



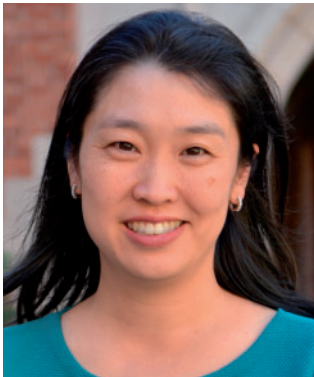
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AHR Conversation **Museums, History, and the Public in a Global Age**

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Since 2006, the *AHR* has published eleven “Conversations” on a wide range of topics. By now, we have a standard format: the Editor convenes a group of scholars with an interest in the topic who, via e-mail over the course of several months, conduct a conversation that is then lightly edited and footnoted, finally appearing in the December issue. The aim is to provide readers with a wide-ranging and accessible consideration of a topic at a high level of expertise, in which participants are recruited across several fields. As participants respond to one another, a unique informal dialogue emerges, one that exemplifies the interplay of ideas that drives so much scholarship behind the scenes. The procedure also throws open a window onto the process by which scholars turn evidence into conceptualization; these are not polished essays, but thought-in-action. It is the sort of publishing project that this journal is uniquely positioned to take.

At the suggestion of Steven Conn (Miami University) and Denise Y. Ho (Yale University), the 2019 Conversation examines the role played by museums and the act of display in the formation of historical narratives in diverse national contexts. Conn and Ho are joined here by Ana Lucia Araujo (Howard University), Alice L. Conklin (Ohio State University), Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (New York University), and Samuel J. Redman (University of Massachusetts, Amherst), to discuss both scholarship on the history of museums and the contested politics of museum display. Most broadly, as historians and/or curators, they wrestle with a deceptively simple question: What, exactly, are museums for? Who should the museum “speak”—and answer—to? What responsibility do museum professionals have when it comes to displaying—or smoothing over—a traumatic past? As readers will see, this is not a question only of architecture, display, curation, or even historical accuracy. Instead, these matters can cut to the heart of the underlying role of museums in collecting and organizing items that necessarily reflect the power relations embed-

ded in their very acquisition. As Steven Conn asks, what can provenance tell us, and how much obligation do curators have to reveal it to museumgoers?

The conversation will continue with members of the audience at a panel at the AHA Annual Meeting in New York in January 2020, with Araujo, Conn, Ho, and Redman in attendance. We invite all those who read this and have remarks of their own to join us there.

AHR Editor (Alex Lichtenstein): I want to begin this year's conversation with a discussion of the contemporary politics of collecting and display. Like many institutions today—the university, the curriculum, indeed this very journal—the “museum” faces pressure to decolonize its cultural practices and national identity. Judging from recent stories in the press, this often entails important gestures toward diversity—the inclusion of artists and topics previously excluded from the canon of high art, historical significance, or national importance. But a more challenging approach might require a thoroughgoing reckoning with the compromised history of the museum and the epistemologies of public display and national narratives. One might acknowledge, for instance, that museum collections represent the material detritus of colonialism, the legacy of centuries of cultural looting rather than just some kind of benign ethnographic curiosity. So, from each of your perspectives, how might one rethink museological practice at this moment? What would a “decolonized” museum or exhibit look like? Are there any good current examples?

Samuel J. Redman: These are critical questions for museums today. As a historian interested in the history of museums and a former museum professional, I have seen these matters play out in several different contexts. Museum history, as the question suggests, is intimately bound up with colonialism and nation-building, first extending from Europe, then throughout places such as the United States and elsewhere around the world.¹ My first book focused on the history and legacy of collecting and exhibiting human remains in U.S. museums during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Human bones, mummies, and flesh represent visceral reminders of this history, but the story plays out in connection to a wide range of art and material culture from the profane to the sacred.² In my current book project, I demonstrate how prevalent and widely influential salvage anthropology was in this larger story. Salvage anthropology was based in the belief that many indigenous societies were threatened by extinction, and the job of the collector was to gather material as quickly as possible for long-term preservation. This complex narrative became bound to museums in the U.S. and Europe, leaving behind many notable challenges (as indicated by this opening question), but also potentially offering a range of new possibilities. The challenge to decolonize, in many respects, represents the most critical cultural challenge for museums in the twenty-first century, as the process represents a chance to rethink nearly every taken-for-granted element in contemporary museum practice.

¹ See, for example, Christina F. Kreps, *Liberating Culture: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Museums, Curation and Heritage Preservation* (London, 2003). See also Conal McCarthy, *Museums and Māori: Heritage Professionals, Indigenous Collections, Current Practice* (London, 2016).

² Samuel J. Redman, *Bone Rooms: From Scientific Racism to Human Prehistory in Museums* (Cambridge, Mass., 2016).

I am not entirely convinced, as the question indicates, that the inclusion of artists and topics previously excluded from museum presentations somehow represents a less challenging or potentially less thorough reckoning with the problems inherent to museum history. The Metropolitan Museum of Art's recent installations, for example, include new text panels written by Native artists, including Wendy Red Star (Crow), offering different perspectives on exhibited artwork than the existing curatorially written exhibit labels. Some museums have taken to highlighting, rather than masking, spaces where sensitive objects have been removed from exhibition. Indeed, adding visible correctives to major exhibitions may help educate thousands, if not millions, who visit museums. Working through existing systems in this way has some value. For many indigenous people, however, the repatriation and reburial of ancestral remains or the return of spiritually sacred objects held in museum collections is paramount. Some objects made by Native Americans were simply not created with intent for public viewing. A decolonized museum rests, often, on granting voice and power to those traditionally silenced in the museumification process. This includes a critical examination of how material is displayed publicly, but also, importantly, how many more objects are cared for behind the scenes.

For Native American communities since the 1970s, responding to the intensively colonized Western museum tradition has been an important goal, something written about by scholar Amy Lonetree (Ho-Chunk) and others in connection to the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian and tribal museums such as the Zii-biwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways in Michigan and the Mille Lacs Indian Museum in Minnesota.³ While some tribal museums have been critiqued as replicating the problematic colonial practices originating in older Western museums, many others work to decolonize the museum experience in the context of their own tribe. Commonly accepted names for American Indian objects, for example, are frequently Western in origin, and in tribal museums the original name is used. Curation in further decolonized tribal museums also means histories told from Native perspectives, but also key reminders that these tribes still maintain active and vibrant cultural traditions.

Among the many changes stemming from the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was the increasingly rigorous effort made by indigenous communities to learn about museum collections and how they were being cared for at museums across the U.S. This represented no small task, but many tribes used the new law as a vehicle to expand consultation with museum staff. Coupled with these visits from tribal representatives, a new generation of museum professionals in the U.S. and Europe gradually proved more open to consultation than previous generations, and in many cases, even objects which were not eligible for repatriation received improved care through this dialogic process. By the 1980s, conservators tasked with care and repair of museum objects began seriously discussing the special ethical considerations connected to their work and caring for sacred or otherwise sensitive indigenous objects.⁴ In public history, the concept of "shared authority" further pushed some mu-

³ Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2012).

⁴ Sara J. Wolfe and Lisa Mibach, "Ethical Considerations in the Conservation of Native American Sacred Objects," *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 23, no. 1 (1983): 1–6.

seum professionals engaging with history to think critically about how to be more collaborative in museum settings.⁵ In 2018, the Society of American Archivists endorsed *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials*, further working to expand the discussion on best practices related to the indigenous material in U.S. museums, libraries, and archives.

Museums will never be fully disentangled from their complex histories. In order to move forward, historians and others connected to museums should instead focus on steps both large and small to address past histories and create more inclusive futures. New professional standards in museums, conservation, and archives represent productive steps forward. It is also clear that there still exists a continued need for historians and others to more broadly and in a more sustained manner engage with underrepresented voices in advancing museological practices.

Denise Y. Ho: The question “What would a ‘decolonized’ museum look like?” was present at the birth of China’s first native museum in 1905. In the nineteenth century, the only museums in China were institutions located in the foreign concessions of Shanghai, and early museum boosters were quick to present their work as part of building the nation. Museums and exhibits from the early twentieth century claimed Chinese treasures abroad by displaying their photographs, and criticized Western museums for including items like embroidered shoes for bound feet, examples of China’s “backwardness.” So for the Nationalist government, and then for the Communists after 1949, to build a museum was to reject the cultural imperialism of the past. But in the People’s Republic of China, whose boundaries extended to those of the vast and multiethnic Qing empire, ethnic minority artifacts quickly became an art-historical category to demonstrate the shared tradition of all fifty-six nationalities.

When Hong Kong and Macau were transferred to mainland Chinese rule in 1997 and 1999, respectively, we had a chance to see how these former colonial outposts would present their histories of British and Portuguese governance. In the Hong Kong case, as John Carroll has written, its curators were pulled between the pressures of creating a museum of Hong Kong history versus one of Chinese history.⁶ In some ways, the Hong Kong History Museum responded by providing a collage: sections on prehistory and local ethnic groups, on Chinese history beginning with the Opium Wars, and on Hong Kong popular culture, complete with a streetscape and a cinema. The exhibit ended with the handover in 1997, and at present is undergoing a renovation. The Museum of Macau, by contrast, was less controversial and more grassroots, resulting in community salvage efforts and popular nostalgia. Through a “Time Corridor,” its curators presented parallel vitrines of “European” and “Chinese” culture, joined by a wall with red holographs reading “Macau 澳門.”⁷ It should be noted that in both examples, neither colony became independent.

In times of a nationalism resurgent and an authoritarianism rising, it is difficult to imagine what a “decolonized” museum—in our words—would look like for China to-

⁵ Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany, N.Y., 1990).

⁶ John M. Carroll, “Displaying the Past to Serve the Present: Museums and Heritage Preservation in Post-Colonial Hong Kong?,” *Twentieth-Century China* 31, no. 1 (2005): 76–103.

⁷ Cathryn H. Clayton, *Sovereignty at the Edge: Macau and the Question of Chineseness* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009), chap. 6.

day. In Hong Kong, which is a Special Administrative Region, there have been attempts to curate politically sensitive topics. Most prominently, a private June 4 Museum to remember Tiananmen Square was installed directly across from the Hong Kong History Museum before it was shuttered; in April of this year, organizers reopened the museum in a new space in time for the thirtieth anniversary of the movement.⁸ Outside of China, there is—in theory—more space for diverse views, but even then the arm of the Chinese state is long. As early as 2011, China demanded that the University of Pennsylvania shut its *Secrets of the Silk Road*, which included mummies and artifacts from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China, items which offered evidence that today's China has a far more cosmopolitan heritage than was politically allowed. Almost a decade later, with the tragedies that have befallen Xinjiang since 2018—scholars “disappeared,” libraries and bookstores closed, and an estimated one to two million Uyghur and other ethnic minorities in extralegal detention camps—I am deeply concerned about forced cultural assimilation, to say nothing of violations of human rights. These examples demonstrate that while in some places the museum may be “decolonized,” in others the museum may be instead “recolonized.”

Ana Lucia Araujo: Collecting treasures and sacred objects for public or private display is a long-lasting practice developed around the globe long before the rise of what has been conventionally called colonialism. But the birth of modern museums during the late eighteenth century in Europe is associated with a dynamic that relies on encounters with peoples from “distant” parts of the world. European modern museums emerged from the exchanges with (as well as conquest and colonization of) lands and peoples of the Americas, Africa, Asia, Australia, and Oceania. Scholars are certainly aware of how and when modern museums emerged in the context of these complex exchanges. Although rooted in violence, major European and American institutions avoided disclosing the traumatic context that gave birth to their existence. Until very recently, most permanent and temporary exhibitions in major and smaller museums simply omitted the genocide and enslavement of American first nations. These museums also deliberately concealed the involvement of European and American states in the trade of enslaved Africans and how central slavery was for the development of colonies and future independent nations in the Americas.

Many decades after the independence of American and African nations, museums continued to avoid addressing the topics of slavery and the Atlantic slave trade. In French and British museums, for example, public historians and curators preferred to present narratives glorifying how colonizers brought salvation and civilization to Africans and how white saviors led movements to abolish slavery. At the turn of the twenty-first century, these narratives already had been largely contested by organized groups demanding museums to conduct research and develop exhibitions discussing slavery and the Atlantic slave trade. The commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the British abolition of the slave trade in 2007 became an important occasion to address the subject in museum exhibitions. This process culminated with the unveiling of the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool. Still, it would take much more than just in-

⁸ Kimmy Chung, “June 4 Museum to Open in Hong Kong in April in Time for 30th Anniversary of Tiananmen Crackdown,” *South China Morning Post*, December 10, 2018.



FIGURE 1: Musical instruments in the Open Storage area of the Musée du quai Branly, Paris. Photo by Ana Lucia Araujo, 2019.

roducing slavery to decolonize institutions that for centuries avoided addressing violence and trauma. In subtle or more explicit ways, slavery can be presented in these museums without dismantling longstanding racist narratives that ultimately portray European men as saviors and Africans as submissive subjects.

As debates on how to exhibit slavery continue, museums in Europe and the United States rarely acknowledge that their collections include a significant number of looted artworks, artifacts, sacred objects, and human remains. Perhaps a first step for a utopic, decolonized meta-museum would be an institution committed to acknowledging and exposing these wrongdoings. A museum that shows people how artifacts and artworks have been collected, classified, restored, and stored. I have in mind the exhibition *The Impermanence of Things* at the Neuchâtel Ethnography Museum in Switzerland. But I also foresee museums that systematically address the provenance of stolen objects and pledge to return artifacts and artworks if the communities and individuals who created and possessed them claim ownership of them. As an academic, the decolonized museum I envision promotes cultural and artistic engagement as São Paulo's Museu Afro Brasil does. A museum that draws from local and international communities and with their consent builds its collections. Although each context is different, I think of processes like what was done at the new National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., whose holdings are partly based on objects donated by members of the African American and African diaspora communities. A decolo-

nized museum could look like Visible Storage at the Brooklyn Museum in New York City, the Musical Instruments Tower at the Quai Branly Museum in Paris, or the Visible Storage area of the Museum aan de Stroom in Antwerp, Belgium. Ultimately, I dream of a museum that reveals its entrails to community and visitors.

Alice L. Conklin: In our answers so far to the question “What would a ‘decolonized’ museum look like?,” a wide variety of institutions have been evoked: history museums, art museums, natural history museums, and ethnographic museums, and there are surely others. If we add different national and colonial histories into the mix, it becomes difficult to generalize about how museums can best shed “worst practices” and renew their epistemologies of display. In the case of France, which I know best, facing up to the problem of the colonial origins of many collections seems an obvious first step. As a former imperial power, France—like Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal, Italy, Germany, and Spain—acquired a wide variety of objects from its colonies in the name of salvaging vestiges of peoples and cultures “destined” to disappear. Yet pressure to decolonize these collections has been slower to emerge in Europe than in the United States precisely because this spoliation occurred on other continents. Recently, however, France’s reluctance to confront its imperial past is beginning to change, largely in response to demands from postcolonial states.

France has been in the news of late because of President Emmanuel Macron’s announcement in November 2018 that his government would return twenty-six sculptures and other artifacts to the Republic of Bénin, a former West African colony. In 2016, that country formally demanded the restitution of a group of objects hauled off to Paris in the wake of France’s invasion in the early 1890s and now on display in the Musée du quai Branly. The government of the time rejected the claim, citing France’s “inalienability” law that prohibits deaccessioning anything in a public collection. After coming to power in June 2016, Macron took a different tack, commissioning a report on the possibility of “temporary or permanent restitution” of potentially thousands of objects. The report’s authors, the Senegalese economist Felwine Sarr and the French art historian Bénédicte Savoy, insisted that only full restitution was acceptable. To everyone’s surprise, Macron agreed, at least in the case of Bénin—on the grounds that France needs to begin to make amends for its depredations.

Whether this recognition of colonial looting will extend to the repatriation of all human remains plundered during the colonial era is another question. A request from Algeria—also initiated in 2016—for crania that have been kept in collections of the Musée nationale d’histoire naturelle and the Musée de l’homme since the nineteenth century has disappeared from the headlines since the story first broke. Of course, anything to do with Algeria and its memory is particularly fraught in France. It was only in September 2018 that President Macron acknowledged for the first time that the French state had sanctioned the use of torture during the Algerian War. The crania in question belonged to Algerian leaders resisting French conquest in 1849. These leaders were decapitated and their remains sent as “scientific” specimens to Paris; several of the crania are thus fully identified. French law requires that only direct descendants can request repatriation of human remains; in the absence of such requests—or the passage of a new law—restitution becomes an affair of state. The French government has given in to public pressure on several occasions: in 2002, it sent the remains of Saartjie Baartman

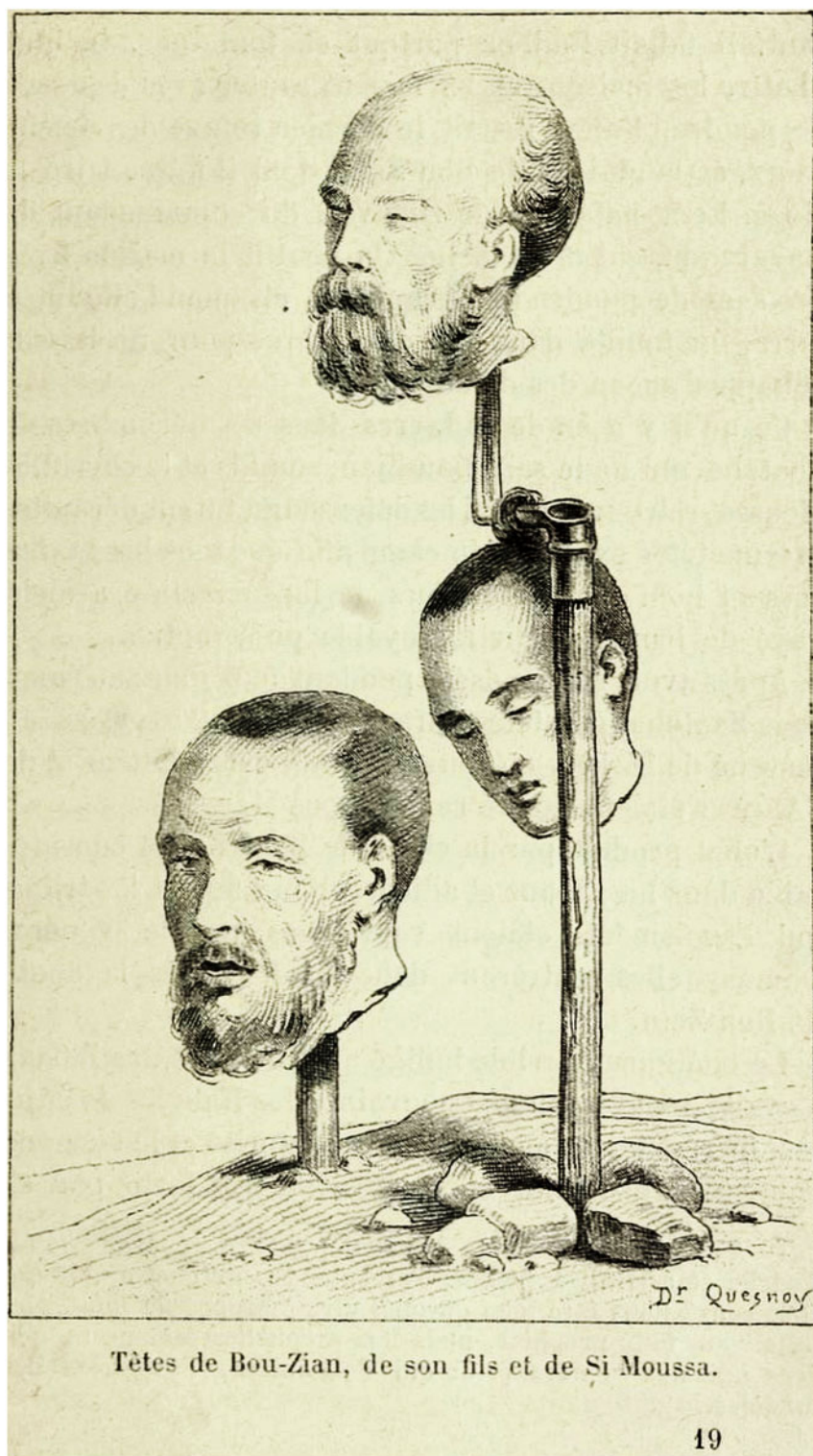


FIGURE 2: The heads of Sheik Bouziane, his son, and his lieutenant Si Moussa, sent to Paris after the French defeated the Sheik's forces and decapitated all three in 1849. From F. Quesnoy, *L'armée d'Afrique depuis la conquête d'Alger* (Paris, 1888), 289, fig. 19.

to South Africa; in 2012, it returned Maori remains to New Zealand; and in 2014, the skull of Ataï, leader of the anti-French 1878 insurrection, was restituted to New Caledonia.

These are modest first steps, alas visible to the public only as long as media attention lasts, toward French museums' fuller reckoning with the colonial past. To my mind, part of decolonizing the museum in the French case requires the creation of a permanent museum in the capital devoted to a critical history of the *longue durée* of colonialism. The popular 2017 temporary exhibit *L'Afrique des routes*, co-conceived by the distinguished historian Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch at the Musée du quai Branly, which highlighted "a continent at the crossroads of different worlds" from the fifth millennium B.C. to the present, provides one model.⁹ Designed to counter "the received idea" that Africa is without history, it revealed how rare such history-centered exhibits have been, at least in Paris.

Steven Conn: I think we need to start with some definitions and some categories, a few caveats and qualifications. The Institute of Museum and Library Services counted more than 35,000 "active" museums in the United States.¹⁰ And that was in 2014. Those museums range across all kinds of subjects and include collections of almost anything one can imagine. They also come in every conceivable size—from the Smithsonian's behemoth constellation of museums to the tiny National Mustard Museum in Middleton, Wisconsin, and much, much in between.

I point this out not just to be contrarian, but to remind us that the questions of "cultural looting" or the museum's "compromised history" are specific to a certain set of museums, and perhaps only to certain collections inside those particular museums. The Metropolitan Museum of Art may have to face up to its past practices with some of what it has on display, but certainly not all of it. And I'm not sure the 5,500 different kinds of mustard in Middleton necessarily need to be decolonized.

And let me stall some more. Before considering how we might reorient how museums do what they do, or imagine what a decolonized museum might look like, I want to ask: Why? What do we expect to accomplish by doing so? Museums—of all kinds—have several different functions, and they all serve multiple audiences. So how does what we—the royal we of museum scholars, critics, and our kin—are asking of museums interdigitate with the pressures and contingencies that museums face every day? David Young, who directed the eighteenth-century historic house museum Cliveden in Philadelphia, introduced an extraordinary set of public projects examining the intersection of the house, the family that built it, and slavery (about which more later). But he confided to me once that what mostly kept him up at night was whether squirrels were chewing through the roof. In other words, what's in it for museums to move in the directions we, who do not have to worry about balancing the budget or trapping the squirrels, think they ought to move?

I'll press further to ask: How would decolonizing the museum advance the research,

⁹ Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch and Georges Balandier, eds., *L'Afrique des routes: Histoire de la circulation des hommes, des richesses et des idées à travers le continent africain* (Paris, 2017).

¹⁰ See "Government Doubles Official Estimate: There Are 35,000 Active Museums in the U.S.," Institute of Museum and Library Services press release, May 19, 2014, <https://www.imls.gov/news/government-doubles-official-estimate-there-are-35000-active-museums-us>.

educational, and civic missions that are at the center of most museums? How would audiences come away with a better, deeper understanding of the world by unpacking the conflicted past of at least some of our museums and putting what we find on display? What if we built a decolonized museum and nobody came? I think—or I hope—there are good answers to these questions, but they definitely need to be wrestled with before we can insist that museum practices change.

One way to approach that change, I suspect, is to take what others have called the biographical approach to museum objects. The word “provenance,” originally from the French, started circulating in English in the late nineteenth century. We are accustomed to hearing it used in the context of fine art. In one direction, a well-documented chain of ownership can enhance the market value of an object. In the other, a sketchy provenance can cause all kinds of ethical, financial, and legal trouble for a museum. See: Metropolitan, Euphronios Krater.¹¹

All museum objects have a provenance, a biography, of course, but that information is rarely incorporated into a museum display. Even in art museums, where the biographies are probably better documented than in other museums, they are largely hidden from view. I don’t want to suggest that there is something conspiratorial here—many of those biographies, I suspect, aren’t terribly interesting. But many, I’m sure, are revealing of all sorts of things. Ten years ago, staring at an Egyptian mummy at the University of Pennsylvania Museum, I was tediously droning on about dynasties and what mummies meant to the Egyptians to my eight-year-old daughter. She interrupted and asked: “But Dad, what’s it doing in Philadelphia?” Therein lies a tale surely worth telling.

But let me circle back to my initial observation to add that the question of object biographies, whatever work they might do in the context of art and anthropology broadly defined, may not be the most pressing question for museums, say, of natural history, with their quite literally countless specimens on display and in storage. In those places, the most urgent issue may be how to deploy those stuffed birds and pinned butterflies in the discussion of biodiversity and catastrophic climate change, not to unmask how this particular bird happened to wind up in this particular museum as a reflection of some colonial enterprise.

So, I want us to be more specific about what questions we are asking of which type of museums and what we think we can and cannot accomplish by so doing.

Alex Lichtenstein: Let me follow up by building on Steven Conn’s contrarian response to my first question. As he implies, first and foremost, museums display objects to the public, and academic discussions of display ignore this “public” at our peril. What makes the Museum of African American History and Culture such a success, for instance, is that it invited a previously excluded public to the National Mall. But museums also traffic in *narrative*; they tell a story. As many of you observe, this story could focus on the history of the objects themselves—how did a mummy get to Philly?—but they also knit together a series of objects into a larger narrative. (As much as I loved

¹¹ The Krater was acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1972 from a dealer accused of trafficking in stolen art. After years of complaints from the Italian government, the Met repatriated the Krater to Italy in 2008. The Krater is Greek, of course, but wound up in an Etruscan tomb in Italy. That Italy made a claim on this piece as part of its “national heritage” left some of us scratching our heads.

the Museu Afro Brasil in São Paulo, it lacked a coherent narrative, and thus was somewhat frustrating, at least for me.) What kinds of stories should museums (and specific exhibits) tell? Should they focus on uplift, progress, and achievement, or violence, trauma, and the restoration of repressed memory? The former choice risks erasure; the latter, however, is not always the story communities want to hear. What specific role does curation play in these choices, and what sort of responsibility to the past and/or the public does a curator bear?

Denise Y. Ho: The issues of the object versus the narrative, the making of the narrative (and for whom), and the curatorial tension between historical content and contemporary audience are critical considerations, both for museums and for those of us who study them. Before I address this second prompt, however, I want to reflect on another aspect of Steven Conn's last response, that is, what kind of museum are we talking about? The majority of the answers above have focused on today's museums in the United States and in Western Europe, a consequence of Europe being the birthplace of the modern museum and the West as a site of imperialism and then imperial reckoning. In the same way we need to consider what kind of *museum* we are talking about, we also need to define what kind of *state* is doing the curation. Authoritarian states, past and present, had their museums, too. Indeed, in the socialist world, museum officials circulated to learn from each other; Chinese curators studied the Soviet Union, and certain styles remain imprinted elsewhere, such as in Vietnam today.

Allow me to continue the contrarian thread to ask why we assume that the first task of the museum is to display objects. I agree that objects (and their authenticity) are what make the educative mission of the museum distinct (as opposed to texts, films, or other media). The premise of the museum is that the object imparts knowledge in a unique way. And yes, the modern museum grew out of the practice of collection, as well as professional disciplines like archaeology, anthropology, and art/architectural history. Yet the narrative has always been bound up with the object, and in fact in the Chinese case the idea of objects as primary is a recent phenomenon. When I first started interviewing Chinese curators in 2007, the concept of *yiwu daishi* (using the object to represent history) was considered the new trend, a way to allow China to catch up with global museological practice. In the Mao period, one started with a narrative of the Chinese past according to Mao Zedong, in the same way that Soviet museums of revolutionary history were organized according to Stalin's *Short Course*. One of the things that docents of the era feared was that the audience would focus on the object in a way that excluded (or, worse, departed from) the official interpretation. This specific example is linked to Alex Lichtenstein's reflection on today's Museu Afro Brasil. That is, the risk of *yiwu daishi* is that the audience becomes unmoored. Perhaps one way to think about objects versus narrative is that the narrative is always present, and the curators will decide how much to make it visible.

If we agree that the museum needs a narrative, then we return to the question of what kind of narrative: "progress and achievement" or "violence and trauma." I recently traveled to China's Special Economic Zone of Shenzhen, a city that in many ways represents the People's Republic and its policy of "reform and opening."¹² In 2018, the

¹² The phrase "reform and opening" describes the economic policies of paramount leader Deng Xiaoping, who initiated China's transition from a planned economy to a "socialist market economy" in 1978.



FIGURE 3: One room in the exhibition *Reform and Opening Up* is designed to initiate new members to the Communist Party. Next to the CCP flag is the oath for entering the Party. Photo by Denise Y. Ho.

policy had its fortieth anniversary, and its watchwords (and undeniable achievements) form the crux of the Communist Party's present-day ideology. Shenzhen's cityscape is embedded with symbols of "reform and opening" and its architect, the paramount leader Deng Xiaoping. One of the most prominent landmarks is a billboard with Deng's image and slogan, and in the main city center a public art piece simply reads: "Fortieth Anniversary," with the subject implied. Outside of the Design Society museum, a visitor literally ascends a narrowing staircase with 1978 at the bottom and arrives at 2018 at the top, dwarfed by an enormous red flag with a hammer and sickle.

In the special exhibition of Guangdong Province's *Reform and Opening Up* that I visited in March, the narrative is one *only* of "progress and achievement." The display begins with wooden agricultural tools and ends with world-leading technology; the penultimate room includes a bar graph depicting the exponential growth of Guangdong's total production output since 1978. The only glimpse of the workers who made South China's economic miracle are in clothing and (carefully selected) letters home, a diorama of a factory floor, and bronze statues of people cycling to work under Shenzhen's slogan, "Time Is Money, Efficiency Is Life." The prompt's idea of "the story communities want to hear" is not part of the equation. This exhibit is not even for an international audience: there was no English (or Korean, as is common in some Chinese museums), and my passport had to be examined and registered as I passed through the



FIGURE 4: The Jianchuan Museum Cluster in Anren, Sichuan Province, is the largest private museum in China. Here, a visitor inspects Chairman Mao badges and related memorabilia. Photo by Denise Y. Ho.

metal detector. *Reform and Opening Up* is an exhibition by and for the Party, and that is why the entrance is designed for group photos and the final room is large enough to take a group loyalty oath.

Samuel Redman, in his leadoff response to our first question, suggested that the concept of “shared authority” has provided the impetus to be both critical and collaborative in the presentation of Native American objects and their narratives. I think that this idea of “shared authority” points to the role of power—and state structures—in our analysis of the museum and its audiences. Curation is ultimately about who has the power to control narratives. China does have some private museums, there have been grassroots oral history projects, and many conscientious historians and private individuals have built collections in hopes that one day they could be used more widely.¹³ But in a state museum and in public space, a conversation about “responsibility to the past and/or the public” remains a privilege of open and democratic societies.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: Many thanks, Denise, for this post. I’d like to respond to a few points. First, objects and their display as a defining feature of museums. ICOM, the International Council of Museums, issued a call in December 2018 for a re-

¹³ The most prominent example of such a private collection is the Jianchuan Museum Cluster in Sichuan’s Anren Town.

vised definition of museums to better reflect their current reality.¹⁴ No doubt UNESCO's intangible heritage initiative of the last twenty years is a factor in rethinking our privileging of the tangible, whether within or outside the museum. While historically museums have indeed been dedicated to collecting, preserving, and presenting the tangible, we might think about exhibitions as curated spaces that shape how we move in them—whether along a strictly prescribed route (Yad Vashem in Jerusalem) or an open plan (National Museum of Mathematics in Manhattan). Indeed, a defining feature of museum exhibitions is the orientation of the body in space, which distinguishes one's experience in an exhibition from one's experience in a theater or cinema. Interpretive designers work with the concept of "narrative space," where space is itself a key player in creating the narrative. Moreover, most museum exhibitions today are multimedia to a greater or lesser degree, and in a sense always have been—they combine objects, texts, scale models, replicas, and more recently audiovisual and interactive media, both analogue and digital.

As for the primacy of original objects, I am reminded of the ideas of George Brown Goode, who ran the Smithsonian during the 1870s and 1880s: "The 'People's Museum' should be . . . a hall full of ideas" and "An efficient educational museum may be described as a collection of instructive labels, each illustrated by a well-selected specimen," as well as the case he made for showing copies.¹⁵ Better a copy of something important than an original of something of minor significance. He also believed that a copy might even surpass the original by showing features of the object more clearly, while also preventing the visitor from being distracted by the aura of the original.

Now, about museums in authoritarian countries. I have been involved with the development of POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw since 2002.¹⁶ Most recently, with the ascendancy of PiS, Poland's right-wing Law and Justice Party, museums have become instruments of state historical policy, as have other cultural and educational institutions and also the media. The explicit goal of that policy is to shape civic and patriotic attitudes and to defend the good name of Poland.

Since the idea of creating a museum of the history of Polish Jews arose in the early 1990s, every president of Poland and mayor of Warsaw, no matter which party, has supported POLIN Museum. Our multimedia narrative core exhibition, while open to criticism from right and left, has generally been spared serious controversy, and POLIN Museum has won many prizes, to mention only the 2016 European Museum of the Year Award.

However, some of the museum's programs and temporary exhibitions have raised objections, most recently *Estranged: March '68 and Its Aftermath*. The exhibition and year of accompanying programs commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the Communist government-sponsored anti-Zionist and antisemitic campaign. That event led to the

¹⁴ https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/MDPP-report-and-recommendations-adopted-by-the-ICOM-EB-December-2018_EN-2.pdf. At the ICOM meeting in Kyoto in September 2019, there was considerable opposition to the proposed new definition; "The Extraordinary General Conference Postpones the Vote on a New Museum Definition," International Council of Museums, September 7, 2019, <https://icom.museum/en/news/the-extraordinary-general-conference-postpones-the-vote-on-a-new-museum-definition/>.

¹⁵ George Brown Goode, "The Principles of Museum Administration," in *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution, Showing the Operations, Expenditures, and Condition of the Institution, for the Year Ending June 30, 1897* (Washington, D.C., 1901), 193–240, here 220.

¹⁶ See Janine Holc's recent review of POLIN in *American Historical Review* 123, no. 4 (October 2018): 1267–1269.

emigration of more than half the Jews still living in Poland—they left under humiliating circumstances. Needless to say, the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage refused to fund the exhibition and programs.

What created the real firestorm, however, was the last section of the exhibition, which presented statements made by public figures today that were virtually the same as the antisemitic statements made in 1968. That firestorm contributed to the enormous public interest in the exhibition and accompanying programs. About 117,000 people came, breaking attendance records in Poland for a temporary exhibition on a subject other than art.

Right-wing MPs raised their objections to this exhibition and to POLIN Museum more generally before the Polish parliament and took the Minister of Culture and National Heritage to task for not exerting complete control over the institution and the content of its exhibitions. Because POLIN Museum, unlike other museums in Poland, is the result of a private-public partnership, the Minister is only one of three partners and cannot exert complete control over this museum. In addition, Jews are a “sensitive topic.” What the Minister could do, however, was to create a new museum, the Museum of the Warsaw Ghetto, which he declared would be entirely funded and controlled by the ministry and would show “the love of two nations.” Understandably, some worried that this museum would distort history in the service of the state’s historical policy to protect the reputation of Poland, while others worried that the museum would be like POLIN Museum, which they viewed as anti-Polish.

One of the extreme right-wing MPs confronted the Minister of Culture and National Heritage with fifteen pointed questions, including one that reveals how he understands the nature and function of museums: “Are the planned museums to be museums in the traditional sense, that is, institutions that focus on the neutral promotion of history, or ‘modern museums,’ that is, institutions such as POLIN Museum, where history is the starting point for the active creation of contemporary social and political debate?”¹⁷ Clearly, the MP was calling for a “traditional museum,” consistent with the Minister’s declaration that museums should promote positive feelings and not create conflict. The greatest fear with respect to museums dealing with the “Jewish topic” is that they will present antisemitism, which is interpreted as “anti-Polish historical policy.”

As for the context of these debates, suffice it to say that Poland, which was once home to the largest Jewish community in the world, is today home to one of the smallest—90 percent of Poland’s prewar Jewish population of 3.3 million was murdered in the Holocaust. Before the war, Poland was one of the most diverse countries in Europe. Today it is one of the most homogeneous. This is the result of genocide, changed borders, relocation of populations, emigration, assimilation, communism, and immigration policy. With the fall of communism in 1989, the “Jewish topic” could be openly discussed, and during the last two decades, Jan Gross’s *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* and *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* have fueled heated public debate and inspired a new school of Holocaust re-

¹⁷ “Poseł Winnicki kieruje 15 pytań do ministra Glińskiego. ‘Polska czy żydowska polityka historyczna?’” (Winnicki Poses 15 Questions to Minister Gliński. “Polish or Jewish Historical Policy?”), *Sejmlog*, March 31, 2018, <https://sejmlog.pl/posel-winnicki-kieruje-15-pytan-do-ministra-glińskiego-polska-czy-żydowska-polityka-historyczna/>. The Minister also announced a planned Museum of Hasidism and a large sum for the renovation of Warsaw’s Jewish cemetery. The MPs were also objecting to the Minister allocating so much money to so many Jewish projects.



FIGURE 5: March '68 state-sponsored antisemitic campaign, installation in the Core Exhibition, Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Photo credit: Magdalena Starowieyska and Dariusz Golik. Courtesy Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

search, itself under attack as anti-Polish.¹⁸ According to current historical policy, the emphasis should be on the German perpetrators and on Polish suffering—and on the efforts of Poles, on pain of death, to help Jews during the Holocaust.

¹⁸ Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton, N.J., 2001); Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* (New York, 2006).

Samuel J. Redman: What kinds of stories should museums tell? There is, of course, no single answer to this important question, but museums should explore what it means, and what it has meant historically, to be human. They should also help us understand our planet, the environment we should be better stewards for, and our place in the universe. Museums should use stories to make us think.

Although they are deeply influenced by the ghosts of their past, museums (at least in the United States) are today nevertheless capable of doing different kinds of work with and for many communities. Museums often use narrative or storytelling to communicate ideas, sometimes more effectively than others. Objects are capable of speaking to or sustaining many different narratives. People continue to want to see rare and valuable “stuff” in person. The trick is figuring out, depending on the context and institutional aims, what stories a museum is best positioned to tell, and how to do so impactfully. Some communities might benefit most from facing difficult narratives head-on in certain contexts, while others may have a greater need for public spaces that focus on inspiring audiences by showcasing progress and achievement. As I’ve written elsewhere, only relatively recently in museum history were institutions even starting to garner a more granular understanding of their own audiences beyond the raw attendance numbers museums began compiling in the nineteenth century.¹⁹ With a better understanding of who they might be serving and an honest conversation about who they are not serving, my view is that museums can continue to be important platforms for social education in the modern world.

All this said, I think we also need to temper our expectations some. Museums are embedded in economic, social, and political forces similarly to other cultural institutions, and while they are certainly capable of doing good work—and more and better work, for that matter—they nevertheless still face limitations. As my colleagues have reminded us in this conversation, this is sometimes shaped directly by the state or other political or social forces. Museums in the U.S. and in many other places can make a social impact, but they can’t singularly solve the global climate change crisis or fix racial prejudice. When museums lack basic resources, they are restricted in the types of actions they can take. In a fast-paced world with mountains of new articles and books on the subject, a thirty- or forty-year-old exhibition on African or Pacific cultures feels excruciatingly out of date. The political clouds are dark, and I fear people of different political stripes in the United States often want their views confirmed and reinforced rather than genuinely shaken up. On the other hand, museums frequently offer us a space to think, slow down, and reflect on the stories being told and their relation to our lives. Whatever stories are being told, younger audiences (and by this I mean those fifty and under) often thirst for experiential learning and alternative museum experiences (consider, for example the recent popularity of alternative museum tour companies, walking tour companies, and historic house tours emphasizing the lesser-told stories of domestic laborers, especially following the success of the TV show *Downton Abbey*).²⁰

Museums, and the stories they are capable of telling, also have the potential to reach

¹⁹ Samuel J. Redman, “Museums and Their Visitors: Historic Relationship,” in Marcia J. Bates and Mary Niles Maack, eds., *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences*, 3rd ed. (Boca Raton, Fla., 2009).

²⁰ The Gilded Age historic mansions in Newport, Rhode Island, now offer, for example, a “Servant Life Tour.” Newport Mansions, Preservation Society of Newport County, <https://www.newportmansions.org/plan-a-visit/servant-life-tour>.

different age groups in a way not often possible in other venues or fora. Lessons and ideas can continue to be drawn from theater, education, and other fields. Museums are limited by continually declining levels of state support and donor interest in funding certain projects rather than others, as well as an overall lack of imagination in many cases. I do think that museums should continue to go beyond the presentation of discrete facts to render difficult-to-understand concepts into stories. These stories, ideally, can be accessed by different audiences. I'm not the first person to appeal to museums to embrace different kinds of sensory experiences in new history communication efforts, but museums and historic sites can and will continue to consider how sound, smell, feel, and taste will enhance visitor experiences.²¹

Why does our emphasis on interactivity in museums so often end with engaging younger audiences and visitor experiences? Interactivity is less commonly emphasized when museum interpretation is offered to adults, likely missing many opportunities for engagement. The National Park Service and numerous other organizations have started to turn away from the "sage on the stage" model for tours and other programming at museums and historic sites toward an emphasis on more "audience-centered experiences." This means that museum docents are as often working toward becoming effective facilitators as they are delivering scripted content. This means, importantly, that some of the control over narratives and how they are told is actually being wrangled away from museum professionals and controlled more firmly by visitors and their interests. This is not to say that museum professionals no longer play a role in constructing and delivering a narrative.

Museums can and should continue to explore more inclusive and diverse approaches to telling different kinds of stories. Pluralism fuels a strong democracy. My (perhaps naïve) assumption is that for all the museum's many faults, things would be better in our world if more people critically reflected on their views, humanity, and their place in the universe every once in a while. While constrained by their resources, museums should work to respond to the interests and needs of their communities and audiences while offering space for these and other reflections. This sometimes means thinking differently about the collection they maintain, the space they occupy, or the communities they serve.

Steven Conn: The creation of narrative is among the things that distinguished the modern museum from the cabinets of curiosities and *Wunderkammern* that preceded them. Modern museums imposed order and system on collections—and in turn, they collected based on those systems—and they did so in order to tell a story. Museum audiences, no less than readers or theatergoers, respond to narrative, and when museums decide to use some other way to mount exhibits—like at the Museu Afro Brasil that Alex mentioned, or at the inaugural set of exhibits at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C.—they risk failing to engage their audiences.

What stories museums decide to tell is conditioned by several factors before we even get to the question of what the intellectual content of that narrative might be. These include: What type of museum are we talking about? What is the scale and scope of the museum? Who constitutes the primary audience for it?

²¹ For more on this sort of multisensory work happening in art museums, see Judith H. Dobrzynski, "Drinking In the Art: Museums Offer a Growing Banquet for the Senses," *New York Times*, March 14, 2017, F30.

I won't belabor these parsings except to note that an art museum will necessarily approach narration differently than, say, a museum of technology; the Field Museum of Natural History has vast holdings from all over the globe, while the Trailside Museum of Natural History in Crawford, Nebraska (population just about 1,000), has a somewhat more modest collection; people come from all over the country to visit Monticello, while those who venture to the Warren Harding Home in Marion, Ohio, come from closer by. These differences shape what individual museums can do and how they can do it.

But having made those distinctions, let me pivot and say that I think that virtually all museums share a basic task in common. They are all historical enterprises. Sometimes that is built into the names of the places themselves—like the National Museum of Natural History—or implicitly understood, as in the presentation of the history of art at the Metropolitan or the Chicago Art Institute. More than that, their exhibits are driven by a desire to connect past and present in some way. Making that connection, it seems to me, constitutes the civic mission of museums, and it is a mission that some museums have embraced, while others have shied away.

In thinking about how museums might do a more deliberate, energetic job of fulfilling this civic mission, I like the town hall metaphor. If museums saw themselves less as repositories—vaults, really—whose primary purpose is to preserve and protect (important though those roles are), and more like civic spaces activated to make audiences better-informed citizens, they might well discover a new role for themselves in all kinds of different communities and might attract new audiences altogether.

The conversations that could go on inside these town halls of science, of history, or of technology would take place where the concerns people have today meet the institutional resources and capacities those museums possess. That still leaves plenty of room for museum curators and educators to deploy their expertise, but the “town hall” model would give audiences a voice by engaging them more directly in what goes on inside the museum's walls.

A spectacular example of this is what has happened recently at the National Trust site Cliveden in the Germantown section of Philadelphia that I mentioned earlier. For generations the site had been interpreted on the “stately home” model, where visitors were told about the significance of the mid-eighteenth-century architecture, the elegance of the furnishings, and the importance of the Logan family, who built the place. Nary a word, though, about the Logan family's deep connection to slavery. Then several years ago, staff at Cliveden decided to confront the slavery issue head-on, and they did so by engaging with the surrounding neighborhood, largely now African American, directly. The process wasn't easy, to be sure, but I think everyone involved believes the challenges were well worth the rewards.

The reluctance of some museums to open themselves up for what could prove contentious stories is perfectly understandable. New directions and emphases can mean, on the one hand, a dramatic shift in the internal culture of an institution, and changing any institutional culture is always difficult. And since museums often already feel threatened and fragile, they can be hesitant to create public controversies. Museums need to tread carefully for a third reason as well: right now, according to surveys, they retain a remarkably high level of public trust (higher certainly than university faculty). If they become too tendentious or didactic, or are seen by the public as simply venues pushing

particular political agendas, they risk losing that trust. At the same time, if they choose caution over controversy, they risk becoming irrelevant.

I don't envy the choices museum directors have to make.

Alice L. Conklin: In addressing the questions posed by Alex Lichtenstein in round two of our discussions, a basic difference has emerged between current museum practices in an authoritarian closed society such as China, and those in democratic and open ones (principally the U.S.). The dividing line has been the degree of community involvement, with Steve Conn and Samuel Redman noting that more participation by museumgoers is key to making these institutions—whether national, regional, or local—more inclusive, diverse, and democratic, and therefore more relevant to the communities in which they are embedded, and thus more conducive to mutual understanding among peoples on a global scale. Where, then, do the museums of the former imperial powers of Western Europe and those of postcolonial states in Africa fall on this spectrum? Here two examples can serve: ethnographic museums in Western and Central Europe, where much of the “booty” of empire ended up, and, to a lesser extent, museums in Francophone African states today. Let me begin by pointing to two other recent developments (beyond Macron's promise to repatriate artifacts seized in the heyday of imperial spoliation, referenced above) that suggest that for much of Europe and many countries in Africa, a new chapter in museum practices may be opening up: first, the completed renovation in 2018 of Belgium's Africa Museum with the explicit goal of confronting its colonial past, and second, the opening earlier this year of a Museum of Black Civilizations in Dakar, Senegal, financed in large part by the Chinese. A major new institution is also being planned by Nigeria, while the Democratic Republic of Congo recently inaugurated a new National Museum. In the case of the Dakar Museum, many galleries remain unfilled, in anticipation that France will repatriate the African works in its collections taken without consent.

But “new” relative to what? Over the past thirty years, European ethnographic museums, no matter whether large or small, began to change their names to museums of world culture, and thus claim to reflect the diversity of the globe. In this way, collections acquired mostly from modern colonial sources were repurposed, but often not fundamentally rethought. Too often the systematic typological, material, or comparative taxonomies used in the past were jettisoned, with no alternative narrative taking their place. But there is now growing recognition that the entangled histories of migrating peoples and objects should be displayed as stories about how the latter came into European museum collections in the first place. Creating these new narratives, however, requires collaboration across the postcolonial divide between the African communities of origin and the professionals in place.

In the case cited by Steven Conn, greater community involvement—what he refers to as “a ‘town hall’ model” of curatorship—meant mobilizing an audience close to hand (such as the African American community in Germantown) and thus confronting the burning historical legacy of slavery head-on. When it is, however, a matter of the Musée du quai Branly and the Louvre in Paris, or the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, or the Berlin Ethnological Museum in Dahlem (whose contents are soon to join the new Humboldt Forum—another imagined center of world culture), then becoming a stage for community voices and reorganizing collections in order to express multiple ways of



FIGURE 6: In some parts of Sub-Saharan West and Central Africa, new museums are opening with help from Asian nations. A recent example is the National Museum of the Democratic Republic of Congo in Kinshasa, co-financed by Korea and inaugurated in June 2019. For more on the long history of collecting in what was formerly the Belgian Congo, see Sarah Van Beurden's review in this issue. Munfarid1 [CC BY-SA 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)], via <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.

perceiving, knowing, and interpreting has been more difficult. Even when the will is there in European capitals, numerous impediments remain. On a purely practical level, in Europe itself, curators who seek to acquire the deep local knowledge of shifting African cultural practices under colonialism—that they might finally properly contextualize how, for example, specific objects now in European collections might carry a story of resistance—do not usually have the training or other resources needed to recover this past.

Meanwhile, African stakeholders in their museums since independence have been frustrated time and time again by the kind of “aid” offered to them from professionals in Europe. The latter too often assume that all intellectual expertise with regard to museums originates in Europe, where the modern institution was invented, and position African counterparts as grateful recipients of Western largesse. The aid donated is often of a “technical” kind, sometimes as basic as the mere gift of a computer and training on how to use it. Of course, several states in Africa have themselves shown little interest in museums, finding other cultural venues more suitable for political instrumentalization and nation-building. For all these reasons, cooperation between communities in Africa where objects in European museums originated, and European curators seeking to make their “world” museums into genuine stages for community voices has not made as much headway as either group would like.

Does this mean that the best path forward would be for European governments to return what they seized by force in the first place? Certainly the moral argument for restitution is strong, much stronger than the specious arguments that are regularly trotted out to oppose it. How often do we hear the claim that Western world museums are universal ones protecting humanity's collective cultural heritage? Or that colonial laws in force at the time of acquisition mean objects are legally owned by Europeans? Or that there are no African museums capable of properly receiving and preserving the artifacts in question? These attitudes continue to impede the very dialogue with specific African communities necessary to rethink displays and contravene older epistemologies, and

imagining other futures is necessary. Here we could follow the lead of the political theorist Achille Mbembe, who powerfully reminds us that while Europe gave so much to the world, it also took so much from it.²² On our increasingly small and fragile planet, collective survival requires shifting from a social and political model of closure—an “us” versus “them,” “Europe” versus “the Rest” mentality—to an ethos of sharing (*partage*) and circulation. Restitution of objects taken barely a century ago to their places of origin is one means of putting the latter back in circulation throughout Africa itself, where these artifacts could anchor other stories and other visual regimes than the ones that European ethnographic museums invented for them.

Ana Lucia Araujo: There is no single answer to Alex’s question because there are too many kinds of museums in so many different places, created to fulfill too many different purposes. As put by Steven Conn, the birth of the modern museum implies the existence of a collection or several collections of objects, artifacts, or artworks, no matter how we define these items. As during the twentieth century we moved away from the original conception of Western museums as cabinets of curiosities, which often made a place for foreign cultures, the narrative gained importance. Through a narrative composed of words, images, and tangible artifacts, museums can create links of empathy. To this end, we gain in exploring a few examples.

Alex argues that what makes the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) a success is that the museum invites African Americans to the National Mall in Washington, D.C., when they have been historically excluded from that space. The paradox here is that although it was in the making for almost a century, the NMAAHC had no collections at its inception. Curators and museum administrators gathered nearly 40,000 objects, most of which were donated by members of the African American and African diaspora communities across the country and abroad. Through these disparate objects they built a coherent (although sometimes problematic) narrative that starts with European contact with West Africans and West Central Africans, continues through the Atlantic slave trade and slavery, and ends in the Obama era in the United States.

A museum of history and culture, very few objects displayed at the enormous NMAAHC remain in mind after a long visit. A random iron sugar pot? Nat Turner’s Bible? Harriet Tubman’s shawl? Could the museum stand out without these objects? Probably yes. Conceived as an identity museum, the various exhibitions of the NMAAHC are built on a thematic and chronological basis in spaces that privilege images, text, and sound. Therefore, the museum copes with a history of violence and trauma but eventually highlights achievement and progress. Likewise, the Museu Afro Brasil administered by the city of São Paulo is also a public museum, created to tell an alternative history of Brazil, focused on its black populations. In contrast with the NMAAHC, the collection of more than 1,000 items by artist and curator Emanuel Araújo gave birth to the Museu Afro Brasil. Although the museum fosters a black-centered alternative narrative of Brazilian history, in many ways it reflects Araújo’s views, a reason why perhaps some visitors see the museum as lacking coherence. Yet, although a national narrative certainly underlies the formation and the organization of art museums such as the Louvre or the Musée du quai

²² Achille Mbembe, in “L’Europe est-elle un mythe?,” podcast, *La fabrique de l’histoire*, hosted by Emmanuel Laurentin, April 19, 2019, <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/la-fabrique-de-lhistoire/leurope-est-elle-un-mythe>.



FIGURE 7: Nat Turner's Bible displayed in the exhibition *Slavery and Freedom*, National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, D.C. Photo by Ana Lucia Araujo, 2017.

Branly mentioned by Alice L. Conklin, I agree with Steven Conn that narratives in art museums work differently because they rely on visual language (artworks should stand by themselves) and not on verbal language. Art museums rarely require visitors to respect a particular path. Still, the various galleries of the Louvre Museum follow a certain chro-



FIGURE 8: African permanent exhibition, Musée du quai Branly, Paris. Photo by Ana Lucia Araujo, 2019.

nological order, starting with Near Eastern Antiquities, Mesopotamia, and Iran (500 B.C.–A.D. 700) and passing through Egyptian Antiquities (4000–30 B.C.) and Greek and Roman Antiquities until reaching the more recent galleries focusing on U.S. and European painting of the middle of the nineteenth century. Here, as in most art museums, the artworks speak for themselves, and unless the visitor chooses to take an audio guide, textual descriptions are limited to descriptive labels and some panels introducing each gallery. In the case of Quai Branly, this narrative is even more obscure or confusing. Relying on an aestheticizing approach to arts of Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas, the permanent exhibitions neither follow a trajectory nor respect any hierarchy. Visitors can rarely find a detailed description of an object: whereas French guests can understand that most of those objects were incorporated into the museum's collections during the French rule in parts of Africa, Asia, and Oceania, there is rarely any information about contentious acquisitions, and this decontextualized approach tends to drive away foreign visitors who are not familiar with French colonialism. How do other community members see and engage with this museum? African immigrants and Afro-French citizens certainly visit the museum, but they are not represented on its board of trustees. Though the museum employs several black individuals, none of them are curators.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: Museums come in many forms, and they are more than their permanent or core exhibition and temporary exhibitions, though our discussion so far seems to conflate the two: museum and exhibition. One of the most

contentious aspects of museums is their collections, whether formed in the contexts of colonialism, missionizing, war, or neglect. Today, the question of provenance is at the forefront of ethnographic and art museums alike, and steps are being taken to return objects to their rightful owners, to “loan” those objects to those from whom they were taken, to negotiate a way to keep and care for them in museums consistent with cultural protocols, or to create museums for them in the communities from which they derived.

As for how these and other objects are displayed, whether in light of their problematic provenance or unreflective conventions of display, there are several interesting examples. The Worcester Art Museum added new wall text to identify the slaveholders among illustrious citizens immortalized in early American portraits and offered gallery tours that did the same. In a recent exhibition, the Musée d’Orsay identified black models in modern paintings by name and retitled the paintings accordingly. Such gestures change the stories these works and the display of them tell.

Even more radical is the reconfiguration, reorganization, and redistribution of museums and collections in Paris, which led to the dissolution of the Musée national des arts et traditions populaires, the relocation of some of the Musée de l’homme’s collections, the transformation of the Musée national des arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie, and the creation of entirely new museums, most notably the Musée du quai Branly in Paris and the Musée des civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée in Marseilles.²³

The history of these institutions and their names is a story in itself. The Musée du quai Branly skirts the problem of what to call itself by taking its address for its name. The Musée national des arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie is another matter. Housed in a building created for the 1931 Colonial Exposition, it was first called the Musée des colonies et de la France extérieure, then the Musée de la France d’outre-mer, and thereafter the Musée des arts africains et océaniens, and finally the Musée national des arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie—until its collections were moved to a new museum, the Musée du quai Branly, where by exhibiting as art objects collected largely by anthropologists, they would be saved from ethnography. Today, the 1931 building is home to the Cité nationale de l’histoire de l’immigration.

The story that museums tell is first and foremost their own story, whether explicitly or implicitly, whether through institutional transformation, change of name, and rebranding, or metamuseological gestures—those wall texts that expose the slave owners behind the elegant portraits of pillars of the community, those captions that identify by name the hitherto nameless black subjects in modern paintings, or “mining the museum” for hidden evidence of black presence in the collection and black absence from the exhibition. I am referring here to Fred Wilson’s landmark exhibition at the Maryland Historical Society, where he placed a child’s Ku Klux Klan robe in a baby carriage, slave shackles in a case of elegant silver vessels, and a whipping post next to a fine piece of carpentry.²⁴

A recent exhibition at the Bard Graduate Center Gallery in Manhattan addresses many of the issues raised in Alex’s second call for responses in imaginative and nuanced ways. *The Story Box: Franz Boas, George Hunt and the Making of Anthropology*, curated by Aaron Glass, in cooperation with the Kwakwaka’wakw of British Columbia, takes as its point of departure a classic in the history of American an-

²³ The Musée des civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée in Marseilles is reviewed in this issue.

²⁴ See “Return of the Whipping Post: Mining the Museum,” Maryland Historical Society, October 10, 2013, <http://www.mdhs.org/underbelly/2013/10/10/return-of-the-whipping-post-mining-the-museum/>.

thropology, Franz Boas's 1897 book *The Social Organization and the Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians*.²⁵ What is the story that this exhibition tells? The starting point is the process by which this ethnographic work was created. That process is being painstakingly reconstructed from scattered archival material and is presented both in a digital edition of the work and in this exhibition. At the heart of that process is the collaboration of Boas with George Hunt, his Tlingit research partner.

Three aspects of this project, both the digital edition and the exhibition, stand out: first, bringing the contribution of Hunt from the fine print to boldface and from the margins of the page to the body of the text; second, revealing the "secrets" of the ethnographic process; and third, showing the importance of this book and this project to the Kwakwaka'wakw today. What about those "secrets"? During the period when Boas was eager to document the potlatch, the Canadian government had outlawed this practice. As a result, it was not possible to document the potlatch in situ. Instead, Boas and Hunt arranged to bring a group of Kwakwaka'wakw to the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, where they performed the potlatch and where Boas and Hunt were able to document it, without so indicating in the ethnography they published. As a result of such ruptures in cultural transmission, *The Social Organization and the Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians* came to play an important role in the recovery and renewal of Kwakwaka'wakw culture. The Bard exhibition was organized in collaboration with the U'mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay, and has traveled there from the Bard Graduate Center Gallery.

It is a given today that museums are about people: the source communities from which their collections derive and their publics, whether these are the same or different. Indeed, it is considered best practice to actively collaborate with source communities and to actively engage the public. Rather than ask what stories a museum "should" tell, consider the approach of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. "Never Stop Asking Why" is its newest global initiative. Boldly visible inside and outside the museum are calls to "think"—"The museum is a question, not an answer," in the words of Elie Wiesel.²⁶

Or, consider the Deutsch-Russisches Museum Berlin-Karlshorst, which is located in the building where the German armed forces surrendered. Their renewed exhibition, the result of a collaboration between German and Russian historians, presents a dual narrative, a story told simultaneously from two perspectives.

I will have much more to say about POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, where I am chief curator of the core exhibition. But I will save that for a future round. Suffice it to say for now that the constellation of history museums in Poland, to mention only the newest ones—the Museum of the Second World War, the European Solidarity Center, the Warsaw Rising Museum, the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II, and POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews—are chapters in a national narrative dispersed across the museological landscape. And, subject to the current right-wing government's "historical policy" and concept of what a museum is, what it should be, what stories it should tell and how, and to what end. How these museums contend with this situation I will save for later.

²⁵ See the exhibition website, <http://exhibitions.bgc.bard.edu/storybox/>.

²⁶ "Museum Launches Never Stop Asking Why Initiative," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, January 22, 2018, <https://www.ushmm.org/information/press/press-releases/museum-launches-never-stop-asking-why-initiative>.

Alex Lichtenstein: I have invited Barbara to initiate the next round of discussion.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: I have noticed an increasingly strong trend toward activism. Consider the International Council of Museums' initiative to redefine museums and the definitions that are being proposed, which can be accessed at https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/MDPP-report-and-recommendations-adopted-by-the-ICOM-EB-December-2018_EN-2.pdf. Taking up ICOM's initiative might be a good way to round out our conversation.

What is the impact of expectations that museums should be activists in addressing social, cultural, political, and economic issues on their role as institutions of public history in a fraught political landscape where there is no consensus on many issues, and not only in authoritarian countries (China, Poland, etc.), but also in the USA?

Denise Y. Ho: Throughout this conversation, I have been struck by the interplay among museum history, contemporary museum practice, and prescriptions for the future. This is evident in the two past questions—how might one rethink museum practice in light of its history, and what kinds of narratives should a museum tell? This third prompt is also a “should” question, prompted by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's invitation for us to consider ICOM's current proposal to rewrite its 2007 definition of a museum. I read the ICOM report as a call for mainstream (including national) museums to integrate the concerns of grassroots and specialist exhibitions, so that museums as institutions can be active platforms for communities to participate in pressing debates, from climate change to human rights.

In thinking through what ICOM calls “future museum landscapes,” it remains relevant to reflect on museum history. In particular, when and where has the museum been a site of pedagogy, and when has it been a site of activism? It is more common to think of a museum as the former, as a “textbook” that displayed imperial and national histories, buttressed by work in new disciplines like anthropology and archaeology. We are less likely to think of museums as places of action. Rather, their exhibits might serve to enlighten and inspire. Or, to borrow from Tony Bennett's “exhibitionary complex,” visitors to nineteenth-century European museums were to see themselves as part of the display, taking the lesson of self-regulation outside the museum's doors.²⁷

But museums of revolutions, from the Soviet Union to China, were both “mainstream” national museums and “activist” at the same time. In 1930s China, for example, museum boosters hailed the Soviet example: a museum was not just a warehouse of old objects; it could spread ideology and transform the people's consciousness. Before the Communist Party came to power in 1949, then, the exhibition was part of its propaganda repertoire, from the base areas where it conducted guerrilla war to the villages where it conducted the early stages of land reform. Here it was described as a new kind of exhibition, one that had the power to identify political activists and persuade followers, to inculcate consciousness and to incite class struggle. The Chinese Communist Party continued to use museums and exhibitions as “handbooks” as much as “textbooks,” and in political campaigns its lessons could result in violence. I point to this ex-

²⁷ Tony Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex,” in Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner, eds., *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory* (Princeton, N.J., 1994), 123–154.

ample for two reasons: to illustrate the fact that “museum-as-activist” is not new, and to underscore the idea that, like other powerful technologies, the museum can be a tool of not only democracy but also authoritarianism (which also claims democracy).

This is not to say that the museum does not have potential as an activist. I wonder if we can think about the context in which ICOM was created, after the end of the Second World War. My first reaction was to suppose that the intention was to establish common ground for postwar reconciliation, though decades later—and especially in our times—I think we are still searching for what might be an international museum or exhibition of war and peace. As Laura Hein and Akiko Takenaka suggest in their study comparing Japan and the United States since the mid-1990s, curators face the dilemma of mediating between fractured and sometimes irreconcilable publics.²⁸ But a search of the historical record reveals that the 1947 meeting of ICOM in Mexico City recommended not narratives of history but exhibitions “established throughout the world to emphasize the importance of *science* to human progress.”²⁹ Taking this cue, my suggestion for ICOM’s redefinition of museums would include science, and more broadly, how we seek and use knowledge. This would encompass the specific (like the science of climate change), it would require the museum to be self-reflexive about its power to shape human knowledge and action, and it would provide the museum a source of legitimacy in addressing contentious issues.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: Many thanks, Denise. This is just what was on my mind, thinking now of museums in Poland, where, under the current right-wing government, they are instruments of historical policy intended to shape civic and patriotic attitudes and defend Poland’s reputation. And not only museums, but also mass media, the arts, curricula, monuments, and memorials. This is nothing new. What is new, perhaps, are competing models roughly along the lines of museums as places that can be trusted to uphold democratic values, especially where democracy appears to be under attack, versus museums as instruments of state historical policy, in essence, propaganda, in authoritarian states. The two models can be found in Poland, both before and after the current political party came into power. The struggle in Poland is to protect such museums as the European Solidarity Center and POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, which are somewhat protected because of their governance structure, but the Museum of the Second World War, which was captured by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage shortly after it opened, is a lost cause for now. In reflecting on the situation of museums in authoritarian states, I was struck by a recent article on the World Economic Forum website, “How Do We Restore Trust in Democracy? Museums Can Be a Starting Point,” and similar statements from the Humboldt Forum, to cite just two cases.³⁰ Nothing could be further from the “traditional museum” of current Polish historical policy.

²⁸ Laura Hein and Akiko Takenaka, “Exhibiting World War II in Japan and the United States since 1995,” *Pacific Historical Review* 76, no. 1 (2007): 61–94.

²⁹ “Museum Meeting Ends: International Council Decisions to Be Reported to UNESCO,” *New York Times*, November 17, 1947, 19, emphasis added.

³⁰ David J. Skorton, “How Do We Restore Trust in Democracy? Museums Can Be a Starting Point,” World Economic Forum, March 8, 2018, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/03/how-do-we-restore-trust-in-our-democracies-museums-can-be-a-starting-point/>; Neil MacGregor, “Es gibt nicht die ‘eine’ geschichte,” Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, March 27, 2018, <https://www.humboldtforum.org/de/stories/es-gibt-nicht-die-eine-geschichte>.

But what really rang alarm bells for me was a presentation during a recent international museum conference in Estonia that went beyond the usual declarations of inclusion, fighting xenophobia, and caring for the planet to a much more direct embrace of specific issues, contentious ones, taking a strong stand, and vigorously advocating for a particular position. The activist museum is at the heart of ICOM's call for a new definition of museum and central to the mission of the Museums Association UK. Then again, Poland's ruling party refers to its policies as "good changes."

POLIN Museum seems to stay out of trouble as long as its advocacy of tolerance is more general, more universal. Once it touches antisemitism in Poland, it touches a nerve. Paradoxes emerge. The museum promotes the values of diversity, of multiculturalism, in a Poland today that is exceptionally homogeneous—exceptional within its own history. Before the Second World War, up to 40 percent of the population was not ethnically Polish or was not Catholic. Today, less than 4 percent of the population fits that description. It is perfectly fine to promote the values of tolerance and diversity—positive values—but it is troubling to address the failures of those values, which are increasingly evident with the increasingly bold and blatant displays of ethnonationalism, antisemitism, and the like. Hardly a day goes by without a report in the media of an incident, whether inflammatory statements by a politician or hateful slogans spouted by demonstrators. I've already described POLIN Museum's activism related to these issues, so I will not go into detail here. Suffice it to say, POLIN Museum is criticized for exhibitions and programs that address these issues in Poland today—and accused of being "anti-Polish," a recent and concerted development. POLIN Museum's director, who speaks out on these issues, is accused by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage of being "too political," an accusation levied against POLIN Museum under his leadership for such exhibitions as *Estranged: March '68 and Its Aftermath*. In his view, museums should produce good feelings and not conflict.

I raised the question of museum activism because I see it as a strong impulse in ICOM's call for a new definition of museums, but worry that activism is a double-edged sword, and that it needs to be addressed in wider terms—on the one hand, in relation to an emerging consensus in some parts of the world around certain core values, and on the other, to state-controlled propaganda. The Polish and Chinese cases are instructive, as are American cases, especially in the South, for different reasons. Resistance to the proposed new definition at the ICOM meeting in Kyoto led to a call for further discussion and deferral of the vote.³¹

Steven Conn: The call for museums to be activists strikes me as a third phase in the way museums have searched for purpose. In the United States, those who built museums in the late nineteenth century saw them as places for knowledge production and as

³¹ Here is the proposed new definition: "Museums are democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people.

Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing." "ICOM Announces the Alternative Museum Definition That Will Be Subject to a Vote," International Council of Museums, July 25, 2019, <https://icom.museum/en/news/icom-announces-the-alternative-museum-definition-that-will-be-subject-to-a-vote/>.

places where the visiting public could see that knowledge. By the middle third of the twentieth century, many museums came to see themselves as primarily in the education business, and especially the education of schoolchildren—this was the moment when museums began to add professional educators to their staff and when partnerships with local school systems became common. Now there is a call for activism and advocacy, and a move by at least some museums in that direction.

I can't help but see the long shadow of 1968 here. As a number of historians have charted, after the political disappointments of the 1960s, many people on the left moved toward "culture" as their preferred theater of activity—what E. J. Dionne nicely called "aesthetic radicalism."³² Culture really was just politics, so the mantra has gone, so by fighting cultural fights, we were really scoring political points.

We should be skeptical of this for three reasons. First, there is an odor of intellectual dissembling in calling for museums to become "activists." The word itself may be politically neutral, but we don't really mean it that way, do we? After all, the Creation Museum in Kentucky was created by "activists" and pushes an "activist" agenda, but I suspect this isn't what ICOM is talking about.

So what we really mean is activism with a particular ideological valence, and moving in that direction is surely risky. As I mentioned earlier, museums retain a high degree of public trust. That might well evaporate if museums are viewed as just one more partisan political battleground. Likewise, the history of twentieth-century museums around the world serves as a caution: the line between activism and agitprop can get fuzzy pretty quickly.

More to the point, culture, science, and history are not simply subsets of politics. Like those Venn diagrams that haunt me from my eighth grade algebra class, they share areas of overlap, to be sure. But to put them all in the service of some political agenda means cheapening the important social functions each has to play on its own terms. Performance artist Marina Abramović has repeatedly insisted, "I am not a feminist artist."³³ This has vexed many who want to see Abramović's work as deliberately advancing a particular set of feminist goals. If some viewers find those goals in her work, so be it. But Abramović's point is that art communicates intellectually, emotionally, maybe even spiritually, and to see it only as the illustration of a political point of view shackles what artists do.

Finally, if museum activism might devolve into bad—or boring—museum practice, then, worse still, it will result in ineffective politics. A museum exhibit can have a political point of view, it can ask political questions, perhaps, but it is very hard to argue, I think, that it can do actual political work. That elision—that cultural work is really political work—is what led Todd Gitlin famously to quip that the post-1968 left in this country took over the English department while the right took over everything else. I think he's largely correct, and I'm not sure why museums would want to join that march toward political irrelevancy.

The academic left has become very good at offering critique—and I stand among them guilty as charged—but it has failed to produce much by way of politically usable

³² E. J. Dionne Jr., "Symposium," *Dissent Magazine*, Winter 2010, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/symposium-e-j-dionne-jr>.

³³ She has made variations of this statement countless times. See, for example, her talk at the 2012 Meltdown festival in London.

ideas. There are several reasons to explain that trajectory, but the result has been that the academic left has become very comfortable in the seminar room and largely alienated from precincts, neighborhoods, and town squares, where the real work of politics gets done.

It seems to me, therefore, that if museums want to become activists, they need to do more than put seminar room critique on display. At the very least, their work ought to be guided by Michael Walzer's admonition that "[c]riticism is most powerful . . . when it gives voice to the common complaints of the people or elucidates the values that underlie those complaints."³⁴ Otherwise, the activist museum will have about as much effect on the world as the English department.

Alex Lichtenstein: Not to add too much fuel to the fire here, but doesn't the call to blunt museum "activism" run the danger of restoring the false idea that the museum can serve as a neutral, apolitical repository of history, culture, heritage, and national identity? Isn't that conceit the very reason that scholars in a number of fields have turned a critical eye on museum practice in the first place? Perhaps Sam, Ana Lucia, and Alice might respond to Barbara, Denise, and Steve along these lines.

Alice L. Conklin: I disagree with Steve. Although I know a lot less about contemporary museum practices than he does, I would argue that museums can and should be activists, but activism (like museums) can take many forms. Decolonizing the European ethnographic and natural history museum, either through repatriation of objects stolen through conquest or by recontextualization of its objects, is important and long overdue because it rights a historic wrong. Other mainstream national museums founded in the age of empire will have no choice but to change as well in the twenty-first century, for all the reasons that Barbara's quotation from the ICOM report points out.

I expect the most activist museums of the future will be new ones rather than decolonized nineteenth-century ones—that is to say, new museums whose content will reflect the politics of the particular communities that led to their creation in the first place. Museums as institutions are like those huge oil tankers: to change direction is expensive and slow-going, and in liberal regimes, every expansion or reinstallation is usually the result of compromises that dilute the original vision of would-be reformers. This is why museums tend to be most innovative at their conception, and this is when the possibilities for community input and redress of previous exclusions are greatest.

Isn't the real question, then, not whether existing museums should become more activist and more community-directed (many history museums have become just that and will continue to do so, while the growth in global tourism will continue to prevent the major art museums of the world from rethinking their missions anytime soon), but whether the original idea of the museum as invented in the West has any real relevancy for the new museums of the future—wherever they are opened? To cite the ICOM report again, "a museum definition should be rooted in a plurality of world views and systems of knowledge, rather than in a single, Western scientific tradition."³⁵

Is this an activist call for the Global North to recognize inside its mainstream muse-

³⁴ Walzer quoted in Dionne, "Symposium."

³⁵ https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/MDPP-report-and-recommendations-adopted-by-the-ICOM-EB-December-2018_EN-2.pdf, 9.

ums the multiple systems of knowledge that exist in the world beyond its own? Or is ICOM acknowledging that within these other systems of knowledge lie the seeds of alternative museums not yet imagined? In short, the future of something we still call “museums,” whether consciously activist, traditionally pedagogical, or something radically different, does not seem to me to be in danger. What is less clear to me is how the modern Western museum concept as an institution that “acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits” will adapt to the digital age, in which learning has become “active, self-directing and self-selecting,” and experts and the public are increasingly supposed to co-produce the knowledge put on display.³⁶ In this sense, museums are like today’s university classroom, that is to say, a place where how we curate, communicate, and construct knowledge is increasingly contested.

Samuel J. Redman: This conversation is important, and I am glad we are having it. An undercurrent in this discussion is the assumption that museums were (or at least aspired to be) more neutral or objective in their orientation at one point in time and became, or are becoming, more subjective or “activist” in their collective orientation in today’s world. I’d like to interrogate this notion a bit further historically and add to the discussion on museums in the present day in light of this history. Museums are, in fact, not neutral. Nor have museums ever really been neutral. Efforts to maintain objectivity may come with certain benefits, but they also run a great risk when they impose certain restrictions on truth-telling.

As a historian interested in the history of museums in the United States, it is difficult for me to disentangle their origins and history from politics. Recently published histories shed light on just how contentious the early institutional prehistory of the Smithsonian Institution was on Capitol Hill.³⁷ Early historical societies and museums served preservationists’ desires while also offering imagined political constructs for regions having been populated by Native Americans for centuries prior. Museum professionals, and arguably the museums themselves, were active agents in shaping and pushing forward the 1906 American Antiquities Act. During World War I, curators viewed deflated specimen prices as wartime opportunities. Smithsonian scientists volunteered their own knowledge and access to the collections for the Allied war effort during the Second World War. During the Cold War, anthropologists set on gathering field notes and museum objects were funded (sometimes unwittingly) by the CIA. These political activities were not always publicized in exhibitions or annual reports. But museums, at least during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the United States, were more politically active than is often realized.

In my view, fetishizing imagined neutrality and objectivity poses a greater danger to museums than entering the fray in crucial social debates. As museums are driven by humans embedded within society, errors in judgment will take place even when institutions are given the best resources and the most freedom. In my view, there needs to be room for these mistakes in order to make possible more accurate renderings of prob-

³⁶ Ibid., 11.

³⁷ A popular account of this narrative can be read in Nina Burleigh, *The Stranger and the Statesman: James Smithson, John Quincy Adams, and the Making of America’s Greatest Museum—The Smithsonian* (New York, 2003). See also Heather Ewing, *The Lost World of James Smithson: Science, Revolution, and the Birth of the Smithsonian* (London, 2007).

lems we wish to explore in the world. This same freedom grants space for critique and alternative stories. Correctives will never fully decolonize inherently colonial institutions, but we can at least learn while we make efforts to move in that direction.

We also need to rethink activism with a wider lens, as many museums are already starting to do. At risk of sounding alarmist, museums need to begin thinking about this more holistically and in terms of their own survival. In New York City, the National Museum of the American Indian, the National September 11 Memorial Museum, and the African Burial Ground would all no doubt be accused of having a political agenda if and when they speak out against manmade climate change. If they don't do so forcefully enough, however, they may soon be literally underwater.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: Yes, that is true, but museum activism today is being understood in different terms, namely, as activism in relation to the challenges of contemporary society—homelessness, hunger, inequality, exclusions, immigration, refugees, and much else. On the one hand, how can one argue with the worthiness of effecting positive change in the world and standing for equality and social justice? The call for museum activism today is a call for museums to be campaigning organizations, and even for museum workers to go out into the streets and join protests. The intentions are good: “to be an active agent in shaping the world and making it a better place.” How can one argue with such a worthy goal? I do think some critical, historical, and comparative reflection would be useful here.

Museum activism as understood today is not about whether or not museums are “neutral” or “political,” but rather about redefining their role as activists in society—museums as “socially engaged practice.” This is not a hidden agenda, but an explicit, openly declared commitment to “social impact.” This is a far cry from the “civilizing mission” of the nineteenth-century museums that Tony Bennett has written about—or maybe not, and far different from how the mission of museums is defined in authoritarian countries, although they too want to be “an active agent in shaping the world and making it a better place.” It's just that they have a different vision of the world and how to shape it.

Ana Lucia Araujo: ICOM's initiative can be understood in the context of the growing sentiment of uneasiness stemming from current debates around the history of the so-called “mainstream” museums (many of which are either in Europe or North America), especially regarding how their collections were built. Although I risk being redundant, it is important to repeat that the collections of the richest and largest museums in the world, such as the British Museum in London (United Kingdom), the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. (United States), the Louvre Museum (France), and the Metropolitan Museum of Art (United States), were formed during a period of European expansion in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, and also during a moment when the United States started aspiring to join the ranks of imperialist states, as documented in the works of historians Sam Redman (*Bone Rooms*), James Delbourgo (*Collecting the World*), and Alice L. Conklin (*In the Museum of Man*), just to cite a few.³⁸

Museums have long been challenged to be more inclusive, as minorities, such as

³⁸ Redman, *Bone Rooms*; James Delbourgo, *Collecting the World: The Life and Curiosity of Hans Sloane* (London, 2018); Alice L. Conklin, *In the Museum of Man: Race, Anthropology, and Empire in France, 1850–1950* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2013).

women, people of color, black and indigenous peoples, as well as the dispossessed population in general, could hardly see themselves in these institutions that were conceived as “places for knowledge production” (as put by Steven Conn). I tend to understand ICOM’s proposal as an attempt to respond to recent calls for restitution of African objects addressed to European countries such as France and to emerging movements such as #Decolonizethemuseum, #Museumsarenotneutral, #RhodesMustFall, and #Decolonizethisplace. These groups have interfered in museum-related debates not only in social media but also through direct actions such as demonstrations on the museums’ grounds.

In this framework, ICOM’s initiative is also an appeal to address the great discrepancy between community needs (as well as urgent political and social issues) and the persisting pretensions of neutrality that have accompanied these institutions since their creation. In other words, museums should (even though minimally) engage with the main problems afflicting the communities surrounding them. This call is far from suggesting that museums should be activists. Large state-sponsored museums or private museums such as the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren, Belgium, the American Museum of Natural History, or the Brooklyn Museum in New York City were created to promote nation-state projects that relied on a racist view of world populations.³⁹ Hence, these museums exist because the countries and empires where they emerged were successful in annihilating, colonizing, erasing, and marginalizing the very groups that today demand recognition and representation. Although these museums can occasionally embrace sensitive themes such as slavery, colonial looting, indigenous genocide, and white supremacy in their permanent exhibitions, they rarely create any institutional channels that allow members associated with underprivileged communities to voice what societal issues they need to see addressed in the museum. Bearers of official memory, the narratives developed by these museums are never neutral and have always been politicized, as put by Denise and Sam. Although museums can be more inclusive, the activist project can only be achieved by community museums or by the organized groups who have been historically excluded from the “mainstream” museum.

Alex Lichtenstein: In closing, I would like each of you to speak briefly about how your approach to museums shapes your pedagogy. How do you use museums in your teaching? How do you simultaneously permit museums to provoke joy and wonder in your students, even while helping them to remain critical of what they are observing?

Denise Y. Ho: Museums present a dual opportunity: on the one hand, exhibits can make history personal and tangible; on the other hand, the objects on display are almost always part of a larger narrative that invites analysis as such. Because my current teaching is in the United States, one of my challenges is to find exhibitions about China that are within easy reach. It was much easier when I taught in Hong Kong to bring students on a field trip to China, and many of my students were Chinese by ethnicity or nationality. For example, when we visited the Shanghai Propaganda Art Center—a private collection—several of my students were especially moved to meet with a collector who was preserving a part of history that they found personally important.

³⁹ The Royal Museum for Central Africa is reviewed in this issue.



FIGURE 9: At the Shanghai Propaganda Art Center, collector and museum director Yang Peiming meets with visiting students. Photo by Denise Y. Ho.

But in the absence of an actual museum visit, the Internet and various media can provide good substitutes: there may be photos and video (including those taken by tourists), there may be virtual tours, and there may be companion websites that allow visitors to learn more about individual objects, even “manipulating” them with a cursor. As a future resource, Jennifer Altehenger is working with the digital lab at King’s College London to develop a website called “The Mao Era in Objects.”⁴⁰ The reasons that objects are so powerful in museums are also the reasons that tangible things work so well in teaching.

I have been fortunate to have some film footage from fieldwork with Jie Li at Harvard University, which has been particularly useful in providing an individual’s critique of a museum narrative in China. Together we wrote an article about a “landlord museum” in China’s Sichuan Province, an example of a genre that was prevalent in the early 1960s, before the Cultural Revolution.⁴¹ In these so-called “class education exhibitions,” the life of a local landlord was put on display, usually with luxury objects, and often in his own home. We were able to interview someone called Liu Xiaofei, whose grandfather Liu Wencai became the most infamous landlord in the 1960s and 1970s. Our footage recorded him in his grandfather’s home—still a museum today—confront-

⁴⁰ The URL for the website, which is currently in preparation, will be <https://maoeraobjects.ac.uk>.

⁴¹ Denise Y. Ho and Jie Li, “From Landlord Manor to Red Memorabilia: Reincarnations of a Chinese Museum Town,” *Modern China* 42, no. 1 (2016): 3–37.

ing an official docent by telling her tour group the story of his own childhood. These few minutes on camera bring up a host of questions from students of all backgrounds: What does it mean to have your family home become a museum? What is the tension between personal history and revolutionary history? What would happen if Mr. Liu were the curator instead of the state?

This last question, which I ask of Mr. Liu at the end of the tour, is one that we can ask of our students. I have experimented with alternate assignments in history classes, like allowing for an op-ed, a policy paper, or a short piece of fiction in lieu of a traditional short paper. In a class entitled “Uses of the Past,” students have written about museums and monuments, both in cultural China and in other contexts. I would be curious to know from my colleagues in this conversation: Do you ask students to curate their own exhibits, real or imagined, as an assignment? How does this work, i.e., where do they find the objects? What are the conditions for a successful project? In retrospect, what are the most important takeaways for those students who pursue careers in public history?

Steven Conn: This is a great and for me somewhat embarrassing question. Given my regular rotation of classes, I don’t have occasion to engage with museums much in the classroom, and certainly not with the issues we’ve been discussing here.

By and large, when I do get the chance, I introduce students to the institutional questions raised by museums. So in one course, I look at museums and their relationship to the production of knowledge—alongside the creation of the modern university and the formation of academic disciplines. In my classes on urban history, I look at museums as part of a constellation of developments—public parks, libraries, school systems, etc.—that American cities built in the late nineteenth century, and then at how museums have been leveraged as economic drivers of urban revitalization since the late twentieth century.

I’ve recently started a multi-semester project where students are constructing a history of Miami University using objects from the collections. In this class we spend time considering how to interpret objects, how to ask questions about them, what they can tell us and what they can’t. It is an experiment, to be sure, and I’m not yet sure what the results are going to be, but I think it is fair to say that this project is teaching students how to tell stories with objects, something, as we’ve already noted, that is basic to what museums do.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: At this very moment, I am co-teaching an undergraduate summer seminar with the sociologist Mitchell Duneier for the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies. We are in residence at POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw and are using the core exhibition, a thousand-year history of Polish Jews, as our curriculum. Students have unlimited access to the core exhibition. I am guiding them through the whole exhibition on one day during the first week, and then we are focusing each subsequent class on one gallery (one period) at a time, revisiting that gallery for a deeper exploration, reading the related chapter from the exhibition catalogue together with primary sources.

In the past, when I have taught such graduate courses and seminars as *Tourist Productions*, *Museum Theatre*, and *World’s Fairs*, museums were themselves objects of

study, as were exhibitions. Depending on the class size, we visited selected museums together, or I assigned museums or gave them a list from which to choose, and students wrote papers based on observations of visitor behavior, guiding, exhibition narratives, and much else.

Samuel J. Redman: Museums, for all the many problems they pose, serve as uniquely valuable tools in my teaching. In my seminars dealing with museums, we begin by engaging with critical readings about institutions and discuss their histories and current problems. Then, as often as possible, we visit these places on tightly scheduled excursions. *Numen* is never guaranteed. But when students visit museums or historic sites in person, new interests are often sparked.

In my undergraduate and graduate courses on public history and oral history, I work with community partners (including museum professionals) to establish parameters and goals for each semester. Then I try to turn over projects to students for them to run with in their own way (again, within certain basic guidelines). The goal is for the students to utilize their skills in historical thinking and to further think creatively in a professional context before ultimately producing a real-world product benefiting the community partner.

While not blessed with the riches of New York, Boston, or Washington, D.C., the Pioneer Valley and Five College Consortium in western Massachusetts is afforded access to a wealth of museums, libraries, and historic sites. My colleagues also collaborate with museums and other public history organizations in Springfield, the Berkshires, and elsewhere across New England. Beyond this, virtual collaborations are ever more possible in the digital age.

During a recent public history graduate seminar, students in the course partnered with the Skinner Museum at Mount Holyoke College and museum professional Mark B. Schlemmer (New York Historical Society) to create an #ITweetMuseums event bringing together students and museum professionals to explore the collection and hone their social media skills. See #SkinnerDetails on Twitter for more.

A now-ongoing project in my oral history seminars is the Emily Dickinson Museum Oral History Project. The project documents the living memory of the transition of Emily Dickinson's former residence from a private house to a museum now open to the public. Students have recorded eight interviews to date, which will be deposited at Amherst College.

In 2015, a virtual partnership with the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History (NMAH) reflecting on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) brought about several object-inspired blog posts authored by students in the seminar. The posts, published on the NMAH's *O Say Can You See?* blog (<https://americanhistory.si.edu/blog>), are still circulated on social media. The experience pushed me as an instructor in a variety of important ways (I had not, for example, fully reckoned with the public history and memory of disability in the U.S. and beyond before this challenge). The experience proved thrilling for many of the students, but also eye-opening in terms of better understanding the intensity of the workflow and revision process in writing effectively about museum objects and their stories for public audiences. The experiences influence my other teaching in subtle ways as well. Illustrative narratives from student research on Smithsonian objects are now described when I

lecture on the disability rights movement in my large modern U.S. history survey course.

Museums pose particular challenges as partners, given their (often) long and complex histories and unique contexts that work to limit possibilities. Despite challenges, students often appreciate the chance to do hands-on work in any capacity, and they tend to learn a great deal by doing so.

Ana Lucia Araujo: Because I live and work in the Washington, D.C., area, museums and museum exhibitions (especially at the Smithsonian) have shaped my pedagogy. In my undergraduate courses in Colonial Latin America at Howard University, students have visited and reviewed the exhibition *The Great Inka Road: Engineering an Empire* (June 26, 2015–June 1, 2020), curated by Ramiro Matos and José Barreiro, at the National Museum of the American Indian. The visit to the exhibition provided them with a comprehensive view of Inka societies, a topic that we cover very fast in one or two classes focusing on pre-Columbian societies. Unlike the classroom context, the exhibition conveys the history of the Inka road networks in a dynamic way, including text, multimedia, real artifacts, images, and sound. Many students were visiting this museum for the first time, and the assignment allowed them to establish a connection with the peoples who lived and worked in the Inka empire, and whose descendants remain alive. Students reviewed the exhibition by looking at the curators' goals and possible biases. They also provided criticism regarding the exhibition organization, the information displayed, and possible missing elements. Students could engage with other peoples and times. In their reviews, many of them indicated how they appreciated listening to audio recordings in Quechua and Spanish and seeing with their own eyes *quipus* (long textile cords used for accounting purposes), which they only briefly saw in classroom audiovisual projections.

In my recent undergraduate course Introduction to the African Diaspora, students were invited to visit and review the exhibition *Good as Gold: Fashioning Senegalese Women* (October 24, 2018–September 29, 2019) at the National Museum of African Art. Curated by Amanda Maples and Kevin D. Dumouchelle, the exhibition offered students a unique opportunity to learn about the importance of gold in Senegal. The exhibition allowed students to become familiar with different techniques through which Senegalese artisans created gold jewelry. They also learned how women publicly displayed a variety of pieces such as gold bracelets, necklaces, and earrings, and how merchants put these objects in circulation. The exhibition helped to dismantle the image of African countries as poor, and provided students with an image of Senegal as a place of wealth and beauty. Most of my students are young African American women, who were lifted by the Wolof notion of practicing *sañse* (dressing up, looking and feeling good) discussed along with the exhibition.

My graduate courses also include visits and reviews of museum exhibitions. In the spring of 2019, my graduate students in the course Readings in African Diaspora: Slavery reviewed the permanent exhibition *Slavery and Freedom* (curated by Nancy Bercau and Mary N. Elliott) at the National Museum of African American History and Culture. Visiting the exhibition in the context of a graduate course allowed them to put aside their personal and emotional perceptions to examine the show from a critical point of view. When visiting the show, students paid more attention to the narratives pro-



FIGURE 10: France's Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration, opened in 2012, is housed inside the Palais de la Porte Dorée, built in 1931 for the Colonial Fair in Paris. The curators have preserved the monumental pro-empire art deco murals on the ground floor of the new museum, but they have not explicitly linked the history of colonialism to that of immigration. The galleries devoted to the history of immigration occupy the building's upper floors. Jean-Pierre Dalbéra [CC BY 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>)], via <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.

vided by the museum guides to the visitors. They also observed how the public engaged with the displays. Through the readings assigned in class, students were also able to examine the exhibition with critical lenses, by identifying existing gaps and areas where the inclusion of more details would have been appropriate to convey the complex history of slavery and the Atlantic slave trade. In addition, the study of the exhibition allows students to put themselves in the shoes of curators whose means to present this long history is limited by the space, resources, and available objects.

Museum visits confront students with a tridimensional space that they should observe and apprehend. During the visit to an exhibition, students engage with a greater variety of primary sources that include text, visual images, and audio recordings, as well as material culture. Moreover, when writing an exhibition review, students are required to use words and images. They are led to think about the work of the curators who conceived the exhibition space, who chose the objects, and who built the exhibition narrative.

Alice L. Conklin: I have never taught museum-centered courses, in part because the museums I study have been so far away. Instead, in my European history courses, I have tended to use images from natural history museum displays to demonstrate how racial hierarchies were constructed visually as part of “good science” in the nineteenth century. My goal here has been to help students understand how, after decades of natu-



FIGURE 11: A museum of donated objects: immigration history at Paris's Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration. Almanach94 [CC0], via <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.

ralization in authoritative collections open to the public, race typology became part of a modern way of seeing difference.

That said, the opportunity first in May 2018 and then again in May 2019 to travel for three weeks to France and Morocco with a group of twenty-five undergraduates drawn from OSU's diverse populations—none of them French or history majors—suddenly brought museum visits within my “pedagogical” reach. The theme of the course was diversity and inclusion in the Francophone world, and I set up guided tours of three Parisian museums: the Musée du quai Branly, the Louvre, and the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration. This was truly experiential learning, with minimal pre-departure preparation. The students read a 2006 critical *New York Times* review of the permanent gallery of the Musée du quai Branly at its opening; a piece on the Louvre analyzing Beyoncé and Jay-Z's recent YouTube video staged in its galleries; and a short history of the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration, housed among the spectacularly retrograde 1930s murals of the original building erected for the Colonial Exposition.⁴² The results

⁴² Michael Kimmelman, “A Heart of Darkness in the City of Light,” *New York Times*, July 2, 2006, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/02/arts/design/02kimm.html>; Lauren A. Henry, “Beyoncé and Jay-Z's ‘Apes**t’ Was a Subtle History Lesson in Race and Power,” *Medium*, July 5, 2018, <https://medium.com/s/story/beyonc%C3%A9-and-jay-zs-apes-t-was-a-subtle-history-lesson-in-race-and-power-f03104d8f67>; Nancy L. Green, “The Immigration History Museum,” in Edward Berenson, Vincent Duclert, and Christophe Prochasson, *The French Republic: History, Values, Debates* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2011), 242–251.

were gratifying: despite our compressed time frame for discussion, students eagerly debated the ethics of displaying colonial booty and the problem of historical erasure, raised questions about the commodification of art, and fell in love with the idea of a museum devoted to the struggles of immigrants who had *voluntarily* donated their objects. Many then chose to go on their own to the exhibit *African Lights* at the Mohammed VI Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rabat. Thanks to my colleagues in this forum, I am now realizing that some version of these experiences can be repeated in my courses on European colonialism or modern France in Columbus, Ohio. Given ICOM's agenda, current debates about the politicization of memory, and the fantastic tools for viewing museum artifacts and exhibits digitally, all sorts of possibilities open up. For example, I could ask students in future seminars to research the history of how a particularly contested artifact in a museum such as the Quai Branly was acquired, and to create their own "imagined" display of it, which they would then present to their peers.

Alex Lichtenstein: I want to thank all of you for your thoughtful engagement with a complex set of ideas and practices around the ever-shifting politics of curation and display. I think we all agree that museums constitute a crucial form of popular historical narrative that historians should pay close attention to. At the very least, museums represent a central place where public ideas about the past and professional historical practice encounter one another, although not without friction. Hence my decision to include museum reviews in the *AHR*.

Ana Lucia Araujo is Professor of History at Howard University. Her work explores the history and memory of the Atlantic slave trade and slavery. She is the author or editor of eleven books, including *Shadows of the Slave Past: Memory, Heritage, and Slavery* (Routledge, 2014) and *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade: A Transnational and Comparative History* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017). Araujo is a member of the International Scientific Committee of the UNESCO Slave Route Project and a member of the Board of Editors of the *American Historical Review*.

Alice L. Conklin is Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor at Ohio State University. She is a historian of modern France and its empire, with a focus on racism in liberal societies. Her most recent book is *In the Museum of Man: Race, Anthropology and Empire in France, 1850–1950* (Cornell University Press, 2013), which won the David H. Pinkney Prize from the Society for French Historical Studies and the Senior Book Prize from the Ohio Academy of History. An illustrated French edition of the book, *Exposer l'humanité: Race, ethnologie et empire en France, 1850–1950* (Editions scientifiques du Muséum national d'histoire naturelle), appeared in 2015. She is at work on a transnational history of antiracism at UNESCO between 1950 and 1965, when ideals for cooperation among a global coalition of experts and activists in the struggle against racism collided with unforeseen political realignments triggered by decolonization and the Cold War.

Steven Conn, the W. E. Smith Professor of History at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, has written extensively about the history of American museums. He has also spoken about museums, their past, present, and possible futures, all over the world, including at the Herring Era Museum in Siglufjörður, Iceland.

Denise Y. Ho is Assistant Professor at Yale University, where she teaches twentieth-century Chinese history. She is the author of *Curating Revolution: Politics on Display in Mao's China* (Cambridge University Press, 2018). With Jennifer Althenger, she is co-editor of a volume on the material culture of the Mao era, and she is co-investigator of the project *The Mao Era in Objects* (<https://maoeraobjects.ac.uk>, forthcoming). Her next book, to be entitled *Cross-Border Relations*, examines the history of the boundary between Hong Kong and South China.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett is University Professor Emerita and Professor Emerita of Performance Studies at New York University and Chief Curator of the Core Exhibition at POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, in Warsaw. Her books include *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (University of California Press, 1998); *Image before My Eyes: A Photographic History of Jewish Life in Poland, 1864–1939* (with Lucjan Dobroszycki; Schocken Books, 1977); *They Called Me Mayer July: Painted Memories of a Jewish Childhood in Poland before the Holocaust* (with Mayer Kirshenblatt; University of California Press, 2007), winner of two book awards; *The Art of Being Jewish in Modern Times* (with Jonathan Karp; University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); and *Anne Frank Unbound: Media, Imagination, Memory* (with Jeffrey Shandler; Indiana University Press, 2012). She has received honorary doctorates from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, the University of Haifa, and Indiana University. She was decorated with the Officer's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland and was recently elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She serves on advisory boards for the Council of American Jewish Museums, the Jewish Museum Vienna, the Jewish Museum Berlin, and the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center in Moscow. She also advises on museum and exhibition projects in Lithuania, Israel, France, Albania, and New York.

Samuel J. Redman is Associate Professor of History at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Before starting graduate school, he worked at the Science Museum of Minnesota, the Field Museum of Natural History, and the Colorado Historical Society. His first book, *Bone Rooms: From Scientific Racism to Human Prehistory in Museums*, was published by Harvard University Press in 2016.