the context of museums and the nation at large. A critical lens on the rise of ‘culturally specific museums’ through the lens of race, and its positioning in American culture, politics and society points to a number of assumptions about the relevancy of race and the logic of racially-defined identity that prioritise the present-day aspirations of an aspiring ‘post-racial’ America. Indeed, culturally specific museums can be said to have been significantly misunderstood as simplistic and essentialising in their pursuit of a coherent voice within a complex nation. Yet culturally specific museums have been read in racially-coded ways. For a minority, they have been understood as sites that promote race and identity beyond

necessity. They have been read as sites of perceived separatism and even sites of hostility in this regard. Even within practice, both 'culturally specific museums' and 'culturally specific programming' have been ideologically problematic in a universal museum context as curatorial reflections on the work of the NMAH revealed.

Emerging from my research across different sets of evidence is a broadly consistent position within the discourse that pitches integrative and inclusive museum approaches more highly - and more desirable - than culturally specific, self-defined approaches. Culturally specific (or more accurately, rights-based) practices are frequently characterised as undesirable, even when also understood as necessary. At times, this is concerned with the perceived threat of encouraging dissent and focusing on grievance narratives. At other times, it is associated with a distaste for museums to operate in overly 'political' ways. Culturally specific approaches have been variously tolerated as necessary correctives to marginalisation, or as temporary methods of injecting voice and cultural self-definition into broader museum programming. Yet they have also been approached warily as providing potential opportunities for expressions of oppression, which brings the uncomfortable notion of the complicity of whites. Even within the strategic and externally-facing rhetoric of staunch supporters of culturally specific museums, including those of colour, such museums are sometimes positioned as an inferior substitute for a more desirable inclusive and universalistic museum spaces; perhaps inadvertently devaluing the agency of focused spaces for the advancement of rights movements, expression and cultural development through museum practice. This suggests that culturally specific or rights-based approaches in museums have typically not been actively welcomed. Echoing the white-centric idea that particular minority groups pose social 'problems' to mainstream society that need resolution, such approaches to museology are more often discussed as problematic, sensitive, 'political' and even unfortunate, even as they are understood as progressive and necessary.

Museum practices can change considerably over time, as this research has shown. That museums are fluid and dynamic institutions that embody broader cultural and socio-political conditions, and are complex, multi-layered sites, are ideas that are often overlooked in the debates around the significance and desirability of culturally specific museums. While they work to amplify marginalised voices and experiences, they are not diametrically opposed to

integrative histories. Indeed, integrative approaches were present in both the NMAI and the NMAAHC which each offered intercultural, national and globally-framed histories.

Unresolved tensions that pitch integrative approaches with culturally specific ones were, in past decades, difficult to articulate and navigate. More recently, however, there is, with the evolving development of the NMAAHC in particular, a recognition of the need to reframe museums as potentially offering both simultaneously. The emergence of new models of practice point to the fallacy of singular and static notions of what museums represent and can mean. This is perhaps the significant legacy of the emergence of new culturally specific museums at the Smithsonian; in addition to offering models of community-centred museology, the NMAI and NMAAHC potentially offer models of nuance and the co-existence of multiple narratives, as well as models of rights-based practice, for a professional sector that is increasingly being called upon to address issues of race.

4. Broader implications of this research

While the aim of this study has been to highlight discourse and practice rather than directly affect change, the political nature of this research project lends itself to setting out the implications for museum work, particularly insofar as it may prompt further scholarship and reflection in the field. However, to do so, it is important to reflect on current and emerging practices within museums at the Smithsonian against broader shifts in race-consciousness of more recent years.

The time frame of this research project focused on the past forty years of Smithsonian history, and in particular, the period of the 1980s to 2012, ending with the Smithsonian hosted symposium on the 'evolution of culturally specific museums'. Yet the research period stops short of a major new moment in the history of race in America. 2013 would see the emergence of a new, globally recognised racial justice movement known as 'Black Lives Matter' targeted in particular at police and judicial violence that was recognised to disproportionately affect African American communities. In the years that followed, the names of African American individuals who had died as a result of excessive police violence became focus points for demonstrations in the streets of Ferguson, New York, Cleveland and Baltimore, as well as many other cities and towns across the United States. While the

broad American public and media commentators had become newly re-sensitised to matters of race at this time, the discourses in protest of 'culturally specific' narratives closely echoed those of the previous years.

Despite widespread support for the Black Lives Matter movement, it represented for some a racialising attempt to suggest that Black Lives mattered more than others. This manifested itself visually and online, as well as in newspapers and political debates. 'Black Lives Matter' signs and banners were altered in various parts of the country to omit the word 'Black', leaving the universalising message of 'Lives Matter' in its place. On Twitter, the hashtag #AllLivesMatter began to 'trend' in immediate response to this significant push for change for African American communities. My research shows that these universalising discourses have a long history in relation to the emergence of 'culturally specific' museums within the notably 'universal' context of the Smithsonian Institution. Moreover, while culturally specific programming within museums such as the National Museum of American History (namely the temporary exhibitions on African American and Japanese American twentieth century experiences in the late 1980s and early 1990s which prompted critics to decry the influence of 'identity politics'), it was only in response to the idea of a whole museum, focused on a particular ethnic group, that critics were moved to express more direct notions of race and charges of racialism, and in particular, a belief that specific groups should not be prioritised over others. I suggest that this may point to the possibility that culturally specific narratives are only at their most offensive and problematic in contexts where they seem likely to 'take over' the mainstream, with all that this would imply for a white and indeed ethnically-diverse society.

Culturally specific narratives in the context of museums are at a crossroads in practice. Indeed, the diverse responses to Black Lives Matter, discussed only briefly here, hint at certain limitations in the use of cultural emphasis to engage diverse audiences, who ultimately might together enact deeper change. Drawing on the theory of 'interest convergence', which has helped to explain both the omission of oppression in favour of 'race' as the hard-edge of inclusive discourses, as well as underlying the tendency to be unsettled by group prioritisation, it is useful to take a closer look at recent discursive shifts in museum discourses and ethnic museum practice in this light.

The issue of race remains firmly attached to these museums alone, rather than those that typically emphasise white perspectives. This point raises further questions as to which racially-defined cultural groups are closely associated with the history of race, and how racial oppression can be ethically approached in more 'universal' museum contexts that do not prioritise 'voice'. My own research points to the importance of embodying rights-based practices in museums to this end. More recent practice, which has been beyond the bounds of my research, suggests the multiple forms that such work can take in the context of culturally specific museums. The Anacostia, the NMAI and the NMAAHC have each been involved in a number of campaigns, symposia, and temporary programming that focused on racial issues including racial stereotyping and the contemporary struggles for rights (Gover, 2014). A more substantive focus on oppressive racial policies on the part of the United States government over the centuries took longer to emerge. It was not until the major temporary exhibition *Nation to Nation: Treaties between the United States and American Indian Nations* opened in September, 2014, a full ten years after the museum's opening, that the role of the United States government in expansion, exploitation, land clearances and partnerships with tribal nations was given any significant space in the Museum.

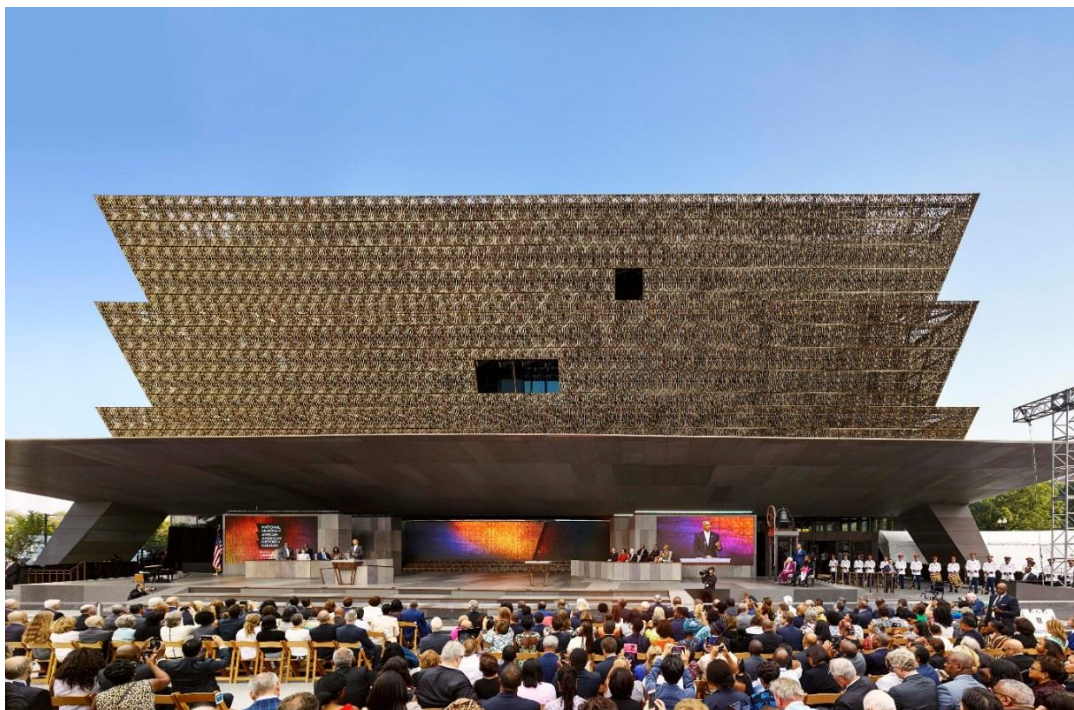


Figure 13 - 'Opening ceremony Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. Washington D.C.' (Photo: Alan Karchmer for the NMAAHC, 2016).

Standing on the brightly-lit platform at the opening ceremony of the new National Museum of African American History and Culture, in September 2016, then President of the United States Barack Obama declared:

That Our [nation's] glory derives not just from our most obvious triumphs, but how we've wrested triumph from tragedy, and how we've been able to remake ourselves, again, and again, and again, in accordance with our highest ideals. [...] It is an act of patriotism to understand where we've been (Obama, 2016).

In contrast to the NMAI, the NMAAHC has long rested on narratives of nation building and integration. For Lonnie Bunch as Director, the notion of a 'culturally specific museum' is an unhelpful one in the context of his museum (Bunch, 2015). Instead, he explains the model as one in which both culturally specific narratives and national narratives are brought to the fore. In terms of Bell's theory of the agency of interest convergence, this model of practice might be seen as serving both national strategies of governance as well as culturally specific interests, yet the remaining problem is that of engaging audiences in new narratives that may not sit comfortably with their own.

An emerging question for practice in relation to this study might be formulated thus: How might museums support engagement with the expression of new narratives and rights discourses that do not converge with those of mainstream audiences or the current interests of the state? Perhaps this points to the potential power of containment reimagined as strategy in rights-based museology. Whereas notions of containment have been problematically cast as agents of maintaining the status quo, my research has shown that the creation of contained 'counterspaces' (as opposed to integrated revisions) have helped to retain issues of race and racial histories on the national museum agenda over time. More fundamentally, containment has allocated such projects specific resource in the process. Perhaps, then, the separation of group histories, and the new lenses that this can offer, *apart* from other lenses, can work to provide spaces for immersion in, and potentially transformation through, new narratives. In this scenario, then, the remaining challenge becomes how to address race (or more specifically racial oppression) in non-culturally specific museums, where the structures of power do not offer that lens as a matter of course, and where new narratives contend and conflict with those they appear to supplant.

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